# INTERVIEW WITH UKË XHEMAJ

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Duration: 186 minutes

Present:

1. Ukë Xhemaj (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. Ukë, thank you very much for taking part! Could you please introduce yourself and tell us something about your background, your family?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** First of all, thank you for the opportunity you have given us. I come from a village family, from a village in the Plain of Dukagjin, in the region otherwise known as Podgur. It is between Peja and Istog. The village is called Cërrollugë, near the *Banja e Pejës*.[1] It is an ancient settlement. There have been archaeological excavations there, and findings show that the area and its surroundings have been inhabited since the Neolithic period. The Kosovo Museum preserves archaeological finds from the spa itself. But my own family originally came from another village, which is now in the municipality of Peja. It belongs to Podgur and is called Jabllanicë e Madhe. It lies at the foot of the Accursed Mountains, next to the village of Radac, where the White Drin has its source.

My grandfather, known as Xhemë Zeka, had separated from the family. The place had become crowded, a densely populated village at the foot of the mountains. He decided to move the family homestead because there was too little space. They too had been involved in livestock farming and agriculture. When the brothers divided the property, he sold his part, his share, in the Rusolia mountains, for gold coins. He set out to buy land somewhere on the plain, where he could expand. He came to this village, Cërrollugë. There was enough space in that village. Part of the land was arable, while a large part was uncultivated. Forests, oak scrub, oak groves, what do I know? But the owner had been a *bey*.[2] They called him the *bey* of the bazaar, of the new bazaar, because during Ottoman times he had bought land; as a feudal lord, he had bought a lot of land.

My grandfather met him and bought that property. He bought the entire spa, the village of Cërrollugë up to Llukavc i Begut. It was a very large property along the Peja–Mitrovica road, it bordered Dobrushë. It covered hundreds of hectares. Because he sold Rusolia. Rusolia had been very valuable because it had good pastures for livestock, with water, and it had a very favorable price. My grandmother used to

[1] Well-known spa town and thermal spring resort.
[2] Bey was an Ottoman title used for local rulers, landowners, or officials. In this context, it refers to a wealthy landowner who held large estates during the Ottoman period.

tell me that when he came here, he brought with him two leather saddlebags full of *lira*.[3] With those *lira*, he bought that large property. He settled there. At the time, there had been some people from Malishtë working the land there. The Serbs called them Serbs from Vraja. The people called them *shkije*[4] from Vraja. Pejoratively, *shkije* from Vraja, that is what they were called. They had come from the highlands, from the foothills that we call mountainous areas.

In fact, later in life I learned that they were part of the highlanders of Malësia e Madhe, from the lower slopes, the foothills that we call Montenegrin. They had converted to Orthodoxy in order not to accept Islam. Then Montenegro, during the time of its kings, expelled them and sent them to the Plain of Dukagjin to change the structure of the population. They came into contact with the *bey*, and he took them on as tenant farmers to work his land. *Malisht*, from *malësor* [highlander], *Malisht*. And they continued there. When my grandfather bought that property, the *bey* told him, "Now you have no obligation to keep them on to work the land for you. You can remove them and bring others, or work it yourself." But he said, "I have had them working my land for all these years," he said, "let them continue their work." And they continued working for him just as they had worked for the *bey*.

However, when the time came for Turkey to withdraw from the Balkans during the Balkan Wars, I will shorten it a little, then Serbia entered for the first time, after the First World War. When Serbia entered, the situation was similar throughout the whole Plain of Dukagjin, as it was in our village. Tenant farmers had come from Montenegro, from Serbia, from Lika, and then Serbia issued a law that is well known in history, it is documented. It was called the "right of the tenant farmer." The right of the tenant farmer meant, "The property does not belong to the owner, but to the worker, to the one who worked it." They usurped my grandfather's property, by then it was his son's property, because Xhemë Zeka had come sometime around 1820–1840, around those years. He left two sons, Malë and Ramë. Ramë Xhema and Malë Xhema. Ramë Xhema was my grandfather. He had three sons and two daughters. The other one, Malë, had two sons.

They took the property, they usurped it right up to the doorstep of the house. They left them only a small plot there and a section of forest and woodland called *Iloma*. That part then… My grandfather died of a heart attack at the age of 34, and my grandmother then raised three sons and two daughters as orphans. One of the daughters was bitten by a snake in the spring and died, Nifa. The other, my aunt, that is, married and left descendants in Vrellë. And it is interesting to mention that an uncle of mine, meaning my father's brother, named Sadik, they have described this to me, but I did not ask, and I still do not know today, they say he was taken by the authorities of the first Serbia at the time. They… Serbia later became the second Serbia, because the first lasted until the '20s, and then the second began, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

[3] Lira refers here to Ottoman gold coins, commonly used as currency in the region during the late Ottoman period and often associated with larger transactions such as the purchase of land.
[4] *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet,* is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

They imprisoned him in Niš and killed him in prison immediately. I do not know the reason why, or how it happened. My grandmother would only say, "They came and said, 'You may open the wake, because he has died in prison.'" They brought some of his clothes as proof, covered in blood, and they washed them at home. She would tell me that the only one who knew, who remembered him, was my uncle's son Ali. He was born in '41, while I was born in '49. He would say, "He was well-built," he would say, "when he walked through a doorway, his chest would barely fit through it. A young unmarried man." My grandmother mourned him all her life. When I was a child, she would take me with her, to the fields and everywhere, because I was the first grandson, the son of her eldest son. She mourned him all the time. That lament, when we would go to the fields with her, now, later on, I remember her words about that son who was lost without a trace. I do not know.

I felt sorry for her, somehow I didn't want to, instinctively I didn't want to ask why. All this time has passed, I don't know, there is a villager there that might know, I say to myself, one of these days I will go and ask why he was imprisoned and ended up like that. Otherwise, I was born on March 10, '49, in that village, into a farming family. My family, my ancestors, had periods when they were wealthy, with a lot of property, and then they became poor when the authorities took everything from them, right down to the bare minimum. So unfortunately, it fell to me to grow up in a poor family. The whole village suffered the same fate as us, and almost everyone in my generation was poor, with the exception of two or three families that were considered better-off at the time, the Podrimaj and the Sutaj. But all of us children, when we went to school, when we played, we were barefoot, poorly dressed. We grew up with hardship, with suffering.

That followed us for a long time, a long time, until things began to improve a little after the demonstrations, after the fall of Ranković.[5] We began to recover as a family, as a village. Both in terms of education and a better social and economic life, and some people began to get an education. At that time… otherwise, my parents, my father's name was Xhemajl. He was uneducated. He knew, he had learned only how to write his first and last name, and my mother was the same. She came from a family in the village of Shushicë e Ulët. It was a well-off family. They had a lot of property. I know that later they stood by us a great deal. During the time when we were in crisis, they helped us a lot, with grain. They had fields of cereals, livestock, and mountain pastures. All of that. They helped us as a family.

We got through that crisis, when there was a major crisis with those neighbors who took the property right up to our door. Then the time came when those tenant farmers, who had worked for us, were given the land by Serbia. My father worked there for them for one tenth of the produce. From his own property, he received one tenth as his share and gave the rest to them. Later, I remember, the arrangement was for a quarter. Four shares for him, one share for ourselves, whether it was hay, corn,

[5] Aleksandar Ranković (1909–1983) was a senior Yugoslav communist official and head of the state security apparatus. He was removed from power in 1966, an event often associated in Kosovo with the easing of political repression against Albanians and the expansion of Albanian-language education and cultural rights.

or wheat. Because the situation changed; the state made them owners. So we went through what the people say: "This world," they say, "goes in strips and strips" (laughs). Sometimes this way, sometimes that way. A wheel, turning around and around. I experienced it through the recollections of my elders: that a family could once be doing well, and then fall into deep poverty.

My education…

**Anita Susuri:** I also wanted to– sorry if…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Speak freely.

**Anita Susuri:** Since we are talking about the time of Ranković and all that, do you have any memories, for example? You told me about your father, that he had the possibility to go to Turkey…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Yes, yes. I can recall as much as you want. I was born in '49, and the time when I was born had been a period of great drought, lasting three years. On top of that, relations later broke down, as I learned, between Yugoslavia and Russia, during the time of Stalinism. Albania remained loyal to it. Until then, relations had been good, people had moved back and forth. Then the border closed. The border closed on both sides, and violence began on this side of the border. Then came the Informbiro[6] period. My father used to say that in the years '49–'53, "At that time, we had livestock that we kept. There was meat, there was milk, but there was no bread and no grain. Because the authorities came and cleared out the grain bins, the so-called surplus after the Second World War, they emptied the grain bins and we became poor." From '45 onward, they were left extremely poor. They would take what they called the surplus. They would wipe out the grain bin, they would take the flour.

When the great drought came, it found them completely on the brink of starvation. "We would go," he said, "on horseback to army friends we had from Podgur and over to Reka e Keqe, around Deçan and Mulliq, to some army friend, to borrow a kilogram or so of flour, if he had any to give you. The family would be waiting," he said, "waiting, because there was nothing to eat." Many people ate tree bark. They would saw beechwood and mix its bark with fat, with cream, to increase the volume a little, because it would clump together and rub against itself because of the dryness. They got through that time. But what was worse was the terror. The winters were harsh.

There was always a metre of snow. Severe frosts. I remember when the snow reached up to two metres, covering the house up to the windows, up to the roof, and my uncle and father had to open the window from the inside and make a hole through the snow to get to the well. Two metres. It is known

[6] Informbiro refers to the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, commonly known as Cominform. In the Yugoslav context, the term is especially associated with the 1948 Tito–Stalin split, when Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet bloc. This led to political repression, border closures, arrests, and suspicion toward people accused of being pro-Soviet or connected to Albania, which remained aligned with Stalin at the time.

as the red snow. Because a southern wind from Africa had brought African sand, or perhaps volcanic dust, something like that, and it formed a layer overnight. Two metres of snow. I remember the whole village, when I was in fifth or sixth grade, helping one another make a path, a narrow road, to the mill, so whoever had a little grain could take it there to be ground. It was bitterly cold. And in that freezing cold, Ranković's campaign to collect weapons[7] was taking place. They were collecting weapons, but no one had any weapons.

They would take them away, bring them in, and torture them all in that snow; they would beat them all night. My father and uncle would talk about it. I was around seven years old at the time, in '56. They would mention names: "They took this one tonight, they took that one." I remember when my maternal uncle's father came one night and said, "We have to leave here and go to Turkey, to save our families." "Where would we go?" "We'll go as far as Skopje, we'll get the *vasikas* there" – that is what they called passports, visas, "we have to settle in Skopje until they prepare our papers, and then go to Turkey." My uncle somehow agreed, but my father absolutely would not. "No," he said, "I'm not going. I will die here, but I'm not going to Turkey. If I could, I would go to Albania, but the border is closed." They were using violence.

I remember one moment, when they were explaining one night, he said, "At the police station in Runik" – Runik is in Drenica, near Podgur. There had been a Serbian gendarmerie police command post there. In the winter, in that great snow, they had taken them from their beds, calling them by name. I have forgotten their names. They tied them up there, in a garden. I later got to see that garden myself, with apples, with fruit trees in front of the station. "Every tree," he said, "had one person tied to it with wire. All night in the snow, in suffering." Only to instill terror, panic, so people would flee, leave for Turkey. Now, for the young people, for me for example, and surely for everyone my age, that was terrifying.

All evening long, you would hear conversations like that in front of you, and then the next day you had to go to the first grade of primary school. In primary school, from the third grade, we began learning Serbian in Banjë. We had them there, of course, as children we grew up with them and knew some Serbian, the kind they spoke, a dialect. In the third grade, there was a teacher who taught us Serbian, some Sava Kovačević. A Montenegrin from Vitomerica. He also worked in Vitomerica. His house was there, but he would come here to teach. It was terrifying for children, frightening for children, so much so that when the time came to leave and take our school bag, back then we did not have proper bags, the ones our mothers had made for us, embroidered or woven on a loom and sewn with a kind of strap attached to carry them to school, we would be terrified. We would be seized by stress, trembling because they were going to beat us.

[7] The weapons collection campaign refers to the Yugoslav state security action in Kosovo in 1955–1956, during which authorities searched for and confiscated allegedly illegal weapons. In Kosovo Albanian memory, the campaign is strongly associated with Aleksandar Ranković's repressive policies, police violence, intimidation, arrests, and pressure on Albanians during that period. Historians disagree on some details of responsibility and intent, but the campaign itself is widely documented as a harsh security operation.

He did not just beat us, he terrified us. He would take a piece of firewood, the kind used for heating in winter. They were beech logs, cut into metre-long pieces, measured by the cubic metre. They were thick, and we would put them into those stoves for heating. He would take one of those logs and say, "Hold out your hands." If you had not memorized a poem, or if you made a mistake out of stress while reciting the lesson in Serbian, he would be there with that log, and you felt as if he wanted to kill you. A child, a child in the third grade. Then, that had actually been good compared to later. When spring came, he would send the pupils to the forest, which was near the school, to get thin sticks, and then he would beat us with them. Or… but yes, there was also a very harsh, frightening method, and Albanians used it too.

For example, when the Albanian teachers there wanted to punish pupils for not having learned properly, they would take sugar cane, the stalk, shell it, scatter the grains across the floor, and make you kneel on them, put your hands against the wall, and then they would hit your fingers with thin sticks, or beat you on the tips of your fingers. Terrifying. Albanian teachers also used violence; it was horrible. If someone did not study or did something, they would say, "To the school attic," and they would put up the ladder and make them climb into the attic until nightfall. In the end they would say, "We are taking you to prison." That period was terrifying. In those years, whatever the Serbs did, our teachers did no less. That is how it was, there was violence, there was terror. Anyway, whatever it was, it passed. Then, as we grew older, seventh grade, eighth grade. We studied, we studied a lot, too much.

The terror, the beating, was waiting for you. You had to study all night. When we returned home, luckily for us, that village had electricity, so we studied, we had that advantage. Because some villages did not have it; they studied with lamps, with kerosene. One part of Podgur still did not have electricity even when I went to secondary school. With lamps. With a wick. It was a kind of device made of sheet metal, with a wick, filled with kerosene, as they called it. It gave off smoke, it was awful, and people studied with that in secondary school. After I finished primary school there with excellent grades, I enrolled in the Istog gymnasium,[8] the first generation. Now, to continue schooling, several of us from my village enrolled: Sylë Sutaj, Ahmet Rugova, and me. Three of us. There were no others. They did not have the means to continue their education.

There was no means of transportation to go to the gymnasium. From my village to there, it was 13 kilometres. My maternal uncles were in Shushicë; from there, it was eight. Still, it was five kilometres closer. Five there, five back was enough, ten kilometres less a day. I travelled every day. My father decided to get a job because there was some income from agriculture, life had begun to improve a little, but there was no cash. He got a job because of me, and also so that the other children after me could all go to school. He got a job at the wood-processing combine in Istog as a worker, so he could

[8] Gymnasium is a type of academically oriented secondary school that prepares students for higher education. In Kosovo and the wider region, it usually refers to a general secondary school with a broad curriculum, similar to a college-preparatory high school.

earn money to educate me. I had to go from the village of Shushicë, from my maternal uncles' house, by bicycle, because it was eight kilometres. Still quite a distance, eight plus eight, 16 kilometres every day. My father bought me an old bicycle.

But there wasn't much. I had one jacket made of coarse wool, with a thin shirt underneath, only a shirt. Winter, with that kind of biting wind that blows in Istog, that kind of freezing gust. For two years I travelled like that. Winter mornings, the night long, the day short. We travelled in the dark. The bicycle broke down and we couldn't find tyres for it. I had to walk eight kilometres through the snow. Heavy snow, half a metre, a metre. I would set off before dawn. My grandmother there, my mother's mother, would prepare food for me. She would get up early in the morning and make me some cornbread, baking it for me over the fire. I liked it to be like coffee. She would serve it to me with some milk and I would eat well but that was all I had for the whole day, until evening, until I returned through the snow.

Not a single day did I miss school in those two years, despite that journey I had to make. Snow, rain, freezing wind. Then, when we got there, there was torture similar to what we had experienced with that Sava, because it was still the time of Ranković, '64. In secondary school, we had almost all our subjects in Serbo-Croatian. Mathematics was taught by a Radeta Đurić from Lug of Istog; there was a Milia, the geography teacher; there was a Musë, who taught history. Then, after him, two others came, sent from Belgrade, both with master's degrees in science. People in the village, in Istog, were surprised that people with master's degrees would come there: a Stefanović and an Orlik Mandić. Mandić taught Latin. A dead language. It was not spoken. He taught us Latin. The other one taught history.

This Mandić drank a lot; he always came to class drunk. As soon as he entered, he would make a gesture with his hand as if holding a sword. "Your heads should be cut off." We were secondary school students. "Your heads should be cut off." He would make a sword gesture with his hand. "You should not be given knowledge, your heads should simply be cut off with a sword." He terrified us. He would come in drunk like that. Stefanović explained history in his own way, however he wanted. Đurić taught us literature. We had to learn literature, all of Serbian Romanticism. We had to write reports on 70 novels. With other people's criticism, analyses, all of that, and learn it only in Serbian. There was no time for the language, because we would come home late at night. They could ruin your grades, make you repeat the year; it was terrifying. Today I still remember many verses from Serbian Romanticism, because they drilled them into us through violence, not because we liked them, but through violence.

Perhaps even Serbs there do not know them, but I still remember them. The typical ones. I remember the history they taught us, in the way they wanted. Once they took us to the [site of] Battle of Kosovo on an excursion, a trip. He took us up there and started telling us how, at the Battle of Kosovo, they had defeated the Sultan, how there had been no Albanians in the battle, only Serbs. They were trying to convince us of a completely different reality, one that was not true. We only studied medieval

history. Their wars, all of that, until the fourth year. Toward the end, he left, because Ranković fell in ’66, and they fled.

Stefanović had apparently been the chief adviser, because later a brochure came out, which this Albanian professor, Hajdar Suti, gave to me. “Do your paper,” he said, “on the Brioni Plenum.” I came to know about this topic later. Stefanović, the one who taught us history, had been an adviser to Ranković. And Mandić was also part of that inner circle. They later fled Istog. Hajdar then explained our national history to us a little, toward the end, covering the medieval period, Skanderbeg, and onward.

**Anita Susuri:** Were there no Albanian teachers at all at that time?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** There was the teacher of Albanian language, Selman, who taught us Albanian. Then Drasković, who taught us physics, then left and a Professor Bujupi came. In the beginning, we had everything in Serbian. But they would find them somewhere, I don’t know, maybe from other centres, and they gradually transferred. For two years, everything was in Serbian, and in the third and fourth years, as the teachers became fewer, Albanian teachers began to come. As I said, after Ranković, in ‘66, the situation changed, and professors for Albanian language, chemistry, biology came. They taught us in Albanian. Like that.

**Anita Susuri:** Were there many classes?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** No. There were two classes. One before noon and one after noon. We were in Albanian classes. There were Serbian classes too. Four classes in total. Two Albanian, two Serbian, that is what there was. But it is interesting that the principal… there were no greater opportunities. It was Abdyrrahim Gashi, a well-known pedagogue who, until recently, lectured at the faculty in the pedagogy department. He was the greatest and best worker in Kosovo. He was recognized as such several times. Because he kept that school going under those circumstances, with discipline, and the pupils studied. It was a regime, as they say, of military discipline. No one missed a class. As I said, for four years I have no absences marked in the class register. The registers exist; I do not have a single day of absence recorded in them. Considering what the times were like, and what kind of journey it was, mostly on foot.

There was discipline at the highest level and they studied a lot. That whole generation, all of them became doctors, engineers, PhDs, people with master’s degrees, those who came out of that time. Then, when they found employment in different places, they spread out, and as the first generation they were successful. He kept the gymnasium going for several generations as well…

**Anita Susuri:** Were there girls too?

**Ukë Xhemaj**: Yes, there were girls. There were girls, not many, but there were some. They were in my class. There was Hajrie Berisha from Gjyrakovc, there was a Nemide Pula from the Pula family of Istog, they had come there from Gjakova. There was a Jana, she was from Has. Her father was a baker; she was Catholic. There was also another one from Shushicë. There were two sisters, the daughters of the hoxha of Shushicë. Both of them. One was Mihrije Mahmutaj, and the other sister, what was her name, I forgot it. Mihrije then continued her schooling here and got a job. She worked at the post office; she is still alive.

Her son later had the misfortune of being killed. The police officer, that one, here… she was married to someone from Kaçanik. These were the girls I had in my class. Those of us who travelled from far away had the first shift, before noon. Those from Istog and some of the surrounding villages came in the afternoon. It was because of the time, so we could get home sooner. There were two classes.

**Anita Susuri:** At that time, was there space for any cultural activities?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** For cultural activities, the conditions were very limited. Until the third year, they did not allow any kind of activity to take place. Later, we celebrated the school day.[9] There was a drama group there, recitations and things like that. Sports field, competitions like that. They would take us there to watch films but there was nothing more than that. There were not many activities, either in primary school or in secondary school. There would be one activity organized for the school day, but otherwise, no, there weren't any.

**Anita Susuri:** Did Istog have a house of culture?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** No, no. There was what they called a *dom* in Serbian, a kind of hall where films were shown. Only films. There was a hall for films. Only that. The house of culture that exists today in Istog was built later. That place was for watching films, yes. They would take you to watch some film. When I was in primary school in Banjë, there was nothing at all. But there was a travelling cinema, films would be projected onto the walls of the hotel. The audience stayed outside. They would bring films. Very rarely, maybe once a month. Then everyone would run to go and watch the film; it was an attraction. But there was nothing else.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it an enclosed space?

**Ukë Xhemaj**: No, no. For a while it was outside. There was a village there, Lubovë, where there was a house where the party officials held meetings after the war. And on the outside wall of that house, they would project the films. They would bring the chairs from inside to outside, and whoever wanted to would go and watch there. There were no tickets. Later, there was an old hotel. They called it the old

[9] School Day refers to the annual celebration of a school, usually marking the anniversary of its founding. It is often observed with ceremonies, cultural programs, and activities prepared by students and staff.

hotel. They even called it Qeta's Hotel, because the owner was a Montenegrin, Qeta. It belonged to the state, but he used it, and they called it Qeta's Hotel. Inside, there was a longer hall, and they would use one wall of that room to show the film.

**Part Two**

**Ukë Xhemaj:** After we finished secondary school, the gymnasium, I came to Pristina to enroll at the faculty. This was Pristina in the fall of '68. When I came, the area from the Grand Hotel downward was fields. The area around Bregu i Diellit was fields. Right here, above where the church is now, it was all fields. Only the center was built up. Where the Grand Hotel is now, there were some small kiosks, some craftsmen, some shoemakers, things like that. All made of wood, small. When I came to enroll at the faculty that day, it was the first time, the first time I had ever arrived in the city, in Pristina. There was no communication. I came by train from Peja. When I wanted to come, I remember my grandmother and my father. My grandmother would say to my father, "Don't let the boy go, because you'll lose him. Don't let him go to Pristina." My mother, strangely, insisted, "No, he should go."

They would tell me, "You will become a *shka.*[10]" He insisted, "He should go, he should go." The biggest problem I had until I finished the faculty followed me everywhere. Then, when I went home during the exam period in May, she would wait for me at the courtyard gate and ask, "What grade did you get?" Not whether I had passed, but what grade I got. She was very education-loving, even though she herself was uneducated. She would suffocate me with that. I was always under pressure from my mother about what grade I would get, because she would be waiting for me at the door when I went there. In the end, when I asked to get a job, she was the one who insisted that I come to Pristina, not stay there. They accepted me there. But when I came to the faculty, as I said, I travelled to Peja and took a train, and my shoes, because we travelled on foot to Peja to catch the train and come here to submit the documents for the entrance exam.

There was a shoemaker in front of the theater, there were some shoemakers who cleaned shoes, shoe shiners. I asked him, "Where are the faculties?" because I did not know how to orient myself. He polished my shoes a little, because they had become muddy, and told me, "Go down this road," he said, "they are at the end there." I had a desire, I loved the sciences. I wanted to study astronomy. But here they told me that there was no astronomy in Pristina, at the faculties. I wanted to enroll in mechanical engineering, I wanted that. I had come with that idea, to submit my documents for mechanical engineering. But when I arrived at the Faculty of Philosophy, I saw many young men and women who had come to enroll. I went into the hall. When I went in, there was a counter full of people pushing forward. I joined them.

[10] *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet,* is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

When my turn came, he took the secondary school report cards that I had. The clerk asked me, "Which department do you want to submit them to?" I said, "I want mechanical engineering." He said, "There is no mechanical engineering here." I said, "What is here?" He said, "There is physics, geography, mathematics," and he listed them. I loved geography very much. There had been a professor named Emilia, and although she was Serbian, she was persistent, she was not a nationalist. She had taught us a lot of geography in secondary school. I said, "Geography." I submitted the documents. When I submitted them, they saw the report card, they looked at it quickly there. He said, "You don't need an entrance exam, you have all fives in all the years." I was very happy. He said, "You only have to come in October, enroll, and get your student booklet. You don't need an entrance exam."

I left full of joy and went back. That is how I enrolled. Then I came and continued. I loved this field too. I worked a lot. There was the library then. All day in lectures, I never missed lectures, and until the library closed, I read in the library. I read literature. I even remember that later here, too, we had Serbian. The department had been opened by Professor Mark Krasniqi; there were no Albanian staff. He brought university professors from Belgrade, people he knew, because he himself had studied there. He brought them. There was a Lubinjko Svetinović from Čačak, but based in Belgrade, a professor with three completed doctorates: Mathematics, geodesy, and cartography. He taught us cartography, a subject within geography.

So even today, the 32 projections, how maps are made, I don't want to say maybe I am the only one who knows them, but I worked with him. I received a Ten,[11] with all the deformations that can occur. Projections. I learned 32 of them and I still have them in my head today. He was a phenomenal professor. Then there was a Dušan Dukić. He taught us ideology and climatology. He was the best known in Yugoslavia. Some books were based on his texts on climate. There was Olivera Marković, director of Majdanpek. She taught us geology. In the June exam period, only two of us entered the oral exam, only two. I was the only one who passed the exam; the other failed. There was a cabinet, and it still exists today, with rocks from the entire Balkans. In small drawers, one small stone in each.

During lectures, she explained the Earth to us, its geology. She would give you a stone and say, "Explain its chemical and physical composition to me in order to enter the exam." She would give you three stones. She would take different ones, volcanic ones and what do I know. But if you did not say exactly what they were, you did not have the right to enter the oral exam. Forty-two of us had registered, and two of us entered the test. She was a very capable professor; she taught us the subject. Even today, those subjects, physical geography, geology, geomorphology, it feels as if I learned them today, I have them all in my head. And human geography too, all of it. Astronomy, we would stay up all night. The problem I had was the cold. Winter. To observe this, there was the telescope.

The best telescope… because Professor Nikola Miković from Belgrade used to say, "My students in Belgrade don't have this; they have an old one." This one was new and magnified a lot. He would tell us, "If the timing is right, when the spacecraft flies, we would see it like a ship." We, the students,

[11] Ten is the highest grade in the university grading system, equivalent to an A.

would observe the celestial bodies and draw, using a coordinate system, the position and movement of the bodies in order to identify them. We would stay there all night. With one tea each. We took turns because it was severely cold. The faculty was flat there, the telescope.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it on top of the faculty?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** On top of the faculty, we would set it up on the slab.

**Anita Susuri:** The Faculty of Philosophy, right?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** The Faculty of Philosophy, where it is today. But the roof was flat, and we would put the telescope there and point it toward the stars. But it was severely cold, cold, snow. In groups of four, four at a time, we would observe, then run downstairs, drink some tea just to warm up, and the others would go up. All night until morning, until the sun came out, to observe all the stars. So the stars and their movements are still as clear to me today as they were then, because we had to learn them. Otherwise, we would not get a passing grade. It was interesting, but the cold, I completed the faculty with one sweater, with one sweater. We had nothing. The cold was severe. There was curiosity to see them. We would point it toward those three high-rises over there, in that part of Pristina near the dormitories.

There was a worker, I don't know who he was. He had his office and worked until late at night. There were no curtains. It was the sixth or seventh floor. Sometimes we would point the telescope lens toward him and see the clock contact going tick, tick, tick {onomatopoeia}, and we would count it. That is how much curiosity drew us in. The professor would tell us, "Turn it back." Sometimes just out of curiosity, to see. There was great curiosity. And so. Then I finished the faculty on time. I graduated on July 12, during the June exam period. In the student booklet… in '72. I enrolled in '68, and on July 12, '72, I graduated. The professors who were on the committee, Professor Musa Gashi, Professor Asllan Pushka, and Muharrem Carnabregu, were on my committee. They offered me the chance to stay on as an assistant. But I said, "No."

I had one… I won't mention it now, it is not pleasant. Because of one grade in morphology, the morphology professor gave it to me, lowered my grade. He gave me an eight. He simply took revenge. I know his name, but I won't give it, who he is. Now he is in Bosnia. He went to Sarajevo. After the war, he settled there. He was a geomorphologist. Otherwise, he was from the highlands there, from Vuthaj. He took us out into the field to see geomorphological forms. By bus, and he explained them to us. But the way he ended up resenting me and later taking revenge was this: when he took us out into the field in the Plain of Dukagjin, there was a stream, a kind of periodic flow that appears when the snow melts; there is not much water. He assigned me the topic… he was explaining it. But he said it was a meandering valley. I… from one bank to the other, it was six kilometres, and that field is still a valley.

From what we had learned, from what he had explained, and from what I had read in geomorphology all the time in the library, all the publications were in Serbian and Croatian. I said to him, "Professor,

that cannot be a meandering valley." He said, "Why can't it?" I said, "Because we don't have the Amazon here, it is a periodic stream. A meandering valley is when the river discharge exceeds the riverbed and floods both of its banks, creating a plain up to the point the water has reached, and that is called a meandering river valley," I said. "That is a stream. It brings stones down from the mountains."

At that moment, the geology professor came in; he had some business with him. It was my mistake, but I was a student. I turned to him because he was a geologist and knew it, he had completed his studies in Belgrade. I said, "Professor, one question." I was there at the blackboard, telling him it was not that. He said, "What?" I said, "This is six kilometres, this is a periodic flow, it only flows when the snow melts, in the summer it dries up. Is it a meandering valley?" He said, "No, what kind of meandering valley?" The other one grabbed his overcoat, went out the door, and threw the chalk. When I went to the exam, he took revenge on me. I entered the exam, he gave me the questions, and I answered all three. Shamelessly, he told me, "I cannot give you a ten." I said, "Professor," I had brought the literature with me, "ask me anything you want in geomorphology." Because I had volunteered and sat in the first chair.

"Do you want me to ask you?" he said. I said, "Ask whatever you want." He thought, he thought for a bit, and then said, "What is an ergu?" An ergu in geomorphology is a glacial form, when glaciers advance and create a hollow. I told him it is this, this, this. He had not expected that I might know that. Then he said, "What are wave-cut hollows and cliffs?" Those form along the edges of oceans and seas, through wave erosion. I said, it is this, this, this. "No, no," he said, "I cannot give you a ten." I said, "No problem, Professor." All the students who were waiting in line stamped their feet on the floor as a sign of protest. He took their student booklets, left, and interrupted the exam until the next day.

A month later, I met him on the *korzo*[12] {laughs}. On the *korzo*, he stopped me, "Can I have two words with you?" I said, "Go ahead, Professor, what's new?" He said, "I apologize," he said, "I want to apologize to you." He had put the grade in my student booklet, so what was he apologizing for? I said, "I have forgotten about that. But you did me such a good turn," I said, "that I can never return it to you, never repay you." He said, "What?" I was with some friends; we used to go out walking. I said, "At that moment when you ruined my grades, when you gave me that eight, the only one," I said, "When I went home," I said, "I swore. I swore to myself that I would never, never, never take revenge on a student. That is what you did for me, and thank you very much. There is no need to apologize." These were small episodes like that, but they left an impression. Later, when those professors told me to stay on as an assistant, and they asked me for many years afterward too, because I worked at the Institute, I said, "No. As long as I have that colleague there," I said, "no." Until the war, I did not go because of him.

I went to the institute; Professor Mark proposed me. After graduation, I worked in education for two years. I have 19 days of experience at the Luigj Gurakuqi Gymnasium in Klina. From there, I went to the Sami Frashëri Gymnasium here in Pristina. At that time, it was called Ivo Lola Ribar. I taught geography

[12] Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

and astronomy. Then the ethnology branch was opened, with great effort by Professor Mark Krasniqi, who opened it within the institute. At first, as a sector within folklore. He told me to apply. I applied. He wrote the recommendation. I was accepted, along with Tefik Basha. After some time, he left and moved to the faculty because they needed an assistant in geography, since he was also a geographer. I continued there. Then, in '78, it separated and a proper branch was formed. I was there, and he brought in Ramadan Ibrahimi from the museum. At the beginning, it was only me.

I began working at the Institute, then doing scientific work, then I completed my master's degree in Zagreb. Then I completed my doctorate in ethnology here. After the war, from the Institute, we managed with great effort to open the Department of Ethnology. The history branch had a major contribution there, Professor Mark. But directly, my colleague Drita Statovci had an important role. Her husband was rector, and he arranged things there so it could pass quickly. The history branch supported it at the Faculty of Philosophy, and the Department of Ethnology was opened. Now the problem was that there was no staff. Because we were the only university, perhaps in Europe and in the world, that did not have this field of knowledge, not as a subject in primary school, not in secondary school, and certainly not at the faculty. Because culture was not allowed to be studied. Nor was there a department where one could study it.

The first ethnographers completed their studies in Belgrade or Zagreb or Ljubljana. As students. There were very few of them because it was difficult to get an education. There was Shpresa Siçeça, a colleague from Prizren, who later got a job in Prizren and maintained the League of Prizren.[13] You may know her. A very capable colleague, very good. We kept asking her to come here, but for a year she did not want to. Because people from Prizren are attached to Prizren. Finally, I convinced her and she came. She gave lectures here, but late, she was barely convinced. There was one, Sazane Kullashi, who had also completed her studies in Zagreb and got a job at the museum. There were no others. There was a Lajçi, Bashkim Lajçi. He too, I think, had completed his studies in Belgrade. He worked at the museum there, so we did not have staff to hold lectures. These were still in the process.

Shpresa had a master's degree, and we engaged her for some lectures. Then the burden fell mainly on me and Drita, with another colleague. For example, for the institute, we engaged Mehmet Halimi for ethnolinguistics. Professor Rexhep Munishi, doctor of ethnomusicology, lectured on ethnomusicology and, at one point, choreography. Drita and I had to teach subjects. The burden then fell on me. The program changed every two or three years, and there was no other way but to take on new subjects. The income for professors after the war was low. We invited a professor from Albania, Mark Tirtja, and he came and lectured. The travel costs and accommodation did not work out for him. He would come once a week, twice in one week. And Ali Muka too. Others did not come because the income was low, the salary was low.

[13] The 1878 Albanian Alliance that fought against border changes decided at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. The building where the Albanian leaders made their *besa* (sworn alliance) is on the river, upstream from the center of town. It is now a museum. The current building is a reconstruction of the original one, which Serbian troops burned down in 1999.

We invited a professor from Slovenia, and when he saw how much the salary was, he would not come. Another wanted 4,000 euros. Four thousand euros, and the four of us professors together did not receive that. So we were forced to sacrifice for the department and teach subjects without pay. Over those 19 years, I taught 17 or 18 subjects. Only two subjects were paid. All the others without a single dinar, not a single cent with full awareness until a generation was formed, until the third level came out, then after several generations they increased it. Drita also taught without pay. Drita and I often paid for a minibus to take our students into the field around Kosovo. They did not give us anything, they did not understand us.

When a generation came out, then we began taking on assistants. The first assistant was Zanita Halimi, an excellent student. Another staff member then came from England, this colleague of ours. We engaged him to teach the subject of customary law. He was a good worker. Now he has completed his doctorate, he is a full professor there. He has made a name for himself, and is still doing so. A full staff was created and it is functioning very, very well. But for many years we had to go on like this, with our own strength. Working. Especially later, we had fieldwork subjects. I mainly did the fieldwork. The colleagues later helped me; I would take them with me.

The institute sent me into the field, and we worked in the field for 30 years. Then we carried that over to the faculty. I took the students through all the regions of Kosovo. The regions of Albania, from the north to the south. I still regret that, because of material conditions, I could not take them to the Arvanites,[14] the Arbëresh[15] of Greece and Italy. I prepared the expedition, but we are sometimes a bit strange, and the money was sent elsewhere, so that failed. Nevertheless, it functioned, and we laid the foundations of anthropology at the University of Prishtina as well, where studies are now being pursued, and there are good students. There are students who have succeeded, who have gained positions in cultural institutions, and it is functioning well.

**Part Three**

**Anita Susuri:** I'm interested in the time when you were at the institute, when you did research and also went out into the field. How was that organized? Did you have resources? What were you most interested in researching?

[14] Arvanites are Albanian-speaking communities historically settled in Greece, especially in Attica, Boeotia, the Peloponnese, and nearby regions. Over time, many became linguistically and culturally integrated into Greek society, though older generations in some areas preserved forms of the Arvanite/Albanian language.

[15] *Arbëreshë* are Albanian-speaking communities in southern Italy, descended largely from Albanians who migrated there between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, especially after the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. They preserved distinct linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions over centuries.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Yes, fieldwork at the Institute, when I went to the Institute in '74, the Institute was in a building, an old military house from former Yugoslavia, where the present-day library is. It was a ground-floor building. That is where it was. There were few workers. When I went there, Rexhep Qosja[16] was the director. In the history branch, the scientific workers were Zekerija Cana[17] and Sejdullah Brestovci. In folklore, Anton Çetta;[18] in musicology, at first there was only Rexhep Munishi, and in the meantime Bahtir Sheholli also came to the musicology sector. In onomastics, there was also the onomastics branch, there was Skender Gashi. Skender Gashi. There was also the library, which functioned inside that building; there were two workers. Daut Bislimi and Emine Fetahu in the library.

There was the typists' sector. There were two typists, there were no others because there were few workers. I was accepted there in the ethnology branch, in the ethnology sector, together with Tefik Basha. After six months, Tefik left and moved to the faculty as an assistant. It suited him better there. I was left alone there in ethnology. At that time, the institute… because it had been re-established for the second time. It had been closed. Now Professor Anton Çetta, who had longer experience, had planned it out. He organized the expeditions from the Institute. At that time, two annual expeditions were organized, one in spring and one in autumn. One person from each branch, one direction each. Because there were few of us.

For example, a region would be selected, Rugova or Has, and we would stay there for one month. We did not have a vehicle. We went there with whatever we could. By bus, by train as far as Prizren, up to there. And then, at the municipality, we would report to the municipality, to the ministry of education and culture. They would find, or sometimes not find, a vehicle to take us to the first village where we had decided to begin the region. And then we would stay for one month, from village to village. We slept in *oda*.[19] The subjects would gather in the *oda*. Each of us had our own field. When the *oda* filled up with subjects, we would find the subject who was relevant to ethnology, to clothing, or to instruments. Another for history, another for onomastics. We would bring the subjects close to us, next to one another, and take notes. Everything they had. Some tape recorders with cassettes. Notebooks, pencils, some cameras. That was the equipment.

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[16] Rexhep Qosja (1936) is a prominent Albanian writer and literary critic from a part of Malësia in modern Montenegro (locally known as *Malesija*). He is known for his contributions to Albanian literature and his role in the political and cultural life of Albanians. Qosja has been an advocate for the rights of Albanians in the former Yugoslavia and has written extensively on issues of national identity, history, and culture.

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

[18] Anton Çetta (1920–1995) was an Albanian folklorist, university professor, and prominent figure in the reconciliation movement in Kosovo during the 1990s. He led efforts to resolve blood feuds among Albanians, promoting peace and unity through traditional methods of conflict resolution. His work significantly contributed to reducing violence and fostering social cohesion in Kosovo during a tumultuous period.

[19] *Oda* is a traditional guest room in Albanian households, especially common in rural areas, where men gathered to host guests, discuss community matters, tell stories, and transmit oral history. In ethnographic fieldwork, the *oda* often served as an important space for interviews and collective memory.

With this work, we recorded the situation in Kosovo at the beginning. One month in spring, one month in autumn. In addition, there were intermediate individual expeditions, as smaller groups, where we would return. The field material was systematized. It was catalogued, all the photographs were processed, and there was a need for additions. We could go individually, first of all, and secondly it was done that way. So fieldwork was very active, well organized. In addition to this, the professor had also begun working with external collaborators of the institute.

With teachers from schools in all parts of Kosovo, from all regions. He engaged Albanian language and history teachers through their families. Through their pupils, they would collect exhibits, record rare words, record terms related to the loom, and when an external collaborator completed one part, they would come and bring it to the institute. He would hold two meetings a year with them, every six months. He would advise them on further work. Bring valuable material for onomastics, for history, for ethnology, and some exhibits. Outside the work, outside the external collaborators. So a great deal of work was done. Professor Anton had managed to produce 22 volumes of folklore with the internal staff.

Gradually, when we moved into the new building… and there I forgot to say that the folklore sector, together with the Professor, also included Professor Anton Berisha in the old Institute building, Anton Berisha and Rrustem Berisha. Those three kept folklore going. That was all of us. When the new Institute building was contracted, we moved here and then the expansion began. The expansion began with each branch taking on new staff. In my branch, Ramadan Ibrahimi came from the museum, as a professional associate, because he had only completed the faculty. He came there. Then in ’78, Drita Halimi Statovci came, also a geographer. We became three in our branch. Much later, we then took on Lumnie Kadriu, who had completed ethnology in Zagreb, and we became four. There were four Institute staff.

However, the work in the field always continued. Much later, when Fazli Syla became director, he bought us a car. It was a Lada, a Niva, not Lada but Niva, a field vehicle, an off-road car. That was when, after so many years, we were able to go somewhere into the field by car. Otherwise, it was all on foot. When we went out on foot to cover the field route. But a lot of work was being done. Because we worked all night, even until after midnight with subjects. There were many subjects. They lived in villages. They were a generation that had created culture. They had transmitted oral histories from their elders. They held values, and worked with tools. Everything was alive. Ethno-culture was alive, it functioned. In the ‘70s and ‘80s. In fact, those were already the ’80s, because histories get mixed up. People consider the years ‘71, ‘72, ‘73 as the ‘70s, but those are years of the ’80s, not the ’70s. ’81, ’82, ’83 up to the ’90s are years of the ’90s.

So I say, in the field, it was an extraordinary experience, extraordinary, with subjects. Since we were few, in every expedition we had to change fields. Even within the field itself, we would switch here and there. Sometimes we would talk with an old woman who knew mythology, who knew family upbringing, who knew about clothing, and we explored that. The next winter, we would find a farmer

who talked about work tools, work, agricultural tradition; we would find a good master of folk architecture. That colleague in musicology, in ethnology, with instrumentalists and others, and so on. So the whole material, spiritual, and artistic culture in the field was exhausted. I cannot say exhausted, but we took the maximum from it.

That material was catalogued, systematized, and submitted to the archive. A large part of it was damaged in the last war. One part is found in individual libraries, because whoever could take something did so. The sound archive was badly damaged. The film archive as well. But there is something, something has remained. A good part was published, in the journal *Gjurmime Albanologjike*[20] and in the French-language journal. Parts of the papers were selected and chosen for language, and those issues were exchanged with all the libraries of Yugoslavia, and with those of Albania. It is interesting to mention that the first expeditions began in '75. After Ranković, there was a period when Kosovo could breathe a little.

There were those changes. The university opened in '70, it was established in 1970. Let me tell you something, in '70, as a student of those years, in '70 the university was established with several possible faculties. In the first generation as a university, Albanian women from all regions of Kosovo flooded in. So many of them, and the number exceeded 30,000 full-time students. The University of Gepe in Germany, with 400 years of experience, had never managed to have 30,000 full-time students; small Kosovo did it. Most of them were girls. All of Drenica came here to study, they flooded in. This was what brought the demonstrations in '81,[21] brought the change. The cornerstone of those events. I remember in '68, when I came in my first year of studies, the first protests of '68[22] were held.

When we went out into the street that night, late in the evening, in this part here toward the Grand, at that time there was the army. Hydajet Hyseni was there, he climbed up into a linden tree and was speaking from a linden tree. But then they shot and killed a student. They shot and killed him. This main road, the square where it is now, from the building. That is where the students cooled down. But they moved forward, broke things, smashed things and so on. It became big. Hundreds were imprisoned. They took and sent to prison whomever they could catch,. Eventually it ended, and that night we came, someone told us, "Run away, because they are coming to the dormitories and they will take all of you." I do not know who that was. We ran away. I went to Banjë. When I went to Banjë, to my birthplace, people there had begun to gather too, and they said that the news was that protests had to begin in all the centers of Kosovo, in '68, there in the center.

[20] *Gjurmime Albanologjike* is a scholarly journal published by the Albanological Institute in Prishtina. It includes research in fields such as linguistics, literature, history, folklore, ethnology, and other areas of Albanian studies.
[21] The 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo were student-led protests that began in Prishtina and spread across Kosovo, initially over social and economic conditions but soon developing into broader political demands, including demands for Kosovo to become a republic within Yugoslavia. The protests were suppressed by Yugoslav authorities and followed by arrests, dismissals, and increased political repression.
[22] The 1968 demonstrations in Kosovo were protests by Kosovo Albanians demanding greater political, educational, and national rights within Yugoslavia, including the use of the Albanian flag, improved status for Kosovo, and the establishment of a university in Prishtina. They are often seen as an important step toward the founding of the University of Prishtina in 1970.

**Anita Susuri:** '81 or '68? Because Hydajet Hyseni was in '81.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Sorry, in '81. Who was it? Someone had climbed up into the linden tree there. Maybe it was Hydajet.

**Anita Susuri:** In '68?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** In '68, I know. In '81, again, it was the students. One person climbed up into the linden tree. He spoke from the linden tree. Others began throwing stones, breaking shop windows. They would take cobblestones from the road. That was when they shot one of them and killed him. They imprisoned 200. An order came from Tito,[23] not Tito, it was someone he had sent, what was his name, he had a cane, he had been a fighter in the Second World War. I cannot remember his name now, it will come back to me. He was at the top of Yugoslavia. He proposed to Tito, and he came to Pristina. He proposed, they say, "Release them immediately." Tito released them so that it would not become bigger. Protests had begun at the same time in Belgrade. They had also begun in then Czeckoslovakia, and he released everyone from prison.

The demands were fulfilled for the university to be created. The university was established in '70. Enrollments flooded in, education began here on a large scale. Our own cadres began to be educated abroad, to complete master's degrees in Zagreb, in Ljubljana, and to come back here. With our own cadres, first they began teaching as people with master's degrees, then eventually we completed doctorates. It was filled out. It reached where it reached. Gradually. Then in '81 came that great storm of protests, demonstrations. At that time, the whole institute went out en masse. We went out into the street, they were shot at, they were beaten by the police, but they never stopped. In the end, they came to close the Institute. The Institute was endangered. At the Academy, they entered the Academy. They removed them from the Academy. They took their library, they took their books. They brought some encyclopedias, some special publications to us at the Institute, supposedly for safekeeping.

It was known that it was only a matter of time. I remember every day, after the day ended, we would turn off the lights and wait for when they would come. Then we took out our books, together with all those of the Academy, loaded them onto a truck at night, and took them to a geographer here in the Hospital Neighborhood, surname Krasniqi. He gave us a basement downstairs and said, "Bring the books to me." Because they would take them and burn them all. We workers carried them in sacks. A truck came at night, someone loaded the books. We took the books there, what we could. Almost most of them, not all, because we could not manage. We put them in that basement, as much as the basement could hold. And then it did not last. Someone from the bakery, Qerim, would bring us one meal of bread with something in the evening. We stayed at night in shifts, guarding the institute.

[23] Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) was the leader of the Yugoslav Partisans during the Second World War and later the president of socialist Yugoslavia from 1953 until his death. His leadership shaped Yugoslavia's federal system and its policy of non-alignment during the Cold War.

One night, we were on the second floor there. We had divided ourselves by floors, the workers, to guard. When he came… there it was, we were on the third floor. Anton Çetta, I happened to be there, Qosja. There were others. Adem Zejnullahu. Then he came from the lower floor, because there was a switchboard operator, and said, "They have come," he said, "the police are in front of the institute." And the director now was Sadri Fetihu. It was not Rexhep Qosja, but Sadri Fetihu. Rexhep had finished his mandates, two or three mandates. Then Sadri was elected, Sadri Fetihu. He turned to the director, "Sadri," he said, "it is your responsibility, you are the director, go downstairs and talk to them." Sadri went down, and when he reached the entrance downstairs on the ground floor, there were the police. He said to them, "I am the director, go ahead, what do you want?" One of them suddenly punched him and broke all his teeth, knocking all his teeth down. When Sadri came upstairs, they stormed the place.

But how did they turn on the lights, since we had turned them off, how did they know? In one second all the lights came on and the Institute lit up. How? They had come before, they knew. Or they knew the lighting plan and touched the switches, who knows. They began beating people. There were many police. They hit Professor Anton and threw him down the stairs. There was a typist, Xhemajl Sahiti, the poor man had a disability in his leg. If he had not been there to catch him in his arms, by chance at the bottom of the stairs, he caught the professor by the head. He was about to fall down the stairs to the ground. After they punched and kicked him, they threw him to the bottom of the stairs. And all the others too. Whoever they reached, they beat.

**Anita Susuri:** You too?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Everyone. There was nowhere to protect yourself because there were many police. You would guard against this one, and another would hit you from behind. They beat all of us, without exception. We all took beatings. Some more, some less. There was a Ragip Mulaku in linguistics; he hit back at a policeman. The policeman hit him and he hit him back. Then six or seven of them jumped on him and nearly killed him. There were many, many of them. Dozens of armed police. They took us outside. They entered the institute. Then the work was interrupted. In the end, Musa Haxhiu let us use his house as a building. We worked in his house for several years until we returned to the institute again. That professor had been a professor of medicine, and later he went to America. The institute has a long history.

In the Institute archive, in your field, it would be good for you to ask. I believe they will allow you. Each worker was assigned, when we returned, to write a report about the accounts, about the situation. Not when we returned, but once we had gone to that man's house, because the event was still fresh, how it happened to us. Each of us wrote one, typed up. It is archived in the Institute archive. It is interesting to see. It has not been published. They will probably give you access like that, ask for it. Maybe they will give it to you.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you something. You were there from the beginning, meaning when the institute was in that old house you mentioned, near the library. Then do you remember the time when you came to the new building that was built, where it is today?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Yes, here, I will tell you.

**Anita Susuri:** Then you moved out to a house again, how was all of this?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Look. When the new Institute was built, construction began, Dukagjini of Gjakova took on the construction of the building. We were in the old building. The work in the field continued. In fact, I was approaching the age of 27. Under the laws of former Yugoslavia, those who had completed faculty, higher education, had the right to postpone military service until the age of 27. I used that right. I did not want to go to the army, and I was working at the institute. I got married. I had a son, my first child. We did not have an apartment; we were renting. In fact, at that time I was renting together with Ibrahim Rugova,[24] in Bregu i Diellit. Two rooms, it was a one-story house. The owner was upstairs. We lived on the ground floor. I had two rooms on the right, he had two rooms on the left. We shared one bathroom. He was an assistant, I was an assistant.

We were renting there. The rent was high. The electricity bill was high, and we could barely maintain the family. Because the rent was high. I spent two years with him in that apartment, with Ibrahim Rugova. He brought his mother there, aunt Sofa. He was with his wife, Fana. Mendim was born to him. Arion was born to me, my eldest son. As usual, we happened to be in the field. We were in Podgur. Six of us from the Institute were on an expedition. The weather was good. In the village of Sinë. We slept in the guest room. In the morning we woke up. I saw a granary there and an old handmade corn crib, well made. I saw that the shelter of the crib was mentioned, the wood it was made from was mentioned, as an agricultural tool. I went out with my camera to photograph the barn, the granary, and the corn crib, to mention them.

The courtyard was surrounded by a fence. With woven twigs, braided together, and covered with thorns so no one could pass, it was high. The doors were made of woven twigs, two wings of the door, large courtyard doors. Then a voice was heard outside the doors, calling the owner of the house. He said to him, “Is there a team from Prishtina here?” He answered, “Yes.” He said, “Is there an Ukë Xhema there?” He said, “I don’t know them by name.” I was in the courtyard and went out. I said, “Yes, it’s me, is that you, Ramë?” My brother. Around those days and earlier, my mother had been ill with a sickness. My mind went there, I thought, she must have passed away. To tell the truth, I was very frightened and somehow lost myself. I was looking at his face. I said, “Why have you come? How is mother?” He said, “She is fine.” I said, “How is she?” I was looking at him to see if he was misleading me. He said, “She is fine.” I said, “Then why have you come?” He said, “You have to go to the army.” “The army, that’s nothing.”

“No,” he said, “you have to go immediately, today.” “What do you mean today?” “Today,” he said, “you have to leave on the last train at 11:00. You have to go to Gospić as a soldier. The summons has arrived; you have to report within 24 hours.” Because the date of 27 had come close. “How?” “You have to go.” I

[24] Ibrahim Rugova (1944–2006) was a Kosovo Albanian writer, literary scholar, and political leader. He became the leading figure of Kosovo’s nonviolent resistance movement in the 1990s and later served as the first President of Kosovo.

said, “Wait for me a little.” I went inside the oda, Professor Anton was there, Rrustem, we were talking with subjects inside. I said, “Professor, I have to interrupt the expedition,” to Professor Anton. He said, “Why? What happened?” I said, “My brother came, he brought me the summons, and apparently I have to go to the army.” “Well then, good, go.” I said, “Tonight, Professor, right now I have to travel immediately to Prishtina to submit a request, a notice that I am going to the army.” “What do you mean?” “Yes, Professor.” “And where will you leave your wife with the child? Where will you leave her?” Because my eldest son was born three or four days apart from his daughter. He knew. We were a small collective.

“Where will you leave your wife? Does your wife work?” “No.” “And what do you want to do with the furniture and all that?” “I don’t know, Professor,” I said, “my brother will deal with those things, I don’t know.” “Look, then go and tell your brother to bring the furniture.” He had the oda at his house there, with a fireplace; he had built it in the traditional style. He would take the subjects there and interview them from the field. “To my place.” I said, “No, Professor, I don’t want to cause you problems.” “To my *oda*, and I will take care of them until you finish the army.” That is what happened. I left a message for my brother. He got some workers, a vehicle, and they carried the furniture. I had a lot of furniture because I had gotten married. A living room set, a bedroom set, a kitchen. They took them there and put them there. I completed one year in the army. When I returned, for several months I still could not find an apartment to rent, because apartments were a problem then. When I found an apartment, I took the furniture and moved into my own apartment.

As for the question you asked, how it seemed to me. In one year, the Institute building had been completed. So when I came, I came to the new building. From the army to the new building. I still did not have an apartment, I was in the village. I travelled from the village in the morning and returned in the evening. 100 kilometers one way, 100 the other. This travel lasted two or three months. I could not imagine being in that building now. What a good building, what wonderful conditions! With separate libraries, with a library, with a sound archive. They had bought some equipment while I was in the army. Drita had come, a few months before I came, from the Institute of History. She had been at the Institute of History with Ali Hadri.[25] I met her. Drita said, “I want to be with Ukë.” We had a larger office divided by a partition halfway through. Ramadan took a separate office for himself, and our branch settled in. We began work.

Immediately there, as usual, we began going out into the field. We had the exhibition hall. Together with Drita and Ramadan, we took it upon ourselves and committed ourselves to creating a small mini-museum with our exhibits, which we had collected in the field over years and years, and to go out and collect others. We made that permanent exhibition. We ordered some display cases for clothing on both sides. I built a hut myself. I went around Gërmia and took wood, took stones, and took moss. I wove it with twigs, the way a typical Albanian hut was. I covered it with straw. With Styrofoam, I

[25] Ali Hadri (1928–1987) was a Kosovo Albanian historian and academic. He was one of the key figures in the development of modern historiography in Kosovo and contributed significantly to the study of Kosovo’s history and Albanian historical scholarship.

improvised a chimney. I took from my mother a *saç*,[26] a clay pot, a tripod, and brought them there. I lit the fire. I left those wooden utensils there. A hut was improvised; it was placed inside that modern setting. It aroused a lot of curiosity among visitors when seminars on Albanian language and culture came. That hut became a hit with all those attractive elements.

**Part Four**

**Ukë Xhemaj:** We had enthusiasm. When we went out into the field, we worked with such great will. If I were to describe an expedition today, no one would believe that someone could have done that kind of work. For example, on the last expedition with Professor Anton Çetta, which we would later decide by agreement. The number of workers had grown, so two expeditions would be divided. The Central Council would hold a meeting: "Where are we going this year?" "Rugova has remained unexplored, Karadak has remained, or Shala." "Let one group go to Shala, one group to Rugova." The professor said, "I have done a few years, Ukë, you are," I was younger, he said, "I would like to see Rugova because I don't know whether I will be able to again." Because it is a mountainous region. "Are you coming on my team?" I said, "Of course, Professor." He said, "I am calling you," he said, "to help me, because in the mountains I cannot carry the bag with clothes," which we took for a month. I said, "Professor, I will come."

We went with the professor to Rugova again together. Rugova is a mountainous region. Over two thousand metres at Hajla, 2,450 metres. I climbed up to Hajla twice. The professor had his load on one side, mine on the other. On both shoulders. One suitcase of mine with clothes and changes of clothing for a month-long stay, and his as well. He also took publications, bags of coffee, many cigarettes, because he smoked in the oda and would exchange cigarettes. We all had to take them, we had to buy them to offer to one another, because that is how life was. If you did not offer someone a cigarette, they would say, "Who is this, he is only smoking mine." I did not smoke, I never smoked, but we all carried them with us. We loaded ourselves too heavily. From Shtupeq i Madh, where we had been based, we decided to go to Llaz-Bellopaq. Llaz-Bellopaq is near Hajla, over the peak. Nine hours uphill, with rain falling nonstop. We barely made it. Nine hours loaded down, me and Rrustem Berisha.

Professor Anton said, "Free me from this, because I cannot withstand it." He continued to another village. We arrived. When we got there, after nine hours through rain that never stopped, not once. The owner of the house did not recognize us, the way we looked. He took us in, a man named Shaban welcomed us. I think the owner of the house was called Shaban. We slept in the guest room that night. There was a school across his stream. Many Rugovars were born and raised there, and even their brothers do not know it. Because it was the most remote village there, deserted. Few houses, in the

[26] Saç is a traditional metal dome-shaped lid used for baking bread, pies, or other foods over embers. In Albanian households, food prepared "under the saç" is covered with the lid and baked by placing hot embers over and around it.

middle of the mountains. The school was made of wooden boards, and instead of chairs, there were beech trunks cut for the pupils to sit on. When snow fell and covered that stream, the people from that neighborhood could not go. The school would be covered with snow through the openings. Until they cleared it, lessons would stop for two or three weeks.

When we left later, we had worked a lot that night, we worked a great deal with the owner of the house. Rrusta and I, and another Rrustem from Rugova accompanied us, because we did not know the way back. The owner of the house got up and said, “Where do you want to go?” The rain continued. “Where do you want to go?” “We want to go to Peja, because we have a meeting at Hotel Metohija for one night, to wash up and return to continue there.” “No,” he said, “do not set out because it is raining. Shushica,” the Shushica canyon, “rises so quickly it will take you and carry you away, it will kill all of you, because the rain gathers there.” Rrustem insisted, “No, we gave our word, we have to go.” Anyway, we set out. There were three of us. When we entered the gorge from that village there, Bellopaq, Llaz and Bellopaq, two villages, the rainfall began to increase, the water began to gather, the level of the river began to rise.

Because you crossed on stones on that side, like this wall here, but high, with a cliff of living rock. In some places it narrowed to five or six metres, in some places it widened a little. The water roared, it was raining. We could not hear one another. With all the strength you had, you had to shout, “Rrustem, go there, cross a little closer, it looks narrower.” The river kept rising, it wanted to take us. We had to cross in 36 places, jumping from that side to this side, until we came down to Novosella. Thirty-six places. When we arrived, my shoes, I had new field shoes, they had all torn open underneath. I took a willow twig, because there are some there, it is reddish, I bent it and tied my shoes with it. With those ties, I went to what is now Hotel Dukagjini. They would not let us in that night. The receptionist said, “You are not fit for a hotel.” Because we were covered in mud. Water ran from our heels as if you had opened a tap.

With all those hardships, expeditions like that in all areas, in all Albanian regions, I could list them for you if it suits you to have it remain somewhere as a document from a person who knows them, because they are no longer known. More than forty regions. And then also with students, in Albania too, in Greece too, everywhere on foot, for materials.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you contact these families that you say you…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** It was organized. The organization was very good. One person was assigned, for each expedition two people before departure. A month earlier they would go with official invitations, with official authorizations stamped by the institute and signed by the director, saying that a team of so many people, with names and surnames on a list, a history worker, a scientific worker in ethnology, would stay in your municipality, in your region, for one month, or 15 days, or however many days. We went to the municipality, to the Ministry of Culture or Education, to the president of the municipality at the time, and they would send us to the committee. Because without the committee releasing permission, you could not go. The municipal officials sent us. We received permission from them.

We gave them tasks. We left them the written document, saying that we were coming officially after two weeks, three weeks, or one month. They had the duty to organize the subjects for us in their own field. They knew them because it was their municipality. They knew that in this village there were two or three old men, in that other one there were ten. Who had the largest *oda*? So-and-so. We would stay in his *oda* for one night, two. In the next village, three nights. They would arrange for the elders to gather. When we went, we knew the village we were going to because we came through the municipality. They gave us the names of the villages. Tonight you will go to this village, so-and-so is waiting for you, you will be in his *oda*. He had called all the subjects to his *oda* and the *oda* would be full. All the subjects gathered. Around 50 or even more. Until after midnight.

That is how the work of field expeditions was organized. For example, I am talking about Rugova, we were in a village. We went late. Professor Anton, during those days, was collecting legendary epics. You have no idea. Until 10:00 at night, messengers from other villages would come to us, riding horses with saddles, to sing epic songs until morning about Mujo,[27] about Gjergj Elez Alia.[28] The entire legendary epic for hours and hours. He recorded it. That is how it happened.

**Anita Susuri:** What was something that left a very strong impression on you, something impressive that you found in these very remote villages? Something that had still been preserved?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Here, I will tell you briefly, because there are many, many things. We could speak for weeks, for months, without stopping. Long experiences, and I have all of them layered in my brain. Fortunately, my memory still holds well for those days. They were good days, full of will, that I lived through. For example, when we were in Shtupeq i Madh, in the oda, we were talking about the history of the village. Because at the beginning of an expedition, one of us had the task of asking questions, whoever was the most capable, while all the others took notes. Today, for example, we are in the village of Shtupeq i Madh. I led the questions, just as you are doing with me now.

How many houses does Shtupeq i Madh have? Does it have this many houses? How many neighborhoods are there? This many neighborhoods. What clans live here? These ones live here. What is here? There is a mosque, there is a school, there is a house of culture, there is a mill, there is no mill at all, we go down there. Approximately how many inhabitants? What do they do? What is their economy? Who are you connected with through friendship? Where are your friendships? How far do they reach? Has there been population movement? Yes, there has. Where did they go? Within Kosovo, outside Kosovo? To Albania, to America, to Australia, all of it. When did it have the largest population, in which years? When was it smallest? How was it organized at that time? Well, when the *posterrma*[29]

[27] Mujo and Halil are central heroes of Albanian legendary epic poetry, especially in the northern Albanian highland tradition. They appear in the Kângë Kreshnikësh, or Songs of the Frontier Warriors, a cycle of oral epic songs performed with the *lahuta*.

[28] Gjergj Elez Alia is a major heroic figure in Albanian oral epic tradition. He is best known from the song in which, after lying wounded for years, he rises to fight the *bajloz*, a foreign challenger who threatens his family and community.

[29] *Posterrma* is salted and dried/cured meat traditionally prepared for winter storage.

was cut, we all gathered. When a guest came, we all went to that guest room and played *kapuça*[30] until morning. When we slaughtered one chicken, we invited twelve people to eat that chicken.

Imagine what an organized, close life it was. Then we moved on to history. Historical events? Yes, did they have those stones in Shtupeq i Madh? Even today those stones are there, gathered together. That had been the tower of so-and-so. In that tower, when Savbataja of Montenegro came here in 1913, he came with the church priest. With the vessel of water, with the large cross of the church, they came here, gathered the youth of the village to change their religion, to give them names, to baptize them, to make them pass under that cross, to sprinkle them, to baptize them, and to make them Slavic, Montenegrin. A mother came out, so-and-so, she had her four sons in line. Because they were required to be there, all the inhabitants of the place had been gathered in a row. She came out and spoke loudly: "If you consider me your mother, you will not accept changing your religion. Let them burn you and roast you, but do not change your religion."

Those four separated. They took them and put them in that tower and closed the door on them. Some others reacted too. Twelve came out because they did not accept changing their religion. They put all twelve of them inside the tower. They took straw, put it inside, set it on fire, and burned them alive. The tower collapsed. Some others they killed here and there with rifles, with weapons. The others there. That tower today is ruined. Those stones are still there today; no one has built a tower with them. You would find stories like this, for example, that terrified you.

In Bogë, you would speak with a subject, they told me about a woman, straight as a candle, 84 years old, she had the clothing, a wonderful subject. I asked, I asked, "Is there an older woman who knows about clothing, older clothing, how it was made? From beginning to end?" "Yes, of course, Rada." "Who?" "Rada." "But I need an Albanian woman." He said, "She is Albanian. But her name is Rada." "Why the name Rada?" He said, "Because they changed it when they changed her religion in 1913 and gave it to her, and now the village jokes with her and says, 'Where are you, Rada?'" He said, "Her name had been Rabë, and they adapted it into Montenegrin and told her, 'You will be called Rada.'" Salih [was changed] into Sali, Stanko, to adapt them.

They assigned them religious holidays to observe and all of that, and then the gendarmerie would go at night to follow them and see whether they were observing Bajram or not. Whether they were observing these things or not. Events like this from the field, from the field. Terrifying. Three times, the locals recall, Rugova was burned and scorched. Not even a dog's hut was left unburned, let alone a house. They went and lived in the caves of Shkodra. When Montenegro withdrew, they returned to their birthplace and built houses out of wood. Eventually, the first floor with stone and wood above. Three times it was razed to the ground. So, three times. Rugova had 13 villages. Then with two [more]

[30] *Kapuça* is a traditional Albanian guessing game, usually played by two teams, in which a small object is hidden under one of several caps or similar items and the opposing team tries to find it. It was often played in the oda during winter evenings or social gatherings.

neighborhoods it became 15. Later, much later, another three were added and it became 18 villages. It is divided into Upper Rugova, as they call it, and Lower Rugova, toward the river Lumbardh here.

Hajla is the border, the highest mountain. I climbed Hajla twice through snow, in winter. Now they are saying the border is at Hajla. The border is down at the Bajrana tunnel, visible from Hajla below. But they deceived us after the war, they said, "Leave this mountain to the state because you will have high taxes, a large tax. You will use it yourselves anyway, leave it." We left it and it remained in Montenegro. And now they gave Hajla to Montenegro too, and Čakor to Montenegro, and I crossed Čakor several times. There is not a tree in Rugova that I did not approach. I spent two months there, sleeping and staying during exploration, two months. Sixty days from morning to evening. Not to mention all the individual day expeditions. The same in all the other regions of Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** Which region seemed to you, for example, the richest in terms of preservation?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Preservation of heritage, traditions, yes. Look, there is an unwritten law, but circumstances, historical and present-day social conditions, bring rapid transformations. Usually where there is a paved road, where there is a railway, life there has a completely different dynamic. These lowland areas very quickly began to lose their heritage. Why? Because they were the first places where life moved beyond primary production, beyond agriculture and livestock. Universities opened, factories opened, and people became employed in education, the economy, and trade. That is where the new is; the television is inside. The old begins to be forgotten. The withdrawn mountainous areas preserved it for longer.

At the time when we were working, that is why we rushed to explore materials in those deep areas, which we called mountainous, such as Rugova, such as Has, such as Opoja. The deeper mountainous ones. The new had not fully penetrated there yet; old traditional life was still present. Clothing was still being made, tools and work implements were still being made, traditional instruments, beliefs and superstitions, seasonal rites, family rites, customs, traditions, weddings. They belonged to tradition, they were deep. So it was Opoja, Gora, the Sharr area there, Jezerc, Karadak. The Karadak of Gjilan, as we call it, from Skopje to Kumanovo. There was Shala e Bajgorës. These were still attractions. The others had begun to lose their traditions rapidly.

The generation that transmitted culture thinned out very quickly because age does its own work. Now the modern attracts them. Some began saying, "Come on, that belongs to the past." Foreigners from outside began stealing exhibits. Itinerant collectors also took many items of traditional clothing: they would give people a few beads, and in return people would hand over things like watch chains, taking the beads to use in their own handiwork.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you, did you go outside the region that was the territory of Kosovo, where there were Albanians, for example, within Yugoslavia?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Yes. When the Albanological Institute was founded, it was founded as a scientific institution for the study of cultural heritage, material, spiritual, artistic, and social, meaning, from birth to the grave. It had five departments, five branches founded at that time, and each with some staff. There was the history branch, the onomastics branch, the linguistics branch, the ethnology branch, the folklore branch, and the archaeology branch. The work was done in the field. The archaeologists in their own field, at archaeological ruins, their own field. History with living subjects, through the search for old documents, different testimonies about historical events.

[Topo]nomastics studied place names and macro- and micro-toponyms across the whole area. Only the names of the large settlements are Slavic. Otherwise, the entire environment of the Albanian space is purely Albanian. You can call it, for example, Leskovic over there, in the south, because they reached as far as the south of Albania, Fusha e Lajthisë at the edge of Greece. But when you enter inside, all the settlements and small toponyms are Albanian. The same in Kosovo. So when the institute was founded, it was founded only for Kosovo. Here inside, as an institution. Then we had aspirations, aims to go outside, wherever there were Albanians, for all Albanians. But in the beginning they did not allow it.

For example, we asked several times to go out in Macedonia, but the Academy of Sciences of Macedonia did not make it possible for us. Because they knew that material on Albanian culture would be collected. Montenegro did not allow us at all. Since we were administratively connected with Serbia, for example, Medvegja and this side, we went there. Because it was [our] territory. We researched Tupalla completely, Toplica. Then I was there individually as far as Molla e Kuqe, as far as Haskovo in Bulgaria, in this part from the lake, Studelica, Maskatica, the oldest regions from which Albanians fled because of violence in 1867, ’78, where they fled amid massacres. Thirteen villages south of Studelica are Albanian today, with the descendants of the settlements of Studelica and Maskatica.

We visited them. I visited all of those. In Montenegro, late, in ’78 and ’79, in Montenegro. We visited Hoti, Gruda, Triesh, Koja e Kuçit, the high plateaus, Plav, Gusinje, Vuthaj, all of it. The following year, then Sanjak, Novi Pazar. There I was on one expedition with the faculty, on the second expedition. I was on three expeditions alone in the villages. Near Novi Pazar, Delemegje, Gllugovicë, Sjenica, Tutin, Rožaje, and these villages around Rožaje where Albanian is spoken. Besnik, in that village Albanian is spoken. Dragaj, where wooden houses are built, and not to mention them all one by one. I covered those on foot.

I also covered the part of Greece with an institute expedition, organized as a tourist expedition. We entered Chameria,[31] we entered the southern part. Then we were there individually several times too.

[31] Chameria is a historical region in northwestern Greece and southern Albania, associated especially with the Cham Albanian population. In Albanian historical memory, it is closely connected to displacement, expulsion, and contested identity in the twentieth century.

There, all the names are Albanian. Lumbardh here is bistrica,[32] which the Slavs introduced, but there they did not touch it; it is Lumbardh, for example. In Athens, from the center of Athens, Omonia, when you go to the Acropolis, there is a field, with an object that remains like a ruin, a large object, half-moon shaped. There is a large field there. It was from the ancient period of Greece. A French travel writer or scholar passed there during the Balkan Wars. He says, "I saw some children playing ball there, but they were speaking neither a Slavic language nor Greek. Who are they?" He asked. They told him, "They are Arvanites, they speak Albanian."

Below is the Flaka neighborhood. They are all Arvanites. In the evening, Greece closes the traffic there, it is quiet. They do not allow cars to pass. Like our square here at Skanderbeg, where there is no traffic. The cafés work until morning. People go there for peace, drink coffee, and sit. It is called the Flaka neighborhood. The old people there say that we raised the Acropolis, our ancestors, and we have protected it until now. Meaning, entirely Albanian. From Omonia, the center of Athens, when you go 20 kilometers outside Athens, there are old people who do not know Greek if they are not traders or if they were not educated. They speak only the Arvanite language. For example, 20 kilometers from Omonia is the village of Vilja.

I am speaking about this because we were on an expedition with the institute. It was a Sunday, and Panajot Pano, an Arvanite, took us there. He had an apartment in Athens. He said, "No, we will go," he said, "I have my house there. I will welcome you according to Albanian tradition, with my wife and daughter." He had one daughter, her name was Eleftheria, Liria, and she was studying in Paris. When we went, they welcomed us at the house in the morning. They had come out to the courtyard gate. The women all welcomed us with large pomegranate flower buds, like pomegranates, and "Welcome," and brought us inside. He said, "You are our oxygen." On that expedition there was Professor Idriz Ajeti,[33] Mark Krasniqi. From outside the institute, they asked us to take Azem Shkreli[34] with us. Professor Mark and Professor Idriz cried like children. He said, "We did not know what was here. We had imagined it completely differently, that there was no Albanian left here."

When we went to the center of the village, they had a religious and state celebration, and they had put the tables outside and were celebrating. Two priests were outside in their robes, and when the mayor came, someone informed him. He said, "Patriots have come from Kosovo." He came and asked us, "Who are you?" "We are from Kosovo, from the Albanological Institute." "Enough, enough, no need for more. We are brothers, only we sleep separately." A biologist, the mayor. "We are brothers, only we sleep separately." He ordered, they said, "Another row of tables and chairs for them." We were one bus, 50 people. He gathered us there. He came with us and welcomed us to the celebration. When we left

[32] Clear water river in Slavic language.

[33] Idriz Ajeti (1917–2019) was a Kosovo Albanian linguist, academic, and one of the major figures in Albanian studies in Kosovo. He contributed especially to Albanian linguistics and the development of higher education and scholarly institutions in Kosovo.

[34] Azem Shkreli (1938–1997) was a Kosovo Albanian poet, writer, and cultural figure. He is considered one of the most important Albanian literary voices in Kosovo in the second half of the twentieth century.

after four or five hours, we visited that village, the village church. They saw us off. When they heard, the whole village, the women at the windows and balconies with handkerchiefs, saw us off until we left.

He said, "We are here, the Greek treat us the same way they treat you there," the mayor was speaking, he said, "they say Albanians are thick-headed. Their brains are in the back. That is what the Greeks call us because they cannot compete with us." He said, "I will also tell you a joke. Someone goes," he said, "a Greek enters a large forest. He takes a large nail and hammers it into a beech tree," beech is a tree. "He strikes it with a hammer, and the nail moves in, enters. At one moment it stops, it will not move, he hits it, it will not move. He says, 'What has the nail hit now, what is this?' He turns around and sees that an Arvanite was leaning against the tree and it could not pierce his head. Because they say we are hard-headed, just like they say about you there," he said, "because they cannot do anything with us."

I happened to meet a woman there at a kiosk, selling kiosk goods, items, what do I know! We asked her, I said, "Albanian, Arvanite?" "Yes." I said, "Do you know anything to tell us about Arvanites? We are from Prishtina here." "I know whatever you want." I said, "Do you remember anything?" She said, "What do you want?" I said, "Do you know any lullabies? Did your grandmother raise you, since I am asking?" "Of course," she said, "she raised me, and I know the songs she sang to me, and I sing them to my children too." "What is that song?" "The red wine in the pot, mother's daughter at the breast. And she ends it in the cradle. Vera, vena. Potir is an earthen vessel. The red wine in the pot, mother's daughter at the breast." Albanian lullabies. Then all the villages, I said to her, "Can you tell me the names of these mountains around the village?" "Yes. That one is called Pastra." It was a bare mountain, there were no trees. Pastra,[35] in Albanian. "And what about this other one here?" "This one is Lishturi,"[36] she said. I said, "Why Lishturi?" She said, "Don't you see how it is thick, like the hair of a cow?"

This river like this, that one Spata. All the names were Albanian. The wheat of the Pelasgians,[37] the rock of the Pelasgians. All Pelasgian, Albanian names. That is why it is of great interest to go all the way down to Olympus. Corinth, all those villages as far as, when you enter here where I went to the monastery. Laisa, Konica, Kostur, Ioannina. Then you return, Gardhiç, you return and go up to Preveza. All around, the whole interior. Dodona, which is there. Where Zeus made his prophecies. You have only Albanian names. Very interesting. That is why, as I said, when we were in the villages of Montenegro, they were all ethnically pure Albanian. We covered all the clans on foot.

**Anita Susuri:** Those Albanian villages you mentioned, does that mean that historically they migrated to these places, or had they been there?

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[35] Clean

[36] Associated to "*leshur*" = having tick hair

[37] Pelasgians were an ancient people mentioned by Greek authors as pre-Hellenic inhabitants of parts of the Aegean and Balkan world. In Albanian nationalist and popular historical narratives, they are often linked to Albanian origins, although this connection is debated and not accepted as settled historical fact by mainstream scholarship.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** No, they are all autochthonous, all of them are autochthonous. Look, the history of Kosovo, unfortunately Kosovo more so, but Albania too, they are close. They have been taught the way the ideologies of the East wanted, and it was not allowed to go further. They were satisfied with Albanians, Illyrians,[38] deeper than that is enough, you do not need to go further. When world anthropology is studied, when autochthony is studied, the whole Balkans, all of southeastern Europe, the entire Mediterranean archipelago, were white offspring. Then came the Pelasgians. After the Pelasgians came the three brothers: Illyrius, from whom Illyria was formed, the Illyrian Peninsula, the Romanians, and the ancient Macedonians.

Then it passes from Illyrians to Arbëror. The early Middle Ages. From Arbëror it passes to Albanians. This is history. The whole Balkans are. When you go to visit… I have visited Bosnia, for example. Wherever you go through the villages of Bosnia in the interior, starting from Banja Luka, Melika, which I mentioned earlier. There is a mountain called Mosor near Split, it is a plain, there are whole settlements. There the clothing is typically Albanian. The music, the melody is Albanian. Many Albanian words are preserved. The dog, the shepherd does not know how to say *pas*, he says *qeni,* not Bosnian, but Albanian. He calls the horse *kali*. Parts of the clothing. When you stop and ask them, "What are these stones gathered in the field?" They, the locals, say, "Illyrian *tumuli.*"

When all the Kelmendi, all Albanians, in the '70s, all of them were wearing *tirq*,[39] the men for example, with the *plis*,[40] with a long scarf, with all these things, now they speak Bosnian, under the continuous pressure of the spread of Slavism. Bosnia: you go to Sarajevo, for example, you enter the central museum of Sarajevo. There you have two Illyrian boats. Their description is written there. Two Illyrian boats that once sailed on the Drina River. And there are many other Illyrian artifacts as well. Alois Benac was an Illyrologist, he contributed more to Illyrology than Kosovo did. They have many issues of that journal *Ilirski*; you go mad when you read it. But now in the legendary epic, and he records the legendary epic in Banja Luka, [there are] all the [same] mythological figures: Mujo, Halil, Ajkuna, Gjergj Elez Alia. The entire text is the same, only in a Slavic language.

Ugao, a village near Rožaje, had a Salih, Salih,[41] who sang. The Americans recorded him. He was bilingual. He sang in two languages. They recorded him and today the epic song by the same *lahuta's*[42]

[38] Illyrians were ancient Indo-European-speaking peoples who lived in the western Balkans. They are central to Albanian historical identity because many Albanian scholars and national narratives view Albanians as descendants of Illyrian populations.
[39] Tight-fitting, white woolen pants worn as part of the country's northern folk costumes.
[40] Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.
[41] Salih Ugljanin, a legendary folk singer who, along with other bards from the Sanjak region, was highly skilled in singing the same legendary tales in both Albanian and Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian, depending on his audience. In 1934 and 1935, American classical scholars Milman Parry and Albert Lord traveled to the Balkans to study oral epic traditions, aiming to understand the mechanics of how Homeric epics were composed. They recorded Salih Ugljanin singing massive epic cycles. Their recordings are preserved at Harvard University.
[42] *Lahuta* is a traditional one-stringed bowed instrument used to accompany Albanian epic singing, especially in northern Albanian oral tradition. It is strongly associated with heroic songs, historical memory, and the Kângë Kreshnikësh.

player is preserved at Harvard both in Bosnian, which is a dialect of Slavic, and in Albanian. The same song. Because the same body, an Albanian. It has been taken. They have been swallowed up. The Slavs penetrated here in the seventh century, to the monasteries, to the churches. In the twelfth century they continued to conquer and withdrew from there. Otherwise, why do they teach history only from the Middle Ages? Because they have nothing to touch deeper. They leave it, because they know that wherever you dig, everything comes out Illyrian. Whatever you take on the surface, beneath the surface, is Illyrian. Tito's Brioni, the whole Adriatic archipelago. It has 1,353 inhabited and uninhabited islands. All the names are there. Isa, Visa, they have adapted them a little. Palagruža.

There are the stone carvers of Arbëror-Illyrian graves, who migrated and went to Italy because of their craft. They formed a state, a state within Italy, San Marino. They are all Illyrian. They know it. Up to there, this whole Balkans, where they did not allow it, you were not allowed to mention it. Even today, when many reports come out, you go mad. There was Špiro Kulišić, an ethnologist in Belgrade, an accomplished professor who had no equal. He told the truth about these lands in his works, but the Belgrade school did not like him. There was Slobodan Zečević of Belgrade, who left several genuine works that were preserved from nationalism, because when he speaks about race, about who had been dolichocephalic. But what can you do? History was like this. One would have to speak for centuries about these field events, when you go and find them, you are terrified.

Today they say Kosovo is the cradle of Serbia, Kosovo is Old Serbia. Did they come by helicopter from beyond the Carpathians? When you enter mythology here, that Zečević worked a lot in this field. You do not find it, there is a cut as if with a knife. Customs and traditions of mythology, beliefs and cults. The Greeks do not have a divine chariot; the Pelasgians had it. Today's Greeks are like the Bulgarians, still unformed as a people, let alone as a nation, but as a people to be formed. Mythology brings all of that into the open, all of it. The pagan period. Then look, where are pagan rites performed? Where are Slavic ones performed? They are wandering. Today here, after several generations, another place.

[Mount] *Tomorr*,[43] since the birth of man, the Albanian has performed them there, at your Pashtrik there, in Has and Borozhup. Since the birth of man, they go to the peak there and make sacrifices because it is their land. Why don't the Slavs go there? Because it is not theirs. They want the city. They do not have roots there. Today it is their land there. But at one time we were, and do you know why? Because only the descendants of the Pelasgians and Illyrians are the Albanians here. All the others are newcomers. There is a Latin saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Therefore, they reach a kind of agreement. Speak to an American as much as you want about autochthony, he does not like it, he does not like it because he himself went to America. Do you understand? He does not like it. He says that the land belongs to the person who lives there, and he supports you in that aspect.

[43] Mount Tomorr is a mountain in south-central Albania and one of the best-known sacred sites in Albanian tradition. In Albanian folklore, it is associated with *Baba Tomorr* ("Father Tomorr"), the personification of the mountain, and with older pagan beliefs and rituals. The mountain is also an important pilgrimage site, especially in Bektashi tradition.

Our great fortune was that we had a large demographic increase and that, although as a people we were in a small pocket, we were many, we increased a lot and we survived. Therefore, the last time, they said, these people are the majority and they have to win their freedom. Because if you had played the string of autochthony, no one would have supported you at all. So it worked out well for us both because of the number of inhabitants and because of the heritage, because we remained in this part of the Balkans. It is a wonder how we survived, it is a great wonder.

**Part Five**

**Anita Susuri:** One more question.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Go ahead, as many as you want.

**Anita Susuri:** Around the ’70s, I think, sometime in the mid-’70s, there was a kind of cultural exchange with Albania…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have the opportunity…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Very much, very much. The first team from Albania and Kosovo to carry out an exchange between the academy and the university was in ’72. In ’72, the first group came from Albania. I do not remember all of them, because I was not on that team. At that time I was working at the gymnasium, I was not at the institute in ’72. But colleagues were there, Rexhep Bulliqi, Anton Çetta, Professor Berisha were there. They were with that team and accompanied them to Dukagjin. They were in Radac on an expedition. In the Plain of Dukagjin, in several villages. A research expedition stayed there, only briefly. Then in ’74 I moved to the institute. The first expedition, the opportunity opened up. They began to come, then the academy, because Ranković had been caught here.

To protect himself, Tito used the Albanians and their culture as a shield. He would say, the Albanians are demonstrating, those events of ’68 had happened. These people are asking for a republic. In ’68, Tito says this, and prepares a team of professors led by Fehmi Agani,[44] Syrja Pupovci, and Ali Hadri. These three. He says, “Prepare the people to ask for a republic in Kosovo,” after Ranković had been caught. They began holding meetings among the people. But what happened? He sent them out until he raised the masses, frightened Serbia over there, saying that Kosovo wanted to boil over, that they wanted independence, a republic like the others. At a meeting of the Central Committee of Serbia in

[44] Fehmi Agani (1932–1999) was a Kosovo Albanian sociologist, intellectual, and political figure. He was one of the founders and leading figures of the Democratic League of Kosovo and played an important role in Kosovo Albanian political life in the 1990s. He was killed during the Kosovo War in 1999.

Belgrade, where Fadil Hoxha[45] also took part as Kosovo's representative, Tito took Fadil outside during the break. I read this in the Zagreb newspaper Vus. Croatia published it. I had those issues and read them as a student.

And Tito told Fadil during the break, he said, "Fadil, today it cannot pass as a republic. But your constitution will lack only the name, and you will have all the rights as an autonomous province. You will have everything. Your constitution and all of that," he said, "because the time is not right. I will tell you when it will happen." Fadil had told the others, "Speak, because it is going to happen." The people were prepared, they were saying, they are about to announce it. Then he withdrew and said, "Stop it here." That autonomy remained. But many privileges were gained within that. The Serbs there lowered their heads, rights were given. The university opened. Once the university opened, we began to breathe. We did not have enough staff, so we began inviting them from Albania. Mainly in medicine, but also in some sciences, linguistics, Eqrem Çabej.[46] Professors began coming to lecture here at the university. The halls would fill completely.

I went and listened to Professor Eqrem Çabej's lectures, even though I was in geography. Three or four times in the amphitheater, he would erase the blackboard. Explaining in Old Persian, in Ancient Greek. In Italian, English. Eight languages. It was a great pleasure to listen to him. The same happened in all fields. The exchange began. The first proper scientific expedition of the institute, because the academy organized scientific work through the institutes. The Institute of History, the Albanological Institute. It was their turn to come to Kosovo, their team, and for us to accompany them. Ten of them, ten of us. They came and the fieldwork area was assigned. Where? In Kaçanik, the Kaçanik Gorge. They were curious about the villages of Kaçanik, the mountain villages. We went out in the field.

For about a month, we stayed at the motel in Kaçanik, which was located there. Every day we went into the field, to the villages. It was early autumn, the first snow began. Up to a certain point, some cars could go, and then on foot. Sometimes we would come as far as Pristina, they would pick us up with a minibus that belonged to the rectorate. The first expedition was in the villages of Kaçanik. One year here, one year over there in Albania, the teams went on expeditions. Expedition after expedition. The last time they came here was in '80. Tito would die around the New Year. On that expedition, we took them and placed them in Hotel Grand. There was space. We went there, they from Albania were settled into rooms; we did not need rooms, but we placed them there. And we were setting the day to leave.

Then Dushk Krasniqi came, the Serbian committee chairman. When he came and entered there, he said, "Who are these people?" I was there alone. He said, "They have to be removed from here

[45] Fadil Hoxha (1916–2001) was a Kosovo Albanian communist leader and senior political figure in socialist Yugoslavia. He held important positions in Kosovo and Yugoslav institutions and was one of the most influential Kosovo Albanian politicians of the Yugoslav period.

[46] Eqrem Çabej (1908–1980) was a major Albanian linguist and scholar. He is considered one of the most important figures in Albanian studies, especially for his work on the history, structure, and origins of the Albanian language.

immediately. Tito is visiting Kosovo and he has to sleep here." They ordered us quickly to take their suitcases and leave. He went in with some police and checked the rooms where Tito would stay with his team. They told us, "Go to Prizren." When we went to Prizren, to enter Hotel Theranda, they told us, "No, he will visit Prizren too, you cannot stay here. Go to Peja." We went to Peja, to that hotel in Peja, it was called Metohija, now it is Dukagjini. There they said, "He will stay here, you cannot stay here at all." Where to go? To turn back. "Come on," I said, "let's go to Trofta. There is a building, maybe it has some rooms," in Istog.

Professor Mark was on the team organizing this expedition. We went to Istog. When we went to Istog, Tito was not supposed to come that way. We settled into the hotel rooms, them and us now. When we went downstairs to have the first dinner after settling in, two sisters were serving us, the granddaughters of Milic Kersta. Miliç Kërrsta [Milić Krstić], the chief Chetnik[47] of Serbia and Kosovo. The two sisters, in Serbian clothing, with those traditional aprons, were serving at Trofta at that time. When they saw us with those from Albania, they found out. They knew Albanian. They were serving, waitresses. They almost went mad, they almost went mad. We arranged ourselves there in that large restaurant, at round tables, and gathered. They served us. The word spread that people from Albania had come. Istog could not imagine, *Lugu i Shkive* [The Valley of the Serbs], that someone from Albania could come at that time, in '79.

They were waiting for Tito's fall in order to make Greater Serbia. Not only them, but then some of our own people who were in the services would come from behind the curtains. One came, I should not mention his name, he said to me, "Ukë," he said, "who was that? What did you talk about?" I said, "Get away, man, don't get involved in these things. We clarified everything at the municipality. These are social scientists , they deal with clothing, customs and traditions, these things." When we left there, Spiro Kurti, a scholar from Albania, came close to my ear… we accompanied them to the Grand in the center so they could go to Albania. The one-month expedition was over. As we were saying, safe travels, "Professor," he came close to my ear and said, "Look," he said, "if something happens to you, so-and-so in Istog," he said, "took the driver out of my room several times at night after midnight." He was with the security services, he was from Ferizaj. Nothing ever happened.

When I went, Professor Mark said, "Ukë, in Ferizaj those days many slogans for Kosovo Republic were spread, it became chaos." Just as we left, many were arrested. That driver was on television, the young man worked there. The television gave us that jeep for the field. The day we arrived and began the expedition in Istog, Professor Mark and I went to the president of the Executive Council to tell him that the expedition was coming. The professor and I. The professor was older, he led it. But I was from that area and knew some faces. He said, "Ukë, come with us, and we will talk." We went there, and the

[47] Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from četa, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

president of the Executive Council received us. The professor explained to him what the expedition was about, that they were from Albania, and that these were the villages we would visit. He listened to us, listened with attention. When we got up to leave, he said, "Be careful, because people here sell wood with donkeys, don't record the donkeys."

Professor Mark stopped and laughed with him. He said, "Whom was I speaking to for all these minutes here? They did not come for donkeys," he said, "still, don't make us look primitive." Then Professor Mark said to me, "Ukë," he said, "talk to the driver." In fact, he had stopped the car under the shade of a tree. We were going toward him. "Talk to him," he said, "you are young, make sure he does not make a mistake if security questions him." They warned the drivers all the time, "Do not make the mistake of saying anything, because they will misunderstand us, they will interrupt the expedition. You tell him," he said, "because you are younger, so I don't have to." "No problem, Professor." I told the driver. I said, this is what the professor is advising you. "You need to know what circumstances we are in here, Lugu i Shkive, security on all sides. They can interrupt the expedition. These people have come for clothing, folklore, they are not interested in politics." He said, "Professor, whether politics or not, as far as I am concerned, you can level the whole plain and unless someone cuts me with an axe, I will not say a word for myself. Not only are you not involved in those things, but I will not say anything."

He slept in one room, because there was not much space there and the team was large, with Spirush, the ethnologist. "They would come," he said, "take him out of the bed and take him outside. He would come back quietly. I was awake, but I closed my eyes," he said. "Be careful if something happens, know that they took him outside," he said when I told him, safe travels. I met him later at the television. I said, "This is what Spirush told me." "I know," he said, "because he was not at ease. He kept turning." There were things like that. There in Istog, the news spread widely. They were terrified. Then Tito died. Tito died that year. The demonstrations of '81 happened. There was great euphoria in our favor. But then the situation reversed. They took over. You all know Milošević,[48] history turned backward. That time came, because you asked how I experienced the institute then. With great joy, then with closure. With burning, with beatings, with removals from work. What was not experienced!

**Anita Susuri:** The building then, functioned as a parallel institution, as they call it…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** As a parallel institution, we had a house. We worked there, each of us, but in cramped conditions. Ten people in one room. We continued our work as an institute, but in a house that was rented to us. In fact, Musa Haxhiu had given that house to President Rugova as a small residence to stay in. But he was an institute worker, Rugova, and he knew the conditions. He said, "I will go somewhere else, I am alone, you use it." Musa had already begun working in America. He gave us his house. There were two floors there, in the rooms of that house, you have an idea what it was like.

**Anita Susuri:** Where was it?

[48] Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006) was a Serbian and Yugoslav political leader whose rise to power in the late 1980s was followed by the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy, increased repression of Kosovo Albanians, and the violent breakup of Yugoslavia.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** It was in Bregu i Diellit. Now some tall high-rises have been built there. We settled there. Ibrahim went to Sofalia. He went to Sofalia, to one of his in-laws. He slept in his room until they prepared the one that is there now. He slept there. They would accompany him and take him there. He left the house there to us. It was free of charge, he gave it to us. From there, then, when they left and things happened as they happened, the war began, the war ended. After the war, we returned to the institute.

**Anita Susuri:** During that time, were you able to do more research or anything?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** We went out, we made efforts, but very little, very little. Because the conditions were not there. We worked, more internally, with the index cards we had, with material work, because there was enough material. Work was done, all those journals were produced, but there was no longer the intensive fieldwork that had existed before. Only after the war. Now the conditions there are ideal, but the work has stalled. The younger generation is a little reluctant to go through the physical hardship in the villages. To tell the truth, the subjects are no longer there. They can go out night and day, but you cannot find a 100-year-old subject who lives in the village. The one who does live there has lost his hearing, has lost his memory, has lost something, and knows little to tell you. Culture continues to be created. It is created in each set of conditions and circumstances. Now it is more modified.

Some layered elements are preserved and remain alive for many years. But there are many; as the weaver says, one drink for the shoulder, one small thread. Like that, there is not much genuine original heritage material. Still in some areas… I was recently with this American who is here, a few days ago, to do an interview. I was there with a subject who welcomed us in the guest room. I began to provoke him a little about heritage; he was old, a teacher who had grown up there. The issue of birth rites came up, and I said I would provoke him a little to see if he knew how to recall, because he was 74 years old. I said, "Birth rites, when a child was born, who was the first to take it in their hands?" "No, I don't know." "Who took it to the grave?" "No, I don't know." He knew nothing, and what about his sons?

All of that is paganism, it is all methodology. Around birth and death rites. Many pagan elements that have come from… in wedding rites as family customs. We find the traces where we collected the heritage, the first traces of Albanian exogamy, marriage in pairs. Otherwise, we had the *kuvade* couvade, the custom of the 'male lying-in' , alive until '47 in the municipality of Gjilan, where the husband imitated the woman's labor pains, staying for one month with her during the postpartum, and imitated the pains. Meaning, spiritual heritage and culture had reached that and survived only in Nepal and Bhutan in the Himalayas, where matriarchy dominates and where the woman is the head of the household.

Now you are terrified by how far it has come the year of fire in their tradition, the cult of fire on St. George's Day.[49] They are all pagan. Europe threw them away more than four centuries ago. Still alive in

[49] *Shëngjergj*, or St. George's Day, is a springtime feast associated in Albanian tradition with seasonal renewal, health, protection, and various ritual practices. In this passage, the speaker connects *Shëngjergj* fire rituals to older pagan beliefs and the cult of fire.

Opoja. I recorded myself, and then with students, twelve fires dedicated to the cult of the sun. There is a methodology of purification. It is for health, for the burning of negative demons. Ritual lunch, ritual dinner. Kosovo is very exotic.

**Anita Susuri:** I am going back to the ’90s, I have a few more questions. During the time when you were in that house, did the police know, for example, that the Institute was operating? Did you have visits?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** From whom?

**Anita Susuri:** From the Yugoslav police.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** They knew. They did not disturb us much there, because they knew, it was impossible not to know. But then our internal parallel activation began there. Home-schools at that time, when they expelled us, the secondary schools. The faculties began working in private houses. The Institute also began carrying out its activity. They knew that work was being done in the parallel system.[50] They knew. But they did not dare, because it would draw the attention of the world. They tried not to give too much importance to it, not to stir things up. It was under observation 24 hours a day, the schools and everything. Then the League began, the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds, the Democratic League,[51] the party organization. The Democratic League was formed.

Ibrahim [Rugova] began advising them around the city. They were occupying the streets, provoking people. There was not a day when ten people were not killed around Kosovo. Two in Podujeva, two in Peja, two in Istog. The police. People would go off in vain. They would throw stones at them, like the Palestinians threw stones at the Israelis, and they had weapons. It was the same here. People here would throw stones at the Serbian police, and they would kill one of them and report it. Until Ibrahim [Rugova] came out appealing, “Hold back, go inside, this is not the time, wait, because we are going under.” They began to listen. “We have to organize peacefully.” Activities began, the party system began. There was the party, the Democratic League. We handed in the membership booklets of the League of Communist, took them there. *Rilindja*[52] arrived there one day before us. We collected all of them and handed them in. We made the report. It fell to me, with a colleague, to take those membership booklets to the Committee and hand them over.

None of us at the Institute were with the party anymore, and we handed them in. *Rilindja* handed them in, then we did. A larger internal activity began, and then Rugova was constantly there in meetings. He said, “A second party has to be formed.” We were all in the LDK at the Institute, I was there myself. One

[50] The parallel system refers to the Kosovo Albanian institutions created in the 1990s after Serbia removed Kosovo’s autonomy and excluded many Albanians from public institutions. Albanians organized parallel structures in education, health care, politics, culture, and social life outside Serbian-controlled institutions.
[51] The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was founded in 1989 and became the main Kosovo Albanian political movement of the 1990s. Led by Ibrahim Rugova, it promoted nonviolent resistance, parallel institutions, and Kosovo’s independence from Serbia.
[52] Rilindja was the main Albanian-language newspaper and publishing institution in Kosovo during the Yugoslav period. It played an important role in Kosovo Albanian public, cultural, and intellectual life.

afternoon, a colleague called me, a professor of geography who was in the LDK leadership, he called me on the phone. “Can you come down from your apartment?” I had my apartment near Santea. I said, “Yes, come up to my place,” because he was a friend. “No, no, I just want two words with you.” I went down. It was not yet dusk. I said, “What’s new?” He said, “Look, we urgently need to form an initiative council to form a second party. I have spoken with Ibrahim about forming a party. I was thinking of leaving the name Peasant Party,” he said.

I said, “No, I can’t, I am in the LDK, how can I leave? I feel bad because of Ibrahim, a work colleague.” We had lived in the same apartment, I knew him from back then, the houses were three kilometers apart. We knew one another. I said, “No, man, I can’t change parties.” He said, “He gave me the order, form it quickly. We will work together, but let us have the name.” “If that is the case, then yes.” He said, “Are you coming with me to Fushë Kosovë?” I said, “Yes.” There was a professor of the Faculty of Agriculture there. He knew his house. We went, and he accepted. We became three. The next day, there was a fourth. After that, it became a problem. They would tell us “Yes,” but when we said, “Come on, we are starting”, they would not show up, the wife would come out and say, “He is not here.” They were afraid, because if they caught you, they would make you disappear. You would vanish. They would eliminate you.

It was quite difficult until we became seven. When we became seven, we went here to the Writers’ Association, where Rugova was, and formed the initiative council. In his presence and in the presence of the LDK, we formed the Peasant Party of Kosovo. Then we as a council took the initiative, there were seven of us. Haxhi Islami was elected its chairman, he was president of the Academy, it had been his initiative, because, as I said, he was the person who came to me. It was his great effort. That council was formed. We began working in the field, going to find supporters. Very quickly the number reached… they said, “We have seven hundred thousand.” It was formed, the work began. Selection of branches. We would go and lobby more for the LDK than for it. Until at some point they called us a satellite of the LDK. The aim was to activate the masses to come out against Serbia; it did not matter whether you were with the LDK. Then the Liberal Party was formed, another was formed, but all together.

**Part Six**

**Anita Susuri:** I would like you to tell me a little about how you took part in some of the organizing around the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds. Students and professors were very involved in it. How were you involved? Did the students ask you, or was it your own will?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** The students. The beginning of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds was a girl, [Hava] Shala was her surname, she was from Peja. There were two or three young men, students. They came for the first time, right at the very beginning, to consult Professor Anton Çetta at the Institute as the elder, as a

man of his word, a man of the *oda*, someone who had worked in the field more than all the rest of us, a faculty professor, a scientist at the Institute with long experience, a name he had created in Kosovo, someone whose word carried weight. They entered. We were at the Institute, and even today it seems to me I can see them when they came in, those young men, and went to the professor. They stayed long. When they came out… because our offices were next to one another, only one wall separated us, in the ground-floor corridor with Professor Anton.

They came out and left. After the professor returned, I was about to leave, I think, to go home, the working hours were over. I said, "Professor, we had guests, they held you up for quite a long time." He said, "Very good," he said, "it is an initiative that deserves respect. Some young people from Peja, boys and girls, students, came. God willing, it will go well for us," those were his words. I said, "Congratulations. What is it about?" He said, "About reconciliation." After that call, they came and consulted with the professor, and then other teams too, as it grew, from different places, personalities, historians, linguists, mainly from the Institute. They began forming the first teams to go into the field, in cooperation with the field, where there were disputes, where there were blood feuds. They gathered information.

At first, the Professor went himself. Muharrem Pirraku, Zymer Neziri, Drita Statovci went to their own regions, because they knew them. Each person knew the villages. Someone from Gjilan, someone from Dukagjin, someone from Drenica. They would come to the professor and say that there is a conflict here, here there are this many unresolved blood feuds. That is how the network was created. We would go into the field. For example, we would prepare there, we would call the elders, "Can you forgive, given the situation as it is?" They would invite the Professor to the guest room. He would bring them, for example, with the team. He would take five people from that area. From whichever area they were in, he would take the team. He would leave the people from Rugova and take those from Has. He would take them in Has and go there. They would set a day. In fact, they worked because people did not reconcile immediately. They stayed in constant contact, calling and going once, twice, three times, until we convinced them. When we convinced them, he would say, "Give your word, I agree to reconcile."

They would set the day when the blood would be forgiven. They would notify that area and the team from Pristina, from the Institute, would go by buses and cars. The meeting would gather in a field. There are many reconciliation fields in Kosovo, places called the Meadow of Reconciliation, the Tree of Reconciliation. There, publicly, or sometimes inside an *oda* when there were fewer people, blood feuds were forgiven. The peak was Verrat e Llukës.[53] More than half a million people were there. Over 64, I think, killings, disputes, and so on, were forgiven there on the spot, without mediation by the team. But in the euphoria of the time, because forgiveness was happening, and they would read who was forgiving, people would come forward on the spot. They would say, "In the name of the youth, in

[53] Verrat e Llukës refers to the mass gathering held on May 1, 1990, near Deçan, as part of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds campaign in Kosovo. It became one of the most important symbolic moments of the campaign, with large numbers of blood feuds publicly forgiven before a massive crowd.

the name of the flag, I forgive the blood of so-and-so." We were there surrounded by armored vehicles of the Serbian police. Wherever we went, we were completely surrounded, under surveillance. It is estimated that half a million people were there. I do not know by what method, someone. It appeared in the press that there were that many participants. That was the peak. That was Serbia's terror and panic. The effect was entirely the opposite.

As we were leaving there, they took a journalist's camera when he got out onto the road to Deçan, there is a road that passes there. I remember Zekerija Cana jumped onto that armored vehicle, grabbed the camera from the policeman, and took it from his hand. It was an indescribable situation, an emotion of its own. People did not know what was happening. Whether they would be killed or not, but there was euphoria. There were two horsemen on horses, like Isa Boletini[54] when he went to Vlora. Horses with those tufts, with flags in their hands, at the reconciliation of blood feuds. It was like a great wedding. It was indescribable. It was a situation full of… films, films, films could be made endlessly from it. Kosovo has passed through different catastrophes, generation after generation. Then came the time of war. The torture, the killings, those who remained here inside.

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

**Ukë Xhemaj:** We were blocked in Pristina, many of us in our homes. Where I was, near Santea, there were Serbs in that entrance, in the larger apartments. They would inform the police. It happened that I had my two sons and my daughter there. My brother's daughter, a student, was also there. My maternal uncle's son was there. Five. One neighbor of mine had three. They would come every minute, select them, take them, and expel them from Pristina. They would take the young men and execute them. They would take them and disappear them God knows where. It was not something where you could just go out. Some tried to go out to the train. They would select them on the train. They would let them board, then the police would get on and take the young people and whoever else. They would put them down, and you would not see them again. So I was neither in a position to try to leave nor to go. I did not know where my family was in the village. They had fled toward Rožaje. Where they ended up, whether they had killed them. The connections were cut. The telephones were completely cut off. There was no communication.

We waited all night. I was there on the third floor. They would come, there was a Montenegrin woman who had a shop next to my block. Now there is a bank there, or a bakery, or something. Šešelj's,[55]

[54] Isa Boletini (1864–1916) was a Kosovo Albanian military leader and national figure active in the Albanian uprisings of the late Ottoman period and the movement for Albanian independence. In this passage, he is evoked as a symbol of Albanian national resistance and dignity.

[55] Vojislav Šešelj (1954-) is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party. In 2003 he surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2016 he was acquitted of the crimes.

Drašković's,[56] Arkan's[57] paramilitaries and all kinds of them would come there, in different uniforms. They would come with small axes covered in blood, with which they had cut people. When they got out of the car, they would come and show the axe, the knife full of blood. They praised one another. I watched them through the gaps in the blinds. They would come, steal cars, what didn't they do! I wrote the license plate numbers of the cars on paper and put them in the pantry between the blocks. I said maybe the day will come when I can tell someone whose cars they took. You could see Arbëria, trucks would go and steal furniture from houses, with trucks. Some Roma and Ashkali,[58] whatever you want to call them. They gave them yellow vests, put them on the trucks, because that side could be seen from my apartment. They would break into houses, take display cabinets, furniture, and load them onto trucks for Mitrovica. They did it nonstop. They killed, they cut people. What didn't they do!

When they came once to force us out, they, the police, said, "You have five minutes to leave the house. We will liquidate whomever remains here." I called my son… I had two cars, one older, one newer. I called my son and told him, "Go down to Uncle Ibrahim," he did not have a car, a colleague at the Institute. He had his mother, his wife, a son and a daughter. I said, "Go tell him, in my car, you go. You drive." My son was the driver. He went down, came back, and said, "No, dad, he doesn't want to come, his wife won't let him, she says, 'I'm not leaving the house.'" "Go, man, five minutes." "No, he didn't come." We set off. Where to leave? Where to go? They said, "This way." Police everywhere in Pristina. They put me… they said that behind the theater there was a line forming to go to Albania. When I went behind the theater, there was a green kiosk there, and it had tobacco and a sign. Two policemen with masks, with black automatic rifles, suddenly stopped me. One neighbor in front of me, that one behind me, he was stopped too. They said, "Get out." We got out of the car.

He took my children, and my eldest son… my eldest daughter had gotten into another neighbor's car with friends. My eldest son had gone to wait for a girlfriend of his somewhere, together with my wife, and we were separated. I did not know where they had gone. I was with this car, with my maternal uncle's son, my brother's daughter, and my second son, who was in the car with me here. When they took me out, they put the children next to that kiosk and lined them up. "Take out," he said, "the money. Take out whatever money you have." I said, "I don't have money. I have 100 euros," I said, "100 marks." I had them in this pocket, and in this pocket another 100. That is how things had happened. I thought, I will need them on the road. I took out those 100 and he grabbed them. "Take out the rest. Take them out," he said, "or I will shoot them." He moved the barrel close to them. Believe me, Anita, the man was drinking my blood. Now, I approached him and pushed the barrel of the automatic rifle away, because he was pointing it at the children's chests. They turned pale, they turned white. I

[56] Vuk Drašković (1946) is a Serbian writer and politician. He is the co-founder and former leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement, serving as president from 1990 to 2024. In 1999, he served as the war-time Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 during the rule of Slobodan Milošević.

[57] Željko Ražnatović, a.k.a. Arkan (1952-2000) was the leader of the Serbian paramilitary force called Serbian Volunteer Guard active in Bosnia and Kosovo during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. A warlord and a mobster, he was indicted by the ICTY for crimes against humanity. He was assassinated in 2000 in the lobby of the Hotel Intercontinental in Belgrade.

[58] Ashkali are a Muslim, Albanian-speaking community within the broader categorization of Roma.

pushed it away. “Slow down,” I said, “wait a little.” In Serbian. I could only see his eyes, he had some kind of mask. There were two of them.

“The money,” he said, “quick.” “I don’t have money.” “Where are you going?” I said, “I’m going to get my mother.” He said, “Where is your mother?” I said, “That house straight ahead.” It came to me like that. I said, “I will get my mother and then leave for Albania. She has the money, I’ll go get it from her and bring it to you.” That is what I told him. He stopped for a moment and thought, and thought. He said, “Quick,” he said, “go and come back. Even if you had wings, you could not get out of Pristina from here without bringing the money.” I got out, got into the car. They threw the luggage out from underneath. The children took some bags. Some had passports, some had booklets, some had taken clothes. In bags. He threw them down. When he threw them down, my son said, “Dad, my student booklet was left.” I said, “Leave it.” “Dad, please, my student booklet.” I became like the child in my thinking. I got out to take it. After I drove five or six meters like this, I stopped the car. He said, “Why did you stop?” I said, “A student booklet.” “Turn back.”

For the second time, he turned them back and took them out. “Do you want me to kill them?” It was God’s terror. I said, “I know you very well,” I did not know them at all. “I know you and I know where you eat.” He said, “Where?” “At my apartment.” He said, “Where is your apartment?” I knew the name of that Montenegrin woman, but I no longer know it. I said, at so-and-so’s, “Every day there. She knows me. Call her on the phone and ask, this neighbor will bring you the money.” To find a way out. My brain worked like that. But that had two edges; she could have killed both me and them. Killing an Albanian had the value of removing a leaf from a tree. He said, “Then go quickly and bring me the money here. Put them in the car. I’m watching you.” That straight road goes toward Kelmendi’s that lawyer who was there, Bajram Kelmendi,[59] that house straight ahead. I said, “That window there.” It was not. When I went into that narrow passage there, I wanted to go toward Sofalia. Someone in a car with women wearing headscarves was coming across. I entered on the left.

“Where are you going?” “To Sofalia.” “Turn back, because the armored vehicle is up there, they are coming. You cannot get out. The road is full of police. There is a tank on the road.” “And where did you come from?” “I came by the courthouse and entered here to get out by the park.” “You can’t go that way through the park because the others are there.” “Then where?” “Turn back.” He turned back and I followed him. When I came out at the mosque, at the Assembly, I went through the center. When I came out there, there is some place by the theater here, in the middle, an Austro-Hungarian building, a shop or hotel. My brother’s daughter in the back said, “Uncle Ukë, that policeman is running, he saw us on the road and is going to come out in front of us by the theater.” And I pressed the car as hard as it could go toward the hotel Iliria.[60] On the terrace of Iliria, there were many police drinking and eating, in the city center. I fled. He came out, I looked in the rearview mirror. He had the automatic rifle, but

[59] Bajram Kelmendi (1937–1999) was a Kosovo Albanian lawyer and human rights activist. He was known for defending Albanians persecuted by the Yugoslav and Serbian authorities and was killed by Serbian police in March 1999, together with his two sons.
[60] Now Swiss Diamond Hotel.

there were police circulating on the road and he did not dare shoot because he would kill them. That saved me and my family.

When I came near the apartment, I headed toward Macedonia to escape, to get onto the road and go somewhere, I did not know myself where. Four or five patrol cars had stopped at Automacedonia. They were searching people, putting their hands into their pockets. I slowed down, slowly, slowly. I waited for them to tell me, "You stop too." They were four or five but slowly, slowly, with the window open, they did not stop me. Because they were robbing. When I got out, I went under the bridge and came out above the bridge; from Mitrovica there were columns of tractors with plastic sheets, covered, attached. Children, women. Uphill toward the Kaçanik Gorge. I did not know where my son had remained, or where my wife had remained, or where my daughter had remained. I drove all the way to the Kaçanik Gorge. Neither then nor today do I know where I passed, whether through Lipjan or Ferizaj, or how I drove, whether I braked or what. That whole film is erased for me. I had a moment then. I did not know what had happened because what kept going around in my head was that he wanted to shoot the children, I lost myself.

I do not know how I drove, whether I changed gears, whether I drove fast or slowly. When I entered the Kaçanik Gorge, the column could not move, it was stuck. Then I saw my son coming with that older car. When I looked, they had come. I had almost stopped. He opened the window, "Where are you going?" He said, "You can't cross the border, I'm going back to Pristina." "Turn back, get in behind me, because in Pristina there is no longer order." For seven days and nights, we stayed by the cement factory on the road, with the cars. They would not let us go that way, nor return this way. More than 40,000 people gathered. It was hell there. In the car, seven days and nights without eating. They had emptied Hani i Elezit ten days before us. The houses were empty. An old woman came. She did not say it to me. One woman had remained alone. She said, "Go in, children, into the freezers, because there is food, because we had prepared it, and they forced us out and it remained like that. I am the only one left in Hani i Elezit. They left only me. Go release the livestock, because they are in the stables without water to drink, let them drink water."

The children went from stable to stable, wherever they found animals, they released them. For seven days they went and found a little bread. Somewhere flour, somewhere meat, somewhere sausage. They supplied themselves however they could. That lasted one day, two. Then only some flour was found, and with water my wife would put it there, and they would take it somewhere, find a stove, bake it a little, and eat it with water. Believe me, that is how it was. Terrible. Patrols came night and day and watched you. It was terrible. One time a car came and brought some bread. A small truck. People ran. People had gone mad from hunger, children were crying. They would throw the bread and people would grab those loaves and run, it was terrifying. My son said to me… Muhamet Pirraku came. He had been down in the courtyard of the cement factory. He had come to see who was there. I met him. "Muhamet." "Come and see, you are in a category A hotel." "Why?" He said, "You are in your own car. There is no stench. Come down there. Typhus is about to break out there."

There, it was full of plastic sheets. It rained at night. All bodily needs, big and small, were being done right there. “Come see.” “No, honestly, I won’t come. Here, take my eldest son and go.” My eldest son went, and when he came back, “Dad, we are in a category A hotel, we are sitting in the car, but down there you had to close your nose and run away. They are all going to die of disease.” One day, after the seventh day, my wife had baked some kind of bread somewhere, but it had become like a brick. She gave me a crumb. They were eating it like that with some water. The car door was open, in the car. There was a journalist from *Rilindja*, I knew him here. The night before, he said to me, “Ukë, I heard some news, don’t tell anyone,” because everyone was stuck car after car, 40,000 people. “Milošević has surrendered, he has capitulated, he has resigned. That was the news, but don’t make it big, because it may not be true.” With some kind of courage, I said, “God willing.”

The next day, around four in the afternoon, while I was eating that crumb of bread, I had the door open in the column. When those cars that were in front of us began coming back quickly, returning to Kosovo. I asked someone, “What?” He said, “Go back, it has been liberated.” I only said, “Throw the bread away.” They threw them away. I told them, “Get in the car.” I turned the car around on the spot, the other one behind me, and headed for Prishtina. When I entered the Kaçanik Gorge, the cars were parking and moving quickly. When I came, there is a fountain, an old stone house in the middle of the Kaçanik Gorge on the left side as you go down toward Skopje, with the Lepenc below. There was a place there, and it is still there now. There had been Serbs, soldiers, paramilitaries, in that stone house. They had come out to the road now. One of them had his automatic rifle out like this, and the other as well that night. He gestured to me, “quickly, quickly, quickly.”

My son was behind me in the other car, I was in the new car in front. I was thinking it had been liberated. Out of spite toward him, I slowed down. He was waving his hand as much as he could, he was going mad. When I came near, he cursed at me and hit the car with the rifle butt. That car, until it was sold, had the hole there in the door. My wife was on that side. He cursed at me. I kept going. When I came to Çaglavica, it was very interesting, two policemen were at the entrance to Çaglavica, where that roundabout is now. Two policemen from the right side were trying to cross with automatic rifles to the left side. On the left side, there was a place with a white brick façade. The two of them, and we in the column passing by. I saw one car pass in front of us. They were hesitating whether to cross; one was trying to go, the second stayed. When he started to cross, I pressed the gas and thought, I’ll run him over. I pushed it as much as the engine had power. I almost caught his legs, he jumped. The other one aimed at me. The kid behind me said, “Uncle, they want to kill us.” He did not shoot.

I came. When we arrived in Pristina, each person went their own way. When I went into the courtyard of the apartment building, I put the car in the parking lot. I let them out and said, “Get into the elevator and go.” I put it in the courtyard, in the parking lot. Then a neighbor from the building came out, they would put up a black ribbon with letters when someone died, as a sign of mourning. His son had been killed, as a policeman or what do I know! We knew each other well. Neighbors. He entered the elevator. He just looked at me and I looked at him. Neither he spoke nor I spoke. He was on the sixth floor, I on the third. I reached the third and got out. The silence of death. The children had entered the

apartment. I walked. There was no surrender by Milošević. Not even five minutes passed when the mother of this Ibrahim from downstairs, the one who did not come with the car, aunt Sofa, aunt Sofi, came. She was 84 years old, vital, thin but upright. She came, opened the door, threw herself around my neck. "For God's sake, don't leave us alone anymore." Because she thought we were leaving. "We were terrified, don't leave us alone." "I didn't leave you, I sent you the car." "I know, but that daughter-in-law of mine. What we went through! We were the only ones left in the building, what we went through, being tortured. Please." She began crying.

I said, "Now even if we want to leave, we cannot leave, because they turned us back. We are trapped." "Just don't leave." Until the war ended, we stayed there. No one dared go outside. Once they made us register at the park, to know who remained, how many remained, the addresses. They told us, "We will execute whomever we find without that paper, without being registered." During the day, we had to go. Madness. They wanted to create the register of what to do with those who had remained, where they were in the houses now. To liquidate us too. We returned there. They were bombing. Someone would inform them by phone, on radio stations. The Serbs who were in the building would come, running down the stairs and going to the shelter below, under the building. We would wait five minutes, and then the rocket would go to the barracks. All the windows in the apartment near Santea had broken from the shaking. But my soul rejoiced. I knew they were bombing.

When they came back upstairs, we knew there would be no more bombing that night. Someone informed them of everything. When the sun set, the wall was there, that furniture company, they went and took boards and large wooden posts and closed the main door. The Serbs, not us. They closed it so no one could enter at night. Luckily for us Albanians, someone had informed them that the KLA[61] was in Gërmia, waiting to enter and liquidate all the Serbs who were there. They were now afraid of the Albanians of the KLA, and we were saved. At night, the Serbs, those paramilitaries, would come to the hotel. They wanted to open the door and take us, and those Serbs would guard all night. They would not open it. They had placed wood and boards, they could not break it anymore. They would say, "Let us in, let us in." These did not dare let them in because they thought maybe they were speaking Serbian but were Albanians. That is how five families survived in that block until the war ended. Until the war was over.

**Anita Susuri:** And when KFOR[62] entered, how was it…

**Ukë Xhemaj:** When KFOR entered, it was a double-edged story. The first night the Russians entered after we rejoiced, the Russians entered and went to the airport. That was a cold shower. Because we said, someone must have betrayed us, and Serbia is entering here again, Russia again. That history is

[61] The KLA, or Kosovo Liberation Army, was an ethnic Albanian armed organization active in the 1990s that fought Serbian and Yugoslav forces and sought Kosovo's independence from Serbia. In Albanian, it is known as the UÇK, *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*.

[62] KFOR, the Kosovo Force, is the NATO-led peacekeeping mission deployed in Kosovo on June 12, 1999, after NATO's air campaign and the withdrawal of Serbian/Yugoslav forces.

known now. That commander[63] did not allow them to use it. He left them, because he said there was the risk of a Third World War.[64] But then, when they [NATO troops] began coming from Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, and from Gjakova and this side, and those Russians went [to Slatina], we did not see them. The Serbs fled, they closed themselves in. The foreigners came, we went out to the city center, celebrating everywhere. Pleasure and wonder, just as everyone knows. Once, a rocket came near Professor Mark's apartment, a Tomahawk, which went between the apartment buildings, with fire behind it like a human body, but larger. It hit the secretariat[65] there, where they were. It pierced through everything there. There were many Serbian police killed. They never said the number. If it had been a mine there, it could not have done that. It penetrated from the antennas above all the way down, it bombed them.

**Anita Susuri:** And then you returned to the institute immediately?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Immediately afterward, we returned to the Institute. We agreed, we came from there, took the books and whatever we had in that house. There, it was like Mecca when pilgrims go. To see professors, doctors of science, kneeling down and kissing the threshold, the threshold of the Institute's door. After all those catastrophes. It was interesting. That is how it was.

**Anita Susuri:** And you, Mr. Ukë, how many publications do you have?

**Ukë Xhemaj:** I have around 70 works in my profession, in all fields of anthropology. Starting from birth, death. Birth rites, engagement, marriage, wedding, funeral rites, clothing, folk architecture, mythology. All fields. Agriculture and livestock. I have the monograph of the *Podgur of Prizren*, my doctoral topic, published. I have *Cultural Layers*. I have *In a Corner of Illyria* there, the monograph on the Albanians of Montenegro. I have the ethnography section there; others have the history. I have clothing, customs, traditions. I have the monograph on Rugova with the Academy of Sciences of Kosovo, with Professor Mark Krasniqi, published in '78 by the Academy of Sciences. Then I have publications in journals such as *Gjurmime* — folklore, ethnology, with the ethnographic Albanian studies, historical studies of Albania, those… papers presented here and abroad.

**Anita Susuri:** Mr. Ukë, thank you very much!

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Did I tire you? Did I bore you?

**Anita Susuri:** If you have anything else to add at the end. For us it was a pleasure!

**Ukë Xhemaj:** Thank you! Well, look, it was a pleasure to recount these events. Often at night I wake up and think. I say, "Why don't I have this device near me now?" Because then so many things come to mind that do not come to mind during the day. But when I sit with colleagues and talk, I think, "Is it

[63] American General Wesley Clark.
[64] British General Michael Jackson.
[65] Police headquarters.

possible that we are this old?" Life sometimes fills you with a great deal. The only regret that remains in my life is that I could have contributed much more, but certain circumstances did not allow us. Because if I were to explain my life to you, you would shudder and say, this man is stronger than any steel. With these hands, what these eyes have seen, I have worked, from the village, where I built with my own hands at least 500 meters of walls and roofs, to while being a professor, a researcher at the Institute, at the faculty, and to help the family.

I would go from here and work there. Whatever meters there are, four floors from the foundation, I built them with these hands myself, myself. Another thing, educating those children, those brothers and sisters, with my own scholarship, I would give it to them, buy them notebooks. Then, in the field, these catastrophes of the system were some obstacles, and obstacles from the Institute as well. I could have received a scholarship to study. When colleagues went to Europe, they would not allow it. Because of accounts, because of certain relationships, the way we Albanians have them, pointless, so very pointless that it always has to be said. If you did not say hello to someone or did not tell someone that this person did this for you, but kept yourself upright, they would become resentful. They would not give you an apartment.

Imagine, it came to the point that the director of the scientific community, which allocated funds for scientific institutes, was a Montenegrin. We had no car to go into the field, no apartments. We lived in rented places, the salary was low, the rent high. We had no conditions. You have no apartment, no work, a family, where do you go? But he said, "You have never made a request, either in writing or orally. The money is being lost," because at that time there was a fund. That fund that was for the Institute had to be spent within the year through programs. Whatever remained was lost, and a new program had to be made. He said, "You have not requested either a car or apartments." And we were renting. Now, when I started the house in Sofalia, there was no water there. I got tired of renting. It was… the children grew up and expenses became greater. Here, where Sveçla from Vetëvendosje is, in his house, after the army, I found an apartment. It cost 500 marks, my salary was 1,000 marks, 500 only for the apartment. I took out a loan to buy there, in the forest, and with 500, how to live? Carrying water to build, to work, to complete the project at the institute that I was obliged to do, and all of that. So sometimes I say a person is stronger than steel.

But what has remained with me the most, I say, when I applied to the scientific community, there was plenty of money, all the colleagues applied. Some for Germany, some for Greece, for specialization and to learn languages. I applied with a colleague of mine, Myzafere Mustafa. We said we would go to France for French. I had learned French in primary school as much as one learns in primary school. I went and applied at the Institute. The secretary had to send the file to the scientific community. The day came, and Tahir Avdyli told me, because I had worked with him at the gymnasium and he had later moved to the scientific community, "Ukë, tomorrow is Thursday, the council has a meeting, the scholarships are being distributed, yours is certain because there are enough funds, there is no competition. Only you and Myzafere for France, Shkelzen for Greece, there are enough funds." I applied for one year.

Then Thursday ended. In the evening, I went out for a walk on the *korzo*, as we used to. He said to me, "Why didn't you apply?" I said, "No, man, I did apply, of course. The file is at the Institute, Ibrahim Shaljani brought it." He said, "No, we did not have your file. I looked for it myself, it is not there." Ibrahim Shaljani made my file and Myzafere's disappear, on someone's orders; he did not let it go to the scientific community, and the scholarship failed. What demoralization, and many other things. I gave you the simplest example. We could have contributed a lot, because there were funds, there were opportunities. A person works differently with a car. For 20 years we did not have a car. All the workers, through rain and snow, with bags, like in the time of Vuk Karadžić[66] of Serbia, out in the field. It was an obstacle. Someone who did not go out did not know your trouble. You were out on expeditions. If those things had existed, even more work would have been done.

Nevertheless, people worked, a lot of work was done. The value of the Institute's work is immeasurable because Professor Anton would tell us, "You go out into the field for one month, and if you learn one thing from one child, the expedition is a success, because that is rare." Therefore, at that time most of them were rare, because they were original. Today, even with 100 expeditions with cars, you cannot find them. That is why it is very important work. Unfortunately, one part was taken by the Serbs, one part was burned, one part was preserved. What was preserved is a large part. The institute has a lot, because one part was distributed to libraries abroad, and that is a very great merit. They can be found there if they cannot be found here. The materials are there. What remains is valuable, whether for linguistics, history, or ethnology. For all the branches.

But superlatives do not exist anywhere, always. So we are well. I managed to educate those children, I made them independent. I made them their own people, they have their own families. In their lives they have been such that they never disturbed us, never took sleep from us. The neighborhood often thinks they are abroad. They are extremely well-behaved, calm. I am satisfied. I am satisfied with life. I have seen a lot, I have gone through a lot. I have had different, different experiences. I carry a history with me like this. Now, if I had the health to work, to bring out some things that I could not before. Now I have the dough, some material that I have taken, but I need some work to be done professionally, to transfer them from the tapes into these formats. I have a great treasure of archive material that can never be found again. Some of it needs to be published, some left archived. Maybe it will serve someone in the future a little, however little.

Professor Anton had an expression, when he retired, we held a farewell meeting for him and for Professor Idriz [Ajeti]. We held a small symposium. The folklore branch thanked him because he was the founder. They gave him oral recognition, symbolically. The Institute bought him a wristwatch. He took the floor and came out there in front of the microphone and said, "Thank you, you have valued me more than I deserve. I made efforts, but if I managed to add even one small pebble to the fortress of Albanian culture, I am very satisfied." And it was a fitting phrase. Because culture and these things

[66] Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) was a Serbian linguist, language reformer, and collector of oral literature. He is especially known for reforming the Serbian literary language and documenting Serbian folk songs, tales, and proverbs.

are great. People compare themselves, but you are not even a drop of water in the ocean. And if you managed to place that drop somewhere in the fortress, that is good. However little, a little. Culture has much. So many ancestors, the earth has eaten them, and time will eat them but they left something. A little this one, a little that one.

There was a professor from Zagreb, an academician, who used to tell us, "All of us rise on one another's shoulders. It is not that I created the world from the beginning. Each person stands on the shoulders of the other." You found something before me and advanced it. The next person comes, finds that, and advances it. The next one. From three of six books, the seventh is created. So, very true. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I do not know how accurate they are or not. A small walk through my days.

**Anita Susuri:** It was a pleasure.

**Ukë Xhemaj:** There is much to say. I have different approaches. I wish you good work, success. God willing, your work goes well. The publications you gave me, I saw that you have worked very well, and I hope you do not stop with that, but continue further. Thank you!