**Oral History** Kosovo

# INTERVIEW WITH LUMTURIJE (LUMKA) KRASNIQI

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Duration: 143 minutes

Present:

1. Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi (Speaker)
2. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
3. Rexhep Myftari (Interviewer/Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*
*() – emotional communication*
*{} – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*
*[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*
*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

**Part One**

**Rexhep Myftari**: Please tell us your name?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: My name is Lumturije Krasniqi, but everyone knows me as Lumka Krasniqi. I was born on August 13, 1964 in Peja. My childhood is not as ordinary as the childhood of the children of the time I was born, because I went through some stages, some difficulties, that happened in my family at that time, at the time when I was born. First I went to the elementary school of a small village, the village of Jabllanicë e Vogël, in the Klina of Peja, while from the second year until eighth grade I went to the elementary school 8 Marsi in Peja. I told you that I finished first grade in Jabllanicë and I want to tell you why I finished the first grade in Jabllanicë.

In 1964, when I was born, my father was a former political prisoner… he was arrested due to political reasons of course for… being against the regime back then. And like this, since my father returned in 1968, sorry in 1969, he couldn't manage to find a job as… anywhere else, as the teacher that he used to be before he was arrested. So, he was offered the opportunity to work in a village near Peja, Jabllanicë e Vogël, in the school which was called back then Mosa Pijada, so in order to keep us close, since we were… we had missed our father for a couple of years when he was in prison, he took us and we went to live in the village of Jabllanicë where my father was working.

So, I was five years old at that time, and I wanted to go to school since in Peja, where my grandmother and my grandfather lived, or where our house was, all of my friends from my generation were going to school, even though they were a little older than I, six years, seven years [older], but I wanted to go to school just like them. So, my father took me and registered me in the first grade just in order for me to try it and to get rid of the urge to go to school, so he registered me in the first grade in Jabllanicë, in the school where he taught. So, he fortunately took me as well and I was successful, I passed the first and the second grade of the elementary school then I returned to Peja, the whole family returned to Peja while my father continued to work, but he travelled from Peja to Jabllanicë everyday until he retired, he worked in the same place for 40 years.

Now, I want to relate to my family a little. My family comes from… it is a family which in Kosovo we call

a *muhaxherë*[1] family. My grandfather was born in Kosovo, but my grand grandfather and his family were born in the surroundings of Leskovc, a region that back then was inhabited by Albanians. I mean, those were places where they lived, and due to the Serbian repression and genocide of 1878, right after the League of Prizren,[2] the onrush and the genocide, that is my family, the first that was forced to return to Kosovo, actually, to return to Albania. So, my family's calvary from Albania to Kosovo lasted for a long time.

Albania until… my family, my father, my grandmother, my grandfather and my paternal aunt lived there until after the Second World War. My father was born there as well as my paternal aunt. My father was born in 1934 in Durrës. They returned right after the war and he continued, my father continued schooling… they returned from Durrës to Peja, first to the village of Vitomericë which is near Peja, then after a very short time they moved to Peja. So, since then, until the day he died… my family still lives in the same place.

My father has finished… he was a teacher as a profession, he was a teacher at that time, a respected teacher, a teacher who contributed a lot to the national cause, to the education cause… and my father was arrested in 1964, he was arrested by the police, I mean by the occupier, he was arrested by the back then ruling power. As a member of the group *Lëvizja për Bashkimin e Shqiptarëve* [The Movement for the Unity of Albanians], of which Adem Demaçi was also a member, but my father was in the group of Peja together with Ramadan Shala, Sylë Shala, Remzi Baloku, Ahmet Zeka, Ejup Kastrati. But let me mention here one specific thing that is very important to me. I was born in August '64, while my father was arrested in June of the same year, when my mother was still pregnant, I mean I wasn't born yet, so I am the fifth child of the family. I mean, I have three brothers, there are three brothers and two sisters. I have another brother who was born after my father returned from prison, my little brother, but I wasn't born yet at that time.

And so, my mother had a very difficult life. On one side with four children, then I was born, on the other side she had pressure, she was oppressed, she had psychological pressure, then to be honest also economic pressure, because none of us could work at that time. My grandfather and my grandmother were still alive, but they were too old, they were too tired, then I was born. But what is very, very specific of this, is that I was born on the exact day when my father was judged. I mean, when the last session took place and the verdict was announced, that was the day I was born, so, two-three sessions before, the way they are done, the public sessions, the public judging. My mother didn't go that day because I was born, I mean, I was born at home, not at the hospital.

My grandmother and my grandfather went, they went to the court hearing, and my father saw them from his spot, he saw that my mother was missing in the session and just blinked his eye, my grandmother told him what it was about, my grandmother told him like this {points to the stomach}

[1] *Muhaxhir* and *Muhaxher*, plural: *Muhaxhirë and Muhaxherë*, Muslim refugees. The term is borrowed from Ottoman Turkish: *muhacir,* and derived from the Arabic *muhajir*. In this context, it refers to Ottoman Muslims who migrated to Kosovo, often following expulsions, from other parts of the Empire.

[2] The 1878 Albanian Alliance that fought against border changes decided at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.

meaning that she gave birth and he asked her about the gender of the child because he didn't know, and my grandmother just told him like this {touches her ear}, meaning that it was a girl, and I was the second [girl]. My father always says, "I was very happy." And that is why my name is Lumturije [Happiness]. And who gave me the name Lumturije? After the session, after my father was sentenced and everything else, Mustafë Radoniqi, who is now a well known attorney in Kosovo and an activist for human rights and defense of freedoms, he was our neighbor, he was young, at that time he was a student, and he went to my father before they took him away after the hearing, he said, "Mehmet, can I name your daughter?" He said, "Of course!" He said, "I want to name her Lumturije since we are happy today." So, I have been called Lumturije since then.

I remember, I remember then after some time the visits of my father when… these are the impressions I got from the prison of Niš. The first and very unforgettable memory, I was almost four years at that time when… I remember it very well, it's a fresh memory when we went to visit my father. Back then, at that time, my mother was making crafts in order to buy us clothes, because my mother and my father always wanted us to be well dressed when we went to visit our father, to be very proud in order for the police of the prison not to say, "Poor them, look how they have become," and feel pity [for us]. So, I was very beautifully dressed and I remember I was wearing some white leggings and when I saw my father from a distance, when they allowed us to enter the yard, my father was sitting on a chair, sitting there and waiting for us, when I saw him I was very happy and started running. And I fell while running and tore my leggings which I was very happy to finally have been able to wear, I tore them, I didn't feel bad for my injured knee but for the leggings. So, that is what I remember very well, I will never forget that memory, one of the memories while visiting my father.

**Rexhep Myftari**: Will you tell us what was the reason behind your father's detention and how did it affect your youth?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: My father was sentenced, his was sentenced, as they called it, as counter revolutionary. He was part of the group that was called *Grupi për Çlirimin dhe Bashkimin e Shqiptarëve* [The Group for the Liberation and Unity of Albanians], I mean, for political reasons, for nationalist political reasons, and this affected our family to be nationally inspired, nationally educated and to always have [the idea] that we were born and we will die for the national cause.

**Rexhep Myftari**: Tell us about your life, your life in Peja and how did your father's detention affect it?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: My life was not much… it was difficult even during my childhood, as I told you earlier. But this affected it, my father's arrest affected the mentality of some people at that time, they perceived us as people who were not so good, were not loyal to the ruling power of that time. They even blamed us, the children. We didn't even know what it all was about at that time, what was happening in the family, what was happening in the state, why our father was in prison, we didn't know, we only knew that our father was not at home, that was it, and that he was in prison. This affected us, for example, it was a burden and this fact hurt us sometimes.

When we went out to play in the *lagje,*[3] in the *lagje* with our friends, with other children of the *lagje*, when we went out, the families of those children, their fathers, mothers, brothers or older sisters would take their children home and say, "Don't play with them, because they are the children of spies." So, we were hurt, because we didn't even know what a spy was. At that time we would go and tell our grandmother, "Why are we the children of the spies?" And our grandfather would say, "You will realize it when you grow up. You will find out and be proud, you will be proud of why your father is in prison, the time will come."

And at school, later at school, later at the elementary school 8 Marsi, where I continued my second grade until third grade we had… then the mentality of teachers, of the people, started getting better, people started being aware of the national cause, the awareness started growing, a level started….And later, I mean later, when I was in school, my teachers gave me extraordinary support, teachers loved me, they kept us close to themselves. I remember my Music teacher, peace be upon her, my Music teacher, Shyqerie Imeri, she was a very good teacher and loved the nation, even though she was only a Music teacher. I remember, even our mother said, because she came to visit us while our father was in prison, "She came to my house and took care of the children. Do you need anything?" Because my older brothers were going to the school where she taught and she told us how that teacher took care of us while our father was in prison.

So, this affected us very positively on one side, but it charged us as children psychologically. But we started getting aware as we grew up and we were very inspired by the national cause. So, I remember it well when my father returned from prison, it was May, I don't remember the month [day], but I know that he returned in May and I only remember it when he returned. We went to wait for him in the train station at that time, because when Ranković[4] fell, Tito allegedly gave amnesty to all the political prisoners, he gave amnesty so my father and his group were released in May, some of them were released two days earlier or two days later. But my father was released with the Peja group, he was released at the same time. And I remember their very grand welcome at the train station, people went there with music, with instruments, with… was it a wedding? I remember it as if it was today.

And then we had one room, which was very quickly built d by my grandfather, because you know, just like the rooms where men were welcomed, just like a men's *oda*[5] among Albanians at that time, but in the city. People came to visit my father, to see him and congratulate him. I remember my father always held me on his lap, all time long. I mean, that is the moment, that time is my inspiration, my national inspiration. Because I didn't know why these people were coming, I had just started getting used to that circle of people. And later my father's friends came, most of them were former prisoners who were together with my father, they usually came to Jabllanicë where we were living in that house, they

[3] *Lagje* in this context means just neighborhood, but more specifically, in the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor.

[4] 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.

[5] Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

gathered there after the prison, they always gathered there. There I met many people that I still remember, maybe two of them I had the chance to meet later as well, but the others not. For example, Hyrije Hana, Enver Tali, Kadri Kusari, they all came, Ahmet Zeka, Seladin Daci, Ramadan Shala, they always came to our place and met there where they organized parties {shows with hands}, they only organized parties, dinners, they hung out, drank, talked. And I have some very beautiful childhood memories from there, because all of them, whenever they saw me they would say, "Look at you, how you have grown. How fast the time flew from when we were imprisoned and sentenced."

Then, when I started… my inspiration for example came at home from my father when, I know that at home we didn't have a luxurious life, house, furniture, we didn't have it, but our father whatever he had… the only one, the only thing my father did was buying books at the time after prison. And he established a library, a not so small library but a very big family library, we had a room, I remember it as if it was today, there was a room full of books. At that time my father instead than buying, for example… my mother told him, "Husband, buy a sofa or something." He would say, "They can be bought," he would take loans and buy books. I remember it as if it was today when books came with minivans when my father bought them, my father took loans.

And so he was very happy when everybody… it became like a library, a city library, a university library, of the close family, the wider family in fact. Children and youth would come and take books, read and then return them, it became like a public library. So, since then I like to read a lot, for example I read Sterjo Spasse[6] while still in fourth grade, always Sterjo Spasse. Then when Jakov Xoxa[7] had its first publication in Kosovo, when it was published, it was published by *Rilindja*,[8] I remember I was in seventh grade. Not only did our father force us to read them, but he also inspired us how we should read, he would buy them and say, "You should read this now." So we read Jakov Xoxa, I read Jakov Xoxa when I was in seventh grade, while I had to read Ali Pashë Tepelena[9] in seventh grade because I had to know history.

Since my father was also an historian and he forced us to read more history, as much as possible and he said, "A nation that doesn't know its history has no future. So, learn history and this way your future will be brighter." From this and… so, I was inspired within my family. When I came back from school we had nothing at home and people would say, "If you want to go to Albania, go to *muhaxherë*'s," because they called us *muhaxherë*, "Go to *muhaxherë*'s because that is where you will feel as if you are in Albania," because there were flags everywhere, everything was Albanian inspired, music, tapes, everything, the Albanian television, that is how we were inspired all the time.

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[6] Sterjo Spasse (1914-1989) Albanian writer.
[7] Jakov Xoxa (1923-1979) Albanian writer.
[8] *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.
[9] Ali Pasha (1740-1822) ,variously referred to as of Tepelena or of Janina/Yannina/Ioannina, *Aslan*, "the Lion", or the Lion of Yannina, was an Ottoman Albanian ruler who served as an Ottoman pasha of the western part of Rumelia, the Ottoman Empire's European territory, which was referred to as the Pashalik of Yanina. His court was in Ioannina, and the territory he governed incorporated most of Epirus and the western parts of Thessaly and Greek Macedonia in Northern Greece.\\

In… during high school, when I was in the second year, in 1981, that is when the first demonstrations took place, it is already known, it's been 36 years since then. And I remember my school as if it was today, I was in the second year of the Technical High School in Peja, and we found out from the radio on March 11, we heard the news that some demonstrations took place but we still didn't know what they were about, what kind of demonstrations were they. And we had an Albanian Language teacher, he fortunately was also my class monitor, Xhavit Aliçkaj, now deceased. Besides my father, he was my second inspirational figure for the national cause and he came and told some of my friends who were there, we were more or less distinguished nationally, we were good students, but also more distinguished nationally and he came and told us, "Have you heard about the demonstrations?" We said, "Yes we have heard, but what are they, what for?" "How, what for?" He told us, "Like this, like this…"

Then, on March 26 when other demonstrations took place in Pristina, they were organized in Peja the next day so… at that time I was young and with some of my classmates, with Zelfije Gashi, we organized some friends and wore as many layers as we could and we went to the demonstration in '81. So, the next day, on March 31 we went to Pristina in….The big [demonstration] took place on April 1. So, I was injured in Pristina in the demonstration, I had cut my hand and we returned. I was in Pristina with Zelfije Gashi, we went there with the thought that we would do something, to participate in the demonstrations but we didn't do anything, we only participated in them. I was injured a little and nothing, we returned, nobody knew anything about it.

Then during, during… so I continued high school, I finished it in Peja and I wanted to study in Pristina. Actually, my dream was to study in Zagreb, I dreamed of studying Industrial Psychology. And one day my father, also because he had no chances to send me to Zagreb he said, "Look, my daughter," he said, "The only chance you have to study is, I would suggest you the Faculty of Economy in Pristina, we need economy, each institution, each country, everybody with a background in economics is wanted everywhere in the world, so enroll in Economy." And I listened to my father, I enrolled in the Faculty of Economy and to be honest I am very thankful to my father for it, because I really found myself there.

I enrolled, I mean in '82, '83, I enrolled in the Faculty of Economics with big difficulties, with big difficulties because I was the daughter of a former political prisoner, and there was no room for us there because we were like the "virus" of the youth, But I had to pass the qualifying exam in order to enroll, I had to have Fives[10] and to pass the exam. If I had all Fives at that time, then would I be able to enroll, right? I fortunately passed the qualifying exam, so they accepted me. They fortunately accepted me as a regular student in the Faculty of Economics. But the first difficulty I faced during my studies was the settling in the student dormitory. I went, I applied to be in the dormitory in the first year, when I went to see whether there was my name on the list of the accepted ones, of course it wasn't.

And then I went, there was the League of Students, where you had to go and get updated about everything, I went there to ask why I wasn't given a place in the dormitory even though I was a good student, I fulfilled the criteria, they said, "We have received a prohibition, in fact a reference from Peja,

[10]Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0).

from the *Lidhja Komuniste e Rinisë së Pejës* [The Youth Communist League of Peja] that you are not allowed to live in the dormitory together with other students because you are the daughter of *blah blah blah* this and that." "Okay." Then, what did I do? I said, "What should I do now?" He said, "You should go to Peja and ask for a paper, you should ask them for a paper then take that paper and come apply to take a place in the dormitory."

I took the bus to Peja on the same day and I went to the Communist League there, to the Central Committee in Peja. I remember it as if it was today, I don't want to give his name, I asked for a meeting with one of the Committee secretaries, he received me and I said, "Why like this and that?" He said, "How dare you," he said, "come here and ask for it?" This is exactly what he said, "How do you dare come here to ask for permission to live… it's good that we accepted you in the faculty, we allowed you to get education, because you don't even deserve that." Then, I went out but fortunately one of my friends who was studying had taken a room in the dormitory. So I illegally lived with her at that time, I lived with her, but illegally, not according to rules. So I continued in the same way every year until I finished university.

I mean, as the child of such a father, a former political prisoner, an education veteran, an intellectual who dedicated his whole life to the national cause, their children were discriminated. I mean, I as a child, three of my brothers who were older had finished their school but had no permission to work, they were not employed. My sister enrolled in the Faculty of English Language but without a permission to regular education, a regular student, but as a student by correspondence, she was still studying English and at the same time the commercial *shkolla e lartë*,[11] but we were discriminated when it came to being employed… I was the first of us who got employed in 1989, in a public company, but with its headquarters in Skopje, Macedonia. They moved to Klina and I applied there and I was accepted as an accountant in the same company until the time it was closed when [the Milošević regime took] violent measures. Then the Albanian companies were closed no matter where they were, they were closed and we were fired at that time so I continued working privately as an accountant. Then, I started working in a construction company as the head accountant so it continued, I worked a lot professionally, but without ever being detached from the national cause, my political activity.

**Part Two**

Now I will return to '89 and '90, when my great activity began, my great activity in the national movement, in the movement for the national cause in Kosovo. In '89 the *Lidhja Demokratike*[12] was already established, a great movement began, those people had already started to… I mean after the miners, after the miners's lockdown, and in '87-'88 we started to organize in Peja, the youth who knew

[11] Vocational school.

[12] *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.

each other. For example I knew, [I knew] the father of one, the mother of another, [we chose] the families we knew were trustworthy and we started to organize, gather and function in that way, illegally.

So, in '89 I meet Angjelina, Angjelina Krasniqi, Rehat Nurboja, Jahja Lluka. I meet them and we start to organize. First the Parliamentary Party[13] was established. I wasn't part of it, but I was an activist of it. I worked in every party, in every activity where there was a need, they invited, they invited me to help, I was very active in every activity. So, after the '90's, I want to mention it when the murders began, the demonstrations in the early '90's, the demonstrations in Kosovo, the first big demonstrations at that time, when Fatmir Ukaj was killed in Peja. This is the first event that is linked to all my activity of that time until today, until before the war.

Fatmir Uka was killed in the demonstrations of 1990, I mean he was the first victim in Kosovo. At the same time he was the son of my maternal uncle. He was young, I was in the demonstrations that day. He got killed. We were all spread, all the activists, some of us on one side and the others on the other side, and he got killed. I didn't know, I didn't know whether he got killed, "One person was killed, one person was killed, killed," I don't know and now we are leaving. We were all spread, "Who is he?" When I went to the hospital to see who is the one who was killed, I found out that… I saw my mother there, I saw my brother, the children of my maternal uncle, "Who was killed?" "Fatmir!" That was the breaking point, the breaking point, but at the same time [it gave me] the will and a kind of… an activation of feelings, I mean, for more work, a bigger activity, for the liberation from Yugoslavia as soon as possible, against the back then Serbia.

So, I met in the funeral of Fatmir Uka… the funeral took place, one of the greatest funeral, no greater funeral than that can be remembered. I was there, it was not that I was the organizer because the funeral, the killing itself made the whole nation aware. There were people from all around Kosovo at that funeral. No funeral like that is remembered, we made a kind of, how to say, we turned Fatmir's funeral into a rally. And then, I met the late Serbeze Vokshi there, as well as Flamur Gashi. We met at Fatmir's funeral, then I met Vera, Vera Kolgjera, I already knew Angjelina Krasniqi, and then we met there and became friends. So, Ali Hyskukaj, Qamil Daci and the others were killed at the same time…

I mean, at the time of the killings of our youth or demonstrations… everybody who went out in the streets would be killed at that time. The news was spread that… it was broadcasted on TV that Albanians are killing each-other, so Fatmir Ukaj was killed, he was in feuds and was killed by the perpetrator, he was killed, he wasn't killed by the police but by the perpetrator. In fact, Fatmir Uka's family, I mean, his father, his grandfather, the paternal uncle of his father was killed, I mean, they had been in a feud from for years, but that feud was passive, they never killed anyone and never forgave, it was not like that, but they made it look like Albanians were killing each other.

So, during the funeral of, I don't know, I don't remember, we went to express our condolences, Serbez and I, I met Serbez and she said, "People have started some blood feuds reconciliations." Serbez was

[13] The Parliamentary Party of Kosovo was a social-liberal political party founded in 1990 out of the Kosovo Youth Parliament by Veton Surroi. In 2004, it became part of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK).

among those, she had a wound in her soul, she [her family] was in a feud with some other family, so she was afraid that something could happen to her family as well. And she told me, she told me that the first reconciliation movements have started, people like this, like that, and I took it like something… I accepted it as a very good cause, but didn't think that I would be part of that group, that movement, because I thought it was a too big of an honor for me to be there.

But one day Riza Krasniqi, who was also my neighbor, we used to live in the same *lagje* with Riza, but we were also… he knew that I was an activist and I came from a good family and one day he said, "Lumka, like this, like that, a Council for Blood Feuds Reconciliations is established," he said, "It would be an honor for us to have you there, because we need people to help us." He said, "What do you say?" I said, "Your invitation is an honor to me." So, from that day, Serbez and I were at the same group, we were working in Peja, I mean, we prepared the cases, we found cases. Riza on the other side, with his students, because he was a professor, Serbez and I researched people all the time, we researched the cases, I worked in Klina and I researched through people in order to find cases, where murders were, where…

So, during the whole week we would go and finalize, for example, the reconciliation case in one… for example, on Sundays or Saturdays, when the group of reconcilers would come, the professors and those from Pristina or people who were very famous or honorable, the case was reconciled or not, but mainly reconciled. So, this was one of my activities, which even today, is a work that was an honor to me and I feel very happy because I feel like I was part of something that… of something very human, not only nationally but also at the human level, because the killings among people were more or less stopped, for example not only two families, but it was a chain of killings. One family at one time, today, the other day they [would kill] them, so I am very proud to have been part of that Council.

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you tell us about any specific case of blood feuds reconciliation?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, there are cases, I have been to many cases, but a specific case which I could mention for example, I remember it very well and I feel very proud for contributing in that reconciliation, it is the case of my maternal uncles. The paternal uncle of my mother had been murdered long time ago, as I mentioned earlier, the paternal uncle of Fatmir Uka had been murdered and left behind only one son. He had been murdered in the same village, because my mother's family come from the village of Lumbardh in Peja. They were killed there, while working in the fields just like it usually happened. And that blood wasn't avenged because he had only left one son behind, he was a *hasret*[14] boy, the other family tried to convince him that he shouldn't avenge the blood and so on. But when he grew up, he wanted to avenge his father's blood, but he got married with time, he had children and somehow that feud faded.

Can we stop here? Stop it here because…(starts crying)… from here? the interview is stopped?

*[The video interview was cut to lend some privacy to the speaker. The interview resumes with a question*

[14] Turkish: *hasret*, means longing, culturally yearning in the Albanian families was translated as longing for a son. Traditionally, the only male child in the family is called *hasret*.

*posed by the interviewer]*

**Rexhep Myftari**: Start from… can you tell us about your family, how was your life in the reconciliation of the blood within your family?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, in my family, I mean in the family of my maternal uncles, in my mother's family. The paternal uncle of my mother was killed and so that blood wasn't forgiven in time and it continued through generations, but it was neither forgiven nor avenged. So, during reconciliations, during the time of reconciliations, people from my family, my mother came to me and said, "Look, my daughter, since you are part of that Council, try to gather those men somehow, and do it. Reconcile them, because there is one blood in my family as well. Don't leave us with a wound." And I went to talk to my maternal uncle, I mean, [I called him ] uncle, he was the son of my mother's paternal uncle whose father had been murdered.[15] I said that, "Uncle Haxhi, I, you know that I am part of the Council for Blood Feuds Reconciliation and I am here to talk to you because we want to come here on Sunday with all the others, with professor Anton Çetta[16] and the others to ask you to forgive the blood." And he hesitated and said, "No, I don't forgive the blood because they will say that I am an only son, I am weak and so on," I said, "But uncle, you haven't avenged that blood for so many time now and now you should forgive it for the sake of the national cause, for the sake of Kosovo cause, for the sake of this movement, you should reconcile, you should forgive the blood." And he hesitated and didn't even want to talk about it.

In the meantime, his sons, he had four sons, they always pushed me, "Don't leave this thing undone, don't drag it, don't let this thing undone." And one day I notified his family, I notified the Council for Reconciliation that you should come here on Saturday. They knew that there was one blood in the family of my maternal uncles and we set Sunday as the day to go to the family of my maternal uncles for reconciliation. We went there and they had prepared, in fact my maternal uncle had not, but his family was prepared to welcome us in their big room. They had adjusted their living room very beautifully, also had invited people from the *lagje,* because it was a great honor for them to have Anton Çetta, Ramiz Kelmendi,[17] the Council for Reconciliations, Mark Krasniqi,[18] Azem Shkreli,[19] Esat Stavileci,[20] Bajram Kelmendi,[21] to have them in their family, it was a big honor for everyone to have

[15] As per custom, the elderly are addressed with respect, the speaker calls her first cousin, the son of the uncle, uncle, he must have been older than the speaker.
[16] Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.
[17] Ramiz Kelmendi ( 1930-2017), a journalist and writer, also leader of Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement
[18] Mark Krasniqi (1920-2015), ethnographer and writer.
[19] Azem Shkreli (1938-1997), Albanian author.
[20] Esat Stavileci (1942-2015), Albanian author.
[21] Bajram Kelmendi (1937-1999) was a lawyer and human rights activist. He filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

them in their house, it was an honor.

And the whole *lagje* was out when we went, such a satisfaction to see them like that. They were out to see who was coming, the *krushqi*[22] of Reconciliations. So we went, we entered the house, my father was there as well and I told my father, "Go there and stay because however you will help us a little." When we went there, my maternal uncle was shocked, there was nothing he could do because we already entered his house, when you enter the house of an Albanian you enter their *besa*.[23] We sat, then Ramiz Kelmendi, I remember it as if it was today, said, "Haxhi Gashi, you know what we aim with our visit." He said, he bowed his head and said, "Yes" {bowes her head}. He said, "See what we are here for?" He said, "Let me tell you one thing. You know that according to the *Kanun*,[24] to the *Kanun*," he said, "The nephew shoots for his maternal uncle." He said, "Yes," he said, "But the nephew also," he said, "forgives for his maternal uncle." He bowed his head and said, "Yes." He said, "And in this case, no matter whether you forgive or not," he said, "your niece is with us, she is a *krushkë*[25] of Reconciliation." He said, "We are not asking you to forgive or not forgive the blood, but we are asking that the blood, if you don't forgive it yourself, then your niece will." He said, without any hesitation and with pride, he said, "No," he said, "This… I will let my niece forgive the blood, she can decide and forgive the blood." Then I stood up and forgave the blood of my maternal uncle.

So, I, as a member of the Council for Reconciliation, forgave the blood. So, it was a great happiness, it was reconciled. Then, Serbez, Flamur, Riza and I went to Lumbardh to send the perpetrators the word that they were reconciled. They had no idea that somebody went to reconcile them. We went and when we entered, it was night, "What happened?" We said, "Like this, like this, we are members of the Council for Blood Feuds Reconciliations and we are here to give you the news that you have been forgiven the blood." And he was shocked. I said, "I am the niece of Haxhi Gashi, I am here to forgive you the blood. At the same time we reconciled the blood with the Council for Reconciliations, with Ramiz Kelmendi, Mark Krasniqi." They were really happy. So, more or less I realized that I was a little drop of that happiness in the whole family of my maternal uncle, of course they were happy. Like this.

Then we continued to villages, to….I remember one case… that is a very terrible case, I want to connect that to my father, how… one mother's father in the Istog region had been killed and she didn't want to forgive the blood, her family yes, but she didn't want to forgive the blood, the case was terrible. Her name was Besa, but now she had given the word to her father, she had given the word to her father that she wouldn't forgive the blood, but would avenge it. So, the next day we went and she didn't forgive. When I returned home, I asked my father, "Father," I said, "I want to ask you something." My father said, "What?" I said, "One question," I said, "for example, what if someone killed you, " I said,

[22] *Krushqi*, escort group from the groom's family that come to fetch the bride.

[23] 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.

[24] *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 Shtjëfen Gjeçovi in 1910-1925.

[25] Female singular of *Krushqi*, escort group from the groom's family that come to fetch the bride.

"and you asked me to avenge your blood, and I promised you that I would do so, but now I am asked by the nation for the sake of the movement to forgive the blood which I had promised you that I would avenge, what would you say if I forgave it? Should I forgive it, or keep the promise I had given to you?" He said, "When it is about the national cause," he said, "you should never keep personal promises. Personal promises are broken when it comes to the national cause, everything." He said, "Not only me, but even if they killed your whole family, if the nation, the flag calls," he said, "you should not only forgive the blood, but give your life. So," he said, "this is my response, for the national cause, for the flag."

So, I was somehow touched, I thought of why that girl didn't want to forgive. The next week she had agreed, she had agreed to forgive it. Then, we went there two weeks later and she forgave the blood, but I remember the emotional trauma of that girl, I will never forget, that braid of hers, when she entered the room, we cried more than she did. Terrible, terrible!

There were many cases, there were wounds….Then we went… I remember one case, when Serbeze, Flamur and I went to Dubovë, we went with… a young boy had been killed. They had killed him and then we went to prepare them, to ask them to forgive the blood. To my surprise, his brothers knew us, I didn't know that they knew who we were, we were young, how to say, we didn't consider ourselves important, we are nobody, we only went there, we considered ourselves as carriers, how to say, we just went there to carry the word, the convince people, to send them the news, to somehow….When we went to Dubovë, they were two brothers and his sisters, the parents weren't there and they said, "We know why you are here. We know who you are, so there is no need to even talk to us, we are having coffee. Would you like tea?" So, we said, "No, we don't want tea, we will have coffee."

It was too late that day, that night. He said, "Next Sunday, whenever you want, just let us know when you will come, at what time, because the blood will be forgiven. We have decided that whoever knocks our door for this issue, if the great men come, we will forgive our brother's blood." And they forgave it very bravely that day when we went to Dubovë, I remember it as if it was today, Anton Çetta barely came with us, he only came when the cases were very difficult, but Mark Krasniqi was mainly with us in the Peja Region, as well as Esat Stavileci, Azem Shkreli, Ramiz Kelmendi and Bajram Kelmendi, among the great professors who did a great job. They did their job very bravely, and such an honor when we entered places, but also pride and pain, I mean there was pain as much as there was pride.

Then I remember, some feuds were reconciled, some time had passed, many feuds were already reconciled, many injuries, many injuries. And we went, then we split in groups, we divided in groups. I remember when the first Assembly was held, we organized an Assembly, the first Assembly for Blood Feuds Reconciliations of the Council for Blood Feuds Reconciliations took place. It took place in the village of Strellc, I remember it as if it was today. We had some disagreements with the groups, whether to organize it in Jabllanica or in the mosque of the village of Novosellë or Strellc, I remember it as if it was today. We decided to hold it at the Riza family's, actually Ramiz Kelmendi was very strict and once he decided something, nobody could change it. And he decided for it to be held in Strellc, at Nimon Alimusaj's house, professor Nimon Alimusaj was a very good human being, he was a great activist not only of the blood feuds reconciliations movement, but of the national cause as well. And

the first Assembly was held there. I had… I remember it as if it was today, I was the one who was in charge of the…

**Rexhep Myftar**i: Of the minutes?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Eh yes, I am sorry, the minutes, because I confuse the word in English, Albanian and Serbian (laughs), and I was in charge of the minutes that day. I remember it as if it was today, 800 feuds had been reconciled until that day, this I remember, that 800 feuds had been reconciled until that day. 800 feuds were reconciled on the day of the Assembly and it was organized by the village of Strellc, they had organized security for the Assembly, for the house, so well. When we went we couldn't, we didn't know where to enter from, the house was all surrounded by tractors, the house was barricaded. So, after it was done, because it happened secretly and it was done very quickly, once we returned, the police had gone to Nimon Alimusa's house and did, how to say… what's the word in Albanian *bre*[26] (laughs)… so… turn it off a little {talks to the cameraman}.

**Rexhep Myftari**: I can continue if you tell us about the case that happened at the professor's house, as a result of the fact that you were engaged, and he was involved…

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniq**i: Nothing there, just…

**Rexhep Myftari**: How do you remember it?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: I… after we left, after we left, we left in a very safe way, we returned, each one of us went to their houses, it was Sunday. The police had found out after we had already returned, but the police was wrongly notified that the Assembly for Blood Feuds Reconciliation was being held in the village of Novosellë, in the mosque of Novosellë and when they went there, there was fortunately nothing there, no Assembly, nothing. So, later they were notified by the spies of that time that the Assembly was being held in the village of Strellc, but at that time we had already finished the Assembly and had returned to our houses. Then, they had gone there, entered, looked around, they demolished the house, they… I don't know whether they had arrested anyone or not, I don't know I don't remember.

So, but I know that the next day the professor told us that, "My house is a total mess, but they haven't found anything." And he said that, "Nothing. Men came, I invited them for lunch, dinner, they came for lunch, we hung out the way people do in the *oda* in villages." So, I think there were no consequences, there were no consequences for the professor's family. And so, the reconcilers' caravan continued until May, when the Assembly for Blood Feuds Reconciliation took place in Verrat e Llukës. That is something that every Albanian must… I cannot make any exception, each one of those who were aware, who were old enough to understand something, that day was the best memory of those generations. A mobilization…

**Rexhep Myftari**: How did it come to the…?

[26] Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Reconciliation?

**Rexhep Myftari**: Before the reconciliation, the great day at Verrat e Llukës?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, we, when the first stage of blood feuds reconciliation began, there were reconciliations today in one village, the next day in another, then it expanded, big groups of reconcilers got established, various groups, because only one group couldn't handle it alone, for example one group of Anton Çetta, of professor Mark Krasniqi, one… in order to go to all those reconciliations. So, many groups were established in various provinces of Kosovo and in the meantime it became impossible to have reconciliations everyday, that is why it was decided to set a day in which an Assembly would be organized… an Assembly where all those feuds reconcile at once. Whoever wanted to forgive bloods could come there and do it. So, it was decided to hold it at Verrat e Llukës because that date and place were a symbol of reconciliation at the time of… at the time of Haxhi Zeka,[27] the time when Haxhi Zeka reconciled with his group, when there was the League of Peja.[28] At that time they reconciled feuds at Verrat e LLukës as well, I mean, the same reconciliations, not in such large numbers, but Verrat e Llukës and May 1 are a symbol of blood feuds reconciliation.

So, we decided to make it a symbol and organize, not I, but they had decided in the Council, I mean, the group of organizers, Flamur was among them and he notified us about every information, every action, Flamur and Riza, as well as professor Ramiz Kelmendi, notified us about everything. And we organized, we went there two days before, we organized the people, we set the place. Sali Cacaj was among the organizers who… the staging, he was in charge of such things and we gathered. Strangely, strangely… I don't know how people found out, I don't know, the whole country stood up, I think it's too much to say, I might exaggerate, one million, but they say that at least 500 thousand people were there that day, that is the minimum. We went, but that is where the solidarity of the nation comes to light, a solidarity that cannot even be seen during wartime, or I don't know for what other cause.

I remember it as if it was today, I hadn't taken my car that day, Serbez had her car and she came to pick me up with her car, because we were separated in groups, she picked me and Esat Stavileci, Azem Shkreli and Bajram Kelmendi with her car. They came and picked me up in Peja, so we were in the same group, we went to Verrat e Llukës. Oh my God, how beautiful, how beautiful! We could see people in the streets, people from the village were organized, they had prepared *flija*[29] on their own initiative, bread, they had, they had prepared donuts… they had taken water, they had also taken lemonade with their teapots. You had no other way but stop and grab a piece of pie on your way, a piece of *flija,* because otherwise they would feel offended… you honored them if you stopped and

[27] Haxhi Zeka (1832-1902) was an Albanian nationalist leader and member of the League of Peja, an alliance which in 1899 tried to negotiate autonomy for Albanians within the Ottoman Empire. In this process, a truce was declared among people involved in feuds in order to unite against the Ottomans.
[28] The League of Peja, an alliance which in 1899 tried to negotiate autonomy for Albanians within the Ottoman Empire. In this process, a truce was declared among people involved in feuds in order to unite against the Ottomans.
[29] A traditional dish in Albanian cuisine consisting of crepe-like layers cooked with cinders under a lid.

took a piece. Women were beautifully dressed in traditional clothes, you could see beauty in every door from Peja to Verrat e Llukës in the *lagje*, in the villages, that is where you could see that we were united, we were more or less united. We were united, not that much, but the blood feuds reconciliations united Albanians of Kosovo at that time more than anything else ever could, I don't know what other phenomena could unite Albanians at that time more than that.

Then, when we went there people started, the ones who were already on the list started coming to the stage in order to forgive the blood. Then other people started forgiving, the ones who were in feuds and hadn't forgiven until that time, they came to the stage themselves. And the line was so long that one would wait for the other in order to go up and forgive the blood to Anton Çetta. Around 60-70 bloods were forgiven that day, many bloods were forgiven that day, 66 or something, I don't know. Many bloods were forgiven, but there were consequences then. When we dispersed, all the reconcilers, people who were there, the dispersion had its consequences, but however those are easily forgotten, the consequences, the threats from the ruling power, the police, from… we overcame them. We reached our aim, bloods were forgiven without any incident, people returned, everybody to their own places and it had it echo. Then people somehow were in solidarity with each-other, they became brothers, they got more bound to each other. They got so bound that they would help each other financially as well as morally, however…

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you share with us some of your special memories that you had with your closest collaborators and the people with whom you led the Blood Feuds Reconciliation together?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: I remember one case, for example let me make an exception, we were in a village in the Peja region I guess and that was somewhere near Iligje. And we went there, we went by… we went to prepare the case during the week, they wouldn't forgive the blood and we decided to go on a Sunday and enter their house the way we would go every Sunday and ask them to forgive the blood. When we went there, the leader of the house, I mean the father of the victim, there was no way he would agree, "I will avenge my son's blood," and so he said. I remember Azem Shkreli, he had very strong words and very accurate, he sat and said, "But man, you would avenge your son's blood, but you would kill him only if you had a gun long from here to there?" I mean, if you haven't killed him until now, now you want to force your children to kill him. He said, "If you had a long gun from here to there, you would kill him," he said, "But you didn't kill him." He said, "But stand up, become a man," he said, "right now, and forgive the blood." He said, "Not to the perpetrator, but to us, forgive it to us, not to us, but to this youth, to the Kosovo youth, for the future of Kosovo, for the future of your children, for the future of the whole Albanian nation."

And he stood, he stood and saw that he… he realized that with that long gun of Azem Shkreli, he wouldn't kill him even with that, he stood up and hesitated, he hesitated and said, "*Paj,*[30] *bre,* man, I don't know what to say, but I forgive it!" He stood up and cried a little, and you know, that is the moment I remember, the gun of Azem Shkreli, that gun of Azem Shkreli, I remember the long gun of Azem Shkreli… I save it as a fresh memory that affected the forgiveness of blood. There were many

[30] *Paj,* colloquia Albanian: Well.

cases, yes, that we went to, but they really remain as memories. I recall them time after time, moments after moments.

But those, the professors, the collaborators, I mean the collaborators, they weren't my collaborators, they were people who reconciled, who led the caravan of reconciliations. Because if it wasn't for them, trust me, reconciliations would be more difficult, but they were great men, that it is a sin that for example no one has thought yet about building a statue of Anton Çetta… I've heard that there are requests to build him a statue, but they hesitated. Esat Stavileci was one, trust me he had very accurate words, a very civilized professor, he knew with… we say that Anton Çetta, Mark Krasniqi and the others sometimes spoke with *mesele*,[31] with *mesele* of *oda*, with *mesele* of villagers, with accurate *mesele* for the country. But Esat Stavileci, when he spoke, he affected the forgiveness in such a civilized way.

**Rexhep Myftari:** How do you remember the day at Verrat e Llukës? Can you describe it, talk to us about how it was on the way to there when men, women and children went to the streets to greet you, gave you food, how do you remember people when you went there? Were you with friends…?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: So, the greatest impression that I remember, I even remember the photograph of that day, I remember people with white *plis*,[32] I mean people who had come, it was mainly white. I mean, the reconciliation was full of white *plisa*, those who normally wore *plis* but there were also people who were wearing *plis* that day. I mean, only pride, whiteness, and pride, were seen there. I remember Anton Çetta was on the stage. I was with… Flamur, Serbez and I, inseparable, we were sitting on the ground, with our legs crossed, Sali Cacaj was the one who took photographs, organized. Then, I remember one woman, I remember one case when a woman stood up to forgive the blood of her husband. That impressed me a lot, because among Albanians the blood is forgiven, I mean, the blood of the husband is not forgiven but only the blood of the son, brother, paternal uncle, I mean the wife doesn't forgive her husband's blood.

But that day, the fact that she forgave the blood of her husband impressed us in such a way, why? Because her children were little. We only found out later that her children were little, very little, they had killed her husband, her brothers-in-law didn't want to forgive the blood and she came out publicly and forgave it in front of the whole nation of Kosovo, in front of the youth, she forgave the blood, she said to Anton, "I forgive the blood of my husband." Some people found it more folkloristic. But that blood was very honest and I mean, that forgiveness affected the children, she removed a life wound from her children. I mean, a burden, setting your children free from a burden is a very good gesture. I would do it too. They would say, "Why her husband's blood?" I would say, "I would do the same too. If somebody killed my husband and nobody forgave his blood, my children are little, the nation is asking for it, I forgive it. Why not?" So, that impressed me very much as a forgiveness of blood in that day, and the photograph, the photograph of the people that were gathered there, one could see nothing else but white, I mean white *plis.*

[31] Turkish: *mesele,* literally issue; also complex discourse that at times falls flat.
[32] Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

And, of course I remember those, I remember the police tanks which surrounded us, but as… we were surrounded, we saw them but we didn't want to notice them. I mean, they didn't impress us because something greater was happening, what they were doing didn't impress us at all, we were finishing our mission, our very great mission and the police had its own business, if something happens we simply finish it. But a little incident happened, they arrested some and I remember the bravery of professor Zekeria Cana,[33] that is something extraordinary that one can never forget. Whoever saw it and I think everybody saw it, most of the people who were near saw the bravery of Zekeria Cana when he went in front of the police tank and said, because they wanted to crash in, and he said, "Shoot, shoot!" And opened [his chest] like Mic Sokoli.[34] Then we called him Mic Sokoli.

He was very brave and excited at times and he found the right moment and didn't care, he opened [his chest], "Shoot," and he even said that in Serbian. Then the police saw that if they shot him, the crowd was very big and the situation would escalate, so they went back to their own places and we passed through. Then they arrested Zekeria Cana that day, but they released him the same day. Then, after the blood feuds reconciliation was done… this is the best, after blood feuds reconciliations, it was done and we went. Trust me, people from the village would come, because we were close, we were the Council for Reconciliation, all of us, we were sitting in our own circle at the front, we were sitting on the ground. And the people from the village came and invited us for lunch, then from there we went to lunches, to *oda*, not for the sake of lunch but in order to honor their *oda*, to enter them. So, professors got separated; some of them went to one *oda* while the others to another one.

We happened to be in one *oda* there, I even have a photograph, professor Azem Shkreli, Serbez and I. We stopped by a village after Verrat e Llukës to a family who was… he had contributed to blood feuds reconciliations as well, and he invited me to go to his family for lunch, we went and I remember one case, the… generosity of Albanians was shown very much that day, I mean, first, generosity because bloods were reconciled, many bloods were reconciled, people forgave their bloods, and bravery, they bravely forgave bloods that day. The generosity and greatness of those people who came from all around Kosovo, they came to participate in the blood feuds reconciliations, I mean to participate in that reconciliation at Verrat e Llukës which was something phenomenal, it had a great echo. So, it affected the raising of the national awareness and of course we got aware.

From that day on the blood feuds reconciliations started slowing down, because bloods were reconciled all at once and that is why reconciliations started slowing down after that, there were some, professors were already spread. But it continued, some continued. We continued maybe until September, and there were various groups here and there that continued.

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you tell us about any event that you remember and that can be considered like something funny or that in those difficult moments made you feel a little different?

[33] Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian.

[34] Mic Sokoli (1839–1881) was an Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter from the Tropoja district in today's Northern Albania. He was a noted guerrilla leader, remembered in particular for an act that has entered the chronicles of Albanian legend as an example of heroism: at the battle of Slivova against Ottoman forces in April 1881, he died when he pressed his body against the mouth of a Turkish cannon.

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, there are cases. I would make an exception, for example a case that was more relaxing in that situation of tension, the moments when blood was being forgiven were very tense. I remember one case, we were in the Klina region, somewhere in one of the villages of Klina, I also was working in Klina at that time. I worked in a marketing company and when we went that day, we reconciled the cases, that case was reconciled and the moment when we left, it was reconciled then we left, the head of the household turned towards Azem Shkreli and said, "Professor," he said, "We forgave you the blood, now you will give us this girl," he said, "and we won't let this girl go today, you can go alone." He said, professor Azem said, "Eh, to be honest, no," he said, "we have many girls, we can give you whomever you want, but not this one, because this is the best we have," he said, "and we want to have her for ourselves." So, that thing started as a joke, but they actually were serious about it, they had thought about it before in the *oda*, they had talked about me. And so, each time we went to another house, the professor would say, "We are afraid they will ask us for any other girl here, I wonder whose turn is now?" There were such moments, funny moments, we made jokes in order to relax in these reconciliations, in the most difficult moments.

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you tell us now the blood feuds reconciliation, the number started decreasing…?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, the activity started slowing down and it started… what did you say after?

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you tell us now from the stage when you finished blood feuds reconciliation, how does your activity in the national cause continue?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, after the blood feuds reconciliations in '90-'91, my activity continued, it's not that I ever stopped, my activity continued even more. We started then in the association, the organization *Nënë Tereza* [Mother Theresa],[35] I got engaged there a lot. The organization, association, not organization *Nënë Tereza* was founded. In the meantime, at that time the Peja youth, we weren't… some parties started being founded, I mean the Republican Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Albanian Christian Democratic Party, then the Liberal Party, no, the Parliamentary Party. Some parties were founded, but in Peja, the youth was such… that we were some activists who from '89 until the beginning of the war we were inseparable, we were always together as a group… a pretty big group, but separated.

And then we started the activity in '91, I remember… I want to specify my activity in, when the poisoning of students took place in that year,[36] in the spring of that year there was the poisoning of

[35] Mother Teresa, the self-help organization that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled from all state institutions and services.

[36] In March 1990, after Kosovo schools were segregated along ethnic lines, thousands of Albanian students fell ill with symptoms of gas poisoning. No reliable investigation was conducted by the authorities, who always maintained no gas was used in Kosovo and the phenomenon must have been caused by mass hysteria. The authorities also impeded independent investigations by foreign doctors, and to this day, with the exception of a publication in *The Lancet* that excludes poisoning, there are only contradictory conclusions on the nature and the cause of the phenomenon**.** For this see Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a war*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999.

high school students. And I was very active at that time, because I was working at the same time, I was actually at work in Klina when this happened and Serbez came to me and told me, "This is what happened." So, she had her car and I had relatives at the hospital, some daughters of my maternal and paternal aunts, some friends, I had friends and relatives working at the hospital in Peja. So, we engaged with doctor Mustafë Ademaj, he was and he is one among those who were part of the blood feuds reconciliations and we were already connected, we were very closely connected. Then with doctor Mustafa we helped carrying the students poisoned in schools from the hospital of Peja to the hospital of Pristina with Serbez's car, I remember it as if it was today. We sent two of them to Pristina, she, the others and I, then we just continued helping them at homes, we sent them medicines.

Then, in the meantime, my activity, my activity kind of stopped for some time in '91, a tragedy happened which spiritually… Serbez Vokshi died tragically and somehow I was passive for around two years. I got passive because I was very desperate. So, I started and dealt more with my profession at that time. I started my own business, I started dedicating myself more to my profession, I did accounting for various brands, I had a small business. And then in, by the end of the '90s… not the end, I mean in the middle of the '90s, in the meantime I came, it was funded, I mean, I got an opportunity to come to America. I mean, I came here for a qualification, I mean, professional study in Oklahoma, America and I stayed here for a short time, maybe six or seven months and I returned.

In the meantime, I created very good relations in the Institute I was at in the Oklahoma University, so in the meantime I opened a branch of the Institute in Peja, at that time, in '96. And so I opened the school, then I opened the journalism school within it, the computer school in collaboration with Riza Krasniqi, and there it began….The school I opened, the building of the school, that is where my national activity started, my political activity of that time, then it started expanding.

I remember the organization as if it was today, *Lidhja e Shkrimtarëve të Kosovës* [Kosovo Writers League], the offices, the activity, every activity of the Kosovo Writers League at that time was… the activities… they had no office, they held every activity and meeting in my school. So, I too… that's where it started. And then, in the meantime I also started working at *Koha Ditore* [Daily Time], the newspaper was opened, the first newspaper *Koha Ditore* and in the meantime that was a motivation that… actually it was an opportunity, an opportunity for me to be closer to the events, the events that were taking place in Kosovo, I mean local political events, the information. So, in the meantime, I was engaged, I wrote for the newspaper but also gathered information about what was happening in Kosovo.

The first stages of organizing, not military, but people's organizing for defence, as we called it back then, the defence of the thresholds of their houses in '96-'97, when Adrian Krasniqi was killed, that is when that activity started. In the meantime in 1996, in the late '96, together with a group, the same Peja youth group, we saw that we needed a place, a cultural institution for the youth to gather, together, to engage and contribute something, not only politically, but also for the culture of the city, the culture of Peja.

**Rexhep Myftari:** Tell us about the founding of the Cultural Center and your activities?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, as we said earlier we needed a place to organize, gather, not only the activists but also the whole youth of the city, to unite the cultural values in one place. So, the *hamam* [37]already existed in Peja, it was an old institution as a public bathroom at the time, it was built at the times of Turks, and we settled there. That was, it was very demolished, it was abandoned. So, we asked the Muslim Community for the permission to renovate the *hamam*. They didn't hesitate and gave us the permission. Then, once we took the permission from the Muslim Community, we started getting funds, we started asking for funds from various private, businesses, institutions as well as from the people themselves, from *Çarshia e Gjatë* [Big Market] where the craftsmen were, the craftsmen of the city of Peja who were many, they were ready to help us, to contribute, to help us renovate the *hamam*.

Some time passed, we renovated it and cleaned it, we did a very good job. And in the meantime we decided to call it The Cultural Center of Peja, the Peja youth, actually it was called, The Cultural Center. That is where meetings and gatherings were organized. In the meantime, I moved my school there since the building where it used to be before was more like an institution, a private house, we were… the police had already started persecuting us, because various activities were being held there. We moved, we moved my school to the Cultural Centre, one part of it, and another part of it in a corner. That is where students held classes, elementary school students, I mean those who were learning English and those who were taking computer courses.

In the meantime, after all the renovation of the *hamam* was done, we decided to organize, this was in 1998, I mean it took some time until it was reconstructed, we decided to organize the *Pejane* Culture Days. There were mainly 15 days that we had set, 15 evenings, one artist from Peja for each evening, I mean each of them had their own evening. One evening for example there was the Elementary Music School. Another night Shahindere Berlajolli, another night belonged to the painters, the other to the poets, another to children and so on. I mean, we had various exhibitions for 15 evenings, we opened various galleries.

So this work continued for some… maybe not even a full week, on each evening. I remember the last night when this activity was stopped, I mean the one we had held as a festival in the narrow meaning of the word, it was March 5, the evening of March 5, 1998 and we had that evening, it was the turn of Sebahate Berlajolli and the singers of *Përparimi* [Progress] from Peja to sing that day. Unfortunately, that was the night when the tragedy took place in Prekaz and Jasharaj were killed,[38] so we stopped it that night, we stopped our cultural activities and decided to silently work on what we were continuing.

These killings affected the organization of almost everyday demonstrations in Kosovo. There were demonstrations being organized in every city of Kosovo during March. I remember then March 18, it was the turn of the organization of the great demonstration, I mean the demonstration was against the killings… against the killings and genocide of Albanians that was done back then by the Serbian state,

[37] *Hamam,* Turkish bath. It is the Islamic variant of the Roman bath, steambath, sauna, or Russian banya, distinguished by a focus on water, as distinct from steam. In Kosovo they were used as public baths.
[38] The massacre of the entire family of the Jashari in Prekaz, Drenica, on March 1998 marks the beginning of the Kosovo war.

by the Serbian ruling power. So, on March 18 it was the turn of Peja to organize the demonstration and the invitation was done by default, we didn't even know who it was done by, anyway, the people organized themselves and we all took off to the streets… I remember that every citizen of Peja was there, people from the villages, from the city, and it was a very big demonstration, but peaceful, a peaceful demonstration.

I remember we were, for example, in Peja there are three main *lagje*, there is one *lagje* Ramiz Sadiku, which is a very big *lagje,* then there is the Kulla e Pashës, the *lagje* down there and the other one, there are three in a row and then there is the street of the *Çarshia e Gjatë*. I mean the three of them in a row, I mean they all have a short exit that leads you to the actual square, the square near the Shopping Mall. The demonstration took place, but people were gathered, people were gathered there like this {shows with hand} they didn't know who was to lead, because they had organized it but there was no leader. Reshat, Angjelina and I decided to disperse. I stayed in the Ramiz Sadiku Street, Reshat in the Kulla e Pashës street and Angjelina Krasniqi, I mean, my friend, in the street of *Çarshia e Gjatë*. And we wound up the watch in order to start the marching in ten minutes, to start marching in order to meet in the square, near the Shopping Mall, and create a queue, then continue marching through the *korzo*[39] and then get the people to join us.

That is what we did that day and when the time came, we had wound up the watches, we continued and met there and established only one big queue so we led it. Angjelina, Reshat and I would stay on the side and lead the protest. That made, that made the police photograph us and then they pursued us. They came to arrest me in the meantime, after a couple of days, they came to my house to arrest me, I didn't happen to be there and I mean, I never turned myself in. They couldn't find Angjelina, neither could they fund Reshat, nor me, so they gave up, they gave up and didn't come to look for us anymore.

But then when after some time it happened… let me connect here to that date. That day, in that protest, we marched in the city and some murders were committed that day. But not in the square where we were, but some murders at the *Fidanishte lagje* [...] were committed as well as at the *lagje of*… we call it close to the beer manufacture, I don't know how it is called now but we used to call it *Sheqerhanja*. They were killed there, when the demonstrators wanted to unite and come to the city, they were stopped and that's where the killings started. I know that many were injured and one was killed that day, I remember as if it was today, it was Qerim Muriqi. So, that influenced… we gathered after that was done, Angjelina, Reshat, Afërdita Kastrati and I gathered and went to the place where… where all the parties were gathered, the Financial Council as well. All of us activists gathered at the Craftsmen Center and talked about what had happened, I mean we discussed what had happened and so on.

That is where we decided to establish the Council for Emergencies, and so we decided on March 18, 1998. We decided to establish the Council for Emergencies, you know, in order to give aid to the people, to get more united because a protest happened that day and the people were not united,

[39] Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

there was no organizing, no leading, someone had to do something, so we established the Council for Emergencies. Then, we moved our Center, we moved the headquarter of the Council for Emergencies and decided to put it in my school or in other words in the Cultural Center, but not where there was the gallery and the historical parts that were constructed, but in the part that was more official, we organized the offices there.

**Part Three**

So that day we decided, since there was a need to establish something, some association, council or something to help the people or the citizens of Peja, we thought at that time about something that would only belong to the citizens of Peja. So, we decided and we established the Council for Emergencies, so we decided to elect as our leader, he was very loved by the people of Peja, a great activist and patriot, Rashit Gorani. We elected him as our leader. We were, we divided in groups, I was in the same group with Angjelina, Afërdita Kastrati, Mentor Morina and Reshat, Reshat Nurboja.

Then there were other groups, the group of women who took care of mothers, women, gave them aid. We divided in several groups. I was in the group that was in charge for food, medicines and hygienic tools for the citizens who had migrated within Kosovo, I mean, those who were refugees within Kosovo. They had moved at that time, I mean from Drenica, the war in Drenica, the city was full of people from Drenica villages, from other parts…

In the meantime, we faced the need to go to the war zones as well, I mean inside the war, so our activity expanded. I remember the first [aid] that we sent, we sent the first aid to the village of Vojnik, a village of Drenica. We sent it with a big truck, it was full of stuff, we went because we knocked every door to ask every manufacture, organization, drugstore to give us whatever they had….Then the people of Peja in the beginning didn't know that we were part of the Council for Emergencies, but they only knew that we were working to help the refugees within the city. We would settle them to families, in other houses, would find them places to stay, help them when they were sick in the hospital. We also had the other group who took care of mothers who were to give birth, to give them clothes, with… it was a very good organizing within the council.

And I remember we filled the truck with things to send to Vojnik, Drenica. We didn't even know where Vojnik was nor where its entrance as. There were police checkpoints everywhere back then. Anyway, we took the truck, filled it with stuff and I was with my own car, Angjelina and I, I always collaborated closely with Angjelina. Angjelina, Mentor Morina, Rexhep Lipa and I. They sat on the back, both of us [Angjelina and I] sat on the front, I remember as if it was today. It was dusk, I remember we chose to go at dusk in order not to be noticed by the police, to go there a little more secretely. When we arrived to the road of Istog, just before entering… the road to Mitrovica just before going to Istog, the police stopped us in Istog. But we were ahead with the car in order to notify the truck that was coming behind in case something happened…

We were with the car in order to prepare for them to pass, or to defend them in case something happened. So, they passed, the truck passed, the police stopped us and… I remember it as if it was today, the policeman asked me, "Where are you going? The documents?" in Serbian. We gave them to him and he said, "Where are you going?" Now it was obvious where we were going through that road to Drenica from Mitrovica, but I said, "We are going to Istog to…" back then the nowadays *Trofta* [Restaurant] was called *Ribnjak*, I said, "We are going to *Ribnjak* for dinner and for a drink." He said, "Are you going with these two troublemakers?" (laughs) they were a little older and we said, "Yes, we are going," he said, "Look where we are…" we had to camouflage everything, whatever we did. Anyway, we passed somehow and allegedly went to Istog, later we returned and continued to Vojnik.

We sent the first aid with a truck full of food there, we sent medicines, clothes. So, half of it was dedicated to that zone, to the people who were isolated, but another part of it went to the headquarters of the *UÇK*[40] that had just been established back then. We didn't even know that the headquarters were there, but we found out about it. So, we started to constantly send aids, which then were sent to other zones by the headquarters of *UÇK* there. When we returned in the evening, after a few days, then we returned, some days later the word was spread in Peja that, "*More*,[41] aids from Peja are going to *UÇK* and…" and so my brother in my family, I was sitting and he said, "*More*," he said, "we heard today that two women are sending aids to Drenica, I wonder who they are?" I hadn't even told my family about this, because I knew they would worry, the time was such, I didn't even tell him anything. Anyway…

Later our activity started getting richer, it expanded, it expanded, it expanded. So, the Council became very big. Then we changed our roles. We changed our groups and the zone. Then I went, we started to mainly focus on the zone of the Dukagjin Plain. We mainly sent aids to the headquarter in Gllogjan there, that is where for the first time we met Ramush [Haradinaj], the commander. We didn't know who Ramush was, who was the commander of the zone. Our aim was not to know who the soldiers were, not who they were, but our aim was to help them. Se, we became famous there, they would respect us and assign us tasks, tasks… then they just started giving us written orders, you have to go there, you have to take medicines there to Pristina and Mitrovica, then the tasks were already set.

I remember one day we had to go to Pristina, because back then the road Pristina-Mitrovica, Peja-Pristina was blocked, there was no traffic because the police wouldn't allow it, there were the checkpoints and it was blocked. In order to go to Pristina, we had to take some big medicines, injections, serums which we had to bring back to the war zone, we had to go through Mitrovica, Rozhaja… in fact through Rozhaja, Mitrovica, then Pristina. Angjelina and I took off that day, we took off really early in the morning, at four in the morning.

I usually slept with my clothes on, in order to always be prepared, and I never used the door to get out of my house, because that way my parents would hear me, I would wake them up and they would be

[40] *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës, K*osovo Liberation Army.
[41] Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

worried. In order not to worry them, I would jump from the window, go to the balcony and then quickly go out and take off to wherever we had to go. That day, at four in the morning, we went with Angjelina, but it was the time of the fuel crisis, there was no fuel. The car needed to be filled with fuel, we didn't have a place to take fuel. If we went to the gas station it would be a problem because they would suspect us, why did we need fuel that early in the morning. We went to a family which we knew for sure kept fuel at home, we knocked [on their door] in the morning, woke them up, but it was… it was a kind of pleasure, because no matter where you went, be it day or night, every family knew our aim, our work ,and they never hesitated to help us with whatever we needed. We took fuel and took off to Pristina, I mean to Pristina through Rozhaja.

When we came to the village of Kulla, that was a kind of border, the zone… there was a police checkpoint and not a small one, but a very big checkpoint and they stopped us, they stopped both of us. We were only two of us in the car, it was very early, four and a half in the morning, we had just arrived, summer had just started. I always kept my passport with me, because I thought in case something happened, I had a work visa to America and in case something happened and we decided to flee, I had my passport with me. But at the same time we also had… we had a bomb, we always kept it in the car, in every car, my car, the car of Aferdita Kastrati, because we mainly used these two cars.

The bomb was covered with a towel and it was just close to the levee. The police stopped us and said, "You two stay there," they said and, "the documents." I gave him the car documents and he said, "Ooo," in Serbian, "Look, look just the one we have been looking for, she came to us herself." And I said, "Me?" He said, "Yes," he said, "Park the car there," he said, "and come here to…" where the policemen were. Angjelina stayed in the car and I was concerned about the bomb because… Angjelina said, "Don't worry about it because…" she just said, "Don't worry about it because if something happens, I'll take action."

When they asked me, "What do you work?" I said, "No, *more* you've mistaken me for someone else, I am not her." It happened that one of the policemen was from Peja and he had seen me many times because I also worked… in the meantime during the '90s until '93 I worked with Sali Cacaj in a photograph studio. They would come and take photographs so I was a familiar face to them because they saw me there… I got reminded of that and said, "You, as a resident of Peja don't know who I am? You've seen me a hundred times when you came to take photographs." I told them what I did for work. "I am not the journalist, or the one who reports," because I also reported sometimes for the television of Tirana about the events that were happening. He said, "Ooo," he said, "Yes, yes, I apologize, she," he said, "works for Photo Drini," he said, "she is not the one we are looking for." And he said, "No, let's confirm it," and they called the center with the tools of that time, the Walky Talky that they used, seems like they were still sleeping, since it was very early in the morning and we survived.

Then, we went to Pristina, in the meantime we also had to take some financial aids… that were sent by people from Deçan living in Germany to the Council of Emergency. They had sent funds to the headquarter in Gllogjan, they had sent money in order for us to buy aids for them. So… at the same time, when we went to take the medicines to Pristina, the headquarter in Gllogjan told us where to go and take the money that had been delivered to Pristina. We took them with difficulties, with big

difficulties, and we passed somehow.

What I want to say is that we did a very dangerous job, but we didn't know about the risks because we had an aim. Our aim was to help and we didn't care much about sacrificing ourselves, we only cared about the fact that we worried our parents, we didn't care about ourselves. Sometimes my father was very worried and said, "I don't care if they kill you or do something. I care if they do to you what they usually do." I mean, he was worried about that, because they did cruel things, we were young women and we walked around the city at various times, in the villages, everywhere so… but fortunately nothing happened to us until that time.

In the Council of Emergency there were cases when we also carried injured people from [war] zones to cities, we brought injured soldiers from the war zones to the hospital or to the mobile hospitals which we organized in cities. There were cases for example, once I went… I went to Isniq to send aids, and met those of the Isniq headquarter, we went there to see some injured, some injured kids whom the Serbian police had shot from a distance, many children were injured, several children from that village. We went to visit those children and find out more about their situation so that we could assess what they needed in order to send them aids the next day. We went that day to Isniq. When we went, instead of going to meet them, we put ourselves in danger because it seems like they noticed us and they shot us, a kind of small offensive started in Isniq and we were forced to return and left them the way we did. Then we went another day and sent aids, we sent everything, mainly medical aid because that's what they asked for, and also food.

I remember one case that is unforgettable, it was a very specific case with an injured person. It was Sunday and we decided to rest, not to go anywhere but to rest. As soon as I arrived home and started to rest, relax, the phone rang, a call from the Council and they said, "Lumka, can you come because we are… my grandmother is sick." Usually that was the code of connections "My grandmother is sick?" "Where is your grandmother?" They told me which house because we had the addresses where to go. And I went, they told me that there was an injured person whom they had brought from a war zone, from a village there, from Loxha, they had brought him from the frontline. Then I remember that case, the case of an injured person who was injured somewhere in war zones in the Dukagjin Plain and they told me, they called me as I told you earlier. I went together with Angjelina to doctor Isa Kaliqani, we called him at his home, I remember he was eating lunch, we interrupted his lunch and he said, "One moment, let me take my bag," he took the doctor's bag and we sent him to Loxha with our car.

He was heavily injured, a young boy, I don't know whether he was even twenty. He was injured here {shows the spot where he was injured} and the bullet had passed to the other side. Well, anyway, he gave him the first aid, we took him but in the meantime we notified people from the Emergency Group who were in Peja that day, Reshat and Mentor, we notified them that we are here, "We have come to the injured person and we will soon bring him to Peja, organize the place where we have to send him and what we have to do." We went, took the injured and put him in Hadi Doda's car, I remember he came, Hadi Doda was one of our group, an activist, we brought him to Peja with his car. In Ramiz Sadiku Street there was a doctor, doctor Shemi, Shemi Muhaxheri, he had his own clinic. He also had an X-ray machine, the X-rays, X-rays or how do they call it, I mean he had a private clinic. He… willingly

opened his clinic that day and we went and did it… we took the X-ray to the injured person and he saw where the bullet was.

Surgery was needed, but we couldn't do it that day, so we had to shelter him at a family's. I said that, "I will take him to my house and shelter him for a couple of days until the doctors come and operate him," but other members of the Council said, "No, don't you dare, none of us can take him because we endanger the mission, we endanger the Council." So we asked the boy, "Do you have anyone from your family, any relative? Do you have anyone in Peja?" He said, "Yes." He told us where. We went, talked to the family, "Do you approve for us to bring him for a couple of days?" Of course they accepted and we returned and took him, this time to send him to his family.

It was Sunday and at that time the championship was taking place, I remember it as if it was today, the soccer world championship was taking place and Yugoslavia was playing Germany I guess. Eh, the city was empty during the day. Albanians were inside because they used not to go out and Serbs were inside to watch the match, there were police in some places just because they were forced to. I took my car, we put the injured person inside and covered it with some cardboard and some other stuff, to look as if we had items, food or something. And I wanted to send him myself. But Reshat said, "No, I won't let you drive, what if they catch you. They better catch us both than you alone," he said and, "I won't let you." Reshat came with me and he sat in the back. The injured person was lying in the car, he was lying close to me in the passenger's seat. Once we got out of the Ramiz Sadiku street, the police was close to the gas station, and they stopped me. It was dangerous, because if they caught you carrying an injured person, you know what would happen…

And for a moment, Reshat said, "Ouuu Lumka, we fell," and I instantly got reminded of something, opened the window and in Serbian I said, "Aren't you watching the match?" I just got reminded of that, "Aren't you watching the match?" In Serbian, he said, "Eh," he said, "what can you do," and he somehow opened up and said, "duty is duty." We talked in Serbian, he said, "Where are you going? Why aren't you watching the match?" I said, "No *bre*, here I am sending some things, I have a shop down there." "Where is your shop?? I said, "Close to the military barrack, in front of the military barrack," I said, "and I need to send these to the shop." He said, "Which shop is yours?" I got reminded that while crossing through that road, my eyes caught a shop named *2K* and I said, "*2K* is mine. Come sometimes for coffee." He said, "Don't worry, we will come these days," and we passed, we survived that day. We sent the injured person to that place. So, our mission was always dangerous, because our action, our work was dangerous. But we didn't care much, we had our own duty to achieve our aim and what we targeted. So, I believe we did it with honor.

So, in the meantime during that time the Doctors Without Borders organization came to work to Kosovo, they opened a branch in Peja as well. So, since I knew the Dukagjin Plain, I spoke Serbian and I could drive, I had my car and the driving license, I also spoke English somehow. So, people from the organization *Nënë Tereza* with its headquarters in Pristina, with their directive, I don't exactly know who but they had sent them… to me. They invited me to a meeting and they said, "We need you to work for us." I said, "I cannot, I have my own job, I work, because I was already engaged in the Council of Emergency and I can't…" I didn't tell them what I was working on but I just said that I have my

everyday work, they said, “That’s not a problem, at least t help us.” So, I talked to those from the Council of Emergency and they said, “This is the best thing we need, just accept and continue with them, continue.”

So I continued, I worked for them during the day while I finished my job during the night. We continued sending aid with the Council of Emergency because we mainly worked during the night more than during the day, because we were easily spotted during the day, so things were better done during the night, in the dark. And then I continued working like that until somehow they noticed that we were working and they persecuted us, so later we dispersed. With the arrest of Reshat, Reshat….They arrested Reshat Burboja, then we all escaped in different directions. I had a visa, I had the American passport and visa, instead of going to Macedonia, Montenegro or Albania, I decided to come directly to America for a very short time. I thought that this event would end in two or three weeks and I would return to Kosovo again to continue helping in some kind of way what I could help, but it didn’t happen like that, because war turned out to be bigger and I stayed in America for a longer time.

**Rexhep Myftari**: What was the connection, the connection between the Council of Emergency and later the *UÇK*? Which was the dividing line or the collaboration or how did they merge into each other?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: In the beginning, we were independently funded. I mean, we were funded according to the need for aids, to help the displaced, the people, the injured, with food or whatever they needed from us, not from us, but in general, what we were able to offer. But then we faced the need in the villages where we went to send aids to the people, we got the chance to contact those people who were connected to the headquarters of the *UÇK* where there were soldiers. And they would come every day we went there, in fact they would tell us what they needed, “We need this and that.” “Who needs that?” “This village needs that, this village needs this, the *UÇK* headquarter needs this.”

And one day we went to the headquarter of the *UÇK* in Gllogjan, from there we contacted them and we started, we started connecting, and they would ask us everything they needed except guns, because we didn’t provide them with guns. They provided [the guns] themselves but they asked us for whatever they needed, be it medicines, food, hygienic products, whatever we could, but those that were more important such as medicines, serums, antibiotics, threads, we collected them and they were furnished through us. They decided to do it through us and nobody else, we were the only ones who furnished them because they only trusted us. We even had to pass through all the villages of Deçan, Isniq, Prapaçan, Pozharë, Lumbardh and so on to go to the UÇK in Gllogjan.

But all those villages were controlled by the UÇK and no foreigner was allowed to pass without having a specific permission. If you weren’t from the village, you had no chance to enter, especially not we, who were unknown people from the city, but no matter that, the main people from the headquarter knew us, but our circulation there was dangerous during the night as well as during the day because they didn’t know who we were. So I remember as if it was today when Daut, Daut Haradinaj, authorized us and gave me the authorization to freely pass in the name of the group of Emergency. I

mean, I had the specific permission, it was written, "Lumturije Krasniqi is authorized to freely circulate in the UÇK zone in the name of the group." So when we passed, we needed that identifying paper in order to pass. So, we were privileged. This was our first connection.

The second connection is at the time when… when the various headquarters of the army agreed to create a central headquarter of the Dukagjin Plain district. They authorized us to furnish the UÇK's military cantonment which back then was planned to be built in the school of the village of Prapaçan. Then we organized it in Peja as well, we mainly went to places, to Devolls, *Bananja* [The Banana] at that time there were… the Lika drugstore, I remember it as if it was today, those were the main ones that furnished us, they would furnish us with everything we needed, with everything that we were asked for by those in the headquarter. So we went to Devolli, took mattresses, shampoos and so on. I mean, we were the ones who furnished the general headquarter of the *UÇK,* the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës.*

And then, they had established, they, I mean the members, had established the headquarter, I mean the Central Headquarter. I didn't know, but at that time we had already fled because our mission was falling apart, and in that list there were Reshat, Angjelina, Afërdita and I, in the Central Headquarter of the *UÇK* that was supposed to function there. So, when Reshat was arrested and sentenced, we were part of the verdict as well, I was accused of the fight… like the others, as a terrorist, see… but I fortunately fled, but unfortunately Reshat, Reshat was arrested and went through cruel tortures in the prison of Dubravë, until after the war when they all returned.

This was our connection, I mean we merged, in a way we were the logistical [arm] of the *UÇK*, we didn't work at the frontline, we didn't fight, we weren't there that day, but we were, we circulated, we circulated and furnished the *UÇK*. I mean, in the city as well, it is very important to mention this thing, when people started to know us, the close group, they would offer help. People from various villages would bring food, I remember it as if it was today, the boxes with cheese, somebody would bring flour, oil and other things to distribute, without even knowing who they were, they just would voluntarily bring them to the *hamam* where we were organized. And from there, during the evening, we would distribute the things wherever there was a need for them.

But I remember it as if it was today and it is a great pleasure and it is important to mention that we mainly stayed… there is a neighborhood in Peja which we call the neighborhood… down the old cemetery, the cemetery of Kakariq, we mainly met there in a house, the house of one of our activists. And when we would enter that neighborhood, it was a big neighborhood but somehow surrounded, isolated, at the Castle, the Castle Neighborhood, once we entered it with our car, my car was seen as the car of the *UÇK*, and once I entered the neighborhood, the youth was so well-organized that they would block the street, they would block the street as if they were playing in order for no police or foreigner to be able to enter the neighborhood until we were organized, furnished, filled our cars, whatever we had in order to go to the *UÇK* and the war zones.

So let me mention my mission with Doctors Without Borders, what did I do during my work with Doctors Without Borders, the aid that I would give to the Council of Emergency. During the day with

the car of Doctors Without Borders, with the big jeeps we went as a caravan, we would always take off with two cars… but I decided by surprise the places where we would go, because they didn't know the road, they were with the police, with the army, we had no permission… I knew the possibilities, Plan A, Plan B because I knew the entrances and the exits. So, I mean I decided about where we had to go, but on the way I also had a doctor, an Albanian doctor who worked, Besa, and since I considered that they didn't speak Albanian, those who were with us, French and Belgians, there were two of them with us and I would tell Besa, "Besa," because she was with me, Besa Gjikolli, a doctor, "Besa, take a pen when we leave and when I tell you to draw a line now, you draw a line and note where."

So, while on the road we would see the police checkpoints and I would tell Besa, "Besa," she would write, "Here," for example in Lubeniq, in Raushiq, I mean we knew, and in the evening I would tell them where there the police were so that they had to be more careful, "When you go… on the other side of the road, I mean on the road to Albania through Junik," which was the road they used to go to take arms, I told them to be careful. And this happened, this happened too. Or I would to go villages and tell, they knew that I was from the Council for Emergencies, but they hushed as if they didn't know me and when I went, I would say, "Tell me what do you need? What do you need us to bring you?" They would say, "This, this and that," those from Doctors Without Borders would say, "It is too much, we cannot do it," and I would say, "It is not a problem, let's send something at least." So, I knew what they needed and on the other side with *Nënë Tereza*, with our Council, I would furnish them during the evening with whatever they needed.

It happened, it happened that… and my first impression was a very good one, I was impressed by the organizing which was very good in Gllogjan at the headquarter of the *UÇK* where we went several times… several times, but the first time when we saw it, the kitchen of the army, we saw that the read was baked there, the bread was being cooked there in the oven, the cooks… I mean, a very good organization, and as evidence we took a piece of bread in order to discuss about it and convince people that there is an organization within the *UÇK*, because people were skeptical, they didn't trust it. But we sent some pieces of bread, one kilogram of bread, exactly the bread from the oven, the bread from the oven of the *UÇK* was as if you sent something from a temple, from a God's temple, to taste that bread because it was the bread of the *UÇK*, that was an impression that…

It happened for example another case when we went, we were seriously at risk, Angjelina and I, with Angjelina again, always with Angjelina, we went to Pristina to take some boxes which they had prepared in Pristina and we went to take them, but we went there by train. That was the time when the circulation of the train from Peja to Pristina began and we went by train. We got inside the train… when we went to the zone of Drenica, the greatest pleasure was when we saw armed people… even though we saw the other zone everyday, but in Drenica the first movements of the *UÇK*, they seemed to us like… they seemed like something so big to us.

**Rexhep Myftari**: What happened after the arrest of Reshat, what happened to the others?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: Yes, after his arrest we all dispersed. We dispersed, in fact some of us went to Montenegro, some in… some in Albania, some there, since I had the American visa as I told

you earlier I left to… I came to America. I came to America and trust me that that day when I passed to… it is very interesting to talk about my journey from Peja to Pristina. I came from Peja to Kulla, because I am forgetting the name of the place, to Kulla near Rozhaja, right before entering Rozhaja. I went there, my brother drove me there but I couldn't pass because they were looking for me. I stopped a little earlier. And in the meantime a car passed and fortunately a woman was driving it, and she was, I didn't know she was Serbian, but I supposed she was Serbian. Because Albanian women wouldn't pass through that road at that time.

I stopped her and said, "Can I come with you to Rozhaja because my car is broken and I have no way to go, I just need to go and take something there, then I will return to fix my car, I have to return and take my car?" And she said, "It's not a problem, I can't send you further," she said, "but I can send you to Rozhaja." "Okay." I got inside her car and greeted my father, I had nothing, only my passport, nothing else, and a small bag. I came… we passed, they didn't even control us because the Serbian woman knew them, she was engaged in trade, she happened to be from Klina, we got to know each other in the meantime. I came… to be honest, she drove me to the Bus Station in Rozhaja. There, I met the maternal uncle of my mother's maternal uncle, he happened to be in Rozhaja and he said, "*Hee*, Besa, what do you have, what happened?" I said, "I have to leave, like this, like that," he said, "come," he said, "because I know the bus driver." And he told the driver, "Take this and she is my *amanet*[42] to you, I will leave her in your hands to drive her to Pristina."

And I went to Pristina without any problem, we passed Montenegro to Pristina. When I arrived in Pristina, the son of my maternal aunt was waiting for me there because he lived there. I slept at his place that night in Pristina. I booked my ticket to Belgrade because the Airport of Belgrade was the only one you could travel from. I booked the ticked to… my maternal aunt's son took care of the ticket to America. The next morning I left alone by bus from Pristina to Belgrade, I went to Belgrade, I arrived there in the evening, the flight was on the following day, to Amsterdam first and then from Amsterdam to New York. I didn't even know where I was going… because I was thinking of going to Oklahoma because that was my place, that was the place where my friends and my job where, I could continue working there because my school was connected to Oklahoma, there were my friend and everything, I had all the chances to continue my life in Oklahoma. But destiny was such that I couldn't find a ticket to Oklahoma and the only one I could find was to New York because it was the season of travelling.

So I arrived in Belgrade. I spent that night at hotel *Slavija*, I guess I slept alone. In the morning I woke up, the bus left from there to airport directly, it was a shuttle bus. I got inside and went to the airport without any problem. Imagine, they were looking for me there but here I was legal without any problem, but I passed. I know, I know how hard it was for me to pass until I went through the passport control of the custom police, the custom at the airport. When I passed there, there were the public telephones which I used to call my mother and said, "*Tete.*"[43] because I call my mother *Tete*, "*Tete*," I said, "I arrived." "Where are you?" She said. I said, "I am at the airport, I am taking the plane, don't worry. I will let you know once I arrive in America." And she was relieved. When I arrived here [in New

[42] *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.
[43] *Teze, tete;* literally maternal aunt.

York] I didn't know where to go. I didn't have… I didn't know where to go.

But in the meantime the son of my maternal uncle, I mean, the son of my maternal uncle's daughter lives here, but I hadn't met him for twenty years, but I had his number and fortunately I had his number written in my notebook, and I decided to call him. Maybe he doesn't even know who I am, but I will call him. I called him from the airport and told him, "I am this person and I need to [stay at your place] until I book my ticket." You know, it's very touching…

**Rexhep Myftari**: Can you tell us what did you do when you came to America, who waited for you, what was the feeling of coming from a war zone to New York?

**Lumturije (Lumka) Krasniqi**: *Uhhh…* it is, it is… life here, the difficulties of life, I had many difficulties… my life was the most difficult when I came to America until I adapted to it, until I found myself. When I arrived at the airport in New York, it was already too late. But there was a coincidence, let me tell you one case. This time, the odds were on my side. I never knew that my American visa had expired that day on July 10. When I came here at… the flight was very late and I arrived 20 minutes to 12:00am, I mean on July 10.

I arrived at 20 minutes to 12:00am, when I showed [my passport] to the custom police at the airport he looked at my visa and said, "You cannot enter America because your visa had expired." And I said, "Expired?" I took it and looked at it, the tenth day. I said, "It is impossible because," I said, "I came through Amsterdam and nobody stopped me…" He said, "No, no, your visa expired. You cannot enter America." At that time I was a little quicker and said, "No, no, no, I don't want to talk to you," I said, "I still have twenty minutes to enter. Don't keep me there because my time will pass, take me to the other side then we can talk." I passed, in a way I passed the border, the airport custom, I said, "We will talk then."

*[The video-interview was cut here, so was the beginning of the sentence]*

… and I called her and said, her name was Raba, I said, "I am Lumka, like this, like that," I introduced myself. "Maybe it is a little late, but I have no place to go, I just arrived today," I said and, "can I come to your place?" She said, "Don't even mention it, but I don't have a car to pick you up," she said, "I am pregnant," because she was pregnant and just a few days before giving birth. She said, "Shaban is not here, but if you can take a cab, do so and I will pay for it, just come, here's the address," just as Albanians everywhere are (laughs). Then I went that night there, I arrived. She welcomed me very warmly and I will never forget that. I stayed at their place for three months and a half.

But in the meantime I was looking for a job. I was looking for a job in newspapers, I didn't know what, I just wanted to do something. I looked for it, and two-three days later I called an agency to book the ticket to Oklahoma, I wanted to go to Oklahoma because I talked to them and they said, "Come!" But fortunately there were no tickets. And my cousin, the son of my maternal uncle, Shaban convinced me, "Where do you want to go? New York is for us, for our community, we help each other, why do you want to go that far, the war is happening [in Kosovo], you have people close to you here." So, I decided to stay in New York. I stayed in New York but fortunately I found a job two weeks later.

I took the daily newspaper *Koha Ditore*, which was published in New York at that time. I bought the newspaper in order to read it everyday, to be informed about what was happening. The internet was hard to find back then, we had no internet, there was internet but not at the place I was staying. When I saw the vacancies in *Koha Ditore*, one of the Albanian agencies were looking for an assistant, a secretary, an agent for the booking of tickets, I called them without hesitating, I called and said, "This, this, this, I am this person," I referred to the newspaper. He said, "How old are you?" Was my age the first requirement? And I said, "What does my age have to do with it here?" He said, "No," he said, "But young girls come and just leave, they leave the job," he said, "you?" I said, "I am 34," I hadn't turned 34 yet. He said, "Oh, that's good," he said, "Where do you live? Where do you live?" I said, "In Manhattan, 130th something, 180th something streets." He said, "Oh, we unfortunately are in Brooklyn and you are so far, you cannot travel here because it is very hard for you to travel." And there I said, "No, no, no," I am here temporarily, because I am living at a family's place because I have decided to find an apartment wherever I find a job." So, I didn't want to lose that job. And they said, "Alright." So I decided. We set an appointment for the interview, I came, the first time I came to Brooklyn, the orientation with trains and so on *pfff,* I made it.

I came and took the job, I mean they accepted me. One month and a half later the people I worked for, I mean the agency found me an apartment, they helped me find an apartment very near the place where I worked, so I continued. But in the meantime the war, the offensives, the massacres that started in… after the NATO bombings in Kosovo. Back then my family, I had a very big family, I still do. In fact there was my grandmother, my mother, my father, all of my sisters and brothers, my sisters were married, with very young children, one-one, five years, seven, six years old, they were all very young, the oldest among the children was a fourteen years old girl. And I mean, my main preoccupation was not only the war in Kosovo and what was happening, but my family. They fled, a part of them were dispersed in Albania. They didn't meet for days, I didn't know where they were for days either, we had that connection.

But all our houses were burned, the houses of my brothers as well as the one of my parents, all of them were burned, they were in the same yard. What has remained as a burden to me are that the photographs and the books, my father's library and books disappeared, I mean, we can never get them back. That was… a neighbor of mine lived here, he was my first neighbor in Peja and while talking on the phone he tried to relax me, he told me what happened to our houses, he said, "*Eiii*, Lumka you know what's new?" I said, "What?" He said, "*Khu,*[44] the whole neighborhood is burned." I said, "Alright Arijan, our house too?" He said, "Yours had the biggest flames, they said, '*uuu*, the house of Krasniqi was all burned in flames because all the Lumka's photographs were burned,'" (laughs) because photographs were my weakness.

And so they gave me the news that everything had been burned, but I didn't worry much about it. I was only concerned about whether they all survived or was anybody from the family killed? But unfortunately nobody from our close family was killed, they all live. But I was worried about the

[44] Similar to *ku-ku*; Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

daughters of my brother, they were 14 years old, two or three of them but they were really physically developed and we heard many stories about what happened to girls on the road, during the exodus to Albania, Montenegro, they would take them and....So, I was worried about them. Each time I would talk to my family on the phone I would ask, "Where is Lena? Where is Arta?" And that was my greatest concern because I loved them very much. My brother's daughter was very young when I left, she was only one year and a half old, and I only asked about her, "Where is Disi?" And today, I want to say that we were worried about the children but more about our grandmother, because my grandmother was paralyzed, I mean she could walk but she was one hundred and something years old. My grandmother was 102 years old when the war took place, but they survived and…

But on the other side it was a problem for me in America because… a problem because, I had no problems myself but I was worried and my main preoccupation was how they would live now. So, I worked a lot, it happened that I had two-three jobs, not two, but it happened that for a long time I had two jobs, three jobs, there were cases when I couldn't sleep for six months… I only worked to help them, first when they were in Albania. Then, when they returned I worked to help them to recover their life, their house, for the education of the children and so… I am still proud that I did something for my family, I helped my family more or less (laughs). Then, my father didn't live for a long time. He passed away. Then my mother and my father came to America and settled here with me. I decided to have them close, because for them as parents life there was difficult after the war until the house was built, it was cold during the winter. My parents were a little old and very tired, and to be honest they were also sad because the war and life itself. I took them here, they came. My father lived here until he died, he only returned once before dying in 2014, in 2012, and so this is my life in America.

But I professionally finished my job, I had a lot of luck, a lot of luck, I had a lot of luck here, because there I was an economist, I had experience with finances and accounting, I had a good experience. I had worked there for quite a long time, 12-13 years. When I came here, in the first year I worked in the agency of my Albanian friends. After one year I found another job in Manhattan as a consultant, I worked as a tourist agent for tickets there as well. But the owner saw that I made the calculation of inputs and outputs of the tickets themselves and somehow I impressed him and he invited me to his office and said, "Lumka," he said, "Are you interested, I see that you are an economist, an accountant, can you, would you like to work as an accountant?" "This is my profession, I would rather do that than ticket booking." So, I continued, I worked there.

I worked for quite a long time, eight years, and I professionally… in the field of economy, finances and accounting here in America I… I got pretty rich and after some time I had the luck through a connection of my friend, of working in a Law Firm, a very big one as an accountant, in the department of accounting where I still work and I am good.

Now the other problem [that matters] is health, it is because I have no family problems, all of them are fine, some of them are here, my brothers had come, my sisters, the children of my brother there are well. I have finished some courses here, in order to get more professional. I do a good job at work, I have found myself and I am very thankful to America for making it possible not only me personally and my family, but that had made it possible for the whole Kosovo, of what they are still doing for Kosovo.

So, this is my life…

I believe that I would return to America… in the meantime after the war, because I forgot to tell about this. After the war, after things got quiet, the friends whom I worked for called me and said, “Lumka, you have to return.” I said, “Why should I return now?” They said, “You have to return and catch up where you left.” I said, “No, I will never return to Kosovo anymore, I can contribute more from here than from there. There is no war, we don’t need to fight and help, you are there to help.” “No, but there is,” they said, “room for you too.” I said, “I am not fighting for room. I have found myself here, so now I don’t need… I only need to work and continue my life.” So… I did a good thing that I didn’t return (laughs).