

## INTERVIEW WITH LIRIJE PEPA

Pristina | Date: September 21, 2020

Duration: 115 minutes

Present:

1. Lirije Pepa (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. 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:** Mrs. Lirije, could you introduce yourself and tell us your birth date, place of birth, or anything about your family?

**Lirije Pepa:** I was born in 1945 to an average family. I mean, I had my father, mother, grandmother and a sister... a sister who was born first but died, she died at a very early age and we didn't get to know her. So, I mean I had a good childhood, as far as I'm concerned, since everyone is more or less... [I'm] not a philosopher, but I mean everyone has different thoughts. So, I loved my father a lot, and my mother as well. My mother was more concerned with housework, while my father did photography.

So, my desire to pursue photography was born at a young age. When I went to school, in the first grade, I thought of my teacher like my mother, that's what he seemed like to me, maybe others experienced it differently. But in the meantime, I would go to my father's store sometimes... we were born in Peja, I didn't mention it at the beginning... the store, and I would go often to get bread or something you know, whatever my mother told me.

So, my love for photography was born. I would say, "Imagine I became a famous photographer," I mean at the time, that was only as one might say, a wish, I didn't know if it would become true or not. My father was a very progressive type of person, he wanted all of us to get an education, the eight year school, I finished primary school and the eight year school in Peja, gymnasium<sup>1</sup> as well. Back then the gymnasium was called May 11, and now it's called Bedri Pejani. So it was good in high school, gymnasium as well, I was...

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Pepa, I wanted to go back... earlier you mentioned your father's store, what neighborhood of Peja was it in, was it a more known neighborhood?

**Lirije Pepa:** It was like across from us, but later on he bought one near the Red Mosque in Kapeshnica, it's an area at Kapeshnica's entry. People tease me about it, this comes from Turkish, Kapeshnica, it means a place where there are a lot of fights. But, I didn't care, there were some distinct families in

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

that neighborhood, Besim Sahatiçia's family, the families of many architects, what were they called, I also had my [paternal] aunt's sons there. There was a family there near the mosque, a fairly rich family as they say. I don't mean rich like... but on average, they were doing well. I mean they didn't need help at that time.

**Anita Susuri:** What was Peja like at the time, do you remember it as a child?

**Lirije Pepa:** Peja was very beautiful to me, I mean in childhood... the school opened in Karagaç, Karagaç is where the park is. Me and my neighborhood friends would go there, we were all in the same class. And then our teacher was a woman, first we had a male teacher, and then they switched [classes] you know, the way it used to be in school, it was very... we were very satisfied with the toys we had and... when we studied, our father would check [our homework], since my mother was a homemaker, she didn't have an education, she only knew the alphabet at the time, I mean.

So our father would check our notebooks to see we finished our homework, if we... I would often... this was a habit from childhood, I would write in the front of the notebook, and re-write my notes in the back, so I could paste everything and make my notes look neat {describes with hands}, and he would criticize me, you know, he was very neat. I am not saying I wasn't neat, but I didn't have good handwriting. And later on I would think that intelligent people have bad handwriting, you know wishful thinking.

**Anita Susuri:** Which neighborhood...

**Lirije Pepa:** So I mean this is what my childhood was like. And then I was enrolled in gymnasium, as usual. But most of our subjects were in the Serbian language. So, I would often not understand, for example in mathematics, physics, the terms they have, you know about mathematics, I would often have to use an Albanian dictionary, almost 60 percent of our subjects were in Serbian. Albanian [subject] was of course in Albanian, except French, since back then we learned French too, I mean like most gymnasiums were back then, but the principal and everyone was Serbian.

**Anita Susuri:** You were born in '45, so after the Second World War ended...

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you perhaps remember a story your father told or something, what the war was like, how did they experience it?

**Lirije Pepa:** I remember a few things, my mother, often when a plane would pass by {looks up} she would say, "Lirije..." since I would happen to be there, you know closeby, "...let's go see your [paternal]

aunt,” since she had some sort of support from my aunt since she was more *burrneshë*,<sup>2</sup> more... And my father would tell us how they would hang people, we even had a photograph, but when the house was burnt, I mean during the last war, they were lost. Because there were people hung in the center of Peja {grabs her throat}, he had the photographs, but the photographs disappeared, you know when you usually finish something and you leave them in the basement. When the house burnt down, the photos were burnt as well, I couldn’t find most of them, even the ones from my childhood.

So, according to my mother, she was terrified, she would say, “It was very difficult” and her fear of planes stuck. But, there were Germans and Italians living here as well, they went into houses at that time. What kind of war was that, maybe for the time it was quiet... but they say, “Nobody bothered us, neither Germans, nor Italians.” I mean besides the bombing of Peja here and there, how she describes it, now I can’t [tell you] all of it, I mean... because I have forgotten some things as well. But, I remember these things, especially when planes used to pass by, my mother would always grab my hand, “Let’s run away!” She had a sort of... This was all of it, I mean at the time.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you know how your father got into photography, why did he...

**Lirije Pepa:** My [paternal] uncle was the first photographer in Peja and he was, how to put it, at least how others describe him, open, charming, beautiful, I mean. And he was killed because he was part of an illegal association, he was a patriot, you know. He was friends with that famous actor, Çarkagjiu, Masar Çarkagjiu...

**Anita Susuri:** What was your uncle’s name?

**Lirije Pepa:** Riza Pepa. I also have his photos. He was the first one and he was some sort of Don Juan at the time, with Serbian women, and you know, but a patriot. He was involved in those kinds of [activities], you know it was the association of some, I mean they were young patriots at the time. And apparently they... we don’t know who killed him. My father found his grave in Kuqishtë [village near Peja], since he went there often you know, tourists visited often, Rugova is near Peja. I loved my grandmother a lot and when she used to fold clothes and she would cry, you know. I would say, “Nona...” I would say, we called her nona, she said, “My son,” you know, “my son has [died]...” but she didn’t know where or how. I used to say, “When I grow up I will find out,” you know, “the place,” you know, that was a fantasy.

**Anita Susuri:** Was he killed before you were born?

**Lirije Pepa:** {Comes closer to hear better}

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<sup>2</sup> The Albanian term *burrneshë* literally means men-like, but can refer to women’s show of courage, wittiness, or general disregard for social roles that often limit women’s participation in the public space.

**Anita Susuri:** Was he killed before you were born?

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes, in '44, I remember you know, since we had a fountain at our house in Peja where all the neighborhood would come to get water, and the dates were there. They would say during the bombings... I don't know if he was killed by a foreigner, or if he was killed by Albanians, some traitor, I don't know that. Because my father wrote {pretends she's writing} our birth dates in a journal... my father was *tada*, I called him *tada*. And when he found the grave, in Rugova's Kuqishtë...

Photographers can be recognized from their nails {touches her nail tips} because we worked a lot, my own [nails] were brown, since I used to make toner for photos, and then it takes color. So, whoever has worked with photos in a lab, since the camera is dark and you work the photographs, I mean to develop them, the focus and these kinds of processes, I mean I could explain them, but maybe it's not important.

So he recognized that it was my uncle based on his nails. We called him *abej*<sup>3</sup> but we didn't know, only based on what they told us because we didn't know him, only through photos. He had left a son behind, [my uncle] passed away. My mother breastfed him, since it was '43, when his son was born, it should be '43, and then my mother breastfed him because my uncle's wife died too. So, it was lost, although his son has children here in Pristina now. I mean his [my uncle's] son, but they didn't inherit it [photography].

My family has inherited photography, almost all of us, except my big sister. Because after my father's death, I worked with my younger sister, and then the children as they grew up, since we were older. So, it's six of us from my family, all of us are alive except my mother and father who have died. My father died in '70, my mother died in '99, when Jashar died, Adem Jashari,<sup>4</sup> around that time, you know. She was really scared of the war, but I don't know why, maybe because she went through it once before. This was all, I mean as far as... so I mean we were a healthy family. We had a childhood, we had food, we had everything, we weren't in need of anything. So...

**Anita Susuri:** Which child are you by birth order?

**Lirije Pepa:** Excuse me?

**Anita Susuri:** Which child are you [by birth order]? Were you...

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<sup>3</sup> Tur.: *ağabey*, elder brother, big brother. The speaker uses a vernacular form of the Turkish term to refer to the elderly of the family.

<sup>4</sup> Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as "legendary commander," was a founder of the KLA, celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of twenty-half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

**Lirije Pepa:** I am a second child, actually third, counting my sister who died, and then the others, there's two years in between me and my sisters. I'm two years younger than my older sister, my younger sister is two years younger than me. And then it's my brothers, the older one, the other one has a store here in Pristina called Foto Pepa, the other ones are in Peja, but now their children inherited it, since you know they're retired. And now my other brother will retire in two or three months, something like that.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like to grow up in a family with that many children, with that many sisters and brothers?

**Lirije Pepa:** I don't know how to put it, it was, I mean when thinking about the past, my father wasn't that rich, but we had a normal life. He always gathered his sister's children, he basically raised them, since they were poorer. They all finished... it's Lule Pula's husband, maybe you know Lule? Yes, Ekrem Beqiri, Qemalj Beqiri, he was the first architect in Kosovo, and Agush Beqiri, Florë Beqiri's father, they own that bar. Doesn't matter, it's not important, but I want to say they were almost the first, they all finished university in Belgrade at that time.

So, my father looked after them a lot as children, since their [financial] situation was like that... for example, my [paternal] aunt was married to someone who was very poor, like a lot of people were at the time. I can't describe it since we didn't know what it was like, I mean as far as my family goes, we had food, we had everything. Back then you were happy when your [financial] situation was good, we were also healthy. And then, later on I had a few ups and downs, an illness or something you know, as usual.

**Anita Susuri:** As a child, how do you remember the first time you went to your father's store?

**Lirije Pepa:** I went there many times, but when I started working there, I was nine years old. Since I was interested in photography, and at the beginning my father would give me the photographs, the films, but I had to be really careful because if you scratch the film {describes with hands} with your hands, because you had to [process it] with those chemicals, it would cause a stain or something, and the photograph would be destroyed. I mean, there could be a stain and that isn't preferable.

So, that's what I decided, I learned photography. During that time people would come to have their picture taken, nobody believed it, even Serbs you know, I would photograph them for free only so they wouldn't... my father would happen to go somewhere you know, he would leave me there, since there were other workers too, I was like a *shegërt*.<sup>5</sup> But, I would photograph them and say, "Don't pay anything, when you come..." so I could prove that I know how to photograph, for ID documents of course. Photography back then was more... people were very interested, now we have these [smartphones] and everybody can take photos and...

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<sup>5</sup> From the Turkish word *sakirt*, which means apprentice.

Photography is weird, not that I'm talking about photographs, but you could take a really good photo, but if the person who was photographed doesn't like it, you know... I am a photographer myself and when I don't like it I go, "Uhhhh! {onomatopoeia} I won't post this or I will post that." I mean that's it, one has to be even a psychologist to commit, not only to the patient [client] who is in front of you but also the photo in general, the background and everything.

**Anita Susuri:** What were people photographed for more back then?

**Lirije Pepa:** At the time they would have photos taken, first for ID documents of course, they would take a black backdrop {describes with hands} so their face would look more, or a white one, it depends, behind the store and we would photograph them. Because inside we had the atelier where we would photograph with photographic plates, there were people who had their photographs taken with plates, they did retouching, they would freshen up, you know with brushes {points to her face}. These cost more and of course were higher quality, you know with reflectors, a bit different, you fixed the light however you wanted to.

And then, they wanted photographs in nature. In particular, there were more people coming from villages than from the city. You know I got to... I don't know why they were much more interested, it surprised me you know, maybe there was no fanaticism. While people in the city took photographs at weddings, events, you know whenever they wanted to, also in family settings usually, you are young and maybe don't know about this, but there were some kind of parties, you know, and of course they got all together in the photograph.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you also go outside the studio to photograph?

**Lirije Pepa:** I did, but that was later on before my father died. They called me as a woman [photographer] to their villages, to take their ID photos. So, [I photographed] all of Deçan, I forget some of them [places], I got to travel by train in the area of Ujëmirë, we would go with my brother early in the morning. He was nine years old, I was 20, he's ten years younger than me, the brother who... And we would go there to photograph people for their IDs. But you know what villages were like, not how I'm describing it [by my own accord] but at the time there were many rich people, there was a Head like they were the Head of...

**Anita Susuri:** *Kryeplak*.<sup>6</sup>

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes. The *kryeplak*. And oftentimes it happened to be Ramadan or something and we would spend all day in the streets, I would take photos. But there were cases, for example when I told a woman, "Brush your hair" you know, {touches her hair}. And her husband beat her up, you know, and

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<sup>6</sup> The elderly of the village, who held a decision-making position.

my brother was nine years old, he was present... I said, "Excuse me, the photo has to be more..." And so they were all successful. I photographed with hesitation because you don't know, you might need to do it again, but they were successful so...

Actually, that's how we got our first TV, we bought it. Since of course at the time, in the '70s, that was before the '70s, around '78. Many people didn't have a TV, only radios, that's how it was, maybe you also have grandparents who have told you about it. But then my father wanted [me] to study, I wanted to study psychology but that was in Zagreb, there was no chance to do it here. I started to study English, but I didn't quite enjoy it because, you know, I liked French a lot. So, I dropped out because I still was connected to photography.

**Anita Susuri:** You finished the eight year school in Peja, right?

**Lirije Pepa:** In Peja, and gymnasium as well.

**Anita Susuri:** And then gymnasium.

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes, '64, '65.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it unusual back then for women to continue [higher] education, were there many women?

**Lirije Pepa:** It was, that was also true for photography, how could a woman work, you know? My father faced prejudice, we were prejudiced against by other people, you know, but my father was okay, he was very progressive in that aspect. He was a pedantic person and he liked to dress well and he dressed himself very well, he didn't possess some kind of [extraordinary] beauty, but he always looked good. While my [paternal] uncle was more beaut... you know based on photographs.

So, I'm won't speak about that because it's not that important. But then in '64, '65, my father [would say], "Start university," I would say, "In Zagreb," we wanted to live in Zagreb, but in the end my father came back, but he wanted to go. I mean, [he wanted] my whole family to move because the situation was different, it was Ranković's<sup>7</sup> time, and... I remember most of '55 as a child, when people migrated to Turkey, that's when my brother who is a photographer was born.

We would say, "We don't want to go," as they used to say *visika, fisika*, I don't know, it was some kind of document you needed to have in order to go. And the main imam of our neighborhood, Mulla Isufi, he went to Turkey first and held some kind of meeting, we had photos [of it] but they were burned you

<sup>7</sup> 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.

know. And I remember as a child, I wasn't very little, I was almost ten, actually I was ten. He said, "Brothers, I am going," you know, "and you will too, after me." That was in '55 when a lot of people from Peja went to Turkey, I mean I remember it like that. And then, I don't remember, in '64...

**Anita Susuri:** What about you, your father didn't want to go?

**Lirije Pepa:** Nope, he was in a dilemma, and [he went] with the first generation that went to Turkey, they went as tourists, he had his [maternal] uncle there in Üsküdar near Istanbul, I went to Istanbul later on but not to visit that uncle, but the family members who remained [there]. So, I got to go to the wedding of my uncle's son, you know, to celebrate his marriage, and I went there with my uncle and then we came back. I just fulfilled my [paternal] aunt's *amanet*,<sup>8</sup> she would say. "Go if you can, he's getting married," you know, I said, "Yes." So my father was there too, they were very poor in Turkey, he provided food for them when they [my family] visited. You know, they went as tourists, and then you know they helped them financially, I remember when he used to tell us, you know, he stayed for ten days or something only to help them out. Because when his [maternal] uncle went there [to Turkey], my father was ten years old, this is all based on what they told me, you know, but I remembered it.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like in school, elementary school, what was the system like back then?

**Lirije Pepa:** {Gets closer so she can hear better}

**Anita Susuri:** When you went to school, what was the system like back then?

**Lirije Pepa:** I will tell you something about the system which is relevant to the present too. In the first grade of elementary school, my teacher was Shemsi Gaceferri, I mean, I remember it well, he recently died. During that time, a neighbor of mine taught me a poem, "*Besa-besa*"<sup>9</sup> I am Albanian" maybe it was... "because Albania said a word to me I am a mother to you, you are a son to me" I know it by heart, you know that's the poem. And I recited it, my teacher said, "Lirije, very good," he would ask, "Who can recite us something?" He would say, "But don't recite this somewhere [else]." I taught that poem to my brother's daughter, Mrika, she graduated in Economics, she works at the Ministry of Integration. And when Mrika started the first grade [of elementary school], I taught her that poem and the same situation was repeated with her. A teacher told her, the other teachers were there, "You are very smart but it's not the [appropriate] situation," you know, "for this poem," that was it.

**Anita Susuri:** That was maybe before the war?

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<sup>8</sup> *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

<sup>9</sup> In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

**Lirije Pepa:** That was a little bit before the war, the first year that she enrolled in elementary school. The situation wasn't the best, honestly, I know that they differentiated [between ethnicities] a lot. Later on I went to work at the Faculty of Medicine. In '75, after my father's death. Because there were too many of us, and I had the opportunity to get employed there, I would think, let me make room for the young ones, you know, family members. Because for example, I would become an obstacle, I wasn't married or anything, I'm still not (laughs). You never know what life throws your way, you know, and...

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to take you back a little bit, before moving onto the faculty, to your job. I wanted to ask you about high school, what were your friendships like, did you go out, did you have activities outside, I mean outside of school?

**Lirije Pepa:** During the first year of gymnasium, we were all a group of people from school and we would get together, from the eight year school, you know, and then the change happened. I was in the social [department] group, and there was the sciences [department] group too. The ones who were better at math and stuff, they went to the sciences [department], while I was with 15 [male] friends. I mean I was the only [girl] in class.

**Anita Susuri:** The only girl.

**Lirije Pepa:** Except for one girl who failed [that year] and she sat next to me you know, I had male peers most of the time, because it was like that. And I remember all the professors who taught us. But most of it was in Serbian, for example math, and latin, but translated to Serbian. And then French, Vera Rajović was my Albanian [language] teacher, she was older, she was Serbian but she finished university in France you know, she liked me a lot, you know. And she accompanied me home often, you know, to provoke me and see if I knew the language, when I went to Serbian classes to ask for a book, she would ask, "How do you say it differently?" you know, "*Excusez-moi*" [French - Excuse me] you know, I would say, "*Pardonne-moi*" [French - Pardon me] and like that, or when I apologized.

She would provoke me, but she encouraged me to learn the language. But I wasn't very interested in English, I only wanted to enroll in any faculty. Gymnasium went super well, as a senior, I got a little sick as a senior. I had some sort of illness in my lungs, I mean nothing too serious, but I took a break [from school] because I had to stay in the hospital. But, that passed and I still got to finish my senior year in time, the senior...

**Anita Susuri:** Sorry, what hospital did you stay at? Was it...

**Lirije Pepa:** In Peja, at the Hospital of Pulmonology, I mean for the lungs.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it...

**Lirije Pepa:** I had some changes, I caught a bad cold while [vacationing] by the sea and some changes happened in my lungs. But, it passed, you know.

**Anita Susuri:** I meant to ask if it was some place like... when you went out in nature, or was it more... what kind of place [hospital] was it?

**Lirije Pepa:** It was a very beautiful place, and more developed than it is now, I think. It had its own natural beauty without it being ruined. There was *Hotel Korza*, and then there was hotel *Metohija* at the time, where [hotel] *Dukagjini* is now. And the [city] center was well constructed, it was less crowded. Now the people are more or less, you know, how they came, it's not important where they came from you know, but it's kind of more crowded. The gymnasium was classic [old], but it was well put together for its time. I mean it had all the traits of a school, like *liceus* [Portuguese: secondary school] in France and stuff, I mean that's how I remember it. And then, maybe now it's renovated, but it was very...

And then we didn't go anywhere during our senior year, we sometimes had literature hours, we would go, some students would write poetry, or something. But we were damaged because we always had to [have our classes] be mixed. I once had to take a math exam in the fall, you know, because sometimes we wouldn't understand the terms. We had to go to a Serbian professor and actually attend it together with a Serbian group [of students] so the professor could prepare us because you had to... And then I got a four,<sup>10</sup> but... so I can't say I was an excellent student, but I was very good. I was the best out of the worst (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have... do you remember going to a concert or some type of event back then, I mean during the time of gymnasium?

**Lirije Pepa:** You mean what were the relations like?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, but did you go to any concerts, were there any cultural activities held?

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes there were concerts and I remember that really well. The Vice Vukov<sup>11</sup> ones, and others who came from... we attended them. Tereza Kesovija<sup>12</sup> and others, of course... I was privileged because my father would usually photograph them when they would come, you know when the crowd would go near them, many people asked to be photographed with them. So, I attended concerts.

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<sup>10</sup> Grade B on a 1-5 scale.

<sup>11</sup> Vinko "Vice" Vukov (1936 – 2008) was a Croatian pop singer.

<sup>12</sup> Tereza Ana Kesovija (1938) is an internationally acclaimed Croatian recording artist. She was one of the most recognizable figures on the music scene in former Yugoslavia, and is renowned for her wide vocal range and operatic style.

We went to the movies more often. The cinema was the most fun. Second, we read books, but we always passed them from one to the other, oftentimes my father would think I was doing homework, but we had our novels underneath {describes with hands}. *Bija e mallkume* [The Cursed Daughter] and these ones, we would get books written in Albania. The book covers were ripped off, but I can say that we always passed them to each other.

Though the literature [class] came to gymnasium later on, but we had Serbian literature which I often compare, Zmaj<sup>13</sup> with Çajup's<sup>14</sup> *Vaje* [Cries], you know all in Serbian "Pođnem, sretnem, idem" [serb.: I leave, I meet, I go] you know. Because you don't know, do you know Serbian? I won't... but I am saying that many things were similar, I knew Serbo-Croatian well, for no other reason than we had to. Because...

**Anita Susuri:** What about the books you are mentioning...

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Anita Susuri:** ... how did they get to you, in Kosovo?

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes, most of them.

**Anita Susuri:** How did they get to you, did somebody send them or...?

**Lirije Pepa:** For example, it was someone from an older generation and they passed it to each other. An old woman died recently, and she was our friend, Zymë Berisha, she left to Albania, because everybody was thinking of leaving, they thought they [Albanians from Albania] love us a lot, you know, I mean the great desire for everyone to speak in Albanian. I went to Albania for the first time after the war ended. We went with an organization.

**Anita Susuri:** Is that the first time you went to Albania after the war ended?

**Lirije Pepa:** Excuse me?

**Anita Susuri:** Is that the first time?

**Lirije Pepa:** The first time. And I actually have a [photo] album from Kruja and stuff. Actually when I sent them to the Germans, when I sent it to a German woman who was here, she would become surprised, it was her first time seeing Kruja, or Tirana. I stayed there for 15 days because there was an

<sup>13</sup> Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (1833 - 1904) was a Serbian poet. Jovanović worked as a physician; he wrote in many poetry genres, including love, lyric, patriotic, political, and youth, but he remains best known for his children's poetry.

<sup>14</sup> Andon Zako Çajupi (1866 – 1930) was an Albanian lawyer, playwright, poet and rilindas.

organization working here like a lot of them do. You get a diploma [certificate], and that was useful if you wanted to join some kind of initiative. We would visit Kruja and the other cities. And then they [Germans] were in Pristina as well, I photographed them, since a girl named Arijeta worked with them, you know, so it was... there are good things we learned there.

You know if you want to organize something by yourself too, if that is something you work with. But, I was [already] working and I wasn't interested. I mean, it was a big difference from what I thought Albania was like during childhood, at the time you thought of it as, I don't know... It was a group of us and we looked really good, you know, I mean the women. Like, you know, dressed up, like every woman likes to look good, you know. The women in Albania looked at us a bit... I became friends with one of them, she was a stomatologist and she told us, "In Enver Hoxha's<sup>15</sup> time," she said, "if we washed ourselves with a scented soap, SUP<sup>16</sup> would come take us" {rubs her hands}.

She said that herself. What we thought was completely different, [we thought] that they love us a lot. I know when Enver Hoxha died, we got together, whoever had a TV with a better screen, we wanted to watch it there. Now to tell you honestly, that was our wish. When Nexhmije<sup>17</sup> covered Enver with the flag Kosovars sent her. He loved us, anyway, these are all, you know, Ali Hardi<sup>18</sup> was my in-law, he was a historian.

## Part Two

**Lirije Pepa:** There was... the University of Medicine opened, and I took different photos, I photographed in surgery rooms, the slide was directly from the scene, we used to send them to Zagreb to develop them, since we couldn't do it here. The black & white photos were used for PhD theses, all the theses I have worked for, of course from '75 until, when we started losing trace, when the footprints began to fade away, there was the war and other things, and many people's PhD theses disappeared. People left them in their apartments and others stole them. You know what it was about, in medical [university], people needed to have as much text as possible, so the photos I made were about that.

Slides for different congresses, there were congresses, even international ones, but they were also Yugoslavian, you know, I mean in Belgrade, Zagreb, you know, different gatherings. Of course students would take part in congresses but also the professors, through various works. So, I would take photos, and sometimes documentaries, and sometimes I would have to work on their slides in black & white, and then of course they would present them with projectors. The conditions were... and then after the

<sup>15</sup> Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

<sup>16</sup> Secretariat for Internal Affairs - *Sekretariati për Punë të Brendshme*.

<sup>17</sup> Enver Hoxha's wife.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Hadri (1928) is an Albanian historian and academic.

war I wasn't successful with photography anymore. Because everyone had phones. I retired ten years ago, which means, wait, 65...

**Anita Susuri:** 2009.

**Lirije Pepa:** I retired about ten years ago, now it will be ten years since I retired. So, it was 2010 I think.

**Anita Susuri:** 2010.

**Lirije Pepa:** Something like that.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask...

**Lirije Pepa:** So, to be honest by the end we weren't that satisfied because there was a sort of chaos all around. They removed me from the photographer job, but they let me work as a helper in lectures because there was no need for photographs anymore regarding PhDs and stuff. They were all only... there were projectors, and different laptops, so... because I would take part directly in the [operating] room. Actually I was first present when they performed surgery on a baby, I would think to myself, how can a six month old baby undergo surgery. A professor did the surgery, Gazmend Shaqiri, I was surprised, you know, because it was a baby... and he asked me, "Are you scared?" I said, "No," I was only frightened a bit you know, because it was a baby under surgery, would they survive. This was it, you know.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you go into the operating room, why were those photos taken?

**Lirije Pepa:** Excuse me?

**Anita Susuri:** Did you also go into the operating rooms?

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes, yes. Wearing a mask {pretends she's putting a mask on} and everything, just like now, but of course also the coat, the hat {describes with hands} I photographed almost every surgery that was done from '75 till the end of '81, '82, and then there were, first the demonstrations,<sup>19</sup> and then poisonings.<sup>20</sup> And when the poisonings happened, I actually had my camera taken away because I had

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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

photographed the poisonings. Big chaos, you would think that you were also poisoned, because it felt like it, when you were [part of the demonstrations] at the time. So, these were very difficult obstacles. It was in my office that they took professor Alush Gashi, they dragged him in the middle of... I worked with a Serb, he was a technical draftsman, it was like that, not that I wanted it to be. He was very busy [with work] regarding... But with me, because I didn't answer to him much, I did the photography, he did the technical drawings {pretends she is drawing} you know, we had to.

So, there were periods of time you know when you say, maybe we didn't fight at the time, but there was hate, it was there, they didn't want to see you for example as an intellectual or something, there was a feeling of contempt. For example, they would tell me, "You are not like the others," my friends you know, that I hung out with, I would say, "[We are] All the same, there are so many who finished..." because they had also finished university and were the first pharmacists. And then, professor Musa Haxhiu and many others who were internationally renowned, they weren't only known to us. However, there was always that jealousy, that contempt and there was nothing you could do.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you continue higher education after gymnasium or... because in Zagreb...

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes I was in university but I dropped out.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** And then my father said, "Enroll" I enrolled in the Vocational School of Tourism in Peja, and I finished that until the last exam and dropped out, I said, "Pack it in." Because he died, at that time my father had gotten sick and when he died I said, "I want to commit to my family a little," you know, because everybody was young. But, my younger sister, the one two years younger, joined me as well, so we worked on photography. We dealt with those at the time, we showed our mother whatever we worked on so she would feel better. When we needed something, we would work as much as we needed to. But, that's how we managed for a while, and then my brother. When I came to Pristina, they took it upon themselves. Because they are more risk-takers, you know it goes differently for them. I would say, "If it's me I will block it." I got the opportunity and then I started working in '75.

**Anita Susuri:** How did it happen, how did it come about for you to go?

**Lirije Pepa:** What?

**Anita Susuri:** How did it come about to go to Pristina?

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the cause of the phenomenon. For this see Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a war*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999.

**Lirije Pepa:** Professor Musa Haxhiu was the initiator, he worked in Peja, he often worked for various publications, I would take the camera on my own, inside where I work, I would do the reproduction from the film and put it in the monitor after, I would take them out as transparent plates. It was a little difficult because you know at the time you had [people] who even directly worked with films or somewhere but you couldn't develop it. Everything we worked on, we had to [develop it] either in Zagreb or anywhere else where Foto Kimika from Zagreb was.

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you about that job as well, where did you take those chemicals, how were they made?

**Lirije Pepa:** They were [found] in pharmacies before. When you took for example the developer, you needed bronze, unifilm,<sup>21</sup> everything. I have forgotten them now, sorry, it was about seven elements that you had to buy at the pharmacy. But back then it wasn't a pharmacy [specifically] for these but at the [regular] pharmacy you had all of these elements, and they had the recipe, like dishes do now, we would take one liter of water {describes with hands} we measured it first and boiled it, then we let it cool, later it was easier because of Foto Kimika. But the ones we did by ourselves went like this, we would take seven of those, it was used to develop [the photographs], but I forgot, sorry but I forgot [the names of other necessary elements].

**Anita Susuri:** It doesn't matter.

**Lirije Pepa:** The developer. And then the fixer was different, we took sulfide, bromine and I don't know what, and you bought all that at the pharmacy. It was like a crystal and they put it in to develop the film, you wet it with a fixer so that what you photographed would not be erased. Because that photo, the first contact with the image when you see how the eyes, hair, etc. start to be seen through the developer, that darkroom was completely [illuminated] with red light.

**Anita Susuri:** Dark.

**Lirije Pepa:** There, I was just looking to see if it had developed well so that I could put it in the fixer, because I worked more in the laboratory, apart from taking photos we also worked ourselves. So it was a difficult period, much more difficult than it is now. Because now they invented... now they are automatic and the technique has improved a lot. At that time there was an old man, I don't know if he was Russian or Serbian, Pier, we called him Uncle Pier, he was an old photographer. He took a photo of me on canvas,<sup>22</sup> but I lost it, you know {raises hands}.

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<sup>21</sup> The speaker refers to a camera film which was universal for most cameras.

<sup>22</sup> The speaker originally says handkerchief.

**Anita Susuri:** Was he in Peja?

**Lirije Pepa:** He was in Peja, master of... that's what we called him, but he was poor, you know, he looked poor, but he was one of the first photographers at that time, *yyyh* {onomatopoeia} as far as I know, he was old then, let alone... And we called him *majstor* [Srb.: master] Pero, you know Master Pero. And he like me a lot, you know, and he made a picture of me like that {shows the palm of her hand} I was amazed how the picture could come out similar to how they do now, but it was in a very primitive way back then, the development and everything. That's how I learned from one generation to another.

I was often [working] secretly from my father, when anyone said to me, "Come in and develop my film!" I was afraid that he would yell at me, because he was very precise, in case that I would break something, and that's how I learned, because without taking risks you couldn't even... It was a lot of work back then, for example the army. They had their photos taken on Sundays. We had to photograph them wearing those masks, you know, "Don't forget me!" You know how it was with various commitments. And we had to do that with a photocopier, it was a whole army (laughs) of various devices at that time.

A photographer who takes pictures in nature. The camera for plates, you put the plate inside. When they go out, for example, with their family, like this [the plates are] up to here {puts her hands to her chest} halfway up. Then we also made copies where the plate was even bigger {describes with her hands}, we just copied it as it was on paper, very complicated but very interesting. There are no longer laboratories, they have disappeared everywhere. Because worked there too, at the university I worked on black and white photos alone. They even thanked me for many doctoral theses.

That was it, I mean, for as long as I worked, 30 or so years, from '75 until '90 and... how long has it been. So, the staff after the war was not exactly adequate. You know, a lot of them somehow wanted to be directors, deans. You know, you have some kind of impression of people that you held in high regard, and these seemed like, you know, pioneers compared to these. But these people were running more for positions, that bothered me as a photographer because my eye saw all kinds of things, you know. And this was all.

**Anita Susuri:** And then you went from Peja to Pristina...

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What was that change like for you? Coming to Pristina from Peja, a different city?

**Lirije Pepa:** For example, I always liked Pristina even as a student, not that life was more like, of course we went to dances, we went to... as students. And then social groups, we often held the "Blue Night" at

the faculties, we would come together, law faculty, because there was no medicine then, law, economics, philosophy, because I enrolled but didn't finish, why should I lie. Because I returned to my father again, after his death I returned there. However, my friendships remained, because we had friendship, you know, it's not that we had anything, you know, prejudices or something, I mean my father was like that, we really valued morality. However, there were those... I mean the life where we went out, we went to dances, we went...

**Anita Susuri:** Can you tell us in more details about how these dances were organized, what, what happened...?

**Lirije Pepa:** For example, I will start from the Faculty of Philosophy, where we had Genc Nimani and others who were more important. There were older generations and those were the ones who organized, for example *Plavo večë* [Srb.: Blue night] in Serbian, which in Albanian means...

**Anita Susuri:** “Blue night.”

**Lirije Pepa:** “Blue night.” And then our group, and each of us took a friend from other faculties, friends, you know the group we had, so that there would be more of us. Professors also participated. We had professors from Bosnia, I mean the English group, there were professors from Belgrade who taught and many assistants who participated with us, nothing... There was no *tallava*<sup>23</sup> then, there was tango, waltz, I mean rock and roll, I mean what they are, then it's {describes the dancing with hands} as the *yankees*<sup>24</sup> [speaks in English] do, they get in line.

I mean all that, there was that and us younger people wanted to learn, to know how to dance, I often played the role of a man with my friends, so that I could lead the dance, you know, because my sister danced better, but she danced secretly from me with her friends but I spied on her, you know, in the room while they were dancing. They played records, with a tape recorder, you know. We used to have *zhurka* [Srb.: parties], you know, we got together with our friends and invited a [male] friend, you know, because we were a bit more progressive at that time, but it was also like that because we weren't *havale*.<sup>25</sup>

Because when I was born, my mother dressed like Arab women, I just have one picture. I was a year old there, we went to our vineyard, you know with the grapes, the house... When we went I... I really like that picture, where all the neighbors are wearing {pretends she's putting on a veil}...

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<sup>23</sup> Tallava or Talava is a music genre originating from Albanian-speaking Roma communities in Kosovo as well as in North Macedonia, with a presence in Albania.

<sup>24</sup> Outside the United States, Yankee is used informally to refer to any American; it is particularly popular among the British, Irish and Australians, and sometimes carries pejorative overtones.

<sup>25</sup> *Havale* refers to the head scarf which in this context means that they had no social restrictions and were not conservative.

**Anita Susuri:** *Peçe*.<sup>26</sup>

**Lirije Pepa:** They had black fabrics and a *peçe*. However, I think mom was there and I was next to her, kind of like, they cut my {touches head} hair to make it look better, I was little and I had dark hair.

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Lirije Pepa:** And I had very short hair, but I like that picture of me when I was little, always with a... it was what they say, a nettle, I thought it was a flower so I took it for the picture, I love flowers a lot you know and I always like to have a bouquet on the table, the table seems empty to me if I don't have flowers. And so I think, you know, there are a lot of details that...

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Anita Susuri:** We were talking about *zhurka* [Srb. parties], was it common to have *zhurka* or did you do it because you were more progressive...?

**Lirije Pepa:** Once a week, we held them once a week, people came and then of course there were, somebody had a crush on somebody, somebody on somebody else, usually you know. They got to know each other more that way. Not in the classes, there was a lot of discipline in classes, we were disciplined, you couldn't do anything... I often hid under the table when the professor had to question me, you know. And I made a mistake once, you know, instead of saying it in English, I said it in French, he asked me, he said, "Lirije?" I said, "If I had known, I would have gone to France to study and not here." I said that I [liked] the French language better, so I enrolled [in English] without much will. My graduation thesis was about geography and I finished it all with Nekibe Kelmendi,<sup>27</sup> maybe you know who she is?

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** She was a generation before me, she even helped me, we went to the *Dom* [Srb.: House] of Armata to get the material, when I chose my thesis topic because I was a little late with the thesis, I chose tourism... *Turizam u Bliskom istoku*, Tourism in the Middle East because I had to, you know, in Albanian to know... anyway, I've forgotten a lot of things, but I think that was it... Nekibe helped me a lot there, you know, we found the material together. She was a generation before me, she was in the same neighborhood, you know, she was our neighbor in Peja.

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<sup>26</sup> The front of the veil.

<sup>27</sup> Nekibe Kelmendi (1944-2011), lawyer and human right activist, after the war she was a member of Parliament for the LDK and served as Minister of Justice from 2008 through 2010.

So, we had a good childhood, because all our friends from the village were of the same generation in gymnasium. We had more [male] friends in the gymnasium, because they were all men. And at the university, I more so came to see what life was like there. Because I enrolled [in university] a little later and then there was no exam, there was no entrance exam. It depends on which faculty... for example, philosophy or something like that, had an entrance exam, and where I was, there was no entrance exam.

**Anita Susuri:** What was Pristina like at the time when you studied?

**Lirije Pepa:** In Pristina there was only the Faculty of Philosophy {points to her right}, there was mud up to here {touches knees} we wore boots when we wanted to leave. We lived in student dormitories that were close to the Faculty of Law, where the Faculty of Law is now, they were almost like barracks, friends from Peja lived there, they chose the rooms just like that. So, there was a [person with the last name] Gacaferi in our generation, and many others who... and then there were teachers, teachers in the schools here, we often ate in the canteen, we took a voucher, so that we could save a little you know, because we felt bad for our parents and then we shared [food]. For example, whatever we took to eat, we shared half of it with a friend.

The canteen was good at that time. Macaroni remained my favorite from the canteen, and later I prepared it myself really well, but they made it very tasty. That's how it was, sometimes we went out to the city, we went to the cinema, we saved up for the cinema, once or twice a week we went to the cinema. Once a week we went to a dance party. Sometimes they wouldn't let us in, but we always had someone we knew take us inside. It used to be held in the *Dom* of Armata, usually [organized] by faculties, mostly at the Faculty of Law, it was the closest and...

Back then, the clothes were simple and there was no make-up, we maintained our hairstyles then, the hair was the most important thing, sometimes we styled it, sometimes you know, that's how it was at that time. And as far as clothes are concerned, it is known that we wore *kecelje* [Srb.: aprons] in gymnasium. And here at the university, a skirt, you know something a little different, a nice sweater, these were the clothes, or whatever boots your family bought you, because back then there was [not much variety]. There were some who came from Niš, people from other places studied here too, Serbs you know, they were a little different, because... we also tried to imitate them. I don't know how to describe others, but I am only describing it from my point of view...

**Anita Susuri:** What you felt like. What kind of movies were there at the cinemas, what kind of movies played?

**Lirije Pepa:** Oh there were films, for example, with Alain Delon, others with Gary Cooper, with Ava Gardner, I have forgotten many of the names of the films, but there were also French actors [like] Brigitte Bardot, Pascale Petit, there were many that I remember, because some are often repeated. But

there were also some topics like, for example I liked social topics, especially French, there was that one [movie] with Jacques Charrier, an actress that played [the role], they even teased me for looking like her (laughs). It was something about divorce, you know marriage, but they had social issues. There were also Italians, for example Sophia Loren, these were more or less social topics, because we also read something like that in gymnasium at that time. I mean well-known works with a global character.

When I enrolled at the University, Anton Çetta<sup>28</sup> would come here, and I wasn't sure... I'm going a little off topic, but I want to connect the events. You know the letter “ë,” I didn't really know when it should be used, I mean I wasn't sure, and he gave us a topic to do because Fatmir Lama was also in my class. Professor Anton Çetta said, “A topic that...” and I did “The Kissed” by Mihal Grameno,<sup>29</sup> I am sure those of you who have finished gymnasium are familiar with it.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes...

**Lirije Pepa:** And I was just waiting to see what he was going to assign me, because Anton Çetta was well respected by us, he said, “Lirije, you are very... to become a journalist your sentences are short, very [short] you know, but with meaning.” He said, “But if not, you can read Alberto Moravia.”<sup>30</sup> I had already read it because my sister used to hide it from me. I looked at {bends} where she hid them and I read them. Because the professor asked us questions in Serbian and I read it in Serbian, you know, he was surprised, it was not within our literature but outside literature.

Moravia, and many others, Italians you know, but I have forgotten them now, but I remember some things. And he would say, I would say, “I’m a little uncurious but I will hurry,” I said, “professor I read it,” you know, he would say, “Okay, you're not sure about...” I would say, “I know,” so I wanted someone who’s good to tell me. Because in the gymnasium there was always a professor, Riza Bicaj, he would give us a one<sup>31</sup> if you erased [your answers], I would erase [my answers] so that he wouldn’t correct me, because somehow I had the impression that I wasn’t sure and that I would get a one. He would give me a one for other reasons.

Even in my graduation paper, I had a slightly lower grade because of the Albanian language, because I... It’s a complex thing, because a person has to learn from mistakes, but those were complexes that you tried to cure in a different way. Well, what I did was a mistake, but... like that. So, now I'm retired, I’m happy, I never think about that, because they turned out to be very bad, I mean, of course there’s various promises and they do nothing.

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<sup>28</sup> Anton Çetta (1920 - 1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign.

<sup>29</sup> Mihal Grameno (1871 - 1931) was an Albanian nationalist, politician, writer, freedom fighter, and journalist.

<sup>30</sup> Alberto Moravia was an Italian novelist and journalist. His novels explored matters of modern sexuality, social alienation and existentialism.

<sup>31</sup> Grade F in a scale of A-F.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you about something else. From the '70 until the '90s you worked in the Medical Center...

**Lirije Pepa:** From '74, but in '75 was when it started to count for retirement, without interruption.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like in the years, in '81, then from the '80s, the demonstrations and things...

**Lirije Pepa:** It was really difficult.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like for you?

**Lirije Pepa:** Because they took over everything there, I... Alush Gashi told me... because we had an office in the institute, I mean where I worked, because Professor Musa took me there because it was a laboratory, and whoever called me, they would just call me on the phone to take photos. There, the entire deanery was taken over by Serbs. The Serbian secretary, {she enumerates} they were all completely Serbs. So, quite a difficult situation. In the meantime, I was in the office with Alush Gashi where we drank coffee sometimes and someone spied on us. They came to take Alush Gashi, at that time I was taking photos for gynecology, a case with a tumor, and in the meantime they took Alush, they dragged him.

They came and said, “*Ko je Aljuš Gaši?*” [Srb. Who is Alush Gashi?] He was an anatomy professor and the minister of health for a time here in Pristina, now he is not anymore, he was from LDK.<sup>32</sup> In the meantime, I was photographing him {pretends she's holding a camera} as they dragged him down the stairs, but from... you know {moves her hands} your hands shaking and everything, but you can see his silhouette. And anyway, at that time the militia often came there and the one who worked with me took and developed the pictures I took in the gynecology clinic and these ones with Alush as well. Because he would leave earlier, we had a common office, but the laboratory was separate, you know where I worked. And he went home, I would stay later and look at the photos. Because when they took Alush Gashi, they broke his tooth, they tortured him.

And then I told Alush and the others you know, what the situation was like, you know, he would say, “Don't worry at all, give me those photos” but I was scared to take them. Alush told me, he said, “Lirije don't dare leave your job” and I [stayed] until the last minute. We would go to the deanery, they were all Serbs there, the whole structure had changed. Some of the professors were taken, they had closed down their clinics, I mean where they worked separately, nobody would even call you anymore. To take photos and to receive calls... I had the privilege, because *shkijet*,<sup>33</sup> you know what, it's not that

<sup>32</sup> Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

<sup>33</sup> *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

they liked me, but I'm thinking that since they worked with Luba [last name], because he committed suicide later, the one who worked with me.

He would take his revolver with him to the office, he was very harsh sometimes you know and I would be silent, I would think, I wasn't scared of him. When he would ask me questions, "What is the difference, you're not like Albanians from Albania" you know, I would say, "I can't say *albanka* [Srb.: Albanian] for myself, but Albanian and *Albanija* [Srb.: Albania] for you, but for us it's Albania." You know, he would ask provocative questions, but sometimes I would challenge him, you know, to tell you the truth. I am not very patient, I wasn't when it came to stuff like that.

### Part Three

**Anita Susuri:** You talked about the '70s... I mean, '75 when you started your work there, what other problems did you run into, did you run into problems because you were Albanian or what were the relations like?

**Lirije Pepa:** Well, look, I had problems but I never gave up. The one who was happy with me was a technical draftsman. He was a type of director, but he himself felt like someone to whom all Albanians submitted to. I felt angry because he made distinctions, he gathered all the friends there, because at the beginning our offices were divided, then when we left... our office was in the deanery. Then when I went to the institute, we had a common office for a while. But, he was sort of standoffish, the kind of guy who only gave importance to himself. Imagine he asked for Albanian people's heads for New Year's, that's what they would say, because he was very loaded, but this was not the case on my side. I had no problems.

At work, I was afraid that every photo I took would come out, because you know how it can't happen again, but I had success, you know. When there was a congress with a Yugoslav character or something coming for three or four days, we were preoccupied the whole time, we made pictures, slides, and reproduced what the students did. Because they needed to be exhibited somewhere, so they were setting them up... then there was only that slide projector, and someone was standing there. For example, the one technical draftsman, he stood there, edited, you know, the slides. I photographed, when there was a case, you know, something of global character or something like that, I photographed it.

You know, I'm thinking about those details, but Dedushaj also took a lot of pictures, you know, as documentation, but it doesn't matter. I have some here and there and some of them were completely burnt in Peja, you know how a person leaves old albums and most of them are destroyed. However, in general, one compensates for them, wherever they might find one, they can reproduce it, so that's good.

**Anita Susuri:** At that time I think it was easier to travel abroad, but also within Yugoslavia, did you travel and where did you travel for the first time?

**Lirije Pepa:** I traveled to Sarajevo for the first time with my father, I was about ten years old at that time. He took both me and my sister. Because my father also raised one of my cousins, the one who had more money raised him. So, Sarajevo left a feeling of... and at the time my mother also went there, they [the women] in Sarajevo had veils on {points around her head}, they called them veils at that time, not like *namazbeza*,<sup>34</sup> but clothes like Arabian women, with tulle over [the eyes] like this. My mother went there with my father many times, and my father took us once, I had just finished elementary school, me and my sister together.

And the first trip was in '60 in Ulcinj, when my father took us, me, my sister and older brother, to the sea. We all went with my cousin, back then the beach was empty. I only remember the theater at that time, because they always mentioned actors from the theater, most of them were from Peja, so we also had pictures. However, I was curious because I knew most of them, however the first trip was via Čakor, we went to the sea by bus. To get familiar with the sea and we didn't... there was [the] Bistrica [river] in Peja, but that was at night, like that. We also see the sea there, of course we swim, as if we learned it in school.

I was there when I was... I have a picture somewhere, I mean I had short hair, but I was very young, imagine that I had just finished elementary school at the age of 14, I only turned 15 at the end of that year, you know. So it was... that's when I caught a cold because when we arrived in Čakor the bus guy said, "I can't guarantee..." because it was raining a lot, "whoever wants to save their life should get off and walk," you know to cross that part [of the road] easier. My older sister didn't get off the bus, I did, that's where I got this {touches throat} throat inflammation for the first time. *Zapaljenje grla* [Srb.: inflammation of the throat], they called it inflammation of the throat. Then more things happened to me, as a high school graduate, just a flu or something, however it passed, compared to what I thought, the situation was good.

Then in Sarajevo, I think that I was even younger in Sarajevo but I don't remember that train trip. We were traveling on a *Qira*, some kind of train that was completely covered with planks, like from those action movies, cowboy style (laughs). We went there, I remember, we went by... well from Kraljevo, I don't know some other places, quite a long way.

**Anita Susuri:** What did it seem like to you, what was your experience like on the train? When you saw the train?

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<sup>34</sup> *Namabez* refers to needle lace scarfs women wore when they prayed.

**Lirije Pepa:** The experience was, but there was a... my father... when the train stopped, he always got off to buy us something. But the train was crowded, and I met a Serbian woman. I always befriend people, I don't know, I'm like that. And she asked me, “*Šta ti radi majka?*” [Srb.: What does your mother do?] You know, “What does she work?” I told her, “My mother is a teacher.” I lied there, you know, and I made room for her, her mother was quite big, I gave her my seat. And my father could hardly find a place for us, because it was a long way from Peja to Sarajevo, one night and one day of travel. With *Qiro*, that train that... it was [built] with planks, but it looked more like the locomotives, it looked more like that.

And my father said, “Who...” me and my sister said, “Who [gave the seat away]...” I said, “Me.” I always admitted my mistakes, he said, “Go out and stay in the aisle.” I mean it was like a punishment. I was embarrassed to tell him, I befriended that Serbian girl (laughs). I lied about my mother being a teacher because I felt embarrassed (laughs). And that's it. And then after a while, my sister didn't argue with me, she would only say, “It's your fault” I would say, “Sure, I admit it” you know. At some point our father brought us back [inside] you know, there was room, she got off at a station, they went from Kraljevo to somewhere else, so there was room you know. My father advised me, because I was a little unstable, you know, someone always influenced my mind, I wasn't secure, you know. He would say, “Don't let anybody influence you” you know.

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Anita Susuri:** I also wanted... you mentioned the years when you worked in the university, so there...

**Lirije Pepa:** At the faculty.

**Anita Susuri:** At the faculty, how did it continue further, what did you work with, was that your only job, or did you also do photography like...

**Lirije Pepa:** With photography, for example, there were cases when they came, someone's doctorate, the audience, you took a picture of that person...

**Anita Susuri:** I mean, at the store, did you still work there, or not?

**Lirije Pepa:** Nope, I didn't work anymore. Because my brother worked in the museum, and he came to work at the Museum of the Revolution, then he opened a store, and then again, where the children, they all finished high school, they are students, they like to do photography as well.

**Anita Susuri:** Were those the years when you met Mother Teresa?

**Lirije Pepa:** Eh, I met Mother Teresa in '75, I mean I met her in '79.

**Anita Susuri:** How did that happen?

**Lirije Pepa:** Well, nothing... my sister took me, as we were sitting at home, with a denim skirt, a T-shirt. Dhurata, [I said] "Come on..." Dhurata was a bit sick, "Come on" I said, "because you are a journalist, maybe you need it for an interview" you know, Mother Teresa. And that was a conversation with her, because I took a picture of her with... what's the name of this composer, now he's dead, [his name starts] with M, from Prizren. He was in the company of Mother Teresa, he is not Mark Cacinari, but an older, older age, Mother Teresa's generation.

**Anita Susuri:** I don't know now...

**Lirije Pepa:** Anyway, I mean I took pictures of them and an interview with the children there and she asked me something. My sister called me, and I went to the church, I took the camera. And Mother Teresa came, we were waiting for her, you know, like when you're expecting a bride. When she came, it was around 9:00, the minister of information was Nehat Islami, some professors, waiting for Mother Teresa, and there was this well-known man from the church... I forget his name, he was the most important person in the church of St. Anthony and Mother Teresa.

**Anita Susuri:** Are these, were these churches in Pristina?

**Lirije Pepa:** The church was here {points to the left}, the one near the park. We were in that church and waited while I took pictures of it and everything, then we were interested, you know, curious to see Mother Teresa as much as possible and we also felt proud because no one [in Kosovo] had seen her. I am the first to see her from the public like this outside the church, outside other institutions. Because [Ibrahim] Rugova [saw her] later, that was later. I [met her] in '79, just when she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Well, then Dhurata wrote an article, at least I told her, "You should be proud" because you know... my sister also mentioned to me that I was the initiator of calling her. And those were the pictures, when I asked Professor Beleg, he worked with transfusions, I said, "Could you take a picture of us?" because I also called the professor so there would be more people present. There was also the wife of Ymer Jaka, with children. There were those from the church district here and there.

Then she asked me, "Are you a journalist?" She asked me in English, luckily I understood it, it was still fresh to me. "Are you from a newspaper?" [speaks in English] I said, "No, I'm a photographer" [speaks in English] you know, and that's all. I said, "You speak Albanian?" [speaks in English] Do you speak Albanian?" Then she said to me, "Albanian, very little," this is exactly what she said. Maybe it's bad that I mention it, but her origin is Albanian, but she forgot the language, she went abroad very early on.

Because she is Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, some people say she was born in Prizren, then [others say] in Skopje. You know, more or less some biographies that...

Anyway, I'm not going to get into those topics, but I'm proud to have seen her, and she was a very modest woman, small, with those wrinkles, she really gave the impression as a woman who was very, I mean, altruistic, you could see the altruism in her face. Quiet, you know, it didn't matter to her if she looked beautiful, or if she didn't look beautiful, the most important thing was that she was somehow magnificent to me. So, that was my contact with her. Then, of course, I had traveled around, I always spent my vacation, as they say... you asked me, you asked "Did you travel abroad?" I traveled abroad, that year I was in Spain in '79, with Dhurata we were in Palma de Mallorca, [we went] from Belgrade.

We went to Belgrade by bus. Because she was afraid of airplanes, Dhurata, however, [once we arrived] in Belgrade, [we went to Spain] via Avioagent, I remember, directly to Palma. Back then, there were few Albanians traveling abroad. And I just... except that I saw one guy from Peja, [his] last name [was] Shala, and I said, "Dhurata, shout, 'Lirije...' you know, call me, if he is Albanian he will turn his head." So, we had a very nice time, we visited the towns nearby. Because San Arenal was in Palma and we had these... that's where we also met Ricky Martin's father.

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Lirije Pepa:** Eh Julio [Iglesias], he was beautiful, and he held our hand there {extends her hand}.

**Anita Susuri:** You met Julio Iglesias?

**Lirije Pepa:** Excuse me?

**Anita Susuri:** You met Julio Iglesias?

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes. He held our hand like that, you know, and we [said], "Julio!" There we also met a director from Switzerland, I looked like his wife, he took us out to dinner [where we drank] Sangria, you know Sangria is a Spanish drink, and there were different places. Two women from Belgrade were also with us, they liked to hang out and somehow we were always lucky, it always turned out well for us. So, we stayed there for 15 days, then we returned to Belgrade.

And then, I know Greece very well, very well, I mean the coast. I was in Athens, because we were in Lutrak, it's a place almost on the border with Albania. I know 80 percent of Greece, I can't say [that] about Spain, only Palma de Mallorca. And I know Yugoslavia all the way, everywhere, and I've been along the coasts, it's not worth mentioning now, but almost everywhere. Then I was in Belgium, my brother was in Brussels, not in Brussels but in Kortrijk, then he moved to Brussels. From there, I, together with my cousin's daughter, because she had just finished high school and she came with me,

because her father wanted to, she wanted to go to London, but you know [what it's like] when your parents won't let you.

And we went there, his wife would say... she is Belgian, she said, she would always tell me, "Paris is very close to Belgium" and then she said, "You can travel [to Paris]." But my brother was working somewhere else, she was working, so we had to go to the French consulate to ask, because they didn't give us a visa. My brother said, "Go without a visa, if they don't give you a visa, act dumb. If they send you back, no big deal, they won't arrest you or anything." And... maybe you're not interested in that? [addresses the interviewer]

**Anita Susuri:** No, no, do tell, yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** And we went to the consulate and they didn't grant us a visa. We got on the train in the city of Lille, where we bought the tickets to Paris. We bought the tickets and when we came to Lille, there was Mouscron, a city between Paris, between France and Belgium. Before you enter Lille. He asked us, "Où visa?" [Fr.: Where are your visas?] you know, then I said, "*Je ne sais pas*" [Fr.: I don't know], I acted dumb, as if I didn't know. "Visa?" You know, that French woman was kind of tall and kind of, she didn't want to let us enter. Then I said to this Belgian, "*Je veux visiter Paris*: [Fr.: I want to visit Paris], you know, and we will come back, and sometimes we even spoke in English, because the English weren't that... And at some point she said, "Go on!" {moves hand}.

And we bought the tickets to Paris there in Lille. The train left at 8:00, we went by train, without knowing Paris. Only my sister-in-law bought a pocket map {as if she is reading something} there when we arrived at the station in Paris, there we went to the toilet. We freshened up a bit, because we dressed like, you know so we wouldn't... I also have pictures from France. And me and Arita thought about what to do next, we took the pocket map and had no problem finding our way. Who knows, you press something, something opens, something doesn't open, like when you go to a foreign city you've never been to, only in your dreams. And now that we got there, I said, "You know what, Arita?" I said, "Let's take the metro."

In the subway, you had every place, for example, if you want to go to the museum, we went to the museum, we went down there. Then we went to see the opera, I mean only to see it, because it was during the day. There we even met some professors from England, we spoke with them in English, because then I knew more English and she [my sister] spoke it too. They asked, "Where are you from?" We didn't know [much English], we just said, "Kosovo" we didn't know, we said, "Dubrovnik" you know, "Dubrovnik" as in from Yugoslavia, "Oh Dubrovnik!" He started [talking], gave us an address, and said, "If you stay here tonight...", [in order] to take us out to dinner. Two professors who even had top hats, {touches head}, they were Jews who lived in London. Anyway, we told them we were going back and you know, we didn't go [to dinner].

There was a French cafe {pretends she's holding a cup in her hands}, as always, across the street from the opera house. At the opera, we just went in to see those {describes with hands} everything made of gold, you know, Paris brother! I've always liked it. From the Champs d'Elysee metro [station], there was all the famous places they always show. Then Notre Dame, I'm talking about what we visited, then George Pompidou, the center where everyone gathers, I don't know how to describe all those places anymore. In front of the museum, the museum was closed, so I just took a picture there in front of the fountain, because more recently they made glass fountains as well, I mean when we were there, because of course if we went to the Louvre, we wouldn't have come out all day. And we were there for two days, what can you see in Paris within that time, you know it was... it won you over.

Then the Small Palace, the Great Palace, the Petite Palace, all the doors made of gold, you know some details that seemed very interesting to us. Then we went to the Eiffel Tower {raises her head}. But she had that disease [phobia], Arita, the height bothered her. There we met someone, he was not French but... not Arab, but from Algeria. There he said, "No, I like Rome, I like it better" we said, "No, honestly, Paris is beautiful" you know, we started [to converse] a little. And only Eiffel Tower [was] there, because the camera we had, because I didn't take mine, but she did, some poses, but good, because when we were at my brother's house, he took pictures of us, our brother.

So Brussels, Paris, I can't say that I'm that much... because [even] if you stay for years you can't see everything, you know. However, what I was most interested in was the center. Then the Arc de Triomphe, we walked to the Arc de Triomphe. Plus Chanel, I liked Coco Chanel, especially the perfumes, I wore Chanel no. 5 at that time, you know. That's where we saw [the designer stuff], we women like it, perfumes, and that... That's how it was, it was in Paris.

## Part Four

**Anita Susuri:** During '91, I believe you were working...

**Lirije Pepa:** I was working and it was very problematic.

**Anita Susuri:** And what was that like for you, in March it began, the demonstrations...

**Lirije Pepa:** In '81, my brother came to Pristina, got a job at the museum. In the meantime, when you went to work, you always had to... even with Professor Maloku, he passed away, he was a pathologist, we were checked by the police at the institute, ID card and all that. There was a situation, an absolute silence, you couldn't [do] anything. These pathologists... there were some cases in Podujevo when they killed those people in Pojata, I had to take photos, we would send the photos to Zagreb to be developed back then, you know. Believe me, they took those photos, and it seems to me, they didn't...

Because I took it directly, there was Lume Gashi and that professor of pathology who died, [his last name was] Maloku and we would take photos, someone was guarding us at the elevator so they wouldn't see us because we did everything secretly. Photos that showed bullet [holes], with Albanian flags and all that. This was some of it and we never saw those pictures, but they were photographed. Then...

**Anita Susuri:** They were never developed, you mean?

**Lirije Pepa:** No, they were developed in Zagreb, but when they took it {pretends she's flipping through pages}, they checked and destroyed it. Then, the situation was like... the one who worked with me would tell me, "Don't hang out with them," you know, he told me in Serbian, "I will never [harm] you, but there's no need [for you to hang out with them]" so he knew us very well, we talked and everything, but he was very burdened. He thought their time had come. When I saw his {touches her waist} his revolver while he was making coffee, because we would make the coffee ourselves, you know. But he... the revolver. It's not that I was afraid, because he couldn't kill me, but what was his goal in coming to the office with a revolver.

Some professors even spoke in Albanian with me and some of them were from Peja, Sćepanović and some others from stomatology, you know, who knew me, because they knew my father, they knew him. A lot of people knew us, we were a known family at that time and we, not that we collaborated, but we talked to people of course, as usual. When my father would send me to get something... because I'm changing the topic but, I mentioned that to make a comparison. I saw Ranković in '55, and my father told me, "This is Ranković." He had a trench that was kind of white {describes with hands} and a hat on. At the time he didn't seem like what they said...

**Anita Susuri:** He was in Peja?

**Lirije Pepa:** In Peja, in Peja. Because it was close to the Patriarchate, a little further from here, the house where the Serbs gathered because hunters also went there, it was the hunters' home where they took pictures of wild boars and all that, and he would come often. Peja had quite the number of Serbs, I think Peja and Prizren, because I also know a lot of people from Peja lived in Prizren. And so, we didn't have bad relations because they knew us, because I also photographed different households for New Year's Eve, at Serbian households for *Božić* [Orthodox Christmas], they would call us and we worked like that...

However, at that time there was not that much nationalism, there was, but we didn't, we didn't have... my father would say, "Don't get too friendly" because here and there we had some friends in the gymnasium. Because he would say, "You don't know them" you know, so don't continue [with the friendship]. This was it and there I got to, I had friendships with Serbs too, I had a good time, but they would always tell me, "You are not like the others." I would say that I was the same, because you know,

they belittled us a little. It was a bit much. But they thought at that time that they had become everything. I didn't get paid or anything. For the smallest mistake, the secretary would say, she would withhold 15 percent of my salary.

**Anita Susuri:** In the '80s?

**Lirije Pepa:** We were in that building, then they took us to where the student library is now, which was a bit separate, because they closed my office and I was working from the dean's office. When they called me to photograph, I would make a request, they wouldn't buy [what I needed] for me. So, apart from the students of the year... when they were Serbian because they all knew me, because I took pictures of students during the graduation ceremony, of course I took the camera from my brother, I worked on the photos at my brother's... and then after... There were cases, graduates and stuff, however, I was still at work, until the end. When the war happened...

**Anita Susuri:** You worked until '99, right?

**Lirije Pepa:** Until... I never stopped, but when it happened, I had some kind of flu, I was really sick from the flu, and then [Serbian forces] came, we closed down. I was alone in the apartment, because my brothers bought the apartment here. And then my brother said, "Come, you have to come!" "How can I go?" I left in my pajamas, actually many things, many things were stolen, because the militia lived there or who knows who. Then at 12:00 AM the police came, "*Jel znate vi Nušu?*" [Srb.: Do you know Nuša?] Who knows, there was a Serbian woman below, maybe she was spying on me, but I didn't commit any crime that this...

I said, "*Ne, ne izvolte ličnu kartu* [Srb.: Here is my ID card]. Here is my ID card." {shows the palm of her hand} And then nothing... and the next day they came, the neighbors asked, "No, there is no Nuša here, only Lirije" you know, [referring to] myself. A Serbian woman told me at work, "Don't deal with them, don't open the door for them at all" you know, that's what she told me, who knows maybe someone from work spied on me. Because at work I found pieces of paper "*Jedan narod bez vere ne može opstati* [Srb.: A nation without faith cannot survive]" stuff like this written in Serbian, a nation without religion cannot survive, cannot...

And a very calm atmosphere, you had to work, and I didn't give up until the [last] moment. Then Arta Dobroshi's<sup>35</sup> mother came, I found out later. She said, "Can you [help me] transport four patients?" Because Merkur Dobroshi was an orthopedist, they were from Drenica. And when I brought them, I even gave them 20 euros, I mean 20 *marka* for Eid, because it was Eid when the worst began. And I took them, they said, "You are very," you know, "well done, you are really brave." I took them to the gynecology clinic, some people came and took them and she said, "You saved them" she said, "you

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<sup>35</sup> Arta Dobroshi (1980) is a Kosovo Albanian actress and producer.

are very humane” Arta’s mother [said that to me]. I don’t know her now, but I know when I asked someone, it was her. And I transported those children.

Then, it began to get big and I didn’t go to work anymore. I told Shpend Ahmeti’s<sup>36</sup> mother, because she worked with us and she is a physician, she finished [Faculty of] Medicine, because she had taken a break. I told her, “Give me sick leave because I am sick, I have some kind of flu” I really did have a cold, when I went to Germany. Then we all got out, they took our car, I went to my brother. They had a house near Santea, they burned Santea in that area. You may have heard about it, because you are younger. He was little {points to her nephew} two-three years old, the boy.

Then we left there, I mentioned this, [the place] on the way to Skopje, Bllacë.<sup>37</sup> Then from Bllacë we were at one place, it was very cold there. I said, “I experienced hell, I experienced the coldness of Russia, and then I experienced” I said, “paradise in Germany.” They came out and waited for us, because we went to Germany, some went to America, some somewhere else.

**Anita Susuri:** Up until what date were you in Kosovo?

**Lirije Pepa:** We were in Kosovo until...

**Anita Susuri:** ‘99 or...?

**Lirije Pepa:** ‘99, when the war [started], we left almost towards the end.

**Anita Susuri:** Maybe in March?

**Lirije Pepa:** When they left by train.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you happen to be there Bllacë, when that case happened, when people were blocked?

**Lirije Pepa:** I have photos from Bllacë. They are there.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like there?

**Lirije Pepa:** There it was, you know like in the movies, maybe you saw how Jews were tortured. They were so tired, I put on my hat {describes with her hands} like this because we had become [exhausted]. And then, my nylon bag [with bread] fell, a guy took it from my hand and broke my nail {describes with

<sup>36</sup> Shpend Ahmeti (1978) is a Kosovo Albanian politician who served as the Mayor of Pristina.

<sup>37</sup> Bllacë is the border crossing between Kosovo and Macedonia where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days in March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either move into Macedonia or re-enter Kosovo.

her hands}. You know the way... this is how you held [the bread] {brings hands to her chest}. As an “*Alžirska džamija* [Srb.: Algerian mosque], I don’t know how to describe it, there was torture. We slept on the ground and fell asleep because we were tired from the lack of sleep.

And we sat at home dressed, because some Serbs would knock {pretends she’s knocking} at our door in Santea, they would tell my brother, “Give me your car or I will burn it with gasoline.” Then a Serb came out and said, “I’m telling you that...” he was a better neighbor, he said, “I can accompany you if you want, but I can’t guarantee anything for you” you know, maybe they were mistreated by others too. Because in Peja, Peja... they completely burned our house down in Peja. Because you know we had contacts, we thought of those over there, of the ones here, our whole family was in Peja. He was two or three years old [talks about her nephew], I don’t know, and we left. He got sick in that camp... in Bllacë, then the other one, but I don’t remember the name, anyway.

And he... all those foreigners, from NATO, would say “*No crying*,” [speaks in English] you know, because I was crying, like in *Sibir*, it was so cold we froze. He got sick, he was little, he would vomit. Then when we got on the plane, they took us to Skopje, on the plane and I think it was going directly to Berlin. Then we were, I was in Ansbach, I had the flu and there were signs that my lungs also [had a cold]. Then they took me to the hospital, it was like heaven there. You know what kind, it was a private clinic, they would take, as if you were sick and I stayed there in Ansbach for two and a half months. They were on vacation in Dorne, but it was... Can I, are you filming? [addresses the interviewer].

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** Jon [turns to her nephew] do you remember the city? No? It is known where there were... I don’t remember where we traveled from Berlin. But the Germans welcomed us wonderfully. I thank them for everything! A woman came right away, “Do you need clothes?” We went in our pajamas. They brought us clothes, they brought toothpaste, everything. Then they took me to that hospital, they gathered me and some others in order to get more [money] because they also profited. Because you know they would take in patients, the institution paid for many diseases and they would present you as if you were sick or something. But actually you were negative all the time, you were well you know.

I was even there as a translator for a professor who was there because [some people] received injections, some know the language, some don’t, I translated for her in Serbian. So, Germany for us was... and the Germans came here to visit us and see how we rehabilitated ourselves after the war. They stayed with me, two German women, one of them actually passed away. Sister Elizabeth was from the place where we stayed. They came, they visited us, we were in the villages that were in Germany and everything, I mean they helped them, you know.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** However, very thankful. Then we also accompanied them, my brother took care of them a lot. You know [they got] some things, some souvenirs from Kosovo. So, we kept up a correspondence. Then over time, you know how it is, today-tomorrow, it's not that you forget them, but, you neglect them. So I am thankful for Germany as long as I'm alive. I think it saved us in those moments and there were many... Germans are great hard workers. They won't give you this much {points with fingers} [if you don't work], but they respect work, they respect... cleanliness, okay everything. You know, what they say, a special culture. There are other places too, but there the discipline was okay, as they say.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you something else about the '90, it was, it was a difficult time because the schools were closed down, so the institutions for Albanians were closed down, and parallels<sup>38</sup> were formed. What was it like for you, you went to work and continued working, but what do you remember from that time?

**Lirije Pepa:** It was misery, I don't know how to describe it, because you went [to work] as if you were completely isolated. When a professor of dentistry saw me... she passed away, Savica, she was [a doctor] for children. She said, "*Kuku*"<sup>39</sup> she said, "Lirije" because you know, she was Macedonian, however... she would say, "The state you're in, and who you used to be," you know, "and where have you ended up now." Not because of poverty, but in an isolated place, and they say nobody could even... Okay, I would, I would sign [myself in], I did everything according to the rules, just so I wouldn't let them fire me.

That was the last time when I talked about Arta's mother, that's when I got sick, I got sick with some kind of flu, maybe it was SARS or what do I know, but I was really very sick, you know I had a fever, I was coughing, everything. And in the meantime, I wasn't photographing nor working, I just went and sat in the office, and you would only hear [stories] from the janitors, "This person did that thing..." I never took my salary, I gave it to a janitor, she was Serbian, I was thinking I'm not going to the dean's office for someone to see me.

Because to resign myself... because they would say we're quitting our jobs ourselves. Until the last moment, I didn't go anymore, I don't know if I got paid or anything, that was it. Because the schools weren't working, everyone was [learning] privately at homes<sup>40</sup> here and there, you know how... At least my niece was at my place, she wrote, "Not even birds have a voice like before..." and I don't know what. I even have the first publication in *Bujku*<sup>41</sup> somewhere. She wrote, I gave it to a journalist, she

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<sup>38</sup> "Parallels" is the parallel system of education created by Albanians in Kosovo after they were banned from state schools in 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

<sup>40</sup> By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

<sup>41</sup> *The Farmer*, a daily newspaper which replaced *Rilindja* after Serbian authority banned it, in August 1990.

edited it, “What should I title it?” I said, “In Waiting,” really, really well, “In Waiting” you know, noise, always waiting for something better to happen. So...

**Anita Susuri:** Did you take pictures, for example, of the women’s marches, the demonstrations that took place?

**Lirije Pepa:** Here’s what I took pictures of, I took pictures in Bllacë, I didn’t get to take pictures of the marches, because of course it was a situation... When they were going [to the protests], I was still at work. I photographed the poisonings, but I gave the [photos from the] poisonings to Lule Pula when she went to Zagreb, someone took them from her. So... because I gave the film to someone from the village, I told him to throw it away, to tear it up, to destroy it, because you know, they would ask me, “Did you take pictures?” “No.” It’s not that I was afraid, but I didn’t want to enter through their door, to be taken, and they didn’t come to take me [for interrogation]. Maybe the one who worked with me told them [not to], I don’t know. No one came directly to me, only indirectly. You know, I would even tell them, “Don’t talk nonsense” you know, “talk...” because hesitation makes a person afraid and they think that they will be taken to jail or something.

There was also fear. It was a situation, I don’t know how to describe, you weren’t even safe in your apartment. And I went to my brother’s place and went out once with my sister-in-law, with their mother. We went out to buy something and to see what was going on, you know, sometimes we even spoke in Turkish or... she spoke Turkish or Serbian, so that they wouldn’t understand we were Albanian. They could take you in the street or what do you know. In Pristina there was absolute silence, an atmosphere, the pandemic is nothing [compared to it] you know, at least now during the pandemic... But back then there was no one on the street, we went to the market to buy potatoes, they would say, “*Tražili ste avione, nema više kamione*” [Srb.: You asked for planes, there are not even trucks anymore], that’s what they told us, you asked for planes, there aren’t even trucks, as in [food]...

**Anita Susuri:** There’s not even food.

**Lirije Pepa:** Yes. That’s it. Then we went to, anyway in Bllacë, from Bllacë... I still can’t remember the name [of that place]. Then by plane in Skopje, to Germany, Germany saved us, we stayed for three months, as soon as the way opened, we were the first to ask to return. That’s what we wanted, and you know how I felt, we thought we’d never come back. We came back, waited, it turned out to be even worse because everyone started, everybody fired up, revolted, [dead] bodies, many of them killed. You know how Peja seemed to me when I left... because you had no place to sleep at home, only when someone who had an apartment took you in. I was in tears, I don’t know... maybe your parents, they know what that experience was like.

Prizren was not so much, because I was with [my] German [friends] in Prizren as well. We went with those people from NATO, there were Germans in Prizren, I took some pictures here and there, the

pictures are not anything [remarkable], but I have pictures of Prizren mosques and that. And there the Germans treated us to dinner. Then they came back, they stayed at my place, with me because they were women and they loved me very much, interestingly, maybe that's my impression, I think, I don't know, somehow they loved me, maybe because I wasn't conceited at all, I was more... not that I was submissive but I was communicative, you know, I was friendly.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you find out the war ended, through the media or somebody let you know?

**Lirije Pepa:** No...

**Anita Susuri:** How did you receive it?

**Lirije Pepa:** I was in the hospital there and Afërdita Saraçini, you know, she lived with me, she slept there [and] when she got a job in '81, together with her brother. They came to Pristina, so they stayed at my place. I slept on the same mattress with Afërdita, we set up the mattress. And while I was watching TV, because I had [a notebook] you know, I was taking notes {pretends she's writing on her hand} from CNN and these [channels], because I thought I would learn English, I knew it a little but not... in short I remembered some words.

Then I saw her with Robert Cook,<sup>42</sup> Afërdita Saraçini was talking to Cook from Skopje. You know how happy I was? "*Kuku*," I said, "Afërdita," you know. Then, Dhurata Kaba, my friend, with whom I was roommates with, we lived together for twelve years, she wrote an article for *Bota Sot*. When I read it, I thought if I knew, because we weren't on speaking terms, I thought if she knew we were in one... I still can't remember the name of the town after Bllacë, Bill Clinton was also there... [Stankovac]

**Anita Susuri:** I don't know...

**Lirije Pepa:** Anyway, I'll remember at some point. And I thought, "She could've come to get us," you know. So, I just cried. I had the hospital, it was like a sanatorium in the middle of the mountains, very beautiful. A city as big as Pristina, Ansbah, there were private sanatoriums. There was also a place to play golf {moves her hand as if she is playing} these, golf yes, you know that game, like that. All of that was private, arranged. There were Croats, there was everybody, you know from the war, how they took them there [for shelter]. We formed friendships there, one of them liked me very much... all young people. Because there were sick people there, but in the meantime us too, that was more like a kind of rest. You know what [kind of] beauty I have only seen in movies and in dreams, I don't know why dreams show so much. Before I left, I felt like I had seen it somewhere, you know what they say, like *deja vu*, you know?

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<sup>42</sup> The speaker mistakenly says Robert Cook instead of Robin Cook, who was a Foreign Secretary who oversaw British interventions in Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Lirije Pepa:** I thought to myself, imagine [a situation] from a dream would be the same situation that happened to me in real life. So I took him, he was two years old, I don't know how old? [addresses her nephew] Show me your hands {shows two fingers} (laughs). Three, I took him in my arms in Germany {describes with her hands}, the cherries were ripe, I told him to take them, we were picking them, a German woman brought us a basket like that, cherries, strawberries, you know everything. [I spoke] a little with some teachers in English there, a little, and I kept notes for everything, so that I remembered when they'd come to talk. Because they told me, "Pepa" you know, "*You eat?*" [speaks in English] Are you eating?" Because they wanted to cure me.

I would say, "*Yeah, good, very good*" [speaks in English] we all went to a restaurant together with the doctors. It was a great life, Germany helped us a lot, all Albanians, they were really fair, not just tricks. And you know Merkel, for us almost everyone was like Merkel. I have no critiques, then we were the first to return, because we found out in June, they didn't want to let us go, because they would say, "How will you rehabilitate there now?" Because at my place, imagine, policemen stayed in the whole apartment and they stole all the gold you had. Now I don't know who stole it, but the militia had stayed there.

**Anita Susuri:** When did you return?

**Lirije Pepa:** We returned immediately after...

**Anita Susuri:** In June?

**Lirije Pepa:** After three months.

**Anita Susuri:** Aha, after three months.

**Lirije Pepa:** After three months right when NATO left, and so you know. What we saw here. We were like this... but we couldn't have stayed longer, because that's when I realized what your homeland means. My tears were flowing, imagine I was praying to the dead. I would say, "You protect..." you know, that much, I would just cry. Then I started to calm down a little, because we had traumas. When everything you had was burned, Santea was completely burned, each one of us had war trauma. Then in Bllacë, then to the other place where we went, it was cold in the tents, we took off whatever we had just to cover the children because they got sick, you know from the cold. I still don't remember that...

**Anita Susuri:** You said that you were there when the students were poisoned, what did you see there? What was it like?

**Lirije Pepa:** What I saw there, was what was on television, everyone running and bringing them to the clinics. One professor said that when someone gets poisoned, everyone around them also gets the poison because it affects them. I was also caught by a professor of internal medicine, he was a rheumatologist, he took my camera {pretends she is grabbing something}. He said, “Did you take pictures?” He really admired me because I worked a lot for him, you know, I said, “I didn’t take pictures” you know. “Are you sure?” Me, “I am sure.” I thought if he takes the film out it will get ruined, no big deal, you know. And he did nothing, he didn’t open the camera.

He said, “*Lutko moja*” [Srb.: My doll] you know. He said, “They don't know what SUP is here” you know. So if they’d take me there... just tell you know, I said, “No, I didn’t take pictures.” And then I took the pictures, gave them to Lule, she went to Zagreb. They went, they had a, not a congress but in connection to... Someone took her pictures. So, we were left without... I was left too, because I gave the film to someone from the village, there were some laboratory workers. I would say, “Destroy [them],” you know, so that we wouldn’t have a problem or something, “You took pictures, you didn’t take pictures.” Like that. The poisoning spread in a large circle and the scent of some chemicals could be smelled. And our eyes were burning, I don’t know why...

**Anita Susuri:** You were in the clinics where it happened?

**Lirije Pepa:** Not in the clinic, but I was in the yard, because I took pictures in the yard and in some places in the clinic, {counts on fingers} in the transfusion... in some places they were crying, they would shout, now I don’t believe that they were acting like that, I don’t believe it. It seemed to me that it was real, there were many poisoned people, now whether they threw it intentionally or not, what they were doing there, those who dealt with it know that. That was all. Then after that I went to work, they called me, Mazllum Belegu as dean.

**Anita Susuri:** After the war?

**Lirije Pepa:** That was after the war. And a librarian called me, Shukrane was working, she said, “Lirije, come, a professor is calling you...” you know the way, “if you want to return to work.” And I showed up right away. I said why lose it, you know, the right to work. Even that man from France, what’s his name, he was big, like a minister now? [Kouchner]. *Kuku bre*,<sup>43</sup> why am I forgetting these names...

**Anita Susuri:** It doesn’t matter.

**Lirije Pepa:** Anyway, he asked me like this, “Are you a doctor?” I said, “No, no, a photographer” (laughs). Because he was coming to see if they were bringing us that aid, you know, because they created some sort of fund, they wanted to register us to get salaries, I had that badge {touches her shoulder} photographer, you know, that’s what I used to go out wearing.

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<sup>43</sup> Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

*[The interview was interrupted here]*

**Lirije Pepa:** Bernard Kushner was the one who... back then he was pro Kosovo, he helped us, he came to every institution, [to check] how we were doing, you know, who does what, what do they for work, and then things got better. They gave us each... then it was still *marka*, a hundred *marka* each, or I don't know. And in Germany they gave us 80 *marka* a month, plus food, everything was free, they helped us.

**Anita Susuri:** After retirement, what did you do, did you have any activities?

**Lirije Pepa:** I didn't do anything after retirement. At first I wanted to work as a humanitarian with a friend, you know at the church, if they needed something, money or something small, but there wasn't that much and then I didn't do anything. But I mean, I went to Albania. It was the first time, after the war. It was through an organization, I think it was Arjeta Kelmendi, an organization, I mean to deal with various activities, who wants to open [e.g. a business], it was something like a seminar for 15 days, like... I don't know how to describe it. There we went to lectures given by professors from Albania. There was also economics, it was like this...

I actually once asked them, "Is the Nobel Prize profitable?" You know, because we were learning how to organize something, how to do it. There we agreed with some professors, there were some professors who talked about the events during Enver Hoxha[’s time]. Sometimes we weren't interested, so that we wouldn't get into an [awkward] situation, we didn't ask them questions, but they [talked] themselves. Because they also won... because one woman said, "I read both the Quran and the Bible and all those [holy books]" you know, I respect all religions {puts her hand on her chest}, everyone, I am a believer myself, there is something [out there] for me, you know it's not guranteed. However, I would never wear a headscarf. Not me but them also, you know some wore headscarves for profit.

We had medical students who covered up, but they'd still hug, you know. I mean, if you love religion, religion is something else entirely. I respect everyone's religion, but I believe, I even say prayers because... as a person, you know what {puts hands together} you have some things that have a positive effect. Like someone who does yoga or something to calm down and that has stuck with me and then I turn to God to open all the roads for me. Everyone has their own way.

However, I don't like to influence anyone, but to respect them, yes, to each their own. That was all I think. After retirement, after that I didn't do anything. However, I read, with friends, I have friends that I've known for 50 years from when we were students, we still are [friends], now one of our friends has passed away, one of my friends has passed away from cancer. There are ten of us who continuously

keep in touch, but we haven't seen each other for three months. I just send them pictures for example...

**Anita Susuri:** Because of the pandemic, right?

**Lirije Pepa:** I send them pictures about where I was or what I did.

**Anita Susuri:** Because of the pandemic, right?

**Lirije Pepa:** The pandemic, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you now... because we are already nearing the end, a little about these last years. This year there is a pandemic and there was a quarantine, how did you get through this time? How did it start for you?

**Lirije Pepa:** To tell you the truth, I may be the type, I always liked solitude, you know because I lived alone. I mean we go out with friends at a certain time when this... But I read all the time, then I also watch movies, I have some series that I like, I watch various documentaries. Then I won't go into the political situation now, I more or less belong to VV<sup>44</sup> you know (laughs). I like it, it doesn't mean I have to mention it, that's...

**Anita Susuri:** It's your choice, you have the right...

**Lirije Pepa:** So, there are various debates, sometimes I would get angry, sometimes not. Sometimes I used to go out on the balcony and look, you know, more or less... because I had solitude, but when you had to go somewhere you needed a mask {brings hands to mouth}, you have to see if you are... My brother and my brother's children helped me a lot. They were there permanently, I mean when I needed something, to buy medicine or something, because I have hypertension and some issues, of course with age, they buy everything for me. You know, so, thanks to them, I didn't have a problem and they're always kind of...

I also have other brothers, in Peja, in Belgium, but I grew up with the ones [who live] here, in my arms, you know, so we were very close. And they didn't neglect me, I could say to him [addresses her nephew] in the middle of the night, "Ron..." or to my sister's daughter or my brother, I'm very thankful for them, you know, because a person never knows if they have time left. Today you're here, tomorrow you're gone, you know, age. And then, I kinda took it as... I wasn't afraid, but I didn't panic either, I was afraid that I might infect someone. And my brother's daughter-in-law just gave birth, you know, and we love that baby so much, and I'm kind of afraid to even touch [the baby], I'm afraid...

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<sup>44</sup> Alb. *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* - Self-determination Movement is a political party in Kosovo which goes by the acronym LVV. It is orientated towards principles of social democracy, progressivism, and Albanian nationalism.

I use hand sanitizer a lot {touches her hands} as soon as I leave I put on a handkerchief to open the locks. However, I don't believe [I have] something because I got over those symptoms with another flu, the ones they are describing. I got sick three or four years ago, but everything seemed the same for me. As they're describing it now, I had no appetite or anything. I am fine now, I never have a fever or a cough. Although I won't take the test. Not for any reason, not that I don't believe it, because some things exist and you don't know about it.

**Anita Susuri:** Mrs. Lirije, for the end, if you have something to add or if you have something left that you would like to say, feel free to say it, tell us.

**Lirije Pepa:** I don't know what I would say, I wish everyone good health, for this pandemic to disappear as soon as possible (laughs). So, in order to be a little more free, because I really feel sorry for young people, for example you. When I was your age, maybe I was in the best position, and when I see you locked up in your houses, now I can't compare my time with your time, I am 75 years old, all of you are young. But what can we do, that's why I'm sorry.

Because I know that I will die and even if I live a hundred years I will still die. So I pray to God only for ease, but for young people for everything to be open, for the normal life to start, because being alone is hard. I mean I read but even reading is sometimes not attractive because you are curious to know, on TV, what is happening, where it is happening, whether [Richard] Grenell<sup>45</sup> came or not (laughs). Did he come today? [addresses the interviewer] You as journalists... I'm kidding, that's how we [cope]... more from anger, but I express it differently.

But it's very hard for children too. What kind of school is it when they don't experience the desk, their classmates, the mischief that happens in the classes. What kind of school is it when you go through those {looks at her hand palm}, I'm 75 and I often call them when something breaks down, I say, "I don't know how to turn it on, I don't know this" you know we don't know the technology, I mean [people] my age because you are younger at least... But also a critique for younger people, because they are constantly on their phones, but there's nothing [you can do] you get everything from there... (laughs) That's all, thank you!

**Anita Susuri:** Thank you so much!

**Lirije Pepa:** Maybe I was too much but...

**Anita Susuri:** No, no, no...

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Grenell (1966) is an American political operative, diplomat, TV personality, and public relations consultant. He served as the Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Peace Negotiations from 2019 to 2021.

**Lirije Pepa:** Because retirees and old people talk too much (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** Of course not. Thank you!