

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH MARIJA BASLER KARAMATIĆ

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Duration: 78 minutes

Present:

1. Marija Basler Karamatić (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

Marija Basler Karamatić: I was... I am Marija, ah towards you [addresses the interviewer] Marija Palić. Married Palić, while my maiden name is Karamatić. I have two children from my first marriage, that's it. My husband was called Sebastian. I was married to the largest and richest family and in the end, it was all taken by the state, we had nothing. Then my husband started drinking, he was drunk. So that was a very hard time in my life with two children. I would cry more at night, while I would laugh during the day, so that no one would know if I have or not, like that. I have an eldest daughter, her name is Paulina. Paško is the second, Paško is my second child and so on.

I overcame a lot of things, then my husband was, we didn't know why, he drank a lot. We thought it was from *rakija*,¹ and his kidneys were [failing]. Both his kidneys were dried out back then, the hospital, they didn't have, not for a piece, how they say in Zagreb *kruh*,² bread. We didn't have anything, still we smiled to everyone, good for everyone, everything seemed to be okay, and at night I cried. And this is how I got through it, longitudinally and indirectly. I had my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law also drank, and he also died young. My husband died young, he was 35 years old. I was widowed at the age of 28, and I fought for my life. I came here to my mother's, they had, then my brothers started working and sometimes my father brought me apples from Macedonia, whatever he brought, some chestnuts and so on.

Then I was employed at Metalac in Janjevo. The wages were good, when I started, the minimum wage began (laughs). Here, what can I say? This is how it all went. Then a neighbor of ours down in Janjevo, down in the center was building a house. She told me, "Come with me, come with me to Turkey." She wanted to buy, she heard that in Turkey there are good curtains and chandeliers and we went there. I say, I said, "Olga, you know what, I have a minimum wage." Those 600 dinars, in dinars then, I don't know much it is now. "No, I'll pay for the trip there and we're going." I went there and I saw that world,

¹ *Rakija* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

² Croatian: *kruh*, bread.

those women who went from Zagreb, Belgrade, there is no place where they haven't been. Back then, they traded, women sold on the streets, and in homes, everywhere.

And a Turkish gentleman tells me, he was originally from Bosnia. So, the man spoke clearly, beautifully and said, "Mrs. Marija, you are", he said, "for business," he said. I started talking, you know, so I joked a little bit. I said, "What business?" I said, "I work at Metalac," I said "I don't have any money." I said, "This woman is paying for me, me, what business." And he said, "No, no, you're made for business. Do you want merchandise?" He said, "You can pay me back after?" I said, "Not even if I go crazy." Then we returned home, and I came with this, we call them, they are like old Turkish imams who were here. Radan, he ran a kitchen, he was the chef. I talked to him, he first asked me, "Marija, how are you?" And said, "How was Turkey with Olga?"

I said, "Listen, Halim, I saw those women, those people," I said. He told me, "You can do it, too." I said, "You know what, I can," I said, "but you know I have no money, two children," I said, "in that big house," I said, "I have nothing." "I know," he said, "but..." "Would you allow me" I said, "if I go if you..." So, he said, "As far as I am concerned, you can go," he said, "but as you wish." But I said, "I have no money, man of God, I don't." He thought about it and said to me, "You know what, Marija," back then there were good people, and "an Albanian comes here, he is very rich," he said, "he helps a lot of people, especially those who are hard workers." He said, "He will come here for lunch or dinner, I will let you know and tell him your situation first, then I will..."

Not three days passed, four, that man with some senior directors from Metalac came down. Halim, the kitchen chef, said, "Marija, put on your apron, you serve them, and you will meet that man." Can you believe that I don't even know the name of that man. And I heard it from his mouth, a hundred stores, he had 110 stores and 110 girlfriends. Eh, that's the story. But for some things it doesn't matter, that person was... And he asked me, "Marija, are you Mrs. Marija?" He said, "I heard, Halim, your boss, told you that you have two children, that you are a widow. Don't think I'm hitting on you." That's what he said, "I would like to help you," he said, "I don't like lazy people and I love hard workers very much. He praised you." And he said, "How much money do you need for Turkey?"

And I said, "500 Deutsche marks. And the first clothes I sell, I will pay you back." And he said, "What will you do with 500 marks, dear Marija?" He said, "You'll pay the hotel, or for the travels," he said, "and you have to buy the merchandise." I said, "I'm going for the first time, I don't know." Honestly. I didn't know because I never left Janjevo. We didn't know about the sea or anything. Not even in Zagreb, my [maternal] aunt was in Zagreb, I was only once there as a young girl. And our only happiness was Letnica here, a sacred place, we went there, there. Children were happy to go there and they cried if their parents didn't let them go to Letnica. It was happiness.

And that person gave me a thousand marks for... I looked at it, and I said, "It's too much." "It's not too much. You have to pay for the hotel, to pay," he said, "you have to sleep for a night there, the bus." He

said, "You can buy the merchandise," he said, "Marija, I'll give you this money," he said, "I don't want to see you, maybe I'll come here for lunch, I don't want you to see me either. The money," he said, "you don't need to give it back, but I hope to God you will be successful and work." He said, "Because I love people who work." This is how it was. I told Halim, it was a Tuesday or Wednesday, I said, "I will go to Turkey on Friday." I left my children at home, no one was home, alone, I was in Turkey. I said to Olga, she asked, there was a bus, "Where are you going, Marija?" I said, "I'm going to Turkey." He said, "Are you crazy?"

She gets easily scared, she was like that. They used to say that Turks kidnap women, this, you know. There was this fear, I honestly don't know, God gave me strength and I had no fear wherever I went. And I left to go to Pristina, and I booked my ticket. I always went with the same drivers after that. First I went because wherever I went, I didn't know anyone else there except for Arif who I knew there, I went to him. That man asked me, "Did you go, or are you still in Turkey, or did you go home?" "Arif, I went home," I said, "and came back." "Thank God." I bought from him what he had and then he helped me get more somewhere else. I came back from Turkey and believe me that when I came, downhill there were our rich people, Palićs who work to this day, who have everything there.

And Olga had a daughter, she was very sick from diabetes. I always felt bad and went to her. And then she was quite sick and blinded by diabetes. But she was still like that then, you know, she was taking insulin and so on. And she says to me, "Micika," everyone calls me in their own way, some Mare, some Micika, I no longer know how people call me, but you can't find me in Janjevo by Marija, that's how it is. She told me, "You stay here with my mother, and I'm going to," she said, "send all these things to Palićs." She packed the bag, they had a lot of children, some twelve, some thirteen, seven-eight. She only sent it to one family, she sold it all, I just told her the price, she brought me the money. I came back with an empty bag, the children looked at me, they waited for me, "Where are the clothes, Mother?" "I sold them all." "Where did you sell them?" "Well," I said, "Olga's Finka took everything and sold it all."

My sister and brother's wife came, they call me Mare. "Mare," they said, "where are the clothes?" "Well," I said, "Finka sold them." She said, "We were excited to see the new stuff" I said, "Nothing this time." I collected the money again, I had it and I said to Halim, "Halim, where is that man?" I said, "I'll pay him back." "Marija, he is not coming here anymore. I can call him and tell him you want to pay him back." He said, "I said I was giving it to her with no need to pay back and that woman would not see me again, but, Halim, did she start?" "Yes." "I'm glad." So I did not see that man. Then I went, they gave me permission from Metalac to go every weekend. Then I worked for my people here.

Some woman who ordered a leather jacket for her daughter-in-law, I would immediately go to Turkey and get it for her. I also had brothers, they are very fashionable, they have a great taste for clothes and everything. I immediately matched it, the cheapest shirt with the skirt, shorts, I immediately matched them in Turkey and everything. I sent them everything matched up, the shoes they asked for,

everything. And when I came they were all there, and this is how I spent my life. I can say that, and now those drivers knew me and when I went they always said to me, “Marija, you are not meant to be here,” he said, “you would be better off in Switzerland.” He said, “You are a hard worker.” And today, tomorrow, like that. I told them, “What Switzerland?” I didn’t even know that Switzerland existed and how it was and what it was. You know, that was too foreign for us, for my mom and everyone. When you don’t know any better, you stay here. Then I said, “Okay.”

But I swear to God when Paulina finished eighth grade I really wanted her to go to Lipjan to learn hairdressing. You know, it’s a good job, you always have money and so on. You can always do someone’s hair at home and so on. But how it all began, it was with the demonstrations in Lipjan, and everything. I went by myself to Pristina myself, I found them at the train station, I told them, “I want [to go] to Switzerland.” And that’s how it was. He said, “Do you want to go to my brother in Zürich for the weekend, Marija?” He said. “I’m not going to leave you,” he said, “on the street, I’m not going to let you, but to my brother in Zürich.” Before this, they sent a Bosnian woman, and messed things up, what to do, and that brother called someone. He was like a mother and a son to me. Bekim was from Peja and he also had a life like mine. His father was drunk, a bus driver. His mother was, he loved his mother very much.

When I went to Switzerland, now his brother didn’t want to receive me and he was a bit scared. Again that Bosnian went and messed things up, he called Bekim. Bekim came to me, “Marija,” he said, “don’t be afraid. I’m your child.” He said, “I know how I got through, I have three uncles here. I thought they would protect me. But I had to get married,” he said, “I married Kristina, but thank God, she is good and she gave me life.” He said, “Papers. She is from here,” he said, “but if you listen to me, I will tell you something. It’s not a problem to stay with me, and until you find a job you will not burden me. But will you listen to me or will you listen to others because there are bad people on yours and on our side?” He said it like that. I said, “No, Bekim, as you say,” “I will find you a job and everything.” And so I went.

But I can tell you that when I left, I didn’t dare tell my brothers and mother that I was going to Switzerland. I left the children in that big house. My little girl was in the eighth grade and my little boy was in the sixth grade, they have a two-year difference. I suffered through while in Switzerland and everything, it was very hard to tell you the truth, very hard, and so it was. To be done with Switzerland stories, I worked everywhere. That man never deceived me, he told me that a Swiss man asked them for a housekeeper. And I went out for coffee in the city, and he said to me, “Marija, do you want to do house cleaning? Cook Swiss food?” I got a headache, I never got headaches. I said, “How am I going to do it, I want to clean, but to cook”, you can’t know Swiss food, you can’t do it. Nor to, nothing, because it was a French canton.

When I went, that Swiss man was a divorcee, and he immediately fell in love with me. And I, what do I do now, go home. And I call Bekim, but we can’t understand each other, and unfortunately my nails grew. And he asked me, coffee, I understood that, espresso, everything. And back then I smoked, and

when I got the coffee, I wanted to smoke and he said, "Nobody smokes here." There were three floors, it was huge, {open her hands to explain} agriculture. He said, "There's no smoking in this house." And I was immediately afraid, I put the cigarette back in the bag, but then he was afraid that I would leave, I would not be there, I would go to work. Then he said, "Take out your cigarettes." I said, "No, no."

And then I knew, he told me "*Tres jolie*" [French - very beautiful] about my nails, you know. And I say, "I will cut them short." Like this {shows with her hands} I said because I can't speak French. "No, no," he said, "they are very beautiful." And all this, and then he got scared and said to me, "No, Marija, smoke." I didn't want to, he said to me, "Forgive me, sorry." He said. He took the cigarette out for me, lit it, gave me the coffee and everything. I said, "I have Bekim's phone number. Bekim will not come for me anymore." And Bekim said to me, "Where are you, Maro?" He always called me Maro. I said, "Bekim, here and there. He will tell you where I am, I came for work." "Who brought you?" "Come on," I said, "it's a long story and I will tell you."

Bekim came there and he talked to him, he spoke perfect French. And he said, "We won't take others into consideration. If you want Marija to work for you, we will take responsibility for her." And this how it was...

Anita Susuri: Where was this in?

Marija Basler Karamatić: In Switzerland, in Switzerland and this how it was. Then there, it all went through Bekim, I worked, I collected tobacco. I had never collected tobacco, those hands never... I cried for my children with tears. And he stopped at the car and like this, and he said to me, "If I am alive, we will bring them here," he said, "both Paulina and Paskal," you know my Paško, his full name Paskal, "Your children will come here and so", and all this passed like that. Messy, messy, then I left him. My brothers were back then, you know real Yugoslavs, back then we were still considered Yugoslavs. And actually many women got married then divorced and immediately got the Swiss papers, everything was okay, everything was okay. And so, what to do, life was like that, I told you with a lot of tears but here, now I will get back to telling you how it was here.

My husband was very sick, he was barely breathing at night. In Pristina, they brought him back from Pristina, they couldn't do much for him. His sister's daughter was in America, she talked with the doctors, she said his kidneys had dried up and there is no way out. Both my children needed to eat, they needed it, we didn't even have yeast to make bread, what else can I say. And he was sick, people came to visit him, I don't know, I don't know what to say. My mother-in-law was an elderly woman. I told you that my brother-in-law also drank. Then my husband got a little better and he went to the seaside, he went to the sea in Novi Vinodolski there near Crikvenica. He had just arrived, he found a place, he called me, he fell and got swollen because of his kidneys.

And I went to Zagreb with my two children. I had no clue, I didn't know anything, like I said now about Janjevo. They found him, he found the apartment, I didn't even know where it is, nor how it is, nor what it is. And he was in the hospital in Rijeka, so I was concerned for my children if one of them would go towards the sea [and drown], I didn't know where to go, which way, you can go any way. And we went back to Janjevo, but when you don't know, everything is foreign, strange. We didn't curse here, very rarely did I swear to God, and at the sea, you know what people there are. Then I hit a person when he cursed at me like that {demonstrates a slap} *tras* {onomatopoeic}. He said, "Why are you hitting me, Marija?" I said, "Why are you insulting my Lady [St. Mary]? Do you believe in God, are you Croatian or not? Each to their own but..." He said, "You are crazy." And so my husband was in the hospital, I was with my two children and working, and there was no one to bring the clothes from Zagreb.

But thanks to good people, there are good and bad people. Somehow the doors always opened to me but no, it wasn't good, it wasn't at all, what can I say. So, and there was no water so I went to the wells to get water, to get two buckets to wash... everything. That's why I said our mothers have gone through a lot and also my grandmother, so this was *ihih* {onomatopoeia}. It was a little better for me than for them. My grandmother had nothing, she almost died because she went everywhere on foot. Everyone knows that she went to Pristina on foot. She went everywhere, she went on foot to Letnica, 12-13 hours and she was hungry with nothing to eat, a potato or pickled pepper even in summer. She said to these women, "Don't throw away that pickle, save it for later." Do you know how they used to make pickles in the winter? She took them when she went on foot [during the pilgrimage]. This is how it was. Life wasn't beautiful, what can I tell you. It wasn't beautiful at all but we are left with Janjevo, it pulls us towards it with all this.

Now I'm fine, now I'm good to tell you the truth, like this. I have my son, he is in Zagreb, he works at a sea resort, not very beautiful and fabulous but okay. He has children, his child is in the first year of high school, he is my pride. I was always proud of my children and I have a daughter-in-law from Zagreb. When the Janjevo people in Croatia ask my grandchildren, "Is the mother ours?" You know. "No," they say, "Mother is not ours, Father is ours," you know, my son is from Janjevo, and the daughter-in-law is from Zagreb, that's it. And I have my pension now, and when I came back the Swiss man came with me. My son didn't want to go to Switzerland, he missed the opportunity to get the papers. Back then, after the war, he worked there with my brothers, it was good. My young daughter came with me right away. She worked, while my son stayed. My daughter and I worked up there [in Switzerland], he didn't want to.

We bought him a car, he came back, he started working in an iron factory. When he came back from work, his hands {rubs her hands} and when Paulina came back from work, she also worked. At first she worked in the restaurant with me. Then the language, when she was a child, she learned the language perfectly and worked in the factory. And when she came, "What is this?" She said, "Well, my hands," he said, "Ah, stop, mother and I will work, you will not work." This is how it was. He went back to Zagreb,

then he went to the military here, in Zagreb, actually. When he went back to Zagreb, they called me in Switzerland, asking if he would come and live here or go to school and learn something, or the papers would be annulled. And we asked him, "Paško, will you come back to Switzerland?" "No, I don't want to. I like it better in Zagreb." He didn't want the papers, it was done. Then he regretted it, but it was in vain. This is how it is.

I don't know what else to tell you, if it weren't... I cried my whole life, mostly crying. Now I've come here thank God but now there's this technology, works so well. The phones for our children, very bad for the youth. They have a lot on their plate, but for us, we talk with cameras, I see the children, they're okay, all smiles, and then I feel good. And like this... I am telling you my daughter, she is in Morocco now and she has two houses in Switzerland, it's beautiful. She has a very nice husband and everything. The son is here, he is struggling with two children and so on, I don't know. I don't know what to say. He worked hard and now here he is. And now I'm waiting, since I came back, for more than a year, no, it's been two years since I submitted my documents. Now that I am a returnee, I have asked from the state, because they burned down [my house].

I don't know who burned it down, was it a child, I didn't see it, so I don't know what to say, but when they came they ruined it completely. They evened out the house, do you know how it is? Very ugly. Now, now, no one helps you. No one wants to hear about it, it's over. I submitted the documents as a returnee to my country and for the state to build my house. I'm not asking for a three-storey house, I am asking for a house. Now my children, my daughter will come here in the tenth month, and so will my son when the season is over, and I want my own house. I don't want to bother my mother. My two brothers, they always come and someone wants this, someone wants that. Then there are too many people. Let them be comfortable in their house, I could have my own house, my own house where my children could come, you know. This is it. Now, when will it happen, or will it happen, I don't know if they will work on it or not.

I want to go there one day, but it's too hot, and having to take care of my mother, I want to go to the mayor, president or what is he, of Lipjan. To go sit, and see what kind of a person he is. Will they be willing to help or not? I don't know what to say. They are saying, I've heard that now they will give money to reconstruct Janjevo, to restore the old houses and the church and everything. And now, if it's true, I don't know, so I've heard, it's being talked about and when we see it then we will believe it (laughs), and so nothing, and that's it. Here you can see the woman with eight children, the one over there. She has only what people give her, and that's it. Her husband works for the Palić family, how much does he get? 250 euros per month? What is that? One of their children went to the seaside to work, but that woman can't gather the money to marry her child, what else can I say. Like that.

And people move out of here, they go one by one, it's sad but true. But I've said, I will not leave. Everyone can go, I've said I will stay and there are good people who are still here. There are those old people there who are paying the same, but some have come from villages, they are stealing and

destroying. They are stealing chickens from people, they are stealing and as I said it is bad. In fact, they haven't [stolen] from us yet, and when that happens, I would say, don't steal from me, and don't break a window. You want this, here it is (laughs). But no one will ask you, that's it. So my life is as it is, sad but real and that is it. But overall, well and alive.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back to your childhood in Janjevo.

Marija Basler Karamatić: Childhood.

Anita Susuri: Tell me about that.

Marija Basler Karamatić: About it now? Okay, what can I say. Childhood was, my mother gave birth every two years. My father was a very good man, he never drank, he was a hard worker. When they got married, when my father married my mother, my mother told me that we had a lodge. My grandmother, grandma, was not very healthy in terms of mental health. She didn't know when she had her physiological needs, she would fall on her way there, she was such a woman. It was a small house, a room and a small room two by two and a hall. Then my father started, he first worked as I told you as a silversmith, he worked then, he made spoons, forks, you know. My father worked there as I told you, and my mother and uncle's wife in... my father would bring the molds and they did the pouring and had to... mix it in those big containers. Then for it to shine, to take on a silver look, because it was initially white and so on.

Then when I was little, as far as I remember, I always cleaned with my grandmother, I went to my mother, then my little sister came and so on. My mother is a hard worker, my mother also cooked, made something out of nothing and so on. Then little by little, I grew up and went, Dad worked there. Then he started working in Macedonia, we were happy as children. We didn't have an uncle, my uncle worked for years in the mine. And then my father, when he worked in Macedonia, he used to bring us chestnuts, apples and there was no bus, but from Lipjan. When there were carriages, he asked for them, you know he would come. If there weren't any, he would walk, carry bags and apples on his shoulders to Janjevo. He would come for two days, three, and then he would go again to get some goods there.

Then our people here processed plastic like this flower here {shows the object}, and some people started with plastic. People went places and got exposed to different things, and so they did everything, people also worked with print. This is how it was until we started, then little by little. Then my father also brought us molds, what he saw there, he made the foundry at home. That's how we built those pillars over the house, that's how he built it, and there he poured the coke fuel, it was processed. Then he hired a worker so it would be poured properly. Then we did the finishing touches. I remember when I was eight-nine years, my mother had already decided that I was going to work and do the finishing touches. And so we nicely placed them in those containers and mixed them.

Initially there was no electricity so it had to be mixed manually. Then it started, first my dad installed it there and got the electricity, and this is how it was. We worked, my mother would trick us, "Come on," my mother said "I, as a mother, will cook for you," those old cookies, "You just work." I worked all day, my sister was grumpy, and she didn't want that, she would go to the bazaar to buy something. I did all the work, this is how it was. And with my grandmother, you know how it is, and when my mother gave birth to each child... a time came, my father put together some money and what to do, he said, "We will buy land." You know, it brings blessings. People who had land and vineyards were rich. My mother said to him, "What do I need the land for, who would take care of it? We should buy a vineyard." I remember all this as a child. "Okay, the vineyard then."

And it is the one up there {shows the direction} where that house is, when we walk by it I will show it to you. My father bought both parcels next to one another, he gave the money, and bought vineyards. But now, my grandfather, her father, he had vineyards, that man was always drunk, but he knew how to graft well. He went to the villages, he sent cherries, he sent grapes. He would bring beautiful things, peaches, then he had cherries. Then he grafted for my mother there through the vineyards, arranged the vineyards and planted those vines. Then that is how we started to have grapes. What would my mother do, we had nowhere to put the grapes. She went to buy a cart, so it was called then, now I don't know what it is called. I think that's how it is called, they were large containers and we brew *raki*.

Then we didn't have cauldrons, but my mother and I took them to the neighbors downstairs, in buckets to brew the *raki*. And to bring *raki* here, do you know how much work there was? And so little by little. Then, my father earned some money and my grandmother was still alive. We were in that little house. My mother was pregnant with my sixth brother almost in the ninth month. My uncle and his wife came, there was a big storm and my mother, my uncle came because he knew that my mother is very afraid of thunderstorms, lightning strikes, and these things. And they said, "Let's go see Luba, because she is pregnant, she gets very scared."

They came and, in the meantime, an electric pole fell and collapsed there {shows the direction}, we called them electric poles and it pulled ours too, and the wires fell there. And it was damp, they wanted to go home, and my mother accompanied them, and they had their house there. My mother was pregnant, this big {shows with hands}. And they used to say that if you're pregnant and if you pull something, your baby rolls in the womb. And she took the power cord to raise it and when she touched it and the electricity {explains with her hands} directly shook her whole. And us, the children, it was our Lady's night in Letnica that we were about to go to, and I was happy with my other brothers and we went down to my grandmother to tell her that we were going to Letnica because we didn't know.

Going to Letnica was the greatest happiness, but before we couldn't because our mother was pregnant, and my father appointed a car and a person, I don't know what kind of car he had. Then people started buying cars, to go to Letnica during the day, for Mother of God. I went to tell my

grandmother that mother experienced an electrical shock, she was in complete electrical shock. Luckily my father was at home and, when I came back from my grandmother's, I went upstairs, some other children were crying, people were screaming, they said, "Ah, Luba is in an electrical shock, it is unlikely that ..." And we were crying, the children were crying, we went up. When we got there, my father was dragging in my mother, the current was going through her. He was dragging her here and there, people gathered, my mother was in electric shock, he was dragging her on her belly, this big {shows the size of the belly}.

You know how they wore *dimija*.³ There were nine meters of textile in those *dimija*, plus the apron that is put on top there. And he was dragging her in one direction, the electric wire was on her, in her hands. They dragged her in another direction, the wire went through her. Dad no longer knew what to do, but thankfully the wire was removed. The neighbors came there, a girl who wasn't married, she got married later and when they heard, she came. They just cut the rooster, or the chicken, for the next day's [the celebration] of the Mother of God, she came with a knife and the knife has metal {describes with her hands}. We were crying, the children were crying, this was in the old house. Those old grandmothers approached us so we would not cry, not to look, you know. And my father realized that the apron my mother had, he put it on the wire, he stepped on it, and my mother got out of the electrical wire.

And Nasta had that knife, it attracted the electricity. Nasta immediately started to foam out of her mouth, everything, her eyes were wide open. Not my mother, she survived. She had gold, the electricity did not run through her much, my mother had gold teeth (laughs). A doctor came, he was older, now my mother was in that tiny room, we as children were around her and so on. And he said, "The child won't survive, but the woman is fine." Okay, what to do, it was over. Then my father dragged Nasta too, he barely took Nasta out, Nasta's hair immediately went up {shows with her hands} like this. I remember it like it was today, it was horrible. Okay, he got Nasta out also. Nasta was in critical condition, my mother wasn't. Her eyes didn't widen or anything, my father also got Nasta out, everyone was there, people, we cried as children. After two weeks, three, it's the Little Lady⁴ celebrations.

My father had pledged that he will go to Mother of God on foot, you can go there on foot through these hills. My mother started having contractions, we had no one to call, a neighbor of ours took us there with a truck, with a truck to Pristina. She had a hard time giving birth, I am the oldest but I was born in Pristina, not in Janjevo. My sister was born here, my other brother and her, no, she was born in Lipjan and my brother Josip. All of us were born around here. And she gave birth to the biggest, tallest, most handsome baby (laughs). My older brother always says, "Come on, why didn't my mother get an electric shock when she was pregnant with me. Cursed be the child," he says, "of electricity." (laughs).

³ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

⁴ Christian holiday which celebrates the birthday of the Virgin Mary.

We always laugh. He says, “He is the tallest, I’m like my mother,” he says, “this short,” he says. We always laughed. This is how life is. Then we worked a lot. My mother wanted to, she really started by herself. Then what should we do? My father put aside some money and we built the house. That was it. We hired these people, they were Albanians, Rexha was his name and his people, they were very good people. They were from up there somewhere, they came and built the house, then I took care of my brother who was born the biggest and most handsome, he was a calm baby. My mother started with the workers there, I went everywhere on hills and got greenage, I ate them all. I always carried him on my back. My brother grew up over here {touches her neck}.

And there, our neighbor let us stay in a room upstairs in his house until the house got built. I prepared food with what God gave us, I baked pies and so on, I walked my brother around. My mother breastfed him, I walked him around, went to breastfeed him again. Children, this is how it was. And when the house was built, my mother didn’t, she didn’t even wait to paint the house and the room. We started living in the house without windows, she placed the old house’s windows in. She placed them one by one. Back then there were no bricks, but tiles that people made them out of mud. We started living there.

The dogs barked, yelled, my mother looked around, stayed up all night, in a rug, that’s where we slept. Then from one, the first room {shows the direction} then the other, we always walked around. When we came, then my father began, then after this, the house needed to be painted, we stayed downstairs. Downstairs there were those large containers, *rakia*, everything. Where the kitchen is now, there. There {shows the direction} my father processed metal and made spoons, we have... I mean he did everything. Then I got married and they started working. Everything, they made those Juda’s bags.⁵ Maybe you remember, they had this thing to pull it up and so, that’s what they called those bags.

My father, I remember here my little Paulina, he brought the material here. So they then started working in his workshop, they dug up there and created the workshop space. Then one after the other, then they fixed the walls. Just then my brothers got organized and put aside some money for those presses and the *štancerica*,⁶ to produce all these wallets and bags. It worked very well and this is how it went... when they finally settled and managed to earn some money, they had to pack cars, trucks and all, and head up there [to Croatia]. So, that’s it. There, life with my parents, this was it. But thank God, our father wasn’t a drunk who beat us and left us hungry and all of this, like my mother’s father. We

⁵ Cylindrical bag that closes by pulling a rope. It is called the purse of Judah because the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus Christ were in the purse of that shape.

⁶ The term derives from German *stanzen*, which means to press, stamp, punch. The speaker refers to a machine that was used to print and punch leather in their home-based factories.

had, we had, he brought us *halva*⁷ from Macedonia, the tahini halva, the white one, with packages. This is it, so...

Anita Susuri: You said you were born in Pristina, how did that happen?

Marija Basler Karamatić: In Pristina, yes. My mother couldn't give birth at home, with those old women who helped them give birth, she couldn't. She tried for three, four days at home, and then she had to go to Pristina. She had really difficult births, even when she had my little brother, she had a cesarean birth. Then, if it weren't for the cesarean birth, she might have had more children.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Did you go to school in Janjevo?

Marija Basler Karamatić: I did go, to tell you the truth, I went up to the fourth grade. I went and did not. That's how it was among the people of Janjevo, they wronged us here, and maybe somebody regrets that now. I was a child, you know, for home. My mother sent me, I was no fool, I crossed the world and I could attend school. But they rebuked her, it's a girl, she'll marry, you know, she doesn't need education she will deal with diapers. But the boys too, they will carry packages, he will work at the market. This is how it was. Mother was giving birth, there they mowed the land, and she sent me and stopped me from going to school. "She will marry, what school?"

And when my brother, when my brother was born, I was at home for months, she did not let me go to school and she had to pay a fine for that. I was in the fourth grade about to get to the fifth. She paid a very large fine, then she had to let me go to school. But without notebooks, books, wasting my time at school. Three years later, after I passed fourth grade and was in the fifth, for three years I went to the fifth. I always joke about it. I said to the present school principal, "Give me a diploma." She says, "Why Marija?" "But, I did go to school, I want a diploma." She says, "What diploma?" I say, "I went to school for eight years, that should mean something."

I said, "You know what? That too is a sacrifice. I want a diploma, I won't show it anywhere." I said, "I don't need it for job applications, but to..." They promised they would give me one for the eight grades I completed. I want to put it in a frame because I went for three years in fifth grade. I also went to the seaside to work. Then I had arguments with people over there, they didn't take me seriously and

⁷ *Halva* refers to various local confection recipes. The name is used for referring to a huge variety of confections, with the most geographically common variety based on toasted semolina. Halva is popular in Western Asia, Central and South Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe.

wanted to trick me. When they see a woman all by herself, you know how it is. I know the people and everything. I felt bad for the place there [so nice], and I found the people and all that *hop* {onomatopoetic}. And he said to me, I said, “You know what {points her finger} wait and see, I will outsmart you.” He said, “No.”

When I did all this, he said, “Marija.” I sat down, he asked if I wanted coffee, he was from there. “Which,” he said, “school, high school, or university did you finish?” I said, jokingly, “You know what,” I said, “not even high school.” I said, “Four grades, I spent three years in fifth grade, but they’re considered four grades” I said. “What?” {yells}. I said, “This is it. Like this, but mother nature and school teaches you everything”, I said. Life teaches you, this is it. So, my mother...

Anita Susuri: Did you go to Vladimir Nazor?

Marija Basler Karamatić: There, it’s there {points} I went there. Now it is still old, now they are doing music videos, in that old school they are doing music videos. Young people are coming and taking pictures, I don’t know, every Sunday there are many young people, young women taking pictures in Janjevo. When I saw this, I was amazed. And a movie is being shot there now, one has been shot and now the other is being shot. All this was there {pointing with the right hand} upstairs was occupied. We couldn’t pass and when we passed, they said, “*Shttt*” {onomatopoeia}. I said, “Good”. (laughs) Leave it, it’s beautiful, it will remain a memory from Janjevo, what can I say.

Anita Susuri: Do you have any memories from when you went to school?

Marija Basler Karamatić: Listen, there are memories and those, my friends were good. You know when you don’t have some kind of, we only had the will, someone had it, someone did not. My grandmother had vineyards there, I sent the children there, then the cherries, then we stole them and this is the biggest memory. Then it was a memory, eh, to go and steal someone’s quince, to steal from the vineyard, and so on. Listen, I do not know how to say it, memories are and all those memories have all been sweet. I remember as a child, when I ate janeriks, how good they were, how sweet. Even to this day I like them, I even in Switzerland had to get an apple if I saw it [hanging in the tree].

My daughter Paulina said to me, “But mother, you can’t do that here.” I don’t care that I can’t. When I was in Zagreb, it depends on the pear or the apple, I have to... this has remained the same for me, I pass by there, I take the janeriks from there and eat it. It’s the same for me, we didn’t have anything else, to know about something better. When rice chocolate came out, I still eat it even today, we all gathered the money, those dinars to buy chocolate, share it, and eat it. So, something I don’t know what, I don’t know how to say.

Our mothers simply didn’t allow us, they did not allow us to move forward. So, I gave everything I had just to move past these issues; I bought my children notebooks and everything, but some of my

brothers finished school, some didn't. For that same reason, for the same old reasons. This is it. Here my son didn't finish it all, and my daughter finished up to the eighth grade. She even came to work here, she was very smart and she loved school. And she cried for school, and she started school at six, not seven, but six. So, this is it, what can I say?

Anita Susuri: Were you a religious family?

Marija Basler Karamatić: Yes, yes. Everyone here was, to tell you the truth. Church was important for us, that's how we were brought up. Now people have moved to Zagreb, even the children lost their faith, they all are modern now. Now they've fallen again and can't recover but it's life... but we used to go, we still go to this day. Listen, here it is, always when *devetnica*⁸ starts, now it's the Mother of God we go there, then Saint Anne and everything. So, our people are up there [Croatia], but the young people who are growing up now, it's no one's fault, the mothers or grandmothers. They can't educate them, it isn't how it used to be.

Children have seen the world, they've seen, my nephews can't be like me, this is it. My daughter still has that attitude that my children will not go, here they are. They're in first place for taekwondo and everything, but they know, but my son's children who are in Zagreb, they let go and they were allowed to do so. They're in their second year of high school and they were allowed to get tattoos, children like football. I felt sorry for them because they can regret it later, you can allow them after they're 18 years old, but you can't talk much. And when that child is on their phone all day long, they're good at school, it's sad, but his daughter is also very smart. But children spend so much time on the phone, everyday more and more.

You can't make them, but I also agree with this, you have to tell them they should go to mass on Sunday, they will not go like we did, like our parents made us go. But at least they should know, but... it isn't like it used to be, no, not the youngsters, no, no, no... generation after generation, little by little. But I can say that now according to the generation, who wasn't there and who didn't give birth, now during the winter in the second month, actually in the first month, when Saint Sebastian is, in Pešter, many young people come, it's full. And now for the Lady, more serious people come, then for the Little One, on the ninth month, many people also come.

Also young people, Janjevo is full, it looks beautiful, there's happiness, everything. But for the second, the first month many young people come who have never been before, who weren't born here, depending on which year, each year more. This, now... God willing, I don't know, I don't know. It isn't good for anyone, even for those who left Janjevo, it would be better to stay in Janjevo than go to Kistane. They ruined their children, now children are doing drugs and everything. It's sad, but it's true, this is how it is. There's nothing, ours is called Ranjo, every place has, I don't know, we have one from

⁸ Devotional praying in Christianity, consisting of private or public prayers repeated for nine successive days or weeks.

Zagreb, he knows the history. If you listen to him... he knows which hill was named after who, when we were created, which families are Palić, which was Glasnović, who is Karamatić, from which family.

In Janjevo, there were four Orthodox churches, one was in Ranja, Catholic. But when the Turks occupied us afterwards Austria, Austria, Austro-Hungarians, when they came, they defended the Croats. Then he says [Ranjo] that all the Serbs who are Ivanović here, who are now, I don't know, Mazarekić, were Mazareku, they were Albanians there, who became Catholics and all those churches remained then, that... but for this man, you must sit down and talk to him, I heard this from an early age, our people were Glasnović, Palić were from Dubrovnik. And then there are some people who have become Catholics, there are some we call Zymeri. A brother has converted to the Turkish religion, and the other remained in the Croatian religion, you know.

Eh, Janjeva is historic (laughs), it is the oldest in Kosovo. I don't know which city I have heard of, but I have heard that there is another place. But it is the oldest and a unique settlement in Kosovo, why not? Exactly on that day I was with Shepa, they have that tea shop there and everything. They also have very well educated children and all of them are university graduates, some even lawyers, some something else. And we talked, he said, "Marija, it's a sin," he said, "Now God given they do what they said, and we become a historic site." He said, "Let people come, let them be here," he said, "let someone open a good restaurant here, drink, eat, have people come. A little advertisement," he said, "whoever sees Anija [Albanian restaurant in Janjevo], sees how beautiful it is."

"My son [asks me] do you know this person from the seaside?" "Yes, I do." He said, "Pal," they called my son Pal there, "What is your mother doing, where is she?" He said, "She went to Janjevo." I was also in Zagreb. I took a picture at Anija and he saw it through Facebook, and he said, "Pal, what is this? You told me your mother is in Janjevo, now in Paris." You know, and he said, "It's possible, she is crazy, she could have gone there." He said, "Shut up, stupid," he said, "there's one in Janjevo." "What is there in Janjevo?" You know, this is for people to post on social media. And so after that my son came to visit, then my nephews who never visited Janjevo, and they were happy, we were all at Anija and we have the photos and everything.

Then my daughter for two years, she wasn't here this year, she will come now because her children just started high school and come because of it. And then when she will be able to travel, she will come here with children. I can tell you that, when she went to Zagreb, she wasn't happy. When she came to Janjevo, she thought there's nothing better, a smile like that is priceless. I never said no to her, can you imagine my oldest nephew Jasin, he asked me when he got them from the airport, he asked me, "Grandma, can," he said, "these old houses be bought?" Talking about the old houses. I said, "If your father gives the money, everything is possible." But the way that kid thinks, immediately, before he got inside of the taxi, he asked if they could be bought. This is it.

My daughter told me, “Mom, we have to bring the old one...” Because my son-in-law was a champion of taekwondo in Morocco, now the children took after their father. She said, “We have to bring the old guy to Janjevo, he will buy half of Janjevo,” she said. This is it, he says, “I would want to,” he says, “But I don’t want to come here without my wife. I have to close down the store there, to come here.” He says, “But we have to eat,” he says, “we have to work. There will be other opportunities to come.” So, there is a woman from Janjevo, she is in America and she is quite rich and now she apparently wants to invest. When she visits now, I hope to God she will do something, and hire some young people who are here, it’s a pity not to.

To tell you the truth, a pity for our country, our president Kolinda⁹ was also here, the one who is down there, Franjo, the second Golome {shows the direction with his hand}, he is a farmer. Kids love Janjevo, they don’t want to leave. Now he has two or three kids at the seaside, they work as other people’s servants, but they always ask, “How are the goats? How is the person who had chickens? How is he?” Such great children... [politicians] they all visited, and they promised things, but they did nothing for people, people have to live in other people’s homes. They did not have to build them houses made of gold, but a house to live in. Kolinda was also here, she promised, she took a picture with little Paško.

Mister Thaçi¹⁰ was in front of his door, he promised everything. I said I will do an interview on live TV, it can show on television, I don’t care. He said, “Marija, this is for the archive.” But I said that I don’t care, no one helped with anything, I don’t know. Has anyone come to help, or did people or other associations steal the means, I don’t know, I wasn’t there, and I didn’t see everything. They say, I hear from people that enough money has been secured for Janjevo but nothing is done, I don’t know. I don’t know, but you can see that now there’s theft everywhere. You see Croatia, what a pity.

Switzerland takes care of its little lake, they clean it and preserve it, while we have all this beauty and we have ruined it. What can I say, that’s why I moved from Croatia. At least I’m comfortable, that’s it. I have a person who drives me, a neighbor, when I have to go to Pristina or to Lipjan, to buy things and come back home. This is it. There’s no better place. I came here for quiet, to calm my mind, to tell you the truth. I worked a lot as a kid, then when I got married at the Palić family. I only experienced something beautiful for a little while in Switzerland, when I remarried, but he was an older man. But he gave me everything.

He didn’t have much money, but he gave me everything, the love, I don’t know how to tell you, what women need, some kind of kindness. He surprised me with flower bouquets. He always worked, he waited for me at home with smiles. He was a very good man. There I experienced something beautiful and with smiles, someone making me happy, giving me something. May he rest in peace, he gave me his pension. I don’t ask for anything more, I’m not asking for wealth. I hope God takes care of my

⁹ Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is a Croatian politician and diplomat who served as President of Croatia from 2015 to 2020.

¹⁰ Hashim Thaçi is a Kosovar politician who served as President of Kosovo from 2016 to 2020.

children because they're my biggest wealth, I am good here and that's it. What can I say, you're done with me or do you want to continue with my mother downstairs? However you want.

Anita Susuri: Could you talk about Janjevo a little more? How do you remember Janjevo when you were young? What was it like here?

Marija Basler Karamatić: When I was young, there was youth here, it was nice. I told you, we didn't know about other places, but we were very, I said we didn't finish school, any of us. Rarely, from my generation, one went to Lipjan, to Pristina, to school. There were some from each generation that went, from my [paternal] uncle's generation one finished medical school, she went to Pristina. It was fun, the children didn't know about others, but the church. But we were very well dressed. There were these streets, this is really pretty now, but back then, it was in ruins. The heels, you had to have the prettiest boots, because we used to call it Little Paris. Women dressed well and men went with it. My brother went, you always had one who went to buy for all of us.

Then, when the cafés opened, that's where people met, and in the streets young men would take walks. You didn't have to go anywhere, men would find you. Those that desired you came to your door. Wooing you, whistling, this and that, to meet you at the church to seduce you. After my generation's youth, the cafés opened, I remember when I was like that. I remember going to Kino Salo when it first opened. That's where Roma people live, that is our spot, mine, now it is my son's. The state confiscated it, now I am trying to get it back. There was real happiness.

But women got dressed, you can see my mother in that photo. The gold coins, aprons were expensive, 200-300 Deutsche marks or more. But our women made them by themselves, they didn't have much electricity so they painted the apron and the sparrow with precision. There were weddings, they got married, they made them by hand pulling all-nighters, and they were in a straight line, and not ugly. This is it, they were all handmade, made with great dedication, then the birds until recently... I was the second bride with a wedding dress, before they always wore *dimija*, *brokada*,¹¹ all of that *tasvesi*¹² was {shows around her head} you put it there, it was like this.

Then brides wore wedding dresses, the younger ones wore *brokada*. Then the older ones, this is how it was, but we were happy. There were many children because no one had less than five children. They had seven, eight, twelve, thirteen. So, there's an old woman there at the bazaar, she came back from Zagreb, she is 97 years old. Do you know how many grandchildren she has? She has around 200-300 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She will soon turn hundred years old. Her nephews, the Palićs, that have the most said they will celebrate her birthday, they will also call television stations [to

¹¹ *Brokada* is a type of woven fabric, very decorative, often made out of colored silk and with or with no gold and silver threads.

¹² *Tasvesi*, hair decor made out of gold and silver velvet.

report]. There's no one else in the world like this, she knows all their names by heart. She tells you how many grandchildren she has, how many great-grandchildren. They are over 200, then 130, they're a lot.

You know how, she's just one woman but all of them came from her. So our mothers, they tried and they were very clean. We were very clean in that old house, we cleaned up to the door, the children with boots, then the mud had to be cleaned, but it was a joy to hear someone whistling, and you go out. Then as children when there was snow we went to slide, we gathered as a group. This was happiness, you know...

Anita Susuri: Were there also serenades? Someone mentioned that men sang?

Marija Basler Karamatić: We sang, there where the plum trees are, we gathered, we brought wine and sang. They sang to women and complimented them, but women did not go to them. That was there, a bit away from Marija where you went, a bit up, that's where we gathered. When I was 16, somewhat 15-16, there were boys too, and their group brought theirs, blankets were laid, we laughed, sang. Then, to the walnut tree, we tied a rope for a swing, that was it. Someone at home celebrating St. Georges, mother would... It was beautiful.

There was no, I told you, we didn't know of anything more beautiful, but this place, people experienced something and that's why they all love this place and now they suffer, even young people. Last night I was talking to my brother, he said, "What's the weather like, Meri?" I said, "You know what, it's very beautiful." Mother and I are sitting outside. What can I say, the moon, the sky is full of stars, you can hear the cicadas. "Now," he said, "I wish I was a bird to fly." He said. You know how it is, it's like this but... there was happiness and we did our best. Listen, we didn't know any better, it's a good thing we didn't, and we were happy.

As I said, by ten or eleven o'clock we had to be home, to wash the boots of the younger siblings. You know how feet sweat, we had a fire stove there, then when we moved here, we put the wood to dry because in the morning they had to go to school. Not to be wet, to not get sick. Then we went to slide in small or big groups, we didn't have a sledge, we didn't have anything, a plastic bag, then a plastic basin (laughs). And like this, we met and married, parents met parents. There wasn't much love even when we got married. Do you know how it was, your family gave you away, family to family, it was like that, we accepted it. They asked me once when I was at the seaside, "Marija," I said, "I am from Janjevo, Croatian."

This was weird for them, they heard me talking, Serbian, I wasn't talking in Macedonian, we have all the words. "Marija," he said, "are you Macedonian?" "You know what, leave me alone. We are." I said, "We lived in Janjevo, my grandmother told us about the Turkish reign, women weren't allowed to go out, they hid. Then," she said, "when Bulgarians came it was even worse. Bulgarians stole, and women ran and hid in their houses, they stole." So they got some Macedonian words. There are also many

Turkish words, like *penxhere* [window], *xhezve* [Turkish coffee pot], many others, *tepsija* [baking tray], many Turkish words. And like this, depending on who was in power. And I said that I don't care, I'm like my mother, if you understand me, you understand me. "No, we understand you." I said, "Why are you asking then?" I said, "This is Janjevo."

So these poor people accepted everything, we know the origin, where they're from and what they are, but there are also people from here, who have become Corats. I've heard this from an important man who told me. So which last names, but a man from here also knows history, then he also said who, what...

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned the Culture Center.

Marija Basler Karamatić: They built it down there.

Anita Susuri: Did you also go there?

Marija Basler Karamatić: I was a few times, not many, my mother didn't let me, to tell the truth it was like this. I was twice, once I went to see a movie, I was with my [maternal] uncle. And the second time was when the singer Mišo Kovač was there, then I went there. Like this, our people went, others. Then my brothers, there was also a dance, they went. I didn't. I went there twice in my life, that's it. So...

Anita Susuri: You also had the Masked Ball...

Marija Basler Karamatić: There was, there was that then...

Anita Susuri: Can you talk about that a little bit??

Marija Basler Karamatić: It was... my brother-in-law wore women's clothes, *dimija*. But that was something that happened across Janjevo, that was fun. It was great, funny. I'm saying there was nothing better and more awesome than that. That is no longer. But when he dressed up, he was very funny. So, husband and spouse would dress up. Those that were freer with their husbands, they lived like that. They get on the horse carriage and roam around. His wife wore male clothes, while he wore *dimija* and like that drove throughout Janjevo. And the kids would join with whatever they wore. Although you had vintage clothes and you could dress whatever you wanted. Like that.

Once when I was here... before I left, I was here at Don Matej's as a guest. Up until a few years ago, Don Matej, two years ago, he brought together youth and children to mask... you know. One of the Palić children dressed up like a gypsy, and I was like, what should I do, and he told me, "Why didn't you dress up?" Don Matej told me, "Go upstairs and dress as whatever," because the Red Cross had brought stuff to him. I wore a suit, a skirt, and some colorful tights. When they saw me, we danced, we had fun,

we entertained the children for a bit. This is the first time I dressed up for a Masked Ball. As children, we did dress up, but I didn't, but I did go to watch, I didn't, no.

But it was a happy place, I said, we didn't know better, but I'm glad we didn't know better. Parents, mothers with children went there, our people were in markets and thank God, God helped us and we gained money, we sent spoons. My father went to your people [Albanians] for weddings, and they bought 100, 50 spoons. Then they went and sold flowers in markets and so on. But women didn't go anywhere, no. When children grew up, their fathers took them along and so on. Then it was, the son would carry packages the same way as his father did.

The daughter has to get married like her mother, she will give birth, she will get married and give birth, this is how it was then. This is how it is, we all accepted this, I was in front of the church, my husband would whistle at me. The other one was more handsome, they got mad, those boys and then nothing. I got engaged to him and this is how it was. This is how it was, but my parents said that this is how it was even before them. Your parents know them, they know the house. This is how it used to be among you as well and they accept it. When you live in a place like this, this is how things go. This is it. Your father knows that family well, he knows you will be fine. Now will you be fine there or not, your father marries you off. This is it. This is how it was.

There were also many old women in the house, my grandmother, my father, and we showed you many of them [addresses the interviewer], my mother showed you the pictures, they, they were in America, they traveled for months. My mother's grandfather was in America, that's why he bought a house for his children. Then the vineyards, then he bought the land, but he was for years in America and he didn't even see his children. This is it.

Anita Susuri: Did they deal with commerce?

Marija Basler Karamatić: In America? Then they worked there. They went there, I don't know up to where they were walking, then by ship, they traveled for months. When they came from America, they bought vineyards, they bought vineyards and lands, but they had more vineyards, there were grapes. Do you know what it meant to have vineyards, it meant you were rich. You have grapes, you have wine, you have *raki*, like this. This is how we stocked up when the fall came. We bought 500, 600 kilos of flour, then you had to have a stack of sugar.

I remember this, some didn't have, most didn't have enough, but I know we had sugar for the winter, one stack, and around 500-600 kilos of flour. Now, that was the most important, salt and flour, didn't matter if you had the rest, once a week we had meat. Only those who had money, a small part of meat but it was sweet, we all ate. Then my mother bought a goat and it gave birth. We had sheep, a little bit of milk. This is how it was, this is how life went. Like this...

Anita Susuri: When did you start working at Metalac?

Marija Basler Karamatić: Now to tell you the truth, sometimes around '88 or '87, I don't know. Because in '91 I went to Switzerland. When I went, that year I didn't work, that's how long I worked at Metalac to tell you the truth (coughs).

Anita Susuri: How did you spend those years, the '90s when the situation here was a little...

Marija Basler Karamatić: Well listen, it was scary, it wasn't good, it wasn't good. You can imagine, you can imagine. We weren't afraid of the people here, people that lived here, since always. Because, as I said, there were Albanians and Turks, to this day we respect each other. This was it, children were growing up and all of this, to this day they long for that, for that good old Janjevo. I mean that respect, he said, now he is old, Halim, he said, "Marija, there's no place to drink coffee anymore. The children have come," he said, "they will run you over with a car."

He was alone abroad, he said, "They drive like this, they don't talk, there's no one you can sit and have a conversation with." I met with him on Friday and we talked a little. But this is how it is, I don't know, I don't know what to say, but it isn't... it was another experience, it wasn't bad but hard, to tell you the truth, very hard. Especially for our mothers and grandmothers, let's not talk about that. They were martyrs, and your [grandmothers] from the villages who were old women. How would they know, what, nothing. Work and work, who had goats milked. Listen, we were poor, there's nothing there. I know many people, but my grandmother, I know my grandmother, she told me, she loved me a lot and she told me how but...

Anita Susuri: We heard that he was here in '90, or '91, I don't know, Šešelj.¹³

Marija Basler Karamatić: Yes, he was.

Anita Susuri: Then the situation changed at once.

Marija Basler Karamatić: At once, that's why young people left. He came to kill everyone in the church.

Anita Susuri: Were you there?

Marija Basler Karamatić: Yes, I was and after this I left. I was there.

¹³ Vojislav Šešelj (1954-) is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party. In 2003 he surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2016 he was acquitted of the crimes.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us a little about this?

Marija Basler Karamatić: I was there, but not down there because I wasn't allowed to. I was married with two children, my husband was a jealous man. I didn't go, but he could have [killed] us all to be honest. But here it was horribly scary, but when Olga came back, she knew a lot of people and she called in Prishtina (coughs), she heard that Šešelji will be coming here. You know that Albanian boy, when they went, when they went down there, allegedly he thought he was a donkey. He was wounded in his leg, that boy. We gathered money to take him to the hospital, me and Finka, so they would remove the bullet out of his leg.

So, it was scary, it was horrible. But I don't know it well, I haven't experienced it because I wasn't at the bazaar. I was at home, my husband didn't allow me, my mother-in-law was living with us, I didn't go there. But from what I've heard, I know that it was horrible and then our mothers started getting the children out of here. They thought they would be sent to the army. So they didn't know who was leaving, this is how it was. My mother stayed here, my father, my little son, he was here with my mother and my daughter. The grownups all went, some by plane from Skopje, some like this. My brother barely gathered all the merchandise, everything, they had many machines, just to leave. Like this.

But thank God, or Saint Nicholas, anyway, the church was full with people but he [Šešelji] went back. I don't know how it was, Olga called them immediately, then they came from Pristina because I knew many...

Anita Susuri: Which Olga?

Marija Basler Karamatić: Olga down in the bazaar. She is alive, the girl Finka died. I told you I was in Turkey with her, she knew many people in Pristina. All the important people in SUP,¹⁴ but she also knew Serbs who... But they were good people who she socialized with, they're not all the same. Even Serbs who worked with Albanians cried for me, before I left for Switzerland, "Marija, how can we turn our backs to our best friends? I don't know," he said, "what is this, we ate, we drank," he said, "we socialized."

In the worst times, they came to me, they weren't scared because they weren't bad. This is it, how in a second things change, they worked, they were inspectors until then, security there. I don't know but our Saint Nicholas ward them off, and they came here to kill people and the church was full of people. I know all of these, but it has passed. No one had, just a boy. Then they ran off, they immediately came from Pristina, they left for up there [Croatia] and wounded that boy. And this is it, the story...

¹⁴ SUP - Acronym for *Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova*, which translates to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, of the Yugoslav Socialist Federal Republic.

Anita Susuri: After this, you went to Switzerland?

Marija Basler Karamatić: After this, yes, yes. After this, I went to Switzerland and this is how it was. Then my family went to Zagreb and so on.

Anita Susuri: Were you in Kosovo during the war?

Marija Basler Karamatić: I wasn't here, no. I wasn't here and I didn't experience it.

Anita Susuri: What about your family?

Marija Basler Karamatić: No, no, they weren't (coughs). No, no they left when that horrible period began. I wasn't. I don't know what to say about that, I don't know about this because I wasn't, I didn't experience it. But, as I've heard, it wasn't easy. They hid, they were scared, they didn't have electricity, they didn't have anything. You know how it is, this is all.

Anita Susuri: Do you have anything to add?

Marija Basler Karamatić: I don't have anything else, this is all for now.

Anita Susuri: Thank you.

Marija Basler Karamatić: Nothing, maybe some other time, when you have time, I will calm down, and maybe I will remember something else.