

MY UNCLE SADIK, THE NATIONAL HERO

By Shkëlzen Maliqi

The story of my maternal uncle Sadik has been very important for me. In our home, as in the home of my other uncle, his brother Tasim Stavileci, there was a sort of cult of Sadik, the national hero. He became a family icon.

I especially like this photograph of uncle Sadik, not a large one, when he was a student. He stands, smiling in a garden full of flowers, slightly turned to the left. He was photographed in the courtyard of the sanatorium in Bari, Italy, where he went to find a cure for tuberculosis. Sadik looks very handsome and with a charisma that we have never understood very well.

Uncle Tasim's oldest son, the late Valbon, was my age and we were very close. It was he who often told me an apocryphal story of the death of uncle Sadik, who was killed in 1942 with Vojo Kushi and Xhorxhi Martin in Tirana. According to this legend, which Valbon believed, the brave youth who "danced" between the enemy's tanks had not been Vojo Kushi, but Sadik, except that Enver Hoxha and the Workers Party purposefully hid this truth. The reason for changing the story was that my uncle, as one of the leaders of the Communist Youth, had been against the choice of Enver Hoxha as the head of the Communist Party of Albania. Another reason, always according to the version that I heard from uncle Tasim and grandmother Zyhra, was that Sadik was from Kosovo. "In Albania there is a prejudice against Kosovars. They don't like us... Even the Communists, although they call themselves internationalists, have a prejudice against Kosovars, they consider them rednecks, unsophisticated." This would have explained why the recognition of Sadik as national hero came later.

I did not believe this apocryphal version that told the story of Sadik as the main hero of one of the most important events of the antifascist resistance in Tirana. His death, together with his two friends, was heroic. It is not important who "danced" between the tanks! Only that my cousin Valbon had always the desire of rectifying this injustice! In 1971, when for the first time in 29 years we, as a family, went to Tirana and visited and honored Sadik's grave, once again the family version of the story resurrected: uncle Sadik's heroism had been neglected because of Enver Hoxha's vengeance. During our stay in Tirana, we hoped to meet some friends of uncle Sadik, who could tell us what had really happened. But we did not meet anyone and only heard the official version.

Recently, I have found on the internet the story of an eyewitness who, I believe, told the real truth of how uncle Sadik was killed with Vojo Kushi and Xhorxhi Martin. This testimony was taken from Muharrem Llanaj's memoir. He said that he was the fourth man in the group that happened to be in the street of Kodra e Kuqe in Tirana, at the house of Ije Farka. Llanaj, according to what is cited on that internet site, said that the three heroes were killed as the official version says, but nobody remembers his name, because he, luckily and miraculously, escaped execution.

The fact remains that uncle Sadik had really been against Enver Hoxha, and this is surely the reason why the Communist historiography and the propaganda of Enver Hoxha chose to celebrate Vojo Kushi as national hero, neglecting the other two. In our family we believe that Said was against Enver Hoxha. And this argument served me well, since childhood, to be anti- Enverist. I was convinced that uncle Sadik had known the character of Enver Hoxha well.

I knew Sadik was very intelligent and open. Enver is remembered as a tyrant, a leader with a bad character, who killed, detained and interned thousands of people, isolated and damaged a place as beautiful and rich as Albania, and plunged it into total collapse.