

INTERVIEW WITH XHAFER NULI

Mitrovica | Date: October 21, 2020

Duration: 107 minutes

Present:

1. Xhafer Nuli (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Korab Krasniqi (Interviewer)
4. Renea Begolli (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

Anita Susuri: Mister Xhafer, if you could introduce yourself and tell us something about your family, your origin?

Xhafer Nuli: My name is Xhafer Nuli, born on February 6, 1947 in the village of Zasellë to the Nuli family. My ancestors respectively were, they always worked, mainly with agriculture. They lived there in the village which is exclusively... how to say, we're all related, there's no mix [people]. I finished elementary school in Zasellë, in the village. Not entirely, only the first and second grades, while the third and fourth grades I finished in Tuneli i Parë which is five kilometers away from there [Zasellë]. I traveled, so I always had to travel as a child in the third grade.

Anita Susuri: Why? Weren't there any other classes, or schools?

Xhafer Nuli: There weren't any more classes. The one before was only up to second grade and then it was closed because it wasn't there anymore, I had to go to Tuneli i Parë. Under very difficult conditions at the time, my father of course died in '57, I was ten years old, but we were raised in a big family with uncles and others that were in our family. Until then, when my father died, he worked in Trepça for twelve years, from '45 to '57. And our family of 17 members lived on a pension, the pension my father got for working there.

Anita Susuri: Did an accident happen to your father in Trepça?

Xhafer Nuli: No, my father died a natural death just like my great grandfather Isuf, I also had the opportunity to talk to a... a photographer. My grandfather was Isuf, he was *kryeplak*¹ of the village. He

¹ *Kryeplaku*, literally the head of the elderly. Traditionally they had the role of the mediator in a blood feud reconciliation. In the wider context, they are also the elderly of the village, who held a decision-making position.

was an honorable man, how to say, progressive. In our village in 1932 there was a *mejtep*² that opened...

Anita Susuri: A school...

Xhafer Nuli: Religious, like a religious school. My father taught in that *mejtep*, it's my father and my great grandfather Isuf, who were the main contributors in order for it to be opened, and he is the main there, known as a remarkable figure, he was the main there as *kryeplak* of the village. He was a very respected figure not only in the village, but in the whole region. So, after my father's death, after I finished fourth grade of elementary school I had to stop school for two years because of our [financial] conditions. I stopped school. And then I continued, after two years I continued fifth grade in Tuneli i Parë and I finished it until the eighth grade. I finished high school in Mitrovica's gymnasium,³ and then I began higher education. I started my studies in 1968 in Pristina at the Faculty of Electric Engineering and I finished it in 1973.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you something...

Xhafer Nuli: My faculty lasted five years.

Anita Susuri: Before jumping to the part after finishing faculty, I wanted to ask you a bit about school. What was it like for you as a child to travel all that...? Was there some sort of organizing or you just walked there? How?

Xhafer Nuli: No, we just walked there. We walked there, there was no organizing at the time.

Anita Susuri: Was it difficult?

Xhafer Peci: A very tough road, the road was very difficult. Back then there were really harsh winters and there was a lot of snow. I was physically small either way, we could barely get there, I could barely get my head out of the snow, but I had an uncle who was two or three years older than me. He was stuck with school, so he went with me. He was physically bigger. He would open the path, I went behind him like a bunny (smiles).

Anita Susuri: Were there any other children, or was it only you who went there from the village?

² *Mejtep*, *Maktab* (Arabic transliterations include *makteb*, *mekteb*, *mektepe*, *meqteb*, *maqtab*), also called a *Kuttab* or school, is an elementary school. Though it was primarily used for teaching children how to read, write, grammar and Islamic studies such as Qira'at (Quranic recitation), other practical and theoretical subjects were also often taught.

³ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Xhafer Peci: There were other children as well, yes. It was all the village's children and we mainly went to Tuneli i Parë.

Anita Susuri: What was that school like at the time?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: Did the school there last eight years or...?

Xhafer Nuli: It was, back then at first it wasn't eight years, it was four grades. And then when I got to fifth grade, so two, after two years, then the class opened, the eight-year school was opened in Tuneli i Parë because there wasn't one before, only the four-year school. And we went there until the eighth grade and then we got there.

Anita Susuri: You said that you lost your father at a very young age?

Xhafer Nuli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How many children are in the family? Are you the youngest?

Xhafer Nuli: From my close family, there were six children. Two brothers and four sisters. The brother before me was the oldest, three years before me and he finished university too, actually he finished the High Vocational School for Physics and Chemistry, and then he finished the Faculty of Economics. He has been living in Germany since 1993.

Korab Krasniqi: What about your sisters?

Xhafer Nuli: My sisters are... one is in America with her son, her son is there, the others, two are in Mitrovica and one is in Pristina.

Korab Krasniqi: Did your sisters finish school?

Xhafer Nuli: My sisters didn't finish school, no. To tell you the truth back then there were little opportunities for girls, there was no room, but even if there was we could barely get an education (laughs). It's a little selfish, but that's how the conditions and the circumstances were like. Women couldn't get an education unless the men finished it first. So those of us who were older got an education, the girls, only one of the girls finished it, one of them finished the Medical High School.

Korab Krasniqi: Why did you stop for two years?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me? {gets closer}

Korab Krasniqi: Two years in the fourth grade?

Xhafer Nuli: Because of our [financial] situation, I had to take care of the cattle, to safeguard them. (smiles)

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that your father worked in Trepça.

Xhafer Nuli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: You don't remember your father, but do you know that...

Xhafer Nuli: No, I remember my father but not too much.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember for example what he looked like when he got back from work? Because the work was usually tough, do you remember?

Xhafer Nuli: The work was very tough. He didn't exactly work right at the mine as a miner, he worked as a plumber. The job was a little easier, although it was still in the mine. He looked, maybe I don't remember anything else, but I remember that when he brought his clothes to wash, you could smell the stench on his work clothes from far away, they smell, ores smell like gunpowder because of the pyrite. That's what I remember. It was quite a tough job.

To tell you the truth, at the time, besides... but I know one more thing, whoever worked in Trepça for example, a person who worked in Trepça, their families had to be especially careful towards them and to take care of them. I remember when he worked the third shift, when he came back he slept during the day and we had to move the roosters away from our yard so they wouldn't wake him up.

Anita Susuri: Is it true that they had meals that were more special?

Xhafer Nuli: In the family, yes, his meals were special, always.

Anita Susuri: For example, I think they had to drink more milk.

Xhafer Nuli: He drank more milk. To tell you the truth he didn't have a big appetite, he didn't consume a lot of meat, but he drank milk regularly.

Anita Susuri: What else do you remember from that period of time, when you started high school? How did you start it? What obstacles were there?

Xhafer Nuli: In high school, when I started high school in '64 for a short time there was a, how do I say...

Anita Susuri: A better situation?

Xhafer Nuli: A better situation, although the situation wasn't good until after '66. After '66 when [Aleksandar] Ranković⁴ fell from power, then it became a little easier for our nation to breathe. But, when I started high school for example, three of my subjects were in Serbo-Croatian, three or four subjects. I had to learn those topics by heart because I didn't know the language at all, and so I had to learn it by heart. I remember a case when a professor of the Serbian-Croatian language was some Raspopović.

I had all good grades to be an excellent student, he gave me a two⁵ in Serbian because he told me to speak, at that moment I was caught off guard and I didn't know it that well and he said, "How you study is how you preach," I could have said, "Well, yes, I'm learning things by heart" (laughs) and then I asked to take the exam again at all costs. And later on he improved my grade, he gave me a three⁶ so that I could be an excellent student.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned the time of Ranković. I'm interested to know if you remember, because a lot of Albanians left during that time, in short they were kicked out...

Xhafer Nuli: I remember as a child, I remember when there was an action to confiscate guns.⁷ I know that it was talked about in our village, that's what they said. What we heard as kids, "They made this person stand barefoot on the snow all night. They made this person do this, they made that person do that" and on top of it they asked for two chickens, a vegetable stew, thirty eggs and a pie, what do I know, and they said, "Pancakes for breakfast, and put honey on them, if there's no honey then put sugar" and they started eating and said, "Oh Sharr mountain, oh son" (laughs).

Anita Susuri: So, they asked for some requirements to be fulfilled?

Xhafer Nuli: Maybe it's not worth mentioning the details but it was like that.

Anita Susuri: I'm interested to know if any of this has happened to your family?

Xhafer Nuli: None of that happened to my family, it didn't, they didn't torture anyone like that. They took them, they asked them, in order to find a gun. We didn't have a gun, but they didn't care, they asked for a gun from everybody.

⁴ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of 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 Grade D on an A-F scale (Five-0).

⁶ Grade C on an A-F scale (Five-0).

⁷ After the Second World War, guns began to be confiscated from citizens. This action was followed by many irregularities, during which the Albanian population was politically persecuted under the suspicion that they were refusing to hand over their guns. This was often used as an argument by the Yugoslav system to persecute Albanian families. The speaker here, too, recounts some of the hearsay of the time connected to this period.

Anita Susuri: Yes because I know that people went somewhere to find a gun just to give to them because [otherwise] they would've been tortured.

Xhafer Nuli: Like that, exactly like that.

Anita Susuri: So you said you then continued high school...

Xhafer Nuli: I finished high school here in Mitrovica, I started it in Mitrovica and then I continued until the end. And then after high school I went to university in Pristina. I went to university in '68. There were demonstrations in '68. I took part in those demonstrations and I was in the physics lab practicing for when it was time to go out at the demonstrations, they gave us some paper with the text on it to read so we would know what to chant.

Korab Krasniqi: What was the protest about?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Korab Krasniqi: What was the protest about?

Xhafer Nuli: Back then the request was, "Constitution, Republic, Flag."

Anita Susuri: So, before the demonstration started there was some preparations?

Xhafer Nuli: Yes, yes, of course.

Anita Susuri: Did you know the people who brought you the banners?

Xhafer Nuli: I knew some of them as a young man.

Anita Susuri: As colleagues.

Xhafer Nuli: I didn't know them that well, but I knew some Sylë Pepozhi, as they called him. I don't know where he is now. He brought those [banners] to us at the dorm to read them, to check them out.

Anita Susuri: What was it like when you went out that day?

Xhafer Nuli: That day...

Anita Susuri: Were there cops?

Xhafer Nuli: When we went out that day, we went from all sides and flooded the place at 4:00 in the afternoon, the place flooded from all sides. One group, the main one, started from the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology, where they still are today. And then we met where the University building is

today. We went from the Faculty of Electric Engineering, it used to be up there at the barracks where the Academy is now, that's where the building was, and we went there, we joined them.

Before arriving there people started to shoot [up in the air] four times with a pistol, they immediately brought the banners by car. We took the banners, we went out, we chanted. We went to the Executive Council where the Assembly [building] is. We went back, we stayed there only a bit only for the sake of showing up. There were interventions wherever we went, there was police intervention and these firefighters firing water cannons at us, but the students fought back as well, they destroyed their equipment and stuff. There were also cops who attempted, but there were also Albanian traitors and stuff, some of them withdrew because they saw...

Anita Susuri: Dangerous.

Xhafer Nuli: There was no violence, no violence on our side, even though they ambushed us. And then the second time we went to the Faculty [building] again. Some people made speeches there. There were some that weren't allowed to speak, there were some, but we went there for a second time. When we went there for a second time, there was a legion of police from Macedonia. They intervened in a rough manner and a fight started. We wanted to go near the prison, but they didn't allow us. While walking near what is Toskana today, back then it was Avalla, a Serbian who they say was from the Vojbula town, shot and killed a student, the person who was killed was a student.

And then we went to the Assembly [building] again, we went back and finally around midnight it ended. The next day we wanted to go to university, but they didn't allow us. We were blocked from all sides and we couldn't go anymore, but the demonstrations echoed. There was a tendency to sort of, differentiate, they differentiated some people which for us as students, for me as a freshman there wasn't much of an effect, but I participated there.

Anita Susuri: Do you know if any of your professors or colleagues were imprisoned?

Xhafer Nuli: No, I don't know, I don't remember any professor. I remember Sylva, I know him because he was in university with us. They took him, but I don't know what happened to him because I didn't see him at the university anymore.

Anita Susuri: You never saw him again?

Xhafer Nuli: I never saw him again.

Anita Susuri: Now I would like to talk a bit about your life, so you moved from Mitrovica to Pristina.

Xhafer Nuli: From Mitrovica.

Anita Susuri: What were the conditions like? Where did you stay?

Xhafer Nuli: Mostly I have always stayed in dorms. During my first year I stayed near the pavilions there at the Faculty of Economics. There were some pavilions, some buildings, they were army barracks, and then they were adapted for the students to use. During the other years, in my second and third years I stayed at the dorm number one, I don't know what its number is now, I think it's number three now. That was the first new one to be built at the time. And then in my fourth and fifth years I stayed in dorm number three which is the furthest.

I was, I had, how to say we were a group of really good friends, I hope I never forget them, we always keep in touch. We were a group of friends with Jusuf Krasniqi, Ali Hamiti, Avni Dika, Gani Bimbash, we had a really good time and we still keep in touch to this day.

Anita Susuri: Now I'm interested to know, most people say that Pristina wasn't that developed as a city.

Xhafer Nuli: Pristina was...

Anita Susuri: How did you see it?

Xhafer Nuli: I'm telling you, when I went to the dorm in my first year it felt like the room would eat me. The ceiling was four meters high. When I sat down to study and looked up at the ceiling it seemed like a beast would drop on my head. But, then we went to the other dorm, as I said at dorm number one, the road was muddy. There were construction sites, and the road was being built. We had to wear only boots, we couldn't go there otherwise. As soon as it started to rain, only boots, there was no other way, rubber boots.

Anita Susuri: What was the city like?

Xhafer Nuli: The city was simple, it was quite old, underdeveloped, the infrastructure wasn't that good... The conditions back then were absolutely very difficult.

Anita Susuri: For example, if you compare it to Mitrovica?

Xhafer Nuli: I'm saying that when I was staying at the dorm near the pavilions, when I went there, I had to go to the Trading Center there at Zahir Pajaziti [square], the Trading Center's name was Gërmia. I used to go to my [maternal] uncle to stay and get warm because it was cold in the dorm, there was no heating (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Was there a place where you went out or somewhere you took walks with your friends?

Xhafer Nuli: No, we didn't really go out because we didn't have money, you needed to have a better financial situation, we didn't go out. In '71 there were some Elektriada⁸ organized, there were

⁸ Similar to prom which was organized for the students of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering.

competitions of electric engineering students from Yugoslavia. Elektriada was organized in Poreč. We went there as a group, especially our group [of friends] and there were some others who went to the competitions on different disciplines, some for sports, some for theory, some of us ranked high there, we were successful in the competition. Even though in electric engineering there was a Serb, she was from here [Kosovo]. She won first place, and then in mathematics one of us got first place, Besnik Kastrati.

And then besides us, Albanian students who studied in Zagreb got first place as well. I know there was Agron Dida who ranked high at the competition, and there was also someone whose last name was Abdullahu. We were very successful at the time.

Anita Susuri: So during the years when you finished university, was there a job waiting for you or what was it like? Because usually right after...

Xhafer Nuli: Before going to university I asked for a scholarship from Trepça. They gave it to me, they gave me the Trepça scholarship. If I didn't have the Trepça scholarship I wouldn't be able to go study. I know first hand to be honest, it's bad to say it [but] I went through the whole week eating bread with yogurt, it was like that till I got the scholarship. After I got the scholarship I didn't have problems. Before getting the scholarship because it was awarded to me, but it wasn't activated, I didn't get it immediately, things started to function as they should've later. Later on I had an opportunity and I got a student loan and my financial situation was fairly good, I didn't have problems whatsoever.

Anita Susuri: So, back then the system was, if an organization gave you a scholarship, they expected you to go work [for them]?

Xhafer Nuli: They expected you to go work [for them] and you couldn't dare to work for someone else unless they approved it. If they didn't approve it you couldn't go work somewhere else, you couldn't because they gave you the scholarship, and that's why I took it. As soon as I finished university I went to Trepça, and they immediately offered me a job position and I got employed.

Anita Susuri: In a way you continued the tradition because your father worked there as well. Did you go off of that or why?

Xhafer Nuli: Well to tell you the truth the only opportunity, the only place which would give you a scholarship and I could get it at the time was Trepça, I didn't have other options. I applied to Trepça because Stari Trg awarded scholarships. There were different sectors, the refinery [sector] [awarded scholarships] to some, Stari Trg to some, the Chemical Industry to some, what do I know. But, I was in Stari Trg, that's where I went.

Anita Susuri: So where did you start in Stari Trg? Did you start living in Mitrovica at that point or what?

Xhafer Nuli: I started working in Stari Trg on February 7, 1974 and then I lived for three years until '77 in Zasellë village. And then I came to live in Mitrovica. Up to that moment I lived together with my brother and mother in the same apartment, and then we lived in Mitrovica.

Anita Susuri: When you initially went to work in Trepça, in Stari Trg, did you know what the job would be like beforehand?

Xhafer Nuli: I did know, I knew because there were people who worked, there was almost no family in our village that didn't have someone hired in Trepça, mostly in Stari Trg because it belonged to that part more. I knew, I knew the conditions, I didn't know them in detail but I knew based on what they told about the conditions and the circumstances. I knew the job was really difficult, I knew that there were such conditions that asked for a special commitment, and the same for the job. Work in the mines is the same as work in the army. You can't just go there for the sake of going, but the job requires commitment.

I was met with understanding and directness there because back then, that was the time when more Albanian staff started to work. A superior of mine, as a leader, was Albanian, he was Shyqyri Kelmendi. Actually when I first went there my superior was Bahredin Osmani, but Bahredin transferred somewhere else and I was treated very well by Shyqyri, both correctly and friendly... So, lastly there was also someone my own age, since I was stuck two years late, he went there two years before me.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Did you work inside the pit or what was your job like there?

Xhafer Nuli: In Stari Trg or...?

Anita Susuri: In Stari Trg when you first started.

Xhafer Nuli: My job as an engineer at first, I started in the maintenance department of the mine. That department had a large number of workers, electricians, stators, builders, what do I know. I worked as a chief of technical preparation at first, and then... But anyway I was an intern for six months and there was no other way, you had to finish the internship stage. As an intern, you only had to go and observe the situation, to describe it, and study it and in a way to be introduced to all kinds of circumstances, especially the protection terms and circumstances. Protection at work is one of the most important segments, one of the most important at mines, everywhere, at any enterprise, but in mines it needs a special commitment.

And then I became a sort of leader or chief of technical service, but in the mine, I didn't have to go every day, but from time to time. It was considered as a workplace where you had to show up in the mine as well.

Anita Susuri: When you started in '74, the Constitution was also ratified, so it was sort of... I mean better times.

Xhafer Nuli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: At the same time there was also the idea that Trepça was also always working for someone else, not the development of our own state. What's your opinion on that? What was your point of view?

Xhafer Nuli: But to tell you the truth, until I got to Trepça, when I went there, they had already started hiring [Albanian] staff. After all, when I started working in Trepça, I was the only electric engineer with a diploma that was Albanian there. As I mentioned about Shyqyri, Shyqyri was a miner, but as an electric engineer in Trepça, I was the only Albanian one.

When it comes to welcoming and respecting workers, the welcoming of Albanian workers deserves praise. You couldn't face [hostility], they were so excited for the amount of Albanian staff to increase [in Trepça]. Later on Albanian staff started to join a lot. When I went there, I can't say about others, but all the heads, all the main workers were put as heads of specific departments of work. All the heads were Serbian, Albanians started to join much later. Slowly they [Serbs] started to withdraw for work reasons, for specific reasons, maybe they couldn't stand someone else to command them or request for them to do a job, some of them left the job and went to Serbia, some retired or went somewhere else. Later on all the heads became Albanian, and all the leaders as well.

There was a lot of work in Trepça at the time, people worked with commitment and willingness. To tell you the truth I worked after the war too. I don't know where we lost that willingness, unfortunately! It's unfortunate, but we lost that enthusiasm.

Anita Susuri: When did it start to get a little... and to notice it's going downward, that it's worsening?

Xhafer Nuli: Until, I'm saying from '74 it became better and better until '81, '80-'81. After the '81 demonstrations,⁹ even though we were working staff, we didn't give up, but you could notice their tendencies. I remember a case for example when they had to sentence people for the '81 demonstrations, they had to sentence them. They would come from Committees, from there, Province, as we used to call it, "they have to be sentenced."

There was some Miloš Vojaković and he came and said, "They have to be sentenced." There was a guy, one of us, who said, "[Even] when the man notified you, and he was given a day off." People who were in the demonstrations were given paid leave, and they ended up in jail. Many people were arrested because of the demonstrations.

⁹ On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

Anita Susuri: So only because they had the day off they were betrayed?

Xhafer Nuli: Now their superior [should answer]. I got up and said, “Slow down, it has to be explained, to be made clear. He can’t use his time off even if it was given to him. He can’t use his time off when he’s in jail.” He got up and said, “No, mind your business,” Miloš said, “Whoever gave them time off will answer.” I wasn’t sure if it was me who gave them time off or no (laughs). “Whoever gave them time off will answer even if it’s the main director of the mine.”

[The interview was interrupted here]

Anita susuri: Did you also take part in the ‘81 demonstrations?

Xhafer Nuli: No, no. To tell you the truth Stari Trg wasn’t, it was blocked in a way that you had no chance to, there wasn’t, only some individuals who were here because there was no one in the demonstrations. It was about three people and all three of them were sentenced.

Anita Susuri: We know that there were two marches that were organized by the miners and they went to Mitrovica and the second one was to Pristina I think.

Xhafer Nuli: These ones were later on, after ‘81 they slowly began, step by step. You could see that everything that was built over the years was about to die down, and return to that regime of total Serbian domination until they even started to change the Constitution. There was a debate about the Constitution at the time. First the Serbs started with gatherings, gatherings where they insulted and threw dirt, all so they could have Serbian domination. Not only in Kosovo, but primarily the main asset was Kosovo anyway, but also in Montenegro and Kosovo and Vojvodina, and all sides so they could form Greater Serbia as Milošević¹⁰ planned and that’s when the rallies started, they announced the Constitutional debate in a way to scare us and so that no one would move, in order to change the Constitution.

At the time I remember really well sometime in September or October they brought, [Burhan Kavaja](#) came, Aziz [Abrashi], Burhan was director of the mine, Aziz was general director, they brought Riza Smaka and Halit Muharremi, two jurists, to explain to us what the deal is with the Constitution's change. They basically told us, “Get up because you’re damned.” To tell you the truth we got a very strong message there that we should do everything we can because...

Anita Susuri: What year was this? Before the marches?

Xhafer Nuli: Yes before the demonstrations, before the march, this was in ‘88, September of ‘88. That’s when we started to prepare and discuss, simply to discuss and oppose at all costs the changing of the

¹⁰ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia’s Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo’s autonomy.

Constitution, the degradation of Kosovo's level, to oppose degradation and to demand advancement. So we could have advancement and not degradation. "We want to be equal to all other nations of Yugoslavia just like Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenians and others are." They often say, "The miners protected the Constitution."

They didn't protect the Constitution, but they protected the position of Albanians so we could be equal. They demanded for Albanians to be equal to the other nations in Yugoslavia. That was the essence of all those rallies, we have always had discussions in those rallies and we more or less praised Tito,¹¹ not for any other reason because that's what we agreed upon, only to raise awareness among Croats... only so they would react. Serbs couldn't stand Tito praise, they would react. We always mentioned Tito, "Tito gave us these rights, you want to take them away."

And then that was over, the march to Pristina, the Miners' March on November 17, 1988, the march began from the mine, from Stari Trg. That day, I did not go to work in the morning because I sent one of my children to the doctor. A colleague of mine called me on the phone and said, "Come, because the workers want to go to Pristina." I went to join them. To tell you the truth, when I saw them barefoot [touches leg], it was November, there was snow, so it was November 17. It had snowed prior to that, there was still snow in some places and it was cold.

When I saw them barefoot and poorly clothed in the work uniform, when I saw them I didn't think they would make it to Pristina on foot. "Don't go boys, you won't make it to Pristina on foot." Swear to God, I said, "Let's try and do something, something, because in Pristina..." A worker came close to me and said, "You mean it?" To tell you the truth I enjoyed authority among them. He said, "But Burhan [Kavaja] says we should go." "Did he say that?" "Yes." "Then go, go!" I said. I didn't know what the situation was like in detail, but I tried to see if we could rally there because we couldn't walk [to Pristina]. But, maybe they had the urge [to go] because they [the marchers] were stopped in some places, and they tried to turn them back and that urged them even more, and we started in the morning, at around seven, we arrived there at around three.

I remember really well when we went to the Sultan Murat's mausoleum, beyond the mausoleum a little further, the cops stopped us near the Gazimestan [monument], the police cordon was on both sides, they blocked the whole street. Now the workers had to confront the police. I said to some of my colleagues, "Let's stand in front and lead the workers, because what if... now when they confront them we will calm them down and ask them to stop." Because we pushed from behind and broke the police chain and we continued the march. But this happened quite fast because there were some Albanian policemen and the police chain was broken. They did not respond and were not violent with us. They abandoned the police and joined us at the Sports Hall in Pristina. A few workers held speeches there, a few...

Korab Krasniqi: What was talked about there, do you remember?

¹¹ Josip Broz Tito, former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Korab Krasniqi: What did they talk about?

Xhafer Nuli: It was talked about that degradation in general, “We won’t allow the degradation of Albanians’ position, we want to be equal to all the other nations and there won’t be constitutional changes like Serbia is demanding. We will never allow them,” that stuff and, “Why were Serbs allowed all these gatherings, but you’re criticizing and trying to hinder us?” That stuff.

Korab Krasniqi: Did you meet any politician?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me, yes.

Korab Krasniqi: Who did you meet when you arrived in Pristina?

Xhafer Nuli: [Azem Vllasi](#) came, and if I’m not mistaken, [Kaqusha \[Jashari\]](#) [as well], not sure if she did.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember what they said?

Xhafer Nuli: What?

Anita Susuri: What did they say?

Xhafer Nuli: Nope I don’t remember, I don’t remember but I know that they were also there.

Korab Krasniqi: How did you go back after?

Xhafer Nuli: And then we went back because there were buses behind us, we walked there but the buses were behind us. And then they arranged the buses to go back. My colleagues and I went back by car, there were some Trepça cars too.

Anita Susuri: Based on your opinion, what did you achieve that day? Was it successful?

Xhafer Nuli: It was very successful because that march opened the door for the three day marches, there were uninterrupted marches for three days, from all sides of Kosovo, from Dragash, from Gjakova, they came from all sides of Kosovo for three days and three nights until they were finally violently dispersed. Remzi Kolgeci came out and said, “Leave because... either disperse or they will finish us all.” It was finally dispersed and... the miners continued either way, some went, in almost all the rallies that were organized in Pristina, but we also held another rally the next day on [November] 18 here at the Sports Hall in Mitrovica, another rally from Stari Trg.

Anita Susuri: How did that continue? Was there pressure?

Xhafer Nuli: There was pressure. And then there were calls, all the organizers should be imprisoned or what do I know. That man Lazar Moslov used to come out and say, “I have the list,” he used to say, “of...”

Anita Susuri: The organizers.

Xhafer Nuli: “Of the organizers. I have [the list of] all 92 people who are responsible” what do I know and until later when the strike was organized. Before the strike was organized. So you know, it was discussed very well about how it would be done. “We have to go in and stay in the mine, we shouldn’t leave until all our demands are met.” That was it, it wasn’t spontaneous as some people say, it wasn’t spontaneous.

Anita Susuri: Did the leadership organize it, or what was it like?

Xhafer Nuli: To tell you the truth, it was organized in collaboration with some individuals, but also in collaboration with the directors. Yes, yes, people can say whatever they want. It was the directors, it was all of us. In some way we got the message that we should do all we can and I’m convinced that if it wasn’t for the directors... Look, the workers can be at least a little bit scared or disoriented by someone, but if they [directors] weren’t connected to the workers that strike wouldn’t happen and it wouldn’t have echoed that much.

Korab Krasniqi: Is there a main organizer? Is there someone?

Xhafer Nuli: As I said they were the main organizers there, I don’t know if they agreed with someone higher up or not. But, for us, it was Aziz and Burhan. For us it was them together with the workers, yes together with them. They couldn’t have done it alone, but they had a group of workers, [Avidi Uka](#), Jetush Bajrami, Sefedin Istrefi, there are some others whose names I don’t know. Even [Ibush \[Jonuzi\]](#) was a director, but it actually wasn’t spontaneous, but it was organized.

Anita Susuri: Could you now describe to us the days while you were inside [the pit], everything that you remember?

Xhafer Nuli: As a maintenance director, I took care of things most of the time, I had to make sure the power wouldn’t go out, and the ventilator wouldn’t stop because if there was no ventilation, if there was no air they wouldn’t be able to stay there for even a moment, and then I made sure the elevator wouldn’t stop, so it would work with no issues. And then to keep all the equipment and infrastructure of the mine working. I remember really well that day at 1:00 [p.m], February 20.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: Yes, at one?

Xhafer Nuli: February 20, at 1:00 [p.m], Ibush Jonuzi who was a technical director of the mine at the time called me and said, “Xhafer, the miners locked themselves in the mine,” he said, “they’re not coming out.” We already knew, “Is it happening? May it all go well!” That was done and we went, it didn’t take long, there was wind and it blew a tree down close to the Trepça school, the tree fell on the electricity wires. It caused a short circuit. To tell you the truth I was really worried, it could happen, the power could go out. I remember it as a moment, it was a really scary moment for me, but we managed to avoid that problem and there were no other problems concerning electricity supply and ventilation and stuff like that, which were necessary for the mine.

We went there, we began. It’s true, it’s true that they went there, they were organized to supposedly tell them to go out, but we never told them to go out, but only to protect themselves, to avoid harm, to protect their health as much as possible. There was a strong self-denial for some time, so strong that people started to get sick because they stayed in the whole time. And then our shoes were on, I remember my feet started to get wounded because we didn’t take our shoes off for eight days and eight nights.

In the beginning, they had to take the workers who got sick at Mitrovica’s hospital, but, apparently, this was organized too, a driver came crying and said, “I can’t take you there because I tried and they didn’t take care of my sick relative. They said, ‘shoo, get away from here,’ they mistreated me.” And then we began to set up a temporary ambulance in Stari Trg. That’s what we requested, the Red Cross of Kosovo brought us 300 beds and 600 blankets, we arranged them in the spaces that were available and a team of doctors came from Pristina led by [Skender Boshnjaku](#) who was Minister of Health at the time.

I remember they called Skender Boshnjaku, from the Ministry of Serbia, they really did, “What’s happening there? Do you need us to send doctors?” It wasn’t about the doctors, but they wanted to send agents and disperse the strike. He said, “I don’t need doctors, send medication. I have enough doctors, I don’t need more.” “No, we’ll bring them to you,” “Don’t send even one doctor,” he said, “send me medication if you have any.” Nobody sent them. A truck with medication arrived from the Slovenian Red Cross and even they were tortured in Raška. When he arrived he was...

Anita Susuri: The driver?

Xhafer Nuli: No, the representative of the Red Cross, he almost went mad, “They treated me so badly,” that Slovenian said. But, they couldn’t totally stop him because he was from Slovenia, they didn’t dare to just do that. They brought us a truck with medication from Slovenia.

Korab Krasniqi: How did you manage to get food?

Xhafer Nuli: About the food, people from all over Kosovo started to send food, as much as they could. I remember a man from Mitrovica, some Musa Brena brought his cow, it was about 500-600 kilograms, he tied it to the fence and said, “Slaughter it and give it to the miners so they have food.” Even though

the strike was referred to as a “hunger strike,” but it wasn’t a hunger strike because we sent them food, we sent them food.

Anita Susuri: As far as I know it was the fourth day. It started the fourth day.

Xhafer Nuli: Like that, they didn’t eat for two or three days, but they started eating later, we did send them [food]. There were some who tried to make a problem out of it, “No, this is a hunger strike,” but everything went well.

Korab Krasniqi: What was it like not going outside? What did you do?

Xhafer Nuli: I did go out, I didn’t stay there all the time because as I mentioned I had to take care of some things. But...

Korab Krasniqi: What was the atmosphere like inside?

Xhafer Nuli: We found them gathered every time we went there. The atmosphere was quite difficult. We had cases, for example when people were so desperate, so much that [they would say], “I will go jump in the well and die because I can’t, I can’t.” The other [would say], “If I die,” he said, “bury me in this manufactory, cover me, I don’t want to go out,” the other said this, the other said that. Something really took over them... it was terrifying, it was terrifying. But, whatever happened, it was pride. It was pride because they felt pride that they’re doing something, we used to send them the newspaper, we sent them information to show them that the whole world is supporting them and sending them food, like that.

When it came to the food I remember a case, some people from Lipjan came, they brought a lot of aid, but lastly they also gave us two onions {shows with hands}, “And old woman gave these to us, she said, ‘I have nothing else to give, I want to give these two onions’ she wants to give these, to bring you two onions.” And then a family, husband and wife, brought two golden *lira*¹² [coins], “We want to contribute this for the miners.” There were...

Korab Krasniqi: How did the miners communicate with their families? Was there communication?

Xhafer Nuli: There wasn’t, only the ones that came, they came there to visit, to know how they were doing, “Tell them I’m okay, go home,” “What do you mean go home?” “Don’t bother us.”

Anita Susuri: Who were the people visiting? Who came there?

Xhafer Nuli: There were visits from all around Kosovo. And then I remember a special case when Azem Vllasi came for example, at the same time with the people from Serbia’s Union, but we had to, we had

¹² *Lira* is the name of several currency units. It is the current currency of Turkey and the name of the former currencies, including those of Italy, Malta and Israel. The term originates from the value of a Roman pound (Latin: *libra*, about 329g, 10.58 troy ounces) of high purity silver.

to send Azem to an office there, “Wait till they go,” so they wouldn’t run into each other, and then Azem went and visited them too. And then there were people from all over, how do I say, I don’t even know who it was anymore...

Korab Krasniqi: One of the demands was to...?

Xhafer Nuli: The demands, there were nine demands from the miners. One of them was, “United Nations, Yugoslavia is not capable of providing a solution, we want the United Nations to deal with our case.”

Anita Susuri: To intervene.

Xhafer Nuli: To intervene and determine our status, where we’re at, that we were mistreated.

Korab Krasniqi: Who did you ask to resign and why?

Xhafer Nuli: And one of the demands was for three people to resign. Rahman Morina,¹³ Hysamedin Azemi and Ali Shukriu.

Korab Krasniqi: Why?

Xhafer Nuli: Because all three of them positioned themselves, how to say, on Serbia’s side, of Milošević and they supported the changing of the Constitution at all costs, to degrade everything that was Albanian. They joined there when Rahman Morina was upstairs. Rahman was upstairs, he came down and said, “Go tell Aziz and the others, ‘Bring out the workers from the mine.’” They said, “Rahman, the workers are demanding your resignation. Resign and don’t bring all these people down with you. Don’t let them...” He said, “No I can’t, I can’t dare to resign, I can’t.” It was exactly like that, I remember it very well.

Korab Krasniqi: Did Rahman ask to join you?

Xhafer Nuli: No, this only happened at the director’s office because he wouldn’t even dare to go to the mine, they wouldn’t accept him.

Anita Susuri: Which one of the leaders went down to the mine for example?

Xhafer Nuli: From the leaders, it was Syria Popovci. Syria didn’t contribute in the way he should’ve. To tell you the truth we really valued him as a professor, but I don’t know why he tried to justify the constitutional changes. We already knew what they meant. There were some others but I don’t

¹³ Rahman Morina (1943-1990) had a career as an agent of the Ministry of Interior of SFR Yugoslavia, and later on as a party official in the League of Communists of Kosovo. He rose through the ranks and was in 1981 appointed as Kosovo's interior minister, and thereby held the top law enforcement office in the province.

remember. I mentioned Azem, [but] Azem wasn't even in position because they had dismissed him earlier.

Korab Krasniqi: Did Stipe Šuvar¹⁴ visit you?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Korab Krasniqi: Stipe Šuvar?

Xhafer Nuli: Stipe, they started to come from Yugoslavia later. Stipe Šuvar came, there was also Radiša Gačić and Jurij Bajec. They tried to convince the miners to go out. But, the miners gave them a very clear answer... I even remember very well when Stipe Šuvar came out he said, "What's his position?" About Mursel Haziri. Mursel Haziri was one of the strikers and he was later imprisoned with the other strikers. Mursel said, "Who is organizing the gatherings in Vojvodina?" He said, "They're saying the people are. Who is organizing the gatherings in Montenegro? They're saying the people are," he said, "What are we?" He was stuck and didn't know what to say. "Why isn't it okay for us to do this but it is for them?" And when he [Stipe] came out he said, "Him, what's his position," he said. "A miner," they said. He said, "It's a waste that he's there. He should be here with us," as in he doesn't belong there (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Knowledgeable.

Xhafer Nuli: "Because he won't let us speak. He should've been here," he said, "together with us."

Korab Krasniqi: You requested for Stipe Šuvar and Milošević to visit you. Why did you want to meet them?

Xhafer Nuli: It was a request, not for something...

Korab Krasniqi: To let them know what...

Xhafer Nuli: Just to let them know that their attempts are in vain because they won't be on our good side as long as they are trying to degrade [Kosovo's position]. They, Dizdarević¹⁵ came too. Dizdarević didn't come to Trepča later, but went to Pristina. A group of five people went to Pristina to talk to him. Dizdarević didn't have power, no power at all, he just got a position and couldn't do anything. Gračanin¹⁶ was with him too. He was a military, he was a very, how to say, sneaky and vile military. He then said, "Get the workers out to resign."

¹⁴ Stipe Šuvar (1936–2004) was a Croatian politician and sociologist who is considered to have been one of the most influential communist politicians in the League of Communists of Croatia in the Socialist Republic of Croatia during Yugoslavia and later in modern Croatia.

¹⁵ Raif Dizdarević (1926) is a Bosnian politician who served as the first Bosnian president of Yugoslavia. Dizdarević participated in the armed resistance as a Yugoslav Partisan during the Second World War.

¹⁶ Petar Gračanin (1923-2994) was a general in the Yugoslav People's Army.

The condition was that in order for the workers to leave the mine, they [politicians] should resign first. Then the other demands could be met after the miners were out of the mine, but without the resignation of the three of them they wouldn't leave the mine. Gračanin said, "Well we can't just resign like that because what do we do if Serbs come down to Leposavić?" And that's what happened. So, we were prepared for the other scenario as well, [we were aware] that the Serbs would rise as well.

[The interview was interrupted here]

And then when they came, when we [the leaders] got out of the mine, Šuvar and that other man, we requested to organize a conference outside in a restaurant, and the Serbian press was there, in a way to make it seem that they [Serbs] had taken the miners out. But, no one went, only us, the organizational leaders, the directors and heads, three or four people, even Aziz couldn't have any effect. So, the strike continued.

And later on, they resigned, they brought the resignations and they [the miners] said, "No we want..." They only showed them the signatures that they're resigning. They said, "Not only the signature, but we want to see the stamp," they said (laughs), with the stamp. "With the stamp, go send them to the Committee, at least the Committee should prove that these people have resigned." They brought them to the miners, they stamped it and showed the resignations, but that was all a trick. None of the resignations went through, and then the retaliation started. After, after the strike, all of those workers were persecuted one by one, they were... whoever was more vocal, whoever was more active, they were all... these are some details that I remember.

Korab Krasniqi: I have one [more] question and I'll stop. After you managed to communicate your political demands through the strike and the march, what economic consequences did this eight-day shut off have in Yugoslavia?

Xhafer Nuli: The eight-day shut off didn't have much consequences, but there, not only this shut off. There was no proper work in Trepça anymore after that time period because it was broken, there was an initiative, an initiative that they won't allow to be exploited anymore, there won't be benefits. Before, Trepça's impact was really strong. Trepça was an economic giant of its own which provided a lot, it is even considered one of the first industries in former Yugoslavia.

But, there was no proper work afterwards. Every time after the eight-day strike, every month, they started to persecute about 14 of us and Lazër Krasniqi and this... all 14 of the mine leaders, Lazër Krasniqi and Azem Vllasi who were together with them. They were imprisoned. And around one hundred others were prosecuted for criminal offenses for being active in the strike and they were imprisoned for up to three months. While they [mine leaders] were accused of counterrevolution and sentenced to many years in prison.

They didn't take them all at once. I remember Veli Osmani very well, he was one of the most vocal activists of the strike. He used to say, "When they took me and sent me to prison, it was like the world

became mine.” They used to release him at day, but took him and tortured him all night. On the other hand, the propaganda was spreading, “Veli Osmani betrayed his friends.” We had many headaches, many problems. Should’ve told them, “It had to be organized. Stop, the propaganda is coming from all sides, let’s not allow it.”

Anita Susuri: The day when the strike ended and you saw the workers, what state were they in? What did you see that day?

Xhafer Nuli: That was a very difficult situation because everyone... there was also a Croatian physician here, Slobodan Lang. He was a supporter and he came from Croatia. He was there when the miners got out. He even gave the idea that the miners should come out at two in the morning, on February 28 at two in the morning the miners came out. So that they wouldn’t come out to light after [an eight-day long] darkness because they could go blind, they would cover their eyes with bandages even though the light wasn’t that strong, it was night. He gave this [recommendation] so they would slowly adapt.

But, those ambulance stations, the temporary one was left with many beds, full of people, but the police got there immediately, the agents went in and raided them, they got them and threw them out. And then the persecution of them one by one began. Some were imprisoned earlier, some later, but those 14 [leaders] were imprisoned immediately. And then the persecutions for offenses began, interrogating everyone one by one whoever was there, in a way that...

Anita Susuri: Did they interrogate you?

Xhafer Nuli: They did interrogate me. They even used different tactics. They took me in for questioning, they called me and said, “Come to Tuneli i Parë at the entrance where the gate is.” Going to Tuneli i Parë from Stari Trg was a tough road, but that was one of their tactics after the strike. A tactic in order to see who you hung out with, so they could blame you by association. I said, “No, I won’t come!” They asked, “What?” On the phone, “You’re saying you won’t come?” I said, “Come if you want to, I’m in my office in Trepça. Come and pick me up at my office, or send me to the [Police] Secretariat, or whatever you want. But I won’t come to the streets and alleys.”

Two people came accompanied by a third, it was Golud from Zveçan who called me. He came with another person, someone from Vojvodina and then they began. Truth be told, the discussion and the interview, the interrogation was easier in my territory, it was easier than going through all that mess. In my territory it was easier.

Anita Susuri: What did they ask you for example?

Xhafer Nuli: Well they asked me, “What was your role in these strikes?” I said, “We didn’t divide our roles, we didn’t act in a movie. I know my role of work, my role is to keep the machines, elevator, ventilator, the electricity and the water pumps working. These things, these are my duties and no one can stop me from doing them, I have them assigned by contract.” “Well,” they said, “you got in front of

the police cordon in Gazimestan there and you dispersed the cordon.” “Well,” I said, Golub knew me {shows with hand} he couldn’t imagine. “You probably didn’t know me. Did you think,” because he was the one asking me, “Did you think I was physically capable enough to disperse the police cordon.” “No,” he said, “when someone has [body] mass they’re very strong,” he said. “No,” I said, “those are fairytales. Leave these fairytales” and stuff like this.

But, I remember another (laughs) detail. During that time period since they were taken to prison, I kept a Trepça jacket with me all the time because what do you know it could be cold in prison (laughs). A technical director had noticed me, some Nexhat, he noticed me, “Why are you keeping this?” I said, “Well do you want me to tell you the truth?” He said, “Say it.” I said, “I’m just expecting them to grab me [and send me to prison] so at least I’ll be warm” {touches his jacket}.

Anita Susuri: To be prepared.

Xhafer Nuli: “And when they beat me up, maybe they won’t take my jacket off and I’ll take the hits easier.”

Part Three

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that after the strike, work never continued normally.

Xhafer Nuli: After that strike, there were strikes and interruptions every month. On March 13, they enclosed themselves in the restaurant for three days. On March 13, actually on March 15, for three days, till March 18. The strike stopped on 28, they had a week off, and then they continued work. They enclosed themselves in the restaurant on March 15 and stayed there for three days. And then there were other strikes. It’s worth mentioning the October strike which was from October 27 to 30. 62 miners locked themselves in the eight level with no food or water, under very difficult conditions.

Korab Krasniqi: 60 miners.

Xhafer Nuli: 62 miners, 62 miners.

Korab Krasniqi: On what level?

Anita Susuri: Eighth.

Xhafer Nuli: On the eighth level, they locked themselves in there.

Korab Krasniqi: In October?

Xhafer Nuli: In October.

Anita Susuri: Was it October 27?

Xhafer Nuli: October 27 of '89, and then they went and took them out violently, beating them up, with violence.

Anita Susuri: Were they imprisoned?

Xhafer Nuli: All of them. Ten of them were accused of criminal offenses and were sentenced immediately, they were sent to three months in prison, while the others were accused of violation. And then after that, a campaign against all the workers began, 1.214 workers were accused of violation because of the strike. 778 of us were fired, each of us were fired in four months.

Anita Susuri: Suspension?

Xhafer Nuli: 778 of us were suspended.

Anita Susuri: And then they fired workers in '90.

Xhafer Nuli: And then we began again, we didn't stop, we kept going on, and then in '90 we still were active, the first demand was "Release our friends from prison" and the other demands that we always had, and they kept doing their work. And then the nationwide protests in Kosovo began. February 20, 1990, on the anniversary of the strike, the miners from Trepça walked to the bridge in Mitrovica, to go and join the mob of students, the mob of protesters.

They didn't allow them to go there, they brought some buses, they wanted to put them in buses and send them to the stadium. They had a really cruel plan to send them to the stadium and throw teargas at them to suffocate those people. But, the students told them, they warned them, "Don't get in." They really did send them near the stadium, [the students] told them, "Leave, don't get in the stadium." Then, they joined the students and that's the day when Selman Vojvoda was murdered at *Ura e Gjakut* [Blood Bridge].

Anita Susuri: Who is that?

Xhafer Nuli: Selman Vojvosa, a student who was murdered in that protest. When he was buried, 500 hundred thousand people attended his funeral.

Anita Susuri: Were you at the stadium too? Did you go?

Xhafer Nuli: I wasn't, I didn't go that day. I wasn't there. And then they didn't work for seven days because they didn't... I wasn't at the stadium that day because I wasn't working at all because they suspended 700 and how many, 778 of us were suspended. I couldn't go to work till April 14.

Anita Susuri: You were suspended.

Xhafer Nuli: Yes I was suspended. And then they took them, we didn't work for seven days, they didn't let us work. After that, the first day they let us work on [February] 28, I organized [the workers] to form the Independent Union and we held a meeting at the restaurant that day, and we announced the leadership and the Independent Union so we could be connected, for that to be a sort of connection between the strike and the Union.

Korab Krasniqi: Who was the Head of this Union?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Korab Krasniqi: Head of this Union?

Xhafer Nuli: I founded it and was Head of the Union from the beginning to 2000, June of 2000.

Anita Susuri: The day when they fired you for not agreeing with the conditions. Do you remember what happened that day?

Xhafer Nuli: From... {raises his hand}

Anita Susuri: In '90 when they fired everyone from their jobs.

Xhafer Nuli: When we were dismissed from work in the '90s, those 787 employees, as I told you that was in October. We weren't... the workers were already in the mine pit, and those 62 workers that were in the pit were taken out by force. While they were locked in the mine pit, the entire mine stopped working because that wasn't in order. However, everyone was dismissed and they didn't allow us to go to work anymore. They said to us, "You are suspended and you shouldn't come to the workplace."

Anita Susuri: What were those years of unemployment like?

Xhafer Nuli: Those were very terrible years. And then we went, after that strike, after the Union was formed till June, I mean August, on August 8 we went to work. When we went there on August 8, the door was locked. To tell you the truth, I was notified on the phone from the main office, "Well they have surrounded Trepça, something is happening, there are many soldiers I think." We went there, but when we arrived they didn't let us in, they said, "You can't go in anymore."

We tried [to go] to our workplace. We went there for three days straight. Until finally the police came there and they were armed. They even declared it as an uprising so they would stage a sort of... But, they told us, "We don't want to see you here." A Worker's Council held a gathering to show that we won't give up on our jobs, we are workers, but they didn't let us go anymore, we couldn't go. They published a list afterwards, they published a list and called someone in order to spread it. The whole time their intention was to divide us, but they were never able to.

And then immediately after, we began immediately, we already had the Union, we began to have activities in order to ensure the wellbeing of the workers in whatever way and help them. Even though the people were ready to help and on the other side it was important not to stop our activities. So, our activities continued and that spirit, how do I put it, the spirit to continue to resist would always be present. These were our two main directions, our main activities as a Union.

So immediately after we were dismissed, the next day or the one after, we got aid from Gjakova, about 7000 kilograms of flour. I'm not sure which company it was, *Agimi* or I don't know which one to be honest. And then we slowly started to receive help. There was a strong fear, people were concerned about what was going to happen, if they would starve to death. But, there was an extraordinary [sense of] organization to assure people that they wouldn't starve to death, no one would suffer for food. We would face difficulties, but we wouldn't withdraw from our goals until we completed all of them.

And then all sorts of activities began. I forgot to say this, before they fired us from our jobs, we took part and contributed at the Convention of Gjakova's Union which was held on June 30 and July 1, in Gjakova. We decorated [the Trepça workers] with crystals and stuff and the miner's contribution was remarkable, but that Convention's support for the miners was remarkable as well.

Anita Susuri: What year was that in?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: What year?

Xhafer Nuli: '90.

Anita Susuri: '90.

Xhafer Nuli: Yes, in '90. We held the Union's Convention there in Gjakova. On July 2 the Constitutional Declaration was held at the Assembly.

Anita Susuri: Yes, the signing. What else was it...

Xhafer Nuli: E...

Anita Susuri: Yes, go on.

Xhafer Nuli: We had an initiative and the request to form BSPK¹⁷ because the Miners' Union is maybe the first union that was formed in Kosovo, or maybe even in Yugoslavia. The Independent Union is the

¹⁷ Albanian acronym for *Bashkimi i Sindikatave të Pavarura të Kosovës*, which translates as The Union of Independent Syndicates of Kosovo.

first one. How do I say, we had the initiative to form BSPK. We went to Hajrullah [Gorani],¹⁸ we talked, we agreed, we organized it and it was created during the Convention and then we continued working on it.

And then as I said, they fired us on August 8. And then the Union tried to do something, LDK¹⁹ as well. But it was more the people, not the parties. There's something worth mentioning and that deserves praise. It's the help offered by the winegrowers of Malisheva. They hired 460 people, they worked there from one to four months and earned income. Besides hiring them, they organized among themselves and arranged them [workers] in families. There were even some, "I will shelter this one, no I will shelter the miner, no I will shelter this many miners." They hosted them in families, as long as they worked there they stayed in these families and were offered food and everything.

It's worth mentioning one of the activists of that time, it was [Mulla Xhevati](#) from Bubavec, it's Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, he's still alive. There were many but I don't remember all of them. There was Bejtë Kryeziu, in all those villages, Bubavec, the other one, what was its name, near Malisheva, Bojë and all those villages, they took them to work in winegrowing.

Korab Krasniqi: I wanted to ask you about the activity of...

Xhafer Nuli: We had great difficulties, we had many difficulties and we had fear when it came down to paying the workers, hand them what they had earned, because when they got out of there, they had to be paid. We had a great difficulty because we had to go and take the money and who would dare to do that, if you had been caught, what would happen to your reputation? Where would you go? Who could defend you, all those people worked so hard, and in the end that money would go to waste. But, we went there in an organized way to tell you the truth. During all that time, during ten years while I independently worked at the Union of Trepça, it was sort of illegal, we were always followed. During all that time I never had a case which would make me say, "Here, I failed in this" or "One of my coworkers reported me [to the police]."

I had, we had a remarkable compactness, a remarkable harmony. I thank all of my coworkers and everyone who worked towards that goal and activity and for their readiness for work. And then we got that money, we went there, we gave it to them in Shipol, Halit brought it to us, he was a driver. To be honest we were scared while they distributed the money. That was a great help. It was an initial stimulation, to lay a foundation for the winter, some *zahire*²⁰ in order to live through winter.

¹⁸ Hajrullah Gorani (1931-2020) was a professor, syndicalist and a former political prisoner. He was the Head of the Independent Syndicalist Union of Kosovo. He led the Kosovo workers' strike held on September 3, 1990, after which Milosević's regime in Kosovo terminated all their contracts, and an oppressive decade for Albanians living in Kosovo began.

¹⁹ Alb. *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.

²⁰ Foods that are prepared and stored for long-term storage and for later use, usually in the winter.

But the help did not stop. Worth mentioning especially the help that came from Presevo and Bujanoc. That was unimaginable. The trucks never stopped, they brought grains and not only grains, but flour because they sent the grain, we had a mill in Zhunica, some man named Selatin. We sent the grains there, they sent it and then we went to take the flour with trucks.

Anita Susuri: Did you want to add something [addresses Korab Krasniqi]?

Korab Krasniqi: He already said it, he considered his activity and commitment in the Union as a sort of illegality. My question, do you interpret this commitment as a support for your miner friends or did you see it as political activity? Did you ever feel persecuted because of this activity?

Xhafer Nuli: Political activity [repeats question], to tell you the truth, I never had political ambitions. Even when I started working there, I had that position, I saw it as appropriate, I saw it as appropriate to commit to that. At the end of the day, people were killed, people went away, you should definitely commit to that, to contribute as much as you can, no matter how little, every one of us. If each one of us doesn't contribute, we won't prosper, we won't have victory. This was all for a national cause. We called it a Union, but we worked on labor [rights] the least, perhaps we did, but mostly we worked on worker's wellbeing and welfare. But, as I said, I told you, it was focused in two directions, the other one was to advance national causes through opposition, to simply oppose them [Serbian regime].

[The interview was interrupted here]

Xhafer Nuli: The Stari Trg mine had 3,050 workers before they fired us, 3,050 workers. Out of them, 2,716 of us who were fired were Albanian and some Bosnians were there as well, but there were about 2,600 Serbs left from 350, not even 350 and about six Albanians remained. There were about six Albanians left but they didn't have much impact to tell you the truth, we distanced ourselves from them, but not with any [bad intentions]. And then, they began, they started to call them in little by little to pressure them and then make them work, but we didn't go, absolutely no one went. I told you, only six people went and then they got 120 workers from Tuzla. They brought them from Tuzla after there was a methane explosion, which is very indicative that they set it up in order to close down their workplace, to bring the miners here. Some people were killed there of course, when methane explodes, it doesn't pass that easily, and they brought 120 workers here from there and they brought some people from Gornji Milanovac in Serbia, but mainly from there [Tuzla].

When we found out they came, we went there to talk. We met some of them while they were getting water, we talked and told them, "Don't take our jobs. What are you looking for here?" But, they continued anyway. We wrote an appeal, I wrote that appeal. We sent that appeal in Serbo-Croatian, to not take our jobs, what happened to us will soon happen to you as well and stuff like that. We sent it to the factory yard. Immediately, that day, 42 people left, they quit their jobs, they went to walk [away] from their homes. They went to stop them [the workers], but they couldn't.

The next day, the police came and took me. People from SUP²¹ took me and sent me to... They filed an indictment against me, a criminal one for violating the laws of Serbia, article 216 is referred to like that. They took me and tortured me of course, they tortured me with those SUP tools and then I spent one months in custody. After custody, I was released but I had the indictment, they just released me from custody.

Anita Susuri: Did they continuously abuse you for one month?

Xhafer Nuli: Not continuously, only that day, only that day. And then I hired lawyers and, actually I didn't hire them, one of them was hired by the Union, one of them by my brother and there was no violence. But that day [when they arrested me], yes, there was violence and very brutal behavior which is unfortunate, but there's nothing you can do. To tell you the truth, not only there, not only that [case], but I can say that during those ten years, they never took me to the [Police] Secretariat to get information out of me, and they continuously physically abused people.

They came to my house pretending to check on me, "Come on, we'll check if you have guns. You have guns. Show us the guns." My children were asleep, my youngest son, I immediately told them, "Let's go outside," I said, "Don't scare my children because when he wakes up he'll see you like this..." We went to the other room, we talked, they said, "We're looking for three guns from you, a shotgun, an automatic gun, and a pistol, a revolver." I said, "Well," (laughs), I said, "you're wasting your time because I have nowhere to get them." They said, "Well you better bring out the guns, don't make us get into situations with no way out because you know what'll happen to you," they said. I said, "Go about your way however you want."

They took me and sent me to the [State] Secretariat and interrogated me, but their intention was to take all the Union documentation which was in my house. But, the [Union] documentation was divided, one part was kept by the secretary, one was kept by me and the other by the accountant. So, but they took the documents I had, I only remember these, because there was no other documents, even the ones which remained, my house was burned during the war and to this day I wasn't able to return because my house is {shows with hand} beyond, on the other side of the bridge, of Ibar.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about that one month in custody, what was it like? What were the conditions like?

Xhafer Nuli: That one month in custody was really, really bad to be honest. During that month, I was in solitary confinement for 13 days, I was (smiles) all alone, I didn't know what to do. And then I was in a room [with other people]. The other inmates were polite and they respected me, they showed me a special respect. The bad thing is that they mixed them [the inmates], they mixed even the ones... there was no murderers in the room, but there were thieves, there were thieves.

²¹ Srb. *Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova - SUP*, which translates to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of the Yugoslav Socialist Federal Republic.

Anita Susuri: Were they Albanian or Serbian?

Xhafer Nuli: There was one Serb and the others were Albanian.

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned the war, I wanted to talk about that. Where were you during the war?

Xhafer Nuli: I was in the village during the war. The day before, we already realized that NATO would bomb, that NATO would intervene and stuff. I was in the village, I was actually at home. I wanted to send one of my sons away because my cousin came from the village to tell me that I should leave, but I couldn't leave my family, I had my mother, my wife and the others [children] were very young. My son was 18 years old, my oldest, the others were very young. I told my son, "You go, only you," but he didn't want to go without me. The next day my mother and wife told me, "You go too, for the son." We left together. We left, we went to an in-law in Tavnik {shows with hand}, and then we went to Zasellë from there.

I had [different] cases, I had offers from cousins [to go abroad], since I had warnings before to watch out because things were not looking good. I went to Zasellë. We stayed there the whole time, during the war. We closely followed the situation from there. To be honest, it's terrifying to tell you what my son, my 18 year old son [said] before we left, at the time it was chaotic all around, he said, I had a small revolver at home, it was actually my brother's, and he [my son] said, "Dad, why the revolver *bre*?²² Why don't you take some bombs?" I said, "Why *bre* son?" He said, "Some bombs so we can do something, better to kill ourselves than to be massacred." That terrified me so much that we stayed in the village there.

Stuff like that, nothing worth noting happened there [in the village]. They later came and burned the houses, but we didn't stay, we ran away when we realized they were coming, we ran away and then they came and burned the houses. They threw grenades on April 3, they threw grenades at the village in '99, but fortunately none of my family members were harmed. They killed one and wounded three or four from a neighbor's family. But, the bombing lasted fairly long. And then after...

Anita Susuri: Was your family in Mitrovica, your wife?

Xhafer Nuli: No, no. And then I immediately went to Zasellë from here, we went to Zasellë, and then my mother, wife and children came the next day. Everyone came to Zasellë and we stayed together, we were there until May 2 [1999], until May 2. On May 2, my family went to Albania, I returned with my two sons, I was in Zasellë again with my two sons and my nephew. We stayed there the whole time. Something we always thought, I told my sons as well, I told them, "Even if they come to kill you, don't give up, run away, leave. We can't fight, we can't" We had nothing to fight them with. "But don't give up."

²² Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *Bre* adds emphasis, similar to the English bro, brother.

Korab Krasniqi: When did you come back to your house here?

Xhafer Nuli: I could never go back home again because it was burned. After a month... and then my neighbors told me, they told me because I had my apartment before, I let my sister live there. And then I built my house together with my brother up there near the hospital. My official address was the apartment, I often had problems with it, "Where do you live?" They went to the apartment that night. A guy told me after the war, he said "That night," he said, "they came," he said, "and asked me," he asked, "Are you Xhafer?" A neighbor said, "Yes, [I am] Xhafer. They just grabbed me *auuu* {onomatopoeia} down the stairs. A woman got out and said, 'That's not him, he's someone else.' They let me go," he said, "they kicked me behind, they just let me go."

The next day my family... the next day they guaranteed that NATO bombed, the next day my family left the house there, early in the morning. Half an hour after my family left, my neighbors told me, "Five people with masks came there, they went in with no warning," he said, "they broke down doors and windows and went into the house, but they didn't find anyone."

Anita Susuri: Did you then live in the southern part [of Mitrovica]?

Xhafer Nuli: No, I only slept in Tavnik that night, and then the next day I left. And then I lived in Zasellë after the war until August because I had nowhere else to go. I had my apartment there, but it was occupied.

Korab Krasniqi: Apartment and the house?

Xhafer Nuli: Apartment and the house.

Korab Krasniqi: The house, was it burned?

Xhafer Nuli: The house was burned.

Korab Krasniqi: You couldn't go back to your apartment?

Xhafer Nuli: I couldn't go back to my apartment because it was beyond Ibar, on that side.

Korab Krasniqi: What happened to it? Is the apartment still there or was it sold?

Xhafer Nuli: It was still there to be honest, and they gave it to a Serb after twenty years, he doesn't pay rent or anything...

Korab Krasniqi: When were you in the northern side to visit these homes?

Xhafer Nuli: You can't visit them, you have nowhere to visit.

Anita Susuri: You never went there again?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: You never went again?

Xhafer Nuli: You can't visit, neither Habitat [UN Habitat Kosovo], nor nothing. They say, "Why do you care, it's your apartment." But how is it my apartment if it was used by someone else for twenty years? I reported it to the court, I reported it to Habitat, but still nothing, absolutely nothing.

Korab Krasniqi: How long did you get to stay in Zasellë?

Xhafer Nuli: Excuse me?

Korab Krasniqi: After the war ended you couldn't go back home, you stayed in Zasellë, you had nowhere to go.

Xhafer Nuli: I stayed in Zasellë.

Korab Krasniqi: You couldn't go back anymore. How long did you get to stay there?

Xhafer Nuli: I stayed there until August.

Korab Krasniqi: Until August.

Xhafer Nuli: Until August. And then in August I came here as I said, I came here in Mitrovica, everyone started to leave because there were some Serbs here. They saw that KFOR²³ protected them for three or four months. They started to leave. At that time I found someone, I asked him, "Do you want to switch apartments?" He said, "Okay." I started to live in this apartment, I took him to my apartment, I had the key there, I took him to my apartment. But, he then filed a request for his apartment in Habitat, to leave it to a relative or... He told me, "Some boxers came and kicked me out" and now my apartment is there [in the northern side]. But I have the documents, the apartment is mine, but I could never use it anymore.

Anita Susuri: So, when the war was over, Mitrovica remained divided in two.

Xhafer Nuli: Yes.

²³ The Kosovo Force is a NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo. KFOR entered Kosovo on June 11, 1999, two days after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Anita Susuri: What were your thoughts at the time, what did you think would happen next when [Mitrovica] remained that way?

Xhafer Nuli: To tell you the truth because it's easy to say it, but it was a big mistake because we should've organized, but you couldn't go on that [northern] side in groups, they didn't allow it. When you went to the Ibar Bridge, there was a KFOR guard on this side and they used to say, "Will you go that way or this way and only one at a time, not in groups. You can't stay here." Because some people used to gather there.

Anita Susuri: Did you continue [to work] after? Did you go to Trepça after the war ended and the Serbs went away?

Xhafer Nuli: Look, we often criticize others, but there's a lot to criticize ourselves for as well. You have to criticize yourself, it's a tragedy, it's a great harm, it's a great harm that immediately after they went back, immediately after the war ended, KFOR was here. KFOR came to Mitrovica on the 19, I came here on the 21st. The 19th was a Saturday, I came to Mitrovica with my sons on the 21st and I met with some people from KFOR at Mitrovica's entrance. They asked me, "What's in these factories? What are they? How do they function?" They had a translator, he was Serbian and they were in military uniforms, soldiers of the French KFOR, and he translated to Serbian, we talked to each other in Serbian.

I said, they asked for my name and last name. I said, "Since you got my first and last name, I want to know yours too," to the officer, "give me your first and last name." He gave me his name. I said, "Can I come?" He said, "You can." I went to the military barracks a few times, they never stopped me (laughs) to talk because I wanted to go to Trepça. We attempted to organize going to Trepça. To tell you the truth I gathered about 10-15 people in Tavnik to go on our own so at least prevent water flooding, so there wouldn't be a flood in the mine because that would be a big issue. But, we finally came to the conclusion that we should go and make an agreement with people from UÇK.²⁴ But the people of UÇK from that region went to Vushtrri. We went to Vushtrri and they told us, "Come tomorrow." When we went the next day, no one was there.

And then four Albanian boards were formed {shows with fingers}, "We are legitimate, we are legitimate, we are legitimate" and from June 22 to December 22 we couldn't go to Trepça because we were going back and forth with each other. When we went there we found the mine almost flooded. Fortunately, we saved it at the last moment and the mine is still going to this day. Because to be honest it was a matter of hours, of minutes, the water was 30 centimeters deep at the pipes station, the water was 30 centimeters deep. If it became twenty more [centimeters] deep, it would flood the motors and it'd be done, you wouldn't be able to do anything, absolutely anything.

²⁴ Alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - UÇK, which translates as Kosovo Liberation Army. UÇK was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

And then we had obstacles after we went on December 22, we had a lot of obstacles between each other because they were blackmailing us, “What do you want?” I don’t know what, but we wanted to be organized the way we used to be before, not with those new boards or what do I know. These were the issues, this is our misfortune, we can say whatever to whomever.

[The interview was interrupted here]

KFOR was there, Serbs worked the same way as before until we got there. On the 22nd [of December], *shkijet*²⁵ didn’t come. When we went there we found the situation [the mine] in a collapsing state. To tell you the truth we found everything sad, and it was a place of tortures which they did to people at the restaurant’s basement. But, they didn’t do anything about it. KFOR should’ve investigated those. No one did absolutely anything about it. We found the wooden board on which they tortured people and blood marks up to the ceiling.

Anita Susuri: Okay mister Xhafer, if there is something you want to add or something you forgot.

Xhafer Nuli: I don’t have anything special, this was it. And then I’m telling you Trepça was close to being flooded [by water] two or three times in a matter of minutes, but we found solutions at the last minute. Not even two days passed and I had to go there at night.

Every time the power was cut off, Serb workers were at the electrical substation. People didn’t work during the third shift [late at night] and I had to call Viktor, I don’t know he was a representative of UNMIK,²⁶ he would have to make some calls for them to come and raise the voltage, but there were cases when they didn’t wake up so I went there to restore the power myself because that’s also my profession. I went and broke the door down, one time there was even an officer from UNMIK’s police, he said, “Who’s breaking the doors down? Now we know who.” I said, “I don’t care if you know” (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs) Okay mister Xhafer, thanks a lot!

Xhafer Nuli: You’re welcome!

Anita Susuri: It was a pleasure.

Korab Krasniqi: Thanks a lot!

Xhafer Nuli: Thank you too. Maybe I talked your ears off but...

Anita Susuri: No, this is exactly our job.

²⁵ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

²⁶ Acronym for the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

Korab Krasniqi: It was a pleasure, totally the opposite.