

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH MULLA XHEVAT KRYEZIU

Pristina | Date: January 26, 2016

Duration: 90 minutes

Present:

1. Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
4. Noar Sahiti (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Jeta Rexha: Mr. Xhevat, can you tell us a bit about your childhood, the *rreth*¹ you grew up in, what was your family like, what were you like as a child and the things you remember as a child?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Well, as a child, like every Kosovar child, we grew up in difficult economic conditions. I come from a family with sort of traditional values, with national, humane, ethical, religious traditions and so forth. So, as a child, we went through difficult times. Our living conditions were extremely harsh. We walked about six-seven kilometers to get to school. Then we didn't have books, we didn't have clothes, we didn't have nice food, until we got slightly older, we started to... because my father was uneducated, my mother uneducated, an uneducated and unemployed family. I mean, I have experienced and remembered very difficult conditions for the time.

Therefore, seeing the need for education, literacy, and engagement, we were forced, perhaps beyond our possibilities, our capacities, to get by, to cope while growing up, [to gain] literacy, employment, and to support the family. Thus, we had difficult conditions, harsh conditions and not only I, but I remember the whole village, my entire generation, my friends. I went to school, I do remember, I went to school with leather *opangë*.² I remember that instead of a bag, I carried, how to say, a bag or a leather *jangjik*,³ handmade, which was made by my mother.

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

² Alb. *Opingë* – moccasin tied on with thongs, clogs with hard rubber soles and rubber or leather uppers.

³ Turk: *Jan icik*, small hand-made bag.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which year were you born?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I was born on April 19, 1958. Thus I have things to tell, I have things to tell about my childhood, because we suffered, we went through hell. Then, the ruling regime, my family suffered. My grandfather...

Jeta Rexha: Which was your village?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: The village of Bubavec, nowadays in the municipal of Malisheva. My grandfather was sent to prison on political grounds. He was sentenced four years in prison in Niš. He gets killed there from torture and up to this day we don't know where his grave is. We weren't even able to have a *pame*⁴ for him. So, then the family was ostracized, it was isolated, people didn't dare to visit. The state kept an eye on us, hence we had a difficult existence and living conditions. Therefore, that was a difficult situation and time, heavy for the time. And often perhaps, even when I tell my children about how we did suffer, "How come father, how is that possible?" It is possible because the circumstances were such, we experienced horror, we experienced everything.

Jeta Rexha: Can you tell us about the grandfather, what was his activity?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: My grandfather was the eldest of the village. Back then the movement of the *kaçak*⁵ sheltered those people who provided resistance for the national cause, who did not agree with the Yugoslav regime of the time, and he sheltered those people also because we supported them, because he was the eldest of the village. And those people were caught in my family, they were executed without trial, Mustafë Dërguti with his son Nuredin and a stepson whose name I don't remember. The three of them were executed. My grandfather and three other cousins were taken and sent to the prison of Prizren. They were tried in Pristina, and they suffered, they sent them, they sent them to internment in the notorious prisons of Niš. Whereas my grandfather in Pozarevac and Niš, my grandfather died in the prison of Niš. And we don't know even to this day where his grave is. In other words, his physical extermination came from the abuse, from torture, from beating.

And even worse, when he died, we found out from other people, "Limon Azizi has died," and we didn't dare open the door, because we were outcast by the state. The friends didn't dare, they came to see us at night. You know, we didn't dare to open the door as it is the custom in our families. We didn't dare! This was the painful part, which was terrible, not daring to keep the tradition of *pame*, not

⁴ Alb. Traditional ritual among Albanians to honor the deceased.

⁵ Outlaws, bandits, also known in other regions of the Balkans as *hajduk* or *uskok*, considered simple criminals by the state, but often proponents of a political agenda of national liberation.

daring to manifest the sadness in front of others, you could not manifest sadness, because it was the state that committed this deed. This was the Serbian-Slavic state.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many children were you?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We were, we were six brothers and two sisters in total. One of the sisters died, thus we are six, seven. Six brothers and a sister.

Jeta Rexha: How was your life as a child back then? Which school did you go to?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We went to the primary school Adem Bajrami in Kieva. That is where we finished primary school, all of my brothers and sisters and I. And afterwards, I continued at the secondary *Madrasa*⁶ Alaudin, here in Pristina, I did finish five years. And then I finished the Pedagogical college, history-geography in Gjakova, in Bajram Curri. And I have been working from the year '79 till the present, in the position of a member of the staff, or as an Islamologist at the mosque of the village of Bubavec. Simultaneously, I am the chair of the Islamic Association of Malisheva for four terms in a row.

Jeta Rexha: So when did you go to Gjakova?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, after I finished the *Madrasa* here, I wanted to enroll in the Faculty of Philosophy, in the department of Oriental Studies. But at the time Sarajevo had opened the Faculty of Islamic Studies and they wanted that the *Madrasa* staff goes to the faculty in Sarajevo, and I was denied the right to enroll in other schools, a type of agreement with the Ministry of Education. This was an unfortunate agreement for us. Thus you had no right to get educated wherever you wanted to. Because with the *Madrasa* you were entitled [to study] in all faculties, as long as you were able to get accepted. Because that was a school that had cadres, there were generations, and they, the students of the *Madrasa*, were successful in every school they went to.

And so we were obliged, back then we couldn't enroll in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, back then we were plenty of children, we were... we had the elderly, we had a grandfather, it was the brother of the grandfather, therefore I was forced to find a job, to avoid studies for a while and provide for their living. Gradually, slowly later on, afterwards in the '90s, I enrolled, finally I enrolled in the college and finished my studies there. So I did not interrupt the work, I continued with it. Hence I am qualified even in the field of history-geography and in my profession which I started [practicing] after the eighth grade, you know, in the *Madrasa*.

⁶ *Madrasa, Medrese* - Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

Once I finished the eighth grade, I was passionate about, I wanted to do [religion], since my parents were religious, they were into religion. They always educated us in the spirit of human, spiritual, ethical and national education. So that's how I started to think where would I want to be after the eighth grade, as a student or a *semi matura*⁷ back then. Each with their dreams of where to enroll, where to go, where were the reasonable people, which direction to take to achieve success. And so I found my calling, I stated, "I want to enroll in the *Madrasa*." So I speak to father about this, he says, "Wherever you like, I am not stopping you, whatever you wish for." And what happened here? I came and enrolled in the *Madrasa*.

And when I applied for the *Madrasa*, I was accepted, "No problem!" And during this time, the '70s, '71-'72, those years, someone comes from my *rreth*, I don't know who even to this day, and he comes and withdraws the documentation, pulls it out of the *Madrasa*. He doesn't want me to pursue this path, supposedly it is primitive, supposedly we have to move ahead, supposedly I was taking us back. And I don't know who came and pulled out the documentation.

And when I come here, the learning process begins, I arrive in September, and they tell me, "What do you want here boy?" "But I was accepted at the school, *more*."⁸ Why, what do you mean what I want? You have accepted me." They say, "No, your documents are not here." "It is not true." "True, not true, listen you sir, you boy," the director tells me, "your documents here were picked up by someone." "But who has taken my documents, *more*?" "A next of kin came, and took them." "Well sir, but don't I have to sign, myself, or someone else. Do you know who took them?" "No, I don't know, but someone has taken them." And what happened? I was forced, I did return, I came to enroll after I lost a year, to the gymnasium⁹ of Kieva. The gymnasium was being opened at the time and so I applied. But my mind was always with the *Madrasa*, my mind was always there.

And back then I didn't want to learn, I didn't want to learn. So I had a professor, now already deceased, who was a good connoisseur of Albanian grammar, not to say perhaps the best in Kosovo and I mean one of the top. There was Tafil Kelmendi, he was a lecturer of studies here, of Albanology. He died in Vushtrri. And Tafil comes and enrolls me at the gymnasium of Kieva, by alleging that it is primitive, it is not current, it is not progressive, [questioning] what kind of ideas are these and so I stopped there. And to my good fortune Tafil was my principal teacher. And I didn't want to study at all. And I was an underachiever, because I didn't want to learn. And Tafil says... I had six-seven poor grades, but I didn't want to learn, he says, "Xhevat Kryeziu, he had been evaluated with two poor

⁷ *Semimaturë* was the old set of examinations given to students after the fourth year of elementary school.

⁸ Colloquial *more!* - used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

⁹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

[grades], but I pleaded to the council of teachers, I kindly asked and I do have connections, and so Xhevat Kryeziu passes, and Xhevat passes.” I said, “No, no, I didn’t pass. I don’t want to.” “But, you boy, are you normal?” “I am normal professor, I don’t want to stay, I don’t want to stay in the gymnasium.” And as soon as the year finished I took back the documents, I arrived again at the *Madrasa*, with documents.

Jeta Rexha: Which year was this?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: The years ‘73-’74. And so I arrive at the *Madrasa*, I tell the headmaster, “I am Xhevat Kryeziu, I have applied last year, I have applied. They withdrew my documents, I was in the gymnasium, I didn’t pass, I didn’t want to stay. I am focused on the *Madrasa*.” “Do come boy, there is no problem.” And I decided and continued, and finished the *Madrasa* with high grades.

And the learning process started, the first day I arrive in the *Madrasa* and I happen to sit in the last row, next to a window. The window was open, an iron window. And professor Mulla Sadriu introduces me, “What is your name?” I stand up, “Xhevat Kryeziu” and I hit my head on the window. He says, “I know about *Kryezi*,¹⁰ but...” I said, “Well, Xhevat Kryeziu.” And I hit my head on the window. I can’t forget that, you know, I am talking 40 years ago. And he, the deceased, rest in peace, mercy upon him as we say, always used to say, “C’mon *Kryezi*, c’mon you *Kryezi*...” and this was the first day at the *Madrasa* that I will never forget when I hit my head on the window. “Xhevat Kryeziu,” he said, “I know about *Kryezi*, but...” I mean, I hit the window, Xhevat Kryeziu, so on.

Even at the *Madrasa*, for me it was still a very difficult time. The economic situation was heavy for me, it was heavy again. But I do thank the creator of the universe and all those donors that helped the *Madrasa*. And it was 50/50, 50 percent we paid ourselves, you had to pay 50 percent, which was the food, it was the dormitory. I mean, at least some relief, a 50 percent, an opportunity which was enough for me, it was sufficient. Perhaps because had it not been for that 50 percent, perhaps I wouldn’t be able to continue my studies there either.

I left for Pristina, as they say, it costs now from Kieva to Pristina, two Euros and a half for the bus. I came here with two and a half Euros to stay for a week and I spent two and half Euros there, I gave it to the conductor and I was in Pristina for a week without a dime. And I borrowed two and half Euros from a friend to go back, hoping that the following week perhaps I would bring some more money and give it back to that friend. And so my friends helped a great deal. So, this was a heavy situation, generally for some families. In a way we were ran over by the wheel of history. It ran over us, it ignored us, it put us on our knees. Not permitting you to get schooled, not allowing you to get employed, not

¹⁰ Mulla Xhevat’s surname Kryeziu literally means black head. In the given context, Mulla Xhevat hitting his head against the window while saying his surname is a funny coincidence.

allowing you to progress also because there was a crisis. My family survived from agriculture, animal husbandry. And so it was a difficult situation.

Hence I have enough, I have enough memories of how I got here and how I went back, how I lived for a week, how I managed. I see it today, my children receive four-50 [40-50] Euros], five-60 [50-60] euros, they are not satisfied, they are not pleased. They have nice clothes, they have good food, they have telephones, they have good living standards, they go to driving schools and they are still not satisfied. I am not satisfied with their studies, “Father, well I didn’t pass the exam, father...” “Because *bre*,¹¹ father, all the conditions, the electricity...” They come back, I go to pick up my children in Kieva with a car. I take them to a bus in Kieva by car. I, who else? I woke up at five o’clock, I went past 50 dogs to get to Kieva. Through 50 dogs, through 50 sacrifices, through dangers. A child, 16 years old. Waking up at night, at five o’clock, to go and get the half past seven o’clock bus, to get to Kieva. It was terrible! Snow, frost, cold. At God’s mercy, without anyone escorting you, absolutely no one.

And this was a heavy situation. Therefore the difference between that time and this time, we are worlds apart, wide apart, wide apart, very apart. Therefore, the young generation doesn’t make the maximum of its opportunities, to get educated, to know the value of education, school and knowledge. Because knowledge is the generator of the goods that God brings into this world. And then I finished the *Madrasa*, I graduated. Some of my friends went East, to the Eastern world, the Arab states. Some of them moved there, finished their studies. I was left behind for economic reasons and to support my family. I got employed immediately, you know, right after I finished school, right after I graduated I got employed as Imam. And these were the things I experienced, [as well as] many other friends and I, even my family, even my relatives, and many other fellow countrymen. But the situation was such that you had to go through those life challenges. Nowadays it is completely different.

Jeta Rexha: Eh eh!. What was your activity during the ‘80s?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: During the ‘80s, I started my young career working in a very sensitive profession. Though I turned this old, I don’t know what it is like to wear jeans, not wearing sneakers, not going out and playing with a ball, nor doing any sport activity. That was the mentality of the time, “How can a *hoxha*¹² play with a ball? How can a *hoxha* wear sweatpants? How can a *hoxha* grow his hair? How can a *hoxha* put sunglasses on? How can *hoxha* get in a car, drive a car? Shame!” I happened to live at that time. During the 37 years that I was on duty, 37 years, it is quite a long time. I caught... you know, I belong to that generation where it happens to know people who were born in

¹¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

¹² *Hoxha*; *haxhi* - Local Muslim clergy, mullah, *muezzin*.

the year 1880 or '90. So 1800, now 2000, it means I have met people from the 18th, the 19th century and we are now in the 20th century. So almost 58 years.

And so that was the ordeal, those... and that nostalgia, and that suffering, and those sacrifices. Occasionally some pleasant moment, but very few, and more bitter ones. Always making effort: what to do, what to achieve. Even my profession was such, as I said. It was a profession that required caution in behavior, in conversations. It was a divine mission, sacred, the preaching of God's message. I have to be an example of moral and ethics myself, so I can give an example to someone else. I said it, I didn't dare, I didn't dare to do those things. I wasn't allowed to do that, absolutely. Somebody seeing me play with a ball, out of the question. Somebody seeing me play chess, somebody seeing me play cards, it was a disgrace. And that is how I grew up, how I got educated, I got mature this way. Always, "Kuku,¹³ shame! I am disgracing myself! Shame!" and to give something to somebody, to educate them, to help them. And so until the '90s there was, you know, my engagement in terms of my profession, in educating people, improving their character, morals, being close to them, how to emancipate them, how to be educated, how to grow up, how to be humane, how to love school, how to love the fatherland, how to love their parents, how to love their teacher. And these points were suggested by me, and I have taught generations and generations.

And then, even since the beginning, the events of '81, it was those events that... you haven't experienced them, luckily you didn't experience those. Because the Albanian world started to get shaken, the concept of national cause in general [started] to get shaken-up. Whatever it was, Albanian started to fall apart, the students, imprisonment of the intellectuals, massive imprisonment of people, massive expulsion of generations abroad. Exercising pressure, beatings, not issuing you a passport. With great repression, to intervene, to give lots of money, to get a passport issued, to escape abroad. That was heavy stuff.

And while seeing the situation, while living like that, always seeing the demands of the people, people's will for changing such situation, because you could not carry on like that. The intellectual elite is imprisoned: professors, intellectuals, patriots, people who love, people who want to see... we didn't have, we didn't have the territorial aspiration of going to occupy Serbia's territory. We only wanted to learn in Albanian, to work in Albanian, to die in Albanian. This was our wish. And this was taken away by the regime of the time. It didn't allow us, "You Albanians shouldn't get educated. You Albanians shouldn't learn. You Albanians are good enough [like this]. You should be the lowest class in the world, should be the servants of Serbia." And they could do everything they want with us.

Jeta Rexha: I understand. Where were you in '80, '81?

¹³ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: In '81? I lived according to the times. I supported the student protests, I supported the move [ment]...

Jeta Rexha: As a speaker or...

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: No, I came, I took the post in the year '79.

Jeta Rexha: OK. What was your duty?

Jeta Rexha: My duty was in Bubavec, I said it. I finished the *Madrasa*, in '79 I graduated. In '79 I got employed. And accordingly to the time, even in the processes of '81 and later, we were never out of bad luck. And that time was... even since '74 there was a relative silence, temporarily, but with no rights. You had no right to think differently than of Kosovo within Serbia. You dared not to think of Kosovo as a republic, because, how does Kosovo dare to become a republic? How dare you to have institutions, this right, or that right? You had no right to have an academy, you had no right to have this, or that, or this. You had no right.

A large number of these faculties were prohibited back then. So, it was a suppression of basic human rights and you couldn't overcome these. Those who read, who knew a bit more, observed the situation. And I lived like this, with this situation, my family and friends and I. By trying to make something, by saying a good word, by doing a good job. By empowering the people, by preparing the people that there is danger approaching, and has the danger come? It did come. We saw that we were heading towards the danger of extinction, being exterminated by Serbia, being erased from the face of earth.

Because it wanted to take... it didn't need the people, it needed the land, and to take the underground minerals, this Kosovo full of minerals, full of mining, full of land. We live on top of gold, you must have followed, there was this interview with an American, saying, "You are sleeping on black gold." But unfortunately we haven't reached yet that economic development, and for it to be launched, dug, promoted in the world market. However, it can be done, it's none of my business. And thus I say that we went through a very difficult situation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how do these political changes affect your work?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I was in touch with the people, and I was in touch with the masses. And they always reflected, "How to act? What to do? How to find alliances, to work on it." Adem Demaçi¹⁴ was in

¹⁴ Adem Demaçi (1936-) is an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

prison. The intellectual elite was in prisons. They were released a few times, persecuted, some of them. I was taught a lesson by my grandfather. I knew it. My father... my grandmother lived as a widow. After ten years of marriage they killed her husband, she raised orphans. And I was always body and soul with those persecuted persons. Because we were ourselves a persecuted family.

Then there were those, those who were anathematized, I told you about it, the expulsion was accompanied by punishment measures. Back then they introduced, they called it, I don't remember, the *otkup*.¹⁵ They collected material goods: you have to hand over this thousand tons of wheat, and all that wheat, and those animals, and that livestock, were given away under orders. And the time of *otkup* was the time of... gun action and collection of surplus, of *višak*, these were two unfortunate time periods for the Albanian people. The expulsion of Albanians to Turkey was a punishment measure. And the unfortunate memorandum between Yugoslavia and Turkey, four thousand Albanians who fled during those years, they got displaced from their land under pressure. They went to Turkey. Serbia telling them that, "You have your religion there, over there you have mosques, over there you have... and there is no place here, so leave from here." And they fled, they were chased away.

You saw those shows broadcasted by TV 21, two years ago there was a [show] by Bahtir Cakolli about Albanians in Turkey. If you noticed a little those experiences by the elderly, how they migrated, how they fled, with wooden vehicles, they left for Turkey on ox carts. And they went there, they were thrown mercilessly into the deserts of Anatolia. And this was terrible for the Albanian nation. It means all of this was painful for the Albanian people, one we lived with, we experienced terror together with the people. And we were always supposed to empathize with one another, to give strength, to give courage, to give them strength in order to overcome and resist, so we don't leave the country, don't migrate, but we get educated, confront it, because the aim of Serbia... Serbia wanted this: for us to leave from here, not to get educated, to remain illiterate and to do whatever they like with us.

But thanks to God and our commitment, we had intellectuals, we had honored professors, we were... we were encouraged by Adem Demaçi's actions, we supported the actions of the intellectual elite that taught us, our professors, I thank them. They kept our memory alive, they taught us about love for the fatherland. Then it is the family, the *rreth* we were raised in. And this kept us alive so that we know where we are heading to, and where are these winds taking us, and how to bear it. Therefore those years were difficult years, difficult years.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This type of a national education, was it a part of your preaching?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, this was part of my preaching as well, no doubt part of the preaching. We used examples, concrete examples of what happened to people in the past and what may happen to

¹⁵ Serb: *otkup*, head tax.

us in the future. We merged, we intertwined the national with the religious. It is an undisputable right and we said it when we explain the martyrdom. It is the highest level where God ranks a human who protects the interest and the threshold of his home, as it was our case with Serbia. Everything that was Albanian... we didn't want to, I've said it before, we didn't aspire to occupy Serbia's territory. We protected our threshold. We had nowhere to go. Therefore the one who is murdered, the one who receives a bullet in the chest, that person is one of those martyrs, as we call them *sheit*.¹⁶ Everything is cleansed by water: the hand gets dirty, the body gets dirty, water cleans it. Water makes the martyr's blood dirty, you ought not to clean the corpse. Even from a religious aspect I'd say, the corpse remains with the head uncovered, and its blood and clothes shouldn't be removed, because it is the most sublime blood, the most precious blood that God pays for and rewards with Heaven's nectar.

These were our preachings, so to protect our identity. Because this language, the Albanian, was offered as a gift from God. We didn't know to speak it, we didn't create it ourselves, the Albanian language. Because we weren't someone else to invent the Albanian language. This is how we were born. And now God left it as a testament, "Xhevat, you have the Albanian language." "Yes." And the others, they wanted to ban it, "Don't speak Albanian! Speak Serbian, you are a good man. Work in Serbian, you are a good man. It's not allowed to speak in Albanian." Why? It was in their interest. They knew it, our education, our liveliness, will threaten them. Why? We will be our own masters. They got used to us being their servants.

And so, you have a responsibility before God if someone takes away this language, to protect it, you will be rewarded by God. This has to be clear, Albanian language is God's gift. Who says it there, it's Naim,¹⁷ "How beautiful, how pure, Albanian language, how nice." I mean, he sang to the Albanian language. He glorifies Albanian, because this language was a gift from God and we have to protect it. And you are obliged not to allow anyone to take away your language and identity. You might be a Muslim today, you might be a Catholic, an Orthodox the day after tomorrow, a Buddhist a day after that. Yet you are always an Albanian, you always have to be. Because you have Albanian genes, blood. You can change your faith, but identity, absolutely not. Thus, it is a duty from God to protect your identity. To die for that, it is the highest rank of heaven. And this is how we have educated and taught generations after generations. And this kept us going, it gave us strength and kept us alive, in order to resist.

In Kosovo we are a nation with two religions, we are brothers. In Albania there are three religions, brothers again: the Muslim faith, the Catholic faith, the Orthodox faith, but we have always kept the

¹⁶ Arab. *Sheit - shaid* hero, martyr.

¹⁷Naim Frashëri was an Albanian poet and writer (1846-1990.) He was one of the most prominent figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the the nineteenth century Albanian national movement, together with his two brothers Sami and Abdyl. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Albania.

straight line of the nation without cracks, without a tendency for some division. The individual ones, those are isolated [cases]. However, I mean, we have gotten along well, mainly. We will get along, because the nation unites us. Because we are of one language, of one blood, of one tradition, of one gene.

And our preachings has been in service of this cause. And it was in its service not only with me, but with my friends too. And so slowly-slowly, being confronted with times, with processes, slowly-slowly (inc.) this, that, this. Then, during the '90s, during '89, Serbia's aggression started to show, now, killing Albanians. They put them in prison for a while, then killed them. It was killing students, it was killing intellectuals, it was killing the peasants, and those wearing *plis*,¹⁸ those with a tie, those with a hat. So, now Serbia was not picking anymore because everyone became an enemy. First, it went with classifications, "No these are the good ones. This social class is good, but that one is bad." But when it became obvious that we are one, it then extended the action even further, whomever they found in the streets, they ran over them with a tank and exterminated and wiped them off and didn't want to see them alive because we were an obstacle to them.

And these were the problems that later, following these murders, in the course of these murders, during the mourning rituals, the *pame*, as we say, another great initiative was born from the prisoners of conscience and the underground miners of Trepça, an alarm, as sort of a prevention, sort of a measure to respond to Serbian repression, to reach national unity. And this was called the Movement for Blood Feuds, Wounds and Disputes Reconciliation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you get involved there? How did it happen that you got involved?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: And now from here, the alarm came from these two categories: the intellectuals in prisons, the miners stuck in a cave there. You are young, you didn't... perhaps you do remember, or you don't remember, no you don't, no, no. You the cameraman, perhaps you do?

Noar Sahiti: I'm younger than she is .

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: You are younger then? No, you don't remember it either. And, and what happened? Back then [the time] required to get together, to unite, to be united, to give *besa*¹⁹ to one

¹⁸ Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

¹⁹ Alb. *Besa* - 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. In this context it is truce.

another. There is the *besa-besë* of Haxhi Zeka.²⁰ A number of times Albanians got united before danger, and they tied *besa-besë*, to be prepared for a danger ahead which was being prepared, prepared in the notorious kitchen of the Serbian Academy, those Čubrilovićs,²¹ *vićs*, and other *ićs*,²² to carry on extermination and wipe off this nation. Something that happened even in the past throughout history. This has happened even earlier. It means, the pressure didn't happen only in '81 and later, but throughout history, this nation shed a lot of blood throughout history.

And there came a moment to establish the Movement for Blood Feud Reconciliation. This movement was led by the best class of people of the time. And they were, they were the angels of that time, the students. The students are the best strata of this nation. They are innocent, they are young sprouts that get educated, look forward, we expect their engagement, we expect their contribution. And it was they, exactly the youth of the village of Lumëbardh, on Feb 2 of the year 1990, it started a... to tie a *besë*, for two-three months, afterwards a wound, a blood feud, and so we consolidated the cadres, established the Councils, and gradually became a full army and we began the action, this action was successful, this action was crowned with getting closer, unity, reconciliations.

When we started I, I was in Lumëbardh sometimes around February 2, we started to shake, what is happening, what shall be done. And for the first time I had a contact with Anton Çetta²³ in a TV interview. And here is what, what I understood... and Anton says, I contacted him through the television, Anton says, "Once someone committed a brave deed and people started, the rhapsodists composed songs and sang a song to that gentleman. And one day, he happens to be at a celebration. He came to a wedding or something, and rhapsodists started to sing a song. And when he heard his song he pulled out the gun and started to shoot in the air. A wise old man who was there says, 'Oh, don't. May God punish you, what have you done, *bre!* Because you have killed your song.' And never again, from that moment on, did they sing a song to that man. A person can kill his song while being alive. Thus, it is not good to sing to someone while they are alive, but sing about them after they have wrapped up the second semester, as we say. Whoever travels to eternity, whoever leaves this world,

²⁰ Haxhi Zeka (1832-1902) was an Albanian nationalist leader and member of the League of Peja, an alliance which in 1899 tried to negotiate autonomy for Albanians within the Ottoman Empire. In this process, a truce was declared among people involved in feuds in order to unite against the Ottomans.

²¹ Vaso Čubrilović (1897-1990) was a Bosnian Serb political activist and academic, a member of the conspiratorial group Young Bosnia, which executed the assassination of the Hapsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. He advocated the ethnic cleansing of minorities from Serbia, notably the Albanians of Kosovo, in a memorandum published in 1937 and entitled *Isejvanje Arnauta* (The Expulsion of the Albanians).

²² Serbian patronymic.

²³ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar. The leader of Reconciliation Campaign in 1990-92.

because they cannot be sung to while they are alive, because a person is able to kill his song.” I saw Anton Çetta for the first time.

The movement, the action began amidst students, it began in Peja, c’mon now, what shall we do? Then the initiative started in the municipal assemblies. And it got established even where I live, in Malisheva and they gave me a call. Some times ago, on the 31st, now it is... today it is the 26th, the 26th today, on January 31, 1990, Ali Kryeziu is killed in Malisheva, Abdullah Mazreku is killed in Malisheva, and someone else who is not known today was wounded, and eleven others were wounded by the forces of Serbian barbarity. Ali was a close relative of mine, our grandfathers were brothers. Ali’s grandfather and my grandfather were brothers, and I got organized together with cousins and brothers, I organized the *pame*, the funeral. And when the Movement started, they gave me a call, “Mulla Xhevat, can you come to the Council to help us because your contribution is significant, and we need you.” “Yes *more*, of course.”

And I went and started off together with friends. We scored some success. And they send me an invitation, on the 20th... on April 14, 1990, on Easter day it was held, a religious gathering was held at the church of Zllakuqan, related to some blood feud reconciliation over there. And I did take part as a guest. It was on April 14. And after that I took the commitment to do it myself... because now, in those places where reconciliation was taking place, in shops, *oda*,²⁴ they were small now. The action started to grow. The requests were pouring, people looked forward to it with enthusiasm. People wished to do something. And back then *odat* were small, small yards. I was forced to organize the blood feud reconciliation in the mosque of Bubavec, which is nowadays called the Mosque of Reconciliation, as we have named it. And there...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did reconciliation take place in Zllakuqan?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, Zllakuqan took place. Now, I wanted to imitate Zllakuqan, and I wanted to do something similar. It was dangerous, because we were under violent measures. You dared not put three Albanians together. You had to apply for permission from the police authorities. Unfortunately they, they were still, our police had few competencies, still. And I had to... four-five days earlier we were preparing to reconcile 27 blood feuds in Bubavec, and some wounds and disputes. We gathered, we prepared for the official reconciliation to take place there. So I consulted with friends, I had to go and notify the authorities. There was a young man, someone called Faik Jasiqi from the region, now the municipality of Junik. He was a new employee in Malisheva, a police commander. He was replacing someone else. He didn’t know me, neither did I know him.

²⁴ Men’s chamber in traditional Albanian society.

I said, “Sir, commander, I have a request...” it was April 26, Eid Day,²⁵ “something special, there is a blood feud to reconcile and I just came to let you know, alright?” He said, “Fine, fine. Your name is Mulla Xhevat? Mulla Xhevat,” he said, “tell me the whole purpose of the action.” He heard, it was spoken about in Bubavec, “It will be held in Bubavec, in Bubavec.” Because back then something was about to happen, we wanted someone to do something, to make a move. “But c’mon commander, there is only a blood feud to be reconciled, a wound, not much.” “No, no, no, you have to tell me.” And now I, if I told him, he would not believe me. If I didn’t tell him, he already heard of it. What will happen? “Commander,” I said, “well fine *bre*, on Eid Day, people do come there. I am telling you, a blood feud will be reconciled *bre* man, that’s it.” He said, “No, no, you have to tell me.” “Well, I am telling you.”

When he said to me, “Listen Mulla Xhevat, I will come to Bubavec with my patrol.” Violent measures have been imposed in the station of Malisheva. There were Serbs, they came from Serbia, from Bosnia. I think I’m wrong, not from Serbia, from other places, Vojvodina. He says, “I want to give them a leave day and I will take over the action, the responsibility, and come to protect you and that region and unless I get killed first, nobody else will be killed.” Eh, what do I gain here! So I told him everything about what is going to happen. “We have invited many people. There will be a few reconciliations. We will have a song, a recital, there will be a stage there, there is a rally there too.”

And this happened on April 26, 1990, Eid Day. We had just finished our Eid prayers, we had set the stage, the sound system. We had put placards at the door of the mosque. Something I will never forget, we had a banner with a slogan written by Muhamet Pirraku, may he rest in peace, on the door of the mosque of Bubavec: “And not look to church or mosque, the faith of the Albanians is Albanianism!”²⁶ Professor Anton Çetta said, “Muhamet, this is too much for Mulla Xhevat. Mulla Xhevat, what do you think?” I said, “Professor, it is a bit much for me, but the times want it.”

And strange enough, this slogan was in place and some of my colleagues got insulted by me, “In Bubavec mosque it says: And not look to churches...?” The point isn’t not to look at churches, mosques. Because they are our religious sites where humans express their will, faith and wish. The message wasn’t not to look at, but the message was not to get divided by churches and mosques, because the Albanian religion is... I mean, it is obligatory, important, primary for us was to strengthen

²⁵*Bajram* is the Turkish word for festival. Albanians celebrate *Ramadan Bajram*, which is the same as *Eid*, and *Kurban Bajram*, which is the Day of Sacrifice, two months and ten days after *Ramadan Bajram*. On the day of Eid, there is no fasting.

²⁶ The line quoted is from Pashko Vasa’s poem, “O Moj Shqypni” [Oh Albania, Poor Albania]. It is the most influential and popular poem in Albanian language. Pashko Vasa (1825 - 1892) also known as Vaso Pasha or Vaso Pashë Shkodrani, was an Albanian writer, poet and publicist of the Albanian National Awakening, and Governor of Lebanon from 1882 until his death. Most of Vasa’s publications were in French and Italian.

and liberate ourselves from the Serbian occupation, to recognize our fatherland, to create our state, and then there is freedom of religion, go ahead and do whatever you want. That was it.

But someone, those who didn't see far, those who used to see only like this {places both hands at the edge of his eyes}, found it offensive, "How come, Xhevat?" And it did happen here... something else. In this very mosque, on Eid Day, five [Catholic] priests came over to the rally for the reconciliation of blood feuds. There were five on stage, because ten or twenty were sitting down, the others as spectators in the crowd.

Part Two

And so they made a big deal out of it, how can an *hoxha* go to church, because he shouldn't go to church. Thus this is the essential thing I have done, building a bridge, connecting two religious faiths so they would take a look at one another, the church and the mosque, the *hoxha* and the priest face to face. To show to the world that we are not fundamentalist people, or terrorist, or criminal. That Islam doesn't threaten anyone, not in Kosovo, not in the Balkans, not in Europe, nor the world. That we are a tolerant religion, a tolerant religion, that we have co-existence, that we are brothers. Three religions come... are of one... coexist among one nation. And this was the main message that the Bubavec meeting is known for.

Strange enough, I was arrested thirteen times by the Serbian forces. All thirteen times it was the same question, "What did they want in the church? What did they want in the mosque? Why did you come together? Why did you reconcile? You want to attack us?" "No, we don't want to attack you, but if needed, we want to protect ourselves from you. By no means to attack you, but to protect ourselves, yes. Because we are not coming to Serbia to attack anyone, absolutely. We have no territorial aspirations. We will protect our honor." And this was that power, the greatness of the Movement. It was spread all over Kosovo, and outside Kosovo. Then I went out...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's stop a bit at the Bubavec reconciliation gathering, how many cases were reconciled, how many people were present?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: The Bubavec reconciliation, that day we noted 27 reconciled blood feuds. It recorded the reconciliation of around 40 wounds and disputes. I mean, there were seven-80 [70-80] reconciliations in total. And we did have a surprise reconciliation, there were two cases. I will mention two. One, in a village in the outskirts of Malisheva, a young teacher was killed. He was killed by a neighbor of his, his neighbor. And when we arrived there, and when we went there, we went to a guy, whose son, the teacher, was killed, a family relative of that house had killed another neighbor. [The

family] had someone killed and they had killed someone. What happened? We went to that other family to make peace with this one first. We went to Suhareka and we made peace and we brought that man with us, so they come and shake hands with him first, “May my brother’s blood be forgiven!” “May you be with honor and humanity, may God bless you!” We applauded, we were very happy.

And then we have coffee, we are resting. Professor Anton wants to slowly go to the front [face to face], “He forgave you, now you should also forgive the other one.” He says, “*Bac!*”²⁷ “Yes, professor!” “Now, dear brother it is your turn to show strength, to show honor in the name of God, of the people, of the flag, of the martyrs, the heroes, to forgive the blood of your son.” “No *more*, professor, this job can’t be done so easily. The teacher’s blood cannot be forgiven. Does this one have a teacher? The teacher’s blood cannot be forgiven.” At some point he said, “But he forgave yours.” “Fine, fine, he did forgive me, but his [son] was not a teacher.” It was hard for us to tell the man, “He didn’t have one, just because his son wasn’t a teacher, his son didn’t happen to be a teacher.” And that was hard for us, and then his brothers, “Don’t *bac*, because you are putting us to shame. Don’t *bre*, *bac*, it doesn’t go like this. But, are you sane *bre*? Our soul, his soul.” “Yes, yes, but my son was a teacher, and a teacher’s blood cannot be forgiven. You Anton, do you know what a teacher is?” “I will tell you, I am a teacher’s father.” “Why?” “I am the one who created, who created generations. I taught your son. I made him a teacher, because I am the first teacher in Kosovo.” “You don’t seem to know what a teacher is.”

And so like this, four-five hours of intensive work and we couldn’t persuade that person. But what happened after? What happened, after we were gone, was that there was a meeting in the Mosque of Reconciliation, in Bubavec. And family, family members go harsh on him, “You have ashamed us and how come you behave so cruelly, and for the sake of the people, for the respect of the nation, of the heroes, and of the family, you must forgive.” And he headed to the mosque in Bubavec. And he calls for us, “Hey Mulla Xhevat! *Bac* has forgiven the teacher’s blood.” “Huh, may you be honored!” When the moment for hugging came, “Professor, here the father wants to shake his hand too.” “Who is he?” “He is the father of the teacher.” “Oh, the teacher’s father!” He then grabbed him and hugged him. I never forget that, and now both of them are in the eternal world. And this was a special one.

Another case in the mosque of Bubavec. One of them says, “I want to forgive.” That was a feud between two faiths. A Catholic had killed some Muslim. And the Catholic had migrated and gone to live in Croatia. The Muslim says, “I want to forgive, but under one condition.” We, “Don’t *bac*, don’t put conditions on us, please don’t.” “No, no, I have a condition.” “Speak up.” “The condition is that he returns from Croatia to Kosovo, he doesn’t leave his country, I would forgive him.” This was big for me, I’d forgive him if he comes back from Croatia, leaves Croatia, comes back to where he used to live,

²⁷ Alb. *Bac* - literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful term for an older person.

and doesn't leave his fatherland. This was majestic for us and it gave us strength to continue further work.

And this, you know, these two cases were special cases that remain in my memory and I will keep them. There were lots of memories. There were lots of cases. There were all around, according to professor [Muhamet] Pirraku, may he rest in peace, around three hundred thousand people gravitated [around us]. The greatest gathering in Bubavec that I remember since the Second World War Two. And it was around ten kilometers, from all sides of Bubavec: in the direction of Pristina, in the direction of Peja, in the direction of Malisheva and in the direction of Suhareka. From four sides the streets... people couldn't, they came. They walked on foot for an hour and a half to arrive in Bubavec, because it wasn't possible by car. So, a vast crowd, but a small space, and people were gathered. Something around three hundred thousand people. And afterwards, after the meeting was finished there, I made an announcement with an intervention of the youth of Deçan, I issued an announcement, "Farewell until May 1, at Verrat e Llukës."

I was given the opportunity to announce the news that on May 1, 1990, we will meet at Verrat e Llukës. Verrat e Llukës is the village of Lluka, in the municipality of Deçan. That is where a meeting was held, that is where an assembly of all Albanians was held. Important decisions were taken. Then it became the Second Assembly of *Besëlidhja*, or Reconciliation, or unity, togetherness. And there was, the action was now spread and the timing was good, and information was communicated to three hundred thousand people, and then the media announced it too, and so it reached the top. Around half a million people gathered in the territory of Lluka, at Verrat e Llukës, where around 60 blood feuds were reconciled. Around 30 blood feuds... now this is 26 years ago, [twenty] seven, quite a long time stretch for me, which I can't remember. Yes, something around 30 blood feuds were reconciled without mediation. They would raise their hand out to the crowd, "C'mon!" "I want to forgive a blood feud..."

It was a special case, an Albanian sister stepped out, bless her from then to this day, "I want to forgive the blood of my only brother on behalf of his six sisters." Another one, "I want to forgive the blood of my brother." One of the brother's, another of the father's, you know, we managed to... an awareness, a willpower to do something, a commitment to place a stone in the newest castle of our time, our national history. So 30 and more blood feuds were reconciled on the spot, without having to ask, without having to go and ask for forgiveness in those families. This was the special feature of the rally at Verrat e Llukës. So, it makes 60 and more.

And there, when Serbia saw this large masses and this great power of over half a million, it surrounded us with tanks at Verrat e Llukës. And there, thanks to God and the commitment, the sacrifice of Zekeria Cana, for whom I have great respect, by a hair he prevented a massacre, a huge bloodshed by

the Serbian forces on us. Many people were beaten, many were maltreated, some were imprisoned and so on...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did he prevent it?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: [There were] repressive measures, tanks, the police. So after it was over, they started to summon activists, they started to beat the activists, to beat the people, they started to maltreat them, to arrest them. And when they saw that people are for real, for Serbia that was a bombshell.. And it then applied punishment measures, and it did not allow us to hold big rallies, as we used to.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean Zekeria, how could he stop them?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Professor Cana has... because our people would gesture with two fingers {raises two fingers up}, victory. They even asked me, “What is the meaning of these two fingers?” Now, I made up a different rhetoric about them. I said, “Either alive in freedom {touches one of the raised fingers}, or dead in heaven {touches the other finger}. But however we may end up, it will be a good end. Either alive in freedom, or dead in heaven.” In other words, we are even willing to die, but heaven awaits later. Moreover, some media picked this up, and quoted it.

Serbia in the beginning, during the actions... I am now getting into the characteristics of the Movement, which are many. Serbia in the beginning spread propaganda that “the Albanians are murderers, they kill each other, it has nothing to do with me [Serbia], why do these things, they are primitive.” And the Serbian propaganda continued with the killing of people even after the Movement, such as killing people during ‘89, it was killing people, the intellectuals. But, because, “Albanians are killing each other. Nobody is killing them, but they are killing each other. Because it is their blood feud, unforgiven blood.” Also some banal comments, they insulted our authorities and our work and our commitment. And Serbia wants to diminish it by any means, to give negative connotations to this mission and to blemish it.

However, the world saw it. Our luck was that we had people in Europe, we had people in America, they followed the situation closely, and they understood, and they knew what was happening. It was something interesting, during these rallies, a divorce from the Communist Party happened. We organized, we put tables with signatures on them, for handing over the Communist Party cards. That was for Serbia, because in the name of the party it kept the situation going, with activists and communists. And we did it to persuade the masses and the public, the people, to throw those cards away, not to remain in matrimony with the Communist Party, because it was terrible for us. And this was powerful. Then...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did this happen, which year?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: In the '90s, the beginning of it... the rallies had an effect. It was grand, it was attractive for the time, it was something sacred to do. Then there was another characteristic. As activists in the Movement, we passed two norms, we bypassed them. We didn't deal with either of those two norms, taking into account that in the past, those were norms deriving from the *Kanun*,²⁸ where the blood was paid off with liras, or we bypassed shariati norms, where again the blood was paid off in the value of one hundred camels, the blood of one man. Or the wound was paid, that was paid too. So, we did reconciliation without terms. There was no compensation. The one who forgave, forgave in the name of God, in the name of the nation, in the name of freedom, in the name of fatherland, in the name of their family. There was no blood to be paid off anymore.

There was another characteristic whereas us, as activists, as mediators, did not received any allowance. Nobody drove us. We went with our vehicles. We went at our expenses. We paid our lunch, our dinners. It was something very special that we never ate in the family that committed the murder, we didn't want to eat their bread. We conveyed the forgiveness, "May it be forgiven, X person has forgiven you, no bad blood with them." We didn't eat there. We wanted to honor the damaged family. We didn't want to suit that other family. And he thanked us and he didn't order anything when while we were there.

There was something else, in order for the action to be successful we went... you understood me, when I said the cream of the nation, the elite of the students, the most innocent category, as we say, the proudest in spiritual and moral sense. We didn't hire any uncle, or nephew, or cousin to help us. No, no, we took them out of the equation. Whoever joined us, bless them. Yet we didn't invite them. Whoever is a friend of Mulla Xhevati, whoever is his uncle, absolutely no. The group came in, "We come in the name of God, in the name of the nation, in the name of the heroes' blood, in the name of mothers, in the name of the cradle, to ask for forgiveness." And so gradually we did convince that gentleman to offer forgiveness, to soften his heart, and to do something for the cause, our national cause.

Therefore, we didn't have rewards. A German lady who was doing her Phd here, "The movement of Blood Feuds Reconciliation during the '90s." And we discussed it with you Jeta, she has a book, it hasn't been published yet. She collected a lot of material. I have found around 30 friends for her [interviews], "Go to X person, and then to Y person." So, the very network we have worked with. And she has collected a lot of nectar in this field. May God allow that the book gets published soon, there is

²⁸ The Kanun is the unwritten, customary code of law that, for centuries, strictly governed social behavior and everyday life in almost all Albanian populated regions. The Code of Lekë Dukagjini is the most comprehensive compilation of Albanian customary law gathered by Father Shtjefën Gjeçovi.

a lot of material there. Because she had collected it from the activists who saved [stories] in their memory. And it is... it'll be a nice book.

We published a few books, there is a book by the [Albanological] Institute, there is a book by doctor Muhamet Pirraku, there is my book, there is a book by a guy from Ferizaj, there is a book by Bajram Hoti. There are around five-six books published to this day, but compared to what has been done little has been written. If this phenomenon happened to a nation such as Germany, Austria, Italy or France, there would have been entire libraries with books. But unfortunately we didn't work seriously in this regard. We didn't work on it properly, conducted analysis, put things down in writing, collect items and place them where they belong.

And this German lady, she took, when she interviewed us, "Fine that you were part of this action, but who financed you?" "At our own expenses. Our vehicles. Our meals." "Did you get paid?" "No, we didn't get paid." "How come you worked like that? How many years?" "We worked, for example I personally haven't stopped for 26 years, until last night. Even last night there was an action." I never stopped for 26 years, never. All at our own expenses, we haven't received a dime from anyone. There are words, from badmouths, from those who had a falling out with the Serb system, people who had privileges and stuff. They wanted to label people, "They are receiving money, they have received money." But my friends and I, with those with whom I have been working, we worked, as we say, in the most honest manner, most soulful manner, most humane manner. We haven't taken a dime from anyone. We haven't even drunk a cup of coffee as I said, let alone receive money, receive something in the form of a bribe. And here it lies, here it is the greatness of this action, that we were spiritually committed to do a favor, a good deed for this nation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who was your close associate, where did you start off with the action?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I started off in Malisheva, and when they saw the level of my engagement in Malisheva, then professor Anton Çetta himself took me along everywhere. And we went all the way to far away America. And we carried on over 20 reconciliations over there. It was professor Anton Çeta, professor Zekeria Cana, professor Mark Krasniqi, professor Muhamet Pirraku, professor Tahir Abdyli, professor Limon Rushiti, professor Hakif Bajrami, professor Musa Limani. There is an entire army, too many to mention all of their names. Then the Peja group: Have Shala, Mirvete Dreshaj. Then there was the other group: Nurije Zeka. There was an accident whereas someone wiped her off the earth. Last year there was a solemn homage for her. Her death is a mystery even to this day. She was an extraordinary activist.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: From the region of Peja too?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, from the Peja region. It was the youth from the village of Lumëbard. I mean, the action stretched over. And according to an analysis by professor Anton, the number of people who were active were around five hundred in Kosova.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What about your region of Malisheva?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: In my region of Malisheva it was... it was Fetah Bekolli. We were all based in Malisheva: Fetah Bekolli, the one who initiated it, led by Avdyl Berisha. Then it was Hamëz Kryeziu, Brahim Kryeziu, Cen Desku, Januz Mazreku, Kumrije Bashota, Xhevdet Kastrati, Ragip Shala, Hasime Mazreku, Zyrafete Krasniqi, and many others. So, we were around... Sherif the teacher, the retired teacher Sherif Gashi. And we were from all walks of life. Hence, in the region of Malisheva we were around 30 activists.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: They collected the data?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: They collected the data for us in the villages. For example, in the village of Bubavec there was a blood feud, there was a dispute, in this village, in that village, you know, they collected the data. And then we as a group, we went, organized, door to door. Like the bee that collects the nectar flower to flower, that's how we collected slowly-slowly the data, the notes. We made the schedule, we separated into groups. At times all of us [would go], at times seven or eight. Thus we really did a great job, a marvelous job. This movement gave strength to the people, this movement drove people to think about other more difficult situations, and to find us more prepared for the new situation, a new entity was born, entirely new, it was called Kosovo Liberation Army. They found the people united. They found these people unified. We didn't have party, county, or regional differences. We were a nation with a very good soul, back then. We are not like that anymore. We aren't anymore.

And we were soldiers at the time, without differentiation. Strangely there was no chair, nor secretary, nor general, nor general. We had only unity, we marched together. We had Anton who led us, we had Anton whom we honored, and he honored us with his wisdom. But to say he is the chair, no. So, he was the wise old man of Kosovo, the wise Anton Çetta, who was always alongside young students, the intellectual elite and those aspiring to commit good deeds for our Kosovo.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did the reconciliations end, more officially?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: No, reconciliations... rallies, assemblies, ended with the Assembly at Verrat e Llukës. Because Serbia now noticed our determination and readiness. And for them this was hard, that we half a million people united, that we are united and are doing these things. And ironically it was repressing the demonstrators, and protesters. And we continued protest after protest, until the

formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Albanians were being killed, imprisoned, repressive measures, other harsh measures. The youth was massively leaving the homeland, autonomy got abolished, the schools closed, the institutions were shut down. Everything that was Albanian was shut down. Everything that was Albanian! And there was no other way, it had to be a new creature, an armed force to confront those tough challenges. We knew that this will cost us, we knew that we will get killed. We knew that there will be bloodshed, but we had nowhere to go besides our homes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: After Verrat e Llukës, did you continue with reconciliations?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Not after Verrat e Llukës, but the movement continued its work for 26 years. The first assembly was held, the second assembly was held, the third assembly was held. In '95, in November of '95, on November 4 we honored professor Anton Çetta who passed away. And then the councils were taken over by the local authorities, it was then passed to the councils of elders. But that strong character of the Movement faded away. Because we did a huge bulk of work, and a large number of blood feuds were reconciled. A great deal of population was reconciled, up till the beginning of the war. The question arises, if we went to war holding these feuds with one another, what would have happened? The meaning of war would have been lost. Serbia would have said, "They are killing each other, they are making war with each other, because it is not Serbia killing them." This was the most important part of our work, so that Serbia cannot say, "They are killing each other, and it is not that we who are killing them." But we reconciled, we united and when the Serbian gun was fired, it was clear that no Albanian was doing that.

We had reconciled, we had reconciled. If we went into a war like that, how many victims, how many murderers would there be avenging each other, the meaning of war would have been lost. To go backwards and fight with each other, to be divided into groups that fight each other. Thus, that was the purpose of this unification amidst this heavy situation: to come together and not point those guns at each other, at brothers, but point them at the enemy. And what have we done here? And we have done it because we wanted to open new schools, to "cover graves,"²⁹ to open universities.

Part Three

They were reconciled, some statistics, perhaps it's not very accurate, around 30 thousand reconciliations were conducted. Imagine, you had five thousand Albanians against each other, five thousand widows, five thousand children, ten-twenty thousand without a father, five thousand in prisons, five thousand in graves. That would have been a catastrophic account, it would have ended

²⁹ To have a closure for the victims of the blood feud.

badly. So the movement made it possible for us to have peace in our soul, to become stable, to reconcile feuds, and to become compact so that tomorrow... we knew what was awaiting for us, just as it happened in Bosnia, just like in Croatia, just like it Slovenia, and then finally us.

And this was the nucleus, the initiative, and unfortunately there is still no proper analysis for acknowledging this movement. I thank you for the initiative, for the commitment, and for bringing these things to the surface, because everything I said is a miniature, it is very little. Also my friends spoke about it, but not enough. This work requires a vigorous approach, requires commitment, it requires new generations to... because there is material, there are living proofs. In a while we will even forget about the war if we don't put things down in writing. Even when it comes to war things are not being written as they need to. Heroes who got killed have been written about. I did propose, why doesn't the state send out forms to each family in my Bubavec, "Write down what happened to you during the war period, where were you, what did you lose, where were you, what happened to you?" It doesn't have to go public, to be published, to be written in a book; tie it with a rope, put it in a sack, send it over to the Kosovo Archives. One hundred years later my son wants to know, my grandson, where has it been, what has my family done, he can go and find it in the Archives: the family of Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu was this, this, this, what have they done, how...

Serbia is inventing these inexistent myths, these... it invents them, it feeds them. While we do have things, but we don't write about it. Unfortunately! But sometimes I say we shouldn't lose faith, or be pessimistic, I say, "Good days will come." Someone like you comes along, or like her. Takes notes, puts them on paper, certifies it, places it on a shelf, stores it somewhere, someone sees them, something is done.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you continue with your national activity after blood feuds reconciliation? And how was your role as an imam modified?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I am saying, I continuously was an inseparable part of these actions. I also took part in the war. I am a veteran of the Kosovo Liberation Army. I have, I have worked at the charity organisation *Nëna Terezë*.³⁰ I was a vice president in Malisheva. Which was absurd, "How can it be Mulla Xhevat with Mother Theresa?" But I only looked at the national cause. I didn't confuse the cause with the religion. I didn't mind Mother Theresa. But we sent thousands, we gave thousand tons of bread to people. With the autonomy abolished, people expelled from jobs, the institutions closed, *Nëna Terezë* gave an enormous contribution, the association *Nëna Terezë*, in Malisheva and across Kosovo. I worked at the Funding Council to keep the teachers going, to finance them, to give them one hundred Deutsch Marks, to keep the education alive. I worked in the accommodation of students

³⁰ *Nëna Terezë* - Mother Teresa, the self-help organization that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled from all state institutions and services.

from school to houses, to convert houses into schools. I worked at the “KPC friends,”³¹ I worked there too, to help them, because there were categories emerged from the war, we asked for aid for them, because they could barely make it. We were... we just emerged from a war. Therefore, I was engaged to help our people wherever it was needed.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you spend the war?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We spent the war in the middle of the mountain. When the bombing begun, unfortunately we happened to be near Kieva. According to [Richard] Holbrook, a strategist, and our great friend Holbrook, Kieva was the most fragile point for explosion of a terrible war, which really happened. And it was there where the projects kicked off, the plans were made. When Kieva was about to get liberated, they came from four sides, and attacked Kieva. And the war broke out. I mean, the war broke out in Kieva. Because some stranded Serbs remained there, and a Serb remained there, whose name I am forgetting.

And it made war, the Kosovo Liberation Army was blocked, they [Serbian army] set checkpoints, it occupied *istikamet*,³² it did not allow any movement. They [KLA] were too small of a number to leash out against the army. The army was powerful, thus they remained isolated.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In ‘97, or ‘98, which?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: This? No, this was in ‘98. In ‘98, because the war started in ‘98. And we, I won’t forget when they established the headquarters. One was established in Bubavec too and I was working in logistics. I was there to bring the material goods. I went in: either a cow, a heifer, a buffalo, a lamb, a ram, a chicken, rice, flour, they didn’t hold it back for me. And I maintained them properly... our headquarter there used to be in the style of a hotel. We used to have a place, and it was in good conditions. On July 28 Kieva was attacked, and we abandoned Bubavec, we went into the mountains. And we did stay there for three months.

On November 28, the verification team³³ brought us back home. They came over, there was an agreement with Milošević. It was winter, November 28. On the 28th we came back to our burned houses, burned to the ground, that is how we survived. The humanitarian organizations intervened. It was the Swiss Caritas, the German Kappenheimer, and some other organizations. And they started to build the new roofs, they started to paint them a little. They brought us some sort of mattresses to

³¹ KPC - Kosovo Protection Corps. The civil emergency agency that emerged from the process of reintegration of former KLA fighters after the war.

³² Turk: *istikamet*, army barracks.

³³ The Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) was an international mission monitoring a ceasefire agreed on October 1998.

sleep on, they brought us blankets to cover. And we managed to go through the winter smoothly. And we were in the mountains you know, three months. And then we returned on the 28th. On March 24, when Serbia got bombarded...when NATO bombarded Serbia, after NATO took the decision to act, NATO bombardments began, we were forced to abandon our homes again. And we were forced to go to our mountains again. And we stayed there until June 14.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you survive?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We survived...the human being is stronger than stone. I don't know how can a human being live in the mountain, it means a human being becomes a wild animal to be able to live in the mountain. It becomes an animal. When I had the chance to go to a village in certain periods ... they burned it and after it was burned and in ashes, as we tend to say, the Serbian forces departed, the population returned to those burned down places. Yet, they were in their own yards. Some without a roof, some with a roof, some less and some more, but at least they were in their own yards. And so I went to one of them and when I got there I went in, I entered... the house was there, luckily it wasn't burned. And as long as I stayed there, I looked at the walls. I was used to the mountain, three months in the mountain, without a roof.

And they brought us food, they brought us *sofra*.³⁴ I missed seeing a *sofra*. After that, a *tepsi* [pan] came, with what we call *përpeq*,³⁵ a cheese pie, and a plate with yogurt. It was two of us there and the household member which makes us three. I tell him, "Can we get fed enough here? Will there be enough food for the children?" "Please, feel free to eat. Eat everything you can." Getting fed was a big deal, we were in the middle of the mountain, you know. When the weather was cloudy, we were nervous. Because when it was clear, NATO bombers would come to bomb the targets. When cloudy, they wouldn't come, they couldn't see the targets. And we went into hiding because Serbia was now attacking, Serbia was firing. We will get killed at this moment, or at that, at this, at that.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were KLA forces with you?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, we had KLA forces with us, but those forces were too small in numbers to confront 50 tanks. We were surrounded by tanks. Serbia was bringing tanks to Kosovo for a month in a row, one month nonstop, we watched a convoy going nonstop. An agreement was not reached yet, there was supposed to be an agreement. And it was a heavy situation. And we were at God's mercy, in the mountain. Supporting each other like that. Clinton's declarations that summer will be the best season, we will help you during the summer, it will become better during summer, we said, "But will we manage to survive until summer? Will we be able to go through the summer here?" The villages

³⁴ Alb. *Sofra* – wooden community table traditionally used for serving food.

³⁵ Alb. *Përpeq* Thick milk used in traditional cooking.

were full of Serbian paramilitaries except some neighborhoods which happened to be far at the outskirts of some village. If you were to go to those places, the KLA would be there.

They assigned me as a supplier for nearly twelve thousand inhabitants. Then I had a registry, and the army went, got organised, took people along. Surely up to ten kilometers, to pick up the sacks and to scout for supplies that people had left in their houses, when they ran away. There was some flour left around. I would go and get that flour, like 20 kilograms, 15-30 kilograms and then give it to them, to keep them alive, not to risk falling in their hands... someone had the tendency, "I want to go and surrender to the Serbs." "But are you in your right mind? They will scorch you." "Well, what can I do? My children will die from starvation." Then we would run to find some flour for them, to find some cooking oil and other items.

Then we were, there was a village, it was called Bubël. That village fortunately didn't get burned. They passed by it, but the forces didn't stop there and it remained intact. And there, that village was economically well off and it had barns full of crops, it had wheat, it had corn too. And when we calculated that there was corn and we could cook that corn, to have it cooked, it was quite a satisfaction, a momentary, temporary pleasure. We have corn, we will eat corn, we won't starve. However, God gave that on the 14th, I saw the German helicopters arriving from Albania to Prizren. They were heading in our direction, I saw them, they landed in Malisheva. Then I just knew that we won and they saved us. And this was our sad story.

But it was a proud one, because God paid off, God rewarded us for that sacrifice, that bloodshed, all that national devotion to freedom, independence, statehood. The international factor helped us as well, hence we are here now.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you return back home?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We went back home... huh! Two days before we returned together with our families, I slipped through and arrived home. So our house was burned down. And Serbia was withdrawing their forces from... everything had been burned down. I saw a cow that was left alive. It was left wounded from the bullets. And then I went back. Mother, bless her soul, was waiting for me, "Oh Xhevat," "Hey mother," "Did you go home?" "I was at the house." "What's new *bre*, mother?" "Mother, may God give us fortune, the house is burned down." "Oh mother, and what about the windows, did they remain?" I said, "Yes, oh mother, the windows were there. But mother, what windows! The entire house is burned down, what windows, c'mon mother." Poor her, wishing, "Oh mother, did the windows survive?" The whole house was burned down, how could have they remained? "Oh mother, but no, mother. But long live us, because we will make them."

This was nostalgia. We even used to say, “Just send them away, and we can even go and stay in the yard. We will live in those nylon tents.” “And not only can we live, but we will get along with each other.” Well, it didn’t happen so. As soon as we came back to our homes, the greed to get rich took us over, constructions. The disputes started, the troubles started, the problems started. And we weren’t the same people from the mountain. “How are you, *bre* brother? Did you survive *bre* brother? Did you survive *bre* sister? How did you get through *bre* sister? C’mon let me give you some flour, let me give you some bread.” To help each other, you know, it was not artificial love. It wasn’t what we call *fi sabilillah*³⁶ for God’s will. And experience showed us. Now, you can see what is going on, that it isn’t nice to act this way. It doesn’t suit us to act this way. A unified politics suits us, one that unites, that gets us closer.

We might have contradictions when it comes to party programs, but we are Albanians, but we don’t go around killing each other, not killing police. But insha’Allah this will pass too. And these were those moments, it was hard, how we survived the mountains, underdressed, barefoot.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened to your mosque?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: My mosque? On August 24 they burned down my mosque. We left on the 22th... on July 28, on the 24th they burned down the mosque of Bubavec. It was one of the first ones to get burned. Because besides having blood feuds reconciliations in that mosque, it was also a theatre, it was a school, it was used for conferences, for rallies. I had turned it into a service for the national cause. Only *Xhumas*³⁷ and prayers were in the service of religion, the rest was in service of the nation, with all the gatherings. It was a place for shows, for concerts, for theatre plays, for drama, that is where everything happened.

The time was a quarter to 15 hours. A sunray, I was eating some food. Someone tells me, “Xhevat, where are you? “Here I am.” “Come here.” “Pardon?” “Come and see, the mosque is in flames.” “Don’t *bre!*” and I went out, I climbed the wall, “The mosque is in flames,” I am crying. “The mosque is burning,” I am crying. And I watched it until the roof crumbled down. There were materials, there were documents, there were items. You know, how it was among the first mosques to get burned, the mosque of Bubavec. It was their target, it and I. But God gave it back, we built the mosque again. The mosque was built, it came out even better.

Furthermore, on the 20th anniversary of the blood feuds reconciliations, the Movement Council decided to name the Bubavec mosque, the Mosque of Reconciliation. Up to this day there is a plaque, “In this mosque on April 26, year 1990, the reconciliation of Kosovo blood feuds took place - National

³⁶ Arab: *fi sabilillah*, the phrase means for the sake of Allah.

³⁷ Friday prayers.

Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation.” And that one is called the Mosque of Reconciliation. The only mosque in Kosovo which has the attribute of the Mosque of Reconciliation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What character did your *Xhumas* have after the war? I mean, did you say more encouraging words to people, or how?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Yes, always. The conversations were always conducted in the interest of the people, to empower them, mobilize their spirit, so that people can endure, can overcome these difficulties, these obstacles we are facing. Because only together, only united, only by supporting each other, only by helping others we can make it through. So the preaching was always in that spirit. But not only mine, but also my friends', my colleagues', you know, the whole spectrum. But not just those of the Islamic faith, but certainly those of Catholic faith as well, the sermons held in churches, were dedicated to the national cause, no doubt.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you notice any spiritual crisis among people after the war?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: Human often falls into depression when they see unpleasant things, when they see painful situations, which we didn't deserve to happen to us. I thought, if a German has ten hours of sleep, we should only have two hours, or an hour. Germans sacrificed after the liberation, they suffered, they were worse than we. But by supporting each other, by committing to the national cause, they consolidated their ranks, their forces. They united, and got out of the crisis.

Therefore, it is good for us to learn a lesson from that. It is useful to get more engaged in order to build a proper state, to create a legal state, to acquire our rights, to have freedom of speech. The people's vote determines people's prospects. Fine, but not through violence, not by force. The things we see, negative phenomena, don't suit us. We are where we are not by accident. We are left behind, isolated. The entire world moves freely, we are still not entitled to travel... only to Albania, and Macedonia, and Montenegro.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Have you reconciled blood feuds after the war?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We have reconciled few sometimes after the war, I have the statistics, if I'm not mistaken around 58 blood feuds were reconciled after the war. Whereas, as it concerns disputes, there are hundreds of them. Or thousands perhaps. Now I want to make a... because we published a book immediately after the war, a small book, a monograph. And now I want to prepare, to collect the materials, everything postwar, and prewar. But those of the pre-war unfortunately have been burned, the documents have been burned. I am collecting the notes now, I have to complete them and check what is their accurate number. And I will... God's willing, if I live long enough, this is uncertain, it is question mark when, because we are living with foreigners. But if there is fate, health, I will publish a

monograph, notes, all the work we have done, and keep it there. Let it be a memory for the generations to come. So they know what has been done.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To whom do people forgive the blood now?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: People always forgave blood in the name of the Creator, in the name of God, and in the name of martyrs, after the war. Whereas before the war it was forgiven in the name of God, in the name of unity, in the name of the people, in the name of the family, in the name of those in the ground, as a respect to their elderly. But nowadays it is certainly forgiven in the name of God, and in the name of war values, in the name of martyrs who are in large numbers... around 15 thousand persons killed, some whose graves are still not known, and so forth.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How are reconciliations organized today?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: We get notifications for new cases, people are calling in. People already know who used to help and is still helping with this activity. We have specific addresses now. It is not a problem to find us through media, through television, through interviews. People know that we are those workers, and we are not tired. And they do come and tell their troubles, they share their pains, problems they have, and we approach to it gradually, at a slow pace. It is a bit more problematic, it is a bit more difficult, because there isn't the same willingness as it used to be before the war. It is not the same readiness. We have more problems, although the cases are new ones, fresh cases now. However, we are successful, there is some success, there are results. And these results make us continue until the moment when we surrender to God, when we are out of this life, we won't stop, friends and I.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Are there any old cases dating before the war?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: There are, but only a few. There are cases such as, for example in our municipality there is a case, two cases I think, that we couldn't reconcile. All the rest... in other municipalities. There is a bit more specific, a bit more peculiar situation in the region of Gjakova. There are older blood feuds, especially among Catholics. We couldn't influence those even when professor Anton was around. May God help us and it gets better there, everywhere. But still, I am saying, we are active and committed. Until the moment comes when we give up on this life, we will work for the good of my people and my country, without ceasing.

Jeta Rexha: Thank you very much. If you have something to add, that we might have forgotten?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I thank you for this commitment of yours, because this is something good. Archive materials are being collected, noted, remain in the memory, the next generations will come, even though you are young. But you will certainly grow old, hope you grow old, enjoy life. And you

take a look at what you have done, and you remember what we have done. And hopefully we don't experience more bloodshed in Kosovo. We have done all of this to prevent brother killing, to prevent bloodshed, to prevent evil. This was the essence, this was its essence. And I wish for no more cases, hope there are none. But unfortunately there are more of them, and evil will continue in our midst until we get more educated, until we understand life, we understand truth, we understand the nation. And we still have hindrances, we still have troubles.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I only wanted to ask you a question, how do you organize the reconciliation activity today?

Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu: I said it earlier: we are still continuing with a same rhythm, with the same commitment, only on a smaller scale. We are no more one of those teams with ten, or 20 or 30, but with five, six, seven, eight, and ten. We gather and go to families, even today. It means we have the same work style, the same work commitment, only in smaller measure. It is not anymore a pan-national action, but we are there where [feuds] happen.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much.

Mulla Xhevat Krasniqi: Thank you.