

INTERVIEW WITH LULJETA MYFTARI BAJRI

Peja | Date: February 7, 2015

Duration: 127 minutes

Present:

1. Luljeta Myftari Bajri (Speaker)
2. Lura Limani (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (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.

Childhood

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to introduce herself and talk about her childhood.]

Luljeta Bajri: I am Luljeta Bajri, I was born in Peja, as they say, in the fire of the war, in 1943, from my father, Emrush Myftari, and my mother Hajrie Mekuli Myftari. It is a little painful to talk about my childhood, but yet, people experience many more difficult events in their life. We had the fate, my brother Kujtim and I, that when we were very young we were orphan of our father, in the year...Sometime in the end of 1944, or in the beginning of 1945 they executed him, they shot him in Pristina, at a place called Strelishte, somewhere in today Tokbahçja. And at that place, of course, they also executed many other people, patriots, different personalities, and from that day till today, he remains without a proper burial.

I have much to say about the history of my family, even though I heard it from others. After the death of my father, I was about one years old and some when dad died, while my mother was pregnant, and four, five months after the execution of my father, she gave birth to a boy, my brother Kujtim, whose name was the *amanet*¹ of my father, who wanted the name Kujtim because he saw how events were unfolding and he expected that something would happen to him.

I must also talk a little about the history of my father. My father was the third brother, the youngest. There were also two other brothers, Sherif and Xheladin, and my father Emrush. My oldest paternal uncle, Sherif, was a man with very progressive ideas. It seems that back then he was part of the movement for democratization... there were movements for unity, I mean, Serbs and Albanians, for the democratization of society. He wanted that my father continue school and he sent him [to school], I mean, once he finished elementary school, in the beginning he did not like it much, he was not good

¹ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

in school, he was not a good student.

But he had a friend, a professor in the gymnasium² of Peja, a Serb, an old professor who also had progressive ideas about national equality and everything... And it was true that Emrush had a natural intelligence and he said, he addressed my uncle, saying, "What does this boy want?" "He does not want to go to school, I don't know what to do. I am busy with work in the house and with business and other things..." he said. "Do you put me in charge of preparing him?" And this professor prepared him, and saw that he registered to school, I mean, after elementary school he went to the gymnasium, in the gymnasium he distinguished himself as the best student in fact, he wrote great essays. Since they were so good, they were read from class to class...then, at the time, school was in Serbo-Croatian.

After he finished the gymnasium, this professor proposed that he went to Belgrade and apply [to the lycée] with a friend, Veli Dedi, who was from Medvegja. In Belgrade they did not accept them, I mean, they came back and my father came back with his friend very demoralized about everything. Of course my uncle too was upset by what had happened, so they prepared the terrain to go to Albania illegally. I mean, Emrush and Veli Dedi went, they went to Albania. Also some other people from Peja went to Albania, I think Shaban Basha, Xhemajl Kada, and these went earlier. And they all decided where to go to school. Veli Dedi and my father went to the lycée of Korça while Shaban Basha and Xhemajl Kada went to Torino to finish military school there.

Of course in Korça, in the French lycée of Korça, they met many personalities of the time, and as my father's friends told me, he was of the same generation of Enver Hoxha. I mean, they knew each other since the lycée of Korça. After they finished the lycée of Korça, it was the time then, the period of King Zog, you know, in Albania. There was the need for military cadres then and all, with Veli Dedi, went to military school, I mean, the military academy at the time of Zog and they completed it successfully. However, the situation in Albania of course was not as it should have been. They had progressive ideas, they were more open.

And at that time, I mean in the year 1937, the war in Spain broke out. It is then that my father, Veli Dedi, Xhemajl Kada, and Shaban Basha, went to the Spanish war as volunteers and Justina Shkupi, a nurse who had finished her specialization, I think, in Italy or France, I don't know, and she was a friend of Mother Theresa, they finished nursing school together. They said that she too went as a volunteer, she was a Kosovar, you know, she too. They went to the Spanish war also from Albania and from Macedonia, it seems to me also from Montenegro, I mean, they were together, as they say, the cream of Albanian intellectuals, from all Albanian populated lands.

However, they were organized in the Garibaldi Battalion, whose secretary or leader was Luigi Longo, a

² A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

known Italian personality, who later after liberation became the head of the Italian Communist Party, I think so, if I am not mistaken. And there I think they had contacts [with great people], I mean, they were in the framework of the Garibaldi Battalion, there, they met many people who had come from all over Europe. For example, there were also well known writers, such as Orwell, later there was Hemingway, there were many other personalities of culture, arts, writers. And there, I think they also had contacts with great people.

Every group of these volunteers also published magazines, journals, of course the English in English, the Italians in Italian. The Albanians, as the smallest group... also because a scholar who studied... a Spaniard, I don't remember, I think her name was Suarez, I don't remember the first name, I don't remember the name, she studied this group of Albanian volunteers in Spain, and said that, proportionally to the population, they had not been a small group. And, what is best, they all had military skills. The majority had been in military academies or military high schools, I mean, they were prepared.

My father was an artillery officer and there, as they explained it to me, there was also the writer Petro Marko from Albania. I mean, they established very good social relationships, Petro Marko was younger and to protect him... he had talent for writing, at that time my father did not let him go to the front, he took him to the Italians and said, "He is a good writer and a journalist, it is much more in our interest to have him report and write what happens," I mean, in the war, at the front, "rather than having him killed in the war."

A group of 15 [students] from the elementary school 8 Marsi [March 8] went to Albania on a field trip, I don't know how it was agreed that we went, and when we arrived in Durres, in one hotel there... in the hallway, they told me there, where we were in a group, a man called me and told me, "We are waiting for you in the other room, Petro Marko and Justina Shkupi are waiting."

Now, Justina Shkupi, I told you also earlier, was in the Spanish war and she is mentioned in the novel *Hasta la Vista* as the nurse Drita. And when they saw me (smiles), they and I became very emotional, they were very powerful, they began, the two of them, to introduce themselves and they and I cried. She said, "It is very good to meet Emrush's daughter," and there we began to evoke memories of the Spanish war and then... Then they took me home, they called there some fighters of the Spanish war, they took me to the house of one fighter in Spain, Ramiz Varvarica, who had married a Spaniard, and had taken his wife to Albania. You know, those were some powerful emotions, also on my part, because I saw them for the first time. I never knew my father and now I saw my father's friends.

Lura Limani: What else did they tell you about your father during the war?

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: Please?

Lura Limani: What else did they tell you about your father during the war?

Luljeta Bajri: During the war my father was, I mean, a leftist. He had leftist views, that the Albanian people would come out of the Second World War as equal to all the other people in Former-Yugoslavia, anyway, of Yugoslavia. It was in...when the Congress of Bujan³ was held, they began noticing his ideas, and naturally the Serb and Montenegrin Communists who had known each other from the war of Spain, also had an impact and they all tried to place Albanians on an inferior level, meaning to ignore them completely. My father has confronted those, the Serbian and Montenegrin Communists, in Spain. And when he returned afterwards, when he returned from Spain...aha, when it capitulated, I mean, the Spanish War, they went to France.

In France they met, I mean, there in France there were many Albanian students, who all studied there. Then, there was also Ali Kelmendi as a member of the Comintern, I think, of the Communist movement. And in France they also met with Zekeria Rexha, a known Albanian intellectual, he studied in France, in Lyon. At the time they met in Paris and decided to publish a magazine in Albanian, a newspaper called *Sazani*. But I am very sorry that... I had this newspaper here, but during the war, when they burned down the house, they also burned all that material with the house. We managed to save something, but very little.

And afterwards, after France, Zog did not allow them to return to Albania, since they were Communist, so then father went to Turkey, he went to Palestine, I mean, he went to these states in the East. I mean, in Turkey the propaganda began against the displacement of the Serbs... that the Serbs (laughs), I am sorry... against the displacement of Albanians to Turkey.⁴ He returned later from Turkey and of course he joined the Communist movement here in Peja. However, everyone respected him as a prepared cadre, an educated cadre, as a person who knew five-six foreign languages. However, they were also all afraid, because from the beginning he showed his ideas, that Albanians must come out of this war as their own nation, and have rights like all the other people. Some did not like him, of course. So, he was at once a little busy with the movement and he opened the first bookshop in Peja. The bookshop was called *Libraria Skënderbej – Vllazën Myftari* [Skenderbeg Bookshop – Brothers Myftari].

However, initially he led the bookstore and later had to go into illegality that all Italians persecuted

³ The Conference of Bujan (31 December 1943 – 1-2 January 1944) was a meeting of Yugoslav partisans in which a resolution was passed that promised to let the people of Kosovo decide democratically whether they wished to be part of Albania or of Yugoslavia after the war.

⁴ Campaigns to expel Albanians from the Yugoslav Kingdom were organized since the First Balkan War, however an intellectual and strategic effort of expelling Albanians from their lands developed later. In 1937, for example, a memorandum entitled *Iseljavanje Arnauta* (The Expulsion of the Albanians), written by Vaso Čubrilović a Bosnian Serb political activist and academic, member of the Academy of the Arts and Science was published. In 1938, Turkey and the Yugoslav Kingdom signed an agreement to relocate 25.000 families to Turkey. The agreement was not implemented due to the start of the Second World War. Many Albanian families were displaced to Turkey nevertheless.

him, later they arrested him, he was in the prison of Tirana. At the time, they say, my uncle Xheladin worked in the bookstore and he even took my mother to work in the bookstore.

My father returned from Spain, from Spain and from France. Since Xhemajl Kada and Asim Vokshi, two close friends of my father, were killed in the Spanish war, he brought with him what remained, you know, the memories and clothes of Xhemajl Kada, to the family of Xhemajl Kada, I mean, to Rexha Kada's. The wife of Rexha Kada was my maternal aunt, Sheqere Kada. And there, because they went to give condolence for the killing of Xhemajl, as he was a high rank officer awarded in Italy, and my father was very outraged that there in Spain there was a conflict also with those leaders of the Garibaldi, because he said, "You always want Albanians to be in the front line, while you stand as guard." And he said, "Two good officers were killed there, two good soldiers who could lead and who should not have been in the front line."

At the time he [Rexha] asked my father, he said, "Emrush, what do you want to do now? You must create a family." "I cannot because I am with... I am busy with politics, with ideas, there is no young girl who swept me off my feet. Also, there is none who is educated enough to understand me. Nobody swept me off my feet." "No," he said, "I found a girl. There is my sister in law, Hajria, the daughter of Hoxha Nokshiqi from Plav, who finished the Royal School in Belgrade, the Royal School for home economics in Belgrade."

Now, I will tell you a short story. My grandfather and my grandmother lived until late, I mean, I was 14 years old when my grandfather died, my grandmother died later. Also, my uncle took us, my brother and me, to Plav every holiday. Since there was not much communication through the gorges of Rugova, at the time they hired a man with a horse, and two baskets, one on each side. The wife of my uncle prepared us this way, me in one basket and in the other my brother, and we went through the Qafa e Dillit. In the Qafa e Dillit, my uncle stopped everyone to drink and eat and rest, there was a source of water. And he told us that there were four burials there. He talked, said, "There are four burials, one of them is of my brother Sherif, who went as a volunteer to fight at the border with Montenegro, to not let the Montenegrin army enter, enter in Kosovo, and there he is, a martyr." I mean, that burial has been there since that day and is still there today.

Anyway, now I am going to tell you about my mother. My mother finished the Royal School. The King, I mean Aleksander, of former-Yugoslavia, sent an official memorandum to Plav - my grandfather was the imam of the main mosque of Plav - which said that a girl from Plav and Gusja could go, you could send women to the School for home economics in Belgrade, and it [the memorandum] was presented to the mosque goers. However, nobody agreed, they said, "No, we are not sending the girls there to

become...” You know, the expression used at the time (laughs), “to become a *shkina*.”⁵ And my grandfather said, “Well, I had an obligation to present this, I would send my daughter” and he sent my mother. She was the fourth sister. After finishing this School of home economics very successfully, I am sorry that I don’t have it, they also gave her that emblem of the crown, an engraving of the crown plated in gold, in addition to the diploma, that too, everything has been burned down.

She returns to Plav and I mean, she gathers..., she becomes as a..., she gathers all the girls of Plav, gives them advice on how to prepare food, how to rear children, how one must rear infants, how one must...she teaches how to work, all the skills that she learned in the School in Belgrade. And when Rexha Kada asked her in marriage, at the time they met with... she came here to Peja, my mother. She met my father. They get engaged and after some time they get married. My father’s wedding was a bit of a sensation in Peja because it was the first time that a bride came to Peja with a white veil. In addition, my father goes to pick her up with his own private car. Here we also kept photographs, everything has been burned down. And my grandfather prepared a very good and dignified welcome, called many guests and my mother came here to Peja to live ever after.

Of course, the surveillance and the arrest of my father immediately began. For four years that they lived together, he spent more time outside the house than at home. Time after time he came, in and out of prison. And when they executed my father, my mother was left, I mean, with me, and later my brother was born. The house here is raided and they take my uncle too to the yard here, to shoot him. Since they were looking for a radio station, they needed a pretext to shoot him [my father], and the excuse, the excuse for the execution was that he was a member of the Intelligence Service, since he knew English, in addition he had an English friend, someone [called] Flavia Kingston, I think, who used to live in Zagreb and she came here, sometimes she was here at our family in Peja. I mean, they confiscated my father’s wealth.

My father noticing in which direction the [political] situation was heading - he had a very rich library with books not only in Albanian, but also in other languages, because he was in Italy, I mean, he travelled all over Europe - aware of the situation, the entire library was walled up in those old shelves that were in my father’s house and they built a wall there... plus also the materials that were in the bookshop. Obviously, not all the books went there, lots of other books were left outside. Something that is left with me from my childhood, we had all of those, from all the centers in Europe where Albanian magazines were printed, we had them here. We had the magazines *Vatra*, *Dielli*, *Flamuri i Arberit*. I can’t remember all of it now, but [the magazines from] the US centers where Faik Konica worked with Fan Noli, we had those magazines too.

⁵ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.) is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

Unfortunately, since the whole family was under surveillance from the Secret Service, someone who was present when the wall was built, when they put the books in, notified them. As they couldn't find it, they dug the whole garden, supposing they were searching for the radio station. They take my uncle to shoot him, my mother goes and says to them, "I'm Emrush's wife. This is the only male in our house, if you must execute [someone], execute me." Anyways, they don't find the radio station so they destroyed the wall, and for two-three days they carried [the materials] with a cart. This is of course as my uncle told me, since I was very little, two and a half years old. They take the whole library with all the books and the typewriter, all the material that was there and they go.

My mother's health then worsened and because we were always under surveillance, the family was followed, I mean... as a family, we were anathematized a little, not by the people, we had great authority among the people, everyone respected us. Indeed, I remember there was a professor in the gymnasium of Peja, a friend of my father, Mikel Marku, a professor who taught Serbo- Croatian in the gymnasium for the Albanian parallel classes. And every November 28th, he came to visit us and he brought us books, notebooks, pens. He told my uncle, "Xhele, Emrush supported all of us, he gave us books, he gave us [reading] materials, everything. He gave us everything that we wanted from the bookstore, we have to take care of Emrush's children after they lost their father." My mother, the doctor, tells her to go to Plav. After that, her health deteriorated a lot, and she went to Plav in two days.

[Incomp.]

Lura Limani: What were the years?

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: The years '44, end of '44, so after my father's execution, or the beginning of '45. She goes to Plav to her parents and of course her mother and sisters take care of her. In the year 1946, beside them, two Hungarian doctors who were friends with my grandfather also took care of her, they had come during the Second World War and had liked Plav very much, as a picturesque place with the lake. They never returned to Hungary, stayed in Plav as doctors. And they came all the time to take care of my mother.

I was two years and a half, something more, and my mother died! Mother dies and we're staying in Plav with our grandfather and grandmother. We also had an unmarried aunt, Aunt Fatime, who decided not to get married so she could raise us. However, here in my paternal uncle's family there were some deaths, I mean execution... Uncle Sherif dies on the frontline of the war, my mother dies, my father is executed, so the whole family is left with my uncle, and two of my uncle's wives, the one, whose husband dies and.... At that point my paternal uncle came to Plav to get us. My grandmother and aunt don't even want to hear about letting us go. Who would take care of us? They think we would be better taken care of in Plav.

However, my uncle takes the hat off to my grandfather and says to him, "Please, we've gone through

horrible tragedies, at least give me one of the children.” And he goes and says, “I can’t send the man back with no children.” “Fine,” he says, “Xhele which one do you want?” “Well, I’d like the girl.” And he takes me, my uncle takes me and brings me here to Peja. However, I was never at peace even though I was a little girl, I was looking for my brother (smiles). My brother also came... we were used to being together. So, my uncle takes [him from] my grandfather, after some time, he takes my brother and brings him here, I mean, we were raised at my uncle’s.

My uncle and his wife took maximum care of us, they did not have children. You know, a desire of theirs has been fulfilled by having us as their children. My uncle did everything he could to give us a happy, beautiful childhood. He helped us with all his means, I went to school, I mean, I think that I have not done for my children what my uncle and his wife did for us. My uncle was a very intelligent, open man. He did not stop me from going out, though the years were such, of course these were the years when girls were not allowed to go to school activities and other things, but I was never stopped from going. I mean, every school activity, the choir, the orchestra, field trips, all those *slet*⁶ events that were at that time, I was never stopped from attending. In a way, because of me, my friends began to come along, since my uncle had this authority here in the *rreth*⁷ in which he lived and in which he...

Youth

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her youth.]

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: I finished elementary school in Peja, at the time we would switch schools...I was then in school in Karagaq, it was called at the time Miladin Popović, afterwards they built the school Ramiz Sadiku, a new school here, and I moved here. I had a very good time, I had very good friends, we did many activities, free activities, the choir of the school, different walks, afterwards I continued in the gymnasium of Peja. I mean, in the gymnasium of Peja it was the year 1956-57, the first year.

At the time we had only two Albanian classes in school. In one class there were only men and the other class in which I was also with my friends there were some 15 girls and the other were men. They told me that the happiest period of my life was in the gymnasium of Peja. I had very sincere and very good friends. Every break [between classes] or every... sometimes like all other students, sometimes we would skip classes (smiles), and use that time to go to the spring, to the church there. After, we would

⁶ *Slet* was an annual sporting event, involving distinguished athletes, pupils, students, workers and soldiers. Every year, on May 25, *slet* was held in various cities of Yugoslavia to mark Youth Day and the birthday of then-leader Josip Broz Tito.

⁷ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one’s reputation.

go for a picnic in Radavc, so until graduation I had a very good time.

My graduation was in the year 1961-62, I mean I graduated then. Of course they did not organize celebrations in the evening as they do now, there was no hall, nothing. We had a very large yard and also we had a large house. Unfortunately my paternal uncle died, he died early, in 1957, when I was in the second year of the gymnasium, the beginning of the second year of the gymnasium and my brother was somewhere in elementary school. Also for us this was a bit of a blow because we were left without...we were left with my uncle's wife. The wife of my uncle has always been a very generous, very good woman, who had no family of her own. She did not have brothers, she did not have sisters, she was alone, but she had a son of her uncle, the father of Dervish Rozhaja.

I must tell you also about this Dervish Rozhaja. Dervish Rozhaja at the time was a student in Belgrade and a very distinguished student who later was the youngest doctor of science in former-Yugoslavia, he got his doctorate sometime in his twenties. Every time he came from Belgrade to visit his family, he spent one or two days with his family and soon after would come to our house, because here there were books, I mean, he wanted to come here to do that. In a way our house was frequented by many people who loved books, who loved, I mean, people who were interested came. At that time, there were very few books in Albanian, you know, and those who came took advantage of all those journals, those books. Dervish Rozhaja came, Hasan Bala, a cousin of ours, who studied technology I think in Sarajevo came. Later, I had Jusuf Gervalla⁸ as a neighbor, because he grew up with his maternal uncle. And he often came, he was of the same generation as Kujtim, maybe one year younger than Kujtim and they came here all of them to gather. While the others played ball or something, Jusuf went to the veranda above there and took those books, those journals, he was interested in reading from the beginning.

I would like to tell you also this story about graduation, I graduated, we wanted to organize something, and we gathered to discuss, I mean, I had very close friends and my classmates came to my house, we went, all the classmates, we did not have any hesitation, they... it was a very sincere friendship. They said, "We have to meet and gather somewhere, but we don't have where." And I said, "I am asking the wife of my uncle for permission, and we come, we have a garden here, and we meet in the garden." I asked, she said, "Yes, mom,⁹ better to come here than going somewhere else, come." We had a very big and beautiful garden. There was a pine tree, the pine today is the same as my uncle planted it there somewhere in the year 1931, when he bought this house, this house that is old, it is my father's. The classmates came, we organized, we put-up the lights, of course we had music and all (laughs), all...it was quite something also for the entire *rreth*, because they were, they did not organize anything then.

⁸ Jusuf Gervalla (1945-1982) was an Albanian poet and writer, a leader of the underground nationalist movement in Kosovo, gunned down in 1982 in Germany.

⁹ Endearing, it means "my child."

And all these surrounding walls {points to the walls of the house}, the neighbors climbed [them] to see what we were doing, what we were singing and playing (smiles). And, this song is one of the beautiful souvenirs from the night of my graduation that we celebrated together.

After graduation, there were not many possibilities to study. After my uncle died, we did not have the means to live. Of course, as a family we were economically ok, I mean, my uncle left us property, the house and the land, we did not suffer but [we did not have] something extra. Plus, the wife of my uncle was very close to us, so that it was very difficult for her to let me go - she was old, relatively old, she was alone -, to let me go and study. And I made an agreement with her that high school graduation would be enough. However, my maternal uncle Esad Mekuli,¹⁰ who cared very much about us...

In 1956 there was a lot of snow in Peja, two meters, we called it red snow, because in the middle of the snow there also was a strip like this four fingers {demonstrating the dimensions with her palms}, there was red ash. The snow was two meters high, I mean, everything was blocked, everything. They say that winds had come from Africa and brought that sand from the desert.

Anyway my maternal uncle married Sahadete Doku Mekuli from Ohrid, a doctor, and he brought her to visit his two sisters who were married here in Peja. They came by train of course, this road did not exist then, only the train. They came by train and from the train with a sled because they could not [walk]. And when they arrived here on this road of ours in front of our house, she said to my uncle's wife - my uncle's wife told me - she said, "Sahadet, here I have my sister's two children, we are going to also visit the other sisters. What you do with the other sisters, whether you respect or love them, it is your problem. These two children, I want you to consider them as our children." And she was left with that [thought]... {puts her hand on her chest}. After their visit, they came to visit us and any time we were on vacation we would visit them after grandfather and grandmother moved to Pristina, we went there every vacation, we went to our maternal uncle's, to grandmother's and grandfather's. And I graduated and I stopped there [I did not continue my education].

My maternal uncle came with his wife, and spoke to the wife of my paternal uncle. They said, "Xhixh," we called her Xhixh, "we came to pick up Lule, to take her to Pristina to study." "Ouu," she began to cry and said, "I reared this child, now that she is ready you want to take her," of course like any parent. He said, "I don't want to leave her with a high school diploma, that's wrong, we want to take her." In the end, she was persuaded. "Well," she said, "I will arrange a marriage for Kujtim then, I cannot stay alone, you are taking away the girl." Kujtim was much younger than I was (smiles), I mean, 17 years old. They began to laugh (laughs).

¹⁰ Esad Mekuli (1916-1993) was the most renowned Albanian poet in Yugoslavia after the Second World War. He was also the first chairman of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Kosovo.

Anyway, the time came to go to university. I remember that day with much nostalgia and with a... I prepared my clothes in a trunk to go to Pristina and the wife of my uncle took the clothes out of the trunk. She cried because I was going to Pristina, I cried because she did not let me go to Pristina to continue my studies. And in the end, when she noticed that I was getting tired of this, "Come on my girl, fold your clothes" and she packed the trunk, "Come on, I will take you to the station." She took me, but under a set of conditions, "Every week you will come to clean the whole house, to do all the work, to wash the clothes, all that." "All," I said, "Every week, I will do it," and I really went every week as agreed. Not because I could not [not do it], but she was old (laughs).

I enrolled in Law School, it was the second generation of the Law Faculty within the framework of the University of Belgrade. I was the only Albanian, there was also another from Mitrovica, one Mykefela Shabanović. Her mother was Muslim and the father Albanian, but she did not know much Albanian, however she considered herself Albanian. And there were four-five Montenegrin Serbs, some were also from Serbia, some from here, and all professors were from the University of Belgrade and Skopje. I mean, the teaching was in Serbo-Croatian. There were 56-57 men and women in all. In that generation there was also Adem Demaçi,¹¹ Adem Demaçi had finished Albanology and enrolled in Law.

I mean, it was 1962-63 when I enrolled in Law. I finished the first year, I finished the first year successfully. I enrolled in the second year, I went to lectures, I took many exams, I thought it was a very good atmosphere. I mean, there, with books in the library, after I had discussions with the wife of my uncle, with my uncle, everybody motivated me to study more and more.

And I must tell you a detail of Adem Demaçi, you know, it was 1963, 63, it was... the seminar of Albanian language was organized in Pristina. It was the first time that the seminar was organized, and we were in this class of Introductory Law, we were with a professor from Belgrade who was giving us a lecture. I have to tell you, I have to say this even here, that the professors from Belgrade were very correct. They gave very good lectures and tests. And at one point...in the lecture, this Adem Demaçi raises his hand and asks the professor for permission, he says, "Can I be excused from the lecture, there is the Seminar of Albanian Language in Pristina and I am Albanian, a linguist, I would like to take part in that seminar," he said. The professor asked, he addressed him, "*Albanski*¹² language?" At that

¹¹ Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner (1936-) who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

¹² *Albanski*, Serbian for the Albanian language. In an attempt to distinguish between Albanians from Albania proper and those in Kosovo, as well as to stop the recognition of Albanian as one of the official languages of the Yugoslav Federation, it was commonplace for Serbs to refer to Albanian language differently, depending on who was doing the talking: *Albanski* for Albanians and *Ščiptarski* (stemming from the Albanian word for Albanians, *shqiptar*) for Kosovo Albanians.

time there was the *Ščiptari*¹³ language and the *Albanski* language (smiles), they were two languages. This Adem Demaçi stands up and gives a small and dense lecture, as they call it (smiles). He said, “For you, we are all Albanians. For foreigners as well ourselves, we are *Shqiptare*, for us. And the language, there is no difference between *Albanski* and *Shqiptare*, it is the same as in Albania, as everywhere is the Albanian language.” He was very emotional, and the professor felt bad and apologized, “I am sorry, I am sorry, please I didn’t know it was like this. I thought that there was a difference between the *Albanski* language and the language... the *Albanski* language and the *Ščiptari* language,” and he left. This was Adem Demaçi’s moment.

And the end of the second year, 1964, came. 1965 was a rather difficult time for Kosovo because it was when for the first time the flag was raised, and many young people were imprisoned. And I had another exam to pass, at some point during the weekend I told my maternal uncle’s wife, “I have an exam in two or three days,” I said to my uncle’s wife, “I must go to Peja.” She said, “Don’t go to Peja, you have the exam, you must pass it.” “Something happened,” and I did not know what had happened, “I want to go to Peja.” We went to Peja by train. When we got to Peja near the house, in the direction of the school *8 Marsi*, a girl came out and called, “Luljeta, are you ok, are you?” I, “Yes, why?” She said, “They said that you had been arrested and they saw you shackled, they took you to prison.” “No,” I said, “Why, what happened?” She said, “You don’t know what happened? They took Selajdin Daci to jail.” She was the sister of Selajdin Daci. They took many others to jail, Shefqet Deçani and many people here, those who seemed to have been the organizers.

When I arrived home, the house had been completely searched, they had everything, they had torn down everything, they had... The search warrant had arrived in my name, and it mentioned also an article of the criminal code of Serbia. When I arrived I found my uncle’s wife... in bed, almost unconscious, they had taken my brother to the police. And I came close to my aunt, and they had told her that they had taken Luljeta to jail. She was completely terrified, she said, “We went through enough at that time, now the same has happened.” And I came and approached her, “Xhixhe, Xhixhe.” “Who are you?” She did not recognize me. “Luljeta!” “No, they took Luljeta to jail. They told me that they saw her shackled.” “No,” I said, “I am Luljeta.” “They they took Kujtim to jail.”

I was terrified by what I saw. But wait. After a little while Kujtim arrived. They had released him and had told him to call his sister and tell her to come, that she was in Pristina to study, to tell me to come here, the subpoena was in her name. The reason why this was... I don’t know. Maybe because we were that type of family, maybe because I was in the faculty and I was a colleague of Adem Demaçi, I don’t know, I don’t know why. And Kujtim came back and said, “Lule, tomorrow at eight you must go to the Secretariat.” Of course it was difficult to go, but what could I have done, I had to, the following day, in

¹³ *Ščiptar/i* Serbian for Albanian/s. This is used as a derogatory term for Albanians from Kosovo, to distinguish them from Albanians from proper Albania, *Albanac/Albanci*.

fact, not at eight in the morning, but they had said sometime in the afternoon, when they ended ...

The following day...they had done the search, they had taken some books that were left and some journals that were left from the library. We never moved from the wall where dad had placed it, a big picture of Skanderbeg, there he was, Skanderbeg. And that photograph, they ... they asked, "What do you need it for...this photograph here?" Really, Skanderbeg stayed.

Anyway, at 2pm of the following day, Kujtim came with me and we went to the Secretariat. In the Secretariat, Kujtim was not allowed to come upstairs and they held him downstairs. Also I, of course, until I began going upstairs, my heart knew with what difficulty I experienced it, however later I pulled myself together and entered the room where they told me to go.

There, there was an Albanian, I don't know the name because I don't remember it, the last name was Haskaj, who had taken part in the house search. And on the desk there was a book of Zog, of the wedding of Zog with that photo of Xheraldina and all Zog's sisters, some journals and the questioning began...allegedly I had provided books to my classmates, allegedly...I had *Lahuta e Malcis*¹⁴ and I had given it to them to read... I denied it and said, "This is not true. This is not true." When he saw that God had given me the strength to resist (laughs), when I denied everything, I said, "It is not true." Then he began to say [to provoke her], "I wanted to keep that photo of Skanderbeg and step on it and break it into pieces." "Yes," I said, "What is the link between Skanderbeg with the current time? It is well known that when Skanderbeg lived, he was a historical figure. He has no relation with anything, he is an historical figure. But even if you broke it into pieces, it is not great courage to destroy the photograph of Skanderbeg, plus my father put that photo there, and since then, no one ever moved it."

Anyway, they began to threaten me. There was also the revolver near the table. He said, "Ok, you don't want to talk, to tell me, to confess." I said, "I don't have anything to confess, because nothing is true. Now, of course the hand of power is big, you can do what you want, however, I don't have anything else to say." "Ok," he said, "You don't want to talk with me, but there are others who don't dare not to talk." And I went downstairs, went home, Kujtim wasn't there. The police has taken Kujtim inside, there, now, he was afraid for me, what had they done with me up there. Now, I was afraid that they had locked up Kujtim after I went, there was drama, very serious drama.

After a time, Kujtim asked them, he said, "Ok, what has my sister done?" "No," they said, "Your sister has gone," and later Kujtim came to the house here (laughs). However, anyway there was joy. After that

¹⁴ *Lahuta e Malcis* (*The Highland Lute*) is an epic written by Gjergj Fishta, an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero. The first part of the epic was published in 1905 and the rest was published periodically, until 1933. The *Lahuta* was banned by the Communist regime.

they did not, later, much later, the downfall began, I mean, the downfall of the Ranković era¹⁵ began, the years... and the wife of my uncle remained in bed. When she saw the two of us, of course (inc. 23:40) after that day she did not leave the bed, she remained there for eight months. I stopped studying because I could not leave her. I could not leave her, because there was nobody to take care of her. She died eight months later, and it was a very hard blow, a very hard blow. Of course her illness, her condition deteriorated, the situation, and then death.

I stayed here in Peja, and my brother went to Sarajevo to study. Later, I met my husband Adem. And after a time Adem, a student in Belgrade, graduated. When he finished his studies, for some time we dated and then we married in 1965, '65. My wedding with Adem was a subject discussed at the conferences of the Communist Party, because we were children of parents who had been executed. Also Adem's father had been executed here in Tabja. Here, many citizens of Peja were executed, well known people. However (smiles), love was stronger than everything, our love, and we got married in 1965.

They accepted Adem in a job at some farming cooperative, after two months he was evaluated, who knows by which sources and he was let go and sent to the military. I remained again alone, my brother was studying, I remained alone, however my mother in law came to live here in my father's home because the house was empty. Someone had to stay there to supervise [me]. My mother in law came and you know, after one year, after nine months a boy was born because I got pregnant, my son Mentor was born, my first son. And in one way, I mean, my life was a little full, the care of my child, the work in the garden because we did not have other means, we did not have much.

My mother in law worked somewhere in... she worked, at a very young age, she was a widow at 22, with two orphan children, she wanted to educate those children, she was forced to work, she worked in some cooperative. One son was in Prizren, Mehdi Bajri, he studied music at the high school for music. Thus, after one year, Adem was a soldier, after a year he came back, and they accepted him for a job at the Court of Gjyarakovc. After Gjyarakovc he came back to work in the Court of Peja, the Court of Peja.

At the time Adem, from the practice he had in Gjyarakovc at the Court of Peja, the Municipal Court, moved to the Municipal Court of Peja. Of course at the time democratization began. Until then, the courts were in Serbo-Croatian, now when Albanian judges came they started trials in Albanian and a new era began in the courts. I will tell you only a detail. When Adem began working in the Court,

¹⁵ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

someone came to work at the Court from the village, and when he came, before he could enter the Court – the judges were Serbs - they forced him, before he could enter his office, to take off his shoes, to take them off, he had to take off his hat, his white hat and take off his shoes and enter. And those who had been taught in that... Now, Adem, Adem was a judge and when the employee comes, takes off his shoes, and he humbles himself thus, he was asked by Adem, “Why did you take off your shoes?” He said, “They forced us to take off our shoes, you cannot enter with shoes there.” Adem says to him, “Put your shoes back on!”

Professional Life

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her work experience and activism.]

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: In the meanwhile, I was accepted at the elementary school 8 Marsi as a secretary. And at the same time I continued studying by correspondence in Pristina, because my maternal uncle had come down very hard on me because I had stopped studying. And he always told me, “Luljeta, you must finish university.” Naturally, I had a very strong support also from my maternal uncle and his wife. I went [to school] with a small child, they looked after my child (smiles). I studied at night and went to take the exams. Now, I had some difficulties, because I had attended all the lectures in Serbo-Croatian and I had the books, the literature was in Serbo-Croatian. Now, the University of Pristina had started, where they had hired many Albanian professors. And in my generation, three or four of my generation remained as professors, Aveni Gjakova, Hasim Loshi, Faik Brestovci, I don’t know, some others. Thus, now I had many difficulties, I had to study more, to not ...drop out before...I had to pass the exams before my university colleagues, with whom I studied. That was over, and I finished in a relatively short time... and I worked, and...

I was lucky to have been hired in a school, in a miraculous collective, the school 8 *Marsi*. The hiring process was a little difficult. But I will give you details, it is of interest to know what was the atmosphere back then. I applied, naturally also some others applied, but I fulfilled all the requirements. Someone from the Committee, or from the Socialist League comes to school, “We don’t accept her because she is unreliable. She is the daughter of Emrush Myftari.” I had there colleagues, also my teacher, whom I loved very much and who was the best teacher, Kamber Pajaziti. Kamber Pajaziti knew me as a student, he knew my family, and he reacted against this. He said, “Why does it matter that she is the daughter of Emrush Myftari? She is... she finished school, I have known her as a student since elementary school, we cannot not hire her.” And of course they hired me. However, now they started against the teacher, because he spoke in my favor. And the organs of the Communist League denounced him, when they were gathered. He was forced to leave that school and move to Pristina. He was forced to leave his job but was not fired, he was notified, he left his job and moved to

Pristina. And all his family was here in Peja.

I learned of this fact much later. He did not tell anybody. Later, he told someone and he told me. Anyway I continued to work there, as secretary of the school. Our school was a famous school not only in Peja, but also elsewhere. It was a very good environment, my working conditions were very good. The school had laboratories for every possible field, biology, physics, chemistry. We had, we screened films, we had films, every week we screened a film. I took some film from the Centre of Cinematography of Pristina, naturally with themes appropriate for the students. I mean, there was a very free and beautiful atmosphere. We had a library, later we had different activities. And the students of the school were distinguished, they all succeeded also in those school competitions, they won first place.

1981 came, the demonstrations, which naturally were hard for us to experience. Those who were also eyewitnesses, who saw the terror that happened in those demonstrations, however, [the system] tried to silence them, to not let them be found out. My uncle's wife, who was the head of the Department of Gynecology, prepared the hospital staff to receive the wounded. Together with all the nurses wearing white coats they went to pick up the wounded to take them to the hospital as best they could. From that moment, she experienced terrible attacks. I was also witness of the threatening letters that she received from Serbs, from Montenegrins, from... allegedly... and for that, and for my uncle it was a very difficult situation, because he worked with all his body and soul for the national cause, my uncle contributed in the field of culture, while she in the field of health. In addition, she was also a professor in the Medical School. Then the torture began for the family, the pressure and all those very hard blows against my uncle, however...

Activism

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her experience as an activist.]

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: Again, a very difficult period began for the Albanian people. The time from 1971, from the establishment of the University of Pristina until 1981, was a boom, a very great progress for the Albanian people, because many young people were educated and succeeded, and in reality it was education that opened doors at the time, because the professors worked with dedication, and students learned with dedication, which in fact, today it has changed a little. That life... we had family, I mean my brother had his own family, he was married with a colleague from Sarajevo, a student. They had two children, Arben and Florina, two healthy and very good children. I now had three boys, I had Mentor, Ilir and Gazmend. And they grew up together with the children of my brother, my children. They had a very beautiful and very happy childhood.

1981 came. I say that dreams, in a way, almost... they were destroyed. I mean, we knew that a very difficult time was coming. However, at the time also the movement began. After the demonstration of '81, many young people were arrested and given long jail sentences. There were many trials. My husband Adem was the defense lawyer in the majority of those trials. After he was fired from the Court, he registered and took the exam for... in fact, the exam was given by judges, and he could take a lawyer license. And he began to work as a lawyer, and he defended many young people who had been sentenced in these trials.

Of course our children continued school. The time of their studies came, 1991 came, and a big blow for the Albanian people, the closing of Albanian schools, especially for us, who experienced the period after the Second World War. And especially my brother who worked in the gymnasium of Peja, and was a very respected professor of Philosophy, and experienced being fired from school very hard. Now, he was worried for his children, because even though we had been an anathema of a family we did not... we were never stopped from getting an education. We continued our education however we could. In comparison to our relatives in Albania, they were isolated... they were secluded and for them it was impossible to study.

At the time, the expulsion from the schools forced us [Albanians] to convert our homes into schools. At one point, all the educational staff remained without a salary. We had to do something, we had to come-up with another way of organizing, and my brother was assigned to a Commission to gather aid, to aid those educators who were left without a salary, because they had no means. When I heard about it, of course it pleased me, but I also was deeply concerned about him, because I knew he was too sensitive and that his health would be paying the price.

In 1991 he was... he was very strong physically, he was, he was very resistant... however, it seemed that all that resistance he had stored, in 1991 he suffered from a heart attack and died immediately. For me it was a very big blow, now the death of my parents felt distant because of what happened to my brother. However, I had to find the strength, to find the strength to take care of my brother's wife, my brother's children, my children, to take it with a little of... as they say, to take that great pain with endurance, with strength. And I could not allow myself to break down. I tried to turn that great pain into strength to face all those attacks, all those blows that life had prepared for us. My brother's children of course were in a very delicate age, the daughter was 13 and the boy twelve. My children were a little older, this ...

One could see on the horizon what was preparing for Kosovo. There was the peaceful resistance from 1991 until 98-99, then, it became obvious that something needs to be done because with that peaceful resistance we were not going anywhere. Even though that resistance did a lot for the internationalization of the Albanian question in the world, Serbia could do more, with its propaganda, with its books, with the presentation of the Albanian people as a people without culture, as a people

which did not deserve its own state, a people... as they say, savage people. We were witness of a time when we had to do something for the national cause however we knew and could. Thus, we organized with the women here in Peja, we organized in the Women's Democratic Forum, of course, to help women, to deal with the question of education, to gather aid.

Lura Limani: In which year did you organize?

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: We organized in the year 1991, 91-92.

Lura Limani: How did the idea come up, or how did you meet?

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: Sure, first we formed the leadership, later we had a branch in every village. We went, we met... we visited many villages, we advised women, we helped them as we could. And the firing of all Albanians came in 1991-92, from schools, from work, I mean, all the cadres, especially the women who had graduated from college, we formed a commission to register all women who have been fired from work, from schools, from work. And I also have my notes somewhere, yes...there, that the largest number of people fired were those who were in the higher positions. They came with the higher cadres, the lower cadres and all the others in elementary schools and they did not...

Lura Limani: They fire you from 8 Marsi?

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: No, no. I can say that 8 Marsi was like an oasis of education, since we were an ethnically clean [homogeneous] school, we did not have any classes in Serbo-Croatian, even though they tried some time to put in parallel classes, however, it was an environment that did not have students, we were ethnically cleansed and so we continued, I can say, to work a little in normal way. Although the police came often, to search for those... later, other schools were established in our school, the School of Arts, where they had all been fired; the Medical School, for four-five years they stopped teaching; and the trade High School. Even this small school near the *hamam* and the mosque, also that was accommodated within the 8 Marsi school.

Slowly, this resistance showed that could not go until the end, and in the year 1998 there was the attack against the Jashari family,¹⁶ in a way, it was clear that the war was necessary. After the death of my brother, after the end of the war, I had one, I can say, one dream, the dream to do something, that highlighted somehow all the works and the life of my father, the material, the writing he had done with personalities not only in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, but also with personalities in France and England. I took charge of writing, I am talking about a small monographic essay, to have it for the younger

¹⁶ Adem Jashari, also known as "Legendary Commander," was a founder of the KLA, and celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty-half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

generations, so that they know, because when the grandchildren come they won't know of their grandfather's family or their great-grandfather.

In Tirana I had the son of my paternal uncle Esat Myftari, who in 1963 had gone to Albania. Esat Myftari had gone, Naime Daci had gone, Zyme Belegu had gone, Namik Luci had gone. All of them were my generation, a generation of course with those ideals of Albania as our motherland, as if they were going to be received with open arms. However, the situation was completely different. They were allowed to enter of course, but they were suspected, allegedly, that they had come to, as they say, to check the political climate, and not for an ideal, not for an ideal. And after some time, when they understood what the situation was, of course they reacted against it. And Esat, Esat Myftari was imprisoned and sentenced to ten years for agitation and propaganda. And he remained in prison for ten years, in prison in Albania. After talking to him, later he said that in prison there was, in the Albanian prison, there was the elite of Albania, there was the intelligentsia, educated people who had been abroad, they had all been in the Albanian prison. And he said, "For me it was also a very great experience because I communicated with many people."

He told me a detail, a detail, that in prison he met with...or when he went to get a book in the library, I think, she did not find it, that librarian did not find it and said, "Leave your name with me, when you come I will prepare the book, you wait in the [reading] room." He waited in the room, and of course there was also another reader there, and she called, "Myftari?" He stood-up, an old man raised his head, he said...I got the book, when I got the book he came closer. He said, "Myftari, where are you from?" I said, "I am from Peja." "Don't you know by chance Emrush Myftari?" I said, "Yes, he was my uncle." He said, "I am a friend of Emrush, I have been with him in France. We published..." He was a journalist, but now I cannot remember his name. And later he said, "We were very good friends, and often we went to the beach and talked, he told me many things." Later, both went to prison. "Thus, also in prison we discussed many things..."

Later, when democratization came to Albania, those who were released one, two years earlier, were released from jail. He worked, at one point he did manual labor, later he was elected in the first democratic Parliament of Albania (smiles). He was elected Deputy and wrote the first declaration on Kosovo, a memorandum on Kosovo. And later I also contacted him more often.

We went to Albania and I...I had many meetings... with Petro Marko, Skender Luarasin, with many friends who were very talkative. There the idea of doing something was born, also because Mehmet Shehu¹⁷ was in the Spanish [civil] war, I mean, they knew each other from the Spanish war, they knew

¹⁷ Mehmet Shehu (1913-1981) was an Albanian partisan and powerful Communist leader very close to the Head of the Communist Party Enver Hoxha. He was found dead from an alleged suicide in 1981, after which all the members of his family, including his wife Fiqirete Shehu Sanxhaktari, were imprisoned and he was denounced as a traitor.

each other, my father and Mehmet Shehu, Mehmet Shehut sent me a letter, it said, “Let’s do something for Emrush.” Mehmet Shehu said, “Write what you remember, those memories of yours that you heard from the family.” And he sent the letter, but was silent. It was left at that. It seems that it was the hand of Enver Hoxha.

Now, I started to research. I went to the Archive of Kosovo, there I had also a friend from Peja, she was Sulltane Ukaj, she worked there as a historian. And I found great help from her to research documents. I found much documentation, however they told me that there was a dossier of Emrush, which some historians had. However, the time was not appropriate to write about him, because there were some Communist factions that had opposed it, and they had learned, they told me that someone at the Institute of Albanology...they directed me towards the person who had the dossier. And I went, his name was Bislimi, I don’t remember the first name, he agreed to see me, I called him by phone, he agreed to see me, and I went. He said, “The dossier of Emrush was very large. There were many documents, in fact the historians did not know, we took only what we needed for our research. For example, some writing or something, also in the year 1991,¹⁸ when the Serbs withdrew, they also took the dossier. They did not leave it here, they took it.”

I tried then to establish contact with Belgrade, with Albanians who were there. A professor, professor Petrit... I don’t remember the name, maybe it will come to mind, he told me, “Had it been earlier, I could have gone to the Archive and now it is impossible because the State Archive or the military Archive are under the supervision of Russia. It is impossible to enter there.” Thus the search also failed. But with those few letters that were left, some discussion with people who had known him, the rather little material that I was able to secure, also Esat who talked there in Tirana, a monograph was published in 2011, and the launch happened in Peja. Personalities from Albania came, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alfred Serreqi, the historian Bici came, also two other professors came, my father’s comrade, Halit Gjuka, came too. And he then talked of all the adventures that they had during the war. I mean, for me and for my brother it was a dream come true that we could have a book for the generations that come on the work of our father.

Also in my third age, I mean, after retirement, I found an activity close to my heart: doing something for the children who come from poor families, who do not have any support from their family, who maybe are neglected in school too... we are an organization, we work in a humanitarian organization which has been founded by an Austrian, Maria Marta in Vitimirica, it’s my fourth year there, and I give my modest contribution. Maybe the life experience that I found, and I will say one very beautiful saying of President Roosevelt’s wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, she said, “When we began not to give a contribution, we began to die slowly.” I mean, until we have something to give, we shouldn’t spare ourselves from contributing.

¹⁸ The speaker here means 1999.

I thank you very much for the time that you have found, for such highly valued work you are doing, that you record the history of people. It is not only the story of my family, there are also many other families that have suffered perhaps the same... not to talk about tragedy, but the same... experience during their life. Later, you have what to do. Thanks for the work you are doing.

War

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her experience of the 1998-99 war.]

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: After all these efforts to resist without violence, it seems that the moment arrived that something had to be done, even though this period had brought the internationalization of the Albanian question in the world, the world had begun to know. The time arrived for the Kosovo Liberation Army to enter the scene. The first blow was in the year 1998, with the execution of the entire Jashari family, and the war began slowly, slowly to develop. Of course, also many young Albanians joined and the moment came when the war took a big jump and we were forced, I mean, to leave, the citizens of Peja especially were forced to leave...

Maybe we were also a little naïve, we did not think that such big destruction would come. Thus, I, with my husband, we did not want to leave the house, I had organized down the cellar, thinking that I will stay down in the cellar, as if they [the Serbian army] could not find the cellar and enter and (incomprehensible, 1:42). But we did not think that such a bitter war would develop.

However, I saw in the end that it was not an option, the police entered. Almost everyone around us had already left, so we got together with the relatives who lived in the neighborhood ... (inc. 2:05). We stayed there together, in the morning the police entered, the military police, some with masks, some without masks, and they said, "Tomorrow in the morning if we find you here... you" (inc. 2:25), meaning, we have to leave as soon as we can. And we left, we went with three cars.

Earlier the whole family was here, the youngest son was in Pristina, Gazmend. He worked in the American office there and he could not come. Here I had the two other sons, Mentor and Ilir, with their families, and with their small children. Ilir went with his wife's family, he went because we did not have room in the car. Then we left, together with Mulaqe and we began to leave and we went in the direction of Rozhaja. When we came to the checkpoint, it was before we arrived in Rozhaja... (inc. 3:10) a place where there was a police checkpoint. One policeman knew Adem, a Bosniak police officer. And they had the news that Adem had been killed.

At that time, two days earlier, Bajram Kelmendi¹⁹ and his two sons had been killed, it was a very hard blow. We expected that something similar would happen to us. The Bosniak police came close and said, “Adem, are you alive?” He said, “Yes, as you can see, I am alive,” he said, “Though from what I’ve seen, I had many reasons to die of heartbreak, but I am alive.” He said, “I also have three cars behind me, please if it would be possible...” There were cases when they would take your car and force you to get out, and it seems to me that he gave them a sign and they let us go.

We went towards Montenegro, passed Rozhaja. The Montenegrins appeared on the road, they pelted us with stones, some with bread... the front window of our neighbor’s car got broken. Anyway, we went to Ulqin. In Ulqin, people gathered there from almost all sides of Kosovo. In Ulqin, the atmosphere was very difficult. It bothered me that women immediately found, they immediately adapted, they called each other for tea, for coffee, to talk. It was very bothersome; it was very hard. It seems very hard to somewhat go and have coffee, talk.

We had... Ilir had met in ‘97 or ‘96 Vanessa Redgrave and she had come to Peja. Ilir had come, of course, to see the situation, to get information. She was a GoodWill Ambassador, she was something in the United Nations. And they met with Ilir, and Ilir said to me, “Mom, can we invite her for breakfast?” “Yes, of course, invite her!” I said. We invited her here for breakfast, we talked and she took notes. Vanessa was helpful in a time of need, she found out where we were, she prepared all documents, and took us to Italy. We went to Italy, three Deputies of the Italian Parliament welcomed us, Vincenzo Siniscalchi, the wife of a lawyer, I don’t know her name, they welcomed us in Bari. They came to Bari to welcome us.

We went from Bar to Bari by boat. We went to Italy. In Italy they placed us in a center for refugees, and they welcomed us very well in the neighborhood of Marechiaro, the most beautiful place in Naples. We went to Naples, and different personalities visited us... they interviewed Adem, many journalists came and interviewed him to take information on the situation which... I have even somewhere also an article that was written by Italian newspapers. Ilir always loved music, you know, our three sons, even though my husband and I were jurists, we did not impose our will on them, we let them chose the professions they liked, thus they went for culture, Ilir for music, Mentor for music, Gazmend as cameraman, like that.

And Vanessa had heard Ilir play the piano here and she liked him a lot, she liked him a lot. And it seemed that she had told everyone that he was a pianist. It was less than a week later, it seems to me, they brought a piano to the center, so that Ilir could play, I mean, rehearse. And they called Maria Pia

¹⁹ Bajram Kelmendi (1937-1999) was a lawyer and human rights activist. He filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

Fanfani, the wife of that Italian President Fanfani²⁰ who was in that association Italian Arcobaleno, an association for humanitarian aid that also helped Kosovo. She hears about Ilir, they organized a humanitarian concert with him and in a very old church in Naples, a very beautiful church, Santa Chiara. He played and they collected donations to help those Albanians who were in the camp in Macedonia, Stankovec, those camps that were there. He did a miraculous concert. I feel sorry that it was not recorded, but I have some photos from the concert. He played the piano for 45 minutes, there was the cream of Naples, and they gave donations, donations were collected there. Later, they did one or two concerts, two concerts in Naples, of course humanitarian.

The time to return came. We stayed in Naples three months and a half, at the end we were getting bored. Mentor with his family did not think that it would end so quickly, the bombing still continued. Mentor took his family to Germany. We stayed there with Ilir, my mother in law, and Adem, we stayed in Naples. But we returned, we also returned. When we came back, the house was burned down. All the houses around had been completely destroyed, we had to start from the beginning. I was not too upset about the house, I was happy that we were safe, the children were spared and we were safe as a family. I did not suffer because the children of my brother were abroad and his wife was in Sarajevo.

The house of my brother there had been destroyed to the ground. I did not feel bad about the house, what made me feel bad was that they had burned all my memories. Fortunately, Mentor had collected some albums, and he had covered them with a plastic bag. He had gone to the cellar, and he had hidden under the coal. In my father's library, we also had the book of Peter Budi, published in the year 1663, one of the first books written in Albanian, that book was also burned.

However, I will tell you also a detail, I am happy that my maternal uncle Esat Mekuli had come and collected, from all those books that were left, after they took the library, the translations in Albanian by Fan Noli, by Faik Konica, by others, and now they are republished. What a beautiful thing that they have been republished, they did not go down, I mean those books were not lost.

Dreams

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her dreams and wishes.]

Luljeta Myftari Bajri: Of course, throughout your life you have dreams. It doesn't mean that those dreams will come true, however one tries to make some of them true. Maybe my dreams were special,

²⁰ Amintore Fanfani (1908-1999) was an Italian politician and leader of the Christian Democracy. He was never the President of Italy, but was Prime Minister more than once.

since I was reared without parents, even though I cannot complain because those parents who reared us were very good and they dedicated much love and care. But, be as it may, my dreams were to go to school and to develop my own personality, to be a strong person who can face all challenges that one has to face in life. I am happy that however I created a family, I can say, it is a healthy one, that I am happy with my three sons who continue their life, have their families and try to make their dreams come true.