

INTERVIEW WITH MURADIJE MURIQI

Gjakova | Date: July 15, 2016

Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Muradije Muriqi (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (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

Muradije Muriqi: I come from a middle-class family, I mean, with a middle class status, a twelve members family before we were left without our father, a family which has lived in Rugova of Peja. Then due to the [living] conditions, my father was interested in moving down [from the mountains], I mean, we moved to a village which was called Nabërgjan and was near Peja, from where, after a very short time, my father together with all of us moved and settled down in Peja, you know, in '64. And we live in Peja since then, my family lives in Peja, while I currently live in Gjakova, I've been working as an actress in the professional theatre of Gjakova for 35 years now.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was your life in such a large family of twelve members?

Muradije Muriqi: Nowadays people might think, they might say that it's a very big number of family members, but I am proud and I feel very good for coming from such a family, because we are six brothers and four sisters. My mother lived until three years ago, when she passed away, and my father [passed away] in '71. So, from '71, my mother raised ten children, I mean, ten orphans: educated them, raised them, and put them on the right path, and let them become what we are today, that we are proud of ourselves, but also Peja, the citizens of Peja [are proud of us]. I mean, there're no bad words spoken about my family because it's one of the healthiest families, by healthy I mean that none of us, the children, deviated [from the right path] in any possible way, because to a mother who raised orphans, life was very difficult and painful. However, she managed to raise them, to educate them, and marry most of them and make it to the point of having grandchildren, so from that twelve-members family, now we have become sixty .

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which year were you born in?

Muradije Muriqi: I was born in 1957 in the village of Nabërgjan, near Peja, then we moved to Peja, we are there, we took residency and resided there. I got employed in Gjakova, then I moved to Gjakova, so Peja and Gjakova are the same to me. To me it is the same in Peja and in Gjakova, but of course, my job is more in Gjakova.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was life in Peja back then, when you were a child, how much do you remember?

Muradije Muriqi: You are making me go back many years, to the moments which are very hard to be forgotten, especially after my father's murder, I mean, it was life was very hard because my mother remained in Peja with ten orphans, without income, without any material aid from anyone, I don't know, sometimes I wonder, where did she take all that strength from? How did she find her way? Because we were little. I mean, the oldest child was 18 years old, all the others were younger.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old were you?

Muradije Muriqi: Back then I was almost eleven years old.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was life for you at that time?

Muradije Muriqi: I mean, it was an incomplete youth without my father, but at the same time filled by my mother who was a very tough and strong woman. So, thanks to her we managed to reach the point we are at now, and as simple as that, in the most honest way, only thanks to nobody but her. It's understandable that my childhood was not easy, poverty was a bit...of course without...because no one worked. My brother got employed after a short time, something moved here-and-there. Time after time, as in every other family, things started getting....as we grew up, things started getting better. So, I believe that that time should be remembered, because one cannot move forward without youth, without the time of childhood. However, as a child, I was a bit different from the others, I was a bit more severe in that sense, in life, I studied, I finished my elementary school in Peja, I mean, with excellent success, the same with secondary school. I went to the Faculty of Economics, which I couldn't finish because of objective reasons, I quit in the third year.

With a very good circle of friends, with various initiatives, I had the luck of getting employed in the theatre of Gjakova, of course, but other things happened earlier. I have been engaged in writing since I was a child, I loved the stage a lot, I loved the theatre a lot, but I never dreamt of one day becoming an actress, that time came, the moment and I...I achieved what I wanted to. However, I was engaged in various activities. I was a member of the autochthonous folkloric ensemble *Rugova* of Rugova, of Peja, for 25 years. I participated in festivals, domestic as well as foreign, I mean, outside the back then Yugoslavia, in various countries, outside the country, where I was rewarded with a number of recognitions, with the gold medal as the best dancer. So, probably those were the things that preceded, and I didn't want to leave the stage and I had the luck of meeting Hadi Shehu, our actor, an icon of the theatre, who in one way helped me, and opened the door of the theatre to me, and I work at the theatre of Gjakova since then.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's go back to your family, did you have any wealth in the village, or how did you manage to survive in the city?

Muradije Muriqi: (smiles) No, my father's, my father's family was, let me say it how people say it, my father's family was slaughtered and massacred by Serbs in 1913 and 1912, in a village near Peja which is called Ciga. His family was killed there, I mean, he was the only one to survive from his family, he had close cousins, his paternal uncle's sons, but he didn't have any surviving brother or sister from his

mother and from his father. He was alone as a human being, but the *rreth*¹ brought him closer to them and raised him as an orphan, and that's why he made it to where he did. When we came to Peja with a very hard life, with very bad conditions, politically persecuted, because he was a child of the family that was massacred and Serbs always kept those people targeted, simply, a person who came from the big family of Zhyl Selmani, I mean, from these places that really... even there in Rugova, the very large family of Riza Zymeri, who are, you know, our ancestors, our close family originates from that family, I mean a patriotic family, a family that really always faced Serbs, and anyone else who had bad intentions towards our country.

But later, I mean in '81, I mean the years when I participated in various ways, I mean, I helped. I helped when the army came, the soldiers... our men who went to military service and were returned in coffins.² If there was nothing I could help with, at least some recital, something to remember them with. Really. Because they passed away the way they did, and today their mothers cry and feel bad for their loss, because they lost them in a way they shouldn't have, because they went to simply discharge their duty, but returned dead. I kept various materials before the war as an activist of LDK,³ the back-then *lëvizja mbarëkombëtare* [nationwide movement] led by Prof.Dr. Ibrahim Rugova. Then as a dancer in the *Rugova Ensemble* of Peja, I mean...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about those years?

Muradije Muriqi: Those years are unforgettable to me, because my father was killed in '71, and I started in the *Rugova* ensemble in '72 and...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In Peja?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, in Peja, and since then I participated in various festivals where I was awarded with recognitions and gold medals at the time, which as far as culture goes was for all...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us about what happened to your father, the reasons, I mean, in what context did that all happen? What kind of family was that? What kind of enmity was that?

Muradije Muriqi: Maybe every person thinks that their parent is... one of, one of the best people in the world. I say that because a parent is a parent and they cannot be replaced by anyone else. I had the luck of being the daughter of a parent known by the entire Peja, I mean, Peja as well as Rugova, and the place where we lived, Nabërgjan. People had a very good opinion of him and loved him, he was valued by many people, because he was a wise man, a skillful man, a man who never interfered in anyone's businesses, I mean, a person who minded his own familiar interest, a person who tried to bring his children, to bring them to the city, to educate them, because he himself didn't have any

¹*Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

² Reference to a wave of alleged suicides of Albanian conscripts which were never investigated and always denied by the families.

³ *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

brother or sister. I am talking about an actual brother and sister, because he had one sister from his father, but he didn't have, I mean... and he always had an urge to open up the family, to expand the family and he loved children. I cannot describe how much he loved children in any way, because I was eleven years old and I remember, I remember well, perfectly clearly, that time and that case. Especially the New Year of 1971, when we were, my mother was pregnant, I mean my little sister was yet to be born when my father was killed, he was killed in the New Year's Eve of 1971, my mother was still pregnant. We were nine children without any income, my father was the only one who worked, and he worked privately or wherever he could.

In one way it was shut down to us, everything was shut down, everything was destroyed, you know. Simply, I could notice it even though I was a child, I felt that our life changed completely. When I say completely, I mean that the loss of your parent without any reason, without any reason, is way harder than when he gets killed for a reason, for a motive, for something he did, some guilt or something that is known. I mean, it's one... it's not good, but it's something that makes it easier for you, inside your soul, your body, you feel that he was guilty and somehow, you still don't agree, but it's a kind, something different, different.

So, I say that when my parent was, when he was killed, we were watching the New Year's Eve show, you know, we were gathered around mother and suddenly they knocked so loudly on the doors that everyone was shaken up, we got up, got out in the yard. When we went out, one of the neighbors who was close to my father, said, he calls for mother, he said my mother's name, may she rest in peace, she was Lake, and he called my mother as the oldest in the house, because my oldest brother was serving in the army, he said, "Come out 'cause I have to give you not that good of a news." And mother at once, "All is welcome, whatever it is, we're human, good news and bad arrives and..." Not knowing a thing, not thinking even for a second that it concerns my father.

But it happened that my mother's father was very sick at that time, and all the time we thought it was something about our grandfather, you know, we thought that our mother's father had died or they came to bring news about him, because our father didn't even cross our minds at all. And for a moment when he comes and says, "Lake," he said, "Gather the children, embrace the children 'cause Isuf has been killed." And that was for us...to me, it seems that that night there was no light, everything seemed darkened and I heard my mother say, "Ah, may you always be with me. Gather, come to mother 'cause a black day has befallen us."

So, and that's how we remained shocked, our neighbors gathered, many people gathered, hundreds of people came in a very short time. They came, there were many people gathered and we didn't know what to do, how to speak, what to say, nothing. We were all shocked, then the police came, they notified us about the case, that he was killed and sent to the hospital. They brought the corpse after two days and we buried him in silence, just as befits an Albanian family.

The ones who killed him, they tried, they wanted to bring someone to the funeral. We didn't have an actual paternal uncle, but we had the relatives who were, whom we respected as if they were our paternal uncles, they didn't allow it, because we didn't know the reason, maybe it was savagery, or a moment when one doesn't know what he is doing. And so after a short time, after some days, they

came to ask for *besa*,⁴ just as the tradition goes. We gave them *besa*. But I must say that when one of you gets killed, no matter who they are, they are your relative, or... it's very hard. I experience it very badly, even today when I hear, no matter that...experiencing it in your family is something, is something that cannot be put into words.

And they came many time to ask us for *besa*, we always gave it to them because we thought it was alright and we are not, we never regret giving them the *besa*. But the family that did it, they behaved very badly, very badly. And at that time, I remember it well, because their house was near ours, I mean, I don't know how to say... I mean, they were in our neighborhood, but on the other side, a bit further than us.

He waited for him, he looked for him that day, the whole day, you know, he deliberately killed him, he woke up in the morning and envisioned it, he studied it and decided to kill him and he killed him in the evening. He was returning from work, he worked even though it was New Year's Eve, because we were many children, and he wanted to earn some, some more morsel for his children. He stopped by a bar to drink a glass and to calm down before coming home. He [the murderer] went in and found him, he sat, he sat together with him, he treated him, he said, "What would you like to drink?" He asked for *lloza*⁵ if I am not mistaken, and he brought it to him, he sat, they had a glass together. When the waitress turned around and left, he took out his gunshot from under the table without my father noticing him at all, he shot at him once while he was sitting. Then he stood up and pulled him by the hair {shows with hands}, he pulled him up and shot him again, because he knew he had a heart condition, he is not well. I mean, he killed him once again.

I mean, to me it is a double murder, because once he shot at him and killed him, he shot at him with three bullets. But, that was not enough for him and he stood up and shot him three times more and I mean, in fact, he remained there at the table. He went out and while going to the hospital, I mean, right at the hospital's door, he passed away, you know, he died. So, those moments are indescribable, I wish no one experiences it in their families, no matter the cause, no matter the reason, everything has its solution. But they decided to take his life that way, and they did so.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you ever manage to find out why they took his life?

Muradije Muriqi: I remember, I remember it as if it happened today. I was a child, because I was little when we went to court while the trial was being held, but I remember it perfectly clear, and one case when the judge asks, "Could you tell us the reason why you killed him?" I remember it as if it happened today, he said, "I killed him just because I felt like it," that's how he expressed himself, "I killed him just because I wanted to, because he was a man known by the entire Rugova, and I killed him just because I wanted to." And since then, I didn't, I never had the chance, how come, how to justify that act, that macabre act, that act...that low act. But he decided that way and took his life.

⁴ In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

⁵ A sort of *raki*, a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

He left ten orphans in the streets, in the streets in the sense that we had no aid. But thanks to my mother, I repeat it, we are where we are today, and I am proud of being the child, the daughter, I mean, the fifth child of theirs, of being from the family of those two, they really deserved that we are proud of them. Because he never had any trouble or any word or anything with anyone during his whole life. I even remember in the trial, when my mother stood up, they invited her as a witness, and they wanted to take her statement, and she addressed the *gjakësi*,⁶ and said, “Could you tell me what did he owe you? Or did he do you wrong? Did he owe you anything? Did he offend you? A...could you tell me here in front of the judges, because I want to feel differently.” He said, “He didn’t owe me anything, I killed him because I wanted to,” and didn’t further discuss it.

Then, he was sentenced, I guess, I don’t remember, I guess, around seventeen years of prison. He was held for twelve or something, then once he got out of prison, he had many family tragedies. Maybe it was our inner suffering, maybe he paid the price to God for leaving such a large family without their parent. However, I have to mention that before my father’s murder, my mother was 39 years old, my father was yet to become 50 years old. I mean, she remained alone with ten children at the age of 39. The prejudices and the people who want to push you to take revenge, or... there are many people of that kind...because those are the worldviews, at that time it was like that. However, there’s not a big difference today, but it has changed nevertheless.

I mean, people coming and trying to convince her to kill them, made it even harder for my mother to go out and kill them, because, “You have six sons,” “Lead your sons, let them go and avenge him.” The words and people coming home were harder for my mother than poverty, so that sometimes she didn’t even have food to put on our table, because people didn’t leave her alone. People, the *rreth*, the wider *rreth*, the close one, various *rreth* that wanted to create conflicts, to create disagreements between people. But she always mentioned one word and that word was noticed, it was known and maybe the reason why she always said it when the reconciliation of... the Nationwide Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation in 1990, because when someone came, or said, “Why aren’t you allowing your children to go and avenge him, why aren’t you allowing one of the daughters, because girls cannot be caught by the law, by the *Kanun*?”⁷ and various words, she always said, the only word she said, she always said, “I’ve left it to God, God witnesses, God knows, I haven’t got any child to lose.”

And it was a fact, the Kosovo youth of the ‘90s turned out to be my mother’s God. The Initiative of Kosovo Youth started and it was forgiven, I forgave the blood in the name of the youth, of the nation, and I am proud for forgiving it, because I know that I forgave it and I never regretted it, neither did my brothers regret the fact that I forgave, they didn’t say any word...not the slightest word. They only asked, they said, “Do you know the reason you forgave it?” You know, and I replied, “I forgiven it in the name of Kosovo youth, I forgave it for the youth of this land, of this place.” And they didn’t discuss it any longer. And they didn’t ask me, “Why?” Or, “Why did you take the initiative?” Or, “Why did you do

⁶ The one who committed murder who took the blood of another.

⁷ *Kanun*, customary law, the unwritten law that regulates all aspects of life in the mountain areas of Northern Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. A written version, the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, was compiled by the Franciscan monk Shtjefën Gjeçovi in 1910-1925.

that?” Not any other word. I mean, I am proud of them as well, because my brothers are born from those parents who left us behind and today we are proud.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let’s go back to the family of the murderer, when they asked you for *besa*, were they expecting that your family would take revenge? Did they have that fear?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, they had it, of course they had that fear. We were a large family, I am talking about the cousins, we are a family, a family of the house of Zhyl Selmani, who were all brave men. And in fact, the men of that place always died because of the bullet, because they fought, in fact, they fought against the *shkau*.⁸ Yes, but what I am trying to say is that we come from a family of which they really had to be scared, and they had that fear, but they were such people...they weren’t the kind of people that behaved badly in that sense, but they probably had the fear. Now I am talking from various experiences, because I didn’t have the chance of having contacts with them. But I know that they had fear, of course they had fear, since they came and ask us for *besa*, in fact, they didn’t dare go out when we didn’t give *besa*. But, it only happened once, we never left them without *besa*, no matter that they behaved in an inhuman way.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Why yes, why, why did you give them *besa*?

Muradije Muriqi: Eëë... back then I was little, I am not saying that I would do something different if I were an adult, maybe I couldn’t do any change. But given the poverty in which my mother was, she had many children, she didn’t find it reasonable, to, to cut the *besa*...there was no way to let the boys go out and encounter them, God save us, to lose another, one of the sons, or...she always thought about what she didn’t want to have, there was no way she wanted to lose her children. And she continually gave permission to give *besa*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you join the Reconciliation Movement, how did you decide to reconcile?

Muradije Muriqi: I, a friend of mine, who is known, people probably know him, Sali Cacaj from Deçanit. He was together with the ones who initiated the Blood Feuds Reconciliation. And I really, back then, I mean, in the ‘90s, there was, there was an extraordinarily unpleasant condition for all Albanians. And I heard, but I didn’t quite know how it started, and he notified me, he said, “Dije, this and that, we have initiated, that’s a...” But it was still the beginning, you know. The blood I forgave, I mean, the blood I forgave, if I am not mistaken, was the fifth in the row that was forgiven in Kosovo, I mean, it was the very beginning and people still didn’t know what was going to happen next, will it be successful or not? Will it [the blood] be forgiven for that reason or for another reason?

But I liked it when I heard that young students who were political prisoners, Hava Shala, Myrvete Dreshaj and many others, whose names I don’t remember at the moment, maybe not...and I mean, they took the initiative of reconciling people. No, not to discuss why they killed, how they killed, why did they not kill, but to simply reconcile and make the blood feuds among Albanians disappear,

⁸ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

especially ours, in Kosovo. And the initiative, their intention was good, it was pure, it was clean, and that's how I understood it.

Because the greatest of the reconciliation was that once you forgave the blood, you had to go to the assassin, to the house of the assassin and shake their hand, I mean, this is what made me think twice, I mean, it's something great. Something is really being achieved and will be successful because you could forgive your blood and that would be it. But no, the intention of the students was for the reconciliation to be clean and to come to its end there, and then and for it not to be continued in any way. So, this is what made it pure, without a certain interest of anyone, be it professors or students or the entire Council of Blood Feuds Reconciliation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you describe how the reconciliation of your case took place, who came, who mediated it?

Muradije Muriqi: My friend, whom I mentioned earlier, Sali Cacaj, he asked me, "Muradije, is there some reason, could we come to your family with some students, professors, to talk, it's the region of Peja, it's Rugova of Peja. You are a family of patriots, a family really known by everyone. Is there a possibility for us to come and start discussing?" I said, "You can come, but I am telling you here that this is done." He remained speechless and was surprised because I was a sister of six brothers, then it's not that I was of an age when I could take such big decisions. But he was surprised and notified the students who were engaged, you knew the main ones, the professors as well and they came to our house.

My mother, when I went inside, I told her, I said, "These people, these men have come to forgive father's blood. I decided, but you are a mother, you are the pillar of this house, what do you say?" And she shed a tear right away and said, "Have you thought it well my daughter, what do you...what do you want to do? What do you want to do with the boys?" Because three of my brothers were abroad and three of them were here, but they weren't there at the moment. I said, "If I am the daughter of ...Isuf Rama and Lake Haxha, I believe that it's not going to be a problem. And since they have initiated this in the name of Kosovo youth. In the name of the whole Albanian nation, I am sacrificing my father, after so many years, and I am ready to forgive." Then my mother just extended her hand and hugged me, she said, "*Qofsh faqe bardhë*"⁹ my daughter, I feel good that you think this way. That you think for your brothers, for the whole family, there's nothing else I have to say."

And I entered the room, around 20-30 students were sitting there. There were Anton Çetta,¹⁰ Bajram Kelmendi,¹¹ Mark Krasniqi,¹² Zekerija Cana,¹³ Ramiz Kelmendi,¹⁴ the elite of the people and

⁹ Colloquial: An expression of honor; wishing someone luck in fulfilling a duty or a certain activity.

¹⁰ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar.

¹¹ Bajram Kelmendi (1937-1999) was a lawyer and human rights activist. He filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

¹² Mark Krasniqi (1920-2015), ethnographer and writer.

¹³ Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian.

¹⁴ Ramiz Kelmendi (1930-), a journalist and writer.

intellectuals, Fehmi Agani.¹⁵ I might forget someone now, but I mean, it was the substance and the wealth, the knowledge of the whole...Kosovo, they were in our room that day. People who really deserve respect for initiating that thing and I entered and said, when Bajram Kelmendi started speaking, he wanted to start speaking in order to discuss how, how they started and what they think and to reconcile the blood. I said, “I feel so good that you have found the way to come to my family, and on behalf of my family, I forgive the blood of my fath...father, of course it’s not easy. But for the sake of what you have initiated the Action for, I forgive it.”

Then Bajram Kelmendi, peace be upon him, stood up and said, “I knew that you are the daughter of Isuf Rama, but I didn’t know you were such *burrënore*,”¹⁶ he stood up and hugged us and started crying. All the professors who were there cried, because they knew that he was killed without any reason, his life was taken from him. And that second, I mean, once I forgave the blood, I asked them, “Is there a possibility for me to join the Reconciliation Movement because I feel a moral obligation towards my family, my parents?”

They approached me, and respected me in a special way when I was with them, you know, for two years in a row. Then, since I was working in Gjakova as an actress, I participated in the Council of Blood Feuds Reconciliation led by Din Mehmeti,¹⁷ who is now deceased, Osman Hoxha, the doctor, then Zekerija [Cana]...Qamil Rexha, who is deceased, Bardhyl Çausi,¹⁸ who was a pillar, really, a person...such a pity that today we don’t know where he his, how, what happened to him, and many other professors who were together with us. Only in the municipality of Gjakova, in two years we managed to reconcile 101 blood feuds.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did then *Krushqit e Pajtimit*¹⁹ go to transmit the news to the person you were in blood with?

Muradije Muriqi: The day I forgave the blood? Maybe I have a weakness which might as well not be a weakness, but, let me mention it again, mine was one of the very first bloods that were forgiven and I wasn’t afraid that I would regret it. But the beginning is always hard, and the only thing I asked them for was that I am forgiving it under no conditions, because blood cannot be forgiven under conditions. I said, “We, I don’t have the opportunity and I don’t want someone in my close family to go to their family and shake their hands, no matter that we forgave [the blood], and there will never be a problem anymore.” We had a paternal uncle of ours at home, a paternal uncle, he was the son of my father’s

¹⁵ Fehmi Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

¹⁶ *Burrënore*, when a woman has so-called more masculine features. Used to describe a woman who’s not conventional in the sense of stereotypical gender roles. Like *burrnesha*, which literally means men-like, it can refer to women’s show of courage, wittiness, or general disregard for social roles that often limit women’s participation in the public space.

¹⁷ Din Mehmeti (1932-2010), poet.

¹⁸ Bardhyl Çausi (1936–1999), lawyer and human rights activist, held in prison during the 1999 NATO war and killed. His remains were only found in 2005.

¹⁹ *Krushqi* is the escort group from the groom’s family that come to fetch the bride. In this context, it refers to the delegation engaged in the reconciliation of blood feuds.

paternal uncle, I mean...the third generation, and he was older, we said, “[As] a representative of the family, could we delegate uncle Brahim?” They said, “Yes, no problem, it just has to be someone from the family.” So he went to the family and forgave it the way he should, and the way it was supposed to be forgiven.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many cases were forgiven ?

Muradije Muriqi: 101. It would be good to mention that our nation is a great nation. When they want, ah? When they want, simply, whenever they want. A nation that can be envied by the whole world. But there are a number of cases when we are shallow, sometimes, it is interesting, I don’t know why. I love my people, I love my nation, I love all of them no matter what, but sometimes we somehow lose our path in our own yard, and we don’t know how to come to our senses, I don’t know why that happens. Maybe the Illyrians were like that, quiet, people who didn’t want to rule, people who never pretended to rule. Maybe now we have kept that, we don’t think to, to rule anyone.

However, I finished three years of the Faculty of Economics, it’s not that I am educated, in the sense, I call myself maybe semi-intellectual or intellectual. But they made an impression, many cases during the Blood Feuds Reconciliation impressed me, especially in the municipality of Gjakova, which deserve to be mentioned. For example, a village near Junik, Nivokaz, when we went there with students, because first we, the youth, went to talk to the family, then the professors came and the solemn act took place in the family.

When we went to the entrance, I mean to the big wooden doors of the yard, an old *kullë*,²⁰ an old lady came out, I am not saying less or more, but she was probably 94-95 years old. She came to the door of the yard, and in front of us she said, “Welcome, the light of Kosovo!” These were her words, and she could barely stand, she was very old and...double bent and she straightened up and leant on the door and said, “May your mother have you healthy, don’t waste time in my *kullë*, but continue your road and the blood of my son is forgiven, and don’t even come inside and waste time, run, go as fast as you can, close this heavy wound of our nation.” And in fact, we didn’t go inside, we left and noted the case as a solved case, I don’t remember now, maybe it’s bad that I am saying this, but I don’t remember, because we had the person who was in charge of taking notes, I mean, he took notes of each family, but I don’t remember the last name of that family at the moment, but it is a family that deserves every good word and of which Kosovo should be proud.

In those two years I finished ten faculties. I am saying that in the real sense of the word, and I really mean it, because I am sure that I know my nation in its very core, because we entered every house, we didn’t leave any house that was in blood feud behind...murder, you know, various. There were difficult and more difficult [cases]. There were even bloods that weren’t forgiven, where I was present. There were cases where I stood up and said, please, “No, please, if you see it reasonable to forgive the blood, please do so, because I’ve forgiven it as well.” There were cases where they said, “So what if you have forgiven it, it’s not a big deal. Why should I forgive it?” There were cases where they said, “There’s no

²⁰ Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

need to discuss it further, this thing is done!” There were cases where they closed the door in front of our faces and we couldn’t even manage to get inside.

There were various cases, that one really...you know, surprising. But there were cases, where two cases, one in the village of Qerim here near Gjakova and another one in...if I am not mistaken...how was the name of that Village...Babaj of Boka where Anton [Çetta] himself told us, “Don’t go there because there it is very difficult, one cannot even try to reconcile.” However, however, we went, but when we went we really regretted it, because it turned out to be just like Anton Çetta had told us. They welcomed us very warmly, the family of the victim, but the case that was explained and told there was a double murder, I mean, we remained speechless and in fact we never went there again, that case remained like that.

Another case near Gjakova remained like that, there were also other cases that remained unreconciled. But most of the people forgave it without thinking twice. Yes, with an extraordinary manhood and bravery. I feel that I have to say that the forgiving of blood is not a weakness, the forgiving of blood is bravery and very big bravery. Because you think, study, you find the sense of it and in the end you come to the conclusion that there’s no sense in losing people again, because the one who went [died] cannot be taken back, and let me say it once again, the forgiving of blood is bravery not weakness. Nobody should think it’s weakness, weakness, because it was not that we weren’t strong enough to go out and kill them.

My family concretely, I had six brothers, we were four sisters, each one of us could go out and kill him. But my mother was the one who was always ahead of us and always, she always told us, “I left it to God, God will bring this thing to its end and I don’t want you to deal with this.” And in fact, that God of my mother was the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation in the ‘90s, where the initiative started, it started from the students who were in prisons in Serbia and experienced the things we didn’t. And that’s why, let me say it again, I am proud for forgiving it, my brothers and all the others are proud, because it was seen and it was known that what was done was very honourable, something very clear, something very, very pure for our country, but there are still people, [blood feuds] are happening here and there. But it seems like [it’s happening] less than before, because I always follow them.

One year ago, we were in the twenty fifth anniversary of the Blood Feuds Reconciliation in Pristina, under the leadership of the mayor,²¹ and I felt good when I saw those people who forgave and the *gjaksorë*, that night...day, they were together. A change, a long time, 25 years, a big change, some knew each-other and the others didn’t. However, I think that it was a very good initiative and I would ask everyone who has the strength, because it’s very difficult, isn’t it? Because the moment you want to forgive blood, everything appears in your head like in a film, as if someone made a blitz of each of them, each event that your heart didn’t want, the bad things come in front of you, in order not to let you go, walk and take the strength to forgive. However, one should become strong. However, one should think of the good of the family first, then of the general social family, of our society in Kosovo.

²¹ The Mayor of the Municipality of Gjakova, Mimoza Kusari.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You were in many *oda*,²² in reconciliations, were there discussions about the *Kanun*, what is the *Kanun*, where did it come from?

Muradije Muriqi: Ëë...in fact...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And the blood feud in particular, pardon me.

Muradije Muriqi: In fact, the *Kanun* was discussed in the *oda*, because maybe it was the *Kanun* that stopped many murders and the blood feuds it...because *Kanun* is not something that cannot be taken into consideration. I am not saying all of it, but however, it was discussed a lot in the *oda*, where the blood reconciliations happened mostly. The *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* was discussed a lot, but it all depends on how progressive people were or how much they wanted the good of their country. Or, now we cannot call bad people the ones who don't have the strength, who cannot forgive, because someone can be weaker and someone else stronger. They always exist, someone weak and someone strong.

But I think that the *Kanun* preserved some things, put them in canners, I am saying, it didn't preserve them, but it canned them. In the sense that people couldn't go out of the circle of what was expressed in the *Kanun*, for example. However, I think that my nation has moved forward and I believe that it is slowly bringing this centuries-old wound to its end, and there are no more [blood feuds]. I still hear rare cases that something happened because of blood feuds. Yes, people are being killed without any reason, for very simple things, but they are not avenging them. And this I think that...I think that this [Movement] made its own euphoria, it took a shape, an intention to soften maybe the wound, to make it easier. Although there are, but I don't...there are, there are everywhere in the world. But among us it took a very big dimension, and I believe that it's slowly vanishing, maybe it hasn't vanished all, but I hope it will vanish completely, and there will be no more murders with the intention to take revenge.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you part of the gatherings?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you describe one of those you were more engaged in?

Muradije Muriqi: Ëë...in Smolica, near Gjakova here I, I led, you know, the entire gathering, of course, with colleagues, with friends who were close to me. There, it's interesting to describe it, if Serbs didn't stop us, I am saying *shkijet*, simply, I want to say *shkijet*, because I want to discharge my anger. It seemed like *shkijet* realized that the reconciliation was widening. I, not 50%, not even 100%, but I am 2000% sure that if the gatherings continued the way they started to echo, no person in Kosovo would remain in enmity, none, be it even a child, because it was obvious that the intention was pure and they understood the influence of this, and since Smolica, they didn't allow us to conduct another gathering. I mean, it's....

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did Smolica take place?

²² Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

Muradije Muriqi: Smolica took place in '91, but I don't remember the exact date because we're talking about 25 years, but I mean, the police came and they simply made us leave. Someone was beaten, someone not. But the main thing is that the gathering was interrupted, but of course with the reconciliation of many bloods. But they dispersed the people before it was over.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many bloods were forgiven that day?

Muradije Muriqi: That day, as far as I know, 22 bloods were forgiven in Smolica.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of bloods were them, were they misunderstandings?

Muradije Muriqi: No, no, they were bloods, bloods, you know, murders, blood feuds, there was blood, someone was killed. But people came without us going to their houses, they came and forgave [blood] voluntarily. They went up to the stage all of a sudden, and for example said, "I am X and I forgive this, this and this."

Part Two

Muradije Muriqi: I have to mention one case in Bec, the son of that house was killed, I mean, the brother of the boy to whom we were talking, Professor Bardhyl Çaushi was with us as well, people probably know him, he went missing during the war and nothing is known about his fate. We were in that family and they really welcomed us so warmly, and we tried to reach the conclusion, to forgive the blood, but there was no way we could reach that point. I mean, we went around it, everybody told their stories, every student tried to, to convince him, various professors, and one moment I don't know how a pen fell from professor Bardhyl's hand, a pen with the national flag printed on it. And while he was talking to the person who was supposed to forgive the blood, he stopped for a second and stared to the pen, he took it and threw it in front of his legs and said, "We have come here to forgive the blood in the name of this flag, we haven't come here for the *gjakësor*." And he, with a very great struggle and an extraordinary manhood, stood up and hugged the professor and forgave the blood of his brother at last.

Then the boy and the girl who couldn't speak at all entered, they couldn't even open their mouth, we started crying, they hugged all of us and didn't speak a word, none of us, the one who forgave it, nor the mother of the boy, when she entered the room, none of us couldn't either...Those moments are indescribable, trust me, those moments are the ones that really great people can make happen, it's not that everybody can, and those tears were really...we also cried for that person, even though we didn't know him, because the case was really touching. An extraordinarily touching case.

His best friend had killed him and went to his mourning, I mean, the *gjakësi* was a teacher, I mean, he was a teacher when he killed him. That case was to me, a case I will never forget and a case that, the case of my parent seems nothing compared to it, it was a really, really difficult one. But they became real men, they became strong and forgave in the name of the professor who really, he used the pen and the flag that was printed on it. Because maybe the regime of the *shkau* had made us stronger,

stronger than we are today that we don't have them here, it seems like we have weakened, it seems like we have become weak, we don't love each-other, we don't want to see each-other, this is terrible.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You told us that you were an activist during the Reconciliation Action, did it make you stronger to get over your own pain?

Muradije Muriqi: Of course, of course, that's...yes, yes, of course because then whenever I went, I felt proud because I had, I could say to someone, "Forgive it!" Because I had forgiven it myself and that helped also the Gjakova Council of Blood Feuds Reconciliation, it helped it a lot, because first I came from the well-known family of Zhyl Selmani, then I came from a family which was known by the people. Then I was an actress by title, and people took it in a positive way, because, you know, it is a woman who opens the door and goes and asks [to forgive]. I mean, they had, they accepted it very closely when I spoke, wherever I spoke, I didn't speak in every place because there were also others who spoke. But wherever I could spoke, they didn't last longer, they immediately stood up and forgave the blood, "You have fallen from the pear tree, let us fall together with you," and they forgave it. They became real men and forgave it.

I remember one case when we went to Skivjan, I mentioned it earlier that blood cannot be forgiven under conditions, because if you forgive it under conditions, then it's not forgiving. We went to a family in Skivjan, I am not mentioning the name because I don't want to become....not that I don't know it. We went inside, we sat down and *sofra*,²³ meat, *rakia*,²⁴ drinks came in two-three seconds, and they served the *sofra* in front of us, tap tap tap tap tap {shows with hands}. They put the...we were around 50 people, students and professors, all of them university professors. And Anton [Çetta] just looked at all of us once without saying any word, and we took the message, Because we, wherever we went in, we went outside without eating or drinking, I mean, that was maybe a little bit stronger....

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Not at the family of the victim, neither at...

Muradije Muriqi: Not at all, anywhere. And once we went in there and they brought all of those in front of us, we were shocked because we didn't know what we were supposed to do next, because that was the first case and, we didn't, didn't...have, and we all looked at professor Anton. He said, "We have come to forgive blood, we haven't come to eat or drink. We are not like those *pleqnarë*²⁵ who eat and drink and don't reconcile, but we have come in the name of Kosovo youth to forgive the blood you have." He said, "Yes, yes, I forgive it," he said, "Yes, I forgive it," he said, "as long as Ibrahim Rugova is alive." And we all were shocked, we didn't understand, at that moment we didn't understand why he was saying, "For as long as Ibrahim Rugova is alive," it was not...it was not clear to us. And Anton stood up and said, "Leave after me." We left everything the way it was, and we left after the professor and gathered downstairs.

²³ Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

²⁴ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

²⁵ *Pleqnarë* has the same roots as *pleq*, the elderly in the society, traditionally the mediators in a blood feud reconciliation or other contentious community and family issues.

Now we all wanted to know why the professor asked us to do that, you know, we didn't understand, he said, "Listen, many years ago there was a similar blood [feud] in the village of Baballoq," he said, "And once he forgave the blood, people, *pleqnarë* didn't discuss it any longer in order to understand what the person who forgave the blood wanted to say, but, 'eh, big happiness, the blood is forgiven,'" and they went to notify the other person that the blood was forgiven, and that time he said, "Yes, I forgive it for as long as Tito is alive, at that time there was Tito." I mean, and he forgave the blood, in fact he forgave it to the ones who were there. But the day Tito died, he went and killed him on his own property and left him dead. And the professor told us, "He is giving us conditions. The blood under conditions will not be forgiven from today on, and I always told you that it's not allowed under conditions. Don't accept blood under condition." This blood was under conditions, you know, he is forgiven for as long as Ibrahim Rugova is alive, once Ibrahim Rugova dies he comes and kills you and that's it.

Cases, and cases. I am saying, there were various cases, there were cases where one was killed for a candy, there was this kind of case in the municipality of Gjakova that one was killed, terrible, terrible. The father wanted to forgive it, but his sons didn't agree and he told Anton Çetta, "What am I supposed to say, o Anton, when the tree has withered, the branches as well, and even the roots that have remained are withered?" I mean, he didn't have the strength to forgive it, because he had his sons who didn't want to forgive, and it was not forgiven. But however, people would become strong, they would become real men, brave men, and would forgive .

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you at Verrat e Llukës?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, I was there twice, once before the war and another time after the war. I mean, at Verrat e Llukës we were surrounded, we were surrounded by armored cars... there might've been hundreds of thousands of them, I am not saying this now, there were people and this is known, there were almost one million people. For one second there, I remember as if it happened today, professor Zekerija Cana, only God saved us, when we came in front of the tanks of the *shkije*, they could [shoot] because of fear, because there were big masses and we surrounded them. I mean, they could shoot us because of fear, but there was no need for fear, they could simply shoot because they had the means on their hands. He showed his chest {shows with hands} and said, "Shoot, kill us, here we are. It doesn't matter, we will stay, here we are." And they shut up and went silently inside their tanks, they could destroy us, they could kill large masses of people.

Terrible, isn't it? We surrounded them, but the strength came from down, somehow a strength...an indescribable strength, a strength...such a big one that I don't know...it never crossed your mind that you should be afraid or not, or that they will kill you or not. Those moments are indescribable. One can say I do it like this, I describe it one way or another, but those things are hard to describe because you only feel them from within, bravery comes from within, also weakness. There were cases where we were afraid, pretty normal, but there were also cases where we weren't afraid at all. We just faced them and said, "We are this or that," and they didn't stop us, especially when we said that. But there were cases when we were, we were afraid because our head was always in danger because they tailed us. They knew, they would come to the theatre, would stay there, would check when I left and when I arrived because they stayed downstairs by the doorman....but it never impressed me, I never had the

feeling of fear. Maybe dumb is the one who is not afraid, but I wasn't afraid, even though I am saying again...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In these gatherings, were you ever there in the role of the actress or in another performing role?

Muradije Muriqi: We held...we usually interpreted various poetry that had...their topic or their content was national, I especially remember one [case] here in Novosella of Gjakova, [the gathering] was held in the church because there was no opportunity to hold it anywhere else, because the police didn't allow us. There was the service and we used it, the priest gave us the opportunity to gather there. Many bloods were forgiven there, I don't remember the exact number, but many bloods were forgiven. We performed there together with Ramazan Berkani, a colleague of mine here in the theatre, we performed in many places, in the many places where we went, when monotony struck or when it was seen that there was a...need for some re-energizing. We were ready and we, of course we performed, because the role of an actor, or the actor as an actor, is always to be on stage with great pride and pleasure, as much as we could, if we couldn't do anything good at least some lines, some lines, we wrote some lines and performed them and we were welcomed really well.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Because I've noticed that there was always an artistic program in the gatherings...

Muradije Muriqi: There was. Yes, yes, there was, there was...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The content was always national?

Muradije Muriqi: National, I am talking about the Action, I mean that was the main weapon. It was the national content because that was the reason it was initiated, the action as the Action was initiated.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did reconciliation end for you?

Muradije Muriqi: It didn't end for me...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You still go to reconciliations?

Muradije Muriqi:...to me, it didn't end. If there is the opportunity for me to do something, if I had the slightest opportunity to do something, I would not hesitate to go. To me it doesn't matter whether that people's word they mention is in Skopje or in Shkodra, it's not important, what's important is if I can...contribute, I would not hesitate to go. Just as I did, I didn't participate in the war, I cannot say that I fought when I didn't. But I participated everywhere in the other way, with my spirit.

Once we returned after the war, I participated in... in 1992, in memoriam of martyrs, of people who died for this country, for the freedom we enjoy today, and I never went there in order to be paid back. I was present, the singers would take around one thousand Marks at that time, they took one thousand Euros, they took five hundred Euros, I don't blame them, because it was the organizers who did such things. I, as an actress, together with my colleagues of the theatre of Gjakova which is not...I mean, they all participated, someone here, someone there. I went there without compensation, maybe I spent [money] myself only, but only, in one way, it seemed to me that I could help them in the moral

sense somehow. Even if nothing else, I wanted to make the pain easier for the parents because their pain is indescribable.

Most of them buried theirs [people], and many others didn't and don't know where they are and to me it's really great if I can go and make their pain as easier as I can. However, they invite me, I go. I go to the families whose sons and daughters were killed, I go wherever I can, no matter. I never hesitate, I never did, and I go. I went to Pashtrik, to Prekaz...there's no place I didn't go to. I went without hesitating wherever they invited me. There are, I mean, I went for ten years in a row to the village of Gusa here near Peja, I mean to her family, Deda and so on, they never invited anyone else, I always went there. They invite me to their weddings, they invite me to the bachelorette parties of their daughters, I mean, I've become a part of the family because I always went there. I, I helped them in the sense of making their pain easier with some line, with some poetry, with some good interpretation, with something that touched them, with some mourning, I also did mourning because they saw, they felt it as necessary. I mean, as an actress, I tried to make it as easier as I could, in the sense of pain.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us about your professional life in the '90s?

Muradije Muriqi: But I had the luck of getting employed in the theatre of Gjakova, because the actors who were in the theatre of Gjakova were well-known actors, who were known by not only the entire Kosovo, but also I mean, audiences abroad. And it was a theatre to be envied by many other theatres, no matter where they are. I had a good time until the war happened, I mean, also under occupation, our theatre gave national shows, three national and a foreign one, I mean, I am talking about the pre-war period. And we usually gave shows for children, I mean, we gave an annual children's show, we gave it in all the schools, also in the villages in the Gjakova region especially, but also in other places.

You know, our theatre did an extraordinary work, it did a very big work. We always had four premieres per year, one for children, I mean, five. A theatre that was highly known and valued, I mean we, in the last year, I mean '99, we held theatrical rehearsals on the stage, *shkije* would enter and leave the theatre with big bloody knives with which they killed people all around. We went and held the rehearsals, we went to the theater, we didn't miss a day. Until the day they chased us, I mean, they removed us from the building. When we returned after the war, everything was destroyed, even the theatre itself, only the building had remained.

At that moment, we only had one children's show prepared to be shown in...and we went on a tour around Kosovo, we gave the show for children because we knew that people were devastated, people were destroyed, the buildings demolished and whatnot, spiritually and morally devastated. And in one way we tried, we tried to gather those children, to, to, to bring them closer to ourselves, to do, to do something that is better for them, and we managed to. But in this freedom, I am saying in this freedom, because I feel free, because the *shkije* are not here, but I don't know where our politics is going, which direction is it going to, or where did it take this direction from. Our nation is completely disappointed. People have remained without food, without houses...and they still stay silent, they continue to silently give the lands of our country, to do things that people who have experienced

massacres and massacres are not supposed to do, or maybe those who didn't experience them feel differently, I don't know.

It happened to us once in 2008, they removed the entire ensemble with an order from God knows who. We were removed, they didn't bring any paper, any note, nothing, they simply removed us from the salary list and since that day we are in the streets. I mean, we worked for nothing, everything we did went to waste, nothing was worthwhile. It seems like the people who are in this shape, who try to do such things, since that day, we are without salaries. I mean, we gave our life, our youth to that theatre, today we are outside of it. When a project happens, if the managements finds it reasonable, the ones who own it, the ones who are there, any director who wants to invite you, they will, if they don't want to invite you, find your own way to make a living.

So to me, I am saying in the professional way, this is a terrible thing to happen to people who have left their life there, their health, and to be left in the situation we are now is a terrible thing. To me it is unacceptable, because you don't know the reason they did it for, I still don't know it. We asked a number people, we wrote, we wrote complains, we went on televisions, to the media, to ...the reason, why, how? "No, we had to remove a three percent of the civil servants because there were too many of them." Actors are actually not civil servants, but someone could do it and did it. And since then we are like that, without an income...I mean, fortunately, thanks to that honourable family of my parents who educated and raised us that way, in that spirit, today I live normally, without anything, without begging anyone for anything, because I have my brothers who take care of me.

I live in Gjakova, currently I am spending most of my life in Peja, because here we are not working, we are not engaged, very rarely. So, I don't know what to do here and I go to my family. My brothers help me no matter that they have their families, they are always open and always helped me and are still doing so. I hope something will be fixed so at least I will have some income in these last years of my life, because we've suffered a lot, we've done a lot for this country for it to at least provide us with a normal life. But, however, I can see that there's not...there isn't any positive development happening. But again and again, they say, hope dies last, I hope that some miracle will happen these eight years before I retire and they will return us where we were.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the war for you, where did it find you?

Muradije Muriqi: One of my sisters is married here in Gjakova, and just before the bombing she asked me, she said, "Please, my sister, don't go to Peja and leave me all on my own, because if you are in Gjakova, at least I think I am with someone," because she had her husband, her mother-in-law, a little son, I mean, he was one year and something. And I decided to stay in Gjakova. I don't know what other people say, I am talking about myself, it never crossed my mind and I never thought about it, because we were not indoctrinated that way and we weren't raised with hatred or I don't know any other reason, but I never thought it would happen the way it did. I mean, on the night of the bombing I was in my private apartment which I payed for, you know, here in the center of Gjakova, with a family, precisely with the family of Mimoza Kusari, I mean, at the old house they had. They built new houses and that one had remained that way and they gave it to me without paying, you know, without having

to pay rent, but they allowed me to be sheltered there, since I had no apartment, and I settled down at their house.

I was there the night it happened, I was all on my own without anyone, and I didn't hear anything at all because the house was very far...far deep from the main street, in the middle of the city centre, but as you know in Gjakova houses have very long yards, especially the old ones, and the night when the bombing happened the *Çarshia e Madhe*²⁶ was burned, many people were killed and I didn't hear anything. Very interesting, the *Çarshia e Madhe* was right behind the house where I was living, when I went out in the morning I saw the military troops in front of my doors, many *shkije*, chasing people, beating them, chasing them, "Eeeu," I said, "Where am I like this, for not knowing anything."

When I went upstairs to the second floor, I saw the entire *Çarshia e Madhe* burned in flames, it was all burned, and I took, I realized the gravity, I mean, what was happening and I went inside and closed the door. After half an hour, eleven policemen and soldiers came. I was alone at home, I had just woken up, I was in my pajamas, still not dressed up, they came inside and I, (sighs), people often ask me to describe that moment, but returning there is very difficult to me, because that was an experience that cannot be described.

I was all alone and they thought I have many people inside. When they came in, they broke the doors, because I, they knocked, but just as I was going out because I knew that the entrance was locked, and the knocking on the door didn't seem logical to me because the entrance was locked and until I went to the door, just at the threshold of the door that led to the corridor, as I was going to open the doors, they broke in, they came inside. When eleven people came in, eleven or twelve, I don't want to lie, a high number of them, some of them with hats and their faces painted to make you crazy, two meters tall, big, built up, with automatic weapons, with knives, with...God, God! And they came inside, they came upstairs, they came inside the room where I was, they went to the other room and one of them went out and in Serbian said, "She is alone."

And I stopped because a strength came to me I don't know where from, I don't know how to describe it, he asked, "What are you?" I stopped for a moment, I didn't know what to say, because as soon as he heard me speaking Serbian, he thought I was a *shkinë*, because there were [Serbs] in Gjakova, but very few of them, I said, "I am Albanian." "Albanian?" I said, "Yes." "Where do you work?" I said, "In the theatre." "You work in the theatre?" I said, "Yes." An old man entered the room and said, "I know her." I didn't know who he was, I didn't know him, he said, "You know her, right? Get out!" That's what he said to the other ones who were there. He went out, and let me only describe one moment, one grabbed me by my arms and threw me to the other one, and they spoke words...the most immoral words in the world, offensive words and dirty ones and whatnot. One grabbed me and threw me to the other....in that way, it's psychologically and physically terrible to be grabbed, but I don't know, I had a kind of strength and I wasn't afraid, I don't know why I wasn't afraid. And one said, "Let's throw her in the well," because the well was in front of the entrance, the other one said, "No, let's send her to that room," to the hearth, here in Gjakova they call it *akqihone*, but the summer house that... and the other said, "Let's send her there and slaughter her into pieces, I will cut her hands, you will cut her

²⁶ Literally Big Market, old part of Gjakova.

legs.” The other one, “Let’s take her out by the *kabzer*.²⁷” The other one, “Let’s make her blind,” many many things.

That old one entered once again, because they had a tactic, five or six of them would attack you and another one would enter as if he was coming to save you, while the others would kick you from behind. That’s how...that was the second night. But then I realized, because I didn’t know it that night, but then after listening to other people, I was convinced that that’s how it was. He entered and said, “Set her free,” he said, “Because she works in the theatre with some,” the name of a, of a worker who worked with us, he was a *shka* and he said, “Let her...let her go ,” he said, “Do not tease her,” he said, “Because she is not the one we think she is.” And they set me free, you know. I couldn’t even wear my shoes, I couldn’t take my bag nor anything. They chased me out the way I was in my pajamas and I walked. I mean, there were around two hundred meters from my house to the entrance, of course, that’s how it must be, I walked all the time waiting where, where they will kill me from, what for, where the bullet would catch me, because that’s how the moment was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you go when you went out?

Muradije Muriqi:...and I went outside, when I went outside the doors of the yard, they remained inside, there were many tanks, many people. They would take people out of their apartments and gather them in the middle of the town center, in front of the Hotel Pashtriku, with that crowd like that, someone in their night clothes, someone dressed, someone undressed, someone, just the way they found them in their houses. They brought us there, they put us in front and for a moment I saw someone who worked with us, his name was Miloš. And I saw them there, he was dressed and I went near him and said, “Miloš, I am going out of the circle, kill me.” And he said, “Wait one more minute,” and I waited for a minute at the corner by the Department Store in Gjakova. He waved his hand to me to move, I didn’t know where I wanted to go, but the main thing was to get out of the crowd, because I knew that something was about to happen, because you could see their faces. I started running, and some other young boys ran after me, to use that opportunity, but once we passed the Department Store, I don’t know where those boys flew, they disappeared in a matter of minutes, they probably found a solution, they escaped, they went somewhere, and I went to a friend of mine at the Bus Station.

I spent two or three nights there, I don’t want to lie, but I don’t precisely remember it now. They would come during the day and would say, “Don’t move, we are here, don’t leave, you are safe.” In the evening, they would take all their families and send them to the factory Erenik, they would save their families, and then would torture the others as they wanted. And the day the people of Vesa’s family were killed, 28 of them in the basement, I saw them with my own eyes. I was on the third floor, on watch duty, because the youth would gather there and go together, to find a way to reach the KLA,²⁸ because there was an appeal to join. If they didn’t have the opportunity to find a way, they would return to their families, we kept watch, usually it was we, women who kept watch to see where they

²⁷ Turkish: *kabzer*, throat.

²⁸ Kosovo Liberation Army.

are coming from and direct them. I was on the third floor when the *shkau*, their neighbor, came and said, “They are all gathered in the basement.” They threw them inside the basement, that’s something that even a horror movie cannot describe, I don’t think there is a movie that can describe the terror of that night, the scream of the people who were killed, they were killed inside, they were burned in the basement.

I will never forget it, I will never forget it, but I never find the strength to remember, to return, to, to recall one case...And my luck was that one person saw that I don’t belong to that family, and came upstairs, when he saw that I was upstairs, I mean, I was lost, I didn’t know where I was and he saw that I was lost and slapped me in the face, I came to my senses once he slapped me. He grabbed me by my hands and we ran downstairs, as soon as we got outside the house, I mean there was a small space, here was a small field where all the people had gathered, in one moment, we just saw the house blow up, *fiu* {shows with hands}. Fire, you know, the house burned. I mean, I survived for a matter of seconds, that man saved me because I would die because I would not...I mean, I got stuck there listening to them and I was lost, I lost the human feeling as a human. And we went downstairs, three-four hours later they came and gathered us and moved us from that place to the Bus Station.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who did that?

Muradije Muriqi:...*shkije, shkije*, masked and whatnot, and they forced us to walk around the city. Rruga e Stavilecit [Stavilec Street] as they call it, was terrible, wounded people, killed people, they forced us to walk among them, and when we went down to the exit of the city, there are Catholic churches there, *shkinat* and *shkijet* would tell us, “Kiss the ground, because you’ll never see it again.” Such words, words, oh my God, oh my God, even the earth cannot bear them, but they were strong, armed, there’s nothing you could do with that whole group. I only found them after a month and a half, so an indescribable terror, a terror that, *inshallah*, will never be repeated on this nation. That’s how the war found me, that’s how, then we returned, in fact I went to Durrës then, where I found my people.

A friend of mine settled, a colleague of mine, Medi Popaj, settled in Saranda. As a sign of gratitude to Saranda and the South [of Albania] for accepting the people with such modesty and such generosity, we prepared a show in Saranda, *Në Kosovë do të qëndrojmë* [In Kosovo We Will Remain] with a script by Din Mehmeti and Besim Bokshi, both of them deceased. We prepared a show, we took the youth of each area of Kosovo who were settled there, and prepared the show and gave it as a sign of gratitude to Saranda, on June 3, 1999, and then we returned to Kosovo. In fact, I returned on July 11, because we gave the show all around southern Albania.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you return to Peja?

Muradije Muriqi: First I returned to Peja, I went to my family, then I returned to Gjakova.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they burn your house?

Muradije Muriqi: Ours yes, in Peja, but also the house where I lived here, yes. I mean, nothing survived. Fortunately, I didn’t have victims in my family, neither did I have them in the wide *rreth*, nor

the close *rreth*. Fortunately my family was all completely fine, they survived, also my sister here in Gjakova survived. When we came here to Gjakova, then I announced it, because we had to announce that we had returned. Then, like that, with a hard life, just like it is after a war, without anything. They gave me this apartment after a year and a half, sheltered me here, and in fact I am here since then. I thanked them. Independently from the fact that they were very hard times, I am very well, since I survived, it's good, good. I saw enough, they invited me in a number of cases to give various statements, I went, I gave them very proudly, and I wasn't afraid, but I also never had any problem because they had...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You are talking about before the war that they, they invited you to give a statement or something?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, yes, before the war, before the war because...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they follow you?

Muradije Muriqi: Yes, of course, of course, yes, especially after the Blood Feuds Reconciliation, we were picked up, once something happened, we were convened right away. But in the theatre I had luck, because there were three *shkije* working in the theatre, one director and two technicians, and they loved me a lot, because they thought that I was a Montenegrin, because I speak Serbian with a Montenegrin accent. And they thought that I was a Montenegrin all the time, and they didn't change their approach when they found out that I was an Albanian either, you know? They talked well and when the time came for me to go and give statements and so on, they went after me and gave the statement that, "She is clear, you don't even need to follow her, because she is not one of those who make trouble or made trouble." I am not saying that it saved me, but maybe the fact that I spoke a clear Serbian, and they couldn't provoke me in the sense of the language, because I spoke the language fluently and I didn't have any problem with them calling me and questioning me, questioning me.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did they ask you?

Muradije Muriqi: Well...there was nothing they would not ask you, they asked, "Why did they kill your father, who killed your father's people?" They knew well who killed them, "But you are from that family, why don't you do? Why don't you like it this way? Why don't you like spending time with us? We are good." You know, this kind of nonsense discussions. Just as every aggressor who tries... however, they didn't beat me physically, but they abused me psychologically. I didn't have the fate of being beaten, for example, the way they hurt my mother when they were leaving the house. She died, and one of her arms was shorter than the other, because they broke her arm while she was protecting her sons, she didn't allow them to take her sons. However, I had a good fate, I didn't, they followed us, especially us from the Reconciliation Action. Around six students who were with us, we were followed pretty much, Pal Lekaj, the mayor of Gjakova before Mimoza was among them, he was followed a lot, because his family is patriotic, and a nation-lover family that has always given, they helped a lot in the Blood Feuds Reconciliation. Let me not forget to mention Don Viktor, of the church of the village of

Bishtazhin, he reconciled many bloods and just called us, gave us the names and told us that this is this way, that is this way, I mean, he helped us a lot.

There were many cases, but maybe exactly when one wants to mention them, they don't come to one's mind, or they unintentionally forget to mention someone. Those of the Blood Feuds Reconciliation were hard days, they were hard days, because we were followed, our head was continually in danger, but I don't know, we didn't stop, I don't know. I don't know what kind of strength made us, made us or drove us to go there, I don't know, I don't know how to describe it, but we went, we weren't afraid at all, but we went and we didn't stop. I am saying, if they didn't interrupt the gatherings, our people would be so bonded to each other that there would be no one in the world who could break them, but the gatherings dispersed, people, I don't know, I don't know why, but, hard, it was hard, very hard.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you have something to add? Because I think that this interview is done.

Muradije Muriqi: I don't know what you are interested in (smiles) so, ask, I don't know...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: We took this part...

Muradije Muriqi: But what do you...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: If you would like to somehow conclude your story...

Muradije Muriqi: I don't know what I would add more (sighs), maybe to eternally thank those who are not anymore, those of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Action, who are not anymore, especially those of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Action, the various deceased professors, some of them missing, who we still don't know where they are, professor Qamil Gexha,²⁹ professor Bardhyl Çausi, Fehmi Agani, Bajram Kelmendi and many many others who really did a lot for this country and today are not even being remembered. Din Mehmeti, Qamil Gexha, the deceased professor whose son was killed during the war, a very well-known historian. Such a pity not to mention, such a pity not to think of those people, of Anton Çetta, a man whom only a few nations can have. To be forgotten like this, to not remember the people who gave a lot for this country, to me this is something unacceptable and inexplicable.

I had a case, one day, I saw a TV show on the monument of Anton Çetta, on which they worked for many years and today they do not put it anywhere, but didn't he deserve to be somewhere, to be seen by somebody, some youngster would ask, "Who is this man?" He did a lot for this country, not only Anton, there are many other Antons, but it is very hard for me to believe how people are forgetting our great people this fast, they are not forgetting the foreigners, but they are forgetting our own, why, why is this happening to our nation? A big wonder, a big wonder. They talk about a person who did a

²⁹ Qamil Gexha (1934-2005), historian.

number of troubles or a number of bad things, *hyhy* {onomatopoeic}, they become very powerful, while the people who gave for this country are not mentioned by anyone, terrible.

Din Mehmeti, a well known writer, a man of the quill, who is not mentioned by anyone, I don't know. Ukshin Hoti³⁰ and many others, whom I don't remember at the moment, I don't know why they are forgotten like that, I don't know why people are afraid of these people who really deserve [to be remembered]. Who am I to talk about them? Nobody. I am someone who was with them, side by side, and I know their value since then, but that was a great initiative, a great courage, an, an, an achievement that cannot be described by anyone. To be, to be thrown into oblivion, the Blood Feuds Reconciliation, an Action of Reconciliation, an action of the youth, of the youth which is, is the hope of this life, the hope of this nation, to be forgotten like this, I don't know, I don't know what to say, and I don't know what to add more.

³⁰ Ukshin Hoti (1943-1999), philosopher and politicians, was sentenced to five years in prison in 1994. He disappeared at the time of his release and his whereabouts are still unknown.

