

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.]

Interviewer: When did you start working?

Narrator: I started when I was 30 years old.

Interviewer: *Uh* {onomatopoeic} and what was it like?

Narrator: Well it was, I was very happy when I started working that they let me go for example, that my husband allowed me to. Why? Because I didn't think it was reasonable, why shouldn't I work like everyone else, why shouldn't I? I was the same person I had always been, wherever I was, I was the same person, why...?

Interviewer: Why did you have to ask your husband?

Narrator: You had to ask him because it was like that then, you couldn't go anywhere without your husband giving you permission, you weren't allowed. Because things might have gotten out of hand and we had to stay quiet and do as your husband commanded you. But I told him, "I want to work, because it's been long enough not working and all." "No," he said, "you don't need to," he said, "our women don't need to work, because we work." "You do work, but I want to work for myself, for my children, for my life, why should I idle when I like working and am hardworking." But later he realized that it's normal, you have to work, working is necessary. And he allowed me, I started working, now I don't ever think about stopping, at all.

Interviewer: Tell me, what was your first job like?

Narrator: Well my job, I was very content with it, when I started working, I was very content. I'm telling you, I always liked working, I never reached my goal and it seemed like another life, even today, it seems like that. I regret the time I spent not working. It wasn't okay, why, why shouldn't women work when they want to? I feel so much better that I work. Even though we couldn't achieve our goal of getting an education, to then work other kinds of jobs, something easier and better. But this isn't bad either, when I know we didn't work at all, we just did housework, you got married, served guests, dealt with some useless stuff, you know? For yourself, how do I say this, you couldn't even afford to go out and drink a coffee. But you did all the work, from morning to night time, you tried to respect that family, all their relatives, but when it came to going out and so you could never have fun.

I started working at my sister's restaurant, it was in Millosheva, but it was seasonal, there wasn't much work during the winter and I had to leave and find work elsewhere. They couldn't, for example, pay the workers they had, and there was nothing to do about it and we had to leave. At the restaurant, I ironed covers and I was the main person for [setting up] the bridal table, because I was, how do I say it, I was perfect at my job. I wanted to do my job right and I was the head there.

Interviewer: What kind of responsibilities did you have there?

Narrator: I had to clean the covers, iron them, and as said, I was the head for [setting up] the bridal table, I did all of that.

Interviewer: What is there to do?

Narrator: There is the cover of the table of the groom, that of the couple, behind there's the curtain, the decorations that they choose. It has happened that the family, the family hosting the wedding brought their own, they wanted their own. Not what the restaurant had, for example, but they wanted to do it better, they had the means, then I had to clean those too, iron what they wanted, whatever wishes they had I had to fulfill them.

Interviewer: Did you like that?

Narrator: Yes, I didn't mind, because we were hardworking and we made a place for ourselves. And I was very content and didn't feel tired. I'd just think how it was a completely different life, completely, such a big change, I went and came back with sheer willpower. Now it seemed like a completely different life. I said that I was never afraid of working, I said that if someone can do it, so can I. Someone else can do it, but I can't? No, I will do it too because I am myself and I will be able to do it. But some sort of stress about where I'm going, what if they say things to me, what if they do not like me even though my sister said, "Who doesn't like you?" I said, "Who knows, there are all kinds of

people, you can have good intentions but they take advantage of you and perhaps fire you.” “No,” she said, “You belong everywhere. Because we are hardworking” she said, “we always make a place for ourselves.” You know?

Interviewer: It’s not easy to go into someone’s house...

Narrator: It’s very difficult, it’s stressful, when I started at that age, at that time it was very stressful. I always wondered where I was going, but always with the recommendation of someone whose family I knew well, because money isn’t worth going anywhere for. [Money] isn’t everything, it will never be. If I didn’t know a family really well, I wouldn’t agree to go. But the woman who found the jobs for me said, “I know what kind of a woman you are and you can, I wouldn’t tell you to do it otherwise.”

Interviewer: Tell me how do you make the deal? Who do you talk to?

Narrator: The deal, we make the deal through a mediator. I have friends from that area, now they’re married, they know someone in the city, connection after connection. Someone tells them, they ask for a housekeeper. Of course, everyone asks for a good and polite housekeeper. And they say, “Do you know someone because this and that...” for example, right now I have an offer, there are some offices at the Arabs’ buildings. My friend called and said, “Do you want to go because they said, ‘We have never had an actual good worker.’ Do you know anyone you could find for us? It’s a full time job, she will get paid this much. If we like her, if she is the way you’re saying she is, we don’t even know, we will help that woman a lot.” When I go there now, it’s her duty to tell me about everything, what kind of tasks I have, to tell me everything on time, “I will tell you what I want, you tell me what you want, so we don’t argue later because I want to be proper...” you know?

Interviewer: Yes, that’s why I’m saying, tell us how...

Narrator: Well, “I want both of us to be satisfied. If you don’t feel satisfied, I will leave. You just have to say, ‘I don’t like it here and that’s it.’ But I will try, you will evaluate my work and so I will start.” Wherever I worked, they were always satisfied [with my work]. And I felt very good about it.

Interviewer: How many hours do you usually work?

Narrator: I usually worked for eight hours. But now I’m part-time, but they said they have offices at the new Municipality building and, after a while, after a year, it will be a year in August. “After a year, we will go there, you will work full time, you have a proper salary, and so you also have a full-time schedule,” you know?

Interviewer: What are your usual tasks, what do you do?

Narrator: Well, my usual tasks include maintenance, windows, everything that needs to be taken care of, tables, I do everything that needs to be taken care of. They never had to, for example, complain to me that, “You didn’t do this”, instead everything was taken care of and they’d tell me, “Very good.”

Interviewer: Have you ever had an employment contract for the jobs you have had?

Narrator: Never.

Interviewer: How do you feel about it?

Narrator: Never. It happened that I went to Fushë-Kosova and worked at BauMarket, I said, “Can you give me a contract?” Because all the market workers have contracts, why would I be the only exception, for example. I did my job, they liked my work and I talked to the lady of the house, I said, “Can you?” She said, “Yes, but we have to cut your monthly salary...” for example 20, 30 euros, how does it work? And I said, I didn’t agree because I didn’t have a very high salary and back then we had the needs of the house and maybe we couldn’t have done it, just some important ones, there was no way. And I just forgot about it... I still continued working that way without documents, without...