

## INTERVIEW WITH FLAMUR GASHI

Pristina | Date: January 23, 2016

Duration: 72 minutes

Present:

1. Flamur Gashi (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. 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.*

## **Part One**

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Introduce yourself, and can you tell us about early childhood memories, family, birthplace?

**Flamur Gashi:** I am Flamur Gashi, born in Peja and raised there until a certain age. Then, years outside Peja follow. I was born in Peja, in a middle class family. My father was a teacher, my mother was a housewife. We are six children in our family: three brothers and three sisters. We have been through life challenges just like most Kosovar Albanians.

The history of my family is a little more interesting, more different, not to say more interesting and different than the one of the others. My father was born in Albania, while my mother was born in Peja. My children were born in Albania and I was born in Peja, my wife was born in Albania. So, it is a beautiful combination between official Albania and Albanian lands outside Albania and Kosovo.

The origin of my family most likely is in Niš, but somewhere around 1785-’86, when there was a big flow of Albanians, because of Serbian repression and violence happened, they moved and came to the let’s say, a central Albanian area, somewhere in the region of Peja, in Banjë of Peja and in Peja, then to be able to constantly move between Albania and Kosovo.

Only my grandfather, his brother and their children live in Kosovo. We have our first cousins in Albania, they have been living there all the time. This is why my father was born in Albania, because we had our house and lived there. Then change happened, because I went to Albania right after 1990 and I live and work in Albania.

I spent my childhood between the village of Ruhot in Peja and Peja. I finished eight years of school in the village of Ruhot after many challenges, because we had to... all the property we had in the city of Peja was taken from us in ‘45 and we lived in a not so good financial situation. For around five years,

we found shelter in a village close to Banjë of Peja, at our cousin's who was a distant cousin, but but who helped us. Then we moved to a village of Peja which is called Ruhot, sometimes around the beginning of the '50s, where we lived in very difficult conditions, in a Serb's house, where my grandfather together with his wife and his children worked for the *tretë*<sup>1</sup> [third] the way it was called back then, because they worked for a Serbian owner, and they had to give two portions to the owner and only keep one for themselves in order to survive.

So it was an extraordinary fight for existence. My father's mother died when he was a child so he was raised with many challenges and difficulties. He continued school, met my mother and married her. And I was born in '69.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are you the eldest?

**Flamur Gashi:** I am the oldest child of the family. And this is where the challenges begin, because my father was imprisoned shortly before I was born. He was one of the organizers of the demonstrations of 1968 in Peja, together with his friends, with his best friends: professor Isa Demaj, Ramadan Blaka, Zymer Neziri and others. And from that moment, maybe my fate was destined to be like that. I am named Flamur [Flag] because my father was imprisoned for the flag. That is why my mother named me Flamur and then this challenge followed me from '69, when I was born, until the end of the '90s and the beginning of '91, when I left Kosovo.

It was not an easy life, pretty difficult, not to say very difficult, because many Kosovar Albanians had much more difficult lives than I. So that is why it is not good to take all the merits and say that my life was difficult, but it was not easy at all either. This is how my childhood life continued.

My father was a teacher even after 1972, when a decision was taken in the Provincial Committee of Kosovo for the people who had been politically sentenced not to have the right to work in Education, and my father lost the right to work in Education. Let me mention it here that my father was the same age as the former President of Kosovo and a school friend with the President of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova.<sup>2</sup> And they had their first internship as teachers somewhere in Obiliq,<sup>3</sup> like other Albanian Language teachers with some other teachers who had graduated at that time. He was fired from the Education system as soon as he got back. And since then he has worked in an organization which was engaged in erosion and flood, it was called *Buica* first, then *Erozioni* [Erosion], *Erozioni* enterprise, in Peja.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tretë*, working the fields of another person and being given only one third of the harvest.

<sup>2</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.

<sup>3</sup> *Obiliq*, originally *Obilić*, is the Serbian name for the town currently called Kastriot.

So the new life of the children began. I was the first child of the family, until the beginning of school in the eight year school *Rilindja* in the village of Tërsetnik in Peja. That is where I finished my eight years school, where I experienced the first challenges in the family, because my father was arrested in very early spring of 1979, '80, '81, '82, '83 and '84. It was called isolation<sup>4</sup> at that time, and I have experienced all the terrors as a child and during the early adolescence.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the excuse?

**Flamur Gashi:** Back then there was the excuse that all those who were considered as opponents of the Yugoslav system had to be isolated, because they did harm, they had to be isolated because... he was in Germany in '79, my paternal uncle lived in Germany, he went there in '68 and helped us buy property, in the beginning we worked those fields with the *tretë* [third], then we bought all of them from Serbs, they became our property. And we became owners of all that wealth, around five-six hectares of land, a big house, but we did all of that with the help of our paternal uncle who was living in Germany and my father who was working.

My father went to visit his brother in Germany because he was injured at work, of course just like all Albanians he did work in construction, and there he met his best friend from secondary school, Jusuf Gërvalla.<sup>5</sup> The police here found out about it, and arrested him at the airport in 1979 as soon as he returned from Germany. Then the isolation began, first during the visit of Tito in Kosovo, then I don't know what, but I know that he was arrested every spring after 1979.

The last time he was arrested was in '84. It was a very difficult moment for me, a moment I often don't even want to remember, because together with three of his friends my father was going to the funeral of their friend in Gjakova, mister Kadri Kusari, who was among well known Albanian personalities who had contributed very much to Kosovo. He was imprisoned in 1964 with the group of Adem Demaçi.<sup>6</sup> A well known personality, he died in the late January of 1984. They were going to his funeral when they stopped and arrested them, they didn't allow them to go to the funeral that day, only to put pressure on them.

But again they decided, the next day my father... Nezir Gashi was a well known personality in the Dukagjin Plain, an extraordinary patriot, there was Sadri Tafilaj, a Math professor who lived in Germany for a long time and there was mister Sefer, who worked as a butcher in Peja, but they were

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<sup>4</sup> Preventive arrest on the occasion of official visits, commemorative days, or whenever there would be large gatherings of people.

<sup>5</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.

<sup>6</sup> Adem Demaçi (1936-) is an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

with his car, a friend of theirs who was arrested and they did not allow them to go to Gjakova. But the next day, they told them again, “Don’t you dare go!” They went back, they went to Gjakova, they said, “We are here for the funeral.” “But he was buried yesterday.” “We are sorry, but we were arrested by the police. But we will go today.”

They went to his grave and brought a bouquet of flowers there. The next morning, we woke up in the morning to see our house surrounded by police, and my father was arrested that day. It was early February of ‘84, and after 28 days I was called to the police [station] to meet my father, to see him. It was a psychological pressure for him. And after 28 days, it was difficult for me to identify my father because of the beatings and the tortures they had done to him.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How long did he stay in prison that time?

**Flamur Gashi:** As far as I remember, he stayed for four months at that time, three months and a half, four. He was released, unfortunately my father was released in May and my mother passed away in September of the same year. We had very difficult moments even during the day of my mother’s funeral. My mother passed away in the evening, at around nine thirty, and the Municipality Committee of the Peja Communist League and the People’s Socialist League of the Municipality of Peja gathered on the next morning, they held a meeting and gave the order that nobody is allowed to participate in the funeral or in the mourning of the wife of Xhemajl Gashi, because he is a nationalist, irredentist, anti-Yugoslav, etcetera, etcetera.

And the next day only my friends from the gymnasium<sup>7</sup> 11 Maji [May 11] in Peja, which back then was called 17 Heronjtë [17 Heroes] came, it was, yes the first was 11 Maji. And only one teacher from the elementary school of the village of Tërstenik where my father had been a teacher, a school whose construction my grandfather and paternal uncle had even contributed physically [to build]. And all the children had finished school there, my sisters, one of my brothers and I, because the other brother and sister were very young, the children of my paternal uncle had finished elementary school as well, and they didn’t allow anyone to come.

The funeral was extraordinary big, impressive, because a young woman had passed away. My mother was around 32 when she passed away. She left six children behind. I was 14 something at the time, I had turned 14 in June and she died in September. My brother Asdren was turning two in two weeks. Imagine it now, it was a big sorrow, but the Peja branch of the UDB found a way to make this pain even greater. The funeral of my mother was finished in two hours. Because the police came and took my father and me, in order to question us for the supposed incidents of that day, only to make our lives worse. So, the funeral was finished in two hours.

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<sup>7</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

And maybe this influenced the fact that hundreds of thousands of people came to our house for condolences for our mother's death. The mourning lasted for two weeks officially, but people came to visit and for condolences for months in a row, no matter the big pressure that was being put on us, because they [the police] stayed in two shifts in both shops, the shops that were located at the entrance and the exit of the village, where people usually stopped to buy cigarettes, sugar, just as the traditions are, coffee and so on. And they asked them, "Where are you going?" "We are going to the mourning." "Do you know that they are punished," and so on. It was an extraordinary pressure. I used these elements to show my childhood, that my childhood was not easy. My childhood was full of violence and repression as well as an extraordinary thirst for education, an extraordinary thirst for the love for the nation. This is how the eight years school ended.

I enrolled in the Peja gymnasium. Back then they were divided: the first two years were general knowledge, while in the third and fourth year we passed to...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** To something more professional?

**Flamur Gashi:** More professional, yes. The first part of gymnasium was called 17 Heronjtë, while the second part was called 11 Maji. Here the friendships started, the collaborations with people, the bigger encounters, the bigger movements. It was a life post '81 demonstrations. The big arrests started happening. So something was boiling in Kosovo. And here the pre-adolescence, the adolescence, every youth has some revolutionary spirit within themselves, they start being interested in doing something different. This is how the friendship with people sharing the same mindset begins, the same ideals, my father's connections made it even easier for me.

This is how a new life begins, a new phase, until 1987. In 1987 I was forced to go to military service, according to a rule based on which you were not allowed to continue your studies without finishing military service. Then this happened, everything was cut off, you had to go to the military service, you finished it in around twelve months, with your father's fear and the fear of the people you loved, who were worried whether you would return alive or not. Because that was the time when they were killed, when the soldiers were being killed while on their military service, but it wasn't still that intense... unfortunately, I went to military service right one week after the big crime which was allegedly done by Aziz Kelmendi, an Albanian soldier, showed somewhere in a military cantonment, in Serbia.<sup>8</sup> And from there, a big violence and terror towards Albanian youth who were finishing their military service in the former Yugoslavia began.

So I finished military service, I returned, I enrolled in the Faculty of Civil Engineering in Pristina. After the demonstrations of 1989 I was expelled from the Faculty of Civil Engineering, because one part of the students weren't allowed to continue. We were one percent and something of the students that

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<sup>8</sup> Contextual: Reference to a wave of alleged suicides of Albanian conscripts in 1990, which were never investigated and always denied by the families.

were expelled from the Faculty. For my good luck I was parallelly registered in the [Faculty of] Albanian Language and Literature by correspondence, and then I passed to [Albanian] Language and Literature, to continue...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why, what was the reason that [you were expelled]?

**Flamur Gashi:** The reason was that many students lost the right of studying in the University of Pristina in the demonstrations of '89.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why did they participate?

**Flamur Gashi:** They were viewed as an element of danger because they had participated in the demonstrations. I had no right to live in the dormitory, there was a kind of permission that had to be given by the municipality you came from, as a proof that you were a good boy or a good girl.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How were they identified?

**Flamur Gashi:** They were identified by the municipality, the police. UDB had their own system, their network was known. I had to take that paper in order to register in the dormitory. I had no right to register in the dormitory. The demonstrations of '89 took place, then of course I was active in those demonstrations.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the cause?

**Flamur Gashi:** The cause was first to support the Trepça<sup>9</sup> miners. Because Trepça miners started the hunger strike, in Stantërg [Stari Trg] as well as in all the zones where there were miners. And we wanted to support them, we were united. First we started with demonstrations in all our faculties, I was in the Faculty of Civil Engineering, then the big demonstration took place in the 1 Tetori [October 1] Hall. All the students were gathered and the strike of the students of the University of Pristina started.

When the hunger strike was terminated, after the competencies of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo were violently taken away by the institutions of the Republic of Serbia, the hunger strike was violently ended and I was arrested by the police here in Pristina. Not only I, but tens of hundreds others were arrested. They kept us for three nights in a police room here in Pristina. They beat us a lot, they educated us well (smiles). They released us with the condition to show later... I believe it was Friday, to show on Monday. And I found the way how... I escaped to Germany. I escaped to Germany where I stayed for around three-four months, in fact I stayed for six months. And I came back in October, I started my studies, I started again, I continued my [political] activity.

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<sup>9</sup> Trepča in Serbian, 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.

## Part Two

*[The interviewer asks the speaker about the danger that members of families with a political profile were exposed to vis-a-vis the Serbian regime. This part was removed from the video interview.]*

**Flamur Gashi:** Of course there was always danger for those families, because they were in the eye of UDB and the police. And sons and daughters of these families were easy to identify.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, was it a matter of life or death, I mean the danger?

**Flamur Gashi:** There was a permanent danger. I mean, you were always a target to them. There was one case when I was wearing the coat of someone else who was a political prisoner as well, and the police shot at me thinking that it was him. They actually didn't recognize me in that moment. Because the moment was such that they were not able to identify me, but they had the image of him with that coat and we were physically alike and we both wore glasses and it happened. We always had, it followed us... maybe we co-existed with death. Especially these families that were identified for being against the system.

Then there were boys and girls who were politically organized in various Marxist-Leninist groups and so on. To be very honest, I was not organized [in such groups]. Maybe I could, but the situation was such that I was not organized. They were even more problematic for the system and they were endangered more each time. Three-four important murders happened in Peja at that time, Qamil Morina was murdered, as well as Ali Hysvukaj and Gani Daci. Why am I mentioning these murders? These murders were extraordinarily difficult for Peja, because tens, tens of other citizens were injured.

At that time I was in the area of Peja that was called Kapeshnica, with a deceased friend of mine, a former political prisoner, an extraordinary boy, an amazing boy who unfortunately was murdered in the last war in Kosovo, he is a Kosovo hero, Xhemajl Fetahi from the village of Raushiq of Peja. We were in Kapeshnica together with him and we had, how to say, safe houses. Because wherever we slept was dangerous, because we were engaged in organizing the demonstrations, and our safe houses, again, were people who were nationally and politically proved.

The first was the house of Cufë Sokoli. Cufë Sokoli was a political prisoner in 1954, a person who had tried the prisons of Goli Otok<sup>10</sup> and so on in the former Yugoslavia. And we found shelter at his family, Xhemajl Fetahu and I. We slept there for nights in a row. We had the house of mister Hasan Berisha, who had come somewhere from Krushevac, or from the village of Shikës of the Baran region and

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<sup>10</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.

settled there, a well-known family. So we chose the families where we could have maximal safety while organizing the demonstrations.

These three murders happened. I don't know, maybe because I was dealing with writing, I liked dealing with journalism, I was studying literature, and the case was like that, that I led those three funerals, so, the main speeches in the three funerals. I was in charge of organizing the funerals. I don't know why! Even if you ask me today, I don't know why, why they assigned that task to me. I can raise hypothesis, I might say that it was because of this or that. I think I had a youthful courage, from a young age, I was a little more... and I led these funerals. The last funeral was done in the village of Nabërgjan, at the Nabërgjan Mosque, the cemetery of the village of Lutogllavë and Nabërgjan, they are together there.

I led the funeral and I saw that in front of me I had three-four families who were in enmity with each-other. There was an amazing girl who unfortunately had killed two brothers in self defence, in order to defend her brother and her father who... and unfortunately those two brothers were the sons of their father's paternal uncle, so they were their relatives. I saw others as well, the children of those two brothers. They were sitting in a line in front of this.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you say in those speeches?

**Flamur Gashi:** Those speeches were messages... this is where I wanted to get to, the greatest message for the citizens was how to unite, how we need to reconcile with each-other. I said that we need to reconcile without knowing what I was saying, to be honest. Because it would be absurd if I said today that in that gathering I was talking about blood feuds reconciliations. I said that we needed to reconcile because I saw Serbeze Vokshi there, as well as the sons of the victims in the same front row. I knew their families and I knew that they were murdered. I saw other families that were in enmity there as well, and I said this sentence. Then when I saw the footage I said, "But I didn't know what I was saying." And I really didn't know what I said.

The next day we met in Peja to organize the demonstrations with this group, Xhemajl Fetahu, Hava Shala, Myrvete Dreshaj... it was a very big group of the students who had spread in different areas. And we met again at a family which was problematic for the resistance against the Yugoslav system which was the family of Din Grabovci who unfortunately was massacred during the war by the Serbian [military] forces - the brother of mister Adem Grabovci, who is the leader of the Parliamentary Group of *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*.<sup>11</sup> [Din Grabovci] was an extraordinary man, an extraordinary brave person, a *par excellence* helper. We gathered there to talk about the demonstrations, what to do, how... I was there by accident, because most of them were former prisoners, former political prisoner

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<sup>11</sup> *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*, Kosovo Democratic Party.

youth, very close friends with each-other, and maybe I was the most outsider person there. I told you that I was in no political organization.

The topic about Blood Feuds Reconciliation was opened and Hava Shala said, “Some days ago, at the demonstration, I had a problem with a close friend of mine from the village of Lumbardh in Deçan who couldn’t make it to the demonstration because he told me, ‘I would love to come to the demonstration, but also the person X from my village whose father was murdered by my paternal uncle will come there. And I can even be shot by a sniper or the automatic weapon of Serbian police, but he will be blamed for it. I know that he would never kill me there, but he will be blamed for it.’ And with his eyes full of tears, he didn’t come to the demonstrations.” And here, what do we do, how do we do it, how do we reconcile people... until then we had around 35 or 36 people murdered in Kosovo in demonstrations and protests. What do we do in order to organize and reconcile? It was a problem because some Reconciliation Councils were working at that time within the People’s Socialist League [*Lidhja Socialiste e Popullit*] of former Yugoslavia, and they often made the matters worse rather than solving them.

And we came to an idea: what if some of the professors would help us, this and that. I said, “I know professor Cana, because he is engaged with the Council for Blood Feuds Reconciliations.” “Alright, we go and talk to him.” And we decided to come to Pristina, a group of students, and talk to professor Cana. That is where we took the decision to go to Pristina. That day Serbeze Vokshi and I came to Pristina...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who is she?

**Flamur Gashi:** This is the girl who had killed two brothers because she was afraid that they would kill her father and brother. Myrvete Dreshaj, Ibrahim Dreshaj and Bajram Kurti came as well. So we were the first ones who came to Pristina. And we went to the Institute of Albanology where we met professor Zekerija Cana.<sup>12</sup> And since I knew professor Zekerija Cana from before, we talked, he welcomed us in his office, I told him about the problem. He said, “Flamur, I don’t know how to deal well with this issue because I am a *gjakovar*,<sup>13</sup> but we have to talk with professor Anton Çetta<sup>14</sup> about this.” And we went down to the first floor of the Institute of Albanology, to the office of professor Anton Çetta. We talked to him and decided to meet him again. I came, we met him. In the meantime Hava Shala, Adem Grabovci, Xhemajl Fetahaj and the group of other people worked on the ground to organize the first reconciliation.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was Xhemajl murdered after the meeting?

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<sup>12</sup> Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian.

<sup>13</sup> *Gjakovar*, refers to the people coming from Gjakova.

<sup>14</sup> Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

**Flamur Gashi:** Xhemajl was murdered in the last war, in Koshare,<sup>15</sup> when the border between Albania and Kosovo was broken.

Then when we talked to him and organized the first visit to Peja, we came to pick up professor Zeqa and professor Anton. We had set the meeting in Peja that day, the brother of professor Ymer Jaka had died, Sokol Jaka. And professor Zekerija was obliged to participate in his funeral so he couldn't manage to come with us. We remained with professor Anton. And during the whole time we were interested in finding other people who could join us there. We talked to many personalities whose names I won't mention because of ethical reasons, who didn't join us in this Action. The first one who [didn't] joined us was a very prominent personality who was called by professor Anton and he didn't even want to hear about this thing.

The first one who joined us was Ramiz Kelmendi, professor Ramiz Kelmendi. Back then a [Albanian] Literature professor within the University of Pristina, one among the coryphee of journalism in Kosovo, he prepared and came with us right away. Our invitation was automatically accepted by the deceased Azem Shkreli, a well known writer, and by Bajram Kelmendi<sup>16</sup> as well. Among the first ones of this group was professor Mark Krasniqi<sup>17</sup> as well. So, this was the main core of the intellectuals from Pristina who joined the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Action.

There was another group of intellectuals in Peja to whom we had already talked, there was the attorney Adem Bajri, the attorney Mustafë Radoniqi, doctor Mustafë Ademaj, doctor Hysen Mazrekaj. So, this was the group, let's say, of the first intellectuals who supported our initiative and this is how we initiated the great Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation.

The first day when we took off by car, there was Riza Krasniqi, a professor of the Peja gymnasium who had a car and who in fact came to me for an intervention in a reconciliation, the brother of another professor in the gymnasium of Peja had killed his maternal aunt's son and he wanted to reconcile. Because the word that we were dealing with blood feuds reconciliations had already spread. He had come for this thing and I asked for his help since he owned a car. I was a student, I didn't own a car. He came by car and in the car there were, Riza Krasniqi as a driver, professor Anton Çetta, professor Ramiz Kelmendi and I, in our car. In the other car behind this one there were Bajram Kelmendi, professor Mark and Azem Shkreli.

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<sup>15</sup> The Battle of Koshare was fought during the Kosovo War between the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) Forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army. (April 9, 1999 - June 10, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Bajram Kelmendi (1937-1999) was a lawyer and human rights activist. He filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Krasniqi (1920-2015), ethnographer and writer.

And when we went to Klina we stopped at the motel Nora for coffee. I will never forget two expressions of professor Anton. I was very desperate about a professor I loved so much, I admired him, who didn't even accept to talk to us about blood feuds reconciliations. And as a young man, I said, "Professor, I admire this man, he is great." Professor Anton said, "Flamur, do you know what is the difference between a mosque minaret and a great person?" I said, "No, professor." He said, "The further you stand from the mosque minaret, the more it seems like it's uniting with the floor, it seems very small. The people we hyperbolize and who seem very great to us, the further you stand from them, the more they seem to be touching the sky, they are untouchable, they are very great. When you get closer to the mosque minaret, the closer you get to it, the more it seems like it's touching the sky, while the more you know these great people, the more you realize how little they are." I will never forget this!

And really then each time I glorified someone, when in my mind I thought they were great, I was reminded of the saying of professor Anton, let me get closer to them first, let's see if it's like the mosque's minaret or it's like a flat balloon, like this. And the second expression of professor Anton that day was, "Flamur, let it go, let's start this Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. There are many risks, many risks, many sacrifices, but remember one thing: you should keep a directory in your mind. You are the youngest." "Directory? Why a directory, a directory is kept at libraries in order to keep notes for each book, where, what, why professor?" "In case we fail, they will swear and will not let anything unsaid about us. In case we succeed, dogs and cats will stick to us and nobody will be able to find out who was the one who initiated it and who was the one who finished it. But the most important thing is that blood feuds get reconciled. But you should keep this directory in your head because you are young."

And it really happened like that. Fortunately, the Action turned out to be successful, and today, 25 years after, there are people who come out as initiators of blood feuds reconciliations, ones who were never there or who joined after five-six months, come out as if they were the leaders, but it's not important. The important thing is that the Action began with success, many people joined it and over 1600 injuries, murders and misunderstandings were reconciled in Kosovo. Why do I say that it was successful? I am absolutely convinced, and I don't think that I am wrong, that without the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation and without that uniting spirit, the resistance of '91 until the end of the '99 war in Kosovo would be much more difficult. This Action united Albanians, it gave them a spirit of collaboration for their national aspirations.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Could you tell us about the Action, how did you keep in touch back then? How did you organize?

**Flamur Gashi:** We divided into groups. First, we divided the groups in the cities. We found our friends. The group of prisoners found their friends who were imprisoned, let's say in Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovica, Pristina and so on, and so on. The group of students found their group. We united and spread in the field. I was in Peja, I was in the Action in Lipjan, in Prizren, I was all around. We spread to the places where we had our connections in order to make this more vocal, this action. The first way

of contact was going to the families that were in blood feuds, collect the information and go to their houses and tell them. We prepared the ground.

In the beginning the reconciliation was done on an individual basis. In the very beginning, with one feud... then it spread. We found a village and two-three bloods were reconciled in the same village. Then the big gatherings for blood feuds reconciliations followed.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you in those gatherings?

**Flamur Gashi:** Absolutely yes. A big gathering took place in the village of Bubavec, another one in Verrat e Llukës, then in the village of Nabërgjan, in Lutogllavë, near the mosque where I told you that I saw that, that I told you that I didn't know what I was saying about reconciliation, where tens of bloods were forgiven. It also went to the Western Countries. A reconciliation front was created. People reconciled. Fortunately, in our first steps we had no revenge that could demotivate our Action.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mean, those reconciliations were sustainable?

**Flamur Gashi:** Sustainable. There might be sporadic cases, four-five cases, let's say ten. But ten cases in 1600 reconciliations are nothing. So like this it grew. It continued during the whole 1990. The momentum fell in the second part of 1990, because the intensity fell. There was a big intensity of reconciliation in the first three-four months. Then it continued in '91 as well, but it was a little slower.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** With the same group?

**Flamur Gashi:** It became... now everybody was a reconciler. It became a national spirit. It became a Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. This Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation then was identified with Anton Çetta and the Peja youth. Who was the Peja youth was not important anymore. Who was the student youth was not important anymore. But professor Anton was a *plak*,<sup>18</sup> the smartest, a man of *oda*<sup>19</sup> who was also a collector of folklore. Besides professor Anton, professor Zekerija Cana gave an extraordinary contribution which we should always be grateful for.

Professor Zekerija Cana was the promoter of the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. Professor Zekerija Cana was a promoter in the Council for the Defense of Human Rights [and Freedoms]... I don't know, if someone wrote something about the history of Kosovo of the late '80s and the early '90s and Zekerija Cana was not mentioned as the leader of many movements, I believe they wouldn't be saying the truth. We should be very grateful to that person.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Who were the bloods forgiven to, how was that process?

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<sup>18</sup> *Plak* has the same meaning as *pleq*, elderly, traditionally the mediators in a blood feud reconciliation.

<sup>19</sup> Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

**Flamur Gashi:** The blood was forgiven to the family of the murderer.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, and how was that mediated?

**Flamur Gashi:** Yes, in the beginning we had good support, I will never forget it when I sent the first video cassette of the Blood Feuds Reconciliation to Radio Television of Pristina, back then RTP,<sup>20</sup> at the time when Veli Vraniqi, a sports journalist was the news [desk] director. And Veli Vraniqi did what only a few people would do.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This was Radio Television Pristina, 1990?

**Flamur Gashi:** Pristina Radio Television, 1990. Pristina Radio Television was not taken by the Serbian police yet at the time. And Veli Vraniqi found the way to broadcast this news, he showed it on the news, and I will never forget Violeta Rexhepagiqi, who back then was in charge for broadcasts outside [of Kosovo], something like that, and Violeta Rexhepagiqi gave this reporting of blood feuds to the foreign media. Fortunately, this time it was well covered and filmed by the now deceased director, Fahri Hysaj. The director Fetah Mehmeti as well as the journalist Nezir Istrefi were in charge at the time, who were... Mehmet Kajtazi and Skënder Zogaj wrote for *Rilindja*<sup>21</sup> as well.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there consequences for mister Veli Vraniqi?

**Flamur Gashi:** Yes, the Television of Kosovo was closed then. Mister Veli Vraniqi was a pragmatist type of person, he overcame it... he was extraordinarily funny, he overcame it with a few drinks, but he was the first one who did it. And he gave us an extraordinary help, the broadcasting of the news of the beginning of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation in Kosovo. An extraordinary help! And we are grateful to Violeta Regjepagiq and him. And I am sorry for all those other people, journalists whose names I am not mentioning, because there is a long list of people who joined us and wrote for us. When *Rilindja* was shut down, there were other newspapers, such as *Bujku* [The Farmer], *Fjala* [The Word], *Bota e Re* [The New World], *Zëri* [The Voice] that wrote about us. And there was *Alternativa* [The Alternative] newspaper which came out in Ljubljana, that wrote, as well as many many other newspapers that... Radio Pristina only broadcasted for five minutes within Radio Zagreb.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was it represented in the media?

**Flamur Gashi:** The great Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation; the Action is led by professor Anton Çetta, collector of folklore, a good scholar. The well known personalities of science, culture and art in Kosovo who were part of it were represented. The most famous intellectuals of Kosovo joined in the second-third week. Then... because there were political movements which began with the *Lidhja*

<sup>20</sup> Radio Televizioni i Prishtinës, Radio and Television of Pristina, Kosovo state TV.

<sup>21</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

*Demokratike e Kosovës*<sup>22</sup> led by Ibrahim Rugova on one side, and more political parties were being created everyday. And the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation was in the other side. So there was a kind of how to say, pluralism in opinions as well as in actions. Everybody wanted to become important and to contribute something. There was a spirit that was trying to mobilize Albanian forces in Kosovo for the freedom and independence of Kosovo.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it shown like this in the media?

**Flamur Gashi:** With the space it had, yes of course. There was no Facebook back then, there was no Twitter either, there were no social networks, no Viber nor What's App which people could use to connect with each-other. But the best system was that it was transmitted mouth to mouth, ear to ear. Its echo was big. And in this case, pleased people are what makes the best advertisement in the media. Such is multilevel marketing [in English], when it is said that the pleased consumer is the best advertisement, such is the case here, where the pleased people and this Action were the best marketing of our work.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This inspired many people to forgive the blood, right?

**Flamur Gashi:** Absolutely. This inspired people to forgive the blood. There was an expression of professor Anton Çetta, he said, "It is a *burrëni*<sup>23</sup> to forgive, not to kill. Strong is the one who forgives, not the one who kills." It is true, only those who haven't experienced it themselves don't know, because there is nothing more difficult than forgiving. Especially forgiving the blood of their sister, brother, child, daughter. It is terrible! The splendor in Blood Feuds Reconciliation belonged to those who forgave....We were there at the right moment and at the right time, some promoters and servers who may have put in the gear in order for it to work. But the greatness belongs to those who forgave.

We found ourselves in the historical moment, the times has drawn us in. But the people who forgave the blood of their only brother... there were two sisters who forgave the blood of their only brother, or one sister who forgave the blood of her brother. Or there were fathers who forgave the blood of the only son they had, he had no other daughter nor son. It is terrible! And how do you say, the son of the brother or the sister says, "I forgive it to Kosovo." How great! Because that sounds folkloristic, to the new generations it sounds very folkloristic, but back then it was great. Put everything in the context of 25 years ago, and put everything where the violence and repression of Serbia in Kosovo was escalating each day more.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did the police create obstacles for you?

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<sup>22</sup> *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. 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.

<sup>23</sup> *Burrëni*, literally: manhood, here: an act of bravery.

**Flamur Gashi:** Absolutely, a lot, a lot. There were obstacles all around; apart from the physical barriers, they did... that was the case when the gathering took place at Verrat e Llukës. Professor Zekeria Cana and I were arrested by the police in Deçan.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How long did they keep you?

**Flamur Gashi:** We were kept for five-six hours until the protest happened and they released us. Because they surrounded the Police Station, there were thousands, hundreds of thousands of people in the protest... in the gathering at Verat e Llukës. They heard about it and surrounded the Police [Station].

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That protest... I mean, were they notified about Verrat e LLukës?

**Flamur Gashi:** It was not important whether they were notified or not, but gathering five-six hundred thousands people, one million people....Do you know what it means to gather five-six hundred thousand, one million people? And remember a historic date where Albanians reconciled openly at Verat e LLukës. That was terrible for Serbia. But then there was something amazing about this Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation, it was the intertwining of the youth and the elderly, the students and the intellectuals, girls and boys, women and men, religious leaders. Religious leaders gave an extraordinary help in the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Action.

We should never forget the extraordinary contribution of Mulla Idriz Kokrruku, one *hoxha*<sup>24</sup> who was working in the Kosovo Archive, an imam; Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, the *hoxha* of the village of Bubavec in Malisheva. The extraordinary help of two religious leaders cannot be left aside, such as the one of the Catholic [community] and the one from the Muslim community of Kosovo: doctor Rexhep Boja and the future bishop of Kosovo, Bishop Mark Sopi. The positive spirit since the very beginning of the Blood Feuds Reconciliations of one of the coryphees of religion and nation in Kosovo, Bishop Nikë Prela, who was the first Bishop of Kosovo, before Bishop Mark Sopi. It was extraordinary! These were the ones who helped us a lot, who even helped in overcoming religious barriers.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** But there were no inter-religious feuds?

**Flamur Gashi:** There were, of course there were. There were inter-religious feuds as well as inter-religious reconciliations. There were around '89-'90... before the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation started... see, history didn't begin with us, the reconciliation of blood feuds didn't begin with us. The reconciliation of blood feuds existed all the time among us, but at the time when we were engaged in blood feuds reconciliation, it took another shape, it took another dimension. Kosovo had extraordinary blood feuds reconcilers. There was Mulla Zekë Bërdyna, a former political prisoner of *Goli Otok*, a personality who was engaged in blood feuds reconciliation in the Dukagjini

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<sup>24</sup> Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

Plain, Ramadan Shabani from the village of Kieva, Mujë Loshi as well. There were many personalities who were engaged in blood feuds reconciliation. But this was motivated in a different way.

We had... the first call for blood feuds reconciliation didn't begin with us, didn't begin with me when I told you that I spoke there. Calls for blood feuds reconciliation were made from the miners of Trepça in the village of Stantërg [Stari Trg]. Three bloods were reconciled after their call. But it didn't work, it didn't have an echo. At that time there were two religious leaders who influenced blood feuds reconciliation, Muhamet Lipa, the *hoxha* of the village of Baran, and the priest of the village of Glllogjan, Don Anton Kçira, these were the ones who influenced the reconciliation between Muslim and Catholic families. So, here was the greatness that people there didn't care who was from the city and who was from the village, or who was Catholic or Muslim, or who comes from the Dukagjini Plain or from Drenica. It took a national dimension.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was all this trust gained? You told us that there was a bad experience before, when the Commission of Blood Feuds Reconciliation existed, where there were people from UDB involved, who created more troubles than reconciliations. I mean, how did that transition from a bad experience...

**Flamur Gashi:** The trust was created because the youth took over. And there were no interests. What personal interest would I have from a reconciliation of a family in Kaçanik? There was no personal interest nor material one, the work was being done. The youth had no personal or material interests. We walked on foot for many hours in a row just to go and ask someone whom we didn't know to forgive the blood. But we asked this for the sake of the Kosovo youth, for the sake of Kosovo destiny, for the sake of our unity. And they saw that we were not... there were cases when we didn't know, we didn't know who was the victim. So, we had no connections at all with the parties in conflict.

If we had a connection with the parties in conflict, then we could be biased. We could be accused that we were doing it for them... but we were young, our only goal was reconciliation and stopping the killing of brothers and revenge. Why? Revenge and feuds happen where there's no state. Where the state with its mechanisms doesn't work, that's where people take over the justice system. The state with its mechanisms in Yugoslavia wasn't interested in solving these problems, in judging them fairly, in punishing the murderer for the murder. But the state only sentenced them with four-five years, the one who had murdered a 27 years old boy was released. So, the family on the other side was pushed to take revenge. This is how it happened.

And in this moment, in this emptiness, this phenomenon happened, this phenomenon is to me only an Albanian wonder. I have said it once before, I will repeat it today as well: I would be the happiest person on earth if there was only one person who survived without being killed because of the work I did in the blood feuds reconciliations, not to say more. Because you haven't experienced it yourself, but you don't know how much the eyes and faces of the people who reconciled shone. The ones who

could possibly be murdered were not the only ones to feel relieved, but the ones whose turn was to murder were very relieved as well.

Why? There were also misinterpretations of the *Kanun*<sup>25</sup> here. The *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* is a wonder in itself for the time it was written and functioned. But taking and approaching the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* five hundred years later, is an absurdity, it is a crime. And those who were allegedly engaged in reconciliations, interpreted the *Kanun* wrongly. Because the *Kanun* says it clearly that the murderer should be murdered, the one who murders should be murdered. Why did it say this? Because it forbids the murder of the other one: in case you murder, you should know you will get murdered yourself. This is a preventive measure in order to stop feuds. While others interpreted it differently, “The best male should be murdered...” and I don’t know what else. That is why the spiritual freedom of those who forgave was extraordinary.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How old were the cases of enmity?

**Flamur Gashi:** There were cases from the beginning of the century. There were 50 or 60 years old cases. There were one hundred years old cases which happened in a chain, it multiplied. There were cases where 25 years old boy was murdered because his family murdered someone’s grandmother. I mean, there was everything. Unfortunately, there was everything. For our bad and black fate, there was everything. We had the great luck that the youth took over this Action, it was undoubtedly supported by the best class of Kosovo intellectuals, and the Action turned out to be successful.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where were most of blood feuds forgiven, thanks to the actions?

**Flamur Gashi:** Verrat e LLukës.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How many?

**Flamur Gashi:** There were over forty something feuds and misunderstandings. It already took another shape and echo.

### Part Three

**Flamur Gashi:** Young women who raised orphans, a 22 years old bride who was forced to wear black forever and mourn and raise her children because her husband was murdered. But the most difficult, the hardest was that besides the fact that her husband was murdered, in her subconscious she always had the fear that her son should kill someone now, to avenge his father’s blood. And children were

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<sup>25</sup> *Kanun*, customary law, the unwritten law that regulates all aspects of life in the mountain areas of Northern Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. A written version, the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, was compiled by the Franciscan monk Shtjefën Gjeçovi in 1910-1925.

raised with the trauma of one day becoming murderers. Because the morals, the context of the morals was like that that you had to take revenge. But see, a traumatized society was raised with the concept that in case I don't kill, they will kill me. And if you don't kill, you are not worthy of the society; you haven't avenged your brother, your paternal uncle, your father. And this is how the feuds escalated.

And this is why there was no village, no *fis*<sup>26</sup> that didn't have... at a certain time, I didn't mention it in the beginning about the Socialist League, there were extraordinary interferences of the Yugoslav UDB. I am saying that when the state doesn't function, then there is self-administered justice. You killed one, you were jailed, and in case someone got close to their families, UDB said, "See, they will kill you because they are very strong, you should take a gunshot, you should do something in case they want to kill you." They gave the gunshot to them, they armed them, they gave it with permission. They even took money from them for that favor, they used them. Somebody else went and told them. "See, they are dangerous, they are connected to the police and they want to set him free. Be careful because they will kill you again." And they took money from them as well and gave gunshots to them too. So, they messed everything up, so that there would be no reconciliation among Albanians.

The Latin theory was applied: divide and rule. They divided Albanians in order to rule them more easily. And the most efficient way to do this was blood feuds and brother-killing among Albanians. A phenomenon which escalated extraordinarily. It extended and became a cancer for the Albanian society in Kosovo, a cancer which was metastasising at a lightning speed. Until the exodus began in the beginning of the '90s and cut the tentacles, stopped the metastasis, and thanks God healed the society, the Albanian society in Kosovo.

It would not be enough, no matter how many times we said "Thank you" to the intellectuals, to the students, but above all to the people who forgave. These men and women who found the courage, who found the spiritual strength... I don't know, I don't know where they found the strength to forgive the bloods, but they possessed an extraordinary strength. It could be a supernatural strength that only comes once. Very difficult. I hope nobody ever gets to experience how difficult that is. Because everybody should put their hand on their heart and say, "What would I do if it happened to me?" I don't know!

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened with your life then? I mean, when did the reconciliation end for you?

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<sup>26</sup> *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that like the Latin gens includes individuals who share an ancestor. *Fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common. Membership in a *fis* is based on a common mythical male ancestor

**Flamur Gashi:** To me the blood feuds reconciliation ended in the first fall of '90. I had many problems with the police for six months, from May '90, in fact from April '90 when two of my close friends and collaborators were killed in Lazarevë, Nurije Zekaj from the village of Raushiq in Peja, a student and collaborator in the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation and the well known activist, Naser Veliu from the village of Sërmënova in Gostivar, who was living in Switzerland. Another phase began for me, a permanent attempt of the police, seeking to arrest me, house raids, controlling the places where I stayed, the houses where I stayed. For six months, my father was obliged to show up in the Police Station each Monday and Friday and give an account of where I was. Very difficult!

In the last moment, I was together with professor Zekeria Cana at a funeral in Kaçanik of a soldier who had been killed. I gave a speech in that funeral. The Voice of America had broadcast a part of my speech, the radio Voice of America, and my father was taken to the Police station the next day. And a collaborator, he was a leader of the Yugoslav UDB at that time, Demë Muja, in Peja, who escaped, now he lives somewhere in Serbia or in Montenegro, he was very notorious in the Dukagjini Plain, said, "I know where Flamur is and I will kill him." He said this to my father. The latter said, "Okay, if you will kill him, at least I know who killed my son." I found out this from my father, this and that. My father was very worried, alarmed, and to be honest when I thought about the meeting with my father in '84, when I couldn't recognize him, it was very difficult for me to imagine my father being in the same physical and psychological state again, the tortures and everything else.

And I went to Albania. My first visit to Albania was on July 2, '90. I returned to Kosovo from Albania, and in the late October, October 5, I escaped to Germany.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How could you circulate to Albania? Wasn't it forbidden back then?

**Flamur Gashi:** No, you could circulate through Macedonia and Greece. There was a bus line to Thessaloniki. There was a tourist agency, their offices were at the *Tre Sheshirat* [Three Hats] restaurant. You had to give the passport to them and they would grant you the visa to Skopje. It was a very interesting bus line. But the entry visas for Albanians who live outside Albania were removed on July 1. Because until then you had to be equipped with visa in order to enter Albania. And I entered on July 2. Unfortunately, July 2 was a terrible day.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** '91?

**Flamur Gashi:** '90, '90. Because it was the day of massive exodus of Albanians from Albania abroad.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And you entered [Albania].

**Flamur Gashi:** I entered it. I stayed there for two weeks. Then I returned again through Greece. I came to Kosovo, always moving illegally. On October 5, I was forced to leave. I went to Germany. I couldn't live in Germany, even though I received political shelter immediately, as well as asylum and I don't

know what else. On January 18, '91 I went to Albania. And since January 18, '91, I live, study, work and am active in Albania.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Could you tell us about your professional life then?

**Flamur Gashi:** It was '91, when I went there, it was the year of big changes: protests, demonstrations, the statue of the communist leader Enver Hoxha was destroyed in February, the big democratic changes, the creation of various pluralist [political] parties. The first pluralist and democratic elections took place in '92 in Albania. Right after these elections, I got engaged and primarily worked as a collaborator and journalist in the newspaper *Kosova*.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it published in Albania?

**Flamur Gashi:** It was published in Albania by the *Kosova* Association. An association of Kosovars living in Albania was created, they established a newspaper and I collaborated with them. And in the late '92, early '93, I started working at the Albanian Radio Television as an affiliated collaborator, then as a journalist until [I became] one of the directors of the radio. I was mainly engaged in the media in Albania, from '92 to 2005 I was active in the media. I continued my education, deep studies in order to see where I stood, because it was a mentality change, education, reading. Because to be honest, there was lack of reading. When you are engaged in activities, you have no time to read. I thought I was reading a lot here. I actually did so, but I only realized how little I had read when I went there. And I restarted reading things deeply once again, and this is how this business continued.

Later on, in '97 when the big messes started, I was a journalist. I started and was appointed editor-in-chief of the first Albanian private radio in Albania, Radio *Kontakt*. It was weird that I was born in Kosovo, and maybe it was the first time that an Albanian from Kosovo became the director of a media in Albania, some barriers were broken.

The military organization started in Kosovo at that time. By nature I am an institutionalist, I mean, I love the state and its functioning so much. I was asked by members of the Kosovo Government to engage. I engaged only in Tirana while I was in Tirana, in the government of the Republic of Kosovo who back then was led by President Rugova, mister Bukoshi<sup>27</sup> was the Prime Minister [in exile]. I was an adviser of the Minister for Information of the Republic of Kosovo, mister Xhafer Shatri.

I worked as the leader of the project of creating the Kosovo Radio Television, which was supposed to be done somewhere in the diaspora. That turned out to be not successful because of the circumstances, conditions, nobody wanted to take over that work, and so on. And after working as the adviser of the Minister of Information of the Republic of Kosovo, mister Shatri, I was the adviser of the

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<sup>27</sup> Bujar Bukoshi (1947-) was the Kosovo Minister of Health in the first government of Hashim Thaçi. He served as Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosova from 1991 to 2000. He graduated from the University of Belgrade Medical School.

Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kosovo until its demobilization. First an adviser of Colonel Ahmet Krasniqi, an extraordinary man and writer, who unfortunately was killed in Tirana. Then [an adviser] of the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kosovo, General Halil Bicaj. When the war in Kosovo ended...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This was in '98?

**Flamur Gashi:** Until 2000 when it was demobilized, '99-2000 when... I always stayed and worked in Tirana, I didn't detach from the media. I came to Kosovo after the war for one year, I didn't... I returned to Tirana, I continued working. I continued as the director of Radio *Kontakt*, then for around two years I was co-director of the Media Board of the Republic of Albania.

And in 2005 I moved to diplomacy. From 2005 until today I am part of the active diplomacy of Albania. I was the leader of the National Institute of the Albanian Diaspora in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 2001, I worked as the director of this institute. In 2010, fortune or misfortune I don't know, I was appointed, I was named extraordinary ambassador with full power of the Republic of Albania in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, it fell on me to be the first ambassador of Albania born in Kosovo. I don't know, first director of independent media born in Kosovo, the first ambassador in Bosnia born in Kosovo, I don't know...

I had this fate of being into some things without my own wish, without my own will, but it happened like that. I worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina for around five years, four years and nine months, around five years. And from October 1 of the last year, 2015, sorry 2014, I am a diplomatic adviser of the President of the Republic of Albania, mister Bujar Nishani, for the region, and at the same time a lecturer at the AAB University in Pristina. In my narrow sphere I mainly lecture on diplomacy related subjects, Bases of diplomacy, The right of consultative diplomacy, Bases of the protocol, Negotiations and conflict resolutions, like this. And a subject I like a lot and love very much, Public relations.

When I went to Albania then, like everybody else, I created my family as well. I married my wife, whose name is Aida, in '98, she graduated in law. I have three children, who because of certain reasons, motives, are named with names that are a little more related to Kosovo than to Albania. My older daughter's name is Ulpiana, which is a rare name in Albania. More because we are in the Ulpiana *lagje*<sup>28</sup> (laughs), Ulpiana is near, but there it is an exotic name. My second daughter is Kaltrina. Ulpiana is 17 years old, Kaltrina is 15, and Jon 7 years.

And in my psychological figuration, I tried to connect Ulpiana with Jon and the blue color [*Kaltërsi*] of the sky (laughs). It happened like this because my father did it too. The names of the children in our family are weird, only my name is different, my name begins with F while all the others with A. My

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<sup>28</sup> *Lagje* in this context means just neighborhood, but more specifically, in the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor

sister's name is Afërdita, the second one; Ardita is the third; Arben is my brother, Arjeta and Asdren. And you connect Flamur, Arbëri, Asdren. So, some combinations were made here (laughs). Weird, maybe unintentionally, but the other ones before us did it intentionally.

But we should be very grateful, very grateful because if it was not for our parents who educated us and filled us with this love for the country, for the people, for Kosovo, for Albania... we should be very grateful to our parents because they suffered a lot. We cannot conceive of the suffering they have gone through for education, for knowledge, to educate us. We today, in this free Kosovo, free Albania, with the conditions we have, all the chances for education, and see how much we are suffering, not to talk about how hard it is under pressure. But their thirst for freedom, for knowledge, for education, for a better future for their children, made us even more committed.

It is our luck that Albanian people all around are raising new educated and emancipated generations, with an education tradition already. If in my family the only one who was educated was my father, now it is totally different with my three children. Imagine how it will be for their children, when they tell somebody that their father was an ambassador, a University professor, my grandfather was a teacher. I mean the tradition begins for all of us. Unfortunately we didn't have a tradition in education. There were only few families with an education tradition, we can reach the grandfather generation in the best case, and those are only the lucky families. I am talking about my generation, because the new generations can go even farther. But for my generation having an educated grandfather was luck, a great luck. Having an educated mother, let's say that my mother had finished middle school, that was a great luck for that time. And nowadays, having a mother without a University degree is not so good. So, this is how life goes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Thank you very much!

**Flamur Gashi:** Thank you!