

### THE GALLERY OF SOULS, WHERE DOES HISTORY DISAPPEAR?

By Shqipe Malushi





Grandfather's house in Gjakova

On the early morning of August 30, 2014, the sound of cranes at work disturbed the peace and quiet of Gjakova, waking up its sleepy citizens. “What is happening?” they asked, running out of their homes to see for themselves. To their amazement, the house of Sylejman Beg Kryeziu, in the center of town, was being demolished with no warning sign or explanation.

Why was this house so important, that the Municipality of Gjakova had to demolish it in order to create a new park? “This house doesn’t belong to anyone, it has no use, and it has no purpose,” said Gjakova’s new democratic government officials in one of their statements on social media. “There is no one to claim this property,” they said.

However, this house has a long history. It stood there for generations as a silent gallery of souls, witnessing injustice after injustice done by different governments to the family Kryeziu and the people of Gjakova. This house belonged to my grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu.



My grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu

The only son of my great grandfather Myrteza Beg Jakova Kryeziu, Sylejman Beg Kryeziu was born in Gjakova in 1893 and died in 1961 in the city of Izmir, Turkey. Who was my grandfather, whom I never met?

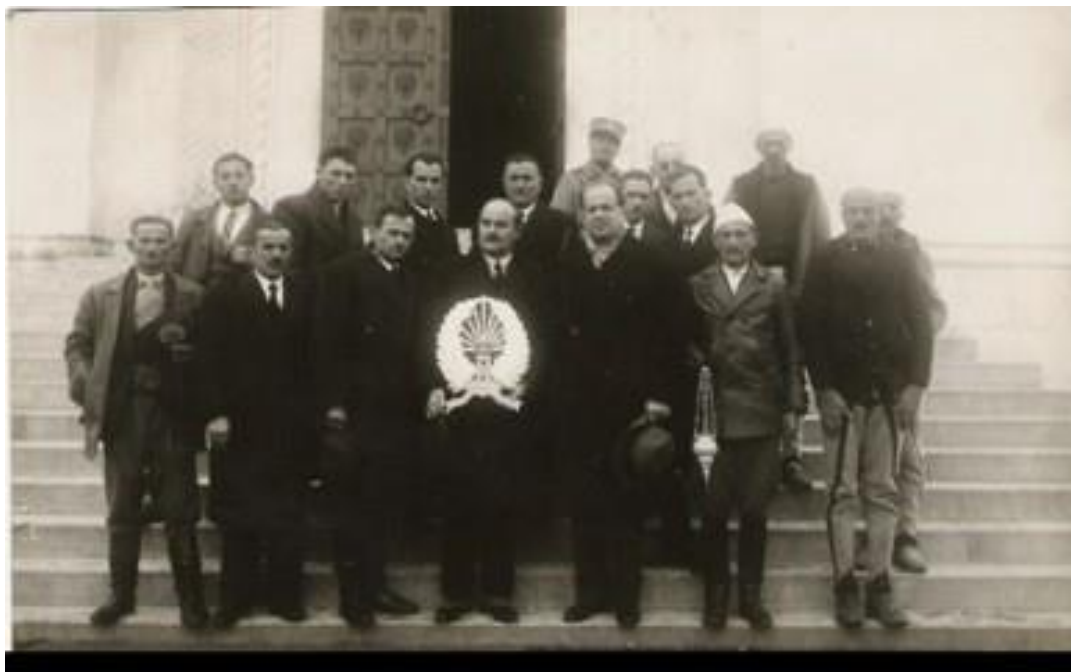
He belonged to one of most patriotic families who were involved in the struggle for the independence of the Albanian people in Kosovo and Albania. I can only relate a few stories I heard from my mother and my aunts about a man with the heart of a lion and the kindness and generosity of a humble man. As my mother described him, he possessed qualities unseen until then: he helped young people get an education; provided help to the needy; created work for those who needed work; supported teachers; and had a great vision of freedom, where all people lived in unity, peace and harmony, with their needs met.



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu at a young age

“He was so handsome,” my mother would say, “when he walked down the street he greeted everyone and looked like a king.” She remembered how he got married to my mother, “She was only fifteen years old. She was raised by her aunt after her mother died. They had recommended my father to her, and so he walked all dressed up, holding a flower, by her house, and she looked at him from the window. When she saw how handsome he was, she agreed to marry him. When her aunt died, she inherited all her property. They were prosperous.”

Sylejman Beg Kryeziu was the Governor of Gjakova and a parliamentarian of the Yugoslav Kingdom from 1925 to 1941. In 1937 he was also elected Vice-President of the regional administrative principalities of Shkup [Skopje] Macedonia, while from 1941 to 1943 he was only the Governor of Gjakova. He was the Governor of Gjakova for 18 years, yet no documents can be found anywhere about his service. How can such history disappear?



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu among other high-ranking officials

The police considered Sylejman Beg Kryeziu dangerous, and referred to him as an Italian agent, despite the fact that he was a Parliamentarian of the Yugoslav Kingdom.



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu with other high-ranking officials

The leaders of the Yugoslav Communists later thought that my grandfather had connections with the rebels called Ballists [Albanian National Front]. Regarding this issue, the Kosovo's National Liberation Movement Division Commander proposed the removal of all Albanians from high positions such as governors, directors, presidents, etc. Loyal Serbian citizens and good nationalists replaced them. Thus, after the war ended the clean- up process began.

Although the Italian Fascists had occupied Gjakova, it was almost fashionable to consider all high-ranking officials collaborators. My grandfather was no one's agent, he had been very protective of his municipality and its people.



In the company of Italian officials

In every meeting that my grandfather had with the Italian occupying authorities, he was dressed in the national costume, because he wanted to emphasize his national identity, while he was going along with the occupiers in order to protect his people.





Walking through town followed by Italian officials

In 1944, after the Italians left Gjakova, the German Nazis came. I remember a story from my family circles, "One night everyone was seated inside the house, the high wooden doors were locked. Father was not home that evening, when a heavy knock on the door was heard. When grandma went to open the door, the SS Nazi police led by Xhafer Deva [an Albanian Nazi collaborator] came in, looking for my grandfather. They searched the house high and low, while bread was being baked under saq [small coal oven] outside in the garden. When a cat got scared and jumped over the saq, the police turned around and shot it. The children were mortified."

As I write this story my mother says, "They used to come often at night in search of something. They lined up all us children against the wall and pointed their guns at us. My legs were always shaking. They killed mostly during market days. They hung people for others to see them, that's how they frightened us."

Another memory is that one day German Nazi agents came back to grandfather's home and Xhafer Deva asked him, "Tell us who is a Communist in your city. Give us all their names." "We have no Communists in this city," was grandfather's answer. They told him to better think twice because his refusal to cooperate could cost him his life and left. When he returned inside the house my grandmother asked him, "What happened?" He told her what the Germans had said and what his answer had been. "My God, what have you done!" she said, "They will persecute you." "How can I give up their names, most of Gjakova's youth is against occupation, they don't even know what Communist means, to give them up would mean giving up my children," he said.

My uncles kept a typewriter that some of their friends used to publish pamphlets against the occupation. Grandmother Emine Polloshka Kryeziu took this typewriter during the night, when everyone was asleep, and buried it in the fields, mixing them with manure. The next day, when the



German SS police returned to search the house and asked for the typewriter, grandma answered, "We don't have any typewriter, the children have buried it a long time ago." The police asked her to show them the place where it was buried. She brought them to the field, and while they were digging to find the typewriter grandma said, "My whole body was shaking from fear, they would kill me and my family if they found it. But what they found was an old rusty typewriter that had been destroyed overnight." They left her there and walked away having failed to find what they were looking for.



Grandmother Emine Polloshka Kryeziu

Emine Polloshka Kryeziu, my grandmother, was quick and very intelligent, though uneducated. She always covered my grandfather's back and took care of him at all times. When my grandfather's friends teased him that he was more handsome than his wife, his answer was, "My wife is beautiful within and smarter than you and all your wives."

My grandfather and grandmother had six children, three sons Sefidin, Myrteza, Mehdi and three daughters Ifakete (Keti), Magbule and Ferial. Just before the new Communist government came to power, someone told the Germans that my grandfather protected Communists. They came two days after their lackluster search for the typewriter and took him away without any explanations. They sent him to German camps in Austria, where he spent three years.



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu after his liberation from the camp

After the war, the new Yugoslav Communist government too declared my grandfather a war criminal. He could never return to Kosovo, because he would be executed just like his two sons. First he went to Italy, but he could not settle there, then he went to Izmir in Turkey, where he had an Albanian friend who was also a high-ranking official, Mr. Prishtina, who opened a little store for my grandfather where he worked until the end of his life. He never saw his family again.

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Sylejman Beg Kryeziu's death certificate

“The Communists did the same as the Germans,” my mother says, “They punished rich people. They wanted to take their wealth. As kids, we were always scared of everyone.”



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu in his store in Izmir



Uncle Sefidin Kryeziu

Sefidin Kryeziu, my eldest uncle, was born in Gjakova in 1922 and was executed in 1945, when the new Communist regime came into power. He was guilty only for being my grandfather's son, enough of a crime to be executed at that time. Sefidin was a student of literature at the University of Belgrade and was not involved in antigovernment action. “He was a loving man,” my mother says, “They took him one day and we never found him afterwards.” My grandmother went to the prison doors every day to bring him food and ask after him, but they never gave her any answer. They took her food and sent her back saying, “He is all right and will come back home soon.” But he never returned home, and no one ever knew when he was executed. He was arrested on 1945 New Year's Day. His body was never found and till today he has no grave. “He was so handsome, my God, they

killed him, and they killed him for nothing. When he came back from Belgrade, he always brought us gifts and he played with us,” my mother says, while I write this story. My grandmother continued to wait for his return and to feed the prison guards who lied to her.

Next, it was my younger uncle Myrteza Kryeziu’s turn to be arrested.



Uncle Myrteza Kryeziu

Myrteza Kryeziu was born in Gjakova in 1924 and was killed by the Internal Secret Service of the new Yugoslav government in the village of Mulliq in 1945. He too was arrested like his brother for no crime committed, and kept in the Peja’s prison called Kulla e Sheremetit [Sheremeti’s fortress]. When he completed two years of detention, there was a prison break down and all the inmates run away, so did my uncle.

Prosecution’s documents found in the archives by my cousin Zamfir Kryeziu and reported in a monograph of the Kryeziu of Gjakova by Mithat Begolli, say that Myrteza Kryeziu was an enemy of the people and a member of the traitor organization called Ballist operating during the occupation of Yugoslavia. They [the Ballists] continued their destructive work even after the liberation of Kosovo and Metohija. They formed a secret organization in Gjakova in February 1945, the so called National Committee for the Liberation of Kosovo.

My uncle Myrteza was a young teacher and was never involved in any antigovernment engagements. He was killed in a village of Mulliq while drinking water outside the house that hosted him. One of the villagers took his wallet, gathered the villagers and set the house of the killer on fire. He then went to my grandmother and gave her the wallet and the sad news about the death of her son.

It was then that my grandmother understood that both her sons were gone, she got sick from cancer and in nine short months she died, leaving her children orphans.



Grandfather Sylejman Beg Kryeziu with his young son Myrteza

The new Yugoslav Communist government repossessed all my grandfather's belongings and property, the house, the land and all that was under his name, throwing his children to the street. The government declared Sylejman Beg Kryeziu "enemy of the people," destroyed all the evidence of any good work he ever did, took away and hid his awards, erased his existence, his experience, and gave away his property.

Aunt Shyqyrie Tefiku took the children into her home.



Aunt Ifakete Kryeziu Hadri (Keti)

My aunt Ifakete (Keti) Kryeziu Hadri was born in Gjakova in 1920. She married Islam Hadri, the first Albanian engineer in Kosovo. Ifakete was a young bride with two small children, Nediha and Enver, when on January 1, 1945 the Communist police took away her husband and her brother Sefidin. They executed her husband in Peja on January 10, 1945. This execution was also performed without any court order or sentence, it was decided by the new Partisan government founded in Kosovo and led by Serbs. His body was also never found.

Ifakete decided to go to Gjakova and take care of her siblings, my mother Magbule who was then twelve years old, her fifteen-year-old brother Mehdi, and her sister eight years old Feriali. They suffered from extreme poverty. After having grown up in luxury and comfort, now they faced hunger. My grandfather sent them boxes of food and some clothes from Turkey once in a while, but they were not frequent gifts. He too had to survive as an immigrant.

Ifakete took care of her siblings for seven years while trying to take care of her children too, traveling between Peja and Gjakova. She sold all her jewelry, having to feed all the children as they lived in poverty and in constant fear, without any protection.

Later, Ifakete emigrated to Brussels, where she died in 1989, a year before her son Enver was assassinated by the Secret Serbian police for his activism toward the liberation of Kosovo. His murderers were caught and extradited to Serbia only to walk away to freedom immediately after.





My cousin Enver Hadri

Enver Hadri, the grandson of Sylejman Beg Kryeziu and the son of Islam Hadri, had sworn to bring to light the truth about the injustice done to his family and about the oppression of the people. He was an activist, a Community organizer, a poet, a student of architecture, a leader, and a diplomat, presenting the Kosova's cause at the European Parliament in Brussels for years. I remember his words when he used to say, "We owe bringing the truth to light to our grandparents. We can't let them rob us of our identity. They killed our families, they are responsible for their acts. I am going to find justice."



My cousin Enver Hadri, a National Hero

Today Enver Hadri is a national hero, and his bust stands in the middle of Peja, looking at the children who play freely around it. When I visit Peja, I often stop by to have a chat with him. I ask him if he thinks that these children knew who Enver Hadri was and what he died for. Would they remember how Enver spent all his life trying to fight against injustice and speak out for justice and freedom for all? Enver's suffering before and during the war kept him going for only one purpose: to return dignity to his family name and restore the truth about his grandfather and his father. I often joined him in this dream, hoping to go to Izmir, find grandfather's grave and return him to Gjakova to restore him to our living memory. I did get to Izmir, but all I could find in the archives was my grandfather's death certificate. I never found his grave.



My cousin Enver Hadri with his wife Aishe Kastrati Hadri

Enver Hadri was married to Aishe Kastrati and left four children Renoar, Ilir, Iliriana and Teuta, all living in Brussels with their mother.



My cousin Nediha Hadri Grapci

Nediha Hadri Grapci, was born in Peja in 1944. She is the daughter of my aunt Ifakete Kryeziu Hadri and Islam Hadri, the sister of Enver Hadri and the granddaughter of Sylejman Beg Kryeziu. She was a child when tragedy befell on the families Kryeziu and Hadri. She grew up following her mother on the road between her home in Peja and her non-existing home in Gjakova. She finished teaching college and worked as a teacher for forty years. However, because of her family history, she was never allowed to work in cities. The government sent her to distant villages for years. It was only in her late years that she returned to work in the capital city of Pristina.

During the Milosević's regime, when the state banned Albanian speaking schools in Kosovo and fired all the teachers, Nediha took the initiative to create a Union for Teachers' Rights. Soon after that, she had to leave Kosovo with thousands of Albanians, an exodus for survival from attacks by Serbian security forces. Presently, she continues the cause of her brother Enver Hadri, promoting his work. She is married to Feti Grapci, an agriculture specialist from Peja. They have four children: Mirlinda, who lives in the United States with her husband and her daughters, while Jeton, Jehona, and Veton live in Kosovo.



My mother Magbule Kryeziu Malushi

Magbule Kryeziu Malushi was born on August 7, 1933 in Gjakova. She remembers the loss of her brothers and the suffering of her mother while growing up. All that happened to her family left a deep trauma in my mother's life. She became afraid of any noise, even the sound of fireworks, she became afraid of people and could never find peace. When my mother turned 19 years old, she married my father Shefqet Malushi.



Magbule and Shefqet Malushi; my mother and uncle Mehdi; and my mother with her cousins Neriman and Gize.



My mother's wedding day

My father was the first Albanian pharmacist in Kosovo. Only four years after his wedding he died at the age of 27, then considered a mystery death, leaving my mother a widow at the age of 24, with three small children: Shqipe, Alida and Eduard.

My mother never stopped talking about her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters. She urged me to remember everything and I should never forget that we were direct descendants of Sylejman Beg Kryeziu, a man with a vision, who was proud, who was smart and who cared for all the people, who gave voice to the voiceless and always stood for justice and fairness. She raised her children alone as a single mom and an independent mom. After my father's death she finished school, found employment and worked for 39 years in the same pharmacy where my father had worked. She educated all her children, built a house in Peja, and later joined her children in the United States of America where they had emigrated and are living together now.





My mother Magbule Malushi presently in the US celebrating her 81<sup>st</sup> birthday



My uncle Mehdi Kryeziu

Mehdi Kryeziu was born in Gjakova in 1928 and died on May 8, 2004. Mehdi was the first generation who finished the Teacher's College in Kosovo. He was only a child when his family was destroyed, but as he grew up he was always identified as a son of a reactionary family. Later on, during the Ranković's era of repression, Mehdi was arrested under the pretense of carrying a gun without permission. This also was a fake accusation, because my uncle Mehdi never had or carried a gun, he was the most peaceful man. He was involved in sports and often trained young people in different sports. He was the first man in Gjakova to dive from the Ura e Shejtë [Holy Bridge], and with that he initiated a diving competition that continues to this day.

He lived a quiet life, never interfering with anyone's business. He was a man who cherished and loved everyone. He was married to Servete Batusha and left three children: his son Mustafa, and two daughters Diana and Drita. All uncle Mehdi's children live abroad and are married, with many children.



Uncle Mehdi Kryeziu and his wife Servete Bausha Kryeziu



Top row, from left to right: aunt Shyqyrie, aunt Ifakete, uncle Mehdi, the bride, aunt Ferial, my mother Magbule, aunt Myza and uncle Mazlom Tefiku.

Bottom row, from left to right: cousin Enver Hadri, cousin Nedra Hadri, myself.  
Bottom row: cousin Agron and cousin Afijete Tefiku.



My aunt Feriall Kryeziu Zhubi

Feriall Kryeziu Zhubi was born in Gjakova in 1938. She was the youngest daughter of Sylejman Beg Kryeziu, and she was only eight years old when her family was destroyed. She remembers her mother's pain and the disappearance of her father. She married Avni Zhubi, who was also one of the first Albanian generations of pharmacists in Kosovo.



Aunt Ferjall Kryeziu with her husband Avni Zhubi

Feriall and Avni had three children Afërdita, Burim and Mirgjin. They lived a quiet life until the 1998 war, when Gjakova was heavily raided by the Serbian paramilitaries. As destiny has it, they arrested Feriall's sons Burim and Mirgjin without any reason or accusation, as they did with many other youth. History repeated itself; that happened to her brothers and many other youths during her father's governance. Her sons were tortured and stood to be executed on the same day Americans bombed Kosovo and the prisons.

They were saved at the last minute. However, while they were away in prison, the paramilitaries beat to death their father, Feriall's husband. He died from heavy injuries without being able to see the liberation of his sons.

After the death of her husband, Feriall's spiritual and economic situation worsened. Once again history played an unfair game with my aunt Feriall's life, by making her again an "orphan" at an old age, and reminding her of the price she always had to pay, by sacrificing loved ones.



The Kryeziu family women. Only a few are still alive, almost all are gone to the gallery of souls.

What can one say about the destiny of my family, who gave up all it had for the right to exist, for the privilege of being in a leadership role, and standing up against oppression and injustice? Is this a comedy of errors after all, with governments always winning by eliminating educated people, and passionate people with a commitment to freedom? What they could not destroy was the spirit of these people, and the memories left behind.

Sylejman Beg Kryeziu with all his family members lives in the hearts of the people who had been touched and helped by him. He lives in the hearts of his still living daughters and grandchildren, as do all the souls that have vanished without a trace.

Thus, today, when Gjakova's new democratic government wants to build a park on a sacred land that is

protected under the heritage law, forgetting history, it is negating the city's own history. The same laws of all previous governments seem to lead the current one, and they are marred by injustice and discrimination. Like the German Nazis and the Communist Regime, now a Democratic government walks over the history of souls. Do they perhaps think that the authority of robbing someone of their identity, property and rights to exist will always remain theirs? Aren't they afraid that this government too shall pass and it will be done to them what they did to others?

One day justice will prevail. Until then, in the demolished gallery, the souls of my ancestors will continue to roam and echo their voice in the ears of the citizens of Gjakova who know the truth, yet have no strength to rise and stand up for justice, pretending those souls never existed.