

INTERVIEW WITH KAQUSHA JASHARI

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Duration: 161 minutes

Present:

1. Kaqusha Jashari (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
4. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Anita Susuri: Ms. Jashari, if you could introduce yourself? Your birth year, and if you could tell us something about your origin, your family?

Kaqusha Jashari: Thank you very much! I am... I was born on August 16 of '46, so immediately after the Second World War. I was born here in Pristina, by chance, since my mother was visiting her parents. Otherwise, at the time we lived in Skenderaj, because my father was there on duty, he worked for the government. And we had a house there, but I don't remember it at all because we moved from Skenderaj very quickly [after I was born].

But they didn't register me here in Pristina where I was born, they registered me in Skenderaj. And I always (smiles) had to go and get my birth certificate at the municipality there. And people thought I was from that area, from Skenderaj, from Drenica. But actually my parents had no connection with Drenica. Except that my father had to finish the duty they gave him [there].

Otherwise, my father is from the Anamorava region, he's from a village close to Kamenica, now Dardana, he's from Tugjec. My whole family are of the Krasniqi *fis*,¹ he [my father] and my uncle have kept their last name Fejzullahu, which they inherited from an earlier grandfather. And most of the family are Krasniqi, but we are Fejzullahu. So, my maiden name is Fejzullahu. My parents were married in '45, they met each other as partisans. Because they were both in the anti-fascist war, in the same brigade.

¹ *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that, like the Latin gens, includes individuals who share an ancestor. *Fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common. Membership in a *fis* is based on a common mythical male ancestor.

That's where they met, and they got married. My mother is Montenegrin by nationality, my father Albanian. And it's a bit interesting why I was named Kaqusha, because people were asking me about it and I asked my mother, "Tell me how you got the idea, Kaqusha?" "Eh," she said, "here it goes. After we were in the war, back then the first weapon that was invented was the missile weapon Kaqusha and we thought..." Back then they couldn't know if the baby would be male or female, as they do now, back then they didn't know. And my mother said, "Okay, if the child is born female, we agreed to name it Kaqusha. What if the child is born a male?" My father said, "Well if it's a male then we'll name him Partizan."

And my mother said, "*Kuku*"² she said, "I prayed to God that it won't be male because I didn't like the name Partizan." Just so you know, a few individuals were named Partizan after the war, I don't know if you heard about a person who... he was popular in I don't know what profession in Prizren. His name was Partizan... I forgot his last name. I mean, they named people based on history and events that... for example, I'm not one of the people who would [name my child after something like that]. I remember talking to my friend about names because my children's names aren't anything related to history.

The history of today might be different tomorrow, so it's better to name them after something different related to the family than a historical moment. And they named me like this since the invention of that rocket Kaqusha was very current [at the time]. But what's very interesting is that I have a lot of [virtual] friends, since I have my own Facebook [account], and the parents of girls named Kaqusha supported me at the time and named them after me when they were born.

The ones I have on my friends list, I once had a hangout with the girls named Kaqusha and 17 of them showed up. And we ate a good lunch. Some of their parents didn't believe it and they said, "When you meet, take pictures to see if it's real" (laughs). So I have some girls [on my friends list] who are about 30 years old, now they've become mothers and they're named after me.

Anita Susuri: You told us a family story...

Kaqusha Jashari: And, I also mentioned my father and mother...

Anita Susuri: Yes?

Kaqusha Jashari: I mentioned that my father is from a village in Kamenica, but they moved from that village very early on, I think it was '32, before the war when he was a child. Not only his family, but I think a lot of Krasniqi [families] agreed to leave the village because life was difficult. They owned land in the mountains, but it was a steep terrain. And they agreed to move out of there and go search for a

² Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

better place. Emigrating to Turkey was common and they went there from Tugjec to Skopje, from Skopje... some of the family members also remained in Skopje.

Some [others] who were determined, decided to continue and head to Turkey. As my father told me, they stayed in Turkey for two months. They [Turkish authorities] appointed them a place to go, and they didn't like the place at all and they said they didn't want to go there. And the Turks, the Turkish government at the time put them on a ship and sent them to Albania. At the time Zog³ was in power in Albania and my father told me then that, "They gave us a place, a house and a land parcel to plow." It was between Fier and Seman, Seman is a bigger village near the sea of... in Albania.

And the Oxharë village, that was a very difficult place [to live in] as well, it was a moor. So, my father said that his father continued to work because he worked with the craft of blacksmithing, to make the working tools, but not even his work went well there. And my father said, "Even when I was young I had to move around a little, to find something to work," and often he went to Durrës from Fier. And he had to do manual work in the port, he had to carry things. Commerce with Italy was developed and later on I found out that (laughs) he [my father] used to say, "I know Italian." But I didn't believe that he knew it that well, but he could actually speak Italian, by working in the port.

He enrolled in Fier's elementary school back then, and Fier was far away to walk to, about seven kilometers to go to school from the village, and seven kilometers to go back. He was a bit older than he was supposed to be, in order to enroll in elementary school, but he finished elementary school there. When he moved, when the National Liberation Movement began he joined it and joined the ranks of the partisans. Back then I think the ranks of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia were mixed. And I don't know the details of his engagement, I just know that he participated.

I know he met Fadil Hoxha,⁴ I know that he formed the rank of Ramljan with him near Gjilan {points behind with her finger}. And my father continued with what they formed while Fadil Hoxha went somewhere else. I know that he [my father] was very active. He sometimes worked as a translator too when he needed to work, because there were Italians here too, Italian soldiers. He worked as a translator. He was also in prison in Pristina, they imprisoned him as an illegal, they imprisoned him. I don't know other details, I just know that he had to be a translator even as a prisoner, and that saved him, they treated him better.

³ King Zog I (1895-1961) born Ahmed Muhtar bey Zogolli, taking the name Ahmet Zogu in 1922, was the leader of Albania from 1922 to 1939. At age 27, he first served as Albania's youngest ever prime minister (1922-1924), then as president (1925-1928), and finally as king (1928-1939).

⁴ Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001), Albanian Communist partisan leader from Gjakova, who held a number of high posts in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, including the rotating post of Vice President of the Federal Presidency, the highest leadership post in Yugoslavia under Tito, in 1978-79. He retired in 1986, but was expelled from the League of Communist on charges of nationalism.

After the war he had various engagements assigned by the power, I mentioned that he worked in Skenderaj for some time, I don't remember life there at all, two years or something, my mother told me that they had a house, they had a well in the corridor (laughs) inside the house. She got really scared when I went out [of the room] because there was a well there. One time she said, "I was looking for you and you were nowhere, *kuku*, I looked into the well. And then I found you" she said, "in the backyard among the tomatoes, picking and eating them. I was scared that you'd go on the street." But at the time the street didn't... {stretches to decline a phone call} the street didn't have traffic. There were no cars, but the fear was still there.

So, she remembers that time, how can I say, they had some bad memories from the life they had in Skenderaj. The situation was a little difficult in Drenica at the time because of these armies, which were not only partisan armies, but also other ones known as *ballist*⁵... so my father had a very sensitive role, but my mother used to tell me that when people from the mountain came, they asked, "Who's working this shift? Is it Halil, or someone else? If it's Halil we'll go, we'll surrender and it won't be a problem. But if it's someone else, no." So, they somehow trusted him.

And later on when I attended some activities in Skenderaj, some people used to come and tell me, "Are you Halil's daughter? Oh, that's good, so good!" So, I had a sort of support in the sense of trust that served me anywhere in politics (smiles). It has always served me in politics. And from there [Skenderaj], they sent my father to Ferizaj for a very short time, I don't remember it at all, but I remember Gjilan.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old were you when you were in Gjilan?

Kaqusha Jashari: In Gjilan... before Gjilan, I started school in Peja. Because they sent him from Gjilan, no not from Gjilan, from Ferizaj to Peja I think, I enrolled in the first grade there. He was a police commander, my father. Then, they sent him to Gjilan and Kamenica. In Gjilan and in Kamenica he was the head of the police force of those municipalities, and I continued my education in those places. It's very interesting how often we moved places.

I'll tell you, I finished first grade in Peja {raises her thumb}, I finished second and third grade {counts on fingers} in Kamenica, fourth and fifth grade in Gjilan, I finished the sixth grade here in Pristina, seventh and eighth grade in Gjilan. And then I enrolled in the Technical High School in Pristina, I finished four years and then I went to study in Belgrade.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did the city seem like to you at that time? Was it underdeveloped, what kind of city was it?

⁵ Members of *Balli Kombëtar*. The *Balli Kombëtar* (literally *National Front*), known as Balli, was an Albanian nationalist, collaborationist and anti-communist resistance movement during the Second World War.

Kaqusha Jashari: Well look, you know what, as children we always looked at what kind of friends we had, only what I remember because it's only me and my two brothers, so my parents had three children. I am the oldest and there's two other sons. We always looked at what friends we had, every time we had to leave Gjilan to go somewhere we cried. Because we had a very good environment, we had places where we could do activities and play, and do sports. There was the upper park, that's what they called it. The children gathered in Gjilan, and not only from the neighborhood, but from the school also and we used to play.

What I remember at that time, I know you're interested to know also about how we were brought up because it's a little different in mixed families because we had the Muslim religion on my father's side and the Orthodox religion on my mother's side. So my mother had a very good influence in general. I remember they used to ask my mother, family [members] from my father's side, "Can we eat this?" They meant, does the food contain pork, or... "Can we eat that?" I asked, "Why do you always ask my mother and not my father?" "Well," they said, "Danica wouldn't lie to us, it's safe with her."

Yes, my mom also respected the other religion. My grandmother [father's side] who lived with us at times, and with my uncle at other times, it's interesting she was religious and she had a room, her own place, where she had a *postaçie*⁶ to pray with and she prayed five times a day. And she did things in her own order, to wash her feet and hands, to put on her scarf {gestures putting on a scarf}, I can see her doing it like it was today. She was a very... small, a very loving woman.

And during Ramadan, my mother knew the customs, about *iftar*,⁷ about *syfyr*,⁸ always. And my grandmother always used to mention her. She used to say, "There's no one like Danica." And it's interesting she always mentioned that she wanted a [golden] hand watch [for my mother] {touches hand} , and she told my father, "Buy a watch for Danica. [He] delayed it for tomorrow, and the next day" she said, "they ended up not buying it." And before dying she left an *amanet*,⁹ she said, "Halil should buy a watch for Danica." And my father immediately did that the next day.

And so my mother had a lot of influence in the order of the house, with rules, for example we knew... she was a stay-at-home mother, she didn't work [outside the house], we knew when lunch was ready. Lunch is at 2:00, for those coming from school and those going. So, lunch time was always precise at home. And then she had her way of cleaning the house, we knew that Saturday was the day of overall cleaning. And whoever was there helped, to shake out the rugs, or to carry something, it was always known on Saturdays. That was the order.

And what's interesting is, I never forgot this, when I see children eating out, I remember my mother, she never let us eat outside. "Nope" she said, "when you're hungry come here, sit, eat and then go

⁶ Fur rug made out of animal skin.

⁷ *Iftar*, meal consumed after dawn, breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan.

⁸ *Syfyr*, pre-dawn meal during the same month.

⁹ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

out,” we said, “Others are going out [to eat] too,” she said, “I don’t care about the others. I don’t want to think about someone else being hungry, maybe they can’t afford it, and for you to eat in front of them” she said, “There is no way. You eat food in the house and then go out.” She never let us eat outside. And we were hungry from school like every other child, “Give me some food” {puts hand out} to take and go out to play. “No, no, no, first you eat inside the house and then go [play].”

That’s something that has... we always had the idea to be careful if others might not be doing well financially. Since we had a good life as children because my father worked, the income was there. Every first [day] of the month my mother was the one, as they say now, who managed the money. He [my father] gave it to my mother because they got their wages on the first [day] of the month. On the second [day] we went to the store and bought everything we needed for one month, oil, sugar, everything. And back then she used to bring us chocolate [bars]. Back then you could not have candy like today whenever you wanted at every moment, several times during the day. No, you got one chocolate [bar] per month.

That’s one thing. The second, when we were a little more grown up, especially in Gjilan, all three of us were in elementary school, our mother used to give us pocket money, “Take this, it’s for one month. To go to the cinema, to go see a sports match, wherever you need it, and there’s no more money.” They set it aside for us. And that [duty] belonged to me since I was the first child, the oldest, and I looked at what movie to watch, where to go. We went to football matches, Gjilan always had a good team, we watched football, we also watched handball. But even back then and also later, women never had to pay [for tickets]. Women were allowed to get in without a ticket to watch the match, I don’t know if it was a decision or a tradition, I don’t know what, I just know that I, as a woman, never had to pay, but I paid for my brothers.

That’s what we had, this was our way [of having fun], and we also went on vacation, not only at home. I remember that we drove to Bulgaria twice, we had a car back then. And our parents used to give us money when we arrived, this is the money for food for as long as we were there, for example, “For ten days this is the money for food, eat whenever and whatever you want.” And we shared it between us, and our mother didn’t have to think about what we ate. And at the end of the day that was a good thing both for them and for us because we had money, it’s a big deal for children to have money (laughs). It was easier for her [our mother] because she didn’t have to be concerned about the food, so that influenced a lot of things.

Since I have already started talking about her being a generous woman, I’ll also mention that she has taught us well also in comparison to other families that were mixed. Because we had friends, we used to hang out with Sinan Hasani’s family, Ali Shukriu’s¹⁰ family, when they had some meetings, some visits, we used to go as a family, I also remember one case which was really important for us as children, to know who we are since our mother was Montenegrin, our father Albanian, when it came to

¹⁰ Ali Shukriu (1919-2005) held important positions in the Yugoslav state.

the language, we knew more Serbo-Croatian than Albanian. When our grandmother [father's side] visited it was okay [speaking in Albanian], but when our grandmother wasn't there we talked to our mother [in Serbo-Croatian], our father was never at home, he was always at work so we had less contact with our father.

And so in '61 I remember there was a population census, we lived here in Pristina {points with finger behind her} above Hotel Swiss, [now] Diamond, that's where our apartment was. And so three people came for the census. I guess my mother knew when they would come. They came inside and filled those documents out, they wrote the information for my father, my mother and the children, we were there. Our names, last names, and when it came to the ethnicity and language section, all that information, if we were pupils or students [or not]. And when it was the ethnicity [section] {looks to the side} we started to look at each other, and mother called me and I went to the room. She said, "Listen to what I'm saying" she said, "I'll tell you this now and never ask me again. Whatever your father is, you are as well, and there is no discussion."

And I turned, I said, "Albanian," and I was registered as Albanian. My two brothers did as I did and they were registered as Albanian as well. When it came to the language, we knew a little Albanian, we spoke to our mother in Serbo-Croatian fluently. And we were enrolled in school like that, because I enrolled in Serbian [school] in Peja. And so I said, "My mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian." And my mother looked at me but didn't react and when they [population census workers] finished all of it, when they went outside, she said, "What did you put as your language?" Well I said, "Should I lie? I can't lie, we don't know Albanian as much as your language and mother tongue means it's mother's. That's your language." And she felt good, I could tell you know, we were like, we didn't want to offend any of them [parents] and that was a good thing.

But I noticed later with the children of the families I mentioned, the sons of Ali Shukriu and Sinan Hasani, they registered as Yugoslavians. Because there was a Muslim option, but also a Yugoslavian one. That's not an ethnicity, but there it was. And how are you Albanians? They often asked us, "How are you Albanians?" "Well, it's easy," we said "whatever our father is, we are as well, that's what our mother told us." So our mother, even though she was from an entirely different religion and ethnicity from our father, she influenced us positively, all three of us, my brothers and me.

So even much later, when there were all these problems in Kosovo, when I was in my position and they fired me, we [Albanians] happened to organize our [own] elections, as we call them Rugova's elections and Serbia had their elections as well and I remember once my aunt [mother's side] visited my mother at our home and said, "Dano," she said, "what are we doing for these elections *bre*?"¹¹ She [mother] said, "You choose whatever you want, I will be wherever my children and my husband are." And my mother voted along with my father, so in our [Albanian] elections. When there was a referendum at the

¹¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *Bre* adds emphasis, similar to the English bro, brother.

time, they [parents] lived at a house in the village because my father was kicked out of this apartment in '92, the police moved him out of there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: From this apartment, right?

Kaqusha Jashari: No, that's my apartment, but this {points down with finger} is my father's apartment and they kicked him out of this one. A Serbian woman came here, I have barely fixed the status of the apartment now because it was being processed. They kicked him out because he had a very progressive attitude, he was Head of the Warrior's League, when there were some instances of vandalism, breaking down the glass on store windows. You're young so you don't remember, but it happened after Milošević¹² came in.

There in Serbia, when they broke the windows of bakeries, of the people who lived and worked abroad in Serbia, especially in Vojvodina there were many people from Prizren, bakers, they had bakeries there. And [people] from Tetova had these cake shops, they broke their windows. And my father stood up as Head of the Warriors and criticized them, there was a big fuss when he spoke up. And so they kicked him out of here, from the apartment. There was a Serbian woman and she told me, "Let's become good neighbors" "Sure," I said, "I'll become good neighbors with you who kicked my father out of his apartment." And... after the war they left by themselves, they left by themselves.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can we go back a little...

Kaqusha Jashari: Okay, [should I talk about] elementary school?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, where you finished most of it...

Kaqusha Jashari: Mostly in Gjilan. It's interesting, we went to Gjilan twice, and we came to Pristina twice, but we spent more time in Gjilan than in Pristina, except when I went to high school. Me and my brothers as well, we had a kind of atmosphere in the house that we should be doing things. We shouldn't only go to school, but we should do something more, some activity, so we all did sports. Since my father was a hiker, he didn't play sports, neither football, nor handball, nothing. But it was accessible to us because schools organized matches within the school and then [different] schools between each other and somehow we were exposed as athletes.

Both of my brothers and I, I started to play handball in Gjilan, when we came here in Pristina in high school, my professor was, I had two professors, Xhavit Spahiu, he was one of the founders of handball in Kosovo, and Hisen Rakovica. And then he was a professor of athletics at the Faculty of Physical

¹² 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.

Education, but he noticed my talent for [sports] games and told me that it'd be good for me to show up at the Kosovo Handball Club and so I became a member. Besides me and another girl from the Medical school, all the other girls were from the Physical Education school.

Because back then there were vocational high schools, very, very organized. I'm telling you that the Technical High School where I was in the first generation, was a school that produced a lot of professional staff. The ones who didn't continue with the [Technical] faculty were technicians in workshops and they were very good at their jobs, so the Physical Education School had people who achieved a lot in sports as well. Even my husband whom I met back then playing handball, he was a handball player as well.

He achieved a lot, he finished his PhD, and his friends from that generation in the Faculty became professors, like Beqir Hasanzheka, let me not mention all of them, Isen Rakovica as well as some other professors. So, it was me and another girl from the Medical school [in the handball team] but we were good and you couldn't tell us apart from the others who had sports as their profession. And I played for a while in the tournament and we almost made it to the first league of Yugoslavia, but we were one or two goals short, Pristina's team was that good. After element... high school here in Pristina, I went to Belgrade to study.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us a bit about Pristina as well, so it was the '60s?

Kaqusha Jashari: I enrolled [in high school] in '61. Pristina back then was a, now I don't know what to talk about more, whether to talk about the school, for example I'll tell you about high school, we...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean the urban planning, maybe there was...

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, we had a high school, the high school was here in the facility where now Pristina's archives are. And I started my first and second year there, but then we moved to the new facility that is now Adem Gashi for the third and fourth year. The school that was together with Sami Frasheri, now they have separated. And so it continued there, I finished my third and fourth year there, we had our sports fields and we had a very powerful youth organization.

I don't know, maybe I wasn't exactly, not calm, very disciplined but I did everything like extracurricular activities and work actions,¹³ they were organized to fix some stadiums and sports fields. And they chose me as Head of the youth [council]. And I was Head from the first to the fourth year of high school, four years. I don't know if you can believe that we had a radio within the school. And we had the school orchestra.

¹³ In the socialist Yugoslavia it was common for the youth to do voluntary work. An organization such as *Omladinske Radne Akcije* [Youth Work Actions] was a way to contribute to the so-called building of the country, where youth from all over Yugoslavia camped and worked on massive construction projects similar to what the speaker is describing, constructing a stadium.

That's where it started, and there was Sabri Fejzullahu,¹⁴ I'm not related to him in any way family wise, but later on when he became more famous, people asked him, "Are you related to Kaqusha, is she your sister?" He said, "I see her as a sister, even though..." and they also asked me, "Are you related to Sabri?" I said, "I see him as a brother, even though I'm not related to him." But his cousin, he passed away last year or two years ago, Hilmi Statvoci, he was with him... {gestures playing drums}

Anita Susuri: Drums?

Kaqusha Jashari: Drums, yes. He was extraordinarily good, we had two guitarists [in the school orchestra] and Sabri Fejzullahu, he started to sing with this school orchestra because we organized what we called *matinee*¹⁵ balls two times a week. Not on the weekends but I think it was on Mondays and Thursdays in Armata. There was a hall and now I think it's a cinema.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Kaqusha Jashari: We had a rule to go in dressed {touches her top}, they said no man without a tie. And something they did, [since] they didn't all have ties at the time, they had only two or three ties. Someone went in with a tie, took it off and threw it {describes with hands} out the window so someone else could go in, just like that (laughs).

The Technical High School was very organized. We worked the fields, now it's the part near the industrial area when you go to Veternik, that plain, there were sunflowers and corn planted. We worked for the enterprise Agro-Kosova and were compensated. We pulled out the [corn] cobs. They paid us and we bought musical instruments and the radio-station. And we needed the radio to play music during the long [lunch] break. We played Elvis Presley, he was very trendy at the time and we listened to him, we played him and... And then important information for the school, about who played, which team won.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Kaqusha Jashari: We were very, very active. And when I finished the fourth year of high school...

[The interview was interrupted here]

¹⁴ Sabri Fejzullahu (1947), born in Besianë, Kosovo, is a popular chanson singer.

¹⁵ Matinee, a performance in a theater or a showing of a movie that takes place in the daytime.

Kaqusha Jashari: And there was a discussion about how active I was, it was the Head of Kosovo's Youth¹⁶ back then, Mahmut Bakalli,¹⁷ of Youth, {raises her index finger} not of the Party. And there was a discussion about how active I am and that it's good to have a talk, to choose me as Head of Pristina's Youth. And they invited me and we had a discussion. My wish was to start university, but there was no [Faculty of] Construction. Because the University of Pristina began to open some faculties, but the construction and technical departments weren't there yet.

And I told my father at home, "Let's talk about what to do, they told me this and that, what do I do." He said, "You can do whatever you want, but you should know that it's good to know a craft in life. If for whatever reason it doesn't go well with politics, you have your craft." The Technical High School was a craft to him, and if you only finished that school you'd be a technician, you could work, but it's good to continue [education], since I was excellent in mathematics as well.

I really loved mathematics, but construction was something that's a little more challenging as a faculty. But I also did painting because I started painting in high school, I really liked art as well. Architecture is somewhat of an attractive profession, but you also need talent. And I had it [the talent] because I painted environments, and I had a good understanding of space and [I was thinking] where I could go, I could go to Belgrade because there was no Faculty of Architecture here.

Part Two

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When you were Head of the Youth...

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us a bit about the cultural activities in the city?

Kaqusha Jashari: We had places to go to in the city, back then... someone might think everything started today, it's not true. At the time there was Kino Rinia, there was the hall that is also there today, I'm not sure if it's ABC now, or if there is a cinema, I don't know. And there was also a garden, and so...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where was the garden?

¹⁶ After the Second World War, SKOJ - *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* (The League Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) became a part of a wider organization of Yugoslav youth, the People's Youth of Yugoslavia, which later became the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia.

¹⁷ Mahmut Bakalli (1936-2006) was a Kosovar Albanian politician. Bakalli began his political career in the youth organization of the League of Communists of Kosovo, eventually becoming its leader in 1961. As he rose through the ranks, he was elected to the Central Committee of the party's Serbian chapter, and to the Presidium of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia's Central Committee.

Kaqusha Jashari: The garden with the screen, you could watch films in the garden, [or] in the hall. The youth was organized back then, we called them the Municipal Youth Committee, we called them the Committee. And there was a Head who visited us, I'm not sure of his name, his last name was Hashani, he was the Head, he visited our school a few times. They invited all of us who were Heads of the schools for the activities they organized and for the work actions as well. Right where the litigating orthodox church is, there were some sports fields where we, the youth, worked. With these {moves her hand vertically}, with...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Hoe?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes. We cut [the field grass], we put sand there, it was the sports fields both basketball and handball, it was a youth activity. Now, where {shows with her hand to the right}, I think Pastrimi has taken that space, there was a small stadium back then, you can see some seats there now I think, they're still there. And below they turned it into stores, but we had our dressing room there, both the school and the city held activities there. I, for example, practiced handball there because the Kosovo Handball Club had its office there.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Kaqusha Jashari: When it comes to urban planning, there were a lot of buildings being constructed back then too, all these buildings, even this building {points down with her hand} was built during that time, this Rexhep Luci street {looks and points to the left} all these buildings were built at that time. There was the Urban Planning Agency which operated at the time for the urban planning of the city. There was an architect back then who was murdered after the war, Rexhep Luci, whom the street was named after since his family lived here {shows to the right with her hand}, in this building behind. This year, or last year his sister died as well, Ahsene Agaj Luci.

I can't say that everything began from this democracy, apologies to the younger ones, but there was a good organization back then too. There was an order, now there were surely many poor families. We, our family weren't poor, but it wasn't the kind of wealth some people have today. We had a good standard for a normal life, apartments were given within the framework of the enterprises and institutions where people worked, always.

And how they made their priorities now is something else, every company had its priorities. First of all priority for the staff, but then those with more experience in that organization had more priority and some other terms, so of course there was some sort of standard. For example, it wasn't an issue for my family to go on summer vacation at sea and skiing in winter. It wasn't an issue at all. With the wage you got you could get a loan because no one could buy expensive skiing equipment, for example with cash, but only through credit.

And as an athletic family we always had that in mind, I mean as a plan, that we have to go swimming at sea in the summer, and go to Brezovica during winter, especially skiing in Brezovica. And my daughters' families kept it going like that, everyone knows. Maybe because their father, my husband, was an athlete, he taught swimming and skiing, and it didn't make sense for his children not to know it (laughs), while he's teaching other students. So, I would say our life was a normal one, for a normal standard, not an extreme, we didn't have many demands.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the situation like with other families, did people work only for the state or was there...

Kaqusha Jashari: No, no, there were private jobs as well, craftsmen had priority because for example in order to buy a store, those who worked with crafts had priority. And there were many craftsmen, tailors, shoemakers, and some other services. There were many [private jobs], it was allowed.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you remember the old area of the city?

Kaqusha Jashari: Of course I remember the old area, I always passed through there to go to high school, it was a street that, I don't know, I'm not one of those, I don't know what I'd think at the time, but today for example, I would never demolish those objects. They have to be preserved, they're attractive not only for tourism but also as a part of the city's development. I remember that old area where a big bookstore was and every time we went in there, they painted the boards with... I don't know what it was, it was black and we could smell it when we went to buy books (laughs).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mean at the stores where the Brotherhood and Unity¹⁸ statue or somewhere else?

Kaqusha Jashari: No, it was a little further, where the government [building] is now, in front of the assembly [building]. I remember that we saw some corridors when we passed there and the children used to go see what's in there, there was probably something because later, they discovered there was a *çeshme*¹⁹ downtown where the hotel is. There was something there, who knows what old object shaped like a tunnel and we were scared we'd be stuck in there if we went. Because it was exactly like a tunnel and...

But I don't know why they weren't careful at the time to preserve that heritage. They're saying that the *çeshme* at the yard of the mosque downtown there, the water is from Gërmia, it was built during Ottoman times, and those ceramic pipes, from dirt {shrugs}. And later they discovered some, they said that also when they built the plateau near Hotel Diamond, they found some there too.

¹⁸ Brotherhood and Unity was a popular slogan of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia that was coined during the Yugoslav People's Liberation War (1941–45), and which evolved into a guiding principle of Yugoslavia's post-war inter-ethnic policy.

¹⁹ *Çeşme* means spring, fountain in Persian.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, the mosque of Llokaç used to be there. They demolished it and built [Hotel Božur] over.

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, they did, it's like that, yes. But you know what, when politics decide it's like that, because state politics always wants to represent itself, all politics [in power] want to represent their era and the changes they made, they think everything that is old doesn't work anymore and needs to be demolished. Take for example Albania lately, they want to demolish everything, they're demolishing even schools and schools are facilities that have no connection with the previous system. A school is a school in every system, it's education, and they demolished it, so it means they demolished many things. The old *çarshia*²⁰ was very interesting and good, I remember every time I went to school, I passed by the old area.

(Laughs) I remembered something, maybe it's not something to be recorded, but I'll tell it. In the entrance of that big bookstore {describes with hands} I remember at the door which was really big, inside there were books, notebooks, and while I was getting books or something, a Roma woman came in and told the salesperson, "Do you have notebooks for the first grade for the Metro Bajraktari elementary school?" (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Very precise.

Kaqusha Jashari: Very precise, for the Metro Bajraktari school where her child is studying (laughs). And I replied, "The school isn't important [information] for the notebook, notebooks are the same for all." [She said] "Well I don't know, I'm just saying, he studies there and his teacher told him to get a notebook for Metro Bajraktari school" (laughs). And everyone got their supplies there, I don't know, there were other bookstores, but when it came to me and my family, since we lived close by, that bookstore was the first place.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there craftsmen there too, or what was it like?

Kaqusha Jashari: There were craftsmen too, but I can't remember now, I think someone also made *plisa*²¹ {puts her hand on her head}, I don't know what else. I don't know, but there were craftsmen there.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the ethnic composition like back then, did you mix, did you make friends [of other ethnicities]?

²⁰ Literally a small market.

²¹ Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

Kaqusha Jashari: At school, we had separate classrooms, but in the same school. The Albanian language classroom, the Serbo-Croatian classroom, but you should know there wasn't enough staff for neither the Serbo-Croatian [classroom], nor the Albanian one. And it happened that one professor might teach a subject both in Serbian and Albanian, I'll mention his name, he was a math teacher, he taught in our classroom as well as the other, both in Serbian and Albanian, what was his name... I remember it often, but at the moment...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You'll think of it later.

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes. So, I'm only telling you about the pupils, we didn't have problems with each other. I knew very little Albanian back then because of our mother as I told you, and I had a classmate from Gjakova, his last name was Stojanovic. Maybe there was no Technical School in Gjakova or something and he enrolled here. Živko [his name]. He spoke Albanian with Albanians fluently, but I was like *tep-tep tep-tep* {onomatopoeia} little by little, *kuku*²² I felt so angry. I said to myself he's a Serbian and knows the language better than me, I won't allow this to myself. And I didn't, back then I really learned the language.

I learned the language the most when I worked at the syndicate, and now I'll tell you my journey from university. I enrolled in university in Belgrade with no entry exam because people who had excellent grades didn't have to take the exam, and I had all fives,²³ I never had a four²⁴ in school. And I placed third in Belgrade [accepted students list], and I was very excellent in midterm exams because we had really good teachers in the Technical School. For geodesy, there was a teacher whose last name was Delanin, I will never forget, he taught how to use the theodolite²⁵ really well, the instrument like the camera {points to the camera}.

And in university in Belgrade, I was the best at practical work and they released me from the practical part in the exam, I only did the theoretical part. And very often I had to explain things to my classmates who finished [a different type of] school, for example gymnasium.²⁶ If they finished gymnasium they could enroll in any university. And I had to... because on the first and second day I had nothing new to learn, [for two years] in university. I had gone through all of those things in high school.

²² Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

²³ Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0).

²⁴ Grade B on an A-F scale (Five-0).

²⁵ Theodolite is a precision optical instrument for measuring angles between visible points defined in the horizontal and vertical planes. The traditional use has been for land surveying, but they are also widely used for the construction of buildings and infrastructure.

²⁶ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

When I finished my studies, that's when I got married, so I still hadn't graduated, and I had many problems, many troubles because my husband worked in Ferizaj, he was a teacher of physical education and I went to live in Ferizaj after Belgrade. I immediately got a job because they had no engineers in the construction company in Ferizaj. I immediately started working, I worked a lot in the company.

Anita Susuri: I'd like to talk about your life in Belgrade during your studies. What was that time period like?

Kaqusha Jashari: When I went there, this was in '65, I enrolled in high school here, in '65, '66 I enrolled [in university]. From Kosovo there were... there were no women, only three men who continued [higher education], and then two of them became professors here in Pristina. Hamdi Sylejmani and Nijazi Hoxha, they studied together with me, but they went there a couple of years earlier, before me, they finished Technical School somewhere in Mitrovica, not in Pristina. I was in the first generation in Pristina. And we became friends there in Belgrade.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it a big change to go from Pristina to Belgrade?

Kaqusha Jashari: Well I don't know, maybe moving places, the life we had before, going to Pristina, to Gjilan, to Kamenica, to Peja, it had its impact in our family, we adapted to change a little easier. During my first year of studies I lived in Belgrade in a room with my father because he rented a private room. He found one that was close to my university and his job as well because he worked in Belgrade and we waited to get an apartment. In the first year we lived together in one room.

And my friends were from all over, some were from Serbia, some were from Bosnia as well, I had some Bosnian friends who enrolled in Belgrade's university. Since the Faculty of Construction in Belgrade was popular because it had some quite good professors. One of the professors, Djurić, was the designer of that famous bridge in Belgrade that connects the old Belgrade to New Belgrade. So they had good professors and people came to study there. I didn't feel like their attitude towards me was different from the others. I didn't feel like they looked at me differently.

There was a case once during tutorials when the math professor came close to me, Stipanić, we were really scared of him because he was very strict. And while he was watching over my work, he said a word that is [usually] said differently, I understood it and I thought it was Albanian. But actually it was in Latin, but it was something similar and I understood it and continued. But I had a very weird case with him during an exam. I started to work on my exam and I finished the first, second and third questions, and I didn't write anything for the fourth one, I didn't know it.

And he looks at the first one {pretends she's checking the exam with a pen}, the second one, and I was answering the exam questions [when he reaches] the fourth one, "What is this?" I said, "I don't know

how to answer.” “*Kuku*, how do you not know this?! How dare you not know this, you learned this in gymnasium!” I said, “Professor I didn’t go to gymnasium, I went to Technical School, but we didn’t learn this and I don’t know how you put in a question for something you didn’t teach us. You didn’t lecture about this.”

“What?” he asked. I said, “You didn’t lecture about this.” “It’s true,” he said, “you’re very consistent with classes. It’s true I didn’t teach this because I thought you should come prepared to this faculty and know this already.” “No,” I said, “they didn’t teach us about this in high school.” He took my *Indeks*²⁷ and said, “Go out” he sent me out. *Kuku*, I went mad when I went out, how could I fail this and not pass the math exam. And I actually felt like I was capable at least for a passing grade. And my classmates said, “Was it that good that he sent you out” (smiles), I asked “What?” They said, “Well you passed.” “What?” “Well if he sends someone out it means they passed” (laughs).

And I really did pass and not exactly a six²⁸ but a little higher. Because I was honest and I was very consistent with classes, I didn’t miss one class, not only math but all classes, I passed all of them. And I regularly passed my exams like other students because language was not a problem for me at all. And there weren’t Albanians there. Except these two I mentioned, Hamdi Sylejmani and Nijazi Hoxha, but they were good students as well. We were good students there in Belgrade. And when I got married in Ferizaj, I had to travel [to Belgrade] to finish the exams and it was very problematic for me, I gave birth to a baby girl, the children were very young and... But that passed as well.

And then someone remembered that I’m in Ferizaj and I was a youth activist. Yes, Kaqusha Jashari, Kaqusha Jashari, isn’t she Kaqusha Fejzullahu? And then they called me and discovered that that’s who I was. And they proposed that I lead the Construction Union here {points back with her finger} And my husband said, “You’re still not finishing that university, still not finishing it!” He finished the High Pedagogical School because here there wasn’t a Physical Education School. “Well,” I said, “do you want to go and finish it?” “Well,” he said, “the only program that is convenient for me where I can continue my third year is in Sarajeva.” “Okay” I said, “you go finish it in Sarajeva first, and then I will graduate.” And he went to Sarajeva and they chose me to lead the Construction Union, that was in ‘75.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you come here again, what did you do?

Kaqusha Jashari: Not here, I was traveling. No, I had my apartment there... in Ferizaj, the one our company gave us. I traveled and then later I got this apartment. And I was there from ‘75 to ‘82 when they chose me for the party. So, I was Head of the Construction [Union] for almost two terms, and if I compare on which job I had a better time, I think that I did the work in the union with joy. I had a good

²⁷ *Indeks* were personal booklets issued to students under the old university system. It was used both as a student ID and grade register. Indeks issued in the ‘90s had “Kosovo Republic” written on them. Very often Albanian students were mistreated by Serbian police if found with indeks.

²⁸ A passing grade in university, equivalent to D.

time with my colleagues in the operating room in construction as well, but especially in the union, it was an activity.

That was after '75, after the Constitution of '74, Kosovo's status was a little different, it had different opportunities. Collaborations began, our university with Tirana, professors [from Tirana] used to come here, I had no contact with that structure. But when it came to the workers we had a lot of work about their rights, about their working conditions, about... I went to visit many Construction organizations, at Izgradnja in Peja, Kosova in Vushtrria, there was 1 Maji in Prizren, in Rahovec, Dukagjini in Gjakova, Ramiz Sadiku, the biggest company here. I had a lot of activity, a lot. And then...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the workers have rights? Did you have to work on that aspect?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, as far as the rights of workers are concerned, there was a sort of a deal signed for the Union at the level of Yugoslavia. And providing [proper] working conditions for the workers was a must. They couldn't work without their gear. The one you need to climb the scaffold, and no one could go there without fastening, without putting on a *kaciga* [srb.: helmet] {pretends to put on something on her head}, without the work gear. And then, [providing] one meal [for the workers] was mandatory during working hours, and not only snacks but a cooked meal.

We set up kitchens in all the facilities. And then a place to sleep and food also had to be provided when they worked in workshops outside of the workplace. So I'm saying it was a very honest work and a work I did with some sort of joy. And then when the '81 troubles happened, it was very problematic. Especially in construction because all construction workers went out on the streets [to protest]. And I had to go and calm the situation down, to...

So the [Yugoslav] Central Committee's stance was very harsh after '81, the differentiation, I was in position during all that time period. I mentioned that my mother was always there when it came to educating me, but for work outside of the house, my father was a very good consultant. My father advised me back then when I was working at the Union, to be careful of what I say at the workshops because there's something about that dissatisfaction that has spurred people on. And then those attitudes towards "*Kosova Republikë*" [Kosovo Republic] as a hostile slogan, there was an explanation on why that slogan is hostile, it's very hard to talk about and he told me, "No! Don't you dare get into that topic!"

Because Fadil Hoxha... he [my father] really loved Fadil Hoxha, I mentioned that they knew each other during the war also, he said that, "It's our right [self determination] but it's not the right moment. So, don't because it's not okay. And it's not okay for people to be sentenced over it either." So, I joined differentiation groups but there is no one who could say that I had influenced the decision on his expulsion, either from his job or the party. No, I never did that. So they didn't appoint me in these groups because they knew I wouldn't pay mind to those changes and I won't apply them.

But in '82, they had to propose women for the Party Presidency as well, and at the Municipal Committee, they discussed who could it be. And since I've been around because of '81 [events], at Ramiz Sadik, at different organizations, and they know me, especially earlier in the Union, they proposed that I'd be a good fit to run [for a leadership position]. And they did. And it has happened to me often when I was proposed as a candidate in these structures, to be proposed because of the required quota. Women, from production, engineers, so I was a good fit and they accepted me as a Presidency member in the party immediately.

But the time period from '82 was very difficult to apply the Committee stances, to expel people, to differentiate,²⁹ to... but, thankfully I was spared at the time, I didn't get into that mess. In '88, [Azem Vllasi](#) was president [of the League of Communists of Kosovo] two times for one term each, and the status was that a president can't be in position for more than two years, one plus one. And then they discussed who could replace him, in that group of four I was included too. They sent their propositions to the Municipal Committees, and everyone, most of them were in favor of me, compared to these other men.

The Central Committee agreed immediately, no woman had ever been president of the party in any republic, nowhere. And they rejoiced, and it was in Kosovo, Kosovo was an issue, as they used to say, gunpowder, *bure baruta* [srb.: powder barrel] that exploded here. They suggested me as a woman. I always consulted at home with my husband and my father, both of them, I said, "What do I do? They proposed this to me."

My husband said, "Well I know who the members there are, which one is better than you? Nobody." "Not even considering who's better, can't you see the situation we're in?" he said, "For the others, for yourself, for us. You can't turn it down." I didn't turn it down, I was elected. I was [president of the party] for seven months, I objected Milošević too, we had an argument, we argued verbally, it was a good thing that we didn't get physical, because some situations like that were close, very unpleasant, it could, it could...

Part Three

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did this Milošević presence begin in Kosovo?

Kaqusha Jashari: The Milošević issue is not related only to Kosovo. In the Presidency of Yugoslavia, in the Party Presidency we were all members as the Heads of the republics and the provinces, there were

²⁹ Political differentiation is the distinction between groups and individuals based on ideology. In the Yugoslav period, people of certain political affiliation had no access to state-administration, socially-owned enterprises or health care.

also others, one or two [people], depending on how they were appointed. Besides me as a president [of the League of Communists], there was also Kolë Shiroka as a member of the Presidency. And then the trouble started, the issue was that Milošević fueled Serbian nationalism.

But not only to Serbs in Kosovo, he wanted to use Kosovo to portray the situation as very difficult and he wanted to encourage all Serbs to stand up and protect Kosovo Serbs and that's where the issue of them wanting to go to Fushë Kosova, to Bosnia, to Croatia, to Slovenia came to attention. But they didn't manage to go through with it, [but] they managed to do that in Vojvodina and Novi Sad, they organized a really big rally, I don't know how many joined from here as well. And that structure fell off, everyone resigned, everyone went away.

Otherwise, they started organizing gatherings as a right of [expressing] dissatisfaction. Just like they're saying now that you have the right to organize demonstrations, to submit it, because it's a democratic right to demonstrate. And at the time they wanted to legalize these gatherings as a way of [expressing] dissatisfaction, but actually they had nationalistic themes, not discontent with daily life, but nationalist.

When they started here they were saying that the University of Pristina is a stronghold of Albanian nationalism. Villagers are good Albanians, but professors are nationalists. That is, that is absurd, how can an intellectual be a nationalist, [but] the ones who don't have much awareness, the ones who aren't educated, they're the good ones. So, they would be able to manipulate [easier] and they were looking to manipulate uneducated masses, unknowledgeable, they didn't want to deal with people who were knowledgeable and wanted equal rights and that's what was demanded at the time, equal rights for everyone and for Albanians to not be second class citizens.

And there were a lot of discussions around this topic in the Presidency, a lot of issues. When I pointed it out over there through arguments, this happened here {counts on fingers}, they demanded this and that, this happened there, in this gathering they demanded this and that. They caused some incidents themselves so they could blame Albanians, they staged stuff, it was one of their strategies. So at first I criticized them, as I said. And once when the President of Serbia spoke, Jović, in Zubin Potok, when the constitutional changes was on the agenda, but that was the request for reforms, but no changes to take the autonomy of Kosovo or Vojvodina, but it was an entirely different intention.

He spoke there and I presented his speech to the Presidency because he said, "Serbia shouldn't consist of three parts, Serbia should only consist of one part." So, Kosovo and Vojvodina would have no authorization, no police of their own, to not have input on anything, not in the assembly, for everything to belong to Serbia. And they wouldn't believe me. They said, "No, it's not possible that he said this." But luckily that day, *Politika*³⁰ [newspaper] published his entire speech {claps one hand on top of the other}. And when I saw it, I said, "If you won't believe me about what I heard, take today's edition of *Politika* and read it, there's his speech."

³⁰ *Politika* is a daily newspaper published in Belgrade, Serbia, since 1904.

Uh {onomatopoeia} and there was a Montenegrin close to me, Vidoje Žarković, he had a lot of influence in the Presidency, and another Montenegrin Marko Orlandić, he did [have influence] as well. I told Žarković, I said, “Take and read this,” when he saw it, {moves her hand horizontally} “I want a break, and I want to see a transcription of what Kaqusha spoke.” And they took a break, they put them out [transcriptions], they distributed them, he took the transcription of what I spoke {looks at the palms of her hands}, he took the newspaper as well. He said, “How is it possible that he said this,” I said, “I’m telling you that he’s a really big danger.”

The Serbs requested [permission for a] a gathering in Fushë Kosova. And for someone from Belgrade to come. Of course I would go, who else, who else? This person should go, that person should go, nobody wanted to. I suggested Marko Orlandić. I said, “I suggested him because he has a lot of influence there.” “Okay.” [He said] “No, I can’t because I’m really sick” and he really was sick, he had a fever, he came to the Presidency [meetings] with a fever. [I said] “I think you should come,” [he replied] “How could I, I’m sick.” {shrugs} [I said] “I’m sorry but not just anybody can go there.” “Okay.” And he got in the car with me and we went to Fushë Kosova. We went there. They had prepared a stage to go up and speak there, a rally, the people all rallied there. As soon as we began...

Anita Susuri: This was in the ‘90s I think?

Kaqusha Jashari: No, no, in ‘88 when they dismissed me. A big rally, as soon as we got up [on stage], “Let’s speak. Who should speak first?” I told Orlandić, “It’s best if you speak first and then I’ll greet them, I’m here” I said, “it’s better if you speak.” “Okay.” As soon as he started speaking, people turned their backs {moves her body to the side} and started to go elsewhere, on the way to the station. He looked, he looked at me, {looks around} looked at the people there, he was surprised, he spoke, but no one listened to him.

And one guy from Fushë Kosova came to me, he said, “You should step down because they’re boycotting you, they’re turning their backs to you, not him.” And I said, “Okay.” And I started to go down, he, Orlandić, grabbed my hand and asked, “Where are you going?” I said, “I’ll go because they’re turning their backs because of me, so you can speak.” [He asked] “Who told you that?” I said, “This one” {turns and points to the left with her finger}. He said, “How dare you tell your president to go down? She also holds a high position in Yugoslavia’s Leadership, as long as I’m with her and she’s a president on top of everything. And she will get out of here when I do.” And he didn’t let me. They went. We remained there, and I didn’t speak, what could we do?

We went to Pristina at the Municipal Committee and we got in. And he said, “Give me the information, where did the people that turned back go? When, where did they go?” The group from Serbia drove here and they went there and called people [to go] to the train station. But our stage was on a different side close to a school. And I didn’t know, [but] Orlandić said, “Before coming, I asked [them], ‘will you

come with us?" They said, 'No, we won't come at all, you go!'" They tricked him. Eh, and he said, "We're going to Belgrade." We went to Belgrade, the people who were working professional jobs rallied there, not all the Heads but the ones working there (laughs). And Orlandić said, "Now I will speak and you will not" to me.

And he said, "You know what?" He said, "What I saw is worse than what Kaqa [Kaqusha] spoke at the Presidency [meeting]. Dear friends, we are late. Not only is this nationalism, but it's worse than Serbian nationalism. This is a catastrophe. Our country is failing, Yugoslavia is failing!" The man said {puts her hand on her head}, he said, "Forget everything I have said before, what I'm saying now is what I actually think. And what Kaqusha spoke, I agree with and sign off. Because," he said, "this is Serbian nationalism and we won't be able to get away from it." And then they started with gatherings, they went to Bosnia, they wanted to go to Croatia, Slovenia, but they turned them back, Slovenians turned them back. But they held these gatherings in Montenegro and Vojvodina and they brought down the nomenclature in both places.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: These gatherings were held in order to bring down the political nomenclature, or what did they talk about?

Kaqusha Jashari: They talked about Kosovo Serbs being in danger from Albanians, the main topic was Serbs being in danger. But what I wanted to say about Serbian nationalism is that they didn't take it that seriously in Yugoslavia either because when I spoke [about it] I didn't feel supported, or a will to help us. And I saw that they agreed [with me], but they minded their business, they wanted to save their own countries. Croats were looking to gain independence, Slovenians as well, everyone. Bosnia was in too much chaos. Macedonia got away too thanks to their president. But we didn't have the opportunity, we didn't... we didn't have an army, or anything {puts her hands up}, you can't go to war empty handed. And Serbs had the [Yugoslavian] army in their hands after Tito's³¹ death. They took on internal affairs and the army. Like that, and who had it worse at the end? Serbs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did they discharge you? Can you tell us about that moment, about the political pressure you had?

Kaqusha Jashari: After everything that happened, after I opposed Milošević, they had a meeting in Serbia and said that I should... they sent a letter to the Presidency of [Yugoslavia's] Central Committee saying that I'm not capable of keeping the situation in Kosovo under control and that I should resign, and Milošević signed it. When I went to the meeting, Šušteršič was the president of the Central Committee, he said, "Come a little earlier because I want to talk to you." I went earlier and he said, "You should know that a letter has arrived, here it is, read it. They're requesting your resignation." I said, "I don't want to resign. I'm letting you know that I can't resign because it's not my fault. If I was to blame then yes. I don't know if there is anyone capable of managing this situation because of Serbian

³¹ Josip Broz Tito, former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

nationalism's activities and it's difficult." Because [in the letter] it's described that Albanians are to blame, but actually, it was them. "So I can't [resign]. I don't want to."

Milošević used to tell me, he said, "I can say it about everyone that they are Albanian nationalists and irredentists, but not you." "no," I said, "you can't ever say that because I'm not. If I had to protect the rights of Serbs I would. Whoever is oppressed" I said, "I protected the rights of the workers at the Union, I would protect every right. But this time around," I said, "what you're doing, we'll draw the border wherever we want." "Uuu." {onomatopoeia}.

I have that title in my book, the border. I said, "You cannot violate [people's] rights. How is the university to blame for the Albanian staff? How are our rights... blaming everything on Albanians, nope," [Milošević] said, "The institutions don't properly function in Kosovo, the institutions..." [I said] "And what is there to do?" [He said] "You're not capable enough, you should resign." "No," I said, "I won't resign. The structure responsible for choosing me can dismiss me." [He said] "No, we initiated it, I initiated it." I said, "I know, I saw that letter. The Yugoslavia Presidency has reviewed it too. I won't resign."

The Slovenians, Milan Kučan said, "I don't want to get involved in Kosovo's issues, that's their issue." Croats were the same as well, "We don't want to get involved." But no one said that I was right. And they formed the group, they came to the Presidency and requested my dismissal, they also requested for Azem Vllasi to be dismissed from the Central Committee membership because he was only a Presidency member because his term had passed, I was first. And the news spread in newspapers, it was an attack... And the miners decided to...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To march.

Kaqusha Jashari: To boycott, [as a sign of] support. The director Aziz Abrashi called on the phone that day before the meeting. He said, "Don't you dare resign because the miners are coming. They decided to come." "No," I said, "I will not resign, but if they discharge me, I can't guarantee they will not dismiss me. I don't know what turn the discussion will take, but I will not resign."

They didn't care, they headed to Pristina before the meeting of the Committee began. As I was holding the meeting, opening the discussion, some Albanians defended us, some Serbians accused us, the Committee members there. And we were divided along ethnic lines, Albanians on one side, Serbians on one side. All Serbs agreed with Milošević's politics. And when the miners got here the way they did, I don't think they came all the way from Mitrovica on foot, maybe by bus also. When they came here, they went to the Youth Palace.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Kaqusha Jashari: When they notified us that the miners had arrived at the Palace, the people leading the meeting agreed that we should interrupt the meeting and I should go there because they requested me. And I went there, I think Remzi Kolgeci was with me as well, I don't know who else and they said the same things, to not resign. The demands they made later during the strikes, weren't there at the march. It was only about our resignations, I said, "I won't resign." And after I rejoined the meeting, the Presidency stopped to discuss the situation, I told them how many workers were there, the hall was full and this is what they were demanding.

There were three or four people from Serbia, and all our officials that were working in Belgrade were there, Kolë Shiroka, Sinan Hasani, Ali Shukriu. And the ones from Serbia requested me to... the ones from Serbia requested me to resign, I said, "No." And in the document prepared by the Presidency many resignations from earlier were approved, Ekrem Arifi's, Rahman Dedaj's, all Albanians but there were Serbs who resigned too. Actually many people from the Presidency had resigned.

They would approve those [resignations], and there was a proposal for me to be released from duty, since I didn't resign. But there's no discharging from duty in the Party's Statute, either dismissal when you're to blame about something, or resignation, but there's no discharging from duty. But that's how they requested it, for me to be discharged. I said, "I won't be discharged," they said, "The Presidency is suggesting that the Committee should vote on the whole proposal." So, not case by case, but the whole thing and they assigned that duty to me. And when I started to hold the meeting with the Committee I said, "All these proposals have to be approved."

And through those proposals, I was dismissed, I held a speech and told that I didn't resign. But I felt very, very bad that my Albanian colleagues agreed with those [proposals]. Maybe they agreed because they saw that there was no other way. And they immediately started talking, before the Committee meeting began, in case of the proposal being approved, who would replace me, who would continue. And one of the members, Husamedin Azemi, said, "Come on, get up from that chair," I said, "I can see that there's no way but to leave this chair, but you will never ever sit here." I said that to him, because I heard talks in Belgrade about who could replace me and his name was mentioned in passing. I said, "You will never ever sit here."

Some people said, "Come on Ramiz, you're the Head of the Presidency and could replace her until the new president is chosen. He didn't object, and there was an opinion that it's best... and I thought that it's best if it's him because we had good cooperation, because everyone had resigned, there was no one else. Azem [Vllasi] couldn't, he didn't have the right to. Ekrem Arifi resigned, Rahman Morina³² as well, I don't remember who else from the Presidency members was Albanian but they all resigned. And then I told the Committee, "You have to vote all of it, that's what the Presidency decided."

³² Rahman Morina (1943-1990) had a career as an agent of the Ministry of Interior of SFR Yugoslavia, and later on as a party official in the League of Communists of Kosovo. He rose through the ranks and was in 1981 appointed as Kosovo's interior minister, and thereby held the top law enforcement office in the province.

Some people asked, “What happened to you?” I said, “The whole thing has to be voted on.” And that proposal was approved and I was dismissed. And then, the next day people from all around Kosovo started coming to Pristina. There were many, they walked, they took the bus... they were so many that I got scared, to tell you the truth. I said, “What will happen?” And when so many people came to Pristina, we directed them towards the stadium, so they could fill the stadium and not stay in the streets. A lot of people went into the stadium. I had to go there too, I had to speak. I’m not saying I lied, but I couldn’t exactly tell the truth either because I was scared.

Anita Susuri: What was your speech, more specifically?

Kaqusha Jashari: More specifically, it was about remaining calm and not reaching conflict between ethnicities, Serbs, Albanians, to preserve national unity for the best. To accept the reforms and not aggravate the situation. All in that sense of remaining calm, coexistence. But there was no other way to go about it because that’s what the atmosphere was like. That was the Central Committee’s request as well. But it was very clear that this nationalism would cost the whole place [Yugoslavia] a lot. And that’s what happened, that’s what happened. But now who would have it worse? Serbs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you talk more about that meeting with the miners at...

Anita Susuri: At the hall.

Kaqusha Jashari: There at the Palace [of Youth], yes it was at the Palace... They came in, they came in, they talked, they were organized. Who should hold a speech, all that was said by them in the sense was to defend the nation. I didn’t feel they’d come to my defense, but I felt defended by the nation, defended by Kosovo, which made me feel good. But if I joined them, who would I be against? I can’t be on the side with those that expressed dissatisfaction in nationalist rallies. So, it was a difficult situation that, even if I went there, what would I say?

You agree with [their] dissatisfaction, but then who are you up against, against Serbian nationalism? And that’s what I had expressed. And one time after that happened, a friend of mine, who passed away a few years ago and she was a director in Gjakova, an architect working for Dukagjini [Construction Company]. And she complained about something about her workplace because she had to go to the Urban Planning Bureau. She said, “How are they not accepting me? This and that.” I said, “Behije, I was president of the party and I managed to stay alive, [losing] a workplace is not a big deal, come one, *aiii* [onomatopoeia].” “Yes, of course,” she said, “the people have supported you a lot.”

“Well, why did they support me? I don’t even know myself, I really don’t know.” [She said] “Do you know why? You spoke, I felt relieved.” That’s the impact it had on people, I mean when I spoke I managed to represent the opinion of the masses, and that’s why they reacted [when I was dismissed].

And I'll tell you the truth about when the situation calmed down, I had some sort of hope that the higher institutions in Yugoslavia would take matters into their own hands and not let Milošević's actions speak for the entire Yugoslavia. But they didn't. When they don't speak on behalf of their actions... I think that Raif Dizdarevic, a Bosnian who was Head of Yugoslavia's Presidency during Milošević's time, is very guilty. Because he was side by side with Milošević to defend Yugoslavia.

But who do you want to defend it with, Milošević? But I remembered one time, I met with the wife of Sinan Hasani's son in Budva during holiday. Her name was Senka, Xhavit Xhabiri's daughter, an official in Mitrovica. And she said about Milošević, since the situation was very aggravated, she asked, "Do you know what his brother told me?" [I said] "Go on?" Because she [Senka] worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Milošević's brother in Belgrade. And when they elected Milošević as the President of Serbia, he [Milošević's brother] told her, "You know what, I'll tell you, his appetite is bigger than this," he said, "in Serbia when we were children they gave those assignments to write about something" for example, they gave you a topic and you wrote about it, and the topic was "What will I be when I grow up?"

And he [Milošević] wrote about what he wanted to be for himself. "When I grow up," he said, "I will become Tito in Yugoslavia." Since Tito was the first to have a lot of influence, he said, "When I grow up I will become Tito." That shows that when he was young, he had in mind to be at the top of Yugoslavia, that's what Senka told me about him. As a person, he was the type of person that didn't listen to what other people said, but he was always thinking about what he was going to say, it wasn't important [to him] what others were saying. I don't remember seeing him carry a notebook or a pen, he never had them. He only spoke, he listened [sometimes] because he had no other choice, but only so he could reply, to have an influence.

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned a meeting where you spoke, and he went outside.

Kaqusha Jashari: Ah yes, well I had many encounters with Milošević. It was a difficult situation in Yugoslavia and we in the Presidency discussed its state. And once when it [the discussion] was about these gatherings where they would go in Serbia, in Vojvodina, sometimes they wanted to go to Bosnia, or in Jajce because it was a historical site of former Yugoslavia, they even planned to go to Slovenia. And we held a meeting about what the situation is like, they especially were interested to know about what Serbs were doing here in Kosovo.

And they put us in an order, what and who would speak, and I was before Milošević, his turn was immediately after me but he also spoke after some others. That was not by accident because it was always problematic with Serbs, they wanted to know about what the situation with Serbs was like everywhere and then Milošević [would speak] at the end. And I was fourth in line as long as I remember, some others before me finished and while the last one [before me] was speaking, Milošević got up and went outside and I really thought that... I observed [the situation] because I thought he

would come back until it was my turn. He didn't come back and Suvar, he was Head [of the Assembly] at the time, gave me the floor, "Go on."

I said, "Please accept my request, I want to speak when Milošević comes back because a lot of what I will say is related to the situation in Serbia" {points across}. "That's fair," and the others continued. After about an hour or so, he came back and sat down, and he asked, "Where are we with the procedure?" And someone close to him told him that I didn't speak yet. And when the last discussion was finished, Suvar gave me the floor, I started [speaking]. As soon as I started speaking, he [Milošević] angrily stood up and started walking around. And I saw him walking, he should sit down and listen to me.

I stopped [speaking] and Šuvar asked me, "Why did you stop?" He asked, "Are you okay?" I said, "I am okay but I stopped because I can't speak while Milošević is taking a walk, he should sit somewhere and listen." And then he didn't know what to do {looks at one side, then looks at the other}, does he go back to his seat, or go on? He was right behind the Head [of the Assembly] and he found an empty chair and sat there with the Central Committee Service. And then I finished my speech, but people started whispering to each other and laughing a little, because you could not fool or influence Milošević, to others that was also courageous. And they would have not acted in that way, because they were careful how they approached him so they wouldn't argue, they avoided confrontation with him. They would say that he wasn't right but rarely they dared to argue with him.

And (laughs) we interrupted the meeting, it was a break, and one Slovenian, Franc Šetinc came to me and said, "What a joke you cracked" he said, "it wouldn't have come out this good even if you planned it. Very, very appropriate," he praised me. But I said to myself thinking, he praised me like that, but why wouldn't he speak at the meeting? One Croatian, Račan, was the same, "It was really good," but why didn't he speak at the meeting? Why would I need you to tell me you're with me during the break when you don't support me up there?

The only person who spoke against Milošević was Boško Krunić from Vojvodina, a member of the Presidency [of the Communists Party]. So, they heard about the problem of Vojvodina and that they won't have autonomy anymore, as it actually happened, but we at least won our country, we didn't give up, Vojvodina completely gave up. Now it is entirely part of Serbia with no competencies whatsoever. So I still remained in the Presidency, they dismissed me as president, but not from the Presidency. But when the assessment of the events that took place I didn't agree with a lot of what was said, I could not agree with that assessment at all. I realized I was always opposing at that point, it wasn't like before with Belgrade's politics but I reached a situation where there was an assessment given in the Party Presidency and it is also our assessment and I was a part of that [as a member]. And when I realized that, I resigned {raises her hand}. I said, "I can't anymore..."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You completely withdrew?

Kaqusha Jashari: I withdrew from the leadership, I came home and I stayed in for a month or something. Usually they're interested to know what's next regarding work and not only for me. But when a term passes they ask you, "What will you do next?" And I was oriented towards economics. And while I was staying home, a friend of my father's visited Qerim, Qerim from Vitia, he asked, "What will you do next?" I said, "I don't know, either at the Chamber of Economy or somewhere related to economy. I worked as an engineer in production somewhere."

He said, "Could you replace me?" [I asked] "Where *bre*?" [He said] "At the Department of Roads, I will retire in six months. I can work as a consultant for these six months. I will request that you replace me, that's a position for an engineer." I said, "I am really sorry, but you're [still] working there, how can I request that?" [He said] "It's not a problem at all, I told you, I will retire in six months," he was old. And I went to Jusuf Zejnullahu, he was Head of the Executive Council. I told him, "Jusuf, this and that, I would go [work] at the Department of Roads." "No," he said, "it's not a problem at all." They named me director with no procedure, it wasn't a directory but it was BVI.³³ We had a BVI at the time, BVI of roads.

And I was chosen to work there, in the meantime, Qerim bought a new [work] car. I asked, "Why?" Because I still had not started [working], but I understood. He said, "If you buy it, they will immediately say, 'Here she goes, she bought a car right after coming here.'" And the department had a big budget for building roads because they didn't take budget [from the government] like they do now, but there was a percentage that went to them from gasoline sales. And every gas station, the companies that sold gas, they sent five percent or something to the account of the department. And the department used that money to build roads, to maintain them and everything, they had a big budget and so he bought the car. And then, I had a different approach at that job, I wanted to build [roads] with as much budget as there was available. The ones before me only built [roads] where it was needed, but did not use all the budget.

So the department always had a big budget, more than the work required. And I worked there for one year, not longer. There was the Union's strike and we discussed what to do. Should we strike that day or not? Like the Union had asked from all the workers because they started replacing all the directors, and I was sure it would be my turn too. I said, "We will participate and I realized, why am I staying in the Party when I don't agree with Rrahman Morina and his work." We discussed it and we all handed over the Party Membership Cards, the entire directory of the party went [on strike]. The Party's Secretary sent an engineer to send the Party Membership Cards to the Committee and I left the Party.

I cried to get into the Party, but I gave the resignation myself. I didn't tell you about this detail about crying when I was accepted. I will tell you now, they usually took some good students from the senior

³³ BVI for Roads was the Bureau of Self-Governing Interests that dealt with the road infrastructure in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo during the Yugoslav times. Today, the Bureau would have been equivalent to the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure.

year in high school for the party, the organization approved it. And at the time I was Head of the Youth but they didn't propose me, they proposed some of my friends to be accepted in the party but not me. And I reacted, I went to the principal, "How was I not accepted?" [He said] "Well because of the case we had." We had a case a few months earlier, a group, two or three students from the school, supposedly part of an *Ilegalja*³⁴ group in Podujeva and they waved a red and black [Albanian] flag at a mosque {pretends she's holding something}.

And they wanted to expel those students. And a friend of mine, a very close friend of mine was in that group. [I said] "How *bre* Shemsi? Why did you do this?" [He said] "Don't mind them, I didn't!" "*Kuku*." And I defended him, "You can't expel him, he's a good student, a good activist, a member of the Youth [Council], a member of the school's leadership, how could you expel him?" And I cried at the meeting, and because of that, because I cried, they didn't propose me for the party. And I went to the principal, it was a Serb, Savic. I said, "*Direktore*, principal," I said, "accepting someone else to be a member of the Party but not me as a Head [of the Youth Council] is not okay. Just so you know," I said, "fix this." And when I went out I hit the door, the whole school heard it.

Then a teacher saw me, a Serbian teacher, she taught Political Economics, "What's wrong Kaqa? What happened here? Why are you yelling?" [I said] "How could I not yell, they didn't accept me in the party, they accepted other people, and I'm Head of the Youth." "Who didn't accept you? Us, the school? I wasn't in the meeting, that can't be it, don't worry I will fix this." Indeed, in the next meeting she proposed me and they accepted me in the party. At home, I told my father about Shemsi's case. He said, "Oh, listen to what I'm saying, these things will go on and who knows what else will happen, but no individual can do anything about it. Don't think you can do something about your colleague at school. If the institution caught him, there's no getting away with it. And so I cried [to get accepted], but when I handed over my Party Membership Card I didn't care. I didn't agree and that's alright.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it common to hand over the Party Membership Card?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, back then everyone, *aaa* {onomatopoeia} there was a mass handing over of Party Membership Cards, just like when there were masses joining the LDK.³⁵ And you know how LDK went about membership, all the basic organizations of the Socialist League in the villages transformed into LDK, eh? I registered in LDK in front of the Youth Palace. When I handed over the Party Membership Card, I registered there. I don't know if those books are still around somewhere, that's where I registered. But I wasn't a LDK activist because after the establishment of the Social-Democratic party, that was quickly after, in '90.

³⁴ Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

³⁵ Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. 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.

Part Four

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you decide to form your own party? I mean, I understand pluralism happened but...

Kaqusha Jashari: We, look there was the Communist Party and there was an initiative to reform within the party, to create a pluralist society. We had a professor, Kadri Metaj, who was a member of a Yugoslavia state level group. He was one of us from Kosovo in that group related to change within the party. So, the initiative for a little more liberal rather than totalitarian society began. So after, after the party disbanded because in other places those communist parties transformed into social-democratic or socialist parties. They simply held a meeting and it was approved but we didn't have the opportunity because our party disbanded. Party Membership Cards were handed over and there was nothing to...

And back to when I said that we discussed if we should participate in the Union's call for boycott [strike], to not work a day? We agreed to participate. But at the time I knew I wouldn't be present because my daughter's surgery was scheduled in France, she was sick. And I had to go, I don't know how long prior to the surgery they asked me to be there. 15 days I think, because she had to be physically prepared. And so I said, "I won't be there," it was at the beginning of September, "but put me on the participants' list, even though I'm not here I'll sign it whenever it is needed." So it counted as me agreeing with the Union's case. And I was in France when the strike happened here on September 8.

Anita Susuri: In February?

Kaqusha Jashari: No, no, the first one was in September, I'm sure of it because I went to France before the strike and my daughter's surgery was in October. So as a consequence they fired people from their jobs. I was in the hospital when they called me from the director's office, they said, "They fired you, there's a new director." I said, "Okay, but don't dare quit your jobs. Unless they fire you, in that case there's nothing you can do. But if they don't fire you, continue working." And when I came back after about a month being at the hospital, there was a new director there. They also fired some engineers that had higher positions, the others didn't get fired. Because I told them, "You didn't pick me [as a director], and you have nothing to do with my dismissal and don't dare lose your jobs and income." So, the director's office continued to work.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did they justify that decision?

Kaqusha Jashari: They didn't, they just... they fired me and there was a new director, I knew the guy, an engineer, a colleague. His father was an official for some time, he was a good person, from Gjilan.

How... I forgot his last name... Cukić, he was a good person, he had Albanian friends too, he was friends with my father, but you never know how someone would behave in certain situations. And so his son became a director and I found out. And the next day [after returning from France] I went to the office before work started. And I sat there as a director. He came in {stares like she's angry}, he looked at me.

He asked, "Don't you know you were fired?" He said, "They named me [as a director]." "Yes," I said, "I heard, but I came to hand you over the duties." [He asked] "What duties to hand over?" I said, "Handover-takeover, when one lead goes and another comes, you should hand over the duties, because I have a lot to hand over to you. Where the construction sites were, where work will continue, about the contracts. It's the order." "No," he said, "that doesn't work. This is Serbia." I said, "Set politics aside, it has nothing to do with what you are saying. We are talking about the directory, whether it's Serbia or Kosovo, someone else decided. Not you, nor me." I said, "It's the directory, I want to hand over the duties."

"No," he said, "I accepted [the job] and I started." I was sitting at my chair as a director, he sat {points across from her} in a chair. He opened up his briefcase, it was square shaped {describes with hands}. *Kuku*, I thought about what he was pulling out, could he have a gun or something (laughs), what if he pulls out a gun (laughs). I said, "I won't leave this seat until I hand you over [the duties] because I have my stuff in the drawers here." When I opened the drawers up they were empty, they put all my stuff in a bag. And I said, "Živko bre," his name, Cukić. I said, "Živko bre, your father was friends with my father, I knew your father. And I know he played the accordion."

"Yes," he said, "you remember it." "Yes," I said, "we went to a picnic together, your father had the accordion. He played both Albanian and Serbian songs, he was a really good person. And now you are behaving like Milošević..." He said, "That's what the times are like. Yes, yes, the time has come." I asked, "What time?" [He said] "Serbia's time." "Is that so?" I said, "Listen to what I'm saying, who will you have a coffee with here, do you have any friends from the office to grab coffee with?" [He asked] "Why?" I said, "Well I know you and I know that you worked in *Binačka Morava* in Gjilan, we met. Even I wouldn't grab coffee with you. Do you have any friends to get a coffee with?"

I said, "You don't. Do you know what kind of life it is with no friends? Are you even thinking a little?" Then he called his secretary, he had replaced the previous one with a Serb. He called her, {acts scared} "Director, yes director," "[Bring me] an *apaurin* [anxiolytic medication]." *Kuku*, I heard *apaurin* is a sedative, but I never used it. She went out, but he didn't wait either and went with her. He came back and opened up his briefcase again, *kuku* I thought, could he have a gun because they all had guns on them. Nothing, he got up. I said, "I'll go down to my colleagues and engineers, feel free to sit here by yourself, you should know I didn't hand the duties over to you." [He said] "I don't need it." And I went downstairs, hung out with my colleagues and went home. I went there again the next day and they

brought me the decision. There it was written that I missed work for a long time and they considered that I had quit.

When I got that, I went to him again, I said, “You wrote this incorrectly because I could work a court case, because I went to France for my daughter, I have the commission's decision. You think I went to visit. The commission approved so I could stay at the hospital. It's not...” “As long as I'm concerned,” he said, “you weren't at work and you were fired.” Just like that, and then I came home, I had no job, I stayed here. And then the Social-Democratic party was formed. They invited me, “Do you want to join?” I said, “Yes.” I was thinking of forming one either way, a social-democratic party, because I talked to politicians from Croatia, I talked to Ivica Račan³⁶ and asked him to help me with the Statute and stuff. He said, “Come whenever you want and I'll give you or send you the information. “But after they formed it, they invited me, “Do you want [to join]?”

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who founded it?

Kaqusha Jashari: Excuse me?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who founded the party?

Kaqusha Jashari: Some professors through the initiative of Fehmi Agani³⁷ founded it. Because Fehmi was a social-democrat, he started out in LDK and remained there. Kadri Metaj, Ramush Mavriqi, Anton Berisha, that lawyer Demiku, Fehmi Rexhepi the journalist, he died. The father of the woman who hosted *Desku* on KTV.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Kaqusha Jashari: So that party was good, it had a lot of staff, Palok Berisha. But we didn't have support, there's a different kind of fight when it comes to votes, through money, through buying, through everything. And we weren't the kind of party that dealt with money or asked for financial support. Like that.

Anita Susuri: What were the '90s like? Most people...

Kaqusha Jashari: We were quite active as the Social-Democratic Party from '90. I was a member till '98. At first there was Luljeta Pula, she created some problems within the party, some disagreements with a few members, but she quit. She thought she was the party, she was not the party. We handled

³⁶ Ivica Račan (24 February 1944 – 29 April 2007) was a Croatian politician who served as Prime Minister of Croatia from 2000 to 2003, heading two center-left coalition governments.

³⁷ Fehmi Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

ourselves. I was chosen Head [of the party] in '98, and remained until 2008, I had some coalitions, it was a good time. I had a coalition with PDK³⁸ once, at the exact time when Kosovo was declared an independent country. I signed the declaration [of independence]. If there's one thing that went well [for me] with politics, it's that I'm one of the people who signed it.

But now I think that, even with some new members who think differently, I'm still a member of the leadership. I went on with normal life, I retired when I became 65, now it's been ten years since I retired. I'm doing what I like. Painting was always my hobby, I continued with that. There is the work [points across from her] I did for an exhibition, I had five personal exhibitions. Now I have an opportunity to showcase them abroad, I never thought of having an exhibition abroad. Now it may happen in Switzerland, I'm still not sure. I have them ready, good if it happens.

My pension is like everyone else's. People think I have a higher pension or some privilege, or... it's not true. It's according to the law criteria. With a [university] degree and a minimum of 15 years of work experience, I have a lot more in the past, but I'm in that category of contributors. So, with a [university] degree and work experience I get 260 euros. That's it, that is my income.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could we maybe talk more about the developments in '97, '98 and then the war in '99? What was your life like back then?

Kaqusha Jashari: Since the party was founded in '98 when they chose me Head of the party we cooperated with all the political parties in the Coordinating Council of the parties where everyone participated, [Ibrahim] Rugova³⁹ was the Head. There was the Liberal Party, Gjergj Dedaj; the Christian Democratic Party, Mark Krasniqi; Soical-Democratic [Party], me; and other parties that were conservative in character. Then people founded some other parties, some others disbanded or what do I know.

So, we had some sort of coordination and collaboration with LDK. I'm not sure if they organized it or requested it through them, but we had a lot of contacts with internationals. With Richard Holbrooke who has died, with Christopher Hill, with many internationals. They looked after us, they gave us suggestions, we had discussions, we got [useful] information, Germans were quite present here as well. So, there was a life, a... how can I say, a parallel way of organizing to the one that was there, which Serbia had conquered.

We also had sports, for example the federations were functional, education [system] was functional. Nëna Terezë [non-governmental organization] was operating, and the health care system through

³⁸ Alb. *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic Party of Kosovo. The party was founded on May 14, 1999 from the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army as the Party for the Democratic Progress of Kosovo, but was renamed on May 21, 2000.

³⁹ 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.

them. Some humanitarian organizations to help the people. Serbia had those checkpoints. To tell you the truth, when it came to war, the Social-Democratic Party was the first to say we support defending your doorstep, that's what we called it, doorstep. There was even a title in the *Bujku*⁴⁰ newspaper, they boycotted us and published it. And we had accurate information because we had a quite strong [party] branch in Skenderaj. Nazmi Xani was the Head there, but not founder, the founder was someone who had died later on, Sabri Hajraj.

But what happened in Prekaz, we were determined in the election conference exactly at the time when the massacre of the Jashari family⁴¹ happened. When there was the first attack in February where two girls were wounded, we went to visit them, the Head of the [party] branch hosted us and we went to their *oda*,⁴² I got to see their father, Shaban,⁴³ and their mother as well. I didn't get to see Hamëz⁴⁴ and Adem⁴⁵ because they weren't there, but I did see the other family members. And their wives and mothers called me, "Come see where we were when they attacked us." And they took me to another space.

We went out of the *oda* {shows with hand} and the woman was walking faster and I didn't see where she went, I thought she went this way {turns to her left}, and I went back, {puts her hand on her forehead} I saw weapons there. When I saw you know the ones {describes with hands} like rockets, I don't know what they're called, green and long. When I saw those I was shocked, I was stuck, she said, "Come, come" and then I went. *Kuku*, better not think about it as long as it's there, I don't know how or for what. And I went to the other space with her, she took me upstairs and I saw all the bullet holes in the walls {describes with hands}.

"More,⁴⁶ how did you [survive]?" The beds were interestingly about one meter high. "That's where we slept, but when it [the attack] began," she said, "we leaned down below the windows." And that's how they survived, and the two girls that were wounded were sent somewhere to be healed, I don't know where. And so it was interesting and we went there by car, the man from Drenica, Head of Skenderaj [party branch] drove us, there were many people that went to visit them. I saw the tanks, but no one

⁴⁰ *The Farmer*, a daily newspaper which replaced *Rilindja* after Serbian authority banned it, in August 1990.

⁴¹ In March 1998 Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marked the beginning of the war.

⁴² Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

⁴³ Father of Adem Jashari, also killed in the attack of March 1998.

⁴⁴ Brother of Adem Jashari, also killed in the attack of March 1998.

⁴⁵ Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as "legendary commander," was a founder of the KLA, celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty-half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

⁴⁶ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

stopped us. Maybe they saw that many people were visiting and they didn't do anything because the police and military checkpoint was there but they didn't stop us.

Anita Susuri: What was it like to pass the checkpoints at the time, especially you as a political figure...

Kaqusha Jashari: I didn't pass them, I didn't move outside of Pristina. Only this case of Skenderaj, because I didn't otherwise. They probably checked them all, I don't know, I didn't pass. I don't know, the atmosphere at the time, you weren't there, it was a very difficult atmosphere, very... *eihh* {onomatopoeia}. I know when they organized, since my husband was Head of the Swimming Federation, when they organized the swimming races, and they went to Batllava to organize them. *Kuku*, there were so many police units behind them, to see what would happen, swimming {raises hand palm}. This is what it was like for football and the others, very, very difficult.

But it's interesting about the donations, because the participants needed some prizes and that cost, you know the travel and everything for the racers had a cost, there wasn't a problem, different companies helped. I know all the companies that helped, but it wasn't big money, it was a hundred *marka*,⁴⁷ we had *marka* back then, or two hundred *marka* but they had enough to organize them. While we had a store, we made a living through our work, we had our company. We had a store behind the theater, sports equipment, since my husband was an athlete and he knew what equipment to pick [for selling]. We lived off of that and three percent of the sales went to the fund,⁴⁸ someone used to come there to collect the three percent for education and other needs of the parallel system. We regularly contributed to that.

But my husband had some issues later on because since we had our store, at the faculty he declared that, "I won't accept my salary, because I have my store and that's enough, I don't want a salary, let this go to the faculty for the ones who need it." But when it was all done, after the war when he went back to the faculty he wasn't in the income register (laugh). And they told him "How do we hire you when you're not in the register?" "Well," he said, "I worked, I didn't get a salary but I worked." Honestly he had issues for about two or three months, as long as they didn't register him as a regular professor, like that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about the war? When the bombings began...

⁴⁷ *Marka, Deutsche Mark*, 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 Yugoslavian republics as a result of hyper-inflation of the Yugoslavian *dinar*.

⁴⁸ The three percent fund was created by the Kosovo government in exile during the 1990s. All Albanians in the Diaspora and Kosovo were duty-bound to pay three per cent of their salary into this fund to finance Kosovo's parallel institutions.

Kaqusha Jashari: In war, it's a little different for the war because as a party we supported Rugova's activity. About Rambouillet,⁴⁹ about the deal, about signing the deal. There were those who opposed it. As for the party, we thought it's good to make a deal and sign it since it was about the bombing. And we asked for it to be signed but it wasn't, then it was postponed to go to Paris in 15 days and we sent Ilaz Kurteshi as a delegate, he was a member of the leadership, a former official and he was there. It was signed, we were all happy about it and he came to inform us, he said, "The bombing will happen."

Part Five

Kaqusha Jashari: Ilaz Kurteshi informed us that the bombing will most likely happen because they visited NATO as well. And he said, "Now we have to look what next," I asked him, "Okay, what do the party leaders do?" As you mentioned the checkpoints, "They take us, they grab us and... what?". [He said] "Well we didn't talk about that. When we arrive here, we said, 'Everyone for themselves.'" [I asked] "What?" [He replied] "Everyone for themselves." I thought if we had to organize, to go and create a staff. We have the army, there's a fight, something. "Nope," he said, "everyone for themselves," "Ow!" I came back home and I told my husband, I said, "Look, we have to do something, because they told us all to think for ourselves."

My father was in Albania because when they kicked him out of his apartment he went to Fier. And He settled in Fier. He went to the Municipality and found his name at the school he was at, they preserve these documents better in Albania. They found that he lived there, that he finished elementary school in Fier and they instantly gave him citizenship. He instantly got Albanian citizenship, since he had lived there. And we worked on something with my father there, we got some apartments under his name because he could get an apartment as a citizen, and then we sold them, we worked on some business things and we got a house.

And my father had a phone there and we agreed with my husband, he said, "It's good if you take our sick daughter and go to your father, and I will stay here" and the girls and him remained here. I went to Kika and asked, "Are you going to Albania?" He said, "Yes, my family is going today in the afternoon." I asked, "Is there room for me?" He said, "Yes," he said, "there is room for you." And I took my sick daughter, I prepared to go, and then Teuta said, "Mom, will you take my son with you?"

My nephew was about, I'm not sure, about three years old, I said, "Yes, with your responsibility. You told me to take him and I will. I don't know what will happen on the road, what we'll do. Only getting on the bus is guaranteed." I don't know, it was about six, I don't know the exact time. "No," she said, "I'll bring him to the bus" and we went. We got on the bus, my sick daughter, my nephew and I. We

⁴⁹ The Conference of Rambouillet (Paris) in February 1999 was the last, failed effort to negotiate a peace between Milošević and the KLA.

went to Elez Han⁵⁰ by bus, they asked us to pay a deposit there in order to cross the border. I knew about it so we went back from the border in Elez Han and paid, I don't know how much *marka*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You went to Albania from Macedonia?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, yes, we stopped in Elez Han, there was some sort of chaos. Cops went in and out, in and out, I don't know. The bus conductor took all our passports, he went, I don't know what happened, he came back with our passports, but no cops. He said, "Four cops in Velania were killed and they have gone mad." There was some attack in Velania, I don't know, four cops [were killed] right in that afternoon. And they didn't even check, they let us through, can you imagine, they let us through. They didn't go in [the bus], they would have recognized me, if they had checked my passport they would've seen my name.

"I got them [passports] back the same way I gave it to them," he said, "they didn't even check them or anything." He gave us the passports, "We got away with it" (laughs). And that's how we passed through Macedonia, we went to Tirana. And then from Tirana I got on the bus to Fier, I asked, "How long is the road to Fier?" He said, "Three hours," they don't tell you in kilometers, but in hours, you know why? Because the streets are bumpy. So he said, "Three hours," "*Kuku*, three hours?" "Three hours." I was on the bus to Fier for three hours with the children. So, I stayed there during wartime.

I've had a lot of meetings with foreigners, [and] people from Albania as a leader of the social-democrats. I wanted to unite two parties {puts her head on her hand}, two KLA⁵¹ members, not two parties. Hashim's⁵² one and the other (laughs), they couldn't unite. I went to Sabri Godo,⁵³ from Albania, he was very interested in helping. And then together with him we went to Pandeli Majko⁵⁴ who was Head of the government, then I had to go to Paskal Milo who was Minister of Foreign Affairs. I was really struggling to unite them, because there were too many problems. Armend Zemaj's⁵⁵ father, he was Minister of Health, he was Tahir Zemaj,⁵⁶ whom they assassinated.

⁵⁰ Elez Han border town between Kosovo and North Macedonia where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days in March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either move into Macedonia or re-enter Kosovo.

⁵¹ KLA, an acronym for Kosovo Liberation Army (Alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*) was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

⁵² Hashim Thaçi (1968-), KLA leader at the 1999 Conference of Rambouillet, founder and leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), served as Prime Minister several times and in 2016 was elected President of Kosovo.

⁵³ Sabri Godo (1929-2011) was an Albanian writer, conservative politician and screenwriter.

⁵⁴ Pandeli Sotir Majko (1967) is an Albanian socialist politician. He served twice as Prime Minister of Albania; once from 1998 to 1999, and again in 2002.

⁵⁵ Armend Zemaj (1976) is a member of the Democratic League of Kosovo in the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo since 2008.

⁵⁶ Tahir Zemaj (1952-2003) was an officer in the Yugoslav People's Army, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosova (FARK) and general of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the Kosovo War (1998-1999).

I used to meet Rama in Kosovo's offices there, "What are you doing Ramë?" [He said] "If you only knew. The ones who are fighting with Hashim are coming to Durrës. While the ones who are with Rugova, we have to go host them in Vlora" (laughs). [I said] "What are you saying *bre*?" He said, "Oh, chaos," he said, "they're coming here, the others are going there," he said, "we have to unite them." "*Kuku*," I said, "I don't know about it, those problems, but..."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was your family here, did you manage to communicate with them?

Kaqusha Jashari: Communicating through a fixed phone worked, but I was careful about what I was saying. But my family decided to come to Albania very quickly. My two daughters and Mejdi, because here [in Kosovo] there were tanks all over the streets {points to the left with her finger}, our car was blocked. But my son-in-law was here, son-in-law now because Teuta wasn't married to him yet at the time. But he came around our place and he decided to stay here, but not leave. While Mejdi and our two daughters, once they saw the road was clear, they got in the car and went through Elez Han, but they went through a lot on their way.

They went through many stops not only by the police but also by militaries, but there were other [random] people who stopped them and asked for money, they... They had some money on them and they kept giving it away. When they arrived in Macedonia, it was not a problem anymore because Mejdi had some students whom he taught in Tetova, and he stopped by at a student's in Tetova, they slept over there, they let us know they crossed the border. They arrived in Fier just fine. I stayed in Fier during wartime. I was...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was your mother alive?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, both my mother and my father. She went with my father (laughs). It's very interesting how my father decided to go to Albania. I told my mother, "Slow down, let me ask you something. No one is asking you, do you want to go or not? Do you feel bad in Albania?" She knew the language well, it's interesting, she knew it well. She said, "Listen to what I'm saying," she said, "with Halil," my father, "I'll even go to Africa and don't even ask me about it, ever." And they really had a good time in Albania. They even had some neighbors of Bosnian origin and they sent their children to my mother to speak the language (laughs).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about your mother, did she know Albanian?

Kaqusha Jashari: Yes, as I said she knew it even when she was here, she was able to understand my grandmother because she could only speak it a little. But I was surprised when I heard her speak Albanian to the neighbors there *uuuu* {onomatopoeia}. She used to say it herself, "We saved ourselves by coming here with your father, what would I do at the lodge up there? The Serbs would have cut me."

Because she was scared of Serbs, she wasn't scared of Albanians, a closeby village, Laishevc, there was a Serbian village next to it, Novo Brdo. "*Kuku*," she said, "if I had stayed there they would have cut me," she said, "no way." She had a good time in Albania.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they both die there?

Kaqusha Jashari: They died there, on the way. We went to take them to bring them here, my father called me because he [then] lost his consciousness and he couldn't talk. We drove to go get him and he died as soon as we got to Kosovo. And we buried him here, in Gjilan, next to my brother because I had a brother who died in an accident, and my mother was buried next to him too. Burying her was very problematic, not really but I thought it would be. I went there to look for a place [to bury her] with Mejdi and she left me an *amanet* a long time ago, my mother. When we went to visit my brother's grave, she said, "When I die," she said, "[bury me] as close to my son as possible."

In Gjilan, they share one place, the Muslims are surrounded by Catholic Orthodox, I don't know if you know it. They're in the same place, only a stream divides them. And she thought that since she was orthodox, the muslims wouldn't accept her. She said, "When I die [bury me] as close to my son as possible, near the stream, near my son." When I went to talk to them about burying my mother, I said, "My brother is buried here," I said, "as close as possible because she has to be on that side," they said, "Why on that side?" "Well," I said, "maybe someone could say, 'Why did you bury this Orthodox woman [here], or what do I know.'" This was in 2007, no in 2006, my father [died] in 2007.

I thought it'd be a problem in 2006, how could I know at that time. They said, "Leave that responsibility to us," they said, "if there is a free place near him, we'll bury her there, near your brother, not on that side because can you see how they have destroyed all Serbian graves there." And they really were destroyed. They buried her and said, "The ground is raised here, but it's not a grave." And they buried her right next to him, oh I was so happy. A place next to it was empty and I said, "Reserve that for my father," I didn't want my father to hear me. But he died after one year as well, so all three of them are there [in Gjilan].

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you continue your political activity after the war, I mean did you engage in it more?

Kaqusha Jashari: After the war, we kept the party's activity going. We held the elections, we held the assembly [meetings], the electoral work through OSCE, [we were] registered in CEC [Central Election Commission], it all functioned really well. But social-democrats here, the idea is not very accepted in Kosovo, they all relate it to socialism, to communism, everyone thinks that this Social-Democratic Party is a continuation of that direction. And this is exactly why I told them at the party, I said, "Don't be bitter about it, but I want to request, not a resignation in the sense of 'I'm going!' But we only have

to find someone who can be a successor in the party, because I don't think it's appropriate [for me] to continue."

[They said] "Why? How?" "Because I was the one who was Leader of the Communist Party at a time and I think these internationals maybe have some sort of reservation towards me," and I said, "don't be bitter." "No to this, yes to that," so I said, "You should know you have to find somebody." And then, maybe it's not by accident, Agim Çeku⁵⁷ came out and declared, since someone asked him, "What do I want to do next?" He said, "I want to form a social-democratic party. I don't wanna join the Alliance."⁵⁸ Because when he went there he would replace Ramush [Haradinaj]⁵⁹ or who? Something like that, and so he said, "Not in the Alliance, I want to form the Social-Democratic Party instead."

And Zekë Çeku, his cousin, was a vice-president at our party. I said, "Zekë, ask Agim what kind of social-democratic party he wants to form when there is already ours. Tell him to join us." And he spoke to him, he said, "How could I join them while Kaqusha is there?" I said, "Tell him I will withdraw. He should feel free to join." It was a bit challenging to convince the party to accept him as Leader, not everyone was happy. But, I said, "Ramush on this side, Hashim on that side, let another person with military background challenge them." But the Social-Democratic Party has a rule, whenever someone with military background joins, they dismiss them.

It also happened with a party in Serbia, when someone with a military background came, but also when we chose Agim Çeku, there were problems and we had to hold meetings with social-democrats. Because they didn't want to accept him, to invite him, can you imagine only because he has a military background {gestures being surprised}. I was surprised, but it's true. We went there with him, but to tell you the truth I was negatively surprised by him. He wasn't a politician, in the sense of listening to people, to have patience, but he was angry, he couldn't hold long meetings and listen to people but only quickly. He used to say, "You continue, I have things to do," he used to leave, he wasn't patient. And that wasn't, how to say, in our party's favor.

The party started going downhill from him, and then people from Vetëvendosje⁶⁰ appeared, "We want to form the Social-Democratic Party." When they went to CEC, they told them, "You can't form a party with that name because it already exists." And Dardan [Molliqaj] asked me, "Why can't we form the social-democratic party?" [I said] "You can't name it like this, you can have a similar program but

⁵⁷ Agim Çeku (1960) is a Kosovo-Albanian politician, the former minister of Security Forces in Kosovo and formerly the prime minister. Of military background, he was a commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) that fought against Serbian rule in 1998–1999, earlier being a commander in the Croatian War of Independence in the Croatian Army.

⁵⁸ The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo is a right-wing political party in Kosovo.

⁵⁹ Ramush Haradinaj (1968), leader of the KLA from the region of Dukagjin, founder of the political party AAK (*Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës*) and twice Prime Minister. In 2005 he was indicted at the ICTY for war crimes and crimes against humanity and acquitted of all charges. He was retried and again acquitted in 2010.

⁶⁰ Alb. *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* - Self-determination Movement is a political party in Kosovo which goes by the acronym LVV. It is orientated towards principles of social democracy, progressivism, and Albanian nationalism.

under a different name.” [He said] “No, we don’t want another one, we want this.” “Well then, join,” and we accepted twelve deputies and the party was empowered, it was really good. With Shpend Ahmeti, with... but they gave up *more*, since the first time they lost the elections, they left. “Did you think you can keep a party just like that, that easily? You have to fight, you have to... *yhh* {onomatopoeia}.” They withdrew but there’s still some people there. We are still members, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Just to go back to another moment, to the independence and we’ll be finished. You mentioned that you were one of the people who signed it, can you tell us what that day was like for you?

Kaqusha Jashari: What was it like (laughs), *eeeh* {onomatopoeia} it’s very interesting, good that you asked. When we joined a coalition with PDK, there was a supportive atmosphere. It’s not just our party, but also the Unikomb Party, not Unikomb, what [Valon] Murati’s party was called...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Oh, Bashkimi Kombëtar.⁶¹

Kaqusha Jashari: Bashkimi Kombëtar, a few parties joined in coalitions. And someone invited me too, Hajredin Kuçi⁶² invited me, he said, “Will you join a coalition with PDK?” I sat down to talk, they were very correct. I said, “Yes. If we [our party] win seats [at the Parliament] then their income will belong to the deputies, should go to the party, even though we’re in a coalition.” “Nope,” he said, “that is not up to discussion,” and they really were very correct. They even made me a part of their list.

[Edita Tahiri](#) called me, she said, “You signed,” she said, “please ask if they would accept me.” I told her, “I’ll ask them.” And I told Hajredin, “Edita wants [to join],” “Okay, since you say so.” It’s not that they actually wanted to take her in, but the US Embassy has always supported Edita. She was a coordinator for the dialogue, that’s all the Americans’ initiative. Not that the party was very keen on the idea. And we did it, I was in that parliamentary group. There was also someone from... from LPK,⁶³ Xhemajl, Emrush Xhemajli from LPK.

And at the parliamentary group we even had our seat location set. And they respected our agreement but I also told them, “Don’t expect me to always support your ideas during discussions. If I don’t agree with something, you have your stance, I have my party’s stance. But if we have something to sign, something to vote, I’m with you because we’re in a coalition. But during discussion if I don’t like something, I won’t support you,” and that’s what I did. When it was Independence Day, we held a meeting, we knew we had to sign the declaration.

⁶¹ The interviewer misspoke. She meant to say, *Lëvizja për Bashkim*, in translation the Movement for Unity.

⁶² Hajredin Kuçi (1971) is a Kosovar Albanian politician, who served as Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo from 2008 to 2017 and as Minister of Justice from 2011 to 2016.

⁶³ Alb. *Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës* - People’s Movement for Kosovo, originally founded as a political movement by Albanian nationalists in 1982. The LPK’s ideology was left-wing nationalism.

And what was interesting, the parliamentary group held a meeting before the meeting of the Assembly, all the women there wore red and black outfits, without talking about it prior. When we went inside {acts surprised}, it was visible. My blazer and skirt were black, I bought a new pair, and a red and black scarf {pretends she's putting on a scarf}, a beautiful scarf. I bought them all downtown. And then I saw Nerxhivane Dauti, the law professor, [she was wearing] red and black. The women from PDK, all red and black. But none of the men, they had their suits, random ties, none of them [wearing red and black], but all the women were. Nonsense, we didn't need to. While we were waiting there, Hashim arrived (laughs), "Today," he said, "the declaration will be signed, we will sign it. Today our flag and national anthem will be approved too."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Didn't you know about that part?

Kaqusha Jashari: Nobody, we didn't know anything about it. "What flag?" He said, "You will see it now. I liked it and you should like it too." That's what he said {winks}, but today... "I liked it and you should like it too." And they gave us the flag we have today, the one over there {shows to the right with her hand}. "Hah!" {onomatopoeia} Emrush was close to me I wanted to tease him, because they criticized him a lot in former Yugoslavia about Kosovo, about us making Kosovo's flag with red and black colors, all the same [as Albania's flag] but we added a star, the star was there to differentiate between Albania and Kosovo's flag. Because there can't be one single flag for two countries, there has to be a difference, so we added a star but in red and black.

And when they gave us the one in blue and yellow, I looked at it. I said, "Xhemajl," I said, "Emrush, are you seeing this flag?" "Yes, *bre*." "Are you seeing it?" "Yes." I said, "Where is the red and black?" "Hush!" {frowns}, "No, no," I said, "we were seen as traitors for putting the star in the previous flag and now look at how many stars there are on this one, what is the foundation? Blue," I said, "*kuku*, later they will say that we were traitors." Hush, don't speak, don't speak!" {talks in a low voice} (laughs). "Hush, don't speak!" But listen, I was joking with him because he told me the case about the flag, you know. A flag can't be the same for two countries, that's absurd.

"The National Anthem, you will now hear the National Anthem too," Hashim said. We listened to it and there were no words, only music, "Words, lyrics?" He said, "This and that" (laughs). But you know what, the people from PDK were very agreeable, whatever Hashim said they didn't discuss it. And since we were in a coalition we accepted it, I'm not one to oppose something. Because look at Bosnia and how they made their flag like Europe's because these are the colors of Europe. And I considered our flag as a flag for the future, for Europe, you know.

And when it was time to sign it, I signed like everyone else, but I felt like the pen was near empty (laughs). Here it is {shows across from her}, they gave us one to frame it there. I also have a picture of the signature. It was a moment I can't forget, I'm telling you, if I had to choose a moment to be in the parliament I would have chosen the moment of signing [the declaration]. But it happened suddenly, I

can't say that I knew. We were waiting for the day to declare our Independence, we waited since the war, but it didn't arrive so fast.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you celebrate somehow, what was the day like after?

Kaqusha Jashari: *More*, it was a very cold day, do you remember? Very cold! We celebrated at home, we made a cake at home. And then for the hundredth anniversary of Albania's independence, I had an exhibition because they asked me to at the library. And there was a celebration in the city, do you remember? Red and black, red and black, and we ordered a cake here, our entire family came. I have a special photo album for the hundredth anniversary. I love pictures and I always take them in special cases. Like that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you have something to add? Something we didn't ask you about.

Kaqusha Jashari: I don't have anything. I mentioned almost every moment in my life. I don't... I would only say this now, I mean about myself, I was the first child in my family, and then my brothers. As the first child I have always felt like I have more responsibility and my parents asked a lot from me. But now when I think about it, I had three daughters, I have two now, I have one nephew and I can see that it's very important for women to become independent. To be self-sufficient and help others.

So here, people still view boys as a priority, it's good to have a son, they become happy when the baby is born male. Lately there's some songs with lyrics like "Who has a daughter, has the world." I'm really saying this for girls, in order to have a secure life and confidence, they have to finish an education. I'm more interested in women finishing university than men. For example for women to finish university, for women to get a driver's license. I would rather have my daughter finish high school and get a driver's license, than finish university without having a license, and no [knowledge of an] additional language. All my children went to learn English. The girl that was here, my niece, she finished the most advanced level, she finished everything. She can speak English just like she can speak Albanian.

So, every family should be careful to support girls and give them priority to be their own person. Because it's a positive influence even for creating their own families and the society accepts them differently. Even your husband's family looks at you differently if you don't have an education. That's my opinion. And my daughters have achieved that, besides the one that was sick since she was born and is not here anymore, the other two achieved everything.

Anita Susuri: Thanks a lot for the interview.