

INTERVIEW WITH DANIJELA SIMONOVIĆ

Batuse | Date: November 13, 2019.

Duration: 105 minutes

Present:

1. Danijela Simonović (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Anita Susuri: Could you introduce yourself and tell us something about you, your family...

Danijela Simonović: So. I am Danijela Simonović, I live here in Batuse. By the way, I was born in the village Bresje. I come from the Mitić family, a family that... for many, many years has lived in the village Bresje and a family that has a very good and famous name, firm, strong family. I have been living here in Batuse since '94, when I got married, created a family, created this household of mine. I have two children, two sons. Unfortunately, I have lost my husband and I am fighting alone with my family.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that your family had been very influential. Why?

Danijela Simonović: Because, well, how should I tell you... that family... I mean, as far as I know, that has lived in Bresje for three centuries already, that that family, from that family [came out] so many scientists, so many doctors, so many strong people who finished university. It's a family who was purely into agriculture, got educated out of its work, brought strong people into the world. So, our family, the Mitić family... with its firmness, well, the example of the household itself, the example of celebration, the example of wedding, the example of, of hosting you, of accepting you, of sending you off, of accommodating you, so in all, in all the aspects. You can ask around about that, I think that all of our autochtones, locals, who live here in this area, know this. Also, the Simonović family is also a very successful family. It's not numerous, but it's honest and it fights from its work and thanks to their work they made it.

This... this village here is a small village. It's hard to live now. Now, now these are difficult times, it's hard to live, now how can I tell you, now it's like we're surviving, as if we are waking up from a long dream and fighting, you know, to survive, to like, to connect our bridges, to, and to, to be like we used to be. We remember our childhood, it was like this, it was like that, it was... When I was growing up in Bresje, there was the Bogojevci family, where we mingled at weddings, at funerals, various receptions, various congratulations, various, so we were happy. I had a friend Nora, who I really don't know where she is now, and I would love to see her and meet her.

We lived... I mean, those are the feelings that have all been mixed up now, so, I'm glad to talk about it, but I'm very sorry, it's just some of our past, our beautiful memory, which can hardly be brought back. Well...

Anita Susuri: What was the village like where you...

Danijela Simonović: Where I was growing up?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Well, it was a village... Well, I don't know how many inhabitants it had exactly. But, people were full of love..., a lot, a lot of love in them, they loved everything, they were happy, when they would meet you, they would be happy, surprised. They knew how to congratulate you, they knew to buy you a present, to surprise you... It was a mixed village, multiethnic village, so, there were no differences between the neighbors, trust me. Otherwise, that friendship, that friendship, that only, now it's our pale image in memories that... I would really like to go back, you know, if only I could bring back that time, that, that beauty, that, that, that, that family to gather once because now we don't know each other any more. It's now all over the world. We hear that someone left for America, someone left for Slovenia, we have family in Slovenia, everywhere in Serbia... If it weren't for those social media networks, Face[book] and like that, to get to know each other, otherwise, it would be horrible.

Anita Susuri: What were your parents like?

Danijela Simonović: (breath) My parents were really good people and really hard working people. My father is alive, my mother is not alive, she died very young. My father is from, so, from that strong, working family, so, and even today they are in agriculture. So, from their work and sweat they have what they have. Then, my mother was from a neighboring village, from Ugljare, she also comes from a really good family, the Denić family, Vitković, who now, by the way, her, her family, they live in Kraljevo. So, during the war, migration was up and down, my mother's family lives in Kraljevo. By the way, my mother died when she was 42 years old, she died even before the war, so I have three brothers, me and a father left. Father continued to live with brothers, they live in good unity, thank God everyone is alive and healthy, but there. That's life. He got married, he has another wife now, and my stepmother is a good woman really. They live in the village Bresje even to this day, working, struggling, so, one normal family, there, to say it like that. Well...

Anita Susuri: Were they in agriculture as well or...?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes... Then at that time, so, when it was my happy childhood, when I was happy, when I could go down the street and sing, when I could go by train, by bus, so, to some dance parties in the nearby villages, to 18th birthday parties in Pristina with friends, I don't know... those are now blurred memories, and those are now... really, it's hard for me to talk about it, but there, and I am happy that it's inquired about, that topic about our life.

Anita Susuri: Did you have a big household?

Danijela Simonović: Yes. Yes. Pretty big household, how to tell you, so strong and big, well I don't know if, congratulations to the families on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, and in Serbia, and in surrounding and all of that, but the firmness of that family I think there was no stronger one. There, trust me. You know, wherever they are now, but that strong connection, that strong lineage, that strong, those strong ancestors who... thanks to them we have what we have, we possess what we possess, so, someone is getting an education to be smart, I think that their (laughs) genetics, are born, like, knowledgeable and hardworking people.

Anita Susuri: Do you maybe remember your grandmother and grandfather...

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, yes...

Anita Susuri: Some of their stories, or something?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. So, my grandfather was a great homemaker, a good man, a respectable man and grandfather, who had a say in the community. Out of great respect for him, at that time, I remember as a child that no girl from the village got married, and no boy got married in the village, not only [boys and girls] from the family, without seeking his approval whether the girl was suitable for that house (smiles), whether that boy deserves that girl. So... yeah, this is the strength of the family, and the faith in it, so, the community, neighbors, relatives, godfathers, cousins, so, that makes one strong.

My grandfather was an elder [of the community], a great man who had a cane, like that, he was a fighter, he worked until his last breath. He had a mill that ground the grain... for livestock, for... so, people always gathered around him, to talk, and they started singing, and... I don't know, something that... It's a shame he wasn't recorded somewhere for it to be watched, for our youth to see how people used to live, to evoke memories, to evoke emotions, to evoke all of that, that children are filled with that love.

Anita Susuri: I once heard that for those who have the mill, that it's not safe to, to sleep there...

Danijela Simonović: Oh no... (smiles)

Anita Susuri: During the night... (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: No, that's not true, those are just some stories, something, you know from the old times probably that the mills used to work day and night, and the one who would take care of those mills, and then they invented the stories to, to scare people or whatever. Maybe the flour was being stolen, who knows, and that's how it was protected, probably, I don't know. Otherwise, no, that is not true. I had one more uncle who had a mill at the beginning of Bresje, so, before the war, now he doesn't have it, unfortunately, he died, his family moved, and he grinded, so, service for the citizens, but no no, those are just stories that (laughs) probably only kept mills safe, and religion and tradition, I don't know really.

Anita Susuri: Like legends.

Danijela Simonović: Like some sort of a legend, somewhere in some over there...

Anita Susuri: How many were you in that family? Did you have sisters or brothers?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes. (breath) Well, there were seven of us. So, grandfather, grandmother, mother and dad, and, actually eight, I had a younger brother who was 17 years younger than me, afterwards he too came into the world so, one like, modest, not a numerous family you know, which was... Eh, after that my brothers, so I got married, my brothers got married, sisters-in-law came, and the children were born, and so now...

Anita Susuri: Which *slava*¹ did you celebrate in that house?

Danijela Simonović: In that house we celebrated the *slava* of Saint Archangel. We celebrated both summer and winter Saint Archangel. Winter, the one in summer is on July 26, and the winter one is on November 21. It's almost now, in a few days. So, like that, there in birth, so, where I was born, we celebrated Saint Archangel. Otherwise, Christmas was celebrated, Easter, *Đurđevdan* [Saint George] had its own celebration because the livestock was kept, and you know how for *Đurđevdan* something was always slaughtered as a sacrifice for a household to advance and all of that, actually, you treat your family who is working, you know, and you take time for that to be a family lunch, you gather the closest family, so, okay, the friends are there as well, godfathers, so all of those who are helping throughout the year and then you gather them for one lunch.

And regarding *slava*, that's *slava*, so, our tradition that is kept and preserved for years, in the same way the parents' land is being inherited, in the same way the *slava* is inherited. The same way, you inherit

¹ *Slava* is part of the Serbian Orthodox religious tradition. Once a year, every family celebrates the day of a particular saint who is believed to be the guardian of the family.

slava and godfathering. If you have, so, you also inherit the godfathering. And if you have one son, two, three, now it depends on how many children you have, how you divide your property, you divide the godfathering in the same way. So, it's one tradition that is being preserved, that is being nurtured, that is being preserved for years. My family has, I know for sure that the godfathering is three centuries old. So, the Mitić family with the Grujić family from Bresje, the godfathering is for sure three centuries, and now it's probably even stronger. I wasn't sure, otherwise I could have provided that information for you about the family and, and, so, strong tree, strong tree of the Mitić family. Well...

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you more about the celebration of *slava*. Why that saint exactly and how does it go in celebration, why is it being celebrated, for example, how is it prepared, so more about the relation...

Danijela Simonović: About *sl...*

Anita Susuri: About *slava...*

Danijela Simonović: Aha. (breath) Every family has its *slava*. So, that's how relatives mixed, now you go non-stop, and back then *slava* were when families mingled, feasted... back then *slava* lasted for three-four days, you know, relatives went on foot, and they come and they sleep over, so children meet and grow up together and all of that. The tradition of *slava*, the custom itself, they make the host, so, the way you celebrate *slava*, says what kind of a host you are. So, we have fasting and *mrsna*² *slava*, so, it's not only to prepare *mrsna slava*, so you make everything that you can think of, no, there is also giving up food. So, you respect that saint, now those are our days, Wednesday, Friday, we have Lent, and those are Christmas, Easter, for the Assumption of Mary, so fasting that last for years, for more weeks and all of that. Now, if *slava* is during the fasting period, so, we strictly prepare fasting food. What's more, when it's those strict days... when you are fasting on water, that's a strict fasting, so, the food is being prepared only in water, without oil. So, what can be [prepared] potato, cabbage, so what is allowed, strict fasting, fruits, vegetables, but with no oil, with no oil, and like that.

So, I don't know, every religion preserves its customs, so we do as well, and that *slava* is very important for a family, that is a name and a surname of a family. So the name is, my surname is Mitić, and *slava* and a surname make one strong family. So, you are no one if you don't have your tradition and your *slava*, how will you, what will you tell your children who you are. How will you have, how, here, now I am, I have grandchildren, I am a mother, now my grandchildren are going, strolling around Serbia up and down, they will come to their grandma to *slava*, twice a year, where they will visit their grandma, to come and see how grandma is doing and all of that. So, it's that tradition that is being preserved. Go all around the world, but when it's *slava*, it's the day when family gathers. So, old fireplace is being preserved like that, so, *slava*, different delicious food is being prepared, so, anything you can think of in this world, everything that is nice, something new, you go somewhere, pick it up,

² A type of *slava* where the food can be prepared with oil and meat can be eaten.

learn, make, host, poor guy... to host someone who is hungry, for God to see you. So, thank God, to cousins, so, to treat and all of that, but still something should remain from *slava*, and then you prepare it, you think of someone who is powerless, and you nicely bring, and surprise him, like, you know...

Anita Susuri: Like a gift?

Danijela Simonović: Like a gift, yes, yes. God gave me food, there is enough for me, there is also for you.

Anita Susuri: What was the specialty, for example, you had that, those, what is it called, bread cake?

Danijela Simonović: Bread cake, our Kosovar bread cake is our specialty, so. It's no *slava* if you don't make a bread cake. So, it's no wedding if you don't, don't have a bread cake. You cannot invite godfather to a wedding if you don't bring the bread cake. So, brother-in-law, it's our Serbian specialty and Serbian bread, Kosovar custom that, without the bread cake, there is nothing. So, that Kosovar bread cake of ours that... there, it's regular bread which is that high...

Anita Susuri: And can you just describe that day of celebration? How does it go?

Danijela Simonović: Like this...

Anita Susuri: What do you do on that day?

Danijela Simonović: So, on that day, we can, we celebrate and the night of the *slava*, then the night of the *slava* is just as important as the *slava* itself. So you get ready... the night of the *slava*, if it's winter, it can start earlier, as soon as it's dark outside, so, the night of the *slava* starts the second it's dark. During summer, it's a little, the day is longer. There's so much cleaning that day, and food preparation, you prepare a buffet, you buy a little something for the house, what you can. Like, the family gets nicely dressed up, puts on nice clothes, the tables are prepared, so servings, food, you cook what's most important. Now, a member of the family, the host or the kids, bring that celebratory cake to the church.

So you absolutely cook the wheat, the wine and the celebratory cake. We take that to the church, we have a church in our village, so, they take it there, now, you cut it, it's cut there, there's a prayer, there's one for the members of the family, which means every *slava* is like that. It's custom, it must be done. Then, when the host brings, like, the celebratory cake, it's placed on a table, then we take a censer and the whole family is smoked, you know, with frankincense. We usually try to buy it somewhere from a monastery, I even got it, I got the Devič monastery and I got the frankincense brought from Jerusalem, which smells really nice. So, when the family is bathed in frankincense and we begin serving and we wait for the guests. The serving is, like, when the first guest comes, he, "Good evening, host, happy *slava*!" "Welcome, help yourself!" Well... you serve the host first, um, the guest, the guest first, so

like... the ones who come later wheat, that wheat that was in the church, red wine, like you serve that to the guests on the *slava* day. And the celebration night. It might be served sweet, honey too, whatever's available, but the wheat is the most important.

The guests are served, then you ask about drinks, who will have what. Usually, us housewives try to make some liquors, you know, something to surprise the guests, *orahovača*,³ and *višnjevača*,⁴ so there's really everything. Now, the jolly host even starts singing. So these are really songs I don't know, but there's kids who aren't here, who know how to sing well, so those are songs about *slava*. "*Trepetilja trepetala, cveto...*" so, host, how did that song go, I mean really nice songs. So that's... Then the children sing and our, like, our toasts, Serbian toasts, so you take a glass of liquor {gestures with her hand as if holding a glass} and you toast to the host, you congratulate him. Then they cross, like, they cross arms, like a... you congratulate the host, and I, as a guest, bring you good fortune, you know, and cross arms, you drink, you toast, and I swear to God, guests get drunk and then someone goes to sleep (laughing), someone goes home and stuff like that.

So that lasts, that lasts for a few hours, and then, if it's a celebration night dinner, then the celebration loaf of bread must be brought out. Now, if there's an uncle sitting at the table, he must get a piece of the loaf, because the uncle also has his place in the family. If you really don't have an uncle, someone a little bit older, it's usually the first neighbor. So with him, everyone comes and goes but the first neighbor is always the one who helps you through thick and thin. Then you break bread with the neighbor and you sing a song there too. "Glory to you, God Christ, glory to you..." you know, like, someone who knows how to sing really well. So, the loaf of bread is broken, you congratulate the host, the celebratory candle burns the night of and the whole day of the *slava*. It's those {showing the size with her hand}...

Anita Susuri: The whole day?

Danijela Simonović: The whole day the celebratory candles, there's a thurible, it all depends on the family, a thurible that burns above the icon, it's also lit at the night of the *slava* and burns the night of and the next day. That's what I usually do {points to herself} in my house.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So you must light that, so like, some wellbeing, progress, so God sees you and your family. You make sure, you know, to... And the host stands, the whole time, while the guests are there, he {points a finger in front of herself} no, he doesn't cater to the guests, he caters to his *slava* {points upwards}. So he doesn't sit at all.

Anita Susuri: He doesn't sit?

³ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit. *Orahovača* is a type of *raki* made of walnut.

⁴ *Ibid.* *višnjevača* is a type of *raki* made of sour cherry.

Danijela Simonović: No, no. He brings all that out, drinks, sings, like, tries to have everything under control, so it's really great. And, you break the bread, I'm going back to the loaf of bread, it's given to everyone. The first piece is always left for the host, you know the one that broke it first leaves some for himself, then gives it to everyone {gestures as if handing something out} the bread, and all that. The dinner is set, followed by a cake, who makes the cake, who, so, the maximum serving, so, you eat, you drink, and so on... That lasts for two days and the third day is like a farewell. So like our family, here in Batuse, a very praiseworthy, the third day, because all the brothers celebrate the same *slava*, so here in Batuse we celebrate Saint John the Baptist. On the third day of *slava*, the family that celebrated it, now we all gather together, like brothers {holds her arms together}.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: It's the most important thing for family. So, I celebrated Saint John's for two days and I wasn't there to congratulate my brother-in-law nor did he come to me.

Anita Susuri: The one celebrating the same *slava*?

Danijela Simonović: That's right. Now, because we, so I'm talking about the Simonović family here, because we're the oldest, my husband was the oldest, he has two younger brothers and his sister in Dobrotin celebrates the same *slava*. Now, so, the family mixes on the third day, the closest family and because we're the oldest, out of respect for our family, they all come here. So both the first and the second brother and the sister, the whole family congratulates us on *slava*. The same serving. Same how, out of respect for the family, like, that's the bread, that like holds everything, until I break the bread {turning her hands in front of herself} I can't go. You know, like, you aren't hungry, but it's the rule. Then the brothers break the bread between themselves, and congratulate each other on *slava*, and we sit here for two hours, then we go to the {points the direction} second brother-in-law, then the youngest one, then the sister-in-law in Dobrotin. It might last the whole day, the third day {holds up her index finger}. That's how we say farewell to *slava*.

That's a little bit rare in this territory because you have to have a family to pay respects to such a good custom. Unfortunately, I say I'm sorry, because it was different before the war, and rarely anyone has kept this custom this much, just *slava*. But okay, whatever, thank God the children, which is the most important thing, the children see what needs to be done and continue doing it. So my older son, if he was born in '92, has three kinds, he took his *slava* {lifts her hand up} and like, he comes, to his mother and his brother, his younger brother to congratulate on *slava*, but he has his own guests, his celebratory cake, his bread, his housewife to prepare all that for him. And it's a wonderful thing, to experience that as a parent...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: And you go to your son to congratulate him on *slava*. So that... we try to imitate life before war. To take back what once was and keep on living. It's a little hard, the circumstances are more dire, it's all more difficult, but I guess will wins over everything.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned the family is bathed in frankincense.

Danijela Simonović: Absolutely.

Anita Susuri: What does that mean, since I don't know.

Danijela Simonović: Well, according to our custom they say God controls you, not the Devil.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: (laughing) So that frankincense, like it chases the devils out of the house.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: So like, the frankincense is a must for the church as well as our family. We bathe in frankincense for Easter too, for *slava* as well, so, for every good day during the holidays, we bathe in frankincense. And let me tell you the scent, I guess, you know, wakes something up, something. It, how do I say this, you feel so nice when you're bathed, the whole family, like the children calm down like, something very nice. So it's, like, God commands the house and not the devil. That's why the frankincense is the holy frankincense, which... it's a must, without it...

Anita Susuri: Are some words said then?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, yes

Anita Susuri: When the frankincense is going around?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, "Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on my sinful self," so, if you're a sinner. "Forgive, God, my family," so, "Forgive me, God, for I knew not of what I spoke. God, give health, progress, happiness, joy..." and, and so like, everything, if it's your *slava* you bathe in the frankincense and you say, "God, give us peace, give us health, give us happiness, joy. May everything born be alive and healthy" you know, just to anticipate joy. Same goes for Christmas when you bathe in frankincense, "God, give us health, God. Watch over our livestock," you know, "Watch over our *biricet*" {looks puzzled while trying to remember the word} field.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, without... you work, you do farming and God needs to watch over that. There are some days from Easter too, from Christmas to Easter, there are nine Thursdays that are kept

(laughing) so the hail doesn't hit the field. That's how the elders kept it. Now, some family that works a lot, that harvests the grain, they keep the, you know...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Some fast, some, like, give up food, some won't work, usually women, housewives do that. Like, you know, I won't wash or knit anything today, like they keep themselves... And you don't spread white lines, like you're kept from the hail as if not to anticipate it...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: If the hail hits, it kills the wheat and the corn and all that. That's one of the meanings. Um, from Christmas to Easter those nine Thursdays. So the people didn't have meteorological stations before. No one had rockets to break up the hail, but that's how they kept safe, they say, the fields and the wheat and the livestock and everything. Yes.

Anita Susuri: I also wanted to ask you about the celebration. You told me how men, what, what's their, how do I put it, what do they need, how they should act and all that...

Danijela Simonović: Yes.

Anita Susuri: But, for an example, the housewife, the women, what were they doing? Did they just prepare the food and the, the celebration or did they have something else?

Danijela Simonović: {puts her glass on the floor} The housewives, they have the main role.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: It all depends on the housewife, so, all, the complete atmosphere in the home, if the host is jolly and the housewife is jolly, *slava* is great (laughs). So, the housewife has the hardest role in the house. So, her job is to prepare. The host brings, but she is the one who is supposed to make, to host, to decorate, to remember everything, so to... The housewife is the core of the family.

The host is, as the, but without the housewife, it's hard, and you know, she is the main there, I at least think like that, and to see someone off, and to host, and to set the table, to serve the meal, and, and that bread cake depends on the housewife. If she is a hardworking and capable woman, you know that, everything has its charm. So, she has a really big role, so, it all depends on her. And the preparation for *slava* goes on for days, it's not, you cannot make it in one day. So, a lot of food, a lot of delicious food, a lot of sweets, a lot of preparation. It's not only to set the table, you also need to make your house look solemn...

[Video got interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: Okay, now you can.

Danijela Simonović: Eh. And like, so, for the housewife, the housewife is the key for celebrations. Regarding *slava*. I said, so, it cannot be made in one day, it lasts for more days, more weeks, first, you need to clean the house, someone paints it, someone you know (laughs), solemn, you know, you are getting ready, a lot of love, you go to cousins or to the sister-in-law, and you ask her what she had prepared, then what she is planning to prepare, then I will make this, and I will add up here, then I don't have enough money, I will save there, here, you know something to, to add, to... We all like to have something special on that day. And so the housewives do their best and get tired I can tell you until *slava* passes, and they really get tired. And they must look beautiful and sleek, so, it's not only to wait for the guests, so everything needs to be...

Anita Susuri: Tip-top.

Danijela Simonović: Tip-top (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs) I wanted to go back a little bit to your childhood now. To which elementary school did go and what are your memories?

Danijela Simonović: Like this, I went to Aca Marović Primary School, the primary school was in Brese. I had a teacher, the late Ljuba Jovanović, he was from, from a nearby village. There were 42 students in class. We had a lot of Roma. The class was Serbian and Romani, so, mixed. Well, it was an old school, afterwards a new school was being built in Kosovo Polje, but that was, oh God, a massive, full school. I remember when it played, you know, well, when the bell {moves her hand from left to right} for the break, and when we start running around, and you run, like everyone wants to buy something, everyone to something... That childhood is no more, unfortunately, because we wanted to use every minute of the break to play *lastik*, that rope {spins her hand in circle}, volleyball, whatever, us friend a lot, so, everyone something over there, and we, in free time we were looking to spend it in those children's activities.

I wasn't a bad student, I was a good student. I had a lot of work at home and so you couldn't study enough because I was... but mostly I was trying to be among my peers. I even went to the competition in the fifth grade for history in Macedonia. Professor Tomić was taking me there. The childhood, unfortunately, unfortunately, it passes so quickly. The best days, you know, what... we all rush to finish school, but actually we all come back, on the whole I am coming back to my school days. My teacher, my teacher, oh God, I don't know...

Part Two

Anita Susuri: When you went, the competition in Macedonia, was it the first time when you...

Danijela Simonović: The first time I went somewhere further. That was, I was at the local competition here, the municipal level in Kosovo Polje and then, I think I took second place in history. But I knew that history thanks to my grandfather.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: Grandfather of mine, yes. Here, let me mention him now, may he rest in peace. Let me get back now to how I knew history. I wasn't that smart to know everything, for example, in the fifth grade, but my grandfather, what I was telling you, he used to gather children in the evening and they weren't talking about empty fairytales, but they were talking about history, "This happened, that happened..." so, he remembered and his old history that he studied as a child and now, so, we, what else and how, so, there was no electricity and then we sit down to talk and then he talks about history, I was the eldest and I remembered it all, which later through school I really well that, I used to tell that knowledge from grandfather. So, I didn't study much history later in school, but I knew that old history. And, I swear to God, then afterwards at the competition at the republic level, it was former Yugoslavia back then, Macedonia...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: I was glad when they called me to go to the competition there. I think I took the fifth place there, I was hosted by one family, I don't even remember what are their names nor the surname, but I know that I really had a nice time there, that those are very much those memories and they are evoked from that family... what, I was a child, it was, a guest for five days. I know they were waiting for us, accept... one school accepted to host us in, exactly in Skopje, like, and then students hosted us as their guests.

Like, something was organized at the level of the former Yugoslavia that, I know that there were children from Slovenia, that there were students from all the republics, we were there, whether we were guests, and then we visited the monasteries, it's probably that, all of us historians went, we had something to see, probably over there, I remember some of the monasteries, Saint Naum, Saint John something, we visited, O, they [took] us to Ohrid, Lake Ohrid like, atten..., and they were really devoted because we knew that history as children. That really, really, I really remember it, you know, I am sorry that I forgot all those names and all those surnames, bit it was a long time ago, what more..

Anita Susuri: How did you go there, by train?

Danijela Simonović: By train. By train, by train (smiles). I know, there were how many of us, with the teacher five of us went from the Municipality of Kosovo Polje. Well, {closes her eyes} they were waiting for us with some roses, with some flowers, with some *bombonjera*, chocolates...

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: Something, you know, a really nice reception we had there. That's an experience, train travel! Traveling by bus, the excursions themselves, the experiences, it was nice... {smiles and moves her head left-right}

Anita Susuri: How many years did you finish in that school? Eight or?

Danijela Simonović: Eight, eight. Well I am, the last generation, like oriented the first and the second year, afterwards I continued with agricultural school in Pristina. Everything in here, I went to Bresje until the eighth grade, the first and the second year used to be oriented education back then. So, it's not like now, you go directly, but the first and the second are oriented, and then afterwards, I attended the third and the fourth year at the agricultural school in Pristina {points in a direction with her finger}.

Anita Susuri: You traveled every day or?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes traveled, normally, by bus without any crowds, without any fear, so without any, one week we went in the morning, the other week in the afternoon, so we didn't [have] any problems... so, it was a long time ago in happy times. So, you could travel without being accompanied by parents, without anyone accompanying you. I remember, dark, I am not in a hurry, you know. Normally, relaxed, you are coming home with your friends, you are talking, you stay in the street, you stop for a while, you know, there, to talk a bit more, whether it's related to school, whether to our lives.

Anita Susuri: Did you have friends from Bresje...

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, yes...

Anita Susuri: You went together?

Danijela Simonović: I had, yes, a few girlfriends that later went to high school in Pristina with me. We went, we were in the same class and hung out, you know, both for the hanging out itself and for the travel itself. By the way, we had friends from Kosovo Polje, from Pristina. I even had a friend from Prokuplje at the agriculture school that used to live in Pristina. Back then they used to come from there, getting educated, they lived here, I mean, well, those were happy times and there were no problems with anything and...

Anita Susuri: And at that time you maybe went out sometimes in Pristina, to walk down the *korzo*⁵...

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes... we did *korzo*...

Anita Susuri: How was it for you then?

Danijela Simonović: We went to *korzo*, crowded, a lot of people walking, “Hi, hi,” you know, you know someone, you nod. There was a restaurant called Beograd, we went for drinks there. That was somewhere in the center. We went to breakfast, below *Kičma* there was this, some Bosnians held, it was called *Bosna*, they made *burek*, I know they had delicious *burek* and I remember that to this day. It was a must to go there, you know, after school, it was a must, we go like to have a walk, you know and, or when we are supposed to go out, you know. We went to *korzo*, we did. When I was a child I went to the cinema, otherwise I wouldn’t know what cinema is.

Anita Susuri: In Pristina?

Danijela Simonović: Yes. Since I was a child, well, the first time in cinema in Macedonia, during that competition when we were there I went, and after that something out of curiosity as a child, otherwise, I wouldn’t know what cinema was, believe me. After that, like this and... There, our children don’t know.

Anita Susuri: Did somebody take you or you went with your friends?

Danijela Simonović: I think that we went to the cinema from school...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: It was something school-related, there were some shows, I have no idea, I know that school somehow organized that cinema. And otherwise we are, we are from such a family where you were doing agriculture and you didn’t have time to, but you can use that walk while you are coming back from school, or when, you know, if you don’t have a lesson and then you use that, otherwise, for you to take some time, to go and wander around, no, no, no, no way. And then, it was Saturday when we were going out in Kosovo Polje, there were some dance parties. Then *sabor*,⁶ village *sabor*, like, in nearby villages...

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us a bit more about that...

⁵ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

⁶ Sabor, refers to social gatherings among the Serbs around the churches and monasteries called during the *Slava* and *Hram* (Patron of the monastery). Among Kosovo Serbs there was a belief that everyone must dance in order to gain and secure good health.

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes...

Anita Susuri: About those...

Danijela Simonović: It's like when a house has its *slava*, in that way every village has, where it has the church, the church has its *slava*. Those are our *sabor*.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: Here, where we are here in Batuse, it's June 20, the church is called Saint Sunday, and, on that day, so on June 20, the day of the church is being celebrated, in our village. We call that *sabor*. Now, in this environment of ours, this church of ours was then at that time a bit bigger and, and it got the name Temple, Temple of Batuse.

While other churches, this one in Bresje, Saborna church, probably because it has two *sabor*. So, every church is like one family, like a house, as well as the village itself. Eh, then back then, from, so before the war, each village, like here in Batuse, June 20 when we have *sabor*. That's when the youth comes from the whole area, they all gather in that village, visit families... That's where the dance parties happened, that's where a lot of married couples, a lot of loves were born in those *sabor* and (laughs) and they took each other, so, "When will you get married?" "In *sabor*." The families were preparing and that day the family comes and that's when most boys and girls got married.

In Bresje, where I was born, *sabor* was in May, 20, sometimes 27th, sometimes 23rd, it's changing, goes before, this... Lent, Easter Lent, that *sabor* goes on for a week. So, Priluzje, Plemetina, so that, but those were, you lived for that day! *Sabor* goes on, so {touches her clothes} you go, you get the clothes to be, you know, the best, you know like, a girl walks, the one who is the best, I mean, that was what the attention was paid to. Now, unfortunate that this television and, and Internet and all, and it took away that childhood and from girls that, they lack the, the attention. There is more attention there than on this, like. That's how I met my late husband, in *sabor* as well (laughs).

Anita Susuri: We are going to talk about it as well, but I wanted something more about the dance parties. Was there music and what kind of music it was?

Danijela Simonović: Of course! Live music, live, so, while, now, everyone who knows how to dance a bit, they go into *kolo*,⁷ into *oro* as they say, they go into *oro*, and then the first one, the first song, until the last one, so, the one who leads *kolo* the best...

⁷ *Kolo* is the traditional collective folk dance, where a group of people (usually several dozen, at the very least three) holding each other by the hands or around the waist, dance, ideally in a circle, hence the name. There is almost no movement above the waist. Each region has at least one unique *kolo*; it is difficult to master and even most experienced dancers cannot master all of them.

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: So, the best dancer, the best girl, who dances the best. There is, like, in Kosovo Polje there was Venac, the cultural artistic society that is now in Gračanica. That generation, I know, they were beginners then, that old, exactly when I started. And then at the dance parties they dance. At the beginning there was some folk music to dance to, after that there was also pop music, Zdravko Čolić, so everything was there! Hits that were at that time, Semsá, Sinan Sakić and even to these days. And, so, that is all, even though it's old, all of that I guess {spins her hand} is spinning around even nowadays.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: And, I am saying, so, once a week... I think Kosovo Polje was on Saturday, Priluzje was on Sunday or Friday, I don't remember, so, Lipljan {points in the direction with her finger} and Lipljan was close to us as well. And then you went to Lipljan by train from Kosovo Polje, you know. You can't wait for the bus, Kosovo Polje, then let's go to Lipljan by train to the dance party. Even Lipljan has three *sabor*, the first and the last one, early spring. Three *sabor*, so, now in that courtyard, whether those are three churches or what, I don't know exactly, I really don't know exactly, I can't speak about what I don't know...

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: But I know that we went to three *sabor*. And then the carousel, music, and th... then the amusement park, and everything! So for everything, and for the old, for the old inn, for children, there were playhouses. They brought those children's, for the children's park those cars, so for every generation, for every age there was fun. So, you save the money, save it through the whole year, *sabor* comes and then you spend it all there.

Anita Susuri: When did you see your husband for the first time?

Danijela Simonović: Oh, eighty (laugh), in '89 I got married, so eighty, I met him in '89 as well.

Anita Susuri: How did you meet, where?

Danijela Simonović: Eh, I'll tell you now how we met. So, Bajić brothers, music in Kosovo Polje at the train station, Usnija Redžepova, so music came to Kosovo Polje, now all of us locals go there, you know, us children, you know, a girl, I married young...

Anita Susuri: Usnija was here? Redžepova?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, Usnija Redžepova, yes, yes! In Kosovo Polje, Bajić brothers so {points with the finger behind her}. I don't know who else was there from these singers. But, the music was at the open, old train station where now in Kosovo Polje...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: So here. And I remember, you know, now everyone... Someone with a tractor, someone on foot, so people go, go to watch, you know how, it's like you are going to the arena of some sort! And us girls from Bresje, we gathered and we are going. Eh, my late husband, since they are from Batuse, this is further on, you saw the relation {points in the direction with her finger}. They went by tractor. Because it was the weekend and they didn't have transport. So, the bus was on working days then, usually on weekends they didn't have buses, and they went by tractor. And we like, you know, we are laughing because they are driving tractors.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: And we are close, and we just ran across (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: And like that, so, we met there, we dated for a bit, for some three months and there, we married and like that. I, well... But, there, my meeting was, well, that gathering. So, *sabor*, there was music, there you go to that *sabor*, you met, not only me, so, ninety percent of loves were born in *sabor*.

Anita Susuri: Did you go out afterwards and how did you see each other at that time?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, at that time, we had dance parties, we went out normally, we were seeing each other, well it wasn't every day, because I was going to school, I was in fourth year, but the days were, so, normally, well, we didn't have phones to, but you had to, when you make an arrangement, if you don't go out that day, the train has left the station, over.

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: (laughs) So, you go, you leave everything and you go, like you know, you find an excuse, you go out, but usually at the dance parties and *korzo*. Pristina, that's where we were seeing each other, there for sure, so, a normal walk, normally, so...

Anita Susuri: And can you tell me now about that tradition when families meet each other, for example...

Danijela Simonović: When the two young get married?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Eh, like this. M...

Anita Susuri: What is your family's tradition?

Danijela Simonović: Our family is from here, well I did, there, I married, so, I can speak about my example, here so, now to...

Anita Susuri: Like that, like that.

Danijela Simonović: Every family has its custom, and the way they are doing it, but there, I married, I didn't do it with the knowledge, eh, that's that family of ours that I was talking about. I am the only girl who ran away from that family, without the knowledge of my parents, grandfather, grandmother, I married without their blessing, who were very angry, who, some time was needed for families to make a truce.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: You understand? Because I kind of trampled on my family because they, their girls were famous housewives and hardworking, and a girl from a respected family couldn't take any guy. But there, I was young, I fell in love and I thought that I was going to solve the problem, I married without thinking how much I would hurt my family. And I really hurt them and, you know how, it needed, it lasted for a few months I swear to God for a good *mirba*⁸ to come. You know, a month passed, I was young, I was really sad. They even offered me to go back because I was young, it was just when I finished, I didn't even finish school, I married in the fourth year...

Anita Susuri: How many then, eightee...?

Danijela Simonović: Well, sh..., not even 18 years old, I started school earlier. They even offered me to go back, no, I didn't want to come back, I continued living in this family, one beautiful family, modest family, well... Then, after the truce between the families, the celebration was organized. Well, that *mirba* was at my parents', you understand, they gathered the closest family there, and then we here, I, my late husband, father-in-law, I didn't have a mother-in-law, she also died a young woman, a

⁸ The reconciliation ceremony between two families that have not been on good terms.

sister-in-law, brothers-in-law, uncles, aunts, so maybe around twenty of them, who gathered from this family, we went to our family where, where I was. And, now, the custom of our family is, you know, when they all come in, we arrived there, now my family is out waiting for us. First, there was the late grandfather, it goes according to the age {raises her finger in the air} so not the father, mother, but grandfather, grandmother, uncle, someone older... You only shake your hands, nothing else. And nobody shook hands with me, everyone was mad. So, that is the *mirba* which is organized, that is the custom of *mirba* between the families...

Anita Susuri: Yes...

Danijela Simonović: The marriage itself. Then, m..., I like that, we sat somewhere behind the door, as unwanted guests, you know. And, now families sat, so, everyone sat down {as if showing the sitting arrangement with her hand} there was nothing on the table, no serving, nothing until the things were cleared out.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: And, now since my grandfather was alive then, when I got married, so my grandfather, "Good day," you know, asks all of that. And, now, until my grandfather asks me {points at herself with her arm}, nothing. "Come here." I come. "Why did you leave our family? Why did you have to," you know, "embarrass us like that, humiliate like that? Why did you run away? Why didn't you have a wedding..."

Anita Susuri: What made you, yes.

Danijela Simonović: "What made you get married?"

Anita Susuri: Yes (laughs).

Danijela Simonović: I was young, like, I didn't even think about what I did, well. And nothing, I like, like, "I fell in love," I squeeze my shoulders, you know like. My late grandmother, "Let it go, let it go, and, that always happened, come on, for God's sake you know, now we are going to torture the child. Let her eat salt and bread and be happy," you know?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Like, that is the most important for a female child. But the grandfather was very strict and all of that. And then he asks, "Did you take him out of your own will or by force?" in the sense that they didn't make me, you know (laughs). "No," I said, "willingly." Eh, okay, then he asks my late husband, you know, "Do you torture her, did you take her out of love, did you take her, so, out of

someone's spite?" So that is the most important {raises her index finger in the air}. "Why did you take my child? Will you respect it, will you help it in life? Will you, so, put her in your place by you or she will be..." And that all like that, "No, no, I..." like, you know, "I was afraid of, of, losing her, and that's why I took her," you know, like, "I caught her."

Eh, so like that. And then, he, grandfather, congratulates us, gives us his blessing, and then my parents congratulate us, and then his parents, and then cousins among themselves congratulate each other, but my late father-in-law brought a barrel of *rakia*. *Rakia* also has a meaning in our family, not only in our family, in our tradition.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: A drink, *rakia*, that is decorated. The act itself means like, so the feast has...

Anita Susuri: Feast.

Danijela Simonović: Eh. And then, that's the toast that you drink and cross over hands and all. Eh, after that, so, the appetizer comes, sweet jam, water. Sweet jam and water like to... And that sweet jam has a meaning, like for families to love each other. Nothing salty is served, but something sweet, for families to love each other, to respect each other, so, the first meeting, eh. And then that, as soon as you have served the sweets, coffee, drinks, who drinks what, eh, then comes food, the same way. Then the song starts, now it all depends on the family, according to the possibilities. There was music and later when I was, so, that *mirba* of mine, and music followed it. And then, when some time passes, the bread cake, the bread cake that is broken by friends, so, my father and his father.

They break it as a sign of friendship, sign of affection, sign of love, sign of friendship, so, sign of common friendship until the end of their lives. Like, what God brings together, let no one separate, let it be that and that. Eh, then they take the salt and bread and eat it, like, that we will go along like salt and bread, and in the same way salt cannot go without, flour without, salt, so the bread without, to be that way {waves her hands from left to right}. Like that, so, the tradition itself. The same way, cake, sweets, all of that.

Eh, now, so there is the gift giving. So, the gift is being prepared. My mother was alive, she made a gift in *baščaluk*, *baščaluk*...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: You also have it for sure, those are shawls which are tied together and the gift for the son-in-law is prepared there, for the daughter, so, that is tied and is carried like this {shows with hands as if carrying something}, so it's being given for you to have full hands. So, everyone is being

given a gift. And that's a family's thing and the ability of a family. My parents were able, then they gave gifts, well, to all the friends that were there that day. So, it's not obligatory, but you give a gift to the daughter and son-in-law and the main friend, so everyone in the house, those aside, but since they could and then they gave gifts to everyone. And like that, they say goodbye to you with a song and all of that.

Anita Susuri: And how did you feel then? The family doesn't want to talk with you...

Danijela Simonović: {shrugs her shoulders} (laughs) Very hard...

Anita Susuri: How was it for you?

Danijela Simonović: Very hard, very hard... You are laughing, but you feel like crying, you know. You want to go to the main, like to your mother, but you are over there. You know? You want both, but you don't want to lose neither one nor the other and then there is the risk that a female child carries with her. The times were hard, and really regarding the female child back then, so, it was taken care of a lot, it was nurtured a lot, you didn't have enough freedom neither from your family nor from society, to go somewhere freely. There, I ran away like that, it happened to me {points to herself}. Otherwise, so, the marriage goes, the customs go, the female child goes, you are going to another house, with the knowledge, with, how is it, *marifet*, with...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: You carry with yourself everything that is the best. And like that, like... And afterwards, when *mirba* passes, and now my parents come to meet the house where I got married. That is a week after *mirba* and it's called the first week.

So, the deed of the custom of the newly weds, the first week. And now, on that first week, all the youth comes. Youth, so, if in your family you have a brother, a sister, a niece, a cousin, so, all of the youth goes. And, now, mother makes you you this: she sends you the apron, she sends you the bag, she sends you the needles, thread, so, she starts sewing something, to foresee your being a housewife, to... Then, slippers for the house, so something that you should have brought to the house as a girl, so she sends you that on the first week, some symbolic little things that, there, mean something, mean a lot. She sends you a cake, she sends you, well, and usually, you know, the pyjamas, slippers, something basic, so, and, and needles and thread, it's obligatory. So, on the first week, everyone sends that, and apron, like for you to be a housewife.

In the same way they come, so, that broader family, you host them in the same way, feast as well, hanging out, already there is no custom to make a truce, so, they come for the first time now. Now the parents have started to go on that day, so, the let the youth, and then the parents come a bit later and

all of that. But, when the situation is normal, so, the parents come tomorrow right away when you get married, to see where you live, for the family to meet, to, what is the most important to meet the family, so, not to meet your mother-in-law on the street and just pass by, you know?

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: My mother and a mother-in-law to, to know each other.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, it's about getting over with those traditions as soon as possible, the deed of meeting, the deed of the family. And, by the way, you as a bride, when you get married, tray in your hands, who comes in, you need to serve, to respect and so on (smiles).

Anita Susuri: And how did that family of your husband accept you?

Danijela Simonović: That family of my husband, so, I was one of the richest girls, I married the poorest guy.

Anita Susuri: Simonović?

Danijela Simonović: Yes. They weren't poor to that extent, but at that time, where I lived and where I came, there was a huge difference. Like heaven and earth. But there, I married out of love, I loved him and I married him. I didn't want our marriage to break because of the family. I sacrificed, I fought to save the marriage. And the Simonović family accepted me so well, like their own child. Maybe more than that. And, I had my respect that I had from my family, and that, one good word opens a golden door. So, I didn't have a mother-in-law, I had two brothers-in-law and a sister-in-law. A sister-in-law was older, brothers-in-law were younger and they weren't married, my sister-in-law wasn't married either.

Anita Susuri: You lived in the same house?

Danijela Simonović: In the same house, yes, yes. Two little rooms, kitchen, corridor, bathroom, and like that. In one very small, modest house with lots of love and warmth. So, wealth is never the measure, never the measure, so, I am telling that to everyone and nowadays, so, not to look at that, so, to always have someone with who you can share life, that you can go through life with, to bare with that, to create family, to... and like that. Well...

Anita Susuri: They didn't have a big household or how?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, they didn't have a big household because their mother died young, father fought alone, educated the children, he wasn't even capable of, because, it's different when a married couple educates the children and fights together, different then one. {shows number one with her finger}

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, he was both father and mother for them and like, late, I mean, may he rest in peace, but he was fighting. Well, what's more, I married young from Bresje, I didn't know how to do many things, then he taught me, you know? Even if I make a mistake, he compliments me, "Oh, it's great," you know, "Just continue. Oh great, no words!" Content grandad, don't ask (laughs). And I can tell you, I am telling that everywhere, so, that, modesty of a family means a lot and when a family is as one, and, when it has an agreement, when a family has patience, full of love — there is the progress, I can tell you. So, I didn't have any problems. And to this day we respect each other, to this day we remain one strong, harmonious Simonović family, that really respect each other nicely.

So, I have sisters-in-law and we are like sisters. Brothers may have some arguments, maybe not, but we never looked at that, we continued our life. Children get along well. So, I have two sons. He has a sister from his uncle that he respects as his own sister, and those sisters from his uncle respect them as their own brothers. That's a rarity, but I am glad when I go somewhere and when someone is talking about us, "That's her, those sisters-in-law, you remember, you know, it's said about them..." It means a lot. It means for children because children afterwards...

Anita Susuri: Have a firm foundation.

Danijela Simonović: Normally. Roots and it's easy to have wings to fly afterwards. When you have strong roots, wings are... {spreads her hands}

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Yes.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: What was your husband's family doing or your husband?

Danijela Simonović: Well, it was a working family, they, they had a bit of land, they didn't, only what they needed for themselves. Late father-in-law used to work at Žitopromet, children were in school, and so you know from their work and, modest family, really modest family. So, they lived off the salary

and like that, they were really struggling, fighting while in school, while everyone went their own way and moved on. Well, so, they did nothing, there, even to this day they sold nothing, nothing, they all have their own houses, they all have their own families, their household, so, with spine, hoe.

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes. You, so, when you finished high school, after that you didn't go on?

Danijela Simonović: I didn't go on...

Anita Susuri: Then you got married?

Danijela Simonović: I got married.

Anita Susuri: How was the life after that, what kind of marriage did you have?

Danijela Simonović: Eh, like this, so, li, I married here in Batusë, the family house {points the direction with her finger} was at the beginning of the village. We bought this, we made it here. Well, since there were many of us in the house, we went out, we were living privately in Kosovo Polje. I got a job after that at Žitopromet, I worked in Pristina. Well, I was saying, we lived privately in the Livadsko neighborhood, with some wonderful people, it was really a long time ago, but they were great people. After three years I gave birth to my son. So, not right away but after three years I got a son. Otherwise, marriage as a marriage functioned great. We had an agreement, we had, we lived in one room but were happy. A lot. I remember I saved some money, I went to buy a bakestone, I was happy from Pristina to Kosovo Polje. There was no happier woman than me. I, you know, for you to have a house during the time of inflation, in the year '92...

Anita Susuri: Yes...

Danijela Simonović: Then life was hard. So, we were working for very little money and so, you had to save a lot to buy something. Until you buy it, the inflation has already eaten it up.

But we were happy! I remember, I swear on my life, in one room in Kosovo Polje, in the Livadsko neighborhood, it's where we lived, afterwards my oldest son was born there... Rarely, rarely, I know, I meet my friends, girlfriends, they all lack something, they all lack something, you know, they got married, full house, everyone is dissatisfied, and I am all happy! They look at me, "God, how is this woman happy!" In fact, community, love makes happiness, nothing else. Nothing else. And so everything functions as it was supposed to. I was working, he also went to work, our kid was in kindergarten. I worked both the first and the second shift because I was working in a shop for a while, Žitopromet, up there on Sunny Hill, I was commuting. He takes the kid in the afternoon... Really one normal, one normal marriage. And this, agreement. We didn't start celebrating *slava* there until we

bought this land here in Batuci, and when we came here, when we made the house, then we started to celebrate *slava*. I mean, but that was quick, so, few years passed.

Anita Susuri: How many years did you work at Žitopromet?

Danijela Simonović: I worked at Žitopromet for eight years, until '99, until '99. And then when that situation started, there was no one to take care of my son and I had to leave. And after that, well, they accepted me at the clinic, they accepted me here {points in the direction with her finger} because the clinic was close, that women left, she left and like that afterwards. And here, I left to work here to this day.

Anita Susuri: What year did you start working at the clinic?

Danijela Simonović: In '99. The end of it somewhere before, before New Year's. So, when there was a need for workers for this population and all that. That was how it worked out, otherwise, I worked at Žitopromet, where I commuted, where I had colleagues. The first and second shifts were working, I worked with Albanians and with Turks in Pristina, great, okay, so, it was the inflation time, where there was a line for bread, where I was leaving bread, so they were not, I didn't ask who you were, what you are, you just come, lady or gentleman, they ask me. People work, so, really, so many, I have so many nice words that I don't know how to, to, to express them, really. So, that's how life was lived, simply like that, a normal life.

Anita Susuri: Did it influence you all of that, how do I say it, the situation that was happening at the end of the '80s, '90s?

Danijela Simonović: {nods} It did, it did. Not just me, all women. That left a big mark. We all got older prematurely, we all, I'm not saying we became senile, but you're overburdened with problems, with fear, so I say (coughs) it's all gone now, so it's gone. Now the times are such that we struggle to get somewhere {moves her head from left to right} among the normal world. But that omission that we had all these years, all women, so that you lived in some fear, in problems, in sick ... I lost my husband because he didn't have adequate treatment. I lost one baby who didn't have adequate treatment. Unfortunately, it's not just me. There are a million cases like this!

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: But then again I am saying, thank God, let him preserve what is left and don't let happen again what already happened, but to continue with normal flow, normal life, where, where we are the population, bridges for these children of ours.

Anita Susuri: That's right.

Danijela Simonović: Where now, I now, there, I am talking with you, where for example I sit down, I am not saying in my old age, it's never too late.

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: So, that omission I had from the war until about three years ago, I want to make up for it now. Here, to educate ourselves a bit. You know, we need that, so that tomorrow I can be in company with my grandchildren, with my daughters-in-law, and with my sons, and with my cousins, so that you won't be silly, and you live in today's beauty, well, in Europe and the whole world is here in this region, at least you know how to go on. And yes, let me tell you the truth, and I love everything that is beautiful. When we already have these opportunities, various organizations ... I am saying again, thank you to those organizations that exist, who invented those organizations, those networks, of women and everything else. So, how will women know something, about something better if they don't go out in society? How am I supposed to take some time off and go somewhere for no reason? How will I go to Pristina if someone does not provide me with a path? So, again, all this is beautiful and I am really saying it means a lot to us women who now, so, are here, we have stayed and survived and all that. Let's move on, and set an example for our children to be optimistic, to love, to go to work, to, to not look at the nation, but to ...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: To choose friends according to their souls...

Anita Susuri: That's right.

Danijela Simonović: According to this... Otherwise, no, we didn't have any major problems. My children are doing agriculture now. By the way, they are working on the land of both Albanians and Serbs and, I will even praise one man, here. So, I am really happy. That is from the nearby village Ence {points in the direction behind her with her finger}, Albanian, we did his land, five acres per lease. We are working for Serbs as well, we worked on 30 acres, we are working not on our land, but per lease.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: My children are working. My late husband worked, and now my children continued. And now, since this place is susceptible to flooding and the very highway lost the directional flow of the rivers...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: And, now, so, the rain that falls, this part over there {shows with her hand} are floods. So, that's already a human factor, that is not for example God forgive me...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: God's will, human factor, but, and that needs to be solved. And now, we took five acres per lease, land from that Albanian from Ence, where we sowed grain and it got flooded. And the water destroys it. However, okay, you must prepare the rent. 500 euros, 100 euros per acre. And we prepared the money and called the man. So, I need to respect that {points to herself with her hand} (laughs). And he came, we are sitting here in front of the house {points with her finger behind her} with children and I say, "Here you go, 500 euros," you know, "for the rent. Thank you very much." He takes the money like this, takes, "Thank you, Danijela", and now he takes 50 euros out, gives it to the younger son, and those 450 he gives back to me {puts a sheet of paper in front of her} (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: He says, "What God takes away, I cannot put a price on," he says.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: And, let me tell you, our Serbs didn't do that. Unfortunately, so, no, eh, I want to tell you, now it means that you cannot judge people by nation, by faith, by religion, by... you judge people for what they are. Here, believe me, so, I have told you one bare truth.

Then, what also happened to me, I was very happy about that, we are leaving Bresje, my children are going by tractor, they are going to Ence, they are going to Kosovo Polje, they are going towards Vragolija, they are going, they are taking risks. So that's a risk. You have to take risks in life. I say, respect for some individuals, but you, it's such a time, you have to earn to survive. And we stopped in Vragolija, to buy something in the store, and then, something broke my son's machine, so he had his hands from oil, he was messy, oh my God, you know how dirty he was! And a gentleman approaches, gets out of an expensive car, "Good day," "Good day," "How are you, repairers?" and gives my son a hand {gives her hand}, and this way he wants to, so he says, "Oh, my hands are dirty." He says, "No, your hands are very clean. I..." he says, "I am glad that a child like this does this because I have been around the world, I haven't seen this," he says. And you know, g..., he greets him and says, "I've never had a cleaner hands up until now" {slapping palms}.

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: So, when someone is working out of his own sweat and all of that. There, we are trying, you know, to overcome the fear, to go somewhere, to earn something, but, there {shrugs her shoulders} it's all life. I am saying again, it's a bit different now, and maybe one can go on somehow.

Anita Susuri: You, you told me that you have two sons...

Danijela Simonović: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Do you also have a daughter?

Danijela Simonović: No, I only have two sons. I have...

Anita Susuri: They live here with you or?

Danijela Simonović: Yes. I have an older son who is married, I have three grandchildren, and a younger one who just finished school.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: Eh.

Anita Susuri: When your older son got married, did you have that wedding...

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...

Anita Susuri: With tradition?

Danijela Simonović: With all the tradition and customs. Maybe even some photos can help you if they mean anything to you? Hm?

Anita Susuri: Sure, we'll take that as well.

Danijela Simonović: Eh.

Anita Susuri: What kind of tradition did you then...

Danijela Simonović: So...

Anita Susuri: Since you didn't have a wedding, as you were telling us, then for sure you made for your son...

Danijela Simonović: I didn't finish.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: I had a wedding there {points in the direction with her finger} where I got married.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: But we got off the topic. So after...

Anita Susuri: After...

Danijela Simonović: *Mirba*, it was the first week, and then a few months passed, we were waiting for warm weather and our wedding happened.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: But then you had it held at home, in a tent, so, the same with customs, I can tell you about this custom with my daughter-in-law, so it's the same custom...

Anita Susuri: Okay, yes.

Danijela Simonović: That was also at my [wedding].

Anita Susuri: Sure.

Danijela Simonović: Only then at home you had a wedding in a tent.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: So, where we were, regular music, you know that one, how they called it, accordion... The music that was used back in the day, so, the accordion, that {shows with her hands in front of her as if holding a big oval object}.

Anita Susuri: *Tamburitza* orchestra?

Danijela Simonović: Eh, yes, yes! And those from the surrounding places, it was music from the local places and you know, but wedding in a rural way, how can I tell you, so a tent. The rural atmosphere

itself and (laughs) a little differently, it was different. And, as for my son, yes, my son also got married, it's the same, it was the same. We didn't know the girl. Likewise, going out, having fun, simply deciding to get married, without her parents' knowledge. But her parents are also good people who also accepted *mirba*, where we went, so our family, the same thing that I said, sh, concerning the *mirba* itself.

So, we went to our friends, so, we were carrying a bread cake, decorated pig, so, drinks, *rakia*, plum *rakia*, it's obligatory to bring plum *rakia* as a sign of reconciliation {makes a movement as if she is drinking} to drink it, to cross over hands, like that. Her family came for the first week here to us. So the brothers, the sisters, the aunt's sister, the uncle's. Later, a bit later, a few hours passed and her parents arrived. The same where her mother brought her a basket of flowers, needles the same, a bag, a purse {makes a movement as if holding a bag}, some bring a purse, some bring a bag, an umbrella, slippers, what else, you know, they bring it. The same thing, so, snack, feasting, socializing, drinking, talking, getting to know each other again, "Hey, who is this, your sister?" so the boys are asking around. This is, and here is where young people get to know each other.

And, we had a wedding after a few months. We had a great wedding. Well, all of the customs were at home. So, in the morning, when the wedding was scheduled, we had an appointment at the tavern and we had it at home. My newly weds, my son and daughter-in-law, there, I wanted a carriage, but I didn't find...

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: Then we took a limousine from Lipljan to drive them. Then, the custom itself starts from Thursday, the wedding. So, when you are carrying the toast to your friend, so to invite, the bread cake, wine, obligatory, wine that you decorate, you add some sugar in the red wine and you decorate it, so, the bottle, the bread cake, lump of sugar, candies, that you put in a cloth, the flowers that are tied up with red and white thread...

Anita Susuri: Yes, the rosemary.

Danijela Simonović: Yes, rosemary too, that's {moves her hand as if putting something in the upper left part of the shirt} to decorate the guests.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: And this, with which you decorate the bread cake...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: When they are being invited on Thursday. So, we are going with five bread cakes. We are going, we carry one to the brother-in-law, one to *starejko*,⁹ one to our friends, to the host, godfather. Godfather, brother-in-law, *starejko*, host and brother-in-law, so five bread cakes are being carried out. Five bottles of wine. So, you go, you are there for half an hour, so, “Here you go,” so, the wedding is in progress. But the first bread cake is to be brought to *starejko*, so that *starejko* can give the blessing to, that the wedding is starting.

Anita Susuri: Godfather *starejko*?

Danijela Simonović: Yes. So, you start from *starejko*. Now for *starejko*, usually you take the uncle.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: Back in the day it used to be, families, that’s how the relationships were nurtured, families, neighbors. So, a family, that is a bit respected, another family takes them as their *starejko*, and they call each other godfathers. But now the times have changed, and you take the uncle, who has the uncle. Who doesn’t have the uncle, then, so, the groom’s uncle, then he takes a good friend, friend, whatever, to be his *starejko*. So, the wedding starts from Thursday, so with those bread cakes, those invitations. *Kondir*.¹⁰ It’s like *bukrija* that is being tied with a shawl, that women’s shawl, it’s decorated with coins, pearls, tin...

Anita Susuri: What is *bukrija*?

Danijela Simonović: It’s *kondir*. We call it *kondir*. I have, I don’t know where it is. Where you decorate and carry {holds her hand like she is carrying something}, where you are calling the villagers and locals and...

Anita Susuri: Aha, yes, yes, yes, I know.

Danijela Simonović: And you are going through the village and carrying that *bukrija*, you know that *kondir*, which is fully decor...

Anita Susuri: Like *sepet*?¹¹ Exactly.

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes. Like, fully decorated, full of gifts...

Anita Susuri: And it has a handle and...

⁹*Starejko* is the Godfather the Elderly, he has a symbolic place throughout the feast.

¹⁰*Kondir* is a decorated flag on especially for the feast. The speaker uses both terms, *kondir* and *bukrija* interchangeably.

¹¹*Sepet* is a Turkish term used among Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, the term refers to the basket.

Danijela Simonović: Yes, full of wine, for example and gifts, and now you invite a cousin, neighbor, “Here you go, my wedding is on Sunday, come.” And he, he won’t bring it back empty to you, but he puts a towel, a cloth, eh. Those, these towels that come to that who, the guests are being decorated. So, you buy more, it’s filled up, but with that, that as a custom from that which is, that is being decorated, that *kondir*, that’s how we call it, *kondir*, so the guests are being decorated, the vehicles that will be driving that day. On Thursday so, when those bread cakes are brought out, toasts, the gate is being decorated.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: Yes. So, those are flowers, they are sown all year long, various flowers so that you can decorate it more. Now they buy, so they, those laces, it’s being added, but again the village is a village, so every housewife likes to decorate a child when he is getting married, a mother who welcomes, a mother... That is, an act that, in life that feeling happens once. And so there is a basil that is significant to these Serbian customs of ours. Basil, all kinds of flowers, so these are the right corollas, so they tie, and they, they sing. “O, ljubavoj devojko, o ljubavoj devojko...” These are traditional songs when, when it comes to weddings.

Then the, the gate is done. You go for the bride’s things on Thursday, the bride’s [things] are being prepared. That’s where you send your sister-in-law, also someone you have to respect. So usually if you have a sister-in-law or a daughter. I sent my sister-in-law and son-in-law, and my younger son. The son-in-law gave the toast and the younger son with his aunt went for the things. And then we decorate the car, again we sing “O ljubavo i devojko,” that is usually sung by aunts. We see off there {pointing in the direction by hand} where you go for, for the things, so to the bride’s house. Prija also waits like that with a song, decorates the car, receives the guests, so takes her toast, which was brought to her, sent by her friend. Then she packs her daughter’s things, so someone still crochets embroidery, blankets, so everything she needs, well, that the package is packed nicely, it’s being prepared for days, then you call the neighbors for them to see what the mother has prepared for her daughter, what she had crocheted, what she had bought. Some daughters were hardworking, some were not (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: Some were schooling, depends. And like that. And they sit there for a few hours, also with the song when they get those things out, also with the song when they are seeing it off, “Oj ljubavoj devojko.” Then those families come, where the wedding is held, the music is playing, and you are also waiting with the song, everything is being waited for with that song, so, as long as the wedding goes on, you sing that song, “Oj ljubavo, oj devojko.” The things that are prepared are being brought out, they are taken to the bride’s room and it’s put on the beds, it gives rays to the bride. So, that’s the bride’s power, how can I tell you, so the things that, it means she is strong. Her family was

able, so they sent as it is the custom. And like that, and then Friday, the same way, preparations for the wedding. So, even the customs and when it's the slaughter time, so, whether it's lamb, whether it's pig, and that's when you sing.

So, you sing everything, whatever you do, to start doing, you sing during everything. Then, hardworking aunts, they are making the pies again, so, when we were preparing my son's wedding, I wanted the custom at home and I provided breakfast at home. Then we, some {points with her hand towards the courtyard} we put a small tent on the road because the courtyard here is small, and then the godfather. The first one to arrive was *starejko*, so, he plays when he enters the village {points with her hand in front of herself}, gives a sign that the wedding, you know, that the wedding has started.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: I feel like crying, it was beautiful. Well, and he arrives, the same thing, son, the song is being sung, but with, the women that we call *bačica*¹² are here, *mešalja*,¹³ they, you know... Those are the women that make the food on that day. The one called *mešalja* she, she cooks the food, like, make the bread cake, pies, what is needed, and the one who is *bačica*, she makes the food for the guests.

Anita Susuri: How, *bači*...?

Danijela Simonović: *Bačica*.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: *Bačica* and *mešalja*.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: That, I will tell you about them as well. And... and like that *starejko* arrives. So, he from {shows the direction with her finger} he comes into the village and plays. So, now he is letting everyone know with the siren that the wedding has started. Over there the music has already started playing, but when the music plays, when he comes to the house, the custom is that the girls decorate the musicians.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

¹² *Bačica* derives from *baka*, in English granny, they are the women who prepare the food for the guests on the day of the feast.

¹³ Similarly, *mešalja* are women that prepare the food.

Danijela Simonović: And then the girls start dancing *kolo*, so and they are dancing. Those are usually towels. And so, she takes a towel, now the girls are aligned and they are dancing with that, one *kolo*, and now each girl decorates the musician. And that's nice (laughs) really nice. And, then arrives, so, before *starejko* arrives, the first *kolo* is, so, to decorate the musicians. And then *bačica* and *mešalja* go. *Bačica* with ladle, *mešalja* with sieve. And so, they dance *kolo*. One *kolo* and then another one. So, to let everyone that everything is ready, so now {spins the paper in the right hand as if dancing} the time has come to dance...

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, everything is prepared, the wedding starts! (laughs) *Starejko* arrives, so, he plays from over there *ti, ti, ti, ti* [onomatopoeia] done, prepared, we are going to the wedding. He arrives, singing all the same, singing to wait for *starejko*. They go out, take out the gifts, presents, carry a banner *bajrak* {makes a movement as if carrying a banner}, flag-bearer... Banner is obligatory, it's put on the house right away, you take a young flag-bearer, so, if somebody doesn't have a son, they take someone from the family, young flag-bearer so, obligatory, who puts the flag on the house. The godfather arrives. He also goes into the courtyard, playing. The same thing, the gifts are being brought, cake, pig, it all depends. The brother-in-law arrives, so, those five who are the most important. The host of the wedding, the host of the wedding is also important because he organizes the wedding, when he is walking, where he is going, what is going on {spins her hand in a circle} and the rest. So, these are the five that are very important for the whole wedding. So, without *starejko* the wedding cannot start. Without the godfather there is no wedding. Without the host, who will organize your wedding. You as a father and mother are just enjoying that day. So, you don't worry about anything. You leave everything {spins her hand in a circle} to the host of the wedding.

And like that. Then we all set that. Then you dance, you go into *kolo*, they all dance around, family gets to talk, from, well. Then, they put the breakfast here for guests to have a breakfast. And, the wedding was scheduled. The newlyweds go to the wedding, I didn't go. The custom is that the mother-in-law doesn't go to the wedding, not to see her son getting married.

Anita Susuri: In the Municipality or in the church?

Danijela Simonović: Neither in the church nor in the Municipality.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: The mother-in-law waits for the newlyweds at home, and the father-in-law goes with the kids.

Anita Susuri: And why not the mother-in-law?

Danijela Simonović: I don't know. They didn't let me go, I swear to my mother.

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: I really wanted to go, "No way! No way! You sit home." Okay, there, I was sitting home, I waited for my daughter-in-law at home. And like that, the municipal wedding was in the hall, and the church wedding was here in our church, because those are our possibilities now after the war. Otherwise, our municipal weddings were always held in Kosovo Polje, there. And now the circumstances are like that, so that the marriage officiant comes and marries the bride and groom. And regarding the religion, the church is here. So, either Gračanica or well, our church.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: And so, while the guests are having breakfast, the girls who are decorating the guests are here. Rosemary, you know, the one with the red and white ribbons. Now they have white flowers. Usually the main guests have special flowers.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: Those are brother-in-law, godfather, *starejko*, so, these that are a bit more important, I mean, they are all important, congratulations to all the guests. But, so, these that are a bit {implies a flower with her hand}, they have big beautiful flowers, and regular guests have different flowers.

And like, so, the guests are decorated, when the girls are done with decorating, so, no one will take the flower until they give the money.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: You are not buying the flower, but the custom is to put some money.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: And the girls buy something for themselves out of that money. Like for the gold, like, so, to have something as a memory from that wedding. Then the cars are decorated. Those are those towels that I mentioned to you from those... then the mother-in-law usually buys more, you know, now everyone has their car and that... and then you decorate every car, vehicle. But, the special gift goes for example, for *starejko*'s car you put a shirt, it's shameful for *starejko* to drive with a towel. Godfather's car, brother-in-law's car, so all of those cars have a bigger gift, and over there it's only a

towel. Again you sing, guests are going to the wedding, it's being sung, so, the guests are seen off with the song. Like they were walking, going to Gracanica, Kosovo Polje... And now you pass, just to say this one thing, so, it's hard to preserve the custom (laughs).

So, the flag, so the flag is, *starejko* is carrying that banner, flag, it's like let there be happiness for the bride and groom, like, banner that is being gifted. You put the shirt, you put the towel, so the socks, and obligatorily full banner. The apple goes on the banner. My family went so, Batuse {showing the way with her hand}, Lepina, Gracanica, that's the Serbian enclave. And when they were going through Bresje, since my village is Bresje, for guests to pass there, they had to hide the banner, out of security reasons. I mean, that, we have to do it like that.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Unfortunately, but everyone is doing it now.

Anita Susuri: Normally, yes.

Danijela Simonović: And then the column starts going, now you hear from over there {points in the direction with her hand} playing and the wedding arrives. We, at the house, are preparing again the welcoming ceremony for the bride, the bride got married and then you prepare especially for the bride. They arrive at our church that is, the wedding so, religious, wedding, church wedding lasts for 45 minutes. Well, while the bride is getting married in the church, so the custom of the wedding itself and all the rest. And when the bride finishes the custom, when she comes out of the church, she throws the bridal bouquet, she is not carrying the flowers any more, she is not young anymore, girl, but she is married and now she is throwing it to some girl over there {makes a movement as if throwing the bridal bouquet}, the one who catches it, is getting married next.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, it's custom for people to dance in front of the church. The newlyweds dance around, here in the church courtyard, the youth dance, all the wedding guests, you know, the people rejoice. Then you hear the siren playing and the guests go home. Now, the wine is prepared, a special kind of wine, which the host brings out to the gate.

Now, here comes *starejko*. The daughter-in-law is not allowed into the yard until the custom is over. Everyone is waiting by the gate. The host prays to God, "Amen, amen." The godfather prays to God "Amen, amen." The old man prays to God, "Amen, amen." So, it's like how we get baptized {holding up three fingers} you know...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: The Holy Trinity, it's like, those three are the most important... And God like, you know... They sing that. Then they open that wine, drink it, the godfather with *starejko*, *starejko* with the godfather, they get mixed up, and the guests are let into the yard. The daughter-in-law arrives and gets out of the car. Now, if she didn't, you know the bride usually isn't supposed to step on the ground but on some sort of a stake, where she steps on the stake (laughing), jumping, like, she steps on it and jumps over it. The daughter-in-law gets into the yard and they give her a child to pick up. A small child, a male child, that of course needs to be baptized. And she lifts him up three times, and the groom lifts him up three times, she has to give him a gift, that's called *nakonjče*.¹⁴ The child is called *nakonjče*. And she gifts that, that child. Some one piece or something. She lifts him up like, you know {lifting her hands up} turning three times towards the sun, lifting...

Anita Susuri: So she'd have a son?

Danijela Simonović: Yeah, to have a son, to give birth, so that that can lie in anticipation for her immediately. Then, she gifts the child, and gives the child back to its mother. Um, then they put an apron on her head and break bread, the sweet one. So the stirrer brings out the sweet bread. So, the daughter-in-law finishes with, with the male child *nakonjče*, she gives him back to his mom. So, now, the stirrer brings out the sweet bread where it's put onto the bride's head {lifts up her arms while holding a paper above her head}

And where it's being grabbed {moving her arms left-right}, suddenly everyone breaks it like, you know, how, what... Probably so, so the boys grab onto the other brides or I don't know, really. But the bread has that kind of meaning. Necessarily, the bread is sweet, not salty, the sweet bread is... And then it's distributed to everyone in a way that {moves her hand in a circle} like, the locals eat it, everyone watching the wedding, the people gather around to watch the wedding. So like now, she finished that, broke the sweet bread. Now they bring out, they put the sweet bread under her right arm {puts a hand under her left armpit} and special wine. And over here, bread {putting her hand under her right armpit} and moonshine. And she gets into the house, but first they give her grease, pig grease.

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Danijela Simonović: So she {lifts both arms up}, you know, rubs the grease onto the door, so like, the house would be rich, so it's not poor, so it's greasy. And like, she enters the house with her arms full. And she enters the house like this {putting her hands like she's holding something under them} over the doorstep. Usually in some places the groom carries her in, and where the daughter in law is heavier he can't or he'd crumble (laughing).

Anita Susuri: (laughing) Yes, yes, yes.

¹⁴*Nakonjče* is the male child who is invited to perform several religious rites at weddings. It is important that the child is male, because tradition holds the belief that the rite will ensure that the married couple's first child will be male.

Danijela Simonović: So, and she enters the house, brings her in. Now, the bread is taken from her, the one that stirs takes the bread from her. I'm sitting here waiting for the daughter-in-law, I don't get up to greet the daughter-in-law {moving her hand left-right}, she should come to me {pointing at herself}. Like, she's the younger one she needs to come to the mother-in-law (smiling). Not the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: So, you have the cabbage, the sarma cooking, and the daughter-in-law approaches to stir the dish, you know, to be hardworking, to load the stove, so the hearth doesn't go out, do you understand me?

Anita Susuri: Mhm, mhm.

Danijela Simonović: So it's filled with, with fire, so she can keep the hearth going.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Do you understand me?

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes, yes.

Danijela Simonović: I was loading it, and she's loading it. She continues cooking, like she has anyone to cook for, you know, to anticipate her own family.

Anita Susuri: As if passed from one generation to another.

Danijela Simonović: Right. So, like that, now she turns around and looks for the mother-in-law. I'm sitting here on the bed, you know, I was sitting on that armchair. So, now she turns around and comes to my lap. Like, she doesn't sit on this, but you put her on your lap, like, she leaves her mother (laughing and crying) and she comes to you to accept you as your mother. And I really liked that because I had no female children of my own. And, you know, if it's someone else's child, but you, put it in your lap like it's your own either way. And you kind of play with her a little and gift your daughter-in-law. I got her a necklace, a nice one. I gifted her that. So, I put it on her and all that. So, now she gets up, thanks me and like I don't have anything to offer to her, but I put a cube of sugar on my right, my right leg so she can, you know, so she can take the cube of sugar and eat it.

Then I took a tray with honey and served it so she can share the sweet with us, so, so she'd be happy, so she has a nice time here. So, that act with the daughter-in-law is done. Now, you get up, go outside, where everyone's waiting for you, the bridesmaids, the family, they prepared a bucket of water in the trolley, you know, as if to smear it on you, to make you dirty. Someone hangs an onion around your neck...

Anita Susuri: Oh.

Danijela Simonović: Someone a pepper, someone, you know...

Anita Susuri: (laughing)

Danijela Simonović: Like you're not relevant any more, there's someone more important than you (smiling). So like, me and my husband walk out the door there. The daughter-in-law gives us a blanket, gifts us a blanket that she brought, you know, as a present and puts it around our necks. We go out, and um, we get washed there, dirtied, our relatives did everything to us, I swear on my mother. In the end they took the trolley and drove us around in the trolley.

Anita Susuri: (laughing)

Danijela Simonović: You know, they didn't even know what to do anymore. The daughter-in-law comes out – now, here's where the dancing starts, like, we start dancing, the song, like, we dance *kolo*, the daughter-in-law starts dancing *kolo*, like she's your son. You dance a lot there, you know, you sing a lot there, like, you dance quite a bit there, like you know, you have a daughter-in-law in your house, so it's custom. So like, the whole custom at home, actually you remember that, if there weren't a custom, you wouldn't remember the wedding either. So that's why us, the mother and father-in-law change clothes, to prepare for the hall. So, at home we kept our religion, our customs and tradition. We went into the hall all proper.

So, we limited ourselves in that, like, so tomorrow they'd learn something to pass on to their children. So that's why that tradition and that religion upholds our customs, so they'd know what to do with their children tomorrow. How will they, how are they going to teach them? Like, you can't learn until you feel it on your own skin. Like, the first thing you, you saw it's nice, being in the center of attention, everyone looking at you, like at the bride and all that. Those are the moments, the moments when... it's a once-in-a-lifetime thing really.

Anita Susuri: What year was that?

Danijela Simonović: My son's wedding?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: 2013.

Anita Susuri: Mhm. So, not really....

Danijela Simonović: No, no, not a long time ago, recently.

Anita Susuri: Not a lot of years.

Danijela Simonović: No.

Anita Susuri: When did you lose your husband?

Danijela Simonović: 2014. After a year. My daughter-in-law was pregnant. He was sick, poor thing. We didn't really have a lot, for the doctors and all that... a mistake. Life itself is a mistake, you know, here. There, a lapse by the doctors, a lapse of inadequate people, a lapse... what can I say? Horrible...

Anita Susuri: Was it hard for you?

Danijela Simonović: Of course. Still is. For the children too, the children lost their parent. See where we live? You came to Batuse.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: This here is the end. Behind this are all Albanian villages. Fields, meadows, rivers, everyone who can come, to pass through, can, should save this. Not from the enemies but from friends too. Two months ago they tried to steal the tractor from our backyard. Horrible... {touching her head with her hands} horrible. But it's different if a host is there, so he's scared, so you know, he's here, walking around the backyard. Like this the children and I are alone, but thank God we survived and saved ourselves, really.

Anita Susuri: How are you doing now, how is your life? You work at the clinic now...

Danijela Simonović: Yes.

Anita Susuri: So you told me. You're also a member of an organization.

Danijela Simonović: Yes, a non-governmental organization Hand to Hand. I joined every single organization I could. Thanks to Nena, really, Nena is a wonderful woman. She recommended me and I have a lot of free time and I love, really, I love to talk to people and get to know them. I also love, like, helping somebody with something, who knows why that's good.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: That's all that's left. (sighs) Life is hard now, believe me. Life is hard, it's just, thank God that you can think with one mind before noon and with another in the afternoon. Then a path opens, then it's different, optimism. My workplace is close, I don't commute, so I could persevere at my workplace, to be honest. So, you had no commuting expenses, I didn't have any, so like, it's close. Within my whole misfortune, at least there's that luck, and life itself, through all these years, strives not to be lucky. Believe me. I not only denied my children their childhood but I also denied myself the will, the right to a normal life, the right to, to see something in life, to know what's nice, to hope for something. This whole, "Thank God we're alive. Thank God we have enough to eat. Thank

God we're all set for tomorrow, we bought wood, we'll endure the winter." That's not life. I have three grandchildren, so three grandchildren, two grandsons, and a granddaughter. I never took them to the zoo, or the movies, or a playroom, nor, nor do we have the means to, unfortunately, believe me.

Anita Susuri: Are you limited?

Danijela Simonović: We're very limited. So, firstly... freedom of movement is a risk. So, the possibilities are better now than they were before. We can't all claim we're lying...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: First, there's no public transport {counting on her fingers}, if you don't have your own car, how are you gonna get around? So you're denied, you're denied everything. Like, a lot, for an example, even if i wanted to get further education, the same goes for my younger son. Now, you finished high school... Even if he wants to get a job, how is he gonna work? Where is he gonna go and work? So, you're limited. Either your freedom of movement is limited or you're really limited. So, both of these are a big problem for us here. I'm surprised we survived all these years. I am, so, my younger son, my life here was hard. It was hard, you're not the first here with these cameras.

Anita Susuri: Mhm.

Danijela Simonović: In 2004, our Miloš, my younger son, he was one of the worst asthmatics that lived on a pump. We had no electricity in our village. I don't know if you, if you all heard. We didn't have electricity for a hundred days in 2004. I lived like that, with the kids here without electricity for three months. I kept the asthmatic one here here, and his life was in danger, but I didn't have anywhere to go. To go and sit around the hospital, but how are you gonna sit around the hospital? You come here, you risk, oh God, oh God, you know, we've been through so much. Thank the Lord we lived, we went through that too, but none of us is healthy. So... it's hard, it's really hard, I... I feel sorry for the youth, we went through what we went through. We can still do what we can but the kids... to continue a life like this, it's hard.

Anita Susuri: Also the war was really hard on everyone.

Danijela Simonović: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How are you, how were you doing during the war?

Danijela Simonović: Oh, I don't even know what to tell you, I was working the whole time during the bombing...

Anita Susuri: Were you here?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, I was here, I was working at the Kosovo Polje clinic. We helped everyone, we made no difference, everyone who asked for help, who wanted to stop by, they stopped by and we offered them help. It was really hard, after I traveled with KFOR, with UNMIK, God forbid. God forbid.

To get back to the point, so I ended up pregnant in 2000. I gave birth that year to this younger son too. The Lord himself saved us. Do you know how many women gave birth at the doctor's? Praise the Lord they were all healthy kids. I guess God opened a path and saved all these sinful souls and all that. If it weren't for KFOR, we wouldn't have survived.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Danijela Simonović: Truth be told, without them, not a chance. I went to give birth, KFOR drove me to Mitrovica. When I gave birth, KFOR drove me. KFOR kept us safe here, there was a KFOR factory [base] for years, anyway if it weren't for KFOR... I don't think we'd have any, we had no progress throughout all these years, and there was no chance of surviving, absolutely none. I'm telling you I kept my job because it was directly in front of my house, otherwise, no way.

Anita Susuri: But after the war you still lived here?

Danijela Simonović: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How did you make that decision, was it hard for you?

Danijela Simonović: You know, I left Batuse for about three months. I went to Serbia. I heard there were still people here. I took my son and came back. My husband stayed here, I was with my older son. And I came back. And firmly decided to stay. I'm saying, we never did anything to anyone, only if, if something gets lost and if it's God's will to be ours. Believe me, those were our words. We lived a modest life. We only had this shack. We made our house after, in 2004. As God says, so it may be. To go there, and see, and as soon as I heard, that there weren't any people here who took the risk, and after KFOR, after that it was different. So they, they really kept us safe. But here, I was a little bit safer because they were right in front of our house {points behind her}. And then I was a lot safer. Here, there were also my mother-in-law and the bridesmaids, so we were all sitting here while KFOR was here. That brought me back. So, I really wouldn't have come back, you know, if I heard that the whole village left. It's true that three of them, a boy died in our village, he was killed in front of his own house. A lot of things happened here, ooh {shakes her hand}, it's stories upon stories, but we won't talk about that. There are families that are damaged, that's their pain, their family's story and tragedy and all of that.

Again, thank God that my family is alive and healthy. The fact that we've stayed, and that we're neglected and backwards, that's another thing, but we managed to survive. But the work itself and life itself, throughout all these years and making a family and nothing from nowhere, and our cow got stolen, a hundred times... like they pass through the yard, take it from you, you don't know who or

what, and the trolley and... The worst thing was when they took my cow, when we lived off that cow, that was the hardest thing, in 2004. So we had no income, nothing, not then. We lived off that cow, I fed my family. They planned it, came at night, took even the calves, they took everything we had. But after, we bought goats and struggled, don't ask, it was awful, awful through all these years. Again, I'm saying, it's a little better now. I guess, I'm saying, the people are smarter, reasonable people... came, the ones that show their knowledge as an example and all that. So I hope these children can keep going easier...

Anita Susuri: I hope so.

Danijela Simonović: If they stay here. Otherwise, people are selling a lot, people are leaving...

Anita Susuri: If you have anything else for the end, if you forgot something, you want to say something else?

Danijela Simonović: Well, I wouldn't know what (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs)

Danijela Simonović: I have a lot of things to say, but I don't know how to in short lines, to explain it and all. I am glad that you so young exist, with a perspective, to love, to know our customs and to work on the documentation of religions, customs, traditions. It will be saved somewhere and...

Anita Susuri: Yes, it will be.

Danijela Simonović: Yes. And I am glad that you were guests at my house today.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much!

Danijela Simonović: With pleasure, always.