

INTERVIEW WITH DILAVER PEPA

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Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Dilaver 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: Mr. Dilaver, if you could introduce yourself, tell us anything about your family, your origins...

Dilaver Pepa: I am Dilaver Pepa, born in 1955 in Peja. I come from a middle [class] family, from the city, that works with crafts their entire life, as photographers. Otherwise, my father worked as a trader too when he was young, he went through all of Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia, at the time... they visited many places with carpets, with... And my [paternal] uncle was a photographer... the first photographer, Riza Pepa, but sadly in 20... 20... in '43, '42, I don't know exactly, he was killed. Now, we don't know who killed him, whether he was killed by the partisans or the *ballist*,¹ it's still an enigma [mystery] that they couldn't solve.

So, my childhood, like all people my age at the time, was school and games. We had our store, ever since '55 actually, when I was born and even earlier. I already started going to the store as a five-six year old, not to work, because I was small, but to send water, to help them with something, went to buy this, went to buy that. So, I started the craft a bit later on, I worked a lot when I was 15-16 years old. I mean, I was skilled enough that I was able to work. I finished elementary school in Peja, *Miladin Popović* [school]. The Gymnasium which was called *11 Maji* back then, now it's *Bedri Pejani*, in Peja. I started my studies in '74 at the Faculty of Law. I dropped out during the third year. The reasons were various.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about your father's store. Where was it located and how do you remember it as a child... what did the store look like? What did it have inside? What kind of people visited it?

¹ *Ballist* were members of the *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front), an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian-inhabited lands.

Dilaver Pepa: Yes. Our store was actually... I mentioned earlier around '50, '55, but I don't remember that because I was born in '55. But we had our store... what I remember and if [you know] Peja... I don't know how much you know it... now there is the goods house. That's where our store was until '73. It was a store which connected to the long bazaar actually, in one line. The store was quite, I mean, for the time, well-equipped. It had reflectors, not flash reflectors like they have now, but light reflectors. There was a large camera, where people had their photo taken, for documents or for fun. Back then it was quite interesting to go and have pictures taken. People would prepare a week ahead, "We will go and take a set of pictures." So, the store was simple... I mean, you know, not like many studios are today, but it was functional.

Back then there were few photographers. In Peja, for example, there were only two-three photographers. *Foto Pepa*, *Foto Nazmia*, and so on. So, all the time, after school, while I was in elementary school, I went straight to the store. My youth [childhood] was spent more in the store than in the streets, in the neighborhood where we played. So, this is some kind of...

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that your profession was handed down to you by your uncle, that he was the first to work...

Dilaver Pepa: Yes.

Anita Susuri: ...with photography. Do you know anything more from... how he worked with photography? How did it come about that he started this profession?

Dilaver Pepa: {Shrugs} As much as they explained to me, I don't know my uncle... we only know him through pictures. He was young, 17-18 years old... I don't know if he was in Zagreb or where... they traveled back then, with trading and stuff, and he started the craft from... I don't know now, you know, I am not sure who got him into photography. When he came to Peja, from there... at that time there were no photographers at all in Peja. Maybe there were but... we don't know about it. So, he did photography. Back then he didn't have a studio, but he worked at home. Back then the conditions were exceptionally hard. He had to photograph at home, to... to prepare a dark room. Back then he used the bathroom and covered it... and he had to work there and develop the films, develop the pictures, dry them and so on.

And after my uncle... he actually disappeared in '42-'43, then my father continued it. Since he was left with some cameras, some equipment, there were no photographers in Peja, and so he continued it. So, he started working [with photography] a lot, he left trading because he had a trading store, before learning the craft of photography. And he started with the craft of photography... slowly, slowly, my sisters began... I had three sisters. One of them... the older one didn't work. [Lirije Pepa](#) did work, the second one along with Mersije Pepa. They are the ones who actually worked with photography their entire lives. My older brother, Skender, he also studied... they all studied but all of them... something happened and their studies were interrupted. After Skenda [Skender], me and another one of my

brothers... we all worked with photography, actually, the entire family, aside from my mother and my older sister (laughs).

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned the trading store you had... I am interested to know with which places the trades happened, was it with Istanbul, or Europe, with Yugoslavia and these places... Croatia, Slovenia?

Dilaver Pepa: Back then... according to what they say, what my mother says and stuff... It was done with Istanbul, with Greece. Now former Macedonia, Skopje, back then it was in the Kosovo *vilayet*...² in these areas. In Albania, in Shkodër, since Shkodër was closer to us as a city... they went there often. They traded with people from all around. When he opened the store, back then it was like a mini-market today, you know, it had everything. But I don't remember that, only from what they tell me... I remember when we were photographers, when our house was near the goods house. We worked there... It was there until '74. In '74 we moved to... after the Municipality undertook the responsibility to build the Good House, they gave us a store in front of it and so we continued.

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know what it was like back then... I mean, when you were a child, how do you remember... the classes of people or what kind of... how to put it, people... you were like... maybe traders had a better economic standing. What kind of city was Peja? What kind of people did it have?

Dilaver Pepa: Peja's like Peja, a really beautiful city (laughs). As far as living back then... I lived in a neighborhood near Kapeshtica where actually all of us were... there was balance. We, as a family of traders, lived well, you know, we didn't have any kind of financial problem. The conditions back then were, [I mean] education, you know, I am talking about former Yugoslavia, they were, as we know, school was free, healthcare was free. Life in general was good, you know, I can't say we suffered some kind of consequence. Despite that, in the villages where they had, you know, the persecution of... allegedly the collecting of weapons, the surplus, and they struggled a lot, but as a child I don't remember anything like that. We were an average family, you know, we weren't very rich but also not... an average family in Peja. Actually, the entire neighborhood was like that, you know... plus the craftspeople lived a little better because they had income every day, you know, they didn't wait to receive a wage at the end of the month.

And as far as I remember in Peja, back then there were plenty of factories, there were about ten factories. It was developed in general, you know... compared to the other cities of Kosovo, it was one of the most developed cities. And this is pertaining...

² *Vilayet* was an administrative division or province in the Ottoman Empire

Anita Susuri: Maybe you were very young at the time, but do you remember the time of Ranković,³ I mean the '60s, '65, when people were fleeing. Do you have, how to put it, any kind of memory related to that...

Dilaver Pepa: I have memories from what they talked about, for example, because I was young at the time, it was '55, the '60s when a lot of people fled to Turkey. From my older sister's discussions... actually my father always kept some letters and he put them in a... we had a metal box at home, he kept a journal there. After my father's death, in '70 when he died, and then my sister went through the pages and showed us the letters... actually we had all the documents to go to Turkey, in '55, the year I was born. But my sister insisted, she opposed going there. She was a little older, 12 years older than me actually, she was about 15-16 years old, she was in gymnasium and she really opposed it. So, we didn't go to Turkey. And as far as the time of Ranković, only from discussions, it's not like I remember something like...

Anita Susuri: Yes, you were very young. I wanted to ask you a bit more about the store, you told me that when you started, you were about 15, but I believe even younger, I think you went to villages and photographed with your sister...

Dilaver Pepa: Yes, yes, yes. I started going to the store when I was five-six years old, I went there to clean and to... to help them with something, as children like to get mixed up everywhere. And my sister worked at the time, Lirije... She was one of the, I mean, my father, my father already started slowly leaving it to my sisters to lead the studio, so my two sisters, Lirije and Mersije. And I was, actually... back then it was called *shëgërt*,⁴ to clean the studio in the morning... the condition of the wastewater system back then wasn't good, the water... to get water... because the water for pictures has to be clean... replaceable. So, I spent my whole life, I mentioned earlier a bit, more in the studio than in the neighborhood playing with friends. When I became 14-15 years old, I already started to learn.

To go back to the question you asked me about the village... I was nine or ten, I don't know, around that age... And they made some changes to the ID cards. In the villages in Dukagjin, it was kind of problematic for the women to come and have their pictures taken... you know, the situation was like that... more or less. And there came a... the head villager of Prilep as far as I remember, he was called Dulje, that's what they called him. And while talking to my father... this was in '69, '68... I don't know exactly now... "Can we come and have our picture taken?" He was aware that my sister was working and we agreed, with my father, with my sister... and my sister and I went there. I was a child, I would hold the backdrop, and help her with stuff.

³ 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.

⁴ From the Turkish word *sakirt*, which means apprentice.

And we started with the Prilep village, so, all the villages of Dukagjin, Prilep and on the way to Deçan and... Strelc and that way... the other area towards Pristina, Zahaq and these [villages], we photographed there. It was quite the job back then, you know, all the villages of Dukagjin, for documents, for ID cards. Quite the job and... and it was interesting financially because there was decent income. I remember like it was today, a TV... back then the TVs became a thing here. My sister, through that income, said, "Okay brother," she said, "here is a gift, buy a TV." Because there weren't [many] TVs at the time, [it was] very rare. And this...

Anita Susuri: Did anything happen to you, for example... interesting or...

Dilaver Pepa: It was interesting, we saw all kinds of stuff back then, the villages weren't developed like they are today. When we entered, what they call *maxhe*⁵ now where they prepared food, where... That was very interesting, you know... don't let me get into details.

Anita Susuri: Were the differences noticeable, for example, the city from the village? Was it a big difference?

Dilaver Pepa: Oh, to... yes, there was a big difference because there was a... the villages were really neglected back then, I mean, the places where they lived. They focused more on agriculture, farming, so they didn't place more importance on living [conditions]. They were, I don't remember either now, the towers or the houses where they lived separately, some for women, some for men, where they ate, where they drank, where they prepared [food] together... like that. It was very interesting to me. In the cities it was different, you know, the conditions were a bit better, more... A person gets used to it, they adapt, you know, seeing it, it started to feel like a routine, it seemed the same.

Anita Susuri: What materials did you use at the time to develop the pictures? How did that process go? Where were those materials found?

Dilaver Pepa: Back then, at the time, I mean, there wasn't anyone who worked with chemicals in Kosovo, with these... we usually got our supplies from Zagreb. Back then there was an enterprise which we called *Foto teknika*... *Fotokemika*, where they produced... the chemicals. It was the developer, the fixer, actually they call it the brightener now... different papers, the films, photochemistry. So, we would go there to get supplies. From sometime around the '70s, they opened a store in Skopje too, Zagreb's *Fotokemika*. So, me and my sister Lirije often went to Skopje, to get supplies. There was the developer, the brightener, the paper, the films.

Back then the films were different, they weren't like... you are young, I don't know if you remember, film rolls, but they were made of glass, sets. So, it was difficult to find them but... when you continue the work you love, you find a way. The work with photography... at the studio it was quite difficult. There was the photography, after photography you had to take it, and develop that film. The film

⁵ A place where flour was kept and cooked.

would develop and there was, as we say it, it was stressful... maybe they closed their eyes [in the photograph]. Because back then you didn't see it as you do now... with digital [cameras], phones, "Ready... oh, the eyes." Remove it, stop it, erase it. So, that was kind of stressful too.

When it came out well, then you had to dry the film. It would dry well and we would put it back in the camera. Then in the camera we had to, you know... to explain it, it's quite the procedure. The paper goes underneath, the camera lets light rays through that film and the photography incorporates it. You take the photograph from there and you put it in the developer. Everything we are talking about is done in the dark room. There is a dim light, red, enough to see a bit. The photograph is developed there. You see that you got the results you want there and you put it in the brightener to stop the developing process because if you leave it for longer, it becomes darker, it's destroyed. You put it in the brightener. You leave it there for some time, one, two, three hours, it depends, and then it's flushed well. After flushing it, you take the photograph.

There's an interesting thing people don't know. We dried the pictures back then on glass. A piece of glass, for example, was one meter to half a meter and we cleaned that glass really well, we... actually with the powder used for babies, we put it there in order for the glass to shine. And we put the wet pictures on the glass. With newspapers, we had some rollers, they would call them like that, the newspapers were there to absorb the water. When we took out the water, we could see it and we would leave the glass close to each other, or somewhere warm or... in the summer we would leave them outside at home. From the warmth, the sun... and they would dry up, they would dry up, they would dry up and the photograph would show. So, it was a procedure that... then later on there were electrical machines. It was... they were... they had their plates, they would dry up, we would take them out.

Anita Susuri: Up to what year did you do that procedure?

Dilaver Pepa: I did this procedure until... now, I stopped in '74. Actually until '74, no... '78-'79... in '80 I already started *color* [speaks in English] photography. I mean, here because they started being done earlier. It lasted long to be honest, you know, I don't remember exactly the year when, but... I remember in '85-'86 I purchased the first machines actually. They were for color photography. They called it dried photography at the time because they came out ready, from the system... from start to finish, they printed out the dried photograph. My brother, Skender, had contacted... some machines in Germany. The machines arrived. So, it started... the color time period.

Anita Susuri: How long did it take for the photo to come out? Until it was... when the final product came out...

Dilaver Pepa: I will go back in time a bit. How I first started... to learn the craft. It was a Sunday and on Sundays we usually would go out to clean the studio. Back then, we had wooden floors, we would coat them with different oils, you know, for cleansing. In the meantime, a client came, we wouldn't work on Sundays, to have their photo taken. Now I... I don't remember if I was ten or 12 years old. He said, "I

want to have my picture taken.” I would think of how to photograph him and he needed the photos quickly. And I took the courage and said I’ll try, if anything comes up I would either call my sister or my father and tell them. I took it, we had some *light* [speaks in English] cameras. At the time they were cameras the size of the palm of your hand. We would put the film... the film... there were already film rolls. We would put the film... I photographed him. And then I told him, “Come back after an hour, after an hour and we’ll see.” He left, [after] I photographed him. I quickly cut the film. A small piece of the film and I developed it. And it was great, it came out well. So, since then I started the craft of photography. And then they started to assign me stuff that I could work on which was a little more simple.

Anita Susuri: For example, how long did it take...

Dilaver Pepa: It took... for a photograph to develop. For example, washing the film lasted five-six minutes. Then there was the process of drying, until it dried, that took a long time if you didn’t have... back then we didn’t have hair dryers to dry them, for example. But we had to leave them somewhere warm, near the stove or something when it was winter. When it was summer, we exposed them to the sun a bit. While the process of photography... working on that lasted for about half an hour too... development, washing, drying. So, about an hour, I mean, taking a simple photograph, about an hour, two hours, that’s how long it took...

We usually took pictures during the day. In the evening we would take them home and at home... I explained that procedure with the glass earlier... and... in the evening we would put them there to dry. When we woke up in the morning, we would take the pictures that had fallen from the glass, we would collect them and go to the studio. This was the procedure. I actually worked in the studio until ‘81. That’s what it was like... because in ‘74 when my sister came to Pristina, they called her at the Faculty of Medicine to work as a photographer. It was me, my sister and my brother. It was my second sister, Mersije, my brother and me at the studio. In ‘78 I went to military service, in ‘79 I finished it, in ‘80 [I worked] at the studio, in ‘81 I came to Pristina for work.

Anita Susuri: Before going there, I have one more question about the studio in Peja. At the time, were there many demands for photography and... you mentioned ID cards and...

Dilaver Pepa: Yes...

Anita Susuri: ...documentation, but also... what else did people have their pictures taken for?

Dilaver Pepa: Besides documentation photos, they came for... to take engagement pictures, even marriage ones because back then people didn’t go to weddings to take photos, but after they got married they came [to the studio], usually it was the whole family. I don’t know, I mentioned earlier, it was quite the ceremony to have photos taken. They prepared one week ahead, they bought new clothes... because they didn’t wear just about anything for photos. So, it was a procedure that... the

studio was... it had its own workshop. So, men, women, children, and whole families came to take photos. It was a good job, you know, it wasn't too much effort, but it was a good living.

And then we had... the military... Back then there were the barracks. And they would usually go out on Saturdays, Sundays, the soldiers. And I would have to go [to the studio] because they came to take photos... they had a memory from the military. Back then we made photos... there was a template... it was in Serbian, for example, what do I know, "Memory from the People's Army of Yugoslavia" at the time. And there was enough work on Saturdays and Sundays, you know, with the soldiers. And then my father would go out... in Peja there is a big park, a beautiful park, they call it Karagaç, it was a very beautiful park. On Sundays families would call him to photograph them in the park... so, that was the job. When it comes to amateur photography, as we call it, for example, people who took photos themselves, that started later on... there were no conditions to own a camera at the time. But, after some time there were cameras, films, work with different amateurs started and that's it.

Anita Susuri: In high school, what school did you attend?

Dilaver Pepa: Gymnasium *Sami Fr... 11 Maji*, now *Bedri Pejani*. That was a school... I remember a case when some Peja natives came from Albania, people who had run away and they managed to come back here. Back then Albania was... I remember it a bit from memories, from discussions... Peja's gymnasium at the time was like finishing a university, you know, it was a good school when it came to education, the professors, and even the students. They were a little better than now, I am talking about the present situation. I am a bit critical, you know... so many schools have opened, but the quality isn't... and from the gymnasium in '73-'74 I enrolled in the Faculty of Law...

Anita Susuri: In Pristina?

Dilaver Pepa: Here in Pristina. Actually, I have been in Pristina since '74, there were some interruptions. I mentioned that I went to military service in '78, in former Yugoslavia, I finished it in '79. I left university a bit behind, I had to go back to the studio again and help out, work... until '81. In '81 I came to Pristina. I...

Anita Susuri: So you ultimately settled in Pristina in '81...

Dilaver Pepa: In '81...

Anita Susuri: The studio...

Dilaver Pepa: Yes with... no, I was working in '81. It actually connects to the demonstrations.⁶ On April 1, in '81 we started work when they called us. That day there was a massive demonstration in Pristina. I came in '81 and was actually here close to Dardania [neighborhood]... the studio I have now, I saw the row of buses, they were in a line. And I thought to myself, "It's the first [of the month], they *Ramiz Sadiku* [enterprise] workers are probably receiving their wages." When I took a few steps further, I saw the crowd of demonstrators, at that point... it's known that '81 was... the massive demonstrations in Pristina, on April 1, April 2... we started work that day, they called me at the Museum of Revolution.⁷

Anita Susuri: What else did you see... was there a lot of police presence, violence... What was there?

Dilaver Pepa: There was everything. There were many policemen... the crowd was so large that... not even the policemen were noticed because of the large crowd. But when they started throwing teargas, and even [shooting] real bullets, that's when people started panicking. People started running away, to... I came here, I had to find my sister's apartment, because Lirije had already settled here in Pristina in '74. I knew it, I was there several times, but one gets confused in that kind of chaos. But I found the apartment, and I went there. And then I couldn't go out anymore. Anyway, my curiosity prompted me to go out and see what was happening, you know, but they didn't let me go out that night, because it lasted until late at night, the demonstration.

The next day we had to be present, on April 2, we had to go to work. Actually there was a meeting, the director, the former director, Muhamed Shukriu⁸ had invited us. But the situation was... until I managed to leave the apartment, back then... we lived near the roundabout, and our meeting was near the Stadium of Pristina. That's where the Community of Culture⁹ was, they invited us for a meeting there. On the way, [there was] broken glass, vehicles... broken cars, the police had shot everywhere. Yes, {shrugs} it was chaos, a great chaos, so, we slowly started working.

Part Two

⁶ 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.

⁷ The Museum of the Revolution operated during the period of the former Yugoslavia, whose mandate was to research and exhibit history related to the National Liberation War. As such it was disbanded in 1992 and no longer exists. The Museum of Revolution was located in the building of the Art Gallery of Kosovo.

⁸ Muhamed Shukriu (1926-2010) was a professional of the cultural and historical heritage of Kosovo, director of the Entity for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Prizren and creator of the Complex of the Albanian League of Prizren.

⁹ The Community of Culture or the BVI for Culture, to which the speaker refers, was an institution that dealt with cultural issues in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo. BVI - Self-Governing Bureau of Interest consisted of various government agencies, which were equivalent to ministries.

Anita Susuri: Before moving on to the work in the Museum, I want to also... ask you about what Pristina seemed like to you at the time. What was Pristina like and how did you spend your time in Pristina?

Dilaver Pepa: I remember Pristina from '74. Pristina was, it was beautiful but not like... it was much less developed. Now, to give you an example, for example, the Kalabria [neighborhood] today, if you said, "I live there." "You are not in Pristina, you are too far away." Bregu i Diellit was like... I lived with friends as students near the students' canteen there. That was [considered] a distant neighborhood too. But over time, Pristina developed, it developed. Bars started [opening], the students started living, making life much more interesting. Back then there were many students.

Actually at the time in '74-'75, there were 40-50,000 students. *Dom* [Srb.: dorms], there were three student *dom*. So, I remember that time period too because I lived for about a year at the students' *dom*. Life was good, it was more modest than now but... I often mention, you met your friends more... back then there were no phones, there was nothing. You agreed on a time to hang out [better] than you do today with two phones in your pockets and... So, it was a good life, very good. You know, we sometimes feel nostalgic about that time, but life goes on.

Anita Susuri: Were there cultural events at the time too, for example, there was *Kino Rinia*, there was the theater. Did you visit them, do you have any memories from...

Dilaver Pepa: To tell you the truth, I personally think that cultural life was more developed than it is now. The theater worked really well. Every day, actually, it may have happened every day, not to say every two days, three days, there were shows at the theater... yes, I did go. The cinema, there were three cinemas at the time, *Kino Vllaznimi*, [Kino] ABC. At *Kino AB*... *Vllaznimi* which is the one at Qafa [neighborhood], there were two halls, one upstairs, one downstairs. The theater... anyway, let alone sports. Back then football was at its peak, [Football Club] *Prishtina*. The entirety of Kosovo would come to Pristina to see *Prishtina*. They entered the first league of Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia. So, life regarding culture and sports was more dynamic... you know, maybe at the time I was young and it seems like that.

Anita Susuri: What kind of movies were there at the cinema and how often, for example, during the week did you go there?

Dilaver Pepa: I went to the cinema a lot. So, we went very often, you know, as much as we had time and means. The films back then showed... The films that were shown the most were Western movies. You know, with John Wayne and some old actors. And then there was James Bond, Sean Connery. These ones... from different genres, but we, as youngsters, liked action or cowboy movies the most... Westerns, as they call them, like that.

The plays that were shown at the theater, most of them, to not say all of them, I watched most of them. I also had some friends in Peja who worked in the theater, so we watched them. And then when we

studied in Peja, there were the actors Astrit Latifi, Zija Bala, Lushi at the theater of Peja. So, you know, it became a habit ever since then and we continued it in Pristina, I mean, as visitors, as... to attend these events.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that in '81 you started work at the museum. I think the museum had the National-Liberation war from '56 or '59, I mean, that department.

Dilaver Pepa: Yes.

Anita Susuri: When you started to work, how and what was your role? What did you... I mean, I know your profession was photography and that was your role, but what did you photograph more?

Dilaver Pepa: In '81 when I started working, I started as a photographer, professional collaborator for photography. The museum as a museum... It was called the Museum of Revolution, of Nations, Nations of Kosovo, its main activity was... actually the National-Liberation War '41-'45 and the socialist development... it followed those three time periods. And the main activity was done through exhibitions. There was the Museum of Kosovo, but Serbs worked there, the majority [of workers] were Serbs, who never engaged in that kind of activity. The former director Muhamed Shukiru had a good vision, I mean, he founded the museum... the primary activity was exhibitions. The exhibitions, back then we didn't have the conditions needed for permanent exhibitions, but thematic exhibitions, depending on the topic.

In... the Turkish [Ottoman] times, the National-Liberation War and the socialist development. If we, for example, did an exhibition on the National-Liberation War, that included the '41-'45 period about the partisans in Kosovo. With those exhibitions, besides going around Kosovo, all the cities of Kosovo, we would go outside of Kosovo. In Serbia, in Bosnia, in Montenegro, these places. So, we visited a lot of places with the exhibitions. While the period of socialist development was about following daily events, not all of them, but the ones who had a greater historical weight. And the situation at the time wasn't exactly good.

After '81, it's known that it was always... surveillance, what are you working on, how you work. I had some friends, actually, very hard-working friends, historians, that through various exhibitions published some documents that nobody knew about, for example. I remember [the exhibition] about the National-Liberation [war] when they published a document at the time, Mehmet [Gjoshi]¹⁰ would say, "This is a document about the Meeting of Bujan," when they held it in '42. And in that document it talks about what actually happened to Kosovo, the Serbs' opposition to... the principles of Albanians that demanded their rights and stuff. And for the first time, they included it in the exhibition. It was quite the problem, the Provincial Committee came at the time asking about how and why it was part of it...

¹⁰ Mehmet Gjoshi (1949-2018) was a prominent historian from Drenas and author of several studies and publications on the history of Kosovo, and collaborator at the Museum of the Revolution.

But, through these things we tried to show who we are. My role as a photographer was quite big, you know, I don't want to show off (laughs)... I had... collecting the pictures from the collabora... from the historians, in different places, from people, from fighters. [I had to] take those pictures, and reproduce them. At the time reproducing pictures was quite the task, because there were no scanners or tools that we have now. I had to reproduce those pictures. From there, to work on the pictures. I had to work on the pictures for documentation. And those negative pictures were preserved so at some time when they decided to do some exhibition, to take them and produce the pictures in bigger formats.

You know, I remember I worked on pictures with two meters to a meter and a half in size, we needed three pictures... at the time the former president of Yugoslavia, Tito,¹¹ to hold an exhibition about May 25, the day of his birthday which was celebrated at the time. The conditions weren't the best at the Museum, although I had my office and my lab, but not enough for such big pictures. I had to go to the Television of Pristina, they had some big containers. Because for big roll pictures you needed a large space, so I worked on them there. So, I worked on exhibitions 80 percent of the time. But, the socialist development after the war... actually I traveled across Kosovo, photographing the factories, the products in factories, how they work. Actually we... to see that Kosovo was built a lot after the war. How real that was... (laughs)

Anita Susuri: What kind of items were there? I am sure you photographed items too?

Dilaver Pepa: Yes, yes. Depending on what they found. When these historians went, for example, we went as a team, three-four people. And if there was some kind of item, we are talking about people who participated in the National-Liberation War, some people had revolvers, different pictures, or something that they used at the time. If they were available, they gave them to us, they gave them to the Museum actually and they were brought to the Museum. If they had to be preserved, they were preserved and saved as documents, to show them some other time. At the time we were always thinking about a permanent exhibition, but the situation was... from '81 we were followed by bad luck... a political situation... Albanians were always persecuted. This was the situation at the time, you don't remember because you were probably not even born, but in general... we worked with what we could.

Anita Susuri: And in... the exhibitions of the pre-war time period... what kind were they? What was shown more?

Dilaver Pepa: We as a Museum, actually, didn't have [an] archeology [department], so, objects like... archeological ones, we didn't have any. 80 percent of the items that were at the Museum of Revolution were various weaponry. With... what do I know, knives, swords, different guns, for archeology, there was the Museum of Kosovo, but it didn't function well, very poorly. We revived life a little in... in Kosovo, I mean, in the aspect of museology and we actually had one exhibition every month. Schools would come, the schools would organize to come and see the exhibitions. So, there was a... we were

¹¹ Josip Broz Tito (1892 - 1980) , former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

given...back then there was the National Library. They moved to the new institution where the Library is today, they gave their building for us to use, and that building, the late Agush Beqiri¹² had... he designed it and he had made it fit museology. So, we had a big room downstairs for exhibitions. Actually, today it's the Art's Gallery, that room is still there. And this is what the life of museology was like.

Anita Susuri: Was the staff large?

Dilaver Pepa: When we started, there were about 15 people. There were historians, usually there were two-three historians who followed the Turkish [Ottoman] times, two-three historians the National-Liberation War '41-'45 and two-three others the socialist development after the war. I was a photographer... we had two artists. They worked, of course, arranging the exhibitions because it was quite the work... those exhibitions had to be placed, they had to be arranged. Fatmir Hoxha, Osman Mejzinolli, these two were two artists in academia. We had a warehouse keeper, a... and the administrative service, a paymaster and stuff, there was the director Muhamed Shukriu, but actually he was removed soon after three-four months. And then there were new directors and that's it.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that there were exhibitions every month, were there new items so often that you had exhibitions, or was there a big demand?

Dilaver Pepa: It's not that there was demand, but, actually the exhibitions were made according to the events, if there was a date connected to it, for example May 25th, there was the day of... back then...

Anita Susuri: Of youth.

Dilaver Pepa: Tito, yes, Tito's birthday, we would hold exhibitions. After some time there was some other date, an anniversary of a brigade, for example of the National-Liberation War, we would hold an exhibition. There was the opening of a factory or some kind of economic development, there was an exhibition. So, the topics were always... For example, the League of Prizren, they held an exhibition, but as much as we could under those circumstances because we always had the Serbs above us, checking what we showed and stuff... So, maybe there wasn't one every month for everybody, but there were at least two-three exhibitions a year. And those exhibitions were visited a lot. There were some [exhibitions] that went to Kosovo, honestly even other places, Serbia, Montenegro... we went to Croatia. We hadn't gone to Albania yet at the time, because the situation was a little more...

Anita Susuri: Were there visits from people who were more, how to put it, who led different institutions?

Dilaver Pepa: *Auff* {onomatopoeia} Every exhibition opening there was somebody, politics were the impasse, the Head of the Committee, or what do I know. They were always at the opening. They were

¹² Agush Beqiri (1932 - 2006), born in Peja, Kosovo, was an architect, artist and interior designer.

actually paid special importance... They were the ones who opened the exhibition. So, the program was all arranged... but, I tried, me but my friends as well, who worked, the historians, we tried to adapt to the time, you know, the history. I have a motto, "History is written by the one who wins, but they can write it however they want, not how it was" (laughs). So...

Anita Susuri: You photographed these [exhibitions] too, right?

Dilaver Pepa: Most of the events, I mean, after the war from '81. We attended every event. I remember in '89 when there were... the miners' protests.

Anita Susuri: The [strike](#), yes.

Dilaver Pepa: At that time our director was Shefki Stublla. Me and Mehmet, Mehmet Shoshaj, and Riza Sadiku,¹³ went to the director and we asked... back then the entirety of Kosovo stood up to support the miners. And now we, as a Museum, to not pay attention to it as an event, you know, it seemed... although, the Serbs didn't want us to pay attention to that event, because it was... and we went to our director, we told him, "This and that, we want to go." The director got a little scared, "Well, this is the situation," he said, "but okay, go," and stuff, and we went. We went to the mine in Stari Trg, we entered it. They allowed us to go in, we took pictures. Those pictures still exist today... I left the Museum in '92-'93. They're in the archives, photographed. I had some pictures too, but... (laughs) life was interesting back then, with difficulties...

Anita Susuri: They... at the miners' strike, I mean... when there was the strike, the miners... there were some miners who decided who was allowed to enter and who was not, because in case they let someone in, they could've done propaganda or something...

Dilaver Pepa: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: You were allowed in and so could you describe what it was like? Because it is several meters deep. What was the experience like for you?

Dilaver Pepa: We were workers of the Museum and we visited the mine earlier too, but not that deep. Back then it was, actually, when there was the miners' strike, [it was on] the twelfth level. Just thinking of descending down was quite difficult. They allowed us... We had the authorizations from the Museum, they knew about us, more or less... and they allowed us in. And we feared that they wouldn't allow us in, because anybody could've gone in, they could've... there was so much Serbian propaganda that you didn't even know where it was coming from. But we were allowed, we went in.

There was a big crowd of miners there, they were enclosed, you know, it was a misery. Besides being so down, I am talking about my experience that we were scared, the air quality and stuff, without food.

¹³ Riza Sadiku (1949 - 2019) born in Kičevo, North Macedonia, was a prominent historian and contributor to the State Archives of Kosovo and professional museology advisor to the Museum of Kosovo.

Somebody brought something to them here and there, so they could survive, as they say... it was misery, it was very terrible. But they all fought for something that... anyway they managed, they tricked them. At the time they were demanding the resignations of Rrahman Morina,¹⁴ [Hysamedin Azemi](#) and... but, like everything here, politics take over.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember which day of the strike you went there?

Dilaver Pepa: We went there around the fourth day, fifth day actually, you know, at that point entire Kosovo started supporting the miners. Every factory. The workers enclosed themselves in factories. There started a hunger strike, you know, I remember that people would prefer food at home to send something to factories. You know, there was a momentum in the entirety of Kosovo. And there was a place... it was a misery. I have two-three pictures somewhere. Just seeing them was a misery and let alone experiencing what they did for so many days, I don't know, I have forgotten now, how many days they were there for.

Anita Susuri: Eight.

Dilaver Pepa: They stayed for eight days.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Dilaver Pepa: People would come close... The solidarity was so big that I remember when we got out of there, people came to us with food, but they would throw something... they wouldn't allow them to bring the food in, because actually they had gone on a hunger strike, they actually decided to die until their demands were met. But, if it was done, we saw it later (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Do you remember what you... what you talked about with them and what their spiritual and physical state was like?

Dilaver Pepa: The discussions were... they were natural, what was talked about at the time... I was concerned for their health the whole time. "How are you? Are you managing? How are you standing?" We distributed the cigarettes that we took with us. They couldn't not smoke. But in that place, even cigarettes seemed... I would think it was terrible, enclosed here, smoky. There were even older people there that could barely manage. But there was great will, the fight for a better Kosovo, for a [better] situation for the entirety of Kosovo, you know, they... they withstood, because otherwise it was really difficult.

The discussions went on... they would ask us, "What was it like outside, what is being done... on the political side?" But back then they tricked them too, "It's being done, they are resigning, they aren't

¹⁴ Rrahman Morina (1943-1990) had a career as an agent of the Ministry of Interior of SFR Yugoslavia, and later on as a party official in the League of Communists of Kosovo. He rose through the ranks and was appointed as Kosovo's interior minister in 1981, and thereby held the top law enforcement office in the province.

resigning.” So, I remember, because I was there the day the miners went out... and they were tricked there, “They resigned.” I remember photographing, with those bandages... they covered their eyes with bandages because it was eight days, ten days, how long did they stay there in that darkness, going outside immediately, it was a problem. They were tricked actually, they were tricked, like you do in politics.

Anita Susuri: At first they didn’t know that, I mean, they were tricked. Do you maybe remember their reaction when they found out that they didn’t actually resign?

Dilaver Pepa: The reaction was very harsh, but at the time they didn’t really have anything to do because the crowd dispersed. They went home, most of them were fired, a large part were imprisoned. The ones who were leaders of some sort. They arrested [Azem Vllasi](#) at the time, who was in power until recently [during this period], but they switched sides, they fired him. They had it hard, it was hard... I remember when the miners walked to Pristina too. The first ones started from Mitrovica. From... they came by foot from Mitrovica. There were some mass gatherings at the time, from all around Kosovo, people started walking, on bicycles too, on whatever... to join the demonstrations, they were so massive, in ‘89.

Anita Susuri: Did you photograph them too? The marches?

Dilaver Pepa: Yes, I photographed them too. The marches... I even hosted friends. I hosted the ones coming from Peja because at the time they had to stay somewhere, I found places for them to sleep, wherever I could... so, I also did photography and organizing, I mean, of my friends, the ones who came. It was difficult, quite difficult, but, I often say that it was a sweet time time, you know, the experiences only live in the memories now, but thankfully this happened too, Kosovo was liberated and...

Anita Susuri: Yes. What other events have you documented through photography? I mean, there were these strikes, marches, but then in '89 there were also... and in '90, there were other student demonstrations and... did you... did you photograph these too?

Dilaver Pepa: Unfortunately, not a lot, because the directors would change... every six months, there would be Serbs coming... what do I know. Politics decided on everything back then, so, they didn’t allow us to at least have cameras. So, if I had my camera, with a friend, for personal use, not anything else, they didn’t allow us [to take them], to demonstrations and stuff. Because we could, we were active. I remember when that late congressman [Bob] Dole¹⁵ came. And we went out with a friend, I had my camera and I started taking pictures in front of the Grand [Hotel], there was a large crowd, a large crowd waiting. But after the congressman left from there... he went inside the Grand Hotel and the crowd began dispersing. Our office was near back then, where the Gallery is now, and we went back. In the meantime the police were looking for me. Somebody had said to the police that we threw

¹⁵ Bob Dole (1923 - 2021) former US senator who played an important role in the creation of the independent state of Kosovo.

rocks and damaged cars and... because there was a mess, the police began to chase the demonstrators who had gone out to welcome Bob Dole. And the police came looking for me, I wasn't there at the Museum. When I came back they said, "The police are asking for you." "For what?" They said, "You damaged cars." "What cars did I damage?"

Anita Susuri: (laughs).

Dilaver Pepa: And I really didn't damage anything (laughs). But they held me for about eight hours at the police [station]. Back then it was quite difficult. It was a situation when they would take Albanians and beat them up or kill them and throw them on the street. They took me and I was waiting and looking where they were taking me. And then I realized they took me to Radio Prishtina, back then at 92, I said, "No, they're not sending me somewhere." They interrogated me for about seven-eight hours... all kinds of discussions, everything. "You damaged this, you didn't, what did you do, who are you." Until there was... she was my director at the time... she was Serbian actually. She came and said, "No, he is a decent worker," you know, "he didn't do anything." After about seven-eight hours they let me go.

And my wife often mentions the case when she was told the police took me. She went to my photographic archive where I had everything. These pictures, of miners and what do I know, stuff... to throw them away in case they would raid my house. And she was scared. This is an event that has stuck with me from back then with Bob Dole.

And we would follow events, actually, the police would impose on us what to follow. I mentioned earlier, May 25th, Tito's Day, because back then it was celebrated even after Tito had died, because he died in '80. But it was celebrated until... the opening of some kind of factory, different manifestations, every jubilee back then, politicians had some kind of event. And we followed these actually... and the economic development. Every factory which was opened or existed, we would follow their achievements.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that they interrogated you, was it here in the Prison of Pristina?

Dilaver Pepa: At the police station, in 92 [police station name]...

Anita Susuri: Aha.

Dilaver Pepa: They kept me there at the office for about seven-eight hours. They would take turns with different questions. But, I didn't do [anything], you know, I won't become a patriot now, "I did this, I did that..." nothing. We had gone, we had stayed, I had taken some pictures. But I don't know where I have them, I lost them, because we had sent most of the stuff in Peja. They burned down our house in Peja during the war and we lost them.

Anita Susuri: Until what year did you work at the Museum?

Dilaver Pepa: We began [working] in the museum in '81, on April 1 of '81, I actually worked [there] until '92. In '92 I decided, while talking to my brother, I decided to open a studio in Mitrovica. At that time Mitrovica had a Serbian photographer, and two-three Albanians who were not that good in their practice. And we went there with modern equipment, new machines for color photography. I opened the studio in '92, I traveled from Pristina to Mitrovica every day. I would go in the morning, until 3:00-4:00 PM, at the studio. I had a worker there after 3:00-4:00. He continued working until 6:00-7:00 PM.

I worked for about three years. After three years I opened the studio in Peja... in Pristina. We left the studio in Mitrovica, actually, we sold the tools to the landlords. I opened the studio where we are today, in '95. And from '95... I work there. Back then we rented. After there was a little... more work. Back then there were no photographers, they needed... for various documents and... I bought the space. It was owned by an Albanian. I bought the space, so I own it now. My children work there. I help them a little, as much as I can, as much as they can stand me (laughs).

Part Three

Anita Susuri: In the meantime, you mentioned some other events and I would like to go back to them. You told me about '89 when Kosovo's autonomy was suppressed and the Constitution changed. You mentioned you covered the event.

Dilaver Pepa: There were big developments in Kosovo in '89. One of them was also the change of... they began preparing to change the Constitution in '74. And we as a Museum actually covered, not to say every meeting of the Assembly, but we covered most of the meetings of the Assembly of Kosovo. We needed them for documentation in the Museum. When the preparations for this meeting began, at that time the entirety of Kosovo was at a breaking point actually. People were opposing the... the change of the Constitution because with that change the entirety of Kosovo would be suppressed actually, it would fall under the rule of Serbia. A great part, I am talking about the press, from what we covered, from the talks, they were about the change in the Constitution not happening. But Serbia's pressure, the police, it was a lot. You know, at the time, you smelled it in the air, that atmosphere, you know, it was very agitated actually. And the meeting began... they sent me and Mehmet to cover the meeting.

The meeting began, the discussions began. At the beginning it looked like, from our impression it looked like, actually, they won't allow the change of the Constitution. One person got up to talk, okay, the other one got up to talk, okay. I remember there was Melihate Tërmkolli,¹⁶ Rizah Lluka from Peja. Some others from Peja, you know, I know them by name, Menduh Shoshi, Gusija, and many, many others. You know, I don't remember now, there were academics, they were sitting front row, Stalivici,

¹⁶ Melihate Tërmkolli (1965) is a Kosovo Albanian politician and writer.

you know, let me not mention them now. And there was one discussion after the other, one after the other, thinking... while talking to my friend, you know, we would be happy, we would say, "We will win, they won't allow the change of the Constitution." With the change, Kosovo would completely fall under Serbian rule and there would be no more autonomy that we had up to that point.

The next day, the police intervention began with the MPs or what do I know, and the mood already began changing. And I would take pictures all the time. And then, besides taking pictures for the museum, there was an interest as a person... I was interested in what was happening, how it was happening, who was saying what. And the MPs started feeling scared. A large number of them already switched sides. They started [saying], "The change of the Constitution won't cost us anything, this and that." It was these people, Melihate Tërmkolli, Rizah Lluka, a number of them, there were eight or 12 people who voted against. That has stuck with me, as they say, engraved. But, unfortunately we lost, the majority voted in favor, we lost the Constitution of '74.¹⁷ And the turmoil began, all over Kosovo, after the change of the Constitution.

Anita Susuri: You said that you left your job in '92. Did you quit your job, or...

Dilaver Pepa: Ah right. In '92 I actually took... I had a director and she allowed me to take unpaid leave. She knew that I... I told her, "I want to open a studio." I already had two children by then. My wife... she was working and that's when... and I decided to open a studio and told her, I said, "I am willing [to come work] whenever you need me," because at the time the Museum didn't have a photographer, "When you need me, call me, I will come and get the job done" and she allowed me. I took unpaid leave, one year actually. I opened the studio. And then I quit because I could see that there is nothing coming out of that job.

In Mitrovica for three years, after three years, I opened the studio in Pristina. And from that day, I mentioned earlier too, I am here. There was another case when the Assembly doors were closed to the delegates. When they announced the Constitution, when they announced it in front of the doors. But, back then it needed to be done a little discreetly because the Museum wasn't allowed... we had five-six Serbians working there. Actually, they didn't do anything, they just observed us, the Albanians, [to see] what we were doing. We were actually a different team, they were a different team. So, they didn't allow us to go and take pictures and stuff. But, we would go, as part of what we could do on our own, with a camera of mine. And...

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know regarding that time period, so, in '90, when you worked at the Museum, if the items, the exhibitions, the amount of items changed. Did anything change?

Dilaver Pepa: It was the same while I was there. Those pictures we made, from the documents I gathered, from various research, because there was the possibility... not that there was the possibility,

¹⁷ The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution was the fourth and final constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It came into effect on 21 February 1974. Kosovo and Vojvodina, the two constituent provinces of Serbia, received substantially increased autonomy, including *de facto* veto power in the Serbian parliament.

but we had, for example, if there was some thematic exhibition, to go and research specifically for that and something that exhibition was lacking. While I was there, a little changed, you know, in mounting the exhibitions. Actually 80 percent of them were photographic exhibitions.

You know, here and there, the items were some boxes made of glass, different weapons, if the theme was war, or something else, I don't know, books, notebooks, you know... these items that were used more by the people who the exhibition was about... And with time, after I quit the Museum, there was no more Museum of Revolution because some of them were fired in the '90s, like they did to all Albanians. And some of them were moved, some historians here and there, they went to the Museum of Kosovo... until after the war. After the war they started again as the Museum of Kosovo, but the Museum of Revolution actually ceased to exist, it disappeared.

Anita Susuri: I am interested in these pictures you took, for example, at the strike. Were they put on display, for example at the Museum, or what happened with those pictures?

Dilaver Pepa: No, the pictures of miners weren't displayed anywhere because we weren't allowed to display them at the time. But they're there... they're in documents. If, hope to God they preserved them, there are pictures in the documents of the Museum of Kosovo. Now I don't know how much they were worth preserving... I don't know.

Anita Susuri: If you could tell us about the last years of the '90s. I mean, in '98, it already began, it was headed towards war, actually in some places in Kosovo, there was already war. What was the state like in Pristina and how did it lead up to the war... until the bombings?

Dilaver Pepa: My apartment was close to the studio, in Dardania, near Santea. The situation was (sighs), I don't know, you know, how to describe it, but quite difficult. People would sell cigarettes on the side of the street here. They would see a policeman, and they'd run fast because they would take cigarettes or money from them, whatever they had. But life went on in cafe bars, the students, you know, back then there were a lot of students, they would go out. But there was always a fear, a, "What is going to happen?" Before the demonstrations... before, actually, before the war, I remember like it was today when they killed Adriana Matoshi,¹⁸ right? The actor.

My apartment is above... back then there was the cafe bar... *Magjik*. My apartment was above *Magjik*. We stayed in the studio until 5:00-6:00 PM, because we would close our businesses earlier, the situation wasn't that good. I arrived... actually all the cafe bars were closed, and then I saw this bar *Magjik* open. I said, "They're out of their mind" because... I got to my apartment, not an hour passed by, we heard the gunshots *brrrrr* {onomatopoeia}. I thought, "They killed someone." Then I looked out the window, and the police and journalists came. They found out that there were gunshots. There was Enver Petrovci,¹⁹ that Matoshi, the actor who died. There were about three-four... he had *Hani i Dy*

¹⁸ The speaker confuses the actor Adriana Matoshi with Adriana Abdullahu, who was killed a few days before the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia.

¹⁹ Enver Petrovci (1954) is a Kosovo Albanian actor, writer and director.

Robertëve [bar], it was his. So, we found out an actor died, a girl. They went out to celebrate passing an exam or something, I don't know.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned the case of Adriana Abdullahu who was killed at the time. What else did you experience back then? For example, when the bombings began. That was the time when...

Dilaver Pepa: At that time, but actually...

Anita Susuri: ...there was a breaking point when the situation became worse.

Dilaver Pepa: At that time, two-three days before the bombings started, the bombings started on the 24th [of March]. The situation in Pristina, in general all over Kosovo, was very tense. Store would close early. We would actually finish before dark. Nothing was open, the entire Pristina would close. And, I remember that day while I was on my way to my apartment, it was about 5:00 PM, I don't know exactly... I got into my apartment, after about an hour it started getting dark and we heard gunshots, *brrrrr* {onomatopoeia}. I told my wife, you know, my wife was terrified. I said, "They must've killed somebody." Because we lived on the second floor, exactly above the *Magjik* bar at the time. And we went to the window to look... we didn't open the windows because we didn't dare to even open the windows actually, but from the side... to turn off the lights... it caused great confusion. The police came, the Serbian police. The journalists came to get information.

I remember a prosecutor who was really bad, she was Serbian, Desanka, I don't know what her last name was, but at the time she was actually, she led in all these events that were happening, she was the initiator of everything bad that happened. And we found out, *Deutsche Welle*²⁰ or I don't know which one broke the news, as far as I remember it was Valentina Saraçini,²¹ that Adriana Abdullahu was killed, this actor from Gjilan [Ferizaj]. Enver Petrovci was present, and there was the owner [Fadil Dragaj] of *Hani i Dy Robertëve*. There were two-three, about five-six people there when that happened. And after two-three days, actually the bombings started... the bombings, which all Albanians welcomed, they welcomed it with joy (smiles).

There was also my mother-in-law who had come from Peja, she was stuck here, you know, because the bus lines didn't... they didn't move... she was stuck with us. It was a great joy *oooh* {onomatopoeia}, but a great joy with calmness, some kind of... what is going to happen now? We already saw the bombings when they bombed... here at the post office, the flames. That's when we could tell. There was a warehouse there, at the former factory of plastics, a gasoline warehouse. Back then, the barracks... the military barracks shot, burned [things]. It already started, as we say, "They mean it, they're not kidding." But then there was fear, immediately after that, because the next day we had to go out and get food or something, we had the children. Everything was closed, you know, out of fear.

²⁰ German international public broadcaster.

²¹ Journalist, writer and singer from Skopje, based in Kosovo. External contributor for Deutsche Welle and news reporter for RTK.

The women, my sisters would go out to get food because they didn't allow us, the Serbs started wandering around, the paramilitaries, there was torture, even imprisonment and killings...

I had closed the studio. My wife asked me, "Do you have anything at the studio?" I said, "No, I don't." We went the next day, after the bombings, on the 24th [of March, 1999], actually on the 25th, I went to get something, here at the studio. But we covered it with curtains, so you couldn't see inside, we got what we had to get. I had a phone, there is a case, you know, there was a lot of fear, I remember. I had a cordless phone, that I could use to make calls in my apartment. And I took the phone from the studio, I didn't want to leave it there, I took it to my apartment. While on the way there near the traffic lights, my son, Asdren, or I don't know who called the phone to ask where I was. The phone rang inside the bag my wife had. And then I panicked, I told them, "Why did you call now?" But, we got away with it. Nobody heard it. We got to the apartment.

We stayed in that apartment for eleven days, I as a patriot, am saying... I am saying I'm a patriot (laughs) you know, I said, "I don't want to leave Kosovo, we are staying here." Me, my wife, three children, my mother-in-law, my sister. She was alone in her apartment and I invited her to ours. We also had a neighbor... his name was Orhan, he was a doctor, and his wife and two children came to our place. We would stay there together, we would prepare... Everyone left their apartments. The building had eight floors... nine floors, it was actually emptied, besides the Serbian residents.

After three days there were some... some young Serbs, who were actually hooligans, thieves. And they knocked on the door. Actually, after nine days... and they asked for my car. I had a Renault 5, it's still a sore spot to this day. They said, "Give us your car," in Serbian. I said, "You don't even have a license or... what do you mean give it to you?" My car was parked near Santea. "We want to go to Obilić," you know, their stories. My wife and sisters started feeling scared, you know, about what was happening... The next day he came again. He said, "Look! I could also burn down your car." I said, "Honestly, you can do anything." You know I got angry. I said, "You could even burn it, but I won't give you the keys." My wife insisted, "Please give them to him because..." you know, "something might happen..." different things were already happening. I gave him my car keys.

After two days we had to, because it became... unbearable to stay... people knocking at our door... the children started to feel really scared. We decided to flee. We took our luggage, me and that neighbor and we went to the train station. At that time the trains went from Pristina to Bllacë. You know, something every Albanian has experienced or witnessed, you know. Let me not go into details, but it was difficult, it was horrible. But, in that misfortune, we had one fortunate thing from Bllacë. We went to Germany after two days.

We registered in those UNHCR records or whoever organized it. They sent us to Germany. We stayed in Germany for about three months. We returned on the first plane back. "We'll stay, we won't stay" My brother was in Belgium, he said, "Why aren't you staying?" I said, "Honestly, I want to go back to Kosovo." I came back to Kosovo on the first plane. Life went on. I opened my studio like before... They

had robbed the studio. They had stolen and broken all the equipment. But we had to start from somewhere. We started slowly. Work began.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to go back to Bllacë²² a little because I saw that you took pictures there...

Dilaver Pepa: In Bllacë.

Anita Susuri: ...I mean, that experience.

Dilaver Pepa: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What was it like for you, how long did you stay there? How did you then cross over?

Dilaver Pepa: In Bllacë... during the war when... I mentioned that we went by train. We went in the morning. It was very crowded, we hardly... we got on the train, we found a cabin. We arrived in Bllacë, we arrived somehow. When we got off the train, there was a... someone who led the train, or a conductor... he told us, "Careful, walk only on the train tracks because the streets are mined." I am talking about the spot where the train stopped from where we had to go... in Bllacë where Albanians were placed in those tents which was terrible to see.

Anyway, we arrived, it was rainy and muddy. We settled somehow. Some friends started to help us, some people we knew, to set up a tent of nylon. Then we were quiet... We were a family of five, [plus] my sister, my mother-in-law, so, seven. My neighbor had a family of four and another neighbor came with us, so there were almost 20 people. And 20 people had to settle in a tent made of nylon. But the children settled first, the women... us, the men, would go out and wander. And we were looking to meet somebody, to see if they survived or what...

And it's interesting, I'll mention my daughter. She had taken a bag of, I didn't know, gathered some pictures in a bag. She filled the entire bag with pictures. They say, actually, when memories die, history dies, there is no more. Among the pictures she had taken, there were two film rolls that were left. I met a friend in Bllacë, Namik Rexha, he said, "I have a camera." He said, "Dilo [Dilaver]", he said, "I have a camera." I said, "I have the film rolls. Will you give me the camera?" He gave me the camera. I took pictures in Bllacë. I stayed in Bllacë for about four... three days. Actually we went on April 3rd, on the 7th [of April] we left from Bllacë to Stankovec. I took pictures, it's a misery to look at, I have the pictures. I used those two films to take pictures.

It was fate that we went to Germany. When I went to Germany, I developed the films as photographer['s studio]. I looked at them, you know, the pictures, that misery that we witnessed, but then we experienced it differently, then the point of view... because then we were in Germany actually,

²² 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.

you know, we didn't have that hesitation. And they saw the pictures, German journalists started coming, different interviews and stuff. Among other things, a journalist saw the pictures, and she asked, "Can we use them?" "*Ouf*" {onomatopoeia}, I said, "of course!" You know, we were very eager for them to be published so people could see what Albanians were going through. And I have... I kept the newspapers too. They published the pictures from Bllacë, a couple of pictures, the ones which were... actually more terrible to look at.

And after about four-five days a collaborator from that newspaper came, he brought me an envelope. He brought me 100 *marka*.²³ I asked, "What?" {shrugs}. He said, "We have it... the newspaper is obliged to pay for whatever they publish." I said, "I didn't do it for money, I did it more for...to let it be affirmed." And I remember, you know, the gesture, they gave me 100 *marka* for the publication of those pictures. I have the newspapers, I can't remember the name, because I don't know German. And we stayed three months in Bllacë... in Germany. There was a village called Puschendorf,²⁴ a cute village.

Anita Susuri: When you came back here, in what state did you find the studio, your apartment?

Dilaver Pepa: The studio was robbed. I had the tools... at the time those tools cost a lot, which I first had in Mitrovica. And then I got new ones, I left the other ones in Mitrovica. They stole them. The tool to develop the film, only that one cost 50,000-60,000 *marka* at the time. The film tool wasn't... they didn't take it, what do I know, but they destroyed it, they... The studio was broken into... I came back. I had a worker back then, he had come back two or three days before me. He asked, "Do I start cleaning?" I said, "Start cleaning," I said, "I will come back soon." I was renting the place at the time. We cleaned up, we started [working again] slowly. The work started happening. Life... life became different. We felt the pleasure of freedom a little bit, as they say, you know we didn't have fear anymore. This...

Anita Susuri: Now the work is passed down to your sons, right?

Dilaver Pepa: Yes (smiles).

Anita Susuri: You continue with this profession...

Dilaver Pepa: It was passed down to us by... from our father, our children from us, actually it's the third or fourth generation working. I am a retiree, but I still go to the studio. I prepare them breakfast, I clean the studio... preparation. So, I have two sons and a daughter. She is... she completed her degree the Faculty of Economics in England. She works in the Ministry of Integration. My sons studied too, but they put studies aside a little, to rest. One of them in economics, the other one in law. But they started

²³ Albanian: *Marka*; German: *Deutsche Mark* was the basic monetary unit of West Germany from 1948 to 1990 and of reunited Germany from 1990 to 2001. It was used as a stable, non-official currency in various Yugoslav republics as a result of hyper-inflation of the *dinar*.

²⁴ Municipality in the district of Fürth in Bavaria in Germany.

with the craft, they like the craft, they know the craft, they have the proper conditions. Now, hopefully, it goes well for them.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Dilaver, if you'd like to add anything for the end... or something you forgot to say or...

Dilaver Pepa: You know, life is very, we say it's very long, but it's so short, when it passes it feels like a one second sequence, two... two minutes. I'm sure I forgot many things, but this is the time we have. Maybe another time.

Anita Susuri: Thank you a lot for the interview and for your time.

Dilaver Pepa: Thank you too.