Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH NASER KUKA

Pristina | Date: September 30, 2022
Duration: 163 minutes

Present:

1. Naser 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

Anita Susuri: Mr. Naser, if you could introduce yourself, a bit about your background, your family.

Naser Kuka: I am Naser Kuka, born in April 1961 in Kaçanik to my mother Salihe and my father Islam. I completed primary and secondary education in my hometown, but further education became impossible for me in '81 due to the regime at the time, which held Kosovo and other Albanian territories in former Yugoslavia under occupation.

Anita Susuri: What kind of family were you raised in?

Naser Kuka: My family was primarily a working class family, but one that valued education and patriotism. In our family, in our home, men from Albanian regions in Kosovo and other Albanian territories in Macedonia and beyond would come and go. Naturally, like everyone else, the family spirit in me was shaped by the traditions of our household and the foundation of the family. It was there that the alphabet of patriotism was learned, along with the struggle for freedom, sacrifice when required for the interests of the homeland, and more. In this regard, I learned a great deal.

I learned from the stories of my father and mother, who lived through difficult periods that our people endured. During various occupations, Bulgarian and others, as they used to divide them back then, the First Bulgaria, the Second Bulgaria, the First Serbia, meaning the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, and later after the Second World War, and so on. These are historical stages they experienced personally, and in different ways, they were part of them, or members of their families were involved in those struggles that Albanians waged for their homeland and their greater national cause.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember a specific story, for example something they experienced or something they found very difficult?

Naser Kuka: Yes, I specifically remember '56. 1956, the year of the weapons action,[1] this was the operation Yugoslavia undertook in Kosovo to disarm the Albanians. My father was among those caught up in this wave of arrests. He was accused of possessing an arsenal, a quantity of weapons that had supposedly been distributed among various people. The occupier, in addition to physical and psychological pressure, persecution, and killings, used another tactic, a different kind of warfare, by forcing people to swear on the Quran that they didn't have weapons or didn't know who had them, and so on.

In such cases, there were people who were trustworthy and couldn't bring themselves to swear falsely, even though religion justifies it, as this is also a kind of tactic, a strategy that, in this case, served the cause. Nevertheless, yes, he was arrested and mistreated. However, it didn't last long because he managed to escape, to get away from what had been planned by the Yugoslav police forces at the time.

Anita Susuri: How did he manage to do that?

Naser Kuka: He went out through a window. He… jumped out of the window at a moment when no one was inside. Then, a baker in the town center hid him inside the bakery. He kept him in the flour storage for several days and sheltered him there until the circumstances were right for him to leave the town and escape to Stanat, as we call it, his village where he fled.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you something, were these actions to find weapons targeted only at specific families or at everyone?

Naser Kuka: No, this operation involved a large number of Albanians. Naturally, though, they had lists, the authorities had lists of families they wanted to either force out of Kosovo in various ways, or instill a sense of fear among the population through these actions. They didn't act without a plan, without a strategy, and they implemented that strategy accordingly.

I had a document that maybe, I mean I had a document that I read about this operation, specifically about this operation in the Ferizaj region, which also included Kaçanik and Shtërpca, and their surroundings. It describes, it's an archival document, where the methods of the violence that were applied to Albanians to force them to surrender even the few weapons they had managed to keep over the years are detailed.

In this context, I would mention that in '43, a Battalion of the 5th Proletarian Brigade of Albania was stationed somewhere between Rakaj and Varsoh, a village in that area. I don't know the exact

[1] The confiscation of weapons refers to a disarmament campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Kosovo, carried out under Aleksandar Ranković's directive. Framed as a security measure, it disproportionately targeted Albanians, who were often subjected to house raids, intimidation, and violence. The campaign aimed to weaken the Albanian resistance and control the region, further intensifying the repression during Ranković's era.

circumstances, but my grandfather and father met with them, and I know that in response to the commander's question to my grandfather, "What do you think, how will things turn out?" he replied, "As long as we have weapons in our hands and faith in victory, we'll succeed." Something like that, meaning that as long as they had weapons in their hands, they believed that a day would come when they would turn those weapons against the enemy to achieve the centuries-old ideals of Albanians for freedom and national unity.

Anita Susuri: And during the Ranković[2] period and after the Second World War, I mean, was your family, so to speak, persecuted for any reason, or what was your family's position during the Second World War?

Naser Kuka: Yes, well, during the Second World War, they lived a life in the mountains, a life of outlaws, resistance, and evasion to avoid becoming part of Tito's[3] partisans. This was the case on my father's side. On my mother's side, for example, it's interesting, you had two outlaws who spent their entire lives with weapons in their hands, two brothers. One of them was caught in the mountains while tending the livestock, and the partisans captured him, forcibly mobilized him, and he became a partisan, you see.

Meaning, well, this side as well as that side… because, naturally, the region of Kaçanik is known as an area that has resisted occupiers for centuries and is part of the glorious history marked by the national resistance movement and the struggle for a united Albania. It's not... we naturally grew up with the history of Idriz Seferi[4] and the battles fought in the Kaçanik Gorge, and then there's the history of the Kaçak Movement,[5] which also left an indelible mark on the memory of the population of that region and beyond.

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[2] 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.

[3] Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) was the leader of Yugoslavia from 1943 until his death. He was a key figure in the Yugoslav Partisans during the Second World War and later became the president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

[4] Idriz Seferi (1847–1927) was an Albanian nationalist and military leader who played a prominent role in the Albanian resistance against the Ottoman Empire and later against the Kingdom of Serbia. He is best known for his leadership during the Battle of Kaçanik (1910), where Albanian forces resisted Serbian and Ottoman troops. Seferi's efforts were part of the broader Albanian National Awakening movement, which aimed for the independence and unification of Albanian territories.

[5] The Kaçak Movement refers to the armed resistance of Albanians in the early 20th century against the oppressive regimes of the Kingdom of Serbia and later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). The term *kaçak*, meaning "outlaw," was used to describe the guerrilla fighters who opposed the forced assimilation, land confiscations, and suppression of Albanian cultural and political identity. Active from the aftermath of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and continuing into the 1920s, the movement was particularly strong in regions like Kaçanik, Drenica, and Rugova. The Kaçak fighters are remembered as symbols of resistance and struggle for Albanian autonomy and self-determination.

Anita Susuri: So, as a child, you always heard these conversations in your family, and perhaps this, in a way, shaped you into the person you became later on.

Naser Kuka: Absolutely, there's no doubt that these conversations were almost a daily occurrence in the family. But then, an irreplaceable role was also played by the songs sung in the traditional gatherings, the folk melodies, which at that time circulated hand to hand. They served to elevate and strengthen Albanian national consciousness. So, these didn't stop. I don't know how my father found them or where he got them, but he had a tape recorder, those with reels, as far as I know (laughs). But these also played a role because songs were sung about Bajram Curri,[6] Hasan Prishtina,[7] Skanderbeg,[8] Shaban Polluzha,[9] and others. These couldn't have passed without leaving a mark on the family's memory and mine as well. For me, though, they had a bit more impact since I was the youngest child, the youngest son in the family, out of five brothers. I was a bit closer to my father and mother in a way.

Anita Susuri: Were you only boys? Did you have any sisters?

Naser Kuka: Yes, we also have a sister; she is a bit younger than me.

Anita Susuri: What other memories do you have from your childhood? How did your family function? Would you say it was a family that lived by patriarchal values, or how was the organization within the family?

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[6] Bajram Curri (1862–1925) was an Albanian nationalist, military leader, and activist during the Albanian National Awakening. He played a significant role in the fight for Albanian independence and territorial integrity, particularly against the Ottoman Empire and later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). Known for his bravery and dedication to the Albanian cause, Curri was a prominent figure in efforts to unify Albanian territories and defend them from foreign domination. He is celebrated as a hero in Albanian history, with songs, poems, and monuments honoring his legacy.

[7] Hasan Prishtina (1873–1933), born Hasan Berisha, was an Albanian politician, writer, and prominent activist of the Albanian National Awakening. He was a key figure in the movement for Albanian independence and the fight to secure Albanian territorial integrity during the Balkan Wars. Prishtina played a leading role in organizing the Albanian uprising of 1912, which culminated in Albania's declaration of independence. He later served as Prime Minister of Albania in 1921. Known for his political vision and commitment to the Albanian cause, he was assassinated in 1933 in Thessaloniki by political opponents. Hasan Prishtina remains a celebrated figure in Albanian history.

[8] Skanderbeg (1405–1468), born Gjergj Kastrioti, was an Albanian nobleman and military commander who became a symbol of resistance against the Ottoman Empire. Initially taken as a child hostage by the Ottomans and trained as a soldier, he later rebelled, returning to his native land to lead a decades-long resistance. From 1443 to his death, Skanderbeg defended Albanian territories, uniting local leaders and repelling numerous Ottoman invasions. Renowned for his strategic brilliance and courage, he is celebrated as a national hero of Albania and a key figure in the broader struggle for Christian Europe against Ottoman expansion.

[9] Shaban Polluzha (1871–1945) was a prominent Albanian commander and leader of a resistance movement against Yugoslav forces during and after the Second World War. Born in the Drenica region, he initially fought alongside the Partisans but later opposed them when their policies threatened Albanian autonomy and sought to disarm Albanians. Polluzha's resistance is most notable during the Drenica Uprising of 1945, where he and his forces defended the Albanian population against Yugoslav military aggression. He is remembered as a symbol of defiance and the struggle for Albanian rights and self-determination.

Naser Kuka: The organization within the family, well, as a family history, we come from a village on the outskirts of Kaçanik's urban center, Kukaj. Kukaj is the village. In '56, after what I mentioned earlier, my father moved from the village with the intention of emigrating to Turkey. However, it was impossible to complete the documentation required at that time, because I don't know what kind of document was needed, something that had to be issued in Skopje, I can't recall now. He couldn't go himself, and the people he sent to obtain that document to complete the paperwork for emigrating to Turkey were unable to secure it, as a result, he stayed, and they didn't leave. Later, circumstances became somewhat easier, the condemnation of Ranković's policies and other factors. In a way, the situation stabilized. The mass persecutions in Kosovo ceased. Then, under these circumstances, they decided to continue living in Kaçanik.

Anita Susuri: You completed primary school in Kaçanik, right?

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Was it far? Or how was it?

Naser Kuka: No, no, it was close. I grew up in an urban center. Both the primary and secondary school, as well as the town center, were just two minutes away. However, my mother was illiterate, but she was the one who ran the household. She managed the family finances and led the household. She took care of everything within the house and the yard. When it came to education, she was ready to do anything, not just for me, but for everyone else in the family as well.

In fact, despite the patriarchal way of life, my mother went to school to check the grades of her sons. She didn't wait for my father to do it, you see? My father was a laborer, working on the railway. But even after his working hours, he took on private work, especially when the persecutions against me began, the imprisonments, he found secondary jobs after hours to earn extra income to ensure he could take care of me. Initially for me, then for my wife, and so on. Also for activism, because no work can be done without some cost.

Anita Susuri: And your parents, what generation were they? When were they born?

Naser Kuka: My father was born in 1918, and my mother, according to her birth certificate, in 1924, but based on the stories she told, she must be about three years older.

Anita Susuri: So, they were at an age when they had you somewhere around...

Naser Kuka: Well, at the time when I was imprisoned and about to be sentenced, to appear before the District Court here in Pristina, my father was already retired. When I was released from prison, I didn't find him at home for long. He had, so to speak, departed from this life.

Anita Susuri: I want to go back a bit to your schooling, to your childhood, how did things continue in Kaçanik after that? How was that period after Ranković? You were just a child then, but was it noticeable as a brighter period for Albanians in Kosovo, if I may say so, or how was it?

Naser Kuka: I remember the political developments in Kaçanik during my time, specifically in the late '60s. The mayor of Kaçanik at that time was a highly respected figure, and even today, Kaçanik recognizes him as a historic mayor of the town. In his role as mayor, he came into conflict with the Titoist policies in Kosovo and opposed them. During his term, he supported the demonstrations of 1968[10] and their demands.

Then, circumstances arose that mobilized the population in support of Sali Bajra.[11] In a way, in '68-'69, Kaçanik was placed under a state of emergency. This was because the meetings to dismiss Sali Bajra from his position as mayor of the municipality lasted all night and all day. However, when it came to voting, he was not dismissed. Eventually, the Yugoslav authorities removed him from that position through a special decree.

In other words, during this period, Kaçanik experienced a significant rise in national awareness, and the very fact that it aligned itself with Sali Bajra demonstrated its level of consciousness and political commitment to our cause. Speaking for myself and for the majority of Kaçanik, Sali Bajra was an emblematic figure, a symbol. In a way, he was the pride of our generation. But he wasn't alone, there were others as well.

Precisely due to his stance during those years, around 70 intellectuals, the number present in the Kaçanik municipality, left the party. Those who were party members were expelled, removed from their jobs, and various measures were taken against them, their families, and Sali Bajra himself. He was also removed, enduring many years of hardship, even existential challenges. However, he managed to live and persevere thanks to the support of the people.

These things, I mean, these issues, I do not deviate a single millimeter from reality. I can say that even when we were seeing off young men from Kaçanik who were being forcibly sent to the Yugoslav army.

[10] The 1968 demonstrations in Kosovo were a series of protests led primarily by Albanian students and intellectuals demanding greater rights for Albanians within Yugoslavia. The demonstrators called for the recognition of Albanians as a constituent nation, equal to others in Yugoslavia, the establishment of the University of Prishtina, and the adoption of the Albanian flag as a national symbol. These protests were a significant milestone in the Albanian national movement in Kosovo, highlighting dissatisfaction with systemic discrimination and the lack of cultural and political rights under Yugoslav rule.

[11] Sali Bajra was a prominent Albanian political figure and the mayor of Kaçanik during the late 1960s.

We would gather to escort them to the train station, but during these send-offs, we sang patriotic songs, mainly songs that were broadcast at the time on Radio Tirana, which we learned through its broadcasts. In other words, we weren't concerned, we sang publicly, forming groups of 20, 30, even 50 people, and sang patriotic songs that were prohibited but which we sang openly.

Anita Susuri: And since you mentioned Radio Tirana, you must have picked up the frequencies because you were nearby, perhaps, it was surely prohibited, but how did you manage to catch these frequencies or listen to them?

Naser Kuka: We started early, not just with Radio Tirana but also Radio Kukës, as Radio Kukës could be heard in almost 70 percent of Kosovo's territory. We also accessed Albanian Radio Television (RTSH). I had a friend, a companion in our activities and joint organizations, who was an electrician by profession and he would do some tricks with the antennas, I'm not sure exactly what he did, to connect to the Albanian television network. We followed these broadcasts in Kaçanik, and of course, we knew when a good movie, drama, or even a party congress was being aired. We watched those congresses and other programs as well.

For the first time in the history of the municipality of Kaçanik, the *Kukësi i Ri* Ensemble was allowed to perform a concert in Kaçanik. It was the first and only time until the liberation of Kosovo. Permission was granted… they had performed in other municipalities, but in Kaçanik, it was not allowed. Then, due to the large turnout and the significant presence of art lovers from the municipality of Kaçanik, the concert was performed twice on the same day. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon. However, the participants...

Even though the authorities ensured that tickets were not sold, they weren't available for purchase but were distributed through organizations of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. We, along with other friends who were organized or sympathizers of the Resistance League, managed to obtain most of the tickets through them, and we distributed these tickets among our friends to ensure the atmosphere in the hall was as lively as possible and to express… it was no small thing when, for example, Bik Ndoja or Liri Basha performed, and the audience sang along with them.

They never imagined that the audience knew those songs that were being sung. For example, for the first time, the song *"O Kaçanik, e shkëmb e gur"* was performed. It was gifted to Kaçanik by Shkodra. The audience sang it equally alongside the group performing it, the *Kukësi i Ri* Ensemble. In a way, Kaçanik, this isn't an exaggeration of modesty, was referred to and called by others as a *Little Albania.* There, people could breathe a little more freely, perhaps also because of the closeness and connection among the people.

Kaçanik, in a way, is a familial municipality, meaning that most families are connected through various ties with one another. There are very few newcomers there. This is due both to its geographical

location and the fact that it wasn't highly coveted as a place for people to move to from other regions. So, I would say there wasn't much difficulty in speaking or engaging in activities because people knew you, and you knew them. As a young person, I may not have been part of organized underground structures, but I did read underground books. They came into my hands, passed from one friend to another. We read them, shared them. As well as magazines and newspapers that circulated within the *Ilegale*[12] Movement during those years.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember when was the first time you realized that these networks distributing banned books existed or…?

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes, yes, somewhere around the '70s… on the centenary of the League of Prizren,[13] I remember it well. Odhise Paskali[14] had opened an exhibition in Pristina. I attended that exhibition, and later, I don't know how it came to be, but I had to write an essay. As always, the first topic was assigned, the second as well, but the third was free for the student to choose. Like many times before, I chose the free topic and wrote about Odhise Paskali's exhibition, the great artist of the people, and his works that he brought to Kosovo at that time. However, the authorities didn't allow them to be placed in the locations where they were intended.

Then, the teacher who read this essay took it and read it to one class after another, you see? I have a friend, he's older than me, but whenever we meet in town, he reminds me of this event. This was during the period of 1968, a time of great awakening. Later, in '78, the centenary of the League of Prizren, the activities of the underground movement in Kosovo and other Albanian regions were very prominent, and most of the people didn't hand over the tracts[15] that were being distributed at that time, they kept them at home and then passed them on to someone else to read. They circulated hand to hand. The same happened in Kaçanik, just as in all other municipalities in Kosovo.

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

[13] The League of Prizren (1878) was a political and military organization established by Albanian leaders in the city of Prizren to protect Albanian territories and promote autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. It was formed in response to the decisions of the Congress of Berlin, which threatened to divide Albanian-inhabited lands among neighboring states. The League sought to unite all Albanian territories into a single administrative unit and defend them militarily if necessary. It is considered a cornerstone of the Albanian national movement and a pivotal moment in the fight for national identity and territorial integrity.

[14] Odhise Paskali (1903–1985) was a prominent Albanian sculptor and is often regarded as the *Father of Albanian Sculpture.* His works, which include busts, statues, and reliefs, reflect themes of patriotism, national identity, and the Albanian struggle for freedom. Among his most notable creations is the monumental statue of Skanderbeg in Tirana's main square. Paskali's contributions to art and culture were highly influential, and his works are celebrated as symbols of Albanian heritage. His exhibitions, including those outside Albania, played a key role in promoting Albanian art and history.

[15] In Yugoslavia, particularly in Kosovo, tracts were underground pamphlets distributed by Albanian activists to protest against political repression and cultural suppression. These documents contained critiques of the Yugoslav government and called for greater rights and autonomy, playing a crucial role in mobilizing resistance and fostering Albanian national identity.

Anita Susuri: You were in high school?

Naser Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Where did you attend high school?

Naser Kuka: In Kaçanik.

Anita Susuri: In Kaçanik.

Naser Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember your first contact with someone involved in *Ilegale*, or how you found out it existed?

Naser Kuka: Well, I can't say specifically with names, but I can make some connections. Not that I didn't know about people who were active. But a closer contact, for example, happened in 1980, that year, veteran educators from Albania, who had worked in the first schools in Kosovo after the Second World War, came to visit. I don't remember the exact circumstances through which I made contact with them, but I eventually became friends with them, and together with them, I accompanied them to visits, like to the school "Emin Duraku," and others where they were visiting, we even attended a lunch together, I believe it was a lunch.

Eventually, I had the chance to spend time and talk closely with Berat Luzha, who was also from Kaçanik, and we knew each other. It was there that we exchanged more words, particularly about the Albanian cause in former Yugoslavia and other related issues. Then there were also the people present and other matters. For example, we later had Gafurr Loku, a hero who was killed during the [1999] war. He had also been a political prisoner from the '68 Tetovo demonstrations, the flag demonstrations. He was a key figure for most of the youth of that time because being a political prisoner carried a certain weight and reputation. He was a well-respected name among the people

Yes, I'll say again that a key reference after the war, besides other things, is the Kaçak Movement, Sali Bajra, and his generation. Then comes our generation, and so on, until the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army.[16]

[16] The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was an ethnic Albanian paramilitary organization that emerged in the 1990s to fight for the independence of Kosovo from Serbia. It played a central role during the Kosovo War (1998–1999) and was instrumental in organizing armed resistance against Serbian forces. The KLA is regarded by many in Kosovo as a symbol of the struggle for freedom and independence.

Anita Susuri: And these initial activities within the organization, how were they distributed? Among you, the three people involved, or how did all of this come to you?

Naser Kuka: In terms of concrete organization, we started around '79–'80, forming cells for the underground movement based on a three-person system, two plus one. That's how it worked. We expanded and established channels for obtaining literature and the press of the time, meaning the underground press, which was mainly published in exile during those years, as well as newspapers and magazines produced in Tirana. These were the foundation because there was nowhere else to get such material.

We had access to the same arsenal of agitational and propagandist literature that the movement in Kosovo possessed, and we had it as well. These materials moved around, they circulated, but they were never kept at home. Specifically, in Kaçanik, if I were to feel proud of any work among those activities, I feel very proud that during my arrests, imprisonments, and convictions, I never implicated any of my friends. I can say that the UDB (Yugoslav State Security) never managed to break me, not under any circumstances.

Now, the first time I was imprisoned, for example, in our trial process, there were three of us from Kaçanik, three friends. The others were from surrounding areas. We were sentenced, the three of us, but we left behind 30, 50, or even 100 others who were organized and continued the work without us. In other words, the organizational structure was successfully preserved in all circumstances.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Within these groups, the group you were part of, what were the main activities you carried out? What were you engaged in?

Naser Kuka: The main activities were reading and distributing underground newspapers, magazines, books, and literature that we had access to during those years. Naturally, we also managed to secure materials through other channels, enriching the arsenal of resources used at the time to raise awareness and expand the organizational circles. Monitoring and expanding these circles was done with the conviction that one day we would reach a stage where we needed to have the people ready for armed struggle. We knew that Kosovo wouldn't be liberated through paper (laughs).

However, it was necessary to work in this direction to raise awareness, mobilize the masses, and expand the circles to increase our numbers. Thanks to these efforts made at that time for Kosovo and other Albanian territories, despite the strength of Yugoslavia's repression against the movement, it always found the power to revive and move forward. Yugoslavia never succeeded in dissolving or stopping the patriotic activities of the Liberation Movement in Kosovo and the Albanian territories

within the former Yugoslavia. No matter how powerful the repression was, the movement persisted, continued to advance, and did not stop until the public emergence of our glorious army.

Anita Susuri: During these actions, did you have rules, for example, about where to operate or time periods within which you had to act?

Naser Kuka: Yes, well… the underground system worked like this, first, the structure of sympathizers was prepared, and once it was assessed that an individual or a group of friends could move to the next level, they would be directly admitted as members, this stage involved discipline and rules, but it didn't happen immediately. A period would pass, three months, six months, or maybe even longer. In some cases, a person might remain in the role of a sympathizer their entire life, yet contribute more than you {gestures to himself} in terms of work, do you understand?

Anita Susuri: Was that like a kind of testing period for that person?

Naser Kuka: Yes, it was a period where, for example, if you gave someone a book to read and they accepted it, that was the first step. Then, if they passed it on to someone else, the second step was taken, and so on. There were certain organizational rules, both written and unwritten. These served us well, of course, because the people never accepted or reconciled with the position of being an occupied population. We also benefited from the experiences of the generations before us.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to connect this to what I mentioned about the testing period, what was the moment when someone was trusted to become part of the group?

Naser Kuka: Well, now…

Anita Susuri: Or was it different for each individual, depending [on the circumstances]?

Naser Kuka: Well, for example, when I invited someone to join the Movement, I would tell them, "This is where I stand. I'm here, are you willing to join me? Are you ready to embark on a path that might bring consequences to our lives but one that we must take?" That's how it worked, trust was built, we evaluated things, made the decision ourselves… but still, there was a structure, and someone else also had to be informed about this. In cases where it was unavoidable, we operated using pseudonyms.

This is how it was decided, a conviction was formed that the person met all the necessary conditions, including their behavior in daily life, their dedication, commitment, readiness, and so on, to become part of the movement. Once we reached this conclusion, that they met all the requirements to be one of us, we would tell them, "Reveal yourself." Then, we would administer the oath, they would take the

oath, and so on. No matter how long the testing period lasted, there came a moment to say, "This is where I stand, are you joining me?"

Anita Susuri: And this oath you mention, since it's often referred to, do you perhaps know the words that were used? And are they, let's say, open to the public now for everyone to know?

Naser Kuka: Yes, these are well known. They've been published in dozens of books and various works, but the essence is this, "I will work until my last drop of blood for the realization of our national aspirations." That's the core of the oath. It's similar to the military oath of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Over time and in different circumstances, the strategy or realities of the work changed, evolving differently from what you initially worked toward, however, a historical process for a people does not depend solely on its internal will. Especially for us, when we are an issue debated at the tables of world chancelleries. In other words, despite how much we have propagated, fought, and engaged for the unification of Kosovo with Albania, our process is not yet complete. A new generation will emerge to fulfill that *amanet*.[17]

Anita Susuri: I want to talk now about the period when you continued your studies. Did you come to Pristina?

Naser Kuka: No, I didn't come because my right to university education was taken away...

Anita Susuri: This was, meaning, in '82, but before that...

Naser Kuka: No, in '81 my right to education was taken away.

Anita Susuri: Could you elaborate on that? Was it during the time when the demonstrations[18] were taking place?

Naser Kuka: No, it's connected now. The decision was made at that time, the decision was made then, but on January 28, 1981, I, along with a group of friends, visited Albania. After that, it started here, in a

[17] *Amanet* is an Albanian term derived from the Arabic word *amānah*, meaning a trust, legacy, or bequest. It is often used to express a deeply personal or moral obligation passed down from one person to another, typically as a final request or duty. In Albanian culture, it carries a strong emotional and ethical weight, symbolizing a sacred responsibility to fulfill the wishes of someone who has entrusted their hopes or legacy to another.

[18] The 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo were a series of mass protests led by Albanian students demanding greater rights and autonomy for Kosovo within Yugoslavia. Beginning in March at the University of Prishtina, the protests soon escalated into widespread demonstrations involving large segments of the Albanian population. Key demands included recognition of Kosovo as a republic within Yugoslavia, equal treatment for Albanians, and improved living and educational conditions. The Yugoslav government responded with harsh repression, including mass arrests, police brutality, and purges of Albanians from political and educational institutions. The events marked a turning point in Kosovo's struggle for political rights and are considered a precursor to later movements for independence.

way, at the time… just going to Albania was enough, not for pleasure or anything, but if you went to Albania, you automatically ended up on the list of people who needed to be monitored, followed, and kept under surveillance, and so on.

Anita Susuri: Did you go to Albania legally or illegally?

Naser Kuka: No, no, we went legally. However, according to the Yugoslav Security, the Yugoslav policies, it was considered an illegal visit because there were apparently certain rules that, in fact, I wasn't even aware of. In addition to the visa from the Albanian Embassy in Belgrade, according to them, that list was supposed to be submitted to other Yugoslav bodies, like the League of Communists of Yugoslavia or the security services, who knows. You were supposed to get approval from them as well, determining whether you could go or not. They would even plant their own agents within such structures, typical of how they operated. We didn't comply with that norm. Personally, I didn't even know about it, but even if I had known, I still wouldn't have complied.

Anita Susuri: So, you only sought permission from Albania?

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes. We obtained permission from the Albanian Embassy. I personally handled and led this process. Then, after our return, we naturally faced significant problems. Previously, I was called in for informative talks about why I was associating with Yugoslavia's enemy, Sali Bajra. Now, they began targeting me or others, asking, "Why are you associating with Naser Kuka?" and so on.

Anita Susuri: Before continuing with this, I'm very interested in the part where you traveled to Albania, as very few people had the chance to go at that time. What was your overall experience like? And, if I may ask, why did you go?

Naser Kuka: Well, our generation, youth is that stage of life where you don't see obstacles in the path you want to take, there's no force in the world that can stop you from pursuing the direction you've set out on. We belong to that generation and are part of it. And not just for this matter, but for anything, if you want to do something, you do it. We wanted to do this, and at that time, we took responsibility for this issue. To see things more closely, to explore possibilities that could also serve us back here. What we envisioned, we made happen.

The external aspect didn't leave an impression on me personally. I don't even know, because when we returned, people would ask, "Did they have this? Did they have that?" But I didn't pay attention to things like what kind of stove they baked their bread on, you know? Or what kind of bedding they had. I didn't go there with that mindset, I went as one goes to their own home, as one goes to their homeland, as one visits the place they've dreamed of, the place that had been forbidden.

Anita Susuri: How long did you stay there?

Naser Kuka: I don't remember exactly, but it was a good two weeks. Even though we had permission and all that, they told us over there, "Stay as long as you want, go wherever you want." In the end, we had each agreed on how much money to bring with us. But still, they kept telling us, "You can settle the payments at the end." And in the end, they didn't let us pay anything. In other words, we didn't pay a thing.

Anita Susuri: Did you stay with someone, a friend, or were there hotels?

Naser Kuka: No, no, they accommodated us in hotels since the visit was organized. We didn't face any obstacles. If we expressed a desire to go somewhere, we went. They arranged the travel infrastructure and everything else for us. No visit was made without consulting us, without us saying we wanted to go here or there. We also had someone from there accompanying us. At that time, they referred to it as tourism, meaning that sector, tourism.

Anita Susuri: Did you visit monumental sites in Albania, or was your purpose to establish relationships and connections, perhaps?

Naser Kuka: Whatever we wanted to do, we did. Wherever we wanted to go, we went. There was nothing left for us to regret, like, "Oh, we couldn't do this." Whatever we wanted, we did, whoever we wanted to meet, we met. We even wanted to stay in a private home through family connections, one connection leading to another, and we did that too. We were as free as if we were at home, like being in your own house.

Anita Susuri: Were you a large group when you went?

Naser Kuka: We were nine people, nine friends.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that when you returned, you faced problems…

Naser Kuka: Yes, there were problems. There were issues, but we got through them, it all tied together. Then came March 11, [1981] and they didn't have time to deal with this matter anymore because bigger issues arose. The scope of investigations during arrests or summonses for informative talks kept expanding, as the timing of our visit to Albania overlapped with the spring events, you understand? This made our situation a bit more complicated. But we made it through '81, even though there were problems. We were interrogated, mistreated, and so on. However, we wrapped up '81 well and entered '82, where we had already begun thinking about organizing the anniversary of the '81 demonstrations.

Anita Susuri: I want to pause for a moment on '81, as you were a participant in the demonstrations. I think it's worth documenting what you witnessed. But first, did you know that something was being organized?

Naser Kuka: Yes, we worked to organize and create the conditions for public organization and public opposition to Yugoslavia, for popular resistance. That was the goal. However, March 11 didn't personally surprise me, but I didn't know it would happen on March 11. I can't say that I knew because I didn't.

Anita Susuri: You didn't know the exact date?

Naser Kuka: No, no, I can't say that. I found out about it the next day when it erupted. This made us very happy, gave us hope, because we were aware that the important thing was for the process to start, once it starts, it doesn't stop.

Anita Susuri: March 11 was essentially the first spark, but then it continued with the relay handover[19] and April 1 and 2, which, if I'm not mistaken, involved more violence.

Naser Kuka: It started on March 26, continued on April 1, 2, and 3. On April 3, a state of emergency was declared in Pristina. Yugoslav special police forces were deployed, and there were incidents in the outskirts as well. However, not like on April 1 and 2, when all of Pristina was on its feet.

Anita Susuri: Where were you at those moments, and what did you see? What did you experience?

Naser Kuka: I wasn't there on March 11. I know it happened from my friends, but I wasn't a participant on March 11. My wife, however, was a participant.

Anita Susuri: And on April 1 and 2?

Naser Kuka: I was there on April 1, 2, and on April 3 until around midday. After that, it became impossible to move out of Pristina by bus or… well, we didn't have a car at that time, so we set off on foot. We had information that a demonstration was planned to start in Ferizaj around 2:00 PM, and we wanted to be part of it as well. That's why we started walking to Ferizaj. Later, we became part of…

[19] The relay handover refers to the symbolic Relay of Youth (*Štafeta mladosti*), an annual tradition in Yugoslavia where a relay baton was passed through all the republics, culminating in a ceremony on May 25 to celebrate Josip Broz Tito's birthday. In Kosovo, this tradition often clashed with growing Albanian nationalist sentiments, especially during periods of unrest like 1981. For many Albanians, participating in the relay became controversial, symbolizing forced loyalty to the Yugoslav state, which they increasingly opposed. In the context of the 1981 demonstrations, rejecting or resisting the relay handover was seen as a form of protest against Yugoslav oppression.

naturally, we worked on spreading the spirit of the demonstrations from Pristina. If nothing else, at least we inhaled a lot of tear gas that day (laughs).

Anita Susuri: And you mentioned that after this, they still came and interrogated you, mistreated you, because they connected it to your trip to Albania…

Naser Kuka: Yes, it happened, yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: But you continued with '82, the year you were imprisoned.

Naser Kuka: I was arrested on March 5 or 6, '82, under the accusation of organized hostile activity, nationalist, separatist, and irredentist, defined under Article 136 in connection with Article 114 of the Yugoslav Penal Code at that time. This was the accusation under which I was arrested and imprisoned.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Naser, you mentioned that the first time you were detained for a longer period was on March 5 or 6, '82, when you were also sentenced to imprisonment...

Naser Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did all of this happen? How did they come and take you? Why?

Naser Kuka: In fact, a day before my arrest, this happened on either March 5 or March 6, I'm not entirely sure. One of my friends, a close collaborator and one of my closest companions in the underground activities of those years and later, was arrested. I was informed about his absence from home during the night by his sister. She told me he hadn't come home all night and asked, "Do you know where he is? Where did he go?" and so on.

I knew he had gone somewhere, but he had returned sometime in the evening. However, he was informed by his family that someone was looking for him. During the day, they had frequently come to his house to check if he had arrived, when he would return, and so on. The same people had asked to be taken to me since they didn't know where I lived, but because their behavior raised some suspicions, his family refused to bring them to me.

Now, when I was told he hadn't come home all night, I was 99 percent sure he must have been arrested. Although I wasn't entirely certain. When I went out into town, this happened on Thursday, and Friday was market day in Kaçanik, I usually picked up the press when leaving the house. I noticed unfamiliar faces who...

Anita Susuri: Who were lingering around.

Naser Kuka: Who were hanging around like that. Naturally, I took the necessary precautions to ensure that nothing could be found in the house in case of any eventuality, and another thing was that if it turned out my friend had indeed been arrested, I knew I would be arrested as well because of our closeness and the work we had done together. I took these precautions and took certain actions to pass on the connections of the cells and the message to continue the work regardless of what might happen today or tomorrow. Then, in the afternoon, I went home for a while to be around and to see my family one last time, because, to be honest, I didn't want to be arrested in front of them.

I had the chance to leave, but I didn't want to, because if they had already arrested that friend of mine, my friend Hysen Shehu, then let them arrest me as well. That's how it was. During the day, someone from his family would come to inform me, asking, "Is there any news? Is there anything new? Are there suspicious movements around the house?" and so on. Later in the day, I became convinced that he had indeed been arrested. However, I didn't know that other arrests were taking place elsewhere in Kosovo because at that time, we didn't have the means of communication we do now, like phones and such.

Late in the evening, I believe it was around eight or nine, I was also arrested. I was sitting at a table with friends, among them Sali Bajra. A large number of special police forces were mobilized, and the location where we were was surrounded. At one moment, they essentially kidnapped me, and so on. To be honest, when they brought me to the State Security Center in Ferizaj, I actually felt relieved. I realized that Hysen was also in prison, him in prison and me in prison. Now, there was nothing left but to endure, to ensure that our imprisonment didn't cause any setbacks in the processes that had already begun.

Later, during the investigations, it became clear that others had also been arrested, from Ferizaj, Vitia, and surrounding areas. We managed to conclude this investigative process without any additional consequences, especially within the organizational circles. In other words, they took us, we remained in custody, the process was completed, we were brought to trial, sentenced, and…

Anita Susuri: How long were you sentenced?

Naser Kuka: In this process, I was sentenced to four years in prison. The friend I mentioned was sentenced to three and a half years, and the others received sentences of three years or less. That's how it was.

Anita Susuri: Where did you serve your sentence? In which prison?

Naser Kuka: There are several investigative prisons in Kosovo. Initially, I was in Ferizaj, then in Pristina, at the District Prison in Pristina. From there, I was transferred to the Mitrovica Prison, then to Sarajevo for a few months, and finally to the Zenica Prison. I was released from Zenica in March '86. I

served my full sentence, day by day, as I was sentenced. Prison life was not easy, as it isn't for anyone else either. But…

Anita Susuri: What were these prisons like? For example, the Pristina Prison?

Naser Kuka: Well, let's say, for several days or more than a week, I was held in… the basement of the State Security Center in Ferizaj. That was much harsher because there was no food, no water, and the interrogations lasted day and night. The investigative teams rotated among themselves, but they were all focused on you. Of course, it wasn't easy, it was very difficult. Then, in the prison, compared to the basement, it was somewhat different. Prisons don't differ much from each other, a prison is a prison. What might differ are the people or the spaces, a smaller cell, a larger cell, but it's still a prison. I haven't gone back to visit the Pristina prison now that it's open to visitors. I spent enough time there, and I don't feel the need to see it again.

It was a bit more specific in that the bathrooms and washing facilities were outside the main building. You had to go through what we called the walking yard at the time, a kind of corridor or open area where you were allowed to walk for two or three minutes during your air break. The bathrooms were within this walking yard, meaning you had to go outside in the winter, in the cold, in the rain, whatever the weather, passing through the yard to wash up. In most cases, there was no hot water available, so you had to use cold water, I don't remember exactly if it was once a week or twice a week that we could wash. But this was the same for everyone, with no exceptions. This was how it was in Pristina.

In Mitrovica, it was even harder. It was more difficult for us who were inside. But also tougher for the family members who came to visit, because there was a different set of rules, stricter monitoring of conversations, and worse treatment toward family members who came to see us, and visits typically lasted two to three minutes and occurred once every 15 days in Kosovo's investigative prisons. In Sarajevo and Zenica, it was once a month, one visit each month.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the transfers between prisons. Were you informed about these transfers, and how did that information reach your family? Did your family know?

Naser Kuka: No, there were no notifications. The guard would come in, open the door, and say, "Step outside!" They would call whoever they were calling. For example, when they called me, "Step outside!" You would step out, and the others would wait on the other side. The guard would come in and say, "The belongings of…" the one being taken out, "take them outside." And they didn't even give you the chance to say goodbye to the cellmates you were with. When you were alone… no, you didn't know, nor did you know where you were going.

This, for example, let's say, relates to another phase. So, I was transferred from Mitrovica to Sarajevo, and my mother or my family didn't know that I was in Sarajevo. They went to the relevant judge at the District Court in Pristina to get a permit for a visit, as for every visit a permit was required. When they went during this time after my transfer to the prison in Sarajevo, they weren't told, "He is not in Mitrovica, go to Sarajevo, because we sent him there." So, my family searched for me in other prisons where they thought I might be for a longer time. Until, by chance, they found me in the prison in Sarajevo and went to ask, "Is he here?"

Anita Susuri: They went all the way to Sarajevo?

Naser Kuka: Yes. But they also went around to other prisons. And then, even there, there were problems, there were issues because they didn't allow speaking Albanian. There were stricter restrictions than in other prisons in Kosovo. Ventilation was lacking, as was the yard for walks. Just a minute, just a minute, you'd step outside, which means that, in addition to being very far away, far from home, far from Kosovo, there were also difficulties imposed on visits, and even when visits happened, there were problems because you had to wait for hours. For example, I had my first visit with my mother from a distance, meaning from afar, because we agreed that we wouldn't speak Serbian, we didn't want to speak it. But at least my mother could be reassured that I was alive and see me from a distance.

Anita Susuri: And the Sarajevo prison, I think it was a prison with many floors?

Naser Kuka: I didn't see it from the outside, so I don't know. But, as I later learned in the Zenica prison, it was a prison from the Austro-Hungarian era. Similar to how the Mitrovica District Prison was also an Austro-Hungarian prison. It was their design since this one was built after the Second World War. But it was an old prison, as others who had been there would say, primarily Bosniaks in Zenica, although there were also Croatian political prisoners. From what I heard about that prison, it was an old one from the Austro-Hungarian era.

Anita Susuri: And in prison, for example, you political prisoners, did you have contact with each other? Were you able to talk or...?

Naser Kuka: No, not in detention prisons. It's not that we didn't talk, but for longer periods even the press wasn't allowed. We had to go on multiple strikes just to gain the right to have books, the right to access published books. To allow our families to bring us a book, or for us to receive newspapers at our own expense. There were circumstances, let's say, when the press was allowed, but even then, it depended on the situation outside. If there were movements outside, if there were protests or

processes happening outside, or for example, during the time of the poisonings[20] that happened in Kosovo in '88. Was it '88? Or '89? During that time, the press wasn't provided. Then, when we first ended up in prison, even bread was rationed. There wasn't enough bread. Bread, I'm not even talking about other things, just bread.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to talk about the strikes you mentioned, what were the longest strikes you held, and for what reasons did you hold them? Were they for books, for these materials, or for something else?

Naser Kuka: I'll talk about the strikes, yes, the strikes. We often held strikes, for example, we went on strike to demand that prison guards not be allowed to carry batons in the corridors of the prisoners. To carry them on their bodies or with them. For instance, in the Mitrovica prison, it was mandatory to keep your hands behind your back and to watch your steps on the ground, not to lift your head up. And not to speak, not even with those in your cell. I don't know how it happened, but we somehow agreed that we wouldn't keep our hands behind our backs and that we would talk in the yard during walks.

At that time, we were in a shared cell with Ukshin Hoti[21] and Ferat Muja. Ferat was imprisoned for another matter, but politically he was sentenced to death under nationalist motives and so on. He was sentenced, essentially, for the killing of a Serb. A necessary killing in self-defense, self-defense. Well, in this case, the guard who stayed in that, that, I don't know what to call it, it was like a kiosk...

Anita Susuri: Watchtower?

Naser Kuka: Yes. And he said, "Don't talk, keep your head down and your hands behind your back." Ukshin said, "We will not keep our hands behind our backs, and we will not keep our heads down." He asked, "Just for now, or how long have you decided this for?" Ukshin replied, "Forever. We are not here," he said, "in a church or mosque to behave and pray for the forgiveness of sins we've committed," something like that. Ukshin said it very well, in a philosophical and admirable way. They interrupted our walk, sent us back to the cell, and for several days after that, they didn't let us out for walks at all.

They put us under surveillance to prevent us from communicating with other cells. Communication, meaning, through the wall to extend this initiative of refusing to keep our hands behind our backs and

[20] The poisonings refer to the mass poisoning incidents reported in Kosovo in 1990, when thousands of Albanian schoolchildren and adults exhibited symptoms such as dizziness, fainting, nausea, and vomiting. The events, widely believed by Kosovo Albanians to be deliberate attacks by Serbian authorities as part of the political repression of Albanians in the region, remain controversial and unresolved. While Serbian authorities dismissed the incidents as mass hysteria, they left a lasting impact on the collective memory of Albanians in Kosovo.

[21] Ukshin Hoti (1943–1999) was a prominent Albanian politician, intellectual, and professor from Kosovo. Known for his advocacy of human rights and national self-determination for Albanians, he was imprisoned multiple times by Yugoslav authorities for his political activities. Hoti disappeared in 1999 after being released from prison, and his fate remains unknown, making him a symbol of resistance and sacrifice for many Albanians.

our heads down. However, we managed to convey the message to the neighboring cell by talking through the wall, as prisoners always find ways to communicate with each other. Eventually, this spread and expanded throughout the entire prison, and we won this right as well.

The strikes were carried out like this. For more bread, for a few more rights, for better treatment of prisoners by the guards and the staff, for slightly better conditions, for newspapers, for books, for normal behavior toward family members who came to visit us. For the security not to stand over us, listening to what we were saying to our mothers, to our fathers, and not to behave in the ways they knew how to behave. Then, the visits were through bars, meaning you couldn't...

Anita Susuri: [Have physical] contact.

Naser Kuka: Physical contact, not even a handshake, nothing like that. But the strikes were reasonable, they were necessary also because, even there, the struggle continued, even there, it was… because we were prisoners of a regime that was fighting us.

Anita Susuri: Yes, a kind of resistance.

Naser Kuka: Yes, it was resistance, of course. Political prisoners resisted wherever they were and knew how to coordinate among themselves. For example, let's say in Sarajevo, I didn't know how many prisoners there were, if there were Albanian prisoners, how many, or where they were. But with our methods of communication through the wall {knocks three times with hand}, we had those, meaning…

Anita Susuri: Like knocking, or how?

Naser Kuka: Knocking, yes, knocking. And then we would know that there were other comrades inside as well.

Anita Susuri: What were these knocks like?

Naser Kuka: Well, now those times have passed...

Anita Susuri: If you remember.

Naser Kuka: No, I remember it, I won't forget because it's life, a part of life. But we had it, I won't say it out loud, but I can knock on the table to show how the knocking pattern on the wall was.

Anita Susuri: So, it was a specific one?

Naser Kuka: Yes {knocks on the table}.[22] This was one of them (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Very interesting. So, you would do this for someone, and they would respond in the same way…

Naser Kuka: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And you would know...

Naser Kuka: We knew that we had comrades there.

Anita Susuri: Very interesting. You mentioned that in the Sarajevo prison, and actually in the Zenica prison as well, in the Sarajevo prison you didn't go outside, you didn't have the right to…

Naser Kuka: No, there wasn't, there wasn't such a right.

Anita Susuri: And in the Zenica prison, how long was it? Until your release, how long did you stay?

Naser Kuka: Now, I believe it must have been July 8 or August '83 when I was transferred from the Mitrovica prison to the Sarajevo prison, to be clear, I didn't even know I was in the Sarajevo prison. I only knew I was somewhere far from Kosovo because of the travel duration. The vehicles used for transporting prisoners were like cells where you couldn't see outside to know where you were going. But it was evident that you were somewhere far from Kosovo. Later, we knew there were prisoners because, well, the prisons in Kosovo were overcrowded.

It started as early as '81, when they began sending Albanians outside Kosovo to prisons in the former Yugoslavia, they filled them with Albanians. I figured I must be somewhere around where they sent others or part of the others. Later, I found out I was in Sarajevo. I learned about this much later, through my mother, when she found me there. I said to her, "Mom, you even found me here?" She replied, "Son, even if they sent you to the ends of the earth, I would find you." Communication was prohibited. They had said not to talk to each other, only to see each other. But I couldn't stay silent. I said to her, "Never mind the ends of the earth, but tell me where I am" (laughs). And then they took my mother away from there.

Anita Susuri: She didn't manage to tell you.

Naser Kuka: No, yes, yes. My mother was... my mother was a highlander. A true highlander of her time, the kind you can only find in books.

[22] Knocks on the table with a fist in the rhythm: "Republic, Constitution, either willingly or through struggle."

Anita Susuri: And when you were released from the Zenica prison, it seems like it was a kind of strategy they used, to release you earlier or not let you know, I mean, did you know the exact date, or did they release you at an unexpected time?

Naser Kuka: No, we knew. I knew that I would be released on March 6. Now, we never knew… because in the Zenica prison, we didn't have names, there we had identification numbers, and they called us by numbers. I knew my number. When they called my number, I responded wherever they summoned me. But there was a rule, a house order, that prisoners scheduled to be released on a specific date were released between 9:00 and 10:00 in the morning, from 9:00 to 10:00.

When that time passed, and they didn't call me, I started suspecting that they had decided to punish me because they could punish you even in prison. They would pin an offense on you, or there wasn't much you could do in prison, and it could be something like that. Then a lot of time passed, and eventually, they called me, but not to release me, they called me to report to solitary confinement, to the solitary unit. I went there. Then they conducted a check on me, like the one they do when you first enter prison, when you're arrested. This reinforced my belief that they had decided to punish me.

They put me in a cell and kept me there for a while. Then they brought in a package, and when I opened it, I saw the release clothes, civilian clothes, because we wore prison uniforms. I put on those clothes and thought, even if they punish me, at least I'll be properly dressed, you know (laughs). It didn't last long, it was in the evening, late hours. They took me out of there and brought me to an office to threaten me and to tell me where I was headed next, you understand? That's how it went.

That conversation lasted a while, well, I say conversation, but it wasn't really a conversation. It was more about threatening me. Then they took me out, opened the door, and in the courtyard, in front of the prison, I saw my mother, who had been waiting there all day, and one of my brothers. We greeted each other. I thought they had come with a car, and I said to myself, "We're saved." And I forgot to mention this, my mother said to me, "Why didn't you wear a windbreaker?" [jacket]. Something like that {touches the jacket they are wearing}. "I'm not cold, you know, I'm not cold," she said. "No, put it on because your father bought you the clothes." I said, "Oh, has father passed away?" She said, "No, no, he just wanted to wait for you at home." But I thought to myself that he must have passed away.

Alright, we got on the train because they had come by train. When the train started, the Security agents, the police, came to check our IDs and conduct a search. I didn't have an ID, only the release document from the prison. They took it from me. They also searched my mother and brother. Now, based on the experience I had with other prisoners, I became convinced that they were going to arrest me somewhere along the way. Anyway, to cut it short, we made it home, and that's when my suspicion was confirmed, the head of the household was missing.

Some from my neighborhood had come to the station, and others were waiting in front of the house. In front of the house, everyone was there, young and old, to welcome me. Then, after a few days, we held a meeting with the other comrades who had continued their work outside. But they didn't let me stay for long because they took me and sent me to the military.

Anita Susuri: Which year? Was it immediately that same year?

Naser Kuka: Immediately that same year. Right at the beginning. So, in fact, I went from one prison to another.

Anita Susuri: Where were you stationed in the military?

Naser Kuka: In Banja Luka. But the harsh conditions of life continued there, just not in a cell. The military was a second, harsh prison for me, but also for many others. That period went as it went. I'll share one fact that I remember, they once gave me leave there and said, "Go home for seven days." They gave me the permit. In fact, I didn't want to go because it was early in my service, and we didn't have the luxury to move around like that, nor to afford the expenses. But I didn't oppose it.

Before leaving the barracks, there were phone booths. I called my mother to tell her, to let her know I was coming. However, as soon as I hung up the phone, the others came and said, "Where are you going?" "Home, I have a permit." They took the leave permit from me and didn't let me go. Later, the same officer who had given me the first permit gave it to me again. "Go now, they won't dare stop you this time." I took it, set off again, but they turned me back once more. The military police confiscated the permit and sent me back.

Now I started to suspect that there was some plan behind all this. I found a way to call my mother, asking her to come visit me. She came with one of my nephews. They didn't let me go to the visit to meet with her. Then I asked someone, a Slovenian, I said, "A woman, you'll see, like this, like this… go tell her. She doesn't know how to speak, but she'll understand. Go to the city center, and I'll find you there." Eventually, I managed to get out, without permission, from the barracks. I found the city center, and I also found my mother. Like our mothers, she had stopped at a shop, looking at advertisements in the window.

I knew they wouldn't let me stay with her for long, so I told her, "I called you because the situation isn't good. I don't know how things will develop around me, but you need to know, and you need to tell others, that there is no circumstance in life that would make me commit suicide. If this happens, know that they have liquidated me." In other words, I had called her to tell her this. Then they arrested me, and this happened, they arrested me and sent me back to the barracks. In fact, they put me in a detention room, and that's how it went.

Anita Susuri: And afterward, was there constant pressure on you the whole time, or did the situation improve a bit, or how?

Naser Kuka: No, it didn't improve, no. Life in the military was hard. In fact, I can say that, psychologically, I was damaged more there than in prison, during my time in prison. They wouldn't let you sleep, all night in interrogations, mistreatment, threats, blindfolding you without knowing where they were taking you, and so on. Life was hard, but we had the will to endure even that. We had the will, the strength to face difficulties, whatever they were.

Anita Susuri: Did you stay in the military for 14 months, like others?

Naser Kuka: No, I stayed for twelve months.

Anita Susuri: Twelve months.

Naser Kuka: Twelve, that's how the military was.

Anita Susuri: Twelve. And after you returned from the military, meaning you had spent time in prison and then in the military, how did you reactivate in your activities? I mean, you surely continued with your activism, right?

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes, immediately, right away. As I mentioned earlier, Hysen had been released a bit before me after serving a three-and-a-half-year sentence. During this time, while I was still away, he had managed to put things into motion…

Anita Susuri: To reorganize.

Naser Kuka: To reorganize those ranks that existed. To bring order to the work of our structures, so it wasn't difficult from the start to get information about the situation and to continue the work together from where we had left off. In fact, even more intensively than we had worked up to that point.

Anita Susuri: You continued distributing writings, various tracts?

Naser Kuka: We distributed tracts, printed, and duplicated various materials. If I'm not mistaken, at the same time, I was also in contact with the OMLK[23] structures operating in Ferizaj and other regions. During that time, we agreed to distribute the tract titled "A Call to the People of Kosovo and the

[23] OMLK (*Organizata Marksiste-Leniniste e Kosovës*) was a Marxist-Leninist organization established in the 1970s in Kosovo. Its primary goal was to advocate for the unification of Albanian territories and to oppose Yugoslav rule in Kosovo. The organization was involved in clandestine activities, including distributing political pamphlets (tracts) and organizing protests. OMLK played a significant role in the political resistance of Albanians in Kosovo during that period, emphasizing self-determination and anti-imperialist ideology.

Albanian Territories", meaning to Albanians in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Eastern Kosovo. This tract was distributed at that time, I believe, in all Albanian-majority municipalities.

We multiplied and increased the number of tracts. But this was a time of great movements and an offensive that Yugoslavia had undertaken in Kosovo through demonstrations by Serbs, Montenegrins, and others. It was also the time when we were definitively convinced that the conditions were ripe for a different kind of movement in Kosovo, for a different kind of resistance in Kosovo. On the discussion table was also the idea of a broad, legal, popular movement. Let them imprison us, let them kill us, but we needed to massify our movement, we had to.

From a small and narrow movement, to create a large, powerful popular movement. These issues were discussed at the time, we talked about them. But when we were right in the midst of that great momentum of work, the time came again, the day arrived when we had to face the fate of our lives, meaning arrest and imprisonment.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: I specifically wanted to get to '88, as it is the year of your marriage to Mrs. Afide, but also the year of your arrest…

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How did you first meet Mrs. Afide?

Naser Kuka: We were already acquainted, as Afide was part of the organizational council structures for the Ferizaj district. She was arrested on March 26, '81, along with other comrades. Then, she was sentenced in '84, meaning she was sentenced together with others that year, our activism brought us together. It wasn't a time for such ceremonies, not because it was secondary, but for our convictions at that time, this matter had taken a back seat.

But I had my mother who would insist every day, "Come on, come on, come on, come on." So, in the end, we agreed to go ahead with the marriage. Maybe they wouldn't let us stay together even for a single day, but we would make it official, and then deal with whatever came our way. We agreed to marry, fully aware that our life together wouldn't be easy. Of course, armed resistance was also part of these discussions. If given the chance, if we were given the opportunity, I wouldn't end up in prison alive. You understand? That's how it was.

Afide, here I'm not speaking as a spouse but as a comrade, as a fellow fighter, knew exactly what she was doing in her life. She was ready to face all the hardships that life under occupation and the

struggle against the occupiers brought. We also held a wedding in this context. A wedding done more out of defiance against the regime. Because you might be young and unaware, but it wasn't easy for two former political prisoners to get married. It wasn't an easy decision. Because you were no longer alone. It was understood that if you fell, the other would fall with you, you wouldn't go alone anymore. But we still went ahead and had a wedding.

We decided to invite at least one comrade from each municipality of Kosovo, former prisoner comrades, to be present at the wedding. Among them, we also invited Ukshin, Ukshin Hoti. Otherwise, Ukshin had been a regular visitor to my home in Kaçanik even before this. We spent time together. When my house was burned down during the war, I was deeply saddened by the loss of letters, documents, and books, but I was also heartbroken about a set of glasses that Ukshin Hoti had brought as a wedding gift. I wanted to say that Ukshin, at the wedding, and if I'm not mistaken, for the first time in his life, drank a glass of "Skënderbeg" cognac at that wedding.

But this, this marriage didn't last long, because on the day we marked three months of marriage, I received a signal that I might be arrested, that this was expected to happen. I thought it concerned me alone, not my wife. Nevertheless, I shared this news with her, word by word as it had reached me, that this was expected to happen and that I might be forced to leave Kosovo. Then we discussed it within a smaller circle of comrades and decided that I, since it was also suspected that another comrade, Hysen, who had been imprisoned before, might also be on the list, we agreed that we would leave together.

We communicated and established connections with comrades in Germany and Switzerland to organize our escape from Yugoslavia. We took measures and prepared accordingly. I didn't have any documents after being released from prison because, in fact, my passport had been confiscated immediately after my return from Albania in '81. Hysen also didn't have a passport. Comrades abroad suggested that we leave via Italy. They arranged to meet us in a border town between Yugoslavia and Italy and to wait for us there. Among them was also a brother of Afide. We entered Italy with great difficulty, as we hadn't traveled before to know the route. We navigated based on the sun for orientation. We made it out, but at one point, the Italian police stopped us, asked for identification, and requested our documents. I handed them an ID that belonged to one of my brothers, and that's how it went.

Anyway, they finally detained us, arrested us, and took us to one of their gendarmerie stations. They photographed us, took our fingerprints, and so on. Based on books I had read, I knew that *questura*[24] meant police headquarters or security. From literature, as I didn't know Italian and couldn't communicate with them. I told the Italian police to take us to the *questura*. They took us there, but they had brought in a Yugoslav consular interpreter. At least that's how he introduced himself, as he

[24] *Questura* refers to the main police headquarters in Italy, responsible for public security and administrative police functions, including handling immigration and foreign nationals.

greeted us in Serbian. Without going into too much detail, they ultimately handed us over to the Slovenian authorities at the border with Slovenia.

Then, they immediately brought us before the misdemeanor judge that same day, at the Court of Koper. The sentence was nine days in prison for illegally crossing the border. I requested that this prison sentence be converted into a fine, to pay for those nine days in prison. Thinking they didn't know who we were. The court converted the sentence to a fine, sentencing us to nine days with the option to pay the fine. They said, "When you go to prison, ask for the treasurer, they'll bring the treasurer, you pay the fine, and you'll be released from prison." However, that wasn't the case. They kept saying, "He's not here today, he'll come tomorrow." "He's not here today, he'll come tomorrow."

They kept us there for nine days, and we served the sentence. Then they handcuffed us and brought us to Kosovo, handing us over there. After that, it became known that we had been arrested and that my wife was also in prison. So, this situation became clear. However, unlike the first time, this time the investigation of this arrest was conducted at the Secretariat of Internal Affairs in Mitrovica. This was a bit more difficult, especially for my wife, who at that time was pregnant. Her condition made my situation even more difficult.

Anyway, we managed to get through this difficult and indescribable phase of mine and came out without any consequences. Apart from the consequences of having stayed in prison, meaning without any other consequences as a result of the investigations, when you have a pregnant wife who is beaten, who you know is staying in a cell, and when you yourself are also in a cell. And when the investigations last for months, leaving no form of violence unused on our bodies. Then you reach a point where the decision is communicated, the day of the trial is set, and you feel relieved because at least the investigations have ended. You've come out of it fine, you've fared well, and the comrades outside continue their work. Whatever happens to us from here on out, let it happen.

Anita Susuri: Was the violence usually during the investigations, or also after you were sentenced?

Naser Kuka: No, for us political prisoners, physical violence was primarily used during investigations or in specific other cases. But this happened in the premises of the State Security, not inside the prison itself. They would take you out of prison, bring you to the State Security premises, where you'd be handcuffed or tied to something else, like the heating pipes. And then, those were the methods they used on everyone. It wasn't something that happened to just one prisoner in particular.

But, nevertheless, I would say that, personally, when the investigative procedure closed, when it went to trial and they saw that no other comrades were involved, that I hadn't implicated anyone, I considered it a victory. I had triumphed over the UDB, and every time I did, it was a victory for me. My entire life has been a victory. They succeeded in breaking our bodies, but they never managed to defeat us, they never managed to force us to say what we never wanted to say, not once, not ever!

Anita Susuri: And during this time, how long were you sentenced?

Naser Kuka: I was sentenced to four years, just like the first sentence. Later, this sentence was reduced to two years, because, to be honest, they didn't have evidence to convict me. Perhaps they sentenced me just because of my stance in court, the stance I held both during the trial and the investigations. There's no question about it, as we defended the demand for the Republic of Kosovo before, during the investigations, and even in the courtroom. We defended it and justified it because they didn't have facts or evidence. What they knew were minor things. Meaning, there wasn't enough to justify a four-year sentence. But, like the others, I defended and justified the demand for the Republic of Kosovo as a rightful and necessary cause to be realized, that one day we would inevitably win the fight. And so I was sentenced to two years, and somewhere around that amount of time I served.

I was released because, during this period, we were in the Mitrovica prison. My wife was in the women's ward, while I was on the second floor. My mother, as usual, would come to visit me, and I asked her, "Have you seen Afide?" On one occasion, she said, "No, I'll finish with you first and then go to Afide." I said, "No, don't come to me without first visiting Afide." I always wanted to know, during the visit, how Afide was doing. And in one instance, they didn't treat my mother well, as she used to console me, saying, "Don't worry, son, it'll be okay, hang in there…" One day, the prison authorities didn't treat her well, the prison director and the Security officer monitoring the conversations.

Then I protested and went on a hunger strike with an extreme demand, namely the removal of the prison director from his position, under the condition of my life. They tried to convince me to break the strike, to stop it, and so on. But I didn't stop. Then, I think after 12-13 days, they transferred me to the prison in Pristina. Now, with this move, I made my mother's life even harder because she had to go to court, to the Pristina Court, to get permission to visit Afide. She would visit Afide, then go back to court to get permission to visit me, and then come to see me. This situation became even more pronounced when I was transferred from the Pristina prison to the Gjilan prison. Now, the poor woman had to run back and forth, running here, running there. Back and forth, back and forth.

This was, in fact, during the pre-trial period that I mentioned, because during the trial, Afide was released for nine months until she gave birth. That's how the decision seemed to have been made. But it wasn't just Afide, there was also a friend of hers in the same situation. Yes. And that's how it went. I finished my sentence in the Gjilan prison, and from there, I was released and went home.

Anita Susuri: On the exact date of your release, or...?

Naser Kuka: Well, no, it wasn't exactly on the date, because I remember if it had been that day, my mother would have come to wait for me outside the prison. No one came, I took a taxi home. It wasn't the exact date, maybe a day or so earlier. When I got out, I found some things waiting for me. I'll share

this as well, a representative from Amnesty International, a German who was assigned to my case by their center. They had written a letter much earlier, Richard Green, I believe his name was, had written to my family on my behalf, congratulating me on my release from prison and asking me to write back about how I had spent my time in prison and so on. But, in fact, I found these letters only after being released. Presumably, based on their experiences, they had received some inaccurate information from, I don't know, various authorities, and...

Anita Susuri: Did they write to you while you were in prison?

Naser Kuka: They wrote to me, but to my home address [not to the prison]. I read those letters after I was released, at home. I wanted to say that I was under the protection of Amnesty International, but I found out many things only after leaving prison. As for the prison sentence, I served it. Now, whether I was released a day or two earlier or later doesn't really matter. After my release, it was a completely different situation...

Anita Susuri: The year '90, right?

Naser Kuka: Yes, yes, mid-'90. Then came the time when Afide had to report back to prison...

Anita Susuri: Because she had been granted leave from prison.

Naser Kuka: She was released by a court decision. Both she and her friend were released due to their health conditions until the child turned nine months old. The decision included the date when she had to report back to serve her sentence. Then, I believe we managed to delay it, link after link, meaning we extended it for some time so that I could rest a bit and she could recover as well. However, during this period of Afide's life, it was mostly underground, her entire life was essentially lived underground at that point. This year was marked by a change in the strategy of our work and activities.

No longer was there talk of distributing tracts, newspapers, or books. We assessed that the time had come for us to change our approach as well. We decided to definitively end underground political and propagandistic activities, what we had been doing daily up until then. The organized underground cells were transformed into armed cells, armed units, and our activity shifted towards securing weapons, organizing the units, expanding them, and so on. In other words, we definitively committed to preparing the people for an armed struggle against Serbia.

This period lasted until my last arrest, which happened on January 31, '94, in Ferizaj, along with others. It occurred during a celebration of the *Flaka e Janarit*[25] event. But during '90 and '91, we

[25] *Flaka e Janarit* (The Flame of January) is an annual cultural and commemorative event held in Kosovo to honor prominent Albanian figures who sacrificed their lives for national causes. The event typically includes artistic performances, poetry readings, and other cultural activities aimed at preserving national identity and remembering historical struggles.

managed to expand in the urban center, forming units in almost every neighborhood. Some were larger, others smaller, and similarly in the villages and peripheral areas of Kaçanik. Then came a period where a few people had to handle everything, securing weapons, securing ammunition, organizing distribution, and establishing a distribution unit.

Around '92, in January if I'm not mistaken, though the dates may vary, I received information, actually a message, that I needed to leave Kosovo because I was at great risk. In fact, I didn't know I was at risk. We were working, but I wasn't aware that something had been exposed, as it hadn't actually happened. Nonetheless, I couldn't leave on my own and abandon my wife and child. So, we agreed that at least she should leave, since she had a brother and a sister in Germany, to ensure her safety. As for me, let whatever happens, happen.

Anita Susuri: At that time, I think you had three children?

Naser Kuka: Yes, the third child was only a few days old. We had to act quickly because the message came suddenly, meaning immediately. So, we quickly took the necessary measures and set off for Dibra together with Afide. Since we didn't have documents, we had to cross into Dibra through the mountains. We had to stay in Dibra for a few days. Relying on a contact, a connection we had arranged, as we didn't know anyone there.

With me were also two comrades from Kaçanik, and I didn't let them get close to the danger zone, along with one comrade from Gjilan and another from the Lipjan area. But those two had to make the mountain journey with me. After staying a few days in Dibra, at Haki's place, I don't remember his last name. They treated us like family. The lady of the house even asked Afide to leave the little baby, our daughter, in her care so she could look after her until circumstances allowed for her to be reunited with us wherever we might be. But of course, we couldn't agree to that.

Finally, once all the preparations were completed and everything that needed to be done was finished, we set off on the mountain route and crossed into Albania. We crossed the border. Not easily, it was quite tough, very difficult. The path to get there was challenging. And then the journey from the border villages was also hard. There's a neighborhood called Capaj there, and from there, we had to go to Peshkopi, and from Peshkopi, then to Tirana. It took about twelve hours of travel at that time. After that, there wasn't really anywhere to go. I had some contacts, as I had been to Albania before, but this time it was different, I wasn't going there for work, this time was entirely different…

Anita Susuri: Alone.

Naser Kuka: Alone. Anyway, it was a good decision, we got through it well, despite facing many difficulties. We endured a tough life. The Italians discovered us because the passports we had were foreign. They held us for a few days in an isolation room under miserable conditions, but we escaped.

It was a great stroke of luck that I had connections and managed to avoid being handed over to Yugoslavia. As the groundwork for that had been prepared. Returning to Tirana felt like returning home, there were no worries about that, however, the plan to get Afide out failed, as that was the goal. Later, someone came to inform me that my mother was very ill, so I took my eldest daughter by the hand, crossed the mountains, and we came back home.

Part Five

Naser Kuka: After receiving the news about my mother's serious health condition, I took my eldest daughter, Besforta, and set off once again on the mountain route, arriving in Kaçanik. We stayed there for about three or four days until I was convinced that she wasn't ready to leave this life. I left my daughter there and then returned alone the same way. I brought back my wife and our two other children, Boletin and Shkëndija, and once again crossed the mountains with them to return home.

The very fact that no summons had been issued and no one had come looking for me at home made the message I had received, with all the stress, difficulties, and risks, seem not very serious. But I had to take precautions since the message had been delivered to me. We continued our work, life went on as normal, with the usual problems, sometimes openly, sometimes semi-underground. This continued in this way until January 31, '94. On January 31, '94, I was arrested along with, if I'm not mistaken, 41 others at the home-school[26] of Hysri Varoshi in Ferizaj.

During this arrest, I was physically harmed significantly, and it became impossible for me to remain in Kosovo any longer. First, because of my physical condition, and second, due to the impossibility of continuing our work. After spending some time in the villages of Kaçanik... I was in a state where I couldn't move physically.

Anita Susuri: Was this the time when they left you on the road?

Naser Kuka: Yes, meaning I couldn't walk, I couldn't move, I couldn't get up...

Anita Susuri: They harmed you a lot.

Naser Kuka: Extremely so. And in that condition, after some time, there were only two options, there was no third: either they would catch me and imprison me, or they would kill me. There was no other way. My comrades helped me escape, and I crossed into Macedonia, to some of my mother's cousins. I

[26] Home-schools refer to private, often clandestine spaces used during the 1990s in Kosovo for educational and organizational activities, as the Serbian regime had closed Albanian-language schools and institutions. These spaces served as improvised schools, meeting places, or safe havens for Albanian resistance efforts, often held in homes or other private locations.

stayed there for a while, using traditional remedies and so on. Around the end of March or April, with the help of comrades and the support of the people of Dibra, I managed to cross the Macedonia-Albania border and make my way to Tirana.

Beforehand, Afide had already made a decision, that was a separate matter. Now I was alone, without any additional burden other than my own situation. But this also marked the end of a period, the end of my active participation and physical involvement in Kaçanik and Kosovo. After many attempts and significant challenges, I eventually managed to make it to Germany. Initially, I spent one night in Switzerland at a friend's house, and he then drove me in his own car to Afide's family, to her brother in Germany.

On April 24, '94, a day after arriving in Germany, I registered at the asylum center in Germany. This marked a transition to a different way of working, to another phase of both life and work. I can say that I haven't stopped, I haven't taken time to mourn where it hurts the most or anything like that. We started working even there, doing whatever we could. In other words, working in another country for the sake of your own.

The asylum process was quick, meaning we get our passports quickly within a short period of time. But by '95, my mother called and said, "I've managed to keep going this far, but I can't keep going any longer. They don't want to deal with us anymore, we have nowhere to go. I'm afraid they'll take the children," because, in fact, they were trying to pressure me by taking the children. She said, "At least take the children. Do whatever you can to take them." I took the necessary measures and traveled to Tirana. I established contacts in Ladorishtë with my friends, the bases I had been using continuously, and organized the arrival of my mother and children in Ladorishtë.

Then, with the support of the women and men of Ladorishtë, they also made it to Albania. I took them and settled them in Elbasan, with some friends of mine, and as for my mother, there was a problem with the procedure, meaning we had to wait for some time. For the children, there wasn't a problem as the transfer procedure to Germany was arranged immediately within the day. However, I used my usual methods of taking risks, and I took both my mother and the children with me to Germany, I didn't separate them. In other words, within one day, there were no issues. The next day, I registered them at the asylum center. I explained how I had brought them to Germany, in this way, since there was no other option. We continued, and even now, we didn't have any problems with the children or with my mother, as she was elderly.

Anita Susuri: How old was your mother at that time?

Naser Kuka: Well, now...

Anita Susuri: Around 70 years old?

Naser Kuka: Over 70 years old. Then we continued, especially through clubs and associations. We formed associations, particularly a cultural center for Albanians in Sindelfingen, in the Stuttgart district, named "Isa Boletini." Initially, I began by offering myself for work and engagement in the interests of our compatriots and Kosovo. Gradually, we also took the initiative to form the Association of Intellectuals in Germany. Later, we also established a sort of Albanian-German community and started activities that we considered to be in the interest of Kosovo.

One of these efforts was informing the German public about the situation in Kosovo. Through publishing and distributing various pamphlets, translating them into German, and through other activities that were considered to be in the interest of Kosovo at that time. This went on until around '96-'97, with meetings with compatriots, not just in Germany but also in other countries. During the period of '96-'97, it was necessary to focus more on developments in Kosovo. We had to secure weapons, recruit people, ensure the necessary logistics, and find volunteers who were willing to die for this country. This led to the public emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

We were all involved in everything, we weren't focused on just one task. Whatever was needed and could be done, was done. It didn't matter. I had a task, yes, and I did it. You could have done other tasks, and you would have completed those as well. But when there were enough people, I, up until then, had mainly been involved in securing logistics, securing weapons, and ammunition for the war. I, along with others, didn't just do this work alone. I was part of that special sector, meaning the general staff, the logistics sector.

We continued like this, coming and going, doing the work that needed to be done. Until the entry of NATO forces and the establishment of the provisional government in Pristina, along with the general staff. After that, until 2002, I was sporadically involved, mostly out of political responsibility at the local level in the municipality of Kaçanik. But this year also marked the end for me, my final withdrawal from activities and the conclusion of the history of my life's work, my involvement in the cause of Kosovo.

What is, what is a chapter of history that we touched upon briefly, but in fact, the period of '90-'91 should have been discussed more. This period is being written about, and I believe it will one day be recognized as the time when, in an organized manner, a decision was made by a group with a long tradition of underground activity to stop the underground political activity and transition the underground cells of the movement into armed formations.

Then, in September '91, when we sent the first recruits from Kosovo for military training in preparation for the war in Kosovo, so, in September '91. This was also our work, our engagement, and our responsibilities. These two periods, for example, are still in need of time to be fully clarified as they

actually were. It is the historians' job, those who focus on illuminating the processes of this period, as there are many things that still remain in the dark and need to be brought to light.

Specifically, what I mentioned earlier, regarding the armed organizations, particularly the formation of armed units in the city of Kaçanik and its surrounding area. This dates back to '90, the second half of '90, during which there was rapid development in the expansion, tightening of ranks, strengthening of the ranks, and practical preparation for armed resistance. The circumstances were different at that time. Like all other Albanians, we, as an organization, saw our hope, our belief, and the only light of support and backing in the official government of Tirana.

In this regard, we traveled long distances, not without many difficulties, not without many risks, to see what could be done in this context in terms of securing regular channels for supplying weapons and preparing recruits, the youth of Kosovo, for war. Formally speaking, there was readiness, at least until '92 in the relationships I was involved in and with the personalities I had contact with during those years. I'm talking about '90, I mean the end of '90, '91, '92, '93. I went several times, not just once.

Until '92, it was clear, and we were officially told that the weapon depots for Kosovo, for our Kosovar brothers, were separate, meaning they were specifically set aside for Kosovo and for Albanians outside the administrative boundaries of Albania. Then, during this period, that project was also realized, the beginning, I would say, of sending recruits, a small group, though significant in terms of historical importance, who were sent and officially received, placed in Currel near Dajti in Tirana, where they would work with well-known military personnel, officers in the Albanian Army.

After '92, in fact, from '92 onward, things in this regard moved, but they didn't develop as we had expected. And, in fact, with the change of powers, the opportunity to send young people for military training was also interrupted. It wasn't completely stopped, as there were still channels, what I would call private channels, but it wasn't private since official people worked with them. However, it was no longer in army training grounds. I'm talking about after '92, when officers of the Albanian army worked with the youth of Kosovo to prepare them for war. For example, one of the training points was at the Football Club "Partizani" stadium, where they were trained. This continued, sometimes at a faster pace and sometimes slower, but it was not completely interrupted.

While we are here, I must say that this organizational structure, which took on the responsibility of preparing for war during those years, lost its first martyr in November '94. Ismajl Raka, one of the activists of this organization, was arrested from the early days of its existence and killed in torture within 24 hours. He was killed without even hearing the voices of his executioners. His resistance, his heroism in front of the UDB executioners, elevated him to the status of a hero of great respect among the people. His fall served as a beacon, a call to action, and a momentum to continue with even greater courage and determination to fulfill his legacy, as well as the legacy of all the martyrs of the homeland.

Personally, and with the comrades I worked with, we may have felt a bit bitter, yes, why didn't I, for example, take even a single cartridge and not be a witness to this? But, we never distanced ourselves from it, we never ran away from it under any circumstances. On the other hand, it's good that we are here, because at least we testify, we have the opportunity to speak for those who can no longer speak. But they are in eternity, they are beacons for this people and will remain beacons of light for the generations to come, as long as there are Albanians and as long as there is Albania.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Naser, would you like to continue telling us about the post-war period? Did you participate in any of the demonstrations that took place?

Naser Kuka: Yes. Dissatisfied with the situation that was created in Mitrovica, specifically with the division of Mitrovica, and with the arrests that began immediately after the war of soldiers and those who had been arrested during the time of Serbia and were still being held in prisons, we were forced, in various ways, within the framework of the Association of Political Prisoners in the municipality of Kaçanik, to organize protests from time to time. Our slogans were "Free the prisoners! Mitrovica is Kosovo!" And in 2001, we also held demonstrations in support of the just struggle of Albanians in Macedonia, specifically the Kosovo Liberation Army.

I feel good that, even on the battlefield of this army's struggle in the Albanian territories in Macedonia, I did what I could and unreservedly provided support and backing. Especially at the beginning of the struggle, when I, together with other comrades, was engaged in securing military logistics, including weapons, food, ammunition, and the financial means necessary to sustain an army that was forming voluntarily, without support, without backing from anyone.

Meaning, everything that happened to us, in the Kosovo Liberation Army, happened on a voluntary basis. Participation in the war was voluntary, mobilization was on a voluntary basis, and support was also on a voluntary basis. It happened almost the same way there, except that there was a layer of former military personnel who had served in the ranks of the Kosovo Liberation Army, who had combat experience and knew military tactics. Then, we carried out our duties under the circumstances and with the resources we had. We feel good that we were able to contribute there as well, just as we did in the UÇPMP.

I would say, in conclusion, that although I have mentioned it in this interview, those who have truly done enough are the ones who have dedicated their lives to the foundations of the free and independent state of Kosovo. Only the martyrs of this land have done enough, the living can never do enough for the homeland, no matter what they do. We, our generation, have tried, we have given selflessly. If we have succeeded in fulfilling our duty to the homeland and to our people, we will feel content.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Naser, thank you very much for your contribution and for the interview.

Naser Kuka: Thank you! I hope you have good health, and I hope you uncover as many things as possible that still haven't seen the light of day.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much!