

## INTERVIEW WITH GRETA KAÇINARI

Pristina | Date: September 28, 2020

Duration: 249 minutes

Present:

1. Greta Kaçinari (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*

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

## Part One

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Greta, could you give a short biography and tell us about your family? What is your origin?

**Greta Kaçinari:** I am Greta Kaçinari, welcome to my apartment (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Thank you for having me.

**Greta Kaçinari:** I was born in Prizren in '47. I come from a family of five. My father was a silversmith. I am the first child, and I had two brothers, now they have both passed away, my parents too, of course. And as a child I remember a saying from the Ten Commandments in the Bible, the fourth one is: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." That's how it is written in the old language. And apparently I have made it to this age because of that, I am the only one left behind. There are other members of my brothers' families, but I am the one to have reached this age.

Otherwise, as a first child, I remember my parents didn't go anywhere without me, to weddings, to parties, to New Year's festivities... you have a picture, you've seen it [addresses the interviewer]. So, I was with them all the time as a little child. And, I don't know, they would put me on the table, I played, I danced, I sang. And my father was involved in the amateur's troupe of Prizren's Theater. Since he had a black mustache, he used to play Hitler in shows and many other comedies.

Of course I don't remember it now, but I remember they put me [on stage] to recite a poem because my father used to work as a filigree artist at the Filigree of Prizren back then and he had written a short poem which he gave to me to recite before it [the show] began... at the Theater of Prizren. They got me a traditional costume from Prizren, *dimia*,<sup>1</sup> the vest, those beautiful silk blouses and a crown on my head, and I recited that poem. Do you want me to recite it now?

**Anita Susuri:** Recite it.

**Greta Kaçinari:** {recites} *"Argjendare kam qillue, një brosh të vogël me mbarue dhe në zemër për me vnue. Kur kom qenë n'koperativë i kam pa njerztë tu punue, tu i ba lacra, tu i ba zogj, t'u qeshë, t'u mahitë ju shkon dita për dakik".* [I happen to be a silversmith, to make a small brooch and to put it near

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<sup>1</sup> Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

my heart. When I was at the workshop I saw the people working, making small holes, making birds, laughing and joking, their day goes by swiftly]. This was it... these are life segments which are stuck in my head, there are many other occasions but... Even when they went out in *korzo*,<sup>2</sup> we walked holding hands. Prizren's *korzo*, Prizren's square was famous back then, I think it was, and even now people take walks there just like they do in Pristina's boulevard. I was between them and this was sort of an encouragement, maybe my parents weren't aware of it, that they gave me confidence which then helped me a lot throughout my entire life.

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Greta, I wanted to ask you how you remember Prizren back then? What did you see it like as a child?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Prizren, I lived on the street that connected the old gymnasium,<sup>3</sup> Prizren's Gymnasium, and the street, it was called Bihačka back then, it connected to Prizren's Bistrica [river]. A very interesting street in which many different people lived, a very beautiful memory. At the entrance of the street there was a Catholic family, and then there were, there was that *bektashi*<sup>4</sup> family, and then a Serbian family, and then there was another Catholic family, I remember they were across from us. And then there was a family from Gjakova, and there was a Turkish family further.

So, it was a street... and I spoke Turkish as a child, except when we moved, I mean I didn't speak it anymore. But my father did, he spoke it fluently. I understand it really well, but I can only communicate a little. So, it's an asset which a person [cherishes], Prizren is a city where I always felt myself warm and I felt myself big, even though physically short because of the small houses, I felt myself big, big, grown, properly, not different from the others... so I'm talking about Ranković's<sup>5</sup> time, in the '50s.

When they used to come, my father wasn't home all night and I asked my mother, "Where is *Baca*?"<sup>6</sup> Because I called him *Baca*, "Where is *Baca*?" "He went to play cards." What actually happened, his whole generation who were in the military had "Unsuitable, *nepodoban*" written in their military card, and each time there were visits, they gathered these "*Nepodobni*," the ones who were unsuitable and they locked them in jail for 24 hours, or even longer.

**Anita Susuri:** Why were they unsuitable?

**Greta Kaçinari:** This happened because there was a special policy of the time so there'd be indirect pressure, not direct, indirect so it would make people migrate. And I'll tell you now, at the time of Muslim Albanians migrating, when they went to Turkey, at the same time there was pressure towards Catholic Albanians, who also started [migrating] in the '50s, a little earlier, so before the '50s there were the first families that started to migrate. And they settled all around former Yugoslavia. Otherwise, most of them, whether silversmiths, or... most of them silversmiths. Actually, not most, but all of them.

<sup>2</sup> Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

<sup>3</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

<sup>4</sup> Islamic Sufi order founded in the thirteenth century, mainly found in Anatolia and the Balkans. More diffused in Southern Albania, it has a presence in Kosovo as well, in particular in Gjakova.

<sup>5</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

<sup>6</sup> *Bac* or *baca*, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

I'm telling this because we always kept in touch with these people later. So, there were family visits, friendly visits, wherever they were or wherever we were. A very painful period of time, and I'm saying this responsibly because later in Tuzla, in Bosnia where we lived, a married couple came because the principle of that time was about protecting your own people. So, people who fulfilled a certain duty were moved to another place, and we wouldn't know this if not for this married couple, Ristić, who came to live in Tuzla and then *ćika* [Srb. Uncle] Aca told my father in detail about why this happened.

And I remember that moment, this was after a few glasses of *raki*<sup>7</sup> when he opened up and said, "From today on you shouldn't step on my doorstep." It was really, I mean, its consequences are evident even today because a lot of these families when all the wars in former Yugoslavia happened, these families took different directions, they migrated, whether in Cana... in all parts of the world. It's... I can say this didn't happen only in Prizren, it happened in Peja too, in Gjakova too, in Ferizaj too, in all the places where politics had influence on the migration of Albanians.

And here, let me go back to Prizren and the spirit of Prizren which guided me all my life later on and which influenced... my mother sang really beautifully, she was a member of the church choir and I listened to those songs, not only the church ones but she sang very beautifully, she also sang old songs, folk songs which we later sang even to where we migrated. So, through music we also preserved the language, the language we spoke in Prizren, *prizrenianche*, "[speaks in accent] Are you coming, do you know, are you going." With turkisms, without realizing we were using turkisms. For example, when someone came over as a guest we said, "*Hoşgeldin*" [Tur.: Welcome]. This was it. And we took it all with us and we...

I thought that this is how I should welcome Albanian friends who came to visit. Until one time, there was a guest who was finishing military service in Tuzla and he said, "What is this? How are you saying *hoşgeldin*?" I said, "*Hoşgeldin de.*"<sup>8</sup> He said, "You should say welcome [in Albanian]," I said, "Oooh, it's very complicated." Yes it was complicated because now I had to change a family custom for a word that he wanted to impose onto me, it was imposing for me at the time. But, however, the thing with *hoşgeldin* was... you could've heard it in Rijeka, everywhere in Zagreb. Welcoming guests who used to come visit or when going to visit, this was the expression that was used. Prizren had these nice things.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it [a thing] in Prizren, for example, to be distinguished in a way who's Catholic Albanian and who's a Serb? Were they distinguished in a way? Was this noticed in people or was everyone equal?

**Greta Kaçinari:** The difference was only in the clothes. I remember as a child because we had those kerosene lamps, so I remember a lot, but all of these are sort of segments, like a movie part. Where we lived, we had a family from Gjakova as neighbors, Xharra [name], we talked with them in Albanian, and with Aunt Palina who lived in front of us, we talked with her in Albanian as well. But when Nusret used to come, my father talked to him in Turkish. With those Serbian families we talked to in *vranjançe*,<sup>9</sup> "*Što praviš mori?*" [What are you doing more]<sup>10</sup> "*Eto, perem draske*" [Well, I'm washing clothes] {pretends she's washing something with her hands} and it was like this.

Why am I saying this? People communicated with each other in whichever language, everyone spoke all languages. If they didn't speak them [the languages], they understood them, so communication

<sup>7</sup> *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

<sup>8</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

<sup>9</sup> The speech of the city of Vranje in Serbia.

<sup>10</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

was very effortless. It's a song which I remember, which was later sang in many parties when I attended weddings as a grown up, in many meetings for 28th of November,<sup>11</sup> because we celebrated on the 28th... yes we did celebrate it and no one knew it was for the 28th because the 29th came right after, the other holiday which was official [in Yugoslavia].

And the song is, I can't without saying it, I don't know if someone else remembers besides me, I think yes. "*Ala imaš gajtan vegi. Avdi ago, more Avdi ago*" can I sing it?

**Anita Susuri:** Sing it, why not.

**Greta Kaçinari:** {sings} "*Ala imaš gajtan vegi. Avdi ago, my dear Avdi ago, ti gumrije, my dear speak to me, aman zbori sa s mene, kis mori söyle benimale*" (smiles). So, how can I not love Prizren? This is it. One, we sang this and many other songs, we never minded which one we're singing, only the tonality which was connected one after the other. We sang in Albanian, we sang in Turkish, we sang in Serbia, there was never an issue. At least I'm talking about my family and the ones close to me and my friends, which we had all around former Yugoslavia whom we always kept in touch. We still keep in touch today, but not physically since we are where we are and we have no possibility to travel. So, this will be another topic for which I will tell you...

And another interesting detail which I want to tell you because when my second brother was born, after me, I was very little but I saw, and I remember them, my mother was breastfeeding him but an ilaka [cousin] on my father's side, she ran out of breast milk and the child she gave birth to at the same time as my brother was born, who is still alive today and lives here in Prishtina, my mother breastfed him equally as well. Does stuff like this still happen? No. So, the fight to protect the human that was brought to life and I am fascinated by all the women who act like that. I don't know, I don't believe they would do that today, modern women surely wouldn't, it's a different time. But that's a very humane case, very beautiful, very loving.

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Greta, do you remember what your first house looked like?

**Greta Kaçinari:** My house in Prizren? Of course I remember. The house had two floors. The bedrooms were on the first floor, on the ground floor there was, I can't say the living room because there was the entrance, there was a big *magje*<sup>12</sup> and the entrance of this room where everyone gathered, and there was a *tangar*, do you know what a *tangar* is?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Good.

**Anita Susuri:** But you can explain it if you want, maybe there's someone who doesn't know.

**Greta Kaçinari:** How do I explain it, it's an earthen container, a hearth yes. A big earthen container in which there was a fire and always... with wood, and the fire was saved to light the next day, I almost said fireplace (laughs) chimney. And my grandfather used to do this. My grandfather used to live with us, and my grandfather had a vineyard, no, let me stick to the front yard first. We had a big front yard through which a stream passed. All Prizren houses were connected to streams where... I don't know what system that was, but I think that even to this day there are houses through which the streams. The stream divided the front yard in half.

<sup>11</sup> Albanian National Flag Day.

<sup>12</sup> A wooden chest where the flour was kept and dough was kneaded.

Of course we had a lot of flowers, my grandfather used to plant onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and we had a big mulberry tree which I loved because I really liked mulberries. And when the time came to shake the mulberry tree, our neighbors used to come with white sheets to help us shake the tree and then we shared it [the fruit] with others. At one time, so when I was very little, I'm saying this because it's stuck in my memory, my grandfather kept a goat and as soon as they milked it, so I was maybe three years old, they gave a warm glass of milk for me to drink and I grew up with goat milk, I grew up in a short period of time.

And I remember going to the vineyard, the grape harvesting, and they put me up on a... usually a donkey and they carried the grapes in big crates. My grandfather then got out the caldron and fermented *raki*. And there are cases when I went and filled a glass... *raki* is very sweet and warm when it's freshly fermented, and I drank it and for the first time in my life I was (laughs) properly drunk and I remember everything spinning around. My mother and father were scared (laughs), "*Kuku*,<sup>13</sup> what happened?" My grandfather [said], "No, no. I didn't give it to her." The poor man. But, I loved my grandfather a lot.

I slept that night, when I woke up the next day, we had a mirror which rested against the window and I saw myself really pale and I heard that my [paternal] aunt's daughter had died, a little girl, she died as soon as she was born. And for me the word death was connected to being pale and I got to my grandfather and said, "Grandpa, I will die." And my grandfather, the poor man, left the caldron, left the *raki* and went to my aunt, at their house, and told them what happened.

I forgot what I said to my grandfather, I went out in front of the house and while playing, I saw the women in *dimia* running. {Describes with hands the way they were running} I'm acting like this because they were quite large and they were running, "*Kuku*, what happened?" They quickly took me and put me on a table that was in the front yard back then. A neighbor came, Xharra, the neighbor, his last name was Kuzhi. And he had a piston behind because he worked in, I don't know where he worked, but I know he always had a piston, a revolver. And I said, "*Kuku*, he came to... till the end so I don't suffer a lot." And this was terrifying to me.

And then they gave me a glass of goat milk and I rested like that. It's interesting how the faces of the people who were there remained in my memory. And then, I remember something else, the wires, where you hang clothes [to dry], before they placed wires to hang the clothes and we were playing with the children of that family from Gjakova, I remember their names even to this day, Kujtim, Lume. And I don't know how, but I grabbed one of the wires with my hand and it was electric. It was terrifying. I was [electroshocked], it shook me.

*Raki* shook me, electricity shook me (laughs). But, the thing where my parents walked around with me in the middle, regardless of these vibrations, there was, there was also confidence and I fought. And I went straight to the stream after that. Actually they took me from there and put me in water, to be somewhere near soil so the electricity would leave my body. From that day and on I never liked it and I'm really scared of it, foolish.

Even though later on I was a master of irons, clothing irons, at the time we learned how to make them at school when we lived in Tuzla. So, the front yard was very beautiful and I remember the time of spring really well when we painted the walls in white and with black at the bottom, either inside the front yard or outside on the street, so all the women from the houses around, there was a day when

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<sup>13</sup> Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

the walls were painted, and the most beautiful part was when they splashed the black [paint] and it was very decorative. This, I remember this as a movie scene too, like a segment...

**Anita Susuri:** Were your houses in Ottoman style like they were in Prizren or were they different, for example the houses of catholic [families]...

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, no. It was a random house, it wasn't different from the Xharra's or the others. You mean those ceilings...

**Anita Susuri:** What was the style for example?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, we had random windows. So, it was a house from the time of Turkey, but it was a house which was built later on which I don't know, I wasn't born there. I don't know how, I know that my grandfather spent a couple of years in America and he returned, that's a different case. They used to tease him later, they used to ask him how do Americans speak? He used to say, "How much an egg [speaks English]?" "What's the price for the eggs?" (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Why did your grandfather go there? To work, right?

**Greta Kaçinari:** They used to go at the time, in my grandfather's time, in my grandfather's time. Now, that is an earlier time, so before the Second World War and even earlier... While I'm talking about my grandfather, my grandfather sang really beautifully. He had an interesting voice, now it's interesting to me, but I know the songs he used to sing to this day. So, it's old songs which I now see being reinterpreted, for example he used to sing a song about revenge, of Ottomans, Ottomans or of Ottomans. I know that song from A to Z, I never forgot it because I sang it and always liked it.

And then it's *Destan Begu* [song title] and these songs. While my father liked *Hajredin Pasha* [song title],<sup>14</sup> how to learn *Hajredin Pasha*. *Hajredin Pasha* was later on when we lived in Tuzla, we used to listen to it sometimes whether it was in weddings or gramophone vinyls which we bought, we had *Qamili i Vogël*<sup>15</sup> and many others but he liked *Hajredin Pasha*. Should I still remain at [the topic of] Prizren?

**Anita Susuri:** As you wish, it's not a problem for us.

**Greta Kaçinari:** So, I was six years old in the first grade, when I turned six, I turned six in May, I enrolled in first grade in September and I remember because the teacher, at the end of the academic year, we were rewarded books, because of our success. And I won three books, I managed to win all three of them. I didn't directly get the third one, but it was given to my [paternal] aunt and when we came to visit Prizren, she gave it to me. I didn't preserve those books unfortunately.

## Part Two

**Greta Kaçinari:** Before, I could say, before turning, around April of '56, before turning nine, I was nine years old, my brother was six and the other one was three. That's when my father went to Bosnia, in

<sup>14</sup> The epic song of Hajredin Pasha is a song of bravery that evokes the Uprising of Dervish Cara in the mountains of Dibra in 1843-1844.

<sup>15</sup> *Qamili i Vogël* - Muhaxhiri (1923 - 1992) was a folk singer from Gjakova. Inspired by Tirana traditional songs, he returned to Kosovo together with Ymer Rizën to establish the Cultural and Artistic Association.



Tuzla, in '54, my uncle as well and it took them a while to adapt, until they started working so they could open stores and they both did, at the time he came [back], he officially requested for us to join him too. And in '54, in April, so before I finished third grade, we went to Bosnia, in Tuzla. And that's where a new stage of my life began.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you take the news that you're going? What did it feel like to you?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Well initially it was very interesting because it was a matter of traveling. We traveled to Ferizaj from Prizren by bus, I remember the bus, you could see them in really old movies and I remember the big road curves at Qafa e Duhlës. The road was old at the time, to arrive in Ferizaj. Why in Ferizaj? That's where the train station was, we had to travel by train.

**Anita Susuri:** There wasn't one in Pristina at the time?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, no. Pristina wasn't, it was a town. Maybe it had two or three buildings where Mother Theresa boulevard is today. I'm not familiar with Pristina at that time. I know Prizren, I know Gjakova, I know... I know some villages in Gjakova, Doblibare, because that's where my [maternal] uncles were, uncle after uncle, my father's [maternal] uncles [as well]. And I will never forget, we were invited to a wedding, we went by cow chariot and we had to cross, I don't know which river, it should be, I don't know, we had to cross a river, I was a child in the chariot with my parents, and the cows turned on one side because the water was fairly deep. And I remember the fear because my mother got really scared and so did we, of course.

I remember the front yard of that house with those big walls in villages and I remember *qiler*,<sup>16</sup> *qiler*, their *qiler* with plates and wooden dishes where the milk was stored. This is all that remained in my memory, the drummer and the lady of the house who danced with drums. I won't ever forget that. She was dancing on her own and... none of her daughters-in-law, God no, at that time that could not happen. But I won't ever forget that she was dressed in traditional clothing and [dancing] in front of the tupan, very beautiful, very beautiful. And then we got on the bus, the front was only half [filled] and then we got on a train. In order to arrive in Bosnia we traveled...

**Anita Susuri:** Was there a line from Ferizaj directly to Bosnia?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, no. We had to go to Belgrade first, and then around to another place in eastern Bosnia, Doboj, and then from Doboj there was a train to Tuzla. So, how many stations is that? And all of this with the slow trains of that time.

**Anita Susuri:** How long did the journey last approximately?

**Greta Kaçinari:** I don't know, I don't know how long it lasted but it must've lasted long. Maybe it was two days of traveling because of the waiting time at stations. And then we got to Tuzla and that's

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<sup>16</sup> Mainly a storage room. Also used as a term to refer to the room itself.



where a new stage of my life began. So, we were in an environment where there was a different language spoken, regardless of our knowledge of Serbian *a la perzeriançe*.<sup>17</sup> So, they weren't the same, they had a lot of differences. And I was enrolled in fourth grade. I was very lucky because there was an older teacher who helped me a lot from the start. Thanks to her, I was able to put into practice a lot of things in my profession. And she helped me since I knew how to dance, and sing, but I didn't know the language very well.

For example, there was a case where I was bullied and I said, "*Sad ću da donesem moju mamu*" [Srb.: Now I will call my mother] {pretends she's angry} *donesem* means to carry, not to call but I said I will carry her because that's the word I knew. And they started laughing so then I came to my senses and started to learn, to read well, and sometimes even what brings us down in life pushes us to take the next step to prove them wrong, I'm not what you think. And when the fourth grade was over after I was dancing and singing, we had a tamarin, I had *dimia*, we took our stuff with us, all of it. Our wealth in Prizren was later sold and shared with my [paternal] uncle.

At the time that teacher engaged me in the school program and I remember being on stage wearing *dimia* and a vest, with a tamarin, and I sang *Ani Kriši Pushka* [A Shotgun was Heard], it was the song. Why *Ani Kriši Pushka*, because people knew this song from a movie of that time, *Kapiten Lleshi* [Captain Lleshi] was the movie. I don't remember the movie but I know that I knew this song, *Ani Kriši Pushka*. And I was singing and dancing on the stage on my own. And I knew how to play the tamarin at the time but I don't know if I would be able to do that today.

Of course, my father bought a really big apartment, during the first few months we lived in a room above the store and then we moved to an old lodge, but this was the beginning. And I remember I had a friend there, a Jewish friend. And Bosnia, Tuzla as well, because it was an industrial city, it consisted of many, it was very diverse regarding nationality, or different backgrounds, there was everyone in that city. So I came from a diverse city to another even more diverse city in that sense. So, this teaches you to love people, exactly as they are.

**Anita Susuri:** Was your Jewish friend or was it after the Second World War that she...

**Greta Kačinari:** She lived there. I found her there in Tuzla, then when the country of Israel was created, they went to Israel. She had an older brother, she was my age. Then they moved from there. And then the municipality gave us a one-room apartment somewhere further from the city center. The home, the apartment my father bought, was in the city center, but other people lived there. Three families lived in that apartment which had five or six rooms. A very beautiful apartment in Austro-Hungarian style owned by a *pasha*<sup>18</sup> or a *bey*<sup>19</sup> who lived there before and then it was confiscated by the state and so it was sold again and again.

<sup>17</sup> A mode of talking typical to Prizren.

<sup>18</sup> *Pasha, Pacha or Paşa*, in older works sometimes anglicized as bashaw, was a higher rank in the Ottoman political and military system, typically granted to governors, generals, dignitaries, and others.

<sup>19</sup> *Bey* is a Turkish title for a chieftain, and an honorific, traditionally applied to people with special lineages to the leaders or rulers of variously sized areas in the numerous Turkish kingdoms, emirates, sultanates and empires.

And on the highest floor, there was a Russian family living, I remember they were really old. They fled Russia during Stalin's time, very interesting. A town, it was a town back then, now it's a big city. A remarkable experience in life. Now I'll go back to fourth grade. After that engagement, when I moved to fight grade I was in luck again with our head teacher. Then I was a member of the school choir, a member of the folkloric group of the school and I was a member of the school ballet. I did ballet too back then (laughs). Ballet, since I had really long hair and I played the fairy in a set where I had to wake up all the roses that were sleeping.

There are those really beautiful experiences that I keep in my memory even though there were also not-so-good ones. For example, a little, this is the ignorance of the people or the politics of that time and people acted the way they did. But, my father was a really good diplomat. I said about my mother, a very levelheaded woman, and my dad used to say to her, "Thankfully you didn't finish school because you would become a minister." She really was special, besides singing beautifully, she was also a brave woman, she was smart. And there of course we immediately joined the catholic church in Bosnia. My mother sang in the choir, she was a choir soloist, and she sang very beautifully. A remarkably good soprano and I sang in the choir too, I sang in the alto.

So, we were very active in the catholic community as well and it's very interesting how there are friends from school, friends from church, friends from the street, and friends from the circle of my father's store. My father's store was close to a mosque and when it was Eid, "Bajriç Nuho, it's Eid," that's what they called him, his name was Ndue, [they called him] Nuho, he used to answer "*Bayram mübarek olsun*" [tur.: Happy Eid. He answered in Turkish and people never knew what we were [religiously]].

They thought we were, they used to say we were Croats, we were *šiptari*,<sup>20</sup> we were this, so, then we were Muslim, others thought we were Hungarian, I don't know, they thought about us whatever they wanted. However, my maiden name is Çetta and my father never changed that name or last name. It was written in the ad {describes with hands} above our store and across from us there was a man named Ramiz. His last name was Deveri, I want to say that it was very interesting. There were many Albanian families which were there earlier, from northern Albania, there was Lumjantë for example. There were people from Kosovo, from Presheva, from Bujanoc and... but, they had started to assimilate.

So, their last name was changed to "ić" and Ramiz went and changed his last name from Deveri to Deveriović. And my dad was in front of the store and told him, "You be damned Ramiz. What did you do?" "What did I do Nue?" He used to stutter a bit. He sang really beautifully otherwise. He said, "How did you add vić *bre*<sup>21</sup> man?" "*Aiiii* {onomatopoeia} hush because I swear to God I will remove it." And he removed it and went back to Deveri. But this was the influence of family members who wanted to

<sup>20</sup> *Šiptar/i* Serbian for Albanian/s. This is a derogatory term for Albanians from Kosovo, to distinguish them from Albanians from proper Albania, *Albanac/Albanci*.

<sup>21</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *Bre* adds emphasis, similar to the English bro, brother.

coexist in a different way, maybe to have other benefits, because... there were many cases where people changed their last names in former Yugoslavia because they were forced to either directly or indirectly.

That was the only way to advance. You had to adapt to where you were and change almost your whole identity and that was it. Unfortunately, these are not good things. I see this even when they go to America, Chinese people for example name their children John or what do I know. Keep your name so that at least that'll be your identity. So, this didn't occur only here, it happens all over the world for people in order to achieve something, they're ready to sacrifice everything.

Let me go back to my *Baca* and *Hajredin Pasha*. When my father used to come from the store tired at night, he used to say, "Come my daughter," we had a short table and, "Come one." He poured himself a glass of *raki*, tired, he gave a little to me and said, "Come one, sing the song to *Baca*." And I sang *Hajredin Pasha*. I sang these songs to my father, while my mother sang totally different songs. So, *Hajredin Pasha* was part of a, look, a song is a song, but there were some songs which they referred to as city songs which had a different melody and they were either with *çifteli*<sup>22</sup> or a different type of singing.

My mother sang other songs. And thanks to her I know hundreds of songs from all Albanian lands. And later on together with Gjergj, my husband, he compiled all of these songs in a special book but we were both lucky to learn these songs from the elderly. And it's an asset that will remain whether for my daughter, or your generation if you ever want to gather and sing along. That book is a big help because it has the notes and the lyrics. Do I go back to Tuzla?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, that's okay.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Tuzla.

**Anita Susuri:** Up to what level did you attend school there?

**Greta Kaçinari:** I continued my education, and I finished university there. I'll tell you the most interesting part of my life, so... it was elementary [school], I was in elementary school, maybe I was lucky since we lived outside the [city] center, we had to take a bus there. At the time Tuzla had double-decker buses because England had gifted them to Tuzla. Tuzla was known as the place where salt was extracted from the ground. It's a place... that's why it was called Tuzla because *tuzla* in Turkish means salt. In German, it would've been Salzburg. Bosnia's Salzburg. So it's, thanks to the structure of the city and its surroundings, which is interesting... so there were gifts from other places and I remember those double-decker buses.

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<sup>22</sup> Two-string instrument with a long neck, played in Northern Albania and Kosovo, used to play folk songs and epics.

I would sometimes go up to the second level for fun, otherwise, I stayed on the first level so I was ready to leave, close to the door. Because the doors didn't close, it was always open. And that bus used to stop somewhere close to my school. And I remember, it was required to have a technical pen from the fifth grade so we'd start to write in a technical font. The handwriting had to be paid special attention. And we did all that with a fountain pen in a millimetric notebook.

And then, during BAT's class we learned how to form the electric network {describes with hands} I don't know what it's called in Albanian, I made the things with the batteries myself. And then [we learned how to make them], stuff that we could make ourselves at home, and like that, I had learned a lot of practical things. So I'm talking about elementary school from fifth to eighth grade. And then when the head teacher filled in our grade sheets, she wrote, "She was born in Prizren, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia," I said, "No, no, it's not, Prizren is not in Macedonia," she said, "*Kuku* thank you for letting me know because I would've made a big mistake." She was a history teacher, she was my head teacher during my eighth grade.

It's a very interesting mistake. So back then people didn't pay attention to stuff we do now, we know exactly who and where, and how someone is. And what I remember from this time period is besides all those many activities which I was involved with, I remember really well that we sang a song, an interesting song about today's Podgorica. It was a song, about what today is called Podgorica, it was called Titograd. A very beautiful song. We sang that song in a choir because it was a very beautiful song.

I remember another detail from this time period. The school, I was lucky that the school's [architectural] styles were like in Prizren, there was a school called Bajram Curri, similar to that there was a school called *centar* in Tuzla, which had an old style. And then the gymnasium had an old style as well. It's very interesting. And the school was close to the city's market. And one day before a Sun eclipse they told us what to do. To take a piece of glass and to burn some paper to darken the glass and to see how... eclip...

**Anita Susuri:** The eclipse.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes, the eclipse would happen. And we were at school. It was such a terrifying moment when the process began and the Sun was totally covered, totally, they would bring chickens to the market, like they used to sell them before, and when the dogs started barking, you could hear all kinds of animals that were in the market. It was very interesting and that gave some sort of feeling, all in gray somehow. All in gray because it almost seemed like night. And we were looking at it, they took us to the windows and told us to watch it. This was an eclipse I experienced as a child, I don't remember [seeing one] later. Maybe there was a partial one but... this would help us to understand other things in life as well.

And then there comes the gymnasium, where the class was also very diverse, very exceptional. And now I need to tell you something else about my father because since they were Albanian, and here in Kosovo there were a lot of demonstrations happening, and whatever happened in Kosovo had

repercussions even in Tuzla. UDBA<sup>23</sup> of the time or what else were they called, Ministry of Internal Affairs, they would come at 5:00 in the morning, before sunrise and they would rush into the apartment and they would look for stuff. My father wouldn't even know what they were looking for.

The first one happened, you may not know about this but it was in Split and there was a, what do you call them, Tito<sup>24</sup> held a speech in Albanian in Split, it was around '61... because all the private companies, a little development in privatization began and at that time privatization wasn't allowed to be developed, but everything had to be social, all the workers to be...

**Anita Susuri:** Cooperatives.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes, in different cooperatives, there were no individual businesses. Besides silversmiths or shoemakers or these one that are a little more distinctive. And I remember back then when they came and interrogated my father. I know that when they came in I said, "Hello, welcome" to the ones that were there (laughs). In Serbian back then, in Bosnian, sorry. Because... and my poor father, whatever happened in Kosovo happened to us in Tuzla as well, until '72 when I got married and came to live in Tuzla... [I mean] Pristina.

That time period of acceptance and non-acceptance was interesting. We coexisted there, we spoke Albanian at home, that *a la perzeriançe* Albanian that we took with us. My father had that military card, in it it said *Nepodoban* [srb.: Unsuitable] all that [info] was transferred. There was information which was not understandable to us. But I remember my father said, "My daughter, the prisons, there's no prisons in Yugoslavia where there aren't thousands of Albanians imprisoned," I used to say, "What are you saying? Why are you saying this?" "Yes, yes."

And when a man was released who was in prison for years and who lived in Tuzla, he came to live in Tuzla. I don't know, my father knew him, he was released from prison. I don't know exactly which prison, it could be Goli Otok<sup>25</sup> and he then had to... he was from Gjakova, he had to leave Gjakova, his home, and he came to live in Tuzla. And these are not good moments. But in the gymnasium, like it was...

**Anita Susuri:** Sorry if I'm interrupting you. Before going there, I wanted to ask you, was your father a soldier during the Second World War? Did he participate in the war?

**Greta Kaçinari:** My father, for some time he was... when you asked me about my name, my father spent some months in Germany, before the Second World War as a young man. And when he came

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<sup>23</sup> The State Security Service - *Služba državne sigurnosti*, also known by its original name as the State Security Administration, was the secret police organization of Communist Yugoslavia. It was at all times best known by the acronym UDBA.

<sup>24</sup> Josip Broz Tito, former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

<sup>25</sup> Island in the north of the Adriatic sea, from 1949 through 1956 a maximum security penal colony for Yugoslav political prisoners, where individuals accused of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, or other dissenters, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

back, I don't know if he knew a woman named Greta there or not. I just know that they gave me this name and I was the first person to have this name in the city. And then there was another one later, but much later and another was in Skopje. So, in former Yugoslavia there were three Albanian girls named Greta. Now I hear there's more and I'm glad about it. Even though they sometimes mistake it and call me Gresa, an "s" instead of "t" because Greta really is not an Albanian name. But the name of a famous international artist and when I was a child they used to call me Greta Garbo.

Actually they called me Shirley Temple more often because I had curly hair and a curl in front {describes with hands} because they were trendy at the time, right? Children dressed in layered dresses with... I returned to my childhood again. You asked about my father, my father was... he was in another group, I think they were called National Democrats. It's interesting, Albanian parents didn't tell much about their lives and affiliations to their children in order to protect them because it was dangerous if the children would know, then there would be consequences. And that was the way to protect children.

He had a really beautiful picture, my father was handsome, and he had a hat, a hat with an eagle [symbol], I don't know whose that was, I think there was a National Democratic movement. And that is why "Unsuitable" was written on his identification card. So, his generation kept even a picture of Gjergj Fishta<sup>26</sup> in their wallets. I asked him, "*Baca*, what kind of clothing is this?" [He replied,] "Eh, if you only knew," [I asked,] "Who is this?" "Fishta. If you only knew." These were his answers. Fishta remained in my memory and that's when I came here in Pristina I wanted to find Fishta (laughs). And then, when were the demonstrations? '78?

**Anita Susuri:** '60 at first, I mean, '62-'68, I'm not sure.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Right, this is the time period when they would come into our house like that and... This went on until the end... and the same thing went on even after the breakup of Yugoslavia because they thought my brothers were also in different networks. For example, they took them in for questioning and asked them if they recognize some paintings which disappeared, I don't know. They tried to explain it to me over the phone, but it wasn't very clear what it was all about.

**Anita Susuri:** Was your father imprisoned for reasons regarding...?

**Greta Kaçinari:** My father wasn't... but the first attempt after Tito's speech in Split, he was in custody for one week and I know that we all really missed him. The accusation was, you Albanians have many wives, you have one family here and one there in Kosovo and that you live illegally. Can you imagine this?! My mother and father were officially married both in the Municipality of Prizren and in Prizren's church. I even had to retrieve those documents recently, they're all there. But, whatever they heard from the people around, they acted that way. Very interesting how you asked that question and I

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<sup>26</sup> Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero. Notably, he was the chairman of the commission of the Congress of Monastir, which sanctioned the Albanian alphabet. In 1921 he became the Vice President of the Albanian parliament, and in 1937 he completed and published his epic masterpiece *Lahuta e Malcís*, an epic poem written in the Gheg dialect of Albanian.

remembered this because they accused my father of having two wives, one here [Tuzla] and one in Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** Was he in prison during the Second World War or...?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, no, no. During the Second World War, he was in Germany for some time, and for the other in that National Democratic Movement or I don't know, I think it was National Democratic. Even among them, whether *ballist*<sup>27</sup> or whether other groups with whom they collaborated or opposed, but I don't know exactly what. But, there was that movement and they were in the mountains [fighting] for some time. I know because my father-in-law also told me about all these movements which were active at the time. And then he was in the navy, the one in former Yugoslavia, not the Yugoslavia in which we lived, but the royal one, he was in the navy, that's where he finished military service.

**Anita Susuri:** Maybe the First World War?

**Greta Kaçinari:** After the First World War, yes. So it wasn't, it was only to fulfill his military duties because military service was mandatory. So he had his own baggage to carry, and we were trying to adapt with the *rreth*<sup>28</sup> in which we were living, I told you about the gymnasium. When they were... oh, they called my mother in as well for informative talks, "What did the priest preach about during the mass?" and she said, "Ask him about what he preached about, he knows best."

### Part Three

**Greta Kaçinari:** Have you heard about Jamie Shea?<sup>29</sup> Jamie? During the war he was, thanks to what he had reported in Britain, they acted that way. Jamie Shea's representative came to our school and visited the Serbian principal. And they told me, "A foreigner came." And I went out and said, "Hello," I told him who I was, I am the Principal of Elena Gjika school. He was speechless. One of them said, "*Maknite se gospođo. On je završio svoj razgovor*" [Srb.: Leave ma'am. He has finished his discussion]. I said, "*Nije završio dok ne razgovor i sa mnom*" [Srb.: He hasn't finished it as long as he hasn't talked with me] you know, like an idiot [referring to the person who told her to leave].

**Anita Susuri:** What year was it, in the '90s?

<sup>27</sup> Members 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.

<sup>28</sup> *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

<sup>29</sup> Jamie Patrick Shea CMG (1953- ) is a retired member of NATO. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium until his retirement in late September 2018.



**Greta Kaçinari:** Sometime in the '90s. It must be '97. I have trouble remembering the years.

**Anita Susuri:** Approximately.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes, this was sometime before the war.

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Greta, let's continue to where we left, you were talking about your mother who was invited to informative talks and they asked him about the priest. What happened after? Did your mother immediately return or did they ask her something more?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, she immediately came back.

**Anita Susuri:** What happened next? You enrolled in gymnasium?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes, then I got into gymnasium and a new stage of life began for me because in the class I was in, the [ethnic] composition was extraordinary. And in the system of the time, the professors who lectured, the ones who taught us came from different communities. For example, there was a Croatian [professor] for the course of chemistry, and whether we wanted to or not, we had to speak in Croatian. [We spoke] Croatian in her class. There was another professor, he was Bosnian, we switched to Bosnian [language]. When the Serbian [professor] came for physics class, we spoke ekavski,<sup>30</sup> we spoke in Serbian. It wasn't easy, but it was very dynamic and interesting.

And if someone asked me today how many languages I know, it would be many because respecting their wish for everyone to speak their language, it's interesting that a language has so many similarities but also differences. While in class, I have to tell this because there were also Montenegrins, for example their name was Goljub, pigeon [in Albanian], in Albanian we call pigeons like that, very interesting. And then there was a Radojka, they were Montenegrins. Then there were Bosnians, there were also Serbs from Serbia and Serbs from Bosnia, in the same class. And there were Croats too of course. I wasn't the only Albanian.

In all of this, in this group [of people] in class, there was a remarkable calmness, we were different from the other classes. We were very friendly with each other. And then the program we had, for example there was learning Latin in the program, we had it for two years, the first and second year of gymnasium. I didn't remember the grammar etc. But what I remembered are all these beautiful sayings, those lines which were of use even back then during school, but even later on in life. I remember many things to this day, so...

I remember the physics professor who was a Serbian nationalist, unfortunately... She mistreated all of us so much, especially me, so much that I wrote on the blackboard, "Until when" her name, "will you

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<sup>30</sup> Shtokavian or Štokavian is the prestige dialect of the pluricentric Serbo-Croatian language and the basis of its Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin standards.

play with our patience?" I wrote it in Latin because it's, "*Quousque tandem Catilina, abutere patientia nostra?*" [Until when will you abuse our patience?]. That's a very meaningful saying. And that's clear but she never found out who wrote it. But at least we let her know that she shouldn't act like that.

Later, when we went to Ohrid for an excursion, I knew many Macedonian songs even better than Macedonians and I used to sing them in the evening. She then regretted everything and told me, "I didn't know you were like this." That's why a person shouldn't be blinded. Nationalist chauvinism is very blinding, it blinds, it poisons the soul, it blinds the eyes. And it makes a person evil, simple. I am [pro] nationalism for preserving identity, but not hating others. When they took my mother for questioning, it was more because she was Albanian and they wanted to understand what was happening, how she was Albanian and going to church. Because they didn't know, they didn't know that Albanians are very general, there's all kinds of Albanians. So, it was surprising to them that my mother was catholic, but also Albanian and that she...

Later I remember a professor whom I worked with and he said, "How are you an Albanian and going to church?" I said, "There's even Orthodox Albanians." He said, "What?" "Yes" I said, "There's even Orthodox Albanians. Actually one of my father's friends is Orthodox." His name was Spiral Llulla, in Prizren. And he said, "Thanks a lot for letting me know because I would die not knowing this." So, a person's biggest enemy is ignorance, not knowing that when you're not informed, you could hurt people. He apologized for asking that question, "How are you Albanian and going to church?" It was interesting. First of all, it was a surprise to me that he asked, it was shocking.

And they quickly let my mother go but they were very against it, the system was against friars in Bosnia. Friars are considered as priests. They have some ranks of their own. And they considered them nationalists, I don't know.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to make a connection here, I know that religion was forbidden, I think, how was that for you? Did people normally go to churches and mosques or was it banned?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Religion wasn't forbidden. It wasn't, but the ones who wanted to advance, they joined [the Communist League] as communists and then they could advance. Otherwise, common people were free. I know, people went to mosques to pray, to church as well. And then, whether in Orthodox churches or Catholic churches. At the Orthodox church, most people who went were old women and the priest there was a family friend, he used to say, "How *bre* even young people go to the Catholic church, but only old women come here."

[You might ask] why, because they didn't go to church because they wanted to show they're progressive. Progressives don't go to churches and mosques. And there's something else that's interesting from this time period in Bosnia. There wasn't a Muslim nation. In their identification documents, they were "Other." "*Neopredeljeni*." The ones who were *neopredeljeni* and wanted to advance, to either work as a cop or internal or state work, they registered as Croats or Serbs. I find

this very, very interesting. And then Tito, I don't know what year it was, together with Džemal Bijedić,<sup>31</sup> I remember his name, they decided the *neopredeljeni* people have the right to register as Muslim. And that's how a new community was born in Bosnia.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have any cultural activities during those years? Did you go, for example, to the theater or cinema?

**Greta Kačinari:** In Tuzla?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Greta Kačinari:** To the theater, of course, we regularly went. But also, Sarajevo's Opera used to come once a year. The opera used to come, the opera troupe of Sarajevo performed the opera in Tuzla's theater. Otherwise, [we went to] the cinema, [and] walking tours with the class either in nature, or visiting other places. And then the church organized various visits. I remember we went to Visoko, that's where, that's where the foundation is, there are also very old writings even for Albanians, I don't know if someone goes to research there. Because friars went to, especially northern Albania where priests served. There are remarkably interesting writings. And so, we socialized a lot. I had two groups of friends, friends from class and friends from church.

We sang with a guitar with church friends, we'd take walks in the city park, with friends from the class we'd go out in the evening in *korzo* and we got coffee together. Otherwise, all the people whom I socialized with weren't upper class even though to tell you the truth, we had different living standards, slightly better. But I always stayed within those lines of my social circle, I was there. I was on the same level as everyone else. My father even used to tell me sometimes, "Put on gold earrings so people know whose daughter you are." I didn't do that. I didn't want to because my friends didn't have gold jewelry. I think it's good when you don't set yourself apart with friends, then that friendship will always be healthy and people get along.

Personal life should be left out of... after the opera I wanted to treat my friends from the church. You know, I worship St. Anthony, St. Anthony and I prayed to him a lot as a young woman. Thanks to him, my life took several important turns, and I said to him, "Look," you know, I am talking to St. Anthony, and I said to him, "Look, all the money I will be left with after I treat my friends with coffee, I will donate for your cause." We went out after the opera. We were out of the opera hall. We were going for a coffee, but everything was closed, no coffee shop was open. It was 10 p.m. and everything was closed. I said, "Oh come on, now I have to give all the money to Anthony," "Which Anthony?" I said, "St. Anthony." (laughs) So, all the money we were supposed to spend on coffee, I said to him, "Here, I brought it all to you."

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<sup>31</sup> Džemal Bijedić (1917 – 1977) was a Bosnian and Yugoslav politician. He served as the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia from 30 July 1971 until his death in a plane crash on 18 January 1977.

But when I asked for St. Anthony's guidance, I even said to him, "Look, you guide me however you see fit," when I met a man, "if you think that he is the right man make it happen, if not, do not make it happen." He did not make it happen the first time around or the second. I said to him, "Look, if you don't think he's right for me, don't make it happen." It didn't happen. When I met the third, I said to him, "Look, St. Anthony, until now you stopped them all from happening. This time around I will decide on my own." And I decided on my own and it turned out so much better than the other two. Absolutely. Later on, life showed me itself. But he supported me with my third one, of course. I had a strong faith in him, it's the same to this day.

**Anita Susuri:** The third one was your husband, right?

**Greta Kaçinari:** The third one.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you meet? Will you tell us?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Can I finish with gymnasium?

**Anita Susuri:** Alright.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Alright. After I finished gymnasium... I have many good memories from the gymnasium, for example, the relay race at the time, and at the time, the students who didn't have good grades couldn't hold the [relay] baton. So I was in the group of students who could go and that was a great joy. Gymnasium wasn't, it wasn't easy at all, it was one of the most challenging schools in the city. The others were vocational schools, economics, technical, what do I know, but I was lucky to attend gymnasium. Even though I loved music too, but nothing happened for me in that regard, I couldn't enroll either because you could parallelly finish both. But, only from a specific age, I was late for that. But music wasn't absent in my life because my husband was a musician.

So many of my wishes were fulfilled in different, interesting ways. I also remember that during that time period we visited Prizren every year. When my grandmother and [maternal] uncle moved to Pristina later, we used to come to Pristina. But, while in Prizren, I once had a case when I walked to [the village of] Zym from Prizren. We woke up sometime around 3:00 in the morning to go with my friends. We were all young, and life in Prizren was really beautiful.

And a man asked me, who was a professor of history, well known, he later lived in Zagreb, Zef Mirëdita, I'm not sure he told me, "Young lady," like this {describes with hands} he had a distinct posture, he was tall and handsome. "Young lady, are you finishing gymnasium?" I said, "Yes," [He asked,] "What do you want to study?" [I replied,] "Law," he asked, "You want to study law?" I told him, "Yes, I really like it," he said, "Think it through before enrolling in Law. Not everyone should study Law."

Imagine. He said this because I didn't look convincing because I was short, I should've been tall like him to study law (laughs). And... but even regarding the law, it was fulfilled later on in life in different

ways, very interesting. To this day I still read about different laws in order to understand the work I do. But this isn't only about laws, it's spiritual and cultural food for someone to learn about this stuff.

When I finished gymnasium, I liked all the social subjects. And I read a lot, especially sociology and philosophy, these two, I really liked Latin and German too. And later on I dreamt of studying German. I had many dreams. Law, studying German, studying children's psychology, because I loved children. And I used to think, when I get married I will have ten children. Alright, when it comes to this I dropped it to five after, so a basketball team. The first one was a football team, the second a basketball team, but I had one because that was God's will, who compensated for all of this, but then I had thousands of children in my life in my profession.

And, I finished gymnasium and I started to study English. I wanted German, but there was no German, only English, and a new stage in my life began. After finishing it I was interested to work, I didn't say that because earlier when I told my father after finishing gymnasium, I told him, "I want to go to Zagreb to study children's psychology," he said, "No *bre*, stay here. If you can, you could help me in the store too," [I said,] "You have aunty, she's helping you," Well, it'd be nice if you stayed here," you know.

I listened to him and didn't go to Zagreb. You should know I had the possibility to go. I listened to him and stayed and now I think about it, if I didn't listen to him and went there, my life would take a totally different turn. It's so good to listen to your parents sometimes. Not sometimes, in life, you should listen to your parents. I'm relating it to the beginning, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

And I enrolled in English, I studied and finished it and then I wanted to find a job. I went and attempted at an elementary school, I'm talking about Tuzla. I tried to go to an elementary school, "No, they said, "we have no vacancies." And one day someone knocked on the door, the neighbor across from us said "Will you come work for us?" It was a high school, a vocational high school of mining. "Will you come because we need a professor of English language?" And I told them, "Okay," I went. And I really worked. I worked for almost two years until I got married.

And now back to your question, about how I met Gjergj. Since we came to Kosovo often, in 1972 we came for the holiday of *Zoja e Madhe* [Assumption of Mary] in Letnica. But we used to come earlier, a week before, we came a week before. And there I saw a boy, handsome, hair a little long, a jumper tied [at the waist]. *Hmmm* {onomatopoeia} He would disappear during the day and show up at night. And I was wondering who he was, anyway, we found out who he was. And since I sang very beautifully, I want to say something else too because from around '64-'65, we used to go to Letnica every year a week or two before [the holiday].

A village that had no water, no electricity. We used to say in the villagers' cottages, we slept in mattresses filled with straw and hay. But these are the most beautiful memories of my life. All the young people from these families which I told you migrated in the '50s. And young people got to know each other there and many marriages happened later thanks to these gatherings.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you, in Letnica, did you sleep in private homes or outside in what they called *predgrade*?<sup>32</sup>

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, in private homes. Only Croats slept in *predgrade*. They sort of occupied them, that's why Albanians used to sleep in private homes. In those cottages built with mud. And that was very, very interesting. Water was a big issue, of course. Even the water which streamed there was very dangerous to drink because of the lack of iodine. The locals had issues with thyroids because the water was natural but it didn't have iodine.

So Gjergj and I got to know each other, and as they say, it was love at first sight. In the same [year], we met in August, we got engaged in September, we got officially married in November, we got married. I came from Prizren, we had a civil marriage in the municipality here and that was well thought out because [otherwise] I would have to go to Tuzla to get a marriage certificate. Whereas we did the church marriage in Tuzla, as well as the wedding. With *çallgaxhi* from Prizren, do you know what *çallgaxhi* are? Right?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, musicians. How did they come to Tuzla?

**Greta Kaçinari:** With the music team from Prizren. It was the *Agimi* collective and so it was a good wedding and we... I explored different waters in my life. We spent a week in Rovinj, we treated ourselves, we went there as newlyweds. When I came here to Pristina in the beginning, the first day of our marriage, the first spoons of honey, we spent another week in Hotel Božur.<sup>33</sup> Gjergj didn't have an apartment here, he used to travel from Prizren, he worked at Radio Prishtina at the time. And then our friends, our close ones found us a private apartment so we wouldn't travel from Prizren, so we started a totally new life.

And then a lot of people moved to Pristina from Prizren as well as other places, so we started to socialize with each other. And this socializing lasted until the end of the '80s. And then socializing went on in different ways, the way it's being done today, through the phone, through these new communication tools. But it's a really good period of [my] life. We were also friends with Simon Shiroka<sup>34</sup> and his family, and I'm also related to them. And then the godfather of our church marriage, Umberto, he's in Czechia now. Marcelto Peci who was a dancer of *Shota*,<sup>35</sup> we regularly danced with him, Leze [Qena],<sup>36</sup> and many others

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<sup>32</sup> Outdoor camping space during the stay in Letnica.

<sup>33</sup> Hotel Božur, a Pristina landmark, was the first hotel in the city. Today, it has been turned into the Swiss Diamond Hotel on Mother Teresa Boulevard.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Shiroka (1927-1994) was a well-known filigree artist from Prizren.

<sup>35</sup> "Shota" is a folkloric dance ensemble, which was established on September 30, 1950, as the National Ensemble, with the decision of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, as well as three other ensembles in the former Yugoslavia: Llado - Zagreb, Kollo Belgrade and Tanec - Skopje.

<sup>36</sup> Leze Qena (1935-2020) was born in Prizren, Kosovo. She was an actress, who for more than 55 years has played in many theatrical performances in Kosovo and beyond.

A family, from all of this, I shouldn't forget *bac* Anton Çetta,<sup>37</sup> who used to tell me, "Feel free to say you're mine [daughter]" since my maiden name was Çetta. "No *bre bac* Anton but no one is asking about my maiden name, I have changed it now." And then [the family of] Mark Kaçinari, a composer. So, my life was divided, between music and my profession, education. And then I continued here... here was interesting too. Just like in Tuzla when a neighbor came knocking on my door to let me know they needed a professor of English, the same happened in Pristina.

The son of my neighbor, it was a Serbian family, he said, "Miss Greta, we're missing an English teacher *bre*," I told him, "Let the school know that a teacher is staying at home." And the boy went and told his head teacher and she said, "Let her come here and see where the workplace is." My daughter already was around, how old was she, '73, '79, around five years old and... and then the Radio gave Gjergj an apartment and we lived in Kaçallarët [neighborhood]. There are two white buildings there now, they're the shortest because the other ones, which were built later, are taller. But I could see the school Vuk Karadžić, at the time, from my window.

"More," I used to say, "it would be so good for me to work there," the school was close to my apartment and I could take care of Florinda and everything would be okay. And the boy said the same. And I really did go to school and when I went inside I started to speak in Serbian thinking I was still in Tuzla. It was surprising for me when I heard people speak in Albanian. So I introduced myself, and the [school] secretary started to speak Albanian, I spoke Albanian too, and he said, "You are Albanian?" "I am Albanian." And I was hired there. First I worked with Serbian classes, the children used to ask me where I was from, who I am, and then they were talking to each other, "She came from England," "No," the other one said, "she's from Croatia," "No, no, she's Hungarian."

Everyone had their opinion and I never intervened or didn't have the need to tell them, or to go into that trouble. And during that year the school principal noticed that his two daughters were in the Serbian class. The school principal was Serbian and he called me the next year and said, "This year you will work with, you will teach Albanian too in the Serbian classes, in fourth grade," I told him, "No, I can't. I speak Albanian *a la perzeriançe*. I don't know the new language," because the Albanian literary language was already in use. I really didn't know it, even though thanks to my father I learned Albanian myself in Tuzla, thanks to magazines, the magazine *Jeta e Re*.

He used to get it, we regularly got it and I deciphered the letters compared to the Serbo-Croatian alphabet and I found where the differences are, I knew how to pronounce them by using these words. So, I learned it myself, I learned the basics of Albanian language. And he said, "No," he said, "I'm not asking you if you can speak it or not. I'm not asking you." And, what would I do? [I took] three dictionaries in front of me, [and I began to] translate an English book into Albanian. Because the English books for the fifth grade were really good, there were many poems, manners of communication and I made my plan based on that. And I started to study and learn the Albanian language myself, later on, my daughter started first grade too.

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<sup>37</sup> Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign.



I started learning Albanian, reading, especially listening to the radio, and reading newspapers, magazines, so much that somebody asked me, “Excuse me, are you from Dibra?” That’s how much my *a la perzeriançe* Albanian improved. But later on, English started to be used and there was an Albanian principal for Albanian classes. They transferred me to the Albanian classes. That’s when a whole new time period began, with Albanian students. I used to tell them, “If you want me to teach you English, correct me, when I speak Albanian correct me.” And we had a mutual agreement that way, I taught them English, they taught me Albanian and everything was fine.

When I came here, my father told me something, “My daughter, don’t change when you go there.” What would I change? When I came here I really saw... I would either become like the others or remain who I was which would be really difficult. I was very free in communication with others. There was no difference to me, whether my coworkers were men or women, no difference at all. But there was not a lot of communication between men and women. That was horrible, honestly. And I remember a night walking in the *korzo* with my husband Gjergj, one of my coworkers passed by and I said, “Gjergj look” there he was, let me not mention his name because he is still alive. I told him, “Look,” he [coworker] turned his head and I was surprised. I didn’t get to say hi, he wouldn’t say hi.

The next day, “Why did you turn your head in the street?” [He said] “I don’t know what kind of husband you have,” “My husband is really good but you think about yourself,” honestly. Horrible! Thank God this doesn’t happen anymore. God’s will, I hope it doesn’t because these are things that tie down someone’s soul *bre* they harm you, they limit you. Like that. We started saying hi to each other after that (laughs). I teased them a lot.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you go out to *korzo* often?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Regularly, regularly.

**Anita Susuri:** What was social life like back then? Did you go out with friends?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Here in Pristina?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Greta Kaçinari:** In Pristina, we didn’t only go out in Korzo but our entire friendship group gathered, we were more than 20 people. Imagine 23 people sitting around the table in a one-room apartment and singing all night and we never repeated the same song twice. All connected. Of course, the book of beautiful old folk songs was born. And we all sang. It’s interesting, Albanians in general have a good ear for... they have a talent for singing.

And of course, church had its role with the choirs, even from childhood, and then the choir for grown-ups, and then the combination [of both]. Okay, they’re church songs, but when your talent develops, you can use it for other songs too. Music is the best part of my life because Albanian songs are very special and they have, I mean, decent songs, because their lyrics have meaning and evoke

feelings.

## Part Four

**Anita Susuri:** You told me a bit about life, the friends you had, your hangouts, what was Pristina like at the time? When you were young? When you started working?

**Greta Kaçinari:** When I came to live here in Pristina in '72, it wasn't that developed as a city. The place where I live was very far from downtown, it actually didn't exist at all. So, there was only downtown and the old part of the city, which has gone through many changes until now. And then these buildings began [being built]. The construction of the old parts of the city. Actually, I remember every time we went to Prizren, when we came back, around Veternik, I used to say, "*More* God, I wonder if a house will ever be built on the left side here." So, at the place where Kalabria neighborhood is now, or was it on the right side? It was like a desert, I mean in '72.

How many years is it? For almost 50 years, all this change happened. I see it as a positive thing, everything that has happened until now, especially the change in the city's appearance. Now we can be compared to other cities in the world, civilized cities. We should raise awareness about maintaining the environment in which we live a little but I am happy that I got to see at this age both sides of Veternik having houses, buildings, and everything that makes a person's life better.

It was '72 when I started working, no, I was married in '72. I started working in '79, thanks to that child who told me they didn't have an English professor and thanks to the principal at the time and I started teaching English in Serbian classes. It was a very dynamic period of my life. At the time I simply started studying the Albanian language which I saw as a gift later in life. Not only because it's my native language. But getting into the literature of your native language and your vocabulary is enriched thanks to that, later on, I had different events in life where I found that really helpful.

When the demonstrations took place in '81<sup>38</sup> in Pristina, I continued working and I saw in my coworkers that things weren't working as they should've, Serbian professors were very concerned and I know because I tried to calm them down, to treat them gently. I don't know, I didn't know what was happening either. We only had a little information, not much. At the time we started watching the television of Tirana, Albania, we would sometimes catch it [the news] and we saw that something was shifting, something was not right. I remember, there was a curfew and I had an Albanian student whose family lived in Gračanica. And that child was stuck in school, nobody came to get him and he was stuck there, so I took him home.

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<sup>38</sup> On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

**Anita Susuri:** The day of the protests, right?

**Greta Kaçinari:** While there was a curfew. And so I took the child home and I remember [thinking], what do I do? How do I let his parents know that their child is safe and sound? I called the police and told them everything, I am this and that, I have a child here, they started to laugh. Believe me. I will never forget that. And I told them, “There’s nothing to laugh about but please let this child’s parents know that the child is here.” And [they said,] “As you command Mrs, that’s what we’ll do,” with sarcasm. But, they notified the family nonetheless. And the next day, his older brother came to get the boy. Now this family lives somewhere outside Kosovo too, somewhere abroad, Germany or something. But I remember that, it was terrifying.

And then accompanying the children, honestly, that happened later. There was always this feeling to especially take care of children. During the ‘90s there were times when we stayed in school till 10:00 waiting for someone to come get their children, at 10:00 in the evening. Especially there, in those parts where the children had to go, and their parents or someone close to them couldn’t come to get them. But the best part of my life was the ‘80s, so, friends, public life, *Akordet e Kosovës*,<sup>39</sup> theater, and rarely at the cinema even though I used to go often as a young girl. And... thanks to all this I have created a world in my mind, a special world, a world that can be much better than it actually is.

Let’s go back to the ‘80s when we used to gather when we sang and lived a beautiful social life. And then other gatherings like literary gatherings, these were all a part of my life in that time period and later. So, I was lucky to know a lot of creative people, whether it was in the field of music, literature, or in art. So today, that is food for my soul. It’s not that I go back in time, but it has simply remained as food which still keeps me going. The most beautiful [part] is the work with children, which was the majority of my professional life. Directly working with them, I mean as a teacher.

There were cases when I saw my colleagues give poor grades, ones,<sup>40</sup> twos.<sup>41</sup> There were poor students in my class too. And a group of them, about five or six people were from all classes and they got together, seventh grade, and this is a very special experience. Mandatory summer classes and the exam in August. During those mandatory summer classes, I chose some topics which were about social life too and I asked them, “How much pocket money do your parents give you, for *džeparac*, for *pocket money* [speaks English]?” And one of them said, “Well to be honest my father doesn’t give me any. But I go to the market with a cart and carry things for other people and they give me money. I then give that money to my father.”

He told me then, and then another one told me about their life. English was forgotten. The other one told me his life, and how he dreams of becoming a boxer, but he couldn’t because he had to help his father with chickens or what do I know. And I returned to the professor’s office from the class to take back the grades register, very emotional, and I said, “From today on, Greta will never give a one to any child, never! That grade doesn’t exist for me.” And I never did, I didn’t even give a two actually. A two

<sup>39</sup> *Chords of Kosovo*, a music festival held in Pristina in Yugoslav times.

<sup>40</sup> Grade F on an A-F scale (Five-0).

<sup>41</sup> Grade D on an A-F scale (Five-0).

seemed very humiliating to me. One is for ignorance, *it's okay* [speaks English], but giving a one to someone who makes a living for their family for not knowing English, which was a luxury at the time...

It wasn't logical to me. So, that opened my eyes a bit and I started to think thoroughly about each and every one of them. There were cases when a child [could pass] in fifth grade, and then sixth, but failed in the seventh. "Come here," at the end of the academic year we had to give final grades, "Look, what was your grade in the fifth grade? Five.<sup>42</sup> What about the sixth? Five. I'll give you a five in the seventh for the sake of the fifth and sixth grades. But I expect from you in the eighth grade. You have to compensate for everything that happened here." Believe me, in the eighth grade everything went wonderfully.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you about the '80s and we got close to '81. You told me about the curfew but when did you notice the situation getting worse and March approaching, I mean, the students protest. Was that noticeable?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Now the students' demonstration in '81...

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Of course it was because since I had Serb neighbors, I had a little bit of information about what was happening, not what was happening but what they feared. Even though they had nothing to fear, I was the one who needed to be fearful, but I wasn't because at the time, since movement was limited and I had no opportunity to go out and because we were working. During the days when school was interrupted, I remember that neighbor, my neighbor's sister who was young, even younger than me, and we'd go to the window. At that moment some soldiers with weapons passed by and they did this {describes with hands} go inside.

Imagine, we couldn't even go to the window. And they did this {describes with hands} and I told her, "Do we go in? Or we end up as Bora and Ramiz"<sup>43</sup> (laughs). It was a very undesirable scenario, not good, even scary actually. But, that passed too somehow, but since... later I had a case with a professor in school, who participated in the demonstrations. She was wounded and... and she told me about everything he had experienced. It was the beginning of what we're enjoying today. If it wasn't for the early ones [uprising], but also the student protests that followed, in '91, '92, it was a movement that needed to happen.

Because of everything that the [people of this] country was going through. Totally unnecessary, right? There could be a, so, after '74, everything could have been different, it didn't happen right? But there could be an exactly *peacefully divorce* [speaks English], a peaceful separation, and not be this painful, with this much blood and pain caused not only here in Kosovo, but also in Croatia and Bosnia and

<sup>42</sup> Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0).

<sup>43</sup> The speaker draws a parallel to the heroes of Yugoslavia, Boro Vukmirović and Ramiz Sadiku, who were executed during the Second World War.

everywhere. Even in Montenegro, and Macedonia, all of Yugoslavia was bloody, whether the ones whose hands were bloody, or the ones who lost their lives.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you become a principal after '81, or when?

**Greta Kaçinari:** No, no. I became deputy principal in '89, so before the '90s, in the end. During the entire '80s, I was a teacher. And the experiences of that time period are beautiful, whether socializing, or... I especially liked when it was St. George's Day, I'm saying St George intentionally because back then, the community of Roma or Ashkali or whoever lived in that part of the neighborhood where I used to live, it was a holiday which they celebrated on May 6 or 7, when is it?

**Anita Susuri:** 5th.

**Greta Kaçinari:** On May 6, yes. At the time they were dressed beautifully and went to celebrate at a different location while singing and dancing. This is that part of the neighborhood where I said the old park was, the older part of the city. And then another advantage of that one-room apartment where we lived is that we were on the fifth floor. And a detail that was a little scary for me at the time was when my daughter, whom I left home alone, I didn't lock the door because there was no burglary at the time, I didn't lock the door so that if my daughter wanted to go out, she could have. In any case. The apartment door was not locked. I saw my daughter from the school window, she was also at the window. I was terrified when I saw her. On the fifth floor.

I went to call her on the phone and said, "Were you at the window earlier?" She said, "Yes," "Please close the window and don't go up there anymore." [She asked,] "How did you see me?" "Ehhh, I see you everywhere and I see what you do from every angle." So that was a terrifying moment for me. And then sometime around the end of the '90s, '80s pardon, that's when a different type of turmoil began and in agreement with my school coworkers, two colleagues and I decided to apply for the deputy principal position. But, they said they would withdraw, and I said, "And what if I become a deputy principal? What do I know about being a deputy principal?" "This is what we will do, that's what's needed."

And these were the first stages of our awareness in organizing with each other if we wanted to achieve something. And then I became a deputy director. That's when they brought the imposed principal, as it happened in all schools. But at our school, maybe I acted a little differently, so I called the parents' council. Actually, one parent represented each class and the room where we held the meeting with the principal was filled. And I think that's one of the key factors that led to our school not being closed down.

The school was in three languages, so the Vuk Karadžić school had Albanian, Serbian and Turkish, and they had a special class in sign language for deaf children. So, it was a very exceptional school for all elements it had in itself. People, that's when the discrimination in payments began, in wages, and I remember in one meeting with civil society somewhere at the Faculty of Philology I brought that up, they told me, "It's not true." I said, "It is true because I am experiencing it firsthand."

Of course, if my coworker is getting paid three times more than me, what else could it be? She had 22-23 students in her class and I had 38-40 students in my class. This is unforgivable, do you understand? Discrimination is unforgivable and I don't wish it on anyone and I don't want my nation to be discriminatory. I am very against this negative phenomenon. When they divided, because there was a special allowance for meals, I saw the differences as a deputy principal, I saw the difference in payments and I refused to get mine. I said, "I don't want it, I don't want it because you have put your spoon in my plate." So, since you're eating my food, fill yourself up.

And this is where separation began, we totally separated. It was determined, children from Serbian classes would be on the upper floor, which was the most beautiful part and it had the best lighting, Albanians downstairs on the ground floor, and they put Turkish students in a totally different part. Special classes were on the upper floor. But, children with life problems being discriminated against is something I've only seen there. They would lock the class when the first shift finished and Albanian children couldn't go in during the second shift. That was painful. And then they came down to me and said, "They don't want us up there, they want us down here. To be with the others" {Makes the eagle with her hands}.

We had capacity problems at the time. And not only problems with capacity, but all kinds of problems. Children's poverty, lack of textbooks, of learning tools which were stuck upstairs. I had a lot of material and unfortunately, it's all damaged. I used to save the best essays by the students, the ones that were special, everything they worked on in my locker. That is all gone. But when the time came for me to do the same, I didn't do that. I said, "I will not act as they did."

First of all, I took it upon myself [to preserve] all the materials in Serbian language, *libri amë*<sup>44</sup> in Serbian, through UNMIK<sup>45</sup> we met with the former principal of the school, and I should be honest about him. He was humane, the second principal brought by force to school was completely different from the first one, with whom we also discussed. We agreed whether heating, electricity, everything, [the second one] wanted to be included in the payment, what is that logic? And so, I sent everything to him. And I said, "Here it is, I didn't want to become like you." At least I told him eye to eye.

This is that time period when people didn't know, we lived day to day, and we didn't know what tomorrow had in store. And when they say parallel education,<sup>46</sup> I think Kosovo never had parallel education. Kosovo worked according to the curriculum defined by the Kosovo education program. The system which they wanted to oppose was parallel. I see it that way and... because if you say we worked in the parallel system, it means you are accepting that it was like a state here and you're working parallelly to them. No, they wanted to impose parallelism, they're parallel, not you because

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<sup>44</sup> The basic school register, in which all the students who attend it are recorded; also it has the meaning of the official register, where the documents of people of a category are recorded.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

<sup>46</sup> "Parallel" is the system of education created by Albanians in Kosovo after they were banned from state schools in 1991.

you are here, you are autochthonous with all the official documents that came from the lawfulness at the time. Did I get into politics a bit? I think I did (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** There were a lot of political events in the '90s, whether you want to or not.

## Part Five

**Anita Susuri:** I know that you have participated in many protests organized by women. How did you get into that? How did that start?

**Greta Kaçinari:** So, this started with organizing... first it was the Democratic League of Kosovo [LDK],<sup>47</sup> so the foundation of all this because... of all the movement of the '90s and this cannot be denied. The Women's Group [Forum] which was within the Democratic League, was a powerful group. Of course, they implemented all the programs which were in the program... that wasn't, it wasn't a movement in the beginning. And, I mean the first one was cooperating with these women. And then they began forming other groups, for example, the [Flora Brovina's](#) group. And then, in groups, women started to organize in fields of interest, whether professional, or [else], and they had to be united.

Back then, during one meeting, where three of us were present, I have to say this publicly, without [mentioning] names, the group... The Women's Network in Belgrade asks our women to join that network. To collaborate with them. The three of us were talking about it, and I said, "What? They're a network, what are we? We don't have a network. When we have one, we can think about collaborating. We don't have a network for now. I personally think that we shouldn't accept this collaboration [offer] on this level." One of their husbands came and said, "Why are you against collaborating?" "No, no, I'm not against collaborating, but we have to be equal, even if by name."

After two weeks, there was a call for all groups to meet and the Women's Network was formed. The Women's Network was formed. I am saying this because I have to, my name was never mentioned and I don't want it to, but it's something, if an idea is good, it takes its path to all activities. Wherever they asked me to go, I went. I wasn't a leader in any group, school was a priority for me. But even in school, I had cases with many foreign visitors.

I remember even people from Serbia came and asked me... but now I am thinking that they were the opposition [of Milošević] or whatever it was at the time and they were interested to have information. And then, from all the European places and thanks to English, my communication with them was direct. I had no reason to say anything untrue because at the time everything [I said] was true, at least what we experienced. What others did, it was up to the ones who came down to ask about what was

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<sup>47</sup> 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.



happening. Because, I never said Serbs did this or did that. No. This is what is happening, this is what has started from this time period until now.

Actually, it's interesting, a Swedish woman asked me, "What similarity is there between your language? Slavic, Serbian language with Albanian?" I said, "The same way Swedish is similar to Chinese." So, totally different. And then of course I explained to her a bit about the famous tree of Indo-European languages, which is something everyone should know, right? And then, another case which was very interesting... ah, I forgot to tell you that there was a period of time during which I was engaged in the Demochristian Albanian Party. They wanted to form a Women's Forum there, I was categorically against it because why do you need a women's forum within a political party? Please. Why should it be men's and women's? When a political party has one name and there doesn't need to be gender divisions.

There could be specific tasks for someone, whether man or woman. But why, I don't know. They told me, "The Germans have it divided like this," "Well okay, since you want to, divide them." I have fought for women's rights since back then. I know, there was, accepting new teachers in school, new educators. At the beginning of the '90s, a large number of elders, elderly teachers retired. But, before they left their jobs they were worried about what would happen, how? And fortunately, there was a young substitute teacher and I asked her, "Please, do you have any friends from University who were good students and graduated and could come?" And they did, seven of them, in the interview. She said, "Oh, there's a man too," "No," I said, "I don't want men this time around."

In my opinion, it's very good to have [women] teachers in lower grades, my opinion. And then they came, all seven of them started working. So, I had a lot of trust in her, and she didn't abuse my trust, not even for one moment. Because I told her, "Look, you are the ones who will live and work together. The closer you are, the better the school will be. The more cooperative you are the better it'll be." And they began, when the professor from the University came who would supervise the interns, they said, "All of them work for you?" I said, "Yes," they said, "They were our best students," "Well," I said, "since I trusted the best, she brought me the best."

But there were cases when they applied for a job and their husband came to bring the application and I asked them, "Are you applying?" "No, it's my wife," "Well where is your wife?" "She's in the car," I said, "Can she come here so we can meet?" She did, she had a beautiful hairstyle like this {describes with hands} of that time with the curls. Okay, everything was alright. But I would immediately know who I was dealing with. I said, "Excuse me, if the police come, will you come help your wife?" Because we would expect the police to get into our classes and stuff. And if a woman was applying for a job position, [and] she was not aware of what she would deal with, I didn't need her. So, "Thank you, there's no vacancy this time."

But there were cases when I called them on the phone a year later and told them, "Will you come because there's a vacancy." Why? I used to communicate with them the same way as... I was simply dealing with what I specifically needed in school. And the ones who positively answered this, which were discussions, they didn't have anything to do with the school but with life, I would take their

numbers and call them when I needed. When it came to all of this, the Directorate of Education didn't really agree with me and I had *clashes* [speaks English] with them. I didn't allow them to impose people in school, what did I know about who they were bringing, so I took it upon myself.

I was the only one who was accountable for the school, the only one who fought for the school. And then came the difficult years, [we were] always cooperating with all the women's groups, the Women's Network, with... in all the meetings which were with external representatives, with whom, to whom we introduced all our problems and... now how could I remember all the names of the... Back then there was an international organization, which had its offices in Pristina and as a representative of PSHDK<sup>48</sup> in that meeting, what would I talk about the political party? There were two others who spoke about it, I spoke about the school and told them we had special classes about children who have difficulty hearing.

And they said, "We don't have that information," I said, "Do you have all the information?" "Yes," they said, "we do, but we don't have information about this," they said, "We will talk in a week." After one week, the representative of an organization came to school, a charity organization from, he was French, the guy. And he provided us with oil for the whole winter, even though Serbs used that oil to warm up, Turkish students also, they all benefited from the situation of the children with special needs. Imagine! And they brought it, they said, "We are ready to bring a ton of food as well, "I told them, "Not a ton. A ton is too much, can it be half a ton?" I didn't have an idea how much that was.

And we regulated the distribution of those supplies since one of the [student's] parents lived near the school and they gave us their basement to use because they had renovated it for living {describes with gestures}, it was very clean and we put all of the supplies there. And we started to compile a list of the students who needed it. Trust me, there was nothing more touching than when we started to distribute the packages because all misery gathers in one place. Back then we had a physician who worked in the school, we had physicians back then, a nurse and I. We couldn't stop crying until we distributed all these supplies. It was a very, very painful thing. And...

**Anita Susuri:** In what events from the Women's Network did you participate? In which protests or marches?

**Greta Kaçinari:** In all the ones possible. But, the last one [march] and all the protests were massive. Unfortunately, I didn't get to be at the Bread protest<sup>49</sup> because I was very sick during those days, I had a fever and... But I was in the prior meetings that we had with American, English, and French representatives, [all members] of the now famous five. But they were from their offices and they... after that there was that massive women's protest. The Network... women played a very important role. Let me say this too, I have started to forget the names of the different groups that were [active]

<sup>48</sup> Alb. *Partia Shqiptare Demokristiane e Kosovës* - The Albanian Demochristian Party of Kosovo.

<sup>49</sup> On March 16, 1998 around twelve thousand women in Kosovo marched under the banner "Bread for Drenica." The march was a response against the military siege in Drenica by the Serbian forces, and the massacre of the Jashari family in Prekaz.

back then. There was a very exceptional group that helped women who lived alone or who experienced domestic violence, which has improved later, but still not good enough.

But, I was with one of them and we got to be with two Canadian representatives, two representatives of the Danish parliament who were in Kosovo. It was the time period before Christmas, before New Year's, or between Christmas and New Year and they came here in Kosovo. But, they came with someone, they were invited by someone else who was Serbian and they were staying at Hotel Grand, where Albanians didn't go anymore. And the two of us were accompanying them because they were told Roma people are discriminated against by Albanians and the first thing to do was visit *Nënë Tereza*<sup>50</sup> organization, they were there. And then we went to the Nënë Tereza hospital, which was a hospital in private homes. And as soon as we got in, there was a line at the door. Now I don't know if they were Roma, Ashkali or Egyptians, but the women were there.

And they went inside, but then one of them got out and said, "I need some water because I feel like I am going to pass out." They were that distressed, they were very touched when they saw everything because there were women who gave birth there as well and there were medical visits, it was *kijamet*<sup>51</sup>. And then after the hospital we were sending them to the hotel. We sent them to the hotel and we were dressed well and we had makeup on and we told them, I told them, I said, "What we told you doesn't match the way we look. But you should know that the way we look and our makeup is a tool of fighting this situation because we keep ourselves going with this. Through us, through our will, we motivate other people too."

The one who was sitting next to the driver took her lipstick out and put it on. That was very interesting because our women really always looked presentable, they didn't give up anywhere. And another political segment of all this was, there was a famous show at the time which was transmitted by Television of Prishtina of the time which was occupied and there was also an interview with me. That was, the interview was conducted in my office, the teachers' office and we were all there. We stayed together. And they came to interview me and asked me how we're working separated in the Serbian state. And I said my opinion around that and then they used to ask me, "How could you count [all the issues] one by one?" (laughs). But however, that interview increased my popularity in the neighborhood where I lived, and not only in the neighborhood.

Because I remember that Anton Çetta called me, he always used to tell me, "You little devil" and he said, "Until now I've called you a little devil, now I will call you an angel." He was very touched by what he had heard. I only asked them to not edit what I had said or cut out the interview and they did it. They cut out a part where I spoke about the wages we weren't getting, "I hope that those wages aren't going to [funding] weapons." This was edited out, everything else went *live* [speaks English]. When I said this through the Demochristian Albanian Party, I had some sort of *rating* [speaks English], and I was chosen a member of the General Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> Tur. *kıyamet*, literally the end of the world. In the given context, it's used to describe a very chaotic and difficult situation.

And I always forget to mention this. Why? Because that was [the nature of the] time. What I remember is that when we held the first meeting in the office, at the office where president [Ibrahim] Rugova<sup>52</sup> held his meetings, we gathered there, there were tanks and the police who surrounded the place. And then Mrs. Kelmendi, Nekibe Kelmendi,<sup>53</sup> called the American Office and they immediately came. They intervened so the others wouldn't. There was some sort of very big *clash* [speaks English], and I remember it being an interesting moment because we were leaving that meeting with documents in our hands in front of the tanks and [gun] barrels directed at the entrance of where the meeting was held.

And then the role of the Red Cross in that time period, the role of... look, living at school, working at school under these conditions for ten years is like living a hundred years under normal conditions. That's a history of its own of everything that happened. It's... you could write about it every day, or when the people who fled Drenica started to arrive, from the place where turmoils began in '98, when the murders had begun when the students were coming, the families started to move to Pristina. I remember a teacher came and told me, "I can't work with 60 students, with 60 children in the class. We didn't have the time to identify who were the [new] ones coming." They stayed for two days and went, then came the others.

There was an extraordinary flow [of new students coming]. I asked, "What? What do you want to teach these children?" They said, "Well Albanian [language] and math," "There's no Albanian, no math. Now we have to teach them how to love each other. There's no more studying, we have to take care of these children like this now, with love, with stories, with positivity for the 60 traumatized children that are coming to class, this is... Anyone who can't [do this] should go home." There was no other way, pardon. You can't study in times of war because it was a war for ten years, ten years, and there were requests for a synthesizer or a piano in school... what? We are in the mountains now. Is there a synthesizer or a piano in the mountains? There isn't. What will we do? We will teach [them] to sing without a piano, without a synthesizer, with what God gave us, with our voice, and that's it.

And then there's really a lot [to tell] from this time period. A very painful period. I also didn't tell you about when the school was named Elena Gjika and when the division of floors happened. We were in a meeting with the union because the union worked a lot at that time, they were really active. Then two tall, handsome, very big guys came. And I was thinking that one of them was the fiancé of one of the teachers. I told them, "Hello," they said, "Speak Serbian. Who is responsible here?" I said, "I am," and they said, "We're coming from internal affairs," and I said, "*Uuu* {onomatopoeia} where are you from, you're so tall," (laughs). I immediately said that. And sometimes it's good to do that because you break the ice.

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<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> Nekibe Kelmendi (1944-2011), lawyer and human rights activist, after the war she was a member of Parliament for the LDK and served as Minister of Justice from 2008 through 2010.

“We need to see how you’re maintaining *libri amë* in Albanian,” “We don’t have a *libri amë*, we have a joint *libri amë*.” And really. We didn’t have a separate *libër amë* but we had a joint one with the Turkish, Serbs, Albanians, and the children with special needs, it was a thick book. We registered the children there. No one forbade us to do that because our secretary was Albanian, he kept those books and that’s where we finished that task.

But the problem was with *dëftesa*<sup>54</sup> because *dëftesa* was the first document to be in Albanian. And the headmasters of schools had issues with the stamps. What stamp do we use? Because we had the name Elena Gjika, no, we didn’t have the stamps yet for these *dëftesa* so we used the facsimile. And there were a hundred issues until the facsimile with my name and the school name Elenga Gjika was made. Just like they put a doctor’s name. Not a stamp because the stamps were not ready yet.

And they came, sorry the thing with the facsimile was a year before, now, they came for the stamp. And they said, “You are using a stamp,” I said, “Yes, the stamp of Elena Gjika school,” and they said, “We need that stamp,” I said, “I don’t have the stamp at school but I keep it at home because I am responsible for that stamp and I don’t have a [safe] place to keep it in here. I don’t even have a place to put my glasses, I don’t have my own drawer with a lock, I don’t have any of it. So, I was forced to keep it safe at home,” then they said, “We have to come and take it at your house.” We went to my house.

While they opened their car door they said, “We’re sorry Mrs., we didn’t know we would be driving a lady and our car is not clean,” “Not a problem,” I said, “don’t worry because either way you’re dealing with a mini lady” (laughs). I was this tall compared to them {describes with her hand, at the waist}, trust me, they were two meters long. One of them was laughing and the other one was serious. And while we were on our way, one of them said, “Ma’am,” he said, “what is this about? Why are you causing all these unnecessary problems?” I said, “How can I not cause problems? Look at the Faik Konica school, they kicked all the children out of the school.” At Faik Konica, there were no Albanians, poor them. At the time the children were all divided in different schools.

And I said, “What about the ones who were kicked out? And the wall they built at the school in Dardani?” I said, “That is not alright,” “No *bre*, the [director] of the Aca Marović school” he said, “She’s not in her right mind,” he said, “The director,” I said, “In her right mind or not, she kicked the children out of the school,” he said, “Yes ma’am,” he said, “There can’t be two states in a state,” I said, “I totally agree with you on this one.” That was a double-edged sword, but my answer was a double-edged sword as well because I actually agreed.

We arrived at the door, I’m telling this because it was very interesting, before getting in the main entrance, I told them, “Look boys, the fact that you’re coming into my apartment is because of my goodwill that I’m allowing you,” I was teasing them (laughs). They laughed. They even laughed out loud. We got inside and came here. Here, in the wall I had a phone, they [the phones] were Greek at the time, it was orange and on top of it there was a letter with a saying I heard in a really beautiful movie.

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<sup>54</sup> Official document issued to a student by the school, where the classes they completed, the final grades, etc. are recorded.

That happened in Scotland and I wrote it in that letter and I put that letter on the phone. No reason only because I liked it.

It was written, I wrote it in Serbian because of the Serbian subtitles. Do I say it in Albanian or Serbian?

**Anita Susuri:** As you wish, whichever is easier for you.

**Greta Kaçinari:** “*Da Bog da se sećali ovoga do god živite,*” I hope you remember this as long as you live, being ashamed, ah, “*Da Bog da se sećate stideći se*” [God’s will, you remember this being ashamed]. And they went in and the first thing they did was read that. Imagine, what were they doing in my apartment? You tell me. There was no need for them to come. They could ask me to bring them the stamp. And when I got my stamp from my bedroom I put it on the table and said, “Here is the stamp,” and they asked, “What about *dëftesa*?” “Well *dëftesa*,” I said, “there aren’t [any here]. *Dëftesa* are distributed to the students.” Which was true. And they took the stamp.

I told them, “I need a confirmation letter that you have taken this stamp,” they said, “Excuse me ma’am? We don’t give confirmation letters.” You know, I said, “Well how do I cover for not having a stamp anymore?” “Since you’re coming to us after two days,” they said, “We’ll talk about this,” I asked, “Why do I have to come? I have scheduled [a meeting] with the council of teachers that day,” he said, “Well, postpone the meeting of the teachers’ council meeting for a day because you have to come to us.” And I went there.

What happened in the meantime, that was ‘92... at the end of May my father died. All communications with Bosnia were interrupted and I didn’t know until ‘95, so two wars have passed, I didn’t know if my family members were alive or not. So, my brothers, my mother, my father. My father died. After what I just told you, my aunt in Prizren died. I couldn’t go to my father’s funeral even though in ‘92 I had... when I talked to my brother on the phone for the last time I said, “I will come,” he said, “Don’t come!” “I will come,” [my brother said,] “because a whole bus of people disappeared, you have no choice but to pass through Belgrade and Brčko,” because that was the road.

I said, “I will class Vladika,” I’m not saying his name because I simply feel bad. “I will call him, he will help us to get together for *Baca*’s funeral,” he said, “Don’t call him,” he said, “Because he’s not the same as he used to be.” And this hurt me in the heart because we loved him a lot. We sang together, he used to sing very beautifully. I think he regretted what he did at that troubled time. I never saw him again. And I feel really bad because of him and his soul. Because at the time when we lived in Tuzla and the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church and representatives of Islam collaborated, all three tried to have... I was young back then, we had youth gatherings and collaborated with each other. And that was a really beautiful thing.

So, my father had died, and I didn’t get to go. My [paterna] aunt died, very close to Pristina, in Prizren, and I didn’t go to my aunt’s funeral. Because I knew, if I went I would cry for my father, I would cry for my aunt, I would cry for myself, I would cry for all the children at my school, I would cry for my fate at

the time and I didn't want to go tired at that meeting with these two boys, the ones from UDBA. And I didn't go [to the funeral]. I went there wearing makeup and dressed well like always.

And they gave me a confirmation letter where it was written Elena Gjika school, teaching in Albanian, this was written in Serbian. And since at the time we didn't have the possibility to photocopy it, I'm sorry, I don't have that document anymore. But I gave it to the Council for Human Rights whom I collaborated with a lot and I hope they still have it somewhere. But, nevertheless, the school secretary and I were in this meeting for five hours and fifteen minutes and one of them left, the other came in.

I told them, "Why are you boys leaving and coming?" "Well," one of them said, "we're reporting to the chief," "Well tell the chief to come here and we'll all discuss together or we'll go to the chief and there's no need to come and go." The goal of the entire interview was for us to talk, for example, they asked me, "Who gave you the stamp?" I told them, and it really was like that, I could barely wait for that stamp. And there was a letter everyone signed, I signed that I got it [the stamp]. Nobody gave it to me.

And I told them, "People, nobod..." like that, I told them the way I'm saying it now. And they said, "Were you at this person's office?" "Well, that's the office where he works but other people work too, it's not only his." So, names, they wanted specific names. And not only that, but they asked about many other things, about how we were organized, what we were doing at school, what our relationship with the Serbian principal was like? I only said, "I told that principal of yours to remove Milošević<sup>55</sup> from his office and keep Vuk Karadžić. The school's name is Vuk Karadžić not Slobodan Milošević."

And I really said, "Remove this person from here, this is the school's name and that is enough," but he said, "I'm with his wife's party," I said, "They're the same because, do they sleep in the same bed? They're the same." But anyway they have both passed away, someone else will judge them. This world here judged them too, but how bad is it for people who know they're judged by the world in a situation, let alone God?

## Part Six

**Greta Kaçinari:** When the war began, when the first bombings began... that was a very difficult time period. We were three people, so Gjergj, Klorinda and I, the three of us. And our neighbors came knocking on our door and said, "We're leaving. Come with us." The reason we didn't flee was our daughter. Why? She said, "Mom, we're three people, they're all five or ten people." So, big families in other words. "We're three people, we're not leaving. We're not going anywhere." And that was the reason we remained [here]. So, she was right because someone had to sacrifice in a way.

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<sup>55</sup> 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.



But, when the bombings began, she came from her bedroom to our bed and got between us. Not the best moments, difficult. So, during this time period, during this bloody part, we stayed in Pristina. Actually, at the time my ulcer perforated and I had to undergo surgery at the hospital. But, I can't not mention that the medical staff, the technical staff, the nurses showed exceptional care and I am alive today.

**Anita Susuri:** Were they Serbian?

**Greta Kaçinari:** All of them were Serbian. And I will never forget that, because in... another interesting thing with this time period, before I underwent surgery, they appointed someone else to operate on me, not the doctor I wanted, who was a Bosnian from Montenegro and he was popular at that time. But they said, "In order to get him, you have to give a hundred," what was it [the currency] back then? What did we use? Not euros but, "You have to give him a hundred *marka*,"<sup>56</sup> I told them, "I don't want to give them even one *dinar*."<sup>57</sup> Never to anyone, not only him."

And I insisted that it must be him and a new doctor came in and saw me crying and concerned and said, "What's wrong?" He spoke in Serbian. U said, "They're forcing me into surgery," he said, "Nobody will force you into surgery." And he took me to my room. Until they didn't allow the doctor I asked for. And then he operated on me. And thanks to him I am still alive here today.

That doctor was forced to leave the hospital later because that was the deal, our people took over it. I don't agree with stuff like that. These people are valuable, leave them there. And I went for a follow-up check and the doctor who operated on me was there, there were new doctors there too who were Albanian. And I told them, "Thanks to him I am alive today. Learn from him as much as you can." And of course I will thank that doctor once again. I feel sorry but I would send him a whisky as a thank you, but I didn't get to do that because...

But what I experienced later, last year at the hospital, it's two different worlds. They're two different worlds of people who are responsible and respect work, respect their system and make these attempts. I am sorry to say this because during three months of last year, only my soul knows what I have been through. Not personally, but for my husband Gjergj. And I hope that new generations will understand this, the street at QKUK...<sup>58</sup> which was named the Hipokrat [Hippocrates] street, would really be a street of Hippocrates, and for that to be a place where they really uphold the Hippocratic oath. Not turn A into an I [turn Hippocrates into Hypocrite in Albanian].

**Anita Susuri:** We were talking about wartime, you said you were in Pristina.

<sup>56</sup> 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*.

<sup>57</sup> *Dinar* was the Yugoslav currency. Now it is the basic monetary unit of Serbia.

<sup>58</sup> *Qendra Klinike Universitare e Kosovës* - University Clinical Center of Kosovo.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What was Pristina like during the war?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Besides the time period I was in the hospital, I will go back to everyday life when we had to get different food supplies. He would say, because Gjergj was the one who got the supplies, he used to say that at the market, at the green market, not the green market but the one that's in front of Post [Building].

**Anita Susuri:** Ulpiana's Market.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Ulpiana's Market, there were all kinds of clothes there, brides' *paje*<sup>59</sup> for sale. Imagine, so everything that was stolen in different houses. And there was a family of seven that came here, they stayed for about a week until some man came and convinced them that they should leave and they left. This was around April, the end of April, before I was in the hospital. And Gjergj would get the supplies. When he came back home he used to tell me that he had to wait in line for bread, he had to wait here for something, and there for something.

And then there was something else, in different houses, in apartments, there were students who didn't, they didn't have food at that point. So in our neighborhood, we organized to collect bread and butter or whatever was in our homes and send it to them. Of course, we had to leave some for ourselves too. So, one day when Gjergj went to get groceries, the police took him, I was in the hospital at that time, the police took him and they kept him for five hours at a place, here, what is it called now...

**Anita Susuri:** Somewhere in Pristina?

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes, there was a really infamous place in Pristina, like a prison, but near the school Naim Frashëri. And Gjergj told me, actually, Gjergj told me [about that] much later. But my daughter came to visit me the next day and I asked her, "Where is *tota* [dad]?" "Well his hands are hurting a lot," "Why are his hands hurting?" "Mom, *bre*," she said, "the police took him yesterday," she said, "and he had to keep his hands like this all the time" {describes with her hands}. And she said, "He couldn't come." What do I know, he maybe had hand trauma holding them like that.

But, they didn't torture him personally but it's what he saw around him, others being tortured, people who were even younger and... everyone, young and old. "Do you want a cigarette?" The cop asked them, they said, "Yes *bre*," "Oh you want a cigarette?" *Bim, bim* {onomatopoeia}. Gjergj was really distressed when he experienced all that. But my daughter told me that... Gjergj told me everything later, about everything he had experienced and seen. But they didn't put their hands on him. They didn't know anyone's name but he was just lucky, he only had to keep his hands up.

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<sup>59</sup> Bride's trousseau.

And then my daughter told me, “Mom, you know, the police came inside,” they got into the apartment, “And?” She said, “They took the cigarettes, the cigarette packs.” We struggled to find cigarettes, wherever they were. They took the cigarettes and ten euros, ten *marka*, they were on the table. I don’t know why [they were there]. I had to give it to someone, or someone to us, I don’t know. But, anyway. “And mom,” she said, “They got into my room and threw all my dolls on the floor.” And I started to cry, “Why the dolls?”

None of the dolls were Albanian, the Albanian dolls had Dalmatian clothing, Montenegrin clothing, with Croatian clothing, of all the possible places of former Yugoslavia, with traditional clothing from different places. They were very beautiful and we still have them. And they threw them... She told me everything about dad and I started crying about the dolls. Of course, it wasn’t for the dolls but for the whole situation. What’s important is that the power was on and whatever happened and we put chopped bread in the freezer, in case we have no food so we have that. Like that, I don’t know. Our family was exceptionally lucky because, simply, I don’t know.

Edhe dy-tre ditë para se kam dalë prej spitalit diku kah fundi i majit, jo besa në qershor, kjo ka qenë në qershor, me 4 qershor, se tash data është atje 4. Erdhën dy policë në banesë te ne edhe fillun regjistrimin në kartela të kaltërta, domethanë emrin, mbiemrin, letërnjoftimi, e tjera, e tjera, të dhënat për të tre ne. Dhe gjysmën e morën për vete, dhe gjysmën na lanë neve. Këto kartela i kam ende edhe sot se janë dëshmi të një kohe të pa kohë. Dhe se tregojnë edhe diçka tjetër që neve kanë qenë si, në kohën e nacizmit kur hebrenjëve iu kanë dhanë *auswise* [German: Identification card] që të dalin prej vendit ku jetojnë po ato kartela edhe pa shenjat nuk kanë mujtë të dalin prej vendi. Në të vërtetë ata s’kanë dalë kurrë, por i kanë çu nëpër llogore për Auschwitz e tjera.

And two or three days before I left the hospital, sometime around the end of May, no actually in June, that was in June, June 4, that was the date. Two cops came to our apartments and they started to hand out the Blue Cards<sup>60</sup> registration, so the name, last name, ID, etc., etc., information about the three of us. And they took half of it with them, half of it was left to us. I still have these cards because they’re proof of troubled times. And they show something else that for us it was like the time of Nazism when Jews were given *auswise* [Ger.: ID documents] in order to travel outside the country where they lived, without those cards and the stamp, they couldn’t leave the country. Actually, they never left, but they took them in those trenches for Auschwitz and other [camps].

So to me, these are testimonies of a troubled time, like *ausweis* of Kosovo. They were given by a state, a mindless state based on occupation, a hatred for expanding and blaming others for what they were doing, just like they did in Bosnia, here as well. I don’t know, we survived, we remained alive and... I want to emphasize something too. Every evening at 6:00 my daughter and I went to the church of St. Anthony, the small church in Ulpiana [neighborhood]. Maybe not every night but every time we could go, we went, and there were five or six people. So, a really small number of people who remained in Pristina.

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<sup>60</sup> During the NATO bombings in 1999, the Serbian police kept a record of all the citizens who remained in Pristina and gave them a special type of ID documents.

When I asked the priest at the time, “Why aren’t you leaving?” He said, “Until there is even a single one of you remaining, I will stay here with you.” And... then there was another thing with the neighbors whom we didn’t know, but who we started to get to know, not [talking] about this neighborhood {describes with hands} we all know each other here, but the one up there {describes with hands} which is a little larger, at Ismail Qemajli Elementary School, it’s a very large neighborhood, but we started to get to know them. So when it was Easter, imagine, [it was time] to paint eggs, what do we paint them with? Where to find paint? And I found a single color and the new neighbors we met came to ours for the holiday and we had the painted eggs and this was all during the bombings time period.

I remember another foolery I did because there were three suitcases with clothes ready. A person doesn’t take anything with them. So, it’s foolish to tie yourself to material things when life is in question. But, I think that photographs must be kept and possibly a special writing which has something to do with a special document of a specific time. These are the beautiful things. And, do I continue about the school later?

**Anita Susuri:** Continue, yes.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Back then, Jews were the first to come, pardon, the first to come was an Italian organization, from Chiesa, who came to school. And they brought a lot of school supplies and we used that supply for about five years. There was that much, and it was really, really good. Later on they helped us with computers. The main computer for the teacher and how to teach others. The thing was to help the teachers in that aspect so they can start learning to work with computers. And foolish Albanians stole those computers, that’s it. And then CDF helped us with the sports hall. These are all...

I don't know, I was wrong to mention names because it was such a big number of organizations that helped and I only want to thank God and my father who didn’t let me go and study in Zagreb, but I graduated in English instead and I was able to directly communicate with people. When the Jew people came to the door, they saw the Elena Gjika school facility was beautiful, and it’s the most beautiful school in the city because it belongs to an old time period of buildings and I fought for it to be protected as an old object. And it was approved by the municipality. And then, the Jews plastered the walls outside, temperatures dropped under -20 [degrees celsius].

It was a beautiful time period which fulfills your soul, it fulfills your mind and doesn’t let you think about anything else. Only sleep for two or three hours and then you had to go on with everything that was happening. It was a great miracle. And then, there were some programs that began when UNMIK arrived. Here, the professors of our school were really smart people who understood that the very first set of trainings was very valuable because there were specialists from different fields.

I remember being in the critical thinking training, I said back then, “Well then from Rugova and everyone else should go to the critical thinking [training].” Because we Albanians lack critical thinking. We simply lack it. And later on, everyone who got their foundation of that training, kept going on other training and many of them became trainers themselves. Some of them became school principals. I

wanted to say it's a really good thing even in relation to the school. I remember in a meeting there was a representative of the Ministry of Education back in UNMIK's time, when they gathered all the principals of elementary and high schools.

We were all at the Assembly. Now imagine how many [people] were in the assembly, there was a special hall with tiered seating, we were there. A large number [of people]. And he said... I forgot to also mention what happened in my school. Pre-school classes were opened for the first time. There were preschool classes only in a state-administered institution. Parents would take their children for a one-day stay or what do I know, and that was close to the school. Whereas the first preschool as a class was in our school. And the opening of these classes is a story on its own, totally on its own.

And I don't know if I should explain how everything went, how the teachers who were interested to work came, how I told them, "I don't know anything about preschool. If you do, write everything you need on a piece of paper." And some Slovenians came, for school furniture and I told them, "I have these two rooms, but I don't know what I need in them." They sent the sketches for what was needed there from Slovenia, from Ljubljana.

After that, Austria's Caritas came and all of this happened in my school. I don't know how, people simply used to come. And they asked me, "What do you need?" and I told them, "I need this," {describes with hands}. And they brought chairs, lockers, and small desks for small children. Those two rooms had everything according to what the Slovenians sent. Everything was paid by others, of course. And, I could talk about the school for a year and I don't know if it would be enough.

So, I began with these changes immediately at the beginning of 2000 and in 2001 I traveled to Bosnia for the first time, with the signing of Kouchner<sup>61</sup> who was an administrator at the time. I crossed Montenegro with his signature, I passed in Sarajevo, I don't know, I traveled for 24 hours. They asked me in Montenegro, "What is this?" Well, "*Nikad video ovo*" I've never seen something like this. I said, "Well I was given this" (laughs). And that was the first time I traveled outside Kosovo, I mean after ten years and I met my mother and my two brothers. With one of them, for the last time, for the first and last time. Because later, after two or three years, he died.

And...I stayed there for one month, without asking anybody at all. Not even... do you [want to] know how that month passed? I totally returned to childhood. I didn't even mention war or anything, nothing about what I had gone through, neither did I ask them what they went through, nor did they ask me. In the evening when they came back from the store we played cards, watched movies, and sang. When they weren't at the apartment with our mother, she used to play *pasians* [solitaire], she used to throw the cards, a super fun game.

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<sup>61</sup> Kouchner (1939-) is a physician and politician, the founder of Médecins sans Frontières. While he was France's Health Minister, Kouchner had made a statement recognizing that Albanian students in Kosovo had been poisoned. After the war, in 1999, Kouchner was appointed the UN Special Representative in Kosovo.

A person could play it alone but there is also a *kibicer*,<sup>62</sup> the one who observes, you know, and he could react. So Gjergj and I used to play this game, we used to fight and make up. It's a really good game, but not in two but in single player. Until my brother told me, "Sister, do you have to go back to work?" I told him, "Yes, I should have a while ago," "Do you want to go visit baca's grave?" "Yes." After a month. And that's when I went to his grave and lit a candle, I spoke to him. I thanked him, I spoke to him and returned to Pristina.

The last look from the bus when I waved goodbye to two of my brothers, was the last look with the brother I saw for the first time after the war and that was the last. He then went to Opati, where he died. And then I got my mother here so I wouldn't leave her alone because she was already sick. I didn't want to leave her alone in Tuzla. So, my family is separated now. One was buried in Tuzla, my father, one in Opati, my brother, while my mother and younger brother were buried in Prizren. Both of them lived here with me and... actually my little brother came here when mother died and I didn't let him go back.

And so life is interesting like that and whoever is left should only thank God for all the gifts. I thank him for all the gifts I have had in my life. And those gifts were exactly my parents who took care of me, my brothers who loved me. When they shared their property [among children], I didn't even think about it. Actually, I had my own property here which my father helped me obtain at the beginning. They, everything was divided in three equal parts, imagine. So me as a sister, the two of them as brothers, my God. What a gift!

I only gave away a part of that there was nothing more. As much as I needed for this part to be finished because it's an overbuild. It's an overbuilding because it wasn't possible to do a proper building, but we should have. Because everyone around did, so we did too, with columns. We built it with a bank loan my daughter took and a bit of inheritance that we had and like that. And for this life, believe me, when I open my eyes in the morning I thank God for today and for all the days I have lived through until today.

I only feel sorry that something was interrupted, it was interrupted unnaturally. I communicated with people a lot, and I regularly went to the cathedral... *Uuu* {onomatopoeia} I forgot to say something else. Until I was a headmaster of the school when they requested to apply once again, so, to apply for the headmaster and I applied the first time, there was no opponent and they called it off. The second time around there was an opponent...

The opponent was from a political party, I knew that he would win even though I submitted my documents because I had applied. On Christmas night I went and withdrew them, I said, "My documents," "No, don't, how, how are you withdrawing?" "Give me my documents." That was the biggest [heart]break that happened in my life. My heart broke. I was left without the children, do you understand? Because I continued to work with children even later when I was a headmaster.

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<sup>62</sup> Srb.: *kibicer*, a curious observer and advisor to a player during a game of cards.

I had some groups who used to come and work in my office, they would come to boast, they would come to complain, they would come to meet other writers. But after two years of break I still had requests but through the phone, "Are you interested in being a translator at...?" Wait till I remember, now its name has changed. Alright, it has to do with the judiciary. And I went there, I met amazing people, and I learned about the judiciary. That old dream of mine to study law. I didn't learn everything, but the basics and I met two judges who were amazing and a prosecutor who was even more amazing and so I learned a little about the judiciary.

And then EULEX announced a job opening. I applied there. I don't know how I did it but I got accepted. I worked in the department of forensics. A very interesting field that is related more to emotions, meetings with people whose family members were missing, with the organization of mothers of Gjakova... let me not mention too many but everyone. But, my last job that I quit was at an organization, whose founding I initiated. It's near the Catholic Church here in Ulpiana. Because when you become a certain age, then... you expect to reach a certain age, a later stage in life, not only mine. And I told a friend of mine, "You know what? Why don't we form a women's group and start meeting, maybe we can do something?" "Yes, very well." And we also asked the priest what he thought about it, he really supported us.

And then we collaborated with the nuns of St. Cross, they are honorary nuns that work at the church, they don't work, they live there and have the student's dorm. And this is how the organization Ulrika was founded, now they are elderly women, so my age. The women who help them are a little younger and from the work they sell they buy flour, oil, and distribute it to poor families. These don't, they don't go public or... an appropriate humane act. Just like everyone should act.

They never go on TV to become public and say they did that, they helped them. And that's real help because somewhere in the Bible it's written, "What the right does... the left shouldn't know what the left does." But we are humans, sometimes we like to, just like I was boasting here with joy (laughs). No, I didn't boast.

**Anita Susuri:** If there is anything else you'd like to add as a closer?

**Greta Kaçinari:** As a closer...

**Anita Susuri:** If you forgot to mention something or...

**Greta Kaçinari:** Do I invite you tomorrow? (laughs) No, I didn't forget but I didn't touch upon everything, of course. I didn't touch upon the main thing which is my married life.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Greta Kaçinari:** How we got there wasn't only the looking, love at first sight but it was also earlier planning of wishes. Since I was living in Bosnia, I wanted to marry an Albanian, I wanted to marry [someone] from Prizren so when we fight I wouldn't have to curse their birthplace. I wanted him to be



educated because there were a lot of men who asked for my hand [in marriage] and were silversmiths or craftsmen. And I wanted him to be educated. Actually one of them had insulted me, “Did you finish school at last?” He had insulted the school. So, all of these wishes were fulfilled because I wanted those things and that’s him, something that connects people.

And I will also say this, here in Letnica we had the last light, how do they say in Albanian? *Dame biraju*, the ladies choose [men] for dancing. And the first [best] dance has the reward of going to the wheat field, corn field, for five minutes because there in the village the houses were surrounded with fields. Ten minutes for the first place, I don’t know what the second one was. I remember the first because we won ten minutes. But I chose Gjergj for the dance. But later we kept dancing in groups, a hundred and something young people that were there, we continued in Prizren the following days and it was like that. That day there were many marriages of the people who have met for the first time, even if it was many times later.

What’s important is that when I said, when I started to think about Gjergj those days while we were in Letnicë. My father said, “Who is that young boy? I sort of like him.” “Hmmm {onomatopoeia} how did you know you liked him? How did you know?” (laughs). Exactly him. And it was like that. Besides these four wishes, life brings many other things. And what’s important is respect, and staying out of other people’s personal business. Because that really does cause problems and for the person to stick by their words till the end in good and bad. I tried to do that until the end and I managed to do it.

And what was shocking to me was when I went to the municipality [building] for some documents. I was told, “Ma’am now you are officially divorced.” “What? Who has the right to divorce me?” It was an impulsive reaction, so much that some men behind me were shocked too. “Who has the right to legally divorce me?” (laughs) At the moment I thought about until death do us part. And this is it, but they were really emotional moments and I handled them with difficulty.

This was before a new visitor came to Kosovo and it was the most dangerous until now. That’s it, this is the pandemic that alienated, alienated, changed, and alienated the daily life of every person alive in Kosovo. I think, after many attempts to raise the awareness of the people, a good level [of awareness] was achieved. Not that the politicians did it, but the citizens amongst each other.

Because it’s shameful for a famous singer to come out with a statement that... whom we consider a responsible person because he’s also a member of the assembly, is he still? I don’t know. But he was at least an MP. But, however, he has a name and allows himself to say, “There is no [virus].” He could have said “I personally don’t have it. But I’m not totally sure.” Just like me today, I am not sure if I have it or not. Neither are you two.

So, when uncertainty begins to take over a place, that place becomes sensitive. I pray to God that the young generations will find their way and understand that we are facing big changes, for which we, the older people, are not prepared. But, we won’t have the opportunity to prepare because it goes beyond our knowledge, our mental capacity. But the young people should understand as soon as possible. The life that expects you and all the young people after will never be the same as it was.

So, adapting is very necessary and young people should learn a lot, a lot. To learn foreign languages, that is the first and the most important, everything comes after. Because through language you will be able to go into the virtual world, into the world of technology because that is the future. So, you are the Alpha [generation]. Do you know about this division of generations?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes I know, according to how the Americans have divided it.

**Greta Kaçinari:** And it's very interesting. Not only Americans, Russians and Europeans have done it too, everyone, very interesting. But everyone is there, at approximately the same level. I know you as the *Alpha Generation* [sepaks in English], as a generation of alpha or Z, you could be Z, because you were born...

**Anita Susuri:** During the '90s.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Yes. But the Gen Zee includes a little until 2010 I think and then comes Alpha. And Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet. Alpha is used [to refer to] a new beginning, Alpha is something that flourishes, something new. That's why, it was my pleasure to have you in my apartment and even a bigger pleasure that you're both girls, you're women and you're working on very interesting and important work. Don't forget that the histories you have, the ones you have finished so far, stories of people who have lived or live in a certain period of time, to upload them somewhere where a virus can't harm them.

**Anita Susuri:** Thanks a lot Mrs. Greta.

**Greta Kaçinari:** Thank you, both of you.