

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH HAVA SHALA

Pristina | Dates: August 13 and October 14, 2016

Duration: 170 minutes

Present

1. Hava Shala (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.

[The interviewer asks the speaker to tell about herself and her early memories. The question was cut from the video-interview]

Hava Shala: I was born in the village of Lugu i Baranit, Municipality of Peja, in a big family typical for the Dukagjin Plane (smiles), for the almost largest part of Kosovo. I am the first child, the first child of my family, the first one who survived... five of my parents' children died before I was born. And, even though I was a girl, there were possibilities, because I was the one who survived among all those dead children, I was a child to whom my parents gave a special status. I didn't feel treated as a girl by my parents, the status of a girl in the big Albanian family is already somehow known, and maybe this was a kind of privilege for me. However, in the big family parents were not the only ones deciding about your status, but usually the patriarch or the lady of the house in the women's line as well [decided].

So, in this situation, later I knew the secondary status or... being not that important... or not that equal to the others, because in our family boys were very few, were. Later my parents had two girls and two boys. So this is a little of what characterized my life as a child, as a girl with... at various phases of my life. I remember the time of puberty, with a few specific aspects of the typical puberty, but with a rebellion which wanted to tell that boys were not the only ones who were right. Mainly, since then I was engaged... in a very spontaneous way, with social topics, the girl, the boy, the man, the woman, why this, why that... (smiles) Not rarely, my mother told me, "Poor me, I worry about you because I don't know what man will keep you!" (smiles). But, that was my life.

I finished eight years of school at the school of the village of Tushec and I had the good luck that my father at that time was... being an immigrant in Germany and Switzerland for three years in total, he somehow brought a new spirit, a new viewpoint about women... about girls, in this case about me. That was very important and I used it because the time matched, the time when I finished my elementary school with the time when my father was abroad as an immigrant. And I had the good luck with the engagement of my class monitor as well, to be given the right to continue secondary school in Peja.

I continued my secondary school sometimes more like a boy, dressing like a boy, I cut my hair. It was maybe a way of dressing instinctively chosen in order to defend myself a little from the mindset that prejudiced girls if they dressed typically like girls. I am mainly talking about the mindset, the village

mindset, it was a hard time for the fact that we had to travel for twelve-thirteen kilometers in both directions, or thirteen, plus thirteen kilometers in the cold. Maybe that was a challenge of nature that influenced the strengthening of the character of girls from the village of Lugu i Baranit.

Then, there were the political circumstances that..the '80s are known by everyone, I had the luck to be a person who belonged to that generation or to those generations. And it was... it was a time where you had no other choice but decide which was your path, "Can I close my eyes in front of a painful reality or can I open my eyes and confront it?" What were the reasons, maybe it takes a lot of time to explain them, but let me say it shortly that maybe because of the combative nature which was, which had to be if you lived in a big family and it made you more courageous, more determined, you were a little more... maybe readier to take dangers, maybe that is why I mainly decided to confront the reality of that time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you finish secondary school?

Hava Shala: I finished secondary school in the Shaban Spahia High School and the two last years in the gymnasium. In fact one year and a half, because in December, 1984 I was arrested together with six other girls, six girls and two boys in total. The so-called, back then, "The girls group in Peja." And that's why... that was simply a political reason. We were engaged for the freedom of expressing your thought, of protesting against the things that at that time happened everyday, at school, in the streets. It didn't take an intellectual, it didn't necessarily take a grown up, it didn't take someone so smart. It took someone who was honest to themselves, it took someone who was conscious that they wanted a life with dignity in order to decide to do something against that regime, against prohibitions... or follow the path of the wretched and say, "I only want to care about myself." And this was possible, but fortunately, we, as well as many other young people of Kosovo, I chose the first path, respectively the path of confronting and resisting, a thing which I never regretted and I would not erase even half an hour of that time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old were you?

Hava Shala: I was 17 years old, I remember Robert was 17 too, Zyrafete and Myrvete as well. I remember that a certain number of us turned 18 during the time in prison. A girl called Emine was the youngest one, she was 16, she was not 16 yet at the time. I mean, we were all between the age of 15 and 17, eventually 18. I don't exactly remember other birthdays. But we were arrested at school at that time in December 19, it was Thursday if I am not mistaken, it was the second class. It is a day I will never forget because it was a very special day, a day that turned our life in a direction we had never thought about. We knew that it was a difficult path, but that it would have such dark shades... maybe for our age it was impossible to have an idea [about it]. I often say that, maybe for an healthy logics it is impossible to predict such challenges, such difficulties. But that was the core point of our lives, of these nine people, but of course of many, many other people we knew and we didn't know at that time all around Kosovo.

As I said, we were arrested and questioned that day. Maybe the most paradoxical word I met, I said, I heard, I met inside quotations was the word, “being questioned,” because we were not actually being questioned there. You didn’t even dare to say a thing there, you were much mistreated, not to say tortured... they were afraid of your courage, of your word, of your thought. It was, in German they say one *höle* [hole], a cave, a grave, how to say, where one got inside or had to decide, to say, “I am also ready for the other path.” Which then could be the true grave, and of course the hopes were for another future, maybe the hope to survive those things...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of family was yours, that you have this patriotic background?

Hava Shala: Eh... I understand that it plays a role, family history plays a big role, but it is not necessarily... the power of free will is known in psychology, and there are people who did not necessarily have a personal preface to a special personal biography, but however, as characters, they were predisposed to have the power to resist. And it is very normal to say that there are people who find it hard to accept... an undignified life, as our time was when you were controlled, you were spat on, you went to the doctor 20-30 times. The dentist said, “I have no material for your teeth.” Then you were spat on, on the bus, for example, I had an episode where the police got on the bus, they forced the bus driver to stand up, forced him to look at us and spat on his face, slapped him in order to provoke us. And they mocked him, they forced him to sit down and drive again. To be honest, I could not convince myself at all to be calm and stay put, “Since it didn’t touch me, it’s alright.” You had to be a big idiot, to be honest, to say that nothing happened at that time... “I am successful, I have my own path,” that was not my nature, fortunately.

But, there was also something in the family that of course shaped my character. I remember my grandmother, the mother of my father, was a very *burrënore*¹ woman and sometimes she told stories which were interesting to me as well, which I was preoccupied with as well. She told me how as a child she once went, and it could be... she couldn’t localize the time, but she could guess that it was somewhere before or after the First Balkan World War. And she tells that together with her mother they went to visit her big brother in the prison of Peja. And when they went near, he was the eldest of the village of Bërliq, which is a village near us. And “I [the grandmother] saw a gravedigger digging a grave,” and her mother, my grandmother’s mother, said, “Whom are you digging this grave for?” And he said, “For the eldest of the village of Bërliq.”

She used another expression, but I cannot remember it now, and she found out that it was her oldest son. But, she didn’t tell my grandmother, that is, her daughter, because she didn’t want her to get sad and cry, even my grandmother was surprised by her spiritual strength. Then, she only found out the whole story when they returned home, I mean, there were stories, or I heard this from men, about the arrival of the Montenegrins, the rapes that were done, the tying of the men of the village of Lugu i Baranit to the trees during winter, and the freezing of their bodies. I knew a man of the Gërvalla

¹ *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.

family, I guess the only survivor of that terrible night. Those were stories which then seemed like a mosaic's pieces. Then I had to finish the entire mosaic myself (smiles), when I grew up. And about the Montenegrins' history, we had a Montenegrin villager settled in our village, he was the only one. Our mothers for example said, "When you pass by Fidak's house, don't you dare laugh or speak loudly." And as a child I said, "Why?"

Sometimes children know how to ask questions the grown ups are afraid of asking. And I asked this question time after time, but my parents didn't want to comment about it. And then later you could see that the oppression, the fear does exist, and I remember that this dimension of the family history of course played a role. Then I had female friends in prison, who didn't have so-called big prefaces, but who were very courageous. They were strong characters and this was something that got me more mature as a person, because I moved away from the mindset that you should necessarily belong to a big family, you should necessarily be a patriot.

And it seems like I was more or less often irritated by this patrimony of family history, and then of the whole Kosovo, I had... I didn't see it as a good chance for the future of Kosovo if we only rely on the past, because it *a priori* means that you cannot be that good if you don't have the same history as I do... let me say it... in the political language of Kosovo, heard in Kosovo time after time. And I thought and continue to think that every person has something that... that has more to do with their own character. In this case it was my decision, the decision was mine. I didn't ask anyone (smiles), I remember that it was the way it was, it was good.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of activity did you and other girls do?

Hava Shala: We were girls and boys, but fortunately only few of us were caught that day. There was a list, I have no idea who made that list. There were arresting [people] here and there. I don't know, or at least what I know....But I don't want to necessarily say that that list was given, but in my opinion it was given, and as far as I know it was given after big tortures by someone who was arrested before us. But, it is amazing, and I say it with pleasure, that there were no other people caught because of us, of our group, even though during all the time... we know that from December to May, April, respectively we had the court [hearing] in May... in April, in the early May until April. There were constantly lists with various names of teachers, or people you could or couldn't know. And you were threatened, you were tortured in order to sign that list. But I can say with pleasure that today I feel pride for my friends because none of us, all independently from each other, gave such signatures. And then it was easier to deal just with your own punishment.

So, it was the so-called questioning, in fact the time of tortures for four-five months, it was a very intensive time, and the history of your ancestors or descendants couldn't help you in those moments. Only your viewpoint, your determination did so, that you are right, and I think that that determination helped you from getting crazy. Not rarely, someone came to the script of pain in... I think that only the one who experienced it knows the far limit of pain, it is almost equal to the possibility of going crazy,

or death is much less than death there. Death would be a path, maybe the worst part there was that they didn't let you die. Or you reach a point where death seems easier than that life. Yes, that was a special time...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long were you sentenced and what for?

Hava Shala: We are... we were active because we distributed the pamphlet, we as the youth of that time wrote a pamphlet on our own and articulated our opinion, because [the situation] was tight, it was created very tightly for us young people, the situation through which we were living was very discriminating. We talked about ways of discrimination, we talked about our right as humans to be free just like every other human being. And we spread, we multiplied, we distributed it in Peja first, but then in Istog, Klina, Deçan as well, and if I am not mistaken, Gjakova too, as well as the municipalities of... some municipalities of the Dukagjin Plane where we lived and acted. We simply acted that way, of course we read, we wrote we... it was our only tool, the word, the pen was our resistance fight... these were our opportunities. But, maybe that was, I often heard it during investigations, that was what made us even more dangerous in that sense, because we dared to speak, we dared to write, "It's more than simply writing a slogan," this is what they said, I am citing them.

Or for example, one night I had, I will describe one night, it was the second night of investigations in Peja because later they took us to the prison of Mitrovica. And in the room where I was being questioned, there were suddenly two Serbs that night, in general those who questioned us were Albanians. But that night it was an accident or like an accident that there were two Serbs, one of them spoke Albanian very fluently, but you could notice he was not Albanian. And I was very tired because we had gone many hours with no food, no sleep, no water no... we were beaten, I myself experienced electroshock three times in my knee, neck, in the room. And electroshock causes a terrible tiredness, then there were various beatings, they were as they called them, tortures with quick methods, which mainly were, beating front-back, throwing, crashing and everything happened really fast. But, there were also slow methods, which means you got beaten exactly in the spot where you were injured, where you had a wound, where there was blood, deliberately once more, twice more in the spot where you were already hurt that was... it was called, "The slow method, soft," this is how they cynically called it.

And this second night, I was sitting there with them... it's almost a monstrous night, it is a cold night, cold for me. It is more... the cold is a sign of grave maybe, of death maybe... they talked to each other and very calmly, in a very understandable way, said what they wanted to do with me. It was a psychological fight, they wanted to psychologically and spiritually break me, and they told each-other that they would ask me to stand and if I didn't stand, then they would hit me with a truncheon in my stomach. And if I don't stand straight, if I don't stand properly, then they would kick me in my knees with their boots. And they said this as if they were talking about a dream, as if they were talking about an event that took place long ago, as if it didn't have anything to do with them... as if... it was weird, it was... It took me very long to digest their calm, that way, it was something extraordinary. It was very

special.

And they actually wanted to execute it after they finished their conversation, and actually even if... of course I had no physical strength to stand and they did what they said, what they said previously. I mean, it was a hit in the stomach, in the abdomen, in the knees, until you crashed on the floor. I heard them saying that we are more dangerous, we, the girls, the women, because men need twenty years to become nationalist while women make them [the nationalists] so in their abdomen. This... this saying, this thought, this terrible articulation of their mind was very macabre, it was very....And to be honest, before getting arrested I was convinced for many reasons that I have the right to rise against such madness. While in prison, I was undoubtedly always convinced that I was right. And maybe this was the side effect of their tortures, because you should really have been against yourself to say, "I will withdraw from this path, I will be the same as they, or I will join them." I mean, things were very clear to me.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was this during the investigations phase?

Hava Shala: I was... the investigations continued until... my investigation continued until April 11. On April 11, they came again in...to my surprise this time not in the investigations building, but in the office of Sherafedin Ajeti. He was, he was a school director, a madman, a psychopath and a big hater of humanity. I had a distinctive character, that I always gave my opinion except when I could not speak. And like this, even when I talk about that time, I feel pleasure inside that I never agreed with his word (smiles) and I always gave my opinion, given all the consequences.

That day on April 11, they came, they came with a person I met during the investigation and cynically started to say, "You think you are Shotë Galica,² you think that way..." And I said, "No, I don't think that way." He said, "I was in Pristina, the black lists are there." I said, "May Albania live for a lifetime. I am not here for Albania, they don't need my help here. I am here for my own thoughts that I expressed, which have to do with our own lives, with our own country." And that was the time when Enver Hoxha³ died.

[The video interview was cut]

It's not a problem, aha, it was April 11, after arguing with that person who came with high hopes that after Enver Hoxha died, it would not be worth fighting for Albania anymore. And I said that they should absolutely not believe that I am for Albania and Enver Hoxha, to me it was almost an absurdity, that black and white interpretation of our stand. He left then, and two other people whom I had not met

² Shotë Galica, born as Qerimë Halil Radisheva, was an Albanian insurgent fighter and the wife of Azem Bejta, the leader of the *Kaçak* (outlaws) movement. Galica participated in dozens of attacks against Royal Yugoslav forces in the beginning of the 20th century and the *Kaçak* movement succeeded to put under their control temporary free zones.

³ Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

during the investigation came. They were two men, and they said that I had to sign a paper otherwise that would be my last day. And, there was Shera, Sherafedin Ajeti, we called him Shera. He was a special person for the worse. And he yelled, he hit the table, he swore, he cursed in Albanian and he... he did his task and they removed me from there. His office was within the prison, it was not in the building outside, the building outside, where we were questioned.

Then they took me, and I really thought they were sending me to the investigations building but then they continued the road by car, a kind of jeep. It was not very big, and we continued the road outside Mitrovica. In the Mitrovica countryside there are some not very sharp hills, with not very dense mountains, where they parked the car, the jeep, by a certain corner, and went not very deep, but almost near the street. I have no idea about the distance, but the street could somehow be seen from there. While on the road, I thought many times about jumping from the back seat and trying to take the steering wheel of... how to say, in my hands, and move to the right because there was an emptiness to the left, because I was not sure about what was happening to me. Going out of the city was very unsafe for me. And they said that it was my last day, I had no idea what that actually meant. And I was really scared, maybe I would be less scared if I knew that they would kill me. Maybe, it seems absurd, but the possibility to die is often a way out. The most terrible [thing] is, let me say this within quotation marks, when you want to die at a certain moment and you don't dare die. It is more terrible than if you maybe have to die. It is almost crazy that I am saying this, but that was part of that day.

And, there in the corner that I mentioned, which of course is a place I will try to find once I have the chance. I have one... I remember it... very well, I remember the things I see with my own eyes very well. And there, in... in the corner of that mountain, one of them took a revolver out and the other one leaned on... it was, it was night, not all dark nor daylight, something between day and night. And one... the car was stopped but its lights were directed to me, I was sitting at the roots of a tree, because I practically had no opportunity to stand. And, the other person took a revolver out and checked the barrel and said, "You have a moment to say one last wish or to show repentance." And today I am very convinced that maybe I was very prepared to die and more prepared than ever before. I was very prepared.

To me death is very... it's not the same as it is for other people anymore, it feels like I have experienced that moment, even though at that moment the person on the right in front of me fired the revolver and there are chances that I instinctively moved physically. And they laughed so loudly, too loudly, maybe because it was on a mountain or maybe because it was a very special spiritual condition, I remember their laughter, maybe I have not forgotten all of it yet. And maybe I will never totally forget it, but I got over it. They laughed, because however my movement was a sign of fear, and I don't know what they talked about with each-other, but I know that they continually said something, but that laughter was very cynical, very idiotic. It was a characteristic of that moment.

Then they brought me back again to the office of the prison director and said that they would like to give a stamp through which I would always remember them. And that day, their last action was the

burning of the cigarette in my hand and that... this was the thing after which my investigation ended.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Given this totally illegal action, did you have the right to complain?

Hava Shala: No, I had no right. I started in... at the end of April, our trial was at the beginning of May, and they tried many times, then they said that since the situation in Albania has changed, there is a possibility for us to show repentance, I forgot to say it that... the previous day they offered me an apartment in Pristina, a study without studying, a diploma without studying, if I show repentance, if I collaborate, "They knew how to give the stick and the sugar," as the German saying goes. And of course those were totally foreign to me. And in the trial I tried to say something about the treatment, but my word was actually cut. I had to say something in a rush, otherwise once you tried to say something that was important for you in the trial, you were not allowed.

The court was controlled, there were only a few people from my family. In the first trial we were sentenced eight years, seven years, five years. From eight years to... Emine, who was very young and had no fault at all maybe, but she was... we held a meeting in her apartment and that was enough for her to be sentenced one year. *Also* [German: so] from one year, which was Emine's case to eight years for us, the more dangerous. But in the second trial, I found it out later while in Switzerland, that Amnesty International intervened, I made a copy of their letter, and constantly put pressure. Maybe because of that intervention, maybe because there was very little evidence, we were sentenced more because of our judgement than for our action. Then the second instance reduced the sentence... the sentence, as it should've been from the beginning for the juveniles, the maximum five years and so on. Each one of us had a part.

In total I was in prison for four years, three of which in the prison of Mitrovica, because my stubbornness was called guilt, in my opinion. In fact the investigations ended, but you were still provoked, you were questioned by the so-called pedagogists, I'd say anti-pedagogists. I stayed in Mitrovica for three years, and if I am not mistaken this long stay... as far as I've heard from the others, I am the only one who remained there until this... three years, for the fact that... I constantly expressed my opinion. I mean, at least once a week I was questioned by the director of the prison, I was provoked. But he was not smart and many times he did, he did things that gave me the opportunity to necessarily answer him in a direct way. For example, once he came to me and said that he had filled [the prison], that there were constant arrests. And everyday more, everyday there were more determined people, and more, how to say, it widened... it was filled. "I am successful," he said, and I said, "I am happy about the fact that it is full." And he said, "But you see, I am successful, I catch you wherever you are." I said, "I am happy for another reason, that those you hoped would get scared of big sentences, are getting more everyday, there are so many of us that maybe one day there will not be enough room left here." And he stood and took his chair and wanted to hit me in the head with it, and however this is the reality. And his problem were people who spoke, at least he hoped and swore that you would either fall on your knees and beg him for something... or, or, or, he would be, he would show that he is stronger.

And there were cases, we had a five days hunger strike, where I sang in the prison, I sang before the prison as well, I sang very well, I remember (smiles). It was my passion, I sang at school, I also sang a lot in the prison... constantly. I loved pop songs very much. I sang pop songs, I still sing pop songs. I have become a grandmother, I sing pop songs to my nephew (smiles)... Various, but I sang pop songs above all. We could catch Albania [the Radio Station] in the Dukagjin Plane and I loved pop songs very much.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you use that as a communication form?

Hava Shala: Not the songs... we had communication...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Inside the prison?

Hava Shala: Inside the prison, with knocks on the wall, or in the areas where the arrests were certified, and the wardens had to suddenly and unexpectedly leave the pavilion, then we had... Because we had no windows at the women's pavilion in Mitrovica. We had only an opening with bars over the door to let the air in. Otherwise, often when there was the chance, we put the bucket there, the so-called, the famous WC. We put it there, we moved it, it was a simple bucket, and we got on it and for example, we knew, hearing and intuition develop more in prison than outside, and we knew which friend was in which pavilion. In our pavilion there were room number six, room number five, room number four and in a special way, almost for solitary confinement, there was room, cell number three.

I tried them all, except room number five, I don't know why. And then we got on it [the bucket] and we had our own signs, we had our own words, I would tell my case to Trëndelina, who after some time in a prison in Serbia had a trial again and returned there [Mitrovica], I was in room number six. And Lina had taken a piece of paper, we had it very rarely, we were allowed to write a letter to someone once or twice a week if I am not mistaken. They did it more on purpose, to control what you said. And she cut her finger with a little glass and in a piece of paper destined to write, in a small triangle of, it she had written, "Hava, I am here." And she had left it, we had a spot in the bathroom, a spot which sometimes worked, until it got discovered. And I was very touched, because she had written it with blood, the blood doesn't last like the color... I mean, I was very touched. One way or another it became impossible to tell each-other that, "I am here." In the sense that, "You are not alone," only that I stayed alone for a pretty long time then.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You knew her from...?

Hava Shala: I knew her from before, I knew Trëndelina from before, because when one stays in prison for a long time, you get to know all the prisoners then, who were arrested at that time, even if you didn't see them, but you only heard them.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you have the recreation time outdoors?

Hava Shala: No, no we didn't have it, we didn't have it. We had the right of reading if we were very obedient. I was in the cell with someone else, at least I had the chance of reading the book of the other, because the condition was that if you socialized, in their understanding of socialization, then you had privileges. Otherwise, if you stayed in your own position, then you were usually punished with [not being allowed] visits, there were cases when you didn't see your family for weeks, or with books, which was even more terrible because it was... the space was very empty. However, chances were created, chances were created. I read with pleasure, even the worst book makes... suddenly makes sense, you read, you engage in something.

The worst part were the last days. For six months, I was alone in cell number three, for six months and a half. And I was in very, very bad health conditions, I couldn't even walk, I constantly had diarrhea. And that was a punishment because I argued with the director. A commission of the back then Yugoslavia came to verify the high standards of our prisons, which were actually terrible, but they improvised. They covered them up well, they tried to do so with things..to create a performance there. But the mattresses they brought, they were three of them, they were very bad. Your body often hurt more because of the iron of the bed than... And other things, the WC was inside, the fecal... they stinked. For my good luck, my nose was not well developed, for my good luck (smiles). So, but of course it was very difficult for those who could smell the scents, especially during the summer.

And as for going out, we went for walks, whoever had the chance. There was also a promenade, the prison of Mitrovica was... it was round and was divided by very high walls in... floors. And at the cross point of those four walls, respectively the two walls which crossed each-other, was the spot where the police, the armed guard stayed. And we had a piece of cake of that circle, within quotation marks, I mean it was the triangle-shaped concrete, those very high walls. If you could walk, then you were allowed to move within that circle for five minutes, if not, then you had to stay inside. And the movements were very limited. They sent us to the bathroom twice a day, in the morning and at lunchtime... after lunch. We ate three times a day, two spoons of tea, eventually some bread, expired cheese, and mainly pasta for lunch, usually with the unboiled oil poured on the surface, that is why most of us suffered from diarrhea. There was no meat, there was meat with skin and hair, be it ham or meat of any other animal. The food was of a very low quality.

We slept at 9:00 PM and woke up at 5:00 AM by the [sound of a] trumpet. We were not allowed to lean anywhere or sit on the bed during the day, we had to sit on the floor with our legs crossed. We were used to it. As I said earlier, we had a bucket for other needs, an improvised WC. As for the visits, they decided the way they wanted, for the reading as well. The light inside was very strong, if somebody got exposed to it for a very long time, then it was necessary for them to wear glasses later. The director also took our glasses from us as a punishment, so we would not be able to read, or see properly. As I said, I was alone in the last six months. It was forbidden for me... ah yes, I was a little sensitive and made a chronological mistake. The commission that came, they came one day after Vezire had been beaten very badly the night before, a friend of ours in room number five. She was beaten so much, that we protested and I remember that the hardest thing in prison is when somebody

else is beaten and not you, because you are so powerless to defend them that it is an extraordinary situation.

And we were very irritated, the warden came near me, very close to my face, {puts her palm in front of her face} with a very cynical grin... after the ceremony of visiting hours was over, people were still outside, but they had stepped back a little. And he said, "What would you do with me, if your time were to come?" Since I was very hurt, because of Vezire, and I was in a very particular emotional state, I said to him.... I said it in a way that I never thought I would, absolutely. First, I never thought that I would have the opportunity to say it to him. Second, I never thought I would say it so calmly. Absolutely, I never thought I would.

It was a totally unthought saying of mine, but I did not think at all about what I said, but I was one hundred percent convinced that it had to be that way, I have no explanation of how I have...it was irritating having him come so close to me, so cynical, so... inhumane. Instead, I said it in a very, very calm way, extraordinarily calm way. I cannot explain it to myself. I said, "I would have killed you." And he was terrified.

I had Xhemile, Xhemile Hyseni was the first agronomist of Kosovo. She was a political prisoner as well. And she said that, "I thought you went crazy." And I was... it's still inexplicable to me, I was very calm. There are chances, my whole being was convinced that that was the right thing to say to him at that moment. And he was so terrified, and withdrew so quickly and was irritated by the fact that I said it in front of everybody... he had no idea. And he said, "You will very soon see how you will kill me." (smiles). And half an hour later they came and took me with those few things I had in prison. We always had very few clothes, as many as we were allowed, two-three things. But fortunately I realized what was about to happen and I hid those few things of mine, the poetry book of Bertolt Brecht and Yannis Risto. Both of them had very good poetry and both of them had... Yannis Risto was a political prisoner himself in the back then Greece.

Ah... and I have those six-seven months when I was in a very bad physical condition because I had problems with walking, I had problems... I really didn't think I would make it out of there alive, but I had to mobilize in every possible way. Maybe there I experienced....During the investigations I experienced the far limit of physical pain, while in room number three, in cell number three which is solitary confinement, I experienced the far limit of... thought, of logical thinking. I was afraid that if I didn't say something it was possible that I would suddenly never be able to think logically again, concretely, go crazy.

And I improvised all the possible ways, be it songs, recitals, drama, as... starting from the first poem to the last, then from the last to the first. The combination of this poetry of Yannis Risto. I had those books for six months and something, they were my best friends. And I sang, I sang, I sang, a lot. The song doesn't sound anywhere better than it does in prison (smiles).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you sing a song for us?

Hava Shala: Yes... I... sang, but of course for example a song about migration, for example... or a sequence of a song which I often listen to, but only a sequence. For example the song...{sings} For example the song, “Come friends, let’s drink,” a whole sequence, of course I cannot reproduce it all, “Come friends let’s drink, let’s drink one glass, let’s drink one glass of raki. Come friends let’s drink because we will not become any younger, because years fly, they fly one by one, girls become old women, our youth doesn’t come back anymore.” For example, or {sings} “I wandered all around Calabria, nowhere could I find mother Albania. I wandered all around Calabria, nowhere could I find mother Albania. I held two roses in my hand, I gave one to my *arbëreshë*.⁴ I held two roses in my hand, I gave one to my *arbëreshë*. *E lum, e lum...*” and that’s it (smiles). I have forgotten the lines, but I sang these. *Also* in prison, one has the chance to exercise more, there are chances during that time, I sang properly. I also sing with little Trim, my nephew, but I sing songs that are a little also for his generation. But I liked pop songs very much, the others as well of course.

Just... this was the time in Mitrovica, one last story about the prison of Mitrovica because one would probably need a long time to talk about it. In the last days of my staying in cell number three, I was almost unable to move, and I constantly had, had... physical weakness which sometimes were to the level where one loses their consciousness. And suddenly I became conscious in prison... in the Hospital of Mitrovica or I was sent to the Hospital of Mitrovica while still conscious, and that is something special that I said, and I constantly said. One of those days which were pretty common in my last two weeks, time after time I woke up in the hospital with an infusion, then I returned.

One day a doctor who was the director of the department came, she spoke Serbian and she most likely was Serbian or Bosnian. It was not important to me, to me she was a woman who spoke another language and who had the chance of being very trustworthy [for the system] at the time, because she spoke the language of the administration and the regime that was here, and *a priori* she had another position. She came to me that day, a nurse, my consciousness was back or at least I heard something in the hospital. She said, “I am person X...” I don’t remember her name, this is my weak point, I don’t remember names. I remember the names of those people I love and... surprisingly I don’t remember them. And she said, “I am person X,” and she asked me, “What is the reason for you being here? Do you know why you are here?” I said, “No. I can guess, but I actually don’t know.” She said, “Would you like to know?” I said, “I actually know something, but I don’t precisely know why I am here today.” She said, “I want you to know why you are here. And I need your trust, because I need to talk to you about something.”

It was something weird, it was something human that was... that didn’t fit, I was not used to meeting people at that time, or at least not officially, how to say, somebody having an official position and

⁴ *Arbereshë/a* is the term that refers to the women of the Albanian community called *Arbëresh*, which settled in Italy after the death of Skenderbeg in the fifteenth century.

being human... no. I had seen wardens who secretly showed humanity, but not from this position. She said that..."Yes," she said, "I want you to know that I've been asked to sign your death." And I said, "They do their work, I do mine." Her eyes were filled with tears and I remember it as if it happened today, she sat near my bed, in the corner of it, and said, "But, I don't want to do it." She said, "You are not sick, they are sick." And she said, let me say it in Albanian, "May they be cursed, I am only a mother of two daughters." She was shocked by it and said, "I will not do it, I don't want to do it. You must know that I will not do it. But, I need your understanding, because today I will take a decision which could be a chance as well as a danger for you, but this is the only way to open a new possibility for you. I will tell the director..." The director wanted to personally follow me, and he had sworn that he would bring me to a condition where I would break, according to his opinion.

And after some time, she swore that she would not do it and she swore that she would stop the director of the prison from bringing me... bringing me to the hospital, with the excuse that I was not sick. And when the director came, she left the door open a little {points to the door} and I swear that she said almost all the things she talked to me about. And her courage impressed me, her courage and her human side impressed me. It was very rare at that time, it was outside the normality {makes air quotes} that was created at that time. And I can honestly said that until that time I was a little nationalist, you should be convinced that since that moment I was much more human than nationalist.

And I remember that in my life experiences, I would not exchange such an experience for anything else, because I've seen it, even though it was a drop in the ocean, but however, it was something, that was a human being, only a human being. It was like Bertolt Brecht for example, it is incomparable concerning any dimension, but just like Bertolt Brecht who rose against the craziness of his people at that time, and she was a little Bertolt Brecht in her own way, with her own possibilities, with her own tools, she was to me, to me this was a possible comparison at that time. And I still value that courage and I think that it contributed to my maturity at the horizontal level [sic], at the level of the experiences which are part of our life, of our formation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What would have happened to you if she didn't help you?

Hava Shala: And she simply asked, she....No, they knew that I would gradually die, because I was actually very weak, so extraordinary weak that I could no longer walk, I could sleep very badly. My organism didn't accept the food I ate, I was actually... I would gradually die. But I would die because of the lack of food, of the lack of movement, of the... I was totally isolated, I had no more walks, no more time to go to the bathroom, I barely showered, in fact I was ready, even I myself believed that I would die. But when I was sent to the prison of Lipjan, with the help of other women I learned, I created the possibility to walk again and to... how to say, just like a child who learns walking again. And they knew that I could die very fast and I felt it, how to say, I saw it. She only had to sign it that I died due to a heart attack or from... I don't know, but she didn't want to do it. And she told the director that, "I don't want you to bring her to my department. I forbid you from bringing her here!

She is not sick, you are sick.” Trust me, she told him exactly the things she told me and in fact they didn’t send me to the hospital anymore, but they were forced to take other measures, and that was my removal from the prison of Mitrovica.

In fact that’s how it happened, within one week or ten days or more... I don’t... one loses the sense of time while in prison, they came and took me. I was very certain that they were sending me to Serbia, because I only had one year of prison left, but it was possible, I thought that in Serbia they would find... my mind... and I felt so sorry about my family. For the first time I felt so sorry because they were in difficult financial as well as emotional conditions and so on. But for my surprise, they brought me to Lipjan. And that was, how to say, my renaissance, or like I was born again, not to make a parallel with *Rilindja*.⁵ But there I experienced very particular moments. For the first time after three years I saw myself in the mirror of the waiting room, where one group of people was delivered while the other one came to receive. There was a pretty big mirror on the door and that’s where I saw myself for the first time. I swear that at that time I had problems to see myself in the mirror because it wasn’t even... to me it was a whole different physical person.

However, Lipjan was one of the most normal prisons of that time, it was built recently. They were dominating... the Albanian staff were dominating, they had their own evils but, however, there was a little more space. The bad thing about Lipjan was that we were forced to work. I somehow sabotaged work because of health issues, but I wasn’t convinced that we had to work that much either....But, there were also female friends, female friends stayed together, the prison of Mitrovica was incomparable to the one in Lipjan in many ways. And I finished the last year in the prison of Lipjan and I was released on December 19, four years later, in ‘88, at the time of the miners, at the time of the protests... at the time that is called our time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was it after being set free, whom did you have outside, how...?

Hava Shala: Eh... in fact, I individually had more problems within the family, everything concerning the routine seemed banal, it seemed unimportant, it felt strange to me when people talked about some harvesting, about taxes... people from the village payed them with animals, people came there and took the animals. Of course, the villager gets sad if more animals, or more grain or more wheat, are taken from him. These topics were banal to me after getting out of prison. It was... no matter whether we liked it or not, a kind of human alienation from society happened. But, we had male friends, we had female friends, we had a very special connection. The best is what connects people most. Sometimes I think about how my family... I am talking about certain circumstances, but however, my family was there for me. They supported me during the time in prison as well, I had very rational parents, very good, that was not a problem to them. They only had the problem that I didn’t

⁵ *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian political and cultural movement for national liberation.

finish the *matura*⁶ in Peja, and then I had to compensate it with exams. The director of the prison was very loyal to the time, to the regime, he swore that, “An enemy like you will never take the exams here.” But there were good people as always, and I want to emphasize this. I remember that thanks to good people, good situations are created in difficult times.

And for my own good luck, the director [of the school] was invited to a seminar, of course the instructions had to be taken from those in Belgrade. And I heard from the secretary of the school, whose last name was Shala as well, but he was not a cousin of mine and I don’t even know where he came from, but he was very, very good. My class monitor Riza Krasniqi, my math teacher and he, all the other teachers were good as well. And I don’t know through whom, but they notified me at home that I could prepare to take the exams while the director of the school was in Belgrade. And in fact, I could pass the exams in a very general way. One can read while in prison, and of course reading takes you higher, but as long as the subjects go, of course I was far from a good student who could pass exams that fast (smiles).

But as I said, I made a compromise with myself in that context, because I am often very tough with myself, with my principles. But at that point, I knew that one of my possibilities was moving to Pristina, be it for studying, of creating a little anonymity because in fact, we were tailed, no matter whether we liked it or not. The police car was not rarely in front of our door. People were questioned. I had other stories, which would take very long... more time to be said. But... it was a chance to get out of the province where you as... defined as the people’s enemy, within the quotation marks, had it very difficult to move. And in fact, I accepted the good offer of my good teachers, and I passed the exams like that. Of course with the exception of [Albanian] language, where I had an interesting topic about literature. Yes... if I am not mistaken, it was Migjen’s⁷ poetry and I loved Migjen and his poetry.

And the only black [wrong] thing I did in my whole life was the acceptance of a diploma thesis of an X person, it was prepared by this mister Shala, whose I have unfortunately forgotten, he had prepared it because I had no time to prepare the diploma thesis anymore, the *matura* thesis. And I know that I want to publicly say it that I am sorry and I can forgive myself, I did it only because I absolutely wanted to get away from the narrow space there, and coming to Pristina then was a chance to me. That’s the only way I can justify that blind acceptance of a diploma thesis, I don’t even know who wrote it, they did something illegal there. They added the first page with my name, I swallowed that offer with difficulty. Even though they said that it was a formality, but it was a precondition in order to come to Pristina. But I passed the exams the way I did, I took the famous diploma which was not even mine, we created the conditions to register to the faculty. And in fact I studied while at the faculty. At the faculty we didn’t... except friends, certain people who helped us with the registration process because we had no ID cards. Things were difficult because of papers.

⁶ *Maturë or Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

⁷ Millosh Gjergj Nikolla (1911-1938), known as Migjeni, a well-known poet and writer born in Shkodra.

Otherwise during my studies, I studied with pleasure, I studied [Albanian] language and literature. I loved folk literature, but I also loved the early written literature. I studied with pleasure *Këngët e Milosaos* [Milosaos' Songs], I studied early literature, I was very interested in the social aspect of the early literature. I was very interested in the pre-Ottoman period, then I wanted to give myself an explanation of how we were, how we are and how we could be. Even though it was a crazy period in other aspects of life, but regarding my studies, I did it with pleasure and that's why I can say that I... I did, I did my studying with a lot... I did it with my own forces and from my own self.

At the same time as my studies, which were not a priority for many students, but to me were very important, because the circumstances were the priority of that time, there was the miners' movement, which had the effect of an earthquake on the sea and its waves involved the entire nation in the positive understanding of the term. I was still in Lipjan when the miners' strike and the Blood Feuds Reconciliations⁸ took place, their idea and so on. They brought a movement in itself, not only in the field of politics. But later on the Albanians were positively provoked in the dark corners where we were stuck, such as the feuds, but also the position of women in general. And there I was, I was part of my male friends and my female friends, I was a part of the protests, my *korzo*⁹ of the school of resistance is the *korzo* of protests, it is the *korzo* of sacrifice, the *korzo* of extraordinary circumstances, it is my *korzo*, our *korzo*. That is why we fortunately had no chance at all to feel lonely. Unfortunately, we lost many times at that time. There were further flights, as well as murders.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were these protests about the University, right?

Hava Shala: No, these were about... the time of Milošević,¹⁰ the abolition of the autonomy, then the University came later. The Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations, which started in February '90, came as a logical flow of all those protests, at the time of the demonstrations...

[This part of the interview below was conducted on October 14, 2016]

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Mrs Hava, could you tell us in a more detailed way about the political situation of the '90s?

Hava Shala: Yes, of course I can tell you from my viewpoint. I was released from prison in the end of... on December 19, 1988, after four full years in prison. And that time was filled with many important events, special events such as protests, the hunger strike of the miners. At that time, I was still in the

⁸ In 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.

⁹ Main street, reserved for pedestrians, here used metaphorically.

¹⁰ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

prison of Lipjan, I was in the prison of Lipjan during the last year of prison. And of course, we experienced those events even from inside, we followed them, we participated in them from a distance. A topic which was important, very important and touched us in a special way. During my time in prison, there was the idea of some miners to forgive some bloods, or the idea of forgiving bloods. But, at that time we were in prison and we had... together with a very good and lovely friend of mine, Akile Dedinca, we talked about what we could do even from inside. And we thought about writing a paper and taking it out somehow through our male and female friends activists, in order to do something in that direction. But the conditions kept getting worse, inside and out. And that remained as a desire, a topic, or better said a need of ours to do something, but the chances were small. It was impossible to do something from inside.

Then I was released and it was '89, with many other events, with the protests, the one of the '90s, with the removal of the autonomy, with many constraints, with the mass dismissals of Albanians from work, with the violation of the right for education. I mean, these were very difficult processes, where an Albanian or a human being of this country, our human being, as Qosja says, was more and more oppressed, at a certain point they became totally oppressed. And the climax of all those events was reached, as judged from my viewpoint, in December, '89, January-February of '90. The events were very intensive especially in January, the mass protest all around Kosovo, all around Kosovo without any exception. And I think, the whole nation from all around Kosovo was involved, not only geographically but also in terms of participation, age, gender, as well as consequences.

And protests were happening everyday in Peja just like in many other cities, demonstrations in which many friends of mine were hurt, injured, murdered. In Peja there was Fatmir, a young boy who was killed in the demonstration, he was very close, by accident, he was very close to us, by us I mean a group of our friends. In other words, there where people are killed, I have once heard or read a saying, "The war is not measured by one or two killed people." Where people are killed, maybe it's by accident that only one of them gets killed or one hundred, or more, I have emotions even now. I have it that day, maybe it is unforgettable for the fact that a very young boy died in our hands and we experienced his murder, his death, he died, he gave his last breath in our hands.

And then the demonstrations were... the next day, the day after and one day, within this week, within these days, January days, there was... a retreat from a very difficult attack of the police, of the army, then the army went on the streets. In a corner, a man came with the excuse that he simply wanted to talk to me, he wanted to talk to me about non participating, or the fear that his relatives and he, who were in a blood feud, had to participate in the demonstration, and the desire he had to not participate. The desire, I mean the fear he had that something could happen to him in the demonstration and he had also told his cousins that it would be better not to go to the demonstration. I mean that was one... a real fear of his even though, honestly, in that moment, I didn't think that in those circumstances where we were being killed by the regime, somebody would go to the demonstration to kill somebody else. But, there are chances, I was more idealistic, I believed in this thing, and he was less idealistic, maybe more of a realist, I am saying this now from this chronological

distance. The chances were not, we were retreating, the movement was very limited and it remained like that. He expressed his concern and we dispersed.

After this demonstration I didn't return home to my mother and my father in the village of Raushiq, because either way we were already somehow more identifiable because we had been political prisoners before. And I went to my paternal grandparents' who were living in the village of Strellc, my grandfather and my grandmother. And late at night, my father came with the man that I mentioned, a man from the village of Bërliq, who came and expressed his concern and his fear once again. And at the same time believing that his family *rreth*,¹¹ including the ones he was in a feud with, had respect for me as a political prisoner, for us as former political prisoners, he made a request. He believed that we could mediate between the two families for as long as the political situation was difficult, there were protests and demonstrations.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did he ask you to take *besa*¹² for him...?

Hava Shala: Yes, he simply thought of taking the *besa*, yes. He simply asked us to mediate, to take the *besa* in order for people not to be endangered and for the murder not to happen between them, a revenge. Let me say it honestly, I was still convinced that such thing could not happen, I strongly believed that there was no person who could go out and take revenge or kill somebody in the demonstration for such reasons. I didn't tell him that I would do nothing, I told him that I would meet my friends and discuss it with them. But I said it more in order to comfort him at the moment, because I was still not convinced that it could be like that. Then they left and that was enough for him.

Of course I would do something, but absolutely not in measures in which it really happened then. They went, I watched the news and I don't remember, maybe if I turn my mind back I will find the time, date and day, but somehow I haven't unfolded the details and maybe I will personally not do so ever. And the spokesman of Milošević's government appeared in the news at that time, I knew his name back then, but I have problems in remembering the names. And he said that, "They were not killed..." Somebody was killed in Peja, in Deçan and in other places of Kosovo. And he said, "They were not killed by our police and army," theirs, "But primitive Albanians were killed because of feuds." That... if somebody watches it, I am sure that it still exists and there are people who have listened to that statement.

And that was a coincidence between the coming of this man from the village of Bërliq, whose name unfortunately I don't know and his concerns, and the news, the charges... concretely the alibi that this person was creating for his regime in this way. It was very irritating, it was very unacceptable to

¹¹ *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.

¹² 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. Here it refers to an agreed truce in a feud.

me, it was very discriminating, it was very untrue, it was very inhuman. And, it was clear to me in that moment that the first thing I would do the next day, no matter the danger I could have, would be to go to the city of Peja the next day, I was very clear, and I was determined, I was convinced, deeply convinced that something needed to be done in that direction. This was totally unacceptable to me, this hiding, this idiotic alibi of the regime of Milosh and the crimes he was committing at that time.

And I went to Peja the next day. Myrvete was the first person I aimed to meet and wanted to meet, back then her name was Myrvete Dreshaj, today after she is married she is called Myrvete Dreshaj Baliu. I met her in Peja and we started to talk, I don't remember whether she had heard the news or not. We always understood each other very well with Myrvete, we had been friends before, before prison, during prison and after prison. And we understood each-other, there was no need to explain, there was no need to convince her... she considered it very important and said, "Let's see what we can do." Brahim Dreshaj and Lulëzim Ethemi arrived right at the time we were having that conversation in Peja, they came by accident, by accident on that moment because in fact they had a task. They had gone out to do something, and if I am not mistaken to distribute various pamphlets. Or something... I remember they had some papers in their hands, but we didn't talk about it at all, because we immediately opened the topic about which I had already talked, about which we were already discussing with Myrvete. And they heard our opinion and said, "Of course. It's the right time, we think, of course!" It was implied right away.

And since the movement in Peja was either way dangerous, we somehow were used to dangers, how to say and... we decided to go somewhere where it was possible for us, it was near and to someone who was of course, who could be a supporter of ours. And that someone was Adem Grabovci,¹³ who was still unknown to me, I mean, I didn't know Adem before, as a name yes, but not in person. Brahim, Lul, Myrvete and I went at Adem's that day, we talked and agreed without hesitation. I mean, there was no need to talk much, to speak much philosophy. The only thing we were preoccupied with that day was that the movement of us alone without any discretion, without some kind of cover would make the action fail from the very beginning. The action as an action, we were convinced about the idea, that it was totally right and at the right time, it was the right response to the charges made the night before. But we thought that we needed support even if it simply was for the performance that it would create, the opportunity that it would give us to be more discreet, not to directly confront the police, the army and the regime of that time.

And then the idea was to ask the intellectuals, to contact them and we asked the leader of *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*,¹⁴ Imer, professor Imer Muhaxhiri and his response was, "The idea is good, undoubtedly, but we are in the beginning of the organization and we are afraid it will be difficult for

¹³ Adem Grabovci (1960-) currently a politician and a secretary of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, in 1990 he was among the group of the Peja youth who initiated the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation.

¹⁴ *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.

the party,” their political [party]. And then we thought about an honourable, highly esteemed, highly regarded figure, e who has the competence of entering the *oda*,¹⁵ of conversing in *oda*, it was professor Zekeria Cana¹⁶ and professor Anton Çetta,¹⁷ really Zekeria Cana first. He was honourable, at least for us, but not only for us but we knew his engagement, his literature. Then we went to professor Zekeria Cana and he was very impulsive just like we know him from that time. He was dynamic, not complicated, he was complicated in his own way just like every human being (smiles). He was often complicated for the fact that he was very courageous and we needed a little discretion, but however that was the person we had chosen. Of course it was not a mistake at all. He says that, “I am the right person of course, but professor Anton Çetta would be a more right and more appropriate person.”

Then we went and talked to professor Anton. Of course, they considered it as an amazing idea, it was only an idea, it was one... it was an undoubtful support from all the people we talked to. But the dilemma was how to make it happen, because we had no doubt that it was the right idea at the right time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you realize this idea...?

Hava Shala: We had already, already... I had given the word to the man from the Plane... from the village of Bërliq, that I would do something. And in one way I was obliged that if it had to start somewhere, then that was the case. And it started in Lumbardh of Deçan, because the family in enmity, one of... the family whose relative had been killed, was the family in the village of Lumbardh, the Leka family in the village of Lumbardh. We organized then, after the conversation with the two professors and with other persons. We also talked to professor Rexhep Qosja then, there were other University professors, as well as other intellectuals. The circle widened in a geometrical proportion how to say, everybody did something in that direction. And we set the day, I am pretty convinced that it was February 2. There are people who say it was February 8. Unfortunately, we didn't keep notes at that time, because we were always moving. Then if you were caught and controlled, it was dangerous if they found you anything then... the problem takes more difficult dimensions. But our aim was for the Action not to stop.

And it could be February 2, for me it's February 2, but it doesn't matter that much, maybe it is important for history, but to me it doesn't matter that much. We went and organized, some friends, 90% of us were political prisoners and supporters of this idea and our supporters who came with cars, came with their means, buses. I mean we had a tractor, we had an offer to take it with us (smiles), because there were too many of us. And that day we went together with professor Anton Çetta and Zekeria Cana and around 17-18 people, it could be that there were even 20 people. And we travelled like that, mobilized in our own way. We travelled to the village of Lumbardh in Deçan. I've always heard various ideas. People who have only heard of it, that it was started by the Deçan youth, it was

¹⁵ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

¹⁶ Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian.

¹⁷ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

started by the Peja youth, it had started... I didn't like such limitations, such localizations. They had started... it was we by accident, it could be someone else, but people from various *rreth*, various ages and genders were part of this group. We were only a few girls, but however we were there, and we went to Lumbardh. We were welcomed well, the *oda* was opened according to the tradition, we all sat.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the case of the village of Lumbardh?

Hava Shala: There was a murder [in] the village of Lumbardh. I mean, we never researched about the causes, as far as I know, but it had something to do with property or with water or something with... common property. I am not sure, because we never went back to the case as a whole, because we didn't want to give ourselves the right of judges. We made a call on behalf of the nation's interest, of our future. On behalf of the youth, on behalf of the perspective of the youth, to forgive, not to judge something. We never discussed and never questioned the fact that a crime is a crime, a murder is a murder. To us it was very clear that a person was murdered there, and a crime was undoubtedly committed there. Then there were the circumstances which made the case either easier or more difficult, but we didn't get into that, because our role there was of another kind.

The reason and the interests why we asked them to forgive the blood was clear to us. That is why we didn't get very deep, there was the fear of people getting mad, sensitive, angry and then return to point zero again. This is why I know that a person of some family was murdered, but what for exactly, I know that property was the reason, but I don't know the details. After many conversations, after many times, a relatively chaotic conversation, chaotic for the fact that each one of us said something in a row, generally with good intentions. In a row or not, we gave a response according to our own opinions, or we asked questions and to the host it was a burden, a big burden. But it was for us as well, we had the very first experience in that *oda*. We went with an amazing idea, we went with a very human intention, very human, very patriotic, but we didn't know how to do it best. But, that day we had a very important experience, we didn't realize that going collectively to someone could be a pressure, a big stress, it was an unstructured conversation... the other one says that they feel alone in front of all those people. Maybe their emotional situation isn't taken into consideration. Simply, to us it was clear that we shouldn't have gone there in that way.

And this was the reason why we gradually started thinking that the preparation and the work in the *oda*, within the families, should be done by certain working groups, selected people who come to talk, who know how to talk, not to hurt each other, but also not get very deep into the problem. Getting into the problem in the sense, "They were wrong, they were right," without discussing that. We just started from it, we are on another level, it's the level of the people, the human level, it's the patriotic level. We didn't have the courage to play. And we had to select the people because there were the cases where the person who went and made an involuntary mistake, and we heard for example that some person X of a certain group was chased by the *oda*. And we researched the case, we saw and we found out that the certain group and the certain person of that group was a relatively dominating person, relatively leading. In fact, you cannot go to the house of the person who has lost a person and

say, “You have to do it!” It doesn’t work with, “You have to.” And this is the reason why the selection of people was very important, of the people who had a moral creed, as well as a moral right to be welcomed in a certain way. Yes, always knowing how to touch the most painful point of that time through conversation, through words.

The freedom of this country and I, the freedom of this country starts with me, and I will do something and I can do something for the future of this country, because we are all endangered. This was the motto more or less, mine and not only my motto. While the other motto was to be forgiven, to me personally it was not an action with limits, it was not... time-wise, we thought about it for one year, but it was not absolute. We didn’t say this much and that’s it, but in the end of the day each one of us had the right to say something themselves. We didn’t deal with the political side of... of course it had a political dimension, but we didn’t go to the point whether somebody is right or not. In case there was any mistake or any carelessness, then we talked, we advised. Then we were, we were in the village of Raushiq, a girl was murdered in the village of Raushiq. It happened twice in the same family, the Mulliqi family who reciprocally had murdered people.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the Reconciliations Movement received?

Hava Shala: And...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there hesitation?

Hava Shala: People said, they heard, they said, “Young students, girls in *oda!*” It was unimaginable, a pretty crazy self confidence was needed in order to enter the men’s *oda*. You had to know the men’s *oda*, you had to know it, not to hurt it, and at the same time get over it, to take the men of the *oda* with you a little, to bring them out, to tell them that the world is wider and [the meaning of] manhood is broader. It was accepted like an idea, of course, but they were, there were skeptical people, because of the fear that it could maybe not be very real, it could be unachievable. But, as for it as an idea, people were fascinated, we didn’t face resistance or lack of support, we didn’t face it. I met someone once who said, “Give it up!” Maybe they heard about certain groups who had interests in mediation... who filled their pockets during the years, they filled their wallets with money. But I cannot say that that resistance was general, but it was heard here and there from some people with certain interests in that sense that, “Men with moustache couldn’t manage to reconcile this blood... not to talk about the youth.”

But the action very quickly expanded its reach. The very fact that it did it very quickly, that it was embraced as an idea and many people joined the action, made the blood in the village of Raushiq to be reconciled relatively quickly, my [Albanian] language professor gave a very big contribution for it... My memory has gotten old, I will remember it later, I am sorry now I can’t... It is terrible how my memory was erased, the names from my memory... Nimon Alimusaj. I am sorry for bringing it like this, because I had respect for him, he was my esteemed Albanian Language professor in the gymnasium. And then the reconciliation of a blood in a family where a girl was murdered, then the reconciliation of

the blood in the village of Bërliq, which is actually the first full reconciliation of a blood, where a [the blood for] a lost, murdered person of a family was totally forgiven. I mean, at the Mulliqi family there were reciprocal murders but further vengeance was stopped, while the typical blood reconciliation, how to say, took place in the village of Raushiq.

Maybe I always avoided the cases. People usually localized the cases saying, “This case and I,” “That case and I.” I am terrified by the fact that I must, I must be crazy to one day say, “This case and I,” because those were very painful emotional processes, from the moment we started the conversation to the forgiving of the blood. It is very idiotic to say, “I have the merits for that.” It is... for my mind, for my soul, it is totally egoist to say, “This case and I.” This and I.” I’ve not rarely heard various versions, various stories, various tales, people said to me, “Why don’t you show?” “Why don’t you speak?” It was very difficult for me, exactly for the fact that I was afraid of being misunderstood by the people who gave so much of themselves if I said, “You are not telling the truth, I was the one.” And I have this problem. Yes... because it’s, they did it, we had the idea, we took the time, it was a very violent process, sometimes it was a very terrible process.

It was... if only justice was taken into consideration, I often asked myself one question, “Is all this pain okay?” We didn’t have the courage to get very deep in humanity, we always held it to a higher level, at that time, it was and it will always remain the homeland, the love for the homeland, for the future of our children, for our own future in general. Otherwise, you have to be very egoistic to say, “We did our nation’s service,” that we took the time, but they forgave the blood or they were convinced that that forgiving was made in the interest of the homeland.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did the Movement work?

Hava Shala: The working groups were created in the region of Peja, first three working groups then we created another working group, each with their own contribution. And it extended relatively quickly, it got simpler. The working groups prepared the reconciliations and the reconciliations were done later, the participation of ordinary people was made in the ceremony of the extension of the hand. In fact, the case was practically reconciled when people gathered. Only as a form of respect for the one who forgave the blood, they had to come and receive the forgiving, let’s say, figuratively. And after taking the hand of *besa*, it was an obligation of the working group to go to the family of the murderer to bring the message, the forgiving, and at the same time to give advices, to have a correct stand, not to provoke, not to act proudly in front of the other one, but simply recognize the forgiving as a human act, as a patriotic act, the act which would also oblige the other family to be very rational in their behaviour in the village, as well as in the *lagje*¹⁸ and so on.

[The video interview was cut]

¹⁸ *Lagje* in this context means just neighborhood, but more specifically, in the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor.

Then, our group went to... by our group I mean Myrvete, Adem, Brahim, Lul and I, that was the constituent group, how to say. We were... we took various tasks and were reached to other regions of Kosovo. And we, the small group of initiators, went to Rahovec at that time, met people, of course those were people we had met in our *rreth* until the whole nation was involved. In the Action there were mainly friends and families of former political prisoners, because you had trust [in them] and trust was an important precondition. And then from there we activated other friends, and I remember that Rahovec was the first, then the next stop was Prizren as well. Then it was extended to Drenica, in Kosovo, Akilja joined, he was an important person for Fushë Kosova and the Prishtina *rreth*, there was Rrahman Dini. He was... many intellectuals, a whole list of people who were aware and engaged needs to be written... they mobilized and the number increased relatively fast... it became a high number of participants. And the idea as such was, it was not endangered anymore because it had enough reach and then we continued the principle, the working groups, the preparation of bloods reconciliation, the blood forgiving in a ceremony, and these ceremonies then became a kind of... a kind of meeting where people who hadn't forgiven the blood before came to forgive it as well.

And, the climax of this gatherings was the gathering on May 1 at Verrat e LLukës, where probably they are right when they say that there were half million people gathered. And us... the planned number of reconciliations that were to be done that day was much lower than the number of the bloods that were reconciled then. Where people started feeling morally obliged to do something and it was an extraordinary gathering and I have never seen and experienced the people of Kosovo more convinced of their own strength than that day, even though we were surrounded by military forces, police with bulletproof vests, all that space. There was a big danger of escalation, but people were more disciplined than ever before, more certain of themselves than ever before, more dignified in their forgiveness of blood than ever before. It is a moment I don't forget, and of course it is not the only one, but it is the climax of these, how to say, great ceremonies of the forgiveness of blood.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the speeches you wrote and what topics were they about?

Hava Shala: Let me say something, I've said it before as well and I will say it now, we... the former political prisoners always travelled, we travelled with a small unsafe feeling that if we go out, we will either go back to our homes again or we will go where we started. We were not sure we wouldn't get arrested on the road, that is why we always needed someone to look after us, not to carry things with us, especially notes, because it would always be a reason in our situation to be charged, in case we were arrested. And this is the reason why I feel bad, but unfortunately some friends and I had no chance to keep precise data about this. But I almost precisely know what the topics were about.

We had... first we organized these ceremonies in a planned way, for example in Rugova, in the village of Rugova, municipality of Has, in other places, not to count them, we planned them because our aim was to raise people's awareness, and at the same time to somehow mobilize the inner human world at that time. Then those ceremonies were turned into an appeal, into a log [sic] where people showed

their *burrëri*.¹⁹ For example, it was planned at Verrat e Llukës, there were certain cases we had prepared. There were the calls, they were actually oral, we never did written calls, but people came, women, men, elders, youth, children, families came. Incredible, incredible!

I think that the Action brought with itself a higher civilization. There are many dimensions and of course various people talked about various aspects and dimensions of the Action, but I think that the man of the *oda* and the woman of the house, there... we got over that limit, I mean, our limit, men had created a pretty difficult limit for themselves in the men's *oda*. Women had a limit which by time... I give myself the right to even call it self-limit, first women considered normal staying at home. And one who stays home all the time does no longer believe that their own forces can push them forward. Those women, those men, those people got out of the *oda*, they got out of the house, they saw, they heard, they saw a great force that one can overcome themselves, and of course one can also overcome the limit of the enemy then. And this force, this emancipation remains in my memory and of course remains in the people's memory as well.

Then often during the wartime, when I saw women on television or... during various translations, when I translated for women who came only with their children to the hills, to the... minefields, to difficult areas. But they came and they were determined, I said, maybe it was a challenge at that time, as if women tried their own force which then they realized, how to say, they carried it with themselves in the wartime. I think, this was a kind of challenge, how to say, for oneself.

Maybe at this point it is important to say something, something special. At the time, when entering the men's *oda*, men more or less saw that the rigid world of *oda* started moving. And not rarely, when it came very near the taking of a "Yes," that the blood was being forgiven, it felt like there was a fear among men that they might be losing the order of the men's *oda*, as if, as if it was a kind [of situation] when one is afraid to even move, they don't know what is going to happen after. In other words, there were cases where men said, "Let us see until next week." For example, in one case, in the village of Isniq, one said, "The reconciliation is almost done," or "The word of reconciliation was given." And the men then said, the men of the *oda* said that, "Even if we forgive it, it is possible that the wife of the victim and his children might not agree and might break our word, our *besa*." And, I remember that I was sitting near Myrvete and... also [German: so] in other words, in the middle of Myrvete and professor Anton Çetta, and I quietly asked professor Anton, "Dare Myrvete and I go to the wife, if that's that important for them?" And it was important to us as well, but this was the first time men had started to avoid a little the order of *oda* and we didn't know whether it was the men's fear that they were going against *oda*, or it was just an excuse not to give the last positive word. And he said, "Men, we have two *burrnesha*,²⁰ two students," just as professor Anton knew how to say it best. He said, "We would like to make it easier for you, we would like to send them to talk to the women in order for you

¹⁹ Literally: manhood.

²⁰ The Albanian term *burrnesha* literally means men-like, but can refer to women's show of courage, wittiness, or general disregard for social roles that often limit women's participation in the public space.

not to carry that burden with the wife of the victim.”

And we went there for the first time, we went... it still was before the gathering at Verrat e Llukës. And we went to the wife, whose mother-in-law walked around, she was worried, in the end of the day she was the mother of the son she had lost, and we asked her then. I said that, “Men sent us here,” in fact we made a word play because men didn’t send us to talk only to the wife and exclude the mother-in-law, the conversation was very detailed. But we said that we needed to talk alone. Of course she didn’t feel very good about it, but she didn’t say anything, she was polite and we remained alone. And we confronted the woman.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you say?

Hava Shala: We said that, “Men agree but they are worried that you might not agree and when your sons grow up they might [take revenge], if their mother doesn’t agree, then it’s a semi-reconciliation.” And we did a semi-movement with the words and she said, “No, I don’t want to leave my children in enmity. My children are little, if men said that, and today something is being done for the future of our children,” because we talked a little about another kind of future for Kosovo and the future of her children and of every children of Kosovo, she said, “Then on my part, I give my word just like the men there.” (smiles).

We went and said that, “She gave her word and she doesn’t dispute your response,” it was a kind of diplomacy. But then for our surprise they didn’t say the “Yes” we were hoping they would. And professor Anton said that, “We have a new situation, please think until next time, and next time we hope you give a *burrnore* answer.” And the next time they came to Verrat e Llukës and forgave the blood. Just a case, in order to illustrate it.

Another case to illustrate when the role of the woman was considered and the overcoming of limits or such status which we often drew for ourselves whether because of social and political circumstances. We had one case in the village of Morina, we went together with Musa, Musa Berisha, one of our best friends, an activist of the first gathering. And we had to climb pretty high, it was hard to go there, but both of us went. And the old man said, “You don’t need to talk to me. I am convinced that bloods need to be forgiven, but he is the brother of my wife, it isn’t up to me, not according to the *Kanun*²¹ nor to the law, to forgive or not forgive the blood of my wife’s brother. But my wife is,” he said, “in her room,” he followed me there, he said, “And to be honest, she is sick since she found out that you are here.” I went inside and she really was laying on the bed and she was tired, sad. I said that I came, she said, “Yes, I know, my daughter told me as well,” her daughter was working and that day she was at school, she worked as a teacher.

²¹ *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.

And I said some words to her, I felt sorry, she was tired as well as sad, she was more sick of being sad than actually sick. But it was clear to me that I had to talk differently to her and she said, I suddenly started to make a digression from the topic, and she said, “How was the road?” She said, “Because these evils are ambushing most of the people,” in the sense that they make the journey difficult. I said, “They have their own business and we have ours.” She said, “Yes. But it is difficult for me because I also have the other sister, we only had one *hasret*²² brother and now it is closed,” they were from the Deçan *rreth*, “And our *gjinia*²³ is closed, to us there is nothing more tragic, you know it yourself what a daughter without a *gjini* means.” And I said, “Yes of course I know, that is why we are here, knowing that it is something hard, because if things were easy, then there would be no need for us to come.” But I said, “I want to ask you a question to which I want your heartfelt answer.” I said, “If your brother was alive today, for one moment, if I could give him my soul and make it possible for him to give me an answer. And if I asked him today, ‘Would he rather forgive his own blood on behalf of this country’s future, or leave the blood unforgiven and remain not honored?’ How can bloods remain unforgiven and not honored today?” And she...{puts her hand on her cheek} I remember, she abruptly stood from her bed, she actually sat and, “Ah,” she said, “You’ve gotten me in a difficult position,” she said, “But I swear to God, he was a brave man, he was very skilfull.” I get chills even now when I remember that conversation. And she said, “I am sure he would forgive his own blood.” And there was a piece of silence between us, and she said, “See my daughter, go. Take your friend and go to your house. I will talk to my sister. My daughter told me, ‘When I arrive home, I want to hear something good from you,’” her daughter, the teacher. She said, “This case is finished.” And she went out and followed us to the yard, she greeted Musa and me, the one who was sick suddenly became stronger (smiles). And her daughter came from Morina and forgave the blood at Verrat e LLukës.

There are many many cases to illustrate this, but it is these cases where I saw that the people have strength to overcome their limits, as I said, being a man or being only the men’s *oda* or simply being a man or being a girl. I mean, the self-limit of the people was overcome from every side and it became a very great power which then overcame the geographical borders of Kosovo or, better said, the political borders of Kosovo. Then the Action grew in Albanian lands, in Macedonia as well as in Preshevo and Bujanovc. We had friends all around. In Montenegro as well, there was the very distinctive case of a family there, not an assimilated family but one who held the flag at the bottom of the crate. Each case was an illustrative case and each one for the same thing. People realized that the goal was not personal, not individual, not self-interest, but it was simply the future which needed to be different than what we were experiencing at that time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was said about blood feuds in the *oda*, that it is... strange, that for some time

²² Turkish: *Hasret*, longing, craving for. Albanians have adapted this term to refer to the child of one gender who is alone among the children of the other gender in the family. This child is usually a boy after many girls and is treated in a special way by the parents and relatives.

²³*Gjini* is an Albanian term that refers to the people who are close by the bloodline to the married woman, the relatives of the married woman.

it was thought that it is either strange or it was left to us from...

Hava Shala: This was said more by the people who had educated minds, and it was good that it was said. But let me say it honestly, I've heard this from those who were inside the problem, a feud wasn't called strange. It was said that blood feuds were strange, but I personally don't think that blood feuds are strange. Blood feuds are strange in the sense that many circumstances were created for people to kill each other. For example, there were many properties that were not precisely set, which was my property and which was yours? The regime of that time had undoubtedly created enough circumstances, I was very convinced that they were, the circumstances were very hostile. The circumstances were created at the moment one killed oneself, because of lack of law and justice. At that time there were murders in Western Europe as well, I read various *kanun* then, people were murdered in England as well as in France and Germany in medieval times, when laws weren't functioning yet, like civil laws did at the time of civilized Europe. I mean, a murder happens t where there's lack of justice, there where justice is not justice, it is not equal for the weak, for the strong, for the rich, for the poor.

But, that was said and maybe the time was such that it wanted it to be said. I didn't say it like that, I said that we are all obliged to do something, To me this is painful, it is important to emphasize the fact that we, who went inside, the fact that we told the person, "We understand your pain, I totally walk in your shoes, I am totally ready to walk in your shoes, even though it is maybe impossible to feel the pain of the other." Solidarity, solidarity for pain played a very important role. I have to say it that one felt understood, you knew their pain, you carried that person with you, you gave them strength, you lifted them over their pain and said, "Pain is understandable, it can be healed, it can get easier, it can take a whole new sense if we do something against further murders, and I have the strength to do such a *burrëni*."²⁴

And the motto that was very important is, "Only those who are men, who are strong, who are human have the strength to do such a magnificent act." Not the people, it was said in a way, not directly, it was said, those who are men, men not in the sense of gender, but men in the first meaning of men of the *oda* - people with character, people with morals, people with great awareness, people who were ready to sacrifice, patriotic people, that's what we called men. They were the ones who extended the reconciliation hand as well.

I remember once at one place, I don't want to name the village, even though I said it openly once. We talked, talked, talked, talked and the man said, "No! I don't forgive it!" And professor Anton, I never forget it, said, "I understand that you don't forgive it," and he said, "Eh, so," in the sense that he felt relieved to be understood. He said, "I understand that you cannot forgive it, because it takes a big *burrëni* to forgive it today." And then he shut his mouth then he didn't... discuss it anymore, he realized what it was. And he didn't go further, and left a message to him, I mean, "You will only forgive

²⁴ Literally: manhood. Here, an act of bravery.

the blood if you have strength, if you have *burrëni*,” whose meaning I explained in my way. In other words, it was clear who would forgive the blood. Unforgiving the blood at that time, in those circumstance, was a kind of egoism to me and many others, even though I understand people’s pain, but you went out and were murdered in the street and had no one to avenge you from the police, the military forces, you were arrested, you were tortured, you... you came to the edge of your life and who would avenge you?

The only revenge was fighting for a dignified life. People who had no strength to forgive the blood, had a big problem with themselves, they had a problem with themselves, they had no power. What reason for? Each case can be looked at, but however, in general, most people showed strength and did an extraordinary *burrëni*, a *burrëni* that overcame a lot, the *burrëni* defined above as the [quality] of the men of the *oda*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When the Action began, you spread in other Albanian speaking areas. Did you go there?

Hava Shala: Yes, we went. For example, we divided, not in a strict way but it was implied that someone will go to Montenegro, someone to Macedonia, Someone to Presevo and someone to Bujanovc, someone will go to this area, someone....Depending on the difficult cases or the initiative, there was a need for somebody with experience and somebody who was honored in... I remember in Malësia e Gollakut,²⁵ we went there once with Akile Dedinca, Rrahman Dini and another friend who was better known by Akilja, I am sorry but I don’t remember her name. Rrahman Dini died right after the war, he participated in the war. He was an amazing person, a person without a political bias, without a party, without... simply a patriotic person. We went to Gollak, to one village of Gollak. And, and there was... we left the car down and went up there and discussed and the welcome of the man of that house was very interesting.

He said, “Welcome, because you never struck to the point more than today.” And we started the ceremonies, “How are you, how’s everything going?” And he said, “You don’t need to tell me who you are, I know who you are.” He said, “And let me tell you something. You’ve come at the right time. Not that the other men who came before to my *oda* weren’t good,” but, “There were either good men at bad times or bad men at good times.” He said, “And none of them matched, they didn’t find the right moment. You came,” he said, “Good people at the right time.” I will never forget it! It was something, an extraordinary formulation. And we talked and brought the case closer [to a resolution]. Of course no case was reconciled the first time, but you could somehow know from the very first time, because as the saying goes, “A good day is seen in the morning.”

Then he followed us downstairs, outside and he had... we were, I have to say something. In most cases, for one year in a row, we were mostly hungry and thirsty. I have to openly say this, to tell it, to

²⁵ *Malësia e Gollakut* is a mountainous region in the eastern part of Kosovo, and southern Serbia, bordering the Llap region to the west.

illustrate it with this case in Gollak. When we went out, he said that his goats were in the mountains and just for the sake of conversation, I said, “You have good goats.” I said, “Do you ferment the cheese with or without thickened cream?” And he said, “How do you know...” No {corrects herself} “Do you sell cheese with or without thickened cream?” He said, “How come you know about goats?” I said, “When I was little, I grew up among goats. I didn’t like them that much, but we sold the cheese, while we ate the one without thickened cream at home.” I said it jokingly, even though it was the truth. Life in big families wasn’t always the way it seemed. And he said, “Ha, you know what cheese with cream is?” I said, “Yes, we ate it sometimes, but it was sold.” And he said, “Wait a bit.” And he called his wife by her name and said, “My wife has put the bread in *qerep*,²⁶ and they are warm. You aren’t going anywhere without taking a piece of warm bread with the cheese with cream, because I don’t sell all the uncreamed cheese.” And he didn’t allow us to go and went to cut a big loaf of bread in four pieces, there were four of us. And he had put one big piece of uncreamed cheese, the uncreamed cheese is the one out of which they don’t take the cream, it’s good, it’s delicious.

And we ate the bread there and walked further, Rahmani, may peace be upon him said, “Even if you have never received anything good from your goats, today we did.” (smiles). That day we ate after a very long time, and we were often hungry and thirsty, but at times, people gave us something to eat when we passed by their villages. Or they cooked, as at Verrat e Llukës, where the whole village volunteered to cook, or they simply heard that we were there, for example in Istog. People waited for us with *pita*,²⁷ with the things they had... everybody contributed in their own way. But I remember, it was not rare that we were without eating or drinking. Especially because of the curfew, which started at eight o’clock, you either had the chance to go to someone’s to eat dinner or return home, it was pretty difficult. And this was a fact.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What reason for, I mean where did they find the motivation to forgive the blood, since they were not living in Kosovo under the pressure of Serbia? What was their motivation?

Hava Shala: You are talking about people outside Kosovo?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes.

Hava Shala: There was the feeling, the nation was, the nation was compact, there was the patriotic feeling, that love for the nation, the feeling that we need to be united, we are united, but we were unfairly divided. It was often said in various contexts that a nation is a river, when it moves, it moves as a whole, you cannot say, “Let this part aside.” And this is how the nation was, the part of the Albanian nation at that time still within Yugoslavia.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations concluded?

Hava Shala: In fact, we thought that the Action of Blood Feuds Reconciliation would last for one year

²⁶*Qerep*, a clay pie pan, was used to bake bread in the fireplace.

²⁷ Pie made with filo pastry.

with the consequence of creating a new awareness, with the consequence of giving a clear message, no more blood feuds. In order to create another kind of culture that would address problems through negotiation, we didn't simply go for the blood [feud]. We talked about many other things, we talked about life, shortages, opportunities. It was a much more complete action than... there were places where we went for the forgiveness of blood and we exclusively talked about the blood, we talked about the future, we talked about the current political circumstances, about the limits, about the injustice, about the new opportunities our nation would have once it got free, our opportunities as a nation, our skills, a peaceful life.

We observed, we often confronted ourselves and the people we talked to with the lack of opportunities we have and with the opportunities we would have through strengthening our opportunities, we don't lack anything, there is nothing we have less than the other nations, it's the circumstances that made us different. Lack of education is a consequence of circumstances, for example. Otherwise, we are the same as every other nation. I mean, in one way we increased the self-confidence of the person we talked to and... we encouraged a new awareness of ourselves for today and the future. That is why I called it a very emancipatory movement, and by emancipatory I don't simply think about women, but men as well, I think about [emancipation] in general.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How... what happened with the participation of all the citizens? Did it come... when was the Blood Feuds Reconciliation concluded, was any immediate change seen, any easement?

Hava Shala: The Action didn't end abruptly. For example, how to say, the Action started on August 2, '90, it started on August 2, '91. The Action didn't end abruptly and the other phase, which is always called problematic, especially in the Balkans, began, the political side, the political dimension of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations. And I remember that it was exactly then where it began to go a little overboard, I don't want to say that no good job was done any longer. Every blood feud reconciliation has the same value as each reconciliation that was done during that time, but they started, "It was me," "It was you," "It was the party," "It was not the party," "It was this," "It was that." As a person I was under pressure to declare that this was made with the initiative of this party and the other party was against it, and I said, "No." It was absolutely not true that the Action was initiated by a party.

We were, I wasn't [a member] of any party after prison. I simply had my own political opinion, I felt limited in various political parties, in the end of the day it's everyone's right to feel like that. But the others weren't at all in various parties and who was where is absolutely a personal issue. But I was convinced, and it was true, that the Action was not a property or a terminant of any political party, absolutely. It was simply a movement of the whole nation, of all the people with diverse political opinions, with diverse political parties, or without any political party. The church and the mosque were part of it, aware people, people who loved, who loved the free human in this country and the freedom of this country.

That is why I cannot allow myself to say that this or that had more or less. Each of us did their maximum and that maximum is what makes us all equal. If there was nothing more I could do, while the other maybe did something less than I, but that was their maximum, that's the same to me. They gave their own maximum just like I gave my own maximum. Then I left Kosovo in August, '91 and I know that the meetings started being held at that time. Of course that the aim was to organize things, facts were needed, I understand those things, but I had the impression that there was a political class in which tendencies, anger and greed were reflected. It was not the dominant factor, but more or less there was a mix. It was something parallel to the action itself. I heard later, I didn't witness further reconciliations, but there were always people, certain groups who helped, who had influence.

There still were of course, of course a human act was done, I was convinced, I was convinced that the message was clear. The Movement was pure and there is no need to return... even minimally, a kind of tendency to personalize the Action or to attribute it to yourself or anyone else. I was and still am convinced that the Action had an inclusive character, it played its extraordinary role in mobilizing people, in raising people's awareness, in emancipating people, I still have this help, I had it back then as well.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there activists among you who were persecuted? Could you tell us something about this aspect?

Hava Shala: Hmm, Nurie Zeka is actually my paternal aunt's daughter. I've known Naser Veliu so little, if I am not mistaken I have met him once, I am not very certain about it, I have... if I am not mistaken I have met him once in Peja, but it doesn't matter. She, they left, respectively they had travelled to Switzerland together with Naser Veliu's car. And at that time, the time of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations is like a house with many alcoves. And besides the big alcove, the so-called Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations, there were other alcoves, many movements that took place within the movement of that time.

And one of those movements was the engagement of the people to research, to define the situation... which was current at that time with the poisoning,²⁸ the poisoning of the students and pupils. It was a chapter within the big chapter. And as far as I know, Nurie had some data from a hospital or from various hospital of various tests of some students or poisoned people. And they left with the hope that those tests could be checked better in Switzerland and they would find out more about it, because someone in Belgrade called it a hysteria. It was said, it was written, it was said, it was heard that their accident was deliberate. To me Nurija was important, no matter how the accident was, I know so little

²⁸ In March 1990, after Kosovo schools were segregated along ethnic lines, thousands of Albanian students fell ill with symptoms of gas poisoning. No reliable investigation was conducted by the authorities, who always maintained no gas was used in Kosovo and the phenomenon must have been caused by mass hysteria. The authorities also impeded independent investigations by foreign doctors, and to this day, with the exception of a publication in *The Lancet* that excludes poisoning, there are only contradictory conclusions on the nature and the cause of the phenomenon. For this see Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a war*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999.

about Naser. About Nuria, she was a member of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. She left for Switzerland and for her brother's and had those things I told you about with herself, with the desire, the hope that she could find out something more about those things. This is all I know and all I can say.

But of course, no matter if it is Nurie, Hava or Ilirja or whoever with whatever name. If you were persecuted, if you were an activist of the national cause at that time, you were arrested, in fact you were dangerous. It didn't take much to be defined as dangerous by the police and other institutions.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the reason why you emigrated then have anything to do with this?

Hava Shala: Yes, among others. The faculty was closed in June, I passed my last exam at that time, it was Folk Literature and it was prohibited, everybody knows. In the meantime other arrests started, Myrvete had already been arrested before. Then my husband, because I was engaged at that time, was teaching at the Shtjefën Gjeqovi School, partly at the school of... the Metallurgical and Mining Faculty in Pristina, and there he received the call. At that time collective calls were being received... the mass calls for the military service and the time was very difficult. And for some time we thought about leaving just like all the temporary and permanent immigrants. And we left in August, after getting illegally married in the village of Baran on Saturday, hiding because we didn't have the opportunities to move freely in a legal way. We had already set a date for the wedding two months later, but everything went in a different direction. That was the reason, the others came after.

It was a disappointment, a disappointment because of the political circumstances. I had the opinion that politics, of course passive politics had... Each person has a role and could do something good, no matter where they are. And each party of that time of course had good intentions and did something good as well as every politician who put themselves in danger by saying something, doing something, organizing in whatever way, of course they did.

I was not convinced that something could be done in a passive way. To be honest, I wasn't, I was more or less disappointed, not from a person but from the circumstances in general. People received mass calls for military service, it was not an accident. The tendency was to execute all the men. We were badly organized, badly organized in my opinion. It was kind of a disappointment to be honest. That was a factor as well. The closing of the faculty as well as... I was not very convinced that something could be done except with peaceful politics.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you imagine it?

Hava Shala: For example, to me as a human it was difficult to see the mocking, the everyday persecution and do nothing about it, to go on the media and say something, of course that has its importance. And the big house had its representative, they chose a representative, they usually chose the smartest man, they sent him to represent the family in various occasions such as parties or mourning. In other words, Kosovo needed the people who did diplomacy, who spoke well, courageously as well. I absolutely don't want to say that what I thought was the only way. People have

various opportunities, but the limit, the limit of only one way was relatively narrow to me, in fact. I was convinced that people had to do something more. I was convinced, and as life showed later, that without being organized, back then I thought about a guerrilla movement that moves and doesn't allow the police to move freely in the lands. Simply a movement, which combines a little politics and diplomacy but also...but also with the movement in everyday life.

For example, once I told a Swiss teacher, I had a lecture once for...I will make a little digression, for some Swiss teachers. When I said, "Kosovo was liberated in this year," I said it spontaneously and it was implied for me, I said, "*Gott sei Dank*," thank God, the Swiss teacher made a grimace I didn't like. One... as if she wanted to say, "It does not have anything to do with me whether Kosovo is free or not, whether it was liberated or not." But, I said... and she didn't really say anything, but I couldn't let it pass just like that, something bothered me. And I said, "Yes, I have to say it once again, because what I am saying is very important, Kosovo liberation, and it is important for the topic I am talking about today as well." The topic was, "Collaboration with parents of different cultures - ways, empathy," and so on.

I have a certification for intercultural communication in Switzerland. And I told her what I am telling you two now {addresses those who are present}, I told her, "Imagine if you came here today by bus from village X, by bus, and the police or the military forces of another country stopped you on the road. And, one of the policemen comes in and takes the oldest teacher among the others, let's say 20-30 other people, and let's imagine this is the driver, this man here is the driver. When the policeman comes in, he takes the driver of the bus you are all in. He turns his face to your side, slaps him, spits on his other cheek and says, 'Sit!', looks at us, laughs and says, 'Drive!'" I said, "That is why this is important to me to say that other migrants who come here have another history. And the Albanian migrants until this time, have another history, that is why I am saying this." In a way, I incorporated it within my topic.

And I will go back to your question now, to me it was unimaginable that the life of a human being be so limited that one could not even go to the market to sell, the farmer to sell a bag of beans or... the only way to exist or survive, or be spat on, be thrown away, be denigrated was to say, "To me it is enough even if I am the only one to show and give a political statement." I am talking about myself, thank God people are not all the same, but I was convinced from the very beginning that other forces were needed, not against each other, but together with each other, or side by side. This was my impression and one of the deepest reasons why I left, disappointment was one of the first reasons why I left.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was your life in Switzerland then?

Hava Shala: Then we left as refugees. I have a very positive experience in the interview there, the policy was that you were interviewed twice or three times there. I was interviewed only once, very little just as much as I got to know them and two other times relatively long where... because of the

lack of papers, the telling of the events in Kosovo had to be very detailed, of the danger, of the scale of danger for yourself. I told that, I told that while explaining the circumstances. Explaining the danger, explaining my personal past. It was trustworthy, they listened to me and it was used for verifying other declarations then. And two-three months later, three full months later, we were accepted as refugees then we made our life path there. I was not healthy, I had many problems with my feet, with my legs after the prison. So first I mostly dealt with my health.

My husband studied really fast, the pedagogic part of Math, because socialist pedagogy was not accepted there. And he started with translations relatively fast, on the other side I started working as an Albanian language and culture teacher for free, because of course the courses that were financed by the Yugoslav Embassies of that time weren't financed anymore, it is understood. And we mobilized as migrants and worked for many years in a row, we worked for free or mainly for free. It was good for me, it was a fulfillment of myself in migration. Then later I became a mother and I wanted to do something else for my children, I wanted to challenge myself with another way of raising and educating them. And I studied how to lead playgroups. I worked for four years with children during the war, with traumatized people mainly, with trauma professionals and not only. I worked with pleasure, I love children very very very very much. Overall, I love humans in general.

Then, I realized that intercultural communication of our people with the institutions of Switzerland was not simple, it was not easy. People were afraid, people were worried, people were needy, people were... they came, for example from difficult circumstances in Kosovo and thought that it was implied that the Swiss know that in Kosovo it is difficult and they would understand. The Swiss cannot understand you if you don't speak, what you say is part of you. Otherwise not, nothing is implied. And the institutions at the same time saw that people were coming, if you worked as the leader of playgroups, people came to bring their children but sometimes they even stayed there for one hour or two or even longer, with their papers, with various advices. And then the cultural center was... it was noticed that people were coming all the time.

And one day, a woman who was the leader of a professional center visited me, she was the leader of a bureau of the city of Winterthur which was called *Fachstelle Für Integration Winterthur* [The Winterthur Agency for Integration]. She said, "I hear, people come to you." They had, in front of them there was a Serbian woman, but people didn't go to her anymore, even though she was actually a good person. But people didn't ask back then, the language itself, the name was a border itself. It was implied, and she told me, "We would like you to come and work as a part-time consultant for us." And then I started there part-time, and I was generally always in demand and then I did some additional education on teaching heterogeneous classes because the teaching of various courses was integrated, it became an integrated part of the regular schools. To me the things that were done differently were very interesting. I always wanted something different.

And I did one year of school there, then I followed two modules for intercultural communication. And maybe this was the point where the communication in the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation

helped me very, very, very, very much. I can undoubtedly say that it was a study of a special kind, I am convinced of what I am saying. It was an experience, it was a challenge, that was an exam to me. And maybe the others noticed that I was more active then. For some time I was as a family escort, then I did additional school as a teacher in heterogeneous classes. And with this qualification for intercultural communication I was qualified as a social pedagogue and of course that was a new opportunity for me. And I worked and still work with various institutions in cases where families face difficulties, children's education is one of the topics, people have various obstacles. Families cannot find the right solutions, simply I still work 60 percent as a social pedagogue.

And, partly I work 20 percent as a consultant in the bureau of the city of Winterthur, it varies, 10-5, 15-20 more or less, the work I usually do voluntarily for people in need. For example, I write the papers for free or sometimes I go to translate for them for free, because there's nothing but their soul that you can take from them. This element of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation, where one realizes that money is not everything that can be called a benefit, it's also a good feeling, it's also one... the feeling of solidarity is the most powerful feeling for me, and I trust people so much. And I do this with pleasure, I will do it still, depending on the circumstances and my health. While my husband works as a Math teacher in... he was a political prisoner before for three years as well. And he works as a Math teacher in various gymnasium.²⁹

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Would you like to add anything else? I think that we can close it here.

Hava Shala: I've heard once that a friend of mine, the one who was highly ranked in politics, a friend and relative of mine, after my arrival in Switzerland, said, "You did it well, you finished your job, and now look after your life." And that touched me very much, because it was not true. He thought that if one is away, then the homeland is away as well. It depends on what relation one creates with the homeland. It may look like a kind of self-praise, but I can say that there are over 200-300 *vorträge* [German: lectures] about Kosovo, reports, meeting with students, doctors, various institutions, where I talk about circumstances, human beings, the need that one has to be understood and supported. And still to this day, some days ago I was in the Pedagogy High School in Lucerne. And, my detachment is not... it is not a physical detachment and absolutely not a spiritual one to me. And when I scold my friends who are in politics, I criticize them, I do it because I love Kosovo.

Kosovo is not our property, I am afraid that, I am afraid that... I will not say this publicly, but I am afraid that a majority of the people, and the majority of them are my friends from the past, have forgotten the message we gave to others. And I am afraid that this Kosovo, which I hoped for, even if I didn't survive to experience it myself, is not [what I hoped] at least for the youth, for the children, for the people of this country to be able to have a life with dignity. I am afraid that those, all of us hold a responsibility for the mess of nowadays Kosovo, which we didn't dream like this. Further, my separation from Kosovo is not physical nor spiritual. Unfortunately, my connection to Kosovo is still a

²⁹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

would, it is relation that has a wound in itself, because the people are still poor, because I am afraid that it is not well understood that the homeland has become the property of certain people. It hurts more than the time we thought that the foreigner took our land, us, the people, the future, the present. It is possible to change the past because it was implied to me, it was the foreigner who didn't want our existence. My connection to Kosovo will of course last until, as the popular saying goes, to the grave (smiles). That's what I wanted to say. I still love Kosovo. It's still the Kosovo of my dreams, I am afraid to fully return to the Kosovo of today because I am afraid of being totally disappointed and I don't want to be totally disappointed.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much!

Hava Shala: Thank you!