

## INTERVIEW WITH IGBALLE REXHA JASHARI

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Duration: 122 minutes

Present:

1. Igballe Rexha Jashari (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication.*

*{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension.*

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I am Igballe Rexha Jashari, mainly everything of mine connects to Pristina, I mean, as a child, and then my activity continues all around Kosovo. But, as a child, my parents, my father is from the Rimanishtë village, Municipality of Pristina and my mother from Barileva village, Municipality of Pristina as well, both of them. So, my father is Ali Rexha, while my mother is Selime Shala, she's from the Shala family of Barileva. I am the first child after seven years of my parents' marriage.

They got married when they were around 18 years old and I am the first child. And then there are seven of us, I mean five sisters and two brothers. I remembered that when they began having children, my father gave my mother a *lira* for each child, perhaps because we were over seven years apart, it was a gift to her, as well as, you know, other rewards since we were seven children. We were girls first, four girls, and then two brothers and a sister, the youngest sister.

I can say that as a family we were middle class. We did well since my father worked, at first in the industrial agricultural enterprise that back then was called PIK [*Poljuprivredni Industrijski Kombinat*] and later on in KEK.<sup>1</sup> So, he worked until the September 3rd strike, when he was fired from his job. He worked in KEK. As a first child, as a child in Pristina, I mean, Pristina of course changed a lot since those years and I changed with it as I grew older (laughs).

I remember how here, as a child, and I hadn't turned seven yet, my father said, "We'll go out and get these, we'll buy something together," and it was '68. I mean, I am talking about November, November 27, actually the demonstrations of '68. And there at the stores, in that street where the old stores were by the Triangle,<sup>2</sup> so we walked around with my father. He bought me a pair of shoes and when it was the evening he said, "You have to go home on your own," you know, "I'll get you a cab."

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<sup>1</sup> *Korporata Energjetike e Kosovës (KEK)* - Kosovo Energy Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> The monument of brotherhood-unity by city hall.

Taxis back then were horse carriages, so there were horse carriage taxis. And he put me on a horse carriage there, where the municipality is now, that's where the taxis station was. I feel like I see it even now, so he started to go uptown towards the theater and the stairs there at the Triangle and climbed the stairs with a long coat. When I went home, my mother said, "Where is he?" I said, "He didn't come with me."

She knew that, I mean, it was the organization of demonstrations and... because my maternal uncles were, my uncle was in prison at the time, I mean, imprisoned in '64 together with Adem Demaçi<sup>3</sup> and he was sentenced to 13 years. And my other uncle as well, so she already knew that he was a participant in the demonstrations. And at home my paternal uncles, I mean, everybody started to worry about him being stuck at the demonstrations. My father didn't come back that night, so because of the police pursuit he was stuck there, in some field Pristina, until the police withdrew and then in the morning he came back home.

Other things as a child, I mean, we were actually very happy as children, as a family, as good students at school, I mean. I was among the five students in the class, at the Zenel Hajdini elementary school in Pristina, the five most excellent students. The other six children were excellent in school as well. That was a relief for my parents of course, that we studied. I remember the former Miladin Popović library, one we went to often. I...

**Anita Susuri:** In which neighborhood did you live?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** In Kodra e Trimave. So, when my parents came, when they bought land in that area, it was in '59. There was much land which was being sold then. My paternal uncles came there and members of my family actually live there today.

**Anita Susuri:** How do you remember Pristina at that time? While you were a child or...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** With wooden bridges, I mean, with rivers, rivers flooding the neighborhood. I remember that we went... my math teacher was living somewhere near the river here and there was flooding and we went as students to help him clean his house a bit. We went on our own, I mean, but there was flooding and we went to that neighborhood. Pristina with the small stores, I mean, this part here and with very nice cake shops. The cake shop right by the river that I am talking about, at the bridge, at the market there which was also there at the time, the Fanoti cake shop as we called it. I mean, I don't know for how long, but Fanoti is still there and there were those very nice cake shops

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<sup>3</sup> Adem Demaçi (1936 - 2018) was an Albanian writer, politician, and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

and my father loved the *tullumba*<sup>4</sup> and lemonades. And we, I mean, usually as children at those cake shops, at those...

Then as a child I was in my school's art group and Pristina's art group. The graffiti in the streets, I mean, the ones done by Pristina's art group were interesting, even now I remember them. There people gathered at the theater, especially when there was an event when we went out to draw all that area in front of the theater. The street was narrow back then, I mean, the sidewalks too, we filled them with various graffiti as Pristina's art group. I wrote poems at that time, I mean, poems which were published on the bulletin board at school.

And then I went to the gymnasium,<sup>5</sup> the former Ivo Lola Ribar gymnasium, so I was a gymnasium student at that time, and then at the Sami Frashëri school. So these streets, I mean, hold a lot of memories from my entire childhood. That part now which is in the city center around the gymnasium and the part towards the Tre Sheshirat<sup>6</sup> but there was not much movement. Those were good stores, so the clothes were really nice, because the clothing at that time was different and also there weren't many clothing stores, there were a few clothing stores. But the ones that were there had really quality material.

**Anita Susuri:** I know that, you are a little younger, you might have heard, the [city] center was up to the Grand Hotel and then it was the outskirts.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was the outskirts.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember that?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, I remember, yes. I remember, not very clearly, because as I said until the Tre Sheshirat, a little further, I mean, I remember that I would walk until there. And that part when the stores opened near the Grand Hotel and, I mean, that's how those constructions began in that area, I remember as a child. And then there was the big store here and we called it Uzor at the time, so it was right in that area here in the corner where the Assembly is now, the Assembly building, but these now are small stores. It was a very big store with small household items.

That passed. When it was built, when that construction I mentioned began, also in that area it extended toward the Faculty of Economics, in that part where the café is on the other side of the street, the Ministry of Education, and across from it that corner. That shop, I mean, when that construction in Prishtina began in that area, that's when the expansion started there. At school, actually, in school

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<sup>4</sup> *Tullumba* is a deep-fried dessert found in Egypt, Turkey, and the regional cuisines of the former Ottoman Empire.

<sup>5</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university

<sup>6</sup> Cross Street in Pristina where now there is the Catholic Cathedral.

since the gymnasium was a better school that required more commitment, I mean. Until the fourth year, in the second semester of the fourth year, I was actually involved in activities.

Otherwise, I mean, during my time in the gymnasium, no, I didn't engage in anything personally, so, I engaged mainly in studying and socializing with that joy that comes from being in school. We were a really, really good class. We celebrated our 25th anniversary after the war, of course, we meet with each other from time to time because a large number of them are here in Pristina. They were, I mean, mainly from Pristina, but there are some of them who migrated, I mean, also people from my class in the gymnasium.

**Anita Susuri:** What did you do back then as youngsters?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** As youngsters, as youngsters we used to go out, meaning we didn't engage in anything specific but we just went out. There was the *korzo*<sup>7</sup> as children, back then. I went out very little at that time. I would mainly read, also in the library, and in my free time I admired various sports that I followed. I was a fan, now, my siblings imitated me, I mean, when there were football or basketball matches, I mean, I dropped everything and, I mean, I watched them. I was merely curious about them, not that I participated. But I was a fan, I mean, of various sports and other activities.

But the school as a school didn't have some kind of activities that were carried out during that time. I know that in the Albanian language class, we took special notes for each lesson and the Albanian language professor used to take the notebook, it was for penmanship and those details, I mean, and he would show it in other classes as a good example. Whereas I said that in the fourth year some actors came to ask if there was anyone among the gymnasium students interested in acting, especially the ones in the fourth year.

And I thought I would try for an interview, I mean, with Asllan Hasaj, the theater director, I mean, at that time Skender Nimani as well, who interviewed those of us who went. And they... there was an interview there and [also] that very beautiful reading. So, I mean, I, I said, okay I will accept to continue playing some roles. At first I had the role of the mother in Maxim Gorky's book. So, it was a very interesting role, very interesting. Then my own self came to the fore, I mean, an old woman with gray hair, I mean, there in that role. And I also played the role of Hajrie in *Halili e Hajria* by Kolë Jakova,<sup>8</sup> the book, so these were the two dramas.

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<sup>7</sup> Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

<sup>8</sup> Kolë Jakova (1916 - 2002) was active in the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Movement and an Albanian playwright.

With the purpose, I mean, that's what was said, with the purpose that these artistic groups would go to Albania during that time, '79-'80, until the demonstrations of '81,<sup>9</sup> and whoever was in these dramas had the opportunity to go, I mean, this was also a reason that I, I mean, went to, to play in those dramas.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you go to Albania?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No, because when we had the premiere of *Halili e Hajria*, it was probably February of '81 so there were demonstrations. So, nothing of that materialized.

**Anita Susuri:** What kind of... what did you organize for Albania? How did you imagine it?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** We didn't have, I mean, we only had that idealism about Albania, that Albania, being Albanian, meaning Albanian lands. We didn't have any idea about the beauty there. All the artistic groups that came during that time, I attended their concerts in the October 1 hall, in the Red Hall, in the Youth Palace, the ones that were in '79 I mean, and I went to all of them. I found ways and I attended those concerts. Also, the groups that came, the basketball players, I remember the meeting, I had my brother who I mentioned was born after four sisters and my brother is called Shqiptar, and I took him by the hand and we went to Grand Hotel where they stayed and I said, "I want to introduce you to an Albanian," and they, as basketball players, took him in their hands, each one, like *auuu* {onomatopoeia}, and that, his name.

Now I remembered, I mean, the name, actually my maternal uncle who, as I said, was imprisoned and he was released in '70. With the fall of Ranković's<sup>10</sup> system at that time, they pardoned him for the remaining years. And when he heard that my mother was pregnant, he had then said, he had told my other maternal uncle that if she gave birth to a boy, it would be good to name him Shqiptar. My mother gave birth to my brother at home, not in the hospital, so she called a helper who was referred to as a midwife then. She called that helper to come to the house and gave birth at home and he, you

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<sup>9</sup> On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

know, like... and this is a very interesting detail, opened the windows, "A Skanderbeg<sup>11</sup> is born!" I mean, here, and we blessed him with that name.

I said, my father said, "You name him however you like." I said, "since I heard because I was also very young, I was nine years old, "If you listen to me, since our maternal uncle said so, we should name him Shqiptar." He said, "Okay." But I suffered a lot for this name. Because, now I am moving from one moment to another, but I am connecting it with this, in 1989, when my brother went to military service, and when the dead bodies of Albanian conscripts started coming from all over Yugoslavia, for me it was a real pain, I mean the fact that we named him that and every morning they called him Shqiptar, it would upset them.

Not a month passed, and they called us and told us that he was sick. He was in Titograd then, I mean today's Podgorica. And we went with my father, with my husband, so, at that time we went to see him. But he got sick because he was a sensitive child, of course, and when they put him in the Morača River, when they put them as soldiers, he immediately caught a cold and... then it passed, I mean, he finished military service.

**Anita Susuri:** Did he have problems during military service?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** A little. Actually the commander who was there was Croatian and my father befriended him and he said, "Any time you worry just call me on the phone," so, "and feel free to be interested in his well-being." We actually went there several times, to visit him and... but he finished military service nonetheless. But during the '90s too, he never carried an ID with him, I mean. Because he was really at risk, I mean, because of his name.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to go back a little to the topic of education, you mentioned that you really liked reading...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** And there were some books which were forbidden at that time. Did you get the chance to have them? Did you read them? And how did you get them?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, since I mentioned that my maternal uncle and my uncles actually were, he, in that part and they had plenty of books. My uncle was an Albanian language professor who completed his studies in Belgrade, so at the faculty and he was a language professor in *Shkolla*

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<sup>11</sup> Gjergj Kastriot – Skanderbeg (1405-1468) was an Albanian nobleman and leader. Taken hostage as a boy by the Ottomans, he served the Empire until 1443 when he became the Chief of the League of Albanian People in the League of Lezhë. He led a resistance to the Ottoman Empire for the next 25 years until his death, and is considered a model of Christian resistance against Ottoman Islam throughout Europe. He is the greatest Albanian national hero.

*Normale*<sup>12</sup> in Pristina when he was imprisoned. He was actually the first professor to write in Albanian in the gradebook. He was the first professor to remove the Serbian inscription in the school, I mean, at the time when he worked. Here somewhere, in these old buildings, he lived in this area. Similarly, my other uncle was a professor of English language. But my uncles had these books, these textbooks and we had it easier getting these textbooks, I mean, ... besides the books which were in the library.

My uncle's son was imprisoned in '81, so, that uncle's son, and he was a recently graduated lawyer and he was employed and he was imprisoned and sentenced to ten years in prison. So it means that there was a part that we continuously had access to, the access actually to these books and these textbooks to read. We constantly listened to Radio Tirana. My mother always had Radio Tirana on at that time. She had a radio which my other uncle brought to her, a radio, those first big radios. The first radios in Kosovo actually. And she always had it on, I mean, and Radio Tirana was inspiring for us, ideals, work, perhaps how we were brought up, like that.

**Anita Susuri:** In '74, so the Constitution[changed...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The Constitution, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** And there was a slightly brighter period, so to speak, for the Albanians and Kosovo, do you remember that? Did you notice that difference?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I can say now that people really saw things differently because the part that saw that oppression at the time was small. Because there might have been some kind of liberation, the university, there were some things. But, compared to the other nations we were constantly oppressed. There was the issue of welfare. I said that although my father was employed at KEK since '70 and the salaries were good, very good actually, I mean, there was oppression, the oppression was in different forms. It was that you were not equal to the other people of former Yugoslavia, no matter how much freedom of education was offered, I mean at that time. Education began, that began, but it was still far from the other places of former Yugoslavia.

**Anita Susuri:** So, you mentioned your friends and hangouts during high school. What else remains as a memory from the city of Pristina at that time?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** From the city, the craftsmen, I mean, the blacksmiths, especially the blacksmiths, now I remember as we passed, we were walking hand in hand with my father and my sister was very curious. She has passed away, I mean, it's been two and a half years since she passed away (cries).

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<sup>12</sup> The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.



**Anita Susuri:** Did you continue university? Why did you choose this field? How did it come to that decision? It's also the year when the demonstrations began. Tell us all that you can.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I chose the Faculty of Economics because I was, besides the part that I mentioned about being inclined towards culture, towards language, which was almost like genetics for us, I loved mathematics, I knew mathematics, I was fond of it and of course, that the gymnasium gave you the opportunity to learn mathematics better. I did not have the interest to be, I mean, in medicine or something, I mean, those faculties, but we were in economics and we were a large number of classmates who actually went to study economics. It was ten or 12, I mean, from our class who enrolled in the Faculty of Economics. And that was the starting point for me to continue at the Faculty of Economics.

In '81 where... I mean, a little while before the demonstrations there was a group of students who were actually, they worked in different groups, I wasn't organized with some groups, I mean, I only did my own thing at that time. But I was also invited to the students dormitory, which, I mean, was interesting to me. It was the first and last time that I went to the dormitory actually, with those friends back then. And they told me that they were working on something in that direction.

And since I heard that I contacted my maternal uncle's son, who I mentioned was imprisoned, and I told him this and that. So, "Something will happen in Kosovo during this time." He said, "It will, but not now." So, "It will." But he said, "Not now. It's being worked on." Of course, he didn't say he was working on something himself. But, "It's being worked on. There are different groups that are working in that direction and, because some things are bad for us," and he explained things to me because he was older, of course.

I remember and I was in the amphitheater when they came and they said that, I mean, it was in the students canteen, that it started, it blew up. In the amphitheater, there was a person and I don't remember who it was, I mean, some people say it was Ali Lajçi, but I don't remember the person. But I know that the amphitheater door opened and, I mean, they said, "You go out as well and stand up and..." and then there was the participation on the dates of the demonstrations, and I, my sister was a first year student in the Sami Frashëri school then, I mean, as well as the Ivo Lola Ribar gymnasium.

And, I mean, when the April 1 demonstrations 1981 started, I was actually at home because I didn't know, since I wasn't part of those groups, I wasn't... but, since I heard that it blew up there, that's when I immediately got up and my sister who was only 15 years old at that time came after me. Of course, I tried, I mean for her to go back home but there, where the Assembly [is, that's where we saw that the protesters were coming, the demonstrators actually, so, and we joined them there.

I sent my sister away to the market once again and I accompanied her so she could go home, but she still joined me that day. So, we stayed there, right in front of the loudspeaker, so in front of the words that were said, we listened until the police intervened. We entered one of the buildings where Kraš<sup>13</sup> was located before, where ÇIK<sup>14</sup> is now, not even ÇIK is there anymore (laughs). The store, where the flowers are, where the flowers are placed in that part across from the Ministry of Culture there, it was a store, ÇIK, if somebody remembers, that's how we oriented ourselves.

We went into that entrance of the building together with my sister and a few other people. At first they just locked us in, in order for us to not go out, and they threw tear gas and for us to not go out of there but since the screams were loud and the people seemingly were loud as well, they said, "Go out," but they grabbed some of the people there. And we ran down the road, the tear gas affected my sister, so, of course, she was a burden for me because I had to hold her, I mean, and not let her go, where we saw the police.

After a few hours, I mean, that night, we arrived home. But, my sister continued organizing the students the next day, so she was like that since she was 15 years old. The police chase sent them somewhere further up from the *Shkolla Normale*, above Gërmia, in that area. And she had a flag in her hands and that's how she walked around and she didn't come back for one night, she was actually stuck there.

And for her there was the risk of being expelled from school. There was Professor Ali Ahmeti, who passed away, who was a very, very good Albanian language professor. He was the head teacher who actually saved her from expulsion because she was the best student in school. She was the head of the class, I mean, all her grades were fives<sup>15</sup> and [he helped her to not be expelled from school. I don't know how he justified it, but I mean, she got away with not being expelled from school.

**Anita Susuri:** When you went back to your family, were your parents worried? What were they like...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Very, very, much, I mean, our mother came after us first, so, like, "Don't, don't, don't go," but she went back. Yes, they worried a lot. My father didn't know because he was at work, but my mother was very worried. And, "Don't, don't, don't, you don't have to," like a parent worries, of course, they worried a lot because we were actually young. I was young too but my sister especially was younger than me, she was five years younger. Of course, she was very young.

**Anita Susuri:** What else did you see those days? Was there violence?

<sup>13</sup> Kraš, a candy store based in Croatia, but present in all republics and provinces of Yugoslavia. In Pristina, this store was located near today's Mother Teresa square.

<sup>14</sup> Srb.: ČIK, a shoe chain store in former Yugoslavia.

<sup>15</sup> Grade A in a A-F scale.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, of course, there was violence, absolutely. And there were some batons, I mean, like that, but of course, I mean, there was violence and everything. So there was a gloom in Pristina because of everything, of course. So that was a starting point of the years... actually '81. There was a calmness more or less until the years '88-'89 but that was actually a start for all the following developments.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you notice this after... after the demonstrations the *diferencimi*<sup>16</sup> also began, imprisonment began...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Absolutely.

**Anita Susuri:** What do you know about that?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I also remember that some of my friends weren't at the university. Some of them were absent, they began missing classes and, I mean, they were imprisoned. I realized that they were groups, I mean, some of them from there, friends from university. Of course, my maternal uncle's son was imprisoned, I mean at that time, and he was sentenced to ten years. There were imprisonments of many groups, there were friends too, actually from my friend group too, my sister's friend group, my brothers', I mean who were imprisoned.

So, it was a difficult situation for those who had that fate, because it wasn't the same for everybody, I mean. But there was an increase in people's involvement, of the whole situation. Compared to the time when my maternal uncle was imprisoned in '64 there was an increasing number of activists, so it was different in '81, for example. It was different. I am saying, for myself, I mean, I didn't hesitate to speak for a right, I never hesitated, not even among friends. So, there were different ways where you understood who stood where.

I remember a colleague from Struga was at the faculty, and when he realized more or less that there were several of us, I wasn't the only one, and so, I mean, he would constantly say, "You always have a place reserved here in the amphitheater," "Where mud seems sweeter than honey." I mean, there were these sayings that... At that time I also acted in some skits within the Drita society of the Faculty of Law. I took part, I mean, once.

Ehat Musa was the singer who used to come from Struga and I played in some skits at the green hall in the Palace of Youth and I more or less continued with that *fach*<sup>17</sup> and that grouping of people in various ways, there was Naser Gjinovci, I mean, and Haqif Mulliqi who carried that friendship and that was a part, I mean, joyful and a time when I participated in the skits during my studies.

<sup>16</sup> *Diferencimi* (lit. differentiation) refers to the purges of suspected Albanian nationalists after the 1981 protests demanding the status of a republic for Kosovo.

<sup>17</sup> The German *Fach* system is a method of classifying singers, primarily opera singers, according to the range, weight, and color of their voices. In this context, it refers to the speaker's acting profile.

**Anita Susuri:** Were they like amateur groups?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Amateur groups as part of the faculty, as part of the faculty, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you, did you have professors from Albania?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No.

**Anita Susuri:** You didn't.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** We had professors who were Sami Peja who had been detained in Goli Otok,<sup>18</sup> as well as Hajrullah Gorani,<sup>19</sup> professors who suffered in prisons. And we as students... especially Hajrullah Gorani, during break in-between classes, held meetings with groups of students and talked about those struggles, but also about Albania in general. Professor Sami Peja as well, he passed away. So they talked about that and how we should be, so Albanians should have better conditions, how to study, to advance. As Albanians at that time it was...

**Anita Susuri:** Did you know the professors from Albania that they sent away? They didn't allow them to come and give lectures.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I don't think the Faculty of Economics had any, so there were professors from there in the Albanian language and at the Faculty of Medicine, I don't remember there were professors from Albania in the Faculty of Economics, no.

**Anita Susuri:** You mentioned that during your studies you were engaged in cultural activities, did that continue, how long did that last?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** A little, I mean, maybe for one semester, during that time, it was one semester.

**Anita Susuri:** Why didn't you continue?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I don't know, maybe my friends, the summer break and I didn't join them the next year, like that. So, that was, they were... maybe I grew up a bit and (laughs). My parents didn't

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<sup>18</sup> Island in the north of the Adriatic sea, from 1949 through 1956 a maximum security penal colony for Yugoslav political prisoners, where individuals accused of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, or other dissenters, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

<sup>19</sup> Hajrullah Gorani (1931-2020) was a professor, syndicalist, and a former political prisoner. He was the Head of the Independent Syndicalist Union of Kosovo. He led the Kosovo workers' strike held on September 3, 1990, after which Milosević's regime in Kosovo terminated all their contracts, and an oppressive decade for Albanians living in Kosovo began.

want me to be in the theater, I mean, although I was accepted. So, they accepted me at the National Theater and I had signed my contract, how to say, so after a week they made it possible to sign it. But, my mother said, “Don’t ask your father at all because that’s not our wish for you,” and I mean I gave up completely on that thing (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** When did you first start working after finishing university?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I began in 87 in *Rilindja*.<sup>20</sup> Actually I still had one or two exams to finish. I was at the National Library studying together with my sister [Shukrije Rexha](#) who was [studying at] the Faculty of Medicine, and at the time we studied together. She was preparing for her exams and she herself was I mean sh always [took] different initiatives and ideas, that’s how she was.

She had seen the job opening at *Rilindja*. She was the one who had seen it. And she told me, “You have to go there and apply for this,” I had a journal, so I had a journal and I consistently wrote there, I continued to write, I continued to draw and the drawings of my other family members, I continued with that. And she, knowing that part of me I mean... she said, “You have to go to the interview in *Rilindja*, I said, “No, I won’t go to *Rilindja*.” Journalism and economy were something, “You have your fate. Regardless of whether you’re insisting on economics, you have your fate. You have to go to the interview.”

That day the interview was at 12:00, and I got up for the library at 11:00 and went to the interview at *Rilindja*. When I went in there was a big group of people who, I mean who went for the interview. Actually the interview was in written form. So, I did the interview, there were questions regarding various news starting from the federation back then, the assemblies, events, sports, music, different fields, which I more or less knew about. And they said that the results from the written interview would be announced after four-five days.

There they asked me, “Who is it? Who is the person who will bring you here and support you,” because back then it was just like it is now. There was no way to work in *Rilindja* if it’s someone who didn’t have anybody to support them. I said, “No, I came here by myself, not even anybody knows except for my sister,” “No, you don’t stand a chance.” They made the announcement five days after and I didn’t go that day. I didn’t believe it at all to be honest, I went the next day. And I saw the list of the 20 people who were accepted, I was in that list too.

They began because, they began with the chronicle Pristina, there was a page about the chronicle of Pristina at that time in *Rilindja*. The editor Esat Dujaka who up until recently was at 21,<sup>21</sup> working at the television [broadcasting channel] 21 and the editor Shefqet Rexhepit, it was both of them. Initially with

<sup>20</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

<sup>21</sup> RTV21 (short for Radiotelevision 21) is a broadcaster and media company based in Pristina, Kosovo, which includes a radio (est. May 11, 1998), a television station (est. September 22, 2000), and six sister stations.

the chronicle of Pristina since I was among those [who dealt] with economy, I began to follow the enterprises during those years '87-'88 until the other part started, the other time period. Later on I also started to follow the enterprises that were in Pristina, especially the productive, service, and trading enterprises. And until that began in '89, the '90s which was a short period, it actually wasn't long.

## Part Two

**Anita Susuri:** You told me that you were in the [Trepça mine] pit during the miners' period...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Not in the pit. When they came here, I mean.

**Anita Susuri:** Aha.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No, so when the miners came here.

**Anita Susuri:** During the march.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes. When they came here.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember that day? What was it like?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I mean that day... I can say that every event, and it's very strong emotions when you think of it. When you remember all of that, actually it seemed like a kind of awakening. It seemed like that to me, maybe not for other people. But for me it was an awakening, regardless of the consequences. It was an awakening because we were still experiencing [oppression] and we weren't satisfied with our rights. It was an awakening, it was painful because, I mean, there was loss of life that... but it was an overall awakening of the people.

It was both joy and, they were intertwined meaning both sides, at the time when you saw the miners. It was... for the miners, each one felt a particular pain, meaning that they were the people who actually upheld a whole former Yugoslavia at the time. Trepça [mine], and their work was very difficult, very heavy, and when there came the time that even they stood up from the [mine] pit and demanded their rights, for us it was... when they do it why shouldn't the others, I mean, why would the others not go out and demand their rights?

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember specifically, for example what you saw? They went into the Boro and Ramiz hall...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** October 1 [hall], not Boro Ramiz. Meaning in the October 1 [hall], that's where they settled, that's where I also stayed with those blankets for one night. I know that I did it, but I went from time to time in that part because the hall was filled [with people]. As a journalist too of course, because at the time I was a journalist, but also as a participator, as... actually as a companion for the people who were there. It was a large number, you had no room to sit at that time. So, there were people lying down who did their part, people who brought all kinds of food to those people.

**Anita Susuri:** So the miners spent one night there?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes. They stayed there.

**Anita Susuri:** Who else was there?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There were others too, yes, yes. The hall was full [of people], I mean, it was full. There were speeches and a police intervention was expected, like that, but until those agreements were reached between them.

**Anita Susuri:** Were there, for example, politicians who came to speak at that time?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There was someone, but I don't remember the name, I actually don't remember who it was.

**Anita Susuri:** [Kaqusha Jashari](#), there was [Azem Vllasi](#)...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There I don't remember. I only remember this part, I mean, in the city center. I don't remember who came in that side.

**Anita Susuri:** What about the city center, was there someone?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** In the city center when we had already risen, I mean, there was a speech in the city center back then which was given by some people and some protesters, those calls, "Trepça is ours," "Kosovo Republic," and like that. I know that that's where Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha were, they spoke in front of the protestors like that, I mean, "You have to calm down, you have to go to your homes, it will only get worse." Like that.

**Anita Susuri:** That was in the [city] center...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** In the city center. There was the committee, now, I mean, where the Ministry of Culture is [now], that's exactly where the Committee was, so...

**Anita Susuri:** Were the demands at that time “Kosovo Republic,” or...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was...

**Anita Susuri:** Or only the protection of...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No, there was “Kosovo Republic,” there was, the demands were there at that time, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** How was the demand received? It was a bit dangerous.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Well, ‘89 then, considering ‘81, there was no more, I mean, it wasn’t anymore because it was a permanent demand of the people. It was dangerous, but the calls were “Kosovo Republic,” absolutely.

**Anita Susuri:** Was there an intervention from the police?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No, there wasn’t because after their speech the crowd of people dispersed.

**Anita Susuri:** What else do you remember from that day, for example, how the crowd of people dispersed? I know that they walked.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, they walked holding their banners, weating {describes with hands}, with... I am saying that it was a very strong emotion that they and us in a way protected them. I mean, all that crowd of people were somehow protecting those people who came in their service. They are one in that moment and in their service, we were with them in their demands.

**Anita Susuri:** How did the crowd disperse afterwards?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** And the crowd [left] I mean, because they were told, “The demands you’re making will be met,” and the crowd of people dispersed. Even though those demands weren’t met (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Those years I mean ‘89, ‘90 and further, but it was mainly these two [years], there were many events.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Many.

**Anita Susuri:** What do you remember, something that remained in your memory?



**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** No, I remember when the '90s started, the mobilization started, the firings, of course, that my father was also fired after the 3rd September strike. I participated in that strike, of course, meaning... in the city which was an everyday thing those days and people getting fired en masse from their jobs.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember the miners' strike? Did you report on the strike?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It wasn't specifically me who reported on the miners' strike. Not specifically me. I know that the journalist was from Mitrovica, there were other journalists who wrote about it too, maybe Behar, so...

**Anita Susuri:** Were they correspondents?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes they were correspondents from every location in *Rilindja*.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember how that was received from you, for example, in the newsroom or in your family? With your friends? What was talked about? Because they stayed in the mine pit for eight days with the demands they had...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** To us, it was important for them to survive, to get out of it alive, to not be taken, to not be imprisoned actually, so to get out of it alive. Because it's always difficult when somebody experiences a moment of waiting, even today. For all of us and for families, so it was in our families and with friends and in the newsroom, I mean, in waiting if something bad might happen to the miners who were inside. And how, so maybe the last days and how they're not accepting at least getting out of there alive because they could die. That thing lasted too long.

**Anita Susuri:** They took a document which shows that Hysamedin Azemi...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The demands. Yes, Aziz Abrashi.<sup>22</sup>

**Anita Susuri:** That Rahman Morina<sup>23</sup> resigned.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes, that's right.

**Anita Susuri:** It wasn't falsified, but it was changed after.

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<sup>22</sup> Aziz Abrashi (1938-2014) was an economist, who led many important socially-owned enterprises. He was the general director of the Trepça Enterprise and led the enterprise during the most difficult period of the Miners' Strike 1989, where he was fired and sent to prison for 14 months together with other miners.

<sup>23</sup> Rahman Morina (1943-1990) had a career as an agent of the Ministry of Interior of SFR Yugoslavia, and later on as a party official in the League of Communists of Kosovo. He rose through the ranks and was in 1981 appointed as Kosovo's interior minister, and thereby held the top law enforcement office in the province.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was changed.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you take that document for granted? Do you remember? Or maybe you suspected that it could be...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Fraudulent.

**Anita Susuri:** Fraudulent?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes. We suspected, I mean, that that could be a fraud. Because as per usual, I mean, I said that even in other cases it happened that they didn't carry out what they promised but they kept it going until the crowd dispersed or until, in this case, the strikers got out of the mine pit.

**Anita Susuri:** After you realized that, what was your stance after? And I also wanted to ask you something else connected to this topic, was it influenced, of course, it was influenced but I'm interested to know how much was *Rilindja* influenced by the Committee?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I know that...

**Anita Susuri:** And was it written [about]?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I know that this is constantly said, but I can say that as a generation maybe we had only a few more journalists who came later, but we were the last generation to actually be accepted, a larger number in *Rilindja*. And with my colleagues whom I still speak to today, we don't remember that there was somebody, maybe we didn't get into those waters either, but we don't remember because there were other directives and with other people maybe.

But I don't remember that there was someone who had [a problem] with what I wrote. And I followed it, there was no intervention of that sort, there was no case when one of the journalists, and [Zenun Çelaj](#) who was my editor or somebody else, there was no case when he said, "You can't write this Igballe," there wasn't, we didn't have that [happen to us]. We didn't. Maybe there were directives of other people who followed politics, because we were divided.

We would follow events, but not the Committee part. There were actually appointed journalists who followed politics. Maybe for them, I mean I don't know. But, regarding my colleagues who we still socialize with today, because we constantly hear that there was. Of course, with a national newspaper there can also be influence, but I don't remember someone ever telling me, "Don't write [about a

certain topic].” I know only one case when I also was in the Democratic League of Kosovo that at the time journalists weren’t very, there was a small number [of them].

There was Xhemajl Mustafa, there was Enver Maloku, who were journalists, but there weren't many of them, I mean from *Rilindja* and maybe as a woman, I was the only one. They would say to set these things apart, meaning to not observe them, because if you’re there and observe them, you transmit things to *Rilindja* in some form. But, even in those moments I perceived that official part. I followed the activity since I had the opportunity, but I marked it as an activity, that was all. Otherwise, I don’t remember any influence, absolutely [not] that someone told me, “Don’t write this because you shouldn’t.”

**Anita Susuri:** I also wanted to ask you about your editorial office, I’m sure you had meetings of...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Every day, every day.

**Anita Susuri:** What was that like?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Every day, meaning the meeting of the editorial office was an everyday thing and the tasks were assigned. There was a listing of the activities that should be followed but also proposals were received, if there were any proposals from the journalists. Someone could be aware of an event that would take place and it was noted. And they were divided, each journalist. At first, voluntarily, whoever wanted to go to that event, yes.

There was a [dead] body coming back from the Serbian army, for example, I went to Rezallë and followed it. It was actually the first body to come and I went to follow the event because I wanted to see it for myself. And we voluntarily raised our hands, the ones who wanted to go, so if there weren't any volunteers, at that point the editor appointed the people who would go and follow the activities. But, most of the time there were volunteers for those events...

**Anita Susuri:** What about, you told me about the bodies of young men who came back from the army, when you went there, I am not sure how to ask the question because it seems too depressing but I mean what did you see there?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** So, when the first bodies started coming back it was unbelievable that somebody could, I mean, kill the young men in that way although we had events like that earlier too in that direction. There was the case of...

**Anita Susuri:** Well, actually the state killed their own soldiers, because at that time...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes, yes. And yes, we didn't dare to talk about it. I remember in the case of Rrezallë as I mentioned, there were very few people speaking. The burial was very massive but with a tight circle which happened because of, I mean, them. Because they were also watched and monitored from them and there was a constant large presence of monitoring from the system, and it was talked about in small groups. So this happened that he was precisely killed, I mean, the boy because they would say, I mean, he either committed suicide or different ways. The bodies they brought were very, very, very heavy [cases]. Those moments were very difficult when, I mean, when the bodies were brought from... and we, I mean we had cases in our family actually. So, there was a young man, my mother's nephew who, I mean, came back from there as a dead body.

**Anita Susuri:** Was he killed, or?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** He was killed, he was killed. Fatmir Krasniqi as well, I mean it was the heaviest murder in Pristina and the biggest burial in Pristina after the murder of soldier Fatmir Krasniqi happened. It was somewhere close to our neighborhood. It feels like I can still see the bullets on his body, I mean, it was absolutely a murder, it was a murder.

**Anita Susuri:** What was, for example, the [official] response to that? How did he die?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Not one time. Never. For them...

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to talk about, you told me that you participated in the gatherings for the blood [feud] reconciliations,<sup>24</sup> I mean there was a decision for Albanians to...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** To not have [blood feuds]. It was a very good decision, it was some really good work, it was a, for us, a very strong pleasure that we felt that Albanians were forgiving each other and joining that collective cause, which was a common cause of the Albanian nation at that time. It was painful for someone who forgave four blood [feuds] and it was... but there was a greater good for the sake of that... However there were emotions and tears too, not only sometimes but there were always tears because forgiving wasn't easy. For example, if a young person was killed by somebody and you forgave them... but it was... but it was a common cause that had to, a lot of work was done. Maybe the biggest work of this country, it seems to me. The good of this country that happened was that, forgiveness.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you only go to the gatherings...

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<sup>24</sup> In 1991 a mass movement for the forgiveness of blood feuds, was launched among the Albanian population of Kosovo. It was initiated by a group of students, former political prisoners, who approached folklore scholar Anton Çetta and other senior figures in academia to lead the process. The movement reconciled thousands of cases, and it became a movement for national unity.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** And then after that case when someone at the burial gave forgiveness for family members, there was a...

**Anita Susuri:** A clash?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The clash that happened. Very good because there's nothing good about unforgiveness. I continue to believe, I mean that there is nothing good about unforgiveness, there is nothing good there. I mean the consequences always fall on one family or the other, constantly, so...

**Anita Susuri:** Were you only at the gatherings or also in the *oda*<sup>25</sup> for example?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I was in the *oda* too, I was also in the *oda*.

**Anita Susuri:** How did they receive you as a woman?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** As a woman, now, I mean, I didn't go to places far away or... I participated [in the gatherings] in Pristina mostly where they had blood [feud] reconciliations. And I remember now as a woman, I mean, because I am going off [topic], when teacher Halil Geci was killed and we went. And I remember, I mean, we said, "How will we be accepted as women?" And the head of the house, he said, I mean, "You will sit," how to put it, at the head of the room.

And he started his speech, I feel like I can see that man, so he said, "You are the three pillars of this house," meaning, the three pillars, "We are one pillar, so it's on you." Because we said we wouldn't disturb the order because there were a lot of people. So, "You continue, we will sit in this area," "No, no, you are always the three pillars of the house, we are one and you need to have your place." Because it's that hospitality.

I think that that was maybe a break of those earlier customs that were in place. When we're talking about customs, because I'm jumping [to another topic], when my mother got married she had gone into an *oda*, so the men's *oda*, the family had pushed her that she would be the bride who, I mean, would always be in the *oda*. Because the families were my mother's family but also my father's family, so they were a sophisticated family at that time, because the school was at their house. The elementary school [was held] at their house. And when they socialized as families they got to know, I mean, actually the sophistication and the brightness and smartness [of my mother]... my mother is still alive. She is smart, I mean, very much so and I rarely see people, not because she is my mother, but I rarely see people that have a memory like she does.

And that's what it was, I mean, somehow, I don't remember going inside [the *oda*] as something difficult, I can't think of a difficulty to go in. Because as a person, I think that if you are upright, if you

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<sup>25</sup> Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

have good intentions, I mean, you will also have access, there is no reason not to. So, it doesn't seem normal to me.

**Anita Susuri:** I am interested to know what generation is your mother?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** '36.

**Anita Susuri:** '36. Very well.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Very.

**Anita Susuri:** I would like to move on to the '90s. You told me about blood [feud] reconciliations, and then it's followed by the firings of many...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Workers, the biggest number of workers.

**Anita Susuri:** Enterprises. I am sure you wrote about all of this in your newsroom.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes and *Rilindja* was actually banned.

**Anita Susuri:** In what year [was] *Rilindja* [banned]?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** '90, yes, *Rilindja* became banned, Radio Pristina was banned, *Rilindja* was banned immediately, I mean, after a month and a half *Rilindja* was banned. And until we organized and discussed some time had passed. I mean, we came up with *Bujku*<sup>26</sup> because that was the only way, I mean, we had to, it was allowed to be published. Of course, we agreed for it not to be called *Rilindja*, but at least to have a window of information for the people and for it not to fade completely.

**Anita Susuri:** Were you there? Did they come to the newsroom or how did the ban happen?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes. They came to the newsroom but they went to the head editor, I mean, and they said, "You can't write anymore." There was also a fight at the entrance and when we got out there were those obstacles. So, even when the newspaper was closed down. I know that when someone got out they were stopped and, "You can't write anymore," and, "You are not journalists anymore," and that's it. But then there was an agreement and the newspaper *Bujku* got out. That's when we came out, I mean as journalists of *Bujku*.

**Anita Susuri:** How did that go on after, was the staff changed? Or did it stay the same?

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<sup>26</sup> *Bujku*, The Farmer, a daily newspaper which replaced *Rilindja* after Serbian authority banned it, in August 1990.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** We didn't change anything, only the name changed, so we didn't change anything. I mean, it continued, with, in the same way all the journalists as we were, I mean, only the name of the newspaper was changed.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have any problems because of what you wrote?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There were problems with going to retrieve information, I mean. We had many, many problems. So many journalists were beaten up. I, that didn't happen to me, it actually happened to me in those checkpoints, through bullets and going to take shelter at a family in Ferizaj, I remember, so, a prisoner died from the torture, as soon as he was imprisoned and I went to that family. They said, "The police came because they know you're inside as a journalist."

And I know that they unloaded the flour in *magje*<sup>27</sup> and they said, "We would get you in there, in this *magje*, so the police wouldn't catch you." But they had found another entrance to go from one house to the other. And I left my materials there, I mean, in the *magje* there with the flour, so they took me from one house to the other and I stayed for a few hours, so [I was] there until it became evening. The driver waited on the other side and then, I mean, we got out of there with no consequences.

Many, many cases like that happened, many, many cases, but I actually wasn't, I mean, for a policeman to beat me up at some point. No.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you ever have a direct problem with the police because of your profession?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Directly, at the checkpoints, yes, at the checkpoints. That justification until they released you, whether they would keep you, or let you go, I mean, that happened constantly, I mean. I remember once at the checkpoint which was in Komoran, the most infamous checkpoint in Kosovo. It was the most infamous because it was actually a crossroads of all the roads that brought you to Pristina and came from Gjakova. It was me and Elviana Behrami, and, I mean, our driver Faik, mister Faik, they stopped us there, they kept us for several hours. They didn't... the materials, of course, we found ways for the materials to not...

**Anita Susuri:** To not fall into their hands.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, absolutely. "Why did you go? The reason?" So, they found a reason that the driver didn't have his mustache in the ID photo, while he had a mustache [when they stopped us]. And they said, "You have to go back there to Gjakova where you went for the information. He will go there to remove his mustache and you continue your way," you know, after some time. At that point I remember, I mean, Elviana said, "No, if that is the only reason, Igballe and I will pluck his mustache by

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<sup>27</sup> A wooden chest where the flour was kept and dough was kneaded.

hand and we will go on,” because the time wasn’t [suitable], it was evening, I mean [too late] to go back to Gjakova. And they started a little (laughs)... and then after we consulted they said, “We,” I mean, “can get this done, just tell us, we will do this. There’s no turning back.” And they kept us there for some more time, there at the checkpoint, I mean, no, but there at the checkpoint and then they released us again.

**Anita Susuri:** Before moving to the ‘90s I wanted to ask you about your personal life, I mean, how did you meet your husband? When did you get married? How did you get married?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Okay. My husband had actually known me long before I knew him. He is, they’re from Pristina, so they’re muhaxherë<sup>28</sup> from Toplica and [they were] in Pristina. I remember he said, “I was preparing to introduce myself,” I walked fast, always, I mean, and I walked really fast in the city. He said, “That’s when I stopped myself” (laughs) and he had seen me in the library, but I mean I didn’t actually know him.

My sister, the late one, she worked in the kiosk across from the Department Store, I mean across from the old Department Store and at that time she was hired almost at the same time in ‘87. And there was the kiosk, the kiosk, in the center because all the illegal material was in that kiosk. And it actually transmitted that information. The [political] alternatives which were voted for in Slovenia, I mean, they came there and distributed [information] to the people from there.

My sister knew him because, I mean, he had been a regular buying the [daily] newspaper. And, but that wasn’t what she said. He casually came to visit my friend, my coworker in *Rilindja* but she was also my friend from gymnasium, so we were together since gymnasium and also in *Rilindja*. And he came to ask something from her and he was surprised to see me there because he didn’t know where I was, what happened to me (laughs). And he told her and she said, I mean, I said, “There is no way, no way, I don’t want to.”

Some time passed, they waited for a bit and then we started hanging out, I mean it was ‘88 actually so after I already started working in *Rilindja*. And so they lived, I mean, they used to because now I live in the University neighborhood for 20 years now, but here at the city park (laughs). And my mother-in-law would tell me, I said, she said, “You were at school so close here you could’ve come and taken a rest, so close to the faculty you could’ve come to rest here,” and, you know, “You didn’t know him during that time.”

We got married, his family was just like mine, I mean, it was only the children with brothers and sisters and parents when I got married. We lived together as a family for ten years, actually there. My entire activity during that time was as a homemaker actually because I was, even when I was head of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Muhaxhir* and **Muhaxher**, plural: *Muhaxhirë* and *Muhaxherë*; **meaning** Muslim refugees are terms borrowed from Ottoman Turkish: *muhacir* and derived from Arabic *muhajir*.



Women's Forum of Kodra e Trimave [neighborhood], at first and then I was head of the second branch because I lived in that neighborhood in Pristina, besides being a member in the Leadership of Kosovo's Women's Forum, so all of journalism... I remember the taxi drivers there near Grand [Hotel] because I passed by there every day and one of them said, "She is always late to work because she's always running" (laughs).

I remember it. I turned back to look, "She is always late to work. She is constantly running" (laughs). That was the road I took, so behind the Department Store and, I mean I constantly walked to *Rilindja* (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like, if you want to share that, your wedding, for example, how was your wedding organized?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes. The wedding, since I was the eldest child, I mean in my family, and my husband is also the eldest child in his family, we didn't have much [money] for our wedding, I mean, and the situation was [like that] actually. It was '89 when we had to have our wedding and times were difficult. And he constantly participated in the demonstrations that took place. He was a student of Albanian Language, actually he finished Albanian Language then, but he was hired at KEK as a student and he continued to work at KEK the entire time, as a chemistry laboratory technician although he had finished Albanian Language.

And so we didn't have [money] to throw a wedding, but there was an actual wedding, I mean, in my family as well. The girls got together, I mean with my friends, I invited them to my home, I mean, all of my friends for a whole night. That was the main thing that night. When I invited my friends, my other family members also came, so I am talking about my house. While at their house there was an actual wedding right from the day on Thursday, they organized it over the phone as well, those hand phones back then, I mean, "This is the kind of music," my sister-in-law would call, my [paternal] uncle's daughters and like that, I mean, there was a sadness, I still don't know. But I know that I entered the room and I cried a lot (laughs). Until I mean everybody [said], "You shouldn't, you shouldn't."

**Anita Susuri:** You were the first out of the girls to get married?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I was the eldest, after seven years of marriage I was the eldest child and...

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, yes. Were you the first to marry, right?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I was the first to get married, yes, yes. I was the first to get married and it was Monday, I mean, the day, and then those three days continued, Wednesday, three Wednesdays and on like that. I felt out of myself for one month straight, I could say, out of myself. So completely something else. After a month, and the day I got married, I had a moment that came to me, I didn't pass away. And

when I went there they called my mother on the phone. My mother [said], “You shouldn’t, you should calm down.” My husband, “But you have always come to this house, it’s not your first time coming here.” It was those wedding [emotions]. I didn’t have children for ten years. Actually I prayed to not have children because I was engaged in activities the whole time, but that wasn’t good. So, I have a son, I had a son in 2000, so after the war. He is now 20 years old, a second year student in Management, so in Economics.

### Part Three

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** From the first organization of the association of women on the plateau of the Palace of Youth, I mean, I became active since then. Actually, so even the meetings that were held especially in the Muhaxher neighborhood, the meetings at the homes of women, I mean, I was part of the meetings in houses before the association of women was organized, I mean. even before it came out. When the initiatives began being founded. I became active with the part of women, so I didn’t become active directly with the men’s part like my sister was, I mean, there from the start, but I was with the women’s part and those first women’s organizations and the founding of the association, I mean, I was there from the beginning.

**Anita Susuri:** How was it organized back then? What...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The motivation.

**Anita Susuri:** [What] kind of plans did you have back then?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, I mean, the motivation for us to find different forms of organizing and whether to organize only as women or to be part of a political subject like LDK<sup>29</sup> was, so that was discussed for several months during that time. Because the need for organizing the women and of women was, I mean, so women would also do something starting with children’s rights. That was, I mean, the main motive for us to protect our children, I mean, at that time, as women, as mothers, so to protect our children. And to organize in the medical and educational areas as well, the illiteracy too.

And there were some approaches that pushed you in founding or grouping together women as well, especially apart from the Democratic League like the Democratic League it was. And after some, I mean, meetings and [discussing] whether we should’ve been part of a political subject or not, it was achieved however. Whether one wanted to or not there was a way of working for us to be part, to

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<sup>29</sup> Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* – Democratic League of Kosovo. The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

organize together, to not be distinguished from the Democratic League and to organize the Democratic League of Kosovo's Forum.

I was, of course, I was with the women of... organizing the first meeting of the Women's Forum at the First Assembly, so I did all my work, I did all my activity at that time for organizing the First Assembly on August 24 [1990], I mean, which was held in Asim Vokshi school, the First Assembly in that spirit. After the agreement that we were part of the political subject and to be as a Women's Forum within the Democratic League. So that's when we began our overall activity all over Kosovo I could say, to not say only in Pristina.

In that assembly there were women from Albania, from Macedonia, from Presheva who participated. I went to the border to welcome the women from Albania, a big delegation of women came from Albania and [I had] the pleasure [to welcome them] as well. I won't forget their joy that just like us, they were also emotional about crossing the border and, I mean, their joy that they entered Kosovo's land and they were coming to participate in a Kosovo assembly [meeting], that was very big, very.

Maybe there were 15 women, I mean, who came from Albania. Each of us organized to host someone at home and I hosted Sevim Arbanaj, she was one of the women who stayed at my house for three nights. So all of us organized to host someone because if you took them to... you had nowhere to take them, I mean, women at that time... there were no more hotels and [we hosted] the women in [our] houses.

**Anita Susuri:** I think it was done, it was thought out in a more discreet way because there were problems with...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There were problems with the police. The police came and took [Flora Brovina](#), who, I mean, was a leader at that time. They also took Anton Kolaj who, I mean, was one of the members of the Democratic League's Leadership. They interrogated them at that time and then, I mean, the work of the assembly continued. The first Leadership of the Women's Forum was elected where I was one of them, I mean. The organization continued with branches, sub branches. Also Pristina had its own leadership as Pristina, I mean. Shqipe Dumoshi was Head of the Women's Forum in Pristina, I was Deputy Head of the Women's Forum in Pristina. As Pristina, I mean, all the branches that were there, however there was also a leadership, I mean, to also coordinate the Pristina branches.

There were different activities [regarding] medicine, I mean, education, aid, collaboration with the *Nënë Tereza*<sup>30</sup> association which was continuous, the opening of those [medical] practices and I went through them recently because [Adnan Mervoci](#) asked me for some information and I saw that, I mean,

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<sup>30</sup> The reference is to the local non-governmental organization *Nëna Terezë*. Throughout the 1990s in Kosovo, it provided humanitarian aid and assistance. This is not a reference to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an Albanian, who was beatified in 2003.

when I also opened [inaugurated] the ambulance in the Kodra e Trimave neighborhood there were, I mean, the things we sent there and everything. A table, a cabinet, I mean, everything we sent was there at that time. The activity was very large, very, the will was very strong, I don't know, I mean, I don't know, the sleep, I mean, which was taken and, the whole time there was...

I was also [active] in the journalism part of course, I mean, which was also a part that helped me in a way for me to be everywhere I wanted. And, I mean, in the way... and a part of the continuous activity, I mean, that... was very large.

**Anita Susuri:** During the '90s there were also many demonstrations which were organized by the Women's Forum, the one with white papers...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** With white papers, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** The one with bread.<sup>31</sup>

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** That's right, with bread.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember, I am sure you remember but...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, I participated, I mean, all the [slogan protests] for the Holocaust, I mean, the organization of the Holocaust [protest] from which there are all those photos, I mean, I was there. Yes, it was a...

**Anita Susuri:** How did the idea come about back then?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** How the idea came about, I mean, for us to find ways of organizing. After the discussions that we were having about what was happening and that we should've become active, that we should've become a larger group, I mean, you of course always had it in your subconscious that the confrontation would happen. I mean, that was always, that the confrontation would happen with the police as well and... that you had no other way. You had to be active, to move, I mean, to be protective from what was happening and during that time there were imprisonments, murders, [they were] continuous in Kosovo. There was a lot of torture. There were checkpoints, I mean, restriction of movement, everything was oppressive and you had to find ways, I mean to organize. There was the one [protest] with bread, I mean, after the start of war which was another motive, I mean for you to send them.

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<sup>31</sup> On March 16, 1998 around 12,000 women in Kosovo marched under the banner "Bread for Drenica." The march was a response against the military siege in Drenica by the Serbian forces, and the massacre of the Jashari family in Prekaz. Also consult this source:

<https://oralhistorykosovo.org/podcast/bread-for-drenica-womens-march/>

The uprising, I mean, the protest with white papers was about raising our voice in order for it to be heard, I mean, for the others too because it was in front of the US Embassy, I mean. That was our starting point and for that to be, so the other embassies, so the other countries would listen, to hear the women's voice I mean, for us to be a... to not remain like that... because you saw that you were being left in a dark oblivion a little, that was an uprising [to show] that you were here and that you were experiencing, I mean, things.

When they gathered, I mean, we communicated through phones, the people who were, I mean, [people] who had key roles we called each other on the phone and communicated the meeting point, we would meet there. Each of us [had] to bring women [with us], I mean, to call as many women as possible. In the neighborhood, I mean, "Bring ten women with you. Come all!" So, bring them along at once, so it happened very fast, very fast.

I remember that within two-three hours, I mean, there was the organization of... because we also couldn't leave it for later. There was a risk, I mean, [a] very big [risk], if you organized something for the next day and in the meantime the people who were involved with organizing didn't show up. So, I mean, the organization [of the protests] happened very fast, then and there. "So, we will be in touch" I mean, "call this, call that." And so the women would show up at once like a river from all the sides of the city and we gathered there very quickly.

And then there was a delegation appointed to go inside and speak to the American Embassy and to tell them about what was happening, what was being done. Not that they weren't aware, but at least there would remain something in written form and something that we were alive, I mean, we should've felt alive. That was it.

**Anita Susuri:** I think the demonstrations with bread was the only one which had an incident. Do you remember how that day started?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** I remember very well, of course. It was from the start, from the organization, I mean, up until the point when going [to Drenica] with the bread. It was, I mean, it was about what way to go, which was the way for us to choose and continue. That was a dilemma that caused confusion in the women as well, that they chose different roads to, I mean, to join the large line of people which was by the railway, I mean the ones of us who were going that way, I was...

**Anita Susuri:** Where did you take the bread loaves first?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** They would bring the bread, I mean, absolutely, you just saw all the bakers with bags, I mean... the solidarity was at a maximum. Whatever people had or somebody who thought something might be of service or for the greater good, I mean, without hesitation everyone would do it, and the distribution... you just saw the bread coming (laughs) even more than was needed, I mean,

there. Each one, when we said we'd organize [the protest] with [holding] bread, and so women came from different parts and they got bread, and I mean, there was enough bread for all the women without hesitation. I mean, it was Bread for Drenica, the war had begun, it actually was a more isolated area from the others where war was happening.

And I went there many times as a journalist as well, I was asked, "Why," I mean, "you're staying in Pristina?" I mean, "While we," I mean, "are going through all of this and we're fighting the war while you're staying," I mean, I was told that personally. In order to not go through that part, I mean in '91 when the attack on Prekaz happened it was only me and Flora Doku, so, who at the time walked to [visit] the family of Shaban Jashari<sup>32</sup> and sent them aid and medication. So, because Flora Doku was a gynecologist, but she asked from at *Rilindja*, I mean, for several days and one day we met and started working together.

When that happened in Prekaz, I mean, she came and told me, she had the car and [she said], "Are you prepared," I mean, "to be with me in Prekaz?" There was a lot of snow and that's why we had to park the car very far, somewhere in Skenderaj and I don't remember where and we walked until we went to Shaban Jashari's family. We sent them some bandages, what we had because they had injured his eye and then the other tortures which happened to the entire family. But, not only to that family, it was also the families close by who endured the same. We also went to the other families, we sent them some medical materials at the time.

**Anita Susuri:** You, as a journalist, did you write about all these events?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** The interview that I conducted with the late Zarife, so, Adem Jashari's<sup>33</sup> mother was never published. It's written, I didn't publish it. It wasn't allowed at the time, I mean.

**Anita Susuri:** You still haven't published it?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** I still haven't published it.

**Anita Susuri:** Why?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** Why? So, now [I'll tell you] why, because I'm saving it for the day, I mean, when the time of the year comes when that happened in '91, I don't want to at a different time because it passes. So I never published it. I have many various materials which I think that (laughs), but it's too many.

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<sup>32</sup> Father of Adem Jashari.

<sup>33</sup> Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as "legendary commander," was a founder of the KLA, celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of 20 – half of them underage girls and boys – in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

**Anita Susuri:** But it's in your plans?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** It's in my plans, absolutely, yes. Yes it's in my plans.

**Anita Susuri:** What kind of people were the Jashari family? How did they welcome you?

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** They welcomed us, I remember that woman, I mean, the one I did the interview with and as they say, I really say bread, salt, and heart<sup>34</sup> there. Not that they were financially well, I mean, they were financially well-off, they had good conditions at that time too, I mean, I remember when we went in there. But there was something special there, I mean, the guns I see today, I saw back then, I mean, in '91. There were those guns hanging [on the wall]. There was that woman, I mean that... and the women, and the women were different from the others, because they were very willing to work in that direction, to collaborate, all of them and... in Shaban Jashari, I mean, I see a special person, a special person.

I remember his words. We waited for him because he had gone to a medical checkup for his eye, I mean, he had a bandage at that time due to torture and we waited until he got back, so I remember those words. And then I later found out that he was a teacher, because I would be surprised by his vocabulary, I mean, his knowledge in general, he had been a teacher, so, at that time I have the most special impression about that person. Special [because] of his words and everything, I mean, he motivated us too. "No, this is nothing," I mean, "Nothing happened. This isn't," I mean, "we should, we are here, in these territories." Words like that, you know, regardless of everything which wasn't much at that time, because it was '91 but there was still torture. Actually they were among the few families where they broke in and tortured like that.

**Anita Susuri:** I will go back once again to the question about all those events in the '90s, about what you wrote, for example, what you set aside that...

**Igaballe Rexha Jashari:** That interview, I mean, I didn't put it in writing, I can say that it was the only one I didn't write, as an interview I did. I wrote, wherever I went, so I wrote about Likoshan. I went to Likoshan under bullets, under the police persecution that day we barely survived, we went through the mountains to go to Likoshan. Actually it was two days after the events that happened in Likoshan. When we went, along with two other journalists and when we saw the police who followed us, I mean, that's when we went into the mountains with that car until we came across a house and left the car.

That was it, I mean the distinctive [experiences] that I went there through bullets, I mean, they fell like this {describes with hands} and they almost fell on the car a few times. The road from Fushë Kosova to Komoran's checkpoint in the area where it happened, I mean, I don't know how we survived twice.

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<sup>34</sup> This is an Albanian expression which refers to people's hospitality and their willingness to share whatever they have with you, even when it's not much.

There were so many bullets, I mean, in the car... because we had the *press* [vest], of course we had the *press* [vest], that could be seen from very far and there were bullets.

And then other persecutions in one event, we went to one case in Kaçanik as well, I don't remember the village because there was only that house at the very top of the village. He was killed, he was imprisoned, I mean, the person who had come back from the underground [movement] that night and after three days he died from the torture, I mean, that person. And I went there and the police followed us there too and we stayed inside the house for very long in order to not come out until we saw that they went away, I mean, from there. Things like this happened many, many times.

**Anita Susuri:** Did it ever happen in the editorial office, for example, for the police to come about some article?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Not for some article, the police didn't come, I mean, they could've called the editor-in-chief, I mean, but not like that. And they beat up the journalists wherever they found them, I mean, there were many journalists who were beaten up, but I didn't have that... I wasn't part of that. There were journalists who were beaten up. There was Behar Zogiani [who was] tortured a lot, I mean, he stayed for so long, I mean, for his skin wounds to be healed. There were journalists...

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have any kind of fear or something that could have... you were constantly...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There was... yes, there was, there was fear, but you had nowhere to go, you know, from what you chose. You didn't, I mean, you had to. To say that somebody else should deal with this and I won't, that didn't happen. I wasn't the person to say that, I mean, never, that somebody else should deal with that state and I wouldn't, I mean.

In '97 my sister was imprisoned, so she was in the Leadership of the Democratic League at that time, the central leadership and the protests, demonstrations, my brother was actually one of the five organizers of the '97 protests too, I mean, also the conversations he had with [Ibrahim] Rugova<sup>35</sup> about, I mean, about those demonstrations and our whole family was, I mean, constantly [involved] in all that (laughs).

So much so that I sometimes think to myself how my mother survived. We were all, I mean, until we got together, I mean, she was very worried of course. Those times were very, very, very [difficult]. My father was also a participant in all of it, I mean, he never hesitated. So, he would say, "You stay," but we never would.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.



**Anita Susuri:** We mentioned the demonstrations with bread in '98 and we were talking about that, but in the meantime...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It connected, yes, yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I know that there was an incident that day, I mentioned, earlier, a vehicle drove into the...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The crowd, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like in those moments? Where were you? In the front, or?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I was in the front. That happened, so...

**Anita Susuri:** Somewhere in the middle.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, somewhere in the middle. When we heard, I mean, at that point the whole crowd was a little disturbed, what do they want to do, I mean, and... fortunately it wasn't, something worse didn't happen, I mean. That woman got up, she got it together, we, we got her out, I mean, from the line, I mean, nothing worse happened. But, that was expected. Personally, I am speaking for myself, I mean, it was constantly expected that all those things could happen at any moment. It wasn't something you didn't expect. That the bullet was waiting for you constantly, I mean, but you didn't stop. (Laughs)

**Anita Susuri:** Until what year did you work at *Bujku*?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Until *Rilindja* was closed in 2001.

**Anita Susuri:** 2001. What about during the war, did it continue working?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, yes, it continued the whole time.

**Anita Susuri:** You were here?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The whole time. I went twice, I mean, for two months in Tirana, because *Rilindja* was published in Tirana, so, at that time and I went twice for two months in '95 and '96 I went to Tirana, I mean. There were journalists, but I went to the newspaper which was in Tirana at the time. But, *Bujku* continued [working] the whole time, it didn't have any interruptions as a newspaper. It continued.

**Anita Susuri:** So the first time you went to Albania...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The first time was in '93. We went as a delegation of the first Assembly of Women in Albania. I went with Nekibe Kelmendi<sup>36</sup> and [Naxhije Buçinca](#). We were the first women to go and participate in that assembly. It was '93 when of course they put a border stamp [on our passports], I mean, I didn't travel with a passport anymore. I moved illegally, I mean, in '95 and '96 I went through Ulcinj, I mean, I came to Tirana from that side because, I mean, you would be arrested if you had the stamp, I mean, Albania's [stamp], the border, so on your passport. And so I wouldn't risk it, I mean, [I passed] the border through...

**Anita Susuri:** Was it what you expected when you went to Albania? What did you see Albania like?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** When... in '93, so, the wife of... I mean, we stayed at Jusuf Gërvalla's<sup>37</sup> family at first. And then we divided as delegates, we went to other families and stayed for several nights. I don't remember how long, but it was several nights. Maybe we stayed for four nights, I mean, or five, in Tirana. When we went to Jusuf Gërvalla's family everything was okay there, I mean, we didn't think, when we saw, I mean, the situation that there would be no food or... but no, I mean, the fridge was filled with things there, okay.

In the family where I continued to sleep [after], there weren't good conditions there. There was, I mean, the floor had concrete, I mean, instead of tiles, the house. The bed [mattresses] were like phyllo, so like this {shows with hands}. A very hard working woman, so I talked to their family a little more, I mean, about how they know Kosovo, I mean. And I can say that it was the same there. Just like in Kosovo, the people who were interested in Albania knew about it, it was the same on their side.

The ones who were there and the ones who had books and read in the underground and listened to, I mean, other things and they had discussions the same as here where people were interested to know Kosovo, got to know it, I mean even better. Those who, there were also people who [outside] of their business, their life, they had no [other] interests. I am saying it, I mean, now since '95 when I went [to Albania] with my husband, we met a friend there who is still a friend, a writer, a professor, I mean, Bardhosh Gaçe which was surprising to me. I am saying this, his written poetry was like it was dedicated to the places in Kosovo, it was like he was from Kosovo.

I was surprised with his description of Peja, Podujeva, the rivers. So as if he was [from Kosovo], he wasn't [in Kosovo at all] but he [got an idea] from his reads, so based on what he'd heard he made a description in his poetry and his books. And I mean, I was surprised like that. I am saying in '95, I mean,

<sup>36</sup> Nekibe Kelmendi (1944-2011), lawyer and human right activist, after the war she was a member of Parliament for the LDK and served as Minister of Justice from 2008 through 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Jusuf Gërvalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and also nationalist activist killed in Germany together with his brother and a third person. All these killings have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

it was the first time I went to Vlora together with my husband because that friend was from Vlora and there I experienced something like in the movies. In the esteemed families like the painter Skender, I don't remember his last name, but he's a known painter, so he sent us to [visit] some esteemed families and their welcoming was... brother, sister from Kosovo, so it was a very heartfelt welcome, very much so. But life was in poverty.

My [paternal] uncle lived from '91, my uncle who was imprisoned, I mean, after they tortured him a lot, so he was in the prison of Leskovac with a group of intellectuals and they tortured him a lot and, I mean, of course he was persecuted. He lived underground for some time here, but he decided to illegally go to Albania, and he lived in Tirana during all those years. So, every time I went to Tirana I had my uncle who lived there. He took an apartment and for all those friends, I mean, also for the part of, and my uncle who was there was informed that the families there were various.

At the family where I stayed, I mean, where I stayed, I actually lived for two months, that was a family who [had family members who] were in the military at the time. In the military before and they had all the conditions. He would tell us, I mean, that the categories were divided, they had had a better standard. In the sense of getting money because maybe, I mean, when it came to food they took care for everybody to have the same, I mean. In '93 it was hell, I mean, very, very much.

My uncle would say that from '91 until '93 however some things started [to get better], but in '93 life was... but with time... now recently when I looked at the photos I had a photo of Orikum in Vlora where we went on holiday with that friend, there was nothing built in that area. Also in '95 in Shëngjin where I went with a friend, in Lezha and we stayed in Lezha for two weeks and we would go to Shëngjin for holiday, there was nothing built there.

Apart from the one from the military, I mean, who went on holiday, maybe Albania's elite, I mean, besides that building there, nothing else. So, this change [that took place], let me not talk about Durrës, I mean, nothing, nothing, nothing. I've seen this change, I mean, continuously and then in Albania through the years, now it's been how many [years], 25 years, 26 years.

## Part Four

**Anita Susuri:** If there is anything else you'd like to add about the '90s...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I want to talk about my sister's imprisonment because, I mean, that was a very difficult moment for my family actually, I mean, especially [difficult]. Our house during the '90s was a house where I don't know who didn't enter and leave. I mean, it was some kind of special checkpoint, where, I mean, people came to a lot, they moved a lot, activities were done from there, I mean a lot. Because I remember I would tell my mother, "You have no reason to be sad, I have more reason," I

mean until that degree. And I know that at the time when they had sent [someone] from the Secretariat,<sup>38</sup> so I got out of *Rilindja* here and at the traffic light I crossed to the Youth Palace and there was a car there, so they saw me.

And then those trials and Nekibe was in prison, the voluntary lawyer who came. My sister had three lawyers at that time, but Nekibe said, I mean, “I want to do it voluntarily,” I mean, “to be here, since she was in the leadership of LDK,” I mean, “and she was active. I want to defend her voluntarily,” “Okay.” And Nekibe was my neighbor, I mean, there. In the morning when I didn’t sleep I would see her in my dreams regardless of the visits, I would immediately say, “Nekibe, I am sure they tortured her today and we have to go to Lipjan,” and we did, I mean.

Never, she never said, “I don’t have time today,” I mean, besides the lawyers who had their timetables, me and Nekibe, I mean, I went there constantly. She would visit because I didn’t have the option, but I stayed there close to the prison and she would visit my sister during that time. My sister was sentenced to three years, but, I mean, she didn’t serve them, I mean, she served a month because then they released her on parole, but they didn’t get to keep her, I mean, during that time. this, this was also a very, very difficult experience for us as a family.

**Anita Susuri:** How did the war time go on for you? So in ‘98 there was the women’s march that they did with bread. But then the situation started becoming more aggressive, I mean, until the bombings happened.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Until the bombings happened.

**Anita Susuri:** What was all that period like...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was hell.

**Anita Susuri:** For you?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was hell. It really was a real hell, I mean, all of Kosovo, really... and those attempts at mobilization, I mean, the way to keep the whole situation under control, I mean, it was a... all of us who were active, I mean, we attempted to keep that [under control] in our ways, to however [keep under control] the lives of people, I mean, I can say about the lives of people that there would [be war] and it would become better and that the war would engulf [Kosovo] we thought, I mean, we could see that it would engulf all of Kosovo. How it would happen and what would happen maybe, I mean, death was close for all of us, I mean, it seemed like death was close for all of us.

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<sup>38</sup> Secretariat of Internal Affairs.

When they came to kick us out of the house, for the first time, I mean, I am saying this before, during that time there was Adem Demaçi's wife, I mean, the late Mrs. Xhemajlije who always came to meet me. We visited each other often. And she would say, "At this time you have to change your appearance, you have to dye your hair a different color, you have to change your appearance, to cover up because you are," meaning, "because you're the person that something might happen to you."

I remember that even three days before kicking us out of our house, before the police came, the paramilitaries, the military. She came and said, I mean, "You still haven't changed anything?" I mean, and, "If you continue to look like this it's going to be very bad," I said, "Yes, even my mother," I said, "told me and my sisters that we should change [our appearance]." The one who had blonde-dyed hair was different, because, I mean, to become different so the police wouldn't recognize us. Each of us in our way were, I mean...

**Anita Susuri:** Wanted.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Wanted. My sister who I mentioned worked in the kiosk, I mean, they took her to the police [station]. Actually, I mean, when they saw her in the street, "*Ah, Nazo ti si tu!*" [Srb. Ah, Naza, you are here] and they took her and sent her to the police and those threats, I mean, "We will cut off your ear, your hand, your foot," meaning, we'll do this to you among other things. And my brother was more on the side, I mean, the side of Albin, Bujar Dugolli, they were five people or how many, I mean, in organizing that other side. We were all in some way active.

When they came to kick us out of the house, I mean, they lined us up at our in-law's room, my brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, me and my husband. They said, "You undress," to my husband, I mean, they pointed their gun here {points to her throat} and just... but me as a person, I mean, I wanted to protect him and I knew what was happening, I saw it every day and [I knew] that it was possible for it to happen to us too. Of course, that wasn't unexpected, I mean, one should be mentally prepared for when situations like this arrive.

I could see, I mean, that when the finger gets close {points to her throat} that the bullet [would go off] because they didn't remove the gun, I mean. And he said, "Undress," of course it was a man's reaction. He {explains with gestures} reacted like that, he laid him on the ground and I was only waiting that {jumps from the seat}. They actually laid down my brother-in-law, I mean, there. And I slowly started to undo my belt, I was wearing pants, I mean, I said to myself, "It's about to happen, what's happening everywhere is about to happen here too but I should try to have as little consequences as possible."

The intention was for nobody to be killed, for the worst, I mean, to not happen and as little as possible. It could happen, it could happen, I mean, I also told my husband and, I mean, in a fight, "Know that if I get killed, I got killed in a fight," it's not, I mean, a problem, "Know that that will be the last thing." But

in order to not put others at risk too you tried to keep your calm, I mean. I was very aware, I mean, of what was possible.

But the fate was, I mean, the one who came once again, I started to take my pants off slowly, I mean, very slowly, I mean, and with calmness without any reaction. My father-in-law said, "My wife has a heart condition and her heart is about to quit, you are doing stuff like this." He turned to my father-in-law once again, "You shut your mouth." And he came and grabbed me once again, I had a {explains with hands} closed, he said, "Undress fast," like that and I [said], "Okay." On the other side, I mean, I was just waiting when they'd be killed, I mean, in a way.

At one point a person came and said, "Everybody out quickly." We were saved, I mean, all of us, from the worst. We all survived. But my husband would say that he doesn't want to go, he continued to [say], "I don't want to leave the house," and [he said] to me, I mean, "You, big patriot, will never come back to Kosovo again," I mean, "As much as my father went back to Toplica there, my father's family, you will never return to Kosovo. Where do you want to go?" Get yourself killed in a way.

But we did leave, I mean, we... on a train to Macedonia. There was my friend who I mentioned, I mean, the gynecologist in Struga, I mean, she lived there, she went to live there because her husband was from Struga...

**Anita Susuri:** Excuse me, what date was that?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** April 1st, April 1st [1990, yes. When we went there at the time, I mean, there was a team who I think were Dutch and, I mean, when I told them this and that, everything that's happened, they said, so, "So you should talk to these doctors and they will see what the situation is and all" and they said, "No, you are well," meaning, "You are strong." Because I think those consequences were, regardless that we survived in some way there are other kinds of consequences, meaning they are very difficult memories. They're actually difficult memories.

**Anita Susuri:** Since you left the house until...

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Until Struga.

**Anita Susuri:** Struga, what was the journey like?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** So, the train was terrible. Everything I had, I mean, of gold, I gave to my mother-in-law, to my sister-in-law, something to all of them so they could keep it. I at least removed it from myself, so I wouldn't be a victim of something like that. We wrapped it with a scarf {explains with hands} and, I mean, in the train through which we crossed to Bllacë, I mean, we stayed [there] for one night. We didn't stay for longer, so the next day we got out of there, we went to Gostivar, because we

weren't allowed to go south. So, we stayed in Gostivar for two nights. Because they would say, "You can't go further south than Gostivar, you can't go to Struga."

Because my request... not that there, I knew activist women who were, I mean, in the Association of Women and when they saw me, I mean, immediately, "Oh Igballe you [are here] too," and I mean, we settled at a family[']s house]. Everything was okay. But my goal was still to go to my friend, I mean Flora Doku in Struga there and after a couple of days we went there. There we held... she was a woman who was an activist and she knew, I mean, we tried to find some women who were there. We held various meetings about what we were going to do, how to do it and how we could help, I mean, the rest [of the people] who remained in Kosovo. My whole family was in Kosovo, I mean, it wasn't... I was the only one. And that was a ruin for me, I mean, that...

**Anita Susuri:** Were you in contact with them?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I was, very little, I mean, for two days not at all, at all, at all. After two weeks, so, when I contacted them they were at my [maternal] aunt's because [she had] a phone at [her] house, so of course it didn't work and my sister was, she had gone underground, the one who was imprisoned. My brothers were also outside [of the city], they had gone to villages, my parents were at my aunt's, I mean, here in Pristina. Two of my other sisters were staying with another [maternal] aunt in Ulpiana [neighborhood] and, I mean until I found out where they moved and that's when I went on to call from the post because of course, you couldn't ask the family [you were taking shelter at] for the phone, but I went to the post every day in Ohër where I was staying. I didn't go to Struga, but we settled in Ohër as a family. I called every day regardless, the numbers I remembered in Pristina.

It happened many times that I remember, I mean, a family who I thanked and then at Kodra e Diellit I learned who they were, but I called only the numbers I knew in Pristina, "What happened in Pristina last night?" For example, I mean, just so I would understand the everyday state, every night. The airplanes that passed, I mean, from Ohër, I would wait for them awake and I was constantly in tears, constantly. Heavy experiences of that time. I think that it was heavier for me, I mean, during the time I stayed in Ohër while there was war in Kosovo than the other period which I was a part of myself. That was even more difficult because it was my family, it was sisters and brothers who were all younger than me, so, younger than me. I never thought that they all would survive, never.

That night when they entered, I mean, the forces and, and I left Ohër with someone else, not my husband's family, I mean, they were all there. But I said, "Tonight if...", in Tetovo there was a group of journalists, I mean, I went and met with that group of journalists in Tetovo and I continued on my way to Pristina. When I came here, I arrived at night and woke them from their sleep, I mean. They do an impression of it, "Is it possible," I would say, "you all have your legs, your arms," meaning, "alive," my family members. It was a very heavy experience. I could say more difficult than life itself.

**Anita Susuri:** What was the city like?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** The city, I just recently told my husband, I mean, we have two linden trees in our yard, I mean, recently, I mean, I said, he, “We will remove them?” I said, “The linden smell near Radio Pristina reminds me of the day I came back,” I said, “oh God,” because the city, the city was still terribly dark. Dark, dark because they had just gone through that difficult night, I mean, when the Russian military had gone out and those threats, so they had just gone through that.

My sister had called, I mean, that day. I had come maybe on [June] 14th, 12th, 14th maybe, my sister that day... that night when those lights happened, I mean, when all of Pristina was in danger. My sister called me from the post, the one who was underground. I said, “How do you dare to go out?” I said, “Because they are saying that,” she said, “No, no there is no risk.” But that night they were really at risk, great risk.

They would tell me that they fortunately met with some teams as much as they could, but they were English I mean, and Dutch. My other sister was a professor of English language, I mean, and my brother as well and they met [with those teams] and they talked and they were told that, I mean, “Tonight you should be careful,” I mean, “all of you as a family. Don’t go out because they will, military moves will happen in this area, throughout Pristina.” I know that it happened that night, but it ended well for my family, I mean, actually.

**Anita Susuri:** Was there damage to your house, how did you recover?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Yes, there was damage, I mean, there were things taken, there were things taken. There was roof damage from the bullets, because there was a paramilitary checkpoint not far from the house of... actually the damage of tiles, windows. This was it, but slowly [we recovered]. Since we came back, I mean, my husband continued to work in KEK where he worked [before], so he didn’t lose his job there. They also had a warehouse with drinks before the war as well, so they worked with that, I mean, the recovery began that way, so, they continued with that warehouse that they were [working with before] and like that. On my mother’s side of the family almost all of them became active with nongovernmental organizations, I mean, brothers and sisters. They began working with OSCE, with, I mean, with UNDP, with all of these organizations. They began stabilizing and they got employed.

Actually, after the war they were still imprisoned and my sister [was] Head of the Association of Prisoners, and the demonstrations continued, the protests continued and we were in front of them continuously and we continuously organized. Since it was our sister, I mean, we were also there. She was a big organizer of the big protests for the release of political prisoners, I mean, Kouchner was in the Transitory Council at that time, she was a member of the Transitory Council. That part continued with that until the release of the prisoners even after the war.



I continued my work at the newspaper, I mean, during that time until it closed down. The closing down was very painful. And at the time when this thing started, I mean, that it would be closed down, *Rilindja* won't close down, I prepared a book, I mean Sevdije Ahmeti's book, the *Kurrë më* [Alb.: Never again]. She invited me to prepare that book and I started collaborating with the nongovernmental organization The Center for the Protection of Women and Children, where Vjosa Dobruna and Sevdije Ahmeti were founders of that organization.

With the closure of *Rilindja*, I mean, I continued to work for other newspapers as well, *Teuta* and then *Kosovarja* and for other periodical newspapers. I had an invitation for, I mean, the new newspapers that came out, I mean, to work there, but I didn't go, I mean. Since, I mean, the newspapers became part of different political currents, I didn't want to work there but I continued to write for *Teuta*, I mean, some writings later.

**Anita Susuri:** The political activity, I mean, you didn't continue anymore?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I didn't continue in the Democratic League. After my employment at the ministry, I mean, I moved to the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo with a lot of insisting from people because, I mean, I didn't want to because I was part of a nongovernmental organization, I was there for five years, I mean, there. I am also a founder of the Kosovo Women's Coalition which was made of political subjects, civil society and the media. I mean, it was the Women's Coalition at that time.

We were a group of women who became trainers of *Women Can Do It* [speaks in English], we were seven women who were part, I mean, of that Kosovo Women's Coalition. It was the organization which I led until recently, I mean, I don't know now, it's been four-five years that it's not been active anymore although I think of becoming active again every day, to reactivate it. But, back then I was part of the Alliance, so I was an adviser to the Municipal Assembly of Pristina, I mean, for one term, like that.

**Anita Susuri:** What about 2008 when independence happened, how did you receive it?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** It was, that was a, I mean, a realization of all that you have worked for and demanded and wanted. It was, I mean, a, that still should, I mean...

**Anita Susuri:** What was that day like for you? You were at home or you went out?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I went out, yes, yes, of course, I went out that day. Of course, I went out to experience it and I went out here at the square, and I mean, it was a really great joy, a really great joy.

**Anita Susuri:** I would also like to know about what you do currently? How do you pass your time?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** I, so, from 2005, I applied at the ministry [and] I was still part of the nongovernmental organization The Center for the Protection of Mothers and Children. I mainly had, I mean, I led the information on that part, I made the bulletin of the organization and all the reports, I mean, informative [reports] of the organization. It was my luck, it was my part that I practiced there, although there were cases that I dealt with certain cases too, I mean, different cases of violence, of prostitution, drugs, different ones.

Maybe it was a really great motive, I mean, a workshop we had at the center and at the *retreat* [speaks in English] and we were there. And, the late Sevdije Ahmeti, the director, told me, “You have to read some letters from raped women,” because the center dealt with those women. Those women were located in different countries, the communication was continuous. With them, I mean, and, she said, “You have to read them”.

I stayed, I know, I mean, without sleep those three nights during the *retreat* [speaks in English]. I read the letters of those raped women, I mean, that for me was maybe the main reason for me to quit the nongovernmental organization, it was such an intense experience. Besides all the other cases we had, I mean, that experience was very intense.

There was a call at the Ministry of Trade at that time, it was 2005 and there were fewer people who applied. And I thought of moving to that part since I finished economics, I mean, I wanted to give that a try too. If I would be accepted there I would quit the organization. I told her, I mean Sevdije, and I applied there. My brother was the one to tell me, I mean, “You should give your contribution as an economist there because it’s enough, do that part too.” I said, “Okay.”

I accepted even though the salary was about five times lower than the one I got at the nongovernmental organization. I remember my late father that night when I started working there and I went there and my mother told him, “Congratulate her,” meaning, “she will start her new job tomorrow at the ministry,” he said, “She didn’t tell me the reason she’s quitting a workplace with a salary that high and she’s going to that workplace. She didn’t tell me the reason.”

Not for the sake of saying it, but my father loved me very, very, very much, I mean, he would say, “As much as six other children,” because [they had me] after seven years [of marriage] and I was very connected to him. I said, “No, I don’t have some kind of reason.” I mean, because he thought I was pressured by somebody to quit. I said, “No I wasn’t pressured,” I mean, “by anybody to quit my job. But,” I mean, “it was enough.”

It seemed like everywhere I went girls were mistreated, I mean, from what I saw inside. I mean, I got the impression that, I mean, the position of girls was very bad, I mean, our girls. And I could tell it

drained my energy, it drained all my energy, I mean, the work drained my energy a lot, I mean, it drained it because I felt the work and I began working at the ministry to not be stuck, I mean.

I had the Kosovo Women's Coalition organization, plus I continued the training. So I was also an election monitor [sent] from OSCE and the Council for Human Rights as well. I continued my activity in civil society, but thinking I wouldn't stay at the ministry for long. Now I continue to work at the ministry, leader for the development of industrial policies and I continue to do the work of an economist.

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Igballe, if you have something to add for the end, if you want to mention something you forgot, or something we didn't ask?

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** There isn't something, I mean, my son coming into this world was special, I mean, that was a good experience, a very good one from all of that and, I mean, it keeps me [strong] a lot and that commitment and energy of mine was directed towards that as well.

**Anita Susuri:** Thanks a lot.

**Igballe Rexha Jashari:** Thank you.