

INTERVIEW WITH METË SHALA

Peja | Date: June 18, 2016
Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Metë Shala (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Mr. Shala, introduce yourself, and then please tell us something about your family, your earlier memories, family, *rreth*¹ and the place you were born at.

Metë Shala: Metë Shala, from the village of Trstenik, I come from a family with a work tradition in the village, mainly in farming. I am the son of Tahir Shala, we were four brothers and two sisters. One of them lost his life tragically by unfortunately being killed by our relative, the son of our maternal aunt. I finished the elementary school in the village, my brothers did so as well, then my deceased brother who was ten years younger than I was in the third year of his studies at the Faculty of Law, the other brother, the youngest one was in middle school, but he dropped off when the misfortune happened, my older brother took him to Germany.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Tell us something more about your family, before going to the case of the feud.

Metë Shala: Yes the family, my family was engaged in farming, we tried to educate. My older brother had the biggest burden, he went to Germany in '69 and continues living there, since then he took care of our education, our mother and our father. Our father left us early, he passed away in '74, while my mother passed away in 2008. We are a family that suffered much, for example my father and my paternal uncle were in prison without any reason. Both of them were imprisoned in '57, one of them was in a *pasterm*² dinner in the village of Loxha, while the other one was at home. But, two Roma went to the mountains of a Serb to steal woods and they told each other, "Rustem, leave! Tahir, leave!" in the names of my father and my paternal uncle, and the Serbian man remembered the names of Rrustem and Tahir, of my father and my paternal uncle, in fact they were totally someone else, two Roma, Isuf and Daut. He went home wounded and notified the police. Then the police came to my house and took my paternal uncle without any reason, then they took my father at the *pasterm* dinner in the village of Loxha, they took, imprisoned, and mistreated them without any reason, one of them stayed in prison for one year, while the other did so for one year and a half. But, looks like the back then police and the court

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 Albanian: *Darka e pastermi*, the *pasterm* dinner, refers to a custom according to which people invite their relatives and friends when they slaughter a cattle.

found out that they were not guilty and they sent them to Rugova to cut and carve the logs. They found out.

But the Roma fell in the hand of a Serbian man, Jovan Petrićević Bogdan, they fell in the hand of a Serbian man who saved them and held them for three years with a salary, in order to save them and keep my father and my paternal uncle in prison. Even though the friends from the village of Loxha went as witnesses and said, “He was at our home for dinner,” they didn’t take their testimonies into consideration, and they held one of them for one year in prison and the other one for one year and a half. We were very young, my brother was very young, we were facing very difficult conditions, poverty. Back then in ‘56 I was three-four years old. Then there was a painful life, and the worst of it was that there were many conflicts and betrayals among us. Unfortunately, our people were doing as much harm as the enemy, unfortunately!

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you overcome these cases of imprisonments, who from the family helped you during the time when your father and your paternal uncle were in prison?

Metë Shala: I had two grandmothers, because my grandfather had had two wives, my father and my paternal uncle had different mothers, both of them were *hasret*,³ and those two grandmothers, the two wives of our grandfather, our grandmothers worked, poor they, they worked in tobacco, in farming, they went to the city [to sell] eggs, chicken, to sell something to solve some problems. They went there often back then by foot, twelve kilometers from the village of Trstenik to Peja then to Trstenik again and they were engaged in [making] tobacco a little, we planted tobacco, we sold ground tobacco and so on. But we also had a watermill, my paternal uncle and my father used to grind [wheat] before. That mill, we had a person who worked there, our old brother tried to keep that mill, to grind, to live, to eat, work the fields and so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you live in a [family] community, or your family alone?

Metë Shala: No, we lived alone back then, but my father and my paternal uncle lived in a family community because my paternal uncle had no children, he didn’t have children. He was part of the third brigade of Albania in Sanxhak, he was in the third brigade and he had suffered so much from typhus that they kept his grave open for 29 days! Imagine, an open grave for 29 days! But an Italian doctor had felt his pulse and knew that he was alive and said, “Do not bury him.” Then he had remained disabled [sterile] since then from typhus and had no children. He had also broken up with his wife when he got back from prison. And we lived like that.

I even remember how once we struggled a lot to plant tobacco, we folded it, we were eating bread with *pelim*.⁴ The police came together with some guy from the village who knew us and took the tobacco, they took the tobacco from the place we had hidden it in order to be able to sell some kilogram of tobacco in order to survive, to manage somehow. There was no electricity back then, there were only kerosene lamps, with some wicks, it was a life... we experienced the middle ages, exactly like the middle

³ Turkish: *hasret*, longing, yearning. In the Albanian language the term means, the only child.

⁴ *Savlia officinalis*, it is a plant that grows in the Balkan region, known for its bitter taste and also used for medicinal purposes.

ages. The tax was very high, the state charged us a very high tax. The harvest was very weak, there was no cattle in order to have manuring which would create better goods and a better family budget. Back then they asked each other, “Did you clean [pay] the *porez*?”⁵ “Yes.” They said, “Lucky you.” “Did you make food for your people?” “Yes,” “Do you have food for your cows?” “Then you are the richest.” Imagine, the crisis of poverty was that great, the burden of the state tax was that hard. I know that we lacked many things, we lacked many things, it was a difficult life.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Until what age did you live in the village of Trstenik?

Metë Shala: Yes, I have lived in Trstenik until ‘99, we lived there until ‘99. I went to Pristina in ‘68 for the middle school, then I finished the middle school in ‘72. Then I continued my studies in Pristina.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you study?

Metë Shala: I also studied music.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us about your student life?

Metë Shala: Yes, student life is the best, the best life is the one where one is only worried about studies. My older brother helped me very much, he sent me money from Germany, I lived in the student dorms together with some very good friends back then, we were very close friends, we supported each-other, we were very, very serious in those times, we knew the problems of the nation, every student knew them, they knew the problem of the nation, that the fatherland was under occupation, without its hands and its legs, split in five pieces. That’s how the enemy tailored a tight shirt and carved out our body [accordingly] with an axe.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you involved in any illegal political organization at that time?

Metë Shala: See in... I was not part of any illegal political organization, in ‘68 I was in the first year of the Middle School of Music and in ‘68 I understood what the enemy meant, because I saw the students in the organizations that took place in ‘68. I was a first year student, 15 years old, I didn’t know what demonstrations were. And I saw, I saw Serbian women throwing concrete vases from their balconies over the heads of students, I saw the Albanian woman student with the flag in her hand when the concrete vase fell on their head, they also poured hot water, I know that I saw the pan with hot cabbage with my own eyes, they were used to burn the students and destroy them, and I saw them when they demanded the Republic, the Constitution, the Republic, the Constitution.

I know that the [military] forces came few days later with tanks from Serbia, with helmets, to demonstrate, to demonstrate the Yugoslav military and wild strength against the students. They imprisoned, many were imprisoned, and I know that the firefighters came, they came to *Tre Sheshirat* [Three Hats], I remember [the hotel] *Božuri*, they came there as well. Back then there were cobblestones, not asphalt, cobblestones, there were cubes and they came and threw water on students, I know that they cut their water hoses with knives and the water kept pouring in front of the *Božuri*

⁵ Serbian: *porez*, tax.

Hotel, in front of was called *Teatri Krahinor* [The Province Theater] back then. The demands were, they were for the Republic and the Constitution.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you go out in those protests?

Metë Shala: I only... look, I was very young. I didn't even know that demonstrations were about to take place, neither did I know what demonstrations were back then. I only know that I saw others who participated in demonstrations, the students, their demands, their maturity, then only what I got from older students who explained me those things, and it is then that I found out what demonstrations and the enemy were, I found out what the national issue was, and about the injustice that was done towards our nation and so on, then gradually during education...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could we go to the case? Could we slowly build the case of the murder, since we have already talked about the family, somehow [explain] the dynamics between two families?

Metë Shala: Yes, we had a very hard misfortune, in '87 they went to the hills of Montenegro, to the village of Gradina, around two hours from Rozaje, a very high altitude. We aimed for the children to spend three summer months in the hills to feed them with clean air, water, the health of the children, clean air improves the blood cells and we wanted to go there, and the sons of our maternal aunt from the village of Kërshevc made us that offer and we went blind and went with them. Even though we knew how they were, but we went there, because of our mother's insistence, our mother loved her sister so much, she loved her sons so much, but they were not to be loved. But we went blind and went there.

My now deceased brother was in the mountain house, he slept together with the brother of the murderer. One night, while sleeping with the brother of the murderer, he thought that my brother was asleep and slowly went outside the mountain house. My brother followed him and said, "Where are you going?" He said, "Go back to the house, because I felt like there was something." He went back, and he [the murderer] went and returned late. The next morning, there was a bull missing in the stable where our cattle was, one of our bulls was missing and my brother notified the police about the case. He walked for two hours by foot to the police [station] in Rozaje and notified them that our bull was missing. The police did their job. And we went to the hills in '88, the owner of the mountain told us, "I don't want them on the mountain. I don't want to accept them on the mountain." And we thought they would not go, they went exactly to that mountain.

They didn't ask us, neither did they ask the owner [the brother of the murderer]. Maybe the owner only pretended and took money from us as well as from them, and they went to the mountain. The relations were very cold on the mountain, they started not allowing our mother to take water from the same spring, the communal spring. I went to the mountain in '88, on Eid⁶ day, together with my third maternal aunt, not with their mother [the killer's mother]. She was on the mountain called Kulla, in Zhleb. I went there with my maternal aunt and we stayed there for two days, on the third day we wanted to return, to go to the plain, we went to Rozaje in order to go from Rozaje to the village in Peja. In the morning my aunt was at their place [her other sister's family] and when she came back, she came back crying She

⁶ *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*.

came with me and a friend of mine, more precisely this friend was my deceased brother's brother-in-law.

My maternal aunt says to me, "Go back to the mountains." I said, "Why, how can I leave you? We are going together to the village, to the plains, to Peja." "No!" She said, "You go back because he told me," the killer [her sister's son], that, "the sun will not rise before I kill one of them or both." I was surprised and I said, "Aunt, why haven't you told me while at the mountains?" And I took off. I left my maternal aunt in Rozaje and returned to the hill with my deceased brother's friend. When I went to the mountains, when I arrived up there, I found him [my brother] dead, he killed him in the presence of my mother. And his brother's son [the killer's nephew] had bruised his neck as he held him from behind, and my mother tried to stop the killer's nephew. He had tied his hands and taken out the gun and shot him with a bullet in the heart. He had fallen on top of my mother and mother pulled herself from under him with difficulty. When I arrived, I found my mother standing by his head. And the police came and would not let me take the corpse.

He was killed on July, '88, at around 11AM, Tuesday. The corpse remained there for the whole day. The police came at night, the corpse remained there during the whole night, and on Wednesday, July 27 until 2PM, the police came at around 2PM. I mean, the corpse just started decomposing. We left on July 27 together with the corpse, only me and my mother, my mother, the brother of my brother's wife and I came to Rozaje. They stopped us, the police knew us, we took some dangerous roads, it is strange, it still feels strange, how could my car go through the roads where it is hard even for a donkey to go, a mini-van. We came to Rozaje, the police kept us until they prepared the [legal] procedures of our travel, then their [Montenegrin] police led us, they brought us, they led us. We arrived to Peja on July 27 at 7PM with the police car. I had an order from the police to send the corpse to the hospital, to the *kapella*,⁷ when we sent the corpse to the hospital with the friend, my friend and I sent it inside and left it on a concrete stall with our own hands, there were no good conditions, the temperature was very high, the next day they came for the autopsy.

It was already 11AM, on [July] 28, before noon until they were done with the autopsy. We left at 11:30PM, I sent the corpse to the village, it stinked, all the women went out of the house when I sent the corpse inside according to our customs, because of the scent that it had, because it was decomposed. I took it with my own hands together with some cousins, put it in the van and sent it to bury. Shortly before burying it, my brother arrived from Germany, poor he, he came by cab and the corpse was over the grave stone when he went out of the car, he had forgotten his coat and the cab driver returned to give his coat. He had forgotten his coat where he had his money and everything else because of surprise and terror. He returned, he entered the line to pray for the dead and finish the funeral. And from then to this day my family hasn't experience good days. My poor mother suffered.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old was your brother?

Metë Shala: My brother was 25 years old, the murderer was 35. He [brother] was in the third year of his studies at the Faculty of Law, a model student, a very good student, he loved life, he was very loving and

⁷ Serb: *kapela*, chapel.

friendly. He didn't believe that it would happen, not from that, from that dog. He [the murderer] went there in order to create a motive to kill him, he had forced the son of his brother who was in the first year of gymnasium⁸ in Peja to go to the mountain and beat the son of my brother who was five years old, the son of my older brother who lives in Germany, he was five or six years, something like that. And he saw the 16-17 years old boy beating the six years old boy, he said, "Don't! Don't!" He yelled at him, he yelled at him and then he went and took the stick from him, he hit him with the stick three-four times, he took the stick with which he had attacked the five-six years old boy and hit him three-four times with it, he hit their son.

He went [home] crying. And the [murderer] came to argue and said, "Come out!" And shot him with a shotgun in front of my mother's eyes, in front of my mother's eyes, I cannot even imagine it. But, out of fear that we would take revenge, because [even before] he had beaten the family friend, he had even beaten the family friend after the theft [of the cattle] and now he was afraid that because we were together with the friend we will kill them or take revenge. There was no way we would take revenge or kill that shithead. For example, the friend, we always insisted that our friend be patient with him for our sake because they were our kin, they were the sons of our maternal aunt. And they acted this way, they killed out of fear.

[The video-interview was cut upon request of the family.]

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you send them to prison, did you sue them, was the case denounced?

Metë Shala: No, we didn't sue them. We went as witnesses to tell how it happened, they... he got it easier, he got it easier, he got it easier, he was set free, he was set free 16 months later.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How do you explain this?

Metë Shala: Yes, I explain it that then in Montenegro, Bjelopolje, how come one he is set free for murder, for example you murder someone, you murder someone and you are released 16 months later, this is inexplicable. But, they were very disappointed at us, very mad at us for having forgiven the blood here. And they had sent it as a testimony there in order to create easy circumstances for themselves, "They have forgiven the blood to us, there is no need for you to sentence him," and so he went out, he went out of prison.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: After how much time did you forgive the blood, or did you do it right away?

Metë Shala: No, the blood was forgiven on March 17, 2000, or '90, the blood was forgiven on March 17, '90, I am sorry because I confused it, he was murdered in '88 and the blood was forgiven on March 17, '90. And then he was released from prison.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us how the reconciliation was done, did you reconcile or did you only forgive it [the blood] to them, was there mediation?

⁸ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Metë Shala: Yes, see, see, this is... this blood was forgiven to Kosovo, it was not forgiven to them, I have no right to forgive the blood of anyone. But when the *plak*⁹ Anton Çetta¹⁰ came together with Mark Krasniqi,¹¹ Azem Shkreli,¹² the youth of Kosovo, Hava Shala,¹³ Et'hem Çeku, Adem Grabovci,¹⁴ I remember many of them, the deceased Bajram Kelmendi,¹⁵ and I remember many many of them who came, the youth Riza Krasniqi,¹⁶ Sali Cacaj¹⁷ and many others who told us that it was the historic moment when the bloods and misunderstandings should be forgiven to Kosovo, but not to the murderers, not to the murderer.

To steal you, to beat the friend of your house and murder you, this is something, something very hard. But, at that time I was... for example the youngster of Kosovo Fatmir Uka was murdered in the village of Nabërgjan as well as Gani Daci. Qamil Morina was murdered in the village of Loxha, the youth of Kosovo were killed in the demonstrations all around, they were still being killed. I envied being dead as Fatmir Uka, they did such a glorious funeral, there were thousands of people, it was a glorious funeral and it was a blood given for Kosovo, demanding democracy with two fingers up in '90, '91.

So the *plak* Anton Çetta and the Kosovo youth, especially Hava Shala, Nurije Zeka,¹⁸ let me not forget them, I apologize if I forget someone, when they said, "*Kush s'ma falë gjakun kësaj stine, Kosovës ia ka dhanë një thikë pas shpine*" [The one who does not forgive the blood this season, has stabbed Kosovo with a knife on the back]. That was a call, a *kushtrim*¹⁹ not to have murders between brothers, in order for us not to become soldiers of Milošević,²⁰ but people of Kosovo. United, not to be afraid from each-other in case of an eventual war but to be together and stand the war together, without misunderstandings, without murders, to be strong without feuds. For example, sisters would forgive the blood of their only brother in May at Verrat e Llukës where almost half million of people participated, if I am not mistaken.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you there?

Metë Shala: I was there and I cried all day long seeing the number of bloods that were forgiven that day.

⁹ *Plak*, singular of *pleq*, elderly, traditionally the mediators in a blood feud reconciliation.

¹⁰ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

¹¹ Mark Krasniqi (1920-2015), ethnographer and writer.

¹² Azem Shkreli (1938-1997), writer, poet.

¹³ See oral history interview.

¹⁴ See oral history interview.

¹⁵ Bajram Kelmendi (1937-1999) was a lawyer and human rights activist. He filed charges against Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1998. On the first day of the NATO war in 1999, Serb police arrested him with his two children Kastriot and Kushtrim. Their bodies were found the next day.

¹⁶ See oral history interview.

¹⁷ See oral history interview.

¹⁸ Nurije Zeka (1967-1990) was a Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement activist.

¹⁹ Albanian: *kushtrim*, a call, an appeal to take weapons and fight the enemy that is made at times of war.

²⁰ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you tell us in details about the day when people came to reconcile you? Who came, how was the case presented?

Metë Shala: Yes, the ones whom I mentioned above came, as well as many others whom I don't remember. They came and told the boys, "You owe it to Kosovo," they told me, my older brother and my younger brother. I insisted as well to forgive the blood to Kosovo, that's what *plaku* Anton Çetta said. He took very convincing examples, he said, "Ramë Binaku," or Ali Binaku, I am not sure, "From the village of Dashinovc in Malësia, they have killed two of his sons, he prayed for the corpses between both his sons and called the murderer and said, "Take them, put them into the graves with your own hands. And if you killed them without any reasons, may they be your burden in this world and the other world." And he said, "If they have done you harm," he said, "May that be their burden. If you have killed them without any reason, may they be your burden in this and the other world." And he forgave the bloods of two of his sons. I mean, very touching and convincing examples were taken.

The main thing was that Kosovo needed that reconciliation, because we could smell the war, we knew that when they [Serbs] were able to fight the Croats and Bosnians with whom they are only divided by the religion, because they're brothers. And each time they scratched or kissed each-other, we know that bad things would happen to us, the war would happen to us, and it would find us unprepared the way it actually did.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they send the word, the reconcilers, did they send the word to the sons of your maternal aunt that you had forgiven the blood?

Metë Shala: They went there, and they asked one of us to go there as well, we authorized the brother of my older brother's wife. We authorized him to go there, we didn't go there. This is not... we will never forgive it to them because it was unnecessary, it was incomprehensible. There was no reason *bre*,²¹ we were surprised, how come they killed? To steal from you, to beat your friend, to beat your little son. And he reacted by hitting their old son who was in the gymnasium with his own stick, and they murdered him, nobody expected it. They are not humans, they only have the appearance of the human because they are animals on the inside, wild animals.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You personally told me about how you found the reconcilers at your house, could you tell us a little about that atmosphere?

Metë Shala: One week before, one week before forgiving the blood, it was Saturday, I came from the city and found the wise and smart *plak* Anton Çetta together with Riza Krasniqi, Hava [Shala] and Nurije Zeka. Yes, it is a coincidence that it was exactly the day when I bought Anton Çetta's book which was out of print, *Tregime dhe Përrallëza nga Drenica* [Stories and Tales from Drenica]. I found the *plak* Anton Çetta when I entered the *oda*,²² I left the covered book aside and greeted them. During the conversation, while talking to the wise *plak* Anton Çetta, Riza unfolded the book from the cover it had, he unfolded it and saw that it was Anton Çetta's, then he gave it to him and said, "See professor," he said, "This is what

²¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

²² Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

an intellectual from the city comes with,” without them knowing and without me knowing that they would come to me, that was a coincidence. And this is the back then book {shows it in the camera} which has survived, my library with over three thousand various books and newspapers was burned during the war. And he left a note...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you read it?

Metë Shala: Yes, it says, “To Metë Shala with the best honor and wishing success in work, wholeheartedly, Anton Çetta.” With two T-s, Çetta, I mean, March 10, 1990, Trstenik. And the blood was forgiven seven days after this. I mean, the blood was forgiven on March 17, 1990.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, first they proposed, then they came to take the word one week later?

Metë Shala: They proposed and then they worked a lot with my brothers, with my family, for nights in a row. Then, in those years I was the director of the school of the village of Trstenik, Hava and Nurije constantly came to me at school, they came to prepare us. They gave an extraordinary contribution, Hava Shala with Nurije and many many others...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did they say, what did reconcilers do, what arguments were given for you to forgive? Why was it difficult for you, can you tell us little about this part?

Metë Shala: They made the argument that the Kosovo youth took this initiative in order for us to be united with each-other, not to be divided and not to let the enemy find us divided and not to allow an inner war to happen. The enemy, if the murders, revenges and misunderstandings that happened continued, if the reconciliations of the ‘90s weren’t done, in the ‘90’s, ‘91, ‘89, if the reconciliations didn’t happen, then an inner war would happen and the enemy would find us weak, then we wouldn’t be able to fight the enemy. And like this, with those [arguments], they convinced us that Kosovo needed forgiving, reconciliation, Kosovo needed the Blood Feuds Reconciliation.

They were mad because of the fact that Serbia kept killing our young boys holding two fingers up in demonstrations, demanding freedom, equality, democracy, I mean, you could see that they felt the pain, our pain. They [murderers] were not worth being killed and going to prison. One brother was buried, another one going to prison, the family was large and they needed to be educated, there were many girls at home, and it would be a mess, a new mess. We saw, for example, the son and the daughter of the deceased brother, they needed to grow up, education, interest, support. We knew that if we killed them, if we took revenge, if we killed some of them, then new misfortunes would happen, the family would remain in bad conditions, the education and so on. So we had to think and make a sacrifice both for the nation and the family in order to get some honor out of my brother’s blood.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You never thought about taking revenge, right?

Metë Shala: To be honest, that left its marks on me, I’ve been thinking about taking revenge for a full one year and a half. And it has left its marks on me, because it is an opposite world, when you have art, music, when you love for example the children at school, when you love your subject, singing, art, music, when you love... know what piano, violin, musical instruments, orchestra, symphony, sonet,

concert, overture are... when you think about listening to serious music, to folk music, when you think about art, and then return 180 degrees in the opposite direction, that leaves its marks on you, and takes you to a totally different place. It is a life full of sadness, full of anxiety, sorrow and harm, you see the orphans at home and you are not able to take your own child in your lap.

You see, for example my brother comes from Germany and the girl says, “Uncle Shaban, why didn’t you take my father from Germany, why didn’t you hide him from the police behind your seat?” Those are moments that left their marks, those are difficult moments, that is a difficult, a sad situation, it is very sad having your brother killed by your maternal aunt’s son, whose mother is your mother’s sister. And without reason, without any reason, I could never imagine killing them, my brother didn’t expect it, neither did we, otherwise I wouldn’t leave my brother there, I wouldn’t go to the mountains at all, I would sell that damn cattle, just as we sold them then, just like we could manage to live without them after that, but we were blind and...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, forgiving [the blood] to Kosovo was a relief for you personally as well as for your family?

Metë Shala: It is a kind of relief, because you no longer think about... you have given the *besa*²³ to the fatherland, to Kosovo youth, you have forgiven it to Kosovo and you have set yourself free of the burden of taking revenge, it is a relief.

But somehow, to be honest, in a way we are, every family who contributed to Blood Feuds Reconciliations in Kosovo, who forgave bloods, misunderstandings, we are disappointed. This is why, because they go to the heroes graves with all the respect and nobody goes to my brother’s grave but me and the close family. Nobody knows, nobody counts that contribution. In a way, it is a kind of contribution and that blood wasn’t emphasized [honored].

Part Two

[The speaker continues his story from Part One]

The blood that was forgiven for Kosovo, I mean we have remained, we envy when they go to the heroes grave who died for Kosovo. I imagine my brother being killed in the war by *shka*,²⁴ but my brother being killed as if he was eaten by dogs, as if he was eaten by dogs... and I mean, the dogs ate him and we buried him, and the dogs actually ate him, they ate him. We are not asking to be declared heroes, but to have a kind of treatment, I am not only talking about my brother, but the whole Kosovo, all the people

²³ 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.

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

who went through this painful experience.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You said that you were at Verrat e Llukës, did you start going to the gatherings where people reconciled after you reconciled, did you feel the need to see other people forgiving?

Metë Shala: Yes, to be honest it was a kind of satisfaction, for example, to relax, for the soul to rest, for the soul to heal, when my little brother and I participated, because our older brother was in Germany, when we participated at Verrat e Llukës, and when the bloods were forgiven and the reconciliation hands were extended, when the peace doves were set free to fly in freedom, that was, I mean, and unity was expected, a mutual strength of the whole nation, a great fist against the enemy was expected, but we are disappointed of what happened after the war.

I thought, when I went to Albania to pick my family up and bring them to Kosovo, I thought that we would let the doors open, we would hug each-other, we would never need to save our back from each-other, I thought that nobody would touch a thing and nobody would steal, I thought that we would let the doors open. But, the honest and the fool are very close to each-other. I was a total fool, very honest, the honest and the fool are only divided by a cigarette paper, that's how divided they are. I thought that now we are liberated and we don't have the courage to lock the doors but we will hug each other, we would cherish each-other's success, I never thought that the brother would not want to see his brother. I only took brothers as an example, because [it's the same] for the neighbors and the other, and the other, there is hatred, jealousy, unfaithfulness, hunger.

When I came and brought my family home, the house was burned, I had a coffee in the yard by myself and said, "I am the richest man alive, is the Serb not here?" Some people from Albania came with us as well, they started crying and saying, "Look at how your house is burned?" I said, "Don't cry, thank God it smells like char, and the lands of this place do not smell like *shka*. This char is good, it is wealthy." And it is true, the fire is wealthy. God gave work, progress, construction, a new house, and thank God they even burned the rats, they burned the rats on our roofs. I thought that would be a lesson, but some took the lesson while some others did not, I feel bad for them.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was war to you, where did you go, how did it start?

Metë Shala: The war, we were at home in '98, we were at home in '99 until May 6, we were in the village of Trstenik, and we had refugees from all around. I slept in a plum trees garden, girls and women slept in my room together with my wife, we had 54 [refugees] at our house. Then the military forces came during the night, they came to the men's *oda*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You are talking about UÇK?²⁵

Metë Shala: Yes, the UÇK, the UÇK. They came to those sides, to those areas, they found us well prepared, I had nine tons of flour at home, I gave it to all the people, I gave [flour] to all the people who came. And there was enough milk, we cut meat, we guarded overnight, there were times when we were afraid and there were times when we were brave, there were times when we were anxious. My brother

²⁵ *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, Kosovo Liberation Army.

together with three other people went to Albania from Germany and met Flamur there, Flamur told him, “You better leave the money here in the military headquarter rather than going to the south of Tropoja.” He left, he went, because 17 boys went from here, my younger brother and 17 other boys from my village went there to take arms. He went with 30 thousands, with 28 thousands Deutsch Marks which he collected from our fellow villagers who lived and worked in the diaspora, they went to Tropoja, Hoxhaj and Bajram Curr, to buy arms and they prepared them together with a... my brother’s name is Shaban Shala, together with Selim Krasniqi and Mahir Shala from the village of Trstenik. They were almost killed by someone who wanted to steal the money from them in Albania. Those 17 boys went there, took arms, they survived and they brought them to the village of Trstenik and we divided them in each house, heavy arms, machine guns, [real] arms, not only that...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You were prepared to fight?

Metë Shala: We were prepared to fight. And in the morning of May 6, a student from the village of Lutogllavë came to the door of my house and said, “Teacher, go and occupy the mountain because they are coming from the village of Lugu i Baranit.” I took the rifle, a M48 rifle, and went to the hill. And fortunately I went there before them, because if they were there before me, they would kill me while I was climbing, but I went there before them. And I saw them trying their guns in the ground, coming near. I started shooting as well, my brother came, the son of my sister Ali as well as Mahir Shala, our cousin Qerim Shala, Brahim Shala, Xhevdet Shala, Sinan from the village of Poterc, Ramiz Kelmendi from the village of Poterc and some others, we united and resisted there during that whole day. We made that resistance just so that we could give the families some time to withdraw. They were afraid to come when they heard arms, otherwise there was nothing from us, we just did it to make some noise, [as the saying goes] to scare the bear with *shoshë*,²⁶ in order to give the families time to withdraw, and they had luckily done so, they withdrew.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you go, to the mountains or to the forest? Is there any mountain near you or what?

Metë Shala: There is a hill near our house, a mountain near our house, to the South of our families [houses]. Then I came with the son of my sister, with my brother and the others, we found the cattle set free, only one calf was locked, I opened the door to that calf and we said goodbye to the house. Our house did not have a concrete base for the roof yet, but we had to leave many books and newspapers behind. I can say that its smoke went up two kilometers for the two or three days that we saw it. We withdrew and went to look for our families. The people went beyond the [river] Drin, the army said, “We are going to withdraw to the hills in order not to put the families in danger.” I know that I said, “I cannot come,” because my family had no clothes, neither did they have any car, they were all with tractors and trucks, I looked for my family and found it. I buried my rifle with my own nails, I covered it with a plastic bag and paper because I thought I might find it later. And I went to my family on May 6 in the evening, it was raining, the weather was bad, it was dark at night. We slept that night, the next day we were besieged, we were caught hostage.

²⁶ Albanian: *shoshë*, sift.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the village of Trstenik?

Metë Shala: No, in the village of Staradran, in the Staradran fields of the village of Kashica, and I was carrying my old mother, there were eleven children, eleven children, twelve people with my old mother and fifteen with three women, there were two *hasret* boys as well. That one there is my *hasret* son {points towards him in the room} and the *hasret* son of my deceased brother, his *hasret* daughter as well. We were hostages, they besieged us in the field and they said, “Give up your arms, whoever has them!” Some started giving their knives, and they said, “No,” they said, “Keep those for yourselves.” They left us in front of the Staradran school for a whole day, a whole day and a whole night. On May 8, Saturday, they beat and killed as many people as they could.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the middle of the field?

Metë Shala: Yes, and we started leaving to Albania from the village of Zallc in Klina in a queue, when we went to the village of Zallc, they took me, my family, because one guy from the village of Raushiq took us in his truck, we will never forget him, Muharrem Alushi. I greet and thank him a lot! That can never be forgotten, he took fifteen members of my family. The police took me to the place called Sharra, they took us, when they left, I was happy that they [family] were leaving. They talked about shooting us with our hands tied on our back. An airplane without a pilot was flying above us, I heard their reaction, they said, “We cannot shoot them now because we are being recorded,” this is how they talked.

I know that they told one guy from the Kabashi family of the village of Gjyrakovc, I know that they told him, “Rexha, take the people from the Kabashi family and get out of here.” He took me as well because I had given him flour three days earlier, I had given him flour three days earlier. He said, “Give me another sack [of flour].” I said, “We will be liberated before you use the one that I already gave you, because Milošević has no other way but giving up.” He couldn’t even use that sack. And as a sign of respect... the Commander of the village of Gjyrakovc Police had run over his daughter with a car, and as a sign... he had forgiven him. But now, as a sign of respect, the police who had run over his daughter said, “Rexhë, take the people from the Kabashi family and get out of here and leave for Albania.” He took me as well and I survived, God saved me.

Then, I couldn’t arrive to my family, but we slept in the village of Gremnik or Vulljaka that night, the queue of the villages of Nabërgjan, Trstenik, Lotogllavë and Staradran was stuck, and we remained, we remained there in the village of Gremnik for the whole night. The next day they asked me to drive the tractor of a woman whose husband had been taken in the village of Zallc where I was as well. Then, poor they, they [Serbs] had deported them to the village of Gjyrakovc and they had destroyed them by beating them, they had sent them to Serbia, they had sent them to Serbia and beat them during the whole trip, they also stopped the bus in front of the school and told the middle school pupils, “Come and beat the terrorists,” and they were even beaten by the middle school pupils while on the road to Serbia. They had destroyed them totally.

Ramiz Berishaj from my village was there, he didn’t live long, he died five years ago, he was mistreated in Serbia, destroyed. Then, I arrived to Kukës with that tractor, I arrived there at night and the tractor had no lights, and my older daughter together with my son, my only son were [waiting for me]. When

my son saw me, I didn't see him, I almost ran over them with the tractor, he came to me, I met my family on May 9, Sunday, May 9, Sunday evening, around 8PM. We meet in Kukës at around 8:39PM, then we went to Puka from there and like this...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How long did you stay there?

Metë Shala: We stayed there for 40 days, 40 days, then the Kumanovo Agreement²⁷ was signed in June, the agreement was signed. But we saw the terror with our own eyes, in '98 we stayed all the time armed, waiting for the enemy as the goat waits for the knife, waiting for the enemy with such an arsenal, we were unequal, we were empty-handed, with our families. There were some arms, but they were not enough, and we had no people in that village, we had no people to lead us. Eleven people were killed in our village, they were killed during Serbia's offensive against us. Imagine the enemy was covered with five centimeters of steel, they had the airplane, the helicopter, the arms, the symbols. [The letter]"S"²⁸ was written in their symbols, their cartridge-cases were written in Russian. They had the food, the radio connection, the clothes, they were covered with five centimeters of steel, they had experience in wars, they had experience from the three wars they made. They also had Russian and whatnot mercenary forces, they had used the taxes that they had taken from our fathers and grandfathers to create a military arsenal, they had, they found us empty-handed with our families, how can you fight when you are with your family?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened after the war, what did you find, did they burn your houses?

Metë Shala: They had burned our houses, and for the sake of God, I was happy that they had done so. We built new houses, even newer and better, with the hope that we would gain independence very soon. Independence got very late, in 2008, and the North part of Mitrovica was messed up, it is a difficult wound left for us Albanians. Then, we had no intentions to get rich, but we had the intention of having the status of a state, of having the people working for the state, because I don't need my house without having a state, to me it was like having no house at all, because that house had no state. I had an autonomy which was thrown out the window by Milošević, they also deported me to Albania whenever they wanted, they killed us, they baked and burned and dishonored us, we had nothing, we wanted the state now. When you leave the state to the children, I have left everything to them. This house is not mine without a state.

I mean, we had nothing, thank God it was burned, because the autonomy was only real in '70 and '81, it was a period in which Kosovo moved forward, we moved very forward in '71 and '81, with the university, the flag, rights, culture, collaboration, professors from the University of Tirana came to lecture in Pristina. Then I remember, for example, the arrival of the drama, "*Baca*"²⁹ e Gjetajve" [The Baca of the Gjetajs] in Peja, the cultural-artistic clubs with concerts, songs, dances, that the longing and the desire

²⁷ The Military Technical Agreement between NATO ("KFOR") and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), commonly known as the Kumanovo Agreement, was the accord concluded on 9 June 1999 in Kumanovo that ended the NATO bombing campaign of FRY.

²⁸ The Serbian state emblems design uses four "C" cyrillic letters. In the Latin alphabet the letter "C" is "S." The four "C" stands for *Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava* [Only Unity Saves Serbs]. The speaker is describing that emblem.

²⁹ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

to see the dancers of Albania moves every hair of my head, I mean everything kept moving forward. But, from '81 and after they started, we got trapped, we got trapped, somehow everything was destroyed, everything, they imprisoned many people.

The UNHCR and some others came after the war with various aids, some organizations that came and made some small house buildings, some shelters for our heads. Looks like they came for money laundering, they didn't really come to help us. Imagine, the houses they have built from the aids, they brought some roof tiles from Greece, and the water still leaks from those roof tiles, they were built carelessly, that was an emergency situation only to save lives. They brought some iron camp-houses, how can one live in camp-houses? With some solar panel that broke every two-three weeks, nothing at all! We had to connect them to electricity with some trions, it was dangerous, I could have burned, we spent that winter in those iron camp-houses. But, we were happy about freedom, because the enemy left, we felt like the richest people alive. When I brought my family from Albania, that day I put the coffeepot over the cows dung in the yard and said, "I am the richest man alive," there were cows there. I put the coffeepot on a gas heater and made myself a coffee and said, "O God, I am the richest man alive."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you work after the war, how did you rebuild your life?

Metë Shala: After the war, a friend of mine whose family stayed at my place, I took care of his family, Ali Alsani here in Peja, he was working at IOM [International Organization for Migration] on the return of the refugees from the airport, and he told me, "Come and take the refugees from the airport and bring them to Peja," and I went there with a Mercedes van, I worked there for one year and a half. I took around 50 thousand Deutsch Marks, I also took a bank loan, three-four friends of mine and I were given that opportunity as war fighters and I built some houses with that money. I did the repatriation, I am proud that I participated in the repatriation, because I drove the refugees, I drove families home from the airport. But when I sent them to their houses, poor they, the houses were burned, only nettles and ashes were left, only burned wood was left. But I said, "Thank God they are returning, thank God they are repatriating." We have moved forward, something has been done, but we are not where we should've been, we are good, but we are not where we should've been,

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Would you like to add something?

Metë Shala: To be honest, dear girl, I have nothing to add, I said, "God help Albanians unite and educate and escape wrong paths." I want this Kosovo to have the school as school, the education worker to do their job, the family to do their job the way they should, the youth to become the way they should, the police to be police, the justice to be justice, the hospital to be hospital, the state to be state. If we want to become something, otherwise if we don't consider the pupil at school as our own child and educate them with knowledge, with the power of knowledge, with every strength that is needed by the state, then we don't need the life neither do we have a future. If we don't think for the youth, for education, not to take the diploma as blank papers without knowledge, no blank papers without knowledge, not a justice that doesn't do its job, there is nothing more embarrassing than a justice not doing its job, a prosecution, then we are only living in the mountain with bears and wolves. I don't know what is happening like this, no justice, no prosecution, no police, no economy, no state, no school, no dignified

university, only villages have remained without having an university, a faculty. Papers, blank papers without knowledge, I can only see them starting to take the diploma in the gas stations, maybe I am overreacting because I am...

Part Three

Metë Shala: Round middle of May, in '92, the elections were organized for President Ibrahim Rugova,³⁰ it was at that time, if I am not mistaken. On the evening after the election day a reception was organized in the house of Mustafë Haredini, who is the son of my paternal aunt in the village of Leshan, and Ramadan Haredini participated there as well as his paternal uncle's sons Dem Berisha and the now deceased Tahir Berisha. When Tahir Berisha went out of the house together with Muharrem, Ramadan, the son of my maternal aunt and Dema, they confront the police, they greet my maternal aunt's son and the others and confront the police some meters from there, and the police directed the flashlight to his face and said, "Hands up!" Tahiri was very quick with arms, he had his shotgun under his arm and quickly took it out and killed one of the policemen by shooting him on the forehead, and he wounded the other one. The other policeman fell in the canal under the street, and Tahir took the machine gun of the other policeman and shot the other police under the canal thinking that the other one was dead and went near the policeman to take the machine gun from him, but the wounded policeman killed Tahir from a short distance and Tahir was shot dead. Then the next day and many other days, the police were looking for Mustafa and Ramadan, the sons of my paternal aunt, whose house the reception was held at.

They knew that we were their mother's family, and on June 10, '92, big police forces were organized from Peja and besieged our house early in the morning with two tanks and many heavy armored cars. My deceased mother came to my bedroom and said, "Metë, she said, "*Loke*,³¹ someone is calling *rrmisht*," *rrmisht* means harshly. And I knew, I said, "*Loke*, it's the police," I said, "Take the women and go to a big room of the house." I was getting dressed and talking to my mother, then I went out, when I went out in the yard, we only had a shotgun at home. I was the first one who went out, with my hands up in the entrance, they handcuffed me as well as my older and my younger brother, our brother-in-law happened to be there as our guest and they handcuffed him as well, and our old paternal uncle, a workman and two cousins, they went and took them to their yard, they handcuffed those two brothers as well, they were still not well-dressed, they brought them to our yard together with their father.

They hurt me, I said, when I saw them throwing my kids downstairs, I yelled and said, "Act like humans!" Once I said that, they hit me in the back of my head with the machine gun and I almost fell, but for the sake of the family I took some breath and the oxygen reached my brain and I held myself. My whole face and body were covered in blood, the blood reached my shoes. They beat us in our own yard, the family was there, it was early in the morning, children were shaking, children, women, our mother were in the yard. They fired the guns behind the house, because a cousin of ours escaped, he escaped because he was scared they would take him to military service, because it was the time when young boys were

³⁰ Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

³¹ Granny, an Albanian colloquial term for older ladies e.g. grandmother.

taken to military service, but he didn't stop and they looted [the house]. They turned the Serbian radio on, *ohh* [onomatopoeic] with some Serbian songs, the Belgrade car plates, they flattened our car wheels, my brother and I had cars, they also flattened the wheels of our tractor.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were they trying to do with this?

Metë Shala: No, no, that was just to create, to destroy, to do harm, and they asked us for arms, they went to the garage to look for arms, to the stable, a bull was the only one that did a good thing when the police went near it. When the police went to see if there were arms in the stable, the bull hit him with its horns and made him fall on the muck, and the other one wanted to kill the bull, he took the machine gun from him and said, "They have many newspapers, the newspapers will write that we killed a bull."

And they took us to the cars and after one hour and a half or two hours of raid. *Ohh* [onomatopoeic] they took us inside the cars and such offenses, such mistreatments, on the road while beating me they told me, "Half of you are Ranković's sons, because Ranković had the mothers of you Albanians," *aj* [onomatopoeic] God. And they sent us to the police station, beating and mistreating us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you suspected of being involved in that case?

Metë Shala: My older brother looked like Mustafë Haredini, they beat and destroyed them all, my younger brother as well, two cousins, our brother-in-law (sighs). They sent us, we arrived in Peja at around 7PM and they tortured us there until 4PM, they questioned us. Imagine, with our hands on the wall, hitting us on our stomach with the truncheon, they hit us on the head with steel helmets. My brother still suffers the consequences from that time, he feels noises on his heads because of the steel helmet. In addition, my younger brother underwent surgery in Germany, they removed one of his testicles. My older brother still suffers the consequences as well, they set us free that day. The enemy is able to keep and destroy you for seven-eight hours, but I'd rather be kept in prison for seven-eight hours and be treated as a prisoner, than be tortured and destroyed in seven-eight hours.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you work in the '90's?

Metë Shala: In the '90's I was the director of the school of the village of Trstenik, I was a school director, I was, we were tortured in various ways, "Why don't you accept the Serbian curriculum?" They came and took me from school many times, "Why did you stamp the transcript with the Kosovo Republic stamp? How come you wrote Kosovo Republic in Albanian and didn't write it in Serbian as well when I am here?" They would take me and I know that once they kept me for a full day and a full night and another time they imprisoned me for a full day and a full night on charges of possessing arms. And they tortured me that I was wearing my shoes when I entered the Police Station, but I was holding my shoes in my hand when I went out because my foot didn't fit in my shoes, because my feet were swollen (laughs), my hands were [swollen] as one kilogram of bread, God save us! We learned to brag about it and say, "See, we were beaten by the police." But looks like it would be better if we took the guns earlier and didn't allow the police to beat us, but what can we do now.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, you had a bigger pressure because of the fact that you were a director of the

school in Albanian language?

Metë Shala: Yes, yes, yes, I felt that pressure because I felt... they constantly put pressure on me (sighs). I even know that in May or June of '98, the Serbian police found two people from my village, imprisoned them and said, "We will set you free if you bring Meta," me together with another man from the village, and I know that we went. We went there and they said, "We know that you want the good for your nation and we want you to collect weapons as soon as possible and save it in order for the military offensive not to start from Klina and go to the Rugova Gorge. You are the one who can save them, collect all the arms." I insisted and said, "There is no weapons!" I insisted. They gave me a one week ultimatum. I went there after one week and said, "There is no arm!" And I am proud that I didn't even send them a bullet nor a riffle nor any arms. I know that we had enough pressure, but, thank God we overcame it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there more pressure on you when you took the middle school to your building?

Metë Shala: Yes, I know that... yes, yes, because they said, "Where do you take the permit to open a school?" I said, "I don't open schools, neither do I close schools, the school belongs to the people." And I said, "A prison is closed where a school is opened. Looks like you want to make Kosovo a prison, that is why you want to close schools." We suffered much, I know that I was the first one to enter the school when the poisonings started, if somebody had to be poisoned, then it was better to be I than students, I checked on each class in order for the students not to be poisoned.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were such cases at your school?

Metë Shala: Fortunately not at our school, we didn't have that fear, in the bilingual schools where there were Serbs and Albanians, because Serbs asked to have their students in the first shift at school, that was their only goal. The Serbian students finish their shift, they leave the poison in order for our pupils to be poisoned. The days of poisonings were terrible, the screams were terrible, it was a weird poison, such screams, such were the consequences of that poison. For example, one girl was poisoned this week, and the others were poisoned two weeks later, and when she saw them being poisoned, she experienced it as if she was poisoned herself again. Trauma, trauma.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Shall we close it?

Metë Shala: Let's close it (laughs).