Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH BETI MUHARREMI

Pristina l 7 February 2015
Duration: 54 minutes

Present:

1. Beti Muharremi (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer/Camera)
4. Donjeta Berisha (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.

Childhood

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her childhood and family.]

Belgjyzare Muharremi: I am Belgjyzare Muharremi, I live in Pristina, I currently run a women's organization that's called "Dera e Hapur" [Open Door], it's a nongovernmental organization. I was born on 19 December 1954 in the village of Kabash in the municipality of Viti. I finished my elementary school in Kabash and in Viti, and high school in Gjilan, at the Skenderbeu school, the pedagogical school, it was called Skenderbeu. My childhood was spent in Kabash, I had my grandfather, grandmother, my mother with whom I was very close, my father, many aunts...I also have a brother. By profession I'm an economist.

I don't know what I'd share with you about my childhood. I spent my early childhood in Kabash. I think I was a very quiet child, very obedient, as my father was a teacher at the time, one of the first teachers because there weren't sufficient cadres then, and they were very young. After they finished sixth grade, they went, they sent them, they sent them to different courses. And six people out of our family - my father, aunt, and some aunts and cousins - became teachers, the first teachers in that place. And I finished elementary school in a school that was close to our house. It was a small, well-organized school. My first teacher was teacher Ilmije, whom we loved very much and who loved us very much (smiles).

Then, it was interesting because when I started working we met after many years, she knew me and she even remembered me by name, because my mother had contacted her, since there weren't kindergartens at the time, and my mother wanted to sent me to school like that, in kindergarten. Then they agreed with the teacher for me to start first grade but as [a] kindergarten [student], I was five years old at the time. However, when the first grade ended, they wanted to separate me from my friends, from my classmates. And I continued second grade with my classmates (smiles).

Then, in the grade...from fifth grade until eighth grade I had to travel, to go to Viti. In elementary school, I mean, from fifth grade until the eighth I had to travel about half an hour. Every day I travelled with my uncles' children and other neighbors to Viti, and we would come back on foot. We went on foot and we came back on foot, we were very young. And we came back...it was interesting, very interesting for us, for me.

Youth

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her youth.]

Belgjyzare Muharremi: There wasn't a high school at the time, and I had to go somewhere else farther away. Where to go? Gjilan. Since my family roots are from Gjilan, and I had my aunts there, I continued high school in Gjilan. It was interesting, we discussed it with the family, with my grandfather. And my grandfather was interested in what field I wanted to continue to study, what kind of schooling to pursue. And then, my mother, father, and aunt also participated in this discussion and we decided that it was best to go to the high school *Normale*,[1] since it's important for a woman to have more free time for the family, for the home, for children, for her husband. So, I continued my education in Gjilan. I lived with my aunt there, since my aunts were there. It's interesting to mention here that schools encouraged the education of girls at that time, because there were very few girls. In all the classes that I remember, in all the classes there were boys, there were only two girls per class, they were two-two, which means five to six girls were in a class. The rest of the class was made up of boys. And, as I said earlier in order to encourage the education of girls, they decided to create an all-girls class. That was a very interesting experience for me and all of us girls, who were there. Nevertheless, girls abandoned their education. Nevertheless, after two years were done, I mean, the first and second year of high school, they distributed us in other classes again where there were also boys. I mean, we became a minority again in high school.

High school was a very good experience, a very interesting experience. Two schools were beside each other, the gymnasium[2] and the *Normale* in one yard. And I remember that noise, I remember the music that was played during breaks, the breaks between classes. It was an especially good experience for me. Then, I had...at that time I was thinking about continuing my education, but because the *Normale* lasted five years, I went to the principal and I pleaded with him, "Principal, can you let me, can you make it possible for me to transfer to the gymnasium?" because we were in the same yard, "to transfer to the fourth year of the gymnasium, in order to finish high school in four years." He said, "I wouldn't advise you to go to the gymnasium because we want students like you and like...some other students to stay in our school." And I decided...we were three distinguished girls, and one boy; during the summer holidays we finished the fourth year, so that when the new school year began, we passed from the third year to the fifth, which means that I finished high school in four years.

Then my family had another discussion of what [kind of studies] to continue, what kind of schooling to pursue. And I wanted to study medicine, but after the discussions we had, we collectively decided that I'd continue and register in the Faculty of Economics. There was quite a good generation at the Faculty of

[1] 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 WWII, these were the first schools in Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the Shkolla Normale moved to Pristina.

[2] A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Economics. I mean, based on what professors said and what magazines wrote at the time, students who'd finished the gymnasium in Pristina that year had been particularly clever. And we were five hundred students, five hundred students registered in the first year. And our professors were particularly good, I was lucky to have my aunt in Pristina, I lived at my aunt's and in the dorms, so I had a chance to socialize, to make friends from Peja, from Gjakova, also from Deçan, and all parts of Kosovo.

I have very good memories of university: socializing with students, and we had particularly good professors. When we finished the fourth year popularity was a popular practice to go on field trips. We went to Czechoslovakia, to Poland, it was an incredibly good experience. Then those prom nights, in high school and in university, were held, it was very interesting then. But out of five hundred students who were registered in the first year, in the fourth year there were 120 of us, I remember this. So, after four years I graduated, in '72 I registered, in '76 I graduated. And I waited, I looked for work for two and a half months and I was hired at the Ministry of Finance, which was called the Provincial Secretariat of Finance at the time.

On 7 January I was hired, then in February I was engaged, on 7 July, I was married. I have a husband, a spouse I live with, and I have three children, two boys and one girl. I have three grandsons and one granddaughter. When I married, I went to live with my husband's parents, they had an apartment in the center of Pristina, close to the Grand Hotel today, where it is now, but at the time the Grand Hotel didn't exist. When I married, the Grand Hotel...the construction on the Grand Hotel, the construction of the Grand Hotel started. And that really bothered me, because our apartment was on the street, meaning right in front of the Grand Hotel. Meanwhile I'd grown used to a sense of quiet, something different. And the construction of the hotel began in '77, and we observed the construction of the hotel. It was interesting because there weren't even that many apartments in Pristina. When I came to Pristina for the first time, that road that goes from the Faculty of Economics to where the dorms are, it was filled with mud, red mud, it was red mud. There wasn't a paved road, and there were many parts with cobblestones.

We lived with the in-laws for four years, with my husband, because we didn't have anywhere else to go. And then, I worked in the Ministry of Finance, my husband worked at the Kosovo Parliament. My father-in-law worked in the leadership of Kosovo, I mean, close to the president there was the advisor of...the Kosovo president, but it wasn't called that, it was called the president of the leadership. So, my husband had an opportunity to get an apartment because they didn't give apartments to women. In very rare, rare cases...men, I mean, the head of the family was the person who had the right to get an apartment. And, after four years they gave my husband an apartment, in the center again, on the other side of the Grand Hotel (smiles). And at that time I'd just given birth to one of the boys, and we moved into the new apartment, our second son was also born. First Fatbardhi, then Lumi, and Besa, my daughter.

Then, after a few years, they gave us a bigger apartment because the children started growing, and we had a bigger apartment. When you had an apartment it was easier to get another one. So, we went to the new apartment in '89. However, in '89 it was very difficult to get an apartment because then the troubles and the, "are-you-Albanian," "are-you-Serb" divisions intensified. And we were lucky to move into the new apartment. And a Serb who worked in the same place as my husband, at the Electro-Economy of Kosovo,

moved into our old apartment. And I said, “It’s a very good apartment, there’s sun, it’s very healthy, very good.” He said, “No, if it was good I would have gone to the big apartment and you would have stayed here. I’m aiming for the apartment they gave you, a new one that had more space, more square footage, more rooms.” And I didn’t understand him because he had small children and there were rules about how, and what kind of apartment was distributed. I mean, he fulfilled the criteria to go to that apartment we used to live in, and we fulfilled the criteria to go to a bigger apartment. But, since we worked, we Serbs and Albanians worked alongside, then we didn’t understand these divisions they thought up. We thought that we should live together, that we should live together and that it’s not OK to have problems.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: You didn’t feel those divisions even in the 80’s?

Beti Muharremi: I did...feel them, of course. I experienced the demonstrations of ‘68. I was in high school at the time, maybe then I was younger and I didn’t quite understand, but I heard my parents, grandfather, grandmother, aunts and father talking, we were very young at the time, but they didn’t discuss it in front of us. We would sleep, they would talk when we slept. They talked about topics like, “A truck with weapons passed by on the road, past our door.” But I was too young then to understand these divisions.

Then, during the demonstrations of ‘81, I was married and I lived right in the center of the city close to the Grand Hotel, and there were was a massive amount of students and people who went out to the demonstrations. So in ‘81, after the demonstrations and the imprisonment of young people, there were tensions in the office between Albanians and Serbs. Honestly, some Serbs whom I worked with in the office bothered us a lot with their statements, “What are you demanding, we’ve given you everything.” As if someone gave someone something, as if it isn’t everyone’s right to live, to get an education, to work, to live a normal life. And later on they started...before we had ministers, Albanian secretaries at that time, there was Mister Xhemshit Duriqi, the person who hired me, who was a very capable person, a very capable minister, he did great work. Then others who were also Albanian, and later they started bringing in ministers from Serbia. I mean they thought it would be easier to realize their goals through Serb or Gorani ministers who came from Belgrade. One came who was called Garip Haxhini, a Gorani. Then the deputies would be Serbs, brought over from Belgrade.

So, in ‘89, in July of ‘89, there’s the first culmination, the first people to be removed from institutions are Albanian employees who worked for the Ministry of Finance, specifically on the budget of Kosovo. I mean, because they were initially interested in controlling the budget, even though it was in their hands for a long time. But on 12 July of ’89, we heard that police had come to the entrance, and we knew what was happening. After this, Albanians who worked in the Ministry of Finance didn’t have the right, they were banned from entering the building. Only Serbs remained. And, after a time they invited us to take the decisions they issued, which said that we left our jobs, that we refused to execute the orders they gave us. And, we were somehow the enemies of this...of Kosovo, of this state. So we, women and men, protested.

There were many women in the Ministry of Finance, three – four were of my generation, later on younger women came who also graduated from the Faculty of Economics. We protested every day, we went out.

Back then protests were popular because the Albanian employees started being fired from their jobs, and every day protests were held on the main street, today known as Zahir Pajaziti Square and Nëna Terezë.

I explained that I went to school very early in order to go to kindergarten, but that didn't happen, I mean, after I continued second grade, and I also finished high school in one year instead of two and in ... during my studies I was an conscientious student, and in fact I graduated before turning 22. For my friends, and for my circle this was something very advanced, because in the municipality, when I would go to the municipality they said that after four years no one had graduated. I mean, girls registered, very few girls registered in university. A friend, two friends from my class, registered and they either finished or they didn't. After a few years my uncle's daughters registered, and then they finished their studies as well. I mean, quite a small number of girls were educated. I don't know why that happened, but probably the family economies of the time, the family economies weren't good enough to send both girls and boys to school. As I said, the whole class was filled with boys, which means someone had to be given the possibility, the chance to educate themselves, and that person was most probably a boy, because the facts speak for themselves, eh?

It was very interesting for me in Pristina. I loved Pristina and I remained in Pristina. I mean, in '72 I registered in the faculty and in '76 I finished. On 1 January '77 I started working. Then, I got engaged, I got married, so it was an unusually good experience, I saw myself in Pristina. I somehow couldn't think of living elsewhere.

Professional Life

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her professional life.]

Belgjyzare Muharremi: I looked for work for two and a half months and I was hired at the Ministry of Finance, back then it was called the Provincial Secretariat of Finance. I worked there for a long time, first of all it was experience-building, [I gained] experience from all sectors, the banking sector, the sector of...revenue, the sector of financing of needs, general and collective. And a year later, our supervisors decided where, also according to my thinking and to my desire of where I would like to work, [they] decided which sector [I should be placed in]. And I worked for a time for the municipalities in the border sector, it was a very good experience. It was there that I learned that border areas are the poorest, because people don't want to live there and there was a policy of encouraging the economic empowerment of that area so that people would want to live there. Later on I worked a bit on the budget of Kosovo.

Then, I was placed in the sector for the financing of general and collective needs, specifically the financing of municipalities and self-governing communities of interest at that time - now they're called funds, funds for science, education, culture -, that's what they were called then. And I worked a lot on the budget reserve and the law for the financing of municipalities. At that time there were 26 municipalities and out of 26 municipalities, only Pristina was financed from its own resources, whereas the other municipalities needed supplementary funds from the budget, from the Kosovo budget.

It was very difficult to see oneself in the street. You were simply active, you worked with all your might, I was even promoted after a year or two in my job. I was group-leader for the financing of municipalities and self-governing interest groups, and a moment later, to find oneself in the street, without doing anything wrong, without any proof… So, when I arrived home, and my husband also arrived from work, and maybe I did not understand the gravity of [it all] I said to my husband laughing, I said, "Husband, from today I will be at home, I'll be a housewife. Whatever you want, I'll make it at home." I started joking. Meanwhile, he replied in all seriousness, "Alright, wife, because I will be like you too." So, on the same day, on July 12th '89, they also fired my husband from his job and forbade him to enter the building. At that time three people had been banned. And they put a piece of white paper on the door that said, "Isa Muharremi is banned" and two other people, two colleagues of his [were banned from] entering the building where he worked, because he was engaged...he was proclaimed an enemy of the state. The children were young, it was a great injustice and it was very illogical, groundless, not...but it was a reality that had to be accepted.

The children were young and it was very emotional. It was the time when my father-in-law started getting his pension, and his pension was worth three to four marks, I mean, he got his pension in dinars. And he would get those three or four marks, his pension that was worth that much, and he would go to the market, he would purchase one half for himself, and the other half for us. What could he buy with four marks? Then, my husband got into an accident and the situation became even more difficult. A portion of the money we had saved for a rainy day in the Bank of Kosovo, even that, they prevented us from withdrawing even that money because the bank was destroyed, I mean, it didn't exist anymore, I mean, the money that we had set aside for a rainy day, we couldn't use it on our rainy day. Even today, after twenty years, we can't withdraw that money from the bank, I mean, it remains in the banks of Yugoslavia.

It was the phase when you could give the most of yourself, because you already had experience, I mean you actively learned how to succeed, to finish school, to finish on time, to finish early, to work at a job and to fulfill your tasks so that they promote you at work and you gain 13-14 years of experience and then you can give the most of yourself, the most of yourself to develop your country, to develop, to have benefits for the family and everyone. I mean, then they fire you, and that momentum slows down, it stops, that momentum stops and you feel disappointed, insulted. And I expected my Serbian colleagues to call me on the phone and say, "Beti, how are you? How are your children? Do you have what to eat, do you have what to drink? Your husband was in a car accident, how is Isa?" I expected all of this, but I didn't receive it. I didn't receive it and I didn't understand how we could have worked together and visit each other for birthdays, we visited each other for holidays, in a way we lived together, but this didn't happen.

At that time my husband started working at something, everything you worked for, no matter what kind of work you did you were endangered by the police, by the financial police. I know that in front of my apartment there at the Ljubljana Bank, the former Ljubljana Bank, there were new white buses parked there, 15-20 buses in a row. When we asked, "Who are they?" "They're the financial police that came from Belgrade." I mean, every business that started, every work that began, would be halted over something. You had to start working at something and in very difficult conditions, I mean, they would come and get

the cream [of the profit], so that as soon as you started to do something, they would come and get the cream [of the profit] and you'd end up nowhere.

That was a very stressful time for all of us, as it was for all Kosovars, it was the same for my family and me. At that time, I mean, activism continued in '98, at the beginning of '99. In February, around the end of February '99, we started becoming scarce, we started not meeting as much with the members of the Red Cross and the Emergency Staff, because we used to meet. And those connections started to be interrupted and we started locking up in our apartments, in our homes. Some other relatives who thought that they would be safe in Pristina for some reason came and stayed in our apartment. And people started locking up at home, stores started getting broken into, windows, and Serbs started taking things from stores, because Albanians didn't dare go outside. I mean, my apartment was in the center and we didn't dare leave the house.

We prepared food at home, but apart from this, even our telephone lines - and this seemed very interesting and impossible to me, but it turns out it is possible - the telephone lines of Albanians were cut off, whereas those of Serbs remained functional. I thought that the telephone lines were cut because of the situation, but no, Serbs had telephone service, and we couldn't communicate with anyone. I saw this, I noticed this because our close neighbor bought an apartment from a Serb, and at her place the phone was functional, because the apartment was under the name of a Serb. And with these communication cuts, I didn't know where my father was, where my brother was, where their children were. And one day, I called my aunt in Skopje from my neighbor's telephone, and they told me that my brother and his family and my father went to Skopje. They waited a long time at the border, but they managed to get out. But we didn't want to leave Pristina, to leave Kosovo, we hadn't done anything, we wanted to stay in our apartment.

However, from the apartment… in our building every floor has five apartments, and it is twelve floors, meaning 120 families lived there. Out of all of the families, only 14 Albanian families remained in that building. And one day, our closest Serb neighbor came and knocked on the door and asked for my husband and they talked. He said to him, "Can you please, can we agree that if you are in danger, I will protect your family because I see you have many members there. But if we're in danger, can you then protect us from any possible danger?" "Yes," we said, "But can you please let us call our relatives to see where they are?" And he said, "OK, take the key, you can talk on the phone, use the phone." And when I went in there I talked to my brother again and he said, "Take clothes, because it's very cold, you're going to wait at the border for a long time." And OK, we agreed on that, when I looked at the balcony I saw a sniper gun and a bag filled with bullets, I mean, that neighbor had them.

Then, all the neighbors started, the Serb men and boys [started] wearing army uniforms, and on 4 April, on 4 April they made all of us, in '99, leave our apartment. And those four families too, the four apartments that were Albanian, we were forced to leave the apartment. And the children were small. So, we looked to take, to take elementary, necessary things, and we left the apartment. But where to go? We saw the river of people, a river of people going towards the train with clothes bundled up in tablecloths. And the police said to us, "Go there where the train is, to the tracks near Dragodan." We got on the train there and the

train stopped in Blace[3] and we got off the train. They ordered us not to walk off the tracks, and only on the rails, because they said it was mined. “You can’t get off the train tracks. Go straight on the tracks, until the Blace border.”

I remember that it was incredibly cold, 4 April 1999, incredibly cold, very, very cold. And, when we got there, those of us who got off the train got there. Many people who’d gotten to the border earlier were waiting there, and they were black in the face {touches face}, like with ash or with...because of the factory that was there. And, they waited for us, on the left side we had the police, on the right and in front of us many Albanians who were placed in Blace. And the police on the other side yelled at someone, I don’t know why, “Dodji vamo!”[Come here!], and he shot at him. My husband was in front there, as well as my daughter, my young daughter and he protected her {holds her wrist} to prevent something from happening to her. But luckily that didn’t happen, the bullet didn’t hit anyone, but it was a very traumatic experience for us.

It started getting dark there, it started getting cold and when it became completely dark, the villages around Blace started massively sending different material, all sorts of rags for people to cover themselves with, so they wouldn’t freeze. Then bread, then milk, then...foodstuff to pass the night as well as possible. But in reality it was very difficult. The next day, around two, we were...because it was like a field there, Blace. We joined the road, we joined the column, the column lasted 15 hours, I mean, from two in the afternoon in April ‘99. We, at two in the morning, no actually at five in the morning, we made it to the border. You know the border there is very short, that part is very short {shows the distance with her hands}, a few meters. But we spent 15 hours in that part. There were that many people, and the border police let people pass the Macedonian border that slowly. And at a certain moment, they separated our family, they said, “You pass {gestures with hands}, you stay.” And I started to plead with that border guard, I said, “Please you can you let them go because my brother-in-law is there {gestures direction}, his wife is there, and the children…” Very aggressively he said, “Go, go pass.” I mean, no one deserved that behavior of his.

And we got on buses, we didn’t know where we were going, or where they were taking us. It so happened that they sent us to the Stankovec camp. They’d already put up white tents, thin ones, and our whole family was placed in one tent. I mean, it was our nuclear family with five members, two brothers in law with their wives and their families, their children, and other family members, the children of my husband’s aunt were there. I mean, there were several of us placed in one tent. And we didn’t...then the offices opened up there to leave [the camp]. Meanwhile, you couldn’t get out to Skopje, because around the camp, inside around the camp and beyond the bars of the camp there were Macedonian soldiers. I mean, you couldn’t get out, it seems they were afraid of the ethnic breakdown that would be caused in Macedonia if Albanians from Kosovo continued living in Macedonia. And you couldn’t get out, you had to

[3] Bllace is the border crossing between Kosovo and Macedonia where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days on March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either moved into Macedonia or reenter Kosovo.

stay there or emigrate to different countries in Europe or America. But since that wasn't our aim, we stayed there for about two weeks.

And one day a Macedonian activist arrived in the camp. She was Savka, Savka Todorovska, she was the leader, the director of the Macedonian Women's Network, I didn't know that. But my husband had worked on a small job with her husband, by chance. And when her husband found out we were in the camp, he was very sick, and he was in the hospital, and he couldn't come there to visit us, but he pleaded with his wife, "Please go because they're people, they're people like us." That's what she said he said to her (smiles). "They're people like us and they don't deserve that kind of situation." And that Savka came and found the tent we were in. And she introduced herself, she said I'm this person, she had brought some things for the children. And I begged her to get us out of the camp, to get us out of the camp because I had an aunt in Skopje, and my aunt and her husband's family had ensured their apartments for us, they had left their own homes, they had set aside their own rooms for us so that we could go and stay there.

I mean, I left the camp, I went to my aunt's and Savka helped me get my relatives out as well, because you had to knock on many doors in order to get permission to leave the camp. The Red Cross I don't know, the Ministry of...I don't know where she didn't knock on in order to get us permission to leave the camp. We settled in Skopje, we were three families in one apartment, three families in one apartment, three rooms, three families. I continued with Savka, I became engaged. Savka said to me, "What did you do? What was your job?" I told her, I said, "I was an activist, I did humanitarian volunteer work with women and children." She said, "Yes, OK, do you want to get involved? Because some women from Bosnia, Croatia, they're asking about you, what position are you in." I was happy and I went to her office right away. Many women from Sweden had come, Kristin Berger had come, I met with Kristin Gerberg for the first time – the director of the Women for Women foundation, Kvinna til Kvinna from Sweden. Nuna Zvizdić from Bosnia had come because they'd lived through the experience we were going through at the time, and other activists.

Then, a woman activist from Tetovo, Miki Emerus, came often trying to reach an agreement on what to do and how. And they said, "Tomorrow we're going to meet with an activist from Kosovo, will you come as well?" I said, "Yes, who is she?" "Igballe [Igo] Rogova." And we went there the next day, it was a park. I waited for Igo with Nuna, we met with Igo. And Igo had brought with herself, a kind of...with herself, a few bags with notebooks, with pens, with colors I think, and she said, "I brought these for the camp." "For where?" "For the camp in Çegran." OK, I was happy that I met her because I'd heard a lot about her, but I hadn't had a chance to meet her. And from that day onwards, we met up everyday with some activists at Hotel Evropa, I mean we met outside and we went to the Çegran camp. Igo had a very good program that she ran with different activists. I know Iliriana was there, Iliriana Loxha, because that camp was open. And there, in order to prevent negative phenomena, quite a rich program was run to raise awareness. There were many journalists who came from different countries to describe the situation as it was.

And after that...we started, what could we do further, we got a room for rent and called it *Dera e Hapur* for refugee women, I mean, women who were from the camp, and placed with various families in Skopje. And

from that time, I mean,'99 to the present, the *Dera e Hapur* women's center that we founded with the activists is still functional.

Trafficking was a reality then {drinks water}. In order to prevent this phenomenon, different awareness raising activities were run with artists, language courses, and other activities. Igo with *Motrat Qiriazi,*[4] developed many different activities at that time in the camp, the Çegran camp. To go back to the room that was called *Dera e Hapur*, there we thought about what would be good for women to do. We started psychosocial activities, because women needed psychological support to talk about the traumatic experiences they had at the time. Then, something else that was necessary, medical care was necessary, primary care, because women's health was quite poor at the time, but also women's rights because Macedonia at that time adapted its laws in order not to give you rights as a refugees, not to have the right to have any rights.

So, we set these three objectives for ourselves and we met every Tuesday and every Wednesday. It's interesting because even after so many years, even after all these years, after 16 years we meet on Tuesdays and Wednesday for psychosocial workshops, and creative-relaxing as we called them in the center we now have in Pristina. So, we continued these activities until the end of October '99, even though my family returned to Pristina because of the entry of NATO, I mean, on 12 June, and my family on 13-14 June came one by one, but I continued to work at the center. I would come on the weekends to Pristina, during the working week I would work with women. Then, in conversation with Kerstin Gerberg, I said, "But these women will also need these activities in Pristina. What to do?" She said, "In November and December go to Pristina and prepare the place, find the place and prepare what you want to do there." And that's what happened, in November and December '99 I came to Pristina, I found the location, an apartment approximately 70 square meters. I wrote the project, I mean I wrote the project with a pen and a candle, because there wasn't electricity, it was a very difficult situation, life was difficult in Kosovo after the war, and that first winter was incredibly hard, it was very cold. We didn't have a computer, and we didn't know how to write, we didn't know how to write projects because in university we didn't have a subject that would teach you how to do something like that, but I wrote it like that, thinking how to put women's needs on paper, I mean, to put on paper what they needed.

And those activists from Kvinna til Kvinna came from Sweden, and when I came to Pristina I crossed the border from Macedonia for the first time together with those activists from Kvinna til Kvinna. And we agreed on what the project proposed and they immediately accepted it, so on 1 January 2000 we started the women's center *Dera e Hapur* in Pristina, in Dardania, in a location we identified as appropriate for us. And women started, those women who initially were refugees there, they started coming to the center.

Dreams

[4] NGO founded by Igballe and Safete Rugova in the 1990s to promote women's and girls' education. It was named after the sisters Qiriazi, who founded the first school for girls in Korça (Albania) in 1892.

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to talk about her dreams in life and whether she achieved to fulfil them.]

Belgjyzare Muharremi:(Laughs). It's definitely hard to achieve your dreams. As I said earlier, I thought that all that work, all that engagement, all that volunteer work, the humanity that was shown, was done in order to achieve a faster development for Kosovo, a better development for Kosovo, where people live more normally, where they educate themselves more easily without obstacles, where they can work. But I even thought that the association would work, would be functional, for two-three years, maybe five years, there wouldn't be a need beyond that. But that didn't happen. Not that there hasn't been positive change, there has been positive change, because if we look at the starting point, from the war onwards, there have been many changes. But they're not the changes we wanted and we aimed for. A lot of thought is not going towards the people in general, mostly people think about themselves, especially the political parties, not a single political party...can be found that thinks about the people. Everything that's seen in their speeches, through their actions, it's not even their actions, I mean, the speeches maybe yes, but the actions aren't...they're far from what they need to be. I mean, work is being done for themselves and for a very small circle of people.

I don't know...I love to work, I always have. I've always worked to have a better life. I managed to educate myself to a certain level, I wanted to continue my education, but it wasn't possible then. I wanted to have a healthy family, a normal family, I'll call it normal. I aimed to educate my children and have them work in the professions they wanted. My children have attained their education, my girl even continued her graduate studies in New York, in America, but with many sacrifices. I mean, with my work and my husband's we've managed to ensure for our children that they will have a normal life and a better life. But I don't know how many, I think this is a very small, an insufficient percentage of the population.

[It is] very stressful, with lots of work of the entire family, and mine, especially my husband's, it is very difficult for us...in these political surroundings, economic [surroundings], to work normally, whatever work you do. If you work in business, if you work in ... whatever you work in, it's incredibly difficult. If you work in business, you don't have normal policies for business development. If you deal with work, with civil society like I do, there were donors, now we're in the phase where donors are leaving and you don't have financial resources. Without money you can't develop activities. The other difficulty is that many Kosovar people who work for foreign organizations are connected to a tight circle of people and they don't support the real needs of the people. Again, here we are also dealing with individualism and a kind of how to say...