

## INTERVIEW WITH MYRVETE LIMANI

Pristina | Date: June 3, 2015

Duration: 104 minutes

Present:

1. Myrvete Limani (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Lura Limani (Interviewer)
4. Kaltrina Krasniqi (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

**Jeta Rexha:** Mrs. Myrvete, can you tell us about your childhood? What was your childhood like, what were you like as a child and everything else that you remember?

**Myrvete Limani:** Of course I can start from that. I can tell you from the beginning that as a family, as a child, the family as a whole, including children and family relations, I can tell you without a doubt and wholeheartedly that we had an excellent life, not only I, but my sisters and brothers as well. Because our family was large, as [families] used to be back then. I had both parents, I had two older brothers, then a sister, of course [she was] the eldest. And in fact I am the third sister, the youngest in the house, but two brothers came after me, therefore our house, our family was big – mother and father, four brothers and three sisters. To tell you the truth, I don't believe there ever was, of course now I can't get into it... a family more harmonious than ours. I am saying this precisely because of the fact that our parents never prevented us from going out and about, their interest was for us to get educated and be well-mannered. In those times, above everything else, family education was the most valuable thing. So from that point of view, the whole population of Gjakova can talk and knows about our family, Halim Hoxha's house.

The truth is both my grandfather and father, during the Turkish administration my grandfather completed the highest Turkish schools. You know that these lands were occupied for five hundred years, therefore my grandfather was very esteemed and successful and was the director of the *madrasa*,<sup>1</sup> high school... how shall I say, a religious school, it was known in Gjakova. All... in fact I don't know my grandfather, because we didn't have pictures then, there were no pictures. But the whole story has remained in my grandfather's history, especially for us who didn't have it like that: when he passed away, a special funeral procession was organized for him in Gjakova, because he was also a religious leader, the leader of the religious community in Gjakova, educated, educated during the time of Turkey the highest schools and the director of the *madrasa*.

I can tell you this as well, the only thing that we... I remember as a child, we had shelves in our house. Our house was a Turkish style house. Turkish houses like our father's house in Gjakova, I've seen them in Istanbul, when I went there later. So it belonged to that period. And all the shelves were full of thick books with hard covers. And my father, my grandfather's son, he also completed a Turkish school, and

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

he later became a teacher, and taught in Gjakova's religious schools, because there were no other schools. There were no other schools at the time. We were under Turkey [’s occupation], in Turkey it was all... at that time they were very respectable... I lost my train of thought.

What else is there... when our grandfather passed away, the entire Gjakova turned out, they wanted to give him a funeral. But it seems like there was a rivalry between the Muslim religion of the *hoxhas*<sup>2</sup> and of the *shehlerës*.<sup>3</sup> I don't know how to explain it, only that half of the funeral procession was done by the *hoxhas*, like the congregation does, and the other half of the procession had to be absolutely done by the Bektashi,<sup>4</sup> or what they are called, don't hold me to my word because I don't know those things (laughs). And it was decided that his grave was to be declared a *tyrbe*.<sup>5</sup> His *tyrbe* - when you enter Gjakova, right at the entrance on the left when you enter, where the road splits, you enter Gjakova, and on the left, that's where his *tyrbe* was, his grave - he was even declared a prophet - he didn't allow it to be taken indoor, he said, "I want you to leave my grave on the side, I want it to rain on me."

So this is a story that we listened to, we listened to [and] especially my brothers [listened]. Fadil was much more interested because I also had a brother older than Fadil, but he was much more interested in these stories that have not been written down, for instance, what happened at the time. Maybe there are among them, those... but in our family as much as he explained and the whole Gjakova knows about this. Therefore, he was very respected, *Haxhi*<sup>6</sup> Emin Efendiu, Emin was his name. My brother carried my grandfather's name but this brother has passed away now, recently. Emin... his name was Emin as well. This is about all I know.

**Lura Limani:** You yourself attended the school in Albanian, didn't you?

**Myrvete Limani:** Eh?

**Lura Limani:** You yourself went to a school in Albanian, you didn't go to a religious school?

**Myrvete Limani:** Eh, now I will tell you about my school (laughs). We didn't have schools at the time, and we started getting old. I had a sister a bit older than I, maybe by two or three years, I was the youngest. And we got all restless about going to school. The first grades were in Serbian, but we Gjakovars never went to Serbian language schools. And we never learned Serbian... you know, we never learned it well.

And what was there to do, our father took us... and at the time in Gjakova there were, I don't know what to call them. Private families would open schools to teach religion, religious prayers and so on. And my sister and I... those were private, for instance a family opened them, took six children who

<sup>2</sup> Local Muslim clergy, *mullah*, follower of the Hanefi Order.

<sup>3</sup> Local Muslim clergy, *mullah*, follower of the Bektashi Order.

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

<sup>5</sup> *Tyrbe* in Albanian, *türbe* in Turkish, is a tomb, usually a mausoleum of notable people.

<sup>6</sup> *Haxhi* is the title given to the one who has made the greater pilgrimage (on the 8th to 10th day of the 12th month of the Muslim year) to Mecca. It is also called *hadj* or *haxh*.

paid a fee and the family member who had the license and the knowledge would teach us about religious things. However, when my sister and I went, and you know I even remember the house and I remember the old teacher, we didn't last long there because some first preparatory classes in Serbian language started opening. And our parents, it didn't matter if they [the classes] were in Serbian or what were they, they just wanted us to enter a school and get some instruction. So in the beginning, before the school in the Albanian language opened during the Italian and German occupation, we also attended schools in Serbian in Kosovo. We attended [school], I don't remember if it was for one or two years. They were like these preschool groups, especially I was about that age, my sister was three years older than I, I was much younger. So I recall this, this... but thank God it didn't last too long.

Because Germany and Italy occupied the Balkans, the Second World War was gradually in progress, and understandably schools opened then and both my sister and I went to school, in the same class in Albanian language. So from that time we started to... there were no teachers! Teachers came from Albania. Invited teachers came... they were the first teachers, I even remember some names from that time, of those teachers, so it started from then after the Italian occupation, the school started, if I may say the first class in Albanian language. And before then, youth went either to religious schools or... or they just stayed at home, there were no...

However, our parents were interested, since sometime in our early childhood, to send us to school somewhere, and we went to religious schools, they were called *mejtep*,<sup>7</sup> they were private schools. It was as if ten people would gather here, study and leave. They learned different religious prayers, and I don't remember how long we stayed there, but I remember it was very short. Changes took place immediately, and then we went to school and of course the school in Albanian language then started spreading fast. It was a disaster! The situation was, first under Turkey, how many years did they... learn in Turkish, but these in Serbian were even worse for Muslim and Albanian people.

But then, no one cared, just going to school and to... When the schools in Albanian language started, then we started opening our eyes and we must thank Albania for sending out teachers immediately. They would send at first two, at first, that's how the classes were established. Of course two-three classes for one grade, two-three classes for another grade, and then classes gained momentum, and when that momentum was gained it never stopped.

There is another difference here, back then schools used to be, how could I say this, they used to be primary schools then, and I can't say they were really schools. With the arrival and victory of the partisans, I mean, with the victory of the National Liberation War, then the entire Kosovo began breathing through these classes that I am talking about, even now when I'm speaking about them it seems to me that I am speaking of something uncertain, we've gotten schools and academies. This is where our youth is, where our science is, this is where our academics are and many other successes are.

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<sup>7</sup>*Mejtep* is a Turkish word that means school.

The National Liberation War has brought many benefits to Kosovo, many benefits. Kosovo was, I can freely say, probably the most undeveloped territory in this... the Balkans. Of course, those religious schools were then in the Turkish language, I don't know their function, but considering our family, they were people without... people who completed Turkish high schools.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Do you remember the Second World War?

**Myrvete Limani:** Excuse me?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Do you remember the Second World War? What do you remember from the Second World War?

**Myrvete Limani:** What do I remember, from what, from the war?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** From the Second World War?

**Myrvete Limani:** I remember everything from the Second World War. I say everything, because from early childhood on, when the war started I was young, I don't know what age exactly but I would say eight or nine years old. And then this... my brothers, the eldest Fadil and Fahri, they were my brothers. Fahri was older than Fadil, they were very interested in schools. They even went to study in Serbian, although very rarely someone went to study in Serbian. Especially the Gjakovars didn't, they didn't know Serbian at all, and they never wanted to learn it and so on. But, they were very interested in completing their education, they attended school in the Serbian language.

Fadil then, because the older brother, we were... our father started getting older, the economic circumstances, although I come from, I will brag a bit now, a very wealthy family in Gjakova, I mean, wealthy in land, in... Our father was also a merchant, he sold fabrics, a fabric merchant as they say. I don't know what they call it now. But, my older brothers were responsible, because the rest of us were younger, so the two brothers Fadil and Fahri, Fahri was just a little older than Fadil and our life was then under their supervision as well. But Fadil then had other desires, to definitely get to school, to get educated and have fewer family responsibilities, because our father was young and communicative and capable. He escaped from Kosovo, I mean from Gjakova, I am a Gjakovar and the border was closed, he was very endangered, and he went to Albania.

By escaping to Albania through the border with many and difficult struggles, he entered the *Shkolla Normale*<sup>8</sup> of Elbasan, where he got educated, and that is where he got the impulse to become, if I may say *buntovnik*,<sup>9</sup> a revolutionary, in order to be able to liberate this nation from orders, because Serbia was very bad to us, it was very bad. Especially everyone - I am talking about that time and most likely in other places similarly - they oppressed people, especially with *poreze* [taxes]. Speaking of our family concretely, we were very wealthy and all Gjakovars know that, but in those days you didn't have cash like you have your salary now, and you had financial obligations to provide the government with what

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<sup>8</sup> School of Pedagogy, specialized in training teachers.

<sup>9</sup> Serbian word meaning rebel.

you owe it. In those days they couldn't as much. So the main butchers, who tortured the people, were the taxmen, the ones who came to collect taxes at home. And if you couldn't pay the money, they would collect valuables from the house so that in order to get them back, you would be forced to go and pay the money, the tax debt of the family.

This is an expression that you may be hearing about for the first time, but when you can't afford to pay the electricity, water, these are debts to the state, I mean. They were called taxmen, it was their duty to go to each family, "You're not paying the money? This is what you owe!" They would take clothes, they would take things, and you didn't have any other choice but to go and find the money and go and pay to retrieve the things they took from you. That was the hardest thing in Gjakova. I can't speak of other places, but of course it was the same throughout Kosovo.

## Part Two

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Do you remember when the Italians came to Gjakova, the Italian occupation?

**Myrvete Limani:** I do remember. They arrived, we as kids got out to the street to see them, went out from our homes because the Italians were coming. They were coming as an army, they didn't come just like that. They passed through the center and took up their positions, they were together with the Germans, and then they entered and created their own state. But for us, it wasn't an occupation, it was a liberation for us. And some people, as they commonly do when the army or anything that gives hope passes by, they greeted them with songs and joy, although we people of Gjakova knew they were occupiers. That is why a movement started afterwards to begin the fights against Italians and Germans because they were occupiers. And then through their state they fulfilled their mission, and it was necessary to organize something.

And among other things the youth of Gjakova was, if I may say, thirsty for freedom, the young, they wanted to have organized sports, to have jobs and what not. Interestingly, there was a large youth in Gjakova back then, I remember it as a child. And so grown-up like that, they exploded. Then, as a matter of fact the war started from Gjakova, the war started. I am not saying it, but this mass of Gjakova youth and families that took part in that war, they spread throughout Kosovo. You know that Fadil was also a general commander,<sup>10</sup> and a large part of the population followed him. A very clean war, a very just war and it remained just, they are now looking for something like that but that's nowhere to be found. It's not...

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<sup>10</sup> Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001), Albanian Communist partisan leader from Gjakova, who held a number of high posts in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, including the rotating post of Vice President of the Federal Presidency, the highest leadership post in Yugoslavia under Tito, in 1978-79. He retired in 1986, but was expelled from the League of Communist on charges of nationalism.

The war happened, and afterwards, we started breathing after the end of the Second World War, after the partisan victory. Your parents can tell you this as well, because another two or three wars happened afterwards. And understandably in the wars we Kosovo did not win complete freedom, Kosovo remained under Serbs, you know. That was again a great pain, but Kosovo is still under Serbs today. Where is the northern part? Serbs, Europe is making decisions, and is giving them to you. Therefore, the people of Kosovo are always suffering. Now it is even worse, from the locals that are abusing[power], there is suffering. You have your parents, and may they all be satisfied.

**Lura Limani:** Let's go back in time a bit, to tell us how did Fadil and Fahri cross to Albania, to get educated, didn't they? In what year did they go?

**Myrvete Limani:** To cross, it was Fadil who crossed.

**Lura Limani:** Aha, OK.

**Myrvete Limani:** Fadil crossed first, he sneaked across the border and then told the story of how he crossed the border, with many difficulties. Afterwards many young people from Gjakova crossed the border. A part of them got stuck at the border, even their families didn't know in the time of [King] Zog, in the time of Italy. It was very difficult, Fadil made it through, but he entered a school, he had no right to enter Kosovo and I remember when my parents said, my father and mother, "We will go to meet Fadil," and they couldn't meet closely to have a conversation, but one on that side of the border, and the other one on this side of the border and they had a conversation and saw each other from the distance. When the war started, I think the borders started opening as well. The Italians entered Kosovo as well. With them entering, this was united, in fact it seemed that we united with Albania, but we did not have our government.

Fahri, the brother older than Fadil, and this other brother Sani, Sani was his name, they went there to work, especially to run away, now that they were chasing Fadil to capture him. Then they... they tortured our family as well, but it is very interesting, when I start thinking about it now, our father was very patient during all that time, very enduring and he welcomed this war. He suffered a lot and then he and our family suffered a lot because we were hunted, and both brothers Fahri and Sani went to Tirana to work.

They were working there, Fahri was forced to join the partisan troops, but because of us, we were still a family with small children, he returned from the partisan army, went to Tirana with Sani and they caught him there, imprisoned him, because there were many spies in Kosovo. Spies are the people who entered the service of the enemy, and one among those well-known spies who is remembered in Gjakova was Ali Bokshi and there was this... I will think of his name now (laughs), a moment... maybe later I'll fill in. There were spies, they entered the service of the occupier... Beqir Maloku, they were the main servants.

So Ali Bokshi, Ali Bokshi a spy well known in Gjakova, even to children in the cribs, he was, so to say, a man of the neighborhood. How should I say this, he was ten houses away, serving there. And, on the

3<sup>rd</sup> of April of '43 I believe, they entered and burned down the whole of Gjakova. Our house was burned down, attacked first. Our house was attacked, I am calling them neighbors, they were so to speak neighbors, four houses away in the neighborhood, this is how Ali Bokshi was to us. The gunfire started and we were in the neighborhood, we were getting ready to go to sleep, *bum bum bum*. My eldest brother, my father told him, "Fahri, get away from here!" We hadn't done anything, we were staying at home, you know when... And he was, my father was old then, of course he was old. I don't remember how old. He left, my mother and father stayed, they sent us to the neighbor's, "You get over there, because we know our house is bound to be [destroyed]." They stayed at home, mother and father stayed at home.

We went to the neighbor's, as if it were to the neighbor's here {points with her hand}, they weren't under attack. They attacked us at our place because we presented a problem. They were about to go out, to open the gate, we had nothing, we went out to open the gate, to tell them, "Here you are, come!" But in Gjakova, (smiles) there is something very peculiar, the gates of Gjakova were very strong, the yard gates, no one in Kosovo had gates like those, I don't know why, made of thick wood, of... you may have the opportunity to see a gate, because they are still around, maybe some people still have them. He said, we didn't do anything, we went out, we opened the gates, we told them, "Here you are." They went to the middle of the yard, and they went to the middle of the yard with the lamp on their hands. My mother told my father, "You never know with these ones, they seem very mad. One shouldn't come across them." They left the lamp in the middle of the yard, and came to the neighbor's where we were. The fire reached the neighbor's, we had an older sister, they were older than I, I didn't get to do much. She was taking down the neighbor's clothes from the string, so that they wouldn't be burned. The fire reached the place, then my father came, but now the neighbors wouldn't let my father in. My father told them, "How come? There's no place for me to go, the army has entered my yard." He said, "I am going out, I am going out to the street." But he was an old man, and most likely out of fear, my father went to say another neighbor's, he crossed over the wall, the owner of the house pushed my father away, my father broke his leg, (laughs) he broke his leg.

My older sister was strong, young, a young round girl, now, she had to carry my father on her shoulders and go out to the street. We went out to the street, now, in the street, we too were behind them, our maternal uncle was close by, the uncle, my mother's brother, he took care of us a lot during the war. We went to his house and stayed there. So, that was another great hardship. But our great misfortune, during that time in Gjakova, was when we were looking for a house to rent after our own was burned down, we were looking to rent, to pay money to live in it. People living in the neighborhood would say, "No, you can't come here," "Why?" "Because they will come to you, and we will suffer along, the whole neighborhood will be burned down."

So the whole neighborhood rose, they wouldn't accept us, a part of it. Then the best neighborhoods of Gjakova accepted us, they were the neighborhoods of Dum, Çabrat and so on... you may not be familiar with Gjakova, we lived there as well, in the neighborhood of Mulla Jusuf, until the final liberation. My two brothers left, the eldest brother was hanged in '43, when they hanged them, they



took them to Tirana and imprisoned them. They imprisoned him in Prizren jail, my mother was in Prizren jail, our father was interned in Austria because the police came at night, we were sleeping when they came to take him to prison, they sent him to Austria, to a concentration camp.

Then, they took him as well... my brother, the one who remained in Tirana, he joined the Albanian partisan troops, my brother, Fahri Hoxha, was hanged in Gjakova. They didn't allow, they didn't give any notice, only my mother happened to be here. She went out, the women of Gjakova at that time used to wear the veil {wipes off her ears}, she went with her brother to the imams to plead with them, "Allow me to at least take him and bury him." They didn't allow her and so his death happened without anyone sending him off (crying). Ten people were buried in one place, and his remains were later exhumed, they are in Çabrat there, and we could never go and visit. It was a lifelong grief of ours. But the war had all these sacrifices. Material goods are nothing, goods come and go. People... we always felt great grief for the deceased brother.

In Austria, no one told my father that... that it happened, all his friends there knew about it, but they kept it a secret from him because it was bad news. It has... bad news travels fast and reaches everywhere. They didn't tell him, in '45 with the liberation, the Second World War ended, they were released from prison, they came and father had told my mother, and she used to tell us afterwards, "I didn't like it at all that people of Gjakova came out to greet us in such a big crowd, there must be something wrong." When he got home they told him so and so, they murdered him. But my father endured it and coped with it with manly strength.

But really, it was my mother who endured the entire war of Gjakova. We were, we would go to... but she had a brother who supported her a lot, she had a brother and he would carry us on his back, we went to her father's house, where we stayed until we built our own house, in the same place where our house had been burned, that is where our house was built. The same place where the old house was, in Çarshi e Vogël, everybody knows our house.

All of these are traumas, when you start telling about it, because when you get preoccupied, you sometimes get truly weak because the memories are still alive, regardless of the passing years. After the death of my brothers, now... to tell you the truth we were {counts fingers} father, mother, four brothers, three sisters, and of that family all that is left is I, the youngest, and the youngest brother. They are all gone, they've passed away, someone in the war, someone there, someone there and they have passed away. Our happy house, big, jolly, afterwards we couldn't... like that.

Then we all created our own lives, our own families, the ones who were alive, created and left children... The eldest one who was murdered, he left no one. He was engaged, he left his fiancé behind, the second brother left children, he left daughters. Then, they all have, we all have families, we brought up our families as we could. And our parents, and my father lived long, my mother lived long too, so they grew old.

I think that I take after them, because I too have grown into old age now (laughs). And aging, it is good, but it isn't pleasant. I also had an accident, I fell, it caused some damage, not little, but rather a lot.

And now what is worst, I have no right to complain. “Come on,” they tell me, “You were fine until now.” I was fine, that is true, but it is hard to put up with deformity.

And, I even fell in the room, it was fatal for me. Because [it didn’t happen] somewhere outdoors... I don’t know what happened, perhaps my blood pressure dropped... my blood pressure must have dropped, I don’t know.

**Jeta Rexha:** Tell us something, afterwards, after primary school?

**Myrvete Limani:** The thing after primary school, of course, the classes were completed in order. We had teachers then, who used to come from Albania initially. Then they started going to Albania for education, therefore we had also Gjakovar teachers and schools improved. Along primary schools we had secondary schools as well, and one of the first good schools that were organized was *Shkolla Normale*. The *Shkolla Normale* of Gjakova<sup>11</sup> is still valuable to this day. After completing primary school, *Shkolla Normale* was a secondary school, an equivalent of today’s category of professional schools.

Back then *Shkolla Normale* was needed because we had to generate teaching staff. Teaching staff was extremely necessary, that is, teachers to go to villages, to reach all over, to open schools, for school to be everywhere. Not one school, but more schools, because the people of Kosovo were young, there were many children. And one of the first schools was *Shkolla Normale*.

I am a student of *Shkolla Normale* along with a group of Gjakovars, as many as we were... we have different pictures. It was very popular, as to say today, “I have completed higher education in Kosovo,” it was that close. Beqir Kastrati used to be the director, the one whose name the street holds. Then teachers from Albania came in the beginning, because there were no teachers. And we completed the school with them, then *Shkolla Normale* started, several classes opened. I belong to the first class of *Shkolla Normale*, I have the class picture, too, which I can show you. And, schools opened in different places, so education started to develop. From *Shkolla Normale*, high schools started opening.

Of course, *Shkolla Normale* had longer teaching hours, the programs were harder, because with the transition to higher classes, there were different programs to match the age and education. And from that, higher education started here. We had, for instance, I was lucky to be in the first class of *Normale*. Then Belgrade started admitting us from *Shkolla Normale* to schools. A group of us friends of *Shkolla Normale* for instance, went to the Higher Pedagogical Schools in Belgrade, and I am one among those who went with my friends over to the Pedagogical School of Belgrade. We had problems because Gjakovars especially didn’t know the Serbian language, and I knew very little. I could understand, but communicating, for example when the time came to do a teaching internship, I had to learn by heart different sentences, and questions.

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<sup>11</sup> *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during WWII, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

I remember when I taught the first class in *Shkolla Normale*, they gave me an internship, as they are organized nowadays. First of all I apologized to the students, they were from Belgrade, grown up girls, well dressed girls and there was some fear that they won't respect you while you're teaching (laughs). And I remember very well I apologized, I told them, "You know what? I make mistakes because I don't know the Serbian language well to [teach] you."

I had different achievements, but of course with great effort, I completed the Higher Pedagogical School in Belgrade, History and Geography. I was successful, but also Kosovo needed us at that time. They wouldn't let you continue, some would allow it because they wanted to distribute us throughout Kosovo, because schools were opening like mushrooms. Schools were being opened, there was a necessity to have prepared teachers, and therefore in time the majority came back. I have a picture when I came back to Gjakova, immediately to the gymnasium<sup>12</sup> on duty, not waiting around if they took you in, but rather you would get an order, "Report tomorrow," or "Report today." That's how it was back then, we didn't have to wait one second. Therefore...

Then I registered for a higher level of education, but I gradually only completed one part, and missed out on completing the other because I started my family. I recalled... bear in mind, I wanted to respect the family, because no school is completed without the family suffering. Therefore, well, I have always been engaged, I was always praised. How shall I say this, I was working in political-social organizations. I was a member of the Committee [of the Communist League] in Gjakova and here in Pristina at the time of Mahmut Bakalli. I was in all the delegations of Party Congresses, Association of Veterans, Yugoslav Congress unions. I was a busy activist and I managed to get to all the places. I was independent then. But then again, the house, children, I gave birth to three sons (laughs), Lura's father, she has a perfect father. Because he is my son, but also because it is true. Don't you ever praise your father? (Laughs).

**Lura Limani:** Yes!

**Myrvete Limani:** I gave birth to three sons. I had an accident, my son completed education, the youngest one, here is his picture {points at the picture behind her}. An excellent architect, they were all excellent in their studies, he passed away. After my son passed away I didn't go out to town anymore, I shut myself. That was impossible! When I was younger I went to these meetings, to... but afterwards I couldn't attend them. I grieved a lot for him. He was very smart, not because he was my child but it came... You never know.

After my son's death, five years after his death, Xhahit, the father, passed away, their grandfather. Their father was a wonderful person. He was from Prizren, a school friend during the whole time, so we nearly grew up together. He was from Prizren, I was from Gjakova. He was a perfect man, so all this grief that I have didn't fade away, but rather it got more and more intense. But there is a time when

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<sup>12</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

you can't stand it anymore. Thank God I have a full family here now, I have two sons with their children, with everything and all the best. I have a happy life, but with grief, with grief.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What did it feel like to go from Gjakova to Belgrade?

**Myrvete Limani:** It was an excellent feeling. It was as if going to a European country, a big life achievement. We were thrilled, thrilled when we went to Belgrade for education. They welcomed us, later they started, because relationships worsened, but they also appreciated us. Now I won't get into it, but even here we say, about schools, that this school is stronger or weaker, more than that, they have also helped us a lot.

I did tell you that I... we Gjakovars don't know Serbian to this day, in Gjakova not at all, not at all... I have nephews and I told them, "How come? It's a shame not to know." He said, "If we speak Serbian they will say, 'You're a traitor!'" And truly the Serbs were tried, they wreaked havoc in Gjakova. We had a street in Gjakova, it was called *Rruga e Shkijeve*,<sup>13</sup> they all knew Albanian, they were all organized in youth organizations after the liberation, they turned out to be killers and murdered many Gjakovars during the last war. Entire families were extinguished by these Serbs from Gjakova. You wouldn't believe it, and we have always been much forthcoming in friendship with them. But they knew Albanian too, however there was a separate street called *Rruga e Shkijeve*, a bit of localism of course, but they saved it to avenge. And we always, we Albanians very open, very sincere, very... I don't know how to say it to you. We never looked at them with hateful eyes - is he a good person, is he responsible -, independently from whether he is a Serb or what, we were always polite. But now they've proven, at the end of this war they've proven to be very bad.

### Part Three

**Lura Limani:** Were there *Ballists*<sup>14</sup> in Gjakova during the war?

**Myrvete Limani:** Yes, there were.

**Lura Limani:** Did you recognize the families, did you know each other?

**Myrvete Limani:** You're asking an interesting question (laughs). *Ballists* were against partisans. *Ballists* were with *Balli Kombëtar*.<sup>15</sup> *Balli Kombëtar* did not support the National Liberation War, the National Liberation, it was liberation, the freedom of the nation. *Ballists* were in the service of the

<sup>13</sup> Literally, the Street of Serbs. *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.) is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

<sup>14</sup> Members of *Balli Kombëtar*.

<sup>15</sup> *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

invaders. And to tell you the truth, on this interesting matter, when I was very young I dealt a bit with politics as well. I don't know if I did, or what was I doing, even now I don't know when I analyze it. I wanted to tell you something, but I won't because I am afraid you will record it {she addresses the interviewer}. The *Ballists* wore white hats like Albanians. In fact, they were, this, they were greater nationalists than Albanians are today and Albanians' goal was always to unite with all Albanians, but it seems that it will never happen, although they are... *Balli Kombëtar* was in the service of the Germans and Italians. As they say, the trend, these were the trend.

I remember we were once in a line, as children line up when they are to be taken to the schoolyard, the bell rang and we were lining up and every teacher would come out to bring their class. And this is what took place in primary schools, we waited, the bell rang, we lined up, everyone went in with their teacher. I won't tell you, but I made a mistake with a teacher of mine. With that mistake, he got me into prison but I wasn't aware of it. A child, just a child, I don't even know how old was I. And I saw him wearing a *plis*,<sup>16</sup> and we partisans, communists, these were fair people, because they were all fair, because they were demanding liberation from Italians, Germans, from all, they were partisans. *Ballists* were in the service... again in the service of the invader, with Italians, with those ones. The sort of politics that no one can put limits on.

**Lura Limani:** And what happened with the teacher?

**Myrvete Limani:** And then, I made a mistake, I feel bad to say [the word] because you will record it (smiles)... nothing, they put me in jail. When they put me in jail, they put me under the school's staircase, you know where they stored the wood. I... I said a word openly and they put me in prison. "Come!" They got me out of the line and put me in, I must have been maybe ten years old. Maybe more, I don't know. I was put into prison. We were in school, we had our own group of friends, there was Cen Zherka, there were these, we were the same age, friends with each other, who stood for and protected each other. And they put me in prison, that teacher, when I said that word (laughs), and they put me in prison. I was afraid, I was thinking what if mice came through the stairs, because they kept their wood there, each school had a place under their staircase, surrounded by bars so they could store the wood for winter. They didn't keep me there too long, but I am still ashamed of what I said. And I can't say it. If the camera was off I would tell you, because no one would have believed it.

**Lura Limani:** OK, shall we stop it?

**Myrvete Limani:** He came out wearing a *plis*, and it made an impression on me, he came out as a representative of *Balli Kombëtar* and I, being of a different, different trend, more progressive, but I was a child. Anyway... let's stop it here. But I remember that I made a mistake. What I said was wrong. That man, even the man himself noticed and I was there in the line, he made a sound, I didn't like it. In a word I let him know that he was serving the invader, and it was very wrong, I was a student, a child. But the teacher showed mercy because he could have slapped me in the face (laughs), burn my face.

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<sup>16</sup> Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

So that's how it is, youth, school, there are good memories... although I was always good, because we girls are better-behaved, we always were, in school and...

Afterwards I used to teach, I really liked teaching. I was successful in schools anywhere I went, I believe I was successful in all the areas that I worked in.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What sort of work have you done throughout your life?

**Myrvete Limani:** Excuse me?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What have you worked during your life?

**Myrvete Limani:** During my life, I was initially in the gymnasium of Gjakova. From there I went to the gymnasium of Prizren. From Prizren we came to Pristina, I worked in education, from there I worked in all political-social organizations dealing with higher education, I was involved in all forums. By the end I was the director of all kindergartens in Pristina, they had asked me even earlier to take an official position, but I didn't want to because I had three sons, I was thinking they should have a warm home because otherwise young people go out to street, for food, for lunches, for... prepared food. So, there were successes everywhere. Then I was in all the Party or union forums, the Association of Veterans, I attended the Congresses: {counts fingers} the Congress of the Yugoslav Party, the Associations of Veterans of Yugoslavia, all forums. Wherever there were delegations, I was always first. I was successful.

Then when I went to work with these children, I worked with children indirectly, I had five-six facilities, then we built new facilities, new facilities. Pristina still has them, it's a success. Then I worked with all the kindergartens throughout Kosovo. We opened them, and in the year 1970 we went to Albania.

Albania was very wild in the year 1970. Our delegation from Kosovo, from Pristina, imagine, when we went there, in kindergartens there was poverty, misery, you couldn't imagine. Kindergartens here were very much up to date, very much. Then we cooperated throughout Kosovo, we supported each other, we would have exchange visits among staff, it was an impressive coordination. They've asked me in several places, but I didn't really want to take on long-term commitments because of the family, I wanted to protect my family, to protect the people.

Then the father of my children, here is his picture {points at the picture behind her}, was a perfect man. A healthy family that can rarely be found anywhere in Kosovo. He died after Shpend, the son whose name was Shpend, the youngest. He graduated in architecture, with all excellent grades. All my three children, they have all graduated university. But I don't know, he started suffering an illness, after him, I closed myself in. I took it very hard. Then I got even more isolated. But that wasn't right either, it wasn't right because now I feel even more pain. Everything should be taken in stride, you can't do anything for anyone, nothing comes back, it doesn't come back. I would advise everyone that natural things should be received normally. As normally as you can, if you can't, then nothing. So... afterwards I got isolated from an extraordinary activity. I was burned out, I was burned out. I don't know...

**Lura Limani:** Will you tell us about the times, when you went to the gymnasium of Gjakova?

**Myrvete Limani:** Yes, here's the picture.

**Lura Limani:** But when? Will you tell us about a particular episode?

**Myrvete Limani:** In 1951.

**Lura Limani:** Will you tell us about those times in the '50s?

**Myrvete Limani:** Eh?

**Lura Limani:** Will you tell us about those times in the '50s?

**Myrvete Limani:** I love that place a lot because it is my place, and I love all Gjakovars a lot. We had a very good working staff. So, for the first time we went to the gymnasium, it meant a lot, it was a huge success. Therefore, we have good memories of Gjakova. Then, the political-social activities, we were everywhere, in Gjakova, too.

I want to tell you another thing because I just remembered. At that time all women of Gjakova were covered in *çarshaf*,<sup>17</sup> not only of Gjakova, but all over Kosovo. Young, old, they were all covered in *çarshaf*, you've seen how they look like in *çarshaf*. And now, there was an action in Gjakova to remove the *çarshaf*. How old was I, I was young, I don't know if I was even ten, twelve years old, I mean, for the veil. I was working with the women to do that... because there were women's association, the older women, And I was working with them. We had an action to go to each family and to convince them that your mother, your sister are covered and have to remove the *çarshaf*. And this was a broad action, to unveil the women, it was very difficult. Then in Gjakova you never saw anyone walk freely like we do, in *çarshaf*, you've heard, you've seen what the *çarshafis*. That was the primary duty, to take it off.

And as young as I was, I was going with women, I was working there, I was staying with them, we were engaged. We were successful, the *çarshaf* was taken off in Gjakova. Then gradually it was taken off throughout Kosovo, they took it off throughout Kosovo. There were different educational courses organized by the Party. We learned, you know when we went to do a duty, they would give us advice, there was a Committee, there was... They used to be organized then, and then there was nothing like, I am working more than you, you're working less, or in terms of friendships everyone was getting along with everyone, and they were successful. Then when we returned from Belgrade, immediately the job, immediately the decision, immediately, no waiting, no going to talk with anyone to ask... We had privileges, but we also worked very hard, the generation of that time, then of course we dispersed. In Prizren then, Prizren was the same, it was good in Prizren as well.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did you prompt women to take off the *çarshaf*? How were they being encouraged?

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<sup>17</sup> *Çarshaf* or *çarçaf*, in Albanian literally a cover, in this case a light cloth, usually black, that Muslim women put on when out in public. Similar to the *niqab*, scarf or veil.



**Myrvete Limani:** Just like that, we prompted them openly, “The time has come to remove the *çarshaf!*” Trust. All political-social organizations, everyone had a duty in their own family. My mother, too, was wearing the *çarshaf*, at least her I remember well. When the time came to remove the *çarshaf*, gatherings were organized like nowadays when they go out in... in the square. All women, there are pictures and what not, [they] took off the *çarshaf*, someone took it off nervously, someone took it off calmly. My mother was feeling embarrassed, she was saying, “I am old, how can I take off the *çarshaf?*” They had to go out in the square, there are pictures, live pictures, they were taking it off, they were uncovering. The ones who were young would put on new suits, coats, raincoats, they did their hair at the barbers, hairdressers and they would go out. We would go after them, to keep them company, we the younger ones. The young girls used to cover, young girls, right after they started developing a little, had to be more private. It wasn’t like now, everything *slobodë*.<sup>18</sup>

Now there’s no more [strict mores], then there was [freedom] none then. Then even if you did, you’d do it in hiding, otherwise you’d be ostracized. But that time was terrible, a pity. But even for nowadays, even this is too much. The middle ground is always stable and very good, very necessary. Everything at its own time, with own behavior to... I still fail to understand and feel sorry when I see someone being so free at their work to do other things as well, they’re not allowed and are harmful to people. There is nothing better than honor and morals. That’s when you are free anywhere, in hundred years, in two hundred and one, to enter a country, a city freely, that it humanly important. There are things that I don’t like now, of course I won’t speak of it, neither do I speak of anyone, everyone should take care of themselves. But they are harmful... I take it you are young now, but they are harmful, they don’t belong to the generation in that shape, just that, just that. Maybe this is conservative, maybe what I am saying makes no sense, but then of course I am older, I’ve lived through different times, and even if I am wrong... I like special respect. I respect people and I like to be respected.

**Lura Limani:** Where did you meet with Xhahid and how did you meet?

**Myrvete Limani:** Xhahid was my classmate in *Shkolla Normale*. We were very good friends, very good friends, each in their own work, but there are moments that happened afterwards. There are moments, because without moments you can’t get together with anyone. But, we were together in school in Belgrade as well. A very appropriate friend, not that I want to say this, but that is how he was, that is how he was. Certainly those were different times, you couldn’t go and... otherwise you couldn’t go to school. And now, now it’s a different time, I can’t set them, I am not a person who can put limit on times. As time passes, it develops, brings useful things, I... But no, we had nothing. You know, we were good friends. In this understanding – good friends.

**Lura Limani:** OK, I didn’t think of it. I meant to ask you...

**Myrvete Limani:** Yes, yes, like that. I want to say just like that, just like with any other friend. The time comes, you don’t even know it yourself, the time comes when you decide.

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<sup>18</sup> From the Serbian word *Sloboda*, freedom.



**Lura Limani:** Then you got married and what...

**Myrvete Limani:** Well, all normal, we followed all natural laws.

**Lura Limani:** Will you tell us how you got married, and then went to Prizren?

**Myrvete Limani:** Take a look at it, I have a picture when I was a bride, I have the picture. They came to ask my father for my hand.

**Lura Limani:** Yes?

**Myrvete Limani:** The most important thing is to know what the family is like. We weren't familiar with Prizren, because I was a Gjakovar, he was from Prizren. But a good lad, a good friend like any other friend. So it was a known fact that usually every family, when they were to engage their daughters, would check the family. Families are checked whether they are a gentry's family that had no problem in their life. I mean, bad kind of trouble, because there are families and have their strengths and faults. Then families with tradition, are they respected in town? And we didn't know Xhahid's family, my father didn't know them. There are people that deal with that sort of thing, and so Xhahid's family came out to be a very good family from Prizren, with traditions and all, and it appeared to be so.

Usually in the past, families in Gjakova and anywhere in Kosovo, when the daughters were to be engaged, they checked the families as well. There are problematic families, there are families that are wild, there are families that are murderers, there are poor families, there are families that are not respected by their fellow citizens, these are the things I'm talking about. A family that is respected by their fellow citizens and had no life troubles, I mean, for at least two or three generations, that is a good family. Having a good family is a matter of nurturing relationships and having good relationships with others, because relationships can break down with people who are evil, with people that are... For instance, in a good family, even if there is no money, no food to eat, you are patient, you will tolerate that family. You entered a poor family, that maybe can't provide the living conditions for you, but you won't say no, that's not it, and then leave.

Marriage should be the most balanced thing in life, because children will come as well, then for bringing-up children you need to make sure that they grow up and leave good things behind. Those I call good families, where at least two-three generations didn't make trouble. Their welfare is sometimes poorer, sometime... you can even be poor, but when you are in a good family, you tolerate it, you tolerate it. And when you are in a bad family, "Have I nothing to eat here, and that..." and to say, "No, I won't live." You must accept that family with all its good and bad. When I say bad, I mean the economic conditions, not other things, I am not talking about other details, that isn't humanly just. Because where there is no education, that is what's missing, humanity is missing. Then, when they are young, people make mistakes sometimes. When people explode because of those mistakes, that is a huge mistake... we are all human.

## Part Four

**Jeta Rexha:** Perhaps you could now start telling us about the '90s?

**Myrvete Limani:** I would ask you to speak a bit louder because...

**Jeta Rexha:** Can you hear me?

**Myrvete Limani:** Yes, yes, I can, I am just asking you questions time after time.

**Jeta Rexha:** No, it doesn't matter. About the 1990s and then you start telling about the war.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Perhaps you could start from the year 1989 when the Kosovo autonomy was suppressed.

Myrvete Limani: I will talk a bit about the '80s demonstrations. I will never forget, those were huge demonstrations, and hostile that... *shkijet* got really furious. Fadil got out, there was no other way, because Fadil was there and he found out because he was a member of the high forums in Belgrade. As usual, Serbs prepared a plan to come to Kosovo and eliminate the Albanian youth, eliminate it. There was no other way, do you know what it means no other way but go out and tell these people, the youth, "Be careful because," he used a very unpleasant expression. But he had no right... he had right. How shall I say this, because Serbs got ready to eliminate, he was there and he heard it, because they wanted to discharge him, too, and all Albanians that were there. And they made up their minds to murder the Kosovar youth, murder Albanians. "You," as in, "move away, don't stay in the streets because..." Someone took it terribly. I, in order to show how much I hate you, the other one will say that I am ready to take your life. But how can I let you know, tell you to be careful, because you are being marked for death, and Fadil wasn't to blame.

Anyway, Fadil was discharged afterwards. I don't know how did Fadil survive, he had a life. How many times did Serbs decide to eliminate him. He didn't fight with Serbs, he fought in a brotherly way, thinking that Kosovo will win its independence, that Kosovo will separate and so. But war is a dirty war. Then others come and take away our rights. Check this out, you are independent, a democracy, yet they've taken North Mitrovica. What can you do? They're not letting them build homes, that's what Serbs are like. And one has no right to speak well about them. Although we are full of anger, now that I am saying, today I only speak freely with you because it's shameful. And now we need to permit, the Special Court,<sup>19</sup> the sentencing of Albanians, and so on.

The war of the '90s was a war of hope, of hope. The war started, then liberation. Fadil was saying, "I am old, otherwise I would wear *opanga*,<sup>20</sup> I would go to the woods, they are not going to win independence, the world is not going to give it to you. Serbs won't give it to you, the world won't give it to you." Then it had to be done through politics with Tito, push and pull, because I have met Tito on

<sup>19</sup> Special Tribunal to prosecute former KLA members for crimes committed during the war from January 1998 through December 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Albanian leather shoes like moccasins.

several occasions, when I was a member of delegations and so on. There was no other way, can you take a group of Albanians, Kosovars to... but it was great luck that there were many republics, otherwise if we were to be only with Serbs {rubs the palms of her hands}, we would have been leveled to the ground. We had Croatia, Slovenia, they supported us more or less. Politics is a very dirty thing.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Where were you when the demonstrations of 1981 happened?

**Myrvete Limani:** In '81, I was in the facility in Ulpiana, I had many facilities with little children. I was staying in the yard to make sure no one is coming to the children, because even parents couldn't come to collect the children either. It was like this {puts her hands together}. And this is where Xhahid's family was, at home here, I stayed there. I was thinking, they might come in and take away my children, and I stayed protecting the children to the last moment. They started because they couldn't go out, because there was a big crowd up there in the hill by the students and there, you know where Ulpiana is. I stayed there, in the yard, I was thinking someone will approach me, but no, no one can take my children unless I go myself. And I stayed there, until they started withdrawing, withdrawing. Parents came one by one to collect their children, parents came to collect their children, until the last child was gone, only then did I leave to go home.

When they arrived, I left to go home, it was like this {shows the crowd with hands}, I was thinking someone will shoot me now. Because I too, had adversaries among Serbs, the whole staff, a big part of it and in the school Aca Marović, and I had Serbs in the kindergarten as well. They were openly opposing me, it was very open. I and politics, with all that, there was no other way around it, no other way. Either one was political, or go suffer and close down, you couldn't even work. You had to protect those children, who would turn their children to the hands of Serbs unless I was there or... another educator, or... an Albanian. I had a very difficult job. We had seven or eight facilities, you have it at home, you have your child at home and you're afraid of what might happen to your child, at home, right here your child. Never mind the children of foreigners, different ones until they would come back from work, I had a very difficult job. But I was successful, oh God. Thank God, I never made even the slightest mistake.

And then the newspapers started writing. Do you know what they wrote about me, whoa, I was an enemy and beyond. "She didn't take in Albanian children, she is not looking after Serbian children... no, she did not admit Serbian children, they are all Albanian." There were seven or eight big facilities. Three in Ulpiana, then in Kodra e Diellit, then in Obiliq, then we had...

I told you how many facilities we had, three in Ulpiana, in Obiliq one, in Kodra e Diellit two in Kodra e Diellit, five or six facilities and four new big facilities were built. Each facility of course with certain number of children, and children were admitted upon request: this many Albanian children, this many Serbian, according to this. And someone's children got admitted, there were Albanians that got upset because theirs didn't get admitted. Then we were funded by the Social BVI [Self-managing Community of Interests] of Pristina. The Social BVI of Pristina was run by Serbs, there was one Montenegrin and one Serb. And when we went to the meetings, we were in the meeting where the budget was being

dispersed, where the salaries were being administered, on the budget for the facilities, because we had the central kitchen as well, they ate and drank there.

You had to ask for funding, they were now making an issue out of it. For example, this much money I need, this much money I need, funding. There was a Serb, or two there, and they were all against me. And now they were liking it, they were trying very hard so that I'd tell them, "Why," I would tell, "*Zašto ti vi verujete samo njoj, zato što je Srпкиnja, a meni ne verujete* [Why do you trust only her, because she is a Serb, but you don't trust me]." Anyway, but there was one of them, Jovica Ivančević. He was good, he tried, he tried really hard when I would stand, "*Myrveta, dobit ćeš sve!* [Myrvete, you will get everything!]" He would tell me "*dobit ćeš sve.*" But there was an Albanian, a very bad man. And the Albanian does you the greatest wrong. I won't say his second name because you must know him, I'd feel bad [for people] to hear. So I want to tell you that I went through a lot of hardship, I had a very hard duty. Then children had to go out safely. They'd get hurt or that, oh. Then mothers would come, they'd say, "You are taking them in by favoritism, you're favoring this one, you're not favoring the other."

One came and criticized me whether I was admitting children through bribery, when she told me so, I held her by the arm, I thought I was going to tear her apart. I went to... I was very harsh as well, I went to the Secretary, and he told me, "Director, please take it easy," she said. "No, no I didn't." "No," I said, "You will say who took the money. You will either tell us now who took the money, or you will be labeled otherwise." I held her, I tore her, she upset me so much. I thought, maybe someone took money, an employee or someone else. It was a very hard job, very difficult job.

Then we had many facilities under our mandate. You have a child at your home and you are afraid, it might get hurt or else... I worked very hard. I was successful everywhere, but I was very honest in my work and I was seriously engaged.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** When did the first preschool in Kosovo open?

**Myrvete Limani:** I was not here when the first preschools started here, I was in Prizren, than later I worked in schools. Preschool came by chance, they were offering me to work in school as principal, but I didn't want to because I was thinking I have three sons, it's better for them to have a warm home, let them come eat at home, rather than in the streets. So even later when I worked in conferences I was like this.

I had a mother-in-law, she was a good woman from Prizren, she was old. She was praying all day long, she was Xhahid's mother, a good woman. I was thinking, let me have a home, when you have... even your husband is calm when your home is in order. If the house is not in order, even the husband will run out of the house. Those were my duties. But I did work, I was never out of work, I always worked.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Where were you during the last war in 1999?

**Myrvete Limani:** Did I tell you?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** No, we spoke about the year 1990, 1989... 1981, and now...

**Myrvete Limani:** Did I tell you that during the National Liberation War we were in the highlands of Albania. That is very important.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Will you tell us?

**Myrvete Limani:** I will tell you this first, see, I forgot it. The actions, now that Fadil was a commander, the actions he took on, we who were in Kosovo, in Gjakova, our home, we were people who were being held. If he took on an action, they hanged our brother, they imprisoned the other one. They imprisoned our father, they burned down our house, they did everything to us. The biggest misfortune, when they burned down our house, we were looking for a house to rent, people in the neighborhood were afraid to let a house to us. Why were they afraid? Because they were saying, "An action against you will affect the neighborhood as well, the neighborhood will be damaged too." Therefore, we were at big risk, all of us who were in Gjakova, my old father, mother, she was old enough as well, we were of various ages. My brother was the main one and he had to, those who were hostages, we were the hostages there.

They burned down the house on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1943. No one in the neighborhood wanted us, imagine. People were afraid because, "If they come to harm you, it will affect the neighbors aside and across." We also had a maternal uncle, he looked after us. And my uncle, we stayed a long time in my uncle's house. And Fadil, seeing that there was a big risk involved, would say, "I can't take on any action. You are hostages, they would kill you, they would..." He sent us a message, our father was imprisoned, he sent a letter to mother saying, "Take the girls, take the two younger brothers," Emin and Skender, "and come join the partisans." The partisans got organized here, and we went to the highlands of Albania, to Dushaj. They placed us in a house there, and we stayed in Dushaj until the war was over.

Then the Partisan League that we had in Gjakova brought us here, they smuggled us through the border, as you would say. How did we cross, we crossed somehow and got to the highlands. We got through Tropoja and entered the highlands of Albania. They placed us in Dushaj with a very good family, and the family had taken the duty to look after us. A partisan used to live there with us, it was Zenel Ahmeti. He was there with his wife and three daughters, they were all grown-up. And throughout the night the villagers would come and stay in his house to guard us. Until the end of the Second World War, when we were liberated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, we were in Dushaj until then. From there we came to Tropoja. In Tropoja we stayed in the house of Gjakovan Spahi, he had a shop and we stayed there. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Gjakova was liberated.

That sister of mine was... because she went with the partisans, I couldn't, because I was too young, and they didn't take me. I, two brothers and my mother were in Dushaj, we stayed there. We lived there several months, I can't remember now how many months, I shouldn't talk by heart now, because I was just a child. Then we came back, on the 9<sup>th</sup> Gjakova was liberated I think, in September, I don't know, I forgot these dates, except the liberation date of Gjakova. She went with the partisans, my

oldest sister Nexhmije, Nexhmije was her name. In fact she was later married in Peja. And so... we only came afterwards.

My father came later, they released him from the Nazi camp in Switzerland, he was only released later. So we had a life, a remarkable life...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Shall we talk now about the last war, about 1999?

**Myrvete Limani:** About 1999, I heard Fadil say with my own ears, "I am too old, otherwise I would have put on *opanga* and would have gone out." He was taking it very hard that he could not help, here some financial assistance somehow, but we were having really high hopes that there will be victory.

But then they started coming, they came here, from the neighborhood, we had Serbian neighbors. They climbed over the wall here, where the rose bushes are and seven or eight armed people came into our house. They knew who we were, we had prepared a place to sleep in the basement. We had brought in things, and blankets so we could sleep in the basement, at that time they were throwing bombs as well and we could have... Then when we saw that we were at high risk, we were at risk, these girls were small then, they filled in their little school bags with a change of clothes, and we left the house. The house has no value, a newly-built house.

Ilir took us, the other son was living in an apartment. We went to take Dukagjin, the neighbors came out saying, "Dukagjin is not here." They had taken him the previous night, put him in a line to be expelled to Albania. We left, when we got to the station there they were – the police. They spoke with Ilir, they took his car. They told him, "Give us your car, we'll give it back to you when the war is over." He gave them the paperwork, the car, we got on the train and went to Albania.<sup>21</sup>

When we went to Albania it was winter time, harsh snow. I was very ill. And then, we stayed like that in the cold. The Macedonians did not accept us, they left us on that platform. There were thousands of people, mud, soil, cold, disaster. Even I, we slept and stayed in the mud. They brought some plastic sheets, there were hundreds of Albanians, hundreds. Some died, some couldn't bear it, many people died. Macedonians wouldn't let us go to Skopje.

At last, a colleague of Ilir had a house in Macedonia. They [the police] barely let us in, we went to his house, he took us in. We stayed there for two months, maybe longer. And this is how we got through that. It was a good family, Ilir was colleagues with that friend, a university professor, they worked together. I can't remember the names now. But it was a good family, they looked after us until Kosovo was liberated and then we came back here.

When we got here, they were watching through satellite TV, they were saying they didn't burn your house. The house was saved, we came to this house where we were before. In Gjakova they made a slaughter, but not in our family, no one was murdered in our family. In Gjakova all sons and families,

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<sup>21</sup>The speaker corrects herself below, it was Macedonia, not Albania.

everyone in the house was listening to the names of those families, Serbs made a slaughter in Gjakova. And so... what else to tell you?

So we got liberated, what did we win when we got liberated? No one recognizes Kosovo. Thanks to America, even they... otherwise we were going to be worse than we ever were. Americans helped us, they helped us. We arrived, now again I don't know if they helped us, but they have both helped us and crippled us. They are not happy. Now instead of minding the country, jobless people are leaving Kosovo, they have no food to eat. What else can I tell you, there's nothing else to tell you. Unsatisfied, and they are not capable of forming a proper government. They are fighting against each other {claps hands}. It's just like if I said bad things about you, where is the friendship then, where is the goodness. Curse... there's nothing for me to say, nothing to say, don't ask me anymore as I may have negative expressions.

*[The interviewer asks about the dreams that the interviewee had when she was young, about the objectives that she has achieved and how she feels nowadays.]*

Independently of the fact that you heard that I have survived wars and everything, and all the suffering we went through, I have been very happy in the end. My family was very healthy. My father's family and where I was brought up, was even healthier. Therefore, all my memories are good, excellent, and I am proud and I praise it with clear consciousness. The well-known house of ours, of my family, and of my husband, it is an honorable family of Prizren. I had an excellent life, I would never have wished for better. War is war, it takes through its way, and it has its sufferings. Life paths that I have survived both when in my father's house, and in my husband's house, I was very lucky. But I also tried to preserve this tradition because I contributed to it as well.

I don't think I made any mistakes in my life, I don't think so. I was respected, anyone who has known me or has spoken to me, they have respected me, I was respected in all instances. I am proud of my life, my family, my families, of my father, my mother, my brothers, sisters, of everyone. We are unblemished. I like an open, but controlled life. I... I don't like it when I see scattered youth, it should be wholesome, close to human norms, that is what I like. I don't like some norms that are loose and uncontrolled, that's what I mean. Let them come forward, the ones that can point a finger at me, let them come forward. All the best... I am very proud of my family, of my husband's family, of my children, and then my father's family and all the relatives. There is no one in the family that has a single flaw, the women, the brides, have all the best [qualities]. I am very, very proud. At least, maybe I am feeling a bit bad for saying this as thanks God there are many more families like mine, but it is perfect, it's perfect.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Thank you.

**Myrvete Limani:** We were very lucky, because one is enough to ruin your order, very lucky. I was praised at work, both me and all my children, and they were excellent in their studies. My son who passed away, oh Lord, he was a special miracle. Ilir and Dukagjin, my grandsons, my granddaughters, maybe I am bragging a lot, but feel free to ask. Here, you know some of the girls here, we are very

proud. I am without a blemish. I didn't need my health to deteriorate like this, but it happened, there's nothing I can do. Until a year ago I was as strong as an oak tree, an oak tree. Truly, old age arrived, but a controlled age, an age with its rules, with memories, with everything, with work, all usual.

And, it's interesting this thing of mine, at least they are all surprised by it, the things from my childhood, since the age of six or seven, I remember them. And no one has told me personally, "Remember these!" but I heard them once and they've rested in my head. And they are surprised, but I fell recently, it has damaged me, it has damaged me, it has damaged me. If I only had peace for the remaining time ahead of me, then it would be a perfect praise. Well, well, I am proud of my life, of my family and all my families before. You've had a chance to hear, there is no one amongst us, not even a distant relative that has made mistakes. This was our fate, this is how the origin was maintained, like this. Then Xhahid's well-known family in Prizren. And I have accepted him because we differed very little from each other, Gjakova and Prizren, they speak Turkish, we speak Albanian. What, what a perfect family.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Thank you.