

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW EXTRACT

[The in-depth oral history interview with the narrator was conducted on May 16, 2021 in Pristina. Due to the narrator's request for anonymity, we have concealed the identity.]

Narrator: In the twelfth grade, because it went up to the thirteenth grade in high school, I went to the general gymnasium, I started working in the twelfth grade.

Interviewer: Where did you work?

Narrator: I worked as a saleswoman at the Grand Store. I perhaps noticed that my mother didn't get paid enough at Amortizatorë at that time. Also my grandfather's pension was very low, I don't know how much it was at that time, 40 euros, or 30, I don't know. My father worked in the private sector, in a steakhouse but didn't, they would delay his salary sometimes for a month, sometimes for two. So, he never had a set date when he got his salary. He always got it in a disorderly way, we never knew when they would give it to him. And I noticed that it isn't, I noticed it wasn't enough for my mother, even though she never said "it isn't enough" or "I don't have money," but there are some things that become too obvious sometimes.

And since I wanted to, I told her, "I want to work." She told me, "Finish school first, then you can work." I said, "I will finish school and work." And I started, I both worked and went to school. So, I went to school from 8 a.m. when classes started until 1 p.m., at 1 p.m. I left school, at half past two I left for work and worked from 2 to 10 p.m. And it was a very tiring period, very [tiring]. Sometimes it happened that when I went home and sat down to eat maybe and until my mother put out my food, I would fall asleep while sitting on the couch. She would tell me, "Wake up, do you want to eat?" I would tell her, "I don't want food." I would just go back to sleep, I couldn't [eat food] because I'd get too tired.

Then, when I also had to study, even though I worked, I never slacked off in school. I always had good grades, I always found the time to study when I had an exam or something. Often I would wake up, I would set the alarm for 5 a.m. I woke up and studied from 5 to 7 a.m. Then I would start getting ready for, you know, 8 a.m., you know, to be at school. My school wasn't very far, a ten-minute walk, so I went. So, that time was very tiring, my immunity weakened, and the tiredness, and I got psoriasis, a skin condition. The doctor told me it formed from stress, from tiredness, the moment you get it, it appears from the age of 18 to the age of 25.

And I was exactly at that age that I got really tired and 17 years old, 16-17 years old, I got psoriasis. In the beginning, I didn't even know what it was, I just noticed my skin was reddening. Then my mother goes, "You have to go to the doctor, you have to go to the doctor," I'd say, "When I have a day off." You know, because I was also working and I'd get tired, I couldn't wait to have a day off, I didn't want to go to the doctor. I made an appointment, found the time, I started using lotions and stuff, because they said, "It doesn't go away, you just have to take care of it." But, that time was very tiring, especially the last two years because it was in the twelfth and thirteenth grade that I was working and going to, going to school. College...

Interviewer: Tell me, elaborate on it a little...

Narrator: Yes?

Interviewer: What kind of job was it?

Narrator: The job, the job, I worked as a saleswoman, I would be there, we were open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., how many hours, from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., around eight hours, right? We were standing for eight hours, we weren't allowed to sit at any moment and we were obligated to have, to wear heels, you know, high heels. Because if you went wearing flat shoes, they wouldn't even let you inside. So, I would always take my shoes to school with me, I would put them in my backpack so that when I went there I could go wearing my sneakers, and there I could take off my sneakers and put these [the high heels] on. It was pretty hard because first from 8:00 in the morning I was tired from school, then went back again and worked for eight hours. It was too much, all of my body and legs hurt.

When I think about it today, I wonder how I could do it, maybe because I was young, you know, my young age and stuff. When I think about it today, I think I wouldn't ever be able to stay like that even for two hours. We weren't allowed to sit even for a minute. Even when we went to eat, when we had a break, they also made the food there, they had a kitchen. When we went to eat, we had to eat in a rush, we had to finish lunch in ten minutes. If the boss came there twice and caught you there, he might have yelled at you, "Why are you eating all day long?" Even if you had just started eating, you know. There was a lot of pressure, nonstop...

Interviewer: What about the pay?

Narrator: The pay was very low, very low, very low, they gave you around 200 euros and even that they didn't give you regularly, they always delayed it for five, six, ten days. Even if you asked for it, you know, you'd tell them, "I need it for something." They'd say, "I don't have it. Wait." You know, the private sector always had it difficult in today's world. Maybe now it's a little better, but at that time, back then, back then it was very, very hard to work in the private sector, because well they...

Interviewer: Did you have an employment contract?

Narrator: No, no, we didn't have contracts. We didn't have a contract, so they paid us in cash, they gave us the money however they could. You had your salary, sometimes they gave you a hundred, other times 50, once 20, you know, depending on what was convenient for them. It wasn't just me, it was the same for all the workers. The students who were in college had it the hardest because they also had the apartment rent and they had to pay the rent.

For example, it happened that... I had a friend, she told them, "They haven't paid me yet." [The landlord] he told her, "Find it [the money] because I don't care, or I will fire you. You have to pay [the rent] on this date. She was asking once, saying "Give me the money because I need it," you know, they'd say, "We don't have it." It was always the employee's fault for asking for their own money. The contracts were not up for discussion at all, no one dared mention them. Maybe most of the employees didn't even know you had to have a contract because this practice wasn't applied anywhere.