

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH AFIDE TOPALLI KUKA
Kaçanik | Date: September 10, 2022
Duration: 80 minutes

Present:

1. Afide Topalli Kuka (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

Afide Topalli Kuka: I am Afide Topalli Kuka. I was born on 21.9.1959 in Greme, a village in the Municipality of Ferizaj. I finished elementary school in my hometown, high school in Ferizaj, and university at the Faculty of Law in Pristina. I come from a village family, a generous, patriotic family, and I am always inspired, I have always been inspired by my family. The various discussions... I was raised in the men's oda,¹ because back then villages had oda. There weren't different cafés to bring guests over, just *oda*.

Thanks to my brothers, two older brothers, they had friends, their circle was broad, and they had [friends] in Pristina, Gjiilan, Ferizaj, all over, and they discussed the systematic oppression of Albanians in former Yugoslavia. My idea, that I should do something, was born from those discussions that I witnessed, I heard. So, besides being brought up in that spirit by my family, I was also educated by my elementary school teachers about the socio-economic condition, the state of the nation, and the Albanian people's history; we had a foundation.

I can't forget to mention the head teacher of my class, he taught us Albanian language from the fifth to the eighth grade. He was an amazing teacher, he would teach us how to love our homeland, how to love, to love our flag, to love our homeland, how to hate the oppressor. My brother was also a teacher, he was a history teacher, Habit Topalli. He always taught us the history of the Albanian people, not the history of the Serbian people. I don't know what the teaching plan programs were back then, but the program should've been recorded in the grades register, but [even] the weakest student knew the history of the Albanian people.

All those generations that emerged, they are old now, they all know the history of the Albanian people, because there was no chance to pass without knowing the history of the Albanian people. There were great problems also in education because of the *rreth*,² the mentality. It wasn't easy for girls from the village to go to high school. But, thanks to my brothers... I remember they didn't enroll me on the first registration deadline. My father had his own beliefs, because there was a, a bad propaganda that the school, once you go to school you become a *shkinë*.³ I am saying it literally as they did.

Anita Susuri: What did it mean?

¹ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

² *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.

³ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Well, it meant that once you go to school, you will marry a Serb, you will marry... What do I know? And then my brother, my second brother said, "If you don't allow Afide to go to school, I will stop my education and I will flee this place." And my older brother enrolled me. He was very quiet, I don't know. He got everything done, but he was quiet. And one day before starting school, he brought me books, my uniform, so I started high school. And after me, every girl in my village went to school, I mean, in my *rreth*, because the village was big. Maybe in the other neighborhood, there were girls who went to school before me, but in my *rreth*, I was the only one.

However, even in high school we also had good professors, but we had others as well. So, UDB⁴ worked, especially on the educational staff, to try and get them on their side. So, we always had to be careful. Since the 1970s, in '79 I was already working with political literature but not in an organized manner. Some, my first connections were to Enver Topalli, he is a martyr. We were cousins and friends from the first grade and we were together during our studies too.

But, that's how it was because of the conspiracy, to not know where that literature was taken from, where those newspapers were taken from, for example, *Liria*, *Kushtrimi*. After '81, for example, the events, the world press, the events in Kosovo. So, there were political texts upon political texts. Later, in 1981, the demonstrations broke out which were given a very good name, "The Red Spring," because the ground was red with blood. In... during the demonstrations from March 26 to April 2 [1981], I played an active part in Pristina.

So, on March 26 I was arrested for the first time in the student dorms. Back then I used to travel, but I played an active part. I stayed with friends back then so I could be a participant. It was a great chaos, people were tortured on March 26. Everyone in the dorms got inside our rooms and when the police came in to take us out of the rooms, they didn't open the door but they broke it down with gun barrels, what were they, I don't know, a type of gun. They broke them down. When... we were seven-eight people, the rooms were full, we didn't have space and we couldn't get through to any room. I am sorry, we went to the bathroom, because there was even a lot of tear gas.

They grabbed us all by the arm and hit us with batons and when we got out in front of the dorm, there were policemen on this side and that side {shows with hands on both sides}. Something crossed my mind. In the Middle Ages, the punishment was to hit you on both sides with 300 sticks. I remember [they hit] all of us, not just me but all of us. The policeman who grabbed me and hit me, I don't know, for the second time, made me dizzy. Another policeman was Albanian, I don't know, I can't say whether he was good or bad, but he only said, "Idiots, don't hit them." And they took us inside a vehicle, they placed us like sardines, there was no room. I don't know how many people were there, on top of each other, we could barely breathe until we arrived at the police station.

⁴ The State Security Service – *Služba državne sigurnosti*, also known by its original name as the State Security Administration, was the secret police organization of Communist Yugoslavia. It was at all times best known as UDBa (pronounced as a single word and not an acronym), and was the most common colloquial name for the organization throughout its history.

When they took us to the police station they separated us, boys and girls separately. And then, I saw a friend from my studies there. I had lost my coat, I don't know. My shirt had paint all over. She said, "Oh, well you, now they won't release you *moj*."⁵ She took it off, she was wearing a knitted vest, she took it off and gave it to me. She said, "So, they won't see it." When it was time to interrogate me, about 1:00 AM they asked, "Where are you from?" "From Gjilan." I didn't tell them I'm from Ferizaj and I don't remember the name I gave them. And I was released there. When they released me, I didn't know where to go...

Anita Susuri: The paint you're mentioning, how did you get it on you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: The paint, the paint came from the slogans they wrote, my colleagues wrote them, and I got close to help them with something. Not me, I wasn't organized like that, because I don't like to say I did something I didn't do. But I had a great will to help with everything. For me it was, for me it was only if you were pro or against that system and I must've caught a slogan and the paint was maybe wet, what do I know? I can't even explain it myself. [After my release] I started going straight to the apartment. The building was somewhere near the Llap Mosque, I was going the opposite way towards the hospital. And I turned back, I read, *Bankos*, where it used to be. I had passed through that street hundreds of times. I sat on the stairs, and I didn't know where I was headed, where I was. Because they threw a lot of tear gas. It seemed like a curtain was lifted and I read it, I knew where I was. Some boys came and said, "Do you need help?" "No, no," I said, "because I have recovered now," and it ended with that.

However, we started again, because... the demonstrations were in Ferizaj... I was in Pristina, and my brothers were participants. My second brother, Sabit, Sabit Topalli, was sentenced to two months. They released him after two months and they filed an indictment. UDB formed [surveillance] groups whenever they needed, within a day, one night, and they had formed a group. He didn't accept to surrender to the police, he remained underground for about three months. Our house was raided so many times, all those tortures were heavy on my parents. Because they would come, for example, the policeman would say, "If we catch your son, we will beat him up really badly." That is heavy for parents. However, that passed too.

My brother worked, the other one was suspended from his job. I remember when the Committee went to the school to denounce them, to denounce the demonstrations, and he didn't raise a finger. They repeated the same thing three times, and he still didn't raise a finger. They asked, "What about you?" He said, "Bring me a pencil," he said, "I won't denounce the boys of Kosovo, I won't denounce them." And from there, because they... and he justified the demonstrations, "It's right to have the status just like the other republics of former Yugoslavia," and I don't know what else. So, they fired him from his job. And then there came the informative talks. My sister was also fired from her job. So, for some time we collapsed financially.

Anita Susuri: How many children were in your family?

⁵ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

Afide Topalli Kuka: We? Four sisters and two brothers, yes.

Anita Susuri: I want to go back to your family a bit, the things you told me earlier about the discussions in the *oda* because you're saying that it started from there...

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, from there.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember, for example, what happened in your hometown during the Second World War? After the war it was Rankoivć's⁶ era. Did people talk about what they experienced?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes. My paternal uncle at the time came here with my father, my father... It was the weapon collection campaign in '56. My father wasn't home, my uncle was 17 or 18 years old, and they took him as a young man. He was barefoot and they walked him eight kilometers from the village in the snow and tortured him. They took him to Ferizaj. With all that pressure and torture, nobody can think positively about a system like that. We never expected anything good from that system. We never got anything good, only bad things. We never did.

Actually, even my uncle greatly contributed to our education, because maybe I'm going a bit ahead, but I'll connect it since I am talking about my uncle. When I was arrested in 1984, besides the raids, the demolitions and all that, he came to the police car there because there were two-three cars or what do I know? How many? He [my uncle] knocked on the window, and asked, "What's up buddy?" "No," he said, "my business isn't with you, I want to talk to the girl." He said, "Young girl," he said, "don't talk! It's better to come back dead with dignity, than alive without it." Then during all the investigations, "She doesn't dare to speak, she doesn't dare to because the old man tightened the leash." Like that.

Anita Susuri: Was your brother in any organization?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, he was, but fortunately he was never discovered. Now I will slowly tell you about the matter of my investigation and my brother. I will explain them to you in order. I... after, from '81 I regularly worked on distributing the underground press, *Titistët* [Alb.: Titoists], *Yje të pashume* [Alb.: Undying Stars], the international press around the events in Kosovo. *Kushtrimi*, *Liria* [Alb.: Freedom], *Zëri i Kosovës* [Alb.: Kosovo's Voice].

Anita Susuri: How did those fall into your hands?

Afide Topalli Kuka: They first fell into my hands from my cousins Berat Topalli and Enver Topalli, and then when my brother began his activity in '81, through my brother, but I also distributed [the press]. On February 9, 1984, I was arrested, I was caught somewhere, what do I know? We were sentenced to

⁶ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

three years for that. It was me, Minire Ramadani from the village of Talinoc and Sejdi Sejdiu from the Municipality of Lipjan, the Karaqicë village, if I remember correctly. In the trial, I was sentenced to three years. I served part of it in the Karaqicë prison, the pre-trial investigation process I served in Mitrovica, another part in Lipjan and a part in the Požarevac prison.

In the investigative prison, the guards didn't treat us right. I remember when they arrested us in the early hours of the morning and then the whole day we were in the offices of the State Security, interrogating us. When they brought me back it was sometime late, but we didn't have a watch, I don't know the time, and it was a basement of the Mitrovica prison. I said to her, the guard was Serbian, "Excuse me, the toilets?", and then going down to the basement, she pushed me down the stairs. Her name was Rozika. They called her Rozika, but I don't know...

Anita Susuri: Did she speak Albanian?

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, no, Serbian, Serbian.

Anita Susuri: Ah, a Serb.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, I spoke Albanian and she spoke Serbian. Because I never spoke to them in Serbian, ever. They kept us there for one night and the holding cell was the size of this room {refers to the interview space}, this was the size, I can't explain it, it was this size. Then there was a prisoner, because usually there was... it was to boost someone's morale with songs, with poetry, and he sang a song, *Në Dardani bjen ni tupan* [Alb.: A drum plays in Dardania]. And that voice felt like it came from the ground. Where is this voice coming from? Where is it coming from? The next day they placed me in the women's pavilion, in cell number 3. And after the investigations, because the investigations ended, we were sentenced. We came to Lipjan.

We had a strike there in Lipjan and the strike was the reason they transferred us. But first... because sometimes I may mix things up. Earlier, in the month of May in '85, there was a tailoring workshop, they made us sew clothes for the prisoners, what do I know? You had to work, to sew. The workshop leader was Mujedin Mulliqi. He said... he brought me the flag of Serbia to iron, he said, "Iron it!" I said, "I can't." "Iron it!", "I can't." "Touch it!", "I won't touch it." "Touch it, okay, just touch it," "I won't touch it." And then the director and everyone was notified, and they punished me with about 15 days in the cell. The prison was a cell on its own, but anyway, I meant solitary confinement which was at the youth detention center. Because in Lipjan there was no women's prison, but they sent me to the youth prison.

Then they came, I don't know, it was time to get a visit after two-three days, my family came. They didn't tell them where I was at all, "We don't know where she is." My brother went through State Security, through SUP⁷ to ask where I was. But, after some time my friend, my cellmate, Nazife Xhemjli, received a visit and told them to let my family know. She said, "Go to Afide's family and tell them what the deal is, so they don't worry because she's here and they can come visit at this time, at

⁷ SUP - Acronym for *Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova*, which translates to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, of the Yugoslav Socialist Federal Republic.

this date.” Then my family came at 8:00 AM, but until it was 1:00 PM, or who knows what the time was, they weren’t allowed to visit because I had to do it at an exact hour, exact minute.

When I got out of solitary confinement, it was two weeks, 15 days without showering, without brushing my hair, without changing clothes. I told my friends, “Come, give me clothes to change into,” I had Akile Dedinca in my cell and one of them was brushing my hair, one of them was blowing on my hands to warm me up a bit so my family wouldn’t see me like that. I went to the visitation. Fortunately, because my mother had health issues, she only visited me twice, fortunately she made it. “Are you well?” “I’m well,” I said. “But you are so pale *bre*,⁸ daughter, very cold.” I said, “No, I’m well,” I said, “but it’s Sunday, we have the right to nap, and I was asleep”. She said, “You are not well, but God bless, hopefully you’re alive.” I said, “I am alive, don’t worry.” After this case, the same leader again, he was problematic, he behaved in a way to make our lives more difficult than they already were...

Anita Susuri: He wanted to provoke you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes. And then they instigated a friend, Ajshe Gjonbalaj, she had a twelve-year sentence, related to work: she works, she doesn’t work. They took that friend, Ajshe, and transferred her. They didn’t tell us, we wanted to know her location, “Where did you take her?” And we went on strike, all the political prisoners, no distinction. I actually remember that we had, there was a woman older than us, Rexhie Mala, and we told her, “Auntie, auntie, you wouldn’t go on strike if you listened to us”. She said, “Are you insulting me?” She said, she said, “No,” she said, “that won’t happen,” and all of us went on strike.

Anita Susuri: A hunger strike?

Afide Topalli Kuka: A hunger strike. Now here’s something, because they took from us all the food we had there. There was [Teuta Hadri](#), a physician, Teuta Bekteshi, a physician as well. And they said, I am not sure which one of them, “Do you girls know what we should do? We take some coffee, and we put it behind the radiators in the bathroom, because when the physicians come, we will eat a spoonful of coffee and it will increase our blood pressure, so we don’t fall down”. And we also did that for three days in a row. They would say, “They are eating, where are they getting food?” But not even 20 minutes would pass and we would lie down, all of us. Sometimes we’d get energy, we would fix up some personal things and then we’d lie down.

And then they, five of us, at the cell again, they sent us to solitary confinement, Kadrie Gashi, Nazife, Trëndelina, and me. I hope I’m not forgetting somebody, and for one week we stayed there. From there they transferred us to the Mitrovica Prison, Mitrovica Prison as far as I know, for a week if I’m not mistaken, because it’s been a long time. When we went, they took me to the cell where Ajshe was, I found Ajshe there and after a week they transferred us to the Požarevac Prison.

⁸ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

Anita Susuri: You were on strike for a week?

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, three days. On the fourth day, we broke the strike because that was our agreement. We broke the strike on the fourth day, as far as I can remember, as far as I can remember. When they took us to Požarevac, we were all handcuffed, tied for the whole day. We left sometime in the morning, Požarevac isn't far from Mitrovica, we got there in the evening. We didn't know where they were taking us. Somebody said, "They are perhaps sending us to Croatia?" someone else, "Perhaps to Slovenia?", "Where are they taking us?" Sometime in the evening in Požarevac, they didn't even tell us where we were. They took us to some quarantine and the Serbian prisoners spread the rumor, we were wearing trainers, "Some women came from the sports field, some terrorists came."

The next day in order to know and properly verify that we were in Požarevac, Nazife Xhemajli said, "You know what? You stay here". Because there were Serbs in that quarantine too, "You stay here, distract them with chatting, I'll pretend I'm making the beds and", she said, "I'll see", she said, "if Qesfere Mala is here." When Qesfere finished her tasks she came out with *këngë e lehtë*,⁹ singing a *këngë e lehtë*. [Nazife] heard her and came back and said, "We are in Požarevac," she said, "because I heard Qesfere." We had enough turmoil and for me it was three-four months, not a lot because I was at the end of my sentence.

When they released me, they released me a day earlier. My family didn't know, my family was expecting me the next day. They [the police] told me, "You will be released from prison tomorrow and you will have to take the train." I went back and told my friends, I told them this and that. Nazife had the most experience in these matters, because her brothers had been imprisoned before and she got to visit them and deal with blackmail and all that. She said, "If you asked me, Afide," she said, "don't take the train." She said, "You're better off taking the bus," she said, "and follow public roads." "Alright." And that's what I decided to do. The next day when I was about to leave, they said, "You have to take the train," "Alright," I said, and went to the bus station. When I went to the bus station those two people who were...

Anita Susuri: Those who told you to take the train.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, by the prison premises, those two individuals were there. I went, bought a ticket and went on the bus. And then I heard two individuals speak Albanian on the bus, but in a different dialect. "Luckily you didn't fall into the hands of the Serbs, you look like you were just in prison, you..." Because I was released wearing prison clothes and nothing else.

Anita Susuri: Did the prison have some kind of uniform?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, a uniform, a uniform, a grey uniform, it was bad. There were some knee-high socks and they were kind of loose. There were some shoes, old women used to wear them, I don't know. I didn't say a word. When we went to Belgrade, because I went from Požarevac to Belgrade, when we went to Belgrade, they took my box [with personal items] and said, "There is no bus, you!"

⁹ Alb.: Light Music, is a music genre and radio format that was most popular during the 1950s to 1970s.

they said, “we will help you, you have to come with us.” I left my box, but I didn’t have anything in it. Maybe a book, I didn’t have anything important.

I went to the station and got my ticket. There, because fortunately my brother had sent me money a week earlier and they gave me that money, I gave them all. I don’t know because I don’t remember the amount of money I left them and the woman in the ticket office knocked, “Come back to take your change.” I was thinking to myself, I didn’t care about the change, I wanted to get on the bus as quickly as possible before somebody could see me. I got on the bus and when the bus was about to leave, they brought me the box and left. And then, they provoked me again, two other people from Belgrade again. They began again.

And then from Belgrade we stopped somewhere on our way to rest, I wasn’t sure if I should go out or stay inside alone. I looked, everyone got out, so I did too. I got out, I sat at a restaurant, I ordered something and maybe it’s inappropriate to say, but I had physiological needs. I didn’t dare to, I was thinking they might lock the door, it was a bigger problem. What I did, I went out in the yard and outside there was a turn and some trash cans, I did it there. And then, I didn’t touch my food at all, I didn’t touch it at all, and we got on our way. And I didn’t walk first nor last, I walked in the middle.

That also went on until Merdare, when we entered Merdare everyone started speaking in Albanian, the whole bus was with Albanians. A man said, “Let’s stop here in Podujevo,” he said, “because it’s far, there are no buses.” I said, “You’re speaking to me in Albanian now, huh? Now you’re speaking,” I said, “it’s not a problem, arriving here is like going home.” And I came back. Fortunately, I arrived at the bus to the village in time and the first person I saw was my cousin, Islam Topalli, Ylber Topalli’s father. And we went together. He said, “Afide,” he said, “don’t go inside right away. I will go in and inform them.” And so, we went back.

Part Two

Afide Topalli Kuka: Of course, there were health consequences, they were followed by treatment, by... But after that, I started again, but then, with organizations, with the Marxist-Leninist Organization of Kosovo, the Ferizaj district, in the Committee, I was in the Ferizaj district, yes.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back to your time in the prison for a bit.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: It was Požarevac you said, the prison was near Mitrovica but a little further. For example, how did your family come to visit you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: My family, my brother Habit never let go of my hand. Wherever I was, he came. Actually, actually, there was once a very harsh winter and he came to visit. The Serbs who were from around that area didn’t receive any visits. The ones who were from Kosovo, not only me, none of my friends ever missed a visit. I actually remember once he [my brother] came, his coat was ripped. I asked, “What happened?” He said, “The train nearly ran me over because I was tired. After the train started, I jumped off the train and my coat got stuck on the door but fortunately I survived.”

My brother in Mitrovica, prison after prison, never missed a visit. He brought a different family member each time, but he was there every time. Financially as well, he never left me without money, never! But we could never spend all the money, because they took it from us. Because we didn't have other means there, there was the *ekonomat*¹⁰ and you ordered things. For example, a yogurt or something, a newspaper and at the end they would say, "You can't, you're out of money."

Anita Susuri: Did you have the right to read in prison, to own texts?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, yes, literature, the novels that were allowed. But we mainly read in the Albanian language, yes, the newspapers. We didn't have newspapers in Požarevac, but we did in the Mitrovica Prison. But sometimes they would prohibit them, for example, if there was some article or something, they would prohibit it. So, let's go back to organizing...

Anita Susuri: So, what year was it?

Afide Topalli Kuka: It was 1984, '85, '86.

Anita Susuri: The years in which you were in the organization?

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, no after '86, '87 we already started with organizing. But it didn't last long, we were arrested in 1988. Because we took, we distributed tracts and we were mainly focused on former employees of the State Security, on sending them to their houses. I remember when we completed an action in '87, I don't remember the precise date but it was the fall, with a person I had in my group, Sebahate Mala, we walked from Gremë to Ferizaj. The action had to be done at 8:00pm, you didn't dare to finish it one minute earlier or later, because if you did it earlier the others could be caught, if you did it later and someone was caught you would be caught too so it was strict.

We completed the action, we walked back to the village from Ferizaj. But I don't know, now I think about how we didn't even feel fear. Plus, we walked through corn fields for eight kilometers. When we arrived home it was 10:00pm. But our families never said anything because they supported us. They didn't think we were doing something else, but knew that we were doing our activities. We were doing activities for Kosovo. We were only worried that we would be caught, that we would be caught somewhere. That's it. So, in June of 1988, I got married to Naser, we were imprisoned after three months.

Anita Susuri: I want to ask you about these tracts first.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: These came in already written, ready?

¹⁰ The *ekonomat* of an enterprise is an office that deals with equipping the enterprise with food, clothing, furnishings and any other necessary items and that takes care of the maintenance of these items. In the context of the interview, it is the *ekonomat* of the prison.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Written, ready to go. No, no, they were ready, we only distributed them, they were ready.

Anita Susuri: For example, what kind of material did they contain? For national awakening or awareness?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Awareness, rights, oppression, the oppression we endured, the terror, the violence that was happening. That was the content, I didn't look to check whether I have any tract anywhere, because I work at the archive and I archived a lot of things, I sent them to the archive.

Anita Susuri: Was there for example, names of the people who were, how to say, spies, *UDB-ashes*¹¹ at the time?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: In the tracts?

Afide Topalli Kuka: In tracts, sometimes there were, sometimes there weren't. Or it was in a general manner, general but there were specific ones too, yes.

Anita Susuri: Did you meet your husband during the activity or how?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, after being released from prison and during the activity we met and both agreed. So, when, actually, when we got married, first we didn't want a wedding at all because we were anticipating being arrested so we didn't want to make it a big deal. But Naser's mother, Naser's family, "No, we can't not do anything," there was a small wedding. But we were arrested after three months, because even after getting married we distributed tracts here in Kaçanik. I had the mission to organize here, to form the group in Kaçanik but it was a short time, we were discovered and arrested. We were arrested on September 27, 1988. Naser was arrested earlier, on the 21st, if I am not mistaken, at the time I was arrested he was in a Slovenian prison, he was in Koper and we...

That's interesting, a big surprise, because the arrests happened at the same time, 4:00 AM, in the early hours, the morning had not yet dawned. They broke, demolished, destroyed. I remember it was two State Security officers, Qenan Hajdini and... Qenan Hajdini and Afet Rexhallari. They went out, they told my late mother-in-law, "Sorry, *loke*,¹² we stepped on your carpets." She said, "Oh, as soon as you go, I will wash the carpets, I have enough water, but your dirty doings can't be washed even by the Lepenc or Vardar rivers," she said, "May Kaçanik's bread be *haram*¹³ for you," she said, "that you are taking our boys and girls." They went mad.

All the time during the investigations, "Why did she say that to us *bre*." They blackmailed us and even tried to destroy our family. Because to tell you the truth, the second time around was a little more difficult. One, it was a group and we were organized; two, I was pregnant; three, I was

¹¹ Members of the UDB, *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

¹² Endearing term for elderly women.

¹³ *Haram* is an Arabic term meaning "Forbidden".

married. That was a little more difficult. But besides me being pregnant, there was also Minire Ramadani, Nazife and her husband, I mean Minire and her husband were both imprisoned. They...

Anita Susuri: What month was it, sorry?

Afide Topalli Kuka: September...

Anita Susuri: Pregnant, I mean?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Recent. Five weeks, six.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: You were telling us about your arrest.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, the second arrest, as I mentioned, happened on September 27, 1988. The investigation process was more difficult, because they were trying to discover names, to make us tell names, to find bigger groups because we were eleven people from the Ferizaj district. In the meantime, at the same time, the Podujevo's group was arrested too, some other groups, I don't remember at the moment. But at the investigative office, I didn't admit I was a member for three days. I remember an inspector from Ferizaj came, his name was Bajram, Bajram Ajaka, Ajaha, I don't know. He said, "You are not my case. You can talk, you can talk," he said, "I only came," he said, "to become familiar," he said, "with your prior stance," he said, "to know," he said, "your family, but as a member of the organization you will be sentenced. Don't be destroyed for other things," he said, "that are not known, endure as much as you can."

It was really like that, that gave me even more strength because I knew he didn't lie about anything. Because based on the questions they asked, they were provoking and insinuating that they knew something. But I always convinced myself that they didn't know anything at all, absolutely. But besides the investigations I had personally with this group, for three months straight, I was brought to the local offices of the State Security. But they wanted to find another group in Ferizaj's district that dealt with arms, among them, my brother, "It's him, it's him, it's him." All the people who came, whom I mentioned, who were at the men's *oda*, when the investigators mentioned their names, I responded, "I don't know him, I don't know him, I don't know him." But there was a childhood friend of my brother's, "Do you know him?" "Of course, I know him," because I was aware that they knew we knew each other. I said, "I was little when he came to the house," I said, "I know him. But I don't know any of the others."

For three months, they regularly interrogated me, for three months. It ended. But what's more difficult, they placed me in very humiliating conditions. They sent me to a cell on the second floor, with no bed, no cover...

Anita Susuri: In Pristina, right?

Afide Topalli Kuka: The Mitrovica Prison, the Mitrovica Prison, at the investigations, the investigative prison usually, because we were under investigation and stayed at the Mitrovica Prison. No bed, no

cover, no change of clothes for six weeks. The way I was dressed at home, a skirt, some thin socks, a coat. Now, I don't know what that was, I could never figure it out. There was always a wind there, it was like a cold wind. I was in the corner of the cell, because it was narrower by the door, and it widened by the window. The wind hit me at the corner, it hit me at the door, I couldn't close the window, I was thinking it was coming from outside, I didn't know. I would take my coat and tie it around my waist, my back would feel better, I would take the coat and wear it again.

Once a guard came and told me, "Come take a shower." She was Albanian. I said, "No," I said, "I can't shower, I don't have clothes to change to." She said, "You have to," she said, because they would often throw cold water at us. But I didn't have power, and I told her, "Leave me alone or I'll hurt you." After some time, they interrogated me at the State Security offices, the inspectors, Afet Rexhallari and Qenan Hajdini. They asked, "Are you okay?" I said, "I am okay." They said, "You are not okay." I said, "Yes I am." "Let's take you to a physician." I said, "No, I don't want your help. If I am not okay it's because you made me like this, because you placed me under the most humiliating, inhumane conditions," I said, "beside, you broke the prison rules," I said, "I couldn't have broken the rules even before stepping foot in the prison."

To prove that I really wasn't doing well, they called the guards a thousand times, "Come take her." The guards came and took me and said, the notorious prison director immediately came, Sherafedin Ajeti, along with the policemen, and all those guards, "Come," he said, "to the physician." I said, "No." "Come." "No." He said, "I," he said, "don't hold responsibility. Of course, you will make me responsible together with your friends," he said, "I could be your parent, I could be your children's parent." I said, "Don't insult me because you can't be my parent, much less my child's." They left. I don't know what my face looked like because I didn't see it, but my body looked like rotten tiles, it was all bruises.

Anita Susuri: Was there physical violence used against you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Because of the conditions, because of the conditions, yes. Because there was violence at the beginning too, physical violence, now, when physical violence was used, for example, because these inspectors I mentioned, these two names, they didn't lay hands on me, but when it was inspectors from other places. I don't know, they never introduced themselves by names, nor last names, it was some big guys, red eyes, scary eyes that you could only see in horror films, yes. "Sit there, you will give birth here." They were insulting. Anyway, that passed. Let's go back, not even one or two hours passed, I don't know, two inspectors came and just entered the room and looked at me. Not even half an hour passed, and they changed my cell. I don't know.

They moved me to another cell, there was a Roma woman there for other felonies. They asked me, "What did you do?" I said, "I was working at a market and at the end of the day I came up short," we called it self-service then. And she, the Roma woman said, "Come take my sweater and wear it," but I was a little stubborn, "I won't take it." I leaned on the bed a bit, it was still a prison, but compared to my prior conditions it was warmer and I was about to fall asleep. She said, "Poor her, she will abort this baby. Let's knock on the door and send her to the doctor," and I stood up. "Who? You can call on him for yourself, not for me. Don't you dare." The next day my mother-in-law came, actually that same day, that day because they didn't allow her to visit. She came there every day begging them to

give me clothes, "For God's sake, these clothes," they didn't allow her.

And she brought everything with her, slippers and everything, but I couldn't wear my clothes for two months. As soon as I wore them, I would have to take them off after five minutes because it was uncomfortable. Two months until I got used to it. The next day my mother-in-law came, she asked me, "Are you okay?" "I am okay," I replied, "Are you," she said, "like you used to be?" "Yes," and she turned to the inspectors and told them, "If something happens to her," she said, "I will bring two bombs here and burn you to the ground along with myself," she said. And she told me, "Do you have money?" She said, "I do." Because at the time my brother was in the hospital, he couldn't come. "I do," I said, "have money." She said, "If I find out," she said, "that you are unwell I won't forgive you ever." I said, "No," I said, "I have everything." That's how it went.

Naser's mother is a second mother to me, because she took care of me a lot. They asked me in prison, "Who washes," they asked, "your clothes? Because others only brought two or three pieces. Who?" She would bring food and everything. I said, "Her, nobody else." They were all surprised. Every visit. And my mother was sick, my father was sick in the hospital. She once went from Mitrovica to Pristina to ask for permission for a visit, she came to Mitrovica and from Mitrovica to my village, to let my family know that she saw me and I was okay.

I will say one thing now, when they brought the food it was some cold soup, I was never able to eat it. While I was in prison, I only ordered some yogurts, and I pinched a little salt in them and ate them. I didn't eat anything else. When we were there, there happened to be a shift of guards, what do I know? They made the soup a little warmer. Otherwise, without eating, because there was nothing to eat there. Actually, actually, I didn't even eat beans for some time because there were insects in them too, yes.

Part Three

Afide Topalli Kuka: After the investigations, all of that havoc, the indictment was filed around January, I think. We actually went on trial in February, it was eleven of us. We received sentences from one to eight years, from one and a half years to eight years. The trial lasted for four days, on the fourth day, because the press interest was high, but they weren't allowed in, Amnesty International organization was there, on the fourth day it was made possible for them. Amnesty International applied pressure, they pressured the Belgrade government to release those of us who were pregnant on probation, on the condition that when the child turned one, we would go to serve the sentence.

My husband was sentenced to four years, I received a year and a half sentence, but the decision was made to release us. Now, I don't forget the [Miners' Strike](#) was on the fourth day, we weren't far away. Because usually when something was happening outside, the press wasn't allowed. Then they the director, took me to his office. He said, "Don't talk, don't talk and you should behave well." I went back and I called... because we would usually talk to each other when there were no guards around, they would sometimes leave, and we would talk. I called her. "What happened?" I said, "Something happened outside because this hasn't happened before, we went on trial for three days but they didn't take us to the office any of those days, why today?" She said, "Me too," she said, "there is something," she said, "outside." When we went on trial, we found out that it was the Miners' Strike, which had already started.

Anita Susuri: It started in February.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, in February, on February 24.

Anita Susuri: '89.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, if I'm not mistaken because February 24 was the fourth day of the trial when we received our sentences. When we were released, I remember a group of students had come in front of the court on the opposite side. Now, mothers as mothers, Naser's mother was out of it because her son was stuck. I was talking to her and my brother came, he said, "Come because a group of students came to see you." We went out. But we were, I don't know what state we were in, I don't even know who they were. We greeted each other, we talked, but I don't know. It felt good because it was a young group, 15 to 20 people who came. And I was released.

April came and I gave birth to my daughter. I was released on February 24, I gave birth to my daughter on April 8. Then I had to register my daughter late. I registered her birth four months later. My daughter was left nameless for six weeks, until Naser sent a letter from prison and christened her with the name Besforta. This name identified our endurance. That's it. Every... because when my child turned one, I would have to go and serve my sentence.

I had four kids, one after the other and I would just send the certificate. Time after time in the underground, because honestly, the underground was difficult. I stayed... To be pregnant and give birth in other people's houses was hard, because I couldn't even dare to go to a doctor, where would I go? Besides my oldest daughter to whom I gave birth in the hospital, I gave birth to the three others in houses, yes. Once at a house, a night there, a night here, I got tired at some point honestly, I got tired.

Anita Susuri: What about your husband, did he serve four or five years in prison?

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, my husband was sentenced many times as a recidivist, he had four years in '82, four years in '88. He was sentenced in absentia in '95, '98, he had many. Let's not talk about how many times he was arrested, he can speak for himself. When... in 1992 Naser was at risk too and he received information from his friends that he should definitely flee Kosovo. We went to Albania. I was three weeks postpartum. We went to Macedonia and people from Dibër sent us to Albania. We didn't have means, I mean documents, we went there in an illegal manner, illegally.

Anita Susuri: On foot, right?

Afide Topalli Kuka: On foot. I remember the family we stayed with, Haki, but I don't remember his last name, he was from Dibër, and my daughter was three weeks old. Then they said to Naser, "We will keep your little daughter because when you go to Albania, because Albania isn't in good condition either, so when you get comfortable and settle, you can take her." Naser told me this and that, I said, "No, we either all leave together or not at all."

There was a young man from Gjilan as well with us, I don't remember his name, when we crossed the

border illegally. He was an only son and had eight sisters, if I am not mistaken, and when we arrived at the hot zone, because the people from Dibër sent us there by tractor pretending they were going to put manure on the fields. We climbed on top of the tractor, and when we arrived at the danger zone, Naser said, “You go ahead, I will stop. I will deal with myself last.” I said, “Let this *hasret*¹⁴ boy go through. Either we all make it, or we all stay here.” I had my eldest son who was one year old, because at that time I had three children. My eldest son was two, [I mean] one year old, and my daughter was three years old. Then when we arrived at the hot zone, Besforta said, she said, “Hush, my brother,” he didn’t cry, “hush my brother, don’t cry, because when we cross to the other side your sister will buy you bananas,” and her tears were falling down. Because children feel that too. We stayed there for three months because... we got on our way to Germany, but they sent us back from Italy. So...

Anita Susuri: Where did you stay in Albania?

Afide Topalli Kuka: We stayed with Yll Pinari.

Anita Susuri: Were you familiar with him?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, he was Naser’s friend, he was his friend. And he let us stay at his mother’s apartment and it was during the time when there was lack of food because it was ‘92, it was chaotic. He had his brother-in-law who worked at the border. They took care of the food and everything. And after a month or six weeks, I don’t know, another friend from Elbasan came and took us. “No,” he said, “are you staying in an apartment with your children? No,” he said, “because we have cows, we have this...” and we stayed in Elbasan. Elbasan became like a second house to us, we went back again.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask if this was the first time you went to Albania then in ‘92?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, the first time.

Anita Susuri: How did Albania look to you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: I, to tell you the truth, I said it myself, it would have been better if I didn’t see it like that. I would keep thinking about it like I did in the past. The schools were closed, broken doors, broken windows, destroyed daycares, toys, people walking on mud. It was a mess, but I said that. It would have been better to not see it at all. But that passed too. We returned to Kosovo, sometimes underground, sometimes half-underground. Whereas, in 1994, in January, in *Flaka e Janarit*¹⁵ [Alb.: January’s Flame], my husband was tortured, like many other friends who were tortured a lot that night, him too.

They broke his arm, his leg, and when he came the next day, when he came back, our children jumped on him, he sent them away and went upstairs. When he went into the room he said, “They messed me up,” he said, “they beat me up badly, but don’t tell my mother.” I said, “It

¹⁴ Turk: *hasret*, craving or longing. In Albanian traditional families, the only son is called *hasret*. The term describes the patrilineal logic, the desire or the longing for a son, a male heir.

¹⁵ *Flaka e Janarit* is a multidimensional cultural festival which begins on January 11 in Gjilan, Kosovo with the symbolic lighting of the flame, to continue until January 31 with various cultural activities.

doesn't seem like you can avoid telling her, they destroyed you." After two-three weeks, we had to make the decision of fleeing the country. They came looking for Naser again, he was at a different house, I was somewhere else with the children. The next day they came looking for me. I had my son in the cradle, together with my son we went out in-between two houses, we have a small door there and we went out into the neighborhood.

The whole neighborhood was blocked. Police were everywhere from the gas station and we went out and then we went to the village. A neighbor had his tractor and loaded it with manure. I went out with my child, and we climbed on the tractor and we went to that village. My daughter was two years old, she was wearing my son's boots and they had fallen along with her socks... when we arrived they were freezing. We decided to flee, and I ensured a travel document, a friend sent it to me and she had two children. My two older children remained with Naser's mother. Naser went to a hospital in Albania, I went to Germany. After six weeks Naser managed to come to Germany. After we settled there, my children were stuck here. We took our children after a year.

Naser's mother called on the phone once and said, "I protected them until now," she said, "but today they came," she said, "they put," she said literally, "their gun to my throat," she said, "they put it telling me to show them Naser's children," she said, "it's written that I will die, but as long as I'm alive they won't have the children." She took them to our neighbor's because she woke up at 5:00 AM to feed our children and she took them to our neighbor's that in case somebody showed up, "Naser isn't here, his wife isn't, his children aren't. I don't know where they went, I don't know."

We organized it, they sent them illegally because the children didn't have any documents and they sent them to Struga. From Struga to the family of Naser's friend, Xhevdet Murtishi. His father sent them there without any documents. He took a van, filled it with women, young women, girls, children, old women. He said, "You, Naser's mother, don't show any ID, anything." At the border, the Macedonians asked him, "Where are you going?" "We are going to a wedding," and that is how he sent them. Then we took them to Germany from Albania.

Anita Susuri: Did he take that van only to take them to the other side?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Only to take the children, only to take the children. People did a lot, because look, we wouldn't be able to do anything without Kaçanik, they helped us. Because keeping two former prisoners at home without anyone being employed, only with a pension, wasn't easy. They couldn't even come for a visit. Kaçanik took care of us, our friends took care of us, our *rreth*¹⁶ took care of us. We had a place to stay everywhere, in cities and villages. We had friends in every city in Macedonia, we had them wherever we went. The same in Albania, they [the same people] didn't keep us all the time. I remember when we went to Albania, Haki from Dibër sent us money three times because they were aware that we didn't have any source of income, we didn't and what would we do with our children?

I am thankful to everyone and starting from this neighborhood, they protected us, they watched for us. Because every time the police came to surround us, we were already notified, we left the house, we left early. I heartily thank them a hundred times, everyone who helped us. Because we wouldn't

¹⁶ *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.

be able to do anything without people helping us. So, I appreciate everyone. And I will say one thing, everybody who gave even one glass of water for the good of the country, for the country's freedom, I respect and value them greatly.

Anita Susuri: In the '90s when you migrated to Germany...

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, in '94 in Germany, yes.

Anita Susuri: I think you stayed there until '98?

Afide Topalli Kuka: No, until, Naser came back in '98, I stayed until January, on January 20, 2000.

Anita Susuri: After the war.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes. To tell you the truth, when we came back, because Germany never seemed good to me, never! When we came back through Skopje, when we entered the border in Hani i Elezit, I don't know what kind of feeling that was, like something opened up, a soft breathing in my chest and I told my mother-in-law, "We entered Kosovo." She said, "No, how can you tell?" I said, "I will ask the bus conductor now." I asked, "Did we enter Kosovo?" "Yes." Because the air itself, I don't know what kind of feeling, because I didn't think I would ever see Kosovo again, this place, ever again. But thanks to the Liberation Army,¹⁷ which is the pivot of everything, everything and it's thanks to the Liberation Army that we obtained freedom, thanks to the great army which I bow down to.

And for them to keep the architects of the Liberation Army in jail unjustly,¹⁸ that is heavy for the entirety of Kosovo, not only for them. I wish, I wish they will be released as soon as possible, as soon as possible and let justice triumph. Because freedom has a price, sacrifice, imprisonment, *besa*,¹⁹ murder and everything. For example, we had soldiers who came back in coffins as well, the best boys from the best families. Getting here was a lot of effort, great sacrifice, starting from the Second World War, we had NDSH,²⁰ we have 1968, the demonstrations, '81 which shook the core of former Yugoslavia. The '90s when there was a movement and it woke up the entire nation, raised awareness, it made them aware. And we have the war, the Liberation Army, the great army to which I bow down to till the end of my life.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the years when you were in Germany. Did you continue your activity? For example, were there people who engaged in sending materials, financing and other stuff?

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ The narrator is referring to the trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity of four KLA leaders, including the head of the KLA, Hashim Thaçi, at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, a temporary international court at The Hague established by an international agreement ratified by the Kosovo Assembly.

¹⁹ In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

²⁰ Albanian National Democratic Movement, known by its Albanian initials as LNDSH or NDSH, became a near-total anti-communist resistance in Kosovo between 1945 and 1947.

Afide Topalli Kuka: To tell you the truth, my husband did. Because our children were really young and somebody had to take care of them. However, every time there was a need, I helped. When it was necessary, I helped him, whether it was a protest or something else. But I wasn't entirely involved myself. I dealt with the children, yes.

Anita Susuri: During wartime when you said your husband came back to Kosovo...

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What was your experience? Did you have contact with your family? With your husband?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, we did, we did through the phone. Sometimes it was like that, sometimes he came to Germany, he stayed for a day or two and came back, yes, he came back. But we were prepared each time, we were aware that Kosovo wouldn't be liberated without war, not with prison, nor killing us one by one every day and beating us up every day, not without war, without pointing the end of the gun, we were aware. But yes, the people became aware, because at the beginning, earlier in the '80s and before the '80s, it was a problem because the issue was with making people aware. Because if your people don't support you, the nation, everyone, it's an issue. But the people became aware. Slowly the education, the university did its thing, everything, reading, these all played their role.

Anita Susuri: Yes. How did you receive the news that Kosovo was liberated? What kind of feeling was it for you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: I am saying, when I received the news, until I came back it felt like I was dying every day in Germany and I wasn't seeing Kosovo's liberation, I wasn't seeing it. I felt suffocated. Because every time, because during the war, we didn't even eat without crying, we couldn't. A massacre there, massacre here, massacre there.

Anita Susuri: How did your life continue when you came back here?

Afide Topalli Kuka: We came back with that great enthusiasm. It continued well. For some time, because we were unemployed for some time. But, in September of 2000, I was employed in the gymnasium.²¹ After one year I moved to the Municipal Assembly. I work as Head of the Archive Sector and my husband works too. So, we were good. Because we survived, even when we didn't have anything, we knew how to survive when we did have something and when we didn't. Freedom kept us going, our ideals, because we made sacrifices to get here. It sufficed us to not be under the Serbian boot ever, yes.

Anita Susuri: How is the work at the archive going? What kind of documents do you work with?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Well, it's going well, well. It's mainly the Municipal Assembly documents, from '46 until now.

²¹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Anita Susuri: Could you describe, for example, a very important document or anything that impressed you?

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes there are, there are documents which impressed me. That's history, there is history. For example, there are documents of the social political organizations we had, the punishments, expulsion, because many which I forgot to mention, even the Committees of the Communists' League expelled us as a family. As the people say, "Even if the *pite*²² was eaten, the baking pan still remains," the lynchings which happened, the slanders, the blackmailing, they're all there.

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Afide, if you would like to add anything or...

Afide Topalli Kuka: I don't know, if I don't remember, I know, what do I say...

Anita Susuri: Thanks a lot.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Maybe we couldn't involve everything in detail. We tried to mention some key things, some, but maybe even the main thing was left unsaid. We made an effort to mention the most significant things, because writing doesn't capture what that period was like, not only for me but for all my friends. My friends with whom we shared the same ideal, it can't be fully captured in writing. But we made an effort to some extent but maybe even the most important thing was left unsaid. Maybe I even got in debt with someone for not mentioning something, I don't know. But the ones I remembered, I mentioned.

Anita Susuri: Thanks a lot.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Thank you to you too. I wish you success in your work, in your family and all the best.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Afide, you wanted to add some things which you talked about earlier, if you want to, please continue and tell us about them.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, true, it's been a long time and you can't include everything in a short time.

[The interview was interrupted here]

So, I am talking about the investigations. Besides interrogating us day and night, there was another time when they came and took me for interrogation in the State Security offices in Mitrovica and they had opened all the office doors, they made it dark and they placed me on the opposite side of the office. For several hours they only left me like that. They played a song, it was like a horror movie and there was noise, "I will kill you; I will kill you." Then there was the reply, "Kill me." I couldn't tell if they were torturing somebody or they staged the whole thing.

²² Albanian *pitë* is a pastry made of a thin flaky dough such as phyllo or similar.

They saw that because we didn't break in any way and they wanted to break us spiritually and one of them said, "Naser," he said, "was killed last night," besides the one hour, or I don't know how long, that song and noise lasted. "We killed him," he said, "last night. Do you want to see him? If you do," he said, "you can go on the other side." But I had always prepared myself, even if it was true, that the Yugoslav State Security only lied. And I took that as a lie. Then, "You didn't tell us about your activity, not even half, not even half of it, we won't even let you attend the burial." The other one would say, "No more,"²³ she will never see it."

After some silence they went out. After some silence, they came back. "What do you think? Will you come see him?" And I stood my ground that it wasn't true, they were lying to me. I said, "No," "Hey," he said, "why would you care? Kosovo has lots of men," he said, "lots of men." He said it like that. Trying to insult me. At some point the other one said, "Yes." One after one, besides two of them who were present, there was another one, they would switch.

[The interview was interrupted here]

And then the other one came and said, "Not even alive nor dead, you will never see him. We will release one and keep the other, one like this, one like that." And that's when I understood that it wasn't...

Anita Susuri: They were playing.

Afide Topalli Kuka: Yes, they were playing. This lasted a long time so they left me there, they didn't speak, or... they would wander. The other side was a mess and this was stuck in my mind that they were able to do anything just so they could break you morally, physically, and destroy you on all sides and your family. Then they would come back, "Why did you marry Naser?" They had taken away his right to study at all universities in former Yugoslavia. I attended university, "Why do we have a faculty? Why like this...?" They tried... and then when my mother-in-law came to visit, they told her all sorts of things, "Why do you keep her as a *nuse*"²⁴?"

But I'm grateful to her, she never said a word. She supported me during every single visit, she always took my side. Not a single word was spread beyond our *rreth* and I have massive respect, not only for my family from which I come from, but also for my husband's family, Naser's brothers, his sisters, everyone. I have endless respect. None of Naser's family members, when I go to chat and enjoy myself, would ever greet me while sitting down or dismiss me by saying "Good morning!" while sitting down. I have a special respect for them.

²³ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

²⁴In Albanian culture, the term *nuse* [bride] often refers to a daughter-in-law. The relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law can be complex, with the daughter-in-law traditionally expected to integrate into her husband's family and take on various household responsibilities. In this context, the prison guards were questioning the mother-in-law's decision to continue accepting and supporting her daughter-in-law despite the difficult circumstances, implying that she should reconsider "keeping" her within the family. This reflects a traditional perspective where the mother-in-law holds significant influence over the daughter-in-law's place in the family.

And another thing that I didn't remember about my family. Besides his engagements as an activist, my big brother Avdi Topalli was a member of the Kosovo Liberation Army in the operative zone of Nerodime. He was in exile, he came back from exile and went to war. I would say one thing, twice, I was criminally convicted, despite that I didn't, I wasn't given draconian sentences because there were friends who had bigger sentences, they were sentenced.

Nevertheless, it wasn't easy. No person, no friend got in trouble because of me, to be taken in for questioning, to be arrested, or during the investigations to be tortured because of me. Or for a mother to cry for her son or her daughter, that didn't happen. I am very happy that I managed because I always prayed to God, "God, make me strong, make me strong to endure this and not reveal names," and God helped me. God convinced me to remain strong and I came out with a *faqebardhë*, (lit. white face, without blemish).

Anita Susuri: Thanks a lot!

Afide Topalli Kuka: Thank you! All the best from me to you.