

INTERVIEW WITH SYLEJMAN ÇOLLAKU

Bregu of Drin, Prizren | Date: June 7, 2015

Duration: 62 minutes

Present:

1. Sylejman Çollaku (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Shefqet Çollaku (Interviewer)
4. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer/ Camera)
5. Suferina Çollaku (Present)

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

Sylejman Çollaku: I was born in Zym on May 30, 1924, it is written so in documents. I had a mother and a father, a brother and three sisters, two have passed away and one is alive. I used to be a shepherd, I was young when I tended cattle. I was ten-twelve when I tended cattle. After I turned twelve, when I was 13 they took me to Pristina, my father had a bakery. And in Pristina I got caught in the war of Yugoslavia, I was around 17 years old when the war started. Three *dërzhava*¹ convened – Germany, Italy and Japan. Those three started the war. The war started in Europe in ‘27... in ‘37, or ‘38, I don’t know, I can only lie. In ‘39 Italy took over Albania, [King] Zog left, [Italians] came in without a shot, nothing.

Let’s get back to Pristina. Standing there at the door of the bakery we heard some voices, they screamed when they saw German airplanes approach. There were four-five airplanes going to the *tyrbe*² of Sultan Murat, since the airport was near. They had six airplanes in there, the Serbs, and they burnt them down and then headed towards Kodra e Trimave,³ where the depot was, they hit all of it, they burned it down.

When the Germans entered... when the Germans entered, first of all it was only ten Germans in total, as there was no war. They [Yugoslavs] did not fight the Germans, there was no war, they did not fight against the Germans. There was no war, but the army stretched all the way, the army queued from Podujevo to Pristina. First, three Germans came with a motorbike and they had something to climb onto one side, when one sat, and other two on the other side, so at some point it was ten of them. Killings all over Pristina, killings and nothing else.

So what to do then? They went from Pristina to Janjevo, the Germans, because Catholics lived there. News broke to us in Pristina that Kostë Vojvoda and someone called Peçanac are coming here, to commit massacres in Pristina. What to do? Hence we the bakers got together, it was around thirty of us and so we

¹ Serbian: *država* - the state.

² *Tyrbe* in Albanian, *türbe* in Turkish, is a tomb, usually a mausoleum of notable people.

³ Kodra e Trimave, literally the Hill of the Brave, a neighborhood in Pristina.

went to Sadikaga.⁴ And there was an *oda*⁵ four by four [meters], or four by five, something like that. We were thirty of us who stayed awake all night in case something happens, but nothing at all happened. In the morning we got up and went to our bakeries, to our place and started with our work.

The Germans came in with their army, which rounded up [people] from everywhere, and took them with wagons to Fushë Kosova⁶ to send them as prisoners of war in Germany. And then the Germans turned here into Albania, from Vuçitër⁷ up to here. And Mitrovica was left under Serbia, because they were working with Serbian money. There was a guy called Nedić,⁸ a democrat who had never won, but when the Germans came in, he did win.

On the other hand, the road to Albania opened up, people went in and out without papers, without anything. And that was how it went as far as I know and as I did experience it. Here in Kosovo the army was Italian, we were under Italy. There was a brigade, not one but many so called *Balli Kombëtar*⁹ brigades, there were plenty of them. Anyway, so we formed an army in Skenderaj in 1943, it was sent to Pristina, set up in Skenderaj. People went by, recruited soldiers, I wasn't part of it. They recruited many soldiers from Albania but Italians were the main ones. At some point airplanes started coming in and after being betrayed [sic], Italy started to allow American and English airplanes to pass by here and get fuel.

They came, one hundred, or five hundred, or two hundred or... I cannot say, they went to Germany to bomb or to Russia because the Germans had taken over many states. And then there was nothing until the partisans came, before the partisans came the Germans chased the Communists, killed them or sent them to prison. In Prizren where the old post office is now, they hanged ten Albanians and two *shkije*,¹⁰ the Albanians were Communists. But there was no killing, there was no war here.

Back then, when he rose, yes... they called him Shaban Palluzha.¹¹ He had two hundred people with him and they were with the partisans, they were with the partisans. However, he thought that Kosovo would

⁴ *Beg*, *Spahia* and *Aga* are Ottoman titles. *Beg* or *Bey* (great), Ottoman provincial ruler but also, when included in the last name, a sort of honorary title. In this case however, *aga* is just a title of respect, and it denotes seniority.

⁵ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society

⁶ Kosovo Polje in Serbian

⁷ Vushtrri in Albanian.

⁸ Milan Nedić (1878 – 1946) was a [Serbian](#) general and politician. He was the prime minister of a [Nazi-installed Serbian puppet government](#) during [World War II](#).

⁹ *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands

¹⁰ *Shkije*, plural of *shka* (m.), a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

¹¹ Shaban Polluzha (1871-1945) was a regional Albanian leader of volunteer forces in Drenica. Shaban Polluzha joined the partisans, but in late 1944 disobeyed orders to go north to fight Germans in Serbia, having received news

remain part of Albania, because they've gone over it. And so they came here, Shaban Polluzha went to Podujevo and they told him, "Go to Sremn to fight Četniks¹² there." He didn't go. He said, "I have nothing to do there. I will stay with my brothers." He went to the mountains in Drenica and two or three hundred got together there in the mountains and they started the war with them, the partisans, until they killed and destroyed them, they killed a great number. And some of them who were *Ballists*¹³ ran away, often they managed to escape, they went to Italy. They couldn't go to Albania because... they wanted to go to Greece or somewhere else. Eh, this was it...

We had the bakery in Pristina, we had to leave it behind, the Germans came and we had a falling out with the landlord. We went to Ferizaj with our dad for work. The Germans were there, they were there as well, although the Italians were [the occupiers]. They visited our bakery, I was with my dad, he was selling bread and I was helping around. An officer walked in with seven bags of flour, each bag had German letters imprinted on them. He approached me, I made a mistake, I know, I was asking for it, he said, "How many kilos of bread do I get for one kilo of flour, baked by tomorrow?" I told him, "Eighty kilos of bread for one hundred kilos of flour." He knew how much flour he was putting in, you get one hundred and forty kilos of bread [for that much flour], and he placed his hand on his gun, {places his hand on the belt} I remember it clearly, as if it happened today. He felt sorry for me, because I was young then, so he said, "Grab the bags!" The bags weighted one hundred kilos.

There were two stairs to get into the bakery from the street. When I grabbed them, only my heart knows how I got it inside. When my dad saw me, he got up to help me, but the officer did not let him. I dragged the bags of flour inside with great difficulty, but he never ate that bread because he left for Germany, they all left that same night, the flour stayed here. The white bread and flour remained, the German went away. This was the story of the German.

In Ferizaj we bought grain for milling, together with father and my paternal uncle we took it to mill it. There was no... we took it with my father and my mother... only my father and I, we had our uncle with us, we were together so we took turns. Sale and purchase was just the same as in Albania on Saturdays. They were coming from Albania here without identification cards. This is how we lived, we bought bread, we even had land so we lived well, it was good.

that nationalist Serbs and Montenegrins were attacking civilians in Drenica. He fought against partisan forces until early 1945, when he was killed.

¹² Serbian movement born at the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

¹³ Members of *Balli Kombëtar*.

I learned how to read when I was a soldier, I knew nothing. Only those who worked as laborers at Savitković's [or Savitković's – not clear] in Pristina could read. And so he bought me a primer in Serbian, he bought it not in Albanian, but in Serbian. He taught me the numbers first, then the ABC, how to write and stuff like that. I started to write slowly, slowly, on my own, at first in Serbian, then it was in Albanian, also in Albanian, I used to have good [hand] writing, but I could only write little, I could write some.

I was self-taught, I didn't go to school, not even a day. My uncle took us out of school, he invited us to a school in Zym at the time of Serbia. A cousin of mine and I were at Hasan Pristina's, he was staying there with people, they [the state] called us to go to school. My uncle was the head of the household, he went to the municipality and I don't know whether he talked to them or what he did (laughs). They did not allow us to go anymore and they didn't call us, we were left like that, [and my cousins] Sahit, Rexha and Adem's Zymber and I.

I joined military service in 1949 but I was late because I stayed in Trepça,¹⁴ I was working, I was a worker in the Trepça furnace. They found us late, and the draft came a month later. I turned up at the municipality and they handed me a letter and some documents. We departed from here with one guy from the Gjonaj family, two of us left for Prizren, two soldiers waited for us there. They came for us and so we left, I was assigned to go to Banat.¹⁵ He was also taken to Banat, to [the city of] Kovin.

Both of us went to Kovin, but I didn't know and so I asked them. "No, you are somewhere else." The conscription letter came for me, I went there, to Banat. I worked as a soldier... it was assigned work, not much... chores at the depot and things like that. Back then we baked bread, we stayed there. And so the battalion was sent home in the year 1950, and they took us to open channels as the war was approaching because... how to put it, Tito broke his relations with the great... Russia.

At the time they thought that they would come and make the land of Banat a net. They brought us bread and things, and when it came to sleeping we found a stable somewhere, with hay and stuff and we slept there, for a month and a half. They took us to a village that was in... I tend to forget those names, that village, the entire battalion. When they summoned me to work there too, the army assigned me to cook meals, then I went, nevermind, they took me. The bread was coming stale from Pancevo, a commander, a soldier who was supervising us, swore, "*Stalna, ta bajat hleba* [Always that stale bread]." He said, "Is there a baker in Banat?" So I raised my hand. "Baker," I said, "It's me." "Oh?" "Yes!" And they took me to work, where? In a village! Because the barrack was inside the village. When I went there, an officer came with us, me, to the municipality of that place so we could find a bakery for Germany, to make bread.

¹⁴ Trepčain Serbian, is a large industrial and mining complex in Mitrovica, one of the largest in former Yugoslavia. It was acquired by a British company in the 1930s and nationalized by socialist Yugoslavia after the war.

¹⁵ Region of the Northern part of Serbia, Vojvodina.

Fine, they gave it to us. They took me to a place, we found the bakery it was alright, sort of. They provided me with an assistant, he wasn't a baker, but he was from, he was *hrvat* [Croatian]. He brought the flour, he brought the kind that... I stayed there for a year, I cooked for them. I made nice bread and else. In fact, when I left... all those God's goods, and when I left, that officer told me to become the head of the bakery in Pancevo. Back then, I didn't have a diploma, I hadn't graduated yet. I came home first. I came home, stayed for a week and then went back to Pancevo. When I arrived in Pancevo, I went to register there, and there were private bakeries even back then, but the army destroyed private ones, so we all worked. It didn't work out with them at all, they'd listen and not listen, like they do. Then I left the job, I had stayed for five months. For five months I had the same salary as the officer did for, and I wasn't staying in an apartment, I was sleeping with the army at the barracks.

I left the barracks there, I came home. I came home, I only stayed for a day, then went to Pristina. I got employed, I worked for three and half years. My maternal uncle came for me, he took me away, he has a bakery in Priepolje. "Come because they have..." He lied to them. I had a salary ... I had a good [salary] in Pristina. He took me away and lied to me, they did not [want to] let me [go]. I was a skilled worker in Pristina, I don't want to flatter myself but I was good. The director of that bakery told me, "Stay, why are you leaving? You can go to a spa for a month, two months during the summer no problem at all, just don't leave the job." I didn't listen to them, I left and went to stay for a year and a half at my uncle's. He wouldn't give me a salary, a proper salary, instead of making me a partner, or discuss what was to be done and what wasn't.

They were giving away bread along the road Priboj – Beograd, they were giving five-six hundred kilos of bread, I wasn't convinced to do so and so I left. When I left I came home, and stayed here... again, but I actually remember, when I came to Pristina I also got the diploma. It was written, "*Majstorska Pisma*," in other words, it was written that it was a diploma, that diploma. When we were in Gusi¹⁶ - I stayed four years in Gusi - my salary was one thousand two hundred dinars... twelve thousand. That is how much it is, that is the calculation. So, a doctor received ten thousands, [and] the guy who monitored the accounts [accountant], how to call him, he had a diploma, he was giving me twelve thousand without any hesitation. I stayed there for a while, then I fell slightly ill. I went to the doctor, and he shows me that it was congested {touches the chest}. Yes, I was mistaken there, I quit there, instead of going home to get cured and have the salary flowing, you know, but no, I said, "I am quitting!" So I quit from there, I came home. And since then I have actually worked everywhere, have worked everywhere in Pristina, in Ferizaj and...I've worked everywhere.

Part Two

¹⁶Gusinje in Montenegrin, a locality in Montenegro with a large Albanian population.

I've worked in many places. I've worked in Mitrovica, two years in a bakery in Dečan... Zvečan, I've worked in Zvečan, in Mitrovica.¹⁷ I quit, I found a job again, and when I started there, they made me leave there and assigned me to Trepça. "Do you want to come to us?", "Yes, I'm coming," I said. And so I went there and I worked, as I told you. Not for a week, I stayed with them for two months, because the salary was not so good...

I was loading the wagons with... from the *shut*,¹⁸ and I was doing the lifting myself. The road was very... the path, two wagons one after the other, the next behind. I was loading them, it was a bit steep. I went from the fifth *shut*, and dropped it at the sixth *shut*. The sixth went to the seventh, the seventh to the eighth and then down the hill, so it wasn't that far. When I came out of there was some sort of... how to say, some sort of a place, there were many places like that, but a place where they had left the shanks. I wasn't aware of it and something got to me... the ground, I was looking from the ground so to say, and it got to my brain and I collapsed. I found myself in the ambulance, someone left me there, the *kupatilla*¹⁹ was down the stairs. I lay there for a while, not for long.

And then I got on my feet, it was nothing, and started at the bakery again. I was getting twenty two bags, they called them bags back then. Two thousand and two hundred dinars was the salary at the bakery. When I started there, I received six thousand or something for two months. From there I went to be a soldier, a soldier for two years. I went in '49, and got dismissed in '51, and so forth.

My marriage happened like this, neither did she see me, nor did I back then, in other words we did not know each other. But her mother is from Gjonaj,²⁰ they have a small valley by Laskavec,²¹ that's how they call it, beyond Laskavec it was theirs. It was a big house, the Qazimfejzt. My grandmother...the mother of the bride, who at the time was two or three years old, I am not sure. And so she went to collect some water in Laskavec, back then she had a water jug. When I went there she said, "Could you pour some water here *bre*,²² son?" And then she said, "Whose son are you?" I replied, "Gjyla's," because my mother's name was Gjyla. "So, Gjyla's?" I said, "Yes." "Ok, pour it then, as I'm afraid of the snake," there was a snake, "And I'm afraid it might crawl on me." I took the jug, I filled it up, and carried it because they were a large family and the water went fast.

While drinking there, I carried the water jug with me when I was a shepherd. I filled the water jug, and gave it to her. At the end, she told me, "May you live forever son! I will give you one of my daughters," that very mother of my old lady. And I went home, and I told my mother, "So I gave some water to a woman of

¹⁷ Dečani and Zvečan in Serbian.

¹⁸ The place for loading the wagons with minerals.

¹⁹ Serbian: *kupatilla*- bathroom.

²⁰ Village in the region of Has.

²¹ River in the region of Has.

²² *Bre*- colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. Similar to the English bro, brother

Gjonaj, and she told me I will give you one of my daughters, I will give you one of them.” And so like this, it then went to their ear, it was constantly going to their ear and they were speaking on my behalf. We went there and asked for her hand in marriage, and they granted it to us and so I waited till ‘52, and then we got married in the year ‘52.

We didn’t have things back then, fewer clothes and items, we were poorer. We had enough land, we were fine, but it wasn’t making much. Sometimes at the bakery, and sometimes like this. And so she gave me her daughter. When we went to ask for her, she said to me, “Beware do not tell anyone!” I said, “No, no, I won’t tell anyone.” Then she gave me her daughter, I waited. In the year ‘51, I finished the military service and in ‘52 I got married. I got married, I was around for a month or two, and I went to work everywhere, in Pristina, yes in Pristina. And while I was in Pristina, we would come for a visit once every two or three months, we would visit occasionally. Whereas, when I was abroad for a year, we never visited, I didn’t visit, as I was working. The old lady stayed on her own most of the time, so did I. And that is how it was...until recent when things got sorted out.

We went together with the old lady to register at the bureau, where they register the old people, for salaries. With the old lady, we went till... we went to register by train. We took a taxi, he charged us two Euros for taking us to the place. And we went there, when we arrived, we went back again and we finished the job. I went to have a check up at the local clinic, as I needed a referral to go to the internist... I don’t know if they have a general internist or what. While I was being checked, the poor old lady was saying, “Go and take it....” They helped her, “Go and take the referral to a certain place.” And once she took it from there, she filled it in and submitted it... “They’ve written it without a referral.” Then the other asked, “You have to go for x-rays,” he said, “You have to go for x-rays, you need this referral.” Then another, and she became so... she finished those. And the doctor there checked me up and went out, since he was done. I was putting my clothes on, when the old lady comes, “Huh, where is the doctor?”, “He left,” I told her.

Had he been there, I would have told him to check the old lady because her face was red, she had fever. The doctor left and we left, it was one o’clock. We arrived at the station and went to a kebab place since we were hungry, we ate and then we headed here. We arrived around half past three... no, it was half past two. At half past two, I went to have some rest over there, and she went out to the barn. There was some cut wood, she was collecting those when the illness got her, a heart attack. I noticed she was about to fall, and so I picked her up. Then, she lay down, I slept there [in the same room with her].

She shouted, shouted, but none of us knew, nothing. Up till when Sadik, a cousin, saw her, he was at a coffee place chatting. “Oh Sadik, oh Sadik, come over here because I fell.” While here, we didn’t hear anything. And he went with two others, he picked up the old lady because she couldn’t walk, and they brought her over there. That boy had a car, his father was at the coffee place and so he says, “Get your wife, let’s go and take uncle Sylë’s bride because she is very ill, take her to...” The car arrived, as we were getting in a car that is when we found out, because we had no clue, we did not know at all how to help her. We took her to the hospital where she stayed ten days. She stayed ten days there, after ten days her

arm was more mobile whereas the leg wasn't and the doctor told her, "Would you like to go home?" She told me, she said, "If it's alright to go, I would," but then continued, "But I came here to get better." "You are fine, now try and lift your hand to the mouth. You are fine, lift it to the mouth, and you can go home."

She came home, she stayed for a week or ten days. And 21 days later, it hit her in the morning. Yes, yes... and I was ten years or more older than she was, she is born in '35, and I am born in '24, she was 17 years old when she became a bride, we lived together for 60 years, and so we were separated after almost 60 years. So like this... We were only sons, I got married in '52, Mehmet was born in '54, Shefqet in '58, we didn't have any girls. I had a brother, yes Mehmet was my brother, and another brother who died very young a long time ago. Then Mehmet got married in '76, he has three sons and two daughters. He has married one of them off, the other is nearly married, she is engaged. The sons are working, they are married. All three of them are married, their brides are here, but they are in Hungary working there, they visit time after time.

Regarding the bakery, I was crying out of exhaustion, when my father took me to Pristina. I was 13 years old, or 14, I am not sure. He took me to Pristina, and he and my uncle were supposed to switch every six months. We were together at home and also there [at the bakery]. My uncle and he were switching, six months each, but I wasn't coming back, I used to stay there. I worked through, I worked from then onwards until '88. Is it like that, '88?

I was always a baker, and so I ruined my eyes. Now one eye has let me down and the other almost, nothing. When I went to the doctor, "What was your work?" And so when I told him, he says, "The fire destroyed your eyes." I've worked everywhere, everywhere, but I never parted from the oven, whatever work I did throughout my life, it was at the bakery. Besides that, I worked for two months in Trepça, we talked about that earlier. Those two months... because I did all other work outside, it was at the bakery again.

I have three grandchildren, from my eldest son, all three of them are married. One of his sons has a child, while the other brides, two of them none yet. One of them is in school in Austria, with a wife, a son. So I worked like this... I have grandchildren, the sons of Shefqet... Mehmet's. And my great-grandchild is now the son of Mehmet's son, it means I waited all this time so I can even have a grand-grandchild now.

The bakery has three people working there, but in two *smena*,²³ six of them in total. And three of them are interns they call them, they cut the dough and bake it together with that baker's assistant, the assistant prepares the dough. When they cut it, the assistant together with the intern prepare the bread to be placed there. They weigh the bread, the shape it into its form and stuff, and I only pull it out of the oven, I clean the oven and I put bread inside the oven. They prepared the dough, those two, the third one, myself, is the baker. To each his own. The bakery has all its items, everything that is needed inside, facilities, the cauldron, flour and these types of things.

²³ Serbian: *smena* - shift

Part Three

Sylejman Çollaku: After one year, that is when Hajrije [sister] became a bride, I didn't come home at all. Because when Hajrije became a bride, I wasn't here. When Nexhmije [sister] became a bride, I wasn't here, I was with Tixhe.

Shefqet Çollaku: How did you work at the bakery?

Sylejman Çollaku: Huh?

Shefqet Çollaku: How did you work in the past?

Sylejman Çollaku: Back then it was like this, it was with a mill trough...there were no cauldrons. It was a big mill trough, two-three meters long, four meters. They poured the flour in there, we worked with yeast, different kind of yeast. It was sweet yeast, there is no more of that nowadays. We would fix the yeast, we did everything ourselves. Two of us went in to prepare the dough by hand, as much as it would fit in the oven, we had to prepare one hundred and twenty, one hundred and thirty kilos. The oven, one hundred and twenty, one hundred and thirty.

Eh back then, they would cut it back there, and shape it like that. We did everything by hand. Flour with yeast, and they worked on dough. And the baker... I didn't work there. Outside, something with the government [to bake], to help something because... since I didn't have any work there, they used to do that kind of work, I was only a baker. I made the oven ready and warm, I turned the oven to get warm, the bread was ready so I put it in, the bread rose, I put it in the oven. Yes, yes...

Back then it was different, because there were no machines, there was no sieve, the flour was sieved by hand. There were no machines, there was nothing, nothing. Now you have the material, you have the machines, then came the cauldrons... [it's] easy to bake now.

When I worked in Pristina, we made everything day by day, everything by hand. We didn't have machines then. Three and half years, for as long as I worked, there were no machines to cook with. They made machines later on, when we had a new bakery. Everything by hand, there were around 13-14 ovens in Pristina, we went in and out in shifts, day and night, and we were making bread for all Pristina.

Shefqet Çollaku: Father Rexha, was he a baker too?

Sylejman Çollaku: No, I don't know because I didn't get to meet him.

Shefqet Çollaku: So, father was a baker, you, the eldest son, grandchildren, all generations...?

Sylejman Çollaku: My father was a baker, he had a diploma at the time of Yugoslavia, he had one. Just like I had one, and there is nothing that goes beyond that. Father had it, I had it, and now the grandchildren, Mehmet has it, he had it while you don't. Shefqet and Besfort [grandson] do not have one, the other two have it.

Shefqet Çollaku: The grandchildren, this generation is passing on, all this is being passed on to the bakery?

Sylejman Çollaku: Yes, yes, this generation too. We didn't have any other vocation, but this one. We didn't have any other vocation.

Part Four

Sylejman Çollaku: To be frank, baking was a difficult job back then, you were sweating bullets. Those drops of sweat fell as you prepared the dough. I had no... it was difficult. They came from The Hague, those prosecutors...²⁴

During the time of war, the war broke out, we didn't have anymore killings and stuff, but in Drin and further they took out people, many people went like that. The war broke out and first they bombed, it was Tuesday, the 24th. When they bombed them for the first time the paramilitaries got mobilized, Serbs were raiding and rounded up men, I will now tell you about Krusha e Madhe, Krusha e Vogël,²⁵ about Piranë,²⁶ that is the reason I am telling you this.

They rounded up women and children, they took them outside and they took men somewhere. They took 13 years old boys, they were stuck there, women, old women. Even today I can recollect, two old women, with all that wear of theirs, they got together. What to do? They carried their daughters on their backs.

They got up in the morning to depart for Albania, to leave this place. They left, they arrived from Krusha e Vogël to Bregu i Drinit, they walked all the way from Krusha e Vogël. They took 114 men, 114 of them were taken and shot, who were...

They came all the way to Bregu i Drinit, and we and some friends went to wait for them, and one was from Krusha, a Babërdak. Now, they got out earlier, they knew something. Then we collected the children with two tractors, and got them across the Drin, women, and children, old women, everyone, it was two hundred and something of them. And then we accommodated them in the whole village that is in front of you. I wasn't there, I was outside, but I did tell them, "Here's the house, you can go in if you want, but I won't be staying here myself. I will escape at night because the road is very near." And they did not go in,

²⁴ The speaker is referring to the investigation of the massacres mentioned below.

²⁵ Krusha e Vogël is a village in the area of Rahovec, where in March 1999 Serbian troops disappeared and killed all the male population. The massacre of Krusha e Vogël of March 26, 1999 is documented in many news reports but also in the Human Rights Watch report, *Under Orders* (2001).

²⁶ Piranë was a village of Has, where a similar massacre took place on 24-25 March 1999.

there were people who took in fifty persons, Xhelil sheltered fifty persons himself, at the Kaqels'. There were two Catholics, Marta and Adile, they also sheltered people.

They stayed for a while, around three - four days, then around the evening on the 30th of the year, the 30th of the month, around the evening, people start fleeing, they are leaving, but nobody is telling us to leave, nor they are telling us to run, but they did tell them, yes from Romaja, Rugova all the way to Gjakova, they were all coming this way. Eventually we did leave as well, we got ready. We had our own car, my son Shefqet took his wife and the children and... his brother's daughter, my other son, and the rest of us left with a neighbor's tractor.

We arrived at the Landovica's bridge on the neighbor's tractor, and just as we were passing, the paramilitaries stopped us. We saw a nice car, which was Ruzhdi's, a cousin, our cousin. They pulled him out of the car and grabbed him by the neck and pushed him behind the car, "Get me two hundred Euros or otherwise I kill you right now, without hesitation." His father took them, went to give him the money and we got out of there. After that nobody touched us, they only stopped us, however they didn't harass us, only stopped us. A bit further from Prizren, they halted Shefqetin his car, asking for money. He was hiding that little money he had, he didn't dare to show it to them. He gave them some, and escaped. And so forth...

Back there in Albania, we entered Albania, they took our identification cards. The old lady was standing a bit further, I remember it like it was today. And Krenar, my nephew, the tractor was full, he came out, they gave him the papers, I gave him the car papers. We took off his plates and fetched them... because that was the drill. We went there to some, I forget *bre*... we went after them, we went on, they took us to some sort of pavilion near the water. It was cold, where to stay, what to do, they had the car, but the children [were in the car], no room for the rest of us. We woke around dawn, the buses came from Albania. They arrived and got full, our son took our car, and drove it a bit further, he left the car, which was in good conditions, like that, with all the papers, with the keys inside.

We went on, got on a bus. It took us to Berat, and actually, from Berat it took us to Pobrat, a village near Berat. Over there, some men and women came to collect us. I was with twelve others, I had 13 family members. Shefqet was with other four. Mehmet was not here, he was in Germany and had two daughters and three sons. The old lady and I, there were 13 of us. They divided us, the old lady, Shefqet's wife went to one lady, a widow, together with her children and mother, my old lady. One guy took me and my grandson to another place, Mehmet's wife went to a neighbor's, near where I was, they took her with all her children. My sons, two of them, two of them went to the village chief and they tended his sheep during the time we were there. We stayed there for quite some time.

The meals were a hassle because we drove all the way to Berat for food. I went for it, it was costing us a fortune. Yes, we stayed there 25 days, we then went to Berat, my son Shefqet found a shepherd's cottage there and that's where we stayed. However, I didn't stay long, three-four nights or something, and then I

headed here. They stayed longer, yes they stayed for two more weeks. I returned earlier, all kinds of people had gone in, they got here before me, and searched, looted, stole and everything else. Yes...

I was in front of the house and there were no roads so to speak, absolutely nothing, only the shore of Drin further away, and a truck came and stopped there, I was watching, knowing nothing. A truck approached the shore of Drin and [the engine] died, yes it died. What to do? [Imitates the engine that won't start] Then, what to do, they were plotting something there, and placed a can of gasoline, they got up and poured the can, but the car wouldn't start. They went and took an excavator, which was standing there, there was a civilian policeman and a uniformed policeman.

They went for it, the excavator pushed the truck to the shore of Drin. The front wheels, the engine and everything fell into Drin, and the rest the half of it remained on the other side [on the shore]. And then I saw it again when it retreated, I saw it was full. They looked like stubs, like sacks, and they were all tied like sacks. And they [the policemen] came out, left. While watching it, not fully burnt yet, yes, we looked whether it would burn entirely. While we were watching a gunshot is fired, and I remain watching, I don't know what is happening. The old lady tells me, "Stay away because it might hit you too!" It didn't get me, through the window the bullet fell here somewhere, when Menduhija [granddaughter] found it. She kept that bullet for some time even in Albania. And the other one was fired in the direction of the barn, three shots were fired. When I walked in and looked at the window, there was a van outside. Our people went in and then left unnoticed, they burnt it down.

What was it, I also told this to the court, "I don't know!" The court was here twice, it was snowing, the court came twice, once, and then twice. Those documents came from The Hague. When I saw him, "Sylejman Çollaku, is this how it was, is it true?" They had invited me to Krusha, yes, yes, and they asked, "Can you come over to Pristina, or shall we come over to you?" I said, "No, no, I cannot make it. You can come here and I will answer. I said, "I can provide answers to you, yes I can, but I cannot come there."

Now they came by, the three judges, two prosecutors, one policeman and three prosecutors, and the driver, and then the judge, the prosecutor. For two and half hours I stayed there, he questioned me, looked at the paper, whether it matches my words. He had The Hague document in his hand. "Yes," he said, "they match, everything is matching." For two and a half hours and then brought us here. They took off while more snow was piling up, but they had a car that was digging through the snow. Then they took me to Krusha. They were in Krusha, didn't stay here. They took me there to Krusha, I went in there to testify, and the prosecutor of this case was telling it the same way I told you as Shefqet or my daughter is telling it. The interpreter was very good. I told him, "May they be welcomed, may they be with life and health!" What else to tell them? He translated. When he told them, the court stood up, they stood up. And then we started.

When I came back from Albania, at the time, my brother and I had a joint bakery in Pristina. We were not in very good terms, we were not on speaking terms, so I never went back there. I stayed here and we worked here but I was not at the bakery, I never went back to the bakery. The only work I did, I mowed the

lawn, I mowed till '84-'85. However, three years ago I got a spell, how to say, just as I was on my feet putting my clothes on, it came and hit me, turned me on the other side, and bashed me on the wardrobe. And I had been injured in my spine and since then up to day I am still complaining. But no, it never happened again.