

INTERVIEW WITH XHAFER PEÇI

Stari Trg | Date: October 21, 2020
Duration: 72 minutes

Present:

1. Xhafer Peçi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Korab Krasniqi (Interviewer)
4. Rënea Begolli (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Anita Susuri: Mister Xhafer, please introduce yourself, tell us something about your origin, your family.

Xhafer Peci: Yes, I am Xhafer Peci. I was born on 12.5.1958 in the village Boletin, in a poor family, like all the other families there. I finished elementary school in Boletin. I finished the first four years in Isa Boletini's tower. It was a school, then they worked in a school aslo, but I finished all eight years in Boletin. I went to high school in Mitrovica and the Technical Faculty, mining branch... I finished it in Mitrovica and graduated in Mitrovica.

As I said we were a poor family. My grandfather back then didn't have work or a pension, my father had a small pension. We were educated in hard conditions. At that time my grandfather didn't work much at home, but in war, where there was a need to go to war for Kosova, he did. He was Bajram Curri's soldier, then with Azem Bejta. When Azem Bejta's song is sung, they also sing of my grandfather. Then he fought with Ahmet Selaci, Boletin and Zharzha were the first who started the war against Draza Mihailović¹ in Žirovnica and in Vllaq, and from there, they liberated the New Bazaar and continued to Xherxhovi Stuba, they went to Raška. They didn't let them get into Raška, so they came back. They fought against partisans for four years. They stayed in the mountains for four years, in bunkers, then they fought in Shala against partisans.

I asked him, "What did you fight for, Grandfather?" He said, "We fought so all Albanians could live in one *država*.² But back then," he said, "There was no one to protect our war at the table, they declared it as war against the ballistic systems and no one helped us so we scattered. Our war was forgotten." I want to say that generation after generation went to war, they suffered, they were persecuted just so Kosova would be free, to not be in the hands of Serbs, Serbia. They fought all the time.

¹ Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović (1893-1946) was a Yugoslav Serb general during World War II. He led guerrilla gangs known as the Chetniks of the Yugoslav Army.

² Srb.: *država*, state, nation.

After the war he didn't even want to get a job. When we told him, when they told him, "Qerim," his name was Qerim Peci, "Qerim, ask for aid, *pomoq*,³" then he said, "No," he said, "I don't want to. I fought against him, I didn't accept this state, I still don't and until Kosova is liberated I will not... This is not my state." And he didn't want, we couldn't even take him to the doctor. "I don't want his medicine or money." Then, after I finished university, I graduated on May 6, 1983 and on June 6, 1983. I started working in Stari Trg as a mining engineer.

Anita Susuri: Before we continue, I want to ask you about your childhood. Your father, was he also a miner or did he...

Xhafer Peci: No, my father wasn't a miner, he was a worker in an organisation that then was called Shpërplloqa. The wages were very low, they couldn't even get enough to eat. Then it closed down, they forced them into retirement. Back then, there were the first and second categories of retirement, he was in the third category, nothing. We lived in Boletin, we plowed, we helped our father and went to school, and plowed just to survive.

Korab Krasniqi: How many siblings did you have?

Xhafer Peci: We're three brothers and one sister. My third brother finished the Faculty of Geology. My second brother only finished high school and lives in Holland. Those of us who are here, we're not in Boletin, we're in Ilirida, but we often go to Boletin. You can get there from three-four different sides, the road is paved, there's water, electricity, the conditions are good and people have slowly started to go back there.

Korab Krasniqi: Where was your mother from?

Xhafer Peci: My mother was from Vinarc. Vinarc is in the direction of the lake {shows with his hands} of Ujman, Vinarc is there, Qabra is on the other side.

Anita Susuri: I find it very interesting that you said that the school was in the tower of Isa Boletini. Do you remember how you went and what the tower was like? What were the lessons like?

Xhafer Peci: Even the generation before went to school in the tower of Isa Boletini, the same tower as it is today. The classrooms were adapted, back then the first four years were in Boletin and the rest in Mitrovica. We were the first generation who finished all eight years in Boletin, and it was a great help for Boletin, Zhazha, Lipa. These three villages took their children to that school.

Anita Susuri: Was it a tower? I mean what were the classrooms like?

³ Srb.: *pomoć*, aid, help.

Xhafer Peci: The same tower it is today, those rooms, *oda*,⁴ other rooms, those were turned into classrooms, we learned there. Then when the new school got built, we moved there, and the tower is still the same.

Korab Krasniqi: You had an Orthodox monastery there. What were your reports like? Were there Serbs in Boletin?

Xhafer Peci: I can't talk because we're recording (smiles). We didn't bother them, we didn't harm them, we respected them, we respected them more than we should have, more than they deserved. I am talking responsibly, and now that respect was paid to us with revenge just like in the last war by... Serbs, I've also told an American delegation once, Serbs use churches for religious ceremonies, they mostly use them for organizations against other nations. From that church in Boletin, the police expeditions came, and from there, they went to the houses in Boletin, in Zharzha, and they abused people. From there, they told the police where our population was hidden, where they were and today twelve-thirteen people from Zharzha were found in mass graves.

So, the Church played a destructive role for that vicinity. And it's weird, the police came and from that position they were in, they could see the whole village of Shala, or half of it, they could see and follow everyone. That church, they call it that, because it allegedly isn't a monastery. That church was built around 1850-60 and they said that it was built in the 15th century. We know that my grandfather talked to people there and, at that time, the church was built on Isa Boletini's father's property, and the way they betrayed everyone, they said, "We will build it here and he will save it because we need it." Then as Serbia's power grew, the Church widened, damaging the properties of Boletin, damaging Isa Boletini and everyone else. Today it has its own territory like a monastery of the XV century, which is not the reality. The church was built around 1850-60 on a half acre of land, and it stayed there, and then it widened and got bigger.

[The interview cuts here]

Anita Susuri: You told me that some coins were found in Boletin, artifacts that were left.

Xhafer Peci: Yes, apparently the Boletin village is a very old place, it's a historical settlement and as our grandparents told us, they found *lira*,⁵ hidden gold in two places in Boletin. They found three pots of gold coins, in another place, they found two big dishes made out of soil with cold coins. And to this day those holes weren't closed, anyone can visit them, anyone can go and prove that there used to be a settlement there. There were soil dishes, paint, bricks, strong, good bricks, it always was a settlement. Then probably, due to different wars, the people disappeared and didn't come back, and now that place is empty.

⁴ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

⁵ Lira, the former monetary unit of Italy and Malta and the currency of modern Turkey.

Boletin and Zharzha came from Isniq. We came from Isniq and we passed by those lands and to this day we're on those lands. Boletin, Zharzha were always on the border with Serbs. We always had issues. That way the Serbian state was formed, they always pressured us, they oppressed us, they troubled those places. When the war against the Chetniks⁶ and Draža Mihailović started, Boletin and Zharzha started it. Then also people from Drenica came, they joined Shaban Polluzha and liberated Pazar, they passed Pazar and followed Draža Mihailović's army up to Rashka.

Then they didn't allow them to go further and they had to go back. But the main goal was, because Draža Mihailović's motto was, "To go into Kosovo and kill everyone older than ten years old, take those under the age of ten, take them to Serbia and assimilate Albanians."

[The interview cuts here]

Anita Susuri: You were telling us about the pots, an interesting story about the families who took those coins.

Xhafer Peci: I'm not going to tell you about that because it's just a legend, I'm not sure.

Anita Susuri: It's okay even if it's a legend, it's something that derived from the people.

Xhafer Peci: I'm not going to talk about that.

Anita Susuri: Okay then, let's continue. High school, you said that there was a tower and you went to school there. Where did you continue high school?

Xhafer Peci: I'll repeat once more, I finished high school in Mitrovica. The gymnasium back then was called Silvira Tomazini. While I finished the Faculty of Mining and Metallurgy, the Mining branch in Mitrovica because of the lack of conditions I couldn't go to Prishtina because I wanted to study medicine. I don't know if I was right, but the conditions were very hard.

Anita Susuri: Tell us how you traveled to Mitrovica.

Xhafer Peci: From Boletin, we went to Ibri's highway. It was around six kilometers downhill from Boletin. There we waited for the bus. We had a monthly pass which our family provided for us and we

⁶Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

went to school and university, I always traveled. The lack of conditions made it so I always had to travel.

Anita Susuri: What was your life like during high school?

Xhafer Peci: Well, back then all our teachers were Albanian. We had really good professors, they taught us well, they tried to give us knowledge at any cost. At any cost they tried to help us as if we were their children. And most of us learned, most of us finished university, we started working, and many others also went abroad, to other states. It was a good school, it gathered good students, and students from that school always went to university.

Anita Susuri: What was Mitrovica like at that time?

Xhafer Peci: Well, first of all, Mitrovica was united back then and didn't have many buildings, the villages weren't paved, there was no water supply. People had to travel to get to school or work, some villages less, others more, but we always had to walk to the bus. So, during summer and winter, conditions were hard.

Anita Susuri: Were there places you could go out, or some kind of social or cultural organization?

Xhafer Peci: Well, I don't know, in villages, we were more worried about learning and buses. I had to be the first to leave the class to catch the last bus and then walk. While the people who were from the city went out in the evening and walked on the boulevard that was there at Ura e Ibrit. They walked around there until ten, eleven and then they went home. Nothing more than that.

Anita Susuri: You told me that when you were a student, so in the last years, the demonstration of '81 took place and you participated with your father. Can you tell me more about that?

Xhafer Peci: Well, every person, but also in villages and in *oda*, elders always talked about it, but even some younger people talked about it. Kosova liberation was always discussed, liberation of people from Kosova, for Kosova to be led by Albanians, to be developed by Albanians. We always discussed it and we had the feeling that we have to do something. We didn't know what, but we had to do something to be lords of our own house in our country. Even back then, we didn't try and say, "We want to rule their territory, but just ours." We grew up with that idea.

We knew something was about to start, the demonstration of '81 started and like all other people who were in those demonstrations, so were me and my father. It was on April 4 in Mitrovica. There were tanks, there were armored vehicles, there were police everywhere, all for those demonstrations. For what? Just so Kosova would be free, so Albanians would be equal to other nations, nothing more,

nothing less. We didn't want to be dominant over anything, violate their freedom, but we wanted to talk, to fight for our freedom, and now you know from '81 and on each day was worse than the other.

Anita Susuri: Can you describe what you saw that day? What kind of events?

Xhafer Peci: Everything. You can't notice much in that kind of mess. You didn't know where more people were. Tanks, armored vehicles, police, special units, people, smoke, people here and there. So, very violent, violent towards Albanians because we wanted to be equal to others, nothing more.

Anita Susuri: Did you notice if the situation got worse socially?

Xhafer Peci: No, those events, that violence united the people like never before and from then there were no more distinctions, "He is from the village, he is from the city, he is poor, he is rich..." That violence united the people like never before. They have always said, "When you try to kill a group of people, they will unite." They will unite to protect themselves and so like this.

Anita Susuri: After finishing university, what year did you graduate?

Xhafer Peci: University, well, I graduated on May 6, 1950, no...

Anita Susuri: '83?

Xhafer Peci: No, yes in '83, and I started working a month later, on June 6, '83 as a mining engineer. All nationalities worked there. I might have mentioned this before but we respected them, we respected them more than we should have, in a meeting if there were two or three Serbs present, thirty Albanians spoke Serbian just so they wouldn't feel discriminated against. Even if the state was giving out apartments or something, "Don't leave them out so they don't feel bad, they're minorities." Now, this respect was repaid to us in the opposite way, it damaged us.

There was a Serbian engineer here who took pre-pension from the Technical School just to have a higher salary, higher pension, and he didn't work on anything, he just moved around. When it came to Albanians, there was a very powerful organizer, an old man, an organizer against Albanians... They started to separate Serbian workers, the division started slowly. And to tell you something else, working in mines is hard. I'm telling you with full responsibility that Albanians had the burden of the risky work. Serbian engineers had easier jobs, Serbian workers had easier work, safer work. But, again, their goal wasn't work or anything, their goal was to rule Kosovo, that was their goal, that's why this idea didn't let them live in peace.

Anita Susuri: You said that it's hard working in the mines and I believe so. What was the first time when you went into the mine like for you? What kind of feelings did you have?

Xhafer Peci: Well, we were young back then, mining engineering, I chose mining, and I never idled about it because I chose it myself. I chose it myself, so did my colleagues, we decided on this field and we worked. We worked, there was produce, and we all got the same wage, those who worked harder jobs and those who worked easier jobs, we had the same benefits. There was no distinction except that Albanians had harder jobs.

Working in the mine is a hard job. They've always said, "Miners' bread has nine crusts." You can say nine, or nine hundred, there are very dangerous places they've worked in, they even work in those places today.

Anita Susuri: For someone who has never been inside, tell us what it is like? What kind of feeling is it? Is it scary?

Xhafer Peci: Our mine has approximately two hundreds kilometers of working space, different directions in a horizontal mine, vertical and you're always limited in all directions. You can move through there with a flashlight and, if that flashlight breaks, you have to sit there for hours to wait for someone to come because you can't take one more step without the light, you're not safe, you can't move.

It's hard work, it's tough work, it's work with a lot of responsibility, a mistake from an engineer could cost someone's life. In the mine today, there could be ten tons of explosives. Precise management is needed there. Often people from KFOR and inspectors of Prishtina, inspectors from Internal Affairs come to check on us. So, a safe, precise management is needed there.

Anita Susuri: People have always said that Trepça has worked more for other places in Yugoslavia than for the development of Kosova. Did you know that and what did you think? What did you think about this?

Xhafer Peci: We knew those slogans, we knew everything and we still tried to take care of Kosovo, take care of that brotherhood and unity. We weren't the ones who ruined things. We were forced to react, to protect those few rights we had, they started taking them also, "There's no need for university to be in Albanian, but to learn everything in Serbian, so we can all speak one language." And Albanians wanted to protect those few rights we had. He had to protect them with blood, with our lives, with suffering, with everything. Surely the world wouldn't have intervened if they weren't convinced that Albanians are only asking for their rights.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us about the moment you realized that this isn't working and came to the point you did something, raised your voice? How did it come to that?

Xhafer Peci: From *oda*, from students in high school, as students they spoke, "This is going to happen. Rights will be removed. The University of Prishtina will be removed. They want to make Serbian the official language." It grew more and more, we were more and more scared until we reached the peak in '81 and from there we saw what Serbia's goal was. The suppression of Kosovo's autonomy, the suppression of rights, to make it an official language everywhere... even in Kosova.

[his phone rings and he turns it off]

This was unacceptable for us. It was unacceptable for children who didn't know much, let alone for the others.

Anita Susuri: The day of the march preceded the strike. What was it for?

Xhafer Peci: We had two marches. There was the march from Stari Trg to Mitrovica, we gathered in Minatori Hall, there were miners, students and there we spoke about the dangers that await Kosova. I remember Xhafer Nuli was there, he is an electrical engineer, he was the director of the Electromachinery, he spoke against Šešelj⁷ and so on. So, to, "I encourage people to open their eyes, to be prepared to protect their rights."

Korab Krasniqi: What was Šešelj's declaration at that time?

Xhafer Peci: Then, the suppression of Kosova's autonomy, Albanian's, the University, Serbian to be the official language and so on.

Anita Susuri: After that?

Xhafer Peci: After that tension, the division started. The tension was evident. Serbs got instructions from here, "Do this, do that." One of our workers, I'm going back now, a Serb wore Albanian clothes at that time and he went and broke Serbian tombs with a hammer. He worked here, I know his name and his last name, he probably doesn't do anything today, I don't know. The police caught him and asked, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm this person, son of Hajji, this Hajji." And they take him to the police station.

⁷ Vojislav Šešelj (1954-) is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party. In 2003 he surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2016 he was acquitted of the crimes.

As the police were taking him to the station, an Albanian saw him and said, “*Kako si Živić?*” They said, “What are you talking about?” He said, “This is Živić Mladen, that’s him.” They said, “What do you mean, we caught him there?” And when he came to work he told us, “They gave me money to go break the Serbians tombs and I took the money and did it.” So the division started, they started to frame Albanians, to damage Serbian properties and frame Albanians.

The glorious march to Prishtina came. I don’t know if there was any other more glorious march, people cry when they think about it.

Anita Susuri: What was that day like?

Xhafer Peci: Those days we all gathered in the hall here, in the hall where the workers held the meeting, the first shift, the third shift. The technical director came, Ibush Januzi, he talked to the workers. “Director,” he said, “you’re talking to us, but can you see what’s happening to us? Where Kosovo is left? Where youth is left? What is happening to us? Can you see how bad it is?” And in that moment the mass got up and went out, “Let’s go to Prishtina.” And we left. We left and other units of Trepça joined us, we walked. At some point, they brought buses, we also got on buses because the road was fully blocked. So the road wouldn’t be blocked, they brought buses. Then they stopped the buses, we said, “Open the door!” We left on foot.

At {shows with his hands}... here in Millosheva Remzi Kolgeci came. He talked to us, we said, “No, we won’t go back, we will continue, and so on.” We continued walking, he was left in the middle of the crowd and he got in a car to Podujeva to the road that takes you to the old market {shows with his hands} to come out in Prishtina. He probably went there, we continued. At Gazimestan the Special Units blocked our way. We were on the first lines and I didn’t even see the police. They didn’t react, apparently they were Albanian and they didn’t react and now we didn’t want to provoke them so we went on the dies {shows with his hands}. They stayed there, we continued walking.

We didn’t say a thing, we just continued walking. At the entrance of Prishtina, the uphill on the left side, maybe we should have also gone to the Committee there. Back then, there was the general Sreten Mirković [...] or I don’t know where to pressure them into resigning. We went to the Youth Hall and now it was filled with people.

Anita Susuri: In Boro Ramiz.

Xhafer Peci: In Boro Ramiz. There was no space there. Workers from Kishnica, Badocv, Hajvalia, and from everywhere came. They sat on the ground, there was no more space. Then the youth, everyone. Kaqusha Jashari also came there. She welcomed us, talked to us. We asked, we told her that no one should resign from the pressure even if we die. “No,” she said, “We will not resign.” “We’re coming,” the

miners said, “We will come to the Committee.” “You don’t need to come, we... these are your words, your support and so on.” They didn’t want it to become a bigger deal.

We went back that day however we could, some walking, some by bus, some with cars, we went back to Mitrovica. We went to our houses. It was a gloomy time, a gloomy situation, a situation like a funeral. Then...

Anita Susuri: Did you think there would be consequences for you?

Xhafer Peci: We owned the consequences, we knew the consequences, we knew everything but still people are ready to die, let alone be prisoned and other things. And work continued, they changed the directory, they imposed leadership. They paid them to communicate with us, we didn’t communicate with them. We only communicated to the workers, the workers with us, not with them. This continued until the miners’ strike, because Serbia reached its peak suppressing Albanian’s rights.

Then on February 20, 1989, first-shift miners stayed in the mine and then the second shift came, no, there weren’t any union or social requests, only political requests, and one of the points there was preserving the territorial and spatial autonomy of Kosovo and everything else was included in that. The workers didn’t leave the mine, level eight, for eight nights and days, slept on the ground.

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

Xhafer Peci: Eight days...

Anita Susuri: The day when the decision to start the strike was taken, was it organized? Was it known prior?

Xhafer Peci: Slowly, we knew this took time. The marches were over and we knew a bigger organization was about to happen, but we didn’t talk to each other, so the word wouldn’t get out. The word didn’t get out, 90 percent of people out of the miners didn’t know what was going to happen. We didn’t even discuss it in our homes. That day we were all here. We prepared, we went to the mine. I went to the seventh level for the first time and some had gone there before me, they tried to get the workers out, “You have to get out, you will get sick, this will happen,” Someone who didn’t know.

I went there and talked to workers, I said, “No, there isn’t... we will fight for our rights, no one will die but we will fight for our rights until they are respected, we’re not against anyone, we just want our rights.” And a worker said, “Thank you, they were about to drive us crazy if you didn’t speak.” I said, “No, not crazy, but this will continue.” And most of my colleagues on other levels said the same things about our rights, to save Kosovo, the university...

[his phone rings and he turns it off]

And ask for our rights. Then a strike council was formed. We communicated with them, we went into the mine time after time and countless delegations came, one of them was there and we asked for the resignation of...

Korab Krasniqi: Resignation of...

Xhevdet Peci: After eight days... Rrahman Morina...

Korab Krasniqi: Rrahman Morina.

Xhevdet Peci: Hysamedin Azemi and Ali Shukriu.

Korab Krasniqi: Why did you ask for their resignation?

Xhevdet Peci: We asked for it because it seemed like they were the ones who mostly communicated to Serbian leaders and accepted all the conditions of the Serbian leaders and they installed their orders in Kosova, those three. We were in a terrible condition at that time.

Anita Susuri: Were you constantly on the eighth level?

Xhevdet Peci: No, we were striking at all levels, the eighth and the ninth. We would go up only to bring in a delegation. Upfront we would consult them, "This delegation wants to visit, do you want to receive them or not? No, no. Yes, yes." We would accompany the delegation to the ground level and continue [with the strike]. All sorts of people would visit, all sorts of aid we would receive, we received food. "Do you want money? Do you want gold? Do you want..." a poor man offered his cow and tied it to the mine.

For the miners, this was too difficult... and they did what they did and betrayed the miners. A decision in three envelopes stamped with the red stamp of the [Provincial] Committee, and they read the document that stated that the three leaders resigned. The miners ended the strike, but we had to get them out of the mine at night because, during the day, they would have lost their sight. During the night, the hall there was {shows with his hands} they removed the chairs, sick people were laid down there.

[The interview cuts here]

We got the miners out and they started taking actions against the miners, he was imprisoned, then the workers. It was interesting, there was a judge, Elheme Kelmendi, and Serbs on the other side. whoever

went to Elhame was sentenced to a month in prison, whoever went to the others two-three-four. She broke the law just to help the workers, Elhame Kelmendi... They were being imprisoned. Then Aziz Abrashi was imprisoned, later Burhan Kavaja, then Azem Vllasi, and fourteen others or more. But what's interesting is that they were very united while in prison, no one turned against each other. The workers were saying, "We organized it, not them."

Anita Susuri: How did they pick them? Or just by chance?

Xhafer Nuli: Their purpose was to get it over with, back then Aziz Abrashi was head, a hardworking man. After the miners got out, the miners in Leposavić were still inside, they had just started, Aziz Abarashi and his secretary went there, I will never forget it, it was a rainy day, he held his umbrella. Aziz Abrashi wasn't scared at all, from anyone, he said, "I don't care about you," he said, "Most of the workers chose me. I don't care about you." And Aziz Abrashi wasn't scared at all.

They imprisoned them. Then there was a two-three-day-long strike on level eight. Those people stayed for three days and nights with a jar of salt, they checked on levels eleven, nine, and five to see if they're giving them food.

[The interview cuts here]

Anita Susuri: What did you see those eight days during the strike? What happened to the miners, to the people who came?

Xhafer Peci: It's very hard to describe those conditions. I don't know, when one finds the best work to describe it, there's still more to say, how the strike began, what happened, what kind of situation it was, and what the medical condition of those people was, I don't know who could describe the situation how it was. The first shift started, then the second shift and then the third, individuals came to the times, family, kids, people wanted to know how their parent, brother, family member is. What happened? What is happening? Delegations came, people were tired, they broadcast it on television. Someone said, "Who knows how they fixed them?" And I think the conditions were fully reflected, they didn't show some sick people. People got sick, so we put them there. They would get a little better, you couldn't take them anywhere, back to the mines.

It was a condition that made me cry as if someone I knew died, it was horrible there, it could have exploded with all of those people there. They were ready to sacrifice themselves in the mine, it was either on that side or this side, there was no middle solution anymore. There was nothing else, it was either they would resign, or we would all die, no other solutions. Medical teams had to come. Do you need sedatives? Any kind of pills? Interventions? They took sick people in beds there, then back to the mines, then they got sick again.

Delegations came, they talked, and let's not forget the blood feud reconciliation campaign began from the eighth level. Two families reconciled there and the news continued to come out. They conditioned, this action got big, and the workers had their requests as I said, all political. One of them was the preservation of the spatial and territorial autonomy of Kosovo. That included all others, and Serbians weren't capable of saying, "We want to be equal to Albanians." We were always considered as less, "Write their rights."

We had meetings in the hall there. The delegation from Serbia came, from the committee of Serbia, from the committee of Prishtina, trying to explain to us that constitutional changes are good, making them seem good. We said, "Constitutional changes, they can make constitutional changes for themselves. We will work however we want... whatever our country needs. Each for themselves." That didn't happen, they had other goals. They said, "We can't accept it any other way, but there are changes, the economical situation will get better for all, but everyone will make constitutional changes for themselves, adapt them for their country."

Things just got worse and that started and that's how things were. The strikes, there was always the strike council, they listened to them as if they were family. It's a wonder how that strike worked, the council there said, "You do this, you do this, you do this." It was a perfect organization in those places and so on.

Anita Susuri: When did you, so, how did the miners react to the news of resignation?

Xhevdet Peci: We all got happy, firstly we were happy the miners will survive. Starting from there the power Serbia had in Kosova would get eliminated and a different life would begin for Albanians, but that didn't happen. Hysamedin Azemi didn't come back. "I resigned," he said, "I will never come back. People asked for it, here is my resignation." The other two [Ali Shukriu and Rahman Morina] came back and then they started imprisoning people.

Then August 8, 1990, we were fired. They fired us just because we protected Albanian's rights, because we protected our university, our language, our leaders, no other reason. They fired us. We stayed unemployed, in conditions... we didn't even have good conditions when we were working, but even worse unemployed. They fired workers just so they would have food to eat and they would submit to Serbia and say, "However you want, just so I can have food at home." Thank God and the organization of Albanians, other families organized, "Family takes care of family" and they saved miners' families, families in Mitrovica, because Mitrovica was dependent on *Kombinati*. It closed down, they were in danger. The action "Family takes care of family" saved Mitrovica.

Anita Susuri: The day you were fired, was there a rebellion, or what was that day like? Was there police?

Xhafer Peci: It was June 8, they came by bus. When I got to that corner there {shows with his hand} I was talking to a colleague, I saw it got all blue.

Anita Susuri: With police.

Xhafer Peci: With police, with police cars, it was all blue. We went down there and we knew. None of us wanted to work with their condition and Haxhi Jonuzi held a speech there, he was a mining engineer, and he explained our attitude, Xhafer Nuli also spoke, we started leaving, we saw that there was nothing more for Albanians there. They continued work. They took some prisoners from Bosnia, some people here, but they worked, they stole ore as they say in those scientific terms, and they worked until KFOR came.

We came back on December 22, 1999, the first day of winter we came here by foot and got into the mine. Apparently the Serbs took the armored vehicles on the other side. Back then we, we all wrote a letter, we signed a letter that we are open to working with everyone, Serbs, Roma and everyone, if those people don't have blood on their hands, those documents still exist, I don't know where they are. We all signed it, "With those who don't have blood on their hands." But unfortunately there weren't any, and it was left like that.

Anita Susuri: I also wanted to ask about your family because as you said it is difficult, so, a difficult profession. Were your children, wife, family worried every time you went to work? Were you?

Xhafer Peci: Well (smiles), back then I lived with my mother, my sister and wife, my brother lived abroad.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Xhafer Peci: Well, as people always said, "All ears, listening to what is happening. Did you come? Thank God you came. Did you come? Thank God you came." People went missing, they would take them, mistreat them, beat them. They did whatever they wanted. They did whatever they wanted. Once, a policeman stopped a man and said, "Do you know that I can do anything I want to you?" So they were free to do whatever. All families had this worry.

Korab Krasniqi: I have another question. One of the requests that you had was to meet Slobodan Milošević⁸ and Stipe Šuvar.⁹

⁸ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

⁹ Stipe Šuvar (1936-2004) was a Croatian politician and sociologist who was considered to have been one of the most influential communist politicians in the League of Communists of Croatia in the Socialist Republic of Croatia during Yugoslavia and later in modern Croatia.

Xhafer Peci: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: To come.

Korab Krasniqi: What did you want to say?

Xhafer Peci: Well, the miners wanted to say in front of both of them that the miners want, are asking for Albanian's rights. Albanians are asking to be equal to other nations. We want Kosovo's autonomy not to be suppressed. At that time Milošević left, he went to KEK¹⁰ that day, while Stipe Šuvar came here and the speech of what he said was recorded, what the miners said to Šuvar, what Šuvar didn't promise here and so on.

[The interview cuts here]

Korab Krasniqi: One last question if I may, I mean from me, in April '87, Milošević came to Fushë Kosova.

Xhafer Peci: Yes.

Korab Krasniqi: Then in '89 for Vidovdan,¹¹ he makes speeches in both cases at Gazimestan. How does this action reflect to the miners? How do you see these two events?

Xhafer Peci: In the worst way possible. In Gazimestan, it was a call for war.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Xhafer Peci: It was a call for war against Albanians. It wanted to run Albanians to the ground. To simply say, his speech was about war. He wanted to put Albanians under their shoe.

Korab Krasniqi: What did you discuss with each other after that?

Xhafer Peci: Everything. We discussed everything, this and that, all for resistance, all for resistance.

Korab Krasniqi: Did Milošević's speech affect, well the speech comes after the strikes, but the further mobilization?

¹⁰ Kosovo Energy Corporation

¹¹ Vidovdan is a Serbian national and religious holiday. It is celebrated on June 28 or June 15 according to the Julian calendar. The Serbian Church designates it as the day of remembrance of St. Prince Lazar and the Serb martyrs who fell during the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire on June 15, 1389.

Xhafer Peci: Every violence, every call again Kosova just united Albanians, it just united them towards a single request, “Kosovo as an equal unit in the Federation or in the Yugoslav Confederation, even if it comes to division, Kosovo decides for itself.”

Korab Krasniqi: Why are you calling it a federation and a confederation?

Xhafer Peci: Because Slovenia and Croatia were thinking of separating, this part to be like some kind of confederation, this was the talk then, or even the federation that was then had equal units and we wanted to have equal units with other units without violating anyone's freedom.

Anita Susuri: In the ‘90s, when you were unemployed, what did you do? How did things continue?

Xhafer Peci: In the ‘90s, luckily we committed to savings, maximum saving. Then I had a brother in Holland and he helped us a lot during that time, we didn’t need to ask for help elsewhere, or to go compete somewhere. We had savings in our hands to this day, but ever since I was in school because as a person, as a family, we were poor, I never asked my father for money for school, just for the bus pass or books, it was a completely different time.

Anita Susuri: So the ‘90s were hard but...

Xhafer Peci: So then we made do with my brother’s money, with savings, we made it, we weren’t many family members. There was the action “Family takes care of family,” and they helped. Some of the miners went abroad and helped people here, but it’s important that the miners didn’t submit to anyone. In Rahovec, they picked grapes and invited the miners. They gave them more money than they worked, they gave them food and everything, families would help families and so on.

There were cases when people didn’t need help, just wanted to get to know families in different municipalities, but there were some horrible days for Albanians. Whoever we met, “How are you? Do you have food?” Then, “Do you have food?” “Yes.” “Thank God. Does this person have food? What about that other one?” “I think he does.” “Thank God.” People were united. There was some kind of pride for resisting foreign power, even though we only had food, no clothes, or coffee, or tea, just food and resistance.

Anita Susuri: How did the war find you?

Xhafer Peci: War didn’t find us, I mean in a bad financial situation, I mean we had money, but I acted a bit stupid, I had a mindset, and I told other people, “Don’t go abroad. Who is the UÇK¹² fighting for? The UÇK has to stay with us, so they can eat with us, because if we all go, where will they stay?” It was

¹² *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army, was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organisation that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

dangerous. I also said, “Don’t, we don’t have to think that Belgrade was bombed and to not throw us out. It wasn’t.”

I was with my brother, we were in the mountains. We would go to the mountains, during the night we would come to Mitrovica, see the situation, we would go back, we would tell them, “We were here, one was there, the other here.” As long as we stayed we would accompany people, “I need to go there.” “We’ll take you there.” The other one there, but we were in the mountains, we had to survive with that little food we had.

Our children were in a house in Mitrovica, they still hadn’t forced people out of the house there. We would go during the night, “Are you okay? Is there anything?” “No.” We went to the mountains, we moved around and there we said, we didn’t know who was going to survive, we said, “Those who survive will be lucky, they will hug anyone they meet.” But interest changed things a little.

Anita Susuri: So you didn’t leave Kosova.

Xhafer Peci: No, we didn’t.

Anita Susuri: Not even your family.

Xhafer Peci: Not my family, not my brother, we stayed here.

Anita Susuri: Were there any cases when it was very dangerous?

Xhafer Peci: Four or five times we were attacked with grenades. We were lucky we survived, the way the grenade would fall, the noise it made was very interesting, very interesting. But we knew it was war time. We didn’t expect anything better. “They killed him. Why did they kill him?” I didn’t expect that they wouldn’t kill people, I didn’t expect better and that gave me strength. I didn’t expect better, “They did this and that.” “Don’t expect better. Don’t expect better from them. They’re for this, now we’re doing this, two opposite ideals, whichever wins, we will be here til the end.” I would tell my brother, “When they bomb us, don’t sit next to me. You sit there because we don’t know where the grenade will fall. Sit there.”

Anita Susuri: Then liberation came. How did that day find you?

Xhafer Peci: We went to war, trust me we didn’t turn back to look at the houses, it had the roof and everything and, until the last week, I said, “I hope people survive, only the people. In the last year I said, “I hope the house doesn’t get destroyed, nothing else.” Liberation, well, whoever we met, we couldn’t stop the tears.... Whoever we met, “Do you have food? How are you? Do you have any place to

stay?” These words dominated everywhere. “Do you have any place to stay? Do you have anyone? Are you all okay?”

There was the family of a miner, he was my employee, he was in our house with his six sons, now, me and my old lady, my wife, that’s how us villagers say (smiles) would bake seven, eight breads for us and them... and now when they forced us out of the houses he said, “Xhafer, what will I do?” I said, “I don’t know what either of us will do, in the hands of God.” I said, “Here’s the key to my house, if you happen to be here, you can go in.” You couldn’t say anything to anyone because you could put them in a trap, you didn’t know what to say. But we were proud that we were resisting.

Anita Susuri: You said that, after the war, you came to the mines and saw Serbs leaving.

Xhafer Peci: They said so, I didn’t see them.

Anita Susuri: You didn’t see them.

Xhafer Peci: They said that they removed Serbs from there with armored vehicles through another entrance.

Anita Susuri: When you came here, how did it seem to you?

Xhafer Peci: 202 people came here. On December 22, 1999, we came here and found the mines on the edge of a catastrophe, almost drowning. There were around a million cubic meters of water. The pump system was out of order. We went into the mines that day even though it was dangerous, it could have been mined. I and the director back then, Burhan Kavaja, and some other engineers went down to the eleventh level. We went and took a look at one point, one place, and we knew the condition, the moment we looked at that point we knew the condition.

We started working. We didn’t care who was an engineer or who was a worker, we all worked the same just to save the mines. It was a lot of work, we worked more than we were supposed to, we just worked a lot. We didn’t care if we worked for ten hours, or twelve hours, did we continue on the first or second shift, we just worked, we left. The winter of ‘99 was very hard. We washed our hands and faces with snow. We went by bus, we took food from home, we ate whatever we could. Foreigners tried, “It’s okay, we will bring you the machinery and everything.” They might have tried to drown the mines, but we didn’t let them. Thanks to those people, the mine is functional to this day. Everything was prepared, a million cubic meters of water was removed from the mines. The canals were opened.

Now you can work everywhere. Workers come in and out without trouble. Just the general risk of the mine, nothing else. We checked the mine even then, they didn’t leave anything, there’s no explosives or anything. There were in some places, we removed them and made the mine safe for work.

Anita Susuri: How does work go today?

Xhafer Peci: Today the mine works in stable condition. Since after the war, we've had two fatal injuries, we can all brag about it because now the mine is in stable working condition. Capital facilities are well maintained and so on.

Anita Susuri: Mister Xhafer, if you have anything to add, or if you forgot to say something?

Xhafer Peci: The whole mining area from the northeast to the border is mineralized with ore mines. There are many others, there must be around 50 million tons of ore in these regions, but even more. There should be an interest by our society to turn these riches into material goods, but we have it. Wherever we want, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, it is here, we just have to preserve it by law so no one can take it from us. Back then, Martti Ahtisaari¹³ said, "The riches within the territory of Kosovo belong to the people of Kosovo." This is an important saying. We have to preserve it.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much, Mister Xhafer.

Xhafer Peci: Thank you very much for being interested to make such a program, to write something so it remains written.

¹³ Martti Oiva Kalevi Ahtisaari (1937-) is a Finnish politician, the tenth President of Finland (1994–2000). Ahtisaari was a United Nations special envoy for Kosovo, in charge of organizing the Kosovo status process negotiations.