

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH RIZA KRASNIQI

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Duration: 112 minutes

### Present:

1. Riza Krasniqi (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
4. Noar Sahiti (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.

## First Part

**Riza Krasniqi** : My name is Riza Krasniqi, I was born on the 3rd of July 1959 in the city of Peja where I also finished my primary and secondary school. I studied Electrical Engineering in the Technical Faculty of the University of Pristina during 1977-1982. From the 1st of October before the war, I worked as an informatics teacher at the then May 11 Gymnasium,<sup>1</sup> now Bedri Pejani Gymnasium in Peja. Childhood memories (smiles)...maybe the first memory that influenced me as a person is the time as a *maturant*.<sup>2</sup> So, I was a *maturant* during 1996-1997 and one day a friend of mine comes to me and says, “Riza, are you coming to become a member of the Communist League?” I didn’t even know what the Communist League was. I said, “What do we do there as members of the Communist League?” “Riza,” he said, “we gather with professors and listen as they debate with one another, it’s a pleasure.” I said, “Yes, of course,” because I wanted to listen to the professors debating because I thought that they... When I told my father, “Father, this and that,” he was like, “What did you want that for, my son?” I said, “I wanted to listen to the professors, father.”

And once in a meeting, in 1977, we were late, it was 11:00 PM when I arrived home, my father was waiting for me. He asked me, “Riza, how was the meeting?” I said, “Nothing important, we sentenced an Albanian to the death penalty.” He said, “Why did you do so?” “Because he murdered a Serb.” He saw red. “Eh, my son,” he said, “did you go there to punish people, or for school? School is not the place to punish people from.” I said, “Father, one has to find a way out in those moments, but all the professors voted.” He said, “Each professor voted for themselves, do you know that you are the grandchild of Cen Avdyli? You have your own life, you don’t dare do what the others do, your name has to...”

This is how we concluded, I couldn’t sleep all night long because it was the first time I saw my father in tears. I mean, he was so bothered by my action as a *maturant*. He was bothered because...I started to think about my father’s story, which is the story of a person who was born in 1919 and died in 1996, I mean, he was born under occupation and died under occupation, the story of a person who was only three months old when his father was murdered. And this history he always...In the night of Božić,<sup>3</sup> he would gather us as a family and tell us the story of his father, how Serbs killed him. That is to say that the night of Božić was black to us because they killed my grandfather and left my father alone when he was three months old. My father’s mother died when he was around eleven years old. Imagine a father who never knew what the word father, mother, brother, sister or uncle meant because Serbs

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<sup>1</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

<sup>2</sup> *Maturë* or *Maturë e Madhe* is a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation). A *maturant* is a high school graduate.

<sup>3</sup> Serbian: Christmas night.

killed his father. Serbs left him all alone. And now I, his son, voted to punish an Albanian with the death penalty just because he avenged his son's blood, he killed a....

That is why this is the first event that since then always made me think, "I wonder what my father would say now? How would he vote now?" And in all the decisions I took in my life after his death, I always thought, "I wonder what father Ahmet would say."

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about your life in Peja as a child, and the things that happened back then, the ambitions towards socialism, how was life back then?

**Riza Krasniq :** Yes if...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Has it changed?

**Riza Krasniqi:** It has changed a lot, because I was a *maturant* in the Peja gymnasium during 1973-1977. And the life of a high schooler....Now I have to say that I wasn't into politics at all at that time, we didn't care about politics. We at that time have...how to study. I played football, back then there was *Buduçnosti*, a football team from Peja. We would go on Sundays with friends, we would play, without any claim to... as a student, it's hard for me to even tell my children about this. I finished the Electrical Engineering Faculty in 1977-'82, and I swear that the word intervention<sup>4</sup> did not exist in our vocabulary. There were 160 students who registered in '77, and there were only 13 of us in 1982 in the fourth year, the fifth year, the third year, fourth, fifth. I swear that each one of us was aware of how knowledgeable each one of us was. And none of us ever mentioned the word intervention during our studies while nowadays it is different. Back then the times were different in some respect. When I finished in 1982, I had three job offers in a matter of one month. When Kosovo B<sup>5</sup> started working, Naim Hoxha, one professor of ours said, "Whoever comes to work in Kosovo B, will also be provided the apartment." When I said this to my father, "Father, I am provided the apartment," he said, "Who am I supposed to live with in Peja, only with your mother?"

They accepted me...because I had the scholarship from the Factory of Auto Parts Ramiz Sadiku in Peja. I went there and said, "I finished my studies, I have my graduation thesis left to finish, can you postpone the acceptance for two more months?" I asked them to postpone the acceptance, I didn't want to start working until I graduated. The clerk told me, "Boy, if you want to start working, do so, if you don't want to, then don't start at all." I said, "Have a good day." Then I went to the Peja gymnasium for completely other reason. They said, "Would you like to start working?" That's why it is hard to explain this to the youth of nowadays, today it's a little bit more difficult, because I had three job offers without even graduating, and each one of them was better than the other. One of them, as I said, provide also an apartment. Had I accepted that offer, today I would have one of the very good apartments which were given by Kosovo B at that time, but times change, and now...a bit more different.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about your close family, let's go back a bit, about your sister, your brother, what kind of family were you?

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<sup>4</sup> Intervention by someone known or powerful to rig the admission process in favor of one.

<sup>5</sup> One of Kosovo power plants.

**Riza Krasniqi:** We were a middle class family at that time. At that time, Shahe Demukaj was my mother, she came from the Demukaj family, in those parts they say Sali Rrustaj, a famous family of the Dukagjin Plane, which let's say, at that time did *pleqni*.<sup>6</sup> *Pleqni* was every disagreement people had in the form of court. And I have written...I even remember one moment in 1966, when Ranković<sup>7</sup> was in power here and did so much wrong, many abuses. A neighbor went one morning to Sali Rrusta and said, "Sali, I came here because...what should we do in order to remove Serbs from here, what should we do to remove Ranković from here." And Sali as a wise man said, "That is an easy thing to do, have a seat and a coffee and let me tell you." "No," he says, "tell me right now because I am ready to go and fight." He had four sons, "I am ready to give four of my sons just to liberate Kosovo from Ranković." Sali says, "Have a seat and a coffee, I will tell you then." When the neighbor drinks his coffee - I also know his name, but it's not important - he says, "What should I do, Sali?" He says, "Yes, leave now, go hug your brother and love your brother." Because Sali knew he didn't have good relation with his brother. "No, I can't hug my brother." He says, "Ranković will stay here until you hug your brother." The message was so simple, if we don't love each-other, we can never liberate ourselves the way we think we can.

[I have] two sisters, Zadja, my big sister lives in Peja, she has four children and a quiet family. My second sister, Xhyle Avdyli, is married in Pristina, she has two successful children. Cen Krasniqi is my brother, he works as professor in the Faculty of Civil Engineering, he has two children. If we want to go back to the closer family, Shpresa Devolli is my wife, she works as a nurse in the Hospital of Pristina now. I have three successful children, three children who are extraordinarily good, not just because they are mine but... Tringa, my big daughter is in the fourth year of her studies at the American University. Rina, my second daughter, is in the second year of her studies in physiotherapy. Drin, my son, is a student at the American High School. The three of them are excellent students, and I am so happy to have such family.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Mister Riza, we asked about your family because we have the aim to build a *backstory* [in English]... a kind of a backstory of yours and the way you were raised. I am not exactly interested in knowing what your sister does...but how was your life within the family during that time and you know a kind of...

**Riza Krasniqi:** Oh now I don't know how...I mean alright, it's...I was raised in a typical Albanian Kosovar family at that time where the father's word was the rule. I often say it, my mother, peace be upon her, didn't have her own brain, she only used her brain to obey my father's orders. I mean, when my father said something, it would not be further discussed in my family, whether it was true or not. It was known that my father was right by default. I mean, whatever my father would say, neither my mother nor we, the kids, would discuss further, it was a rule. That is why we were a family just like most of the families of that time. Such was that time and we got used to that way of living.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where did you go to primary school?

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<sup>6</sup> Traditional Council of Elders

<sup>7</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

**Riza Krasniqi:** In primary school, I went to 8 marsi primary school, it was close to my house. I had an excellent teacher, Resmije Kelmendi, I remember my father's and my family's desire to force me to grow up quickly. They sent me to school before turning six, even though I didn't want to go to school. In the first year of primary school my teacher came to my house everyday to pick me up and send me to school, because I didn't want to go to school. I am so thankful to teacher Resmije Kelmendi for everything I achieved later. At that time we used to say that the 8 marsi primary school was the best school in Peja as every other school [was] without something...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then you continued with the gymnasium?

**Riza Krasniqi:** The May 11 Gymnasium, we had some professors there who were really...Ymer Muhaxheri, Rexhë Gjonbalaj, human beings in the full meaning of it because nowadays it is hard to find such humans. A normal friendship, without...then I continued, I registered in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, I graduated according to deadlines. This is how families are now. I told the story of my father, he grew up as an orphan. I also have two older sisters. They both are...my father's life dream was that I get married. And he was like, "Son, get married, son, get married because I haven't got anyone as you can see, I can't wait," since I was 18.

After I finished my studies, I happily came home one day and told my father right away, "Father, I found it." "Who did you found, son?" I told him the name of a girl, he said, "Who's her father?" I told him. "Who's her mother?" I said, "To be honest, I didn't ask her." And my father's face turned red immediately, it turned red, it got red. "See, son..." I told you that he's lived in Skivjan since he was three months old when his father got killed, his grandfather avenged his son's blood around six months later, he killed that Serb. And they had to put my father on a saddlebag... only those in the villages know, you don't know what they are, they had to send him to Skivjan, to his maternal uncles' so that Serbs wouldn't be able to kill him. And my father grew up in Skivjan at his maternal uncles', he got married in Skivjan. My father's dream was that I get married, expanding the family. He said, "You know that I grew up in Skivjan." I said, "Yes, father." "In Skivjan," he said, "We had... we had to send the cow to seven villages because..." he also said the name, "one had a good ox, because it was important to know what kind of calf would come to a big house, and my son doesn't care about what kind of calf he will have in his house." I said, "Father, I am a gymnasium professor, calling me a calf is not...is not very good." "Son," he said, "even animals care about their family. And explain this to them, you're telling me that in America when they buy a dog or a cat, they want to know what the dog's family was, they want to know their predecessors. And you're telling me now that you don't...know who that girl's mother is. Are you sane?"

I mean, I only learned about the importance of the family here. Later on, when the action for the blood feuds reconciliation started, there I heard a story that explained best the importance of the girl, the importance of the bride, the importance of a female in society.

This was the story, professor Anton used to tell it this way, let's say there were two families, family A and family B. Family A was a well known family at that time, which means a renowned family, a very good family that the *rrethi*<sup>8</sup> valued. Family B was not such family, family B was more...the *rrethi* didn't value it. But what happened, happened, and some member of family A murders another member of family B. They now go to family B and say, "You have to forgive the blood, because you

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<sup>8</sup> *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is incontact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

know who family A is, you are aware of what they did.” And he says, “Alright.” After some time he says, “I will forgive my blood,” and to render it the way they said at that time, “I will give one of my daughters to your family so that we will establish a *miqasi*<sup>9</sup> and continue the *miqasi*.” When they went to the family A and told the owner of the house that, “Congratulations, they forgave the blood. And in order for the *miqasi* to keep going, in order for it to be complete, he gave one of his daughters,” the one who was in turn to get married at that time, “to your son.” The owner of the house thinks about it and says, “No, tell him that I am thankful, but I don’t accept the forgiveness of my blood with *miqasi*.” “Why don’t you accept it?” He says, “Because this way, if they don’t forgive me the blood, then they will kill a male of mine. But if a *rob*,<sup>10</sup>” as it was called back then, “if a no good woman joins the family, she will destroy the whole family.” “Now,” he says, “It’s better for me to kill one of my males, than to destroy my whole family.”

This means that people at that time valued the family so much that they didn’t even accept their blood to be forgiven and establish a *miqasi* with...But I pray God that...because nowadays it’s very difficult to explain the importance of the family to the youth. Usually now they say, “No, it’s important for the boy and the girl,” but I think that again...I am with the old tradition, the importance of the family is indisputable and we have to take care of our families in every moment. Why do they care of it even in America, even in Germany and everywhere. You know the rules, it’s not by coincidence that in the royal families they are not allowed to marry whoever comes first, but times are changing to us and...

**Jeta Rexha:** Let’s go back to you now, in the high school, what was some other activity you did, outside school?

**Riza Krasniqi:** To be honest , I was...I don’t know how you call it now, we used to call *bubaq*<sup>11</sup> someone who kept studying all the time. I studied most of the time. I didn’t have any activity that I can say without...and what, we would go out and play ball in the school yard, that was our greatest pleasure. To go and watch soccer matches when there would be any, to read some other day, but not much, we used to read more or less at that time, but not as much as we should have.

**Jeta Rexha:** Where were you in ‘81?

**Riza Krasniqi:** In ‘81 I was as...the fourth year of my studies, student of Electrical Engineering. I lived at my sister’s, I didn’t lived in the student dormitory ergo I didn’t eat either in the student dormitory. So, I don’t know how the protest started, who organized it. I wasn’t even part of the organizing group, I don’t even know how, I just went after the other students wherever they went, but it’s not that I had a certain role in that movement.

**Jeta Rexha:** University life...because we diverged from the topic a bit.

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<sup>9</sup> *Miqasi* (friendship) is a strong, permanent bond between families, that joins them in a complex system of reciprocity.

<sup>10</sup> *Rob* (peasant, serf), colloquially used in traditionalist society to refer to a person, a family member, often a woman.

<sup>11</sup> Serbian: *bubaq*, someone who studies very hard.

**Riza Krasniqi:** University life, a normal life of a student. As normal as it can be considered. I lived at my sister's, our pleasure with friends back then was going to movies. And there was a bar called Belgrade, where we would sometimes go and drink with friends, we would go for walks with other students. At that time we had the *korzo*<sup>12</sup> as our greatest pleasure in life, to go and observe in the *korzo* since in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering all of us were boys except one girl. We missed friendship, and we would look at many girls when we went out in the *korzo*. Now, I even remember a professor who used two methods of water's analysis, the method of Lagrange and the Euler method, that's what I remember. But we never clearly understood it, we would forget them. For example, the Lagrange method was the one where you sit on a bridge and analyze all the amount of the water that flows. Euler method was, he said, "You take a boat or something, or you walk very close to the water and analyze the amount of the water alone, its changes." For example, you analyze the amount of water in one kilometer. We, the students, would confuse it at that time. Once the professor said, "I will put it this way so that you will remember it, when you go out in the *korzo*," since most of us were boys, "I'll say, you first use the Lagrange method, stop in one spot and first look at all the girls passing by. Later on you use the Euler method, stop the girl you like and just start a relationship with her. You no longer care about the other amount."

I mean, this was a practical execution of...(smiles). It might seem funny, because the student didn't have enough of a mind (smiles) and I would probably never remember the Lagrange method and the Euler method had he not explained them with the *korzo*.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Tell us a bit of about Peja, when did you move back to Peja?

**Riza Krasniqi:** I moved back to Peja in 1982 because my father didn't allow me to take an apartment, "Who am I supposed to live here with, only with your mother?" And I coincidentally started working as a professor in the Peja gymnasium.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which year?

**Riza Krasniqi:** I worked as an informatics' professor until 1999 and that's when those start...now let's say, our nation has continually suffered but there are some stages where it suffered more. The situation got worse after '81. Serbia took...the surreal sufferings started at that time, because there were real sufferings already, you were forced to engage in politics no matter whether you wanted it or not. I remember we had meetings every night at that time, we had to stay until late at night at the meetings of the Central Committee of Kosovo, the meetings of the Central Committee of Serbia, the meetings of the Central Committee of Yugoslavia and the situation just kept worsening each day. The *diferencimi*<sup>13</sup> started, they started to fire people from their workplaces, and it was a bit difficult not to engage in politics. No matter that we, as engineers, learned that in order to develop the nation you have to engage...in politics as little as possible; in order to do that, you should engage in science. But there came a time not so...you had to engage in politics no matter whether you wanted it to or not, because there was something new happening each day [in] the meetings of the Communist League, the writing of the slogan, "Kosovo Republic," it was a pretty difficult situation. A situation that let's say can only be experienced but not explained. Tell someone now that we had to be careful at that time in the gymnasium to not write "KR," because if someone did that, we would have to organize meetings for one week in order to find out who wrote it, and punish the one who did so.

<sup>12</sup> Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

<sup>13</sup> *Diferencimi* (lit. differentiation) refers to the purges of suspected Albanian nationalists after the 1981 protests demanding the status of republic for Kosovo.

In the context of today it may seem illogical that when for example one of the students once draw Skanderbeg on the blackboard and the Committee came immediately to hold a meeting and expel that student. Why expel the student? “No, no way, no...” And we split the way we would split at that time, all the Albanians wanted to only suspend the student who draw Skanderbeg, while all of the Serbs wanted him to be expelled. One, one of the Albanians at that time voted for him to be expelled. And all of us...”What did he do it, just because he drew Skanderbeg?” He was a demagogue of his kind who after the meeting said, “No...” “Why did you vote to expel him?” “Because he offended Skanderbeg, Skanderbeg’s place is not on the blackboard.” So, every time, at that time, even among professors there were some people who didn’t work for the nation the way they should have .

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This happened while you were working as a professor?

**Riza Krasniqi:** As a professor, as a professor...I don’t know, in the meeting when he said, “Man, *bre*,<sup>14</sup> how could you vote for him to be expelled? What did the student do? Just because he drew Skanderbeg, the people’s hero?” “No,” he said, “Skanderbeg’s place is not there, that’s why I voted for him to be expelled.” I mean, those were more difficult times that...because the situation kept worsening. Then, Serbia denied even those few rights we had at that time, the miners walkout started, protests in Peja every day.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they expel you from school or did you have any kind of pressure when these political changes started?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Well...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they close the high school?

**Riza Krasniqi:** No, they didn’t close the gymnasium until 1990. When they closed it...the pressure, it was pressure because they asked us to accept Serbia’s curriculums. But no one doubted that those curriculums should not be accepted, because in those curriculums Serbia didn’t appear as Kosovo’s occupier, but as Kosovo’s liberator. When it came in 1992, based on their curriculum, you had to say that Serbia liberated Kosovo. And many many more other nonsense that a normal mind doesn’t...accept. That is why we didn’t accept them, and as it is already known, after 1990 we started [schooling] in houses. It’s a very high price that we had to pay because of not accepting those curriculums. Even though we called it home-schooling , the teaching was developed in abnormal conditions.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which year? Since 1990 and after?

**Riza Krasniqi:** We started with home-schooling since 1990 and after. Every meeting of the party at that time in the gymnasium was abusive in its own way, pressure. They wanted to convince us as professors and intellectuals to accept the constitutional changes from which Kosovo would be denied some fundamental rights. And, and he would say, “Accept them, because Kosovo is not losing anything.” They wanted to fool us, and then say, “They voted for this themselves.” What they said about us at that time was beyond...but, maybe the best situation at that time, I heard from...a Ph.D. estimated it in the best way, he was from Slovenia. In a Slovenian TV show, they asked him, “When did you realize that Yugoslavia was going through a crisis?” and he said, “When I applied with another colleague for the Ph.D., the vote of a housekeeper was the one to decide which one of us would get accepted,” because there was the Workers Council back then. The Workers Council was required to

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<sup>14</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion, similar to the English *bro*, brother.



have a housekeeper. “When a housekeeper,” he said, “decides if a Ph.D. candidate should get accepted, that’s when you realize that that society has no future.” I often mention it today. When a housekeeper, an uneducated person takes merits which don’t belong to him and decides the fate of a Ph.D., or the fate of an academic, that society has no...

And at that time, let’s not mention it now, some housekeeper or someone from Belgrade who I am not sure whether he knew how to read, would come and hold a speech on behalf of the Communist League. That is why, even today, we have to be careful in that respect. We should not allow a housekeeper to come on behalf of any party... I am telling this without any intention to offend anyone, but it’s not okay for a housekeeper to decide for an academic, because that society, let’s say a housekeeper decides for an academic, because that society has no future.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did they chase you from schools, did they take any decision? How did the process of moving you out of the school buildings happen?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Yes, it’s a bit interesting because...maybe a human being often thinks what it the best way for them. The last year that we worked in the gymnasium, 1989, we also finished the last year there in 1990...because before, the working schedule in the gymnasium was that way, that the first turn belonged to the students of the first year and the fourth year, same for both, Albanians and Serbs, while the second turn belonged to the students of the second and third year. The last year Serbs said, “No we are afraid,” and that all the Serbs would take the first shift and the Albanians of the fourth grade. So, the first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade {counts with his fingers} of the Serbs would be in the first shift, with the Albanians of the fourth grade. The second shift, first grade, second grade and third grade of Albanians. They were influenced by this and in the end of June Serbs came out with a proclamation. When we went there on the 1st of September, they didn’t allow us to get in. The police were in front of the facilities, they even took professors there and imprisoned them because for those not accepting Serbia’s curriculums, there’s no place in those schools. Then we started the action, every family who had a student was obliged to provide home-schooling for one day. But it had its problems, I remember as if it happened today, for example there might’ve been two girl friends at the same desk, when you went to the place of one of them you’d see that she has no food on the table. The next day you had to go to the other one who lived in extraordinarily good conditions.

It is very difficult to accept it now, going from such house to another one, or I, as a professor, remember for example I had six classes per day, and I had to hold the first one, for example, in this neighborhood, while I had to go to a total different place for the second one, one of the students had to come and tell me which was the house where they were holding the teaching. The third class was in a total different place and you were always under the threat that the police would beat you, because according to them, it was illegal to hold the teaching. I even remember once a parent...because even parents are not always right, after the sixth lesson was finished, I was holding a class at his place, “Eh, professor, let me offer you a drink, I want to because...” “Why?” He said, “I am happy because I got rid of a trouble, now I won’t have the students at my house for a month, I couldn’t sleep the whole night because of the fear that the police would come and beat us.” I said, “You got rid of it for a month, but I have six classes tomorrow again. The day after tomorrow is the same, your trouble of one month is my everyday trouble.” That’s how we went everyday, in fear. The fear was normal because every policeman in the middle of the street could...because Peja is a small city, most of them knew us. They knew us, they knew you were a professor. And they could beat, imprison you, or do whatever they wanted to. It was a price we had to pay. The price we had to pay was very big because

unfortunately at that time we went more with the aim to continue teaching, not to let knowledge stay at the level it was at, because it was impossible to stay at that level.

I could not lecture on informatics in an *odë*<sup>15</sup> where everything I had was a chalk, not even a blackboard. How would I explain informatics because at that time I had a dossier and some rules, dir command,<sup>16</sup> write it this way, dir this way. The computer, informatics, doesn't work like that. Imagine, how could you explain Windows to someone without having a computer, without having...or, how to say, how do you explain someone the use of a telephone if they don't have a telephone or don't know what a telephone is. Our education system at that time went through extraordinary things, but as I said above, this was the price we had to pay because we had no other solution.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How politically engaged were your students? For example, did they feel this political pressure all the time, having...being forced to move from house to house. Did this bring a revolt to your students at that time? How did it affect them?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Of course, the students were affected. Of course...and... at that time it is, even now if I tell you that Myrvete Dresha and Hava Shala were my students, who celebrated their 18th birthday in prison. They were imprisoned before turning 18, as human beings...as gymnasium students.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What reason for?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Political, political...because of the Albanians' rights, they demanded Kosovo Republic, they established youth organizations. Even though you know the work that youngsters could do at that time, but the need to contribute to the nation was greater than reality, because their strong awareness that we have to do something in order to be liberated, let's say, dominated over reality. Truly, their power was not so great, but their desire was so great. There were protests everyday not only in Peja at that time, for example. The support for the miners was magnificent. And now, when you are a victim of politics, and when you know that all your friends in Europe are going to normal schools, when you see your first neighbor who is a Serb going to a normal school, while you have to...you don't know where the teaching is going to be held today, you have to engage in politics no matter whether you want to or not. Politics is imposed on you...because you are a victim. And if you as a victim don't react, then who is going to react on your behalf?

That is why the students of that time were engaged in politics, let's say...more than the nowadays *maturantë* or the nowadays youth, because they had no way out. There are tens of prisoners from the gymnasium of Peja whom I gave lessons to...for the national cause. Imagine now a 17 or 18 years old being imprisoned and mistreated in various ways, they still suffer the consequences. Most of them have health issues because of prison consequences {addresses the interviewers}. Ask whatever you are interested in knowing, because now we erase something, we remove something, something....but provoke a bit, tease a bit. Don't...

To you it is a bit more difficult because you haven't experienced those much. You know, it's more...telling someone that she is 17 years old, and was imprisoned, Kosovo Republic, because it was their dream. Youth nowadays thinks a bit differently.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened after, did you find any permanent facility?

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<sup>15</sup> Or *oda*, men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

<sup>16</sup> Computer language: command used for file and directory listing.

**Riza Krasniqi:** No...it was given to me then by Local Communities [Municipalities]. There were some Local Communities that found a permanent facility while there were others who never did so...but had to change places, houses everyday for eight years.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you get involved in reconciliation? Can you tell us how did you get involved, who invited you and how did the things flow in that period?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Yes now, exactly in the end of January, the 10th of February marks 26 years since the first meeting in Raushiq, at the Buçolli family's, happened. Around one week earlier, this time 26 years ago, Flamur Gashi, a former student of mine, a former-prisoner,<sup>17</sup> came, he is now an adviser of President Nishani in Albania. He said, "Professor, we have initiated the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation, do you want to join us, first?" I said, "Yes." I knew the scar of reconciliation, I know how people suffer, I knew because people used to tell how hard being in a blood feud is. "And second," he said, "We have to establish the team of Peja intellectuals." I said, "Let's do so." We had to find people with reputation, who were known and valued by the people.

I came with Flamur to Pristina on the night of the 9th of February, we went to professor Zekerija Cana's. Professor Zekerija Cana was not home, because the brother of professor Ymer Jaka had passed away that day. I even remember his mother, her name was Magbule, she said, "Can you boys take me now to the place where he died..." We didn't know the address. We said, "Yes. Where does he live?" She approximately knew, Dragodan, but she didn't know...we had to stop the car on the way and ask people. Most of them didn't know, and the old lady got mad, "We in Gjakova know where each house is. Shame on you here, shame on you for not knowing where it is..." We found it at last (smiles), then we went to the house of professor Anton Çetta.

Professor Anton was waiting for us in front of the door because he was afraid of the police. Then there comes the fear from *milicia*<sup>18</sup> ... I am not telling you, but this is how it happened. He said, "Who should I call now?" I didn't know many of the Pristina intellectuals, I knew more the professors...he called president Rugova, at that time he was only leader of the LDK,<sup>19</sup> because the Democratic League was established in December while this happened in January. But professor Çetta told us that, "Rugova," he said, "has his phone busy all the time." "Who should I call?" He said, "Let's call professor Ramiz Kelmendi." We called professor Ramiz Kelmendi, the writer. "Yes" he said. We went, picked him up and continued to Peja. On our way he asked, "Riza, who are you in a blood feud with?" I told him that this is a movement taken by the youth, that Riza is not in blood feud with anyone, but the youth initiated it.

From there we went to...friends were waiting for us in Peja. Professor Nimon Ali Musa was from the gymnasium, a colleague of mine with whom we worked on the Albanian language. Hava Shala, Myrvete Dreshaj, Adem Grabovci, Ibrahim Dreshaj...there was a group of young people. Now I remember other names, Nurie Zekaj and some others...we went, first they said, "It'd be good if we went to the mourning because a *Goli Otok*<sup>20</sup> prisoner had passed away." *Goli Otok* prisoner of that

<sup>17</sup> See Oral History interview with Flamur Gashi.

<sup>18</sup> Serbian police.

<sup>19</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>20</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.

time, *Goli Otok* was the most notorious prison where they used to send Albanians. And a patriot of...professor Anton said, "Yes, we're going," before going to reconcile blood feuds. When we went there, I guess you can imagine now. Professor Anton was in the middle, Ramiz Kelmendi was on the left side, I was on the right side, all the others were high school and university students.

An old man didn't seem to be convinced by professor Anton, and he said, "Professor, we are used to you coming to mourn with a group of men, but this time you came with children." Professor Anton told him that...professor Anton had many good virtues, he was *burrënor*.<sup>21</sup> I heard that he knew where to tell stories, he knew a lot, and each time... As regarding folk stories, as important as it is to know as many of them as possible, it is also important to know where to put them. Professor Anton said, "Once a king died and left a young boy behind who was supposed to become a king. When *pleqnia* gathered, they decided that not the boy but someone else should become the king. They went and communicated this to the king's son. The king's son said, 'Alright, can you take this decision...can you take it on Saturday?' It was market day, 'Can you communicate it on Saturday?' He says, 'Yes, and let all the people gather.' The king's son went and took a chicken and some little ducks. He throws the chicken in the water, it doesn't know how to swim. He throws the little ducks in the water and all of them start swimming. That's how the people get the message that what matters is not age but how intelligent you are, how nature gave it to you, and the boy becomes a king." He said, "Don't mind the age of these youth because they have initiated the most useful movement for the people that ever happened to us. It's exactly this youth that started the Movement for the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds. From here we went to Lumbardh, we went to Raushiq. This youth is doing a magnificent work which should've been done by us. But, they are doing it, since we didn't do it."

And like that, from there we went to Lumbardh. In Lumbardh they gave us three months of *besë*.<sup>22</sup> From there we went to Raushiq, there was a big problem in Raushiq, however they agreed to make the reconciliation happen. The characteristic of Raushiq is that the reconciliation was done with the Qur'an. And professor Nimon told me how when he went to Strellc's *hoxha*<sup>23</sup> to ask for a Qur'an because of what was happening. Strell's *hoxha* gave it to Mulla Ramadan, he gave the Qur'an in Albanian, he says, "In order for your work to be done in Albanian, not in Arabic." And...the coincidence, the work was exactly done in Albanian in the whole Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. What is important later, when foreign journalists came, and would usually ask about the reconciliations, it was very difficult to explain Anton Çetta and the Qur'an. Anton Çetta, an Albanian Christian, the Qur'an, a Muslim holy book as it is known, he'd say, "What do they have in common?" It was difficult even for us to explain our religious harmony to foreigners.

I remember one case, when we talk about the Blood Feuds Reconciliation, the Blood Feuds Reconciliation is the most ideal movement that happened to us. It has had some very powerful pillars. One of the main pillars was honesty {counts with his fingers}. Why honesty? Anton Çetta died poor, I am sorry to say this, but he died poor. More than one thousands blood feuds were reconciled. If he took one mark, but the money was never mentioned, that's why it is a very honest movement. It rarely happens that the leaders of a movement, no matter what kind of movement, die poor, as

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<sup>21</sup> Quality of a real man, brave, loyal, honorable.

<sup>22</sup> In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests. In this context it refers to a truce.

<sup>23</sup> *Hoxha; haxhi*, local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

professor Anton did. Religious harmony, one of this movement's pillars, I intentionally said, "the Qur'an and professor Anton."

I know one case, two journalists from Belgium came to the Dukagjin Plane. Professor Anton didn't come with us that day, but there was professor Mark [Krasniqi]. The journalists spent the whole day with us, listening and shooting. In the evening, I was close to professor Mark, they asked the professor, "Professor," she said, "we have seen reconciliation of blood feuds, but we are also interested in interfaith relations among Albanians, because Serbia always says that they are building an Islamic state. Is there any truth in it? How much are Albanians of the Christian faith discriminated? Are you discriminated?" He said, "Yes, I am discriminated." "Can you tell us a case?" "Yes," he says, "Today, while you were with us, there were doctors, professors, intellectuals, in that..." as they used to call us the *krushqi*<sup>24</sup> of reconciliation [messengers of reconciliation]. "All of them are Muslim, one is Christian. I am that Christian, I lead everyone. Is there any other place on earth where a Christian leads the imams and intellectuals and everyone?" The journalist said, "Professor, fine but this could be a coincidence." "Fine, if this is a coincidence, I can take you later, or if you go to Drenica, there professor Anton leads, professor Anton Çetta. He is an Albanian of the Christian faith, while 99 percent of those who follow him are Muslim. Can this be a coincidence too?" "No," she said, "this cannot be a coincidence." "Can it be a coincidence," says professor Mark, "that our national heroes are Mother Theresa and Gjergj Kastrioti, none of them Muslim? There is no nation on earth where the percentage is known, the majority are Muslim, while national heroes are of the Christian faith. Have you seen this elsewhere in the world?" "She said, "No." Because when professor Mark got mad, he would continue with such cases. "Do you have any case in the world?" He would tell a village on that side. He said, "See, when the time of Ramadan came, because in Ramadan there is the time of *iftar* and *syfyr*<sup>25</sup> that people should be notified of. The priest gave the key of the church to an old Muslim man so that he would go to the church and notify the Albanian Muslims through church's bells that now is the time of *iftar* or now is the time of *syfyr*." He'd tell many of these cases. "Do you now understand religious harmony among Albanians?" And the journalists was speechless.

You know, religious harmony was one of the main pillars of the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. Another main pillar which is constantly mentioned is the Albanian female's role. The female's role was extraordinarily great, and the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation wouldn't have even started without female influence, because truly, Hava and Myrvete started the Movement. They are the first that...both of them were my students. And both of them say that three demonstrators get killed in Peja demonstrations by the end of January. That night, the Serb minister of Internal Affairs shows up on TV and declares that three Albanians got killed in Peja today, but it's not true that our police killed them. They get killed because they have a blood feud, that's why they kill each-other. Albanians are using the protests in order to cleanse accounts among them. This was the declaration that pushed Hava, Myrvete, then I think together they went to the house of Adem Grabovci and invited other friends such as Flamur, Ibrahim, Myrvete, Serbeze Vokshi and started the movement.

And the other one, we were often deceived in the beginning when the man would say, "I never forgive the blood!" We'd go to the men's *odë*, especially in the beginning, and he would say, "This blood will never be forgiven!" There were justifications. When we went out, Bajram Kelmendi, the deceased lawyer, who was in the Movement in its first days would say, "Hava, Myrvete, you have to go to the

<sup>24</sup> *Krushqi*, escort group from the groom's family that come to fetch the bride.

<sup>25</sup> *Iftar*, meal consumed after dawn, breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan; *syfyr*, pre-dawn meal during the same month.

women, because now the woman decides here, not this man with moustache.” And we would go crazy, “What are you saying *bre*, Bajram, how does he not decide?” “Hava and Myrvete, go to the women, and you...” he would say to Hava and Myrvete, the next day he would say, “The work is done, next week we will go a bit just to reconcile it.” And honestly, the blood would be forgiven. Because some time we would live with those [ideas] that the man with moustache in men’s room forgives it or doesn’t. Truly, the role of the female in the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation is extraordinarily great. As if they had to forgive the blood, as if they had to... because as I am telling now, when Hava, Myrvete, Serbese and Nurie went and talked to the old man for two to three hours, they were ready to cry in front of the old man, to kiss his hands, to beg the old man, because forgiving the blood was in the interest of Kosovo.

The old man would feel bad to turn the youth back, the honesty of the youth was extraordinarily great. Even though youth has that honesty, it always had it, I am talking about the majority. Then and even now, there is always someone not honest among the youth. But when we talk about the majority of youth, the majority of them have that honesty. To be honest, when there was the need for females to forgive [the blood] it was a bit more difficult. Some situations were created...I remember the case of one...Besa was her name, we went to a village, her brother was a teacher, he came to the men’s *odë*. He said, “I must...” his father was murdered, “Can I,” he said, “I have a request. I know why you’re here.” “What’s your request?” “Can my sister Besa come here?” “Yes of course, why not.” Besa came and sat near Hava and Myrvete and started talking. “Men, I know why you’re here, and I value your movement, all the best. But, can you listen to my case.” “Of course, why not.” “I,” she said, “went out with my father to work in the land. We went with a horsecar at that time. While working in the land, two neighbors came, both had a hoe. And while I was talking to my father, they started hitting my father with the hoe which in the plural we call *shyt*.. When we got close to them, they both stepped back. On the way to sending him to the hospital by horsecar, my father asked me for *besa*, he said, ‘Give me the Albanian *besa*, that if something happens to me, you will not forgive the blood.’ I gave the Albanian *besa* to my father,” she said. “Can I forgive the blood now? My father died in the hospital because of the injuries suffered.” She even said it in this way, “Can Besa step on *besa*?” What were we supposed to say? I mean, none of us was able to say, “No, stand up because...” I guess professor Ramiz said, “Alright, we understand you, Besa. Can you do something else for us?” “Go ahead, professor.” “Can you come with us and help us with other reconciliations? Become a part of the reconciliation *krushqi*.” And Besa accepted, “Yes, I am ready to do everything, just don’t ask me to break the Albanian *besa*.” She was with us that day and the day after. She was in the car with me, professor Ramiz and professor Anton, when one afternoon at around 14 o’clock, she said, “Men, can we go to my house?” It was obvious that she decided to forgive the blood. And we changed our plan, it was so important to us for that blood to be forgiven, and on our way to her house she asked us to stop by the graveyard. When we stopped to the graveyard, she got out of the car and continued to the grave but she seemed a bit kind of troubled.

*[this story continues in the second part].*

## Second Part

**Riza Krasniqi:** Somewhere Sunday afternoon Besa asked to go...she said, “Let’s go to my family.” We noticed that she decided to forgive [the blood], we changed our schedule and while on our way, she asked, “Can we stop by the graveyard?” We stopped, and when she went to her father’s grave, the professor and I went after her, we went close to her and she developed a very difficult dialogue.

“Father,” she said, “You know that I gave you the *besa*, always,” she said, “you told me to keep *besa* and you even named me Besa. But nowadays, the times are changing, Kosovo’s youth is asking for your blood to be forgiven, Kosovo’s interest is asking for your blood to be forgiven. Your daughter is faithful, and she will be so for a lifetime. But Kosovo’s interest seems to be greater than the given *besa*, so father...please forgive me because today...I have to forgive your blood.”

Besa started crying at her father’s grave, we started too...but after a couple of hours, we went and she forgave the blood. I never saw Besa again, I don’t know what happened to that female...not only Besa, but all the forgiven bloods were forgiven for Kosovo’s future...for one Kosovo, for a better state...a Kosovo we all dreamt for, a better one than the one we have today. And the bloods, there are hundred cases [of the forgiven bloods] and they were all forgiven for Kosovo’s youth, for its future. They weren’t forgiven for any party or for any other intention.

*[The interviewer asks the speaker to talk in a more detailed way about the women’s role in The Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. The question was cut from the video interview]*

I already mentioned that the female role was one of the pillars, even we, the males, kind of resented to say it (smiles), but whenever we couldn’t manage to reconcile the blood feud in men’s *odë*, Bajram Kelmendi would ask the girls’ team, Hava, Myrvete, “Go to the women now, it’s your time to get the work done there.” Because we lived with the illusion that men with moustache forgive the blood, but that often turned out not to be true. I remember one case of a mother whose little son was killed, she had two other sons. She had no husband and both of her sons were grown up, that means around thirty-thirty five years old. When we went to men’s *odë*, both of them, “We know why you’re here, but...even if we forgive the blood, our mother won’t. My mother’s little son got killed, there’s no way she will agree.” When they said this, we said, “But you, you will forgive it?” They said, “We will forgive it only if our mother says so.” That’s when it seemed way easier for us and we asked Hava right away, “You go downstairs, not that day, but the next day or the day after.” When they went there, the mother waited for them with these words, “Even if boys forgive it, I won’t. He was my little son, whom I loved the most.” “It was impossible,” they were telling, “to convince her.” But even in those cases we always looked for a solution of how to...we asked and they told us that that mother whose son got killed had a sister to whom she was so close in the village, but she has no children...and she considered the children of her sister as her own children. Then the team went to the sister’s...and in the beginning she had those words, “Even if my sister’s sons and my sister forgives the blood, I won’t! Because that boy was more my son than my sister’s.”

Then the negotiations started and Hava with Myrvete persuaded her to forgive it at last, because, “If it doesn’t get forgiven, what happens...let’s suppose the big son takes revenge for the blood. They will come and kill the second son. So, this will truly never end.” And she said, “You will remain without the three of your sons.” They forgave the blood and somewhere after six months the sister with no children died, we went to visit the old lady who forgave the blood since we knew that she loved her sister extraordinarily much. And the conversation turned to the blood, she told us a detail we never thought about before, she said, “To be honest, I am sleeping comfortably since the blood was forgiven. Each time my sons went out in the city, I was afraid that they would meet the killer, or his family and kill them, for God’s sake, someone would kill my sons. You know, I couldn’t live a normal life, I didn’t know what life was.”

We often only dealt with the sufferings of the isolated family. But we never dealt with the family who had to avenge the blood, which in fact was a victim, because the victim was from that family. I remember another case that maybe illustrates it best, because the students of the Peja gymnasium at

that time had a task, I am talking about Peja and its surroundings, to come and tell me and professor Nimon about the cases, in which village there were killings, where were bloods that needed to be reconciled. Then we made the schedule, the students worked in their way, through students, and we would gather every Friday to make the plan where we were supposed to go the next day. Because to be honest, when they said, "Come on Saturday and Sunday with professor Anton," we were ninety percent sure that the blood would be forgiven. Because the hardest work was done before professor Anton came.

We went once, they told us about one killing, they killed a 30 years old five years ago. We went to the village but we didn't know where his house was. I stopped the car and saw two boys around seven-eight years old maybe, no...none of them was going to school at that time which means they were six-seven years old. They were playing with wooden rifle, bam-bam. "Good afternoon, boys!" They, "Good afternoon!" "Where's his house?" we asked. He said, "This is the house," We were already in the house of the ones who were supposed to forgive the blood, "What are you doing?" I asked one of them. He said, "I am killing Hasan." "Why are you killing Hasan?" He said, "Because he killed my father and I have to take revenge. My father left two sons..." "Are you in school?" "No," he said, "but I will register this year." For one moment I stopped and thought, a child who doesn't go to school, who doesn't even know the letters, is taught at home how to kill someone, how to take revenge. Can you imagine such a family, where every night they talk about how to kill their father's killer. I mean, the environment that person is raised in. How many such families we had in Kosovo, in which it was discussed how to kill someone, what did the children hear in those families, "We will go out and cross someone's street, this and that..." In those families there were no discussions about economic development, how children should learn in school...but how to take revenge, that was the main point.

Let's say in the other families, what was discussed, in the isolated families? In the isolated families, did they talk about who should work the land, how to work the land, how to eat food? Because it's known that based on the *Kanun*,<sup>26</sup> they didn't take revenge on females. That is why the females of the houses had the right to go out and work in the land... the power of the female at that time is known, what can a female work in the land in those conditions. And now the female, the male didn't dare go out...what do isolated families think about, the children cannot go to school. I don't know if I can ever imagine for a moment the situation in which both families exist. Let's say, in the isolated families, if someone, for example, had their sister in that family, they were also involved one way or another. That means, each family, the one that had to avenge the blood as well as the one who was isolated had also five to six other surrounding families that were involved in that problem. So, if we count the number of the families involved, even if it is in a direct or indirect way, it's an extraordinarily high number. Was it difficult to forgive the blood? It was extraordinarily difficult. I always said it and will always repeat it for as long as I am alive that the only heroes of the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation are the ones who forgave the blood. We, the others, were only peons who ran from a house to another, but the real heroes were the ones who forgave the blood.

I remember another case after war, one Sunday I went for a walk in the city with my wife Shpresa and my big daughter Tringa. I saw a person who was slowing down his pace and walking towards me, I knew him. And one notices when someone slows down their pace and wants to greet them, I stopped with him. "Good afternoon." "Good afternoon." "How are you doing?" "Do you know me?" I said, "Yes. What are you in Peja for?" Because in Peja, I am talking about that time, 15 years ago, people from the

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<sup>26</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.



villages came to Peja more rarely on Sundays. And it was obvious, the man with the white *plis*<sup>27</sup> and... he said, "Professor, I came in the hope to see someone from you of the reconciliations, because I am kind of sad." I said, "Yes of course, let's sit and have coffee." I apologized to my wife, and said, "Continue with the girl."

When we sat to have coffee, he asked me, "Do you know me?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you know my case?" I said, "Of course I do." And told him that his son was killed with *kmesë* in primary school, a small axe that was used to cut the tree branches. He sent his son to primary school, he argued with his classmate, someone from the boy's family came and killed his son with *kmesë*. In primary school! I know how much we suffered when we went for the preparations of the case..."Eh, professor," he said, "My son's classmate is getting married today, there's music, they are eating meat and pie," he said it in the folk way, "my son is eating dust. I took my wife and went to his grave, we cried until we couldn't cry anymore...now she went to her sister's and I went out in the city in the hope to see someone from you." You know, the person who forgave [the blood], we left them in pain for a long time. That is why I am saying that the ones who forgave [the blood] are the real heroes and it's such a shame for our society that we still don't have a commemorative plaque, a monument of those who forgave [the blood], be it unnamed, but to those who forgave the blood of their beloved ones for the sake of Kosovo, so that we could have a state. And this state of ours even after 26 years can't build something, not even a statue of professor Anton as the carrier of the Movement, not even a whatever you call it, a place where those who forgave the bloods maybe go once a year and see their contribution. An extraordinary contribution.

I guess I said it once before, we as a nation, as Kosovo, have two big achievements, two big triumphs. The first triumph is the one we achieved with the great Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation, for the reconciliation of thousands of families. The second triumph is the liberation from Serbia, but if we don't achieve the third triumph which consists on this youth to love the state of Kosovo, the first two triumphs are useless. If we don't manage to create a state which is loved by our youth, even those two triumphs are useless. If we don't manage to...I've read somewhere that Stipe Mesić refers to the state as a "forever parent," if we don't invest in the forever parent, I am afraid that the two great triumphs are useless.

*[The interviewer asks the speaker to talk about how old were the cases of families in blood feuds. The question was cut from the video interview.]*

Unfortunately, it's...we never held a statistic of how old each blood feud was. There were various cases. You know it's...I read that there were cases of killings on both sides that lasted for fifty-sixty years. But, we have to know that those blood feuds were created...or are a consequence of the lack of laws. Professor Fatos Tarifa has a book, *Hakmarrja është e imja* [*Revenge is mine*]. Revenge has existed even in western countries, it existed in America, but then laws were created, laws were executed and laws punished the one who caused harm, in this case the killer. When law punishes the killer, there's no need for you to take revenge. But if we look at our history, where there always was a lack of law, and when the killer never got punished the way they deserved to, not even close to that. Then, everywhere in the world, even here, people who cause harm exist. If someone doesn't punish them, then they will always cause harm.

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<sup>27</sup> Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

That is why blood feud was a necessary element at some time because there are bad people who would kill someone everyday. If fear wasn't an element of education, that if you kill someone, someone else will kill your child, then bad people would commit killings everyday. That's why I am saying, killings are a consequence of lack of law, I am talking as Riza Krasniqi. After the war, only once there was one who came like, "Come, come, because the case is like that, I just want you to be there when they reconcile." Because I wasn't engaged in reconciliation after the war, because I think that we should fight to create a good state, where the law is the law, when it wants it does, and it sentences the punishment, not humans. That is why, I repeat, I will fight all my life for Kosovo to have a state, to create a law which will be equal to everyone. And when we will have the law the way it should be, people will not need to engage in blood feuds. Because we cannot enter Europe with blood feuds, we cannot move forwards with blood feuds. We will only destroy each-other with blood feuds. This way, we will only move forwards when the Prime Minister doesn't know the phone number of the chief prosecutor, they don't need to know that. But when the Prime Minister, no matter who they are, know that, they will be punished for the mistake they might've done.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there cases when people didn't forgive the blood?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Well, there were such cases in every Movement. The whole nation is never...no matter the great success we achieved, we made the first reconciliation on the 10th of February in Raushiq. The Movement managed to gather half million people for eighty days at Verat e Llukës. This is to me a unique occasion in history, when in only eighty days, from 22 people that were in the first day in Raushiq, most of them, as I said, students and former-political prisoners, in eighty [days] they became five hundred thousands supporters of the Movement. There were no mobile phones that day, when five hundred thousands of people gathered. There were no tools like nowadays, and each one of us who went there that day, went with fear because Verat e Llukës was surrounded by police. I never saw so many police and Serbian tanks like that day. I don't know...you could feel a power, I never felt more powerful. If I tell you about tanks, Serbs, the police in every corner, but I don't know how, today this is unexplainable, I wasn't afraid. Earlier in Peja, I would be so afraid even if I just saw a policeman, that day there were plenty of them...a lot....maybe the masses, maybe the desire, the great will to contribute, I wasn't afraid.

I am telling you that we managed to gather five hundred thousands people in eighty days, because the aim was good. People understood the aim of the Movement, it was a honest Movement, lead by honest people, where the female fulfilled her role, maybe in the best way in our nation's history and took the position that belonged to her. Where money was never mentioned, in any case, I don't know, not...because Serbia on that side probably did its best to be able to ask someone to say, "Anton Çetta gave me 100 marks" or whatnot, but they never found such a person. And I am telling you, it was such a honest movement that its leader died in poverty, not to say an extreme one.

**Jeta Rexha:** Where did this occasion with five hundred thousands of people happen?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Close to Deçan, in 1990 at Verat e Llukës, in one village.

They said that Isa Boletini<sup>28</sup> historically held a gathering and it was decided to be held at Verat e Llukës, where 66 bloods were forgiven during only one day. And it's, as far as I know, until now the greatest gathering Albanians ever held, because now I sort of joke when I say that all the politicians put up together cannot gather five hundred thousands of people. And at that time, not...none of them, not to say from all of this movement, I don't know who continued engaging in politics. I guess, Adem Grabovci is one name crossing my mind that is engaged in politics, and I never heard him taking advantages out of blood feuds' reconciliations, a movement like this...because none of the friends hasn't...hasn't continued engaging in politics. They didn't misuse it and say, "I was in blood feuds' reconciliations, this is our meritocracy."

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you explain in a more detailed way what happened that day?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Yes, yes, it's...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was it decided?

**Riza Krasniqi:** What do you mean?

**Jeta Rexha:** How was it decided to be held in that venue, who dealt with the decisions? How was it?

**Riza Krasniqi:** The organizational council, I was not part of it, because they started...how was it decided? After some time, I mentioned in the beginning that there were twenty reconciliation *krushq*, let's go back chronologically a bit. The team of reconciliation *krushq* started to constantly extend. Somewhere around the third week, fourth, the team had to split. Anton Çetta was not in Peja anymore, he started going around Drenica. After some time, they started waiting for us in...because there was not enough room in men's *ode*. They started waiting for us in meadows, and we have photographs where meadows and Anton Çetta with the team or professor Mark, and many others on this side...it was obvious that meadows are...there was a need for more room for the masses. Then we started in Rugova, for example Musa Xhevat held a gathering with three hundred thousand people in Bubavec just two weeks before the one in Verat e Llukës. And it was seen as a necessity, not to say the peak [of the movement, to find] a place, and it was decided to be Verat e Llukës.

What was characteristic of that day, for example I remember I went with professor Ramiz Kelmendi from Peja, and it seemed like there was no Peja citizen in streets. It was the same for Pristina, as people told us, when Ramiz Kelmendi said, "Riza, there's no people in Pristina, everyone is at Verat e Llukës." I am telling you, not only it seems like...but it seems unbelievable when you look at the pictures of that time, someone might think, it's a photo-montage or something. On my way, I saw Hava, I said, "Hava." "Professor," she said, "we reconciled two bloods by three in the morning." I said, "Girl, do you remember that..." I know she had health issues from being a caretaker in the prison. I said, "Are you planning to look after yourself at all?" She said, "Professor, I want to look after Kosovo's health." I said, "Take care of yourself a bit," because she was, she had health issues. She said, "No professor, that's not important."

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<sup>28</sup> Isa Boletini (1864-1916), an Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter. He was one of the leaders of the Albanian Revolt of 1910 the Kosovo *Vilajet* and became a major figure of Albanian struggle against the Ottomans and Serbia and Montenegro. His remains, originally buried in Podgorica where he was killed, were reburied in the village of Boletin, in the northern side of Mitrovica, in June 2015.

Then Myrvete, then...all the students that day that...it happened in Deçan, there something happened that Deçan people decided that day, the Lluca village with the surrounding, not to allow anyone to leave without eating. And imagine, when it was done, all the doors were opened, our mothers had prepared bread, *fli*<sup>29</sup> for the people who lived far from Deçan. That day, they tried not to allow anyone to go back, let's say to Pristina, or Mitrovica or Prizren, without eating food. They forced people, "Come, eat a bit." The atmosphere of that day in Deçan was unexplainable. Today when I see for example, because there are the footages of Pristina Radio Television, I guess they still have some footage. It's an atmosphere, it's the around 90 years old man, he stays there all the time with two fingers like this {raises two fingers}. I don't know where he took the strength from...it's an atmosphere when the children come, 15 years old is one of them, who says, "I've decided to forgive my father's blood," to Zekerija Cana. There are some moments which are difficult to forget, because they can only be experienced once in a lifetime, and lucky is the one who got to experience them. I had the luck to experience them, and I feel good for having had such luck.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was the closing of this ceremony, how many bloods were forgiven? Did you safely go back home since you were surrounded with tanks?

**Riza Krasniqi:** No, not safe. That day for example, I remember professor Zekerija Cana, because he showed his chest to the police and said, "*Ubijte, ubijte!*" [Serbian: Kill us, kill us!]. Because professor Zeqa was the bravest among us, and he had genetic bravery. But on the other side they, I don't know, it wasn't to their advantage killing professor Zekerija in the presence of five hundred thousand people, because it was to no one's advantage for it to explode there. I remember that they beat him on the way, but we didn't count these much back then, you know (smiles). The pleasure of blood being forgiven, the pleasure of we doing something for Kosovo was greater than all those barriers.

For example, I remember the case of Enver and Skender whose father was killed. Before the preparatory team arrived, we would check who was the one who could influence them. We found a close cousin of theirs who could influence them. We went there twice and they didn't forgive [the blood]. Professor Anton at some point said, because all of those who wouldn't forgive [the blood] would say, "Alright, we are with you, but my case is more specific. My case has this, my case has that..." Each one of them had [its specifics], because each blood feud is a history itself. They didn't forgive it and professor Anton would say, "Enver, Skender, you are good boys but we cannot come anymore." "Professor, we apologize, but we cannot forgive." "Alright." We turned back. I was working as a professor in the Peja gymnasium at that time.

The next day, I mean on Monday, I had classes starting at eight, or half past seven. When I went there, one of the brothers was waiting in front of the gymnasium door. "Good morning." "Good morning." "Professor," he said, "do you have time, two minutes?" I said, "Of course." He said, "I have a request." I said, "What is it?" "Can you come next week to our place?" I said, "Why, what happened?" He said, "We decided to forgive." I said, "We were there last night, I mean, on Sunday, we left you at around four o'clock," I said, "and you didn't forgive it. What happened?" "Yes," he said, "after you left, I have a Serb neighbor, and when I went out, he asked me 'Who were they?' And I said... 'Have you found a bride?'" He asked him, because there were many of us. "'Oh,' he said, 'I haven't found a bride, but they were here for this reason, to forgive the blood.' 'And, what did you do?' he says. 'I didn't forgive it because my blood was more...a different case.' 'Eh,' he says, 'you are man of men for not forgiving it, because for real your father was like this and you shouldn't have forgiven it.' 'So,' he says, 'when do

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<sup>29</sup> A traditional dish in Albanian cuisine consisting of crepe-like layers cooked with cinders under a lid.

you want to take revenge for the blood?’ the Serb said to him, ‘if you don’t have a rifle, I will give it to you. And don’t be afraid of the prison, I will free you.’ ‘When I turned back,’ he said, ‘at home, I told my brother what happened.’ ‘Eh,’ he said, ‘let’s forgive it. Since Stojan told us that, ‘The rifle is from us,’ let’s see.” I said, “Alright Enver, professor Anton Çetta with the whole team tried twice and didn’t manage to convince you, and Stojan did...” “Professor,” he said, “Stojan convinced me.” And we went to his place, I mean we went the next Sunday, he forgave the blood.

You know, there were these kind of things as well, but the Blood Feuds Reconciliation, I think that in that Movement the intellectuals failed a bit because we never described what we saw in a proper way. I remember one case in Rugova for example, it’s a difficult case. Even though it didn’t happen to us, one’s daughter was killed, her husband had killed her. We went two-three times in preparations, the old man wouldn’t...”It’s not possible!” he’d say. That Sunday, when we went, Azem Shkreli, Bajram Kelmendi were both from Rugova, Ramiz Kelmendi from...professor Anton was in Drenica. Out of fear, I said, “Azem, I am afraid it will be difficult because the team has weakened.” We had to split in two groups, I said, “And we have remained a few men,” you know, in that respect. Azem as Azem said, “Riza, men have to be in Rugova now, we have to...*burrëni* is not what they ask from us, they ask them for it, because they will forgive [the blood]. We went to the old man’s and he didn’t want to forgive the blood. He said, “See, they’ve...” and tells how his daughter was killed, “they left me with two orphans.” He says, “The orphans wake up at night, and...” because they witnessed how their mother was killed, “They still have psychological problems.” And, Azem was Azem, Azem Shkreli, I mean, he had an extraordinarily convincing vocabulary, and started to convince him.

He said, “Oh men, I haven’t got anyone to forgive it to, because if I had someone, I would forgive it.” Azem said, “We don’t know that person, and we are not asking you to forgive it on his behalf. But even your orphans, for whom there are people fighting, even they will take the favors of this forgiveness, because we will establish a Kosovo in which they will grow up as they should. And not one like the one we have today.” And it’s...each time Azem with professor Mark, Bajram...would convince one. There was a neighbor there who said, “Oh men, he will forgive it but it is a bit difficult because you cannot find a girl like his in seven villages. I was close to him when they brought his dead daughter. You didn’t see what I saw. He will forgive, but not today...you know, he would ruin the situation.” At some point, Azem said to him, “Man, not all of those who eat from your bread, wish you good. That is why, for Kosovo’s good...” they convinced the man, he forgave the blood. When he forgave, he said, “Now, you have to drink some coffee.” “Alright, since you forgave the blood.” While having coffee, the neighbor said, “Well,” he said, “I was certain that even if the whole Kosovo forgave it, you wouldn’t, because you used to be brave, a real man” (sighs). The girl’s father sighed and said, “Men, to be honest, God already forgave him, because after he killed our daughter and got out of prison, I followed him in order to kill him. And some time later he went to Peja with his mother to sell dairy products. But how can one kill another when he is with his mother, one can never do that. I won’t kill him, I would have no morals if I killed the killer while he is with his mother. In the evening I saw him alone, I went near him in order to kill him, and when I got close, I wanted to face him, because it’s not fair to kill somebody from behind. I heard him talk to his friend, because he asked him, ‘Where did your mother go?’ He said, ‘Mother went to buy a *samun*,<sup>30</sup> because we haven’t eaten for the whole day and I am dying from hunger.’ In that moment,” he says, “somehow my father called me from his grave and said, ‘You can’t kill a hungry man because the moral code of Albanian says so,’ and I said. I will kill him after one week. One week passed, then another one, but he didn’t go out, and it seems I didn’t forgive him, but God did.”

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<sup>30</sup> Small round bun.

Then we would discuss it with Azem Shkreli, “Riza,” he’d say, “there’s no code nor book nor movie in the world that says that the hungry man cannot be killed, it’s only in the Albanians’ code. It only exists in the moral code of Albanians that a hungry man cannot be killed.” Eh, I said it many times, if we had a state, a movie should’ve been created for this man, because the hungry man cannot be killed. You cannot find such a moral code anywhere in the world. So, in the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliations I saw the positive national side of ours as well as the killings that don’t serve us that much.

**Jeta Rexha:** How many bloods were forgiven in total by the end of this process?

**Riza Krasniqi:** See, there are statistics for which we cannot be very thankful, because every blood [feud] is a history in itself. That is why let’s say, it always bothered me, “No, I participated in this number of blood [feuds].” “No, I participated in this number of reconciliations.” “No...according to some notes, because the Movement continued even after the 1st of May, even though with a lower intensity.” Somewhere it’s manipulated, not manipulated, but it is said that around 1500-1600 families and bloods were reconciled. But if 1500 multiplies by two, then it’s 3000 families. If each of those families had five other families, which I said before were directly or indirectly involved, then we have 15.000 families. If these 15.000 are counted in a village, one member, with an average of ten members, then we have 150.000 people involved here. And we concluded that after the Movement, 150.000 people were allowed to breathe freely. Without counting the other benefits.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you spend the time of war? The war, how did it find you in Peja? How did you get over it, what did you do?

**Riza Krasniqi:** (Sighs) The war, how...when the war started in Peja, I went to Ulcinj with my family, we stayed in Ulcinj all the time. My wife was pregnant and had other problems with which...of course when we came back from the war, everything was burned. But, I repeat, the pleasure that now we are free and the first visit I made after I came back and saw the completely burned house was at my father’s grave, where I talked to him for around half an hour and told him, “Father, there’s no Serbs in Peja anymore, we are liberated, sleep calmly!” As I said before, I always felt bad because my father was born and died under Serbian occupation. He was born in 1919 and died in 1996. And when I would say, “Father, say something,” because one wants to...”Son,” he would say, “what do I say, I was born under Serbs and I am dying under them.” An atmosphere...and my father’s greatest prayer was, “For the sake of Albania’s time!” When...those three years of Greater Albania here were the only years he enjoyed. I am telling you that it’s a conversation that...I would talk, but I didn’t know whether my father was believing me or not (smiles), in that style.

After the war we continued moving on and working. We didn’t take advantages of those activities and so on because... I consider that one is obliged, I am saying obliged with capital letters, to work for the national issue, because I don’t understand people who say, “I am contributing to my family.” Because to me, the family and our state are like siamese brothers, even more tightly bonded. And one cannot say, “I have a happy family” in a non-developed state. To me, the state is even more important, the permanent family, as I said, more than the family, because a developed state makes even a middle class family move forward, while a non-developed state destroys even the best family. If most youth aim to live abroad, then where is... where is our goal.

That’s why I am telling you that I’ve always tried to work for this country, even as a professor in the gymnasium, and...it doesn’t mean that we all have to engage in big businesses. To me a real patriot is the one who does their job as professor the way they should do it, because one can show their

patriotism everywhere. To me a good patriot today is a good journalist who does his job in a loyal way.

For example, at that time...because one can and has to always work for the national issue. Earlier you mentioned the years '90 and '99, at that time I was working at a jeweller in Peja, as an adviser of Sali Kastrati. At that time we knew how to specify it this way, all of the Peja students who had the average grade over eight, were given a scholarship of 100 marks. The whole long *qarshi*<sup>31</sup> of Peja gave money for the students. The only condition was not to cheat. Where was the aim? The aim at that time was for the student to think how to make their average grade over eight, not think who was the member of the commission. Not think of how to find intercessions in order to get the scholarship, but think of how to make the grade. When they made the grade, society would think of them. Some time ago I publicly said that...to me even today, maybe because I worked for a long time in education, but I believe the expression, "Where the education is sick, the state is sick as well." This is a Latin one. I still think that if the Education Minister had come out with a declaration that all the Kosovars who register in the top one hundred best Universities in the world, will be provided the scholarship from the state...money for the students. The only condition was not to cheat. Where was the aim? The aim at that time was for the student to work in order to have an average grade over eight.

Automatically, the level in high schools would raise not to say by one hundred percent, because high school students would no longer think about, "Who is a member of the [admission] committee for Medicine? Whom can I find to intervene?" These are the conversations in our schools. But they would think how to study and register in the university, because one knows that not interventions, but knowledge, is what will help them to register in good international universities. First, this way we would show them that we have a state for our youth, second, I would say to my son, "Study, son, you have the state, it provides the education for you, don't ask for anything from me." And he would not think about interventions any longer. Because today he thinks, he says, "Father..." I keep asking Drin to study. He studies, but he says, "Father, the other one told me one hundred times, 'You don't have a good intervention that will help you register in a good faculty, we cannot register you without interventions.' Why should I study?" And I am in a bad position as a parent. In this aspect, I mentioned the case before...of the old man with whom I had coffee in Peja. The desk mate [of his son] who was married that day, we drank those coffees in tears that day. And I thanked him.

Let's go back to the topic of the conversation. "Thank you because your case was..." He said, "No, thank you." He told me his case. He said, "You know I have another son?" I said, "Yes," he said, "Had I not forgiven [the blood]," he said, "the other son was supposed to kill the guy," to avenge his brother's blood, that was considered normal. He said, "Had he killed him, today my son would be in prison." But the blood was forgiven. After it was forgiven, my son continued his studies. He continued school, his studies. And at some point he said, "My son graduated from University two months ago," he said, "the day he graduated was the most...I never felt happier since my little son was killed." And I told him, I said, "Since your son graduated, then wait for us next week, because we are coming." He said, "Why are you coming?" Because he told me that... When he told the case of the wedding, "There," he said, "the flag is waving. They are eating meat and pie, my son is eating dust." You know, he had those...

Before the war, I had a friend from the Netherlands and when he came to my place, which is a true story, we looked at the photographs and he saw a photograph of my wedding in 1990, the flag was in front of the door. "Riza, this flag?" I said, "When I got married," he shook his head {shakes his head}.

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<sup>31</sup> Market.

“Why?” he said, “In our region, in the Netherlands, we put the flag when someone graduates, because that’s a national holiday.” I said, “No, we put it when we get married,” He said, “Riza, even a fool can get married, shall we put the national flag when a fool gets married, does the whole nation get happy when the fool gets married?” He made me think, “National happiness,” he said, “Is when someone graduates, because that’s the day when an intellectual who will help is born.” And I told the old man, “We are coming in two weeks and raise the flag because your son graduated, because that’s when the nation is happy.”

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you go back to teaching after the war?

**Riza Krasniqi:** No, because I had some other plans and realized other...teaching didn’t provide me with some...to help the children’s education. It was a bit problematic to...because the greatest problem in life is the balancing of short-term interest and the long-term one. We are often deceived by the short-term interest. Short-term interest is let’s say, to sleep, to rest, to say it’s ok because I will finish my homework tomorrow, there’s time for it. The short-term interest has often destroyed our long-term one even in the national issue. It’s good to manage a balance between these two interests. But truly, our long-term interest, the greatest long-term interest of all of us is to invest in our state. Because I say that if our children go abroad, we are to be blamed, not them. If we don’t establish a state which they will love, we are to be blamed, not them.

Because to me it was a misfortune, or...yes it is a misfortune, in these last years, most of the weddings or *kanagjegj*<sup>32</sup> we are invited to, the boy lives here and the girl abroad or vice-versa. It’s a misfortune when one student of mine, five-six years ago, asks me, “Professor, is it better to live in Germany or in Switzerland?” I said, “Why?” She says, “Because I have two offers to get married, one of them is in Germany and the other in Switzerland, with documents, they offered me.” I said, “What about the boys, which one of them is better? Do you look at the boy, is the one from Germany better?” “Professor,” she said, “I don’t know any of them, but I am asking you where is it better to live?”

You know, we have arrived to a point that to me is a national misfortune, marriages for documents. I will marry someone from Germany because they have the documents. Now, most of the weddings I went to last year, in Peja, are like this. It’s a misfortune when an old man in Strelc invites you for dinner and celebrates because his only son has received the German documents, he got married to a girl from Germany. What does the old man celebrate? His loneliness and the lost son? But I don’t blame the boy, I don’t blame the youth. We are to be blamed, my generation, if we don’t establish a Kosovo which our children will love as much as they should and the way they should. This is our greatest interest and our long-term interest which we have to work on.

**Jeta Rexha:** Mister Riza, can I ask you something...

**Riza Krasniqi:** Ask as much as you want, don’t feel bad (smiles).

**Jeta Rexha:** When you spoke to us a little about your grandfather Cen Avdyli, who has a song [written about him], how is it?

**Riza Krasniqi :** Does it seem personal?

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<sup>32</sup> Henna Night, a bridal shower, the ceremony held one day before the wedding that generally takes place in the home of the bride and among women.



**Jeta Rexha:** Well, that's actually the idea. If you want.

**Riza Krasniqi:** No, I say it with pride, because I am proud of him.

**Jeta Rexha:** I think it would complete it a bit.

**Riza Krasniqi:** Alright, alright, I don't want to do the unscrupulous promotion of myself.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, it's the family education and your tradition that was followed generation after generation. It's what we need now.

**Riza Krasniqi:** I told you that my father, always in the Božić night, gathered us, and the topic was how his father was killed. Ahmet Riza was my father, which means that in the village they called them based on their parents. I carry the name of my grandfather.

Our nation always loved the brave ones, and they sang a song to him. The song of Cen Avdyli, if you search for it in the internet today, it's clicked pretty much, the Vëllazërit Qetaj sing it, there are a few versions of it. But, an old man, I mean when one wants to fight, they find the way. My father always gathered us in the night of Božić, he raised us with this...the family history was mentioned in each Božić night, how Serbs destroyed my father's future. That is why in my family we never said good things about Serbs, because they destroyed my family's future, and left my father alone when he was only three months old. I told you, my father died without knowing what father, mother, brother, sister and family is. We were all he had. This is...the environment my family and I were raised in.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you tell this story to your children, have you followed it?

**Riza Krasniqi:** Yes, even though the children now...I know, in the beginning, when they were little, the CD came out and I played it many times with pride. My daughter who was seven years old, six years and a half, the second one said, "Father, change it." I said, "Why? It's the song of your grandfather." She said, "Let Genta sing it father." I said, "But Genta doesn't sing this kind of songs" (smiles). She said, "Well, if Genta doesn't sing it, then..." (smiles), this is it. You know, it's normal that...the family is holy in every international culture, the family is the cell. The importance of the family, the importance of the education is the first...it's that great that...but, every time is changing a bit, they say, "Walk with time's step." I am telling you that today to me my children are more important, if they study, because I publicly said it and will say it again, if for example, the success is there and children are here {shows with his hands}, the only way is the book. The only way to achieve success is through knowledge.

No matter that in some certain moments, it seems a difficult road...no matter that it seems that some cheater is achieving success by cheating on the other side. No matter some moments of demotivation, "This cheater who never knew anything in their own life achieved so much by cheating." I want to believe and I believe that knowledge is the only way in life, the only way to success. That is why even today I try to teach my children that they will be successful through knowledge. Other ways can bring you to a momentary wealth, but it's not a way to success.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you have something to add, something that would complete the story?

**Riza Krasniqi:** An appeal to my generation, to work for this youth. We have an excellent youth that no one else in the world has. Sometimes with some heavy actions, we succeed in destroying their future. So, let's think a bit further, let's think about a state where our youth would find themselves. Let's not

think about how to make our youth go to Germany or America. But let's try our best to create that Germany as much as we can within Kosovo, this would be my message.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us something about Nurie Zekaj, since she was your student?

**Riza Krasniqi:** I talk about Nurie with pleasure, because she was my student in Peja at that time, and she was one of the best students. Beside being a good student in school, Nurie had some other virtues which were rare at that time. Nurie is one of the first who was engaged in writing and she has a book of poems which was published after her death. She was engaged in the national issues and had a close relation to Hava Shala, I think she was her paternal aunt's daughter. She also was in the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation from the first day. But unfortunately her days were cut very early because she died in a suspicious death during one trip with a friend of hers from Macedonia who was an activist too, she died in a traffic accident which is very suspicious for that time. At that time, we didn't have the means to prove that it was caused by the State Security more than by human mistake. But I always remembered Nurie with respect and I always will. She came from a very honest family from Raushiq, a family that was constantly engaged in the national issue. She was in the group as I mentioned, during the reconciliations, in the group of girls. Each time we gave up in men's *odë*, they would continue their work for reconciliation.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did her accident happen?

**Riza Krasniqi:** In 1990.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** After the reconciliations or during?

**Riza Krasniqi:** No, it happened during.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was it part of political pressure or persecution? I mean, was there pressure on the girls who were engaged in reconciliation?

**Riza Krasniqi:** We constantly had pressure from State Security, but there were different pressures. After some time, they were smart, and had they killed someone at that time, it would have a counter effect. I told you the case when we went to one, they told him, "We will give you the weapon." We constantly had pressure.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were they followed?

**Riza Krasniqi:** But if it wasn't for those pressures, the Movement for Blood Feud Reconciliations wouldn't have happened. It was exactly those pressures that brought us to the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliations.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Any other comment, anything you remember related to Nurie, her writings?

**Riza Krasniqi:** As every young poet, she had pleasure when she wrote something, and couldn't wait to...maybe because I was closer in character, "Professor, how does it look, how...?" There was an extraordinary pleasure in her face when she wrote three lines. And of course, as a professor, it's your obligation to motivate her. I'd say, "Bravo Nurie, bravo. You're a young poet..." "Only a poet?" "No, you will achieve much more in life." And I honestly believed she would achieve much more in life, but great misfortunes happen, what can we do... they are part of life.

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