

INTERVIEW WITH BEHRAM HOTI

Pristina | Date: April 3 and 5, 2017

Duration: 148 minutes

Present:

1. Behram Hoti (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (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

[The interviewer asks the speaker to introduce himself, his family and the *rreth*¹ he grew up in. The question was cut from the video-interview]

Behram Hoti: I am the son of Hasan Jashari. Who is Hasan Jashari? Hasan Jashari from the village of Likovc in Skenderaj, born in 1916, remains a *hasret*² son with three sisters. Since the times were difficult, there was the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Monarchy, but the Monarchy of Serbia was ruling in Drenica, when he was two, the Serbian gendarmerie, supported by Albanian-speaking informants, kidnapped his father, that is, Jashar, and suffocated him and threw him into the plum trees well, about one hundred meters from his *kulla*.³ And as a sign for the corpse to be found more easily when someone looked for him, because it's normal to look for a person who is missing, on top of the well, the plums well, because the garden was full of plums, they left the tobacco box... so that when someone who came to drink water here, or look for him, would see the tobacco box and say that he was murdered here, committed suicide or drowned in the well. But the truth is that he was kidnapped, tied and thrown in the well, when my father Hasan was only two years old.

His sisters took care of their only brother. Both his sisters, *dada*⁴ Zojë and *dada* Halime, that is, my paternal aunts, married the grandsons of Azem Galica,⁵ the Kastrats and Bakshits in the village of Baksh in Skënderaj, respectively, Avdyl and Hazir. They were four brothers. There was uncle Hazir, Abdyl the second, Halil the third and Sinan the fourth. The fourth brother, Sinan, was not married and in 1945 he was killed in the massacre of Bar in Montenegro.⁶ Together with thousands, around four

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

² Turkish: *hasret*, longing, craving. This word was adapted from Turkish and in this context it means an only child.

³ Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

⁴ The older sister is usually called *dadë*.

⁵ Azem Galica (1889-1924) was born Azem Bejta but took the name Galica from the village in Drenica where he was born. He was the leader of the *Kaçak* (outlaws) movement against the Kingdom of Serbia first, and then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Bejta's units put under their temporary control a free zone in the western part of Kosovo. He died from wounds received during a confrontation with royal forces. Together with his companion Shotë Galica, Bejta acquired legendary status as a national hero.

⁶ Also known as the massacre of Tivar (currently Bar, Montenegro), was the mass killing of Albanian recruits from Kosovo by Yugoslav partisan forces in 1945.

thousands to eight thousands Albanians from all Albanian lands were sent to Bar to allegedly chase the occupier, Fascism, the Germans and so on, and liberate Dubrovnik, Trieste and others because they were endangered from Italy and Germany. But the main goal of the Bar massacre was the purge of Albanians from Kosovo and it was a revenge for the Boka Brigade of Kotor, in Serbo-Croatian it is called Bokenska Brigada, under the command of Zyfer Musić and Petar Brajović, the general, when they started the fight against Shaban Polluzha in Drenica.⁷ The Serbian-Montenegrin *četnik*⁸ and partisan brigade went missing in the war of Drenica in January and February of 1945. When the last gun of the Second World War was fired by Moscow, Russia and Paris, Drenica lighted the fight against communism, the national Albanian war to unite the natural lands of the Albania of God, not the Greater Albania nor the Smaller Albania, because there is only one Albania, the natural Albania which is called Albania, not the greater nor the smaller one.

Only one Drenica exists too, not the Drenica of Pasha nor the Red Drenica, only one Drenica. These labels were put by occupiers and their followers, Red Drenica, Drenica of Pasha, Greater Albania, Smaller Albania. And still to this day, the government of Serbia and its friends in the Balkans fear Albanian nation unity, because Albania is attempting to create Greater Albania. That's not Greater Albania nor the smaller one but it is only one Albania, just like the body with limbs which are a gift or God. The right hand of Northern Albania is called Presheva, Bujanoc, Medvegja, that have remained under Serbia. The left hand of the natural Albania that was cut from this organism, from this body, is called Tetovo, Debar, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Prilep and Skopje. And there is another part of the Albanian body called Ulqin, Kraja, Anamali, under Montenegro. These are lands of the natural Albania which remained as a maimed body with its limbs cut and it still survived. What's this body called? It is called Kosovo, it is called Kosovo.

So he is the only son, who was living at his sister's when he got married, at his brother-in-law's, at his sister's, my father Hasan Jashari. Who is he? Since you are a journalist {addresses the interviewer} I would like to tell you that Milaim Zeka is his great-grandnephew. Mainly his grandmother, *dada* Vahide, took her brother at the age of nine because their mother was also killed, she was cut with an axe in order to inherit her wealth, because the plum trees of Hasan Jashari...

Aurela Kadriu: You mean your grandmother?

Behram Hoti: {nods} My grandmother. The plum trees of Hasan Jashari, there were tens, fifty hectares of land that belonged to his paternal uncles and cousins who right after the murder of Azem Galica

⁷ Shaban Polluzha (1871-1945) was a regional Albanian leader of volunteer forces in Drenica. Shaban Polluzha joined the partisans, but in late 1944 disobeyed orders to go north to fight Germans in Serbia, having received news that nationalist Serbs and Montenegrins were attacking civilians in Drenica. He fought against partisans forces until early 1945, when he was killed.

⁸ Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

moved to Albania. The father of Lulzim Basha's⁹ grandfather and the father of my grandfather were brothers. I mean, Lulzim Basha's milk line is... his mother and I are second cousins in blood line, his origin is from Drenica, respectively from Likovc, not from Peja nor from Mitrovica but from Drenica, Likovc.

And who knows Lulzim Basha well in Albania also knows Flamur Gashi, who during the '90s was a very committed young man to the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Movement and the national unity in Kosovo. Exactly Flamur Gashi, an extraordinary contributor to the blood feuds reconciliation moves to Albania where he gets educated, finishes his University and manages to become the chairman of Lulzim Basha's cabinet, because he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Now he is the director, the main political adviser of the current President of Albania, Bujar Nishani. That is why...

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, can we return to your family a little? Since your grandfather, I mean your grandfather...

Behram Hoti: It is the first time that I say these words about my family in front of televisions. At the age of, in... my father returns to Likovc, gets married...

Aurela Kadriu: How was your father's life after his father was killed by Serbian forces?

Behram Hoti: He was raised by his sisters.

Aurela Kadriu: Yes. Then when...

Behram Hoti: *Hoxhë*¹⁰ Abria is exactly his brother-in-law, he was supported by Arif Zeka, the grandfather of Milaim Zeka, who helped him marry within his family and after the marriage with the change of... with the arrival of the Government of 1939, when a part of Albania comes to Kosovo, Germany and Italy make it possible to... Often when I asked my father, "How old are you *bre*¹¹ father?" He said, "Two years..." "When?" "During the time of Germany and Italy, that is when we were free." He returns to his fatherland, to his land, to his cradle and gets married.

He got married to the granddaughter of Azem Galica, I mean, to the sister of his brothers-in-law from Baksh, with my mother Zeliye. When my mother Zeliye was twelve years old, she was in the car [of the bride] instead of a boy, at Azem Galica's second marriage, when Azem, when Azem's Shota¹² marries her husband in order for him to have heirs, my mother was in the car. That is why I am a

⁹ Lulzim Basha (1974) is a prominent Albanian politician who was Mayor of Tirana, the capital of Albania, from 2011 to 2015, and the leader of the Democratic Party of Albania since 2013.

¹⁰ Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

¹¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

¹² 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.

great-grandnephew of Galica but also a great-grandnephew of Shaban Polluzha, because my maternal uncles who are from Baksh, the Kastrats, the family of Shaban Polluzha are Kastrats, of the same womb, the same family.

After the war, in 1947, the organization for the unity of Kosovo with Albania was founded. Skender Kosova was the head of that organization, the former commander of the gendarmerie of the secret services of Tirana, 1947, his origin was from Llap. The activists from Albania come to Kosovo, the more trustworthy families found their cells for the unity of Kosovo with Albania, the unity of Kosovo with Albania.

My father is their *jatak*.¹³ Skender Kosova gets killed. Secret services and the gendarmerie of Serbia, of Yugoslavia at that time find those who were imprisoned before, and they say that Hasan Jashari was the most loyal person we had in Likovc and twelve other surrounding villages, that is why my father is also called Hasan *Besa*.¹⁴ Hasan Likovci, Hasan Jashari, Hasan Besa. When my father was imprisoned, he didn't denounce any of his fellow activists from the organization for national unity in the court in Pristina...

Aurela Kadriu: So your father was persecuted as well?

Behram Hoti: Persecuted and sentenced, and in the prisons of Skenderaj, Mitrovica, Pristina, Niš, Sremska Mitrovica and even in Goli Otok!¹⁵

Aurela Kadriu: Even in Goli Otok!

Behram Hoti: Imprisoned in Niš...

Aurela Kadriu: Did your father tell you anything about his memories of prison, do you know anything?

Behram Hoti: Of course, of course...

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember any of them?

Behram Hoti: I am the first educated child and also the first professor of Likovc, I am also the first poet and writer from Drenica and so on and so on. Nebil Duraku was a writer in Drenica before me. I

¹³ *Jatak*: literally a bed, a place to sleep; in this context a shelter for underground activists.

¹⁴ In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

¹⁵ Island in the north of the Adriatic sea, from 1949 through 1956 a maximum security penal colony for Yugoslav political prisoners, where individuals accused of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, or other dissenters, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

published the first literary work in Drenica which is called Drenica, the Albanian name Drenica, I am the author of the first literary work. Then I gained the title of the first poet and writer from Drenica.

Aurela Kadriu: In which year did you publish it?

Behram Hoti: In 1965, when I was 19 years old, the second year, the first year in the *Shkolla Normale*,¹⁶ 1965. Esad Mekuli published his work ten years before me, 1955. Behram Hoti is the author of the book *Ligjërimit e Mia* [My Lectures] while Esad and Hasan Mekuli are its editors. Who are Esad and Hasan Mekuli? Two dedicated Albanian intellectuals, all the most dedicated poets of Kosovo have the support of Esad Mekuli because he was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Jeta e Re* [New Life]. And all the talented writers and poets would gather there and it would be distributed all around Kosovo. Among them, for example Din Mehmeti, Ali Podrimja, Mehmet Kajtazi from Drenica, Nebil Duraku from Drenica and many others.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Hoti, can you tell us about your father's memories of prison, how...?

Behram Hoti: My father's memories, I heard...

Aurela Kadriu: Especially of Goli Otok...

Behram Hoti: Yes, I have a very fresh unforgettable memory when he arrives, gets sentenced in Pristina, in the local court. At that time, at that time Ali Shukriu was a military prosecutor, and Selim Obranqa was deputy military prosecutor. The people of Llap called him Selim Zeshku [The Tanned Selim] because the skin of his face was a little dark. Who is Selim Obranqa? One of the most dedicated partisans of the Llap region in the war of 1944, '45, until the end of it in '45. Which war was that? The one for National Liberation.

He had joined the war for National Liberation as a partisan in order to liberate the Albanian nation from the Serbian-Slavic regime and obtain freedom and in order for Albania to be everywhere where Albanian was spoken, for it to become the Albanian National Republic of Albania wherever there were Albanians and Albanian was spoken.

But in 1945, '56, in February, when also the Albanian brigades took off, the Seventh Albanian Brigade took off to Beqej, Kikinda, Srem, to chase the Germans from the Balkan, that is when the Communist Party of Yugoslavia led by Josip Broz Tito, and the most dangerous criminal for the Albanian nation, Aleksandar, Aleksandar Ranković¹⁷ and many, many others... they ordered that... the command was in Albanian until they reached Srem, the Seventh command, of the Seventh Kosovar Brigade, Qamil

¹⁶ Specialized high school that trained teachers.

¹⁷ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

Brovina was the commissar of that brigade while Shaban Haxhija was a commander from Tropoja in Albania.

That is when, that is when the command was changed, until then it was *tungjatjeta* [hello], *shun* [attention], *gatitu* [attention], turn right, turn left and many others, and there they say that the command was changed immediately... they say, “*Ode zima dodje leto, nema vise tungjatjeta*,” [The winter passed, spring is here, there is no more *tungjatjeta*], only in Serbian. The greatest betrayal in the Balkans took place against Albanians. That is when telegrams with names and lastnames came to Selim Obranqa in order for him to judge them in the local court, not so far from here, in the place that is known as *Te Plepat* [At the Poplars].

The list came with the people who had to be sentenced and imprisoned, they were actually imprisoned, but for the fighters of the Drenica brigade led by the commander Shaban Polluzha to be shot to death, because Shaban Polluzha, the commander had been killed together with Mehmet Galica [the name is Gradica]. And my father together with his friends, with his confidants and his loyal friends from Albania where he had his paternal uncles, and his first cousins, found the organization for the unity of Kosovo.

They found out about that organization and my father was sentenced. He was sentenced in the military court of Pristina, in the local court and was deported to Niš. It didn't take long and Selim Obranqa refused the verdict and refused to sign the decisions to judge and execute Albanians. In Streli, it is a place in Pristina that is called Sterlishte, that is where Gjon Serreqi, Shaban Bajku from the village of Muqivërc in Kamenica, were shot to death. Many Albanians were shot to death there, but I only mention these two.

And Selim Obranqa decided to desert, he said goodbye to his position, to the chair [position] of partisans, he found out that he was betrayed by the partisans and was arrested, I mean, he escaped to the mountains. First he was sheltered by his paternal aunt in the village of Dragushë in Purgovc and that is where he contacted the *sheh*¹⁸ of Llap who had authority in the communist circles at that time here in Kosovo, in Pristina and Llap. And the *sheh* said, “Give yourself up!” These were the words of Selim Obranqa, because I have the journal of Selim Obranqa, only I do have it, nobody else, as well as his photographs from the war... he said, “You will be sentenced, maybe with one year, maybe with two, but you are guaranteed your life, give yourself up.” He gave himself up, was sentenced, went to the prison of Niš and met my father Hasan Jashari there.

That is where they started becoming brothers while telling each other... because Selim said, “Oh Hasan Jashari, when the brigade of Drenica with Shaban Polluzha and Mehmet Galica [Gradica] came to Podujeva on their way to Srem, Kikindë and Beqej to fight against the Germans, they had decided to execute them near Perpellac, as soon as they got inside the train and pretend that the train crushed and was destroyed. I was,” he said, “under the command,” now in Podujeva. “I had my

¹⁸ *Sheh* is the religious leader of a Sufi sect.

sharcin,” the automatic gun, a German *sharc*, “it was ready, when the command from Pristina arrives, to kill them all.” He said, “But it wasn’t meant to be, now I came to prison and met you,” and they became like brothers. “How many sons do you have?” He said, “I have seven...”

Aurela Kadriu: Your father asked Selim?

Behram Hoti: Yes, yes. “Seven, all of them are young.” “You should give one of them to me.” “Yes,” he said, “I will give him to you, but why?” “For him to become the son-in-law of Llap.” Since it is the first time that I am talking about these private things, and my father gave me to Selim Obranqa and I became the son-in-law of Llap, I am a son-in-law of Llap and the first son-in-law of Llap. But Agim with the Veliu lastname, who is the major of Podujeva, his father, his father was the courier of Shaban Polluzha in the war of Drenica. That is why Drenica with Llap had... I don’t want to divide territories, but we always got along. And Nuhi Bradashi is exactly the name of the courier of Shaban Polluzha, Nuhi Gashi, they called him Nuhi Bradashi.

In the year... my father was in prison. The repressions and raids of my house started, we remained like poultz only with their mothers. But my maternal uncles from Baks raised us, they took care of us, they brought us meat and bread, pickles and everything else, wood... and in 1959 I, at the end of ‘59, I mean, in September, I finished elementary school in Likovc and turned out to be the most devoted student not only in Likovc but all around the municipality of Skenderaj, the best student with the best behavior and grades. There were others as well, but doctor Sadik Zeka comes after me as an extraordinary student, the first doctor of Abria. And I became a student of the *Normale* in Pristina. I passed the admission exam. There were many others from Abria with me who today talk on television and don’t mention their colleagues. They couldn’t pass the admission exam to the *Normale* while I did because I was excellent, I passed the admission exam, became a student of the *Normale* and...

My professors from the *Shkolla Normale*, most of them were, had finished the *Shkolla Normale* in Elbasan. They were so devoted. Beqir Kastrati was among them, a professor, an Albanian, he loved his nation, a polyglot, a visionary, he spoke many languages and so on, he was my class monitor. But again, my classmates from Llap taught me Serbo-Croatian language. Because the wife of Gjon Shiroka, a so-called professor, I knew her name but I can’t remember it now, would say, “*Ako ne znaš ti si iz Drenice, ako ne znaš srpski jezik kao Alji Šukrija nećes nikad prolaziti, dobiti prolaznu cenu.*” [If you don’t know you are from Drenica, if you don’t speak Serbo-Croatian as fluently as Ali Shukriu, you are never going to get a passing grade]. But my classmates from Podujeva had Serbian and Montenegrin neighbors so they knew the language. They would secretly, illegally take me to their apartments during the night and teach me Serbo-Croatian. They would also take me to *Kino Rinia* [Youth Cinema]... they all supported me, they...

Aurela Kadriu: Where were you living at that time?

Behram Hoti: I was living in a private flat which Fazli Grajçevci¹⁹ found for me, because Fazli registered me in the *Shkolla Normale*. Fazli Grajçevci, the patriot and symbol of our national flag. He didn't denounce any of his friends when he was imprisoned either, that is why most of us who collaborated with him, even the young ones, are alive, he didn't denounce anyone in court. Fazli bought a blanket for me, he would come every Sunday because he was working as a teacher in the village of Dobërshevc. I lived there, not in the dormitory because I didn't have that right since my father was a political prisoner because he was against the government, against the Communist Party...

Aurela Kadriu: Your father continued being in prison while you were at the *Normale*?

Behram Hoti: In prison, in prison, in prison...

Aurela Kadriu: How many years did your father spend in prison?

Behram Hoti: Eight years. And this, even if I weren't allowed to stay in the dorms, because I had the badge of being the son of a *ballist*,²⁰ a nationalist who turned his gun against the partisans because in the brigade of Shaban Polluzha, my father led a company, he was a fighter of the Hoti *Bajraktar*.²¹ So, this way I had no right to a pension, I mean, to a scholarship, to credits and I also didn't have the right to be accepted in the dormitory because my family was persecuted by the Communist Party, by the Socialist League.

Nobody dared to come and work in our fields, to harvest, nor to the wedding of my brother, *baca*²² Selmon. Only one person from Likovc came to the wedding with his wife, because nobody was allowed to do so by the Communist Party, we were persecuted ...and, five, six years after my father came from...until the fall of Aleksandar Ranković.

Then there are the tortures during the arms [collection] action in Podujeva as well as in Drenica, Dukagjin and all around Kosovo, the tortures...I finish the *Normale* as well as the Faculty of Albanian Language and Literature in Pristina. I was... I started my graduate studies together with Jusuf Buxhovi and some others... and I met the boys from Rugova, first Zymer Neziri, Isa Demaj and then the others.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you politically engaged during the time of the *Normale* and the faculty?

Behram Hoti: Yes, of course.

¹⁹ Fazli Grajçevci (1935-1964), member of *Ilegalja*, the underground Albanian nationalist movement, killed in detention.

²⁰ Member or supporter of *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front), an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

²¹ Local military leader, literally standard-bearer, from the Turkish *bajrak*, standard. When the Ottomans began to enlist Albanian subjects for their army they chose brave representatives of the tribe to lead the recruits and they called them *bajraktar*.

²² *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about that period, how was it?

Behram Hoti: Of course. I am maybe among the few intellectuals of that time jailed in the Yugoslav Army.

Aurela Kadriu: During what time?

Behram Hoti: No, no, not prison, for having an anti-Serbia newspaper or an Albanian newspaper in your pocket, or a book of Enver Hoxha, but for political activity.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you explain these [arrests] and did they happen during your studies?

Behram Hoti: These, immediately, it was 1980, 1968. In order to give back to my homeland, I became a professor of Albanian Language in Likovc. But the aim...

Aurela Kadriu: After the *Normale* or your studies?

Behram Hoti: After my studies. The aim was because there was the National Movement back then...

Aurela Kadriu: What year are we talking about?

Behram Hoti: 1968. It was the National Movement and we were preparing to raise the flag on November 28. And precisely these hands of his [BH] students, who today are professors, doctors and Ph.D.s, they are also freedom fighters of the UÇK²³ in Drenica, but not only in Drenica, also in the three wars, I am a member and a veteran of three wars, my students, together with their professor and Vesel Zeka, my collaborator in Likovc, a teacher, who raised the national flag on the roof of the school of Likovc, not in bushes or trees, but on the roof of an institution. The police came. They put the paper there that, "The celebration should stop!" Because we did it on November 28, not on November 29. November 29 was the day of the Republic of Yugoslavia while November 28 was the day of the Republic of Albania.

We put it at the entrance of the school. We danced in the yard, sang and performed. I was the only one wearing our traditional clothes. My collaborators, most of the other teachers were members of the Communist League. I told them, "You are free not to attend it, because they will fire you from the Communist League, they will fire you from your work, but I have taken over." I was the only one with my students, some of them were killed during the last war, and so on, I was wearing our traditional clothes, I can bring that photograph to you {addresses the interviewer} that part of the book, that photograph, we raised the flag. They put the order to disperse at the entrance.

Then I told Shefkije Zymberi from Likovc, and Hamide, Hamide from the neighborhood of Cmokaj from Abria, Hamide, an eighth grade student, "Tear it off because I will defend you." Of course I had

²³ *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosoves*, Kosovo Liberation Army.

what to defend them with, as long as I was alive, I had what to defend them with...but they didn't even come to bother me... two trucks with policemen. There were Albanian policemen at that time as well, but most of them were *shkije*.²⁴ And they didn't arrest me that day, but the arrests followed after.

And precisely in the '90, by the end of the '90s...in 1969 I was put in jail as a soldier, first in Postojna, in Slovenia. Then I was held in prison in Postojna, in the Titova Barracks, the Barracks of Tito, Titova Barracks in Ljubljana. From Ljubljana, [I was held] in the officers military prison in Zagreb, where I was sentenced to prison by the Supreme Court of the Yugoslav Army, and I spent a big part of my sentence in Copra, in Slovenia, and In Sibenik and some other places. Only my father and a cousin of ours were allowed to attend my trial, my cousin is the son of Xhemajl Bajraktari, his name is Rrustem Bajraktari, he was working in Zagreb at the time and my father slept at his place the day before attending my trial. I was sentenced for stealing, breaking into the army warehouses, stealing weapons from the military and bringing them to Likovc in Drenica to my *kulla*, my father's *kulla*. We organized for many days, but none of them suffered except my brother Jashar and I...

Aurela Kadriu: Was that true?

Behram Hoti: Yes it was. My brother was sentenced to two years and a half while I was sentenced to eight years. My brother Jashar, he was sentenced together with me and we suffered the punishment together, I as a soldier and he as a civilian, in Mitrovica and other places. Who is Jashar? He is the father of the hero who fell together with the commander of the Adem Jashari brigade in Vërbovc, in Drenica, Ilaz Kodra. I mean, he is the father of the hero Lutfi Jashari.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us...

Behram Hoti: No, not Lutfi but Fazli Jashari. Then I served my sentence and they didn't allow me to work anywhere...

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about your experiences in prison? The tortures, the years in prison, during prisons, if you can tell us about those experiences.

Behram Hoti: Yes...

Aurela Kadriu: I believe you remember them.

Behram Hoti: Today...how can I tell you when you are young, you will...

Aurela Kadriu: For those who will see this...

Behram Hoti: You will become young mothers. You are useful and glorified as girls, but you are not holy. You will become holy when you hold the cradles and become mothers, that's when you will

²⁴ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

become holy. And I don't want to disturb your souls because the war with Serbia disturbed us enough. But let me tell you this, around half million Albanian civilians were interrogated or mistreated in Serbian prisons, students in prison after the students demonstrations of '81 and before that, before that...the most cruel prisons.

We haven't experienced prisons in Albania or America and so on, but the most cruel prisons the most anti-human prisons that were destined for Albanians from Kosovo, civilian prisons. Not to talk about military prisons. I was persecuted by the secret services even after finishing military service..

Aurela Kadriu: In which year did you finish military service?

Behram Hoti: I finished it in 1900...I had to go to the military service three times because they interrupted it for me, they imprisoned me, do you understand? But I had to go and finish the remaining part. Eh, the military prisons differed from the civilian ones because my prison was not ordinary, it is special because first I was the first Albanian language professor who got imprisoned that way, stole weapons from an active prison, weapons which Kosovo needed in order to start a just war.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about the stealing of arms, how did you organize it, who was with you? Something about that...

Behram Hoti: I had soldiers from...

Aurela Kadriu: In which year did it happen?

Behram Hoti: In '70. I had soldiers from Ulcinj...

Aurela Kadriu: Where did the idea for that action come from?

Behram Hoti:...from Macedonia. My idea was to always furnish my house, the threshold of my house, with arms. And before going to the military service I provided my family, my nephews and many others with arms. I was always prepared. I knew that the day would come when we would have to take up arms. And exactly in Likovc, at the headquarters of the KLA, when we started the first exercises, my father gave his *mamzera*²⁵ rifle to our army. "Here," he said, "You can shoot Serbian helicopters with this." Because in the beginning there were people with hunting rifles who wanted to join the KLA, some of them didn't even have arms.

And we had to go to Albania to pick up weapons and carry them for 80 something kilometers, around 50 kilograms, and bring them to Likovc in order to spread them all around from there. But my elder said, "Son..." while we were opening the *istikame*²⁶ between Likovc and Makërmal, there are the mountains of Makërmal where we were opening the *istikame* to create the liberated zone of Drenica.

²⁵ *Mauser*, semi automatic pistol produced by Germany since the 1870s.

²⁶ Turkish: *istikame*, the position of the soldier standing as guard or preparing to attack.

He said, “Here,” he told my students who were grown ups now and came to fight in Drenica, “The old man will have no other gun than this.” “Where do you have it?” He said, “My arms are somewhere else.”

And Hasan Jashari in September 17, 16 or 17, after a harsh battle is the only one who didn’t leave the threshold of his house in Likovc. Shaban Jashari, Adem and Hamez in Prekaz,²⁷ it might’ve happened somewhere else as well but like in Likovc, he is the only person, we had to leave, the whole army, the staff, because they were coming to us with two hundred tanks and we had to leave in order for the army not to be damaged nor the people, because Likovc had become an oasis, a free zone. Around 50 thousand refugees from all other villages of Drenica, not only Drenica but also Llap had come to that zone, to Likovc. We had to take the people to other places so when the Serbian army entered Likovc would not be able to kill anyone.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, can you tell us more details about stealing arms? In which year did it happen, how was it organized?

Behram Hoti: In ‘69 I was one of the soldiers and a lecturer to the other soldiers, I was also nominated sub-lieutenant after finishing one year of military service. But luckily, most of my officers were Croats, Tomislav Badovinac, Croatian, the commander of the battalion and many others. I explained it to you earlier that my aim was to finish military service and return to my homeland to contribute as a professor, because Kosovo needed professors and teachers. They wanted me to become an active officer because according to them, and it was true that I was very skillful, very prepared in using every kind of arms because we had the family tradition. My aim was to bring arms to Likovc, to my homeland, to my *kulla*.

Aurela Kadriu: So, you accepted the position of deputy-lieutenant.

Behram Hoti: Three months before finishing the military service, I brought the arms to Likovc because as a skillful soldier with a high military education, one would obtain 15 days of family vacation, to go home, as a reward. And during that time, I organized the men of my family and some men from other villages of Drenica, but especially from Likovc, who were working in Celje, Postojna and another city, Maribor, in Slovenia. I didn’t tell them what was inside, there were mattresses for two people and for a single bed... your parents or your grandparents might remember, they were so hard, thick and well embroidered. Back then my brother Jashar and some other boys who were working with him in Celje, tore the mattresses and put the weapons inside, because weapons can be all taken apart into pieces, and they put some weapons inside the mattresses. For example, among them, there were the first automatic weapons, which had never been seen in Drenica before.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you take those weapons out?

²⁷ In March 1998 Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marked the beginning of the war.

Behram Hoti: I took them out.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us how?

Behram Hoti: Because I had an extraordinary authority there. Yes, I assured possession of the keys of the warehouse when I was in various exercises. I would take them out of the yard of the barracks one by one and take them to the mountain where I would cover them with plastic bags and leave them there. My people would come and take the weapons there, then they would buy the mattresses and put them inside the mattresses. And the mattresses and the doors doors in Ljubljana and Celje... Just like in Pristina, they would demolish some old houses in order to build some high rise, high buildings. The doors were in some boxes, they were wide doors and windows, and Slovenia is known for its trees, doors and windows...for example Lesna in Kosovo, the brand of doors and windows Lesna originates from Slovenia, the famous brand...

I told my brother, "Look where they sell doors, where they left them on sale after demolishing the old houses, just like at the time of Austro-Hungary, when they built in order to modernize the state, the infrastructure of the city... and fill it." Back then they called it "the wool of the devil," it was like cotton, "Fill it with that, and put the pieces of weapons in the cover of the door. Do you see, this door has its cover as well {points to the door} but this is a very narrow cover..." Stick the plank on the other side and put it on the train in Ljubljana, to the address of Glllogvc, Drenas." Now, I had organized people from Likovc in Glllogvc to go and take them with a horse car.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you communicate from inside with people outside? From the military service...

Behram Hoti:...where, here? I myself went on leave three times...

Aurela Kadriu: So, that's how you organized?

Behram Hoti:... When I gave the command to the general Jorze Zbati from the military zone number nine of Yugoslavia, as soon as I cut [finished] it, he said, "Fifteen days of leave to go and see your family," do you... I was made for such things...

Aurela Kadriu: So, you organized the action during that period of 15 days?

Behram Hoti: 15 days. Three times of 15 days leave. And then I told my father, "Start building the new *kulla*, the new house once the new doors arrive, let the people of Likovc know that you are building new houses and these doors and windows are being sent by your son in Slovenia." Do you understand me? You know, just like they sell washing machines from Germany nowadays, those doors and windows were being sold, just as if someone sold windows and doors from Pristina to...and they would come by train.

My father, brothers and other cousins would go with horse cars and take the windows and doors and send them to Likovc. Most of them didn't even know what was in there. Very conspirative, but some of them knew. They took them out of the mattresses as well as of doors and windows and prepared the doors and windows for the new *kulla*, because we had three *kulla*, three big houses, 25-26 meters long until the last war, and they hid them.

Once I got arrested, because they started registering the weapons and they started torturing the warehouse workers because, "Where are the weapons?" And so...and I noticed that they had some doubts. Then I called my brother and said, "How's it going?" He said, "They are saying that our father has been arrested," I mean, not our father but our mother and brother. Do you understand me? {addresses the interviewer}. In an informative conversation, "They say that they are suspecting you." Then I voluntarily gave up because I was actually thinking of starting a small war there, but I had to give up when I found out that my mother was in prison. But it turned out not to have been true, it wasn't true. I wrote a letter.

One of the generals together with around two hundred something soldiers came from Slovenia to Likovc, they came and besieged the village. They went to my family and told my father, "Here's the letter of your son. We only need the weapons that he brought here, he is safe and sound." I was in prison. "He is safe and sound, we only need the military weapons, not your family's weapons, only the military ones," and he said, "which your son brought here. Your son is safe and sound. He was the most famous soldier, he was number one in the whole battalion of Ljubljana, Postojna, but this only happened because your son had a dream..."

Because in the trial I said, "I had a dream that *çetniks* went to Drenica and they were going to massacre my family just like they did before." Do you understand me? And I really had had that dream. So, that dream and that declaration helped me a lot. He psychologically had a dream and that is why he filled out his house with weapons, without telling anyone the reason why I had brought the weapons to Kosovo. This is the journey of the weapons that came from Slovenia for the first time, and nobody could ever do such thing, such an action. But my friends were strong. They asked me whether I did it on my own. All on my own. But who sent them there? My brother. Because I knew that my brother would not tell anyone. I happened to have my brother working in Celje in Slovenia...and this was the journey of the weapons...

[This part of the interview below was conducted on April 5, 2017]

Part Two

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, can you tell us about the '70s?

Behram Hoti: Yes, let's start. The '70s, it was precisely 1970 when I was imprisoned in the officers military prison in Zagreb. Kosovo was flourishing at that time, from '70 to 1978, '79. Since Kosovo with the help of God and the commitment of its people and nation obtained the University of Kosovo, Kosovo would every year raise extraordinary generations of University students as well as high school ones. Back then, there were 35 to 50 thousand students attending the University of Kosovo.

The '70s are among the most successful years Kosovo ever got to experience, the history of Kosovo, of its people, the history of the Albanians from Kosovo. After the University of Pristina in '74, the Constitution of the Autonomous Socialist Province of Kosovo at the level of the Yugoslav Federation followed, according to that Kosovo was almost a republic, it just didn't have its Military Academy. It lacked the Military Academy but it had all the other institutions, the Police Academy, the Academy of Sciences and Arts, the University and everything else. But this is the reason why the demands for the declaration of Kosovo as a republic followed, but it was impossible because the Republic of Serbia wouldn't allow it in any way because it wanted to continue keeping Kosovo under its arms, but it didn't manage to.

Until '74, '75, '76 Kosovo did not only flourish intellectually, in science, culture and education, but also in the economy. Trepça was a guarantee for the whole Yugoslavia, the Federation of Yugoslavia, a guarantee for the whole Europe, for construction and reconstruction, Trepça worked and Serbia benefited. The nation was reduced to a situation of poverty until 1974, when the Constitution arrived, Kosovo institutions, workers organizations, the employment of Albanians in Kosovo proportionally to the minority which in Kosovo ruled, the Slavic minority, Serbian-Slavic minority. In every organization, there were at least seven or eight [Serbian] employees while only one or two Albanians.

With the arrival of the Constitution of '74 a renewal began, the proportional employment and the use of languages, the Albanian language. Normative acts began to be translated in every institution, in every workers' organization, because various statutes and normative acts, work rules were only written in Albanian language, I mean Serbo-Croatian language, there was nothing in Albanian. Many detainees returned from various prisons, professors, students took the positions of administrators, translators, bilingual clerks in workers' organizations.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram...

Behram Hoti: Until '74, I was in prisons in Serbia, but *Rilindja*²⁸ would come to our prisons as well, the only newspaper from Kosovo at that time. There is a lot to say about those years.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about the years in prison, the memories of those years in prison and what did you do after prison?

²⁸ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

Behram Hoti: Memories..I wasn't the only Albanian in prisons. Prisons at that time and even earlier were filled with Albanians who were serving their sentences. I have an unforgettable memory when they were moving us from the prison cells to the yard for the promenade. The walls were five-six meters high, with barbed wires in the four walls of the yards and so on, they looked like the walls of a castle...you have to keep your hands in the front like this [explains with hands] or in the back, and you are not allowed to look left nor right. But I managed to steal the sight in four corners of the yard, the high walls. Two-three soldiers were always prepared as well as the machine gun. It was impossible for us to escape from the prison, but maybe those guards were so prepared only for Albanians, in order to install panic in our hearts, souls, dignity and morals. No matter that, our morals only kept strengthening more.

The prisoners would walk in circle like this [explains with hands], one by one, one after one. Around seven-eight, ten meters far from there, I saw a boy who was younger than I...and we had the military uniform but we had no military emblems, for example the star of communism, but the military hat...during winter, when it was winter time we had the military uniform...he waved his hand to me, he greeted me. Maybe he had noticed that an intellectual from Kosovo was in that prison. I don't know who that boy was, that young soldier. I still want to know who he was, want to identify that boy, who was he, who was he...to me he was...and soldiers, officers, the officers guard, the military police of Yugoslavia immediately took him from the yard and sent him to the prison cell or I don't know where. I never saw him anymore.

Aurela Kadriu: What was your engagement after being released from prison?

Behram Hoti: When I wrote letters from prison, I had a loyal courier, Feriz Nuraj from Plluzhina, who would send my letters to my mother, father and brothers. He would take them to the post office and take care of them. During the night, he would go under the shadow of an apple or pear tree or under the shadow of haystacks and read them to my father and my mother because they were illiterate. A very devoted human being. Then after the arrival of the Constitution, the amnesties started, I was granted amnesty, got released from prison and came to Pristina. As a person, a professor, it was impossible for me to get employed anywhere, to take the [school] register, even to villages. For example, I went to the village of Ujëmir in Klina, in Peja, at the border with Drenica, I knew the school director who told me, "Behram," he said, "We have the list of many people and you are part of it, you cannot take the register, I am sorry." From there on, I could not get employed anywhere.

A good thing happened to humanity, Sherif Ahmeti, whose photograph I have here, Mulla Sherif Ahmeti was the director of the *madrassa*²⁹...the *madrassa* was separated from other public schools. He was the director of the *madrassa* here in Pristina...and Muhamet Pirraku, professor Muhamet Pirraku informed him, he said, "There is a guy from Drenica, he is an unemployed professor, can he come and teach Albanian Language here?" "Yes," he said, "It is possible." And Mulla Sherif Ahmeti accepted me illegally to teach the students of the *madrassa*. So, many *hoxha* whom you see during the

²⁹ Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

Eid³⁰s prayers, for example, Sadri Bajgora, Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, Mulla Fetah Bekolli, Mulla Ali Vërmica were my students in the *madrassa*... all of them were part of the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Campaign, they were all my students in the *madrassa*.

Aurela Kadriu: In what year?

Behram Hoti: That is where for the first time I registered a boy, a cousin of my father. His father was my father's cousin, because during the time of the weapons [collection] action in my house, during the time of Ranković, nobody could come to harvest or work in the fields. It was forbidden for people to even attend our weddings because our family was persecuted by the system, a family expelled from the Socialist League. But Selmon Murati from Likovc always supported our family. After I started working at the *madrassa*, one late night he came to our house, to our *kulla* and told my father, he said, "This son," he said, "I have six sons, but I am giving this one," he said, "to the professor," he said, "to Behram Hoti," because at that time I was not known as Jashari, by my family last name. He said, "I am giving my son to Behram Hoti." "But he is young," he said, "But this year he will finish the eight years school." And his father wanted to send him to study to become a teacher, an engineer or a doctor, or in other words, to get an education.

Since my father had been a political prisoner, he got along with committed, nation loving people in prisons. He said, "No," he said, "I am giving him to the professor," he said, "for him to become a *hoxha*, to register him in the *madrassa*." He is Mulla Osmon Muslija, who is part of many debates against terrorism and Wahhabism. Mulla Osmon Musliu, who had the courage to attend the funeral of Jasharaj in Prekaz. He is the *hoxha* in his clerical clothes. There were other *hoxha* in that funeral, but they came as civilians. He was the only one wearing his clerical clothes and was targeted by international televisions such as CNN and BBC when he was crying while looking at the corpses of the Jasharaj at their funeral. So, he is a devoted *hoxha*.

Aurela Kadriu: Until which year did you work at the *madrassa*?

Behram Hoti: I worked at the *madrassa* until '74.

Aurela Kadriu: Only in '74?

Behram Hoti: Only in '74, for seven-eight months.

Aurela Kadriu: Then, after the *madrassa*?

Behram Hoti: After the *madrassa*, I worked at the Branislav Nušić school for some time, but as soon as they found out about me, the director said, "We cannot keep you." I worked, from there I worked in Millosheva to find devoted and brave people, where the director was ready to illegally accept me for some months, seven months, five months...I worked in the village of Besi, in the countryside of

³⁰ *Eid* is the same as *Ramadan Bajram*, the holiday that marks the last day of the month of fasting, Ramadan.

Pristina, I worked as an Albanian Language professor in the village of Lluzhan. So, I knew the families there, for example I worked with Zeqir and Ahmet Gërvalla as well as the son of his brother, with the Zhitia family, I also worked in the village of Shipol in Mitrovica, I taught Albanian Language at the elementary school there... so many places in a row, until...

I forgot to tell you that before going to the military service and getting imprisoned, I also worked as a journalist for *Rilindja* for around four-five months. But since *Rilindja* was under the supervision, under the investigation of what we back then referred to as *UDB*,³¹ the state secret military services of Serbia of Yugoslavia, but mainly Serbia, as soon as they would identify that children of *ballist* and nationalist families or children of political prisoners were employed in *Rilindja*, they would immediately fire them. When I worked in *Rilindja* for five, seven months, Mehmet Shoshi was its editor-in-chief.

And he told me, "Professor, you are being investigated. They found out about your and your family's past." He said, "You better withdraw from *Rilindja* by your own will, because I cannot fire you, because it should either be me the one who resigns, or you." I said, "No, no, please, you just work," and I signed the agreement. I still have the decision. Even though many decisions, writings, agreements, archival testimonies have been burned because our villages and *kulla* were burned to ashes. My father was burned there, in those *kulla* as well.

Since 1912, when the feet of the soldiers stepped... of the *çetnik* soldiers of Serbia stepped in Kosovo, Llap, Drenica, Dukagjin and all around Kosovo and they walked in 1913, they passed Zhur and went to Kukës in Lum, and aimed to go to Durrës and occupy the whole Albania, around 400 Albanians were shot daily. Since 1912 or 1913 my family has... in 1912 they faced the Serbian army with the *mamzera* of the King. He is Osmon Isufi, the father of the grandfather of Lulzim Basha, who inherited his name. The other one is Hysen Bajrami from the village of Rexh, from the other neighborhood... three of them national heroes. They were the first national heroes in Drenica, they were captured alive and killed, and their graves are in the yard of the mosque of Plluzhinë. That's where we have the Bajraktar of Hoti, Rrustem Bajraktari, now our Bajraktar is inherited by Hasan Tahir Bajraktari.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, what was your engagement in the demonstrations of 1981?

Behram Hoti: '81?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes.

Behram Hoti: The demonstrations of '81. I was employed in '74, in '81 I was employed in the Local Medical Center in Pristina, in '81, as a bilingual clerk, because of the law according to which nine Albanian and one Serbian employees were accepted. When the national employment structure moved forward, I was in the Local Medical Center. The demonstrations, in the demonstrations of 1981, I wrote a lot about those demonstrations, I experienced... I forgot to tell you that I also worked in the

³¹ *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

Elementary School Emin Duraku in Pristina, back then it was called Branislav Nušić, for one year. Fahri Makolli from Lluzhan was my student. Fahri was injured during the demonstrations of '81 in front of the Parliament building, that is where he was injured. I was working... I, I knew him well as a student, we sent him to the hospital by car and Boro Moracić, a strongly anti-Albanians surgeon, especially anti-youth, students, instead of saving his hand, the palm of his hand, his fingers, he cut it, because he had been hurt by the teargas, he cut four of his fingers and he was left with only one finger. Even today, my student Fahri Mekolli has only one finger.

Since I was very spry and at that time... I often drove the ambulance during the demonstrations. I carried the injured, the driver was there, but I... because I was also an excellent driver. I drove the ambulance car and sent them to the hospital. The demonstrations of '81, it was a reawakening of the Albanian nation in Kosovo. They were not simply demonstration, that was a war, an uprising, it was an uprising, a war.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you have...

Behram Hoti: The people, I am talking here, I met my wife without me knowing it, with her neighbors, her friends, her collaborator, cooking donuts, bread, water and onions and everything... Do you see this side? {explains with his hands} back then, it was called Dragodan, the hill where the Arbëria neighborhood is now, that was called Dragodan, there was no house on that side, it was a field. During the '70s, there were the games of the Association of Motorbikes of the Balkans, of Yugoslavia, they competed to win in the Balkan Olympiad for motorbikes. To us it seemed... while escaping from the police, from the army to that side to take shelter... we went by foot to the graveyard and returned. That is the street of Bihaq, the street near the market is called the street of Bihaq, near the market, the green market of Pristina, the Bihaqi's street that leads to the mosque, near the Bankoviqe mill, that part is called the Llapi's Mosque.

I was there when Ismet Krasniqi was killed. I was there when one of the demonstrators from the village of Sveqël, a boy from Llap was killed, I was there because I told you that I drove the ambulance. Maybe from that car when the special units of the Yugoslav Army and police came, it is... where NewBorn is located now, near the Youth Recreation Center which back then was called Boro and Ramiz...

There, in those three high rises, in the front of where the governor was, the bank, they would sunbathe on top of the high rises, the policemen and soldiers would just go out to the balconies and provoke us. Maybe from the ambulance... one week after that, Serbia's newspapers wrote in big letters, "*iz kola hitne pomoci kazali su specijalnu jedinicu JNA*" [The Yugoslav Army, the policemen and the soldiers on the balconies were attacked with an automatic weapon from the ambulance]. The marks on the ambulance were there until late, maybe those hands are still alive, the hands that fired at it. It is the first time that I say this, but the driver who was with me is still alive.

For this reason, the demonstrations of '81, they were only called demonstrations because that was a war, it was an uprising, and... not even Yugoslavia or its friends could manipulate us, with those false

writings that Albanians are allegedly favored by the Federation, that they were allegedly giving us education and work, and many many others...

Part Three

Behram Hoti: Our forerunners of the Blood Feuds Reconciliations [Campaign] of '90.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you get involved in the Blood Feuds Reconciliations [Campaign]?

Behram Hoti: As I told you earlier, after my grandmother and grandfather were killed by naive people driven by the greed to kill people in order to inherit their wealth... after they found my grandfather dead, tied with a rope and thrown on a well, after my grandmother was cut into pieces with axes while she was milking the sheep in their stable near the houses of my father's relatives, who had migrated to Albania after the murder of Azem Galica, and after their migration the whole wealth remained my father's property. My father only had three sisters and no brother. That is when they started [wanted] to execute my father as well, because my sisters were married. His youngest sister took my father and got him married in her family. My father lived at his sister's for three years, married, he got married, for three years.

New times came. The perpetrators of my grandfather's and grandmother's murder were being searched for, the murderers of Rushit Osmani started being searched for. Who is Rushit Osmani? He is the brother of the grandfather of Lulzim Basha, *baci* Isuf in Tirana. And according to the *Kanun*³² they started... back then, he was a leader of blood feuds reconciliation. Shaban Polluzha and the Bajraktar of Llausha, and many others, the leader of the *islihat*³³ in Kosovo, we are talking about '26, '27 until '30, '39. After they started reconciling, because in '40 the Second World War took place and the propaganda of the Communist Party, of Communism at that time had started to make Albanians go to war, because Albanian language would be allowed after the war, and everywhere where Albanian was spoken would become Albania. Albanians would for the first time be liberated from *çetnik* and occupiers.

They began, the perpetrators began to be identified. The perpetrator was imprisoned together with his brother... he went to Niš. One, one of the perpetrators died in Niš and the other was released. My father with his friends started to take revenge even before we were born, and he avenged his mother's blood. It was at that moment that I started feeling in my soul that feuds, the killing of brothers.... Look, the ones who attacked my family, who executed my family, let's leave that to history. They were really harmful to Albanians. But they say that no one ever fired a gun to avenge their mother and their fathers like my father did, a positive gun. But then they began, I, in my soul, I was a student of professor Anton Çetta and many others, I knew him perfectly well, because when my father returned from prison the professor came to visit my father in Drenica.... He took stories, various historical and

³² *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.

³³ *islihat*, this is how the first blood feuds reconciliations movement in Albanian regions was called.

political anecdotes, he collected all that wisdom, he constantly came to Drenica. When they began, thirty something young boys were killed in the Yugoslav Army.³⁴ The political prisoners that had just been released from prisons at that time, before '90, for example Myrvete Dreshaj, a professor, Adem Grabovci, also another Dreshaj, Lulzim Dreshaj, Hava Shala...

They organized in prisons to plant flower seeds for every national hero, and they started the blood feuds reconciliation. Prior to that, before '90, when the miners of Trepça locked themselves 900 meters deep in the mine, in the ninth horizon, they found out that two, three, four miners, their families were in feuds. They organized and forgave bloods, they forgave bloods. That is why the very first bloods were forgiven exactly in Trepça. Myrvete Dreshaj, Hava Shala and others, Adem Grabovci, Et'hem Çeku and many others came to the Institute of Albanology in Pristina. This was exactly the beginning of February 1990. They met the honourable professor Zekerija Cana because he was the leader of the [Council] for Human Rights, because Serbia was killing young boys in the army and bringing them in coffins, they killed people in demonstrations, imprisoned them.

Professor Zekerija Cana was a leader of the national cause, the leader of the Council for Human Rights and the professor said, "Yes, I will join you but we have the honourable professor who knows the people's wisdom, their sufferings, he has studied and wrote stories about Drenica," and so on, and so on... and professor Anton Çetta said that he was ready to accept, to join the students in order to establish the Movement. And two weeks of *besa* for the first time in Lumbardh, when the youth went to reconcile some bloods, to ask for reconciliation, the reconciliation of families, on the first day of February 1990, in the village of Lumbardh in Dukagjin, they only managed to take a 15 days *besa*. But then, the Movement expanded. So, in only one day, 120 feuds were reconciled in Drenica.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you part of it since the first day?

Behram Hoti: Since the very first day with the professor, as one of the coordinators for the Drenica region, but also.... Another coordinator, a devoted activist, Avdi Kelmendi, the organizer from Lipjan, Muhabet Pirraku, Mujë Rugova. Mujë Rugova destroyed a new car during reconciliations, not to talk about the fuel that he paid for, but the car, four-five professors would use his car and it got destroyed. *Hoxhë* Idriz Kosova, Idriz Kokrruki as well, while professor Muhamet Pirraku sold a cow together with its calf in order to pay for the fuel for the cars. The movement expanded, buses, minivans, tractors came from four sides of Kosovo, it transformed into a Movement, it transformed into an offensive for the good of humanity, because our motto, our main word in big gatherings was that feuds needed to be reconciled because we could not enter the war with enmities. Practically, if it wasn't for the professors we are talking about, we wouldn't have the freedom of movement and we wouldn't be here today conducting this interview.

³⁴ Reference to a wave of alleged suicides of Albanian conscripts in 1990, which were never investigated and always denied by the families.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you organize them in Drenica, how was the reconciliation organized in Drenica?

Behram Hoti: The greatest merits for it belong to high school youth and students. The Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliations refers to the youth, not the professors. The youth in villages with tractors, no matter if it was daytime or nighttime, they went jumping over yard's fences, with constant fear and panic that the police would find out about them and imprison, beat and hurt them, they went to families especially during the night. The Councils of Reconciliations were established in every village, the professors, students together with professors, elementary school teachers, high school teachers... and they would go from family to family, prepare the gathering, the reconciliation, set the date in which for example the gathering in Qirez, Palluzha, Likovc, Llausha or Prekaz would take place and so on.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about these gatherings, how were they, for example the gathering in Lumbardh, Verrat e Llukës and the ones you just mentioned?

Behram Hoti: That is help from God, just like this spring we are in now, nobody has the power to destroy its green. People were aware, they were ready to forgive three bloods. For example, the doctor, professor, the current [University] rector, Marjan Demaj forgave three bloods of his brothers. I have the photographs there.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you in that reconciliation?

Behram Hoti: Of course. And he expressed his desire to join us from that moment on, because the one who would forgive one blood or two would automatically become the most famous reconciler, because we would tell the man, the parent, the mother, the sister, "Here we have the professor who forgave three bloods. Here we have Nezir Vojvoda from Llausha who forgave his son's blood." Who was Nezir Vojvoda? The father of Selmon Vojvoda, the current bloody bridge in Mitrovica is called so after his son's murder in the demonstrations. This is the reason we used many ways to get them to forgive bloods, to hug each other, to extend the hand of reconciliation. Our conversations first started in families, then in *lagje*³⁵ where we would gather during the night, our conversations were about how extending the reconciliation hand was something great, hugging the perpetrator, the member of the perpetrator's family, the perpetrator, the perpetrator, to hug him and extend your hand, forgive the blood...

We were often afraid. For example, in Karaqevë, in the gathering of Karaqeve, for example in the gathering at Hajrat's well, in the fields of Pristina near the new *madrassa*... we were afraid that when they would go to extend their hands, they would say, "You have done this, this, this..." and accuse them in front of the people and say, "Your head should be cut off," for example, but that never happened. Yes it happened that they said, "I forgive the blood to the Kosovo youth, to Kosovo, to the

³⁵ *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.

fatherland, to the University of Kosovo.” But for example, it never happened that they said, “I will never forgive the blood to you!”

There were reconciliations we made in 1990 that were older than 1945, before the Second World War, they were even older. Mainly, mainly the perpetrator, not the family, the perpetrators were naive, they were led by unreasonable greed for other people’s wealth. For example, there were even moments when the family was poor and they jumped the yard’s fences and took some corn from the neighbor’s corn basket, there in the neighborhood.

That is where it was heard, I cannot call it robbery because it was done in order to keep the family, the great poverty that was caused by the Government of Serbia against the families, they were in a total mess, around 90, 80 percent of the Albanian families were in a miserable situation. The leader of the family was forced to go to somebody else’s mountain to take some tree in order to warm his own children, there he would meet with the owner of the mountain, and after arguing they would kill each other, that is how the enmity would begin. On the other side, these were very hard, but the most difficult ones were the ones when the occupier, Serbia, *UDB*, the secret services of Milošević, not Milošević but Ranković at that time, because Milošević is the heir of Ranković, he is younger...

At the time of Ranković, for example, Serbia knew that well, they played with the minds of the families to destroy them, they knew that Albanians tended to have arms... they would be given one rifle and with that rifle they would kill... they would make them forestry guards, forestry guards, and they would kill people for two-three words but would not be arrested. So, several Albanians were killed with only one weapon, this was the main reason, the main reason was to destroy the nation’s cell which is called a family, to get inside the family and make brothers kill each other, neighbor with neighbor, it happened that even brothers killed each other because of wealth, villages among themselves and so on.

This would send water to Serbia’s mill, the occupier, that is why in gatherings, in *oda*,³⁶ in families, during the night as well as during the day, in big gatherings we openly addressed that all these enmities, feuds, brother killing each other, are consequences of the occupiers, of the occupying country that created an unbearable mess among Albanians. We would openly say it in gatherings, there were also, they knew us, Albanian workers of the state security, we would see them there, they would follow us.

For example, the gathering in the village near Zhegre, I don't remember the name of the village, the police came with 18 *pizgaver* aiming to interrupt the gathering for blood feuds reconciliation. The gathering was taking place in a yard, in the field of a relative of that family, and among them there were professors from almost all around Kosovo. They interrogated us, “Who are you? Why you?” Back then Skenderaj was called Serbica, “What are you here for?” They interrogated, imprisoned and sent us to Gjilan for an informative [investigative] conversation. “We know what you are working for, we have the file for all these reconcilers. Why don’t you allow the courts, we have the courts, we have the

³⁶ Men’s chamber in traditional Albanian society.

prisons, let the prisons of Serbia get filled, because we need prisoners, they make washing machines, stoves and so on, they get Serbia wealthy. Why are you interfering with the state's business, who are you?"

The state needed to have thousands of prosecutors, attorneys and judges in order to reconcile one thousand bloods, 1400 to 1700 bloods in one year, one year and a half. We did that. the intelligence of the Albanian nation turned into a prosecutor, attorney, judge, professors. So, this was something extraordinary, we shook the foundations of Serbia and the whole world saw what was happening. For example, we were in Lumbardh around twenty five-six reconcilers, around half million people came to the gathering of Verrat e Llukës, but the gathering of Verrat e Llukës was led from the gathering in Bubavec where there were 300 thousand people... priests came there, Dom Lush Gjergji and other priests of the Albanian Catholic Churches, *hoxha* and other muslim clerics would enter churches, priests would go to mosques and the unity of the nation took place.

This started installing a great fear and panic in Serbia, because it was known, because we talked about the fact that we were about to start the liberation war, first peacefully, but we would also use the arms in case we gained nothing with peace. And they forbid the gatherings by law. But we wouldn't consider them, we would hold the gathering, be it legally or illegally. So... until Struzhë, Kukë e Sharrit, we even went there for reconciliations, not to talk about Zhur, Dukagjin, Podujevë... the gathering in Pollatë, near Dumosh at Kuletolls, in the village {shakes his head trying to remember}, where Shaban Kuleta forgave two bloods, that is when most of the families from Podujeva, from Llap, that was a historical place, Llap is a national place, they started forgiving all the bloods. The village is near Batllavë, in the border with Batllavë, I have...

Aurela Kadriu: Sveqël, Orllan, Ballaban?

Behram Hoti: No, not Ballaban. There are many Kuletolls in that village... I'll remember its name later.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, were there inter-religious feuds, and if yes, can you explain them a little?

Behram Hoti: Inter-religious feuds at that time? They were really rare at that time, not to say there were none of them. I had the luck to immediately after the war, I have the photographs here, during the war a Muslim family from the village of Krajkovë in Drenas, Drenica, was sheltered by a Catholic family in the village of Dërsnik near Klina for three months. There, Albert fell in love with a girl, Myrvete. She was a member of the family that was being sheltered there. A secret love began and nobody found out about it until the end of the war.

Aurela Kadriu: So, the boy from the Catholic family...

Behram Hoti: The boy... with the girl...

Aurela Kadriu: With the girl from the Muslim family?

Behram Hoti: Yes, like that. And the war is over. They continue the illicit relationship. At some point the time comes for them to send the *msit* [matchmaker], but how to do that, whom to send? Because according to our traditions we held the family here like our own children, like our own sister, we ate together and so on, and so on... and the boy's family sent his maternal uncle, his maternal uncle. I have the photographs here. They sent his maternal uncle.

When the people from Drenica noticed what it was about, they got very angry, their relations broke to the point that according to what we heard, they were preparing to take revenge somehow. But first they knocked on the door of Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, since he was a *hoxhë*. Mulla Xhevat said, "Since I am a *hoxhë*, I cannot go to mediate and convince them to allow these young kids to be together, I am against shedding blood and everything, but we have someone, we have his address..." And at three in the morning... because that family was locked... yes, I forgot, they asked for the hand of the girl, and they didn't accept. So the girl eloped and went to the boy's family, she abandoned her family and went to the family of the boy, Myrvete.

And at three in the morning they called me at home, right after the war, two-three months after the war. And my wife said, "You didn't leave us alone before the war nor in the war, but what is happening now after the war, what if someone kills you during the night?" I say, "No, no." "Whom are you looking for?" They say, "Professor Behram Hoti." "That's me." He said, "We have a big concern, there are three of us at Kroni Bardhë in Pristina," there is a place called Kroni i Bardhë in Pristina, near the mosque... the school in Dardania. I stood up and said, "I will take a newspaper in my hand so that you know which one is me." Prior to that I asked someone to accompany me and stay a little further because I was afraid that it would be a trap or something... I went, I met them. The elder, the grandfather of the boy, his father and his godfather. So, I said, I took my notes, "Go home, tomorrow at around two in the afternoon I will come to your family." And we began to reconcile them.

Aurela Kadriu: What were the words that you used...?

Behram Hoti: We convinced them that, "Myrvete is your daughter and sister by accident because she belongs first to the homeland. She expressed her will and they gave *besa* to get married to each other. We will investigate whether that love is forced or pure. In case it is forced, we will bring Myrvete home; in case it is pure, then we will work so to not allow this love to turn into a tragedy. We will amaze the Albanian nation, as well as all the nations in the world." And we reconciled them. We reconciled them.

Today, Myrvete and Albert live in America and the first word that I said to the family of the girl, Myrvete, her brothers, her whole family was in the war and they knew me... she said, "Professor, where did they find you?" Because in the very first moment of the first day, I said, "You will never find a better family-in-law even if you look from this place here to Tirana." And she proved that with their humanitarian aid from a friend to another. They slept in tents after the war because their house was

burned to ashes during the war. Now they have their own houses and comfort and are very happy with the marriage of Myrvete with Albert.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram were you, I mean, can you tell us...

Behram Hoti: That is the Gjini family, their last name, I have all of their photographs. And we held our journals for every place and family we went to. The journals. For example, here I have the 1997 journal {touches the notebooks in front of him}, 1990, until after the war, the 2000 journal, the 2000 journal, they are all filled, look {browses them}. Then, all that I am talking about, what I cannot remember right now, is published in books. The first book about the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Campaign was published in 1995, as a commemoration, on the the occasion of the [death] anniversary of professor Anton Çetta, 1995.

The University and National Library were occupied by Fascism, by Serbia. Students were getting their education from their families, in houses, at home-schooling, at home-universities. The *madrassa* of Pristina was transformed into a university. And this book, *Anton Çetta, Orakulli i Pajtimit Kombëtar* [Anton Çetta, the Oracle of National Reconciliation] was written by the people, by the youth. But my name is there, but that is not my work, that is the work of the people, of the youth of those people who extended the hand of reconciliation, if it wasn't for them, that book would not be. Then the other book comes right after, *Kuvendi i Bubavecit* [The Assembly of Bubavec], and after these two works comes my trilogy, *Fati i Madh i Kosovës* [The Great Fate of Kosovo], in 1990, and many many others. Another was also a book by Cen Desku completed dedicated to the Blood Feuds Reconciliation...

Zymer Neziri, Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, Dom Lush [Gjergji] and many other priests as well as many other professors such as Mujë Rugova; Bardhyl Çausi, who was kidnapped in Drenica by the Serbian police in the very first days of the war and his corpse is still missing, he was the main reconciler for the Gjakova region; Professor Latif Berisha, main reconciler and a committed professor from Mitrovica, he was killed at the threshold of his house. Many of them have died... The University should deal with this era, there should be a specific subject on the '80s and '90s. In the '80s as I told you the uprising started, the demonstrations of our awakening, then the blood feuds reconciliations in the '90s, as a guide and support of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the Presheva Liberation Army and the Tetovo and Kumanovo Liberation Army.

You are talking to a person who is still nowadays part of the reconciliation assemblies in Shkodra, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Preshevë. Hundreds of reconcilers and I am one of them, one of the coordinators. Here I have to mention professor Murat Bejta, Rifat Blaku, professors of the Llapi region, Bajram Blaku, *hoxhë* Bilall, Idriz Bilalli and many others... the committed elder Selim Obranqa, I have a photograph with him during reconciliations. Selim Obranqa and other reconcilers, a big part of them have died, for example Haxhi Zekolli from Vushtrri, a devoted reconciler.

But the merit and the gift of God belongs to the families, to mothers. For example, Hyra Gjoshi from the village of Sankovc of Drenica, Gllokogvc, the father of the perpetrator had been killed and she had

sworn that she would never get married, she had prepared the *qeiz*,³⁷ but she would never marry without avenging the blood. Hyra Gjoshi. No, she is part of my books in case you read them. But when people started forgiving the blood, Hyra Gjoshi broke her oath and went to the grave of her beloved and said, “Kosovo, the Kosovo youth, the national flag, the University and the war is asking for your blood, Drenica and the whole Kosovo will go to war.” And she forgave the blood.

Aurela Kadriu: What was the story of this feud?

Behram Hoti: The story of this blood...One has two eyes, but also has two invisible eyes, those are the eyes of the heart and mind. When those eyes get troubled, are not self-aware, that is when one slips and falls in the brook. But one has to extend their hand to them and take them out of that brook and lead them to the path of God and the nation and say, “Do you regret what you have done, mister?” Since we are talking about regret... the conversations we had during the night, but also the lectures before the gatherings, 200 thousand, 30 thousand, 25 thousand people, were so... the lectures of the professors were so committed, so patriotic, visionary, a platform for the future because the time would come for the war, to take up arms and liberate Kosovo.

For the first time here in front of you, I am uncovering a very sensitive side of my heart and experience. This man reconciled in prisons as well. For example, the educator Demush from the prison of Lipjan is still alive, the prison of Lipjan is still being mentioned. Prior to that, the family would say, “Professor, we don’t think he will ever repent. They are in prisons but they don’t regret what they have done, we haven’t heard about their regret.” The professor [BH] went to prison, I am still licensed to go to prisons to visit the perpetrators. I would go to prison and talk to him, I also got to talk to women and get their statements, not that they regret what they have done, but the power of word...

Aurela Kadriu: What were the reasons behind these feuds that...?

Behram Hoti: The reasons behind these feuds, something invisible that is created in one’s mind and soul. That invisible thing vanishes patience, one forgets that one is human, one is not conscious of their actions, but something invisible inside the perpetrator accumulates some strength, something black, in order to push one to take someone else’s life. The sun and the moon shut down, but we have no eyes, and we talk and cry when the Albanian kills the Albanian, when the husband suffocates his wife, when the husband kills his wife...

Aurela Kadriu: Were there such cases?

Behram Hoti: Yes, many of them, yes...

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about those cases?

³⁷ Clothes and embroideries that fill up the bride’s trousseau.

Behram Hoti: These were caused by poverty, great poverty creates family conflicts. Then the low rate of education causes pain... and makes men raise their hands against women's heads, and sometimes the women have to defend themselves and there are cases when they killed their husbands, and so on, and so on...

Donjetë Berisha: Can you tell us some more specific cases?

Behram Hoti: These are motives, these cases are older. At this time, for example, after the war, they are really rare.

Aurela Kadriu: But back in the '90s when you reconciled, a specific case in which the husband killed his wife or vice-versa and that you went to reconcile. What's the story? Even if it is anonymous, can you just tell us one case?

Behram Hoti: Of course, the story is poverty...

Aurela Kadriu: Yes, yes...

Behram Hoti: Poverty, difficult social situation, a...

Aurela Kadriu: How did these cases happen?

Behram Hoti: One can say and wants to constantly investigate, I have said it in the very first seconds that we will talk about truth and justice. And the truth, the truth is that many rumours came out that it was about morals and so on, and so on... we never blamed women. If *bota femnore*³⁸ made mistakes once, *bota mashkullore*,³⁹ what is called Albanian *bota mashkullore*, made mistakes one hundred times more, because mothers are holy, they are holy.

There were people who contributed there by putting gasoline on fire, instead of extinguishing it, instead of extinguishing the fire once the smoke started coming out. We played the role, and we still play it in order to extinguish the fire once the smoke starts coming out, because once the flames start burning they will burn everything to ashes and destroy it. At that time, these were rare. There were also various families, for example there were four-five bloods created because of a pear tree, and that pear tree was...

Donjetë Berisha: Can you tell us any specific case, for example, of a reconciliation, no matter which one. What was the reason behind the feud and how did the reconciliation continue with your mediation?

Behram Hoti: For example, there were cases because of poverty, of real estate. According to the word of their father, grandfather or grand-grandfather their property was there, now they moved the

³⁸ *bota femnore*, literally the female world, refers to women.

³⁹ *bota mashkullore*, literally the male world, refers to men.

property limits farther down and so on, and so on... or a pear tree was in someone else's property, it was mine and now you own it because you are stronger than I am, you are braver than I am, and so on. Once the real reconcilers found out that the pear tree was the problem, they went and cut it. But those reconcilers who wanted to feed themselves from that pear tree, to misuse it, to feed themselves with that pear tree said, "The new reconcilers did us a big harm by cutting the tree because now we cannot eat pears," and so on, and so on.

For example, there is a village near Pristina, we have reconciled in that village as well, he was a famous intellectual, word after word, he took an axe and hit a 13 year old in the forehead {points to his head} and caused him a bloody scar. He was not a professor by profession, but he was a humanitarian by profession, he is still alive and has regretted his action. And we reconciled them, we reconciled them. But the police was waiting for us on our way back at two at night, and they stopped us. He said, "We know who you are," the Serbian police, but there were also *magjup*⁴⁰ policemen who were trained to be the first ones to beat, the *magjup*... I was the first one to get out of the car. There was professor Kajtaz Rrecaj, and the Sa... Prestresha, there were 25-26 of us there.

I went out, because I was in the first car and was driving. I said, "Mister, at two at night?" "We know," he said, "We heard where you were going." "We went to stop a bloodshed, to do a humanitarian act, but if you," I said, "are from Kraljevo, tell us, in case you have any problem, any feud or something with your mother-in-law," I said, "because you kill each other for wealth, your mother-in-law, sisters." I said, "We can come to Kraljevo and reconcile you." "We heard," he said, "That it is difficult to defeat you." He said, "But my child is sick and has high temperature," he said, "The ambulance wouldn't come." "Where do you live?" He told me the place. We are talking about Graçanica. I said, "We are coming to your door at this time tomorrow with the pediatrician, but be careful and don't raise your hands," I said, "and sticks against the youth." Because they robbed young students and high school students who were coming from Gjilan, exactly before entering Graçanica, at the first checkpoint. That's it.

The motives are, I cannot say, I cannot say the word shallow, because the word high doesn't exist in my vocabulary, high person, shallow person, nor does the word mister someone, I only call people by their names and lastnames. The word "he is a great writer," a great reconciler, doesn't exist in my vocabulary, only God and the homeland are great, first God then the homeland. These. That is why all this politics, prison... Serbia wanted to send as many Albanians as possible to prison, in order to create enmities, to destroy families from within. Once the family is destroyed, afterwards a nation will be destroyed. That is why we noticed, we had known that, and returned the dignity to the people and they supported us. This is a merit of the people, the merit belongs to the youth, especially to the students.

Part Four

⁴⁰ *Magjup*, derogatory term for Roma people.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, how did your life continue after the reconciliations?

Behram Hoti: The reconciliations in Shkodra, Lezha, Bajram Curr, Tropoja, in the Kurbin area,⁴¹ I have photographs with reconcilers, there are more murders there than in Kosovo.

Aurela Kadriu: Currently?

Behram Hoti: Currently. The Albanian state has built a shelter for orphans whose families are in feuds, because they knew how to deal with children as well, how to take revenge on children. This is why in the southern part, in Skrapar, they have built a shelter for orphans whose mothers or fathers are in prisons or whose mothers and fathers have been killed...

Gjak Mariqi is the leading reconciler in the Kurbin are, Nikollë Leshi in Lezha, Zef Sokoli in Shkodra, together with all the other reconcilers. They often invite us because the reconcilers from Kosovo have an extraordinary authority in that side because the murders there are very cruel at this time. Especially family conflicts, a husband with his wife or a wife with her husband. For example, a brother's lack of patience takes the life of [a woman's] husband. . Then he goes to prison or escapes to Italy and his sister remains a widow. She is forced to marry someone, no matter if he is Catholic or Orthodox .

Hundreds of Albanian girls, most of them from a Catholic religion, Catholic, Orthodox, the Gjako... Shkodra area, more than three hundred girls are married in Raška of Serbia, while many other girls or widows are married in the Prilep area, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Manastir, in those regions. One market day, I took the train that comes to Skopje from Prilep and Velest and I sat there invisible, simple in the train seat. I saw a woman with an infant, such a woman, beautiful, healthy, like a *zana*⁴² from the mountain, the child with eyes like an eagle, she was talking to him in Albanian, she was talking to her child in Albanian. When a man came limping, he was old, 20 or 30 years older than the woman and they started talking in Macedonian. I was with two other people.

Since it is a long road by train, I told my colleague, the two young boys who guard and accompany me, I said, "When her husband goes to the corridor, this one, her Macedonian husband, and she is talking to her child..." She didn't know who we were, what we were... "Since she is talking in Albanian, when he goes to the corridor to smoke, or goes farther, give me a sign once he wants to come back to the car." And I asked her, I said, "Can I ask you," in Albanian, "Can I ask you something? You are speaking Albanian," I said, "Where are you from?" She said, "I am from Shkodra, from the village, I am from Shkodra." "You are speaking Albania, who is the mister who came here?" She said, "He is my husband." "But how, what happened?" She said, "I got married to him." "But why did you come to Prilep from Shkodra?" She said, "My brother killed my husband because he abused me, he drank *raki*,⁴³" and so on, and so on, "He left me without food," and so on, and so on, "He mistreated me," and so on, and so on.

⁴¹ Localities in Northern Albania.

⁴² Figure of Northern Albanian mythology, mountain fairy.

⁴³ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

She said, “I lost patience,” she said, “I couldn’t find any other solution, I came to Macedonia and got married.” But, I said, “Who taught you this?” “Exactly,” she said, “Those who introduced me to the Macedonian,” she said, “Are Albanian speakers.” For their own benefit. And then she said, “I took my sister and my sister took her friend,” and she said, “Around one hundred Albanian women are married in the Prilep area.” But the Macedonian couldn’t go to Shkodra to look for a girl, or a woman, or a widow to marry, someone taught them. And that someone is an Albanian speaker. This is why the state should be more careful, they should not sleep, they should work. But the movement, this [current] Movement, the word itself says that it doesn’t rest. The movement is like air, if nature can live without air, then a nation and a state can live without a movement.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, what were you engaged in right after the reconciliations of ‘90, ‘91? How was that period for you?

Behram Hoti: I am fired...

Aurela Kadriu: We are talking about ‘90, ‘91...

Behram Hoti: {nods} I was fired from work in ‘98, the first intellectual in Pristina fired from work. I am a...

Aurela Kadriu: Where were you working?

Behram Hoti: At the Local Medical Center, as a clerk.

Aurela Kadriu: What was the pretext for your firing?

Behram Hoti: The professor, because I didn’t want to mention it, I also have a Master’s degree in Albanology and so on, and so on... the excuse for the violent acts, the violent administration of Serbia. I didn’t accept the Government of Serbia, the state organs of Serbia, I didn’t accept them and they fired me. They issued a decision. I didn’t willingly quit. They said, they called the police and they took me out of my workplace. From that moment, we started to work illegally, the first cells of the army, from two people.

The border wasn’t broken in 1998, ‘99, the border was broken by activists, fighters, nation loving people since the ‘80s, since the demonstrations of the ‘80s. We constantly worked in our motherland for arms, wisdom, knowledge about first aid especially for women. We started the active armed war, until the year, until June ‘99 when we entered Pristina and Kosovo with the brigade.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, what did you continue doing during the war?

Behram Hoti: During the war, we reconciled in the war. There were families that we couldn’t reconcile during ‘92, ‘90, ‘92, ‘93. ‘94, ‘95... {explains with hands} here’s the diary of ‘97, I have the other interviews with... Eh, there was the case of the Paqarizi family from the village of Lubizhdë in Malisheva. They were in enmity with each other, they had killed each other. The Paqarizi,

unintentionally, due to lack of patience, takes the life of the honorable professor of the Gymnasium⁴⁴ Sami Frashëri in the middle of Malisheva. During the war we prepared the reconciliation.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you prepare the reconciliation during the war?

Behram Hoti: Our army had authority in the war, an extraordinary authority. People had joined the fight for their homeland, for the nation, for the people's generations, for the nation's generations, for the real history of the nation, war... those three letters *UÇK* [KLA] are very holy, just as holy as human eyes and mouth. One is really incomplete without eyes and mouth. This nation, without an army, is incomplete, is limping, and of course, of course the police and the army are the hands and the legs of our body, and my body.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you continue doing after the war in Kosovo?

Behram Hoti: Reconciliations, constantly.

Aurela Kadriu: You still continue...?

Behram Hoti: Currently, reconciliations. We have...

Aurela Kadriu: Didn't you return to your workplace after the war? Didn't you work as a professor?

Behram Hoti: Ah, yes, I returned, I returned to my workplace.

Aurela Kadriu: To the Local Medical Center?

Behram Hoti: Yes, yes, yes, because I forgot, I returned to my workplace (coughs).

Aurela Kadriu: Until what year?

Behram Hoti: Until I retired... until I retired.

Aurela Kadriu: What year is it?

Behram Hoti: I didn't ask, I gave lectures in faculties, two lectures per week, or month... I didn't ask... I joined the war as a professor, I stayed in the war as a professor, I came out of the war as a professor, I continued my life as a professor in the reconciliations together with Zymer Neziri and many others.

Aurela Kadriu: In what year did you retire?

Behram Hoti: I have forgotten the year, to be honest, but it must be about seven years ago...

Aurela Kadriu: And you currently continue being engaged in reconciliations?

⁴⁴ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Behram Hoti: Of course, constantly, constantly, together with my honored colleagues who... Eh, reconciliations after the war... the devoted soldiers, devoted commanders made an inter-faith reconciliation right after the war, that you mentioned earlier, precisely in the Malisheva and Prizren areas, in the village of Capar and the village of Shku... {puts his hand on his forehead trying to remember}, Korishë.

The commander had the main word, because the brothers of the girl who had gotten married to a man from a Catholic region, her brothers had been the soldiers of the commander whose name is Gëzim Hazaroli. And he called us, he said, “Professor, the issue is like this. Can we go to reconcile them and stop the bloodshed?” They were prepared to cause bloodshed, but the authority of the soldier played its role.

Still to this day, they are everywhere... he is from Pollatë, the Deputy Minister of the Armed Forces, of our Army, Muhamet Latifi from Pollatë. He was always ready to come with us, together with the professor [BH], to reconcile feuds no matter where they were, but also the soldiers from Llap, Luta, Llata and Remi, all the others, they were all there. I know all of them well, and they always came whenever I invited them. For example, right after the war we made a reconciliation at... the village at the Surdulli family, Shajkovc, we made the reconciliation between the family of Hasan Ramadani and the Surdulli. A feud had started, for example, they had killed their son-in-law and he was in prison...

Aurela Kadriu: The perpetrator?

Behram Hoti: It was right after the war, he was one of the main commanders, I knew his family, we gathered them... Binak Gashi was with me, a commander and high officer, and so on, and so on, and we reconciled that family in front of the television. But before reconciling, this family had killed once again, immediately after they avenged the blood... we stopped that bloodshed.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, if you...

Behram Hoti: And still to this day, the goodwill officers, together with the professor who was speaking, as well as with Zymer Neziri and many other reconcilers, are ready to reconcile wherever there is a need to do so. The cause for feuds, after the war, were mainly wealth, real estate, the property of *shkije*. Those are not lands or houses of the *shkije*. Those are lands that were given to them by old Serbia, to the colonists brought here by the *Kralj*⁴⁵ of Serbia. For example the road to Podujeva, there were colonists in both sides. The road from Pristina, from Bardhosh to Podujeva was filled with houses that were built by the *Kralj* Nikola Pašić⁴⁶ and so on. They entered into various conflicts when selling the lands, “No, that part belongs to me, that part belongs to you.” We have [reconciled] and we are continuing to reconcile many of them. We stopped a lot of bloodshed.

⁴⁵ *Kralj*: South Slavic, King.

⁴⁶ Nikola Pašić (1845 – 1926) was a Serbian and Yugoslav politician and diplomat, the leader of the People's Radical Party, and in the interwar period the author of the agrarian reform that confiscated land from Albanians to favor Serbian colonists.

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Behram, if you have nothing to add, I think that we can conclude the interview now.

Behram Hoti: I have nothing to add. I wish you luck, first the television... Eh, I forgot to mention that in 1992, '93, '94, the national Albanian television, RTK [Radio Television Kosovo] Pristina played the most important role in the distribution, the internationalization [of the Movement], as well as *Rilindja*. Kosovo was in darkness once the television and *Rilindja* were shut down.

And now I thank the media, the televisions here and your association. I wish you all the best, just like this sun and moon wish all the best to this land, and just like the rain that falls and waters this land. You are the wave. I wish you luck, health and a good marriage. Before they used to say, may you have luck, not only luck, but *fat t'bardhë*.⁴⁷ That is why everything should be elaborated, investigated in this life, constantly, constantly.

The future is yours, of the young generation. Your children will be happier than you. The children of your children will be happier than all the children of Europe. Because our blood is pure, we owe nothing to anyone, that is why we should respect and support each other, because we have God and the homeland. National unity is happening, it is closer everyday, and the National Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation did the unity, the National Movement... the National Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation created the KLA, now the KLA will create our national Albanian army and it's done.

Aurela Kadriu: Thank you very much, mister Behram.

Behram Hoti: Honor and glory to the homeland, God and the Albanian Mother.

⁴⁷ *fat t'bardhë*, literally white luck, in this context, good luck.