

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH MURAT BEJTA

Pristina | Date: May 18, 2016

Duration: 158 minutes

Present:

1. Murat Bejta (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (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

Murat Bejta: I was born in the spring of 1936 in the village of Zhiti, municipality of Podujeva. So, concerning the distance, our village is 25 kilometers from Podujeva and extends to the border with Serbia. It's one of the last Albanian and Kosovar villages which extend until the border with Serbia. Our village is approximately four to five kilometers from the border with Serbia. It extends in the direction of a place in Serbia, precisely at the border with Kosovo, a place which was also used by Romans, the ore of that place, because they are connected with the ore of Trepça. And provinces with various mines, with lead, which extends to that part, goes through our village.

And, as I said it earlier, relying on my birth year, I experienced the Second World War when I was eight or nine. And I heard the firing of rifles and cannons between the Albanians who were defending their land and the Serbian *četniks*¹ who wanted to get into our villages, also our village, to kill us, rob us, massacre us, while I was looking after the cattle in our fields which are called *konaku i keq* [bad hospitality]. I call it "bad" because there is a very rough mountainside there, but fortunately at the peak of it leads you to a plateau, which is a plateau from where you can see the border. The border cannot be seen while climbing to the plateau of *konaku i keq*. Not very deep in the mountain, there is a spring whose flow doesn't stop during the summer, nor during the winter. And we always used it as shepherds, but it was also used by the workers who harvested the fields and by those who collected the grass and worked up to the point where *konaku i keq* ends, the haystack, the hay as they call it, up to the end, and bring it to the village during the winter in the snow with a sled, by loading that sled and bringing it to the yard in order to feed the animals.

¹ Serbian 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.

And so the ending of the Second World War happened in the fall of 1944. In those regions of Kosovo, this happened in the beginning of October until around November 22 or 23, 1944.

Jeta Rexha: Where was your family during that time?

Murat Bejta: Our family was in the village. And... in the house we found... the crate with flour with its cover removed and broken, even the wheat and the corn was shed all around the yard and in the corners of the fields behind our house where there was a mountainside which lead to *Kroni i keq* [bad spring]. And, they had rolled the cans of pickles and other food, as I said, they had even left them in the yard, the flour and grain crate. There were also explosives such as bombs, various shells which were dangerous. And as a child, I was not aware of the danger we were in, but I was personally endangered.

And one day while I was looking after the cattle in the pastures, and in the hills and the valleys around the fields and the village houses, I found a shell, a capsule which was half full and half empty. Those who know about weapons understand perfectly well what this condition means. The length of this shell was almost ten to eleven centimeters. And according to the military technique, the shell was half full. I took it in my hand, playing with it and moving around with it all day long until night came and I had to return home with the cattle. It was cold as you know, fall and... before the war, we couldn't harvest all the fields, especially not the corn because we were forced to move from the village just like everyone else from the Llap and Gollak region as well as Kamenica, Gjilan and Ferizaj, also the part of Shala e Bajgorës to Mitrovica. We were all forced to move and flee with the cattle, with the clothes, with as much food as we managed to take in order to survive from hunger and death. We were accompanied by the guns and other weapons of the partisans and the Serbian *četnik* all the time.

We managed to go far away, first to the village of Bajgora, where my maternal uncles are still located, because my mother was born in the village of Bajgora. Then, the next day we were forced to escape again in order to survive. We went through the valleys of the village of Bare, then we went through the village of Tërstena, both villages of the municipality of Vushtrri. And near Tërstena there is a pretty big village which was called Pasoma back then, and now is called Suma. At the village's end, in a wide field with a house with walls almost as wide as a castle, which in Turkish is also called *kala*² (smiles)... there was an Albanian family, a well known and brave Albanian family, not known only in the village of Shala e Bajgorës but in other Albanian inhabited lands, the family of Sherif Voca, Adem Voca, Hetem Voca and their families.

We settled in that house but there were other families who settled there as well, and there was not enough room for all the people who were sheltered inside that house, in its rooms and its kitchen. And we, but also a large number of other people, were forced to sleep in the lawn on straw, covered a little

² Turkish: Kale, castle.

with blankets, without pillows, sometimes we even lay on cold grass. This is how we stayed outside our village and our houses until we returned, the German and Italian forces that were in Kosovo during that time withdrew, and partisans came and settled everywhere. They came until there, they settled in Vushtrri, in Mitrovica, but first Podujeva, because Podujeva is at the border. Podujeva is very near the nowadays border, which is called Merdare and where the offices and the border between Serbia and Kosovo buildings are located. We stayed in front of our house for six weeks, our neighbors did so as well. And how it is historically known, Mitrovica was liberated on November 23, 1944.

Let's return to the village where we were before. And to the moment when night came and thus the time to take the cattle back to our stable, to our yard. I left them grazing because the dark of night hadn't come yet. In the hills of the village I noticed that our neighbors were still harvesting the corn in the field near our field, which extended up to the border of their field around 150 meters from our yard gate. There was a fence between two fields and in the middle of the fence there was a *qershi* [cherry] tree. But the villagers call it *qurshi* (smiles). I learned the accuracy of our language later on, during my education and learning the Albanian language as well as other languages. I went close to them in order to warm up because those who were harvesting the corn had lit a fire to keep themselves warm, because it was cold.

There was the daughter of a neighbor, his name was Hyse (smiles). And when the son of my paternal aunt Refiqe from the village of Kaqanoll noticed me... they were living in our house because their house in Kaqanoll had been burned down by partisans. The boy, who was almost my age, whose name was Ibish, came from the house yard and sat next to me, close to the fire. I tried to blow the shell because of my childish curiosity. I was lucky that in the moment I put it close to the fire. And just when I wanted to blow it, it didn't explode, otherwise it would have blinded me. I was on my knees, Ibish was standing next to me on my left side, he was holding some burning twigs. I was holding the shell in my left hand. His left side wasn't working for me and I took a twig with my right hand and like this I brought it closer {shows with hands} for two-three seconds. The shell exploded and it took away two of my fingers {shows his hand and the missing fingers} here, and half of my left hand palm and these two fingers remained like this {shows his hand} and they were bleeding, dirtying my clothes and my chest.

At that point I couldn't stand anymore, while walking towards the house doors, Ibish was crying all the time because he had been hit by some pieces on his fingers, his eyebrows and the eyelashes of one eye. And Hyse had been hit by a small piece in the upper part of the eyebrow, but he fortunately hadn't been hit in the eye. And neither was I, for my good luck, I still have these two eyes with which I am looking (smiles) ... and I can read.

But the fingers bothered me, those that remained, whose skin was crawling {shows the hanging of the skin}, I grabbed them with my right hand and threw them before entering the house yard. And I don't know whether my mother or my sisters collected my fingers or not (smiles). And, I lay on the bed of

our room. My mother started removing the blood stains from the clothes that were all dirtied by blood, then my face as well... she pulled a shirt which was knit by her own hands. She took the scissors and cut it from here {shows the upper side of his hands} to my chest and my throat. She pulled them on the other side and covered me with a quilt. Then, I continued like that and the medication, I mean, the cure in order to somehow use this hand lasted one year, one year and a half. It is called recidivism in medical terminology, the recidivism [of the injury] happened very slowly, but a very hard part of the [recovery] was that the fingers had remained, because a part of my thumbs were cut, had remained uncovered, because there was no flesh to cover them. And once I touched something, the blood would burst and I couldn't stop it... but I survived!

And the spring of 1946 came slowly, when at the school... sorry, when the elementary school with the first grade was opened in our village, my brother Maliq had been invited to go to the first grade of elementary school before me. He was almost one year and a half older than I. And when my father saw the invitation, he thought and said to Maliq, "Come here!" And to me, "Come here. Maliq, you have been invited to go to school, but I cannot cut the beech and oak, the oak and other trees without you..." because they had already started to cut the trees to sell woods in order to survive. "Murat is left without half of his left hand, he cannot use the *sopatë* [ax in standard Albanian]." Of course he, as well as many other Albanians and Kosovars, didn't know the word *sopatë*, but they called it *sakicë* [ax in Gheg Albanian] (coughs). "He cannot use the saw to cut the trees and make planks either. So, Murat will go [to school] instead of you. And listen Murat, you are not Murat from the day you go to school, but you are Maliq, otherwise they will sue me," how the uneducated people used to say back then, they will *kaznitin* [sue me] in Serbian. "So you will go there instead of Maliq, that's how you will be called."

I went and slowly started school, it went well. We had a *hoxha*³ as a teacher, a *hoxha* of the Azemi family from the village of Pollata, this family is also known as a nation loving and brave family not only all around Llap but even farther. Especially their ancestor called Azem Pollata. He had four or five grown up children, *hoxha* was one of them, he was called Mulla Bahtiri by the people. There was no other literate person in those areas starting from Podujeva as I said, 25 kilometers far, there was no other literate person. I am deliberately using the word literate because literate means at least knowing how to read and write. So, the one who learns is called *nxënës* [lit. catcher], from the verb *nxënë* [to catch], and the one who doesn't know the Albanian language is called *i panxënë* [lit. uncatched or illiterate], but most people use the word with Greek⁴ origin after the first letters... alpha and beta. So, the alphabet are the letters, so the one who doesn't know how to read and write these letters... is called with the Greek prefix with the opposite meaning of its root, *analfabet*. So, illiterate, one who doesn't know how to read nor how to write.

³ Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

⁴ Here the speaker is referring to the Albanian term *analfabet*, which means illiterate.

And I... he knew, he knew how to write Albanian in Latin letters, but he had finished almost all his education in Serbian. But, however, he knew arithmetics well, also some elementary subjects, reading-writing, conversation. And he taught us in the first two years, 1946-1947 the first grade, and 1947-1948 the second of elementary school. I did very well, but also I was physically well developed, I was skillful. The end of the school year came in June, 1948. And as I said, the school was required to give the grade transcripts to the students of the second grade in order for them to go to the three months summer course which was organized in Mitrovica for the whole Kosovo. We, the students to whom the teachers gave the grade transcripts, and whom [the teachers] instructed, proposed and even ordered to go to Mitrovica for the summer course, hit the road. Sometime by foot, sometime by some other means of transportation, but back then there were no buses or trains from Podujeva, we only managed to take the train from Fushë Kosova to go to Mitrovica.

We went there, settled in the dormitory and were divided into four classrooms which were already established with an approximate number of 33 to 35 students and started classes, A, B, C, D. They placed me in the first class, A. We were 33 students, we went on with the classes. Most of the teachers were from Mitrovica, but from other cities of Kosovo as well, also a considerable number of the teachers were from Albania, who had come during '41, '42 and '43 and had remained there. Especially the teacher with the Gjinaj lastname who was very well known... another one called Kasim and some others.

We finished classes in the end of August, because the school year was supposed to begin in September. And according to the decision they had made, only 35 students of those four classrooms, as well as those with excellent grade average point, would register in the gymnasium,⁵ with a list of names to register in the second grade without the school grade transcript. For my good luck, my name was on that list. There was my name, maybe this is too much, but I will say it, among the students from the Llap region, from Podujeva to Prishtina, I knew almost all the villages... I was the only one on that list with some others from other municipalities. So, I returned home where I stayed somewhat one week, and then I went back to Mitrovica. I registered in the third grade... or... yes there, the second grade in the gymnasium, as it was called back then *semimatura*.⁶ So this is how they were counted (smiles).

The first four grades of the elementary school were accepted as well as the first grade of gymnasium, of *semimatura*, which lasted three years and then I was supposed to continue the second grade in order to move further. So, it was the 1948-1949 school year and I started the second grade. In the gymnasium, before the second grade there had been... one year earlier there had been the class which now was in the second grade. The *semimatura* was taken in the third grade. I continued the

⁵ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

⁶ *Semimaturë* was the old set of examinations given to students after the fourth year of elementary school.

second grade in 1948-1949, I successfully finished it. According to the rules and laws that were in power at that time, the third grade was still part of the Mitrovica gymnasium, the *semimatura* ended in the end of the third grade when the exams were passed and the grade transcripts and diplomas were awarded.

That class [the older generation] finished the second grade, but according to the laws that I mentioned earlier, they couldn't continue further to the *matura*⁷ by finishing the third grade, but they remained outside the school desks. It was our turn to take the *semimatura*, we were in the third grade in '49- '50. There were two classes, working parallelly, let me mention it here that the building where we were taking the classes was not appropriate for teaching them at all. There was not enough room for 20 or 25 people in the class, but there was no other [option]. There was not enough room and we continued like that. We finished the third grade, we undertook the *semimatura* exam which I passed with an excellent grade point average. But, for our good luck, the fourth grade was possible for the next school year and our generation had no interruptions, no course failings, but we continued regularly. So, it was, how to say, '50- '51, wasn't it? Because we finished the third grade in '49- '50.

So we were... as I mentioned it earlier, we were two classes, we registered in the fourth grade, two classes, but the students who had a gap year joined these two classes, they joined us. We continued the classes like this until the third grade. The third grade was in the school year '54- '55. Yes, at that point we had moved to the gymnasium building, where until the sixth or the seventh grade, I don't precisely remember now, only Serbian students had taken classes. At that point we Albanians moved to that building as well, with the director Xhevdet Pula and our Albanian Language professor and class monitor, the poet who is still alive, the honourable professor Rexhep Hoxha.

We finished the third grade, we took the *matura* exam. We were 24 students in our class, while twelve students took the exam in the first term based on their [excellent] grade point average. According to the rules, no matter how good was the grade point average in class, even if it was excellent, we had to take written exams in Albanian Language and in Mathematics. So, I had finished the eighth grade with excellent success, I took the written exams where I had excellent success as well, and based on this success I was exempted from the oral exams. And this is how it happened. From the twelve students, Selvete Rudi, Ejup Hamiti and I were the ones to be exempted from the oral *matura* exams, while the others had to take the oral exams and took the *matura* diploma just like us, and the secondary school ended here.

While I was studying during the fourth, five, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, we also had some professors who were Serbian native speakers. A Serbian women taught French to us, Natalia Tonasković. To this day, I can still say that she worked justly and with commitment. I deliberately mentioned French Language because during the lectures and in class activities, at the end of the third grade, she

⁷ *Maturë or Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

proposed, “Murat, I propose you to go to study French Language, because you will not have any obstacles in finishing the University because you have a good grade point average and a special skill for this language among other things.” Yes... I... we also had Serbian professors of Latin and Serbian of course, and of Philosophy, but shortly, however we were successful.

I obtained the *matura* and returned home. My father asked me, “How are you doing? How are you? Where do you stand? Are you the best?” (smiles) “Are you the best?” “Yes, yes, father.” I said, “Excellent, the best and the first of them all, because my mother and you have fed me well.” “Stop kidding me, otherwise I will slap you!” “No, no, it is true.” “Then, I am asking you to go and study Medicine, only Medicine.” “Father,” I said, “I am thinking about going to study French.” “I don’t know what French is, go to Medicine.” (smiles). And I got convinced, no matter whether I wanted it or not. I enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Belgrade in ‘55- ‘56. I started classes but I noticed that I wasn’t that motivated, as it seemed, especially from the psychological viewpoint, I wasn’t even attracted to it, I wasn’t happy. And, I told myself, “You will unregister from this faculty and will enroll in the Department of French Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy,” which was near Kalemegdan in Belgrade. And that’s what I did. I unregistered, I went and enrolled and continued my studies. For my good luck, I had no obstacles in the exams nor administrative problems regarding semester enrollment and I continued my four years studies.

So, the classes and lectures ended by the end of 1960s, and of course the diploma exams followed, as according to the rules. Before reaching the diploma, I went to France in 1959 [to attend] a seminar of French Language for foreign French Language students. The seminar took place in a city on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, next to the known city of Bordeaux. This was a small city, but with an extraordinary and proper beach called *Rua Jan*, in French it is spelled *Rue Jean*. And we stayed there for two months, this was in ‘59.

I returned to continue the school year ‘59 - ‘60, the classes ended and the month of June came, the month of exams, the month of diploma exams. First we had a written exam in French Language, then the oral exam in French Language and the oral exam in French Literature. I did very well,, not to say excellently, especially in the Language, because I was surprisingly good at Language and I had an extraordinary motivation. I had studied the Literature as well, so I was not in danger of getting a low grade. I took my last exam on June 20, 1960, I took the diploma and I returned to... to my house in the village. But, during those years my father had sold the house and the land in the village of Zhiti and had bought a land in a village of the municipality of Vushtri, which is called Stanofc, Lower Stanofc, because there is also Upper Stanofc.

The Circassian population of the Caucasus were in that village, they had settled there after the Crimean War in the Caucasus, the Russian-Turkish war of 1864. When those regions were occupied by Russians, these honourable people couldn’t stand the raping and massacres by the Russians. They aimed at the world, and went in the four directions of the earthly horizon, they crossed the Black Sea

to go to the Balkans in Europe, to Syria in the South, and Lebanon and Tur... all over Turkey and today's Georgia. And on their journeys, always looking at nature, at last they had settled, they had arrived in Kosovo, just like many Serbs after the decisions of the Serbian Monarchy to colonize Kosovo with Serbs from the province of Croatia. We know these things from history. And as I said, we bought the land, it was near the Llap river, on the left side of its flow or not, 600-700 kilo... pardon, meters, not even a kilometer, there is still that village, totally inhabited by Priluzje Serbs, who are demanding a municipality.

Jeta Rexha: Now just to ask you, what did you do after returning from your studies? You said you returned to Stanofc, right?

Murat Bejta: To Stanofc.

Jeta Rexha: Then...you told me that you started working as a professor in Mitrovica right away.

Murat Bejta: Yes.

Jeta Rexha: How was that period? How did you go to Mitrovica?

Murat Bejta: Let's go there, yes. So, we settled in that village and I had an obligation because I had a scholarship from the Municipality of Mitrovica to study in the University. And somehow it was a loan I had to pay off. And the employment was done with the administrative decision of the respective municipality organs and I had taken the decision to start working on September 1, 1960 in the gy... pardon, in the Technical School of Mitrovica, which back then was called Boris Kidrić. And the first generation of the Technical School in the Albanian Language had started one year earlier, in 1959. Serbs were the only ones teaching there in the Serbian language. The now deceased professor Milan Prekaj was already appointed as the director. He welcomed me well, he informed me about the situation, gave me some instructions about other classes, but besides everything he said, "You will not only teach the Albanian classes but also the Serbian ones," which back then were called Serbian-Croatian.

So, as I said, there had been no teaching in Albanian before the previous year, but I found some Albanians in the Serbian parallels. Albanian Language was being taught there besides French. Those were the very first years that the Albanian language was being taught in the secondary school classes. And the director proposed me to give Albanian Language classes to Serbian classes. For my good luck, I taught French Language to them as well, so I had no obstacles concerning my academic preparation, not to say the arrogance or carelessness and other kind of obstacles, because teachers, Albanian Language teachers, my colleagues who taught there, had problems and big troubles in Serbian classes. Let me mention it once again, for my good luck, I had no obstacles at all, but it was a special situation, reasonable as well as unreasonable. Let every person who hears this, judge it with their own head, because those Albanian students in the Serbian classes, when the time came for the

Albanian Language class, they left. Because in their own head they thought that we are Albanians and we don't need the Albanian Language (smiles). Do you understand? {Addresses to those who are present}.

Jeta Rexha: Yes.

Murat Bejta: But to me, this was not a problem at all, at all. I continued working in the Technical School until the fall of 1963. During... in the meantime during these years until then, Yugoslavia, as it is already known, had created an international movement together with other countries that were colonies until that point and had established the Movement of Independent [Non-Aligned] States. And these states, especially from Africa, because Yugoslavia was the only member from Europe, the relations among these countries began. It is known that the number of the countries that were colonized by France in Africa was very high. Let me mention some, I will begin from the North, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea...because there is another one as well, Guinea Bissau. But this Guinea differs by its capital city, Conakry. And they needed qualified people. Yugoslavia offered qualified people, it opened the federative call.

I applied for the French Language and was accepted immediately. We went in the beginning of November, not to say in the end of October. I went there by airplane with the group from Yugoslavia together with my wife and my eldest son who was 14 months old and we were already expecting our second son. We settled there, but didn't continue for much longer, a certain disagreement was created at some point and we returned to Belgrade after one month. I returned from Belgrade, but they paid us. For our good luck, Yugoslavia paid us for that one month, and that was very good for the time. I returned to Mitrovica, I had no obligations towards the Technical School anymore and I went to the gymnasium. I applied in the gymnasium and they accepted me immediately. There was a Serbian director, he was called Dragan Mircvetnić. There was no Albanian director or deputy director in the mixed gymnasium until then.

I continued teaching at the gymnasium, at that point the classes of *Shkolla Normale*⁸ in the Albanian Language were established, as well as the classes of the secondary school of Economics. There was a Turkish class in the gymnasium as well, these classes and to some of the Albanian classes in the gymnasium. Since my fellow colleague, with whom I had graduated in Belgrade, Bedri Deda, had started teaching here earlier, and continued teaching, this is how it happened, he continued and we worked together.

A historical event took place all around Yugoslavia, in 1966. The political problem with Aleksandar Ranković⁹ happened, and it is known what happened. So, Aleksandar Ranković and his politics

⁸ The *Shkolla Normale* is a high school that trains teachers.

⁹ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in

somehow changed and it was replaced by a bigger progress and with a little better democracy compared to the past, especially compared to the Serbian nationalist ideology, the so called Serbo-Slavic. And the time to open the call for the [school] director came, this happened as well. We talked with friends, with colleagues, especially with my colleague and my classmate who is fortunately still alive, the Physics professor Skender Skenderi and his cousin Ejup Hamiti, a Maths professor. And some other professors who still had the feeling of National Albanian belonging, but unfortunately there were some people among Albanians who supported the Serbian Language and Serbs more. I will not mention them. My colleagues said, “Murat, nobody but you will apply. And we have agreed among Albanian colleagues and decided for you to apply and to vote for you.” I am saying their words because talking highly about myself is not good, because there is a French proverb that says, “*Le moi haïssable*” which in Albanian means, “*Uni*” or Ital... pardon in Latin, “The Ego.” Therefore, the hateful ego, because it is known that the one who only talks about oneself causes hatred in those who are listening, or who are with them.

And, “We will vote for you because first of all, you have no obstacles when it comes to the Serbian language.” And I really learned Serbian very well, since we are talking about this topic and this idea, during my studies my fellow students took me to their houses to do the French language homework, but they were Serbs (smiles) and like this... other...

Jeta Rexha: Could you tell us a little about... you were working on the first dictionary that you published, it was in the ‘70s, right?

Murat Bejta: We’ll see... we’ll see now. Let me continue a little more here then we will go back to the dictionary.

Jeta Rexha: Alright.

Murat Bejta: So, shortly, “Nobody has the courage that you do. That is why you will become the director.” This is what they said. It happened that way and they voted for me, but since then as we mentioned it earlier, there were additional classes, the number of the Albanian teachers was higher and we had the majority of the votes... and, they elected me. A Serb was elected as the deputy director... her name was Sofia Drenda. She fortunately did not harbor Serbian nationalist feelings. But for his bad luck, the Serbo-Croatian Language professor, Miladin Raspopović, was charged with nationalist chauvinist and even anti-human feelings. In the first meeting of the Teachers Council, I proposed the topics of discussion in Albanian, then in Serbian. It didn’t take long and the Serbian language professor Raspopović stood up, left his seat and walked towards the door that led outside the room. I called, “Miladin,” I am talking in Albanian now but I talked to him in Serbian, “Miladin, where are you going? You haven’t asked for any permission!” “I am leaving,” he said, “Then,” I said,

Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

“wait one second.” There is a French proverb that says, “Those who are absent, make a mistake.” “You are willingly absent and you will miss out, that is why you are making a mistake and you will make a mistake. So, leave!” And he left.

Let’s go back now... but I continued working and doing all the work and my tasks. Since the beginning of teaching French, I noticed, especially when it came to the students, that a French-Albanian dictionary was lacking. And since ‘64- ‘65, around that time, I started with a big notebook, one of those big notebooks that looked like registry books, you know, a school registry. And I wrote in what was then the Albanian language, I didn’t know, not exactly the standard Albanian language, because it was not standardized in Albania at the time, and I didn’t know how, consulting literature, working, but I had a great will and desire and I was persistent as well, sometimes even at night especially after classes, because I taught during the day.

I mean, it didn’t take me three full years to finish the hand written text. There were around 41 thousand words included in the dictionary, as well as 15 thousand French expressions in Albanian. And I sent it, [first] I printed it with a typewriter, but I couldn’t typewrite it myself. I found a typist, I paid him, but there was no computer back then (smiles), you know how the typewriters were. I prepared it and sent it to the Journalistic Publishing House *Rilindja*. They appointed three reviewers, among them two colleagues of mine [professors] of French.

After some remarks, after some suggestions, after some consultations which lasted pretty long, we found a solution to publish it at last. It was published in 1975... then after some years... no, sorry, in ‘78, in 1978. And it sold very fast, a reprint was needed, after these consultations it was decided for the reprinting to happen in 1985. This is how it was, if I am not mistaken, but that’s irrelevant, there is a characteristic of the reprinting, especially in the scientific, linguistic, professional publications, it is called the phonetic transcription. French language is a special language in the world, which is not pronounced the same way as it is written, for example in Albanian or other languages such as Italian, Turkish or especially Slavic languages. French is hard to pronounce, it has many letters. A special characteristic in the linguistic aspect of French are the nasal letters. So, four oral vowels, as we say, have their nasal nature as well. But, let me not bother you with these. For example the vowel... here... there are not many differences, but as a linguist I make the difference in the Albanian language as well, because we have two “A” vowels in Albanian languages, two “O” vowels, two I vowels, two “U” vowels, as well as two “Y” vowels. Let’s go to the Albanian “Y”, we say *dy djem* [two boys] but we also say *dy vajza* [two girls], it’s not the same vowel. Do we agree? Like this...

Jeta Rexha: I am sorry, now I have to ask you more about... during the ‘80s, when the exchange of professors and teachers took place in Kosovo and...

Murat Bejta: In Albania, yes.

Jeta Rexha: How was that period?

Murat Bejta: Eh, well. Well, a little bit here and we will continue further. About the republishing, like this, we have French nasal “À” vowel which originates from the oral vowel “A”; then “Â” from the oral vowel “A”. There are two special vowels which are not present in Albanian. No oral or nasal [vowels], and are present in French, the vowel “É”, “È” and “Ô”, “Œ”. Let me not bother you anymore... and in this direction we will go further. We still didn’t mention the Ph.D. thesis nor the Master’s one. So, I stayed and worked as a teacher as well as a director in the gymnasium until the early 1970s. The University of Pristina was opened in 1970, those conditions are already known. The department of Albanian Language and Literature was opened together with other various departments. And I started studying Linguistics first. First the Phonetics of French Language, Morphology then Lexicology and Semantics because the respective professors for all linguistic-based courses were not appointed yet, and it was the beginning, you know. But since I started classes, back then at least a Graduate Degree was necessary, which now in English is called Master’s.

And I told myself, “I will go to the University of Zagreb, because there’s nothing I can learn at the University of Belgrade anymore. They had given me all what they knew, I learned what I could.” I registered there in the department of French Language and Literature but with a special emphasis on French Language. They professors were very smart, extremely professional in their specialized fields as well, but especially in the social, collegial and human aspect. And of course it is known that the professor which is in charge as a mentor is on that level as well. His name was Voj Mervinja, we had other courses as well, other lectures... and they went well, but of course the ones beside French Language were taught in Croatian. The Croatian language is typical and special and it differs from Serbian, because in Serbian many technical and scientific terms are used from foreign languages, while Croatian follows the German model, they use the terms of their mother tongue. Such a phenomena and undertaking forces the speaker and the user to express certain notion or certain idea with only two words, very descriptive. Although one word is not enough, but we understand each-other.

I didn’t have enough experience with that language, but somehow I embraced it and I had no trouble. But, a special characteristic with the so called exception, as it is said in Latin, *Nulla regula sine exceptio*. If we translate this into Albanian, it means *Asnjë rregull nuk ka pa përjashtime* [There is no rule without exceptions]. So I made an exception in the University of Zagreb, the Faculty of Philology. My professor and my mentor suggested me to treat the French Language for my Master’s thesis and defend it in French, because it is well known rule that all of these should be done in the country’s language, in Croatian. But he had his own intentions and his own wish, and this is how it happened and he supported me in the decision-making organs in order for them to accept my request, to write my thesis and defend it. And this is how it happened, I defended it, but always giving lectures in the French Language Department in Pristina, but always continuing at least once a month in Zagreb during the weekends. Like this... this happened.

Then for the Ph.D. I started thinking about it right away, but I had always thought about my Ph.D. thesis, even before. Let me say some individual personal thoughts, not to say selfish or egoistic. I asked myself, “Are you an Albanian, Murat? You work in a place where you give lectures to Albanians...” to Serbs as well, but let’s begin from Albanians. “And Albanian is your mother tongue, you Murat learned French, you specialized in French, Serbian as well, but you haven’t learned your mother tongue the way you should have yet, and you haven’t brought the right and necessary contribution to your Albanian mother tongue. That is why you should think towards making your Ph.D. thesis about Albanians and in Albanian.” I thought and unthought, and thought of connecting it with my profession, so the French language which originates from Latin. And as Romance languages, those that have their roots in Latin are French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, and in the Balkans, Rumanian, Moldavian, as well as the language of our ancestors, Dalmatian, which extended from Albania to Venice. I mean, the Dalmatia province which was somewhere inhabited by Illyrians and in Latin was called *Ilirikum* which means Albanian... Illyria.

And they, they have romanized, they have lost their mother tongue and to this day there are testimonies that some *Arbëreshë*¹⁰ are alive in Zara, in Dalmatia, who since 140 years ago have spoken the Dalmatian language. The last Dalmatian speaker was called Antonio Odaina, who died in 1879, and the Dalmatian language died with him. But there are traces that have remained, and as a linguist and specialized in the field had to take this language into consideration as well. That is why, I worked, I worked and I wrote it, I printed it with a typewriting machine again...a typewriter. It came out in A4 format, we know what it is... 760 pages (smiles). And with analyses as well as the dictionary and with special differences for every language.

Part Two

And for my good luck and for the luck of all the Albanians from Kosovo and especially for us university professors, we were able to go to Albania for scientific research. And I went there in 1979 around the end of the year to stay as a group for one month, we went. But... however the conditions and circumstances of the communist political regime are known. And I will not get into that... right? {An expression of wonder}.

Jeta Rexha: Ah, ok.

Murat Bejta: And, besides everything else they divided us and we were always tailed by one person or even in the car. Even while eating breakfast, lunch or dinner... even when we went to the library or

¹⁰ The *Arbëresh* are the Albanian community, which settled in Italy after the death of Skenderbeg in the fifteenth century, and who speak an archaic form of Albanian.

any other institution to do research, they tailed us to the entrance. It was a kind of jail with guards and constant escort. I am making a diversion and telling a not very good event, should I tell it or not...?

Jeta Rexha: Yes, yes, feel free.

Murat Bejta: The one who followed me or who accompanied me, pretended to be a professor of Albanian Language. But while I was talking to him about different topics, I became convinced that he was not a professor of Albanian Language. I told this to my colleagues while we were in a restaurant eating or relaxing. There were some *albanologë*¹¹ among them. More precisely, Agim Deva¹² was among them, he was also a poet, as you know, but he died early. Is it true or not? There was another professor as well, an Albanian language assistant [professor] but I don't remember his name at the moment, who had a very accurate, deep and good knowledge of the Albanian language and literature. But unfortunately he died too, he died early. But he was accepted in the Department of Albanian Language as an assistant. While eating breakfast one day, I said, "He was not a professor of Albanian Language." "How do you know Murat?" "I know because while I was talking to him, he said some things, some thoughts, some viewpoints that do not fit with his claim that he is a professor of Albanian Language. And you will get convinced with what I will do in order to prove these thoughts and words and you will listen to me. You will witness it, I think you have enough ideas in order to judge." Well...

The next day, we usually had coffee after breakfast but he always tailed me. More of us were gathered while having coffee. I don't know whether I knew his name or not, maybe I called him by his name or I called him "comrade," because back then in Albania nobody dared to use the word "mister," because I had a habit of using it from French culture. And I think I called him by his name and, "You told me that..." Oh, yes, he said he was not of a professor of Albanian, but of Chemistry, not of Albanian, but a professor of Chemistry. 'You told me you were a professor of Chemistry, therefore allow me to ask you a question. Can I ask you a question, please?' 'Yes, Yes.' 'Even during high school, but also later in life until today, I heard that carbon is two valence, even today I don't know what means two valence, and why two valence?' 'Forget that professor, forget it...' Everyone burst into laughter (laughs), and they were persuaded about what I said. This is it, the digression I made and I apologize for this digression (smiles).

Jeta Rexha: Shall we continue now...

Murat Bejta: Let's [continue].

¹¹ Scholars and researchers of Albanian language.

¹² Agim Deva (1948-2009) was a Kosovo poet and university professor at the University of Pristina.

Jeta Rexha: What was the challenge when you went to visit Eqrem Çabej?¹³

Murat Bejta: Ah, thank you for reminding me of this... of this event (smiles). According to the plan, to the program, we had to deliver our plan on our first day, our program and the persons we would like to talk to and to consult with. So, as I said, I had suggested the honourable professor Eqrem Çabej. But a week passed and I didn't see him, neither could I meet professor Eqrem Çabej. What to do? I made my mind, I changed my mind, I said, "I have to make a trick before their tricks." (smiles) And I didn't respect the organization and the visit agenda. So, my intention was to separate from my escort and try to find professor Çabej.

And I thought it out like this, I will not meet with my colleagues next morning at the given time, I will go out after they meet, in order to avoid being escorted by the supposed chemist. And there, at coffee time, when they left the restaurant, the hotel, and left altogether, that's when I went. I ate two-three morsels and went to the city. I walked towards the National Library in order to meet, to find Eqrem Çabej, because I had still not seen him with my eyes neither had I met him. For my good luck, before entering the library, I noticed professor Çabej on the famous stairs of the National Library in Tirana. I went near him and greeted him, which was the reason why I was in Tirana. And I suggested him that, "If you cannot accommodate me in your schedule today, or depending on your mood, please set a day, time and place where we could meet." He set an appointment with me for the next day and set the time and the place inside the Library. I went there the next day, met him and told him why I [wanted to meet], I had a copy of my Ph.D. [thesis] which I had prepared in order to give it to him so that he could read it and give me his feedback. This is how it happened, he looked at it, it was kind of heavy but... however, he managed to hold it in his hand.

And I said, "Tell me how much time do you need to read this and set the day, place and time where we will meet to talk, to discuss." And this is how it happened, he needed five days. And we agreed... he set the meeting, we met again and I asked, "Professor Çabej, please could you give me your advice for this Ph.D. thesis? Do you have any remarks, anything to add, do you have any suggestion in order for me to finally print and defend it? And, I desperately want you to be part of the committee when I defend it, but the political-social relations between Kosovo and Albania do not allow such things." "Professor Murat," he said, "listen to me, there is no need... there is no need at all to say such words, no suggestions, no additions. I propose you to go to Pristina as soon as possible and sit and defend your Ph.D. thesis. Everything is amazing." And this is how it happened.

Jeta Rexha: How was it when you returned to Pristina?

¹³ Eqrem Çabej (1908-1980), was an Albanian historical linguist and scholar who, through the publication of numerous studies, gained the reputation as a key expert of Albanian language, literature, ethnology and linguistics.

Murat Bejta: So we... according to the program schedule, we had to stay in Albania for 30 days, this is how the program was. We had to return all together by bus just the way we had gone there. Some friends, especially those [expert in] Albanology, but also some others, started to get bothered, they started to get bothered especially by the escorts who were following all our footsteps. And Agim Deva and I thought about a trick or a joke. The colleague of Agim Deva, the Albanian language assistant, was the one who started getting bothered the most and also getting sad. Eh, well, I said, I said, "Agim, what do you think?" "No," he said, "Alright, I will stay." I said, "I will make a joke related to what is happening." And while eating breakfast or having coffee, I will propose something, and I said this to him in *besa*,¹⁴ "I will tell you what I will tell you, but don't tell the others. In front of them, I will propose that I need further consultations and I will request the continuation of the stay and the research." This is what I did the next day.

"Agim," I said, "I haven't finished the program yet, that is why I need to continue beyond 30 days, I will send a request. What about you?" "Me too," he said. As soon as we finished our word, the Albanian language assistant stood up from his chair, worried and even sad, not to say angry. No I don't want to imitate him because he yelled pretty much, but I don't want to imitate him (smiles). "No! What? I will walk through mountains tomorrow and will return to Pristina, you can do whatever you want." (smiles) We laughed a little then we told him and he got a little calmer, we stayed 30 days and then returned to Pristina.

Jeta Rexha: I would like to ask you a little about '91? Precisely about July 3, 1992... 1991 when the gathering, if I am not mistaken, of the University Workers Union took place?

Murat Bejta: In front of our Faculty's stairs.

Jeta Rexha: Like that, yes. Could you please tell me more about the organization and what was the reason behind all of that and what happened to you after the gathering?

Murat Bejta: Alright... so let's get into this event as well.

Jeta Rexha: Please.

Murat Bejta: Yes, let me just have a sip of water. As what happened is already known, we will now talk about the University of Pristina because many changes happened also in other Kosovar institutions because of Serbian politics, Milosević's¹⁵ politics. As it is known, we were chased out of the Faculty

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav Communist leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalist and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia. He revoked Kosovo's provincial autonomy and began a politics of repression of Albanians in Kosovo.

buildings. They expelled us, students as well as professors. It is known that thanks to people's good will, we continued our work in private houses, we all know this. But, since the beginning of this, somewhere around the end of June, 1991¹⁶... after the Serbian-Montenegrin gathering in Gazimestan, at their memorial. On June 28, their day, as they call it, Vidovdan,¹⁷ when Milosević came to give his nationalist speech to murder Albanians, to kill Albanians and expel Albanians from their lands, just as it happened, as it happened later. And... by then, we had established the Independent University of Pristina Workers Union. We had established the leading bodies, the chairman, the vice-chairman, the secretary and so on. And we held meetings to deal with the problems that came our way, especially the issue of education and facilities. Yes, and politically after that gathering, the Serbian-Slavic in Gazimestan, it is called Gazimestan, right?

Jeta Rexha: Yes.

Murat Bejta: So, we decided to organize a gathering of students and University of Pristina employees. And we set the date right away, July 3, 1991. Since we somehow knew the actions of the police, the army and even of the Serbian paramilitary forces who started their massacres and we knew their intentions. We made a very short program for the participants and to disperse as fast as possible in order to avoid having victims, in order to avoid murders, handcuffs and detentions. Because of my professional and language capabilities, but also technical circumstances, conditions, the chairman proposed in front of the leadership, he said, "Murat Bejta will give the speech, then we will all disperse," and this is how we acted. I prepared a speech quickly, with the points that my colleagues and I thought out, so we agreed we had to articulate publicly the situation that was created, about the situation that was about to get even worse and for the consequences that would come our way.

And, as i said, we had no technical tools, no megaphone, no loudspeakers, that is why the chairman said, "Murat, we will give you this task and this duty, especially because of your vocal and language skills." I prepared that speech. For my good luck I did it in the landing of the stairs, in between the first staircase and the second one, there is always a middle there. The leading members were around me, so from the stairs and onwards, the whole yard of the Faculty of Philosophy to the Grand [Hotel], the Albanian Kosovar National Library was filled with students, workers as well as random people. I managed to finish my speech, somewhere to the end, the beatings and the chasing of the participants began with very barbaric tortures, physical tortures, as well as with howls and swearings in Serbian coming from the police and even soldiers and paramilitary forces.

So the mass spread quickly and I returned to the office... of the chairman and vice-chairman. We stayed a little, then left to our houses. At the entrance, where the guards stay, you know, the police was there, they came near, "You," he said, "gave the speech in front of the people?" "Yes." "Your name

¹⁶ The speaker is referring to the June 28, 1989 rally at Gazimestan, to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo.

¹⁷ The day of St. Vitus in the Julian calendar.

is Murat Bejta?" "Yes." "Give me your ID card." "Yes." "You," he said, "have to come with us." "No," I said, "I will return to my office." "Then," he said, "extend your hands, I will handcuff you." They handcuffed me and sent me to the misdemeanor court, who... after the interrogation, sentenced me with 60 days in prison, which I started that day in the Pristina prison until the end of those 60 days. But during this time I was always tailed, always... then the questioning, provoking me with various questions, threatening me to the point that I got the impression that even after getting out of the prison, after 60 days, I would still be prosecuted and that I was on the list of those who would be prosecuted and that I would be executed. Shall we go further or not?

Jeta Rexha: Maybe shortly tell us about how you continued in the Sorbonne?

Murat Bejta: There. Shall we continue?

Jeta Rexha: Yes.

Murat Bejta: While I was imprisoned, especially the French Embassy in Belgrade, they were interested in me and my fate, and they had called at home. My wife had told them, "Murat is in prison," they know and knew about what... how they will act and what will happen, and since they understood that my detention would last 60 days, they also had gotten to know the time when I will be home, and they called. I told them what happened, but I shortly said, "I was fired from work and imprisoned as well, but my life is in danger." "Professor Murat, do you accept to come to France and continue your professional work and lectures in the Department of French Language and Roman Philology, especially in the two special linguistic disciplines such as lexicology and semantics (smiles)?" "Yes, I accept." I said. "We will talk with our [leading] bodies and will call you again."

They called me after two-three days. So they had talked to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the security and diplomacy bodies and I said that they should come and pick me up with the car of the diplomatic corp which has the immunity and is not controlled by the police, because I cannot move otherwise, they will catch me and kill me. "Alright... where should we come?" "Come on this date, at 1 AM, fifty meters down the entrance of Grand Hotel," just where you and I met today {addresses the interviewer}... "There is a bus stop there. Of course at that time there are no... because buses come very rarely during the night, but I will leave my bag there, while I will not stay close to my bag, but I will stay on the opposite side and will wait for you to arrive there, then I will approach you." This is what I did. They came, we greeted, I went inside the car and continued the road to Belgrade during the night. We arrived at the airport, entered the airport building through the corridor that is not controlled according to the immunity of diplomatic personalities, according to international regulations. This is how we went to the entrance of the airplane. The same way at the exit of the airplane in Paris, with diplomatic escorts and directly to the hotel. And like this I stayed for some time, until all the administrative, professional and collegial issues were solved.

And so I started, as I said earlier, to give lectures to the third year students who according to the actual European program of Bologna take the diploma in the third year. Is it true? [I lectured] in Lexicology and Semantics in the third year, but since my colleagues knew my knowledge and professional training, also many other foreign languages as well, but also other, especially linguistic courses. And they suggested me to give lectures and hold classes with the Drama and Art students, within Lexicology and Semantics, especially with a focus on their professionalization on stage, drama, relying on their professional course, the core course which is called Prozodi and is only available to them, and which has linguistic elements, with the understanding of the circumstances of these elements, with the harmony of these elements, with the pronunciation of these elements, with the intonation, rhythm and harmony, with breaks and stops, with supplications and crying screams. And then, as they were writing their Master's thesis by taking these circumstances into consideration, in the end of the year they asked me to allow them to record my voice to analyze it.

Then after, they proposed me, in the Department of English Language and Literature, to give lectures on Phonetics of French Language as the mother tongue of those students, because they were studying English. I taught them for one academic year, they did well. In the same year, there is the Department of Foreign Languages, in Albanian they say, I will pronounce it, L-E-A, in French it is EL-Ě-A, which means... no... L-A-E, so *langue étrangère appliquée* which means applied foreign language. Just like I had French as my profession, they had French, but as a foreign language. To the students who were studying French as a foreign language, just the way I have studied it. I taught them a foreign language, they had it in their program for the third year, a quick, dynamic program which lasts one month, a foreign language. So, they asked me that. . And I also taught Albanian Language, and their success was with an excellent grade point average. Like this...

Jeta Rexha: Mister Murat... we would like to now go to your activity in the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Movement.¹⁸ How were you involved and what were your tasks during that period?

Murat Bejta: So... here we go to the history of the Albanian nation and especially because we were separated from Albania, to the history of the Albanian-Kosovar nation. As we know, within our Albanian nation during centuries murders, injuries and misunderstandings were committed. And this phenomenon was widely present. The circumstances, the conditions, the interveners, the participants were diverse, we can also say like that, not only individuals, but let's say here that also the anti-Albanian Serbian-Slavic chauvinistic regime had its own part in the divisions and murders.

Then, we as intellectuals, taking this situation into consideration, these circumstances and especially these consequences and the phenomena that happened and the consequences that were created, as

¹⁸In 1991 a mass movement for the forgiveness of blood feuds (*pajtimi i gjakut*), was launched among the Albanian population of Kosovo. It was initiated by a group of students, former political prisoners, who approached folklore scholar Anton Çetta and others seniors figures in academia to lead the process. The movement reconciled thousands of cases, and it became a movement for national unity.

I said, during centuries, not during years... And I will sadly use the word, it had become a tradition of the Albanians to kill not only someone from a wider circle, but their own relatives as well, sadly many words, thoughts, circumstances and extraordinary conditions are needed to describe this... to evaluate this, to analyze this, and to draw a conclusion there is a need for many words, many thoughts, many circumstances, many extraordinary circumstances. We understand one-another?

But however, I will try to present some of the circumstances. So we decided, together with some intellectuals, especially with University pedagogues, but also other intellectuals, researchers of the Albanological Institute of Pristina, especially historians, Albanian Language and Literature professors, but also from other fields of study. And like this, I will only tell about the Founding Council... {takes a list out of his pocket}, the Central Council which we called, The Reconciliation Movement for Blood Feuds, Injuries and Misunderstandings. This was it, it happened in the beginning of March, 1990, and Anton Çetta¹⁹ was the leader of this Council, there was also professor Murat Bejta, I, that I am talking; Prof. Dr. Mark... sorry, professor Musa Limani, a professor of the Faculty of Economics; Prof. Dr. Rexhep Mehmeti, a Chemistry professor; Professor Sami Peja, Prof. Dr. Mujë Rugova, this was the main Council. And in the organizational aspect, we were directly active until the early February 199... from the beginning of February, 1990 until May... May, 1992.

So, we also collaborated with regional and municipality councils in this direction. And we also had the responsibilities of these councils for these businesses, we contacted them. We made all the registrations, organized all the events, the circumstances, the conditions and other things, especially the main and the core ones in order to find the way for blood feuds reconciliation. And during this period, but I will sadly say because that [blood feuds] have happened even after the official termination of this period, let me say it again, sadly, it still happens. And especially, I will make a digression here as well, it is being widely spread out especially in Albania, the phenomenon of murders and injuries. So, during that time we visited every family who was in blood, but prior to that we visited the one who committed murder in order to find out about the circumstances, to know the events and the circumstances in order not to make mistakes and to find the most appropriate and acceptable way of achieving our goal, the forgiving of the blood feuds.

Regional and municipality councils, as I said, were established all around Kosovo, in the municipalities all around Kosovo, in collaboration with which we visited the houses, sometimes in other circumstances, conditions and places. There were cases when the head of the house had no room to receive us. There were cases when the head of the house told us, "I have no bread to eat, receiving someone in my house cannot even be taken into consideration," and other various cases. For our good luck, we found ways to visit the houses, to meet those in charge, the families, the members of the families, by that I mean men and women of the house, their daughters, sometimes even the families of their daughters, because the circumstances were various, in order for us not to

¹⁹ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

leave out anything especially in the future, and not to leave the slightest reasons, or leave space for dishonoring a *besa*, or a reason for murder after the reconciliation. We achieved this goal, and until the conditions and the circumstances changed during the war in 1999 and '98 or not... the word was kept. And it continues being kept in large part.

Let me mention it here that during my stay in France, from the beginning of '92 until 2005 when I retired, I organized Albanians in France, I established the Association of Albanians in France, I organized not only classes for Albanians, for the children of Albanians in France in their mother tongue, but we also helped people in need and Kosovo as well. That is how we organized events for the Kosovo cause in other cities, in Paris, in Belgium, in Switzerland, in Germany, in Italy and other countries, always with other Albanian organizations and associations for the Albanian cause which was the issue on the agenda.

Jeta Rexha: Mister Murat, maybe we would just like to close this part about Blood Feuds Reconciliations. Now, one more specific question, do you remember or could you tell us about any case when the blood was not forgiven?

Murat Bejta: {Expresses wonder} There were such cases as well, but they were rare... very rare. I will tell one case, if you allow me.

Jeta Rexha: Sure.

Murat Bejta: The person and the family who had to forgive the blood was living in a village in the municipality of Podujeva, especially we in this part of Llap, let me mention this as well, as a person born in this part of Llap, with my birthplace Zhiti... so, I organized but also visited them with members of the Council, even the main [Council], with professor Anton Çetta and we also had another very important and committed, an Albanian Language professor in the Pedagogic Secondary School in Gjakova, but who lived in Pristina, Shefqet Canhasi, and to whom, let me shortly say, nobody can measure up in any regard, he's an exceptional man. There were members of the Local Council of the city, and municipality, and we started the conversation. In most of the cases, I am overdoing this, they let me speak because I also had a very deep experience, not only social but also psychological, moral, and national.