INTERVIEW WITH AGIM PAÇARIZI

Pristina | Date: April 30, 2024
Duration: 147 minutes

Present:

1. Agim Paçarizi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Ana Morina (Camera)

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

Other symbols in the transcript:
[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate understanding
Footnotes are editorial additions that provide information about places, names, or expressions

Part One

Anita Susuri: Mr. Agim, please, if you can, first introduce yourself and tell us something about your background, your family?

Agim Paçarizi: I am Agim Paçarizi. I was born in the village of Dragobil, in the municipality of Malisheva, in the year 1955. I spent my childhood in my birthplace, naturally, also my primary education. I was very interested in school, as I started primary school at the age of six. After completing primary school, I enrolled in the *Shkolla Normale*[1] of Gjakova. At that time, teachers held great authority, and as a child, I had two cousins with whom we lived in the same household. One had finished the *Shkolla Normale*, the other was still attending, and I followed their path.

However, I don't know why, even though I was quite young to continue school since I had started at six, I felt a desire not to become a teacher, but to have the opportunity to complete a different faculty, a different field. So, I made a request to switch in the second year from the *Shkolla Normale* to the gymnasium.[2] I made the switch, as required at that time, in Rahovec. After I successfully passed the subject transition from the *Shkolla Normal*e to the gymnasium, I continued my education in Prizren, where I completed secondary school at the Prizren Gymnasium. After that, I continued my studies in Prishtina.

Anita Susuri: I would also like to know a bit more about your family. How were you raised, for example? What was the environment like where you lived?

Agim Paçarizi: There's a lot to say about the family, because even the year I was born, 1955, is significant. At that time, there was the weapons collection campaign.[3] After that came the campaign of

[1] 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.
[2] A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.
[3] The confiscation of weapons refers to a disarmament campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Kosovo, carried out under Aleksandar Ranković's directive. Framed as a security measure, it disproportionately targeted Albanians, who were often subjected to house raids, intimidation, and violence. The campaign aimed to weaken the Albanian resistance and control the region, further intensifying the repression during Ranković's era.

"surpluses,"[4] as it was called. In fact, it wasn't a surplus for us Albanians, in many cases, even the last bit of flour in the pantry was taken. Honestly, as a child I couldn't explain what I had experienced. But from what I heard in the *oda*,[5] where we spent most of our time because until late, if I'm not mistaken, until the year 1972, we lived as a large family of nearly 50 members.

Fortunately, we had very good material conditions. However, all those families that in some way were wealthy and well-known families were in the enemy's sight after the Second World War, and so was our family, even though my father, now deceased, had been among the ranks of the partisans back in 1945, when the final mobilization was done for the pursuit of Nazi forces in Kosovo and former Yugoslavia. The experiences my father used to recount, about the moment they were mobilized, because they weren't going willingly; they were called volunteers, like in the case of Tivari[6] which is often mentioned, but there was no voluntary mobilization, they were forced.

He explained the ordeals they went through, especially the moment when Shaban Polluzha[7] and Mehmet Gradica[8] came into conflict with the other partisans of the Albanian National Movement of Kosovo, at that time led by Fadil Hoxha[9] and others. The reason was that the Serbs had begun committing massacres from behind the lines, killing Albanians from behind the lines, and so on. Shaban did not allow the units under his command to join the others in pursuing the Nazis outside Kosovo. My father would often tell how they met near Podujeva, they encountered each other there as his unit was heading toward Serbia.

As for those who didn't continue the mobilization or the pursuit of the Nazi forces outside of Kosovo, he would often say, "If only we had known, maybe it would have been better, maybe we wouldn't have gone either." But fate, a large portion of them, including my father, went. They pursued the German forces who were in retreat. The way they lived, the war they fought, the privileges they had while they still held weapons in their hands, and the relationship with their superiors during that time, it shows that they were privileged in a way. Everything was allowed to them, just so they would keep fighting.

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[4] In the first decade of the postwar period, Tito's Yugoslavia followed a Soviet-Style planned economy policy, in which the extraction of farming surplus was a forceful and often violent process used to fuel rapid industrialization and feed the urban population. The state seized control of the agricultural sector, eliminating private farming and independent peasants to achieve its economic goals.

[5] Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

[6] The massacre of Tivari, currently Bar, Montenegro,, was a mass killing of Albanian recruits from Kosovo by Yugoslav partisan forces in March 1945.

[7] Shaban Polluzha (1871-1945) was a regional Albanian leader of volunteer forces in Drenica. Shaban Polluzha joined the partisans, but in late 1944 disobeyed orders to go north to fight Germans in Serbia, having received news that nationalist Serbs and Montenegrins were attacking civilians in Drenica. He fought against partisan forces until early 1945, when he was killed.

[8] Mehmet Gradica (1913-1945) was the sub-prefect of Skenderaj during the Italian occupation of Kosovo, and continued to be a military leader against the Yugoslav partisan forces until he joined Shaban Polluzha at the end of 1994. He was killed with Polluzha in February 1945 in the war of Drenica.

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

But when they returned to Kosovo, they saw that all the promises made were not true. Because as we know, in 1945, during the Assembly of Prizren, the decisions of the Bujan Conference[10] were annulled, where it had been determined and stated that the Albanian people of Kosovo, after the war, could decide whether they wanted to live with Yugoslavia or with Albania. Then, in the Assembly of Prizren, those decisions were overturned, and those who opposed were either imprisoned or killed. All of this, when I was young and heard it, was difficult to fully understand, everything that our family and our parents had gone through.

But when, in 1966, changes were made in the political system of Yugoslavia with the fall of Aleksandar Ranković,[11] who at the time wasn't just a problem for Albanians, but surely had other ambitions within the Yugoslav state, and he was then removed from his position. In Kosovo, if I'm not mistaken, I was probably in the fifth or sixth grade of primary school, maybe even the seventh, I'm not sure. In 1968, as I remember, it was the 500th anniversary, I believe, of Skanderbeg's death. And I remember, like in a film, how some of us in school began, even during the technical education classes, to prepare the Albanian flag, red with the double-headed eagle.

I remember one case when I had a homework assignment, and I did it at home. And when I presented it to the teacher, he came with a lot of kindness and looked at it. He said, "I hope we will have it free as soon as possible…" because I had made it by hand, with red color, and the eagle, how I was able to draw it at the time, the double-headed eagle! It's very important to point out that, for us, the *oda* played a very significant role at that time. In our *oda*, since we were a large family, there was never a night without guests, people who would come, visit, and stay for days, for weeks, and so on.

There, in most cases, the conversations were about everything our people had gone through and were still going through. Because you should know that large families typically befriended other large families. The families who were under surveillance by the authorities found it difficult to befriend those who were closer to the regime. Because they didn't dare to associate with families persecuted by the state. As a large family, we had friendships with well-known families of that time, and most of them were under the regime's watch.

Starting with the Bajraktari family from Polluzha, for example, Sadik Osman Hoxha's family, the Berisha family, the Radovski family, Rexhep Rrema's family, the Tojaka family — they were our relatives, with Evdi Kastrati, Hamëz Kastrati. Then the father of my aunt, Demir Kastrati, in the village of Damanek, those were considered large families in the region. Especially in our region, they were close to us. When they came to the *oda*, they would stay for hours, for both joyful events and especially for mourning, for deaths. Every time, the discussions were about what the Albanian people had experienced. In a way, as a young person, you would feel all that, and slowly, you'd begin to

[10] The Bujan Conference was held from December 31, 1943, to January 2, 1944, in the village of Bujan, in the Tropoja District. It was a meeting of Albanian and Yugoslav Partisan leaders where they discussed the future of Kosovo. The conference resulted in a resolution that supported the right of the people of Kosovo and other Albanian regions to self-determination and union with Albania. However, this resolution was later disregarded by the Yugoslav authorities.

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

understand who had caused so much poverty and suffering for many people. We, fortunately, were a large family and had wealth.

When you heard, for example, that during the time of surplus collection, people were forced to build walls around their fields using special compartments to hide the corn or wheat, just so that when inspectors came, they wouldn't find it in the barn or the silos, which were specially made for storing grain and corn. I used to be surprised when they said they were taking the surplus, I was surprised then, but now I know why that policy existed. They called it a surplus, but in fact, they were leaving people without even bread to eat. Then came the weapons collection campaign. Various events, different forms of torture, all these things were discussed among people in the *oda* when they gathered…

Anita Susuri: Did it ever happen to your father, or your grandfather, or someone in your family, that they were mistreated, for example, over weapons?

Agim Paçarizi: Yes, in our family, they were mistreated. It happened, they were mistreated, but they were very careful. Knowing from the beginning… since my father had been with the partisan forces. At that time, in a way, they were somewhat protected by the large families. Authorities were cautious not to provoke large families. Starting from the fact that we had a whole network of allied, strong, and large families. There were cases in our family where people were mistreated. But to avoid torture, they would recount cases where they were forced to sell their livestock in order to buy a weapon, ust so they could hand it over when asked. The goal was to avoid mistreatment.

There's a case related to the "surplus" collections, which we might have a chance to talk about later, when a friend of our family was killed in front of Tito's portrait. At that time, Tito was President of Yugoslavia. The reason, they said, was because he hadn't delivered 25 kilograms of barley. And without any justification, he was killed in an office where Tito's photograph was hanging. Later, the person who killed him was killed by the son of the murdered man. I'm not mentioning this to justify revenge, but at that time, the one who committed the murder held a high position and killed him in his office without any reason. He wasn't sentenced to even a day in prison. He continued to live freely and held positions afterward.

After Ranković's fall, if I'm not mistaken it was in '67–'68, the victim's son killed the murderer in Prishtina. The killer was the director of the post office at the time. He left Kosovo, if you remember, the Union Restaurant was there, I'm not sure what it's called now, where Skanderbeg's statue is now, across from it...

Anita Susuri: The Assembly, the theater is there.

Agim Paçarizi: Yes. Where Skanderbeg is now, near the theater, maybe it wasn't there during the war, now it's been renovated. That's where he was killed. I'm mentioning this because afterward came the moment when our friend from the Thaçi family of Carralluka was imprisoned. He escaped from prison. I was a high school student in Prizren, together with my uncle Nuhi Bytyçi, you surely know him. At my uncle's apartment, my uncle was convinced [to help him] they decided to help him because he had escaped from Niš Prison and wanted to go to Albania, and they helped him cross over.

So these large families collaborated with each other. They had wealth and the means to educate their children. But the mentality was such that education wasn't given as much importance. In our case, I was the third one, my first cousin finished the *Shkolla Normale* and started working as a teacher. The second one continued. I was the third in the family to pursue an education. Looking back and analyzing it, I know, and even back then we knew, that there was a chance for others to be educated too, including girls. But the mentality was perhaps that it was better to work the land, to take care of the livestock.

So, more or less, my childhood was like that. I was a very curious type. I liked to read, I wanted to learn, I was interested in everything new. I remember the eagerness I had to read. We had a library in Malisheva. I would borrow a book from the library and, on the two- to three-kilometer walk back to the village, I'd try to read as much as possible. I don't think there was any book that had been mentioned in school and that I didn't read. I really loved books, and I was a good student in elementary school. For that reason, they gave me the opportunity to continue. I had three other brothers, but they said to me, "You continue."

Anita Susuri: So you continued in Prizren? First in Gjakova and then in Prizren?

Agim Paçarizi: I finished the gymnasium in Prizren, and then from Prizren, I enrolled in, to be honest, at first I wanted to study either Economics or Natural Sciences, but then a new department opened: Journalism. The admissions were open at the start of the school year. I was actually already enrolled in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, in the Chemistry department. But I decided to enroll in the Faculty of Journalism, along with my uncle and some others.

But the competition was tough, and I didn't manage to get in. So I fell behind in some mandatory lectures and lab work in Chemistry. In a way, I was forced to change direction and moved to the Faculty of Philosophy, History Department. I completed it in 1979. During my studies, if I'm not mistaken, in the second or third year, '71–'74 or '75, some slogans were written on the walls of Dormitory No. 3. They were also written in other dorms, but in Dorm 3 where I lived, the walls were full of them. In a way, this gave us hope, that something was being done in that direction, toward gaining equal rights.

During our studies, we started to experience a bit more freedom than before. After Ranković's fall, and in 1974 when the Constitution of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo was changed, we gained a certain degree of freedom. There was more room for expression. The University of Prishtina started cooperating with the University of Tirana. Professors from Tirana would come and give lectures here. Cultural and artistic groups from Albania would come to Kosovo. We began to collaborate with them through letters, through people we knew.

In a way, we began to breathe more freely. I graduated in 1979, and the next day I was asked to start working as a history teacher at the Rahovec Gymnasium. That was the final year of the classic gymnasium, because a new educational reform had started, and high schools were now being called centers of oriented secondary education. But I started in '79 when the classic gymnasium still existed. I was assigned a class of fourth-year students, and under the curriculum, they had three history classes per week.

What's interesting to mention is that, as a young man coming from the academic world, with freedom, energy, and a will to push the Albanian cause forward, since I had professors like Ali Hadri, Skënder

Rizaj, Masar Kodra, and others, especially Ali Hadri, who toward the end of my studies had written some articles against Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo,[12] who was a Serbian historian and a communist who had, in a way, distorted or twisted the truth about the National Liberation Movement in Kosovo. And Ali Hadri responded with articles countering and disproving those claims.

We, as students and graduates, had the opportunity to discuss and talk more broadly about what was happening between Ali Hadri and the Serbian historians. I remember very well one time when he said, "Boys, be careful, history doesn't end with us. We are currently living through a time where we are trying to tell things the right way. But you will be the ones who must continue and tell the truth as it really was."

He would mention the 1966 fall of Ranković and say, "We were given a party directive." I remember it clearly, it felt like something out of a movie. He said, "We were given the task, I, Ali Hadri, as a historian, together with Millan Perka, to prepare a book where, for the first time, we would state that Albanians are descendants of the Illyrians." Until then, it had been said that Albanians were descendants of the Slavs. He told us, "Now I feel… I feel really, really bad that until then we didn't dare say it. But even now, I shiver when I think that we dared to say it back then." Because it was a very difficult situation. You couldn't speak the truth about Albanians at all. That's why he told us: "You're reading the books we've published so far, but don't think it ends there. Research, study, and tell the truth as it really happened."

Part Two

Anita Susuri: I would like to ask you a bit about cultural life, since you mentioned cooperation with Albania at that time. There were also, for example, ballet troupes from Albania, theater troupes from Albania, there was cultural cooperation too. How much were you involved in that?

Agim Paçarizi: Personally, I don't think there was a single city where a program was performed by the Albanian Song and Dance Ensemble and I didn't attend. I'd go with my niece. In fact, in Prizren, when the program was organized, we bought a big bouquet of flowers, I was with my niece. On the ribbon that ties the flowers, we wrote some beautiful words of gratitude for them. Bahrie [Kastrati Besimi] went and handed it…

Anita Susuri: Handed over the flowers.

Agim Paçarizi: Handed over the flowers. After the concert ended, she went and hugged one of the singers and gave them the bouquet as a gift. Of course, once the state security noticed that, because they were under surveillance too, they understood. There's one case I don't know if she mentioned, but I remember it well,she stood up in the hall and handed over a large bouquet. It was a delight. It's hard to describe how much joy we felt when attending performances by those ensembles.

The case I mentioned… I had the opportunity to be taught archaeology by the respected professor Myzafer Korkuti. I later met him in Geneva after many years, and we had a long conversation about

[12] Svetozar Vukmanović - Tempo (1912-2000), Montenegrin partisan leader, during the war served on missions in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece.

that. It was a pleasure when we had lectures with those professors. Sometimes, we'd attend lectures of other professors in other subjects just to hear how they spoke. That gave us a sense that we were, in a way, almost equal to others. But when we saw the reality, when we visited places like Belgrade, Zagreb, or other cities, we immediately saw where we actually stood.

Regarding school, I didn't randomly mention that fourth-year class. I came fresh from university, where I had attended lectures by professors from Albania. In a way, I had read and used literature that was somewhat banned, which I used for my diploma thesis. My topic was "The cooperation of Yugoslavia and Albania in the National Liberation War." I researched some documents that spoke about that cooperation and also the conflicts and tensions. I was more informed about everything that had happened.

When I started working as a teacher, that class luckily consisted of adults, some had even finished military service but wanted to complete high school. In the curriculum for the fourth year of the classic gymnasium, there was a subject called the National Liberation War of Yugoslavia. That was the topic for that year. Since I had just finished university, I went there. For some time, we talked about all the important events of the Albanian people — the League of Prizren, the declaration of independence, various battles…

One day, I randomly asked the students what they knew about Skanderbeg, the Assembly of Lezha, the Albanian pashaliks, the League of Prizren, and independence. It happened, maybe, as often happens, students blame the teacher, they said, "No, we haven't learned that. We don't know." For me, that was unacceptable. A fourth-year gymnasium student not knowing about Skanderbeg, the dates, the Assembly of Lezha, the League of Prizren, independence, etc. I don't know… I felt really, really bad. I said, "How is it possible? You're in your final year of the gymnasium and you don't know… what have you been learning?"

In fact, the curriculum only included the Yugoslav National Liberation War. So, I told the school's pedagogue, a very good man who's still alive, Muhamer Meta: "I'll follow the official curriculum, but one of the three weekly classes will be dedicated to national history." I asked the students that each week, one of them would prepare something: One week on Skanderbeg, next on the League of Lezha, then the League of Prizren, independence, and so on. In a way, we tried to keep that memory alive, because it's important to know our national history.

Later, when I was dismissed from work, it seems they found out about that too, someone had been following what was happening. 1981 comes, I say "comes" in quotation marks, but it wasn't accidental, the demonstrations happened...

Anita Susuri: I want to ask you something before we get to the demonstrations. You said you saw slogans as a student and that they inspired you. But did you know about the existence of the underground groups back then?

Agim Paçarizi: As a student, of course I knew. I was aware, I mentioned our family ties. I was lucky to have Avdyl Krasniqi as my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, and she's still alive today. We worked together. I was informed about everything. We met often and talked frequently.
But knowing who we were dealing with, we had to work under deep secrecy. The deepest secrecy was that most of the time, we worked with people we were related to, or who were family friends. If

someone was caught, we could claim: “No, we’re just friends, there’s nothing else.” But our activism had already started back then.

As a student, I had access to a lot of literature from Albania. We used it with other colleagues, with people we trusted. Because we couldn’t spread it everywhere, and we knew…I knew who Adem Demaçi[13] was, because my brother-in-law directly collaborated with him. So, when we saw those slogans, it wasn’t a surprise, not for me, nor for some others. Maybe for some people it was, but not for us. It’s no coincidence that I mentioned that after 1974, we had a certain degree of freedom. The university had been founded. Many students enrolled. It became one of the largest universities, if I’m not mistaken, there were over 35,000 full-time students, and another 10,000–15,000 in other colleges. That was a large number of students compared to the population.

We had situations where, after seeing those slogans, some would say: “What are they even asking for? We’re here, everything’s fine. What more do they want?” But the reality was that, although rights were granted on paper, for Albanians they didn’t really exist. This was obvious to those who were actively involved in the movement, and it’s no coincidence that the slogans were written in the Student Center, aimed at those in charge. To let them know that not everything was fine. Naturally, I was informed through my brother-in-law.

Anita Susuri: Did you personally carry out any activities?

Agim Paçarizi: Yes, I did. I was involved in distributing books and various literature. Personally, I was interested, even during my studies, when we had to prepare papers, I always chose to work on the life and work of Azem Bejta. Then I read Ajet Haxhiu’s book about Shote Galica. Those books that came to us, through Sylejman Krasniqi and others, were about historical figures who were barely touched upon here. But in books and novels, you’d find their lives and biographies in detail. Even from the titles, it was a pleasure to read them yourself, and to share them with others, even though we had to do that with extreme caution.

Of course, I distributed them myself and continued doing so even after I started working as a teacher. Because during my studies, my two nieces also enrolled, Fatime and Bahrije. I kind of take credit for convincing their parents to allow them to continue their education. I remember very well when they were in high school: Fatime is the wife of Kadri Kryeziu, who was later sentenced as one of the organizers of the 1981 demonstrations. She was the older one, she attended gymnasium before Bahrije. Her father would often come to us, and you could tell he was troubled, because in both our family and theirs, there wasn’t much support for girls to be sent to school.

I remember one time when she was going to Prizren, she said to me, “Come, walk me to the bus,” since we traveled by bus. I was still a student, hadn’t finished university yet. She said, “I’m really struggling. I don’t know what to do. Just like in your family,” she was talking about the men, older men, father and uncles, “they don’t support girls’ education, the same is true in my family.” They were making a living through handicrafts at home. On the other hand, they had a real desire to study.

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

I told her, “If you ask me and truly listen, then my opinion is this: let them continue, but talk to them so they can learn. Behave properly, and set a good example for the generations that come after them. Because if their behavior is good, surely others will follow the same path.” Fate wanted that she also had cousins, Azem and Sadi Kastrati, who told her the same. And that’s how she continued. She finished high school, then university. And when I was working as a teacher, I felt a moral obligation to support them constantly.

We also began distributing literature through them, because it became easier for me. I’d go under the pretense of visiting them and would pass along whatever materials I had, or vice versa. Sometimes it worked in a chain, I knew Bahrije directly or Avdyl on the other side. You've probably heard of the “trio” system and how it worked. I’d pass it to Bahrije, and she’d pass it to someone else I didn’t even know. Or I’d send it to someone else who didn’t know who it was going to. We managed to distribute all the literature that came to our hands within the groups we worked with. Later, when publications like *Çlirimi* (Liberation), *Lajmëtari i Lirisë* (Messenger of Freedom), and others began to be printed, we distributed everything that came to us very carefully, with the request that it be read, passed on to someone else, and then returned.

As a teacher, I justified myself, maybe it happened, though I doubt it. Once a week I would come to Pristina from Rahovec, from Dragobil. I would meet with Bahrije, meet others, and we would exchange conversations and literature. We’d discuss what to do, how to do it, and where to do it. Always with great caution, in case someone randomly asked what I was doing, I could say I was visiting my niece, because I had promised her parents I would take care of her. I don’t know how clear I’m being, but it was really important that our work, our conspiracy, was done in deep secrecy, so that we would never give them a reason to investigate or accuse us of anything.

Anita Susuri: You said you started working as a teacher in 1979. Were you working in Pristina?

Agim Paçarizi: No. As I mentioned, I’m from Dragobil. The day I graduated, the next day I received notification from the Center for Secondary Education in Rahovec that I could start working. A cousin of mine was working there as a technical staff member, maybe he helped somehow, I don’t know. The director said to me, “If you want to work, come to Rahovec.” So I started working there. I wasn’t in Pristina, I came to Pristina only to visit friends and those I collaborated with, and of course my nieces.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: Did you know anything ahead of time about the start of the demonstrations? Or was it a spontaneous event?

Agim Paçarizi: To be honest, I’ve read a lot lately, many different articles. But speaking from personal experience, aside from our activism and knowing that something needed to be done to secure our rights and equality with others, I don’t recall any specific date being mentioned for action. But when the first reaction started on March 11, on March 12, 1981, I happened to be in Pristina.

I came in the morning, we had an early bus from our village. When I arrived at Dormitory No. 2, where my nieces lived, I saw the doors had been broken. A cousin of mine worked at the Student Center as a maintenance worker. I met him before seeing Bahrije. He told me, “The demonstrations started

yesterday." I said, "Well, then congratulations." Then Bahrije and Fatime came out and explained what had happened. That was March 12, 1981. I had come just like I did every week, and that's when we started talking about what had occurred and about March 26.

Up until March 26, of course, we met. We met in Prizren and started preparing what slogans would be used, how not to contradict the message, etc. We prepared materials ourselves at my aunt's house, together with Bahrije. On the 26th, I came and participated directly in the demonstration. What happened, when the police cordon began to surround us, was that officers from other towns arrived, including Malisheva and Rahovec. One of the policemen… We were trying to exit the protest area to move toward the lower part, there was the rumor that professors and political representatives had arrived to talk to students. Azem Vllasi and Pajazit Nushi were there, among others. I don't remember other names. There was talk about dispersal and what do you want.

At some point, we began throwing stones at the police. There was a construction site above the Student Center, full of gravel and small stones, we used those. Then they started throwing tear gas at us and advancing up toward the area now known as the 1 October Hall, what's the name of that hall? When we'd catch our breath and recover from the gas, we'd go back and throw stones again.

At one point, we decided to break through the cordon and move downward. There was a police line, but luckily, one officer from Malisheva recognized me. I told you I worked. Because aside from Rahovec, we also had teaching centers in Malisheva and Ratkoc. At the time, educated staff were in short supply, so those of us with university degrees were few. We had two official cars that would pick us up from home, take us to school, and bring us back. On the surface, it looked like good conditions. But knowing where Albanians stood in comparison to others, many of us weren't satisfied.

This policeman recognized me. They were stopping everyone exiting the protest to check their ID, so they could have a record. He told me, still remember it like a movie, he said,
"Slow down, the Rahovec officers are behind. Don't leave your ID here," he said quietly. "Say you don't have one or leave through another way. It's not completely surrounded yet." Something like that, and you don't dare move. So I took both my nieces and turned back. I said, "I don't have any ID." They said, "Then you can't pass." "Alright." We left through the upper part of the Student Center where some construction was going on and made our way out that way.

That evening we took a bus to Prizren. Later, we continued with distributing slogans, writings on the walls, leaflets, through the alleys. There was a kind of excitement, when you saw the masses confronting the police, even those who once didn't dare to say a single word were now shouting and throwing stones.It gave you courage to express yourself. Because you thought maybe the whole population would join and, in some way, we'd win the rights others already had.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Agim, you mentioned the 26th of May. That's a date…

Agim Paçarizi: I meant March 26, not May 26, maybe I misspoke. There was a gap between March 12 and March 26. On the 26th, a large demonstration was planned. That day was also when Tito's baton, a kind of ceremonial relay, was scheduled to pass through Pristina, part of a daily procession through different cities. The demonstration was timed to coincide with that event. That's what drove me to be there on the 26th, even though I had to skip classes at school, it was clear that this was a conscious and deliberate decision.

Because it's different when you're a student, the wave of the demonstration pulls you in and you join it. Maybe you're not a supporter and you don't want to participate, but the wave carries you. I came because it was discussed, it was said that this is what we would do. Because that day was marked as a way to resist in some form, and to show that there is no 'brotherhood and unity' among us as long as we're not equal.

Anita Susuri: Were there more police, for example? Surely there must have been, maybe there was even an expectation that something would happen. How did you see the city, for instance?

Agim Paçarizi: That day, initially, because I arrived very early, the police were even stopping buses on the road, checking, but it wasn't too obvious. Until the students gathered in the middle of the Student Center, in the middle of the dormitory area. When a small stage was set up, it was improvised, they expressed dissatisfaction, demands were made not to use violence, and so on. On the other hand, professors and also politicians were asking for no action to be taken, for everyone to disperse because the relay [ceremony] was ongoing. The goal, of course, was to not allow it, to disrupt it.

The police came especially in the afternoon. I later saw what I could see, but I didn't know that all of them were police. Except for the special forces, who stood out with their special uniforms. There were police everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. But then the next day and afterward, with colleagues, those who were still students and who I knew better, told me what they had experienced, the violence that was used against students, especially female students, but also male ones, when they were forced to come out with their hands behind their heads, made to sit down, and beaten with batons — horror, pure horror. Then how they were gathered in the stadium down there. We talked about all that later.

As for me, what I experienced was the chase we endured from the police because we didn't disperse, and they started throwing tear gas to scatter us. We would run to get away from them and recover from the gas, and then we would come back and throw things again. After lunch, when we found a path where there weren't any police, we joined and linked up with another group to continue toward what was then called the Provincial Committee, or whatever it was. In the end, in the evening, the road to Prizren.

Anita Susuri: Then came April 1st and 2nd...

Agim Paçarizi: April 1st and 2nd were almost entirely popular rallies. That was even more magnificent. They were a continuation of what had started. I continued working at the school. But it was immediately noticed that there was more intensive surveillance. Besides those police officers, there were also people we more or less knew were their collaborators, who were observing the work being done. When it came to the end of April, it was the May 1st holiday, I don't know how many days off there were. We, most of the time, were then with Bahrije and others, moving around with slogans, organization.

The police had continued with arrests and the gathering of a large number of intellectuals in a specific center in Lipjan. I didn't know anything. We had been active with Bahrije, from Prizren, from their house, since the night we had been distributing slogans here and there and writing them... we tried to write them not with our own handwriting, but we used rulers so that, if we got caught, we could say, "I didn't write it, I don't know who did," and so on and so on. I got on the bus, there was a bus that

traveled in the morning from Malisheva to Prizren and in the evening, around 3:00-something, it departed from Prizren to Malisheva, Dragobil, and into Malisheva.

I got on that bus. Now, looking back, it's quite incredible. and painful, to realize how cooperative we, our people, were with the enemy. I'm speaking generally. When I got off the bus in Dragobil, the station is about one kilometer from my house. On the way, I ran into a fellow student I had studied with. He said, "Agim, you should know, the police are at your house looking for you." Meaning, if you've done something, know that they're after you. In the time it took me to walk that one kilometer to my house, someone from the bus must have gone straight to the police station and told them Agim had returned.

The police had already come to my house two or three times looking for me. At one point, my father got upset and said, "Do you know what? It's May 1st, a national holiday across Yugoslavia. He's on his break, I don't know where he is. When he comes back, I'll tell him. There's no need for you to come to the house, you're frightening the family." When I walked into the yard and opened the guest room door, I saw that the whole extended family had gathered — cousins, uncles. The police had been there several times and the family was asking: "What's going on? What are they looking for?" I said, "Well, it is what it is, we know why. In the end, I haven't done anything shameful to disgrace you." My father said, "Fine. Just know, they've already come three or four times."

I hadn't even sat down properly yet when a small police car pulled up, and two officers came:
"Let's go, we have an order." I said, "Alright." They took me to Rahovec. Meanwhile, another vehicle had been sent to pick me up, I don't know how well you know the area up in the hills of Zatriç, the road that leads to Zatriç village. The two cars met and exchanged me. The second group said, "We were the ones sent to pick him up." They took me to the police station in Rahovec. I was still dressed just as I had been. I always dressed neatly, professionally, because of the job. They locked me in a room under the stairs at the Rahovec police station.

Coincidentally, one of my former students was there, they had badly mistreated him.
It showed. He is now a martyr, he was killed in the last war. Qemail Bytyqi. When he saw me, his teacher, there, he was stunned. I wasn't handcuffed; I was in civilian clothes when I walked in.
They shut the door behind me and left. Who knows what they were up to. I asked him, "What's going on?" "They caught us," he said. They had also caught my younger brother, who was a high school senior. We were brothers, of course more or less he knew a bit about what I was doing, but he was just a student, and I was a teacher, so more or less he felt more protected. Together with some classmates and others, they had organized a demonstration.

I asked him, "Did they mistreat you?" "No, no, professor." I said, "Well, this isn't shameful. It's no big deal. Don't feel bad." He calmed down. Ten or fifteen minutes later, they called me out again. They took me, now we were going to Prizren. No one spoke a word to me. Just, "Come." In the village of Bollacërkë, before you get to Xërxë, a police vehicle with a cage-style back, the special type, stopped our car on the road. They transferred me again. There was someone else already in that vehicle, but I don't know who it was. He might've been another detainee, or maybe even a collaborator, I don't know.

From there, they took me to Prizren. We didn't go in through the main gate, but through a side door near the prison. They led me into a large hall, and what I saw shocked me, full of young men and women, dressed in red and black: pants, shirts… Some wore white caps, or red and black scarves.

Wherever they had caught them, they brought them here and just left them all there, waiting. They took me past that crowd and upstairs to an office. No one came to question me, they just locked me in the room. Sometime around midnight, someone finally came, he did not say who he was.

He asked me about Bahrije, about Kadri, about Fatime, about my cousins, about some friends. Just asked, "Do you know them? Where are they? How are they?" only superficially, before asking anything deeper about who they were or what they did. Then he left the room. A little later, they came back and said, "Come with us." They took me to a room where there were weapons. One of them picked up a weapon in front of me, loaded the magazine and inserted it into the automatic rifle. "Give me your hands," he said, and handcuffed me. There was an inspector, a driver, and me. As they were walking me out, we passed through the same hallway I had entered from. At that moment, I saw some of my students, and they saw me handcuffed. I felt great relief, because during the whole time I had been waiting upstairs, I was dressed in civilian clothes, the police were with me, and I was afraid…

Anita Susuri: As if they'd think you were collaborating?

Agim Paçarizi: Yes, exactly. I thought the students might think I was a collaborator of theirs.
But now, seeing me handcuffed, it was obvious. Surely they'd seen others being brought in like that too. Most professors and others who had received the same verdict as me were taken to Lipjan. After midnight, they took me there in a vehicle, I think it was a Peugeot 604, one of the last new models the police had. There were three of us in the car: the inspector, the driver, and me.

As the car drove, it was night and no other cars were on the road. I didn't know — were they taking me to my aunt's house, where Bahrije lived? Were they taking me to the homes of the cousins they had asked about? To Kadri's house in Pristina? He was a student there. Or some of the friends they had mentioned? I didn't know, they didn't stop anywhere. Once we started climbing the Duhël hill, and didn't turn toward Dragobil, I realized they weren't taking me home.
We were heading to Pristina, or who knew where. The winding roads through the Carraleva Gorge… the car was speeding. Every small movement of my hand made the handcuffs dig deeper into my wrists. Then I saw, we had stopped in front of Lipjan Prison.

They brought me inside. At the entrance, one of the guards said to the other, "Should we remove his handcuffs?" The other one, a fellow Albanian who seemed tired, probably from seeing so many educated men brought in like this, replied in a harsh tone, "Of course you should remove them! Don't you feel ashamed?" They removed the handcuffs and placed me in a room. Inside the room, sitting cross-legged, was a teacher from Podujeva, Jetish Rekaliu, the father of Xheladin Rekaliu, who had been imprisoned for the 1968 demonstrations. He was a tall man. He greeted me: "Welcome," he said. I was very young compared to him, I had only just graduated in 1979, and it was now 1981, I was 26 years old. He said, "Welcome, and don't worry, the best men are here."

In the room with us were also Seladin and Qemail Braha, two brothers. There was also a history professor who had been dismissed from education and was now working in a printing press, Muhamet Shatri. There was a poet too, I think his name was Rani Tuda. I'm not sure if you've heard of him. In the following days, in the other rooms, there were others like Kadri Halimi, Sadik Bajraj, who had served as a mayor at some point, and Eqrem Kryeziu, whom I greatly respected. He was from Pagarusha, and I had known him for a long time, along with his brother.

Two of my own cousins were there as well, one close cousin Sahit Paçarizi, and another who was actually a student of mine, Habib. There were nearly 100 of us.

We stayed in Lipjan for about a month. There was one day in particular that I remember well, maybe you've heard about it. There was a group of students from Podujeva who, it was said, had disarmed a police patrol. They were brought to Lipjan. We had designated times when we could go out for a walk in the prison yard. Of course, hands behind our backs, no talking, walking in pairs, and so on. One day, we saw that those students were also being brought out to walk. There was Jetish Rekaliu, who had been a teacher to some of the students who were now walking through the yard. We, from behind the prison bars and windows, started calling out to them by name, giving them moral support.

Some of the students smiled back, some might've said something, I couldn't hear it. Then one of the guards, an Albanian, lined [the other guard] up and said, "I'm going to give each of you a stick." He handed them each a baton. The teachers' reaction, especially Jetish's, was furious. He grabbed the prison bars and shouted at the guard: "You idiot! You lowlife! How dare you beat children in front of us?" The guard, still immature himself, shouted back, "Watch it, if you come out here, I'll do worse to you than to them." Jetish didn't hold back. He cursed at him, screamed at him , "You're a coward, beating children in front of their teachers!"

They came inside. We made a decision, we went to other rooms... the building had multiple rooms and you could talk from room to room, visit each other, even play a game or two.
They had even allowed us a small transistor radio, someone had snuck it in through the window, probably the younger ones who had been sentenced and had a bit more freedom. They followed the news and told us what was going on. We decided: "We're not going out now. We won't go get lunch, we won't collect our meals at all until someone responsible comes to talk about that policeman's actions." We coordinated even with the floor above. Nobody left their rooms.

In the evening, the prison director came. We were all gathered into a hall. He told us, "It's for your own good. Staying locked in isn't healthy, you should come out, move around, eat." Then Jetish stood up, and also Kadri Halimi, as one of the older ones, and said: "First, tell us what our status is. Are we prisoners? Are we under investigation? Are we convicted? And secondly, why are we being provoked like this, beating students in front of their teachers?" The director explained in a more human tone: "Understand that the Kosovo leadership, the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, ordered us to prepare 100 beds for a few days. We haven't been given any other details except that."

We all had a template decision document, only the names were filled in. It said something like: "With this decision number, dated [specific date], the Presidency of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, Secretariat of Internal Affairs, orders [name], professor or director or whatever their role is, to stay in a designated place from this date onward." There was no mention of how long, no end date. The reason given was vague: "Due to the created circumstances…" I actually had the document with me, but I forgot to bring it now. Surely someone has shown it to you. It was a standard form given to everyone.

We didn't know how long it would last. He said, "We don't know. They told us it'll be short, a month has passed now, maybe it'll be less from now on." And he added, "There won't be any more incidents like that. The officer responsible will be suspended immediately." We really didn't see him again. By the end of May, they began calling us one by one. Eventually, my turn came too. Two inspectors,

civilians, came. They didn't give names, didn't introduce themselves, and I still don't know who they were. They asked surface-level questions, not in-depth. Just a few things here and there.

They said, "You'll be released. But be careful about your behavior." That was it. I was released, speaking for myself. I met a few others who had also been released, we met at the bus station. I took a bus from Pristina to Prizren, stayed the night at my aunt's, and the next day went home to Dragobil.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: You said you were released after that isolation. How did your life continue after that?

Agim Paçarizi: Right after that one-month isolation, maybe ten days later, two weeks max, I received a call-up for military service. To be honest, I had always intended to do my military service as a reserve officer. That was my original plan. But after those events, it seems they didn't want to give me that opportunity. Instead, I received an urgent summons, I was sent straight into regular service, stationed in Prilep. To talk about everything that happened during military service would take a long time, but it was truly a heavy experience.

Because even on the first day, the moment I met my commanding officer, I saw it right away,
In the cover of the official documents they had sent about me, they had written in Serbian: "*Bio u zatvoru 30 dana*" ["Has been in prison for 30 days"] I read it by chance while he was looking through the files. I was standing in front of him. He started asking me some basic questions: "Who are you? Where are you from?" and so on. Then he said: "You're not telling the truth, it says here you've been in prison." And right away, his tone changed, he switched to a harsh, accusatory tone.

Calmly, I knew that I had to complete it and had to be careful because it was known how the differentiations[14] and such had started. I said, "No, it's not true I haven't been in prison," calmly, "I haven't been in prison," I said. "I have the data that you have been in prison," "No, I haven't been in prison. I was in isolation," I said, "not in prison." To show him that also… but it's very interesting and let me mention one thing. The differentiation that started immediately after April 1st and 2nd, especially when they started taking people off the street with their families, with children. Arresting them without any warrant, presenting a written order saying, "we have a warrant to take you," but they just grabbed them on the *korzo*[15] while walking with their wives or with their husbands, because there were also women, in front of the children, in a harsh manner.

They were thrown into isolation. They instilled fear into a large part of the population. When I came out of isolation, my older brother tells me that for a whole week they didn't know where I was, "For a whole week we couldn't get any information on where you were, the police didn't tell us." But what's more interesting, the brother who was a high school senior got sentenced to two months in a fast-track procedure for a misdemeanor supposedly as an organizer of the demonstrations, while I was put into isolation. He told me, "When I got on the bus to go get some information somewhere, no one dared to

[14] In the context of Yugoslavia, "differentiation" referred to a form of political and social ostracism. It involved isolating and marginalizing individuals who were deemed politically unreliable or dissenting against the ruling Communist regime. This could include demotions at work, social exclusion, surveillance, and other forms of repression to discourage opposition and maintain control.
[15] Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

sit in the seat next to me. Neither relatives, nor people from the village." It was… you understand what kind of differentiation had started happening.

Since I knew it was a very sensitive, delicate situation, I tried to behave as calmly as possible. I said, "I haven't been in prison, maybe you have the information but it is incorrect. I have been in isolation and I wasn't guilty, now I've come to complete military service." And we continued from there, even as a soldier. Of course, we were under constant surveillance by the secret military security, the state security. However, we had some connections there. We found some people we could speak to freely but also inquire about the situation outside.

It's interesting to mention the case when the Congress of Albanian Affairs was being held. When Albania raised its voice against Yugoslavia for the violence used against students and the population of the people of Kosovo. The captain who had it out for me and was thinking of sending me to prison said, "Have you heard what your Enver Hoxha is demanding?" He said it in Serbian, but I'm telling you, I replied in Albanian, intentionally to oppose him, because he gave me a reason to react, "If Enver Hoxha were mine, I wouldn't have come to complete military service here, but what are you saying? What are you talking about like this?" I said, "Alright, we'll talk later."

One time I happened to pass by the command officer of the barracks in the yard. I stepped forward, saluted him, and addressed him with a somewhat harsh tone, even though he was the commander of the barracks but… I said, "I don't know how to manage anymore with Captain Pralica," that was him, the captain. "Why?" He was surprised. He was an older man, seemed like a reasonable person, but to me, anyone who had that Slavic first and last name I put in one basket. I said, "Instead of, if I'm on the wrong path, leading me and saying, 'come, this is the right way', he is trying to push me off the path." "Why?" I told him word for word, "He came and said to me, 'Did you hear what your Enver Hoxha is asking for?' If Enver Hoxha were mine," I said, "why would I come to do service in Yugoslavia here, I'd have gone to Albania." "What?" He got angry.

Now I go into the office encouraged, I said, "Go out, he's calling you." He nearly lost his mind. "How dare you go before him?" Because to meet with another superior you had to get permission from the lower ones, one by one. I said, "Go, he's waiting for you." He kept him standing at attention for almost an hour in front of him, what he told him I don't know. But it means I was very careful, because I could have ended up like many others who we later heard were imprisoned or they tried to poison, or they wanted to, all the soldiers in the kitchen and so on. But luckily, luckily I got through thanks to that caution.

Even though not a week passed without them calling for me, "Why, what happened?" "Why were you there? Why did you meet with this person? Why are you speaking Albanian?" Plus, they had even engaged Albanian officers, we also had Albanian officers. Unfortunately, one of them had been with the military state security. But not to drag on, because there's really a lot to say about that time. At the final moment when they brought me my civilian clothes to leave that place and they came to pick me up there at the barracks, that state security guy called me to meet with him. To provoke me he says, "We made a mistake with the date, you have to stay another day, you can't leave even though they came to pick you up at the door. You have to stay one more day because the days…" They had sentenced me to 15 days, a kind of pretrial detention, it's called.

There is a lot to be said about that period, but let's skip that. I said, "When I have stayed for twelve months and one day already, it's no problem." He said, "No, no, it's fine, we'll forgive you that one day too, but be careful. You've shown yourself to be a very good soldier, but I know that you are the head of Albanian intelligence," he said, "you are the head of those, you're the one among those who organized the demonstrations in Prishtina and the head of the intelligence." When he mentioned it two or three times, I smiled a bit. I said, "Where do I get to be the head? You're giving me too much of a privilege," I said, "because…" "Be careful," he said, "you've shown yourself very good but if you make a mistake, you'll suffer badly." I said, "I am who I am."

I was released from military service, meaning I completed it. Then, truly it was a problem to find a job because they didn't allow me to be employed in the education sector. To accept any job was kind of, not of my nature. But still, in consultation with friends who were collaborating and were active with me…better to be employed and have the possibility to move and maybe the surveillance isn't at such a level and so on. Friends helped me, colleagues, locals, colleagues who we had studied together with especially from my social circle. To mention the now late Qazim Hoxha, he was the financial director where they sent me to work. One Halilë Morina, director of the enterprise for one sector. One Shefki Morina, Mahmut Morina, Milazim Morina who were in the legal sector.

They made it possible for me in the enterprise regulations, they included an article that changed my job position from administrator and administration work to controller of the administration. Imagine, if I went with my car because they didn't have a car there, they would pay me for the expenses of the car. If I took the work car, we had work units in every city of Kosovo – Pristina, Prizren, Ferizaj, Gjilan, Mitrovica. I was given the opportunity to meet people we cooperated with, friends, as if I was working, and we continued the activity.

Until one case caught attention. I encountered a Serbian engineer in a not-so-good case with a Serbian female worker there in one worksite. I reported it as a case because I tell you, everything that was Slavic bothered me. Then he, with the committee connections they had, asked the director to either change my job or the director takes responsibility. The director called me, said, "Are you for removing me from work or… because we now, with a decision, we have the decision, you are a controller of the enterprise but that's your job." I said, "No man, because you help others too, I'm not making problems."

They kept my salary the same but changed my workplace. In the year 1990, when it began, after the declaration of the constitutional changes that were made, education began to work with the programs of Kosovo, I went straight to the school in Malisheva initially to the high school of Malisheva to ask them to accept me to work as a history teacher. Because I don't know, the director was still the one that had been forcefully appointed there and maybe he was afraid. I justify him today for that time although not as much as I should. He didn't accept me to work there and I was offered a job by a former colleague of mine whom I thank today for that time always. He was the principal of the professional school in Kijevë, Haki Gashi, the principal there.

He said to me, "If you want, come as principal in my place or the history classes are here, please, and start work tomorrow." I started in 1990 until the end of 1993. Then I spoke with the new principal who came to the high school of Malisheva, Gani Bajraku, whom I had as a friend and companion, we had graduated together. He told me, "At the beginning of January or February come and start here since it's closer for you. As much as you travel, better to come here." In February 1994 I started working in

Malisheva. It was closer to home and easier for me. Even though there was no salary then, we didn't have a salary. They started from time to time to give us 40 German Marks at that time. But those weren't even enough for the fuel. But the main thing was that we had no salary, except for what later started to be organized to help education. At first, we were told it would be 40 German marks.

In Malisheva I started at the end of February. On April 14, 1994, I was in class, the little son of my sister, of my brother-in-law Avdyl Krasniqi, Kushtrim Krasniqi, comes. He says, "Uncle, early in the morning," he says, "the police came and took my dad and three of my older brothers," crying. I said, "It's not a problem." I told them that I have to leave and go there to see how the situation is at my sister's. I knew that there were still police on the road. I went home, took my father with me as he was like that. As if, in case the police stop me, I'll say he's sick and I'm taking him or we're going to pick up some medicine at the pharmacy.

We used that tactic. We kept prescriptions in the car so that when they stopped us, "I didn't find the medicine in Malisheva, I'm going to Kijevë," or the opposite, "In Kijevë I'm going to Pristina," when police stopped us. I told my father, "Lay down back on the seats…" like "He's sick, I took him to the doctor and now we're going to get some pills in Kijevë." Because entering Drenas, the village, entering Drenas, the police were out at the bridge. They stopped me, they looked… they were searching for me normally, but now just to see where I'm going. "Alright, go on."

I went to the house. When I arrived, I saw what they had done, what kind of breaking during the raid. My sister told me all the horror they had experienced. I said, "Where did they take them?" She said, "I don't know, they took them and I don't know." I took the car like that with my father as if he was sick and to Kijevë. In Kijevë I had a colleague who was an UDB agent, one Sami Toplana. We went to his *oda* and I said, "Find some solution, ask at the police station where they've taken them." We waited there until we were informed that they were sent first to Klina and then to Peja. Luckily they only kept Avdyl, because they released the three sons. They had thought that also the sons… the sons… the person they were looking for had shown up under another name. When they released him then they said since we released him, now we must… where to find so quickly. To link the events I'm speaking of, it was April 14th.

When I returned home, I told my sister that, "Avdyl is in Peja, your sons have been released, don't worry." I go home. I tell my father and mother, the family, my wife, and the little children were there. "Be careful because there is a chance they'll come at any moment to us too." I removed some things I had, some of the literature and some little things, some weapon that there was. Early in the morning the next day, around 4:30AM maybe 5:00, very early, they come. They knock on the door. They had surrounded the neighborhood and the house. 40–50 armed police dressed up, you'd think it's war.

I don't know. But the fear vanishes when you know that… What can you do when you are in the middle of all those? They started searching everywhere. They showed me the order they had to search, gave me a copy and there were three civilians: two Albanians, one Serb or Montenegrin. The main leader, one Osman Fejza. I knew where he was from and who he was. He was the chief. One Hasan who later was killed after the war, Hasan Rrustemi I think, and one Jovica, Jovica the Serb. It's painful when I remember those moments when the Albanians were trying to break my teeth while I was screaming, and the Serb or Montenegrin just stayed quiet and watched what was happening.

He asks me, “Where is Atom?” That nephew had the name Atom, Atom is his name. I was horrified. You don’t search for Atom in drawers and cupboards. You look for Atom somewhere else… I said, “You’re looking for Atom, huh? Where are you searching for Atom, in a drawer? You know he’s my nephew, even if I had him in my fist, I wouldn’t give him to you.” Ardiana, my daughter, was the second child, later told them, she said, “Even if dad had him in his hand, he wouldn’t give him to you.” The moment we went in, they had left my father in the guestroom. These are things that really are worth mentioning, that’s why I bring them up. Because when I remember them I shiver. I don’t even like to repeat them. But for those who don’t know what we went through, it’s very interesting to hear those things.

When we entered the guestroom, I had all these faces of the National Renaissance in order, from Skanderbeg up to Ibrahim Rugova, who was president at that time. Framed photos. He says, “Come on now, tell us in Albanian what you have,” he said, “against our state.” My father, may God have mercy on him, rest his soul, was sitting upright, leg over leg, his cap always on with his traditional trousers. He stood up and said, “Is this bastard Albanian or what?” Literally that kind. I said, “Yes dad, he’s Albanian.” Osman, I couldn’t remember the surname Fejza but I said the village he’s from, “Osman Patoku and he’s the leader of the expedition.” “Ah,” he said, “tilt your cap,” he said, “just know who is taking you.”

Believe me, when we came out of there he came up beside me and said, “Careful because you’re speaking very harshly and these police understand Albanian,” because they were from the Rahovec region. They were actually from Opterusha and it’s understood they knew Albanian. I said, “Let it collapse,” I used a folk expression, “until it falls to the bottom.” I noticed immediately that he got scared. They took me, sent me to Rahovec. All day he didn’t dare leave his office but kept me in his office because in the other offices you could hear the screams of people being beaten not with batons but with special sticks. In the hallway there were three or four police roaming.

That Hasan, the other one… because when I told him, there was another case. Ardiana the little one was with her friend there, they were in front. Hasan, not the chief Osman, said, “Just something, because you’re coming with us. Come on, come on,” in a tone like an order. We had just come out of the room. The girl, I think I saw her… one case with my second daughter Ardiana when the civilian police officer who was dressed like that too, Hasan Rrustemi. He said, “Go put on something because you’re coming with us.” In front of the room’s door. The girl, together with my wife, was there, she was small. Her lip was trembling, she said, “Daddy, are you going with our friend?” Because he was dressed as a civilian, and I’ll tell you something.

I said, “No my daughter, he’s worse than those police who surrounded us. He’s a cop too.” He got offended and said, “Wait till we show you when we take you there.” I said, “You’ll see the light.” Then we continued, they sent me there. The one in charge, the one who was leading the expedition, that Osman, Osman Fejza, didn’t leave his office all day long. When we went out just briefly to the bathroom, we went because he was afraid that maybe that guy would mistreat me, and on the other hand my father had told him, “Now I know who is taking my son.” I noticed that he got scared from that. They didn’t use physical violence except for the questions they asked, one at a time. “Connections with Avdyl, why? What did you do? Where were you? What were you doing?”

It’s painful when I think how they had the possibility to know where my car was every hour and minute. Today technology exists and there's the possibility of surveillance but back then? Back then

only through unpaid people, 'black' Albanians who were tricked for a passport or for nothing at all and cooperated. How did they know, at the moment I left Dragobil, in which direction I went when I passed through Malisheva? Where did I enter which house? They just hadn't been there to hear us and…

Anita Susuri: In the room.

Agim Paçarizi: In the room. That thing with Avdyl, this last incident when they took him and then me as well, had been preceded by information from one of their people, when we had gathered, about 100 of us, at my brother-in-law's house. Because in the years '91, '92, and '93, people began to think about better organization to protect our rights. The peaceful policy truly existed; it guided us and created opportunities for friendships with powerful countries, with the United States and others. But everyone who understood what Serbia was, knew that it was impossible to succeed without war. We began, in some form, to cooperate with people and organize ourselves so that, if the time came, we would have the means to resist.

It was then that front [formed], what was it called? There were Jeton Kaçi and Mentor Kaçi, Sokol Dobruna and Kadri Osmani, Avdyl. We gathered more or less 100 people, but we were in their yard, the cars filled the yard completely because you had to go inside. We discussed there for hours, had lunch there. Someone must have been there. Surely there were people who took notes about each person, knew who they were, those they knew and those they didn't. Now, they started taking those of us they knew. They took Avdyl. They came and took me the next day. They started taking others in Mirushë, here and there, in Turajkë.

We had agreed, as I mentioned earlier, that we from the families, if we are taken, we are just friends. Like for example when they asked me about Bahrije, "She's my niece. I went there to take her because something had happened, to bring her back because she's my niece, I am her maternal uncle. We have no kind of connection. If I've done something, I'm aware of what I've done and I stand by it. If she's done something, she's grown up and she stands by herself." Same now with them. Because now they were asking me about Avdyl. "We've taken this one, we've taken that one, we said this, we said that." "I…" I said, "Avdyl is my brother-in-law. He married my sister. His uncle was sick" – we often used him.

Today I will talk about how we used him. We'd take him, for example, we were about to meet somewhere and we'd take him with us so that when the police stopped us, he was very old, "We're taking him to the doctor because he needs to go to the doctor." We took him often, today I feel sorry for him from back then. I told them, "I went to take my sister, I went to see my sister, I went to do a service for her because he didn't have a car to do some errands for my uncle Brahim." "Alright, alright, we're waiting. He's saying this and that."

"Bring him here, let him tell me or send me to him, let him tell me what you're saying. I know it's not true." "If you want to accuse me," I said, "you can only accuse me of working with the education programs of the Republic of Kosovo. I don't regret that because I am aware of the work I do. If you want, go ahead, you have proof. That is the truth. For anything else don't ask me." In the evening, he said, "Go home but if they come to take you don't resist, just come immediately." "Not at all," I said, "don't even come to take me. Just send a word, I'll come." I thought to myself once I get out of here, you will never see me again.

In the meantime the events come to my mind. One moment someone calls on the phone. Who knows who said, “They’re looking for him? How did you take him?” Now he’s talking to me, still on the phone, he said, “How did they find out so quickly that we took you?” I said, “You’re surprised?” I said, “I guess even Washington knows by now.” Because there was that Kosovo Information Center, those journalists from the field immediately reported the news that he was arrested, this professor Agim Paçarizi was arrested with heavy police forces. That was the headline.

I said, “They were informed, it’s not something to be surprised about.” But in the end, they released me. When I came out from there, I no longer went out publicly. I would go to school carefully, watching where I was going in case the police came so I could escape somewhere. They came once more two or three days later to look for me with the police. My father said, “He went to school.” I was in the room getting ready. I was nearly preparing to jump over and get out the other side through the window. My wife gave me a sign to wait. The police thought I had gone to school, they asked there and were told, “No, he hasn’t come.” I sent my brother afterward to check. They told him, “They were here.” I informed the director, “I won’t come anymore, finish the grades however you want. I don’t intend to go to a Serbian prison.”

Part Five

Agim Paçarizi: I stayed in hiding until we found an opportunity to leave the country. Through Macedonia with Bahrije’s brother… and even this, we took for example the border to cross once, we thought to go through Qafë Thana and say that we’re taking him to a checkup… I was in Skopje, and they told me to go to Tirana. It was allowed then to cross. But now I was afraid of the passport that someone might verify us, I might be registered there and they stop me. We got on a plane from Skopje to Tirana, imagine that. We didn’t have the means, who knows what we had, we bought a plane ticket from Skopje to Tirana.

From Tirana then with connections to Durrës. From Durrës we went to Italy. In Italy we stayed one night, we had made a connection, we paid 1200 marks to be taken to Geneva. In Geneva we applied for political asylum. After two or three days they sent him somewhere else, I was sent to Chiasso, I stayed there for two weeks and then had two days of interviews. The interview you’d think they were more dangerous than the UDB agents in Serbia. It’s interesting to mention when they asked, insisting heavily for names of the people I had cooperated with. Because in a way those documents that had been written by the press about the arrest and the isolation back in ‘81 but also about the arrest and the raid were published by the Information Center as well.

But now, “People you cooperated with.” Well, all those people who were there, I said, “I can’t give a single name. Because I can’t. I’m sworn not to tell on each other. For those who were some that had come out, that’s not a problem, but I can’t.” “Alright.” The one doing the interview stopped it and when we went out on a break to have coffee, he said, during the break, “Your file is very convincing to be granted political asylum. But the moment you don’t cooperate with us,” meaning that you’re not giving information we’re asking for, “we’re obligated to use this article,” they had the article according to their laws, “since you’re not cooperating, you have no right to political asylum.” I said, “Alright, you know. Continue your procedures. But I have a principle because I don’t have enough trust.”

He felt offended and said, “How do you not have trust? Then why did you seek political asylum in Switzerland?” I said, “Don’t… don’t misunderstand me but while you still doubt what we have gone through and what we are still going through from Serbia, with the propaganda it has done and has created this belief in you that what we are experiencing is not true, I'm speaking in general,” I said, “how could I not distrust or how could I not be afraid that even before I leave your offices, someone here with the touch of a fax could send word to Belgrade and people would be imprisoned there before I even step out of this building?” He understood that I’m speaking with great sincerity.

However, he said, “But you’re hesitating on some questions.” “Yes, I’m hesitating,” I said, “it seems pointless to me that you ask the same thing ten, fifteen times.” Then he smiled a bit and said, “I know why I ask ten, fifteen times about one thing because,” he said, “the truth, if said 100 times, is still the truth. That is,” he said, “our technique,” he said, “but here I’m at risk because,” and then he told me himself, “since you’re not giving names of collaborators,” he said, “it’s a bit… I’m not sure how your file will go through.” I said, “Let it go how it goes. I came with the assumption that Switzerland is a democratic country and I applied for political asylum, and it’s up to you to decide.” After some time, my right was finally recognized.

But they also interviewed my wife. Because things get forgotten, it’s a long period. They asked my wife, “Can you tell us the case, describe it to us, when they came to take Agim? The event of April 15.” This…things that are unforgettable. She said, “How can I forget something when I wasn’t even sure he’d come out alive from the yard with all those forces surrounding it,” and she described the event as it happened. Okay. After some regular time, once their procedures were complete, they granted me political asylum. When political asylum is granted, you know, the state offers you all the means for survival. I found myself there in Geneva because there was a large number of activists.

There were even some who still hadn’t been able to return to the homeland. Among them were Xhafer Shatri, Sami Dërmaku, Naim Shala, and others, Ramadan Avdiu, who later certainly… I found myself among them… Naim Mala. I found myself among them and I was given the opportunity to have political asylum, secured housing, money for food and clothing, and they even gave us money for phone bills. Meaning we had, in a way, average living conditions. Since I had been removed from education and I had that teaching passion in my blood, I asked to be involved immediately, but at first it was maybe not very safe also among them, because you couldn’t know who was going where.

Then a job posting was announced by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kosovo in exile. I applied and I was appointed to work as a teacher in Geneva along with some others. Because the competition they had announced then published the names of all those who had applied, those who were selected, in the daily newspapers, where we were assigned and who was appointed to work with Albanian children. From 1996 I worked as a teacher with Albanian children until the war. When the war started, I got involved in helping the war through people, my nephews.

Then I saw that there had also been an order from the General Staff of the KLA, because later they brought me a certificate as a veteran, a participant in the war. I worked in logistics for supplying KLA soldiers here with aid that we could gather there. I personally brought to Tirana once, this is worth mentioning, the first satellite phone for the municipality of Malisheva and some radio connections, ten or twelve radio links, some mine detectors which had been bought in cooperation with friends. We had gathered the funds, starting with myself and then the others. And I have all the written reports. I brought them to Tirana and from there they were brought into Kosovo.

Surely a person is also included here, known also as a soldier, who came with me, Ilir Mirena, who later was also deputy minister, if you remember the name. We came together to Tirana. We had trouble passing through the airport because the materials were in my name and they stopped us, but we passed. We stayed there two days and then Ilir continued with the soldiers this way, I returned for other aid. On another occasion I participated with a convoy of theirs, from a municipality in France, through an association of France–Albania friendship. Two trucks with 30 tons, we brought aid and distributed it during the war in Albania. We brought them from there. I, as an Albanian, accompanied them with the help of KLA soldiers.

A nephew of mine, Halim, was there in charge of the military police. He enabled me to move throughout the territory of Albania without hindrance. We distributed that aid. Then in other cases when we sent other materials… there were cases when we sent bulletproof vests. We sent mine detectors especially, because when crossing the border there was fear that the soldiers might step on mines. At the end of the war, fortunately with the Swiss, with those who hosted us, we talked with them, we shared our troubles with them, and told them what we had experienced in Kosovo before the war, and I knew they didn't believe us because Serbian propaganda had done its job. It was almost impossible to convince them that there exists a people like us Albanians living in such conditions in Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia had great international authority. After the war, they understood what people had endured during the conflict. Because a large wave of children, students, and people came there as well. And we, as the League of Albanian Teachers, dealt with their placement, preparation… Several opportunities were created for them, which they called "reception classes." Reception classes because it was during vacation time, we took them in, worked with one teacher in French and another in Albanian. We cooperated with them, took them to pools, recreational activities, visits to various parks, trips, museums, and so on—to help them escape the horrors of war.

Later, when I saw that we had built friendships, I spoke with some people and with the presidency of the League of Albanian Parents and Teachers, I decided not to work as a teacher anymore but to deal with the organization of classroom learning. I was then appointed chairman. After the war, with the friends we had made and who had seen the reality, they offered us help and asked us, as the leadership of the League of Albanian Teachers, to reopen the classes. They promised that they would provide all the necessary resources, just show us how many students you have, how many teachers, and how many classrooms you need.

We started the lessons. They began giving us material support. For all the work done from 2000 to 2012, when I was an active member of the presidency, sometimes as a member, sometimes as coordinator of work between the League of Albanian Parents and Teachers and the local authorities, and the central presidency of the League of Albanian Parents and Teachers in Switzerland, me and the members of the Geneva presidency managed to be the only canton in Switzerland, out of 26 cantons, to have a stable and complete budget by 2011–2012, to start in September with the supplementary lessons in the Albanian language.

Every year they gave us sufficient funds, although sometimes we had to wait and couldn't pay the teachers on time. But we were offered resources to pay for the work done. In 2010–2011, we requested, together with a Swiss colleague, to receive permanent support. The Bureau for the Integration of Foreigners in Geneva offered us 60,000 Swiss francs, even though the standard grant for foreigners was

10,000 francs. In 2011, I met with Minister of Education Ramë Buja in Pristina, and I asked him to come to Switzerland to meet with the authorities there, to see the situation and, in a way, to thank them for the help they had given us.

He came in 2011, after Kosovo had become an independent state. Because until 2008, whenever we made a request for support, we had to refer to the fact that we were once functioning before the war, the war destroyed everything, we now had no resources, and the state of Kosovo could not help because it didn't exist yet. When the state was formed in 2008, I would mention that the state had just been created, and it was impossible to expect financial support for supplementary Albanian language education. Still, we managed to secure a budget to start the school year for everyone who wanted to continue learning Albanian.

It remains the only canton where we were able to secure not only classrooms but also financial assistance. Other cantons only provided facilities, while we received funding too. For this work I've done, I also made sure it was written down, so it wouldn't be forgotten. I published a book [shows his book]. You'll have the chance to browse it if you're interested. It summarizes the activities and work done in Albanian schools in Geneva and, of course, in Switzerland. After 2012, at the Assembly of the League of Albanian Parents and Teachers, since a stable budget had been secured for the continuation of education, I requested that the leadership members be selected from the younger generation to continue our work. New board members were elected.

I then continued to lead another association we had established back in 1998, during the war, mostly with Albanians but also in cooperation with locals in the municipality where I was working. The association is called Rrethi Shqiptaro-Mejrinas (Albanian-Meyrinas Circle). It consisted of Albanian members, but also Swiss from the city of Meyrin area and Geneva. From 2012 to 2020, I led that association. In 2018, we marked its 20th anniversary with a large event attended by many local Swiss residents, Swiss authorities, and Albanians.

Maybe I skipped over this, but when Kosovo became a state in 2008, all associations and activists in Geneva organized a special event for the Swiss people called "Faleminderit Zvicërr" (Thank you, Switzerland) / "Merci la Suisse," where Ambassadors and locals were invited. Among the invited was [President of the Swiss Confederation] Micheline Calmy-Rey, one of the first to recognize Kosovo. I had sent her a formal invitation in the name of our leadership, and she replied that due to a prior commitment she couldn't attend, but she thanked and congratulated us. They were very respectful.

We gave a very meaningful program. To show them, as a sign of gratitude, for all they had done, for welcoming so many young people and others who had fled the war, and for the support they gave us in our educational work. Today, even in my personal life, I, as someone who had political asylum, had more free time to engage in other activities, and I took advantage of that opportunity. My wife, fortunately, had completed a high school degree in medical sciences, but for the sake of our young children, she didn't work and stayed with them. I took care of the children, especially Albanian children who were there.

I always thank my wife too, because she took care of our children and cared for them, thankfully today they've all finished school and are working. They're all grown up. I'm grateful to her for taking care of them. I, being busy with others, was sometimes afraid that maybe my kids would go astray, but thankfully they turned out well too. It's a great pleasure today that when you come to Geneva, you

won't find a single young Albanian man or woman who isn't in a key position. There are many lawyers, many economists working in banks, professors, teachers, engineers, judges, prosecutors, and many lawyers, who all passed through those supplementary classes.

It's truly a joy when you meet them and realize they've changed the image, that bad image that existed about Albanians. Now, that bad image that Serbia had spread everywhere, claiming that Albanians weren't like others, even calling us things like "with tails" is no longer accepted. I'm telling you, it's such a good feeling when you hear these things. Until 2003, I had accepted living almost like a "parasite," in a way, because the state provides everything. I was involved in the school activities and didn't really care about earning money myself. But then in 2003 and onward, it started to bother me: Why, if I have the ability, shouldn't I work and earn my own income, rather than live as a parasite?

In 2003, in cooperation with the People's University, which was founded in 1996 thanks to the efforts of associations and us, they offered me an office. I was the Chairman of the League of Albanian Parents and Teachers… You've probably had the chance to visit there once? They gave me an office to work in the university's premises, to have closer ties with the League. I was to work one day a week. But later I started requesting to work full-time. They didn't have that possibility. Then they offered me a job at the Cantonal Social Insurance Services, and in 2007 I started working there full-time, in a workplace with almost 400 employees, not a single one Albanian. I started alone, already at a fairly advanced age.

My coworkers were surprised when they found out I was Albanian. Because they were used to seeing Albanians only in construction or cleaning jobs. But over time, they began to change their perception of us. Because I made every effort, even though it wasn't my professional field, I had moved into a different direction, now working in accounting. I had left education behind. But with great willpower and a lot of attention to detail, I showed them that we, too, know how to work. Because there, every detail mattered, everything was done by strict standards.

Today, I hear that there are now 10–15 Albanians working there. Since 2020, I've been retired. Besides this book {shows book}, I'm also working on two or three other projects, let's see how much I can finish. If there's any question I haven't answered or something I've skipped that you find important, feel free to ask…

Anita Susuri: I just wanted to ask a little bit about your activism, you mentioned the years 1997–1998. There was also a hunger strike, I think in Geneva?

Agim Paçarizi: Yes, yes. There's a lot to say, but maybe because of time… That was the beginning of the war. The war had started. You've surely heard, Geneva was probably the city most frequently walked by demonstrators outside of Kosovo. Demonstrations were held thousands of times in front of the international organizations, especially in front of the UN headquarters. In 1998, when the war started, and fighting was taking place here, a group of activists along with all the associations that existed there, organized a two-week-long demonstration. That means people stayed outside, day and night, in front of the UN headquarters.

I was in the organizational council. Each association had its own representative. There are still records, we're collecting them, and I'm working on compiling them too. After the two-week demonstration, we decided to go on a hunger strike to raise awareness and let the world know that a war and genocide were happening in Kosovo, and that it was an unfair fight. Because the KLA soldiers were in the right,

they were defending their people and fighting for their country. The hunger strike lasted seven days. There were 14–15 of us who stayed without food.

A support group was formed, people who supported and helped us. They organized medical staff to monitor us. Initially, we began outside the UN building, five or six of us. I read the letter that declared we, a group of activists, had decided to start a hunger strike and invited anyone to join us. Four or five of us were already there when the police arrived. It was January, early 1998. The police noticed something was going on. We had permission to protest, but not to hold a hunger strike. They came and asked for our documents, ID cards. It was cold, it had started snowing, and snow doesn't fall often there. The weather wasn't suitable for staying outside.

The police said, "You don't have the minimum conditions here, you can't stay. You need at least a tent and support teams." So they didn't let us stay there. From there, we moved to a local Protestant church that let us stay two nights. People brought us blankets, pillows, and we set up and settled in. After two days, they moved us to the People's University of the Albanians, a room was freed up in the basement, and we stayed there for five more days. So in total: two days at the church, five at the university.

All we had was water, and occasionally some herbal tea, no food at all. A doctor monitored us constantly. We formed working groups, some handled foreign media, some the Albanian media, others organized visits. We stayed in that hunger strike for seven full days. After that, the doctor instructed us to slowly begin eating again, starting with soup, because our bodies were weakening. Some friends and activists came, urging us to stop, saying the world already understood what was happening in Kosovo.

But once we had begun, we were determined to continue. There were even news articles covering our action. I believe, and many others like me believe, that others have done far more than I have. What I did is nothing compared to what many of my friends and fellow activists did for this country. The least we could do. We never thought, at least I never thought, and I'm sure others didn't either, that we were doing this for recognition or credit. We simply tried to do something for the good of our homeland. We succeeded, at least to some degree.

Anita Susuri: Thank you so much for your contribution and for the interview!

Agim Paçarizi: Thank you too, for not forgetting us, for not letting these hardships and those difficult days be forgotten. So that you and the generations to come can enjoy the freedom as they wish. That's something to be valued and appreciated, that you're doing something. It's good that you're researching, and I encourage you to contact everyone, because each person in their own way has done something for this country.

Anita Susuri: Thank you!

Agim Paçarizi: Thank you again!