INTERVIEW WITH TEUTA BEKTESHI

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Duration: 193 minutes

Present:

1. Teuta Bekteshi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (Camera)

Symbols for comments in the transcript of non-verbal communication:
() – emotional communication
{} – the interviewee explains with gestures

Other symbols in the transcript:
[ ] – additional text to facilitate understanding
Footnotes are editorial additions that provide information about settlements, names, or expressions.

Part One

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

Teuta Bekteshi: I am Teuta Bekteshi, that is my maiden name, Ajeti is my husband's surname. I was born on November 16, 1957, in a village close to the city here [Kumanovo] [Kumanovo], about four kilometers away, the village of Llopat. I finished elementary school there, high school in the Goce Dellçev gymnasium, and it is still called that today, in Kumanovo, where all the lessons were completely in Macedonian, except history and Albanian language. Later also biology, some subjects were added, there were Albanian professors. So, we completed it mostly in the Macedonian language.

I completed university at the University of Prishtina and continued… It was a bit of a difficult time because of the broader situation and my personal engagement in the movement, which caused delays. I was a graduate candidate, but my graduation was postponed and in the end I returned here. I have been working since '97, I run my own practice in a clinic in a clinic with a laboratorycalled called Doctor Teuta. The opportunity to work in public health was impossible for me, because I had my personal history, where I was always labeled as an irredentist, dangerous to the state. So, I never had access to working in working in public healthcare. After a very long time, I was forced to start on my own, independently.

When it became possible in Macedonia for the private sector to open, meaning private practices in primary healthcare, which would have allowed me to have a contract with the Health Fund of Macedonia, I had a serious problem because I didn't have citizenship until 2001. Born here, educated here. My family had it, but it was denied to me. So, from '94 until 2001 I couldn't travel anywhere. That was problematic also for my work. So, this is… then I continued meanwhile also with non-governmental activities and so on. But I wanted to say, this is part of my story.

I come from a family that valued education; my father was a teacher. We came here from the region of Bujanovac, but originally we are from Shkodra, from Malësia e Madhe,[1] meaning the Kastrati tribe is also there, in Malësia e Madhe. We are from that tribe and have come many generations ago, I may be

[1] *Malësi e Madhe*, (literally Great Highlands) is a region largely inhabited by Albanian speaking people, which lies to the East of Podgorica in modern day Montenegro, along the Lake of Shkodra in modern day Albania, next to Kosovo.

the eleventh or twelfth generation that settled in the Bujanovac region from there in the Bujanovac region. Then, since '52, '53 they settled here. But my father was a teacher and that was the best possible thing thing, he taught me a lot. Because at that time girls were not allowed to be educated, schooling for girls was very problematic.

Anita Susuri: What generation was your father?

Teuta Bekteshi: My father was from the generation of '28.

Anita Susuri: How did he get educated at that time?

Teuta Bekteshi: He completed, my father completed his schooling… he was a soldier and then continued with the *Shkolla Normale*,[2] back then, they completed it through exams to qualify as teachers to work with Albanian students. My father completed it like that. The *Shkolla Normale* in Gjilan, under those circumstances, was completed that way. After that, when he came here, he worked for a time, he started working in those villages over in Bujanovac and when he came here, he started right away. He worked 30 years at the school, today it's called Faik Konica, back then it was Jeta e Re. We lived in that village for a few years as well, because moving around was more difficult at the time.

My father worked until retirement… After working in the village of Llopat for about two years, he retired. I say that in our family we have nearly all profiles in art, professional writing, poetry, we have a composer, an actor, and a director. We have Kushtrim Bekteshi, my brother's son, who is a very successful director. My brother's daughter is an actress. So, in our family there is almost everything. It's a good thing that all generations are successful and capable. Not just successful but also useful, for themselves and for others.

Anita Susuri: What memories do you have about your childhood? How was the family organized, for example, or what kind of environment did you live in?

Teuta Bekteshi: I was the youngest of the daughters and maybe a bit more connected to my father… so, my father was a teacher and from the age of five I started going to school. They tell me this, because I don't remember, but I apparently slept in school and then they brought me back, they carried me in their arms because the school was near the house. I had this habit of overfilling my bag with books, I filled it so much I couldn't even carry it, but I thought I needed lots of books to go to school. That's where my childhood began.

My family, only our *vllazën*,[3] only one family had come from over there to Llopat to Llopat, meaning there was no other family in that village. But I was born into a family where I had my grandmother. My grandmother also had come from elsewhere but was a very brave woman. She had nine children —

[2] Teachers training school. 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.

[3] *Vllazni*: simply translated as "brotherhood", it denotes a deep loyalty to one's fis (clan) and extends beyond the immediate family to a network of related households descended from a common male ancestor.

five girls and four boys — three of them died, about twelve births total. She was very patriotic and the first songs I learned were from my grandmother.

I sang my first songs with my father and my uncle. So, those early sequences of childhood leave an extraordinary impression, especially on children, during their growth, during the formation of their identity, simply as a person, which makes family extremely important, and then schooling and experience and all those things follow. But that was the foundation for me to form a kind of opinion about what my path in life might be. Regarding education, that was a foundation for us, but also the situation of our people…

My uncle at that time was in *Balli Kombëtar,*[4] but it was never spoken about because it was very dangerous to talk about it back then. But from time to time, I would hear that he had been to Albania, and he would tell different stories, but it was never really talked about. Then my father was also part of that organization NDSH[5] with Gjon Sereqi, but always very little [was said]. You understand, like, how can I say it? You know when something is hinted at but not really acted upon, but it sparked our interest because they didn't dare [to talk about it] because we were children.

They listened to Radio Tirana at that time, with some small radio. I was the youngest, my father kept me close to him, and I absorbed everything. I was curious about what they were listening to, I didn't know what it was, but had the feeling it must be something secret since they didn't allow children to be present. All of these things formed me. In '68, when the demonstrations started, a cousin of mine, my paternal uncle's son, was involved and moved around different places and was also in Kosovo. When he came back to Kosovo, he told us about the demonstrations, that he had been there.

He told us about the demonstrations and the protest song of '68, and that was an extra piece of information for us. At that time, we raised the [Albanian national] [Albanian national] flag, which was very problematic. It was a small flag. I was a ten-year-old child. We raised the flag at our place, I mean we had two houses. But the one next to the road was more like a stable, not exactly a stable, but a place where they kept food, you know. They placed the flag facing the road. But it was very dangerous because the situation was very tense, especially in Macedonia.

We children went out to watch and guard the flag in case the police were coming so we could warn them in time to take it down, since we had it up for a short time only. You couldn't keep it up longer because it was very dangerous at the time. My father was a teacher, my uncle was younger, my other uncle too. So that event is something I still remember. It seems like I'm still there, stepping out the door onto the main road and looking at that flag. Meaning, in my life journey, I've had many situations

[4] *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands. Balli Kombëtar (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

[5] Albanian National Democratic Movement, an anti-Jugoslav and anti- communist resistance movement in Kosovo active from 1945 through 1947. The full name would be *Lëvizja Nacional-Demokratike Shqiptare*, LNDSh but NDSh is a short version.Albanian National Democratic Movement, an anti-Jugoslav and anti- communist resistance movement in Kosovo active from 1945 through 1947. The full name would be Lëvizja Nacional-Demokratike Shqiptare LNDSh but NDSh is a short version.

that influenced me. The song about Oso Kuka,[6] for example, at that time my uncle and my father used to sing when we gathered.

I hadn't heard of Oso Kuka before, didn't know who he was, but the way they sang the song was extraordinary. I still remember things from that song. Then, the song of Halil Garia, my grandmother taught us. Then the song about Sali Syla, "She says, oh mother!" another song. All of these were sung in our family, always sung. Meaning, there was always singing and dancing. Maybe that was the feeling of art and culture in our family, and even today we do the same thing.

Then the cousins would come, one played the violin, the other... my paternal aunts' children, and we would go out to the yard and sing back then. We as children were curious because they were all adults. I remember how we always tried to act like the grown-ups; we had them as role models. Actually, role models are very important for the formation of a person's character. Not what is said, but what is seen and taken in. It's how you shape yourself as a person later. I think the family is very important.

Anita Susuri: Yes, I also wanted to ask you about your mother, what kind of family did she come from? What was she like?

Teuta Bekteshi: My mother was a very wise woman, very loving and very positive. My mother completed only four years of school. My father... so, she knew how to write her name just enough to know... she came from a village above the village of my parents. But they were an extraordinarily patriotic family too. So, there was a unity of families at that time, because even then people would look at families that were involved... but she married very young. My mother was 14 when she married, my father was 15. So, they got engaged young but...They were sent to the army at 18, and at 18 they got married. But they engaged my mother at age 12, while she was out in the mountains... She said, "I was in the mountains when they told me, 'We have engaged you.' I had no idea what engagement was."

So, I want to say she was a very intelligent woman whom I always had in front of me. My father was more energetic, more temperamental as a person, very fair, he read a lot at that time. Now that I think about it, he read a lot, I didn't realize it back then. My mother was a woman who supported us a lot and understood things with her intuition. She used to divide our books perfectly by author, she knew whose book was whose. She would analyze the news just from listening. What was important also from my father's side, he always called my mother Shqipe. My mother's name was Selime, but my father always called her Shqipe, and I always liked the way he said Shqipe. That form of addressing her, I really liked it.

My mother lived 95 years. She always had an extraordinary positive energy and was quiet, didn't speak much but supported you in everything. So, I remember her with great joy, not only my father in one way, but also my mother. My father was very fair, he loved children and students a lot, because I used to go with him to school, and he would bring students and give them all pencils. When it was winter, he always dressed them warmly, gave them clothes, back then we didn't have many clothes... the situation was that people were poorer.

[6] Oso Kuka (1820-1862) was an Albanian guard at the border of Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire who blew himself up with the tower he was defending. He is celebrated in Fishta's *Lahuta e Malcis*.

He dressed them all and sent them off two by two on the road so they wouldn't be in danger, even though there wasn't much traffic back then, but because they were little... [The school] was up to grade four. And I liked this very much about my father, his dedication, and not only with us, but with all children. He often used to say, "How is a child's mind?" He would say, "Like a white sheet," he would say, "tabula rasa, and everything is recorded there, and it is very important how it is recorded. And children," he said, "must never be scared. You must never scare them in any way."

He would also observe how people walked, if they held their posture straight. He was concerned about everything, not just with us but with all the children he worked with. He was my idol, truly my idol. I wanted to become a teacher; I had a great desire to be a teacher. But later, even though I had the intention to become a teacher…I just want to say one thing about this, I had physical education, I loved sports very much. But in the third year, I changed my mind immediately to take up medicine, for a reason that I experienced very painfully.

My mother was sick and had a gynecological issue, bleeding. I took her to the hospital in Kumanovo, to a gynecologist, but there were no Albanians, they were all Macedonians. The doctor behaved very badly, so badly that I was extremely shaken. That was the moment I changed [my mind]. I said, "I will study medicine, no matter what, I will take medicine and return to work and help women, and I will return and tell that same doctor, 'This is how you treated Albanian women.'"

That was the reason in my third year I changed and took medicine. I have no regrets about choosing medicine, because I love my profession very much, and I love people, I always want to help as much as I can give of myself, and help. This is what... It was decisive for many things. Both the fact that I went to Prishtina, I continued in medicine, and I still work today, and for me, people are extremely important.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that you raised the flag in '68 on the street...

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes. Not on the street but at home.

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes. Where the road was...

Teuta Bekteshi: It was beside the main road.

Anita Susuri: The road where you lived, what was the neighborhood like? Were there others, Albanians, who had the same opinion as you or how?

Teuta Bekteshi: I say that we were newcomers, I mean, we had come [from elsewhere]. No, there was a mentality, an extraordinary ignorance. At that time, we didn't have support from the *rreth*,[7] but over time things changed, but at that time, no, no there wasn't. We were far ahead in that sense compared to *rreth* where we were. Our village has both Macedonians and Albanians. Meaning, the majority are Albanians but there are also Macedonians.

[7] *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

But in the neighborhood where we are, almost all are newcomers, [they came] from our village, from the village of my parents, from the village of my mother. Meaning, they migrated and came, settled in this village. It's near the city, a good village. It is a fertile village, there is water on all sides, it is extremely good, and they call it the village of the beys,[8] because apparently, at that time it had baths, it had... yes, yes. It was and still is an extraordinary village, and it is my village.

Anita Susuri: And you as a child, but also as you grew up, what kind of ideas did you have about other Albanian places? About Kosovo for example? About Albania? How did you imagine these places?

Teuta Bekteshi: In my family we spoke about Albania and also about Albania and Kosovo. We adored Albania. Now, we all adore it, even today we adore it. At that time, we adored it even though we were, how to say, fragmented in all these regions, meaning the Albanian territory and its borders. We spoke a lot [about Albania], because also my paternal uncle who had been in Albania used to talk a lot, because I hadn't been to Albania at that time. My father at that time, I remember, initiated for some teachers to go to Albania and they went. I was young, a student in high school maybe, I don't remember, maybe it was elementary or high school...

Anita Susuri: You were in Kumanovo, right?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, in the village of Llopat, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: And you studied... Where was the high school?

Teuta Bekteshi: The school was in Kumanovo, I traveled. I traveled to high school all the time, I traveled by bicycle. We were about four girls who traveled by bicycle, and I traveled by bicycle. They [teachers] went to Albania when they were allowed to go. At that time, as teachers, they were allowed to go in a group. When my father returned from there, we waited eagerly for what he would say about Albania. I remember these two things he told me then. He said, "In Albania murders are not allowed," he said, "murder is not allowed because murderers are punished in the harshest forms. Murders are strictly forbidden." At that time, he said, "And there was no theft." He said, "We left it, we forgot it," they had left something, "and when we returned, we found it in that same place." Meaning, there was no theft, and for us, that was something extraordinary. "And they spoke Albanian," you know how it is.

In fact, when someone came, when it happened that someone came [from Albania] to bring goods, and it rarely happened from Albania, we went out to meet that person at all costs. We went out to meet that person, the driver, that chauffeur because he seemed to us like an extraordinary person, you know, because he was from Albania. For Kosovo it was a different situation because it is on the border. The village where my parents are from is on the border with Kosovo and all my aunts were married in Gjilan, in Gjilan, in Pristina. The uncle and the brother of my grandmother, meaning my father's uncles... Kosovo was not… Kosovo was very familiar. My brother was also a student in Pristina before me, about three years before me and the others. So, we had much more information about Kosovo. The information about Albania was very, very limited. But we had idealized it because we loved it, because we had support that motivated us.

[8] *Bey* is a Turkish title for a chieftain, and an honorific, traditionally applied to people with special lineages to the leaders or rulers of variously sized areas in the numerous Turkish kingdoms, emirates, sultanates and empires.

In fact, at that time in high school, I speak for the high school in Kumanovo, we were only two classes in that generation, meaning it started with two classes and ended with two classes in my generation. But the earlier generations had only one class, meaning there were very few Albanians who... in fact, most of the time a couple of times they were even beaten, and it was a very difficult situation for us in Kumanovo. Because here there is... it is a city with many nationalities, but the oppression was very pronounced and the hatred for Albanians was very pronounced, because there are Serbs, there are Macedonians, there are Vlachs, [the hatred was] from many Vlachs and others, but especially from Serbs. And there was always something that was not allowed.

We had a problem with names, giving names. We had problems with almost everything. I say that I finished high school almost entirely in the Macedonian language. At that time, we organized, I mean, that spirit had started, and we organized, as students we sang. We had the history teacher I mentioned, this teacher of mine, Dr. Ramiz Abdyli, and he motivated us a lot. I mean, the history of our people was forbidden in high school, talking about the history of the Albanian people [was forbidden]. But Professor Ramiz taught us history so well that there was not a single poor student who didn't know our national history. It was necessary. He did it beyond... in fact, in the second year when we were in high school, he organized…it was the 500th anniversary of Skanderbeg's birth, meaning it was '74, '75 or '76…

The professor organized a recital, the same professor, that is, the history professor. We also had Noli's poems, "*O flamur gjak, o flamur shkamb*" (Oh flag of blood, oh flag of rock.) I had to begin, and I shouted so much into the microphone, because we didn't know how to work well with a microphone. I shouted so much that I went over that… "Oh flag," when I shouted… and everyone told me, "You recited very well but shouted too much." I thought that in that form, the emotion did its part. So, it was one, one professor who motivated us a lot. We read so much at that time that, *Kalorësi i Skanderbeut*[9] (The Knight of Skanderbeg), I don't know if you've read it, is an exceptionally good novel. We and the professor read it, because he gave us to read history and novels.

We read a lot. He said, "You will come out," he told me, "You go and draw how the herald came to inform the Mountains of Dibra," meaning from Dibra, "and how you saw it, how you think to draw it on the blackboard." I didn't, I didn't know how to draw well. Oh my God, never in life had I struggled more… I was in the second year of high school, I'm talking about the second year. I went and made some mountains, I didn't know how to draw well, the horse, the herald and everything. So much was that, that spirit of the people's history, the oppression, the confrontation and knowing that oppression and what we had to do. What we might need to change as youth. We organized… we organized well at that time in the second year of high school.

We sang. In the fourth year, we organized, imagine, schools that forbade singing in school and skipping classes. We ranked second after the Macedonians. We had many, over 20 exemplary students in the class. We had 40 people in the class because the classes were very crowded. We interrupted the class, our class tutor was Macedonian, we interrupted it. We went out into the hallaway and went downstairs, there was a bakery, we bought bread because we had nothing. We divided that bread into pieces and sat on the stairs. We were on the second floor and on the stairs. The school was alarmed.

[9] Historical novel by Haki Stërmilli, published in 1967.

We started singing and we sang, "*Trim i madh o Skënderbe*" (Great hero oh Skanderbeg), we liked that song a lot. We sang it a lot. "The stormy north wind blows, brave Skanderbeg," it's an exceptionally good song. The school was alarmed. We left the school and walked out into the city, lined up four by four, our class. And we went to a war monument, and we walked there. The police accompanied us on the sides. Imagine, we made that step which was an unimaginable step. But no violence was used at that time, no specific violence was used. These songs were there, but no specific violence was used at that time.

That's why they dropped our behavior grade from Five[10] to One. Our class was the second in school and was graded One in behavior. So, at the end, we finished fourth class with that grade because of those activities. But we didn't worry much about that. We did what we wanted in the city with songs and dances, like that. Then that issue continued, the other issue of my life. I say, I say, but it was not by chance… I say that the family, the family, is very important for forming a person's identity, whether personal identity or even national identity. Because you have, how to say, you have to plant, breathe, you breathe that and how the family is and then the *rreth* outside the house, school and… that is the identity formation phase. Even a female identity indeed.

For me the family had an extraordinary impact in forming my female identity, being a female. Because they always said that a woman should be very important, a woman should make her own decision, a woman's word should be heard. In my family, the word of a woman, of a wife and of a woman was heard, that is, was valued. My father always told us, "You will finish some schooling so that you won't have anyone over you, but you yourself will decide about your personal development. Not to be oppressed by someone, but for you to have, yourself to have that freedom of yours, freedom of work and of movement and everything." So, that was extraordinary for me. Even today I thank them a lot, somehow, I have respect because those were very hard times seriously for [women], even more so for women.

Anita Susuri: But when this event happened that you mentioned with your classmates, were the parents notified too? How was your parents' reaction for example about this?

Teuta Bekteshi: We did that regardless of the parents. We youth didn't always ask our parents. But let me connect this with an event. My son, I have two sons, let me connect it with the fact that you don't ask the parents. And I have two sons, one studied informatics, the other studied economics, but they have children, they have families. I have three grandsons and one granddaughter, and it is a joy to have children, because it's very important how your children will be tomorrow. I insisted that my children first and foremost have humanity. I always insisted that they be humane, with such virtues that they help as much as they can, but that people say good words about them, that they are well-mannered, they are…

But I wanted to say, to link it with the matter that the family isn't asked. My… My son wanted to go to Afghanistan to work because work was very difficult to find here. Even though he was a very good student, they didn't accepted him at work, or they took students who… now, it's also known how everything is politicized. He sought to go to Afghanistan to work, but I was very much against it because the idea of going to Afghanistan was unthinkable to me and I was against it. Now, I couldn't…

[10] Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0).

I had done so much, so much. I tried to do…not to say "so much," because it's never a lot, but it's always little. But I tried that generations…

I never thought that I would form a family, because we thought that our life would be completely different, we thought that we would be killed, we… that is, we didn't even think about children, [about] family, but we thought about the generations after us. We didn't even know that we would live to see this time, but for the generations after us, that they would have a more dignified life, to be free, to decide for their life, to decide for their work, to decide for their activities, but to be free as individuals. That was very important. And this was the foundation of many things, that the issue of freedom, the cause of freedom, whether personal freedom, whether the freedom of your people, whether the freedom of humanity, is a cause of every person, because it is born with freedom, every cause is born with freedom and is born free, but then the circumstances are different.

And I was against it. My son said to me… at one point I said, "I am against it and I wouldn't want you to go there." And he said, "Can I ask you a question?" he said. "Yes son," I said. He said, "When were you in the movement," he said, "did you ever ask your parents, did you ask your parents about themovement?" I said, "No, that was a very important matter, a national matter." We didn't take the family into account at all, nothing existed. It was just that in front of us. What was happening to the family? All those persecutions in our families - who, who went through all those difficulties -, we didn't think of them, because a young person doesn't think.
A young person thinks of that life as priority and he has no more, to him nothing means more.

I said, "That was a very important issue, a national matter," I said. "A matter," he said, "even of prisons," he said, "Well, you mom, it's that you were in prison," he said, "I'm with you because you're my mom and everything, but what came of prison mom? Your position," he said, "you with all these troubles, with all these worries, with all these rejections, I mean, no place here, nor there," meaning in that sense, not that it wasn't worth it, but what? "I will go," he said, "I will work for two years there, secure my life, and will come back again. This," he said, "is my decision." And then I gave in. But only two years, and I insisted he return, he return because I had a very hard period in that time. Because the children couldn't in any way accept… but that's how it is. I wanted to say that a young person makes decisions, he doesn't confront risks. I mean, he doesn't take risks into account.

Anita Susuri: So, did your family give you support also in that regard?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, yes. My family was an extraordinarily big support of mine. Why? My father took me himself, he took me to concerts when they came to Gjilan. He inspired me in that. My father… but my father didn't know, no one in my family knew. We had the goal that the family would not be included in our close circle in any way, because the risks were big. We operated separately. That is, my brother acted but acted with others. That means, we were not directly in the same cells in any way. We did not enter cells with family members. They had their own cells, but we didn't have knowledge about his cell, or he didn't have… in case of arrest, the information stayed there. Depends how you endure prison, torture, but to have it stay there.

I went in this direction. My father, when I was arrested even the first time, when I was in isolation [did not tell my mother]. My mother didn't know at all that I was in isolation. She asked about me, why I wasn't coming, why I wasn't coming. "She has exams." They didn't tell my mother at all that I was in

isolation. I was released from isolation after a month because they didn't have other evidence and they released me under surveillance. Now they followed me. But I… that was June, and in October I fell again. I was arrested for the second time in Suhareka and then it was decided that even my mother should be informed, because that was something completely different. That is, we needed to inform. But I had extraordinary support from my family, from all of them, from my father, my mother, my brothers.

Meanwhile, while I was in prison, my other brother was also in prison. So, meanwhile we were two people, two people in prison. Even my older brother, who worked at the Television of Prishtina and when I was in isolation came to ask [after me], was not allowed to see me. But even inside the prison there were guards who were good, who were [politically] aware, even though they didn't show it. So, there were moments and moments when they even showed that, that sympathy toward us. And he said to one of the guards, gave him, my brother gave him a handkerchief and something else small, "Just send this to my sister so she knows that I came up to the prison, that she's not alone." I mean, there was another kind of support, "Just so she knows that…"

So, I had full… so, the second time, because the last time I was arrested in Kumanovo, you know, I was released, it was two, two weeks after I was released from prison, I mean, I had a two year sentence after the second arrest. It had been two weeks, we had set the wedding date, the celebration. I had been engaged since, like, the fourth year of university, it was a relationship from high school, with my husband we started as kids, as students in the same class. We got engaged much later. It was a very long relationship. We did it… because I was released after two years, let's get married because it has been a long time. My husband's family had only one son also… and we did it. We made the dresses with… they sewed them especially for me.

Near here is a basement, and you go downstairs, it was summer, no, it was November, yes, they were working here. They made me completely ready and after two weeks I was arrested again. That is, the wedding failed. I wanted to say the issue of the wedding, but I want to say that in that case they arrested me in the village and surrounded our school, our house. The school is nearby and my brother's wife and my father were teachers there and they were questioned, and they even went to the school and said, "We've come for your daughter." But the problem was that the night before I had been in Pristina because I wanted to meet some people, since I had just gotten out of prison. I went to Prishtina.

In Prishtina I met a sister of one of my friends, I went there and met her. And I went to a family that had been… they had been extraordinary supporters of mine and the movement. And I went to meet them. There I was informed that a group of youth had fallen, Naime [Maçastena] and her group. But it had been 15 days that they said they had fallen, and I was sure they couldn't have made any mistake, for 15 days had passed. I returned home. Meanwhile, they came, they raided our home that night, that is, the night I returned they raided our house, searched for materials. They raided the whole house, but I had no information.

My father said, [they asked], they said, "Where is she?" He said, "She went to Prishtina." I had indeed gone to Prishtina. "Where in Prishtina did she go?" But we had, as I said, a maternal uncle of my father, a teacher. He said, "She went," because my father didn't know where I had gone, he said, "She

probably went to that uncle." Imagine what happened, they raided our house here, then they went to that uncle in Prishtina. He was in Dragodan, that part, I don't know what it's called now. Is it called…

Anita Susuri: Dragodan.

Teuta Bekteshi: That's where they had their house. There was… his mother was sick in bed. They even dragged his mother out and searched, they didn't leave anything. The man had no idea about what was going on, they raided him. Yes, I came back the next day, because at that time they didn't know my movements, where I was going. I came back, yes, I came back to Kumanovo in the evening, and I wanted to go to the house… this house, that is, to see my fiancé, but he wasn't here. Meanwhile, we had installed a phone at that time, when landlines had just started and we had one also at home and here. I told my father that I had arrived. I said, "I'm here," just to tell him. My father said, "No, stay there, don't move." I didn't know what had happened, he just said, "Stay there, don't move."

He got up and walked four kilometers from here. He came on foot, and said, "They've raided." I realized, I understood because it wasn't the first time that such a thing had happened. That is, it was the third time. We went home, "They only said it was a routine check." I knew it wasn't just a check. I knew that something would come of this. But the next morning they went to the school. They went to the school and put pressure on my father. They had surrounded our house and told my father, "You have to hand over your daughter because we have an order from Prishtina," that is, from the Secretary of Internal Affairs, "to arrest and take her to Prishtina."

My father was in a very difficult position. Imagine now, your daughter has just come out of prison and again they arrest her, and he knows what happens next. They told my father, "It's no problem," they said, "we will take her, but we will also take you to Prishtina." My father came home and *ish nxi* (turned black),[11] you know how it is for a parent. My mother had prepared me an early breakfast, I was very weak. Because of prison and not eating, I was very weak, I had been very weak. My mother had made me something for breakfast, not that I wanted to eat, I still couldn't return… but still, I sat down.

My father at that moment came and he felt very bad that I… he said, "Look," he said, "my daughter, they have come and surrounded us," he said, "and there's pressure to arrest you." My first thought was, I said, "I won't surrender," because I knew what awaited me. I said, "I won't surrender." And my father started pleading with me, saying, "You," he said, "you won't surrender, but they'll kill you somewhere and we won't be able to find even your body, not anything." And then I said, "No, I won't surrender." So, I was thinking where to go, how to escape, where to flee. My sister lived in a part of that neighborhood, but a little farther away. "Yes," I said, "I will go over the walls, to my uncle's place and to my sister's."

My father said, "The house is surrounded, there's no chance," he said, "even if you escape, they'll kill you somewhere," he said, "at least in prison we'll know that you're alive somewhere and we'll look for you, we'll know you're somewhere. Like this we won't find a body or anything." My father pleaded with me, he pleaded, "Just this time, listen to me." I kept saying no, because I knew what was coming, "No." My father pleaded and pleaded, and I felt so bad because of my parents, and that's how I surrendered.

[11] "*Ish nxi*" is an expression of the northern Albanian dialect from "*me u nxirë*", which means "*të jetë bërë i zi*" "to have become black" or "to have turned black." Depending on context, it can mean, physically darkened (e.g., bruised, burned), emotionally affected (e.g., saddened, embittered), or metaphorically ruined/damaged.

My mother, when I went out the courtyard, at the yard door, said, “Hey,” she said, “my daughter,” she said, “the way you endured before,” she said, “endure again,” she said, “don’t worry.” And somehow, we left. When we arrived here at the Secretariat, where the police are…

They took me to a room… I didn’t know where, because I had never been interrogated in Kumanovo, I had all my interrogations in Kosovo, in Prishtina and in Mitrovica and in Suhareka. But I mean to say, in Kumanovo, no. The interrogator, an Albanian, said, I had never seen him, didn’t know him, he said to me, “You,” he said, “what did you do?” To me, exactly like that, harshly. And I had that kind of, you know, that, I don’t know what to call it…

Anita Susuri: Pride.

Teuta Bekteshi: Pride, and somehow, I said, “What could I possibly have done?” I told him. He saw that he had never seen me before, nor I him. When I came out, he said, “We’re sending you to Prishtina,” he said, “we have orders to send you to Prishtina,” and while walking out he said to me, “Someone,” he said, “has talked,” that’s what he told me. Nothing else, just said, “Someone has talked.” I… indirectly he told me while walking, but I… but I knew that something had happened because they can’t arrest you without… However, I was a repeat offender, three times, and even without anyone saying anything, they would have arrested me. Even the smallest suspicion, they would have arrested me.

They sent me to Prishtina with four police officers in a Zastava car. Two officers in the back seat, I in the middle. One police officer was in the front, and the other was the driver. My father, my father, when I was leaving, said goodbye to me, said, “Oh man, this is really hard.” Then he told my mother, “It was very hard when I handed her over, very.” It was difficult for him. And in Prishtina the third round of interrogations and sentencing continued, and that’s how it went.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: So, I want to go back a bit, to how all of this began, how it all started. Maybe when you came to Pristina to study, or how did you get involved in these movements?

Teuta Bekteshi: In fact, my involvement in the movement started as a student, in ‘77, ‘78, that was the year. I was a third-year student, as far as I remember. ‘74-’75, around that time, I must have been in my third year when I started … We had…it was a great coincidence for me. Teuta Hadri, my friend, yes, both of us are named Teuta. Even when we were sentenced, there was an article in a newspaper, “The Two Namesakes.” We read it in prison: “The two namesakes were sentenced to…”

There was a seminar organized by the Faculty of Medicine, lasting 15 days. I didn’t want to go to Skopje [to study], even though I had the chance to go to Skopje, but I didn’t want to study in Macedonian, I wanted to study in Albanian. My brother was in Pristina and there was this spirit, professors were coming [from Albania], lectures were in Albanian, professors from Albania were coming. There was that feeling of wanting to go to Pristina to study. It was very interesting because we had to be placed in a dormitory. For 15 days we had to attend classes in chemistry, biology, physics, those subjects.

Teuta Hadri…she turned in my direction, I came, I had come to Pristina for the first time with my brother. It was an afternoon since we had traveled early. We were walking by the Grand Hotel, there are those buildings there now, Pristina has changed, but even the Television was there at the time, not the Radio, that was in front, a building near where the dean's office is now, and the other faculties, like the Faculty of Philosophy, down a little alley which wasn't paved back then.

Teuta Hadri had her uncle's apartment there and it was an interesting coincidence, she happened to be out on the balcony. I didn't know Teuta Hadri, and she didn't know me. But she saw me young, she came out to the balcony by chance, saw me young and said, 'This one has surely come for someone of these…' she saw that I was from outside and everything, 'probably she also came to the Faculty of Medicine,' that's what she thought at that moment.

She waved from a distance, "Good afternoon, good afternoon," she said, it was very interesting. We turned back, not knowing what was going on. "Where are you going?" she asked. My brother said, "My sister is going to the dormitory because she has to register for the seminar." She said, "Oh, great! Look, let's do this, I've already been assigned to the dormitory but I'm staying at my uncle's, and my name is Teuta too, so she can use the dorm room under the same name, just the surname is different." And that's the first time I saw the name Teuta, we saw each other.

That was my first time in Pristina and the first time we communicated, and then everything continued with Teuta, all the later activities. Later, we were in the same generation, we started connecting more. That's when the spirit began, those arrests in '74, the sentences. We knew their families, like Rexhep Mala's family, because his wife's sister [Remzie Limani Januzi] was a friend of mine in Pristina, and her brother was a lawyer in Pristina, and that's how we started making connections and getting more involved…Then we got organized with the brother of Rexhep Mala, the hero, with Teuta Hadri and with Remzie Limani and me. We made the first cell, we formed it. We made it.

Then the movement continued. The entry into the movement, into the LMKSh[12] at that time, I mean, there were plenty of other groups, but we didn't know each other, I mean, those groups that were there. But later we began to recognize each other, and when the unification of all the groups happened, then we knew each other much more, and that's when it started, I mean the preparation in advance. We went to Gjilan, we met, we talked until we got to know each other a bit. That spirit of ours, our readiness, because the danger was very high at that time, those things were taboo at that time. In fact, at that time we didn't even talk about Kosovo, we talked about unification. I mean, we began with unification.

Our movement was for the unification of the territories. I was from Macedonia. There were people from Montenegro, there were from Preshevo. I mean, the movement started for unification. But regarding the Republic of Kosovo, it was the situation that determined coming with that request, because of what was needed, the possibility later for a unification. Because we had the right to a republic, which had been demanded earlier, a sixth republic in former Yugoslavia, and that was it. Then we localized [the republic] as a bridge, our path toward unification. That's where we started.

Then we expanded step by step. Then we identified new girls and boys. I mean, we had phases in our education, our preparation, our training, extraordinary situations, how we would react, how we would

[12] *Lëvizia Marksiste-Leniniste e Kosovës dhe Shqipërise* (Marxist-Leninist Movement of Kosovo and Albania)

activate, how we would take on actions. There were the masses, "entering"[13] the masses, especially the poorer ones, we went there, I entered the poorest homes under the pretext of looking for an apartment. Always saying we were students. But then we detected the people's own spirit where we stayed, we had conversations. And you laid the groundwork, for example, in a possible war, where the people are, how you would mobilize the people, and who you would have with you.

We thought that we must also "enter" the police, also the hospital, and that people must be found there. That means, to enter from the inside. Not to speak about the faculties, about the professors, about the students who were more… who were knowledgeable, that we worked with. And we worked a lot once we had formed the other cells. We were very careful in the formation of the other cells because there was an oath that had to be taken; for every cell that was formed, an oath was made. But the oath was made after an action. Meaning, when you proved that the person was ready, only then was the oath taken with the flag, meaning that you would be consistent in the movement, that is to say, that we would give our lives for the flag, for unification.

That was what then continued in larger numbers. We formed an extraordinarily high number of cells. But what was very interesting was that all the cells, once they were formed, you know, the one person from the cell that we trusted the most, would report to us that the cell had been formed. But they didn't know us, meaning we had a system of secrecy so that they wouldn't know who we were. I mean, so that they wouldn't recognize each other and that, in case of a possible arrest the next day, there wouldn't be… we never walked together on the street, not once.

We were never once on the street with people with whom we operated, because that would be evidence, because if they arrested you, they could identify you much more easily, and we never… we moved only through alleyways, we were often hidden, through alleyways, [stayed] in houses that we rented, that we paid for, where we printed leaflets, where we wrote slogans on large banners. That is to say, we did it in certain houses that we used for a short period of time, for a month. That means we changed places, we had different locations, we constantly changed the locations to avoid being tracked and to avoid being exposed.

Anita Susuri: And during this time, you, before getting involved, did you previously know that such groups existed…?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We knew it, because exactly when we were formed, we knew that the groups that had fallen, for example, with Adem Demaçi, starting from Adem Demaçi in '68, and other groups, in '74 people were being sentenced massively. There were people who remained outside prison and were not arrested at that time, though some of them were arrested, but the movement continued. That is to say, communication continued, the activity continued. It was not something that began with us. We continued in that activity; we had all that information. In fact, we tried to have information even about the issue of sexual violence that might be used within prisons.

[13] "Entryism" is a well-known tactic pursued by radical organizations for gaining more members through covertly entering more moderate groups. Classically, Communist (Stalinist) and Trotskyist groups pursued entryism.

We had heard about Marie Shllaku,[14] that she had been raped. We had this issue in mind, and to tell you the truth, it was the most sensitive point of all that we prepared for. This was the greatest fear we had. I personally had the greatest fear of that, because regular torture, if you haven't experienced it, you don't know it, but I thought I could endure anything, but how would I survive that? Not that I would surrender, not that I would give in, but what would my life be like after that? What would my life be like after such a thing? That was, let's say, the biggest question mark or fear, the greatest fear in all that work, that if we were arrested, and if they took us, what would happen afterward?

Otherwise, one goes through those tortures and sees how hard they are and doesn't know how long one can endure. We prepared, we read a lot of literature, we took different models, for example from the war, from the resistance of other women in prisons. We also had Persefoni Kokdhima,[15] we had Bule Naipi[16] as a model. That means, they were taken to their execution and they didn't say anything. And somehow, we had that, like, that you could endure, you could even endure being executed but not give in. Ganimete Tërbeshi[17] at the same time. We had models who endured extraordinarily well under torture. And they were killed, but they didn't give in.

Somehow you had male models, of course, but female models were very important for us, what [a woman] could do, how she could face and how to manage all that very difficult situation that we were confronted with during arrests, during torture, also but especially in prison. Because we continued the movement even inside prison, we also worked there... even those who weren't politically active but were in for other reasons, we worked with them too, in one way or another, so that they'd leave with good behavior, we offered them a normal life.

I wanted to say it wasn't just like that, but it had to happen because otherwise, you couldn't come into contact with... you couldn't enter the movement. You couldn't without knowing, without having previously had people who had worked earlier who offer it to you, and that you're ready, of course, to enter that difficult journey.

Anita Susuri: I'd like to ask you a bit about the group's activity, and also about the rules you had…

Teuta Bekteshi: Understood.

Anita Susuri: Also the pseudonyms, for example. Why were they used? Yes, I understand it's to avoid…

Teuta Bekteshi: Ok.

Anita Susuri: If you could explain.

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[14] Marie Shllaku (1922-1946) was an Albanian nationalist and political activist, involved in the resistance against the Communist partisans. She was executed by a firing squad in 1946 after a 13-day mock-trial.

[15] Persefoni Kokëdhima (1928-1944), young Albanian partisan executed with her friend Bule Naipi and celebrated as heroine of the people by the Albanian Communist regime.

[16] Bule Naipi (1922-1944), young Albanian partisan executed by German Nazis with Persefoni Kokëdhima and celebrated as heroine of the people by the Albanian Communist regime.

[17] Ganimete Tërbeshi (1927-1944) was born in Gjakova, Kosovo. As a fourteen year old, during the Second World War, she joined the Anti-Fascist Movement. She was hanged in 1944 by the Germans in Gjakova.

Teuta Bekteshi: There were group rules, there were an extraordinary number of group rules. For example, the rules were…meetings, those I mentioned, the oaths and all of that, the meeting had to be very conspiratorial. The meeting, going out to meetings had to be 15 minutes before, and at most you could wait 15 minutes, you couldn't wait longer. Walking to the meeting, for example, we always had one rule, one precaution. For example, we'd sit down and tie our shoes and look around to check if someone was following us. Do you understand? To make sure you weren't being followed and that you could go to that meeting.

It was very important. Usually we were very clever people, I mean, they were excellent students. Seriously, I'm saying this. Even women… even among the masses… the women who were not educated, and with whom we entered into contact, we also worked with them. We had to work more with them, of course, because it was much harder to penetrate there and to gain their trust, because it was a taboo. Look, people were very afraid. Just from the taboo that existed, they were very afraid because it was a very evil regime, a very oppressive regime. The consequences of it were well known, and simple people were scared.

To take a step forward, that's high risk. You know, you always had to do something before others to lead the others who would follow you. But that first step comes with many, many consequences, I mean, that might appear from time to time, but that step must be taken. That's how it was with us. Meaning, we were careful with people, we were careful never to give any kind of information. That means, I didn't know [people] from the other group. Nor did Teuta tell me, and I didn't tell her about those in my circle, in my cells. That means, everything was in conspiracy, we said only the absolutely necessary things.

We worked, we worked, we collected money from students to buy a typewriter, because we were students. That means, we tried to do it ourselves. But there was extraordinary enthusiasm. At that time, the youth would take steps, I mean on their own. Sometimes very dangerous steps that might hurt, but enthusiasm does its thing. You must do something, do something. That means, at that time we gave complete priority to the movement. There were periods when I even put my studies aside, because the movement had higher priority than my own education. That means, you had to, you needed time, time to meet people, time to go into homes, it took time. I want to say, in this regard we were very, very careful.

What I want to say is, the formation of the cell was always in threes. It was done in threes because fewer people meant fewer pieces of information that could leak and fewer people who knew each other. That's why this group of three was created. Every group of three that was formed… for example, I would form a group of three with one person I knew, she would form a group of three, but those people did not know me at all, and she would give me the information about the trio. That other trio gave information to the one I had brought in. That person didn't know anything further than that. That means, it went on and on, but the chain was unknown. Always preserving the flow of the movement. Meaning, the networking was always being preserved for the reason that, in case of arrests, the organization would still function well, but also so that in case of arrests, the others would not be endangered…

Anita Susuri: And about the activities of the other trios, did you know about them? They informed you but you didn't know who the people were?

Teuta Bekteshi: No. For example, I would know the person. Let's say, I bring you into a trio. I know you, and you form your own trio…

Anita Susuri: I think from…

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes. You give me information about your trio. I had more information about many trios, you understand? Because they were groups of three people. But that information was only with me. There was great risk, for example, that during an arrest, under torture, you might make major disclosures. Only those who have gone through it know what it's like, the torture was unscrupulous. Starting with slaps, because the head is not to be touched under all international conventions against violence, you're not allowed to hit the head because it's the most sensitive part.

For example, when they beat you, they would hit your face for hours, hit, hit, even with a whip and everything, excluding other parts of the body. You would become confused because of brain concussion. And when you have a brain concussion, an intense headache starts, vomiting, and you lose focus, you don't even know what you're saying later because it's a very heavy psychological state. It was dangerous to go through all of that. But I say they can be endured, I've gone through them, and I say it can be endured.

Anita Susuri: Regarding the activities, I read somewhere that you wrote about 200 leaflets…

Teuta Bekteshi: Ah yes, that's one of the activities. We started writing slogans, say, we wrote them in the dormitories and then we went to demonstrations. "Down with Titoism", "Freedom or death", "Free our comrades." Later came "Kosova Republic." After the events, after the demonstrations, came other slogans. At that time, we had "Unification," and all the slogans typical of that period, before 1981. I'm talking about the time before 1981. We wrote them in all the dorms we could through our groups. We made leaflets twice. The last leaflet was on March 7, before the demonstrations. It was a call to action. We wrote them, we had a house we had secured, somewhere in the Taslixhe neighborhood, near the electric substation.

Anita Susuri: The transformer?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, the transformer. The gymnasium is there, and there's a small alley that leads to an elementary school. I forgot the name now, I used to know it. Might it be Gjergj Fishta?

Anita Susuri: Gjergj Fishta? I'm not sure…

Teuta Bekteshi: I don't remember now. Down from there was a street with a small stream, just little water. Some families lived there, and we needed a small house for a few days. But you couldn't rent one for a few days, you had to rent for a month, no one would rent for just a few days. As students, we found a small concrete house, simple, just one room, on the roadside. We paid for it, Teuta, my partner Sami, and I, and we settled in to write the leaflets. But it was cold, very cold, it was March, and Prishtina is very cold, especially without heating.

Teuta helped me write during the day. I typed, my brother had a typewriter since high school. He used

to write, and I knew how to type. I ended up typing all the leaflets, one by one. The problem wasn't just getting the house, but the risk: the typewriter noise could be heard through the concrete walls. There was a real danger that someone was surveilling us and…

Anita Susuri: That they were listening.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, that they were listening. The house we rented, some students had stayed there before and later they said that some people had come by, and the students said they had noticed something. "What are they doing all night in that room?" Only I was there at night. They had heard, they had heard something but being students themselves…and later they became involved too. They sensed something was happening in that room. That night I typed until morning without sleeping at all. We typed about 200–300 leaflets, maybe even 300. We spent the whole day and night typing.

In the morning, it was freezing cold, I was freezing. There was no heating, nothing. They had left a small stove, the owners, to make tea. There was also a bed and a table. The bed was cold, I couldn't warm up. One night I went, at around 10:00 PM, I said, "Ok, I am going to warm up, I am going to ask for some water, and I will take the opportunity to warm up." Even if I warmed up, also to see whether they had not taken some…it was risky. I went over, they gave me water, I didn't stay long and returned. They didn't say anything. I calmed down a bit because we were afraid of getting arrested while making the leaflets. I stayed until morning. In the morning, I couldn't feel my legs, my toes didn't feel like mine.

From there, from that alley, I had a friend from the movement, she's in America now, Flora Mustafa. She lived with her paternal uncle, and I had activated her in medical high school. She used to babysit the children. Her uncle's wife worked in the court. This Hetem Ramadani,[18] the one involved in meditation, her uncle. He had a house near the high school, not an apartment, but a house. I went there to warm up because I couldn't feel my feet. I didn't tell her what I had done all night, even though she was actively involved in the movement too.
I warmed up at her place, she even prepared food for me. She made, and I am telling you in the middle of this story because we don't talk about it, she made some meat, because they had it because they were a family that worked in the court and were well off. She gave me some meat, she said, "No," said, "I will make you some meat." And she did, but I couldn't eat much because I was exhausted and very cold. I ate a piece and left, warmed up a bit and went to my apartment. My apartment was in Aktash, in Aktash I was at number two, there were six houses. I lived there with my two brothers. Later, our younger brother joined us. We finished the job.

The next night, we printed them that day, and the next day, we started distributing the leaflets. All night Teuta, Sami, and I split up the city to distribute them, putting them into houses. We peeked inside and checked whether there was anyone…it was to our advantage back then that there weren't many street lights, the streets were dark. Especially in the City Park in the center by the old Technical Faculty, that earlier park up there. Now I saw that it was renovated, it was not that way back then, and I felt some nostalgia. Back then the streets had cobblestone and there were no lights. You could move around at night unnoticed.

[18] Nutrition and health entrepreneur, author, filantropist, alternative healer, he is considered the father of meditation in the Albanian speaking world.

We would open doors, peek in, if no one was there, we'd slip a leaflet in. These were leaflets …calling for demonstrations. It was before the demonstrations. I mean, the demonstrations started in March 11 demonstrations of 1981 and continued. We printed leaflets not once, but twice. The typewriter we bought…my brother worked at Radio Television of Pristina always gave me money because he said, "You are not eating." And he always gave me money. I did not spend that money and he said, "Go in the city center and eat because you are weak and need medicine." I put the money in books and we collected enough to buy the typewriter and we also gathered funds in case of war…

Later, when I was arrested, that comrade with whom I was arrested took the typewriter from there and hid it in a village and then we looked for it with that friend when we met. "Can we find that typewriter or not?" I don't know whether it was ever found. We used it for the leaflets…not to speak about what we wrote in the streets and all over, we wrote slogans on schools, streets, dormitories, on all walls… One night with Teuta, we wrote a slogan on a wall of the school uphill by the student dorms, I don't know what it is called; there was a canal there, we thought that the police were chasing us and we jumped into the canal.

I want to say we worked in many places. Not just us, but all the groups worked… they worked very much especially on schools. In Suhareka, for example, we dropped an eight-meter-long red banner with black letters, saying "Kosova Republic" and "Freedom or Death" in the city center at noon, and that's where we were arrested.

Anita Susuri: Was that the first time you were arrested?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, that was the second time. Then the third time was with Teuta Hadri when we were arrested and sentenced to one year each. So, then they tried to open proceedings to sentence us more heavily, but they couldn't get any evidence. The sentence was light, even though we had done a lot more, but since we didn't reveal anything, they couldn't prove it, even though we were more active, the sentence remained just one year. They couldn't build a bigger case, and it stayed that way... Yes, our group was never uncovered, not once. I was the first to be arrested from our group, but we were never exposed. That's the important part.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned the leaflets, that there were around 200–300 of them. What was the specific content of those, and in general, what did the leaflets include?

Teuta Bekteshi: The leaflets had, how can I say, their main goal was to raise awareness among the masses. The leaflet, its content was aimed at the broader population. Because you weren't free to speak openly. When you raise awareness, like now, people organize rallies and events, you sensitize the people, a larger mass of people. Back then you couldn't speak openly, so you had to do it in different ways. A slogan was a kind of call, something pointed. The leaflets had content.

For example, tracts described the deteriorating situation, the continuous repression, mass arrests, killings. At the time, soldiers were returning in coffins,[19] mothers weren't even allowed to open the coffins. The oppression was increasing, the cruelty of the regime intensifying. Not only against us but against students in general. Because you had a generation of students, a future political elite, many of

[19] Reference to a wave of alleged suicides of Albanian conscripts in 1990, which were never investigated and always denied by the families.

whom would go on to play roles in the blood reconciliation campaign and even later join the Kosovo Liberation Army; they were from this elite of students.

There were also intellectuals, and ordinary people too. It was all a collective effort. What I mean is, there was a movement, a shift happening. It became a catalyst for many later processes. The leaflet had a valuable role because, when you wrote one and put it out, it might say: "This repression is happening to us, we must raise our voices, we must protest, we must react to all that's happening." That leaflet might be read by a whole family who finds it, or someone might keep it and pass it on to someone else, someone they trusted, to their extended family.

So, it was a tool for informing, calling people to action, and raising awareness. Then there were the illegal newspapers, let's not forget them. There was *Zëri i Kosovës* ("Voice of Kosovo"), there was *Lajmëtari i Lirisë* ("The Messenger of Freedom"), and those were also distributed. Besides leaflets, these were shared too. Their distribution was extremely dangerous at the time. They contained poems, calls to action, everything, and most were printed abroad. Most were printed outside Kosovo, because printing something like a magazine inside was nearly impossible back then.

Anita Susuri: Did you work on printing the magazines?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, not on the magazines. I worked on the leaflets, but the magazines were handled more abroad, in Switzerland and Germany, more than inside Kosovo. Because inside Kosovo you didn't have the conditions for printing a magazine back then... And I wanted to say that the impact of the leaflets was huge. It's not by chance that the protests of 1981 happened. In 1978, we had another protest. The Medical Faculty was the base of active students. I don't know why the Medical Faculty was like that, but it had a lot of active students. In '78, we organized a protest, we protested and walked from the Medical Faculty to the dean's office downtown, the main building...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Teuta Bekteshi: We went there. We used it as a pretext... In the Medical Faculty, we had professors from Belgrade, prominent professors, authors of books still studied today. At the time, there weren't yet qualified Albanian staff at the Medical Faculty because it was still the beginning. We took all our exams in Serbian. Later on, professors from Albania started to arrive... We had epidemiology with Dr. Gojart Cerga, and pharmacology professors came too. Eventually, more Albanian professors arrived, and that was the greatest joy. That's actually one of the reasons I came to Prishtina, to study in Albanian.

I wanted to say this in this context, so I don't lose my train of thought: the Faculty of Medicine in 1978 organized [a protest], because it was the tenth anniversary of the 1968 demonstrations, and we were a group that was active. We had just started, because in '78 we had just joined the movement, Teuta and a few others, but we were from the medical faculty. There were other comrades who were very active, not in our ranks, they had their own groups, but we knew about their sensitivity to these issues. We knew they were active, working in other ways, but we didn't know each other, everyone was doing their own thing, because we were afraid of being exposed. We organized because we demanded Albanian professors to lecture us. We insisted that Albanian professors lecture us, and it was actually a demand in the form of a request, but we organized the protest for '68, in a way to have lectures from

professors in the Albanian language. We organized this.

At the dean's office when we got there, it was about who would speak. It was problematic, who would speak? So, we spoke. I spoke, and also Hasan Bekteshi, he had the same surname but was from Kërçova. Just a coincidence about the surname. And we spoke. I think Arsim Braha also spoke, I'm not sure now, but I remember that I spoke and so did Hasan. Then others spoke after we made our demands and explained why we had marched from the Faculty of Medicine to the dean's office. Then the police intervened, but they didn't use violence.

They dispersed us under the pretext that the Faculty of Medicine… Well, not a pretext, the academic leadership claimed the Faculty of Medicine had the best students and supposedly they had the right to demand lectures in the Albanian language. So that was it. This means the protests didn't start in '81. That one was… also a kind of test for us, to see that we could organize, that we could hold such protests. Therefore, we had only been waiting for the right moment, we needed the right moment, because those are certain moments when you don't expect it but then things channel, and you help that moment. That's why the 1981 demonstrations were organized. We had worked a lot for those demonstrations.

Then came the moment with the [Tito's] relay.[20] We were against the relay. In fact, they had the relay brought to us during that time. There was a friend of ours, Sanije, I've forgotten her last name now, from the Faculty of Medicine. That year they selected Sanije to deliver...

Anita Susuri: Hyseni?

Teuta Bekteshi: Hyseni, yes. To deliver the…

Anita Susuri: The relay.

Teuta Bekteshi: The relay to Tito. We were against it. We all stood up against it. In fact, we stopped talking to Sanije. We were outraged. "Why should Sanije deliver the relay?" And it was because of things like that, the reactions and those kinds of organizations, because we were against that, and that the relay shouldn't be handed over to him. But Sanije went anyway, and we didn't speak to her afterward. That was it. I wanted to say that everything was organized, there was a lot of work behind it. A lot of work went into those efforts. Then other demonstrations happened... in '89 I participated again.

I was again at the sports hall, we organized it, I even came from Kumanovo. I went there to participate in that demonstration. The Movement continued its work. Then came the blood feuds reconciliation, then other things... all of that is part of a journey. I always say that what I value most in a person, in a personality, is especially that they're committed to the cause of freedom, is that I bow to the people, to the martyrs and heroes who gave their lives, because they gave everything. That's the most sublime

[20] The Day of the Relay (also known as the Youth Relay or Relay of Youth) was a significant event in Yugoslavia held annually on May 25 to celebrate the birthday of Josip Broz Tito, the President of Yugoslavia. This event involved a relay race in which a baton was carried across the country by young people, symbolizing unity and youth's connection to Tito. The relay ended with a large celebration where the baton was presented to Tito, marking a major patriotic and festive occasion.

thing, the highest sacrifice. And to the people who dedicate their entire lives, continuously or in different ways, to that cause, I bow to them too.

Otherwise, the time periods someone contributed, whether they happened to catch the right time or made sacrifices, is extremely important, but if you stop there, that's not good. Contribution means you must keep giving your whole life, you must continue to act and stay involved in different forms. It depends on the time and what context demands it, but when you are committed to the cause of your people, to the well-being of your people, and of all peoples, not just my own, but of all people living in that same historical moment, for a decent life, freedom of action, movement, and work, a decent standard of living, and dignity, that's the most valuable thing for a person.

I believe that this is the path I have chosen, and I am very much at peace with myself for being on that path. Despite all the hardships, I'm still on it, and I continue in one way or another to be part of all these processes that involve me, my people, and all the peoples of the world.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: I'd like to ask a bit about the cultural life that took place during your schooling period. Before your imprisonment, there were also many groups that came from Albania…

Teuta Bekteshi: Of course.

Anita Susuri: I mean, and it seems like you often accompanied them.

Teuta Bekteshi: We did. I was even part of cultural groups myself. I sang, I danced, and I was part of a cultural song society called Bajram Shabani. Even in elementary school, we were very active in this area, we sang and danced. I have always loved singing. I used to sing, although now I no longer have the voice I used to, but I still love dancing. Wherever I go, anywhere in the world, I make it a point to learn a dance from that culture because I really enjoy it.

At that time, different groups came. The State Ensemble of Songs and Dances used to come, sports teams came as well. I remember that the football team Teuta from Durrës came to play against Pristina at the time. "They're coming from Albania!" We organized all the students. The Pristina stadium at that time was packed, completely full. But the issue wasn't about winning, it was the fact that they were playing together. We supported both Pristina and Durrës. For us, it didn't matter who won; what mattered was that they played together.

I remember clearly one occasion, we were cheering loudly. I was small, not very pretty, not very noticeable, I didn't stand out much and I was able to get through a bit more easily. Teuta was distinctive because of her red hair and she stood out, but I didn't stand out and I could get in, it was easy for me to get through many situations. My older brother, who passed away, and my younger brother were both tall, handsome, and noticeable, so the police would always stop them. I would tell them, "You stay here because no one's going to stop me," because…

I went to meet one of the players after the match to see what the Albanians were saying. One of them

was being asked something, I'm not sure what exactly, and he said, "They told us in Albania that if an incident happens during the game," because it's a game and sometimes things happen, "if they hit you on one side, turn the other cheek. But don't retaliate, don't hit back under any circumstances." That really left an impression on me. I thought, "Look how nice," you know, it impressed me.

Then there was the time the State Ensemble of Songs and Dances came. Teuta and I were there, I mean, along with some other friends, but we mostly moved around together. I said, "How do we get into the National Theater?" which is the same as today. That's where the concert was being held. But how could we get in, because no one would give us a ticket, they wouldn't give tickets to students. I said, "Teuta, let's go anyway, we'll pretend we're with those from Albania." I didn't have a problem with the language because they could never tell me apart, since the way I spoke was very close [to their accent], but with Teuta yes, because Teuta was from Gjakova and she stood out right away. I said, "You don't say anything, I'll do the talking."

She took an instrument, and I took an instrument. I was at the end. We dressed like them. They had a slightly more classical style of clothing, some coats, some pants, not like us. We were freer in terms of clothing. But we dressed like them, so we'd resemble them more. As we climbed the stairs, it was full of police, full of spies, those UDB[21] spies, guarding from the sides. I told Teuta, "Don't say a word, I'll talk. You just stay behind me." I said, "How are you? Now we're going in." I did this a little to camouflage Teuta, to protect her. And the two of us entered, but a problem arose once we were inside. Now the issue was how to join the audience, how to get out there? They were saying... and I, the ambassador of Albania in Belgrade at that time, we had communicated with him several times. Back then, we used the [phones of] the old post office of Pristina, and we'd communicate directly.

In '79 we wanted to go to Albania with students, organize a trip. To go to Albania, you had to talk to the Embassy so they could enable us to go somehow. I did all this work over the phone to go to Albania, and we decided. Teuta and I didn't go. I'll never forget it. I had my passport ready, and the money, my father prepared it, but we couldn't go. Because it was a risk that if we got arrested upon returning from Albania, they'd say, "You've been to Albania," and then our case would be much more problematic. Everyone else went; we organized it, honestly, I organized it, but in the end, we didn't go. And I suffered so much, I cried so much for that missed chance. Everyone went, the whole group went, we didn't.

We went inside [the theatre]. But when we got in, the ambassador was in the second row, the first or second. In the last row, they gave us coats. They had some drape-coats, light-colored, and I wore one. Teuta got another. The Albanians gave them to us so we wouldn't stand out in the front rows. We sat down. The ambassador was looking at us because he knew we weren't one of theirs, that we were students, he could tell. Then the singing started, and our hearts were about to burst, who could stay seated without clapping, without standing up? At first, we started slowly, but then we stood up. But it was very serious because there were many UDB agents there monitoring the situation. We barely managed to get out of there safely, to be honest, we barely made it.

[21] *Uprava državne bezbednosti* [Directorate for State Security] 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. Also known by the Serbian acronym SDB.

Another time, we went in when the basketball team had come to play, the Albanian basketball team. I don't remember what it was called at the time, whether it was national or not. And we tried to accompany them. Also, with the track and field team, the athletics group, we took a bus from Fushë Kosova, and we were lucky not to get caught. We returned in the same bus the athletes were in. Even Bajram Kosumi[22] was in that bus at the time, and we returned to Pristina. But the dinner that was held downstairs at the Grand Hotel, in the basement, well, the dinner wasn't for us, but we went to see them again, out of curiosity. And we were detected. When we tried to leave, they followed us.

There were some cars in front of the Grand Hotel, and we got under a car. To avoid getting caught, we lay down under the car. And they were yelling, "Where did they go? Where did they disappear?" Then, after everyone left, we crawled out from underneath and didn't get caught. It was interesting because they didn't recognize us; no one had ever caught us before, and we were unknown faces to them. The arrests happened…before for others, because people didn't recognize us. That's probably why we lasted so long, this was from '78 until I was arrested in '82. I was arrested in May of '82 and held in isolation. So, we survived for years thanks to our secrecy and the great caution we took in our actions.

Anita Susuri: Can you now tell us about the 1981 demonstrations? How did you experience them?

Teuta Bekteshi: Look, we started from the 11th [of March]. We were in the student dorms, actually, the night when the initial commotion began. We were waiting in line for food. What's interesting is I really liked the student canteen, especially the beans and the leek stew they made, it was my favorite. We had cards and waited in line. That night, an initiative started, something was going to happen, since it was March. Every March or April, we expected something, since historically things had always happened then. That's when the turmoil started, with noise and chaos.

We went out downhill, but at the bottom, the police were already there. They had been informed. Then we moved from the canteen area to the open space nearby, up above was the sports hall, some barracks, and then dorms I, II, III, IV. In that open space, we began chanting. That's when, for the first time, "Kosova Republic" was shouted. One rock, there was a rock there, we helped Ali Lajçi[23] climb it since we were all for unity and needed to make a statement. That's where the chant "Kosova Republic" happened for the first time.

Then the whole city got involved, and the shouting spread. The police intervened, there were arrests and all that. Then came the March 26th protests, again organized at the dorms. Azem Vllasi[24] came to try to disperse us, and our demands were better living conditions. Then we started shouting, "Free our comrades," "Release the prisoners," "Kosova…" and then that slogan began, it started also earlier but to give you an example, "Free our comrades," "Freedom or Death," "Kosova works, Belgrade is built," "Kosovo Republic, either by will…Constitution."

Anita Susuri: "Either by will or by war."

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[22] Bajram Kosumi (1960), student leader, the third prime minister of Kosovo after the war (2005-2206).

[23] Ali Lajçi (1955-2024), political activist and prisoner from1981 through 1991, was mayor of Peja from 2001 to 2007.

[24] Azem Vllasi (1948) served as the President of the Presidency of the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo from 1986 to 1988. In 1989, he was removed from that position during Slobodan Milošević's grab for power in Kosovo and across Yugoslavia.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, "Constitution: either by will or by war." That's when they began. The police responded harshly with tear gas. My partner, who was in Pristina at the time, helped me up the hill near the canteen. I was badly affected by the gas, it entered my nose. My partner, who had served in the army, knew what it meant. I never experienced gas in my nose. He said, "You can't move," because it was very severe, with coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath, everything. And there we then dispersed uphill, and we climbed up. My partner and another girl took me by the arms, they took us up. Then, the 26th continued.

On April 1st, it was in the afternoon. We knew that it would happen on April 1st and we organized it. The high school students came, and we organized them to come to the dormitory. The students from the dormitory… that day it was in the afternoon. I don't know what day it was, like what day of the week it was, I don't remember, I don't remember. It's just that we organized. We were in the front rows going down from the student dormitory, going down there to the old Technical Faculty. Then some of us went toward the Faculty of Philosophy through those alleys, going into the city, others going toward where the Municipal Committee used to be before, I don't even know now, I think it still is. No, it's not the Parliament, but what is there now? It's still something. At that time, it was the Committee, that's where those in power, the representatives of the authorities, used to sit.

We started the front rows, but we were very few at the beginning, meaning it was one or two rows. Just like that, going down to gather down there. When they started gathering down there, the police were alarmed and came and made a barricade. They came out completely in front, right where that road is, that goes uphill, I mean the straight road, at the Hotel, what's it called…

Anita Susuri: Swiss Diamond maybe?

Teuta Bekteshi: Higher up. No, the old Technical Faculty is here at the intersection, here the Philosophy [Faculty], that alley, here it was Philosophy. Here was the Technical Faculty. Here, there is an alley going uphill that leads you to the Muhaxher neighborhood, in that part over there. The lower part that takes you to the city. The main road has two splits like this. But now it's built up there and now…

Anita Susuri: By the Ministry of Education.

Teuta Bekteshi: I don't know what's there now. It used to be the Technical Faculty at that time…

Anita Susuri: Yes, right there.

Teuta Bekteshi: Below was the Faculty of Philosophy, [and] Economics, and there was a kiosk that sold books. In fact, there was a guy from Kumanovo who sold books at that time there, and he would display them outside, he had a kind of table, and there were also flags there... They were Yugoslav flags, the ones he kept, since those were the rules back then regarding the flag. And there they came out, the crowd gathered there, I mean. They all came from the dormitories. First of all, they all came from the upper parts, from the dormitories. There, in the afternoon, around 5:00–6:00PM o'clock it was, I don't know exactly. That's where the main problem started, that's where it happened because the police made a barricade. That's where the chants started: "Kosovo Republic," "Death rather than

slavery," "Republic, Constitution, either willingly or by force." I mean, big calls. The crowd was gathering.

That's where the first filming started, for example, which later led to the arrest of many students there. Because from that house up above, there was another building there, and that's where the filming was made. Maybe they did the filming from the Technical Faculty, we didn't follow such a thing. In fact, I remember students, it was extraordinary, it was such an enthusiasm, it was something indescribable. Especially when you see people, the crowd that gathers, because the crowd swallows you. Usually, you become part of the mass. In the mass you are strong, you are powerful, in the mass you are everything, in the mass because you are the mass. Alone, it's hard, but when you are in a mass, you are not afraid anymore.

They came… even my brother… the students from Kumanovo, there were about eight friends, they were a very successful generation at that time in the Faculty of Economics and someone [was in] architecture. They, with my brother, I saw them coming and I was very happy when I saw them, because I hadn't called my brother but I saw those young ones, beautiful, tall, all of them joined the crowd. Then, we broke through the police cordon there and one group went toward the Faculty of Philosophy to go to the city center, the other part went down those little streets. Other crowds came from the road where the Parliament is, now where the city center is. The workers came from Ramiz Sadiku. I mean, you had people from all sides.

You can't even imagine how packed it was, how much enthusiasm there was, you didn't have… there were old people, there were young people, there were women, I mean, there were girls, there were children, there were men. What can I tell you is there were people from all sides. It was so tense, like for example, when Hydajet Hyseni stood up in that part that is almost at the end of that pedestrian walkway that Pristina has today, there near the hero Zahir Pajaziti a bit before reaching it, there were the same trees as today. When they stood there, we were very close and one of our friends climbed a tree, our groupmate climbed, Remzije Limani, and she climbed that tree.

The problem was that while the demands were being shouted, the ones made by Hydajet, you know, disguised, masked, and everything. But the problem was very serious, because the crowds were so compressed, it was like this {she joins her hands} one right behind the other. When they started firing tear gas, now as the crowd moved… because it hit that front part first, the ones in the front started having serious problems. You didn't have the possibility, you couldn't turn back, the crowd was pushing. I got caught, I got knocked down. I fell, because the crowd pushed me. You had nowhere to hold on, because the other [person] was running behind you.

I fell on the ground, on the asphalt, I mean, my brother on top of me. Teuta [fell] to the ground because we were there together and I lost my breath. Teuta said, "A very big man fell on top of me," she said, "I couldn't even breathe underneath." And my brother on top there, when we got up, now that the crowd had dispersed, when we got up there, there was still cheering, the demands were out loud… And when we got up there, my brother got caught, the one on top of me, he got hit with the tear gas and we got caught there. [The crowd] dispersed. We stayed because we hadn't made a single step. We lost our breath and what could we do now, we couldn't escape in time because we got caught down there and we went toward the Secretariat of Internal Affairs.

There was some kind of little alley down there, there were some apartments, where previously the Army had been, a house, and there we went into one apartment building to hide.
We entered that apartment building to hide, we went floor by floor, no one opened the door for us. We were left on the stairs, about ten people, ten or twelve people were left on the stairs. "Where to go?" The police blocked the entrance downstairs. "Come out," they said, "come out!" We already knew they were going to arrest us all right then, there was no doubt. We put our hands on our heads so they wouldn't hit us on the head, because they were hitting us, at least to protect our heads. And there was that Albanian, surely he was the commander of the security. He just said to us, "Quick," he said, "run. Run, get away from here!" We didn't expect that because we thought we were already arrested. He said, "Quick!"

We ran, some this way, some that way. We tried to get back up the road, meaning the main road that's near the cafeteria, the main road that still exists today. Shoes, sneakers, things scattered the way people had fled, and then we returned slowly. I wanted to say that was… the next day was April 2nd when the demonstrations continued. We got up early and we knew there would definitely be demonstrations there. There were children in the Muhaxher neighborhood and in Aktash. There were many children, just like always in our neighborhoods, there's always youth. The children, I knew many of them because my brother was involved with writing and books, and he had given books to children, he had visited families to get to know them, and had met a lot of kids. I used to give the children books to read, reading material and things. The kids loved me very much, there were many children.

The next day, imagine this, the children got organized, because kids… so enthusiastic, even the children. We went out, we went down at 9:00 in the morning. Naime was with me, my friend, we went down to the Technical Faculty. At the Technical Faculty, there was again that open grassy area, and we started shouting again. Other parts, other groups. But the center was again the same place where we had gathered the day before. And we started chanting, "Kosova Republic," and all the demands we had. The crowd was coming, growing, growing, the crowds were increasing. Imagine, it was so interesting that the Medical Faculty with the emergency vehicles, those emergency cars, like vehicles…

Anita Susuri: The ambulances.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, the ambulances came to see if they needed to intervene. It was that well organized, even the hospital. Unbelievable what kind of organization it was. They had done it… even from within. But people were ready, they were ready to do anything, to do everything. I even remember, we started singing. I've always loved, and still love, the song "*Kur na ra kushtrimi në Kosovë*" ("When the call to arms fell upon us in Kosovo"), and we sang it. I've always sung that song because I love it very much, and I still sing it. Even today at weddings, anywhere, I ask them to sing that song for me because I love it so much. We started singing "*Kur na ra Kushtrimi në Kosovë*." And at that time, the army started coming down that main road, the road I'm talking about, where we were gathered near the faculty, that road that goes straight down to the dormitories, that main road.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Teuta Bekteshi: From the dorms going downhill, which you go down even today, it's just expanded even more. We started to see that the army was coming, meaning those military vehicles, those were

smaller ones, I don't know what they were called. With the military. Not tanks, the tanks came later. These came first with soldiers in them, those… I don't know what they were called, they had a name too, like small vans, but I know they were about the size to hold just two people in the front...

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes. Like armored ones.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, like armored ones. At that time maybe they weren't armored. But when the first one came, we said, "The army is coming in." And the situation was very serious, meaning all of Prishtina was blocked in every direction, and the army just came in. There, before the tanks, they fired, they shot, I saw it myself. A soldier came out, opened the window and shot at us. At that time, we were very close, because it's close there. In front of me, we were all crowded. A boy got hit in the leg by a bullet. Right there he was hit. What could we do now that he got hit? I had a bit of knowledge in medicine, so I tried to tie him so there wouldn't be blood loss. We took the boy to bring him to the hospital.

But there were some houses there, where some Serbs lived. We entered a house, he had a car, and we entered and asked him to give us the car, to help us get the boy to the hospital. They refused to take the boy. We argued with them, "Why not take him?" Some other students took him, found a car and took him. I didn't go because we had to continue the protest. I mean, that's where it started. It lasted a long time because later, people intervened. The main street filled with people, then tanks started coming, people climbed on the tanks and then the tanks started moving. We thought the tank would run people over. That's where the first two killings happened… Mehmet Hajrizi's brother was killed, and then they began to disperse the crowd.

Then they started identifying us in the alleyways, the UDB guys stopping us and identifying us. Only that group was dispersed that day. Then we went to the student canteen where there was another group, those vans coming down from the top, they had gone all the way down. And that's where the first killings happened, from that Serb's house who shot down and killed students. It continued all day until evening, I mean. I'm talking about April 1st, it was in the afternoon, and it went late into the night; and on April 2 the protest started in the morning. That's when we were locked down, a curfew was imposed, the situation became very serious. On the 3rd, we initiated again to organize another protest but it was very difficult to act because everything was blocked. I mean, police everywhere, they were stopping every movement.

Then we continued, and it went on in other forms. But the 1981 demonstrations were extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. Such a massive turnout, I mean, that kind of joining in happens only when you're pushed against a wall, otherwise such a wave of awareness is hard to create. I don't think such a mobilization and participation can happen again. But Prishtina was favored because it had a very young population. I mean, it had students, it had that elite, it had very active people, because youth, I'm sure, youth always make the changes.

Youth always make the change, because youth know no fear, it doesn't stop, it wants change. The older generations think differently. I mean, our generation helped a lot. The generations that brought it up to that point, that worked for it, that continued, our generation of those years that continued with the next generations despite the difficulties. And it continued with the Kosovo Liberation Army, and even today it continues, youth is still the one that brings change and I am sure that it brings the

change. The big changes, I mean, because we all make the small ones. But the big changes, we make them. Back then, the Serbian regime had…Why were the youth identified and arrested? Because they saw the spirit.

And it was very interesting regarding women, because they were very afraid of women. Not just for their activism, but also their endurance in prison. Because women… understand this: when a mother, a woman becomes aware and conscious of the issues, especially the freedom that she herself lacks, then you can't stop her anymore. I say, together, I'm always for acting together, but the role of women was irreplaceable in the national liberation movement. Irreplaceable. And it continues to be irreplaceable in all changes, because things are not finished, there is work, and work, and work to be done. We are still not free, not free in many ways.

That's why the cause of freedom continues even in the younger generations, but women must be active. Women must be willing to do it themselves, and it is up to the ladies to do it themselves, but to be active, to volunteer and to make a difference, you need to prepare for it, not everyone can do it, not everyone can do it. Not everyone is born to lead. Yes, the biggest work is done by those behind you. I mean, the second and third line, but someone must lead them. Not always they are in the condition of leading, I know, because leadership ability, for example, but it's more important to always have people who lead.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: I wanted to connect with this part after the demonstrations. It was the time when the highest number of political prisoners were detained, especially young people. I've often come across stories that this was a difficult period because most of the groups and their leaders were arrested…

Teuta Bekteshi: Of course, of course.

Anita Susuri: How was it for you? How difficult was it?

Teuta Bekteshi: It was, it really was a serious problem, and that's why we operated with a lot of secrecy so that the movement wouldn't be compromised, you understand? That chain shouldn't be broken. It's very damaging when the leaders are caught, because the masses, like I said, need leaders, people who can lead. Imprisonment is very problematic and harmful. We understood that and worked a lot on that aspect. Meaning, if I was arrested and didn't give any [information to the police], then the next person would continue. But that next person had information only up to a certain point, only about who to continue with. Not about their work, not about their activities, nothing. Just, "If I get arrested, continue with these others." Without information about what they worked on, to avoid risk. Do you understand? And the work continued.

For example, Teuta continued with the youth group. She was arrested last; I had been arrested twice before. So, nothing was left from me, but Teuta continued. We tried to preserve the continuity of the movement. We even continued our work in prison, because in prison you could also identify people. Some people were convicted just for minor offenses and didn't have deeper involvement. You found ways to keep going. So, we continued to work even from prison. Still, the movement was heavily

damaged during that time, and it took a while to recover because the arrests were extremely widespread. There were many leaks, large groups were sentenced.

I mean, not all those groups were fully prepared, but their opportunities were only as much as they could prepare for. Some were more prepared, some couldn't withstand it. Torture, there's nothing I can say about torture. Everyone can talk about it, but it's hard. Those tortures were very difficult to endure, extremely difficult. Torture with electric shocks, waterboarding, days of continuous abuse. You couldn't even stand on your feet, your soles were so beaten that you couldn't put your foot on the ground. Hands, don't even mention the hands, they were worse. And the aftereffects, like kidney damage.

I had kidney damage, I had bleeding later because of the injuries from falling. Let me just tell you a short episode. On one of the days I was severely tortured, that night I had internal bleeding and was in great pain. The women in my cell banged on the door to get medical help because I was in a bad state. When they took me upstairs, to the second floor, there was no doctor. Sometimes there was a doctor on duty, but often not. But there were imprisoned doctors, people who had studied medicine, imprisoned for other reasons, not political, and they were used, for example, when a prisoner was sick, to treat them as best they could with what was available.

They brought me upstairs that night, and I didn't say anything, especially not to people I didn't know. I didn't speak, I kept silent. I always stayed silent because I didn't dare speak. I chose silence, because for me it's much better to stay quiet and only say what's absolutely necessary, rather than speak. I was afraid that they would extract something from your words and connect it to someone, or to something else. But I stayed silent throughout the torture, throughout the arrest, I stayed silent. Most of the time, I didn't speak. That's how I got through it. I went through what I went through, but I didn't speak, simply put.

When I went there, he saw my serious condition and said, "You need," he said, "to get an injection." An injection because I was in a lot of pain. And he told me, "Sit down," to give me the injection in the buttock, intramuscular. When I exposed my buttock, that buttock, the man stood up. He said, "What happened to you?" What could have happened? That buttock was completely bruised, completely. Even to give injections there, the capillaries might burst because it was… that man was terrified. "*Kuku*,[25]" he said, "I can't give it to you, I can't." And they sent me back downstairs. I went back downstairs, that's it, you know?

I wanted to say that it was something extraordinary. To tell you the truth, I had even read somewhere that having a goat lick your feet is a form of torture you can never endure, I had read it somewhere. "Oh God," I'd say, "What if they do even that to me?" I had read that it was very severe, and I could not say they would not do that to me. I thought, "They'll probably do even that." I'd say, "They'll find it and do even that to me," and then maybe I'll confess, because I was afraid. Maybe if they did that, I said, "Who knows!" because they say it's unbearable, you understand? I was afraid of that, but luckily, they didn't think of it. I had read it somewhere, I don't even know where. I'd say, "Just don't let them do that, everything else I can handle," because I had already gone through torture and I said, "I could overcome this too, I could get through it." It was really hard, seriously I say… nevertheless…

[25] Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

Even regarding the issue of sexual violence, well, I, personally, was spared from that, I can't talk further because I don't know what happened [to others]. Maybe there were cases where that happened too. But I'm speaking about myself, at least that. All the other horrible things, yes, but even then, I don't think I would've compromised. I often say, "What would I have done with my life?" You understand? In that sense, that is the most serious torture. What I wanted to link with what you asked earlier, I don't know if I answered adequately as you wanted, I wanted to say that we were extremely careful not to get arrested. To avoid arrest as much as possible because of our activity, because of the movement, because if you get caught, you suffer greatly.

Anita Susuri: I think it was in '83 when you were arrested the first time?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, '82.

Anita Susuri: '82.

Teuta Bekteshi: I was arrested in May '82. I was in isolation for one month. Then in October '82, on October 26th, we carried out an action in Suhareka with my friend Shemsije Elshani, where we wrote at noon, at 12:00PM, the slogan "Kosova Republic." Shemsije wrote it. Because she had very beautiful handwriting, and we did it in an apartment we had rented, we had taken it for about a month because it was dangerous. She made the board, then put it up there and took it to the building in Suhareka. It was the only five-story apartment building in Suhareka, and it was a market day. We did it on a market day to create a stir.

Then I was arrested. In Suhareka it was a minor offense. They caught us in Suhareka, but they didn't catch us during the action. No one recognized me, but they recognized her when she came down from the building. I had climbed up and done this, but no one recognized me. But they recognized Shemsije, since she was from Suhareka, they recognized her. Then I went to a house where we had arranged to meet, they didn't have information about what we were doing, I didn't even know them very well, some I knew, some I didn't. I went there, and then Shemsije came after me, so, they had followed her. Then they arrested us in that house.

Well, the worst thing was not just that we were tortured, but the whole family there was tortured. Those girls were tortured a lot, even though they had no such ideas. They were, they were very aware and they were our friends, but they were not part of that action. But they were beaten a lot, a lot, you know, without knowing what had happened. Then we were, we were… they left me in Suhareka, they sent her to Prizren, and the next day, they kept me in Suhareka in that miserable room for one night… There is a room there… There used to be a police station in Suhareka, but I had never entered the police station. I had been in Suhareka a few times with that friend of mine, I had been to her family and I knew Suhareka and the other girls from Suhareka well.

That police station was small, on the right side leaving Suhareka, before you entered, where the bus station is, there was some sort of building like, like one story but not two floors, and it had some wooden stairs. But under those wooden stairs there was a room. They tortured us as much as they tortured us there, but sometimes they would take us downstairs, sometimes they would take us. A room with no light, nothing. A small room, all the walls were…because when the door opened you could see the walls, because there was no light…there, blood, vomit, it was very bad, that room. I've

never experienced a room like that. I've been arrested several times, but I've never experienced a room like that in my life.

There was even a wooden door there, not exactly, but wooden. They locked it, the police had that little room on the other side, and they kept me there that night. They even brought me some bread, supposedly to eat some bread with cheese. There were lots of mice. Those mice… I couldn't even lie down because of fear, what can I say? I lay curled up in that part of the night. I used to talk to the mice, they didn't bother me, seriously I mean, I would say at least let them eat that cheese, at least I'd say, "You mice, eat this cheese and be done with it," (smiles) because I didn't take anything there. The next day, in the afternoon, they took me to the court there in Suhareka, automatically sentenced me to two months and some days, and sent me to Mitrovica.

Then the procedure continued. Then I was sentenced to two years along with Shemsije, in Prizren we were sentenced and then I was released, I mean, on October 26. I was arrested again on November 9th, that same year. Again we were sentenced, then to one year with the other group, not with the group because the group wasn't discovered, but I mean, with other members like that. With Teuta and with Naime. They were released because they were young, they were minors, luckily. We were like scapegoats, they had no information at all about them even though they were very active. Teuta and I were sentenced to one year in prison. That means, the third time I was sentenced. The third time, yes, three times with, with arrests and with… this investigation period was very hard, because then the prison time, but the investigation period was very hard.

Anita Susuri: During the investigation period, were there any family visits or anything like that?

Teuta Bekteshi: No. In Mitrovica… during the investigation period, no. In Mitrovica, you had the right, the parents could come once a month. But the visits were such that there were bars, iron bars, meaning you could only see parts of the face. That [only] with permission from the court, they had to give you permission, and they could come once a month. The family had the right to bring something that the prison allowed. For example, some bread, something that was allowed, some pie. Some things they allowed, some things they didn't. They had stuff that they checked and wouldn't allow.

But in Lipjan Prison, which is a correctional prison, Lipjan Prison is a correctional prison, in fact, in Lipjan Prison [visits] were once a month, while in the investigative prison it was every 15 days. Yes, every 15 days you… meaning they could allow you to go [for a visit], or they might only let them bring clothes and you would return the dirty ones. That means it was up to them whether to allow you to see or not see [your family]. There it was one minute, not even a minute, meaning the visits were very short. And in the correctional prisons the visits were a little longer. That's how the visits were. But there was a time when that monster was the director…

Anita Susuri: Sherafedin…

Teuta Bekteshi: Sherafedin Ajeti. Imagine, Sherafedin Ajeti banned it at that time when we were there, because at that time we were also in solitary. We had organized, when Nuhi Berisha and that hero, Rexhep Mala, were killed, we had organized a protest. Because the newspapers weren't brought to us, and we reacted, asking why they weren't bringing them to our room. And we organized in our room, I was in the room with Hava Shala. We protested by refusing food, we started a hunger strike. And they

sent us into solitary. I just want to say, at that time he was… he was the director. He even banned lemon from being brought inside, imagine. Lemon wasn't allowed to enter the prison. Because lemon is strong, it boosts immunity, and our families weren't allowed to bring us lemons, he strictly banned it. That's how extreme it got. Not to mention the food, which was miserable, the stuff, the water and all that.

Anita Susuri: And how was the communication among you, as you said…

Teuta Bekteshi: In prison? Aha. Communication in an investigative prison is different from communication in a correctional prison. In a correctional prison there's a little more freedom of communication, because they may allow…the prisoners were in one pavilion and you could communicate. They entered each other's rooms. The rooms were locked, but they communicated among themselves. They had a tailoring workshop, and we used to go there. But in the investigative prison there's no chance, because you're locked at all times.

In the investigative prison, the rooms were miserable, Mitrovica Prison was a misery, a prison that I don't know if one like it even exists anywhere else. At that time, for example, you had the toilet, there was one toilet. That toilet was in the cell, you had a canister where you did your basic physiological needs. We protested; for example, there was a need to be taken to the toilet. Maybe they'd take you, maybe they wouldn't. Meaning, you had it in the cell, a small space with no air, nothing, with lights on all the time. You stayed in there.

What did we do? Now, prison teaches you, experience teaches you how to do it, because you have to be careful where, how. For me it was easier because I had been there three times and I knew the movements, when. They watched things constantly, but there were times when someone would go out and we knew the steps, when the door closes, when it opens, when they enter.

Through those holes, we would look at the rooms. When someone went to their own room, we knew when they would come out. We used those moments when they weren't there for a short time. That's when we communicated through the wall, first, we communicated through the wall {she gathers her hand into a fist}. We had that, "Republic, Constitution, either willingly or by force" {demonstrates hitting with her fist}, by knocking. We knew immediately that in the next room there might be… even though we had also raised awareness among the others about the killings. But we knew that something was also happening in the other room. Someone had been arrested because we knew, we could tell from the footsteps, the shoes we would see when sometimes they let us out, they let us walk a bit for two or three minutes, and we would see different shoes and we knew someone had been arrested, because otherwise, how could you know?

We found those means, we knocked on the wall and climbed up on those iron doors, because the windows were very high and open. The corridor was there, and then the other wall with windows that stayed open to let us get some air, meaning, from the air of this wall, here the corridor, here the room, so the air could reach your room, which otherwise had no chance of getting any air. I'm talking about Mitrovica Prison here. We'd call, we'd knock {demonstrates hitting with hands}, "Who did they bring?" You know? "Is there someone here they brought?" And the one who had a bit more experience, because the new ones weren't allowed to talk, we protected the new girls who came. "Yes, they

brought one." "Where is she from?" You understand? Most of the new ones, we knew that there was no other reason for them to be there.

We'd ask, "Did they bring more people with you, or only you? Then, stay quiet." "They might ask something, don't talk." We had that first rule, "Don't talk, be careful, don't talk, not even in the room," because someone might be there for murder and could report you, they even placed people in the cells. "Don't say anything, not even in the room." That's how we communicated. For example, when a new one came, we would communicate through song. For example, now the young person, I said, young people don't see danger. The first time they put me in isolation, the song had just been released about Azem Galica, the song about Shote Galica was being sung. That was about demonstrations, but the one about Shote Galica was very strong at that time, and I learned it.

My grandmother always wanted to teach a new song when I went to visit her and sing it for her. That night I was tortured from 2:00 a.m. until 4:00 a.m., until they brought me to Mitrovica. I, from…from the concussion, because they beat me a lot that day, I mean in the face, started to vomit. I had very strong headaches and started vomiting. I wasn't in good condition. They took me to a cell we called cell No.3, the biggest one. I didn't know anyone. It was my first time entering prison. Now they said there were people there for murder, you know how prison is. That woman, one of them was there for murder, she was also young, and she said… I told her, "Headache," and she started banging on the doors. She said, "She has a really bad headache and is vomiting," and they brought me a tablet. Imagine, you could have taken who knows what kind of pill, but when someone is in real pain, they don't choose what tablet they take.

I took the tablet, but I was in a lot of pain, and it really helped me. Somehow, they treated me very well in the room, you know, as if they saw me as young, a student. They knew that students… The next morning at 5:00 a.m., because it was May, meaning we had to wake up at 5:00 a.m., since in the winter you'd get up at 6:00 when the bell rang. But in the summer, at 5:00 a.m., they would wake us from sleep, for no reason at all. At 5:00 a.m., you had to get up, get ready, go wash your face. They would escort you, unlock the door with a key, take you to the toilet, then bring you back, lock the door again, and you'd return to the room.

I thought, how do I let them know I'm here? I sang the Shote Galica song with as much strength as I had. But the problem was that as soon as I started singing the Shote Galica song, they heard it. The guards heard it and ran immediately to the door because they knew it was someone new, because even singing wasn't allowed. But when they came and opened the door, I was lucky because the room was long, and the door was over there and the bed was over here. Somehow, the guard couldn't immediately see you, unlike other rooms where the whole space was visible. Here you couldn't see one part of the room. That one woman, the one in for murder, got up and [the guard] said, "Who was singing?" She, because the room, "That one was singing." "No," she said, "no one was singing." She said, "What do you mean no one was singing? The voice came from here. Who sang?" I had just arrived that night. She said, "No, you're mistaken, no one sang," and none of them said anything.

I got through it well, meaning without any trouble in that case. But we also used that as a way to communicate. When a new girl came, she would sing something or say something in a certain way, or show a skill of hers until she figured out where she was and whether there were other prisoners, who was there, or if maybe one of her friends was also arrested, and that's how we communicated.

Especially when there weren't beatings going on. Then we'd say: "Be careful, be careful, that guard is coming, this one is on duty at this time, this one is more dangerous." So, that's how we did it. And we also communicated through letters, but not us. Usually, we didn't dare because they checked everything in the bathroom.

For example, when we went out for walks, the men were up above, meaning on the second floor, and there were also men in the basement. We were in one pavilion, one part of the pavilion, there were four cells on the first floor. They took us out to the yard. Our hands behind our backs, and a guard with a weapon was watching from above. The way [Mitrovica] prison is, it's enclosed and the yard is divided into four parts. One yard where we walked, another yard for other prisoners, and two others. Meaning, two yards for us, and two for the prisoners who were there for murder. But our yard had two exits. Meaning, one exit to the other side, like a space, like when you divide something into four parts.

There we communicated with the other political prisoners. There, sometimes they threw us a poem, something. And so that those above wouldn't see us, sometimes one of us who had longer legs managed to pick up the letter, and we kept watch to catch that letter. Sometimes they caught us, they realized we had taken something. We did something, we destroyed it so it couldn't be found in any way, and we sang, I mean, in different situations, for different holidays. We started it, and they from above responded, and [the guards] sent us back inside. But the main thing is we… somehow, in one way or another, it became known where the political prisoners were. Because usually, they always, always made themselves known when something happened. So that we'd know there were others up there, too, so that we'd never feel alone. That was very important to us.

Anita Susuri: That first time you were arrested, how was your trial? Were you sentenced as a group with someone else, or…?

Teuta Bekteshi: No. You mean the first time?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Teuta Bekteshi: I was in isolation. Isolation is not…

Anita Susuri: Just isolation?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, isolation is one month. Isolation. They took me, every day they interrogated me. They had information already, and it's true. The first time, they didn't even know me, but they had information. But I didn't admit anything from that information. Because I didn't admit it, and because of lack of other confessions, I was released on probation. So, I was in isolation,[26] I wasn't sentenced. I stayed one month, but I wasn't sentenced. But that was in isolation, and I was released. Then, the second time I was arrested, I was sentenced in the Prizren court together with Shemsije Shala, both of us got two years in prison.

Anita Susuri: Then you served that in Lipjan or…?

[26] Administrative detention without trial.

Teuta Bekteshi: No, no — all the investigations were in Mitrovica. Meaning, every investigation only happened in Mitrovica. The first time, I spent one month in Mitrovica; the second time I spent about six months — the investigation lasted a bit long. The third time, I served the full sentence in Mitrovica. Meaning, I served one year in Mitrovica, in the investigative prison. I served the sentence there because they didn't send me to Lipjan Prison, since I was already organizing women there, I wasn't compliant. So they kept me for a full year in investigative prison to serve my sentence.

Anita Susuri: How were the trials? I mean, were there others present, or did you have a lawyer? What was it like?

Teuta Bekteshi: No. The investigations…well, that phase was all investigative. You had the right to have a lawyer. We didn't agree, I never accepted a lawyer. In fact, my father, who felt very sorry for me, had hired a lawyer and I didn't know. But the lawyer came to prison. This was the second time. He came to prison, and they allowed him to meet me, of course, since he was a lawyer. He said, "Your father appointed me to defend you." I said, "My father should have consulted with me. I don't need to take a lawyer. What will you defend me for? You have nothing to defend, I haven't done anything for you to defend," and I didn't accept the lawyer. I sent him away. The court assigned its own lawyer, but that was just for formality, I mean, that was just to make it appear like it was legal, because the verdicts were already known before the trials.

I mean, imagine, the first time I wasn't sentenced but detained. The second time I was sentenced to two years without any evidence. I didn't confess anything. I didn't accept anything. Whether you accepted it or not, they had something written already. And what was their reasoning, the justification they wrote at the end? "We, with my friend…" because she denied everything in court. Shemsije said, "They forced me." But they took that as a basis to say that we acted, even though they had written everything. What we had done, yes, we had done it, but I didn't confess. They used it as a basis just because we raised our fists, like, we were the ones who had truly acted, since we raised our fists as if to say they couldn't do anything to us.

The third time, the third time we had the trial again in Pristina. The third time, the trial was in Pristina. And in Pristina, it was only for propaganda. I mean, in all the trials they couldn't charge us as a group, because if they had charged us as a group, then the minimum sentence would've been 15 years. But they couldn't charge us like that. I'm saying, our group was never discovered, they could never get us as a group. But we each were charged with the violation of Article 133 of the Penal Code, meaning hostile propaganda, that's what they call it. In all the cases I had, it was this propaganda. And I avoided those group [charges] even though the sentences were very heavy.

The lawyers followed procedure, just to be there, otherwise they had no role. The trials were all prearranged. It was known that… people were sentenced for nothing. You know, for example, there were cases where we really did act, you didn't admit it, but you did it. You didn't admit it, because if you did, other things would come out. Meaning, by insisting and not admitting it, many other things didn't come out, because that one link leads to another and another, and then it would have been...

Anita Susuri: Yes, that's why I asked, because sometimes [trials] were orchestrated in such a way that people who weren't part of the group were still included, there were cases like that…

Teuta Bekteshi: I think, I think… look, prisons, investigations, and torture were used in my case. I told one inspector or one of these, whatever you want to call them, interrogators, I told them that I would consider someone skilled just if he managed to discover some action without torture. Skilled would be someone who could put together all those puzzle pieces. I would say he's the real deal. Because with torture, they made people say things that weren't even true. They made people admit things that weren't true at all, because they couldn't endure it, they couldn't take it. There are plenty of cases like that. So, torture doesn't choose a method, it doesn't discriminate. But still, I say that without having at least some data, even if just speculative data, for example, they've released people, and even with torture, they have nothing to hold on to if you know how to handle it, because they can't, they just can't.

Anita Susuri: You also told me about the torture with electricity and water...

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Was that used?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, torture was used. Not on me. On me they used all the other kinds. Physical violence, I mean. But this, on me… look, they used different methods. They used more extreme forms on people, for example, where they had more data, especially youth, you understand? With Hava they used electricity, Hava told me, she was in the cell with me, and put her head in water. Not me, I didn't experience that. Personally, I did not have those two types of torture — electricity and water. All the other ones, yes, but not those. Also, at the time those lie detectors had come out, you know those lie detectors? You know, when one lies and that…

Anita Susuri: Truth?

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, truth. We practiced because they were going to use the detector on us, and we had to maintain calm so that we wouldn't give away that we weren't telling the truth. At that time, detectors were used. And everything was used, I'm telling you, everything… not to mention the insults, not to mention the other things, other things. There were moments where you'd say, "What's happening now?" I mean, the situations were completely unpredictable, completely unpredictable.

Anita Susuri: You also said that for a while you were in prison with your brother, and later with Teuta Hadri. You told me how you found out about your brother through a letter, but when Teuta Hadri was arrested…

Teuta Bekteshi: No, my brother…my brother was in Skopje, in Rizova. We had another problem, besides all this, in '81 we had an incident in Skopje, my two brothers and I. We were traveling to Prishtina, I had an exam that day. We traveled often, every two weeks we came home. During our whole studies, not once did we go a full month without going home. Once I did and felt very bad. We came often. There were buses in the morning. The first bus to Prishtina was at 6:00AM. I had just gotten engaged that week, and on Sunday I was traveling to get to my exam on Monday. The exam was in infectious diseases.

With my brother and my other brother, we were going to Prishtina. In Skopje it was very crowded, because there was a bus full of students and travelers, but no seats. My brother worked in television, and I had my exam at 8:00AM, I couldn't miss it. We got on the bus, but there were no seats. My brother said to the conductor, the driver was Albanian, but the conductor was a Serb from Ferizaj. We actually knew that conductor because we traveled that route often.
My brother said to him, "Look, we're not going for fun. I'll lose my job, and my sister has an exam. Let her ride standing." He said, "I don't need to take your sister. I've got a woman at home." Then, my brother was on the stairs, and I was down below, my brother grabbed him by the chest and pulled him. I was below, I had an umbrella because it was raining. My other brother practiced karate. He pulled the conductor down, and my brother hit him good. But it was very dangerous at that time.

Actually, it wasn't '81, I made a mistake, it was '80, before the demonstrations. '80 it was. When we got down, the conductor alerted the police. All of Skopje was on us, the Macedonians, they all came at us. When they all came to attack us, my brother, my father had a licensed gun at that time, this brother of mine, I didn't know he carried it, had taken it with him. He raised the gun to scare them, like he was going to shoot. When he raised it, he aimed it at that Macedonian conductor. But the gun slipped from his hand. They surrounded us. The problem was, they were going to kill us, the whole group of Macedonians came at us. But when they saw the gun, they scattered.

That was the reason the police then took us. One of our brothers went to Kumanovo to notify our father because we were in trouble. My other brother and I were taken by the police. They held us until 3:00PM in the afternoon. Unfortunately, I had a small knife on me. I always carried it because the neighborhood we lived in was very dark and sometimes dangerous. I carried it for safety. When they saw the knife, they asked, "Why do you have this knife?" I said, "I use it for food or something." Anyway, they let us go.

Later, they sentenced my brother, apart from everything else, to two years. I was sentenced to six months, but conditionally. My other brother got three months, but he wasn't caught there, they didn't even know he was involved, because they didn't recognize him. So he got away. But when I went to prison later, imagine, I already had this other criminal charge, and it was very problematic back then. But Yugoslavia was what it was at the time. Then my brother got other problems. He was expelled from Pristina Television. That's how that whole other part happened.

As for Teuta [Hadri], of course I knew they were going to arrest her, because they arrested her the same day as me. The same day. They arrested Teuta in Gjakova and me in Kumanovo. I didn't know they were bringing her, but when I arrived in prison, she arrived after me, and Teuta recognized my shoes. We were in adjacent rooms. Meaning, two prison rooms were one after the other. She was over there, I was here. Teuta saw my shoes and knew. Then she gave me a sign. That's how we realized we were both arrested. Neither of us knew about the other. That's how we found out, in Mitrovica Prison, that we had both been arrested.

Anita Susuri: Did you then have communication with each other inside the prison?

Teuta Bekteshi: Very carefully. We agreed to not talk about these things. Only something that was necessary, if she didn't know, otherwise, no. Just something so she wouldn't go further in that direction, because they didn't have information. And Teuta knew that during the investigations, you

know what kind of information they have, because we had been active together for a long time, but they didn't have any information about Teuta from me. And Teuta remained firm in that sense, she didn't give anything out, and we both got away with just one year [sentence] at that time.

Part Five

Anita Susuri: At that time, because of these activities, and also when some incident happened, often there was retaliation, because [activists] were seen as unsuitable persons for the state. Many had their education and jobs taken away, like you mentioned with your brother. But how did it happen for you? Did you continue your studies? How?

Teuta Bekteshi: Teuta was working at that time, and Teuta didn't have a problem, because Gjakova is a bit different, it somehow protects its own, its own Gjakovars. But I was a medical school graduate, my luck was that I had already finished my studies except for graduation. Other friends who weren't in their final year, meaning those who were in the fourth year, their studies were completely interrupted. But I was helped because I graduated. I mean, I finished over the years, and that helped me so that my studies weren't fully interrupted. But it was a serious problem, because I needed…I basically needed a whole new faculty year just to finish one year, the fifth year. That is, it took me five years to finish one year, the fifth, because of the obstacles I had after.

Anita Susuri: From professors, or?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, not from professors. Professors couldn't… professors never…you couldn't, because you were constantly being followed. The possibility of going to Pristina, you were constantly under surveillance. Then I got married, we had the wedding right after, then the children. Medical exams are very…

Anita Susuri: What year did you graduate then?

Teuta Bekteshi: I graduated in '90.

Anita Susuri: In '90.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, in '90. So, it took me quite a while, I mean, in '82 I was arrested, in '85 I was released from prison, I was held… '82 arrested, '85 I got out, in November '85. So it took me all those years to finish. And I finished just before the University of Prishtina was shut down. I was helped a lot by friends there, professors there, because it was very hard for me to move around with kids. I carried the kids, they helped me carry the kids, I held them in my arms. I had the older boy, then the younger one.

People helped me a lot. In Pristina, I don't know, it felt like I entered every door in Pristina as if it were my own home. I was especially helped by the Pllashniku family, Adem Pllashniku, they are from Lagjja e Muhaxherëve. Lagjja e Muhaxherëve, across where back then were the dorms for high school students. That was my base, I had many bases in Prishtina, I don't think there was a family I didn't

know, but they were the ones who supported me all the time. I mean, I came in day and night. They helped me, even later with the children and everything.

Also my friends, and my professor, Professor Ramiz, I can say, helped me, he helped me in every way. I made it through, I finished, because it was very, very difficult. And it continued, I was considered a dangerous person, also an unsuitable person, and I had other problems later. I wasn't accepted for work, I waited years for a job. When privatization began, I also started working. And since then I've worked independently. I mean, I am my own boss.

Anita Susuri: There's another phenomenon I find very interesting: when men ended up in prison, their wives or fiancées or girlfriends would wait for them for years...

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: But even you…

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, even he waited for me (laughs). It's interesting, Teuta often brings this up, when we're somewhere, she says, "Oh, they say they didn't wait," she says, "not only did he wait, but he waited properly," she says, "man, here you are," and we laugh, "Here, you have the example, here's Rexhep," because my husband's name is Rexhep. "Here's Rexhep, the perfect example of waiting." We were very close, from early on. Let me tell you something interesting, he was into football, he was a professional footballer. He played, at that time he was with the team Trepça. When I was arrested in Suhareka, he was with Trepça.
It was torture for him too. He was followed as well. It was very dangerous. They even knew where to look for him, in the Liria Hotel in Prizren, and everywhere. They kept asking me, they pressured me a lot about my husband, but for me there was a block, no way. When they had no information, my husband had to leave because of the constant pressure, they kept showing up at the club, following him, and then he left Mitrovica and returned to Kumanovo. He went back to Kumanovo to play for Kumanovo again.

At the time, the night I was arrested… it's a bit broken {she is referring to the lights in the studio}, the night I was arrested, imagine, my husband came to Pristina to meet me. I had left, I didn't tell him at all. He came to my apartment with my brother to meet me, and I had already gone to Suhareka. He didn't know I was in Suhareka. The next day, when they came to notify me, they came to our house and notified me, and the search began… When the raid happened, they must have said, "She's been arrested," someone who knew us, a friend must have said, "She's been arrested in Suhareka and she's in prison." Because he didn't know I was in prison, he was in Mitrovica with Trepça, and I was in prison.

I want to say, and let me tell you something that really happened. Because my father-in-law had only one son, and five daughters, my husband was his only son, and the wedding was delayed and postponed, my father-in-law, having just one son, and not knowing whether I would even be released, we didn't know… I even sent him, I secretly sent a letter saying that I released him from his commitment, because my life was uncertain, whether I would get out or not, maybe in 15 years. Meaning, he would be free from me, and he could choose his own life. I wrote to him. It was very hard, when you love someone, but still, I wrote to him, because I'm saying, this was a priority and you left everything else aside.

My father, at that time, because of the great dangers that existed, nobody agreed to go to the house to see him, to see him on my account, people didn't dare to go. But someone went with specific intentions, and my father said, "My daughter hasn't died, and there's no need for anyone to come and see me. I know why my daughter is in prison, and for me, she knows best, and there's no need for anyone to come and see me, because my daughter is not dead, she's alive."

People, when they came, they came secretly at night to see those people who were patriots, they came at night because they didn't dare during the day, as they'd be arrested. And he said, my father told my husband's father, he said, "Look, my daughter… the situation is clear. We don't know when she'll be released, how she'll be released, what her future will be, we don't know, none of us. But," he said, "you are free, you and your son can go on, you are free, you have no kind of…"

Anita Susuri: Obligation.

Teuta Bekteshi: "…obligation toward us or toward my daughter, because of…" and his father replied, he came back and told him, my father-in-law told me later, because my husband didn't tell me, my father-in-law returned and said, "Oh son," he said, "this and that… this is what he told me. What do we do?" And [my husband] answered, he said, "Dad, this is not… this matter is not up for discussion. Not three, not five, not ten [years], it's settled. I'm waiting for her."

And it's not just about waiting, it's how you wait. Because truly… and I thank him so much, and I've had his support throughout my whole life. He has always pushed me forward and has always said, "You can do this. Go, because you know when you should and when you shouldn't." Even today, I still have that support. That has helped me a lot. I cried later because I've had to do everything alone. With problems, because here I've been constantly at risk, with problems of access, problems of movement. There were times I didn't go home for four days, but I always had the support of my husband's family and my mother-in-law who took care of the children. But I never stopped, and that was… because having support, especially from your spouse, is essential for a woman to be able to move forward.

Anita Susuri: And while you were in prison, you didn't have visits, right? They weren't allowed?

Teuta Bekteshi: No, no, they weren't allowed. In Mitrovica it was allowed once, and even then, I didn't see him, we weren't able to meet. In Lipjan Prison, you had the right, no, only close family. For your fiancé to visit, I was engaged at the time, he couldn't visit you. You had to get married in prison to have the right for him to come. For example, Drita Kuqi, a friend of ours, got married in prison and we even did a sort of wedding for her, we dressed her, fixed her up a bit, you know, a short dress because she was getting married, it was being done in prison so that she could then have the possibility to meet with her husband. But I didn't accept that. I didn't want to, no.

Anita Susuri: Then after you got out of prison, did you get married?

Teuta Bekteshi: After I got out of prison, that was the third time I was released. Actually, he wasn't here, he was in Switzerland at the time. He had gone out a bit to work, a bit… and after a month we got married. Actually, my sister, it's very interesting with my older sister, because every time the time for the wedding came, I was getting arrested. Always, when the wedding time came, and… somehow,

she couldn't get me married. And she said, "Look, sister," she said, "just tonight please, just tonight don't let them arrest you. You know, just one night to spend with your husband. Just tonight. Get married and tonight," she said, "even if they arrest you tomorrow," she said, "at least just tonight don't let them take you," she said, "and when you wake up in the morning, sister, just let me know that you're there, that they didn't arrest you tonight."

In the morning, at 5:00AM I called. "Oh sister," I said, "I'm here, I made it through the night" (laughs), "they didn't arrest me." And today my sister still laughs, "Just tonight," she used to say, "let them not take you." And this is, this is life in general. It's the life of all women, who are so many in number. Each one has her story, her own story. But even so, in all that sad history, the painful stories, there are many things, truly many beautiful things that one remembers with joy. We've always remembered with joy. We always gave our memories a slightly more positive and humorous tone. Precisely to find that strength, because it would've been too hard to overcome otherwise, to overcome all those difficult situations that…

You had hunger strikes where for two or three days you couldn't even drink water, nothing, no bread, nothing, you were down on the floor. So, it was very hard to get through. But I think a person's conviction, and that… that great love for something, that big desire to achieve something, that's what keeps a person going and gives them strength. Because you had moments, for example, where you doubted. At that time, the issue of the Republic of Kosovo was taboo. Unity, unification, taboo. People used to say revolutions happen every 30 years, but big revolutions. And we used to say, 30 years, but we still said, 30, 30. We're working for it to come, and one day it will come.

And there were hard times when you thought, you stopped and thought, you forced yourself to believe it sometimes. You understand? That it had to happen. Even though a part of you said, How could it happen? Because it was difficult for it to happen, with such a regime, with such an organized regime,to shake a state like that, as it was at that time… it was very, very difficult to believe that it could happen. I'm speaking seriously. People were really afraid of it. But we had, I always had the conviction that it would happen, it had to happen, it definitely had to happen.

Anita Susuri: But after you got out of prison, a few years later began a different period of demonstrations, the year '89…

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Then in '88 there were the marches, starting from the miners, the miners' strike, you were always…

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, I was, because I had exams and it was very… actually, something interesting happened, during the demonstrations, I took the exam in gynecology. And in '89, when it happened, we returned, I returned through Skopje and didn't go to take the exam, I abstained, because we were… I went to the demonstrations and skipped the exam. We came back and the police stopped us in Skopje, at Han i Elezit, a police cordon, to control us. "Where are you coming from? Where were you?" to the students, us from Macedonia. At that time, [the country] was all one, it wasn't Macedonia, it was one state. I said, "I was at an exam, I'm returning from the exam. I could not take the exam, but

I'm returning," no, I actually said, "I took the exam and I'm returning," that's how I got through. But we were always involved.

Anita Susuri: There was also the miners' strike, I think, how did you somehow support it?

Teuta Bekteshi: The miners' strike, yes, yes, yes, at that time even the miners came out to strike, I remember it very well. Even for the miners there was support in the sports hall at that time. The entire hall was full of students, full of… we were all sitting even on the floor. You know how that sports hall was, down below, we were all sitting on the floor. At that time, I was also… we tried to be involved in things. Later, we joined the blood reconciliation initiative. Then from '94, I no longer had the right to move. I was completely blocked here, [I could not go to] Kosovo, nowhere. Until 2001, I wasn't in Kosovo at all. So from '94 to 2001, I couldn't move around Kosovo anymore.

Anita Susuri: We're talking about the years, a bit before the '90s, the year '88-'89, when the marches were being discussed, starting in November with the miners' march from Stantërg to Pristina. Do you remember that period? How do you remember it?

Teuta Bekteshi: I can speak more about the side of those events, the sports hall, where I was more active. Because I wasn't living in Pristina at the time. I was married and had children, and I couldn't be there every day, at every event. So, I was present at the more vital events. For example, in the sports hall, at the miners' arrival, that part I wasn't involved in, and I can't speak about something I wasn't part of. But as for the protests and the sports hall, I was there, because I know I was there and I can speak about how the atmosphere was, what the situation was at that time.

Then in '89, '90, then in '90 I had my other child, the youngest one. In '91, because of the worsened situation here in Macedonia, I participated in the blood reconciliations campaign. I even came to Kosovo with the children. My brother and I came to Kosovo for a reconciliation. We went to Drenica, there was some kind of gathering there… it was in Drenica, but I don't know now which village exactly. When we went there, we barely made it back because of the police. Barely made it back, with two kids, imagine. I went with two small children to a blood reconciliation in Kosovo. Then, we continued the reconciliations here [Kumanovo]. Even here, I went with my kids to blood reconciliation meetings.

Anita Susuri: What kind of experience did you have during that period?

Teuta Bekteshi: I had my oldest son, he was three years old, and the little one four months, when I was assigned to the reconciliation group, to be part of it. It was very difficult for us because of the mentality and everything, with two children. But it was requested from Pristina that I be involved, that I must be there, and I accepted. I went to the reconciliation with two children. I took the older one with me wherever I went. The little one was kept by the women in the rooms. They often said, he was very beautiful, fair-skinned, they'd say, "Let's see, is it a boy or a girl?" My friends used to say, "Let's change his name, let's name him Pajtim [Alb: reconciliation] because he's Astrit, but let's call him Pajtim," because of the blood reconciliations.

The experience is an extraordinary one, the blood reconciliation here. There's a village called Sllupçan here, maybe you've heard of it, a village where we also lived, and my father always said, "When you enter Sllupçan, look only straight ahead, not here, not there." That kind of fanaticism. Meaning, not to

the left or right, only straight. When I was assigned, in fact it was supposed to be here, the reconciliation. They were a close family, I mean, cousin, a murder, 15 years of blood feud. Relatives, meaning cousins from the family. 15 years. They had killed over land, over a boundary, like it used to happen in the past. We had to reconcile them.

They had a professor, a family member working in Prishtina, in a school. They told us to go there. It was our first time going for reconciliation in that place, in this family, with three blood feuds. My father had always taught me that in Sllupçan, when you enter, "Be very careful, they are very fanatical, and you should look only straight ahead — not to the left, not to the right." It was a bit problematic for me, something my father had always emphasized — and how would I present myself now in a place that was the most difficult.

But there was one thing, one advantage for me, because my father had been a teacher there and they had heard I had been a political prisoner, and that remained like that, that case in Skopje, it stayed like that. He had fired a gun, and people had exaggerated things. It hadn't all been like that, but you know how people are, they inflate things, even when actions aren't taken. People had a certain respect for me, a kind of opinion, a good view of me, like, "This is a woman who can even go among men." Because usually women can't enter [the *oda*] among men, but "she can sit and speak with men." That's where they agreed in a certain way that I went in.

But the problem wasn't being there, it was being there with two children, because I couldn't leave them. The little one was still breastfeeding, and I couldn't leave him. I had to take him with me, we were out in the field all day. The families held him. We went upstairs, and I'll never forget this, and I've described it in all my talks because it was a moment that can't be compared to anything. We went upstairs, and they seated me at the head of the room, a small room, but they sat me at the head. Somehow, in Sllupçan, for them to sit a woman at the head of the room, it was unimaginable. I felt uneasy, not because they were men, because for me even if there were a hundred it would be the same, but it was the place where I had a bad feeling.

My son was nearby… and the imam and everyone were invited. Everyone else stood up because the room couldn't fit everyone, some were seated, the rest were all on their feet, the room was tight. The discussion was about the reconciliation of blood feuds in Kosovo, about the need for reconciliation. "Tomorrow a possible war, we must not be divided, we must be united. Tomorrow, for example, the killer and the one who has the victim will be in the same place, another conflict will occur there. So it will be a serious problem for our future war." The discussion revolved around this issue, the professor spoke, Professor Dr. Ramiz Avdyli spoke, everyone spoke. I was just listening.

I thought they wouldn't give me the floor because everyone else was speaking, and it didn't even occur to me that they would call on me at the very end. I never imagined it. But they did call me in the end to get up and speak. Never in my life have I felt heavier. I don't even know what I said, I have no idea what I said, I don't remember anything at all. I just stood up in the middle of the room, where to start? For a moment, where should I begin, what should I say? My father was speaking to me, do you know how it was? What could I touch on so this [reconciliation] could happen? I didn't even… I don't know what I said. I spoke, and spoke, and spoke, I don't know what I said, I was that emotional.

When I finished my speech, the eldest man of the family was standing nearby, close to me {gestures to left arm}, right here, and he started crying, tears running down his face, and he said, "Let the blood be forgiven." I started crying so hard, I don't know if I've ever been so overwhelmed in my life. I kept asking myself, how is it forgiven? Someone kills, do you know how that feels? For me, it was very hard. I hadn't experienced it, but it was hard even to imagine. I was stunned. Then we were called again by them, and we went down to the women, they called me to the son. Then we went to the family to inform them that they had reconciled.

After that, we continued in all the villages. But with children, I went to all of them with both my children. But that moment, it shows how grand a person can be. I saw then how noble the human spirit is, to forgive. I say I've never tried it myself and I don't know. But for something so important, for the interest of the people, for the freedom of the people, people have forgiven. People have forgiven. Those who had suffered the most could do it, who lost people, something which, sadly, happened very often for us. May it never happen again, otherwise, you can't unite people.

Anita Susuri: Wherever you went, were the blood feuds always forgiven, or did it sometimes happen that they weren't?

Teuta Bekteshi: In this region, I'm speaking about the Kumanovo area, even the feuds and hostilities were forgiven. There were also conflicts that could've led to another murder. In one village, Llojan, near Kumanovo, teachers were killed in a school. They had disagreements and one teacher killed the other…

Anita Susuri: His colleague.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes. For different reasons at the time. The same issue almost happened to my father back then, but thankfully it didn't, it happened to them. We stayed at their house for three days. We spoke with all the family members we could. They were an educated family, it wasn't a family …. But one of the victim's brothers was abroad and hadn't been around. And he, that brother of the murder victim, always said, "I will not forgive the blood," you know, "I will take revenge." We approached him and spoke with him, we went three days in a row to the same place. Then he said, "I can't forgive," he said, "I can't forgive. But I won't seek revenge either. I can't forgive, but I won't take revenge." That was good, to avoid another murder. So, that happened too.

But in other cases, we didn't have cases where reconciliation didn't happen. There weren't many murders here in our area. I'm not saying there weren't any, but not like in Kosovo. Fewer here, because the oppression here was great. The regime here was so brutal that people were dealing with a state where anything could happen. People…

Anita Susuri: Didn't speak up much.

Teuta Bekteshi: They didn't go that far, not to that point, they had even more severe repression here. And maybe people didn't go that far and there weren't many cases. But the ones that did exist, there was one case I remember, three murders forgiven at once. That happened. I always say, women together with men do a lot of good. But a woman's word has deep meaning.

Anita Susuri: You said that after 1994, you didn't move anymore…

Teuta Bekteshi: No.

Anita Susuri: Why did that happen? Because of checkpoints or?

Teuta Bekteshi: No. At that time, Macedonia had become an independent state, and you had to have Macedonian citizenship. But because I had been a political prisoner, I had a different history, they listed me under Article 6, which says "a person who endangers the state." The worst part is, it wasn't just me, even my husband and my children didn't have citizenship. Imagine that, even small children didn't have it until 2001. Despite our requests, everything. My father, my whole family here, they all had citizenship. Me, no way. My movement was blocked, I couldn't move anywhere, I didn't even legally exist. They would say in the Secretariat where documents are handled, "You don't exist." "Where am I then?" "You're nowhere."

My situation at that time was very serious. In '93, privatization began, the opening of private practices. The right began to open private clinics under contract with the health fund. I started then, but a year earlier I had left illegally for Switzerland. Hava Shala helped me to leave illegally, because the situation was hard. I couldn't get a job, nothing, it was a difficult situation with small children, it was overwhelming. I was against going abroad, always was. But the situation was so dire, I said, "Something will happen to me," I felt terrible, and I left. But Switzerland didn't grant me asylum.

When privatization started, they said, "You'll stay, and we'll take the kids later," but I didn't accept it and did not agree. I never felt well in Switzerland, I felt very empty inside, spiritually, and I was just waiting to come back. We came back. But when I returned, I still couldn't get citizenship. And then they blocked me. Until then I worked with colleagues, keep that in mind, but the issue was that I was considered a threat. They'd say, "You can't even work with colleagues,you have no right to work." That was a very, very, very hard period for me. Because not only could you not move, you didn't even exist. You couldn't work, nothing. Not me, not my family. Even my brother didn't work for 12–13 years, he was waiting for a job. So, we were basically all stuck.

Anita Susuri: When did you open the clinic?

Teuta Bekteshi: I opened the clinic in '97, and another person helped by being the official founder of the clinic, so I could work with a temporary ID. They gave me the right to work, you understand? In the clinic as a doctor. I led it, but officially it was under someone else's name, because of my documentation issues. Until 2001, I didn't… actually, even the language was a problem. You had to pass a test in Macedonian, even if you knew the language.

Imagine, my husband played football, he knew Macedonian better than some native speakers, and I, who had completed my education in Macedonian, had to take a test in Macedonian. It was seriously a big problem, I faced many, many problems. But those passed too. Later, I got involved with the non-governmental sector. I worked in that area. I did training, worked with the Albanian Women's League in Macedonia and was very active, very, very active.

Through that, I… even the Swedish organization Kwinna till Kwinna (Woman to Woman) — we had projects with them as a network in Skopje. They requested my documents and sent them to centers dealing with statelessness, but nothing could be done. You couldn't fix it in any way. Because I was always seen as someone who endangered the state and even they couldn't help me. But what helped me…I moved in different directions and trained in many other areas. But I always worked with women. I must say that I've always worked with women, even now.

Part Six

Anita Susuri: This period was very difficult also in Kosovo, especially because of the creation of the parallel system…

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Hospitals, for example, the Nëna Tereze[27] organization, how was it operating on its own? How much, how involved were you in that regard? You said that during the war you were also…

Teuta Bekteshi: No, I wasn't in the war. No, no, I wasn't in the war, I couldn't be in the war. No, no. I told you, I told you that during the war, regarding the NGO sector, we dealt with refugees during the war, you understand me?

Anita Susuri: Yes, of course. Okay.

Teuta Bekteshi: Yes, with the refugees, yes…

Anita Susuri: During the wartime period.

Teuta Bekteshi: During the wartime period, we were active even before the war. Actually, we, as the Women's League at that time, gathered clothes to send to Kosovo. We collected so much, we gathered from families for everything. We selected everything, pants, everything, categorized [clothes] for children and everything else to send to Kosovo. At that time, we also organized the Women's Protests for Bread in Drenica, we also did that… I haven't spoken much about that period. There was a problem then, because we organized a protest to join the women's protest in Drenica.

In Kumanovo it was very problematic to organize. We had a meeting with a school here, the Naim Frashëri school, with the school director, to organize it not in the streets, because the police wouldn't allow it, but within the school, you understand? To do the protest in a closed space. What happened? We organized all the villages, girls who would recite [poems], and things we had gathered, we

[27] Nëna Tereze (Mother Teresa) was a humanitarian organization that, during the 1990s at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians who were expelled from all state institutions and services. The organization played a crucial role in supporting the population by offering healthcare, distributing aid, and assisting with births amidst the conflict.

organized a protest to join the others. But there was a problem, because at 11:00 at night, I was contacted by the police and they said, "You organized this," meaning, "You organized this event."

But the issue wasn't that we had organized it, the pressure was put on the school, and the school, by 12:00 or 1:00 at night, informed the principal, and it was canceled without notifying us at all, you understand? That the protest was canceled without even asking us. There was a big mess, we were very angry. We did it, people from the villages gathered, but we didn't do a well-organized protest. It was more sporadic, more of a sporadic reaction you understand? Not the type of organization we had planned. Then those things we collected, we organized to send them to Kosovo.

At that time, in Kosovo they didn't accept it, at the border, they didn't allow us, they didn't allow us because we wanted to send the aid through the Islamic Community. But the entire truck was returned. What happened? Again, back to the Islamic Community. When the war in Kosovo happened, when Kosovo was displaced through Blace[28] and through Llojan and those places near Preshevo, because we had two exits on our side, in Blace, we doctors got immediately organized, all of us doctors came together and said, "All patients that come, all refugees, all Albanian clinics will work for free, no money, nothing." That is, we would cover everything, and we did.

I worked in Orizoll at the time, a village where I worked at my clinic. We organized. What else did we do? We went out, we tried to go to Blace, we doctors, a group of us. Some went one day, others the next, because you weren't allowed to go every day. And then all the clothes we had gathered, we sent them to Blace, the Islamic Community teams sent them. It was raining and very cold. Rain and soaked, exhausted people, what can I say? Only those of us who saw it know what the scene looked like. At that time, what a coincidence, very interesting, on the edge of that Blace, where the border was and where you all arrived through Blace, the field below the railway was completely full. Tents, rain, people soaked, how they got off the trains and how they moved from there.

On that hillside, I met, you know, the man I had had as my support point, with his daughter and son, because they had left Pristina. But they weren't allowed to go out, there were heavy controls there, you couldn't just take them with you, they wouldn't let you. But they decided to go abroad at the time, not to Macedonia, because some were being sent abroad. It depended on how they were found, how they were located. But the people who came to Macedonia, we made it possible for them, we accommodated them in the villages everywhere, and we opened aid centers, aid points, also with the European Community, which was active at that time. We tried to cover them in every way possible.

There was even a child in Orizoll, where I worked, he was from Drenica, a little child, about three years old. That child's legs had gotten frostbitten, and they had amputated them. Both legs amputated. That child was placed with a family of my patients who lived there. "There's a sick child like this," they said. I went and visited him. What did I do with that child? I examined him, we checked him… I'm telling you, that situation was something unimaginable, how can I say it? Later, we organized with someone from Dibra to send that child abroad, so maybe he could be rehabilitated there, to see if there was a possibility. [The family] is abroad now. They are abroad today. I don't know in which country, they wouldn't go to Turkey and those from Dibra came, they took them and fixed the documents and today they're abroad. I don't know where. But I want to say… we also had cases with cancer that I identified,

[28] Border crossing with Macedonia.

it was horrible. Horrible, horrible, horrible, it was horror, horror, horror. But these were the kinds of situations.

Then the same thing happened with us. Again, we got involved with our people, with our women, with… I want to say that… and we continue to be involved. I say we continue to be involved, sometimes you think that somewhere we've stumbled, and it hasn't gone as it should have. I often ask myself what more could we have done so that these things wouldn't happen, these stumbles in our activities, whether in Kosovo, or here, or in Albania. I can't say that change hasn't happened. We've made a state today, it would be wonderful to have a functional state, a state that includes all categories and not big divisions between groups, how to say it, by class.

Very rich and very poor, without just one… one middle between all this. A middle of all this that makes it better, that makes stability. Because these are two extremes, two extremes that can't, neither of them can, they can't balance each other. Not just in Kosovo, also here with us. I won't even speak about Albania, they speak for themselves, but I am talking about us. In Kosovo, in Macedonia, Macedonia has a smaller number, but in Kosovo, our women have been sidelined who gave a lot and could have given more, who had the potential to give a lot. They've been scattered around the world, and those who, I mean, the voice of all those activists who were extraordinary, they're said to have been most present in the hardest periods, now you don't see them. This hurts me. This hurts me.

Anita Susuri: I want to go back a little and talk more about the Kosovo War in '99, because you had a different perspective. You were in Macedonia, many people came to Macedonia…

Teuta Bekteshi: Clearly.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell me a bit more about what you saw? What condition were these people in? You told me a little, but…

Teuta Bekteshi: I'm telling you, what I saw myself, I also mentioned that birth in the mountains, but I didn't have time to tell it. That was, that was horror, seriously, horror. You had people exhausted, hopeless, mistreated, hurt, emptied, hungry, sick. People who died on the spot. You can't…how to describe it? It was so painful, so painful that I can't describe it. If you were to analyze it, to do a… I often say it's good if someone would make an image of what we saw, if there was an artist who would paint it, because I don't think it can be expressed in words. Something would be missing, maybe something in the words, because you can't find the adequate words for a specific image.

But to be an artist, to be a painter, if I were a painter, and I'm not, I would've painted all those scenes. That would have spoken better than anything. This is our weakness, that we don't even speak about these events, because we've put them into silence. Very little is spoken, or it's spoken in different ways, but not the factual, the horrific one. We always avoid showing horror. We always avoid horror. A friend of mine, Hava Shala, used to say, "The Germans, the Jews, the Jews," she'd say, "we should be like the Jews." Because the Jews showed the horrors they experienced. We need to do the same thing, we should do the same thing.

When you see it, for example, I tell you exactly how I saw it, and you can't say otherwise, because you went through it. But you have to tell the truth, because it has to be presented, not only to us but to the world. What we endured, what we went through…

Anita Susuri: Yes, because you're a witness.

Teuta Bekteshi: What we went through. For example, take the issue of Ukraine now, the war in Ukraine, why do you think the Europeans have been hypocritical with us? I was even called by the OSCE, they summoned me, asking, "Why is the Women's League against this, why don't you call people terrorists when they rise up in your country?" I said, "And you," I asked one of them, "what was your job before?" He said, "I was a French officer." I said, "How would you have qualified your own people, your own population, as an officer? Could you have called a people who never committed terror, never committed genocide, could you have called such a group terrorists? Would you have done that?" I said, "What would you have before your people?" And he didn't respond.

He said, "What do you believe? Will Kosovo be formed?" The war was still happening in Kosovo, and for us, things were flaring. I said, "Look, I believe in the United States of America," I said, "I don't believe in Europe," I said, "because Europe has never been there. It always divided us, tore us apart, split us up," I said, "Europe. I will never trust Europe. I trust the United States of America, and Europe in a way has no choice, it will be forced to react, to respond." Look now at what's happening in Ukraine. Didn't Europe know what happened to the Albanians? And now it's repeating. But now the danger has come to them directly. But now the tail…the fox, when her tail catches fire, says "Oh, I'm burning too, I'll cry out." That's a serious problem, this issue, because things must be told as they happened and as you saw them.

The trustworthy person is the one who saw it with their eyes. Words are not as trustworthy as sight. But words speak also for those who today can't speak, because it's a different time context, and you bring out what you went through then. But I, I think that…I think we need to work so much in this direction, and it's you, the new generations. Like you, now that I'm so, so happy to have you close here and I hear you and see you and I get to know you, actually. I mean, I want you to get involved, I want you to be engaged. Because you have a different war that you must continue, together with us, but with our help.

Anita Susuri: I think I want to ask if you have any memory you'd like to add at the end, something I may not have asked, something I couldn't ask, but that you'd like to add.

Teuta Bekteshi: There are many, there are many, many memories. Maybe I've written some somewhere, because I've started writing a little. Each moment has its own time, because you can't… when you try to go back, it's another kind of experience. You can't write something like that without emotion, because you're there like it's happening now. It needs its own moment, and you can't write it, that's something you have to do alone. You can't do it with others. Because the presence of others takes away that fragility or maybe that… that magic of the moment. You can't do it, it demands its own moment.

I have so many things to say. But I remember one scene, two scenes I'd like to share from that experience. When one of our friends was kept in solitary confinement, after I was released from

solitary, and then she was kept three days without water, she couldn't… she was almost in a semi-conscious state, not completely alert. That's what we call it professionally. When they brought her to Lipjan later, the woman couldn't even swallow water. Her throat wouldn't open, it had dried completely and closed up. I had experienced that from my own solitary confinement in prison, but I knew what needed to be done.

At that time, we used just a little milk to moisten a drop, just to penetrate, because even the saliva glands don't work anymore, they dry up. No food or water goes down, especially water. Food maybe, still, but water is a serious problem, it dries up. The saliva glands stop working. When they brought her into the cell, we thought she was dying. With a bit of water, slowly, slowly, over days, weeks passed until she recovered. That was Marie, she had been in for a different case. They took her and her brother after a killing in Gjakova. Later, she was convicted, she was a lawyer, Law Faculty, sentenced to 15 years, and her brother too. He had attacked the children, and then a clash happened, a confrontation, and a killing occurred. She was sentenced then. That moment was very hard for me.

I wanted to tell you about the moment when this woman gave birth in Llojan, some people came from Llojan, some from Llojan and some from Tabanovce, as we call that part because there are two entrances to Kumanovo where people could get through. Now there's a new part, another border crossing, so there are three now, but back then it wasn't like that. One group called us to come help. They had placed them, it was cold, I'm speaking about the Kosovo war. Cold, harsh, the women's situation was hard. The way the refugees arrived, how they had gotten there, a part of them had remained on that slope. There was a slope, then a river like this...

That woman… she arrived in the evening, we barely got permission to enter, because they wouldn't allow it. They didn't allow us from Macedonia to enter the other side that was at the border, the Serbia-Macedonia border, not Kosovo, but Serbia-Macedonia. With a friend of mine, a gynecologist, with Doctor Nurije, we were going, they sent us in a car. We went there, barely made it through, the gynecologist and I. The women were saying, "She's giving birth, she's giving birth, she's giving birth." Now this gynecologist was checking the women. "She's giving birth." Imagine this, she was surrounded only by a partition, in the cold, only with a sheet, like a blanket they had used to cover her. The woman gave birth. Right there she gave birth, imagine, in the open field. I said, what should we name him? Shpat (ridge), not Breg (slope), but Shpat. You know how it dips slightly? We named him Shpat. It was a boy actually, not a girl, and we named him Shpat.

I meant to say, I wanted to say, the extent of a woman's hardship: a woman giving birth in the middle of a field, without conditions, without clothing, naked, in rain, in cold. What I mean is, where the human body, especially a woman's body that's giving birth, has to endure, and all the risks that follow after that. These are two moments, there are many others, but I often return to that strength of a woman and I say, "Oh God! Oh God! What does a human have inside, what strength is within!" Like that saying, someone once asked a stone, they asked the stone, "How much can you endure?" Meaning, not even a rock, a human can endure more. "No," it said, "I'm not a human to be able to endure, I'm not a human." Meaning, you have a strength stronger than a rock.

I mean, you face such situations with hardship, but I say this is life, and life continues. I think we must dedicate ourselves to life, because it is… I, I love life very much, to tell you the truth. Every day I take something from life. I say, even from my own life that I've gone through, and I am content with the

path I've taken in life. I have tried. If nothing else, I've helped in certain life situations and I continue to be there for people, to offer all that, how to say, that love for people, that empathy with people in specific situations, that support a given situation needs, in all the possible ways. I think… It's worth living.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much!

Teuta Bekteshi: You're welcome! Bless you both, and I wish you much success, and keep going, never stop.

Anita Susuri: Thank you, success to you too.

Teuta Bekteshi: Thank you!