

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH ENVER TOPILLA

Pristina | 7 July 2015
Duration: 90 minutes

Present:

1. Enver Topilla (Speaker)
2. Lura Limani (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Camera)
4. Labinot Topilla (Speaker's son)

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

First Part

Enver Topilla: My name is Enver Topilla and I was born on 18.08.1946 in the village of Shkabë, formerly Glladnasella, in the municipality of Drenas. I was educated at the School of Industry. I have eight children (smiles), five girls and three boys, all married. They have children, they are educated...as much as I could.

My father was Tahir Topilla, he went to the high school for mechanics at the time. They made him head of the railway station of Dobroshevc¹ and he was jailed as Cominformist² and in the archive of Kosovo I found some documentation that twice or three times, he was sentenced twice or three times to about twenty years of maximum security prison. He stayed [in prison] for seven years with some interruption. For seven years, I did not know who my parent was when he came [home], about seven years later, my brother Sejdi was born. My father had been engaged first to the sister of our national hero Aziz Zhilivoda, but she died. We have that popular expression, “under the commitment of the ring,” engaged to be married, and Shaban Polluzha, the national hero for both Albania and here, gave him his youngest daughter, Shefkije. They lived together for a long time, but my father had to face three -four challenges before dying.

With the first campaign in 1957, when the arms collection campaign began in Kosovo, he was tortured in the most brutal way that someone can be in life, and there was the conclusion of a blood feud reconciliation, he wanted to go, from Gradica [he would have to walk] for one hour and a half through the snow barefoot, it was not possible to wear shoes, to wear anything [because of the tortures he had suffered]. And he put hot packs made of sheep’s skin, as [they did] in those times, he did it for five-six weeks until he could go in person. Any time Khrushchev, or someone else came from Belgrade, my father was put in isolation and he was in isolation, he would present himself twice at the police station of Drenas

¹ Dobroshevc, now Dritan, a village in Drenas.

² Cominform, or Communist Information Bureau, stands for Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties, the international forum of the Communist movement founded in 1947. After the expulsion of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from Cominform in 1948, those suspected of sympathies for Moscow were prosecuted as Cominformists.

or Pristina any time, until 1981, when came...but I think from 1981 until the war, now that we had the liberation war, he formed a very strong resistance to protect his family and this boy near me. And it happened that in the most brutal ways, they shot him with their hands, he was recognized as a national hero... not national hero, but martyr of the nation... I apologize.

He was a participant in the war of Shaban Polluzha. The journeys, the murders, I cannot explain those things, because they [the family] always evaded talking about it, because I suffered and was persecuted. They did not want to see me continue this work, even though they obligated me to read perhaps every book, every novel, every newspaper so that I knew and was aware of what happened and what was done. Like, for example, I read, to take one example, this novel, *Tradhëtia [Betrayal]* by Kapllan Resuli,³ where it is well written, “There is no Albanian threshold that hasn’t been washed with Albanian blood; there is no mother, nor sister who does not have an Albanian son or brother who wasn’t killed.” This happened to all Albanians.

In Podujevo, when they [the partisans] went and deceived them, here also Fadil Hoxha⁴ was responsible. There were Albanian groups... not to use the word manipulated, but definitely quite often deceived. And they went from Podujevo to Pestovë and in Pestovë the oldest son of Shaban Polluzha, Tafa, was wounded, my father too was there, and they took him and brought him for recovery... to Bajram Shallci’s, in Shallc. Shaban Polluzha had maternal uncles from Shallc, in the municipality of Vushtrri.

And the war was...the partisan ranks from Albania collaborated with these others, the war was very heavy, five-six weeks, because Albania, now let’s not judge whether it made mistakes, or not, it had no choice. We know that they were also always against Albania. And it was a very big war, it was a war with twelve thousand soldiers... with Shaban Polluzha. If we consider... according to eyewitnesses who were in that war, but if we borrow the vocabulary of Ded Gjo Luli⁵ and Shaban Polluzha, both were illiterate and led the war and the Albanian ministry told *xhaxh*⁶ Ded, “You won the war with weapons, now work with the brain.” He replies to the commissar, “My son, point the gun down, write the letter.” He said, “[Write] ‘A gun can blow your brains out,’ and take it to the Albanian ministry.”

³ *Tradhëtia* is a novel by Kaplan (Burović) Resuli (Ulcinj, 1934-), an Albanian who was a political prisoner both in Yugoslavia and Albania. The novel, whose title refers to the betrayal of the Albanian nation by Yugoslavs, was published in 1965 after being censored by Albanian authorities and was banned in Kosovo.

⁴ Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001), Albanian Communist partisan leader from Gjakova, who held a number of high posts in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, including the rotating post of Vice President of the Federal Presidency, the highest leadership post in Yugoslavia under Tito, in 1978-79. He retired in 1986, but was expelled from the League of Communist on charges of nationalism.

⁵ Ded Gjo Luli (1840-1915), whose real name was Dedë Gjon Luli Dedvukaj, is an Albanian nationalist hero who in 1911 led an Anti-Ottoman revolt under the protection of King Nikola of Montenegro, but later fought Montenegro’s expansionism in what is today Northern Albania. He was killed in this war.

⁶ *Xhaxhi*, in Albanian literally uncle. An endearing form used to express intimacy or respect for older men, with whom the speaker is not necessarily related.

Heavy operations and weapons are used in the end, when nothing else can be done with other means. A very brutal fight happened for five-six weeks. And on the same occasion, women and children were also tortured then, and the *kulla*⁷ in Tersenik in Drenica, it is a village, was hit...with cannons, and they killed Shaban Polluzha. Shaban Polluzha left the *amanet*⁸ that they should let no Serbian hand touch [his body], and that they had to, they have to throw him into the river Drenica. It's here, next to the railway tunnel. But we are talking of the end, that Shaban Polluzha was the one who... there is also a film about when he went to Serbia, to the Sandjak, an area inhabited by Bosniaks, whom he went to help and there is a film of theirs, the Bosniaks have filmed Shaban Polluzha when he went to help them fight against the occupiers.

Labinot Topilla: I apologize for interrupting, he went to help Albanians and Bosniaks?

Enver Topilla: He went as an Albanian to help the Bosniaks free themselves from Serbs, to free them from Serbs.

Lura Limani: I am sorry, can you not interrupt him while he is talking? You can ask a question when he finishes...I mean, when he finishes his sentence.

Enver Topilla: Either way, I apologize, perhaps I make great mistakes. I can be wrong.

Lura Limani: No, no, there is no problem, except that the interruption shouldn't appear on the video.

Enver Topilla: It is a question of, I said, also it has been a rather long time, and one does ...talking about how Albanians suffered, or [talking about] the work... you can write an entire novel about a single man, let alone about the entire nation. And they never accepted the occupier who is... it is not only ours but, everyone knows it, [the occupier] of all the republics of Yugoslavia. And one can never have trust, the same case just happened in Macedonia, I don't know how it happened... It can also happen especially here, because they do not have enough *besa*,⁹ not because I hate [them], but the world knows and can prove that this is the truth.

Now, to give you a short biography of mine, I was a soldier of the Yugoslav army, there a Serb offended me, "*Šiptarsku majku*," [I'd f. your Albanian mother] I have the testimony of Nehariz of Zabeli i Ultë, and

⁷ Traditional, fortified Albanian house, tower.

⁸ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

⁹ 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.

Murat Bajraktari. And I couldn't take it, and I stabbed him with the rifle's bayonet, I hit him in the leg and I don't know what happened, but it was before I was sworn in, and they could not punish me at the time.

Afterwards, I worked in the Absorbers Factory in Pristina, I worked there for 15 years. In 1979, I was called to Belgrade in connection with a Renault service and they called me as the supervisor of the workplace, in control engineering, when I was specializing in Germany in Bielefeld for that job. And I opposed them, they came to pick me up at work with the police car, with an armored car in 1979, and they tortured me enough, I was tortured by both ... Serbs and Albanians who are sick in their souls {cries}. And for two years, until 1981, when I was taken to isolation on the eve of May Day, they put me in isolation without trial on the 30th...what would that be, April? On the eve of May Day, they put me in isolation for three months without visits, without my family knowing where I was. I spent some [time] in Lipjan, some in Mitrovica, in the prison of Mitrovica, a prison hard enough, we were in the basement. When the Italians built that prison, an Italian killed himself, saying, "I, a man, spent time in a place where one cannot live." The prison was very hard, one of the hardest prison in Mitrovica, where I stayed for a long time.

I have to move now to the very heavy suffering of my family. It was broken in... I had an apartment in the Dormitory 2 in Pristina, at the Absorbers Factory. It was broken in a few times and any time they took all the documents I kept in the house, they did not leave me alone, the State Security Services, in Serbian *Državni bezbednosti* [State Security] how was it called...They release me from there, from Mitrovica, and the investigations begin. In August I got pneumonia because our conditions were very hard in prison number four and three, where after some time, after a sentence of 14 years, they released Jakup Krasniqi.

Both [prisons] were made of concrete, very hard places, there I got pneumonia, and I was tortured 27 times, 17 times I came close to die from their tortures. And I decided to say, "I can die but I will not give anybody up, that there were one million Albanians in the demonstrations." There were one million Albanians. Some testimonies by some broken men are given and for 17 times I was never tortured by Serbian hands, even though I had the inspector of the Security Service, but they were from Plav in Montenegro, Albanians from Medvegje at the service of the Yugoslav State Security, they helped and they almost killed me.

They take me to trial and they cannot sentence me without the evidence [provided by] the doctor that I am able to stand trial. They take me to Pristina, to Skender Boshnjaku's, a neuro-psychiatrist, and Skender Boshnjaku says I cannot take the stand in judicial procedures. And they take me to the central prison of Yugoslavia, the Serbian *Centar Zatvora*, a central prison, where I stayed six months in the hospital to recover from the tortures they did to me. And they, and I, who was not prepared, but article 114 [of the criminal code], "counterrevolutionary," they wrote well, also the judge, Elez Hoxha, today he is in jail for a mistake he made after the war, they took him, what do I know, it's their mistake...everyone must answer like he is perhaps ...In the verdict, they wrote well, they said, "He receives a small sentence because of a health condition that does not allow us to put him in court at all," and I served two years.

Afterwards I come home, the procedures continue, they become more about the family. “First, Tahir Topilla,” they say, “was sentenced, first your father, then your grandfather Shaban Polluzha.” I never stopped suffering, and they also gave me, five times, sometimes one month, two months, whenever I went to Drenas they sentenced me. Somehow I worked at Feronikel and they fired me after I did the six months and a half, I won, and when they sent me to court, they told me, “There is nothing we can do because two have lost their mind, and one his head. You have lost your head for the moment, we can’t do anything.” You know this, now, Albanians in court. They changed my workplace five, six times, but after the war, knowing what sort of family I had, knowing the suffering and...also because I was very sick from my spinal cord, I had a difficult operation because I never got rid of the chronic bronchitis I got in jail in 1981.

And I bought a gun... I did not have anyone to send to Pristina...I bought a 20 automatic gun and joined the Kosovo Liberation Army, where I am also a war veteran. Also my son, a professor, short of being 18, and my brother also came to war. But it was a great risk because they always took the whole family in front of you, and you were not in the condition to do anything because even if there was only one murderer, it was very quick if he had the whole family in front of him and could kill as much as he liked. There were also people who were looking for my family, the newspapers wrote that I was a strong participant on that day when Fehmi Ladrovci and Xheva Ladrovci were killed. When he was killed, it was [as close] as now that we’re sitting here. Shefqet Zekaj from Pristina, here, near the transformer station. That day was the 22 September 1988, ‘98.

Then the newspaper wrote that they were tortured...I had my children in an apartment in Pristina, I was a Pristina legal resident and four times they gave me a final notice that in case I don’t show up, they’ll kidnap my children. And I went underground, a man even died, a person who kept my children, and the association *Nënë Terezë*¹⁰ always brought food and flour to my children in the apartment. And there was Engjëll Ukshini, who worked with me at the Absorbers Factory, and when he learned where I had my children, where they were, he did not spare money, he always brought clothes, food, to the children, he brought it to the apartment. I went underground when the OSCE [Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe] came and the OSCE took people, on that day at 10 they went and took my family, they took my family out, they left my daughter. My daughter was studying at the Faculty of [Albanian] Language and Literature and friends in Pristina kept her until the war ended, I never knew whether she was alive. They released the others {cries.}

They were looking to shoot my family, they spared them, but then they faced me. They killed my father first, he was 84 years old, he resisted, then died in this kid’s arms. Now, they killed the son of my sister, a

¹⁰ *Nënë Tereza*, the self-help organization that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević’s repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled from all state institutions and services.

fighter of the Kosovo Liberation Army. They killed my paternal uncle, they killed two sons of my uncles and two sons of the sons of my uncles. Eight, nine tombstones are in my house in addition to what was burned down... tractors, cars, all I had, they took it. And they did that damage which was common in every Albanian house.

But when we pause and analyze everything, the nation suffered very much, it did not fight only a war, it did many wars. Any time Drenica is assaulted, considering everything, we in Drenica pray, "Inshallah that part of Kosovo won't be attacked," because they are not adequate places for battle, although at our place too it's not like there's a special forest either. The Yugoslav geodesy had measured all the land and the roads. They knew where to put their weapons and where to shoot. There was no way of defending ourselves, besides, our weaponry was weak, but our oath was, "We will fight to the death for the liberation of the fatherland."

And then I went back to my job even though enough mistakes were made afterwards, some of the things done by some people were not flattering, nevertheless in war Albanians were excellent. Thank God no state was freed without the help of others, God willing, America [did it], God willing, nations that knew what suffering is. And the nation is in a situation now, how... It is not completely pleasing, but it is not bad either, I cannot say things are bad.

Now, I am proud, in many aspects with us, they made us suffer as they liked when they knew the father of my mother, Shaban Polluzha, a 74 years old who fought a war with twelve thousand fighters. His sons were imprisoned afterwards, they killed his son and he was also killed and did not accept that they lay a hand on his body. They have built now a memorial, the Albanian Americans, the Albanian Americans who work.

And they took the land and confiscated all they had. The same happened to my father because his brother-in-law, a Cominformist too, until they killed them, because that is death... a person is born to die but what remains after death?! He has remained a hero of the nation and the pride that I have... I had my father and my grandfather.

In the same vein my children, whom I educated with a lot of challenges, are proud, also because after the war I came third in the municipality of Drenas among all parties. For two mandates I was elected with many votes in the municipal assembly as a councilman, and the president of the community where 215 were killed in five villages: Gradica, Likoshan - the first shots were heard in Likoshan - Novosela, now Shkaba there, Driton of Dobroshevc, Çitakova. 215 were killed, my village alone had 93 orphaned children under 15. All these villages were burned down, from 75 per cent to 90 per cent they were all burned down. They killed all the animals, they cut the majority of trees, they took our farming tractors and... I don't know what they did not to our spirit. For this reason, I cannot say it any differently than I could say, I am Albanian.

And once, in connection with “The faith of Albanians is Albanianism,”¹¹ all were unified and the war was won only when it was fought [by all], from the farmer to the academic, when they enter a process then the war is the victory of the people, of the entire, authentic people. But take for example my children, I am proud that I have them and they are proud of having me a parent. I can be harsh sometimes but only because I look out for them. They have been educated quite a lot, I’ve accepted no scholarships, in case someone thought of giving me one, I said, “No, because I can support my children, give it to someone in poverty,” also because I was in all the committees.

They proved themselves... they all finished university, public universities, not private, and my son has had the possibility to go to University, he is in FSK [*Forca e Sigurisë së Kosovës*, Kosovo Security Forces], he is doing a doctorate in metallurgy at the age of 29 in Turkey, at the University, a faculty which among from 117 to 30 universities or how many they are, is the seventeenth in the world. And I say it once again, you are welcome here, you are very sincere, the nation needs you very much because people [should] tell it how it was during the times they experienced, they lost their mind every time, when reality was denied honor was lost, and they saved their skin.

For me you are...you are very honorable, I respect you very much as if you were my children, not because you are interviewing me, but nobody would go through this procedure [the interview] unless her heart actually wants it. Your heart wants justice and truth.

When you consider it, the national custom also symbolizes also your future, your state, your past, with songs as well. Because back then one had to sing, for example, “Azem Bejta,¹² Azem Galica you are jeopardizing all Drenica.” I think that we loved to sing in that strong form, or about Shaban Polluzha, but about Shaban we sang illegally, many songs were sung for him. And they said, “Come on, come on, oh Shaban Polluzha.” It goes, “You shoot very well, bless your weapon, many Serbian women you’ve widowed.” I am talking about folk songs, as are sung everywhere else, these are normal.

But Albanians, an Albanian is born with music, he is reared with music, and dies with music. They know very well, everyone, that a mother, when a child is born, her birth pangs become love for the fatherland of her children. And when she sings, “Ninna nanna/ in the wooden crib/ may you become the village chief,” or “Light it, light it, drag the smoke, we are marrying a brave boy,” or, “You left my gun hanging,” when a child or a man dies, three more songs will be made. But the Albanians, I think, clearly, they also take our

¹¹ Very famous verse from the poem, *O Moj Shqypni* (Oh My Albania) by Pashko Vasa (1825-1892), an exhortation to abandon religious factionalism.

¹² 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.

music, and destroy other forces. For example, Montenegro took the lute because they had a state or, Macedonia took bag pipes or Serbia the flute, and the *çifteli*¹³ was left here. *Çifteli* belongs to the family of the *sharkija*,¹⁴ the Turkish *sharkija*. And bad people, the enemy of this nation, have destroyed the music.

I am repeating it, maybe I have left many things missing which I [need to] speak of, but one can write novels about a single person, let alone a nation. I read many books of many nations, but regardless who and what, for all the past suffering of my spirit, the killing of my family, of the grandfathers, of the parents, are very painful. But smart people and knowledgeable people must be remembered, and bad people must be pitied because they were not as good when God gave them a mind and the eyes just like the others. And for this reason, once more I thank you with whole my heart.

Second Part

Lura Limani: You spoke about your father a little and you told us that you did not know where your father was for seven years, because he was in jail. Can you tell us a little more about what happened after the Second World War ended and after the death of Shaban Polluzha, specifically [what happened] to your father?

Enver Topilla: After I was born in 1946, in 1946 my father was imprisoned. I was a child, he was sentenced twenty year as political prisoner. A group of people was sentenced, eight persons were sentenced to death, I don't know exactly, my father was part [of this group], but he was a very strong orator, he was educated for that time, and so he was sentenced twenty years. He was released, it seems to me, after eleven months according to their words. They sent him through an expedited trial, they sent him into isolation for more than two years, they sent him into isolation without a court hearing. And, when they built the prison of Pristina, I remember I thought myself quite big when I was four, five years, I went with my paternal uncle and saw that they carried bricks in boxes hanging from their necks, [boxes] completely full, without an elevator, without a lift, without anything... and they, the prisoners, built the prison.

To be comprehensive... I grew up mostly at my maternal uncles' in Polluzha. In Polluzha they burned all the houses. And I went and spent more time there because my mother had no husband. My paternal uncle respected my mother very much even without my father and brother. And all our houses were burned in Polluzha, we had houses... he was well off. Shaban Polluzha did not go to war because he was poor, but he wanted everyone to have equally... everyone to have freedom, to have honor because he wasn't a poor man, he had enough land, but everything was taken from him.

¹³ Two-string instrument with a long neck, played in Northern Albania and Kosovo, used to play folk songs and epics.

¹⁴ *Sharki*, is a plucked, fretted long necked chordophone used in the folk music of various Balkan countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia.

And I remember very well when my father comes back, only once did I go to visit him as a child. The same happened to him, to the professor {addresses his son}, this one, Faton. He came after 17 months, came to prison in Ferizaj, and I ask my wife, "Can the boy speak?" And the boy sticks his hand through the bars and touches my face {touches his face}, supposedly to say, "Why don't you ask me instead than ask mother?" the same happened also to me.

But they gave my father an injection in the arm, it is not more important who gave it to him, I don't want to label people... [he was from] our side, to poison him. And a very damaged piece stays in this arm {touches the arm} and it must, it made him very angry in front of the house, but he survived. And he needs a doctor, it was a certain Manevski the Macedonians said he did the operation, he took off a whole piece of flesh and he definitely removed that piece of my father and saved him from the craziness of that suffering. From then on he had no rights, he had no right to vote, he couldn't vote for the Socialist League, mother did not vote, I also did not vote since my mother and my father never voted.

He was very well-read, I mean, educated. At the time there was a lack of education amongst people and many times, he participated in the blood feuds reconciliation, in the mediations, every time. Even though, when a patriotic song was sung in a wedding, he would be called in [by the police], "Have you been there? What did they sing? What was going on?" (smiles). Every time tortures...he was not even once defeated in life (cries). And if I consider his circumstances, they hurt my soul many times.

For example, if I replied just once, perhaps coarsely or not even coarsely, but just in the same manner as I was addressed, [this person] knew what could happen to one, what could happen to me. For this reason, then, I took him to many reconciliation meetings, I am young but these are the traditions, that for the 54 year of my life, in my life, if he came or went out one hundred times, I never waited sitting, I never waited sitting. Every time, even when we exhumed the bones of Fadil [Fazli] Grajçevci¹⁵ with friends and comrades, all the time we also organized, we waited, we helped in the reconciliation of blood feuds and everything else. Thank God that the great man of this nation, Anton Çetta,¹⁶ took the initiative and ended the killing in Kosovo even though they still happen. But he has done a job that neither war nor peace could, they could not solve the issue that was solved in the reconciliation campaign.

Afterwards, after the war I also took this initiative, because Skukrije Gashi did this, we held training, she was a director of mediation. Together with Americans, we also helped a lot, and we began reconcile everything that was bad before the war and during the war. For this reason, there are many things, which I'm saying again. I cannot focus on dates much because of my illness, which is...and once more I have to say that [my father] evaded those conversations because he knew I would never be at peace. My children are the same, they tell it as it is. Everything that is too much hurts one deeply inside even if it said by whomever, let alone if I said it.

¹⁵ Fazli Grajçevci (1935-1964) was a teacher from Drenica who died in prison from torture.

¹⁶ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar.

Lura Limani: You mentioned that although you were living in Pristina and worked, in a way you were “undesirable.” When did you begin to work for the *llegalja*,¹⁷ and can you tell us something more specific about the situation before you went to jail and after?

Enver Topilla: Yes, look, I told you that I was in the Yugoslav army when I was 22, and only because my mother was offended, there’s testimonies I mentioned people, only because my Albanian mother was cursed I took a blade, and they could do what they wanted, I stabbed a Serb with the blade of a rifle. And, in addition, they could not punish me because I am... I was not sworn in. Before the oath, there, it would have not been legal to punish me. And we agreed with all the friends that when we’d get out of the army, on that day we would buy white *plis*,¹⁸ and they took only me in the morning, in Mostar, Trebinje, with a white *plis* and they promised me, the military superiors, “Your day will never come,” that day that I was let go from...20 years old.

But, these were...at the time the activities were very difficult, I keep saying, humans don’t know how to think differently, one for seven-eight years, just when ... when one stopped thinking, it was not about killing, about mistakes, corruption, but [the fight] against Slavic rule, against injustices. Everyone hated injustice, with all their soul, and I always hated it, any time they wanted a meeting after work, I was sent because I had a job, before going to the Yugoslav army.

I always opposed injustice, I was always tortured, I was always interrogated, my apartment was always broken into in ‘69. The Absorbers Factory gave me an apartment because I was skilled. At the time, the organizations distributed apartments, and every time I went [away] for five or six months I had to change the lock because they had broken into during my absence, the State Service Security. And I don’t know what needs more to be said, I never voted as people do, because my dad had been taken away the right to vote by the Socialist League at the time. My mother, as the child of Shaban, did not go to vote because of her father. And I because of my father and mother, [I swear] on my soul I never voted as a Yugoslav.

And our activities never stopped, they never stopped neither on my [maternal] uncles’ [side], nor on this other side [of the family] but there were a few more serious activities. It was not possible for everyone to be an activist. Even I could not after my father, the family suffered and was spent. Even the guests who came to us, had to come at night, to come at night. In one case, when they released me from prison, they called me to the police station in ‘83, and I did not go. I did not want to go, they called me three times and they took me by force. When I arrived, a commander of the station, an Albanian, rummaged my pockets and said, “Who are you not to come?” I said, “I did my time, what do you want with me?” He talked to me very well, I never forgot. He said, “You are escorting people, they come to see you at night, but you are escorting them through corn fields, you are not escorting them in the street,” he said, “and you are

¹⁷ *llegalja* (Illegals) is an umbrella term that includes the Albanian militant groups who organized against the Yugoslav regime under Tito.

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

accompanying people. We know everybody who comes, and who came. Three types of people came: one to see what happened, the second to see what you are still thinking, and the third how you were screwed,” he said, “what they did to you in prison.” And here, since he said all these words, I had to be active every time.

Lura Limani: Can you tell us a little about your work and your experience of the 1990s, after you worked at Feronikel, after being released from prison?

Enver Topilla: Yes.

Lura Limani: What happened afterwards?

Enver Topilla: After suffering in jail, I remained nine months without a job, and I had six children. I got a job through an application, I did not know anyone and I had a job for six months and half. After six months and a half, a director of the cadres, an Albanian, [who had] a characteristic signature, also wrote to the Municipal Committee of Drenas, “This man has gotten a permanent contract,” because a permanent contract was done after six months. He said, “If you want to, you can take measures, the responsibility is yours.” And in two hours, in two hours they tell someone, “Take the decision to send him home.” He says, “No, because I do not know anything bad [that he did], he has to support a family. Fire me too!” But now, they took three people, that was an organization of about one thousand workers, twenty people did nothing but gossiped, and were paid by the Slavic government. Mistakes of the time. And they took me, and I went home smiling, the whole *rreth*¹⁹ was crying. Because they fired me from my job, they were all crying.

Then I went, I remained without a job. One organization accepted me in Skenderaj, I did not want to become a burden for anybody. They easily accepted me in the Bardh Kombinat, now KEK – electro... whatever KEK is.²⁰ And after I started my job, everyone was interrogated, and they were in a very difficult situation, they could have been sent to jail. “Why did you accept him?” I smiled, I said, “Here I am, there is no need [to bother] them.” They sentenced me for weapons [possession], they punished me for not sending my children to military training, they punished me five more times, for about one month, one month and a half, for 25-26 days, but five times I was sentenced afterwards, [in] four workplaces. After they accepted me, the fifth place that accepted me at the Heating Plant of the *kombinat*, KEK used to be called a *kombinat*. And I worked 18 years, six years and a half I was on an enforced leave, they fired me, again everyone... until the Kosovo Liberation Army was organized. Afterwards, I was fired from work and they gave me half salary.

¹⁹ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is incontact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one’s reputation.

²⁰ KEK is the abbreviation for the Kosovo Energy Corporation, the main utility company.

I was head worker at a company, the head of a place, and when the KLA started, I joined, I joined the first day.

Lura Limani: What years were they?

Enver Topilla: It was the year 1998, the year 1998 when the Kosovo Liberation Army began, and I did not have anyone to send to Albania to get me weapons, because usually we can't do much about it, we were armed from Albania. And I bought arms with 1500 DM, Adem Nika and I, in our poverty, Adem Nika is the director of Kosova Siguron. Even my brother, at the time I did not have money, he bought it, and he is a KLA fighter and a medical invalid, Sejdi Topilla, my brother. He bought me a weapon, he said, "Whether you go out or not," as a soldier, "it's there."

In one case, in Verbovc, at the house of Tafë Rukiqi, Tafa and Ajeta Rukiqi, who were political prisoners, we were friends, and with Fehmi Ldrovci's satellite phone - Fehmi Ldrovci was caught, his brother is now an Ambassador in Albania Ramiz (smiles). Fehmi...and with his telephone, it was 18 DM a minute, and after 40 minutes, I reported at the house of Tafë Rukiqi. Ramiz connected me directly to Brussels, I reported where the NATO [bombs] fell, I reported. Not because I say so, but there were twenty witnesses, I can recount whomever you'd like. And I tried to spare Feronikel with all my soul after seven...because I felt sorry for Feronikel, which is a well-known factory. And after one week NATO hit Feronikel with 34 bombs, I could not completely spare it.

I needed to report how many people had been killed, where the Yugoslav army was. Only in my village of about 200 houses, there were 14 police and army checkpoints, the village of Shkabë, in Glladnasella, former Glladnasella, where 73 were killed. This is why I had to join with my entire family, and fight that war, and go through that suffering. Meanwhile, as I said about work, I was never able to have a stable job, every time maybe despite my age I had to cut bricks and sell them to support the children. My father was unemployed, sick, and I had to support my children, and so on...

Lura Limani: After 1998, you joined the KLA. Can you tell us a little about the time of war and I suppose, especially when you went with your son to the mountain?

Enver Topilla: The village as a village [in itself], now, it has more soldiers, but had you asked me, if I was a factor... the whole Albanian nation was in the war, everyone is a war veteran, I'm speaking for myself now. I don't like to differentiate them like this. Because even the mother who gave away her bread, and the one who sheltered children, and even the man who was never separated from his family, and the one who knew he'd be killed, they never gave up. And because the Albanian nation was very small and many became soldiers, it would have been better had we done like in France, make them all soldiers, war veterans I mean, veterans. The Yugoslav system was very bad, and if a woman cleaned somebody's shoes or a pair of socks, they wrote down that she helped the army. Our Albanians worked for the struggle, from the academic to the farmer.

The war started in our place... it first started in Likoshan. The Xhemaj family was murdered, 11 people. They resisted from all the sides, they came... but over there... they weren't prepared enough because you don't just go to war, you need to prepare maybe for three years to fight one hour, or five hours... not to just go like that, as people think. And in a condolences visit a boy was killed at a transformer station, Abdullah Nika was his name. There was a big crowd in the village, when the helicopters and the airplanes and everything else started, I went directly to our village to see what is going on. And, they took two boys, one from Qirez, one from Baks and they took them, one was selling cigarettes, and one was putting up a fence. And they brought them to Likoshan, and the police tied them to a pole there and shot them. We were watching from a house, they started shooting at us, shooting heavily. We returned home, and then after a very short time it started in Prekaz.

Adem Jashari's family, Adem Jashari with Hamëz... even when the independent unions were dismissed, because Hamëz worked in the ammunition factory in Skenderaj, he was an accountant. Hamëz was the greatest activist for the workers and Albanians rights. Adem Jashari's brother, Hamëz and Adem. Their father was a teacher, my father and their father... I mean, both Hamëz's and Adem's maternal uncles, th Geci of Lausha, their uncles are from the same place. My father is a close relative of theirs, very close.

And Adem was attacked many times, but he never surrendered, he didn't give up. Adem's family was murdered that way the second day. Together with this professor [his son] I went there again on the second day, and we had a tractor, which was later taken from us, they damaged it. And I had to go to Prekaz, and the people of Prekaz themselves came to Ngojfile, we call it Prellovc here, Mikushica, and they didn't let me go there, because it was impossible for a man to get through alive to Prekaz from all the heavy weaponry there. Prekaz is very strange, I am not saying everything there is good, but it has... that land grows brave men.

And in '81, on May 13, "Army Day" ... "The Yugoslav Police Day," there was Tahir Meha fighting in Prekaz...Tahir Meha.²¹ Tahir Meha is a friend of my [paternal] uncle, he married his daughter... my cousin. I was in isolation in Lipjan, when... Tahir Meha was fighting. Those battles happened then rarely, but we were lucky that we had engineers, Fehmi Lladrovci, he was our commander, graduated in Croatia. He got very upset on one occasion, "Why did you buy the weapon if you are poor? I would have made one for you." He had a sniper gun, 17 thousand Deutsche Marks worth. He had a good 12.6 sniper gun. And he sent me a magazine with 30 bullets as a present. And again, when the newspapers wrote that I was a participant, on the day that the great Fehmi had fallen, I was very ill in my spinal cord, another case with 30 bullets was sent to me as a present by Sabit Geci, who is now on trial. Sabit and the Geci of Llausha, my father's maternal uncles, and Adem Jashari's and Hamëz's maternal uncles, [both] from Llausha.

²¹ Tahir Meha (1943-1981) was killed in the siege of his house together with his father Nebih, when he refused to turn himself to the police.

The battles were very difficult, the family suffered a lot, the Yugoslav army was very tough. But Albanians, I say, the day that Fehmi was murdered, I am speaking based on facts, I can prove it... seven of us were stuck in a place when Zhevzhet Zeka was murdered, and grenade fell on him and left nothing of him. We were 115 meters air distance and we sang a song, a song that I had never heard before, we started, "*Tuk le dilli, preron hana, zhuj Selmon, se boll bon nana*"²² (smiles). And not a soul could be heard, but we were stuck in mud, a lot of mud and our clothes were stuck in a canal, in the ditch. We were suffering more from wood stumps than from bullets. And half of us were hurt, and seven others, I wasn't injured... we were stuck there, we didn't know which way to go.

Lura Limani: When was this, were you...?

Enver Topilla: This was on the 22nd of September 1998.

Lura Limani: In what village were you?

Enver Topilla: In Shkabë, in Glladnasellë.

Lura Limani: In Shkabë. Were you staying at home, or elsewhere?

Enver Topilla: I don't know where the places were.

Lura Limani: I mean, not like... during the war, during the fighting... when you were not fighting, were you at home?

Enver Topilla: No, there was no way you could stay home. You were in the mountains. But I didn't move because... it was very interesting, some things happened without any knowledge. Because if you walked ahead, the bullet would strike you each time, because the land was geodetically measured, their weapons reached far. They used to shoot like this and you'd be twirling {moves his hand in circle} around them, we were always on the move. At night they didn't move, although there were 14 checkpoints in my, their village, we used to always sleep in our home, as burned as it was. We tried to cook to survive and then in the morning we went out to the mountains, always those mountains there. Sometimes you just stopped, stayed, you did not know what was happening because they killed our animals as well, they damaged, they burned our cereal, everything. The animals left [inc.] because even animals would not stay on their own. Interestingly, we were watching everything from a close distance.

Civilians moved, civilians suffered the most. Because many people were killed in front of them, as my father was, my first cousins and all of them. And they were killed... now imagine a village with 200 homes, 78 killed, it is not a game, 48 people killed in one go. There is a big shortcoming in us, that when we are liberated we aren't as we should be because these [things] are not mentioned anywhere. It's not a loss to

²² "As the sun rises, and the moon goes down, hush Selmon, mother cries enough for both."

mark anniversaries for people who have saved the country... but now I don't know, I don't understand people.

Lura Limani: Where were you when the war ended?

Enver Topilla: When the war ended I was in the village. When the war started I was in the village, and when the war ended I was in the village. We didn't have... I was twice in Çyçavica, we had a very difficult situation with Ilaz Lladrovci and other two persons who were there, we were stuck in, it's called Behadell of Gradica, so many came and shot at us while we were crossing the field. In Dibrans of Gradica, there was a field on which more than thirty mines arrived from Qirez were concentrated, and there at once my face got hot and with God's will, the earth was wet, the field was wet and it sank very deep and all the mud {lifts his hands} and I fell over. He said, "Oh, did it get you?" I started to laugh and I said, "No, no, I got away once more." Until we crossed at least around seventy meters, we had five mines on one side, one on that side {points with his hands}, and yet we survived.

Lura Limani: What happened... how did you find out that the war was over?

Enver Topilla: Well, we were following, we were. We had our radio connection as well, the scouts had also pocket radios. People are very interesting, when we wanted to have a smoke, we would find notebooks somewhere, we would boil the notebooks. Those lines [ink] would fall, and then we would cut them to make, to roll a smoke, we would find a way when we wanted to do it. We were saving radio batteries very well, we would put them in boiling water, heat them, prepare them and finally we would listen to the radio. We were always informed, I am telling you, I can name you 15 people who can witness the use of Fehmi Lladrovci's phone from Verbovc, I reported where NATO should strike. I couldn't save Feronikel, for seven days 32... 34 bombs were dropped on it, I reported because we knew each time where it was going, what was going.

And on the last day, unlike others, when the police and the military were gone, my 19-year-old sister's son Fitim Gashi, even a song is sung about him... no Mentor Gashi, a song is sung about him (smiles) and it goes, "I won't let it be without going and striking them," and according to the commander, he's my friend Hysni Shabani, he says, "Enver, the boy fired 72 machine gun shells on them." They killed him and threw him in a well. It was a seven or nine fathoms deep well, where they threw him on the last day in Kjemë, on June 16, I think.

Lura Limani: What happened after the war, when the war ended and everyone withdrew? What have you done precisely?

Enver Topilla: Parties are a new thing among Albanians, parties don't like Albanians, parties have become a business. The whole nation was in the Democratic Party, in the Democratic League, they were everywhere... we weren't happy with them either, people would join any party out there, just to get away from Socialist League and from the Communist League. We accepted whatever you thought, I don't want

to be here although I was never a Communist, I never voted Socialists, I don't want only to suffer, the people, the nation suffered.

But after the war then they started... the war too, was done in three ways, as I was told by those in prison. There were some people - we say "For God's spirit and will," the folk proverb that we use - some had been in war to cover the mistakes of their families. Some had done things after the war, they became soldiers to usurp and loot, and made mistakes. And people and war come in three forms, which we had not known.

I will even go back to a part above, but no, it's not earlier, it's later, when we went out to an election rally. I had been proposed as a candidate to City Council and we went to Komoran, those people started coming, saying what were they going to do, how they were going to work, and I had never heard such thing, I had never taken part in such meeting, and suddenly it was my turn to do this. "Truly, I don't know what they are saying, I am with them as well, and I will truly work with all my heart for these people, independently of the political party or religion." And they voted mostly for the honest words that I said.

Now we are [talking about] after the war, great aid started arriving. On one occasion, when things changed, I mean, after the war, I was a delegate with Shaban Shala in Prizren. Shaban Shala the general, he passed away, he was sentenced on political grounds. And, Hashim Thaçi,²³ with many of his friends, was there, everyone was there. We chose the Movement, we transformed it into the Party of Progress, Bardhyl Mahmuti was named the President of the Party of Progress. Then after a very short period of time, the Democratic Party of Kosovo was founded.

I was a member of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, but again, I am talking independently of the party, as a person with no support - no matter what party they're in, it won't make a difference - and I was officially named the President of the Municipality and Vice-President of the Party subsection. So the aid started coming in, and Canadian KFOR with a guy named Wilson came, and he respected me, my authenticity, so much, and he phoned officials in Switzerland, and they sent one million Deutsche Marks, Switzerland sent it for the reconstruction of 73 houses of the fifth category²⁴ in my village. It was the first time that a village was going to have all construction done in the same category, in fact the fourth category, because the fifth one [means the house was] burned - four to one. And, those people helped me with all their heart.

The association of political prisoners started bringing clothes by trucks and my late wife, she did not let them enter my yard because all the houses were burned down. Instead, she told them, "Take them where the point [of distribution] is, distribute them to the people." And they told her, "These are dedicated to this person." She insisted, "You can take them away from the yard, because he is busy and he cannot, we cannot leave things in the yard without his permission, without taking them to the spot and share them with the people." And a commission was formed, I had Milazim... Karaçica is his name, a guy who knew

²³ Hashim Thaçi (1968-) was the political leader of the KLA. After the war he founded the Democratic Party of Kosovo and became Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

²⁴ Degree of destruction, where five is the complete destruction of the house.

people very well, he helped me a lot and he divided [the aid] based on [people's] financial conditions. I never even got close, nor did I know what came or what didn't come, because I wasn't, I couldn't think when seeing people in that state.

Their cars from abroad arrived at some point, and they made money, they enforced the three percent [tax]²⁵ and they made money, and made everything. Often I couldn't help them, I'd say, "Take a bag of flour or something," since these are not helping empty the truck or else.

Once, on one occasion, in Pristina, the political prisoners stood up at a meeting of the Assembly and said, "We received one thousand and two hundred liters of oil." They said, "We are going to see where is the police." And I was pushed, because I am very tough when injustice is made. I said, "Give me a break, in my village about ten thousand liters of oil were brought, and you're saying one thousand and two hundred liters were brought for not such a big association, shame on you!" You know, I am expressing myself in the most banal way. And people are to be helped wholeheartedly, but I was too overwhelmed because I dealt with many deaths.

After they murdered my father, they threw him in a well, we had to take them out, we couldn't bury them. They took him and threw him into a well. And, four or five months later, they came and took him out, I organized the funeral, I dealt with bodies, with foreign delegations, with people. I may have torn it maybe, as we were taking him out from our trenches, because the bodies had been thrown in reeds, together, I tore the body, when I held on to the belt it broke in two, because five or six months had passed. And during the whole time, my biggest hardship was to organize the anniversary [commemoration], the heads of the villages and their entourages helped me. Many foreign delegations and people had come to help, for seven years I marked the anniversaries for 215 in the best way possible, and after seven years no one else marked it any more. Because people who haven't suffered at all are appointed [to political posts], just for the sake of becoming rich.

Third Part

Next, as a Council, we had [to look after] the roads, we had the water, we had... and I was the one to raise the point without it being on the agenda, without procedures, and I requested that Likoshan, where the first shot was fired like in Vlora, that Likoshan be declared the place where the first gun was shot in Kosovo, because I was the President of the Council in Likoshan, in Qirez. And then things started flowing, life, work, people... I was also in the administrative body for appointing board directors. But I don't get them, I am not someone that deals with politics, you must be a politician. To deal with how tenders or

²⁵ "Three Percent Fund" – The Kosovo Republic Fund launched in 1992 by Bukoshi Government in exile. The fund was financed by Albanians in the Diaspora and in Kosovo, who contributed by paying three percent of their monthly wages into the Republic of Kosovo's accounts.

thefts are done, you must be of that caliber... I don't want to get into those procedures or what is done. A tender is a loss for the state, completely!

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Can we just return to the beginning for a moment?

Enver Topilla: I was watching one day the academic Mark Krasniqi, I am getting goose bumps as I talk. And, all the work that the man did made me cry, made me think so much because he was the first person who withdrew from the Yugoslav government, from the leadership, who was degraded as a person. Because people tell me as well, they say, "How come, Enver, you were *nepodoban*,²⁶ the Serbian word, now, you are a misfit, why won't you adapt?" I can't adapt to injustice!

In the first grade of primary school, when I completed it, pupils used to be rewarded, they were... the poverty was very great and I was... my first teacher was Veli Gjinovci from Makermal of Drenica and I was rewarded with a book by Mark Krasniqi, this book... I have it in my library, *Posta e Porositun*,²⁷ *Posta e Porositun* was awarded to me as a student. And, like all the children, I wasn't especially distinguished and school is very hard. An Arab proverb about uneducated people says, "An animal in the image of a human." Education is above everything. I was like all the children, maybe with some more suffering but...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Did you have sisters and brothers?

Enver Topilla: Yes, I have five sisters and one brother. My brother has five children, five sons. They are all university graduates, he is like me. He is a dental technician, they have a dental clinic. He was a strong soldier in the health unit, he is also a war invalid. And in '80, a year before '81, when people were imprisoned, he went to the Yugoslav army, he went, they sent him to Macedonia, to the Marshal Tito barracks. When the oaths were made, he never took the oath, he had taken the oath at home that, "I swear that I won't swear, 'I swear to you Comrade Tito.'" And they sent him to prison, to Goce Delcev, they kept him there for two months.

I consulted one after another for advice, a warrant officer, he was a Bosnian standard-bearer, he was from the prison. And I had to give twenty thousand Deutsche Marks to one after another to get him out of prison, because he didn't take the oath. And there was nothing I could do, my father was shouting, "Why, are you not suffering enough?" I would tell him, "He doesn't like Tito, there's nothing I can do" (laughs).

Lura Limani: This was your youngest brother, wasn't he?

²⁶ *Nepodoban*, in Serbian, misfit, ill-suited.

²⁷ *Posta e Porositun (Ordered Mail)* is a poetic children's book written by Mark Krasniqi, first published in 1959. It was required reading for elementary schools.

Enver Topilla: I am the eldest child, and he is seven and a half years younger, [he was born] when father came from prison. Then my sisters came, my sister who is after him, has a martyr son, Mentor Gashi. All my sisters' children are university graduates.

Lura Limani: Where were you in primary school? Were you in the village of Shkabë, did you continue...?

Enver Topilla: No, the primary school then used to be in Dritan in Dobroshevc. It used to be far, it was I don't know how many villages away, but after a long delay an eight grade primary school was established there. I took a very long break, because I didn't have where to go for four years. Then initially it was established in Drenas, and then these schools started...a great delay.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: And after the primary school, did you go to high school?

Enver Topilla: When I completed the primary school I went to secondary school, but I went privately because they wouldn't allow me to go. I completed the secondary school in Zveçan in Mitrovica, and I completed the high school of Industry in Mitrovica on the other side of the bridge,²⁸ it used to be on that side then. I completed it, but I always had to, I could never do it here, but I had to do everything illegally because of my family.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: In 1981 how much time did you spend in prison? How long were you there?

Enver Topilla: I explained it earlier as well, I was initially isolated on the eve of May 1st, on the 30th of April, one hundred and twenty of us were isolated, they sent us to Lipjan [Detention Center] without due process.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Do you have any idea why you were put in isolation, was it only because of your family background, or were there other reasons?

Enver Topilla: No, isolations were done, namely to put pressure on the population. And I was isolated because of the Shock Absorber Factory, because many people respected me and in '79 I stood up against the Renault Service of Belgrade, against injustice. And then every Saturday and Sunday, when I went to the village, I had to notify the police station in Pristina, because since '69 I had a state apartment, in Serbian it was called *Samački hotel*, a single room occupancy hotel, a small apartment. I sold it afterwards and bought this one six years ago, although it was taken away and Habitat returned it to me. They also took my apartment in Lakrishte, 76 square meters, when I went to prison and they returned it to me afterwards. And, that's it... I was put in isolation, I was put in isolation without a trial, just by a signature, it was article 47 [of the criminal code]: "He has influence on the people, he's dangerous." And we went with all the intellectuals, there were the mayor of Podujevo, it was Ilaz Pireva, and Dibran Bajraktari. Many prominent people were there, one hundred and twenty people.

²⁸ The Mitrovica Bridge, crossing over the Iber river in Mitrovica, stands as a mark of the separation of the city in which around 80,000 Kosovo Albanians live in the South, and 23,000 Serbs in the North.

And they were released, and only around seven or eight of us were left. After a month they were all released, and they continued to keep me for another 15 days there. And they took me to Mitrovica, they took me and sent me to the prison of Mitrovica, there is a prison on the other side of the bridge, very rough, the worst prison ever, an Italian committed suicide. And in the basement there, we couldn't even tell what color the clothes or the sheets were, because they had opened a square hole on the door, and we lined up to take a breath there, because it was very heavy inside, there were 15 of us. And from there, after three or four months of isolation, they sentenced me for a criminal offence and I served another two years. Yes, I also served six months in the hospital, I told you, in Yugoslavia's central prison because of all the tortures I had endured. I served the rest in prisons, in Ferizaj, Pristina, Sarajevo, Mitrovica, Foča, all prisons, Belgrade, all Yugoslav prisons.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Were you usually in the section with other political prisoners, or was it...?

Enver Topilla: No, there weren't only political prisoners in prisons, but when I take a moment to think what they say about Adem Demaçi, "He either made this mistake, or he didn't." In correction centers there are factories, in Niš, everywhere. For instance, there was one also in Istog, in Dubrava. There was the prison in Vushtrri as well, there are factories, they do farming...

There were 17 of us political prisoners over there in Foča, they took us there from Sarajevo, but I had a completely different treatment for health reasons, which was given to me by doctors. And I went to work in the factory sometimes, where I met those three or four friars from the church in Duna, two monks and a friar, Ferdinando, brother Ferdinando had been sentenced for the second time for 15 years, the most eminent people in my opinion.

Don't misunderstand the things that I say in any way. And we did not mix with them, they didn't even go to the yard to not disturb us, they respected us [political] prisoners as well, we were very careful because we didn't want to have anything to do with anyone, absolutely! There were also Albanians sentenced for murder in Sarajevo and throughout Yugoslavia, you name it.

We were a few friends, I was with Nazmi Selmani, he was the mayor of Deçan, his brother is now the mayor of Deçan, I was with him. I was also with a guy named Jashar Salihu... he is a general, he passed away, he used to be a professor of English. I was with Alush Thaqi, he is the director of the school in Llapushnik, and many other friends with whom we were [in prison] together. We never had any trouble, but in prison they noticed, the Serbs and Bosnians and other prisoners, that we had... because over there they were sentenced for rapes and other bad things. We had, they said, a superior, a parent, a relative that educated us, it was Adem Demaçi. The prisoners said [this]. We can speak badly about him, but a man like him, (smiles) we should stand up when we mention his name.

Lura Limani: After you were released, did you join... were you one of the participants, you mentioned that you were engaged also with your father in the reconciliation of blood feuds according to tradition.

When the initiative started with Anton Çetta with some other prisoners, ex-political prisoners, did you take part in those reconciliations?

Enver Topilla: I am not sure where I left a picture when we were... {he searches in his pocket} ... once, when we exhumed the bones of Fazli Grajçevci with friends, there are pictures with Shaban Shala, with Jakup Krasniqi, I am close, I used to be close to them. But we have a completely different tradition because I had to accompany my father every time. Leave it Labinot {he addresses his son}, I always took part, I always took part for instance in blood feud reconciliations, but not every single time, don't misunderstand me. My activities were a bit harder because someone had to support the family, and perhaps often I had to do manual labor just to support my family, because my father wasn't able to, but when I had to accompany my father, I accompanied him only a few times. And I always had respect, as for the especially distinguished man he was, no one can take their place, but I was an activist in anniversaries, in [blood feud reconciliation] conclusions and other things, after the war and before the war.

Lura Limani: After the war, you started an initiative for [blood feud] reconciliation together with Shukrije Gashi. Can you tell us something more about that initiative?

Enver Topilla: After the war, the Municipality sent three or four people, I mean, from the Assembly, the Municipal Assembly, and it was me, Enver Deliu of Obriu whose entire family was murdered, including a six-week old baby, and a guy, Halit Vorani. We were four or five people and there were seven municipalities, I mean, while I was there. Now, it's embarrassing to say that Ymer Deliu and I were declared the best.

It was God's will that we were a good match, because Shukirije Gashi, Shuki, was a political prisoner. She was engaged to Nuhi Berisha, he is a martyr... of the nation and on each anniversary, each occasion, each work, each... she always visited my family, with many people.

We had a very difficult case in my village, I had to go over there during day or at night when *besa*²⁹ stopped or something, because they would kill each other... I won't tell you why, some cousins. And many times I may have been harsh, because I had to stop them when it wasn't right, because I knew the cases very well. And then I called Shuki, and Shuki arrived as well, the Mayor of the Municipality, many people came. Television came and everything, the first reconciliation that was done, I was the initiator and I did it... I didn't even accept for the neighbor to move from there, to pay for the blood, or absolutely anything [else]. We achieved a very sincere reconciliation.

²⁹ 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.

And then, what else has happened... apart from that, recently I started being ridden by illnesses. Because I had to undergo a vertebral surgery, a difficult surgery, on top of that high blood pressure and I got stuck in the operation room. And I was also overwhelmed - "She went to her husband." "She asked me, or she didn't ask me." "Got married, got let go [by her husband]" -... Those are things, they are normal things, and even religiously, it is necessary for a girl and a boy to get to know each other, in order to get married. But then, to deal with: how he took me, how did she go, how did he do it...I laughed and said, "If we start to deal with these issues, we are equal to zero."

And when needed we went, but it is easier now, because for instance, even without knowing anything, when Fehmi Lladrovci's father goes, when Adem Jashari's brother goes, she [Shuki] goes... I hope nothing happens to me, because if they came, I would have to forgive the blood, what else can I do. Because he³⁰ would say, "Mine were killed fighting for you and me," or something like that, "while you are putting obstacles to things." Some things are much easier now, although my father is a martyr, I could never use [his name] to put pressure on anyone because... because one should accept reality.

Many people respect me because if I did you good, I would never drink your coffee.³¹ I may have asked you, "Do you have money, shall we go for coffee?" when I didn't have any. If I couldn't do you good, I would get sick because I couldn't do good. I have made it happen, I am respected by many people, professors, people, friends. In addition, I thank my children, because they say, "You never put pressure on us." Because when my son was in Mitrovica, every time, since I knew everyone there, every time I wanted to go for coffee, he would call his mother on the phone, "Mother, if dad comes, I won't take the exam." And I was very careful, I didn't want to walk all over the face [honor] of my grandfather, or my father, or mine, because *bajrakllaku*³² is not inherited, like some say, "I am the son of a *bajraktar*,³³ and I can do anything." *Bajraktar* is called he who has his *bajrak* in the sea [sic], the flag as we call it, not generation after generation. I could shame my father and grandfather, not because I'm not a good person, but I need to be particularly careful.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: In your family did you know about the history of Shaban Polluzha? Was there a story that followed you throughout your life?

Enver Topilla: Shaban Polluzha had his...his son Ramadan is alive, the last son, the youngest one. And he never, he was never inclined to do what others did. It was a very difficult time. Before the war we were in the school of Tërzenik, we were marking one of Shaban Poluzha's anniversaries. Sali Berisha, the president of Albania, decorated him with the golden medal, and we went and had a celebration, we were

³⁰ Either Lladrovci or Jashari.

³¹ Idiomatic: ask for a favor in return.

³² Standard bearing, see footnote 32.

³³ *Bajraktar* (standard bearer) is the Turkish name for the leader of a *bajrak*, a territory including several villages in the mountainous, border regions of Albania and Kosovo during the Ottoman Empire. He was entrusted with the task of providing recruits for the Ottoman army.

given a lunch reception in Polluzha, we call it Thana, a place, a meadow. And the police surrounded us so closely, and some people who were carrying the books told my uncle, “Get up, uncle Ramadan, you go and see what they want.” And I got up. “No, let us get up, because there’s no need for him to go.” We organized his anniversary.

Jakup Krasniqi held a speech, and about Shaban Polluzha, I don’t know what to think about a man who had twelve thousand soldiers, it was the times but... I am saying it once again, that unless there is [solidarity], from the academic to the farmer, the victory is never yours.

There were no academics then, there was nothing, they were all together, all oppressed by... Ali Shukriu, Ali Shukriu. When he was public prosecutor, he sentenced people to death. Simply put, the Yugoslav government could have lasted one hundred years with people such as those. Veli Deva or Ali Shukriu, I feel really sorry for Veli Deva’s son, he was a good boy, that doctor. One of them was the Secretary of the Party in Skenderaj, one was public prosecutor, they may have damaged people as much as the war did. But I don’t want to go through those procedures, it’s not my place, but the people’s.. When a nation has only one national hero, it is not adequate. Albanian people have many heroes. Those who led are something else.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: There is the belief that after the Second World War there were no investments made specifically in Drenica.

Enver Topilla: I am saying, if there is only Drenica in Kosovo, may it not be either. But what you are saying is not very good, because Serbs have a saying, “Amongst you Albanians, when one falls, instead of reaching out a hand to him, you walk all over him.” Drenica was walked all over. Drenas is the poorest of all the municipalities, and only in the municipality of Drenas, there are over one thousand killed. I am saying, in my district there are two hundred... 215 people.

There wasn’t investment, because it was oppressed. Now how was it oppressed? Azem Bejta, then Mehmet Delia, then Shaban Polluzha, then this one is resisting, then that one, always. The only thing that made Drenica stand out was that it was always attacked the most. Even now, after the war, Drenica is somehow left out because it needs many investments, to see what is being invested because everything was zero, everything zero. Elsewhere even a village is more developed, I am saying, compared to the municipality of Drenas, I am talking based on my calculation. Because before the war everything was invested in bad things, nothing good was ever done, not even a mouthful of bread for Drenica. It might have been because of the northern winds, or maybe that the others did not like it, but... we didn’t get stuck, Albanians do not need outsiders to like them.

[Part of the interview cut out from the video: the interviewer asked the speaker about life in the village, “You grew up in village, what was life like? Can you describe it for us briefly?”]

Enver Topilla: Life in the village as I remember it... those villages were only engaged in farming. It was a very difficult life, because you had no choice but to herd cows to pay high taxes. It's not even... yes, it is true, that people in poverty are more subject to racketeering. It's written somewhere about my village: five hundred kilograms of beans. And an Albanian who was engaged in those activities, he didn't even know the Albanian language properly, he says, "Put another *nula* [zero] after it," and from five hundred he made it into five thousand, we didn't even see five hundred kilograms of wheat.

And the wheat that we planted, we had to sell it all in Mitrovica, in order to pay taxes to the state, or to organize a wedding, there were those traditions, Albanian traditions. I wouldn't say that... I can say that three to four, or five to six years before the war, the Albanians in our region could breathe freely, easily, because they always suffered with all their soul from poverty, from hardship, tortures, lack of education, everything was very difficult. You know, I am talking about the years that I remember.

I can't describe the conditions that I remember, I can't describe the conditions or life. Because we never knew what is, for instance, a chicken, unless there were religious holidays, because you never had national holiday then, none. For instance, I know *Bajram*.³⁴ Or, we never knew what is grain bread, wheat bread, because we had to sell it all [to pay] for taxes, for weddings, or something, only cornbread, and suffering... with all our soul, like that.

Lura Limani: You mentioned it earlier, that you want to show us parts of songs. Do you play any instrument? Did you sing when you were young?

Enver Topilla: No, I can only play *çifteli* very little, *çifteli*. A nation had to survive somehow, because Albanians have something special, now... worldwide, the flag, the songs, because we debated with Anna [Di Lellio] as well, and I told her that it is very reasonable to go to Belgrade and find the reading book, *Çitanka* [textbook] is written on the reading book, and Serbs say, "*Hey Miloše, Arnautsko kopile.*" Serbs say, "Hey Miloš, you Albanian bastard."³⁵ And people were kept alive with songs, with traditional clothes, but even more with songs.

The wisest will tell you, in the past the the *hoxha*³⁶ was considered the wisest and the peasant the dumbest or else, and the singer was the wisest because he could make one hundred words out of one, and God may protect you, God may help you, but he always said, maybe he would have been committed [to the national cause], "You go and sing patriotic songs, then people gather to see who is supporting

³⁴ *Bajram* is the Turkish word for festival. Albanians celebrate *Ramadan Bajram*, which is the same as *Eid*, and *Kurban Bajram*, which is the Day of Sacrifice, two months and ten days after *Ramadan Bajram*. On the day of *Eid*, there is no fasting.

³⁵ Miloš Obilić is the Serbian folk hero who is believed to have assassinated Sultan Murat I in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. According to the Albanian epic, the assassin of the Sultan was the Albanian folk hero, Millosh Kopiliqi.

³⁶ Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

them or what are they doing.” And they always said that you are an Albanian who suffered and went through hardship, because I am telling you what is most interesting.

If I were to read *Posta e Porositun* now, 60 years later than how [old] I was [then], I know all the things that Mark Krasniqi has written because they have stayed with my soul as a child, let alone some of the patriotic songs, because there are many patriotic songs, I often say, even if it may not be like that, at least it’s good, you know (smiles). And I adored them, not just I, but all Albanians did. And at the end of the day, [the song] said that you are Albanian.

Lura Limani: Is there anything else that you would like to add? We don’t have any additional questions, therefore anything you would like to say to conclude.

Enver Topilla: I would just say, it is my nature that, even if it is impossible, I want to be very accurate. Words remain, words, writing is action. If I didn’t know many things, or I failed to mention them, don’t hold it against me. I’ve spoken, I have minimized them more that I should have. And the only word that I can say is, I firstly thank God for being Albanian, I thank all those who have dedicated their lives to the homeland above all.

And I thank my family, my entire family, and all the families that have dedicated their soul to the homeland, I am proud, I thank the young generations as well, my children who will never say, “Dad, you were very good, but you stole because you could have never built this wealth with your salary.” I thank them for respecting me, for completing their education with honor, I thank you because it is very interesting, a mother should always be more educated in her soul than a father, because a child’s education is above everything. Thank you for coming, thank you for finding the time, thank you for showing me respect. It is not in my nature to show off, but I am considering you as my children, and may God honor you and your families and the entire Albanian nation.

May all be rewarded for everything they have done for the war, for work, for honor. Who made mistakes, may he be held accountable.

Lura Limani: Thank you very much, thank you very much for your time.