

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SELATIN NOVOSELLA

Pristina | Date: February 16, 2022
Duration: 102 minutes

Present:

1. Selatin Novosella (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: You will introduce yourself, your date of birth, place of birth, something about your family?

Selatin Novosella: Yes, I was born in Vushtrri on July 1, 1945. My father was called Ismajil, as in Maxhun, so that means from the village Maxhunaj. While my mother Naile was from the village, I mean, from a village from Llap, [her full name was] Naile Shala. I had, because I don't anymore, I mean, five brothers and three sisters. Three of my brothers died in the meantime, now we are three brothers, three sisters. I finished the first year of elementary school in Vushtrri, and then in 1953 we moved from Vushtrri to Pristina.

Of course, I finished elementary school, the eight-year school, with half of our subjects in Serbian. . We had Serbian, Serbian as a subject. We had crafts in Serbian, physical education in Serbian, music in Serbian. The French teacher lectured in Serbian. Around half of the subjects were in Serbian. The rest of us didn't actually know Serbian at all, as much as we could [speak it] at school. In 1961 I enrolled at the *Shkolla Normale*,¹ back then it was called Miladin Popović, and fortunately for us, now it's Eqrem Çabej. While the place where I finished elementary school was Vuk Karadžić, and fortunately for us now it's Elena Gjika, so even the names show...

So, my childhood was the same as every other person's my age, with extreme poverty, with significant financial problems, without school bags. We had some kind of notebooks, thin ones with those spiral bindings. Oftentimes we would take books from each other. I was at *Shkolla Normale*, while I had no shoes, or no sneakers, I had rubber *opinga*.² The time was like that, I mean, extreme poverty.

¹ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly-opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

² Similar to moccasins, made out of rubber or bovine leather, mainly used by the villagers.

For me, *Shkolla Normale* was a turning point in life because at the time there were no faculties of Pristina, but there was the school which had the best staff. Not only in Pristina, but in Kosovo, it was precisely *Shkolla Normale*. You would prepare to become a teacher and there was a benefit there in that the moment you finished school, you would immediately start working. Now it's difficult to immediately start working, and that day [when you graduated] even more. There, the best professors of that time taught us, among them [Pajazit Nushi](#), Sali Nushi, Beqir Kastrati, Shefqet Veliu, and many others.

Especially we, as young people, loved them a lot, almost worshiped the two professors who had finished the *Normale* in Elbasan. It wasn't common knowledge at the time, it was left out [at the time], that the *Normale* of Elbasan was founded by Luigj Gurakuqi,³ it had its symbolism. They taught at *Normale*. That's where I learned my first poems that we would secretly receive, which I don't even know where they came from, for example, the poems, I mean *Shqipnia e Robnume* [Alb.: Occupied Albania] by Pashko Vasa⁴ or *Kosova e Lirë* [Alb.: Free Kosovo] by Pirro Floqi, or *Gjarpërinjtë e Gjakut* [Alb.: The Snakes of Blood] by Adem Demaçi,⁵ who I will talk about more later. We could barely get *Lahuta e Malësisë*⁶ [Alb.: The Highland Lute] by Gjergj Fishta.⁷ We would write down a copy and pass it to each other.

So, those were the times when I first started to know myself, I mean, that I was Albanian, being Albanian. I found out through very little information that Kosovo was part of Albania, it was separated around 1912. In 1945 it was separated again and we were under occupation. Like I mentioned in elementary school, then in the *Normale* of Pristina when we would prepare to become teachers, more or less half of the subjects were taught in Serbian. Imagine the irony! We would prepare to become teachers, while we learned subjects through Serbian. This was first the lack of professors, the lack of staff, but a small number of knowledgeable and skilled professors weren't allowed to work.

And then, in *Normale* there was a literary group called Migjeni.⁸ A really nice guy would lead it, a known poet called Zeqir Gërvalla, who fortunately is still alive [and lives] in America. Every week or every now

³ Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-1925) was an Albanian politician, writer, and a key figure in the Albanian National Awakening. He contributed to the declaration of Albanian independence and was a proponent of education and cultural development.

⁴ Pashko Vasa (1825-1892) was an Albanian writer, poet, and nationalist figure. He is best known for his patriotic poem *O moj Shqypni*, which played a significant role in the Albanian National Awakening.

⁵ Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

⁶ *Lahuta e Malësisë* is an epic poem written by Albanian poet Gjergj Fishta. Published in 1937, it is considered a masterpiece of Albanian literature, celebrating the history and culture of the Albanian people through myth and legend.

⁷ Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero. Notably, he was the chairman of the commission of the Congress of Monastir, which sanctioned the Albanian alphabet. In 1921 he became the Vice President of the Albanian parliament.

⁸ Millosh Gjergj Nikolla (1911-1938), known as Migjeni, a well-known poet and writer born in Shkodra.

and then we would have a reading hour there. One day, Zeqir Gërvalla, who we found out is friends with Adem Demaçi, told us during the reading hour, “When the reading hour ends, Adem Demaçi will speak too.” He had been released for a short time from his first time in prison in 1963. “When Adem Demaçi speaks, you should spread out in the hall.” *Normale* had an amphitheater which could accommodate around 250 students, there was no school with a better amphitheater at the time. “When Adem Demaçi speaks, you should applaud, just applaud.”

Adem Demaçi took the floor, before he started speaking, the ones of us who had spread out, about five-six friends started applauding and after our applause, other people joined it. Then, when Adem Demaçi took the floor, he said, “I have a problem, should I speak or not? I heard your poems, your stories, I liked many of them. We also had some thoughts, but you applauded a lot. Now if you don’t like what I say, maybe you will regret applauding in vain. You should’ve let me speak because it’s possible that I will mess it up,” his natural modesty, “but now I don’t know what to do.” His modesty inspired us even more and our applause turned into an ovation, the entire room stood up on their feet.

In one way I could say that that was the first time I met Adem Demaçi. Although our homes were on the same street near Dodona Theater. Now it’s Adem’s family living there because we would usually call him *bac*⁹ Adem. That was the first time I met him. So far I have written around 12-13 books about Adem Demaçi. While the ones behind me {refers to the books in the room}, this is a project with 14 volumes which have compiled the life and work of Adem Demaçi, which I can’t talk about because I’d have to talk for a month. And so it means...

Anita Susuri: What kind of speech was Adem Demaçi’s speech? What did he talk about?

Selatin Novosella: No, it wasn’t some kind of speech, it was about the writings of the students, some thoughts that we didn’t grasp enough. “You will become good students, educated, and polite. You have to become good teachers. Kosovo really needs teachers, it needs for you to educate [students] in the national spirit. Kosovo needs a lot of things, everything. But, it needs teachers the most and you will spread out in the eight areas of Kosovo. So, you are the future hope of Kosovo, which we need a lot. So, I love you, I value you.”

So from the *Shkolla Normale* to Pristina it’s maybe 20 minutes, so three-four kilometers, of course we came back on foot with *bac* Adem. It was late because reading hours would be held in the evening, after school was over. I had accompanied him home and our homes were closeby. He suggested to me the whole time to write, “Study, read, write essays, do your homework, but don’t forget to write,” that was his message, “and write whenever you feel inspired, all the inspiration you get, put it on paper.

⁹ In Albanian culture, *bac* is an informal term used to affectionately address an older man, akin to “uncle” or “old man” in English, conveying respect and familiarity. It can also be used for individuals who are respected or looked up to, often in a mentorship or advisory role, regardless of age, to convey a sense of reverence or admiration.

Leave it aside for two-three-five months, don't touch it. When you go back to what you wrote, the first thing you'll do is say, 'I did very well,' because you can't write that again," because he was a writer.

That one, *Jeta e Tretë* [Alb.: The Third Life], which we can see, all of them are stories from Adem Demaçi, and *Gjarpërinjtë e Gjakut*, which he published from '53 to '58 when he was imprisoned for the first time. These are the first written works of Adem Demaçi. That's why, Adem Demaçi was a person who had experience, he had a lot of experience. So, it was a meeting which I could say was almost a turning point in my life. In the meantime, some slogans started being written at the *Normale*. To the left as you go toward the *Normale*, there is a rather high hill made of bricks, and with the help of the teachers of course, "Long Live November 29!" was written. This, of course, refers to Yugoslavia Day.

Someone at night, some troublemaker, or maybe a good boy or girl, but I didn't know them, they had changed the nine to an eight. They had added some bricks, you could tell they were added, then they had painted it with white lime. But from a distance, about a meter away, it came out very symbolically. Not "long live," but "long live," not "Long live November 29," but "Long live November 28." It made the news back then. Today it's nothing at all, but back then it made the news. Because saying "Long live November 28" means long live Ismail Qemali, long live Isa Boletini, long live Albania, long live the flag. That's why, we as children were actually inspired by these, by this slogan.

Meanwhile, I don't know if it was whitewash or lime, but I know that I saw it. On the way back to Taukbahçe, at the intersection leading to Gërmia, someone had written a slogan in large letters along the edge of the road, "Kosmet¹⁰ belongs to Albania." Very powerful. That day, Fadil Hoxha,¹¹ who was then the president of the assembly, came to the *Normale*. And in every classroom, we had a loudspeaker above the door. Any news, any information, any lecture from the principal... was broadcasted there, and of course, the teachers and supervisors asked us to be quiet and listen to what was being said, it was that kind of time, indeed.

We found out that Fadil Hoxha had come there, and in silence, we listened to what he was saying. He said, "The enemy," no, "Water sleeps, but the enemy does not sleep. The enemy has infiltrated our midst, our ranks, and has found the weakest point. Future teachers will act in a hostile way against comrade Tito, against Yugoslavia, against the Communist League of Yugoslavia, and have written 'Kosmet belongs to Albania.' Those irredentists, they love Albania, they love the Communist Party of Albania, they love Enver Hoxha. And we must fight because they are dangerous enemies, as they have touched a point that should not be touched."

¹⁰ Kosmet is a Serbo-Croatian abbreviation for Kosovo and Metohija, historically used by Serbs to refer to the region. This term underscores the Serbian perspective on territorial and cultural claims over the area.

¹¹ Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001), Albanian Communist partisan leader from Gjakova, who held a number of high posts in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, including the rotating post of Vice President of the Federal Presidency, the highest leadership post in Yugoslavia under Tito, in 1978-79. He retired in 1986, but was expelled from the League of Communists on charges of nationalism.

To be honest, we didn't know who had written it. I found out much later, much later. When I wrote 35 books about the patriotic underground movement in Kosovo, I talked to a guy who was a close friend of Sharr Hoxha, Fadil Hoxha's eldest son. Some friends asked me, "Why are you saying this?" I say it because the truth must be told, always the truth. A guy, it was Foto Nesha, Foto Nesha, a well-known photographer, and there was Bujar, whose last name was Disdali, Turkish in origin. And when he saw that I wrote the book, to quote him, "I don't know who wrote the slogan 'Kosmet belongs to Albania.'"

He had an office somewhere else, Bujar was a very polite boy... they had been *Normalists* [students from the *Normale* school], gymnasium students, in this gymnasium. And before you enrolled at the gymnasium of Pristina, then Ivo Lola Ribar, now Sami Frashëri, it was news, news. Because mainly the children of the leaders were the ones there. And then Bujar Disdali came saying, "Do you know who wrote the slogan 'Kosmet belongs to Albania'?" "No." "He wrote it," he said, "Sharr Hoxha, Fadil Hoxha's son." Unbelievable, unbelievable! For Fadil Hoxha's son to write, "Kosmet belongs to Albania," a big saying. I didn't know Sharr, at a distance, but we weren't friends. The leader's son and we were in different schools.

What I mean by this... whereas Vahide, Vahide, the wife of Fadil Hoxha, was a well-known history professor. To let you know, to call it a kind of analysis, Sharr Hoxha learned from someone that "Kosmet belongs to Albania." From whom? From his father, because his father knew very well that Kosovo is part of Albania. Why mention this moment? I am convinced that historiography, part of this work that even you are doing, is a part of it.

Actually, actually, Zekirja Cana¹² told me, a well-known historian... I had used some, used some footnotes at the end of the books, they told me such and such. In terms of methodology because I am not a historian, I am a language professor, but he was a historian so I had him as an editor. "Can I cite in a footnote the thoughts of this person on a specific event?" He said, "Yes, if the statement is authentic, it is accurate, it should be noted in the footnote, it is more accurate than any other document. A document can be falsified about whoever wrote it. On a certain day when that decision is quoted, the author who said it is not quoted, but the book is quoted."

I quote these thoughts. What does that mean? The beginnings of my patriotic, and respectively, political activism, or rather, political but fundamentally patriotic in essence, was the *Normale*. A turning point in my life has been the *Normale*. One day, one night actually, because classes happened in the afternoon, when I was coming home, I saw my mother Naile, now deceased, with the wife of my brother [Sabri \[Novosella\]](#), wandering around our yard upset, "What's happening?" She said, "Sabri," she said, "is mad at everyone." Sabri, my brother, is now the owner of Nëna Naile.¹³ I asked, "Why?"

¹² Zekerija Cana (1934-2009) was a prominent Kosovar Albanian historian, publicist, and human rights activist. He was a member of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms and played a leading role in the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign. Cana was known for his extensive research on Albanian history and his contributions to the academic and cultural understanding of the region.

¹³ *Nëna Naile* is a rehabilitation and healing spa.

She said, “He lay down,” she said, “he even threw his wife out of the room,” Safete. They had just been married, not even a year. “And he won’t even let anyone into the room,” they were worried.

I knocked on the door, but he didn’t open it. I knocked again, but he still didn’t open it. “Sabri, it’s Selatin,” he opened it. He had locked the door with some kind of mechanism. When I entered, the entire room was filled with fine silk fabric in red, yellow, and black. He had received an order to sew flags. “Will you help me?” I said, “Yes.” I drew well, I had been a student of the famous Professor Engjëll Berisha. He said, “Draw me the eagle because I’ve received a letter, my brother,” but the letter hadn’t come at all, considering the conditions in which we were working. These things I’m telling you are not for you because you are too young. But even for a large number of others, including my children, they wouldn’t believe it because it’s unbelievable when a brother doesn’t dare to tell his brother about something. When a son doesn’t dare to tell his mother. When a husband doesn’t dare to tell his wife.

What he told me wasn’t true at all. “Look,” he said, “I received this letter.” And he said, “Selatin, come out...” [he] was a tailor, worked in a shop, but also had a small machine he used at home after hours. “Come out on this day, at this time, at this place, at this minute. Take this material and sew 100 Albanian flags. Wrap them up again and leave them at that place. Don’t tell anyone, let no one know, and if you don’t complete this task, we will execute you and your family.” I was terrified. That wasn’t true at all, but to justify it, you know. And so, one flag got damaged and we sewed 99. Those 99 flags were then distributed all over Kosovo, including Pristina and Prizren, of course. And that was an activity of the organization *Lëvizja Revolucionare për Bashkimin e Shqiptarëve* [LRBSH, Revolutionary Movement for the Unification of Albanians], which Adem Demaçi had founded, and I didn’t know, I found out about it much later in September of 1963, with Zeqir Gërvalla, with Fazli Grajçevci¹⁴ who would later become a martyr, and with many others.

Back then, this movement, this organization, had seven committees. Because the NDSH¹⁵ had committees, they didn’t have branches. Now, these parties have branches, but back then they had committees. So, the LRBSH had the Committee of Pristina, of Mitrovica, of Peja, of Gjakova, of Gjiilan, of Skopje, and of Istanbul. Fortunately, the chairman who led the Committee of Istanbul, meaning Njazi Saragjogllu, is still alive. He is living in Istanbul.

So, some activities were carried out. What kind of activities? Raising banners with slogans and flags, that’s what it meant. But in the meantime, Adem Demaçi had written a 54-page program, which I obtained from the archive, fortunately it was preserved. The first article, which is the essence of this organization, says, “Our movement,” meaning the organization, “aims for the liberation of Kosovo and other Albanian territories occupied by Yugoslavia and securing the right to self-determination until

¹⁴ Fazli Grajçevci or Fazli Grajçevci (1935-1964), member of *Ilegalja*, the underground Albanian nationalist movement, killed in detention.

¹⁵ *Lëvizja Nacional Demokratike Shqiptare* (Albanian National Democratic Movement) armed group formed in the aftermath of the Second World War to retake Albanian populated territory from Yugoslavia. By 1952 its members had all been arrested, sentenced to prison, or executed.

secession, with the ultimate goal of uniting these territories with mother Albania.” That document exists, and I have published it dozens of times.

Serbia considered it one of the most dangerous organizations of that time. After a relatively short period of activity, unfortunately, came the imprisonments. No one knows the exact number, but Adem Demaçi has said time after time that around 300 or so people were imprisoned. What were those interrogations like? The mere fact that Fazli Grajçevci was killed under torture shows it because the greatest horror is not the killing, the shooting, or the hanging. The greatest horror is when a person dies from torture. You are very young, and I want to protect you, to spare you from knowing what kinds of torture were used there. When someone dies from torture, you can imagine that all the others were tortured in the same way. After the imprisonment of Adem Demaçi and his comrades, my brother, Sabri, was also arrested. We were left outside...

Anita Susuri: What year was it? Just to have it...

Selatin Novosella: June 8, 1964.

Anita Susuri: ‘64.

Selatin Novosella: And now, the ones of us who remained, the young men and women, of course, continued raising flags and writing slogans. Now, our aim, among other things, was to show that despite the imprisonment of Adem Demaçi and his comrades, we would continue in our own way. When we divided the tasks, our comrade Ilmi Rakovica asked, “Where do you want to write slogans and raise the flag?” I chose Vushtrri. That memory stuck with me, I was about 18 years old then, 17 or 18. And it felt like going to my birthplace would be easier for me because everything had to be done at night, of course, at 10:00 PM. If you managed to do it from 10:00 PM to 10:05 PM, good, if not, we couldn’t risk more time, that’s how it was.

I went with a friend of mine, Ibrahim Gashi, to Fushë Kosovë by bus. From Fushë Kosovë to Vushtrri by train, and from the train station we walked. There was the city fortress, where you could go in the open air because it was hot. We watched a movie there because we needed to stay somewhere until 10:00 PM and had nowhere else to go. How could we wander around the streets? I had many *ilake* [relatives] there, as they say in Gjakova, but I didn’t dare visit them, “Why have you come? How?” When the movie ended, we went out, and seeing that it was 10:00 PM, we set off.

My friend raised the flag right where there was a light at the top of a pole there. He was the athletic type. Why would someone climb 10-15 meters? It seems he would grip with his hands and release his legs, then grip with his legs and release his hands. He climbed quickly. He put up the flag there. We had

to climb with pliers, and our hands were smeared with garlic so that when the UDB,¹⁶ the police, and the dogs caught us, they wouldn't be able to smell our scent, our traces, because of the garlic odor. That's how it was back then. And then I was giving a signal from a corner at the turn, right in my neighborhood where I was born, I had left there when I was seven years old, and I felt emotional from when I was a child. Then I was signaling to him to stop because we didn't have time, we still had to write the slogans. The priority was the flag, and the slogans if we had time.

The truth is, he had raised the flag and was kissing it up there at the top. I signaled to him that it wasn't the time for kissing, we didn't have time, run! He thought it was a danger signal, so he quickly descended. When he came down, with his legs and hands, his whole body got stuck with splinters from the wood. We were just kids. I had the text for three slogans to write, since I was good at drawing. The slogans had to be as short as possible and convey a message. The first slogan was clear, "We want freedom!" We didn't spend much time on that one. The second slogan, "Long live Albania," because those who taught us knew that without Albania, Kosovo wouldn't survive, without Albania there's nothing, never. Now, without Albania, there is no Kosovo. It's all politics.

The third slogan that I really wanted to write, when I shared this story about 10-15 years ago at an event for the inauguration of a book about Rexhep Mala,¹⁷ I didn't know that Enver Hoxha's¹⁸ son was in the audience, and I was recounting this life story, I don't know how it came up. I said, "The third slogan left me with much regret because I didn't write it. I started writing it but had to leave it halfway because it was longer: 'Long live Enver Hoxha!' I only managed to write 'Long live,' but I couldn't write Enver Hoxha because my friend signaled me to run." He had seen someone with an ax, would anyone be out at night with an ax unless they were a troublemaker? Out of fear, we left it halfway done.

And then one of my friends, [Hydajet Hyseni](#) said, "Do you regret not writing 'Long live Enver Hoxha'? Go out and write it now." "I won't write it now because it isn't the time," so like this. And then I was also imprisoned, to tell you the truth, I served a little time in prison, but when I was released from prison, they kicked me out of school, my brother was sentenced in the meantime, Sabri, to nine years. Things got tough, hundreds were imprisoned. All my friends were stuck at home, the girls had their families in villages, they went to work in the garden, doing farm work. I started herding the cows at home, I became a shepherd. I mean, it was a deeply sad feeling.

Anita Susuri: What about the arrest, how did that happen?

¹⁶ The State Security Service - *Služba državne sigurnosti*, also known by its original name as the State Security Administration, was the secret police organization of Communist Yugoslavia. It was at all times best known as UDBA (pronounced as a single word and not an acronym), and was the most common colloquial name for the organization throughout its history.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

Selatin Novosella: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: How did the arrest happen?

Selatin Novosella: The UDB asked me, “Do you want to see Sabri since you haven’t seen him in prison?” I said, “Of course.” When they took me to prison, they said, “We didn’t call you to see your brother, we called you regarding some work you did recently,” that’s it, it was over. Because we still thought that when the UDB saw you, they would kill you. The UDB are the most deceitful people possible in the way they imprison, the way they talk, the way they behave outside. They are the most well-mannered people someone can see. That’s how the Secret Service is, they are not aggressive. Their aggression is in the cell, in prison, and during interrogations.

Anita Susuri: To which prison did they initially send you?

Selatin Novosella: To Pristina. And the first conversation, because when they imprisoned my brother, Sabri, we had a picture of Skanderbeg, a painting on the wall. It’s not worth telling the story of how we got that picture. In fact, when they took it, they removed the frame and broke the picture into two, four pieces and took it as *corpus delicti*, meaning as criminal evidence. Now, one of those UDB *shkije*¹⁹ investigators said, “Tell us everything you know about Skanderbeg.” What did I know? Nothing. I didn’t know anything. Of course, five or six of them were standing, each shouting in their own way. He said, “Tell us everything you know about Skanderbeg.” I said, “I don’t know anything.” “How come,” he said, “you don’t know?” Truthfully, my picture was not one by one meter, but the *shka* exaggerated. He said, “You have a one by one meter picture of Skanderbeg on the wall but you know nothing at all? Speak!”

All I knew, I had heard from the literature professor Ditar Qamili, from Prespa in Macedonia, who spoke the Albanian language as they do there, well. He had told us a legend that Vojsava, Skanderbeg’s mother, had a dream that she would give birth to a child with a star on his forehead, like a legend. And that during the war against the Ottoman Empire, during the siege of Krujë, Skanderbeg, according to the legend, flew on his horse, didn’t walk, but flew from one slope to another. In Krujë, I saw something that looked like a horseshoe, I’m sure it was from rain, from snow... it has the shape of a horseshoe, and it’s called “The Hoofprints of Skanderbeg’s Horse.” So I knew fairy tales, I didn’t know anything really. But I knew something. He told me... you don’t understand Serbian, right? [Addresses the interviewers].

Anita Susuri: Yes, we do.

Selatin Novosella: Do you? “*Gde se rodio?*” [Where was Skanderbeg born?] he said. “*Skenderbeg?*” I, with a faint voice, a poor kid, they were all standing, I was sitting on a chair in the corner, and I said,

¹⁹ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkije*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

“Rodio se u Albaniju” [He was born in Albania]. “A zašto se borio Skenderbeg?” [What did Skenderbeg fight for?] “Skenderbeg...” I didn’t know how to speak the language well (smiles), but I said, “Borio se za oslobođenje Albanije” [He fought for the liberation of Albania]. What more do you want to know? That wasn’t anything significant. With such force, he slapped me, it was the first slap while I was sitting, and he was as tall as a poplar tree. He slapped me with such force that not only did I fall, but the chair I was on also fell, and he fell on top of me. In other words, it became *kijamet*.²⁰ They thought I was mocking them, but that’s how it was, I was mocking them because I was a kid (smiles).

This was my first encounter with the UDB. Later, the investigations were mainly conducted by a *shka* who spoke Albanian. The Albanian UDB investigators were incomparably worse than the *shkije*. Is it easy to understand? It’s not easy, neither you nor the reader tomorrow will be able to understand. Why? Serbia had as many *shkije* as it wanted in Serbia, and it also had as many in Kosovo as it wanted, but it made the Albanians worse than the *shkije*. The tortures used by the Albanians during the investigations, the insults they hurled, the humiliations they inflicted... the *shkije* could never think of such things.

I was imprisoned four times. In 1964 and 1965 [the arrest was in January 1969], when I was sentenced to five years for demonstrations, in 1975 when I was sentenced with Adem Demaçi and Rexhep Mala, and in 1981 when I was slapped by a *shka* investigator, they were all Albanians. These things need to be known, they need to be heard, they need to be understood. For the Albanian UDB members, the police, prosecutors, judges, leaders of the Communist Party, Kosovo not only would not be a Republic, not even a *Pokrajina Kosova* [Autonomous Province], it would be Kosmet, Serbia. If it weren’t for Adem Demaçi and his comrades, if it weren’t for the UÇK²¹ and Adem Jashari,²² today Kosovo would be Serbia. There were such Albanians who loved Serbia, who loved Yugoslavia, who loved Tito.²³ This is the truth, it is painful, but the historical truth must be told. So, I stayed for a while after being released from prison when they interrupted my education. But then...

Anita Susuri: How long were you there for?

Selatin Novosella: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: How...

Selatin Novosella: A little, a little. 30 days.

²⁰ Tur.: *kıyamet*, literally the end of the world. Usually, it’s used to describe a very chaotic and difficult situation.

²¹ Alb. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army, was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

²² Adem Jashari (1955-1998), also known as “legendary commander,” was a founder of the KLA, celebrated as its foremost leader and symbol of Kosovo independence. He died in March 1998, together with his family of 20 - half of them underage girls and boys - in a shootout with Serb troops during a three-day siege of his home in Prekaz.

²³ Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) was the communist leader of Yugoslavia from 1943 until his death in 1980.

Anita Susuri: Did you not receive visits?

Selatin Novosella: No, no, what visit? After being released from prison, after two years, on July 1, '66, on my birthday, I was in prison visiting Sabri in Goli Otok. Sabri was serving a nine-year sentence, I had gone with my mother, Sabri's wife, and Ilir, Sabri's son. There was a moment when Ilir, who didn't recognize his father, understandably, said to me, since children called me *bac* and still do, "*Bac*, what does daddy look like? Because I don't know him." Now what do I explain, I just said, "Daddy is the most handsome of all," as many prisoners were coming out. I said, "He is a bit dark," although Sabri was not just a bit dark, he was quite... you know. But the strong sun there had given him a chocolate color, as he spent all his time outside. He had grown his mustache down to here {touches his cheeks with his hands}. So I told him, "He looks like this, like this, like this."

It was a moment, an indescribable, inexplicable, and sorrowful moment. When Sabri came out with his friends, there were also Avdyl Lahu, who had been imprisoned with him, Fadil Cuka and some others from Prizren, Haxhi Zybjaj from Bukosh, and many other boys from Prizren. Now, one of those friends came out first, and as soon as Ilir saw him, he hugged him around the neck, thinking he was his father because he was dark and had a mustache, which was heartbreaking. Sabri's friend realized the boy had made a mistake. He said, "Ilir, I am your father's friend, I am your father's friend, not your father." It was difficult, terrible, terrible!

Part Two

Selatin Novosella: That day, Sabri was very happy and said, "Have you heard the news?" I said, "No." "Why?" I said, "We took a train from Fushë Kosovë to Belgrade and then switched. From Belgrade to another place, Zagreb. In Zagreb, we boarded a train to Rijeka and from Rijeka to... we haven't heard anything, we've been traveling for three days." He said, "They have surrounded Aleksandar Ranković."²⁴ Ranković was Marshall Tito's closest associate. But the fact that he was a *shka* and had been the head of the UDB was good news for them, and it turned out to be good news. It turned out to be good news. If you were older [addresses the interviewers], we would speak more freely because you don't know these things, of course. You have heard something but you don't...

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes, I know...

²⁴ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serbian 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.

Selatin Novosella: No, I mean you don't know the details because you certainly know a lot. But if you were older, you would have more information because I know you know a little bit about everything. Actually, '66 was good news, very good news. The prison releases began. Those of us who were expelled from school were accepted back into studies. I started at the university, meaning I had lost... I was in the same class as Ibrahim Rugova,²⁵ Sabri Hamiti,²⁶ and many others, but I had fallen behind because I had spent two or three years as a shepherd.

Now, from '66 to '68, it was a time, a kind of romanticism of its own kind. Why? Because the press from Albania started coming in, illegally. Books from Albania started arriving, *Historia e Skënderbeut* [Alb.: The History of Skanderbeg], *Trimi i Mirë me Shokë Shumë* [Alb.: The Brave Man with Many Friends], from Pitarka, Skanderbeg's photographs, Skanderbeg's emblems. It was the 500th anniversary of his birth. Songs about Skanderbeg, the movie about Skanderbeg. There was a Kino Armata here somewhere. People would sleep [camp], they slept to be able to buy tickets in the morning to go see the movie *Skanderbeg*, it was a time of romanticism.

Anita Susuri: Did you see it too?

Selatin Novosella: Yes, of course.

Anita Susuri: What was it like? What kind of feeling?

Selatin Novosella: Now it's this, go on Google and look up Skanderbeg, the main role is played by a Russian. It's the best film that has been written and shot so far. Why? Because it was made by a Russian-Albanian production. When we saw Skanderbeg's war, his heroism, I mean... then the dramas started to come, *Cuca e Maleve*, *Shtatë Shaljanët* [The Seven Shaljans], *Trimi i Mirë me Shokë Shumë* [The Brave Man with Many Friends] and others. *Plaku i Maleve* [The Old Man of the Mountains], about Bajram Curri. In fact, with us, a kind of reactivation began, not just for us in '64 because it had happened even earlier, in fact, there was a growing sense of optimism that things were getting better.

Meanwhile, after the fall of Ranković, Tito was now a well-known strategist, a great patriot, a very great Yugoslav patriot as a Croat. In fact, [Kaqusha Jashari](#) once said, I said something in this context about Tito. She said, "I am a Titoist. But, hearing you say good things about Tito!" I said, "First of all, Tito was neither a Serb nor a Montenegrin, Tito was a Croat and he was a great patriot. Not a Serb or a Croat, but a Yugoslav, he loved Yugoslavia very much." Yugoslavia was the most stable, the strongest, the most democratic, the most economically strong state compared to all the eastern states. Now they might say, "How can you say that? You were imprisoned three times during Tito's time?" I am telling the historical truth. This is the historical truth.

²⁵ Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

²⁶ Sabri Hamiti (1944-2018) was a prominent Albanian writer, poet, and literary critic.

Tito used to take advantage of the situation, sometimes Kennedy would come to Belgrade, sometimes Khrushchev,²⁷ he [Tito] as a genius, a strategist who knew how to exploit circumstances like few others until now. Maybe no one. This is the truth. And then discussions began about constitutional changes, to advance the status of Kosovo, to become a Republic, to gain the right to self-determination, to open the University of Pristina, to allow literature from Albania. It started to breathe. An international conference was held, not a national one, an international conference in the hall of the Assembly of Kosovo.

Aleks Vuthaj was the president of the Academy of Sciences, they brought the bust of Skanderbeg, and Fadil Hoxha unveiled it, the bust of Skanderbeg in the solemn hall of the assembly. There were French, Russians, Turks, and Italians. About 80 papers were read. It was read, until recently they took your photo and tore it up, *Gde se rodio Skenderbeg?* [Where was Skanderbeg born?] and now, there was a huge change. These things need to be critically evaluated. Only the ignorant, and in Turkish, in Arabic it means uneducated, without knowledge, without education, liars. One must not lie, the truth must be told. There was a great change. Only Adem Demaçi and many of his friends were still serving heavy sentences.

Then the idea to organize demonstrations came to us. Because *shkije* were saying, “Only some nationalists, some irredentists, some Enverists want the Republic of Kosovo,” so in order to show that it wasn’t just them but also the students and the people demanding it, we went out in demonstrations. We didn’t know what demonstrations were, we had never seen them, we watched on television how they did them in Paris, how they did them in Berlin, how they did them in America, how they did them in London, to see technically how they were done. We thought that if we went out, they would kill us all. In fact, one of our organizing friends said, “If they wound us or kill us, what should we do?” May he rest in peace, Osman Dumoshi said, “Put them on the sidewalk and continue the demonstration. There will be time to deal with them.” Because young people, as they say in Albanian: “Young are like the north wind,” they are reckless, they fear nothing at all.

The demonstration turned out to be very powerful, very. Despite the fact that a boy was killed, that boy died in my arms, Murat Mehmeti, about 12 of us were wounded by firearms, dozens were injured, and over 70 were arrested and sentenced... The first demonstrations took place, it is important for you to know, in Prizren, precisely in Prizren. Then, in Peja, Pristina, and other places. The demonstration was very successful. We were later tried along with many others. I was sentenced with nine of my friends. I was sentenced to five years and so on.

Anita Susuri: And how was the organization? Was there... surely there was some kind of organization for that kind of demonstration?

²⁷ Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894-1971) was First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, and Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1958 to 1964.

Selatin Novosella: To talk about the organization, we would need to talk for two hours. But your brother wasn't allowed to know if it was being organized, your mother didn't know it was being organized because we held the meetings in people's houses. For example, when they were at my house, they would put out a *krelanë*²⁸ and some cheese, bring a cup of tea, and the friends would come and sit. When a family member came inside, they didn't know we were having a meeting, Sabri, who had just gotten out of prison, didn't know. He couldn't know. Mother Naile couldn't know. "The friends are just sitting and chatting."

There, we would decide what we were going to demand, who would write, who would raise the banners, who would organize the demonstrations, who would make the connections with other cities. I mean, it's a history in itself. So far, I've written six books, I mean, it was done in strong secrecy. And the demonstrations turned out powerful, then spread to Podujevo, Gjilan, and Ferizaj. They were successful, and the main demand was self-determination, which is much more than a republic. But of course, also the Republic of Kosovo.

We were then punished and dispersed throughout Yugoslavia, and... actually, there's a family element, I got engaged about three months before I was imprisoned, and of course, this is my wife {points to a photograph} and she waited, of course, for four years. I even wrote her a letter after I was sentenced... I will publish it in the meantime since next year is her 50th birthday. I have gathered all the letters I sent her and all the ones she sent me in prison, and I will publish a book of letters. Only I know how I managed to get them out of prison.

In that letter, I told someone, I didn't tell them, I even wrote a book. My friends asked why I didn't say, "Dear," I didn't say dear. I wanted to make it more distant, I wanted to free her from obligations towards me. I said, "Respected girl," not dear, "Respected girl, I have been sentenced to five years of heavy prison." I shouldn't have said it, but I did, "I will serve these years," I told her something I shouldn't have, to hurt her, "whether I get out of prison or not, it's unknown. You have no obligation towards me, you are young, marry, start a family, look after your life. You have no obligation towards me at all." Did I really mean that? It's not true (laughs). But I wanted, as they say, to be at peace with myself and with God. "If I am destined for this, you have no obligation."

She wrote to me, told me, "Not just five, but even if you were sentenced to 15 years, I wouldn't seek another fate. I will wait for you my entire life, and this, this, this..." This phenomenon, you should have taken up this topic, not them, the phenomenon of waiting, a worldwide phenomenon. Not just women with children, not just women without children, not just fiancées, how many girlfriends have waited? Five, ten, 15 years. Ali Lajçi didn't have anyone for about 15 years, no marriage for 15 years. My friends,

²⁸ *Krelanë* is a traditional Albanian dish, consisting of round bread topped with ingredients like cheese, butter, herbs, and sometimes vegetables or meat. It's often served during gatherings or meetings alongside tea or other beverages.

their wives went to Stara Gradiška,²⁹ they got engaged, they were educated girls, working in banks in Pristina, and they went there to get married and wait. This is a phenomenon to which we have dedicated very little attention. When I say we, I mean us, you, science, knowledge. The phenomenon of women waiting is a miracle.

And then after my release from prison, of course... I was released on January 27, I was imprisoned on January 27, '69, and I was released on January 27, '72. After a week, I got married and it was a special wedding. The dinner was held in a house... dinners were held in houses back then. When we heard that in Turkey they were being held in salons, we used to say what is that, like *shkije*, that's what we used to say. In one house was the bride, the women, and the girls, in another house were the men, uncles, and whoever else, and in another house were my friends. And there was a wedding, it was phenomenal for the time. Even the Shota Ensemble³⁰ was there, not singers but the music, I mean, and it was a very, very well-known moment.

Even my mother Naile, while I was in prison, dedicated a poem to my wife, while my three sisters, [Igballe](#), Magbule, and Meleqe, were wonderful women. At that time, all three of them were students... she [my mother] wrote the text, she said it in her own way because she was illiterate. My wife's name is Elife, and she says somewhere, "Oh Elife, how beautifully you have waited for your husband for five years," (cries), "for five years, oh Elife, how beautifully you have waited for your husband for five years. For five years, he has been in captivity to make Kosovo part of Albania" (cries).

Anita Susuri: To say Kosovo is Albania, is that correct?

Selatin Novosella: "To make Kosovo part of Albania." And my three sisters with three tambourines, singing like only sisters can for their brother. It was a moment that cannot be repeated. And then, in the meantime, my son was born on November 28. What should I name him? Flamur [Alb.: Flag]. But I couldn't name him Flamur because my older brother had already named his son Flamur. So, I named him Valon [Alb.: waves]. Meanwhile, when my other brother's daughter was born, we already had a Flamur, now Valon was my son, and now Sabri's daughter, who is in Sweden, is named Vlora. So, it came together, *Flamuri Valon në Vlorë* [Alb.: The flag waves in Vlora]. What do I mean by this? Not just that we understand each other. But a large number of political activists, even through names, have shown their dedication, they have shown their commitment. Nothing in life is a coincidence at all.

²⁹ Stara Gradiška is a village and a municipality in Croatia, known historically for its prison. During various periods, particularly in the 20th century, the prison in Stara Gradiška was used for different political prisoners. It became notorious during the Second World War as part of the Jasenovac concentration camp system, and later, during the Yugoslav era, it was used for incarcerating political dissidents and other prisoners.

³⁰ Shota is a folkloric dance ensemble, which was established on September 30, 1950, as the National Ensemble, with the decision of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, as well as three other ensembles in the former Yugoslavia: Llado - Zagreb, Kollo Belgrade and Tanec - Skopje.

In the meantime, I began my studies. I had started in '68, but I had some significant problems during those years. They wouldn't let me work as a teacher. At that point I had a child. In the meantime, my daughter, Donika, was also born. And simply, this new generation of Kadri Zeka,³¹ Jusuf Gërvalla,³² Ilmi Ramadani,³³ and many other friends had arrived [on the scene]. Then the activities continued, and a political process began, which is a history in itself. The political process and the framed political process have an essential difference. The political process is when you are punished for something you have done, while the framed political process is when you are punished for something you might do. The latter is more terrifying.

Again, I got involved in this trial, there were 19 of us. Of course, Adem Demaçi was sentenced to 15 years, Rexhep Mala³⁴ and Isa Kastrati are martyrs, and many of them were sentenced to ten to 12 years. I was sentenced to seven years. This started the waiting period for my wife, not seven years, but I served five. When I got out of prison, Valon had already started his first year of elementary school. It was a somewhat emotional moment. So, this was my third trial, and the third time in prison began. They usually moved us around in these prisons. For these four prisons of mine, I say I was, but I wasn't really there, they took me to the prisons of Pristina, Mitrovica, Prizren for about a year, Gjilan, Niš, Požarevac, and Belgrade. But I served my sentence in these prisons.

Anita Susuri: Why did this transfer between prisons happen?

Selatin Novosella: It's a police matter. It's a long story why. For example, we would go on strike. What kind of strike? We wouldn't take the food. What kind of strike? We wouldn't work. Then, to prevent the entire prison, which has a minimum of 1000, 1,500 inmates, from rising up, they transferred those who were a bit more troublesome, a bit more rebellious, from one prison to another. They also put them in cells, put them in solitary confinement. During my time in prison, around ten years, they kept me in solitary for about two and a half years. As for Adem Demaçi, I researched a lot about his life and work, and I estimated that he spent around six years and four months in solitary confinement.

³¹ Kadri Zeka (1953-1982) was a prominent Albanian nationalist and political activist from Kosovo, known for advocating for Albanian rights in the former Yugoslavia during the 1970s and early 1980s. He was assassinated in 1982 in Germany, along with Jusuf and Bardhosh Gërvalla, in an attack believed to have been orchestrated by Yugoslav secret services.

³² Jusuf Gërvalla (1943–1982) was a prominent Albanian writer, journalist, and political activist from Kosovo. He was a leading figure in the movement for Albanian rights in the former Yugoslavia during the 1970s and early 1980s. He was assassinated in 1982 in Germany, along with Bardhosh Gërvalla and Kadri Zeka, in an attack believed to have been orchestrated by Yugoslav secret services.

³³ Ilmi Ramadani (1953) was a political activist from Kosovo who fought for Albanian rights and self-determination in the former Yugoslavia during the 1970s and 1980s. He was part of the same movement as Kadri Zeka and Jusuf Gërvalla, advocating for greater political freedoms for Albanians.

³⁴ 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.

But then I heard in an interview, Adem Demaçi on a television program said, “I was in solitary confinement mainly for five and a half years.” And who came to my mind? Big Brother [Reality TV]. What kind of poor souls are they? What kind of nobodies are they? They haven’t seen their mother for a week, they cry. They haven’t seen their wife for a week, they cry. They haven’t seen their daughter... nobodies, poor souls. For five and a half years Adem Demaçi was alone, with God. Mainly in solitary... and the world didn’t end...

Anita Susuri: What was the difference between these prisons? Were the prisons different in terms of conditions or what was it?

Selatin Novosella: We had a trivial question, and I say trivial because it was meaningless. When you are transferred from one prison to another, “Which prison is better? In Požarevac or in Stanište?” The question should be asked differently, “Which prison is worse?” “Which prison is better?” (laughs). All prisons are the same, that’s it.

Anita Susuri: Did you have contact with your family at that time?

Selatin Novosella: Yes, of course. Regularly. Only in the investigative prisons was it not regular, for example, for months I didn’t have any contact. But when they sent you to Požarevac or Niš, they called those trenches. There, you had scheduled visits, you had a 30-minute visit once a month, that’s it. My fiancée couldn’t come because there was no proof that we were engaged, married. For four years, obviously, I couldn’t see her, that was the rule. One letter per month, one page, and that’s it.

So, the conditions... those who are in other prisons don’t understand, it’s normal, it’s normal that they can’t understand. But the prison conditions... Adem Demaçi gave an interview after he got out of the third prison. A Serb from Belgrade asked him, “Can you describe to us what a day in prison is like? Just one day?” Adem Demaçi knew Turkish very well, and that’s how it is in the newspaper too. He said, “*Kako bi rekli Turci gjyr da gör*” [Srb.: As the Turks say, look and understand] “*Anladın mı?*” [Tur.: Did you understand? - He addresses the interviewer].

Anita Susuri: Mhm [nods].

Selatin Novosella: “Prison cannot be explained, prison cannot be commented on, prison cannot be analyzed, prison is experienced.” If they tell the truth. Don’t say this and that, just let it go. For example, a pig’s ear would come like this {explains the size with hands} full of hair, dirty and filthy. Some rotten cabbages were put there, and you got that. You had to eat, to survive. You threw away the pig’s ear in the trash. You washed those cabbages, added a bit of salt and some oil if you had it. Or they put pig’s nails in the beans and you removed the pig’s hooves and ate the rest. Prison cannot be explained. Prison cannot be explained. I don’t intend to repulse you.

One day, the girls from the ministry came, I said, “Oh girls, don’t tell fairy tales. The Prison of Pristina must be restored to its former state. These makeshift toilets must be removed. We relieved ourselves in a can.” There was a potty, you don’t remember, they were from long ago. A potty, clean and plastic, it’s disgusting. But when a man gets up, he relieves himself. Today, there are no animals, in the zoo they don’t treat animals, beasts, wild creatures the way Serbia treated us. To make you relieve yourself publicly. Why did they do that? To humiliate you, to strip you of your dignity, to strip you of your personality.

Therefore, the treatment of prisoners, especially Albanians, was unimaginable. For example, I was kept in the Prison of Prizren for 14 months alone. I requested it, I requested it myself. I went to the prison director, and I said, “Everyone smokes.” One [person with the last name] Bozhur [smoked], he was a Serb from Belgrade and smoked some type of Zodiac that was this long {explains length with hands}. One smoked a cigarette, they brought it in shirt boxes. Three people smoking tobacco. The window was as big as the photograph of Adem Demaçi, not to smear the photograph, even smaller. In June, July, August, you would lie on your belly to stick your nose through a five-millimeter gap between the door and the floor to get some oxygen. They were actually poisoning you. I’m not even talking about the unwashed feet, the filth, and dirt that accumulated there.

I went to the prison director in ‘78 and said, “Director,” I said, “I am not returning to the cell” He said, “God bless!” I said, “Blessed be you! You need to put me in a cell alone.” “But why? You are very quiet,” he said, “you don’t cause problems with the guards, you don’t cause problems with me as the director, you don’t cause problems with the other prisoners,” he said, “I need to write something. It’s true that I am currently your boss, but I also have bosses. I need to justify why you are in a cell.” “Tell them he can’t stand the smoke, he can’t stand the dirt, he can’t stand the filth.” “But we can’t put you in a cell alone.” I said, “If you don’t, there will be a problem.” “What will you do?” I said, “I will go on a hunger strike.” “How many days will you not eat?” “I won’t eat,” I said, “for as long as it takes. Three days, a week, a month, I won’t eat at all. You will have to deal with taking me to hospitals, infusions, troubles. You will have to allow it.”

For investigative prisons, there are two visits per month. “When my family comes,” I said, “I won’t go out to the visit, and you will have to bring them to my cell, which the law doesn’t allow, or you will have to explain that I am sick and in which hospital, or that I am dead and give them the corpse. Now we have a problem.” He said, “Let’s make an agreement, you,” he said, “stay. I won’t write any letter at all. But when the prison inspectors come to visit and open the doors and ask you, you say you had a problem with other inmates and were brought here yesterday afternoon. When they ask me in the office without you, I will say he had a problem with other inmates, we haven’t reported it yet, and I haven’t punished him in the cell yet. Do we have an agreement?” I said, “Yes.” I stayed there for 14 months. Like Big Brother (laughs), a catastrophe, it’s a pity when I see them.

Anita Susuri: Did you regret asking to stay alone?

Selatin Novosella: No, I requested it myself, why would I regret it? I read at least ten to 12 hours a day there. I read all the newspapers of Kosovo, *Rilindja*,³⁵ *Shkëndija*, *Fjala*, *Jeta e Re*, *Përparimi*, *Epoka e Re*, and I always ordered three newspapers from Belgrade: *Politika*, *Borba*, *Novosti*. Whatever book was published, if someone visited me and didn't bring me a package of books, that day for me was... I didn't care if there was sausage, white cheese, or cheese, it didn't interest me. Books. That's why Albin Kurti said something wise, because he is a smart guy, he said, "The quality of reading in prison," he said, "cannot be compared to any other reading." And that's true. I spent over 95 percent of my time reading, and I was at peace. How I was at peace, I know (laughs). Like that. I was released on June 15, '79, and then I returned to life...

Anita Susuri: And how were the trials?

Selatin Novosella: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: Did you have a lawyer, for example? How was the trial process?

Selatin Novosella: I never wanted a lawyer. But according to the law, for serious offenses, you can't go to trial without a lawyer. The court appoints one and pays the fees. But the lawyer in political trials, do you know what they do? They take the fee and go home. Because political prisoners are sentenced before they even go to trial. They are sentenced by the committee, the police, the UDB, they just call witnesses, ask them questions, they tell their stories, and those stories mean nothing. For example, when Adem Demaçi was sentenced the third time on January 6 or February, I think it was '76, there is a term in the law called the final statement [allocution]. Whether they sentence you for a month, six years, or execute you, it's called the final statement, that's the juridical terminology.

They asked Adem Demaçi, "What do you have to say for your final statement?" He said, "I will say that the first time I worked, it was just because I didn't know more and I organized just because I didn't know more. The goal was to unite with Albania. This time I haven't done anything at all, I didn't have time, I just got out of prison a few days ago." There was a bastard from Prizren, Durmish Kaqinaj, a judge, who had said, "If it's okay, I'll go," because they didn't go to court in Pristina, "I'll go and judge Adem Demaçi." And when he judged him, they immediately promoted him.

Albanians in power who were worse than *shkije* competed to get positions. These things need to be said, need to be emphasized. And the truth is, it was a terrible trial. We were 19 prisoners, we had 19 police officers, and we had 19 family members. Each of us was handcuffed, linked to a police officer. You couldn't dare look left or right. Those who smoked weren't allowed to, and if someone needed a light from a friend, the police would light it for them.

³⁵ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

During Adem Demaçi's final statement, he said, "That girl who is writing there, write this down. I haven't done anything at all this time, neither Selatin nor Osman, the two or three friends I see here who you have put on trial with me. I haven't done anything with them either. You want to know my opinion, my political belief, I will tell you. Until Kosovo and the Albanian regions under Yugoslav occupation are liberated, there will be no peace in Yugoslavia, in the region, in Europe. Keep this in mind."

I would not stay [with Demaçi] this time, because the second time I stayed around four years with Adem Demaçi, and this third time I didn't stay. Friends had asked him during prison, "Why *bac*? Why did you need to say that? You could have kept quiet, didn't you think it was enough that you were being judged?" "Swear to you, I knew they would sentence me to 15 years. How could I serve 15 years? And secondly, we have a soul, I couldn't die in prison and let them think I had changed my mind," and so on. Then after the liberation in the '80s, the demonstrations of '81³⁶ began. They arrested me again, but not as an organizer. They kept me for two or three months in prisons and so on.

Anita Susuri: Until what year were you involved in this movement? In these underground movements [*Illegale*]³⁷ that existed?

Selatin Novosella: Underground? I told you. The year 1964, the year 1968, and later in some not very well-organized movements, but from '64 until what was called the democracy of the '90s, I was involved all the time in the underground movement. Then the '90s came, different times, different circumstances. Now, asking for the Republic of Kosovo wouldn't get you imprisoned, it simply became a matter of freedom of speech. I was a member of the Central Council of the Democratic League of Kosovo [LDK],³⁸ the chairman of the Pristina branch. In 1992, when the first parliamentary and presidential elections were held, I was a member of that assembly, meaning with [Ibrahim] Rugova and others.

We made efforts to do a lot during these years, and I believe they were arduous, exhausting, and painful years. But the political movements were never what we aimed to achieve. We always made a peaceful movement, a mournful one. A peaceful movement of waiting, a peaceful movement of sitting, a peaceful movement of silence. We did not make an active peaceful movement. Because the authority

³⁶ On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

³⁷ Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

³⁸ Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

that the political prisoners and the Democratic League led by Rugova had from the '90s to '96 was such that you could have aimed for the sky. We had that kind of authority, I know.

First of all, Rugova and others, but Rugova had the theory to stay, to wait, to be silent. Quit work? Quit. Leave the hospitals? Leave them. Leave the universities? Close them. Send the children home? Send them. That was a catastrophic policy. I was with Ibrahim Rugova for eight years. They were very terrible years. But over time, it became clear that this tactic needed to change, needed to change and wouldn't work without change. In fact, ideas emerged that we needed to have a peaceful movement, but an active peaceful movement in the style of Martin Luther King in America, in the style of Gandhi [in India].

This term that the movement was Gandhian-Rugovian is totally untrue. Here, it was a cowardly movement, while there it was a democratic peaceful movement. India, which was a colony of Great Britain, what happened? Colonies are kept 99.9 percent, nearly 100 percent for political reasons. All wars that are fought today, all of them, including the Kosovo war, were fought for economic reasons. If you look at it fairly. Now Gandhi, with his sandals, with a white cloth, with a goat, with goat milk, a philosopher of his kind. Goods would arrive, according to history, with ten ships from England, ready-made items, food, bedding, clothing to be sold. He just told them, "Don't unload the ships of our occupiers, leave them." What? They would stay for a day, a week, a month, they would spoil, their expiration date would pass.

Now, to take the primary goods like bananas, cotton, wool, ores, and minerals by force, the British police would load them onto ships for processing. "Don't load them." They were being blocked. Demonstrations, hundreds of police, thousands being separated, beaten, trampled. He would say, "Don't turn back, let them beat you." This turned into a movement... In fact, the strongest empire of the time, like America, when America hit... I heard from Adem Demaçi, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, all equaled zero. We could have created an active peaceful movement in Kosovo. I was among the troublemakers, along with Adem Demaçi and Ramë Buja, but it didn't work out for us.

The time came when the cards had to be shuffled. When the cards of the other movement came, it became an armed movement. Under what conditions? None. No conditions at all. With no chance of winning. But fortunately for us, our great fortune was that these years of waiting, as Rexhep Qosja and many others called it, had a positive outcome. They say every good has a bad, but also every bad has a good. Now it happened that the uprising, the KLA war in Kosovo, did not happen when it did in Croatia, Slovenia, or Bosnia. And three events of global significance happened. What could the Albanians do? Be killed. But you don't get killed just to die, you get killed to have an impact.

Part Three

Selatin Novosella: In Vukovar. I saw it. At the hospital, the *shkije* executed everyone in Vukovar. They removed the IV drips... in the hospitals, the Croats were killed, they destroyed Vukovar, wiped it out completely before the eyes of the world. What happened? Then came Sarajevo. For months, the *shkije* bombarded Sarajevo because it is primarily a Muslim city. I saw in international films, a child took three pieces of parquet flooring from the apartment and put them in the stove. His mother scolded him, "Why three pieces of parquet? Just put one," to survive. They were bombarded, massacred, and Europe just watched.

The third and the peak was Srebrenica. No man, no woman, no old man, no old woman, no children, all young men. They were massacred because of Europe. After Vukovar, Sarajevo, and Srebrenica, the cup was full. If there was, not to get into politics because it's not fun, but if there was a mission, if there was a positive effect, it was precisely the thoughts and stance of Rugova that there is no war here, no massacre, they would have killed us all. And I had him as a colleague and professor and had many relations, but I never absolutely agreed with him. Very cultured and very knowledgeable as a person, but politically, it was a shame.

When these three things happened there, they declared independence, Croatia and Slovenia and all, at that time, I was a representative of a well-known Slovenian company in Škofja Loka. The last time I traveled, I traveled between our airports, Skopje-Zagreb. In Zagreb, we rented a car because the borders were closed. Bernik in Ljubljana was bombed. They made peaceful resistance, the army came out, naturally the *shkije*. When they came out of the barracks because the army was commanded by the *shkije*. Now, the Slovenes, being a well-known political people, what did they do? They cut off their electricity, water, food, and supplies.

That's why the peaceful movements had this effect, if they [KLA] had started earlier, it would have been very risky. And then the war came. During the war, I was the Chairman of the Emergency Council, which was a very important sector for logistics, but also for sheltering those whose houses were burned down and the orphans left with women and everyone else. But, especially for supplying the war, except for weaponry, of course. We provided cover, food, clothing, medicine, fuel, vehicles, I mean, I wrote a book about that event. And then freedom came.

Anita Susuri: Were you here in Pristina during the war?

Selatin Novosella: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: Were you in Pristina during the war?

Selatin Novosella: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What was it like for you?

Selatin Novosella: To tell the truth, for a while I was here during the war, we're not talking about during the war because I mentioned that, yes, for a while, simply the paramilitaries came with masks and threw us out. Any attempt to escape or hide could only result in getting caught and executed publicly because they wore masks. My wife was with the children and the family. In fact, for a while, I was also in Macedonia. Later, from Macedonia, I was in Albania for a while, but for work. While as for when I was in Macedonia, sheltered, I think it was right after the bombings, on the third day.

Anita Susuri: What was the return like? What did you feel and what did you see along the way when you returned? What was Kosovo like? In what condition?

Selatin Novosella: To put it briefly, it was like this, it was the turn of the century. At the border, there was a KLA checkpoint, KLA soldiers had set up the barrier, then there were British soldiers, and of course, there was no official border. Elite ground units were still entering Kosovo from Macedonia. On a human, ethical, and moral level, it was painful. I saw a massacre. I hurried to get away, I couldn't bear to see it, I was horrified, I mean, seeing the *shkije* as I did.

Only the *shkije* were paying a toll, and we were organized on buses. We were in cars, but I didn't have a car because they had taken everything from me. The important thing was that we were in Pristina, we were in Kosovo. With open windows, with the national flag, with the American flag, with songs, with cheers... And do you know what the *shkije* were doing? Now, before being Turkish, before being Albanian, before being Bulgarian, we are human beings. Humanity is more important than nationality. You can be a very good Turk, but you are nobody if you are not a good person. One must be a person first, human. The rest follows, what religion, what nationality. I felt pity.

Buses, trucks, tractors with children, with little *shkije* crying, scared, their mothers covering their eyes... from Veternik towards Serbia, they were fleeing that way, while we were entering with America and NATO in the sky. The elite on the ground, we were coming with what? With cars, with buses. We were entering a free Kosovo, a free Pristina, while they were fleeing, fleeing, fleeing. Terrified, the eyes of those children, I will never forget, full of fear. Why? Because they knew what they had done in Kosovo.

For the first time, their fathers and grandfathers told them, for the first time, the *shkije* experienced such a setback, they had never done so before. Not in the First World War, not in the Second World War, never. They used to save each other, help each other escape. *Shkije* dressed in sheets to escape. But in this chaos, neighbors were killing neighbors, burning each other's homes. My three-story house near Dodona had been a police station and a brothel. Who did this? The *shkije* from the neighborhood. When we returned that day, you can imagine what had happened in a police station. They had even said to burn the last house, but fortunately, they hadn't burned it.

The English units, when they entered, you don't remember them [addresses the interviewer] there were three policemen in front, soldiers, not police, soldiers, three of them with automatic rifles, and three more covering their backs. They secured their backs, and they secured theirs. They secured the front, and the others the rear. English army. Not even a fly could get through them. They were retreating. Now, one of these *shkije*, whom we knew, for the first time, for the first time, I knew he never spoke Albanian. But he said to my wife, "Neighbor, have you come?" My wife, a wonderful, gentle, polite woman who had never had the chance to speak to *shkije* as neighbors and didn't need to. But when she saw what they had done, he asked, "Have you come?" When she told me... you have no idea what he had asked, "We've come, but what are you waiting for, why aren't you going to Serbia?" What more could I say?

His son was an engineer, his son was a specialist surgeon. This specialist, during the war, went in uniform, a doctor in the uniform of the paramilitaries. In our neighborhood, within 24 hours, no *shkije*, nor children, no one was left. I am from the village of Maxhunaj, in our entire village, except for the well shafts they couldn't remove because they were made of concrete, they burned everything, leveled it to the ground. When the *shkije* retreated, what did the Albanians do? They burned everything the *shkije* had, and I would conclude with one observation.

My uncle, the late Isak, lived in Pristina during the war, when they fled, he was from the village. When he saw that the roads to the village were open, he said, "My cows remain in the village," because he had his family with him, and he said, "I'll go to check what happened, if they died, or if someone has broken anything." It was a very interesting moment, politically significant and historically too. He said, "When I got on the bus to Vushtrri, I saw paramilitaries, *shkije*, *shkina*, children, some drunk, some crying, some saying 'Gde ćemo, šta ćemo?' [Srb.: Where will we go, what will we do?]." He said, "I was shocked by what I saw there," a depressive state, as they were fleeing.

There was a neighbor of my uncle, a paramilitary in uniform, because the *shkije* in the village of Maxhunaj spoke Albanian fluently, with an Albanian accent. Their houses were face-to-face, only the river in between. He said to him, "Isak Maxhuni," he said, "you made a mistake." Isak replied, "Maybe, indeed." The neighbor continued, "You should have waited another two or three days. You see the chaos in Kosovo on the buses," he said, "we are fleeing, and you," he said, "fled and are returning, while we," he said, "are fleeing never to return to Kosovo. The five cows you had in the barn, I took your cows into my barn. Go take three or four of my cows, take them all. You have five sons and two houses, I have a two-story house and a three-story one, you know. I would like to say, don't burn them." Listen, he spoke on behalf of the *shkije* of Kosovo, "I am leaving, if I ever return, which I won't, you can keep them. No, no, don't burn them because you need them for your sons, because we," he said, "suffered because we went mad as a people."

This is one of the wisest observations a *trezan* [Srb.: clear-headed] *shka* could make. What the *shkije* did in the last war is unprecedented. Then, after a few days, my uncle said, “What should we do? They’re burning everything.” “I would tell you, uncle, don’t separate. If you decide to burn, remove everything, wipe it off the face of the earth.” He said, “I took the cows, mine and his, and we took the tractor.” I said, “I would suggest not leaving any trace.” When he went to burn it, they had already cut down the trees and made them into firewood. The *shkije* had two households, one with a stone wall a meter thick, the other with a brick wall a meter thick, and they burned the walls. For the two meters around the well, they removed as many stones as they could and made it desolate. Today, the village that once had more than half *shkije* doesn’t have a single *shka* left.

A day will come, my wife and I, there is a restaurant where they prepare fish really well, the restaurant *Kalifornia*, she said, “This village is a bit further away.” I said, “there is Babinmost,” if the *shkije* could go from there, but they have nowhere else to go. Nowadays, not a single *shka* stays in Kosovo. Why? Because they have committed atrocities. We have been rewarded, not in the sense of a gift or a decoration. But we have been rewarded as a result of our efforts as a nation, as a sacrifice. Ah, ‘81! (smiles).

Anita Susuri: I wanted to go back to ‘81 since you mentioned the imprisonment in ‘81. Did it happen because of the demonstrations or how?

Selatin Novosella: To me?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Selatin Novosella: I absolutely didn’t do any activity in ‘81. I didn’t take part in any organization. The only truth is that I went out to the demonstrations. There’s even a somewhat trivial episode. Someone came, like a messenger, and said, “Selatin Novosella, don’t go out because you are under UDBA surveillance 24 hours a day, and if they see you in the city, they will arrest you.” But when I saw what had happened, Ramiz Sadiku had taken it, Trepça had taken it, Obiliq had taken it, the workers with uniforms, with helmets, they had some like small axes, like work tools. In fact, there were no *shka*, no *shkina*, no police in the city. The demonstrators had taken over there.

That day I said, to myself of course, I would be the happiest person in the world if I had died that day out of joy. When I saw Pristina in the hands of the demonstrators and... but then the police and military forces started with weapons, from handguns to automatic weapons, from tanks, from armored vehicles, from helicopters, from airplanes. According to international conventions, it was prohibited for military planes to fly at low altitudes and create, as they called it, an air membrane rupture, which happened when the speed of the plane was faster than the speed of sound, causing an unimaginable explosion-like sound. Tear gas, of course. I saw that situation.

I went out on the street, and I saw maybe 100, maybe 500 girls and boys surrounding Adem Demaçi's house. Adem Demaçi was serving his third prison term. These thousands of people were chanting, "Adem Demaçi, Adem Demaçi, Adem Demaçi," and I was thinking to myself without talking to anyone, "Have you ever seen Adem Demaçi? No. Have you ever spent time with Adem Demaçi? No. Have you ever done anything with Adem Demaçi? No." They had created their hero. They were cheering for their hero. But whoever saw the demonstrations of '81, saw enough both before and after, unless there was a worldwide miracle, the '81 demonstrations were massive in terms of participants and demonstrators. That day in Pristina, four people were killed, in Ferizaj two were killed, in Vushtrri two were killed, and hundreds were injured. I wrote a book about the '81 demonstrations.

That very night, I was arrested. The truth is, I knew we would be arrested because we had nine arrests, me, my brothers, my nephews. And every time something happened, it was near our door (laughs). I was sure they would arrest one of us. But such a siege had never happened before. I was looking at the old house, it was two stories, now there is another one there, I was looking through the window at night, and I saw a line of people with their backs to the house, all wearing helmets and carrying automatic weapons. The police had filled the yard.

I've always had a fascination with carrying a revolver, always, always. As a student, I had a revolver. I used to be very fond of carrying a revolver, always, always, always. As a student, I had a revolver. I had drawn the revolver, I mean, how the revolver looks, I had carved it with a razor blade. I carved, carved, carved. I had done it so much that when I saw the revolver here, it didn't look like a revolver at all. I had a big book in Cyrillic, *Izabrana dela Marksa i Engelsa* [Srb.: Selected Works of Marx and Engels], and I used to carry it with me to the faculty. Whoever found it in the library would see that I had the gun in Marx and Engels' book. I was fascinated by it. I never shot with it (laughs), but I liked having it with me.

Even during the '68 demonstrations,³⁹ I had it with me, there was this artist, Safete Rogova, a wonderful woman, and she saw that I wanted to pull it out, and she said, "Oh don't, they'll kill us all," "So what should I do?" "Give it to me," "What about you?" She said, "I'll hide it because if they catch you..." and she put it in her bag. She was a student back then. After I got out of prison, she brought me the revolver. I mean, I had that revolver. Now, I saw that I was surrounded. I had seen the miracle of '81, and I felt like shooting from the window because they couldn't see me. I thought, at least I'll kill two or three of them since they couldn't see me (smiles).

I said to my mother, "Mother," I said, "the end has come. I'll kill three or four of them from up here." "Oh," she said, "don't do it my son, because we are 20 family members," I mean, I had my daughter and son, the sisters and brothers, everyone. But I had my prison clothes. A pair of thick pants, a thick

³⁹ During October and November 1968, many demonstrations were organized by the Albanian population across Kosovo. The main demand was to recognize Kosovo's right to self-determination. The first and most massive demonstration was organized in Prizren on October 6, 1968. This demonstration ended in front of the League of Prizren, where for the first time the demand for the Kosovo Republic was publicly articulated.

knitted sweater. We used to call them prison clothes. I always had them in the closet, and I put them on. I was sure it was the last goodbye. Out of fear? No. But I was filled with energy when I saw the city in the hands [of the students], and there was no greater peak. Then, when I went downstairs, I wanted to say goodbye to the family members, of course, the children were asleep, Valon and Donika, but my wife, my mother, and the sisters were awake.

There was this scoundrel, Ibush Kllokoqi, who they got rid of after the war, and they did very well. My daughter Donika, who is a doctor, asked me, "Why do you say that it's very good, Dad?" "They did very well, my daughter, very well." "Did you do it?" "No." Radio Kosova and Radio Television Kosova reported that night that he was killed, and they said, "Brothers Selatin and Sabri Novosella had a celebratory dinner in Tirana when they heard that the UDB agent Ibush Kllokoqi was killed."

My daughter immediately called on the phone, "Dad, is it true?" "Oh my dear, stay calm, I was in Pristina, not in Tirana that night. But they did very well." "Why well?" "Because killing a UDB agent is like walking in the flowers of heaven." "Did you do it?" "I wouldn't do it." Why? I would have arrested him, got him a lawyer, if he was sick, I would have treated him, I would have opened an investigation, called witnesses, gathered evidence of his crimes, and judged him. I would never have killed him. By nature, that's how I am. But that he was killed, they did very well, they did very well.

Now, as they were taking us away since we were many, I found out later. They didn't seem to have handcuffs, they tied us with chains like shoelaces. So that we wouldn't escape, they fastened us with a lock. They were taking us somewhere at night. They tied me with Avni Lama, a well-known professor. These were the [street] turns of Badovc, at night we couldn't see, but I had a sense. There was a circle of the Serbian Special Unit, while we were in a truck, probably military. One of our companions said, "Light it." When he lit the cigarette, this is a dialogue which I didn't hear, the other said, "*Što si zapalio* [Srb.: Why did you light it?]." To convince me that they were executing us, I was sure. But he said, "*Pa neka bre, poslednja želja u životu neka zapali čovek* [Srb.: Well, let him, the last wish in life, let the man light it]" (laughs). They convinced me they were executing us, and it couldn't be clearer. Was I scared? Not at all. Because young people and fools are just the same.

In the meantime, somewhat discreetly, one of them says to the other, "*Gde će da bude streljanje?*" [Srb.: Where will the execution be?], meaning, the agreement on where they would execute us. At that point, it hit the peak. Now, I examined the situation and said to Professor Avni Lami, who was older, "Professor," I said, "I'm about to start singing." "Hush!" [he said]. Honestly, under the influence of Albanian films (laughs), with partisans, with Chetniks, with soldiers, and with Germans. I felt like singing, but I didn't know which song, unfortunately...

Anita Susuri: You couldn't remember it.

Selatin Novosella: I couldn't remember it. I wanted to sing so they could join me. He said, "Hush, what song!" Imagine, when we got out of prison, we were sharing our stories, he was one of the most well-known educators, and he had another quality, he was very handsome, like a prince. And imagine, he said, "I went into the bathroom," he said, "I had the police," he lived in an apartment, now he's passed away. "They banged on the door, I didn't open it, they banged on the door, 'We'll break it down, open up!' Do you know why I didn't let them in?" I said, "No, *bac*, no." He said, "Damn it, I couldn't tie my tie properly." Imagine, telling these stories now, someone might think they're crazy.

The special [unit of the] police were taking him to be imprisoned and judged, maybe even executed, and he said, "My fingers were tied, I wanted to tie a good tie in the bathroom and go out to get handcuffed." In other words, these people are not understood as they should be. Not that I'm praising them, but soldiers are understood only by other soldiers to the end, and political prisoners are understood only... you might think, even artists, even artists aren't understood by everyone. Therefore, I meant to say... therefore, in '81, a miracle happened, something that has never been mentioned in history again.

So, as I am saying, my friends and I, even my family members and our sacrifices before and after us, we have only one consolation, only one satisfaction that cannot be compensated with money, position, wealth, or anything else... Today, even if you surround the city of Pristina with a Chinese wall, completely surround it and give me the keys to the city, it does not give me the pleasure that the freedom of Kosovo does. Our only consolation is the freedom of Kosovo.

Therefore, when the Prime Minister came, when the application for compensation started, it was clear that I filled out the first application 00001 for Adem Demaçi, and he said, "Prime Minister," Hashim Thaçi⁴⁰ was the Prime Minister then, "the state of Kosovo has no obligation to political prisoners, we have done our part. It is Serbia that owes us." And then the Prime Minister said, "*Bac* Adem," he said, "we have not come to compensate you for your suffering and sacrifices, they cannot be compensated, paid, or repaid at all. As a government, we are grateful for what you all have done," he said, "with these 5.5 million [euros] that we have allocated for you, we just wanted to show that we as the institutions of Kosovo are grateful, that's all. Don't take it as compensation, don't take it as reparation." That is the truth.

Therefore, I say we can all stay comfortable together. I was at the American Embassy a few days ago, I don't have these online conversations, I almost never talked, but they said, "We have an interruption," it was something with the ambassador. And before going, I went to schedule an appointment, and some guys came out, only God could have created them, each about 1,90 meters tall, handsome, healthy, and in American security uniforms. It was a delight for the soul. And when they saw I wanted

⁴⁰ Hashim Thaçi (1968), KLA leader at the 1999 Conference of Rambouillet, founder and leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), served as Prime Minister several times and in 2016 was elected President of Kosovo.

to get out of the car, [it's the] the American discipline, "Inside, please, inside, there is no talking, inside," because they were American.

It's not a joke like here where they curse the police, sometimes even burn stuff, like Vetëvendosje!⁴¹ used to do! Or now they slap them, it's a disgrace. Why? They don't love the state. You can be a policeman, but don't insult. When you have the uniform, you are the state, that's why you have authority, and that's why you should be respected, valued, and loved. Why? Because you represent the state of Kosovo. And when I went inside, the words softened, and they calmed down. He turned out to be the son-in-law of a friend of mine, Haxhi Zybjaj from Prizren, whom I mentioned earlier.

He said, "I know you... so-and-so, in prisons, here, here, here," he said, "But the rest of us." he said, "are not doing enough." I said, "You are doing," I said, "wonderfully." He said, "Bless you!" I said, "For me," I said, "you made my day. First of all, to see you so handsome, to see you so elegant, to see you in an American uniform," I said, "just seeing you in front of the American Embassy," I said, "it made my day. But when I know," I said, "that behind, only the asphalt separates you, it was once..." Do you know what mistake I made? Do you see, we didn't have coffee at all. Why are you laughing? Why didn't you ask for coffee?

Anita Susuri: It's not a problem, we had coffee (laughs).

Selatin Novosella: Not with me.

Anita Susuri: (laughs).

Selatin Novosella: And I said, "Behind us," I said, "we have the barracks that used to be called Marshall Tito and today is Adem Jashari," I said, "my friends and I don't want more." For me, it was a pleasure to talk.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Selatin, I just wanted to conclude about '81 that you mentioned, how did that end? You weren't executed, but where were you taken?

Selatin Novosella: Me personally? That's not important. They took me to the Prison of Gjilan, kept me in isolation for a month. From there, they took me to the Prison of Mitrovica, kept me in isolation for another month, and then I came home, and that's it.

Anita Susuri: And were you happy that you weren't executed?

Selatin Novosella: What?

⁴¹ Alb. *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* - Self-determination Movement is a political party in Kosovo which goes by the acronym LVV. It is orientated towards principles of social democracy, progressivism, and Albanian nationalism.

Anita Susuri: Were you happy that you weren't executed?

Selatin Novosella: I never thought about it. That night I said, in front of my friends, I can't call you my friends because you are very young and we don't know each other, but I'm speaking as if I were in front of friends. That night I was very, very ready emotionally, mentally, spiritually to be executed. Why? Everyone has a moment, they say. When I saw Pristina as I saw it, in front of the committee, in front of the assembly, in front of the police, in front of the UDB, no *shka*, just helicopters, tanks at the corners, airplanes above, Albanians below, I saw freedom with my own eyes. I saw that you can kill this nation, you can kill them, you can imprison them, but they won't go backward. They have decided on their freedom. The demonstrations of '81 are the brightest page that Albanians have ever made, along with many other activities. Therefore, I got out of prison, worked, lived, and thrived.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Selatin, thank you very much for your time, for the interview.

Selatin Novosella: It was a pleasure, it was a pleasure.

Anita Susuri: Likewise.