

INTERVIEW WITH ZYRAFETE KRYEZIU MANAJ

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Duration: 154 minutes

Present:

1. Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (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

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Zyrafete, if you could introduce yourself? Your date of birth? Place of birth? Anything about your family? Your origin?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, firstly thank you that we are here together. I am Zyrafete Manaj, my father's last name is Kryeziu. Born and raised in Suhareka. I was born in 1958 into a family where my mother and father raised nine children, five sisters, and four brothers. A family, a family, I mean, we had complete harmony, we made all kinds of jokes and we were an exceptionally harmonious family with each other.

Despite the hardships we had in life, whether from the system which is already over, or various life obstacles, however, we survived. And I say that we have steadily survived all the mess which engulfed us during our whole life. My father and my mother, I am actually proud of my parents who gave birth to us and raised us in that spirit to first love ourselves, to love our homeland. And when one loves themselves and the homeland then above all it's, above all those [traits] which a successful person in life possesses.

My father was a worker at the Ballkan factory for a bit. But, during that time in the '60s, the system of that time pressured him in all kinds of ways and he fell into a confrontation with a worker of Serb nationality and since that time all his rights to work were denied in the system of that time. However, we didn't give up regardless. I previously mentioned that we were nine children, seven of us were raised, got an education in different professions and my father and mother always pushed us to achieve what we wanted in life. Although Serbia and former Yugoslavia put an extraordinary pressure on my family, as I said, I mean, my father was fired from his job.

My brother, an Albanian Professor of Literature, remained unemployed for 12 years after his graduation because they restricted his right of employment. They didn't allow him, I mean, the Committee of that time in various ways pressured people who didn't suit the system. I was fired from my job three times. My sisters were expelled from the school several times, whether from high school or university. And, I mean, everything belonging to a person who is free was denied to us.

However, we worked regardless, we made so much of an effort that sometimes, people who worked at the committee¹ and the police would tell us... or better to say the militia of that time would portray us like we admired Enver Hoxha,² the system of Albania because we worked... we were raised and we were educated from [the income of] agricultural work. And from the result of our labor we achieved all of that. That's why I can say that we were a family, we were sacrificed to the system. We were so strong above that system who tried to stamp out the good of Albanianess.

Anita Susuri: Does this persecution of your brother and family connect to the events that happened during the demonstrations of '68?³

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, actually my father carried the flag when Haxhi Bajraktari raised the flag in, here, in Suhareka in 1968. And then the police at the time reacted and the people who were servants of Yugoslavia's system and they took the flag and... how to put it, they put the flag inside a bookstore that was in the city center back then. My father and some of his friends went and broke the bookstore locker, they brought out the flag and for two whole hours paraded it in the city of Suhareka. What was special about that day, because it was a market day and all the traders of that time, they left their things at the market, at Suhareka's market and joined the demonstration at the time.

It was, I was nine years old when this event happened. As a child, even though I didn't understand the importance, because as a child one doesn't understand the importance clearly, the weight of what happened. However, with the passage of time, through the discussions my father had with us around the fireplace during the winter days, he told us different stories about the heroes, about our people's history. Then we were raised and engulfed by the love for our homeland.

I remember as a child back then they hung out a lot at *oda*⁴ and *oda* were a kind of assembly at that time. I remember that my father made me learn [by heart] the poems of Naim Frashëri⁵ and when he had men over at his *oda*, he invited me and told me, "You will learn this poem," meaning in this amount of days. I would learn the poem, and he recorded it [me reciting the poem]. We had a tape recorder from that time and on those tracks as we called them, he would record it and often [play it] when I wasn't present because they went from one *oda* to the other.

¹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kosovo.

² Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

³ During October and November 1968, many demonstrations were organized by the Albanian population across Kosovo. The main demand was to recognize Kosovo's right to self-determination. The first and most massive demonstration was organized in Prizren on October 6, 1968. This demonstration ended in front of the League of Prizren, where for the first time the demand for the Kosovo Republic was publicly articulated.

⁴ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

⁵ Naim Frashëri was an Albanian poet and writer (1846-1900). He was one of the most prominent figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian national movement, together with his two brothers Sami and Abdyl. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Albania.

When they hung out in other *odas*, my father would take the tape recorder with him and play [the recording of me reciting the poems to those men or when they were at our *oda* he would invite me there to the men's assembly (smiles), let me refer to it like that. And as a child I would be impressed and feel so happy that I could do something like that, because a child is always empowered by the grown ups. It depends on how they pave the way in life. So, we were raised with feelings like that.

Anita Susuri: So your family was in possession of these books? You kept them?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes. Actually my father even years later was taken into interrogations as well. But I remember well because there was an *UDB-ash*⁶ of that time, Vessel Krasniqi, who took my father during those years, after '68 in different interrogations, different interview, in... in some way it was a psychological war on him, not only psychological but also physical torture in order for him to give names, to talk about his activity, et cetera, et cetera.

Then when I was in prison in '82, 1982 after the demonstrations which took place in Pristina, the same... among many security inspectors of the time, there was him [of all people] precisely again and he knew my family's history very well, the source of all that activity, because he was continuously interested and observed my family in different processes of that time.

Anita Susuri: What about your father, was he also organized with the underground network as well or he was only...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I can't say that he was organized or part of some network. However, he was, how to put it, a carrier of dissemination. Because Kosovo was occupied and in order to free Kosovo, for Kosovo to be free there should've been a revolution, a change at that time. My father worked closely with Nezir Kuqi, with Destan Bajraktari, with Adem Demaçi,⁷ with Nezir Kuqi who I already mentioned and with many men from Suhareka and only from Suhareka. But they found a common spirit and developed different ideas for producing dissemination among people, because at that time dissemination was a must for the freedom of our homeland, for the liberation of our homeland. Because not all of the nation knew or understood that we were really occupied by Yugoslavia.

We are well aware that at the time Yugoslavia had malicious propaganda to convince the world, but to convince also the people living in Yugoslavia, that we [Albanians] lived in freedom, that we had equal rights as nations and as people. But, that didn't actually exist, it wasn't true for the Albanian people.

⁶ Members of the UDB, *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

⁷ Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

Anita Susuri: Here I wanted to relate to this topic, to ask you about how that feeling developed in your father? Was it, for example, his father, your grandfather or maybe...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes. Of course, my father got, I mean, that nectar of patriotism from his father, from the ones before him. And that was passed generation after generation to my father, my father passed it down to us, we try to pass it down to our children. Although the situation in Kosovo is different now. Oftentimes when I talk to my children or my children's children about some things and there's some kind of, it's abstract, how could things like that happen. How could there, for example, be a country that aggressive towards the people who at the time, it was alluded to, that we lived in a joint Yugoslavia and we all had equal rights.

I often say that there should be a lot, each of us to not only give interviews, but leave [behind] written notes in the most varying forms so the younger generations understand that Kosovo's freedom wasn't gained easily. It was exceptionally difficult work, a sacrifice of the people for us to get here. For us as activists at that time, it was hard for us even from our own people, because a big part [of people] at that time were supporters of Yugoslavia and it was difficult to convince them that wasn't the right way for Kosovo, for its people.

We needed another way, we needed a different kind of activity to get to that point where we learned our language, our history, to write our own history, our historians. And not for our history to be written in Belgrade and to be served to us in Kosovo. And then many of our writers, our creators, people who loved our homeland, were anathematized. It was before '68, our flag was banned, the right to our own history was banned. At schools it wasn't, it wasn't taught to the students, to the students about who we were. They connected everything to our origin, supposedly we were closely tied with Slavic people, with other people who lived in former Yugoslavia, which was not true.

Anita Susuri: Something you mentioned, I mean, your family being patriots, was your circle like that too, or?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Not my entire circle, not my entire circle. I stressed it, I will give you only one example. I was arrested during the education process in 1982 and at the time when they arrested me and when I finished prison, I would see my colleagues, people who if they saw I was going in their direction, it was the road I had to take, I saw my colleagues crossing the road and getting on the other side. Some of my cousins, some of my neighbors who lived close by, weren't sure. They weren't fixed on that [idea] that we should love our homeland like we really should have, but they were... or they protected the positions which they got by the system of the time or they did not want to sacrifice or... opinions from all kinds.

However, fortunately, with the passage of time, with the networks of the time, with underground groups, with different textbooks which we distributed, with various stickers, various banners, I will say

we finally raised awareness. Because most of them and then with the creation of UÇK⁸ and our army, they deeply understood that they were, it was true, that period of time for which we sacrificed a lot, we gave a lot. We gave, we gave, I mean, people gave their lives, we were submitted to all kinds of torture, physical, mental, imprisonment and all that. But, fortunately we achieved what we, what we sacrificed for and committed to our whole lives.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to go back a bit first and then come back to your activism. You told me about your father and that you actually got it from him, he planted that patriotic feeling. But what was your mother like? I mean, nine children...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Thanks a lot for the question. My mother was a mother with no education, but within her there was an entire university, an entire faculty. Why am I saying this? I am saying it because my mother, only by the effort she made to raise us, she shaped us with that love for our homeland and for other people in the most honest way. And then, during the '90s, I am moving to the more recent years, my mother was an active participant in the demonstrations and what was special, because at that time the police threw gas with...

Anita Susuri: Tear gas.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, tear gas or what was it called.

Anita Susuri: Tear gas.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, and my mother as it was a tradition for our mothers who wore *dimia*⁹ back then, she would go and isolate the gas, the tear gas with *dimia* and when the crowd of demonstrators saw what my mother did, then those of us who were around her started running and they saw it and that gave us great courage. Trust me, it was a feeling like we weren't demonstrating and our lives were at risk, but it felt like we were going to some wedding or some party. That spirit of patriotism was so high, so dignified, that everybody didn't think about themselves but only thought about the person next to them. So, my mother was the main pillar to keep, to keep our family tight and to advance further. For all the achievements which we had after. I am very thankful to my mother for her contribution to us, but not only us.

At our house two-three days before I had contact with some friends from that time, actually one of them said, "We owe it to *bac*¹⁰ Rrahman," he said, "to buy him some floor cushions," the ones used back then for *oda*, "because," he said, "we ruined it," he said, "by going there and holding different

⁸ Alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army, was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

⁹ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about 12 meters of fabric.

¹⁰ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful term for an older person.

meetings.” And then, when the schools were closed, when Serbia closed down our schools, my brother had taken the entire inventory of his books, and the rest of us because I was married, my other sister was married. We combined those books we had at home and we placed them in their *oda* and for the city of Suhareka it became a library. The students would go there for the books they needed for school and take them. They took them themselves, they brought them back themselves, I mean, there was exceptional self-organization for the time.

My mother always took care, my mother... there were also the wives of my older two brothers and they always took care, I mean, of everything there was a need for. At the time they were always prepared and pioneers for the activity which was continuously happening.

Anita Susuri: Where do you fall in the lineup of siblings?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I was the fifth child. Two brothers and two sisters were older than me. I was the fifth child in order, there in the middle (laughs).

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you, how do you remember Suhareka at the time? What was the city’s infrastructure like?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Suhareka was, I can say that it was a bigger village than the other villages around it. The infrastructure, there wasn’t much infrastructure to tell you the truth. I remember there was a film room at the time and the elementary school’s building was old. After, in that school, after the ‘60s, I don’t know exactly when, a branch of Prizren’s *Shkolla Normale*¹¹ opened there. However, later the school that is used even today was built, *7 marsi* [school], a big school.

I had the luck of finishing elementary school there. Back then it was called *Vllaznim-Bashkimi* [Alb.: Brotherhood-Unity], because many things were done under the slogan of brotherhood-unity. What else was there? There wasn’t, I mean, some kind of good infrastructure, because there wasn’t... Yugoslavia wasn’t interested in developing Kosovo and turning it into a garden of flowers as they pretended or as they said under their slogan, of the brotherhood-unity slogan. It wasn’t like Tito¹² and others around him disseminated in Europe.

Anita Susuri: The school you mentioned, *7 marsi*, is that building like a museum now?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, that’s the school near it. However, that first school, which is a museum now...

¹¹ *Shkolla Normale* of Prizren was a vocational secondary school for the preparation of teachers located in Prizren.

¹² Josep Broz Tito, former President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Anita Susuri: You didn't get to go there...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes I worked there as a teacher later because that was there until recently, I worked in the now *7 marsi* school, because back then, it was *Brotherhood-Unity*. And later after the war that was transformed, it became a museum, it was turned into a museum. Eh, that was it, but it was our childhood, as difficult as it was, it was enjoyable. It was a childhood that maybe a big portion of our time we worked with agriculture, as I mentioned earlier. However, that was, that wish for work kept us going, for our own work, to live off of our own hands, our own effort and to advance career-wise from our own effort. That's what kept us going.

We were exceptionally enthusiastic, I am saying we were happy even though we had all that pressure. We had all those kinds of raids on our family. Not, I am saying, dozens of times, but much, much more than dozens of times. The UDB of that time would come in the early hours of the morning, they raided, disturbed the children, us as children, I mean during the time when my father did his activity. But even when we grew up and my brother's children who were little children, in the cold days of winter, they would come at three, four in the morning to kick us out, they would rip the flour bags. Everything in their sight because they wanted to absolutely find something to tell us that you are this and you are doing this and that.

Anita Susuri:

They didn't find anything?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: We were very careful in that aspect and we knew, I mean, the manner in which they would act and we were exceptionally careful.

Anita Susuri: Since you mentioned the movie hall here, how was the cultural life? Did you watch movies?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, and the pressure was such that cultural life was always dependent on the system of that time. However, as part of the Youth of the Municipality of Suhareka there was incredible advancement whether with literary hours, or with various cultural activities. Suhareka's Jehona during those years, the '70s, was a cultural artistic association that kept, I mean, alive, not only the cultural life in Suhareka, but in Kosovo and beyond. There, I mean, songs of all kinds were created which made a good impression on people.

Then, there were basketball clubs. I was also a basketball player for the city of Suhareka and then I actually studied Physical Education. There was the Ylli [Alb.: Star] basketball club which was represented by both boys and girls from our city. We had several years of activity, until I was imprisoned. And then my friends continued. But, I didn't have the opportunity because I wasn't allowed then, because everything was interrupted for me, every activity. They didn't allow me, they

closed every door. But, I am proud of the work of the girls from my municipality because we broke down various barriers.

The earlier years were difficult, there were attempts for girls, Albanian women to remain in that vacuum of the preceding years. For them to not get an education, to be isolated in one way, but we made attempts more and more for girls to be educated. For Albanian women to have complete freedom, to advance in society. Only in this way we managed to... although to this day the women's role in Kosovo's society leaves much to be desired. I lived in Sweden and see the difference, I mean. I see what place women have in Sweden and in Kosovo.

In Kosovo oftentimes our women and girls are given political positions only to fulfill those political quotas, but not to value the role of women exactly as they should. And this is for the younger generations, but also why not for us, but especially the young generations to work for our girls and women to get the role in society as they deserve and [as it] should be. Like that.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about these cultural, sports events that you mentioned. How many participants were there and do you remember any special cases?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: It's interesting, actually now the participation of viewers when those matches take place isn't as big as it was back then. We didn't have sports gyms, we didn't have sports halls, we held our tournaments, our games, in open ranges. However, the entire youth of the city and not only the city, when we had our basketball matches, they would come and the surroundings of the open range would fill with people. There were dozens and dozens of viewers who supported us, who stimulated us for the game, for our wins. We had, we managed to get to the second league of Yugoslavia at that time in basketball. I mean, we achieved notable successes.

I mentioned that we lived off of the work we did with agriculture, because all our paths were closed in working in state institutions of that time. When I... during the weekends when our matches took place, at that time I usually went and worked in the field in the morning, in the afternoon my father would tell me, "And now..." two hours before the match started at most, or three [hours before] I would go home to shower, I would take my bag and the other stuff I needed for the match and went.

That was the only way we could've survived, because otherwise we didn't have other alternatives. So, I would go from manual labor to my sports activity. It was a, if we told that to our youth today it would seem abstract to them and I don't know if they'd believe it. But, that was the truth and that's how we acted.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: You started doing activities after high school?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes, since elementary school. In high school the professor, Ramadan Shala in '78 I think, in '79 the first basketball club in our city was founded and at first they only went for the boys' activities. And then, after a few years, two or three years after because I don't exactly remember now, the city girls' team was created. And I am very thankful, grateful, not only me but my friends too, because Ramadan Shala was a professor who gave us the opportunity to do that sport and he was a main pillar, I mean, of activities, not only sports but also the city theater and the literary hours that took place.

He was professor of Albanian Literature. He was one of the first professors from our municipality. Now he is of retirement age, an exceptionally old age. However, he was a proponent of all these things and gave us the opportunity, I mean. And then, of course, with the advancement of, with the coming of the new generations, other activists continued too. I mean, today the Ylli team is the champion in Kosovo and the Ballkani team of Suhareka is the champion. Suharka is the champion and I am very happy that I belong to this city (smiles).

Anita Susuri: Yes, I am interested to know, did you travel for matches back then with your team?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes. We would organize back then, we had a minibus and we would travel to different cities of Suhareka, of Kosovo I mean, and yes we traveled. Back then they took place in all the cities. Peja had its own team, Gjakova, Gjilan, Leposavić. We went to the other parts of Kosovo too and we competed, we competed in those races. And then, we had, we went to Ohrid, in several cities. I also went as part of my university in various universiades. Actually it's worth mentioning that as part of the universiade I got second place in skiing in 1979. So, I was exceptionally active in various ways and forms.

Anita Susuri: You were talking about sports activities and you told me that you traveled to different places. But I am interested to know when this girls' club was formed...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Was there any prejudice by the *rreth*?¹³ How was it received?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes there was. I said that in every time period you can't find everyone or for the entire nation to be a fan of something. We, for example, back then as athletes had to wear the sports uniform and stuff. There were, I mean, elders, individuals, maybe both women and men of an older age and younger, but we as girls of that time, they didn't like the way we went about, you know.

¹³ *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.

However, for us it was important to break down the barriers of that time, to advance as a society and exactly, maybe it was very good to tell the system and Yugoslavia of that time that we were not a nation who, for example as they called us dishwashers, our mothers, that they only know how to birth children and they are not ready for or not capable of other things.

We, despite all those hurdles, managed to break down these barricades, in all fields of life whether sports, or cultural, or those of educating the girls of that time. I actually could say that the '70s are known as, as an advancement, as an education where girls were included en masse. They understood that without the development and advancement of Albanian women and girls, even us as a nation we will be lacking and we wouldn't achieve the proper pedestal if Albanian women weren't educated. And we made an effort and I think that to some extent we achieved our goal.

Anita Susuri: You continued high school here in Suhareka, right?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, high school. I finished elementary school and high school here in Suhareka. And then I enrolled in the Faculty of Physical Education and I finished university in Pristina.

Anita Susuri: During high school, what kind of teacher or professors did you have? And to what extent was it allowed, for example, for Albanian history or literature to be taught?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I remember we had some professors who were, I can say, devoted patriots. There was Bajram Kurti, Ramadan Shala as I mentioned, Xheladin Shala was a professor of history and he was the head teacher of my class for two years. Since high school we were, besides family members, that patriotism was ingrained in us, because they would lecture with piety about the people who were contributors throughout different time periods in history. I can say that we as young people at that time, we already started our activity with some banners, with some, with these literary activities that we developed, we wrote various poems, we did dedications to Skënderbeu,¹⁴ our heroes and those were the first steps which, or better to put it as the best sparks between us, to then advance in more voluminous and unaligned ways. Then during studies and so on.

Anita Susuri: And during the time, you're saying, [during the time] of high school you developed those, so to speak, activities?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

¹⁴ Gjergj Kastriot – Skanderbeg (1405-1468) was an Albanian nobleman and leader. Taken hostage as a boy by the Ottomans, he served the Empire until 1443 when he became the Chief of the League of Albanian People in the League of Lezhë. He led a resistance to the Ottoman Empire for the next 25 years until his death, and is considered a model of Christian resistance against Ottoman Islam throughout Europe. He is the greatest Albanian national hero.

Anita Susuri: But there was no contact with the underground?¹⁵

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, there wasn't, that was later. Not me personally, maybe the others might have. However, my underground activity, let's call it that, started during my studies. During my studies I got to meet with different underground groups, I was in contact with Qefsere Mala, [Teuta Hadri](#), [Teuta Bekteshi](#), Lumnije Musa, with Xhevahire Rrahmani. And then I met a group of girls and the activity... girls who were active, they did activities and when I was imprisoned there, with many, Hidajete Osmani and many other girls.

However, to give it that big echo and to make that revolution in Kosovo it was... the end of '70s and the beginning of '80s. That was... the students carried out activities of all kinds, whether illegal, or even legal. When I say legal, what were they able to do? In dormitories we would play music by Arif Vladi, Fatime Sokoli, by various Albanian artists on loudspeakers and it wasn't heard only within the dorms territory, but even in those neighborhoods surrounding the students' dormitory.

It's exactly these things that seem small at first glance and maybe secondary [by importance], but however these made that, how to put it, that, they planted that feeling that it's something that should be seen a little different maybe, the perception of all those things happening in Kosovo at that time. And then, in the underground, of course many groups were active. Personally, for example, I worked and was active a lot with the group... I wasn't a member of some group, but I was an intermediary of several groups.

Time after time I worked with another group in distributing pamphlets. With another group maybe, with individuals of other groups we wrote some banners. We came and distributed various pamphlets in territories, in different cities of Kosovo. I actually want to stress, after... before I was imprisoned, me and my sisters distributed, [together] with Qefsere, with some girls at the time, on the same day, in different big cities of Kosovo, the same pamphlet, with the same call that the people of Kosovo should wake up, to say their part and to come down to different demonstrations and protests. These were the things [through which] we tried to keep the spirit of patriotism alive and to plant it in others who hardly understood that Kosovo should breathe differently.

Anita Susuri: You came to Pristina in '78, or what year?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: In '78, in '79 it was my first year as a student in Pristina.

Anita Susuri: And you were located in the dormitory?

¹⁵ Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I was located in the dormitory. And to tell you the truth, when you told me to call up some kind of memory, in the dormitory I was with Kadë Berisha, Lira Kuqi and Shpresa Elshani. And our dorm room became like an assembly room. The students would gather there and we would express our opinions about what to do, how to act. We distributed different books at the time, Adem Demaçi's book, *Gjarpërinjtë e gjakut* [Alb.: Blood Snakes], it was a book which was passed from hand to hand. And then there were different books, different literature coming from Albania.

We tried to pass them through the student network, those books that fell into our hands got to most of the students. These things raised the people's awareness, those books, that organization, those banners, those pamphlets, those stickers raised awareness even to the unconscious, that we really were occupied and we were living in a country that isn't right for us.

Anita Susuri: But at first you won the trust between friends who talked about stuff like that?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes (laughs) it's interesting. I will tell you a memory that, how I met with my closest friend, Qefsere Mala. I was in the dorm, and a friend from Ferizaj, Rrushe Ramadani, she was a student of medicine and our rooms were near and as the girls we were we would greet each other, "Good morning!" "Good day!" We would go to the bathroom to wash our eyes or in corridors. And there with a few words we said to each other we were able to understand the mentality or that spark that how during different discussions we learned about each other. In that way we came close to each other in order to reach a decision or a common opinion. In that way.

I will tell you about another case with Lumnije Musa, they, she was in a room with Xhanije Berisha, I was with Qefsere Mala and our room's fuses had broken down and we didn't have power there. I went to take the fuse in their room and I switched it and put it in our room and I put that broken fuse in their room. Then when the power stopped in their room, Lumnije Musa got out of the room and said, "You girl, where did you get the right to mess with the electricity?" I said, "No, I don't know what happened because there is no power in our room either and that's why I am here." I realized she was from Gjakova, because based on her accent I realized she was from Gjakova. From that, how to put it, confrontation with a few harsh words, we managed to soften the tone and to form a strong friendship. To this day we are still in touch and we did, we completed some other activities together. This was it.

I don't even know how friends got in touch with each other. I, for example, some of my friends, girls from the same place as me and I got them in touch with friends who I trusted that they could talk to, that we could do something together. However, it needed great plotting, because we had, there were people who were infiltrated in different manners and it became risky, to the extent of imprisonment, or interrogations, or the physical and mental risk. So, it needed great plotting.

Anita Susuri: How did the first contact with the underground movement happen, that you found out a circle like that existed?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Well look, I said a, for example, after the death, when they killed the Gërvalla brothers¹⁶ and Kadri Zeka, I traveled to... with Qefsere Mala and Nuhi Berisha I was at Kadri Zeka's family to express condolences. And I remember, we were on the bus and Nuhi told me and Qefsere, "We will create a trio, but you will give me your underground names," you know. After all that and understanding who we were, who he is and would come to the conclusion that we can work on something together. Then, after we took part in a trio, I, for example, would come to Suhareka and form my own trio. In my trio I worked with my late sister Murvete Kryeziu, and Naime Hoxha.

Besides that, they were from the same place as me, Kada Berisha, Lira Kuqi, we worked on something differently with them. With the others we did a different activity. With Qefsere and Shyhrete Mala we did a different activity. With, for example, Lumnije Musa and Teuta Hadri we did a different activity. It wasn't, I mean to focus on one activity and for all to do that one activity. Activities were various. With each person we were in contact with, first, of course, we needed to know who they were, what kind of family they come from, what ideals they have, all of these and, of course, that without closely studying who they were we didn't dare to begin light adventures and then to get to the risks.

Anita Susuri: Who identified you as a trustworthy person?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: After the contact, I think I didn't take that memory I wanted to recall to the end. I took the book *Gjarpërinjtë e Gjakut*, from Rrushe Ramadani, or I gave it to her, I don't remember well now, I think I gave it to her. She gave it to Qefsere Mala, because we lived in the dorm. And I went and asked Rrushe, I told her, "What happened to the book?" She said, "I gave it," she said, "to a girl there," she said, "from the Municipality of Kamenica," she said, "we will go and get it together." And as the athlete that I was, I wore a leather jacket, a pair of jeans, and some... and when we entered her room I looked like a bandit to her as they said, I'm expressing it this way (laughs).

We drank coffee, we hung out, we exchanged some thoughts, I went. She asked Rrushe, "Why did you bring that girl with that outfit? How could you bring her to my room?" She said, "No, no," she said, "wait because the book I gave to you, I took it from her," and that's where it started. And then we stayed in touch in the halls, "Good morning, how do you do?" And that's how our contact began, we got closer to each other. And it was, it was, I don't know, it was, as much as it was risky, we felt fulfilled by our activity. We felt like big people within ourselves, not big like that, but fulfilled inside ourselves because we were doing something good for our occupied homeland.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the first activity you did?

¹⁶ Jusuf Gervalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and also nationalist activist assassinated in Germany along with his brother Bardhosh Gërvalla, and fellow activist Kadri Zeka. These assassinations have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: The first activity was writing some, some pamphlets by hand, we didn't have typewriters and we wrote by hand. A copy of that pamphlet, Nuhi Berisha and I gave it to Qefsere, Sali Mala, Bajram Dërmaku and I got... at the time we lived in a private apartment. We wrote there, because we would take that A4 sized paper and cut it into four parts and we would write the text by hand, with red pens, I even remember the pen color, it was red.

When I came here in Suhareka I got my trio to write. I got my Suhareka native friends and those pamphlets were distributed. And then in the dorms, in the yards of the student dorms, in the *Jeta e Re* gymnasium in Gjakova, some were distributed in an area of Gjilan, and then they were distributed in Peja. So, in some big cities in Kosovo and it made noise, I mean, at the time. Because to distribute them on the same day, the same text in those pamphlets, it was a very risky thing, very... but at the same time it was really good work because many people became aware. We would also go to house yards and put them above walls or under doorsteps, we found various ways and alternatives.

Anita Susuri: You kept those hidden?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: And you gave them...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: We tucked them away, in bags, we would put them together with study books. I mean, we acted in the most various ways.

Anita Susuri: Were you scared that maybe somebody would identify you from the people you gave the pamphlets to?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Of course, yes. But we did not give up, I mean, we did not give up. The part, at least the activity that I did was, or we threw them underneath door steps or school desks. For example, an activity I did with my sister in the *Jeta e Re* gymnasium, we broke the school window, we got inside and we put them on the students' desk and we did that activity. In different neighborhoods of the city, as I said, on door steps where we could or we threw them over walls. In the most various ways. We found ways which were convenient for us and it was achievable on our side and we did it in that way.

Anita Susuri: So, you are saying that you held your meetings in the dorms, for example, in apartments, at your houses?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes, yes. We found... look, that underground activity was mostly done at night. However, we used the dorm rooms pretending we were getting together as friends. We started with random conversations, with different conversations. When we made sure that everything was alright, that's when we got into those procedures we gathered for. We made plans and the material

they had, I mean, the illegal one, where to send it, where to place it, in what position of the cities, in which neighborhood of the cities. And in the most, as I said, the most various ways. One plan varied from the other based on the situation, the circumstances that were at that specific time when we wanted to do it.

Anita Susuri: Was there, for example, I am sure there were instructions coming from others and you maybe didn't know who gave them?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes, yes, yes, that's right. We didn't know where they came from or who was behind them. We did our job, but we didn't look behind. We had our perspective forward and what we had to do. In this way that plot was protected, otherwise there was a risk that you'd be discovered and we did get discovered at some point later and... but, I mean, we didn't know... as I said, I was arrested at school. I don't even know who it could be, or where they could've come from, I don't know at all. And it's good that I don't know and... but I also don't blame anybody.

That was a job we took upon ourselves fully consciously, we were aware that maybe one day we would be at risk and we would be imprisoned because the circumstances were of that nature. I was at a TV [interview] a while ago and the moderator asked me, "How were you not scared?" "Well, we weren't scared because our work kept us [going], the ideal for which we started that work," and the ideal for which you dedicated yourself to give you that inspiration for that work you do, we didn't mind the sacrifices, for what would happen to us. We thought about how to, how to achieve complete freedom for our country, that was our common goal and that's how we acted, as much as we could.

Anita Susuri: As far as I know you also had some coded language, or the time of meeting or acting...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes, yes. Now and again I even met with people whom I didn't know at all. We had, we had planned to go to Albania at one point to get some illegal books. My friend, Lumnije Azemi from Ferizaj, made an agreement to go to Albania. I, there was a guy here in Suhareka, Nexhat Kuqi, he was a worker at Ballkani and he earned my trust that he would find us a connection to take us to Albania.

He gave me the code when... I didn't know what person I was going to meet, who was living around the Albanian border. He said, "You will go to this specific place, a person will meet you and you will say to him, 'Sunny day,'" you know, "he will answer with, 'Maybe it will rain in the afternoon' in case there was risk," so, the potential of crossing the border. And it was, I mean, an unsuitable day to cross the border and I ended it with that and I came back to Suhareka, so I didn't risk crossing the border.

Anita Susuri: What was the risk? Why was it unsuitable?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Because there was the patrol, the border patrol, what do I know. He then... I don't even know who that man is today, I don't know who he is. But, we had, "Sunny day," he [said], "Maybe it will be rainy in the afternoon," you know, and I continued my way, I came back and like that, we worked with numbers, with formulas of all kinds. We had our codes. And then we had our underground names and so on.

Anita Susuri: If you could talk a bit about these underground names. I know that they were used in order to not be discovered by someone...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What was your pseudonym if you can share that?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Even the poems... because prior to being imprisoned I worked with [writing] and even now I still write. When I published my poems in *Kosovare* [magazine], oftentimes they didn't publish my name. I published some poems under my name. Later on I had to make it Besa Guri, that was it. I remember that Esad Mekuli¹⁷ was the editor of the magazine at the time. And then, there were magazines and newspapers at that time that couldn't publish my poems. But, I like it and even to this day if I had the opportunity, I was too lazy to go through the administrative procedures to change my name (laughs) and so on. Qefsere's pseudonym was Arta, my friend, it was Arta, and so on. Everyone had their underground pseudonym.

Anita Susuri: You said that you had many other codes for example. Was there a specific time when you did your activities?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: When we had to, I mean, when we wanted to do an activity, of course it was done at a specific time. However, those discussions in the dorms, we often got [together] and came, we did, we came together spontaneously. Three-four friends got together and during the conversation, as the conversation progressed we got to the goal we wanted to carry out, to wrap up the conversation. So, many times the things which would be done in a planned manner, of course it was done through specific codes. It was done during the night in different suburban neighborhoods.

However, we did it and the activity, how to put it, half-underground you know. We would get together in a dorm room and call each other we did... and then we conversed, how an event was uncovered, how an activity was achieved. Back then there were Albanian music groups, sports groups coming, we went to sports halls, concert halls. How to motivate the student youth, the high school youth. They were activities of all kinds, in today's prism they might look easy, they might look unimportant, but at the time they were exceptionally important.

¹⁷ Esad Mekuli (1916 - 1993) was an Albanian poet, critic and translator. He was the first president of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo.

Two letters, “KR” [Kosovo Republic], if they were written in the streets, people were imprisoned for years because of those two letters. But, those two letters had their power, they had an effect on people. That’s how it came about, an event connected to another event, an action to another action. All of these were connected to each other chronologically and they achieved their effect.

Anita Susuri: Did you only distribute these banners or you also wrote them, for example in the streets...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And distributing the material.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, we could get through. I said, I told you about the case in high school, the distribution in different cities, the banners, wherever we could get through, that we noticed we... I said, what I thanked my mother for when you asked me that question, because my mother helped us too in many cases, in many cases. She covered them with her trench coat, with her scarf and underneath her trench coat, we would hide the pamphlets that we wanted to distribute. There were ways of all kinds. We didn’t work for one day or two days, but we did activities for years, until we were discovered and imprisoned.

Anita Susuri: Was this maybe also the time when you met your husband?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: My husband...

Anita Susuri: In the underground?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No. I met my husband during my studies. But, my husband was, after our marriage and while we were engaged and after our marriage, he was my right hand. Because when I got married, firstly I was arrested in school, I was imprisoned, I was sentenced to 18 months in prison. I finished prison. After some time I got married and I did...

Anita Susuri: After prison?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: After prison. I got married after prison. And I did activities even in the village where I lived. Then there was also the creation of LDK.¹⁸ But back then it was the beginnings, it wasn’t like, it functioned as a, it didn’t function as a [political] party, but as a whole movement and most of

¹⁸ Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

the nation supported it because there was good work done as part of it. In the village of Gllareva and the Municipality of Klina we did various activities. Back then as part of LDK there were also half-underground activities.

We formed the Village Women's Council there and at that time young people were even being killed in prisons, in the Yugoslav army. And in order to support the families who lost their sons, we gathered the women of the village, we got on the tractor trailer and we would go to those villages. Trust me, there were 65 year old women, 70 year old women besides younger girls who came, there were also elderly women, they didn't avoid the call we did as young girls and we would go and do activities. We organized different courses to advance the girls who did not have an education.

And then we would organize, we did actions also about bringing the role of women of that time into the spotlight. Back then women weren't in the same positions as today, they were extraordinarily, I am saying, much lower than the position of men, whether in the family, or in society. These were the things we thought about, I mean, to do that in every segment of life, to do the right thing that had to be done.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: I wanted to go back a bit to what you mentioned, the visits of, how to put it, cultural, artistic associations from Albania...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember, for example, what the atmosphere became like when they were present or...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, I remember and to this day I get goosebumps when I remember. Can you believe that the sports hall which is close to...

Anita Susuri: The dorms?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, *1 Tetori* [hall] which is close to the Students' Dorms, it filled up and there was not enough space for all the people who were interested in going in. And oftentimes, oftentimes it happened that people watched the activity which was happening from outside. So many shirts were burned, so many... all that youthful vigor. And then, that adrenaline gave us the opportunity to feel like a superman to put it like that (laughs), and we felt extraordinary. And these things, these things inspired the nation. As much as on first view, they seemed like tiny things, easy things, they convinced the people that we belonged, we belonged, I mean, to that spirit, we didn't belong to the spirit of...

Because at the time there was Tito's baton,¹⁹ that ceremony went from city to city. I remember that day when it was carried by the Kosovo youth and so on. And then, we split into two camps. The camp who supported the Yugoslavian system and the one that didn't. So, all the activities that were done as part of RSFJ and this other camp which breathed the breath of patriotism, with the love for Albania and they were, I mean, almost divided black from white and that's how they acted.

Anita Susuri: Did you happen to, for example, have any contact with the artists who came from Albania...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: To converse.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, I remember well. It's a pity that I don't have the photographs because I left them all in Sweden. With Gëzim Kruja,²⁰ with these singers, now I don't remember the names at the moment. But I remember Gëzim Kruja when he came to play a drama in the Theater of Pristina. It was him, and we, the students, surrounded him so he could tell us jokes and he made us laugh a lot, laughing our heads off. However even at that time we had to be really careful. because everywhere there were, everywhere there was someone who observed the situation. Not everyone there loved, for example, Gëzim Kruja, Albanian artists, Albanian singers. People of all kinds were involved there.

I remember when there was an entertainment scene and Avni Mula and other singers from Albania in Hotel Grand, people and the students surrounded [Hotel] Grand and it was a meet and greet with the singers. As soon as they got on the bus to go to Albania, they started kidnapping the young people and everyone there, by UDB at the time. And we had to find ways... quickly dispersing because otherwise if you fell into their hands you were imprisoned and tortured physically or mentally or all of that.

Anita Susuri: At the time when you said your education at university continued, but also your activity, to what extent were you able to participate in the city life for example? How did you experience the city as well?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: We did, of course, we did, we lived the student life also besides what we did, besides the underground work we did. We would go to the theater at that time. The theater was exceptional, it was advanced and they held [shows], there were shows almost every weekend. Then, we would go, back then we didn't have many cafe bars like there are today, back then people went to some pastry shops more, lemonade places, *indijanki*²¹ cakes, I remember. So, we did [go out], not in

¹⁹ The baton was carried in a relay of youth that crossed all of Yugoslavia on May 25, Communist leader Tito's birthday.

²⁰ Gëzim Kruja (1939 - 2020) was a comedian from Albania.

²¹ *Indijanki* is a creamy biscuit pastry.

the way it is today. Back then there were different circumstances, they were more difficult, of course. The students were much more restricted.

Back then, in the years '79, '78, '79 these rock music groups emerged in Kosovo. But there were not so many, here and there. I know that they tried to advance music, to follow European trends et cetera. The ones of us who liked traditional music, the one who, how to put it, it answered to our ideal. So we were more focused on folkloric music, traditional [music], artists who came from Albania and so on.

Anita Susuri: I will go back to your activity a bit. How often did you do activities?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Are you talking about underground or aboveground activities?

Anita Susuri: Underground.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: In the underground every time we had the chance and every time we were entrusted with a task, we did it. Maybe, sometimes it was more often and sometimes it was rarer. It depended on the position of the situation because we couldn't always do our activity on the day we wanted. But maybe it had to be postponed from one day to another.

I remember once we had some banned texts in dorm number 1. Actually, there was Zylfije Muriqi, a girl, Mulliqi or Muriqi because her maiden name was Mulliqi and after she got married she had Muriqi. We had some banned texts in our room. We received information that the dorms will be checked, because there were raids from time to time, dorm checks, in the dorm rooms in which they suspected there was something. I was informed by a friend of mine that they will check the dorms.

We had to take all the banned texts we had and send them to a private apartment. A friend of mine lived there, Tafil Rama, but my [husband] also. He was actually a secretary at *Rilindja*, he worked at *Rilindja* at the time and we sent them to him, we avoided it. In the afternoon it was true that they would check the dorms. They came and checked in some rooms, but fortunately didn't find anything and we were exceptionally careful. We needed to be careful, otherwise you could go to prison over the smallest thing, get imprisoned, arrested and so on.

Anita Susuri: I am sure your family also knew that you were part of the underground, but did your father join you later as you mentioned?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes. My father (coughs). Excuse me.

Anita Susuri: Drink some water if you want.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: My father had, of course, he knew, he was aware of the work we did. Oftentimes he lectured us about how we should get out of various situations, a lot of advice. But also regarding my father's activity, I didn't know all of it, because my father didn't, he didn't speak openly to us. I worked together with my sister, who is no longer with us, Myrvete Kryeziu, she was younger than me. She didn't know my contacts, who I contacted. And then, my fellows [from Suhareka], the other people who I did activities with, we didn't know about each other.

It was a great conspiracy, I mean, because only in that way the continuity of the activities was ensured. At the time when I was, at the time when it was... actually Qefsere Mala was sent to prison before me and got sentenced to only one or two months in prison or I don't know exactly. They had found some music CDs, as I mentioned that we disseminated through music. She was sentenced to two months and we were planning, we planned in advance to write a slogan at the Faculty of Philosophy, on the side of the Faculty of Philosophy from where the street could be seen, where the main two lane road leads to even today.

She got imprisoned beforehand. Then I wanted to ensure that that would be done, the plan for which we had an action plan. I got a paper, a toilet paper and I wrote the message that I would send to her and I took a string of that toilet paper and made a string like this and I put it under my shirt collar. I unsewed my shirt collar and put it there and I told her mother, "When you go visit her," because she was free to visit her, and her mother told her, "There is something under your collar."

When she went to the room there she found the paper with what I wanted to say, what I wanted to tell her. So, we found all kinds of ways to understand each other, like that, and we got a lot of work done like that. Otherwise, you fall into a trap. There were people from UDB all around, all around. At the bus station, at the cinema, at the theater, at the dorms, they were everywhere.

Anita Susuri: I have taken a note here that you have designed, but have also distributed treatises. For example, what treatise did you design?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: At that time it was necessary to call on the people to understand that we were under occupation and we had to take our lives into our own hands. However, in order to take our lives into our own hands, a worker at the place they work, some in agriculture, the workers in the factories and all that. But it was necessary, I mean, now I don't remember the exact text which was written, but the focus was on this that everyone, whether a worker, a professor, a farmer, all kinds of professions, for everyone to understand the essence of that because we were occupied and there had to be a change for them in order to, in order to free Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: Within the group of the underground movement in general, were there rules about how one should behave under specific circumstances. For example, if you get caught by the power or various traps?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Well look, of course there were those rules. You had to be careful to not give out names, to not expose your friends. In those situations you had to make something up when they interrogated you in those investigation offices, all kinds [of questions]. But there it was, in the investigation offices, the mental torture was equal to the physical torture. Because especially us women, we were threatened with the nastiest words, the most inhumane words somebody could use, they used towards us.

We were simply scared because of the moral aspect and the pressure they put on us. So, it was exceptionally difficult. You had to be very vigilant with the questions they asked, to find mazes to get out of what they wanted and to not give names. Because back then a link exposed another link and it went like that in order. There it was, believe me, there came Serbs, Albanians, one came, the other left. And then, they made you stay all night standing without a chair.

I was personally handcuffed to the radiator and now imagine all that physical torture to be handcuffed to a radiator all night without having a chair to sit on. And then somebody came and pressured you in all kinds of ways. The strongest pressure came from Albanian speakers. Because there were Serbs too but they maintained that, that....

Anita Susuri: Humanity.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes. And they did it in ways, like they usually do with their diplomacy like look how good we are and we're not pressuring you like our colleagues. So, they used that diplomacy and blamed more the people who spoke Albanian. And so on.

Anita Susuri: When did you finish, I think you graduated in '80?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, later, because I was imprisoned and finished it later.

Anita Susuri: Did they interrupt you[r studies]?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: In what year did you continue it?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I started working before graduation, in '80 I got my first job. And then I was a correspondence student and I studied and worked at the same time. So, I had to, I was connected to, I mean, both my underground and aboveground activity was connected to my city a lot. I would take, I mean, my friends' opinions there and I would come and apply it here and in a wider area, not just Suhareka, but also different villages. So, we tried to get to know people, get them on our side, as you

said [addresses the interviewer]... a perfect eloquence was needed to convince, for example, someone who was maybe close to the system of that time. You had to talk and talk, not only one day but for a longer time, for several days in order to convince them. It was a difficult time.

People were in that quiescence and what is really our right path, which one? Or maybe if I deal with this side what will happen with me, what will happen with my family? Because there were people, we all thought of not bringing bad things to our family or to ourselves. However, they were determined to do the work for our homeland and we left what might happen to us behind, what would happen to my family, and we kept going. But, there were people who were unstable, unconvinced and we had to work a lot to convince them.

Anita Susuri: There was also a story when you removed Tito's photograph from your workplace?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes (laughs). Not that I removed it, but actually there wasn't one. I was a supervisor of a sixth grade class and I taught at the school which is now a museum. I got inside and I didn't know how the students noticed that we didn't have Tito's photograph hanging in the classroom. And I don't know how that happened. However, I was in that situation thinking how to answer the students. And I thought they would say... because exactly in that class there was a student whose father was mayor of Suhareka.

One of the students got up and asked, "Teacher, why is it only my class, our class, that doesn't have Tito's photograph?" And I said, "You know what," I said, "You know what," I said, we indeed had photographs of our *rilindas*²² outside, Naim Frashëri, Abdyl Frashëri and these figures. I said, "You know what," I said, "we are missing that one but we have some other photographs substituting it in the corridor," you know. And in a way I made it seem like... I let them know that the pictures we had there are enough, more than the other one. So you had to get out of situations and find different ways to overcome situations.

Anita Susuri: Yes, when the demonstrations started in March of '81...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Did you know it was going to happen in advance?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I was working at the school, at the school here, *Bashkim-Vllaznim*, [then] the name, today it's *7 marsi*. Qefsere, my friend, told me that there will be, there will be a demonstration on March 26, because the ones on March 11 were already done. And I went to school, I left my coat at

²² Figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian political and cultural movement for national liberation.

school. At first I thought of not letting them know where I was going, but I knew that if I was absent the whole day the principal would take measures, why are the students being noisy, why this.

I told a colleague of mine that we will go to Pristina together. He had some private business regarding his car, for personal reasons, he wasn't aware of the demonstration that would happen in Pristina. He told me, he asked, "Can you cover for me because I will go to Pristina?" "No," I said, "I," I said, "have an exam in Pristina and I will come to Pristina," and I said, "we will go together with your car." I notified the principal that I was going to Pristina and that someone had to substitute my classes. I also notified a colleague of mine and we went to Pristina.

Actually, he was headed towards the student dorms as if he knew, he actually didn't know at all that there would be a demonstration there. I said, "You know what," I said, "drop me off here because I will meet a colleague," I said, "who I will take the exam together with and we will go there together," he told me, "Today it's Tito baton and," he said, "the students have gathered and I guess they're going there since Tito's baton will pass by," and I didn't say a thing. He went by car, and I was dropped off there. I found the crowd of students at the dorms' yard.

There was a debate between [Azem Vllasi](#), Sanije Hyseni was there, she would come from the Committee back then. Students had their complaints and they began coming out with political demands, "Release our friends from prison," "Trepça works, it should work for Kosovo, not for the other Yugoslavian republics," that's where "Kosovo Republic" was born, and then the other slogans. And they weren't convinced, I mean, neither Azem Vllasi, nor Sanije, they weren't convinced by our demands and they left us, they went about their business. We were doing our thing and we decided to go out to the city center.

But, there were some barricades at the student canteen and at the crossroads near the police [station] at the time. It was very impossible to go to the city [center], because there it was happening, they were expecting Tito's baton. We on the other side protested and demonstrated and we couldn't, we couldn't go to the city center. However, all the activity that day happened at the dorm yards, at that plateau near where the *1 October* Hall is now, and so it happened there. But it was, I saw girls and boys who were arrested, they were tortured in all kinds of ways. But that adrenaline kept us, it kept us alive and the protest continued until the late night hours.

Anita Susuri: Was there violence, did they use guns, for example, firearms?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I remember that a demonstrator got injured with teargas because he tried to throw it away and he cut three off his fingers. There were beatings, there were, there were, whoever they could catch, because the crowd was so big that we went through to the dorms in those... I had the luck to be at the plateau and I wasn't, I wasn't arrested, I wasn't, I mean, nothing happened to me

that day. And then we dispersed and went into houses. Regardless if we knew each other or not we went to houses to sleep that night and we took shelter.

Anita Susuri: Where did you go, for example?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I went with my friend Qefsere to a person from the same place as her in Kodra e Diellit where his house was and we were lucky that he was from the same place as her and we knew him. He was a trustworthy person and we spent the night there. The next day in the morning we took some books as if we were going to class and we all went our way, because the next day there was no demonstration. We dispersed and there were no more [demonstrations] until April 1 and 2. But April 1 and 2 were focused in Pristina, and when April 3 was in Ferizaj as far as I remember and so on, there were all kinds of protests in different cities.

Anita Susuri: Were you in Pristina on April 1 and 2 [1981]?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, I wasn't, I wasn't...

Anita Susuri: What was the situation like in Suhareka?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: There were organized events in Suhareka too, the main event here happened in Prizren. My late sister was in Prizren and got arrested. And it's interesting to say because when she was arrested, there were three policemen and two other policemen went to take the other students. Because it was mainly done by Prizren students from the Higher School and high schools, high school students.

The policeman who remained turned his back, it made her understand he was telling her, "Run!" She ran at that moment and went to a private home, she stayed there until around the evening and the woman of the house took her to the bus station. Because the bus station was supervised by UDB and its people. She took her there pretending she was going to her [maternal] uncle, she got her on the bus. In order for others to hear, she said, "Okay my daughter, send regards to uncle and I will wait here for you at the bus station tomorrow and we will go home." And then she came home and that was done, that night. So, there were activities happening here.

Anita Susuri: After that day, when you were at the demonstration in March, were they worried when you went back home? Did you contact them?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes. I then came home and yes, my father, my father was expecting news, what news we would bring from Pristina, my mother as well. It was... at the time... then the demonstrations gave a new breath to the situation in Kosovo. I can say that the March and April Demonstrations of that time were the foundation of today's Kosovo. And then there were protests

constantly, there were demonstrations, there were various organized events until the '90s. And then they revoked Kosovo's autonomy, when all the people went out on the streets. Then they asked for Azem Vllasi and [Kaqusha Jashari](#). At some point they punished and punished us. However, the situation was such that they asked for them for the sake of the situations that were happening at that specific period of time. Like that.

Anita Susuri: Even politicians changed based on the situation...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, of course. But even today, today I know people who were, as they say, they looked after Yugoslavia and Serbia back then and today they come out as more patriotic than the ones who sacrificed at the time, they spent years in prison and were beaten and tortured and anathematized. Today, oftentimes when I see them, to tell you the truth, I'm surprised at how they can do it. For example, people of that kind touching up their profile to fit the situation at the time.

But they infiltrate and fit whatever type of situation that comes. Whereas the ones who are ideal, they persist, persist on the principle of who they were and they will remain like that until the end of their lives, so unchanged. Unchanged in a positive sense, regarding what they did and, I mean, to this day Kosovo needs people [like that]. Of course, it needs people and devoted people to create a strong country.

People who were unstable in life and who tried to profit for their families, for the person, for... they are harmful to the country too, to society and everyone. But now we hope, maybe there will come out newer and more advanced generations, whether politically, or in professions and... to wake Kosovo up because it's been 20 something years and still, our schools still don't function properly, universities don't function properly. And then what's to feel sorry for is our hospitals, our medical system.

Maybe [since] I spent 31 years in Sweden and I lived in Kosovo just as much as I did in Sweden. When I come from that life and see the situation in Kosovo it really seems like my country is doing... it's an undesirable situation, not as it should be. We thought that after the war in Kosovo, we would advance Kosovo like Switzerland and we often said it in our conversations and stuff. But, many things deviated after the war. It was deviated by politics itself at first from the people in municipalities, institutional people. So, it has to be changed, it has to be better.

I am not a politician, I don't do politics at all, I am not a member of any political party, but I can tell good from bad, evil from difficulty. I hope something becomes better.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: You were then imprisoned in '82, in the beginning, in February...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: You said that you went to school, but how do you remember that moment?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I was actually teaching, I was in the class and a person from UDB, he had gone to the school principal and asked for me. And the principal sent the janitor, he said, “Go call teacher Zyrafete.” But I don’t... I’m sure he... he maybe saw who was inside [the principal’s office], I don’t know the details. But I saw that when he came to tell me, he was, he wasn’t, he was stressed in a way and he didn’t even greet me as he usually did with, “Good day, good morning,” he didn’t, he just opened the door and said, “Teacher,” he said, “the principal,” he said, “asked you to urgently go to the room of... to his office.”

I’m surprised at how, in that way, you know he addressed me. I told the student supervisor, “Look after the class until I get back.” And I went to the principal’s office and saw the person there. I had seen him in the streets of Suhareka and recognized his face. However, I wasn’t aware that he was involved with the Internal Affairs Secretariat of that time. I saw him there. Before the principal said anything, he spoke to me, he said, “Do you know who I am?” “Yes,” I said, “I’ve seen you in the streets of Suhareka but...”

Anita Susuri: Was he Albanian?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: He was Albanian. I said, “I’ve seen you,” I said, “in the streets of Suhareka,” I said, “I recognize your face.” He said, “I am an inspector,” he said, “of the Internal Affairs Secretariat of Kosovo,” and I immediately realized the reason and intention of him coming there. From there he took me and sent me to the police station in Suhareka and he interrogated me more generally and then he sent me to Prizren’s SUP.²³ And then he handed his task over to Daut Morina, who was the one who, I mean the *supovc*²⁴ who had my case. So, he was the main one. But then the guy I mentioned before would come, Krasniqi, and some Serbs would come too. Now I’ve forgotten their names, unfortunately I’ve forgotten their names too because I wanted to erase them from my memory.

One would come in, the other would go out. All sorts of questions. As hard as the physical torture was, so were the mental ones because they would threaten you with the nastiest words. I can’t say them here, the vocabulary they used. But, for the girls, for the women who were imprisoned, besides the physical torture, what was more painful was the threats, they would affect your morals, they would make you do inappropriate gestures. However, we were honorable in our actions. We were honorable.

²³ SUP - Acronym for *Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova*, which translates to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, of the Yugoslav Socialist Federal Republic.

²⁴ The people who worked in the Secretariat of Internal Affairs were referred to as *supovc*.

For me it was more important [or acceptable] to kill me there or we passed out many times due to the torture. They attempted to in their animalistic ways.

I say often that not even Hitler's gestapo did things like that and didn't behave in the manner the people who spoke Albanian did. And this was the worst, because it was the ones speaking Albanian. It wasn't the ones we expected it from, where all the bad things came from, but it was the ones speaking Albanian, speaking our language. That was painful.

Anita Susuri: Was there physical violence? Beatings?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: There was.

Anita Susuri: From several people or...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: There was. Many times it was two or three of them, it wasn't just one individual. Many times there were two or three, and... There was a case once here in Suhareka, Teuta [Bekteshi] from Kumanovo, a medical student, and a girl from my hometown here, Shemsije Elshanaj, and they had decided, they wrote the slogan "Kosovo Republic" on a six-seven meter long canvas and they had decided to wave it from the tallest building in Suhareka at the time, it was in the center of Suhareka. They didn't manage to unfold it, to wave it down and they were later discovered.

One of them, Shemsije, came to our family, whereas Teuta went to another family. They were arrested the next day, I think. They were arrested and then they came and arrested us too, me and my two sisters and the other girl where Teuta was saying, Selvije, I don't remember her last name. They placed me and my sister in some kind of room there that was dark, I think where he served coffee, I don't know for whom, the maintenance worker. They locked us in that room. While they interrogated my little sister, on the floor above and they tortured her physically and I heard the noises...

Anita Susuri: How old was she?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: She was 16-17 years old. And to tell you the truth, I hit the door and the door frame broke and I started climbing up the stairs to see what was happening there. And two other cops came out of their offices and grabbed me and so they didn't allow me to go up there. These were, they did it intentionally, so they tortured her for us to hear it, to hear it and to be defeated mentally and then give out details, give out information. However, we were determined in that aspect and we resisted all of those things...

Anita Susuri: This happened earlier or at the time when you were arrested?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: This was after my imprisonment.

Anita Susuri: Aha!

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, so after my imprisonment. And after me my sister Myrvete was sentenced to two months. This, this was, I was sent to the Prison of Mitrovica. She and her friend were arrested in Suhareka. But my sister was sick beforehand and the doctor here in Suhareka told her to undergo a surgery in Prizren. She went to the hospital and got surgery on that day and the day she got surgery, UDB went to arrest her at the hospital. But, Arif Elshani happened to be there, a chief medicinal technician and, in collaboration with the other doctors, didn't allow it. Because she was freshly operated on and they didn't allow it, I mean, he told them that she was their patient or what do I know and didn't let her go that day.

However, the next day they went and took her and sent her to the security rooms in Prizren and they tortured her physically and mentally and they sentenced her to two months and they sent her to the Prison of Mitrovica. There I met... because in the Prison of Mitrovica it was interesting, we would be informed as soon as a new prisoner would come in. I was in a cell, it was at the end of the corridor and my sister was in cell number 3. They said, "A new girl came in, a high school student from Suhareka."

I immediately asked, "Who is she?" Because we would know when the guards got in and out through the heels there we would know when they went to the corridor and the first cell in the Prison of Mitrovica, which was near the main entrance where you would enter the women's and girls' pavilion, you would receive information that the guard got in or out through knocks, we would know, I mean, our signs, we would communicate with each other. When the guards left we got up there and found out who came in. I found out, I mean, I talked to my sister and it was her.

She told her story of how she got there, how they took her from Prizren's hospital, how they sent her to the investigation, how they sentenced her to two months and brought her there. Of course, I felt bad because I knew that my sister wasn't physically well after the surgery, but they exploited all of these things, they used them to lower us to the ground and to give information and to fall under their influence. We tried on our own to not fall under their influence, to withstand, and so on.

Anita Susuri: When you appeared before the court, the courtroom, I mean, what was the verdict for you? With what...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, I was sentenced based on Article 133 for Propaganda for hostility against the system of Yugoslavia, against Yugoslavia. Based on that Article, somebody could be sentenced from one to ten years [in prison], if I'm not mistaken. I was sentenced to 18 months as I said. After prison all of my rights were restricted. I didn't have the right to work, not in state institutions, nor to do sports as I did before, nor literary activity. So, I either changed my name or I found friendly connections to publish poems here and there.

So, I mean, I moved from that small prison to the big prison as they called it in Kosovo and until I married my husband. Before I got married I formalized my marriage to my husband in order to change my last name. I changed my last name and then I had the opportunity to work for about four-five years in the municipality of Klina. After five years they tracked me there too and they fired me. From there I went to the municipality of Lipjan, in Gadime. I saw in a newspaper that they were looking for a physical education worker there, they were asking for a teacher. I sent my application there, they accepted me and I worked there for several months. They were asking for that police clearance certificate that was required at the time. I had nowhere to get it from.

In the first case my husband illegally got it at the Municipality of Klina. I mean, he got it without an official protocol and he sent it to the school secretary. This is how I got employed there, and then after five years I'm sure these committee workers collaborated, collaborated and tracked me and reported me. Whereas when I got employed in the municipality of Lipjan, in Gadime, I had nowhere to take that [clearance]. And after three months, I think I worked for three months, they fired me from there too and I had no other solution besides emigrating. I felt at risk during that time, because of my activity in the municipality of Klina with the Women's Forum. I was forced to emigrate away from my homeland with my family.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back to the prison for a bit, when you were sentenced, were you in a group or...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, I was sentenced alone. I was sentenced based on that Article alone. I am very happy that I didn't have other people with me, I was sentenced alone. And then, there in prison, actually in the courtroom, my father and mother were there and there wasn't, it was closed to people, I mean, the general public. I remember, there was an office there, the judge, and my defender. I didn't even ask for a defender, it was them, because based on state regulations a defender must have been there. I was sentenced. I served a portion in the Prison of Mitrovica, and then I was moved to Lipjan.

Anita Susuri: What was Mitrovica like...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Mitrovica was...

Anita Susuri: Because people say the prison was really bad...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Mitrovica was a hell prison, it was a hell prison. Mitrovica, the Prison of Mitrovica, was an investigative prison and until one completed the investigation process, they went through hell. We attempted to protect each other in some way when we went into those investigation rooms, to wear thick clothes to protect ourselves from the baton, from that metallic baton that the

investigators used. But, it was impossible because they knew. They undressed us and left us wearing only a thin blouse. They would torture us.

We passed out so many times and they splashed water on us so many times. They would splash water, because they would keep us there for hours on end. They would take you in at the most unsuitable time for a person. So, they would take you in at the early hours of the morning, right at the time when you were in deep sleep. So, Mitrovica really was... the food was catastrophic, there was not enough heating, we slept on some mattresses, what do I know, stuffed with lint, I don't even know what they were stuffed with. But there was a [high] level of uncleanliness.

As much as we tried to keep the hygiene within the cell... we had the right to go to the toilet once in the morning, just to complete those morning rituals, to wash our teeth, our face, and you didn't have the right to go to the toilet for the remaining part of the day. There were some containers, they had a lid and we had to complete our physiological processes during the day there in the room. We tried, and maybe we had stomach issues and stuff, and pain and stuff, to preserve the atmosphere and not complete those physiological procedures and only go to the toilet the next day. It was a very, extraordinarily difficult prison.

Anita Susuri: Were there many of you in one cell?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Well, that varied there. On the dates of these demonstration anniversaries the prison became overcrowded. There were so many of us in one cell, that sometimes even the oxygen had to... we'd have to share it in parts. But, sometimes it could happen that we were alone. I remember after my arrest, they changed my cell after about three months. I was with Drita Kuqi, Xhevahire Rrahmani and a girl from the municipality of Kamenica, I unfortunately don't remember the name, we were imprisoned due to our political activity. While there were ones for murder too, for that kind of stuff.

They changed our cells, they sent me to cell number 2 from cell number 4 where I was and I met Hidajete Osmani and some other girls there. And then, some of them who were sentenced for offenses were released, I was left with, it was only me and Hidajete Osmani and a woman who was there because of prostitution. Then it came time for Hida [Hidajete] to [be sentenced], she was sentenced, there got a binding sentence and it was time for her to go to the Prison of Lipjan. When she was sent to the Prison of Lipjan, it was only me and that other woman left, Fatime, or I don't know what her name was. At that point I fully realized that I was in prison. Because for as long as it was two-three of us for the same, for the same...

Anita Susuri: Cause.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Cause, for us it was a great ease. But, when I was by myself or with someone who you didn't want to be with, you really felt, you really felt that you were in prison.

Anita Susuri: Was there internal communication, for example, through a letter where you wrote something in prison?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Inside the prison we communicated more verbally, for example, personally, me and my friends who were there. It was the cell, and then it was the metallic doors, but on top of the doors there were... because they were on the corridor, the prison was circular. The corridor was circular and then there were the cells. And so the windows didn't have a yard view but they had a corridor view. And those windows weren't made of glass, they only had bars. We would climb on those door latches to the bars up there and we could hear each other very well from cell to cell, because there was no glass to dampen our voices. We would talk, and talk.

We recognized each other by voice very well. Then to identify who it was, when we went for walks in the prison yard we would tell them to go in line, for example Lumnije Azemi, we had pseudonyms there, "Cuca should go first, Flaka second, Shkëndije third." So we would know who it was. In that way we knew who it was, who was the next one in line, that's what we did.

Anita Susuri: How long did the physical violence against you last?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Until the investigations stopped, the investigations continued until the indictment became comprehensive. It varied, for someone it was longer, for someone else it was shorter. For example, I was at the Prison of Mitrovica for eight months, a little before hitting eight months, I stayed in Mitrovica. My sentence became binding and what's interesting, they released me. After the trial I was released until my sentence became binding. Because they gave you a time window for you to file a complaint and then your sentence would be increased or lowered.

From the Prison of Mitrovica, when I went from the Prison of Mitrovica to the court in Prizren, I was released. After one year I went and continued in Lipjan, in the Prison of Lipjan. It was, I mean, my imprisonment... what it was used for I don't even know myself. There was an alternative to let me free in order to find my links or the people who came to visit my family. For example, my friends came to illegally visit me often when I got out of prison, because we agreed while in prison, we agreed that whoever was released, we would go to visit our friends' families.

For example, when I was released from the Prison of Mitrovica... because the trial was in Prizren. I was sentenced to 18 months in prison and then I had to go and take my clothes that were in Mitrovica. I would go with the police car with which they drove me from Mitrovica to Prizren. I had to go back in the same car to Mitrovica and take my clothes and then my family members would come get me with a civilian car, I mean. I said, "I don't," I told my brother, "I don't want to come directly home, I want to go

back to Shtime,” because a friend of mine from Shtime who we were in prison with in Mitrovica and I had to inform her family about her situation, her state in Mitrovica. We went there, we hung out.

Then I visited the family of Teuta Bekteshi in Kumanovo, in Macedonia. We visited our friend’s [families] where we were able to and talked about the prison. To reassure the family members, to lift... because they were worried about how we were doing there, what were the circumstances, what was the situation. To stimulate the family members a little that we weren’t doing as bad as it was pretended. At least morally we weren’t doing bad, and so on.

Anita Susuri: What was Lipjan’s prison like?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: The Prison of Lipjan was a little different, it was an open prison, a free prison as it was called at the time, because the visits were free. So, from the pavilion we were in, we would go, there was that visitors’ hall and what made us feel good was that when we went to that office or visitors’ hall we wouldn’t meet our family members first, but we would go to the family members of our friends. We greeted them, we would go, talk to them. Actually we dedicated a few minutes to the other families and then we came to ours. The organizing was exceptional, a happy feeling, a very, very positive feeling. We would feel fulfilled with that, with that feeling, that principle. Because we stood by all and all stood by us. Like that, and that’s how we spent our days in prison.

Anita Susuri: What was the situation like with the family, did they have the right, I am sure they had the right to come visit but were they worried?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, of course they were worried, because actually we couldn’t talk about everything we wanted to talk about. Because although it was a free prison in Lipjan, the guards were there. However, what was most important is that in the Prison of Lipjan among the guards, we had won over a lot of the guards. And we treated them like we do our friends, you understand? For example, I remember a case when Kadrie Gashi had gotten her eye injured in the investigative prison and they operated it in Pristina. When they brought her to Lipjan her situation worsened and we would ask to bring doctors there or to take her to a doctor.

They wouldn’t resolve her issue, I mean, they would leave her in that condition and we revolted and protested. They took us and sent us to those small dungeons, solitary confinement as they were called, they sent us there. Then the guard would come... because the solitary confinements were located in the men’s pavilion and policemen guarded. The guard would come and open those, we referred to those small holes on the door as slots, they would open them and tell us, “Now you can communicate with each other. But, when you hear me coughing you have to absolutely stop the conversation.” So, it was also them, when the guards were good they positively contributed to our side.

Whereas the guards there in the women and girls' pavilion, we started to connect more and win them over and they would even bring us things that were banned in prison. So, we still keep in touch to this day with some of them (smiles), now through tools, through social media and stuff. Whereas in Lipjan²⁵ it was a different story. In Lipjan [Mitrovica] it was, it was... the guards were very strict. It was... they would take us and as I mentioned in that story about the conversations, they would take us to an office there and threaten us. But, we still kept doing our thing (laughs).

Part Five

Anita Susuri: You told me about the problems you had after the prison, so you also lost your right to graduation...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes. I had one exam left to graduate, two actually. I was at a high risk of not graduating too. Thanks to Gafurr Kabashi, a person from my hometown, who was on friendly terms with my gymnastics professor, because I had finished the equipment exam. Neshat Koshi was my professor from Gjakova and to tell you the truth he didn't bother a lot about that exam and so I finished it. I graduated thanking [him] because he had told him my situation. He told him I was in prison and everything and he appreciated my effort and in a way he passed me in that exam although I wasn't as good as I should've been, but I passed it and I managed to graduate.

But, the matter of employment was, it was very difficult at that time to, to continue work and to work in a way you wanted to in front of your students. Because I often turned the physical education class into a historical one or something like that, you know. Because at that time physical education as a school subject had its own hardships, it didn't have enough requisites to teach a class exactly as we should in a pedagogical way, as we were taught to teach it. We lacked the necessary tools. I had the physical education hall in Suhareka, in Gllareva I didn't have anything. Besides balls, and a shot through which we taught tactics of throwing the shot, there was absolutely nothing else. I had to improvise things to teach the class. And there I often taught, I taught history and geography and other stuff.

Anita Susuri: You told me about that interrogation of your sister and that they took her and tortured her. But did it occur that they took other people too?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes. I've seen it many times, not only me but they took my father many times, they took my sisters, my brothers. My brother was refused the right to employment. He stayed, he was a graduated professor for 12 years and he didn't manage to, to get a job, until the educational system which was under the umbrella of the Yugoslavian system fell. Until the Association of Albanian Teachers which was founded at that time and they took the institutions of Kosovo, I mean, education

²⁵ The speaker meant to say Mitrovica.

and some... then he worked in those home schools.²⁶ Actually my brother is no longer with us, because COVID took him.

I did a monograph about his life. He was a very great activist here in the Municipality of Suhareka, and not only that. And founder of the Democratic League. He was a very [pro] multi-party person, he didn't want to follow that monistic system, because he was the founder of the LDK branch in Suhareka, he was a founder of the **AAK**²⁷ and another party. I didn't know that, actually I was told by his friends who I hung out with two-three days before. However, our family was always under scrutiny by the system and they restricted us from many things. As I stressed earlier, my sisters were expelled from school. My little sister wasn't allowed to study, neither was my other sister. They, I mean, they didn't allow her to study. And so on.

Anita Susuri: Were the questionings followed by physical violence?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: The interrogations?

Anita Susuri: The interrogations.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, yes. Every time that, I mean, people from UDB weren't satisfied with the information we gave, with, they couldn't get what they wanted, of course, they attempted to get to where they wanted through physical violence. But, there, I mean they intended but never could achieve their goal.

Anita Susuri: [The Reconciliation of the Blood Feuds Campaign](#) also began in 1990...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And I know that you participated. If you could...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I, to tell you the truth, wasn't able to be very, very active in this direction because I had my one-year-old daughter. But, I was in Suhareka at my father's, and a friend of mine came and said, "We have a blood feud [meeting] at a village of the Municipality of Suhareka and you have to be there at all cost." And I had to leave my daughter under the care of my mother and my sisters and I went to the village of Budakova, it was Budakova. I was with Professor Shala, with a reconciliation elder, a reconciliation facilitator of the time, Qamil from the village of Reqan, I don't

²⁶ By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

²⁷ The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo is a political party in Kosovo. The party was formed in 2001 after having previously operated as a coalition of five parties since 2000.

know his last name. We called him elderly Qamil at the time. We went to that family who had a blood feud with another family and the blood had to be forgiven.

I remember, it was night, there were no lights, there were no lights in the village. We traveled with that tractor to that family where we had to go. The *oda* was full of men, it was me and two other younger girls. I was very happy, I felt very privileged even though we went there for a very highly humane act to facilitate the reconciliation of two families so their feud wouldn't continue. When we went to... and they forgave the blood. We had to travel for a while with that tractor, because that village was a neighborhood, a neighborhood. It was a neighborhood like that, after ten minutes we had to travel to the other neighborhood.

I remember I spoke that night, in that gathering where we were and I said, I told them I was a girl, a mother of a one-year-old girl. I said, "For the sake of this reconciliation, of forgiving blood, of this blood," I said, "I left my daughter," I said, "and I had to be with her, I sacrificed several hours," because she had to be breastfed, "and I sacrificed all that to come here and facilitate the blood reconciliation" and exactly, no, maybe I didn't influence it completely because everyone else who was with us spoke too. But, the main thing that we got was the blood reconciliation and we went to that other family. We notified them and it was a great enthusiasm, we were all happy. That job was done successfully.

Anita Susuri: During the '90s, were you teaching in home schools or how did you engage? Or you went...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: No, before going to the home school, because when it, when the schools were closed down there was that parallelism, because they separated Albanian students from Serbian students. They scheduled for Serbian students to go to school in the morning, and they scheduled Albanians for the afternoon. Now I don't know exactly how long that lasted. Before the home schools started, me and my husband made the decision to go into exile, because at that time people worked with no income and it was more than a year before we migrated, we worked with no wages, there were no wages at that time.

I had two daughters, I was pregnant with my third child and I had no other alternative. Because besides the economic hardships, I also had a health issue that I had to ensure an injection after birth at all costs. That wasn't provided in Kosovo, back then the medical situation was catastrophic. We had to make the decision to leave and in '92 we fled. It was a little before giving birth. After 20 days of going to Sweden my son was born, Mërgim,²⁸ our third child. Then we had to organize, to get involved in the system of a whole new country and life continued there for me.

Anita Susuri: Were you there during the war too?

²⁸ Mërgim means exile in Albanian.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, I was there during the war. We were, we were very active with fundraising for the three percent²⁹ and then with fundraising of *Vendlindja thërret* [Alb.: Homeland calling]. Albanians in Sweden responded to the calls en masse and there was extraordinary contribution. We really weren't in the war physically, but believe me, we were very mentally drained as an Albanian community. Because we all knew we had our families here and we knew that war didn't bring good things.

Many times we spent days on end in front of the TV watching news from all kinds of channels. Although we didn't understand English, we didn't understand German, we didn't understand these languages, only watching inserts if we could see a family member, if we could see someone we knew. Because even communication through the phone wasn't possible back then. It was a chaotic situation, it was very difficult. We were in a lot of discomfort.

Anita Susuri: Your family, for example, your parents were alive at the time...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: They were.

Anita Susuri: Where?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, they were in Suhareka. At first they were in Suhareka, and then one of my sisters, she is unfortunately no longer with us, she was, she didn't manage to go through to Albania. She spent the whole wartime here in Kosovo taking shelter in one village to another. She prepared food for the soldiers of the [Kosovo] Liberation Army, so she spent the whole time with her son and her husband in, in villages, in various shelters which existed back then in Kosovo. Whereas the other part of my family, my other sister and her family, my parents, brothers, their wives, their children and everyone were, they managed to go to Albania after some time.

My sister who stayed here the whole time, I mean, Kosovo, she then told us all kinds of stories. How people moved from place to place, those sacrifices, and so on. At the time before my family went to Albania, when the Serbian police kicked people out of their houses and lined them up in Suhareka's square, they divided men from women. They put the men, they lined them up to shoot them. Among those men there was also my brother's son. He was a minor, he was 12 years old as far as I remember. At first they and my brother stopped... he was my brother's only child. There happened to be a policeman, now I don't exactly know if he was or wasn't from Suhareka, but my brothers would tell me that he was told, one of them told him, "He is a child, let him go with the women because he is a child," you know. My brothers tell me, "When they removed Bardh," his name is Bardh, "when they removed

²⁹ The three percent fund was created by the Kosovo government in exile during the 1990s. All Albanians in the Diaspora and Kosovo were duty-bound to pay three percent of their salary into this fund to finance Kosovo's parallel institutions.

Bardh from the lineup where they lined us up to execute us, we felt so relieved, because at least one of the boys is surviving.”

But they were lucky because in that... in the meantime when they put them before execution, somebody came and gave the order that everybody had to be moved from there and to go on their way to Albania. Then they had a truck, they took the truck and they got on their way to Albania. When they crossed to Albania, they had my phone number there in Sweden. And trust me, when they called me, when they told me they went there and they're safe and sound, I don't know, it's such a happy feeling, so painful, so difficult, that I don't even know how I spoke to them, how I conversed. It seemed like life started from scratch, from the beginning.

For my sister who remained in Kosovo for a long time, we didn't know if she was alive or not. However, she also prepared food, she prepared food for the Liberation Army and after some time with the phone used by KLA's soldiers she managed, I mean, to call me and tell me she was well, that she was alive. She didn't dare to mention where she was, but enough for me to find out she was alive. Then I also informed my family members that she was alive, that she was living and until the end of the war that is how we stayed in touch.

Anita Susuri: How did you, I am sure you found out through the media that the war ended. What was that feeling like?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes. I was attending a course at that time, I would go to school there in Sweden and there was the dilemma if NATO would go in or not. Sometimes there would be a decision for NATO to hit Yugoslavia, sometimes not. Us Albanians who were there, talking about our theories about how it would happen, what would happen, and then we found out through the information media that, I mean, NATO already hit the Serbian military bases. At that point we felt reborn once again. Of course it was an exceptional joy. We were then trying to get those inserts from every TV show, we would record them with our cassettes so we could save them, so we could then have them for our children, for our successors. It was an exceptionally good situation.

We would then organize various activities there, concerts, different things, because we also needed mental relaxation. We were extremely, as I said, mentally charged because it was that spiritual side, our families in our homeland and we knew what the state was like here [in Kosovo]. A chaotic state, a very difficult state. That was... when freedom came, each of us in exile were trying to come and see Kosovo and what it was like...

Anita Susuri: That's what I wanted to ask...

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: When we came here it was a great chaos, potholes in the streets (laughs). We came to Macedonia by airplane and my little brother had come to get my sister who was coming from

Germany. I was not aware that my sister was coming from Macedonia and... actually I'm wrong, we drove from Sweden but we came through Macedonia because that was the waybill of the time and the streets that we needed to come to Greece, from Greece to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Kosovo. It was a very long road.

My little brother, his children met him and hugged him and eased the longing. He told us, "Be careful," he told my husband, "Be careful with the car, don't drive fast because the road is a little rough," he told us, you know. Anyway we got on our way to Kosovo, the road wasn't just bad but it was super bad (laughs). Because every meter there was a pothole here, a pothole there. He was being careful with the car because we had to drive back with the same car. It took us, I mean, from the border in Macedonia to Suhareka, about five hours, as I remember. An uncomfortable road.

When we came here we hugged our family members and the children. We were very excited. It was an incredible vacation that we had. Because now we come here often, we come here often. Especially me and my husband, we are now resting and we come here several times a year. But, we don't have that post war nostalgia anymore, like the one after the war. It was poverty, there was poverty, there was... a difficult life at the time, but the joy was superlative. Now the situation has changed a bit, it's not the same state as before.

Anita Susuri: Then you adapted to life in Sweden and you work there now?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Now I am a retiree, I retired a little early, one year and a half early, I have health issues. I worked all kinds of jobs in Sweden. At first we had to enter the Swedish state system. We were unemployed for about three years, because we had to wait to get a residence permit in Sweden. During this time period, in that place of asylum where we were waiting to receive it, I mean, to receive the Swedish residence permit, we were about 40 Albanian families. I saw that there were students of different generations who had left school in Kosovo and they came to Sweden.

One day my husband, while talking to fellow Albanians there, had made a decision to do something, to open an Albanian school at least for the time while we were there. To gather the children at a point because they had no activities, they would stay outside. In that yard where those asylum houses were at, because it was a big camp in the city of Degerfors. One evening my husband said, "It would be great," he said, "to work on the Albanian school, to open an Albanian school." I had my son, my son was just born, two-three months old, but I had so much will and I received his request so well and I immediately was ready to work with Albanian children.

He submitted it to the Swedish institutions, our request. They immediately approved it, they ensured us with the space, pens, papers, sheets, all kinds of books and we notified LASH, because LASH was functional in Sweden too. And then, it was founded at the time. We opened two classrooms with Albanian students. My husband took the older students up to the fifth grade, I took the younger ones

from the fourth grade. For three years we worked with Albanian students with no compensation, no wages, no income, nothing.

And then, when we were granted the residence permits we had to move to a different municipality and we moved. I couldn't immediately enter the educational system. I worked at a company where car parts were manufactured for a few years, like Volvo or Scania. And then, there was a vacant position in Vetlanda, not where I lived. A city which was 22-23 kilometers away and I worked there as an Albanian language teacher with Albanian children, but I also assisted in Swedish classes where there were Albanian children. I worked there for several years and the education, I mean, the regulations of Albanian teaching in Sweden were regulated with the system of Swedish schools.

Teachers there are paid just like teachers who work in regular Swedish schools, Albanians too. They are involved in the general teaching process and the teachers are assessed there, they receive points from Albanian language and I mean, those students who follow Albanian language, when they get graded of course their general points in the classroom are increased as well. So, the Albanian language teaching is well regulated in Sweden. And the students massively respond to the Albanian school.

What's worth stressing, maybe our generations who went there, we, of course, were aware of the importance of the Albanian school. However, our children deserve recognition, for example, I have two married daughters and four grandsons, and the generations of our children understood very well the importance of learning Albanian language and even their children respond to it, I mean, they respond to the Albanian school and go to the Albanian school en masse.

Anita Susuri: Is the Albanian community large in number?

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, it's a large community. There are, now, I don't know the exact number, but I am saying that there is no municipality in Sweden where there's no Albanian families. While the regulation of learning Albanian language is regulated, if inside the school there are only five students who learn Albanian, it's possible for them to learn in the Albanian school there, only five students. And there is almost no school where there's no five Albanian students studying there.

And then, for some time I also worked with, after teaching Albanian, because I had health issues and I stopped work. After my physical rehabilitation, I worked in a Swedish school, where Swedish students finish school during the day and their parents work until... while their parents are working they come from the school to extracurricular activities there. I worked with Swedish, Albanian, and students from other nationalities there, but with a Swedish personality.

It's... I would really like, I would like that preschool workers that work here in Sweden from lower classes that work here in Kosovo, I mean, to complete trainings in the Swedish state and to see that from the time of preschool, from those lower levels of education a person is equipped with the culture

of protecting the environment, how to behave in society, how to respect the family and many other things. So then by adulthood they begin taking, for a grown up student to gain the personal concept that they are now grown, and they would know how to act. These things are planted from an early age and they are things the Kosovar society needs.

Anita Susuri: You also wrote, you have published several books.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes.

Anita Susuri: You did writings.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Yes, I also write. I have been writing for a long time, but to tell you the truth I published my first book after the 1999 war in Kosovo. I was given the opportunity, I published it in Albania in the Dritëro printing house, which was directed by Dritëro Agolli's³⁰ daughter. When I published it, I don't have all the copies because they were distributed, and I found some here but I don't have some of them. I felt extraordinarily good when I published my first book. It felt like I gave birth to my first child, you know (smiles). I experienced it that way.

Then in continuation, every, when there was enough material to publish the first material and then the second and so on. Now recently I published two books, one is *Hieroglifët e shpirtit në trajtat e kohës* [Alb.: The hieroglyphs of the soul in the forms of time] and it's stories, essays, commentaries and interviews. A big portion of this book is about my friends, fellow imprisoned women in the prisons of Kosovo and not only Kosovo. And then... it mainly speaks about Albanian women and girls. It's about, there is a story about a mother who lost her family, her whole family in Kosovo and she emigrated to Sweden. How she talked with herself when a Swedish postman sent a delivery to her apartment and that postmen looked like her son to her.

Another Albanian mother went close to her and asked her, she said, "What are you talking about with yourself?" And she started telling her story about how the postman arrived, and he looked like her son and how she wanted to give the postman a sweater she had made for her son. Because internally in her brain that felt like he was her son, not like a postman, but like her son. She would talk to herself and say that that was her son, he had all the traits of her son, there's no way he wasn't her son. Only the language wasn't like her son's, he spoke Swedish. And some other stories I mean.

I would really like it if the readers... this book can be found in the book store Artini, there at the Albanological Institute, it's there. I left some copies there, of my two last books, and whoever is interested can find them there. I am continuing, now as a retiree I also have a little more time to work on it. I have a novel in handwriting, it's about war and love, the love of two youngsters and how war

³⁰ Dritëro Agolli (1931 – 2017) was an Albanian poet, writer and politician.

separates them. I won't dig into it deeper. I will leave it as a surprise for the readers when the novel arrives.

That's how I am continuing life, a little in Kosovo, a little more in Sweden because I can't separate from my grandsons (laughs) and my family. But, our journeys to our homeland happen more often now.

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Zyrafete, if you have anything else you'd like to add for the end.

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: I thank you for all of this conversation we had together. I was very pleased and happy we had this conversation together. In the end I would like to tell Kosovo's youth, because I see recently that the diaspora especially has become like a key, like a key to open new paths, to grow a part of the population to leave Kosovo and to migrate.

Emigration isn't an easy pill to swallow, it's a hard pill. I am saying that Kosovo was never in a better state. But who can make Kosovo better, it's Kosovo's youth, its people. Because the West can help us, Europe can help us, but our fate is in our hands. So focus on living and acting and contributing to our homeland. I would like to say this to the people whose intentions are to migrate.

Anita Susuri: Thank you a lot!

Zyrafete Kryeziu Manaj: Thank you for being with me.