

INTERVIEW WITH SAIME ISUFI

Pristina | Date: April 2, 2023

Duration: 70 minutes

Present:

1. Saime Isufi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Saime, if you could introduce yourself, tell us your date of birth, place of birth, something about your background, and your family?

Saime Isufi: My name is Saime Isufi. I was born in Gjyryshec in the Highlands of Kamenica on August 20, 1958. When I was three years old, our family moved to Gjilan, and my family has lived in Gjilan since then. There, I lived with a large family, including my [paternal] uncles. We were three families living together in one house, as was common at the time, big families living together. That's where I was raised. I completed primary school in Gjilan. At the time, it was called the Vuk Karadžić primary school, which has now been renamed Thimi Mitko, and the building is different, it is not the old one. After primary school, I continued in the Zenel Hajdini gymnasium¹ for four years. After the gymnasium, I continued my studies in Prishtina. I pursued Albanian language and literature. In my final year, I was forced to leave before finishing university and went to Switzerland. Later, in 1992, I completed my final year and graduated in Tirana.

Anita Susuri: What kind of family is yours? What kind of family background do you come from?

Saime Isufi: My family is a simple rural family, but a progressive one. My father was always an active person in the national movements, starting from the Second World War, and, so to speak, I did not find it difficult when I became involved, let's say, with the National Movement. I did not find it hard to act because he was very supportive of this endeavor of mine, even though he didn't know exactly what I was doing, since we were a clandestine organization and had to operate in secrecy.

For a girl at that time, it wasn't easy, so to speak, to leave the house, to sneak out at night, to go to meetings, I mean, with, let's say, my comrades. Most of my comrades in the *llegale*² were men and... but there was a kind of understanding on my father's side because he was very convinced that I wasn't

¹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

² Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

doing anything wrong, that I was on the right path, and he agreed with that. So, it was easier for me to act.

Anita Susuri: Was your father part of any group, or was he...?

Saime Isufi: No, my father wasn't part of any group, but he helped during the Second World War. Later on, he also helped, as my comrades who later sought shelter would say, our comrades who came to our house, and later my brother's comrades, because my brother was recruited. I recruited my brother. I was older and a member of the movement, and then I recruited my brother as well. My brother then expanded the activity. So, my house was always a haven where activists found shelter, support, and backing. Both my mother and father, as well as the whole family, provided that support.

Anita Susuri: And were you the eldest among the children...?

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, I was the eldest, and then came my brother.

Anita Susuri: Is that why you were the first to get involved?

Saime Isufi: Yes. I was the first to get involved because when I was in the gymnasium in '74, as high school students, during '74-'75, that was the time when Rexhep Mala,³ who was from Gjilan, was imprisoned, and at that time, we would hear about his resistance in prison. For us, as young high school students, he was an inspiration to do something. I mean, we knew, as much as we could understand it at that time, as young and enthusiastic people, that we needed to do something, but we weren't very, let's say, mature enough to act in ways that wouldn't draw attention.

We formed and started by first reading underground literature. It was Adem Demaçi's work, *Gjarpërinjtë e Gjakut* [The Snakes of Blood], that we began to read, and it was circulated in our class. So, by reading underground literature, we decided to create a group here, to operate in groups because we had heard that there had been groups earlier, and we needed to organize and do something as well. Thus, we formed our group, called *Shqiponjat e arta* [The Golden Eagles], and we even published a small leaflet at that time, something artistic.

However, we were young, there were nine of us, three girls and six boys. We held meetings, but they were open meetings, we didn't know how to be cautious. This all seemed like a game to us, so to speak, and we quickly drew attention. After a year, the organization came to the attention of the UDB,⁴ and they began questioning us one by one. Two of the members were even sentenced, Ismet

³ Rexhep Mala (1951-1984) was a prominent Albanian activist in the underground movement. He died in 1984 with Nuhi Berisha in a shoot out with the police when their hideout was discovered.

⁴ UDB (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*) was the State Security Administration, the secret police and intelligence agency of Yugoslavia. It was responsible for monitoring and suppressing political dissent and opposition during the socialist era.

Ramadani and Hamdi Zymberi were convicted. As for the rest of us, we were interrogated, and we tried to justify ourselves, claiming that as young people, we didn't know any better, we had to, so to speak, camouflage the whole situation, as even a small act like this was genuinely risky at that time.

So they also... they didn't bother us too much, the rest of us, so to speak, they let us go. However, we continued, because at that time, the news had spread that a group had organized. We would even go to the stadium and hold meetings, imagine that, at a time when such a thing was not normal, we drew attention. Even these other groups that were more serious, which included Kadri Zeka,⁵ took notice of us. They talked to us and said, "You've been too open. If you want to continue your activities, you need to organize in a safer and more appropriate way."

So, later in '77, I worked in a cell with Kadri, and I was organized with Ismet Isufi, may he rest in peace. He was my [paternal] uncle's son. The three of us formed the first cell, so to speak, a more serious activity where we held secret meetings. These meetings were usually held at night. We would read literature and then discuss the underground literature. About how things were done in Albania during the war, during the National Liberation War, how we should organize, and how to act covertly.

During that time, Kadri was forced, in '78, to go abroad... Due to persecution or surveillance by the UDB, he was compelled to leave Kosovo and went to Switzerland. Meanwhile, I continued the activity with other comrades, the ones Kadri had left behind in the organization. These included Mehmet Hajrizi, [Hydajet Hyseni](#), [Berat Luzha](#), Jakup Krasniqi, Ismail Sylja, Jahir Hajrizi, and [Teuta Hadri](#). There were many comrades with whom we continued our activity until '81, when the demonstrations⁶ broke out, the year '81.

Anita Susuri: And how was the meeting with Kadri Zeka for you? What was he like as a person?

Saime Isufi: I will never forget that meeting because it was one evening when my [paternal] uncle's son [Ismet Isufi] told me, "Look, we're going to meet a comrade today, and you'll get to know him." I hadn't met Kadri Zeka before, even though we had a family connection through my [paternal] uncle, as my uncle's wife was Kadri Zeka's [maternal] aunt. I had heard about him, but we had never had the chance to meet. I knew his family, though. His brothers and sisters were older. Kadri was the youngest in the family, and he studied and worked in Prishtina, so we never had the opportunity to meet.

⁵ Kadri Zeka (1953–1982) was a prominent Albanian activist and nationalist from Kosovo. He was a key figure in the resistance against Yugoslav oppression and a co-founder of the Marxist-Leninist group National Liberation Movement of Kosovo. Zeka was assassinated in 1982 in Stuttgart, Germany, alongside fellow activists Jusuf Gërvalla and Bardhosh Gërvalla, becoming a symbol of the Albanian national struggle.

⁶ The 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo were a series of protests organized primarily by Albanian students at the University of Prishtina. The protests initially began with demands for better living conditions and educational reforms but quickly evolved into calls for greater political and national rights, including the demand for Kosovo to become a republic within the Yugoslav federation. These demonstrations were met with a harsh response from the Yugoslav authorities, resulting in arrests, imprisonment, and a tightening of political repression in Kosovo. The events marked a turning point in the political and national struggle of Albanians in Kosovo.

But when I met Kadri, I remember it like it was yesterday, [he came to the meeting] on a bicycle, and my cousin was there as well. He always had a smiling face. He had a very sharp sense of humor, so to speak, and could make you laugh in any situation. From that moment, he left me with the impression of a very serious person who was dedicated to his work, and I realized that we could truly work together. So, to speak, we could collaborate further, and from that point, we formed the first cell and took an oath to fight to the last drop of blood for our homeland, and so we did.

Anita Susuri: And once you had formed the cell, what were some of the activities you carried out?

Saime Isufi: Well, look, in those times, in '78, there weren't many significant activities yet, I mean, not until Kadri left. After Kadri went to Switzerland, the youth's interest began to grow even more. I was living in the dormitory at the time, and there was movement there, so to speak. Literature was shared between friends, and a kind of trust developed naturally without one person knowing what the other was doing. I was studying literature, and typically in literature and history, those fields tend to push you more toward an interest in national issues, so to speak, and you end up reading more about history.

There, we began exchanging informational materials among ourselves. As for me, being part of an organized movement, truly a movement that made [a difference]... it was one of the most enduring and meaningful organizations, not just because I was part of it. I am very proud to have been involved, but it was genuinely one of the longest-lasting organizations that proved its worth in the end. The *Lëvizja Popullore*⁷ even went on to form the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army), and today we are where we are, we were liberated. For us, liberation was a dream. We never even believed we would live to see this day. It was a cherished dream, but not one we thought we would experience ourselves.

⁷ *Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës* - People's Movement for Kosovo, originally founded as a political movement by Albanian nationalists in 1982. The LPK's ideology was left-wing nationalism.

So, we then organized the distribution of tracts⁸ for the 100th Anniversary of the League of Prizren,⁹ for Tito's¹⁰ visit to Kosovo, for example, on November 28. We began distributing them among the people, usually at night. These actions were typically carried out at night and by two people together, who would assign the area where the tracts would be placed. We would leave them in people's homes, throw them over walls, or slip them under doors. There were instances when dogs would chase us, barking, and we would hurry to get away. Those were difficult and dangerous times, but they are the most beautiful memories I have in my life.

Anita Susuri: I know that the tracts contained content aimed at raising awareness among the population...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: About the position of Albanians in Yugoslavia. But do you remember more specifically, for example, what was written in them?

Saime Isufi: Yes, it was about the economic situation, the political situation, and the social conditions... compared, so to speak, with the other republics; we were more oppressed, more discriminated against. Women had a highly discriminatory position in Kosovo, and backward customs, all the remnants of the past, played their role. Kosovo was always oppressed, and the legal press didn't do the work it was supposed to do because it was always under pressure, as is well known. But we also published newspapers.

It was the newspaper *Liria* [Freedom] that belonged to our group. Then there was *Lajmëtari i Lirisë* [Heralds of Freedom] by Jusuf Gërvalla, which was published abroad. Also, *Bashkimi* [Unity] by Ibrahim Kelmendi, who was active abroad in Germany. So, this literature, which was very dangerous to bring into Kosovo, still managed to be brought from Switzerland, as publishing was easier there. It was then brought to Kosovo and distributed as much as possible among sympathizers, the people, and

⁸ 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.

⁹ The League of Prizren, established on June 10, 1878, was a political organization of Albanian leaders aiming to defend Albanian territories within the Ottoman Empire from being partitioned among neighboring Balkan states. It played a crucial role in the Albanian national awakening, promoting the preservation of Albanian lands, culture, and autonomy. The 100th anniversary in 1978 was marked as a significant event for Albanians, symbolizing unity and resistance.

¹⁰ Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) was the leader of Yugoslavia from 1943 until his death in 1980. While he promoted the idea of unity among Yugoslavia's diverse ethnic groups, his policies in Kosovo were often viewed as repressive by the Albanian population. Under his rule, Albanians faced restrictions on political and cultural freedoms, as well as periodic crackdowns on dissent. Tito's visits to Kosovo were politically significant and often aimed at consolidating Yugoslav authority in the region.

others. In a way, it opened people's eyes and prepared them for what eventually happened in March 1981.

Anita Susuri: And these groups usually had some kind of connection with Albania...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: But I also want to talk about this, as well as about the culture and the performances of the ensembles that came here and all of that. How was it?

Saime Isufi: Well, it was, let's say... I studied literature, and at that time, we also had professors from Albania who gave us lectures. We had an extraordinary love for Albania, I mean, and for the homeland, as is completely natural. Because we had two paths, either to align with Tito or with Enver Hoxha.¹¹ So, we followed Albania's path, and all the literature that inspired, educated, prepared, and shaped us came from Albania.

We learned about Shote Galica¹² through the works we received from Albania. About Mic Sokoli,¹³ Bajram Curri,¹⁴ all the literature we had came from there, and in a way, we were prepared and inspired by their activities, so to speak, to do what we did. Ensembles came as well, and first, it was the volleyball players from Albania. Then there was the state ensemble. We followed their performances. Then there were also theater plays, such as *Cuca e Maleve*.¹⁵ We attended those too. However, we were always under surveillance, followed, and threatened by UDB spies at the time because they tracked people who, so to speak, pursued these activities.

¹¹ Enver Hoxha (1908–1985) was the communist leader of Albania from 1944 until his death in 1985. He established a strict Stalinist regime, characterized by state control over all aspects of life, isolationist policies, and intense propaganda promoting Albanian nationalism and independence from foreign influence. While his rule was repressive and marked by human rights abuses, Hoxha's government also cultivated strong cultural and ideological ties with Albanians in Kosovo, inspiring nationalist movements and resistance against Yugoslav policies.

¹² Shote Galica (1895–1927) was an Albanian nationalist and freedom fighter who played a significant role in the armed resistance against Serbian and Yugoslav forces in Kosovo during the early 20th century. She was part of the Kachak movement, which sought to protect Albanian territories and resist foreign rule. Alongside her husband, Azem Galica, she became a symbol of Albanian resistance and is celebrated as a national hero for her bravery and dedication to the Albanian cause.

¹³ Mic Sokoli (1839–1881) was an Albanian nationalist and fighter known for his role in the resistance against the Ottoman Empire during the League of Prizren. He is remembered for his extraordinary bravery, particularly in the Battle of Slivova in 1881, where he sacrificed his life by blocking an Ottoman cannon with his chest to protect his comrades. Sokoli is celebrated as a symbol of courage and self-sacrifice in the Albanian national struggle.

¹⁴ Bajram Curri (1862–1925) was an Albanian nationalist, military leader, and politician who played a key role in the Albanian National Awakening. He was a prominent figure in the fight for Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire and later resisted Serbian and Yugoslav forces to protect Albanian territories. Known for his dedication to the Albanian cause, Curri is celebrated as a hero and a symbol of patriotism in Albanian history.

¹⁵ *Cuca e Maleve* (Cuca of the Mountains) was an Albanian drama by Loni Papa first in theatres in 1966 that represented the struggle of women for education and emancipation before socialism.

Anita Susuri: Do you have any specific memory, something from these visits, that has stayed with you?

Saime Isufi: Well, as I recall, I know that at the Gjilan Theater I watched *Baca e Gjetajve*,¹⁶ which was, so to speak, a drama, and Kadri got me the ticket for it. I went and watched it. It was the first time I had contact, so to speak, with the figures from there. Approaching them was a bit difficult, I mean, even for us as organized members, we had to be careful not to draw attention for things that wouldn't help our cause. We wanted to meet them, but we had to be cautious because we needed to act. The goal wasn't to meet them, take photos, and draw attention only to end up being arrested for no reason. Instead, you needed to do something more, let's say, qualitative for your country. You had to work without standing out too much by running after them. Later, when I was in Switzerland, of course, we had the state ensemble there. I followed them throughout the week, so to speak, in all the cities of Switzerland. We even hosted them at home, talked to them, reminisced, and spent time together.

Anita Susuri: Later on, you and Kadri Zeka, but also other couples, did it ever happen that you went out together or met up, or was it too risky, to avoid putting the other at risk?

Saime Isufi: Are you asking if we were organized together with Kadri, or...?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Saime Isufi: We were organized in the same group, and naturally, love developed there, as is normal, so to speak. But we didn't go out openly, we didn't make it public because it was too risky, because if one of us were caught, the other would immediately be at risk, as they would know where the other was and how things were. So, we met in secret. But it was short-lived, so to speak. In '77, we got organized in the summer, in August, and by April '78, he had to leave for Switzerland. After that, we maintained contact, but very cautiously, through phone calls and letters. It was, so to speak, a secret love, you could say. My family knew about it, as did Kadri's family, but no one else did because if they had found out, they would have arrested me immediately. I had already been interrogated before, you see, and by the time I was first interrogated, I had already joined an even more dangerous organization, at least in their eyes. So, the pressure was even greater, as you could imagine, if something were to happen.

Anita Susuri: In '77, you were interrogated once...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

¹⁶ *Baca i Gjejtave* [The Treasure Chest], Drama by Fadil Kraja first published in 1980, representing intergenerational relationships and ideas of legacy and sacrifice for family and homeland.

Anita Susuri: How did that happen?

Saime Isufi: That first group that had formed was questioned because it was dismantled. They didn't question us immediately after the group fell apart, so to speak. I simply withdrew because I didn't see any serious work being done. They were all enthusiastic, everyone wanted to do something, but they didn't know how to approach things in a serious way. So, I withdrew, I didn't want to continue there. Later, I started my studies, and at some point, my brother came to me and said, "Look, State Security has been asking about you." I didn't take it seriously, I knew, but I acted as if I didn't. I didn't take their summons too seriously. I delayed going for two days to, in a way, show them that it wasn't a big deal. I went, and it was over. By that time, I was already organized elsewhere.

I went there [to State Security], and Selim Brosha, who is no longer alive, was there. He was yelling and swearing, cursing others, saying, "Why didn't you come on time? What do you think we are? Who do you think we are? How can you play games with us?" I said, "No," I said, "I thought it made more sense to wait and get..." so to speak, the signatures we got from professors when we finished our studies. "It seemed more reasonable to me to focus on that than to come here since I haven't done anything," I said. So, they kept me there all day questioning me, "What were you trying to do? Why this, why that?" The usual questions they would ask. I acted as if it was nothing, like it wasn't a big deal, and with that, it ended.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that part of the work went abroad...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And then it was distributed here as well. How did all this cooperation with abroad happen, and in European countries?

Saime Isufi: Well, in 1981, when the demonstrations broke out, everyone participated. From our group, so to speak, the most vocal were those who were the most organized. We maintained connections among ourselves. After the demonstrations, we paused for a while to avoid drawing attention because those who were more vocal during the protests were being closely monitored. At that time, Hydajet Hyseni was operating underground, he was a close comrade of Kadri. Kadri went to Switzerland, while Hydajet stayed here.

Everything was done according to the organization's decisions about what was best, "You go abroad and continue the activity there with the workers, while you stay here to organize with the people locally," but always maintaining contact, whether through comrades traveling there or through letters. There was always coordination regarding activities and actions being undertaken. The publication *Liria* was produced there, as was *Këngët e Lirisë* (Songs of Freedom), which consisted of poems dedicated, so to speak, to a patriotic and revolutionary content of that time.

The demonstrations broke out here in Kosovo on March 11, 1981, followed by March 26 and April 1 and 2, as they grew significantly in scale. The question abroad was what should be done next. At that time, Kadri and the OMLK (Marxist-Leninist Organization of Kosovo) had issued the *Theses of the Front for the Republic of Kosovo*. These were theses about the Popular Front for the Republic of Kosovo. The theses called for the inclusion of men, women, young men, and young women, everyone, regardless of religion, gender, or region, to unite in a front for the Republic of Kosovo. At the time, the primary demand was to form a republic because the demonstrations led to the first demand for a republic, initially within Yugoslavia. This was the key demand.

So, Kadri made efforts there, as Jusuf Gërvalla, who belonged to another organization, and Ibrahim Kelmendi, who also belonged to a different organization, were active. They had contacts among themselves, so to speak, and were aware of each other because they had roots and branches here in Kosovo. They came to an understanding and began discussing unification, because, as we know, unity creates strength. This was Kadri's effort at the time, to unite the organizations. Likewise, after March 11, when the demonstrations took place and April 1 and 2 happened here, it was natural that something would also be undertaken abroad. Kadri gathered Jusuf, Ibrahim Kelmendi, and other activists and comrades of his.

Of course, he had organized them into cells in Switzerland. He immediately began working with comrades who might have been organized in Kosovo and were now active and working in Switzerland. He brought together those most dedicated individuals, and they then expanded the circle further. When I went there in '81, there was a concert marking November 29, the Liberation of Yugoslavia, which featured both Albanian and Serbian songs, as was customary at the time.

I will never forget that moment when the migrant workers stood up and started shouting, "*Kosova Republikë* (Kosovo Republic)," calling out "*Kosova Republikë*." It was something extraordinary, an incredible enthusiasm from the workers. At that moment, I thought, Kosovo's Republic is, so to speak, within reach. These were the workers who had, so to speak, participated in the demonstrations organized in the West. After the demonstrations in Kosovo ended, someone had to support them because the press was heavily restricted. There was no way to speak openly about the demonstrations or to inform the global public opinion.

Kadri, together with the Gërvalla brothers and Ibrahim Kelmendi, who were activists and organizers, held the first demonstration on April 11, 1981, in Bern, Switzerland. This was the first demonstration, the first step. As they say, the ice was broken in Bern, and then eight more demonstrations followed. In Belgium, Düsseldorf, Bonn, Vienna, and then another in Brussels. In total, nine demonstrations were held in the spring and summer of '81 in the West.

There, so to speak, Kadri, the Gërvalla brothers, and Ibrahim Kelmendi all gave speeches to the workers and sent petitions. These demonstrations were usually held in front of international institutions, Yugoslav embassies, or consulates. Petitions with clear demands were consistently sent, such as, “We demand the Republic of Kosovo,” “We want jobs in our homeland as workers,” “We support the workers, the students, the farmers,” “We support the Republic of Kosovo,” and “Republic, Constitution! Either willingly or through struggle!” This was the slogan of the demonstrations and protests. So, this was the activity in the spring and summer of ‘81 in the West.

There were also informative evenings held with workers about, so to speak, a demonstration or the situation in Kosovo. Meetings were organized, for example, on November 28, ‘81, I’ll never forget, one was held in Stuttgart. All the activists from the summer and spring, as well as the participants in the demonstrations, came together. They celebrated November 28¹⁷ together, and similarly, the clubs as well. The clubs that were under the patronage of the Yugoslav state began transforming into Albanian clubs, becoming independent. For instance, there were still some, like the *Përparimi* club in Zurich, which were still, so to speak, under the Yugoslav embassy’s influence.

There, there were individuals who carried out activities even though they were there, so to speak, as a club, organizing activities, meetings, and gatherings without the Yugoslav embassy knowing, so to speak. Later, independent clubs began to form in Germany and Geneva, Switzerland, such as *Emin Duraku* and *Emine Prishtina*, along with other clubs, one after the other, where activities were held. Truly, ‘81 was a major turning point for our compatriots as well. Despite the participation from here, many compatriots who returned to Kosovo were forced to remain abroad due to the risk, as they were being sought or had their passports confiscated upon returning to Kosovo. There are cases where our compatriots were imprisoned, but this is life, this is the struggle. Without sacrifice, without blood, freedom does not come. This too was part of the debt we owed to Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Saime, I wanted to talk about the ‘81 demonstration and your experience from when it started...

Saime Isufi: Yes. Regarding the demonstrations of ‘81, I remember that on March 11, I wasn’t in Prishtina. My mother was ill, and, so to speak, at that time, I wasn’t here. However, during that night, during that demonstration, Nuhi Berisha,¹⁸ now a martyr of the nation, also participated. Nuhi Berisha

¹⁷ November 28 is a significant date for Albanians, celebrated as Flag Day (*Dita e Flamurit*), marking the declaration of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. It also commemorates the raising of the Albanian flag by Ismail Qemali in Vlora. Additionally, it is associated with the birthday of Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and is widely regarded as a symbol of national unity and pride.

¹⁸ Nuhi Berisha (1961-1984) was a prominent Albanian activist in the underground movement. He died in 1984 with Rexhep Mala in a shoot out with the police when their hideout was discovered.

and I were in the same cell, along with him and my brother. They were younger than me, and, so to speak, we worked closely together in the same cell.

The next day, he came straight to Gjilan and told me, “Look, this and this happened last night, a demonstration.” I was surprised because it was a bit unexpected. So to speak, it was like a boiling point everywhere in the student dormitories. We exchanged literature among ourselves without knowing each other very well, but we had gained a certain level of trust. We also listened to Radio Tirana, which was a very, very important window for us. Listening to Radio Tirana, so to speak, was significant. We also had friends from Macedonia, from Struga, and so on, so we were in very good contact with them, and we exchanged literature among ourselves.

I was surprised when Nuhi told me that there had been, so to speak, a demonstration. He explained it to me in detail. Later, I naturally came to Prishtina, and then the demonstration of March 26 began, coinciding with Tito’s baton relay.¹⁹ It was known that there would be participation. Among ourselves, we said, “I’ll go, he’ll go, this one will go,” and so on. That’s how we went out, each of us, but in a way, each on our own. There were some underground organizations, but there wasn’t a unified organization or shared coordination. It was more about who could speak or what they could say at the time.

We went out, so to speak, with friends from the dormitory and joined the crowd. I remember seeing Hydajet Hyseni on top of the linden tree (laughs) giving a speech, so to speak. That was a moment of great enthusiasm, and he was in disguise. At that time, most people thought he was a worker at *Ramiz Sadiku*, while we knew who he was, and we stayed nearby to protect him, to make sure nothing happened to him. Nothing did, he got away and escaped arrest. This was a very, very interesting and unforgettable experience, participating in the demonstrations, with slogans and calls.

Then we saw comrades being arrested right before our eyes, being beaten with batons until they fell. That was when Naser Hajrizi and Asllan Pireva also fell. In fact, today marks the 42nd anniversary of their deaths, and I will certainly participate since I happen to be here. This further fueled the wave of arrests and imprisonments, which in turn intensified the demonstrations on April 1 and 2. Everyone joined in, so to speak, young and old alike. The participation was extraordinary.

However, as organized members, we were careful not to expose ourselves too much, so to speak, because the demonstration would pass, and the activity needed to continue afterward. So, I then continued my activities abroad, as in October of ‘81, I went to Switzerland. The arrests of comrades from the organization had begun, which forced me to stay there.

¹⁹ The baton relay, or “Tito’s Baton” (*Štafeta mladosti*), was a Yugoslav tradition held annually from 1945 to 1987 to honor Josip Broz Tito’s birthday on May 25, celebrated as Youth Day. A symbolic baton was passed across all republics of Yugoslavia, representing unity, loyalty to Tito, and the Yugoslav socialist ideals. The relay was accompanied by mass events, parades, and celebrations. In Kosovo, it often became a point of tension due to the growing national and political grievances of the Albanian population.

Anita Susuri: Were you also persecuted, did you feel at risk?

Saime Isufi: Yes, of course, I belonged to the organization. Today, there are also the indictments, so to speak, where I am listed as a member of the Executive Committee. There was the Steering Committee, the highest body of our organization, and then the Executive Committee. I was a member of this committee. So, the risk was inevitable.

Anita Susuri: During the protests and demonstrations on April 1 and 2, which were the largest...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: In larger numbers. How was the city, how did the police behave? How were the people?

Saime Isufi: Look, the police, so to speak, were special forces, and it felt like Kosovo was on fire. No one knew what was happening, what kind of pursuit was underway. There was violence with tear gas, armored vehicles, everything, it was really... But people find, I don't know, they find the strength to resist. Having comrades close by, you try to encourage each other, to work together, not to give up, so to speak. We opened the doors in our homes, wherever we sought shelter that day. Some brought water, others brought onions because of the tear gas, and some brought other things. It was really an extraordinary display of solidarity at the time, because, as is well known, we Albanians are very, very united in difficult times.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Then you said you left, in October, right?

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What about in the meantime, what did you do? Did the activity continue during that time, or was it too risky?

Saime Isufi: Yes, we met, so to speak, but very secretly, very rarely. We were extremely careful not to draw attention. We met, for example, and we had our own slogans. At a certain time, at a certain place, and we usually met at night. That's how it was at that time.

Anita Susuri: It seems like it was an activity of writing slogans, "Kosovo Republic."

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes. It was, so to speak, that time. I will never forget it, never! It was the time of writing the "Kosovo Republic" slogans. Together with Nuhi Berisha in Gjilan, we wrote slogans around

the city with red paint. “Kosovo Republic,” on the streets, so to speak, on the paved roads at the time, or on institutions, in schools, for example. At that time, we wrote the slogan at the Economic School in Gjilan. We wrote the slogans on the streets around the city of Gjilan. As far as we could go, late at night. We wrote slogans, and by morning, when people saw them, they were amazed, “Oh, what slogans!” Later, we heard what people thought, as if no one knew what had happened. We knew we were the ones who had written those slogans.

Anita Susuri: Did you hear if there were arrests for these slogans, as usually, those who were suspected were arrested, or...?

Saime Isufi: To be honest, I don’t know if there were arrests for those slogans at that time. I don’t have information about those specific slogans. No, I can’t say for sure. It’s possible, but I don’t know. But we weren’t discovered, we were the main ones, the authors.

Anita Susuri: When was the time you were at great risk and were forced to leave? Was it in October, or even earlier?

Saime Isufi: Look, we were constantly at risk, so to speak. As soon as you’re part of an underground organization, you’re always, so to speak, under surveillance, especially if you’ve done something in the past, it would be known. If the connection was understood, whispers began, “She is linked to Kadri,” because sometimes we had been seen. Even when we met to exchange a book or literature, it drew attention. In some way, whispers spread that we had a connection, but it wasn’t clear what exactly was happening. Then, suspicions arose about this or that. Yes, we were, so to speak, at risk. I went to Kadri’s place, I went to return, actually. I went just to visit and return. But then arrests began in Kosovo, and that’s why I had to stay. Otherwise, if I had returned, I would have been imprisoned, just like my comrades.

Anita Susuri: And how did things continue abroad? You got married, almost...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How was that entire period?

Saime Isufi: I would say, before I moved there, I would mention ‘81, when we were in the dormitories, and I remember it like it was yesterday, on June 26, when the schools and universities were closed because it was known that there was no longer any peace. After everything that happened, our comrades were arrested, both the men and women, and there was all that violence and terror against the demonstrators. They took us out of the dormitories and forcefully scattered us in our hometowns. I remember it like it was yesterday, we were put on buses. The buses were organized, and they put us on them to return to our places. Everything was shut down.

I will never forget that the universities were left abandoned there, all the fervor of the students, all that time, all those dreams, all those memories were extinguished in an instant. And we were forced to return, to go back home. Then, I went to Switzerland. There, I naturally found Kadri, and *Liria* was being published. We worked together, so to speak. While I was in Kosovo, I learned about printing, typing, as you would say, with a typewriter. He gave me the opportunity to learn, and today, I feel very bad about Jakup Krasniqi,²⁰ who is now in The Hague. He was also part of the Executive Committee. We worked together.

At that time, we had to learn, so to speak, to print the tracts ourselves. He gave me the printing press and the book to learn from, so to speak, how to print. And since then, it has served me greatly, I've used it a lot. So, when I went to Switzerland, I was prepared, so to speak. Back then, there were some primitive machines, not like today's. We had to take the letter A, for example, if we made a mistake, we had to take it, stick it, and trim it with scissors. Can you imagine such a small letter? And then, we would put it into an article or writing. We continued there, so to speak. It was the last issue of *Liria*, because I went in October, and that happened on January 17.

I stayed in Switzerland for about three months, so to speak, with Kadri. During that time, we tried... our comrades were arrested here, they were all imprisoned. We stayed there, and the provocations on Kadri's phone started in Switzerland. "No, I'm so-and-so, no..." they would introduce themselves using the pseudonyms we had because we used pseudonyms. For example, my pseudonym was Bule. Some of our compatriots, some of the people there, would call me Bule, so to speak, and they would provoke us on the phone.

Kadri went with the concern of what had happened to the comrades because he didn't know exactly. He knew something had happened, but... the connections were broken at that time. So, we began working on the last issue of *Liria* together. We sent it to Germany. It was published in Germany, and after Kadri's assassination, the newspaper was handed over to us. So, these were three months, so to speak, of activity. We went to the Gërvalla brothers, to them. We were in Düsseldorf when the independent group was formed, the first club, so to speak, the first independent group in Germany. We participated there. We also participated in the November 28 event together with the Gërvalla brothers and our compatriots. So, this was, so to speak, our activity.

Also, on January 2, 1982, which might be worth mentioning, Kadri wanted to give the compatriots who had participated in the activities and demonstrations a little, so to speak, something different, to refresh them in a way. Together with the comrades, they organized a wedding. We had the wedding on

²⁰ Jakup Krasniqi (1951) is a prominent Albanian politician and former member of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). He was a key figure in the political and military leadership during the Kosovo War and served as a spokesperson for the KLA. Krasniqi was later elected as the speaker of the Kosovo Assembly and has been involved in various political roles post-independence. In 2020, he was summoned to The Hague as part of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers' investigations into alleged war crimes committed during the Kosovo War.

January 2 in Switzerland, in a house, like a resting place in Switzerland, and everyone was invited. We had a *krushqi*²¹ the demonstrations. We didn't have any family members present. But we had, so to speak, those people, the fighters of '81 who had participated in the demonstrations, and the recordings were made. Luckily, it was, so to speak, a recording from that time. A very beautiful, very good memory of an event. As you could say, it turned more into a form of activity because everyone was very... we sang patriotic songs. It was a special wedding, not an ordinary wedding...

Anita Susuri: To perhaps raise morale as well...

Saime Isufi: It was also to lift the morale of the people and to offer a bit of refreshment, so to speak, for the compatriots. A kind of reward for the compatriots, for all the work they had done.

Anita Susuri: Was it a big wedding?

Saime Isufi: No.

Anita Susuri: Were there a lot of people?

Saime Isufi: There may have been around a hundred people, yes. Maybe not exactly one hundred, a bit fewer. But it was mainly people from the demonstrations. Not everyone came because only a selected few were invited, the people who had been more active, so to speak, the more visible ones who had been involved and more active during the demonstrations. These were the ones who participated.

Anita Susuri: Then you lived with Kadri Zeka, with your husband. How did you receive the news? How did it all happen?

Saime Isufi: Yes. That night, it was around ten o'clock when Ibrahim Kelmendi called me. He asked, "Has Kadri returned?" I said, "No, he hasn't returned." Normally, Kadri would have returned that night because it was Sunday, and he would be working the next day. He didn't return. He went out to call and inform me that he wouldn't be coming back that night. Naturally, I became worried. You start to worry, even if he wasn't an activist, a wife or a husband would worry when their partner doesn't return without warning. They didn't have a phone at the Gërvalla brothers' house, so they went out to make a call at a public phone booth at that time. While they were out, that's when it happened, they were ambushed.

²¹ *Krushqi e dasmës* (groomsmen) are the groom's closest friends who traditionally go to pick up the bride on the wedding day. They are a symbol of a deep and lasting friendship, and are part of a family's history.

They just wanted the three of them to be together and kill them. That was, so to speak, the work of the UDB. Around ten o'clock, Ibrahim Kelmendi called me again and asked, "Has he arrived? He will come," he said, "since I was with him." "Okay," I replied, saying nothing more. Then he asked for a comrade, Ibrahim Kelmendi called again to ask for one of Kadri's comrades, Hasan Mala, who was his most trusted and close person. He said, "I need Hasan Mala, is Hasan Mala there?" I said, "No," I said, "tell me." I immediately suspected something had happened. I said, "Tell me. I won't give you Hasan Mala." "No," he said, "nothing has happened, he will return," and then he hung up the phone.

Then Hasan Mala came, and I said, "This is what Ibrahim Kelmendi said, something might have happened." He said, "No," he said, "don't jump to conclusions, don't think the worst." But, of course, he also felt bad. Then, Ibrahim Kelmendi called again, and Hasan Mala took the phone. He said, "I want to inform you," he said, "there has been an assassination in Germany. Kadri Zeka," he said, "Kadri is dead." I heard this because there was silence, it was night. I heard it. As about the other two, it wasn't clear, because Jusuf was injured.

He then felt bad because he thought I didn't hear it. I heard it but just froze, I didn't do anything, I didn't react, I just stayed there as I was. He said, "Look," he said, "Bule, we're leaving for Germany because Kadri is sick." I said, "No, I heard very well, but there's nothing I can do. I heard the news very well, but there's nothing I can do." Then he called a comrade, and one came to pick us up, and we left by car. In fact, we drove to Zurich... in St. Gallen, we lived with Kadri. From there, we took the train to go to the friend who had the car. We would go with his car.

On the way, I remember it like it was yesterday. I didn't cry at all, neither at home nor on the road. These people, the comrades, were crying, they were weeping. I said, "Are you trying to drive me crazy, what's wrong with you?" I could barely walk, I swear, I could barely hold my knees. My knees were shaking, and I couldn't control them while walking. I didn't cry all the way, it was like I was numb (cries). When we arrived at the Gërvalla family... Along the way, I apologize, I want to mention that Hasan Mala, who had been like a father to me after Kadri's death, was very close to me. I owe him my life.

He held his chest and said, "My chest is going to burst." "Oh Kadri," he said, "who have you left behind? Who have you left behind? What will we do without you?" So, he was crying. We arrived at the Gërvalla brothers' house. We knew about Kadri, but we didn't know about the others because we hadn't heard anything, as there were no communication options at that time. Once you left the house, there was no phone, nothing. Nothing was known. It was hard to even find the way at that time, we were so disoriented, so upset, and all those emotions. We barely found the place.

When we arrived there, Jusuf's wife [\[Suzana Gërvalla\]](#) came out and said, "Come, bride," I had been married for only two weeks. She said, "Come, bride, three dead." It was a bombshell. Despite the immense pain for Kadri, at least if someone was saved, which was very hard. That was, so to speak, the

situation. Then, the people, the compatriots, all stood up because they were, so to speak, their leaders, the heads. He was a comrade to everyone. Everyone came there to offer condolences and material help. They tried to bring him back to Kosovo, but in no way did the embassy allow it. So, the burial took place three weeks later, so to speak, in Germany because they didn't allow him to be returned, and so on.

Anita Susuri: Then, as you mentioned, in Kosovo, most were arrested...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: And you were actually left as a very small group abroad. How did you recover?

Saime Isufi: Look, we tried there as well, because Kadri and Jusuf were united that night. That night, so to speak, when they were killed, they were united that night because the talks were about unification. Then, of course, as the saying goes, "One falls, and thousands rise," and this was our motto too. After that, so to speak, our compatriots, we started protests for their killing. The first protest was organized in Stuttgart. Then the protests continued, so to speak. We, those of us who were organized, because the comrades had done their part. We were not at their level to do their work.

Nevertheless, within our forces, we found strength and courage to continue the work, and we began to keep going with the comrades of Jusuf and Kadri here. So, we continued the work. Ibrahim Kelmendi stayed, and we kept up with the protests, the demonstrations, and the publication of the newspaper. A kind of unity was formed there, so to speak, and the *Zëri i Kosovës* (Voice of Kosovo) started to be published. So, the work never stopped. Then, some were arrested here in Kosovo, and some went abroad. There were other groups too, as it became known who was in the groups, there was no more secrecy, so to speak.

They also went abroad, for example, where the killings of Rexhep Malaj and Nuhi Berisha happened here in Kosovo. Then, there were people who had been members of the groups and went abroad. They were more experienced cadres or had been released from prison. So, we started, so to speak, to recover. Later, Xhafer Shatri, who was one of our comrades, was released from prison. So, the activity continued uninterrupted until the end.

Anita Susuri: From abroad, you continued, of course, with the publication of the newspapers...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes. I was an editor for *Zëri i Kosovës* for a period, and I was also a member of *Zëri i Kosovës*, so to speak, a member of the editorial board. We had the *Liria* publishing office, where *Zëri i Kosovës* was published, along with various materials. There were books about Nuhi Berisha, Adem

Demaçi,²² Jusuf Gërvalla, Kadri, and so on. So, we were constantly active, in action. We never stopped. We produced different tracts and various information. Thankfully, and I must emphasize this, we had a Swiss couple, Beart Shafer and Catrina Salt, who have lived in the city where I live today for 42 years. We had the address of *Liria* newspaper there, which later continued with *Zëri i Kosovës*. This Swiss couple helped us by bringing literature from Albania. There was a library with Albanian books, and we would go there and supply ourselves with books.

There was also the fund for aid to Kosovo, *Hilfe für Kosova*, where money was deposited. There was no specific fund, as we gave all the money we received, so to speak, for the newspapers, for activities, and they helped us a lot, so to speak. Their house was the address of the editorial office, where people from all continents would reach out. It was a well-known address. So, we operated with protests, demonstrations, and the [miners' strikes](#), which were also held. So, we were constantly active.

Anita Susuri: When the miners' strike happened, what activities took place? I'm interested because it was a historic turning point when the constitution was adopted and Kosovo's autonomy was achieved.

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, yes. We went to Geneva, so to speak, and held a strike, a strike like that. We stayed there for a week in front of the United Nations to raise awareness in the international community. Many protests and demonstrations were organized in front of the UN, and we sent petitions with our demands. So, it wasn't just an event here... or the poisoning²³ of students, which happened in 1990. We, so to speak, raised our voices there about what was happening in Kosovo. We tried to be a voice for Kosovo because everything here was closed off, and we had no way to openly speak about what was happening.

Anita Susuri: I'm interested in which year it was, it seems like it was the end of the '80s, the beginning of the '90s when the organization's activity took place, and then the approach changed a bit...

Saime Isufi: Yes. Yes, because then there were changes made, of course, according to the situations, so to speak, but nevertheless, the work continued. There were disagreements, disagreements, as you might say. The actions were not movements with a clear address, movements without an address, so

²² Adem Demaçi (1930–2018) was a prominent Albanian political activist and writer from Kosovo. He is considered one of the most significant figures in the Kosovo Albanian resistance against Yugoslav oppression. Demaçi was arrested multiple times for his activism, including for his involvement in advocating for the rights of Albanians in Kosovo and calling for Kosovo's independence. He spent a total of 28 years in Yugoslav prisons, becoming a symbol of the struggle for Albanian national rights. After his release, he continued to play a key role in political movements and was an advocate for peace and reconciliation in Kosovo.

²³ The poisoning of students refers to an incident that occurred in 1990 in Kosovo, during a time of intense political unrest and growing Albanian national consciousness. A group of students in the city of Prishtina, primarily from the University of Prishtina, fell ill after being poisoned, with many attributing the event to a targeted attack aimed at suppressing the growing student movement and protests for greater autonomy within Yugoslavia. The poisoning remains a controversial and tragic event in Kosovo's history, symbolizing the political tensions of the time and the lengths to which the Yugoslav authorities would go to curb dissent.

to speak. But the goal was still the same, so to speak. The work continued until the formation of the first cells of the KLA.

Anita Susuri: I'm also interested in the '90s, because in Kosovo, these changes occurred...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Then people also left the institutions, their jobs...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: I'm interested in how the activity was during the '90s.

Saime Isufi: So, yes, many people started to leave for abroad. For example, supplementary education for the Albanian language was organized there, because earlier it had been organized through the Yugoslav embassy. We started to make supplementary education independent, so to speak. I was the first president of the Albanian Teachers' Association in Switzerland after the separation from the Yugoslav embassy's educational system. I continued with supplementary education, contributing for 25 years, working as a teacher for supplementary education. I also participated in various projects with Swiss schools. I worked in Swiss schools, conducted courses for the Swiss in the Albanian language at various institutions. So, I was active in terms of education, so to speak. This was also an aspect, so to speak, of the patriotism of Albanians in the diaspora because we had to go to the homes of the parents, mobilize them to send their children to the Albanian school to preserve the language and culture.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that you continued living in the country where you first went...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Where did you live, of course, also with Kadri Zeka...

Saime Isufi: No, no, in fact, we lived with Kadri Zeka in St. Gallen, which is in the northern part of Switzerland. As for our Swiss friends, we had them in the city where I live now, where we had our address. After the event that happened there, this Swiss couple suggested that I come here, to this city, because they would help me by organizing a lawyer for my stay. Because we weren't married, so to speak, with documents, as it was truly a time of uncertainty. Who would have been thinking about documents and, so to speak, formalizing a marriage at that time?

So, it was somewhat problematic to stay there, because Kadri was killed, and it might have been dangerous to remain in the country for the state, in some way. They said, "We don't want something to

happen to us,” as it happened in Germany, “we don’t want something like that to happen in Switzerland.” Because Switzerland was considered a more neutral and democratic country, I suppose. These Swiss friends preferred that I come to this city, where I would be closer to them and they could help me. For three months, I didn’t even know the language. I hadn’t made progress, I was still shaken, both spiritually and it was hard for me to regain myself at that moment. So, I stayed there, and then I continued living there, I didn’t change the city, where I still live today.

Anita Susuri: How long after did you start again with activities? We talked earlier that, so to speak, three people were arrested and killed... How long after did you start again?

Saime Isufi: Immediately. We didn’t stop, immediately, yes; with their killing, I held a speech there, so to speak, against their killing. I spoke out, so to speak, because in this direction, I was somewhat prepared, as you would say, and the path didn’t stop, I felt it was my duty. There was no pause, no break from that. On the contrary, I acted even more and with more enthusiasm. Feeling it as a duty to those who fell, but also to those who were in prison. We had comrades in prison here. It was, by itself, a duty towards the cause that I would continue. One falls, others will continue their work. It’s a task left unfinished.

Anita Susuri: At that time, you were also seen by the Yugoslav state as a leader...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And the group, which is probably why it was very risky for you to return...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, that’s right. In fact, I returned. I came illegally a couple of times...

Anita Susuri: Is that so? (laughs)

Saime Isufi: Yes (laughs). I came a bit later, because, so to speak, I did it on my own without anyone telling me to. I decided to come to Kosovo, and I came to Kosovo. I don’t know how I got there. If you asked me today, I wouldn’t make that move, but I did it back then. I came, and then the newspapers, in fact the Yugoslav ones, wrote about it, there’s a paper called *Ilustrovana Politika*. I mean, there’s a photo of me between two activists. Then, they used their wording to say that I was from the Albanian state, as an agent of theirs, I don’t know what. They wrote and made those claims. But if they had caught me, like they did with my comrades, I don’t want to overestimate myself, but they sentenced you for a book, for nothing, for an Albanian song. Let alone if I had formed an organization, of course, I would have suffered the same fate as my comrades...

Anita Susuri: Did you stay for a short time and then return, or how was it?

Saime Isufi: Yes, for a short time, just to visit my family. I said I owe no one, so I'll go to my family, and I went to my family. In fact, I went to my family, but then friends came to visit. I don't know how it happened that I managed to escape arrest. Then, I came again, but this time my family wouldn't let me expose myself. So, I stayed hidden at Kadri's family. They kept me there for a long time, I stayed there the whole time because, so to speak, they had found out I had been there before, and I didn't want to create a burden for my family. My brother had suffered a lot. My brother was in prison for six years, and I didn't want to add to the suffering of my parents because they had already suffered enough from my departure, my absence. I didn't want to burden them further.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that depending on the political changes, the activity and the organizations adapted accordingly. You said that in the formation of the cells, the KLA cells... I didn't want to say it (laughs)...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: With the formation of the KLA...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How did this adaptation happen?

Saime Isufi: So, yes. We always said, we always considered our actions a form of struggle, regardless of whether it involved weapons. But we knew that we wouldn't escape from the enemy without a fight, because we hadn't gained anything without fighting. So, in some way, we prepared ourselves for something like that. But when the war began, of course, before the war in Kosovo started, those activities were taking place. I can't say I was part of the organization, because at that time, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) emerged, and some of our group joined the Democratic League here, and somehow we got disoriented. Some of our comrades joined the Democratic League. We, who were a bit more revolutionary, didn't want that because we had already done the work, and we intended to continue. Because by submitting, we wouldn't gain anything. So, a kind of division occurred, even in Switzerland, as it happens everywhere.

Despite that, I included friends and comrades. Some of us were divided, so to speak, in terms of participation. But in fact, I myself got more involved in the Albanian education with the students. I didn't, so to speak, help the KLA with material aid. We also organized a women's association, "Drenica," which was established in the city where I live. That organization was formed because we were connected to the events here. We followed, so to speak, and we suffered during that time for our families, for our people, for everyone, for our country. In that association, as women, we worked, we gathered material aid. It was sent to people here and to people in Albania. So, we acted more in that

way. As for me, I was more involved in education, in supplementary Albanian language education. Even today, I am a coordinator in the canton where I live.

Anita Susuri: How was the experience when the war started in '98, with the killing of the Jashari family,²⁴ and then the massacre in Qirez that happened...

Saime Isufi: Well, look, we followed it with great concern, of course. We were keeping a close eye on the news. My brother was the commander of the Karadak region. Then I had friends who informed me... Jakup Krasniqi, Berat Luzha, they informed me from the frontlines, saying, "We will win, we will do this," so to speak. There was a lot of courage. Then, Mehmet appeared in Rambouillet when they went for negotiations in Rambouillet. So, there was a very spiritual connection. They tried, morally, to keep me with them despite the fact that at the time I was pregnant - because I got married later ...after 15 years, and I was pregnant at that time -, because the homeland was calling us. That's how it was at the time.

Anita Susuri: I mean about your family, were you in contact with them? Were they in Kosovo?

Saime Isufi: It was very difficult. It was very hard to contact my family. My family was in Gjilan, of course. They didn't expel them from Gjilan, like they did in other places. They didn't expel them from Gjilan, but they did in the surrounding areas. My sister is married in Përlepnica, and they, for example, were expelled by bus. My family couldn't even make contact because Gjilan was surrounded. They say, as it was at that time, that in a place called Gllama there were open pits, so to speak, to carry out a massacre and throw people in, just like they did in many other places.

I know that in Stankovec, my sister... While the family stayed hidden in Gjilan, in different houses, my father stayed at home, he didn't leave, because we Albanians are accustomed to [not leave] He didn't leave the house. They entered my father's house, tied him up, and threatened him, saying, "Where is Commander Rexha?" Because my brother took the name of Rexhep Mala, as a hero, and was called Commander Rexha. He didn't tell them where his son was, and said, "I don't know where he is." Then they started breaking the furniture and other household items, damaging everything to create fear and panic. Fortunately, no one was shot in the house except for my father.

They threw a bomb in the yard, but fortunately, no one was hurt, it happened with delay, so to speak. No one from the family was harmed, no one was killed, as happened in the massacre in Drenica and

²⁴ The killing of the Jashari family refers to a pivotal and tragic event in the Kosovo War. On March 5-6, 1998, the Yugoslav army and Serbian police attacked the Jashari family compound in Prekaz, Kosovo, which was the base of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) resistance. The massacre resulted in the deaths of over 50 members of the Jashari family, including women and children. This event is seen as one of the most significant moments in the Kosovo War, sparking widespread protests and an increase in resistance against the Serbian forces. The Jashari family became symbols of sacrifice and resistance in Kosovo, and their legacy is honored as part of the broader struggle for Kosovo's independence.

other places. Gjilan was somewhat untouched, so to speak, in these massacres. Maybe it was preserved for later, but then the NATO troops entered and saved it. Otherwise, with our eyes and ears, we were all aware, because it doesn't matter if it happens in Drenica or anywhere else. Kosovo is Kosovo, it is our country. We suffered a lot. A person suffers when they are at the scene, but when you're outside the homeland, you're even more affected... We were truly eyes and ears in Kosovo constantly.

Anita Susuri: And what was the experience like when Kosovo was liberated? Since it's partly your work from the youth...

Saime Isufi: Unbelievable. That day was very emotional for me (cries), I don't know, I cried the whole day. Because in our city, like in every city in Switzerland, people went out. I couldn't go out. They called me, "Come out, come out, you contributed." I couldn't. I just cried from joy, the whole day. Twice in my life I have cried from happiness, when Kosovo was liberated and when I gave birth to my son. It was truly unbelievable because we contributed, we acted. But we never thought that one day Kosovo would be liberated, that we would be free to come and go. So, even though we are not satisfied with many things, it was truly a great achievement. We should be satisfied with the fact that we can move freely. We greet the Albanian police officers, we are not afraid of the Albanian police, we must respect this state, this country. Even though we are not happy with many things, things are moving forward. A lot of work has been done, blood has been shed, many sacrifices have been made. The past should be respected, and no one should forget it.

Anita Susuri: Then you came to Kosovo shortly after, I believe?

Saime Isufi: I came immediately, pregnant. As soon as Kosovo was liberated, I came. Despite the pressure I had from my husband's family and my own family, saying "Not like this," I told them, "I'm very strong and nothing will happen, I will go."

Anita Susuri: How long after that did you have to travel?

Saime Isufi: So, in June, right away, immediately.

Anita Susuri: I think you were far away? You said you came twice...

Saime Isufi: Ah, yes, yes. So, after those two times? Don't count those two times at all (laughs). Yes, '81, then '98-'99. Yes. But I still tried to stay in contact with my family because I went to Albania, to Durrës. Then, my family came to Albania, for example, my mother came with my sister's passport, both of them in hijabs, no one knew them, like sisters. I thank my [maternal] aunts, they did a lot for my mother because their husbands were in Germany, and if they were investigated, helping these people would have put the family at risk, with seven or eight children. It wasn't easy, but still, I was able to

meet them. At least I met my mother, my father, and my sister too. I met them two or three times. We met in Durrës, spent our holidays together.

Anita Susuri: Now, you continue your life in Switzerland...

Saime Isufi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: With your family...

Saime Isufi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: You have your son and...

Saime Isufi: I have a son, one son. He is the most precious thing in the world to me. Honestly, becoming a mother... When Kadri passed, my greatest worry was that I hadn't become a mother. That was my regret. Like every young woman, when you're in love, you think, "No, it will never happen, it will never happen." But after 15 years, it happened. I didn't do it for heroism or anything else, but I didn't want anyone. I simply didn't feel for anyone. But when that happened, I got married in Albania, in Tirana. That's when I had my son.

Anita Susuri: Which year is it that...

Saime Isufi: '97.

Anita Susuri: '97.

Saime Isufi: '97, yes. Just before the war, yes, yes. So...

Anita Susuri: Mrs. Saime, if you have anything to add at the end, if there's something you'd like to mention...

Saime Isufi: What can I say, I thank you very much for this invitation, I gladly accepted your invitation because these things need to be said. Especially for those who are still alive, it's important for the past to be known, told by those who lived it because the youth, the future, will have history bring to light everything that was done. Because truly, people have sacrificed a lot.

Anita Susuri: Thank you!

Saime Isufi: Thank you as well, and best of luck with your work!

Anita Susuri: Thank you! Likewise.