

INTERVIEW WITH AJET DULI

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Duration: 153 minutes

Present:

1. Ajet Duli (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (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: Can you introduce yourself – your name, surname, date of birth, something about your family, your background?

Ajet Duli: I am Ajet Duli, born on the 10th of March, in the year 1954, in the village of Svirca, municipality of Medvegja.¹ I completed elementary school, the four-year school, in the village of Svirca, whereas from the fifth grade until the eighth grade I was in Banja e Sijarinës. We were the first generation to be schooled in the Albanian language in Banja e Sijarinës.

Anita Susuri: Wasn't there any earlier?

Ajet Duli: Earlier, only in Serbian. But we were the first generation, and we completed the eighth grade in 1968. In the year 1968–69 I came to Pristina, I enrolled in the *Shkolla Normale*.² I was part of the last five-year generation of the *Shkolla Normale*. In 1974 I finished the *Normale*, and in the academic year 1974–75 I enrolled in the Higher Pedagogical School, the physics-chemistry field. I completed this physics-chemistry degree and then began work; in the year 1976–77 I worked in the elementary school Zenel Hajdini in Topallë as a physics and chemistry teacher.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back a little and ask you about your family. What kind of family were you?

Ajet Duli: My family is known as the family of Dul Gurgurovci. Earlier, our family had the surname Gurgurovci, based on the place we left, the place from which Serbs expelled us in the year 1878, in the years 1877–78. That village where our ancestors were, Gurgurovci, is near Lebanë, about four kilometers from Lebanë, and it was a completely flat area with very fertile land. The elders used to say that when they fled from Gurgurovci, they had granaries full of wheat, corn cribs full of maize, and attics full of walnuts. But from all that wealth, they only took their livestock with them and went to Ferizaj.

¹ Medveda in Serbian. The town is in Southern Serbia and is inhabited mostly by Albanians.

² *Shkolla Normale* refers to the Albanian teacher-training school established in Elbasan on 1 December 1909, following a decision of the Congress of Elbasan. It was the first national pedagogical school to teach in Albanian and played a central role in training teachers and advancing Albanian-language education.

They wanted to return to Gurgurovci from Ferizaj. One branch of our family remains in Ferizaj to this very day. They preserved the surname Gurgurovci. Another family settled in Krilevë and remains there to this day. But they changed their surname and took the surname Demolli. Whereas Duli' family, Dul Gurgurovci, returned to Svirca with the intention of returning to Gurgurovci, but they were never allowed to return, and we remained in those mountains, in those fields, under extraordinarily difficult conditions. Our family lived in Svirca for one hundred years, and so did the others who had settled there; they survived and remained alive, alive until Judgment Day, as the saying goes. In 1969, we sold the property we had in Svirca and settled in Pristina, in September 1969, September.

Anita Susuri: But your families, for example, who lived in that area, outside Kosovo, so to speak. How did you live? Did you experience pressure, or what kind of work did you do?

Ajet Duli: Listen, where we were, especially in the municipality of Medvegja, there are some villages such as Svirca, Gurboci, Ramabaja, Kapiti, Llapashtica, very underdeveloped villages. But Tupalla and this whole area from Medvegja to Vllasë is a valley, and that valley had good living conditions. We struggled for a piece of bread, for how to secure the family's livelihood. The conditions were extraordinarily difficult.

Anita Susuri: Did you work the land, for example, or what kind of work did you do?

Ajet Duli: Yes, we worked in agriculture and livestock farming.

Anita Susuri: And going to school, the journey there, what was it like for you?

Ajet Duli: On foot. It was six kilometers from my house to Banja e Sijarinës. Back then the winters were harsh, there was heavy snow, severe frost. Whether you wanted to or not. I remember when I went to first grade, I walked wearing shoes made from cowhide, in first grade.

Anita Susuri: Were those bought or made?

Ajet Duli: No, they were made.

Anita Susuri: Did someone in your family make them?

Ajet Duli: Yes. Every family knew how to make them, because at that time living conditions were extraordinarily difficult. I remember once I stayed a little longer in Banja e Sijarinës to buy some oil, sugar, and kerosene because we did not have electricity. My classmates and the students from the other classes had already gone ahead, and I had to wait until the store in Banja opened. I had a pair of canvas trousers, and they had torn above the knee. I was left alone as I made my way home. A heavy snow had fallen. When I got near my house, one of our villagers, a man named Ruhani Ramce, as we called him, had gone out looking for his son to clear a path for him so he would not be stranded in the snow. His son had taken a different route, and fortunately I ran into Ruhani. Together we went to his house. When we arrived there, we called my house, it was about one kilometer away, and he informed them that I was at his place. Then my father came and got me.

Anita Susuri: How old were you then?

Ajet Duli: I was about twelve years old then.

Anita Susuri: So it was a dangerous journey.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And what was the overall situation like, for example, while you were growing up, the political situation, I mean? It was the period of Ranković,³ and you were perhaps around ten or twelve years old then. Was that noticeable in the area where you lived? Those political pressures?

Ajet Duli: In our family there wasn't, there wasn't any because my grandfather and my grandfather's brother, Halit and Halim Duli by surname, after the Second World War in '45, together with several fellow villagers, were taken by the partisans, and to this very day we do not know where their graves are. My grandfather and my grandfather's brother Halim, had been very capable men. Mainly the partisans, let me say in quotation marks, truly *Chetniks*,⁴ took them from us and erased even the traces of their funerals.

Anita Susuri: Do you know any more stories, for example how they came to take them or how this happened?

Ajet Duli: Yes, when they came to take them, they took my father because my grandfather was not there. They were some people whom we called the Limani people, Limani with the surname Baftiu. The partisan headquarters had been stationed there, and then they entered the village and gathered all the most capable men. But when they came to our house, my grandfather happened not to be there, so they took my father.

Anita Susuri: Was he young?

Ajet Duli: My father was 17–18 years old at that time. And when they lined them up to take them to Sijarina Spa, from the village of Svirca alone there were 23 men. They tied them up, and while they were going... Then my grandmother insisted with my grandfather, her husband, and said, "Go, because they took our son." And he went. They put my grandfather there and tied him up, while they released my father because he was young.

Anita Susuri: And after that it was never known where they were?

Ajet Duli: To this very day we do not know. Now, since I am a member of the Trojet club, in fact, I have been president of the club's executive board twice, we have researched it. The place where their bones are has been found, but they still do not allow us to go and retrieve those remains. We could somehow

³ Aleksandar Ranković (1909–1983) was a senior Yugoslav communist official and longtime head of the state-security apparatus (OZNA/UDBA). He oversaw a system of repression in Kosovo marked by mass surveillance, arbitrary arrests, torture, coercive weapons-collection campaigns, political trials, and pressure on Albanians to emigrate. He was removed from power in 1966 following revelations of widespread abuses by the security services.

⁴ The Chetniks were Serbian nationalist and royalist armed formations, most prominently the movement led by Draža Mihailović during the Second World War. Although initially organized to resist the Axis occupation, many Chetnik units collaborated with Axis forces and committed massacres and ethnic cleansing against non-Serb civilians in pursuit of a "Greater Serbia." The name was revived by Serbian nationalist paramilitaries during the wars of the 1990s and is also used more broadly for Serbian irregular forces.

build a memorial in Sijarina Spa and make it into a monument, and write the names of those victims who perished at that time.

Anita Susuri: Where exactly is that place where they were? Somewhere around Sijarina?

Ajet Duli: No, they took them, they took them to Lebane from Medvegja, they took them to Lebane on foot. A son of Halim's, his name was Ramadan, and he has died now too, went to Lebane to transport something, with oxen and a cart he carried something, wood or something, he carried it there. When he got there, at a checkpoint he spotted those villagers — his father, and my grandfather too, that is, his uncle. He had some bread in a bag, and he threw them that bread. “Right away,” he said, “some of them came and took it from them, they didn't let them keep”, he said, “the bread.” Halim, Dani's [short for Ramadan] father, said, “Go to Avdia, and speak to Avdia of the Jasharović family.” When he [Ramadan] came back, he said, “I swear, that's how I saw it, that's also what they told me, like, “Go to Avdia.” Avdia was a man of some authority, during the war he had found a wounded man, taken him in, and looked after him at the time. So he had a certain kind of standing. But when they went to tell him, “Can you go, can you get them out, or something?” he said, “I swear, I don't dare, it's a serious situation, and that's already come to an end.” This was two or three days later, that's it.

Anita Susuri: And when you were a child, for example, did you, how should I say...

Ajet Duli: No, but there is something else I want to mention. My father especially, because it was Bajram when they took my grandfather. Whenever there were holidays, he was always worried, always saddened, and suffered greatly. For a long time he would say that he was waiting for when he would return, when he would return. He never came back.

Anita Susuri: As a child, I mean, did you grow up with these stories in the *oda*,⁵ stories of Albanians?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes. These things were always discussed in the *oda*, in gatherings. But I should tell another incident as well. In Sijarina Spa there was a teacher called Mumin Kastrati. Mumin Kastrati had been a political prisoner from the area of Dardana [Kamenica]. He had not been able to get employment there, but they hired him in Sijarina Spa, since there was a shortage of teachers. In Sijarina Spa he taught us... he taught us Albanian and he also taught us history. Mumin Kastrati had been in prison with a man named Rrahim Lipovica, Redenica. Then, when Rrahim finished his prison sentence, he went to Turkey. There he got married and had three children, but he got into conflict with his wife, killed her, and came back again. And he had originally escaped from Yugoslavia after prison.

They had been living in a village in Marevc. His brother, Shahin Redenica, when Rrahim returned, out of fear that the police would get on his trail, took him and brought him to us. My mother was a cousin of both Rrahim and Shahin. They arrived before morning, during the night, and called out. We got up before dawn and they came inside. My mother prepared some food and sat them down to eat bread there during the night. Back then our women would quickly put on a *krelan*⁶ and rush about in a hurry,

⁵ The *oda*, traditionally known as the *oda e burrave* (“men's chamber”), is the guest and gathering room of an Albanian household. Particularly important in rural Kosovo, it served as a space for hospitality, storytelling, community discussion, dispute mediation, and the transmission of oral history and customary traditions.

⁶ *Krelanë* is a traditional Albanian baked dish common in Kosovo. It is made from a thick flour-and-water batter, which is broken into small pieces after baking and covered with melted butter and crumbled white cheese. It is usually served hot, often with yogurt or pickled peppers; some regional versions use cornmeal.

God help them. Then Rrahim asked me, “Who teaches you?” He had learned that Mumin was there. I said, “Well, Mumin Kastrati teaches me both Albanian and history.” “Do you know where he lives?” “Of course I do,” I said. “I know him in Sijarina Spa. I even know his apartment.”

I took those two men before there was even the slightest light of dawn and brought them to Mumin Kastrati. When we arrived, he was asleep. We knocked hard on the window, he came out, and was astonished when he saw us. But he was frightened too, wondering what had happened, because, as they say, he always had a fly behind his ear, a political prisoner is always cautious. When they went inside, Rrahim and the teacher Mumin embraced. Mumin Kastrati told us what torture and suffering he had endured. He was nearly 1.80 meters tall and broad-shouldered. “I dropped to 35 kilograms,” he said, “and I wasn’t able to lift even five kilograms off the ground. That’s how much they tortured me and made me suffer.” It was very interesting, because then he told me, “No one, no living person, must know these men were with me, because we’ll suffer consequences. You must not speak.” I never spoke.

But during lessons, at certain moments, Mumin would lose concentration. While explaining something—bang!—he would suddenly drift off the topic. Then, to create a bit of atmosphere, you know, he would call on me: “Hey, Ajet Duli, may porridge strike you dead! Hey, Ajet Duli, may porridge strike you dead!” (smiles). We students would laugh. “Ah yes, where were we, where were we?” You know, then we would remind him where we had left off, because he had been left with lasting effects. And that gathering there, and his bearing, and his account of everything, left a very deep impression on me.

Anita Susuri: Since you said you were the first generation, what teachers did you have? Did you have others as well, for example, other instructors?

Ajet Duli: The others we had were from the municipality of “More Ajet Duli, more të vraft qulli. More Ajet Duli, more të vraft qulli” (buzëqeshë).. We also had a man named Hisen Konçeli; he too was from the Dardana area. The others were all our fellow villagers.

Anita Susuri: Were they young teachers?

Ajet Duli: Well, they were young, and we had one teacher, she is still alive, Havzë, teacher Havzë, Havzë Ferati-Hajdari. She was a wonderful teacher, an educator. She taught us geography there, in Sijarina Spa. She was a teacher, but she was very dedicated and well prepared. We also had Bafti Krasniqi, who made an extraordinary contribution to opening the school. The merits of this Bafti Krasniqi, and indeed Ramë Xhema too, he was an activist who lobbied a lot here in Kosovo for Albanian-language schools to be opened in Medvegja... The first school in the Albanian language was opened in Sijarina Spa, and then a year later another one was opened in Tupallë.

Anita Susuri: And how were the villages organized at that time, for example? What kind of houses were there? What was the population like? Was it mixed?

Ajet Duli: Our village had 500 houses, more than 500. We were all Albanians. Sijarina was mixed, with Montenegrins, Serbs, and Albanians. Gurbac was entirely Albanian, Kapit entirely Albanian, Llapashtica mainly Albanian, Topallë Albanian. These were all Albanian villages, mainly inhabited by Albanians.

Anita Susuri: And in the area where you lived, were they all newcomers, or were there local inhabitants too?

Ajet Duli: No, there were locals and there were *muhaxhirs*.⁷ In our village it was about half and half, *muhaxhirs* and locals.

Anita Susuri: Were the houses, like...

Ajet Duli: Scattered.

Anita Susuri: Yes, but I mean how were the houses and buildings constructed? What style were they, for example? Were they simple?

Ajet Duli: Very simple, made of wood and wattle panels filled with mud in between, plastered with clay inside and outside. Then on the inside they whitewashed them with lime.

Anita Susuri: For example, were they large houses, or did they have space for animals, where the animals stayed?

Ajet Duli: Yes, we kept animals too, but we kept them in the basements. Upstairs, above the basement, we had the *oda* and one room. At the house we had the kitchen where food was cooked, and we had one room where we slept. We also had the *çarranik*.

Anita Susuri: What is that? (laughs)

Ajet Duli: We called *çarranik* the place where dairy products were kept.

Anita Susuri: And was it only your immediate family living in that house, or did you also live with uncles?

Ajet Duli: I don't remember that. I only remember our own family. We were four brothers, two sisters, and our two parents.

Anita Susuri: Which child were you in the family?

Ajet Duli: I was the second son. The eldest brother was Bejta, I was the second, Ajet. The third was Zymer, who passed away. Gani was the fourth and Ramiz the fifth. The four of us brothers are still alive, and we have two sisters, Fatime and Rrahime. Rrahime now lives in Sweden, has created her family there, and has three children, all married.

Anita Susuri: Was it difficult for your family, for example, when you decided to come to Pristina and enroll in the *Shkolla Normale*, financially speaking, to make the move here?

⁷ Muhaxhirs (Albanian: *muhaxhirë*, "refugees") were Muslim refugees displaced during the territorial conflicts of the late Ottoman period. In Kosovo, the term refers especially to Muslim Albanians expelled by Serbian forces from the Sanjak of Niš, including Toplica, Prokuplje, Kuršumlja, Leskovac, and Vranje, during the Serbian–Ottoman conflict of 1877–78. Many resettled in Kosovo, where their descendants continued to be identified as *muhaxhirë*.

Ajet Duli: I had a maternal uncle here in Pristina who had come before us, and I lived with him for one year. My uncle supported me for free that year. Then the following year our whole family moved...

Anita Susuri: In '69?

Ajet Duli: I came out in '69, and in '70, around March, the family came as well. But let me mention one more thing...

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes, go ahead.

Ajet Duli: My father was very worried and did not want to leave Svirca. When we finally decided and moved here, he cried like a child. But after some time, my father got a job at the Higher Pedagogical School.

Anita Susuri: As a...

Ajet Duli: As an employee, the school caretaker. I remember he wore a *plis*,⁸ and he had to clean the corridors and the toilets. Then he took off the white cap and put on another cap, a black beret as they called it. [Ramiz Kelmendi](#) was teaching there at the time, the writer who had helped my father a lot to get employed. When he saw that my father had taken off the white cap, they called him to the director's office that day. "Ramë, why did you take off the white cap?" My father said, "Listen, director, you don't go into toilets to clean them wearing a white cap." They all laughed, but yes.

Anita Susuri: When you came to Pristina in '69, what was Pristina like? In which neighborhood did you live?

Ajet Duli: We lived in a neighborhood called Bledi Street [now street Xhavit Ahmeti], the Bledi Neighborhood as it was called. A sewage canal ran through the middle of that neighborhood. Mud everywhere, unbelievable mud. There was no water supply, only wells. Conditions were very difficult.

Anita Susuri: Was it a house where your uncle lived?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes. It was my uncle's house where he lived. Then we came and built a house not very far from my uncle.

Anita Susuri: And your uncles, were they originally from here, or had they moved too?

Ajet Duli: No, my uncles were from Kapit. They are well known, that Kapiti family. That uncle left Tupallë and moved to Marevc. He lived in Marevc for ten years, and from Marevc he came here to Pristina. Today he lives in Sofali and keeps 300 goats (smiles).

Anita Susuri: He's still alive?

Ajet Duli: Still alive, yes.

⁸ The *plis* is a traditional brimless white cap made from felted sheep's wool and worn by Albanian men. Its shape varies by region; the rounded form is particularly associated with Kosovo and northern Albania. Once part of everyday dress, it is now commonly worn at ceremonies and cultural events as a symbol of Albanian identity.

Anita Susuri: And what was Pristina like for you? Was it perhaps the first time you had traveled there?

Ajet Duli: The first time I came to Pristina.

Anita Susuri: What did you think of it?

Ajet Duli: Listen, I had somehow dreamed about Kosovo and Pristina. I would have liked someone to ask me about that dream I had in my mind. The way I imagined it, with trees, cherry trees, with Gërmia, I fantasized about it like that. When I arrived and saw it, I saw that it was not at all as I had imagined it.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember, for example, any building or someplace you visited a lot?

Ajet Duli: You mean here?

Anita Susuri: In Pristina, at that time when you...

Ajet Duli: We only... My aunt was also here on Bledi Street, and my uncle. Mostly we stayed among ourselves. My father had uncles in the Muhaxher Neighborhood, and they had come before us as well. There was Mehmet, son of Rrahim, my father's uncle. They were from Radec, well known among us. They too had left Radec and moved out. Throughout all those villages in Medvegja there are people from Radec. And that uncle Mehmet, poor man, when my father went to the army, my grandmother was left with two children. Uncle Mehmet always looked after them and kept them alive because there was no one else to help. My father served 24 months in the army, in Sarajevo.

Anita Susuri: What years were those?

Ajet Duli: As for the years, I...

Anita Susuri: Before the Second World War, right?

Ajet Duli: No, after the Second World War, after. Because at that time my father was about 17–18 years old when... and then the time came for him to go to the army, and my mother was left alone with my older brother, and my grandmother with two or three daughters.

Anita Susuri: Did your father tell you, for example, about any experience he had there in prison, or how he got through it?

Ajet Duli: My father was not in prison.

Anita Susuri: Sorry, in the army.

Ajet Duli: Ah, in the army. Interestingly, my father got through the army well as a soldier. He did not have any problem, but he was worried about the family and their life. My mother used to tell us that the poverty was so great, and it was so difficult, that we baked one pie two or three times with the same dough sheets. We gathered nettles and various wild greens to put in it and keep ourselves alive. Because at that time they had also taken away things; they had to hand over the livestock, the grain, and everything to the cooperatives.

Anita Susuri: Was that when the state took a portion?

Ajet Duli: Yes, those things were taken by the state, yes. And they did not have much to begin with, and then the state took some of it. So they were always under pressure, trying to survive. It was a struggle for existence.

Part Two

Ajet Duli: Let me return to when I started working. In '76–'77 I was a teacher at the elementary school Zenel Hajdini in Topallë, and I worked there for one year, three months, and 25 days. That is the amount of work experience I had when I started in Topallë.

Anita Susuri: Did you travel continuously to Topallë from Pristina, or how was it?

Ajet Duli: No, I lived with my uncles in Topallë. I stayed with an aunt and an uncle. In the meantime, I was called up and went to the army. In '78 I was a soldier in Ohrid, and after six months I went to Strumica. I held the rank of sailor. In Serbian they called it *desetar*; in Albanian, sailor. I served in Macedonia, and there I saw what injustices and what anti-Albanian policies were being carried out. At that time I was 26–27 years old, already mature enough to notice those phenomena. But any small gesture an Albanian made, they would, as the saying goes, turn a fly into a buffalo.

In Strumica, one time I served with Astrit Bardhi. Astrit had a master's degree in mathematics. I kept company with him there in Strumica. As I said, I was a squad leader, and one day I took Astrit and went out with him into the city because I had the right to enter and leave; I had that permit. But as always, someone had informed the officer that I had gone into town with a soldier. They sent the military police, took both me and Astrit, and put us in jail. The first time I was ever in jail was in Strumica as a soldier. Why? Because I had taken a soldier into town. There was nothing wrong with it, but it was a way of expressing their chauvinism.

And there were military superiors who truly did not want to see us with their eyes; if they could, they would have erased us. There in '78, it was as if my hatred toward Yugoslavia was born. As a soldier, I saw the injustices and the extreme discrimination against Albanians. After I finished the army, I returned to Pristina. It was summer, I had nothing to do, so I boarded a train through Belgrade and went to Zurich. When I arrived in Zurich, it was Friday evening. When I went out into the city, I met some fellow villagers of mine, one of them Rrahim Doda, and they found me a job. I worked in a café in Birmensdorf, about four kilometers from Zurich, for about two months.

Meanwhile, I had applied to the school Zenel Hajdini in Pristina. They informed me that I had been accepted, and on September 1, 1978, I began teaching at the Zenel Hajdini school in Pristina. It is not good for a person to speak highly of himself, but it is the reality: I was very, very dedicated and worked extraordinarily hard with the students, especially with the class where I was the homeroom teacher. We organized extra lessons in mathematics, physics, and chemistry outside regular school hours. We organized performances and various plays with my class.

I remember once the principal called me in. “Ajet, what are you doing?” “Well, we are doing some activities with the students.” “Hey,” he said, “what subject do you teach?” “Chemistry,” because at that time at Zenel Hajdini I taught only chemistry. There were eleven classes, and I taught chemistry to all eleven. We had two chemistry lessons per week. He said, “Why are you dealing with those things? The language teachers are responsible for organizing activities, not you.” I said, “What harm am I doing?” “No, no, you should focus on your own field.” I had caught their attention, you know (laughs). At the Zenel Hajdini school there were some teachers and staff members who were extraordinary. We simply worked, communicated among ourselves, and exchanged literature.

There was Xhevdet Sylja, who also ended up in prison. Four years... in fact, I replaced him at Zenel Hajdini. When he was arrested, I took over his classes. I worked mornings and afternoons until a new teacher was hired. After him there was also Vehbi Bajrami, who taught biology. He too was imprisoned. I was the third person from the Zenel Hajdini school to be arrested, on January 18, 1984.

Anita Susuri: Was this the time when you had begun your activities?

Ajet Duli: I had begun my activities earlier. The organizing and meetings with friends took place during the 1980s, and especially after 1981 the movement took on much larger dimensions.

Anita Susuri: How did it begin for you, for example? Who guided you, or were you one of the organizers?

Ajet Duli: Well, in our group I had a neighbor and friend, Remzi Bunjaku. He knew Kadri, Kadri Mani. At that time he was called Kadri Osmani; later he became Kadri Mani and changed his surname a bit. He had been a political prisoner. When Kadri came to Remzi’s place, Remzi called me, and we went and met Kadri Osmani. Then, together with Kadri and Remzi, we began our activities. We had literature, we read, we created a kind of organization, and we took it as our duty to recruit new supporters into the organization.

Anita Susuri: How was it organized? Did you have a particular place where you met, or did you change locations?

Ajet Duli: We met in our homes, and we also arranged meetings in Taukbashçe, or in Germia, or up there at my house. We would meet and talk.

Anita Susuri: And how was the organization structured? Did you have any written text or rules?

Ajet Duli: Yes, we did. We had rules, we had a text, and we had an oath. We swore before the flag and before photographs, like that.

Anita Susuri: Which photographs, for example? Skanderbeg?

Ajet Duli: Yes, of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. Some had photographs of Adem Demaçi,⁹ some of others, that's it...

Anita Susuri: Of those who were active.

Ajet Duli: Yes, those who had been active, and also former political prisoners.

Anita Susuri: And these texts, for example, and the obligations—what kind of text was it, what sort of content did they have more specifically?

Ajet Duli: Well now, I do not remember the exact text of the oath, you know? But it was something like: “I swear that I will work, that I will dedicate myself, and if I betray, may our blood never forgive me,” something like that. I remember one occasion when Kadri Osmani, when I agreed to become a member of the organization, told me, “Do you know,” he said, “that you have to die seven times and rise an eighth time to become a member?” he said, “if you think it is easy to become one,” because he had experience. I said, “Even eight times, eight times I will be a member,” I said, “and I will work with dedication in this direction.”

Anita Susuri: And what were, for example, the criteria for being part of the organization? Did they investigate you?

Ajet Duli: Yes, certainly. For example, they would inquire, they would find out what kind of person he was, what he did, whether he was dedicated, that is how it was.

Anita Susuri: For example, how long would a person be observed before becoming part of it?

Ajet Duli: I do not know how long exactly, but mainly in meetings and through conversations with people they would ask, “What is he like? What kind of behavior does he have? Has he been problematic? Is he moral or immoral?” Especially questions of morality, we gave them great importance. I remember once Kadri asked me about someone, “What is the matter with so-and-so?” I said, “Well, he is a good, hardworking young man and everything, but he is a bit immoral.” “Ah,” he said, “if he is immoral, then we have nothing more to discuss,” he said, “because if he betrays his own family and his own wife,” he said, “he will betray us too.” That is how it was.

Anita Susuri: And these texts surely had content about the position of Albanians...

Ajet Duli: We had the newspapers *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo] and *Çlirimi* [Liberation] and two or three other illegal newspapers that came from abroad, and we distributed them to members and to the sympathizers we had.

Anita Susuri: Did they come from Albania or from somewhere else abroad?

Ajet Duli: No, from the West, from the West.

⁹ Adem Demaçi (1936–2018) was a Kosovo Albanian writer, political activist, and prominent advocate of Albanian self-determination. Yugoslav authorities imprisoned him for a total of 28 years for his political activity opposing state repression and Yugoslav rule in Kosovo. Released in 1990, he received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1991 and served as the political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998–99.

Anita Susuri: And how was that...

Ajet Duli: From Switzerland.

Anita Susuri: That network...were there people involved in a network?

Ajet Duli: All of them were people in a network who brought them, distributed them, read them, and passed them among themselves.

Anita Susuri: And who, for example, financed them, who printed them?

Ajet Duli: I do not know who in the West financed them. But here, for example, writings would be sent from Kosovo, people would take them, publish them, and then distribute them.

Anita Susuri: And in Kosovo itself, there was no printing of them?

Ajet Duli: The press at that time was only *Rilindja*¹⁰ as a newspaper.

Anita Susuri: I mean your texts, were they not printed?

Ajet Duli: Ah no, those were illegal. The entire activity was carried out illegally.

Anita Susuri: Did you have any writings yourself, for example? Because you told me that you were inclined toward writing...

Ajet Duli: No, I did not. I had no writings of my own.

Anita Susuri: Besides distributing these newspapers, was there any other activity?

Ajet Duli: As I mentioned earlier, our organization had formed headquarters, operational headquarters, and assigned each of us duties. As I told you before, for the first time they gave me the rank of captain. My task was to form a group of three people and continue the activity...

Anita Susuri: You also said that you were called the party of war...

Ajet Duli: Yes, because we formed those operational headquarters and regional headquarters. That is why they called us the party of war.

Anita Susuri: You were telling me about the party of war.

Ajet Duli: Yes, it was called the party of war because headquarters were formed for the first time, and a military organization was envisaged, because we were convinced that Kosovo could not be liberated except through a military organization. Then some of us were given ranks, while at that time we had

¹⁰ *Rilindja* was Kosovo's principal Albanian-language newspaper and publishing house. Founded in Prizren in 1945 and later based in Prishtina, it became a central institution of Kosovo Albanian journalism, literature, and cultural life. Serbian authorities closed the newspaper and took control of the publishing house in 1990 as part of the wider suppression of Kosovo's Albanian-language institutions.

proclaimed Adem Demaçi a marshal. He was in prison at that time, but our organization awarded him the rank of marshal.

Anita Susuri: You said that there were around fourteen people in groups?

Ajet Duli: Yes. In our group, at that time there were more than one hundred of us throughout Pristina, but we were divided into different groups. In our particular group there were fourteen people: Kadri Osmani, Enver Topalli, Ramë Buja, Raif Qelaj, Nexhmedin Gërguri, Abdullah Rustolli, Remzi Bunjaku, Rrahim Rama, Agim Dishi, Ibush Dishi, and one Mahmut, his surname was Mahmuti, in fact he was later appointed ambassador in Switzerland and then in Macedonia after the war. Mahmut Ibrahim, that is the name that just came to me now, Mahmut Ibrahim.

Anita Susuri: And now, how did the party go about forming those headquarters? How was the organization carried out to establish them?

Ajet Duli: When I met Kadri Osmani, he told me, "We will extend the organization throughout all of Kosovo, and also outside Kosovo." Since I was originally from Medvegja, he said, "We also need to include that area and have members of the movement there." They assigned me the task of organizing and finding people from the municipality of Medvegja who were devoted to the national cause.

Anita Susuri: I asked you this earlier, but I am asking again so that it is documented...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: You said that only a small group remained, because there had been many people who were members...

Ajet Duli: In Medvegja there?

Anita Susuri: Yes, in Medvegja, in that area.

Ajet Duli: Yes, in those 12–13 villages that are Albanian there, there were more than eight thousand Albanians during the 1980s when I worked there. There were two fifth grades, two sixth grades, two seventh grades, and two eighth grades just in Topallë. The same was true in Banja e Sijarinës, but in Banja e Sijarinës there were both Serbs and Albanians. One class was Albanian, one class was Serbian. But the number of Albanian students kept increasing continuously, because in those villages where the Serbs had lived, they sold [their properties], and mostly Albanians bought them, while the Serbs went down to Niš, Kragujevac, and Smederevo.

But when the war in Kosovo began, the paramilitaries and military forces returned. They were mainly stationed around the border with Kosovo and began putting pressure on the Albanian population there. Most of them moved away. Today they are in Fushë Kosovë and in Pristina, some in Kamenica and some in Gjilan. Only in recent times, especially since 2015 onward, the deregistration of the Albanian population began. Even though they are there, there are people who never left, never moved away from their village or from Medvegja, and yet they were removed from the records with a specific

purpose: to reduce the number of voters. In that context, Vučić¹¹ said, “There are no more than four or five percent Albanians in the municipality of Medvegja.” But in reality, more than 35 percent of the municipality’s population had been Albanian.

In 2015 there were extraordinary elections in Medvegja on September 13. Through the club Trojet, of which I was a member, we organized ourselves, and in fact I was the initiator of unifying the political groups in the municipality of Medvegja. I called together all the representatives of the political parties that existed in Medvegja, spoke with them, and insisted that we create a unification of the Albanians of Medvegja. Although we did not succeed in creating that unification, the organization remained, and then a kind of competition emerged among them over who would win.

In 2015 we had eight Albanian municipal candidates in Medvegja, and even though in Mutivodë the police and gendarmerie came out and stopped the voters and did not allow them to go vote, there were ten buses organized from Kosovo to go to Topallë, Medvegja, and Svirçë and vote. Nevertheless, if they had allowed people to go, we would have emerged as the party with the largest number of votes in the municipality of Medvegja.

Anita Susuri: Let me go back a bit. You said that you also had the task of organizing members or finding people in Medvegja...

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Was it, I mean, a large group of these activists?

Ajet Duli: It was still in the process of being formed, and one had to be very careful, because working illegally and not being discovered... it only took, for example, one word leaking somewhere, or something similar, for the organization to be exposed. Then the security service also became active; it had people whom it infiltrated among the underground activists, and that is how we were discovered.

Anita Susuri: And was there a case when you personally either saw or heard that a person, so to speak, was a spy within your group?

Ajet Duli: Yes. At that time, I do not know if you remember, no, you are too young: in 1984, someone named Xhevdet, I do not remember his surname now, had penetrated the organization. It was suspected that he had been infiltrated. And Bajram Baftiri was a member of our movement. He went to that man’s house, Bajram killed him, and then fled. The police surrounded Kodra e Trimave and killed Bajram Baftiri as well...

Anita Susuri: What year was that?

Ajet Duli: 1984. Yes.

¹¹ Aleksandar Vučić (1970) is Serbia’s dominant political leader, serving as prime minister from 2014 to 2017 and becoming president in 2017. During the 1990s, he was a senior member of the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party and served as information minister in Slobodan Milošević’s government during the Kosovo war, when restrictive laws were used to fine and close independent media. Although he later presented himself as a pro-European conservative, his rule has been marked by democratic backsliding, pressure on independent media and political opponents, and Serbia’s continued refusal to recognize Kosovo’s independence.

Anita Susuri: You surely had rules on how to protect yourselves, for example? To avoid falling into the hands of the police or attracting attention.

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes. Everyone knew his own methods, knew how to work and act, but the main thing was not to expose oneself. And I tried not to expose myself. But someone else, somewhere, words leaked out. What is important is that on January 16 [1984], Rrahim Rama was arrested; on January 17, Remzi Bunjaku was arrested; on January 18, I was arrested. With me, it stopped.

Anita Susuri: Are you saying that, for example, they talked?

Ajet Duli: Well, I cannot say for sure, I do not know how things happened. But I do know for myself that they put a lot of pressure on me afterward to make me reveal...

Anita Susuri: The others.

Ajet Duli: We worked according to the rule of threes. Under that rule, each person had to find two others, then those two would each find two more, and in that way the number would grow.

Anita Susuri: So, for example, you did not know who the other members were?

Ajet Duli: No, no... only... for example, I had meetings with Kadri Osmani and Remzi Bunjaku. Then, in order to increase the numbers... There were many people, I told many of them that at first we gave them those newspapers as a way to start a conversation, to talk, to explain things, to see their attitude, and that was the beginning of our work.

Anita Susuri: And then how did it continue?

Ajet Duli: It continued until we were discovered and ended up in prison. We were exposed, we were imprisoned. They sentenced us.

Anita Susuri: First, I would like to stop a little at 1981...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: At the demonstrations, because that is important...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: I do not know whether you were aware beforehand that the demonstrations would happen, whether you had heard anything, or how it was.

Ajet Duli: Listen, we took part in the demonstrations together with our brothers and sisters. Well, with one sister in particular. She was at the Faculty of Economics, and all of us participated. I remember one demonstration when they arrested my brother Ramiz and my nephew Rexhep, my brother's son. They took them to jail, where the main police headquarters was, at the place they called the 92.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: They took them to jail. At that time, my friend Bajram Tmava was the Director of the Kosovo Police. During the questioning, when he saw my brother and my nephew, he quietly escorted them out and said, "Leave, and do not get involved in things like this again." But the demonstrations were always very massive. The dissatisfaction of the people was very great. Yet there were, so to speak, two camps. Some people were satisfied with the government because they had certain privileges, had gained positions and benefits. But the broad masses were mainly dissatisfied. They joined the demonstrations.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember, for example, surely you do, the details, or what you yourself saw? What kind of violence was there?

Ajet Duli: Of course I remember. The violence consisted especially of tear gas; it was very intense. When they threw it at us, the crowd was so large that people had to jump over one another while running away because we could not breathe.

Anita Susuri: For example, did you see anyone being beaten there, or killed?

Ajet Duli: I did not see anyone killed, but beaten, of course. Every demonstration was accompanied by tear gas, beatings, and so on.

Anita Susuri: And what was the atmosphere in the city like at that time? I suppose it was very tense.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What were the circumstances like? For example, was there any destruction of buildings in the city, or was it only the police and the population in conflict?

Ajet Duli: Mainly the police and the population, that is, the demonstrators. There was not much destruction during the demonstrations. They were mostly peaceful, but in the end they always turned into violent demonstrations because the police intervened and dispersed the demonstrators by force.

Anita Susuri: After these demonstrations there was also, so to speak, a political purge. Many people were removed from their jobs...

Ajet Duli: Yes, after 1981 the purge began. It took place in every organization, every school, every institution. Especially targeted were educational institutions, particularly the Albanological Institute and the Institute of History, and people who, to one degree or another, were nationally conscious. There was pressure and a purge unlike anything seen before.

Anita Susuri: Did it happen to you?

Ajet Duli: Not to me. But it did happen at our school, Zenel Hajdini. People from the Committee [of the league of Communists] came there to carry out the purge. They mentioned a few names, but nothing further happened.

Anita Susuri: You probably also tried not to stand out too much or attract attention because of your activities.

Ajet Duli: It is true that I was perhaps very reserved. I never exposed myself. I worked extraordinarily hard with students, and I remember that I always encouraged each graduating eighth-grade class to enroll in the Yugoslav Army. The reason was that they would receive training there, and whenever the opportunity arose, those who completed military schools later joined the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Anita Susuri: They gained expertise there...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And then used it.

Ajet Duli: There was a man named Bilall Syla, from my native village of Gurboc. He had been a student at the Zenel Hajdini school, not my student, but he had been taught by Xhevdet Syla. Bilall went to military school, completed it, and later became one of the organizers of Operation Arrow [*Shigjeta*]. There were many others as well. Zymer Halimi, another fellow villager of mine, was also a military man. He served in the Shala Operational Zone, where he was commander of a brigade or something similar.

Anita Susuri: You told me that when you were arrested, you were the fourth or fifth person from the group.

Ajet Duli: The third.

Anita Susuri: The third.

Ajet Duli: Yes. The third one arrested.

Anita Susuri: Do you have any idea how they managed to discover you? Any suspicion?

Ajet Duli: Yes, they were certainly following Kadri [Osmani] and Kadri's daughter [*Hidajete*], watching where they went and whom they contacted. I remember one time Kadri's daughter came to visit. I left the house and went out onto the street. As soon as I stepped outside, there was the police. They asked me, "Do you have a match around here? Do you have a match?" There was no match at all. And also, about ten days before I was arrested, this was after Rexhep Mala¹² and Nuhi Berisha¹³ had been killed on January 11, 1984, that was when the surveillance and monitoring of us began. I assume they had information that we were in contact with something.

¹² Rexhep Mala (1951–1984) was a Kosovo Albanian political activist and leading member of the Revolutionary Group of Kosovo, an underground movement opposing Yugoslav rule and advocating Kosovo's liberation and Albanian national unification. In the mid-1970s, he was sentenced to nine years in prison for his political activity and subjected to severe mistreatment. After his release, he resumed underground organizing. On the night of 11–12 January 1984, Mala and fellow activist Nuhi Berisha were surrounded and killed by Yugoslav police following an armed standoff in Prishtina.

¹³ Nuhi Berisha (1961–1984) was a Kosovo Albanian student and underground political activist. A participant in the 1981 demonstrations, he organized against Yugoslav rule and advocated Kosovo's liberation and Albanian national unification. After going into hiding, he worked with Rexhep Mala to rebuild the underground resistance network. On the night of 11–12 January 1984, Berisha and Mala were surrounded and killed by Yugoslav police following an armed standoff in Prishtina.

In 1984 there was heavy snow and bitter cold during those days. People disguised and wrapped up in clothing constantly moved around near my house. I even remember my father saying, "Who are these people all wrapped up like this? What is going on?" I said, "Father, do not concern yourself with them. Do not concern yourself," I said, "because you should not get involved with them."

Anita Susuri: And your family surely knew that...

Ajet Duli: No, they did not know. My wife did not know until I was arrested. We even concealed things from our family so as not to put them in a difficult position. As I told you, my wife's brother was in the police and at that time he was Director of the Kosovo Police. For security matters there was Rrahman Morina, while Bajram Tmava was responsible for public affairs in Kosovo.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: Where were you when they arrested you?

Ajet Duli: I was at home. They came with the assumption that I would only give a statement and that there would be nothing more. But they took me on the afternoon of January 18, 1984, brought me to the police station there, and from that day until February 12 I was in Pristina Prison. Then they transferred me to Mitrovica.

Anita Susuri: And beforehand, when they came that day, did they search your house, for example?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes. First they took me, but meanwhile another team went and searched the house.

Anita Susuri: What was your family's reaction?

Ajet Duli: The family was confused because...

Anita Susuri: They did not expect it.

Ajet Duli: They did not expect it because I had never told them that I was organized or that I was doing these things. I also had in mind that I did not want to endanger that relative of mine who held a position there. I remember once I told Kadri Osmani, "I have a relative there," I said, "and I feel bad about it and so on." He said, "Oh Ajet, he does his job, we do ours" (laughs). They really did not expect it.

Anita Susuri: What was that first conversation in the police station like?

Ajet Duli: In the police station? The first conversation was about why I had joined, why I had become a member, with whom, how. That is how it started. And the first night after they took me, because I want to tell this as I told you at the beginning. The first night, after they brought me there, dusk had just fallen. They arrived. I sat alone for some time. Meanwhile, two officers from State Security came, Muharrem Bekteshi and Januz Loshi. They introduced themselves and told me they were from Mitrovica. These men from Mitrovica handled my case because of Bajram; they were afraid there might

be some connection here. They assigned two investigators from Mitrovica and two from Peja. Januz Llonçari and Demë Muja were from Peja. These two others were from Mitrovica, from State Security.

That first night, after they arrived, they sat down and called for someone to bring drinks. There was a waitress whom they called over. She came, and they ordered something. They asked me, "What would you like to drink?" "I don't want anything, I don't want anything." "No, no, that won't do here. We are all drinking and you will drink too," they insisted. "Well then," I said, "a tea, I guess." They brought the drinks and I started drinking the tea. As I drank it, my body started warming up. I realized something was not right. Then I lost consciousness. There was a large long table there, and I was sitting in one of the chairs. I do not know how I fell onto that table. I bent over and collapsed. I do not know how long I stayed in that condition.

I saw Muharrem Bekteshi, well, I did not exactly see him, but he took out... I do not remember exactly, but he had a rubber baton, what they called a truncheon. Beside me, he struck the table with the rubber baton. It cracked loudly, and as I was lying there, that shock brought me around. I forced myself up onto my feet. It felt as if my head had been pierced up here {points to the top of his head}; steam seemed to be coming out, and I was drenched in sweat. I was soaked through. I said, "May God punish you, what have you done to me?" He said, "Now," he said, "you will sing like a nightingale. You will tell us where you have been, what you have done, how you organized yourself to overthrow our government." Then a guard came and took me to a cell.

When I woke up the next morning, I was the most despairing man in my life. But during the night I had slept so heavily that I had never slept like that in my life. When I woke up the next morning, tears were running down my face and gathering here {points to his chin}, then dropping off. That is how emotional I was. They took me again the next morning and started beating me. Once they began beating me, I hardly spoke at all. As long as I was under investigation, every day, two or three times... and at night especially when they took us, they beat us all night long.

Anita Susuri: Did they beat you with those batons?

Ajet Duli: With batons.

Anita Susuri: To make you say something.

Ajet Duli: Yes, to make me confess. I remember that Kadri Osmani had asked me to obtain a passport. I had gone to Topallë there, to an uncle of mine. At first I wanted to steal it, to take his passport without telling him, but then I could not do it. So I told that uncle, "You don't really need it," I said, "could you give me this passport because I need it for something." Meanwhile, they had somehow found out about the passport matter. Yet they never asked me about the passport until the very end.

There was that Demë Muja, from somewhere around Peja or Istog, I do not know. He was an executioner. An executioner. He nearly killed us with beatings. Hands, legs, hands, legs. Down here everything was bruised. There was also a State Security officer, a man from my own area, Xhafer Beshi. One time he came there. He had learned that I was from Svirca. He said, "Show me your hands." And when he looked, indeed they were completely... He said, "Man," he said, "it looks as though you have become a painter. Have you ever been," he said, "in Medvegja, with the painters? That's what your hands look like," he joked.

Anita Susuri: And how long were you under investigation?

Ajet Duli: Yes, I was under investigation the whole time I was here in Pristina and then in Mitrovica. For about a month, maybe a little more. That period was an intensive one. For nearly a month, every day they were mistreating us, beating us. Only one thing I noticed: when I was alone, for example with Januz Loshi...this Januz Loshi is interesting because later he himself became a political prisoner; later on he too ended up in prison. When he was alone, they no longer used violence. The violence came especially when they gathered in a group or when some Serb would come there and sit down. Then they wanted to beat the soul out of you.

Anita Susuri: Were they mostly Albanians?

Ajet Duli: Mostly Albanians, mostly Albanians.

Anita Susuri: And this Pristina Prison, what kind of prison was it, for example? What were the cells like? Were there many people in a cell?

Ajet Duli: Of course. There were seven or eight people there. The cell was about four meters long, a little over two meters by three meters wide. Seven or eight people. But it was even worse in Mitrovica. Because at that time they had imprisoned some people who had allegedly misused materials in Trepça, some crystals, some gold and silver they were accused of stealing, and their number increased. Sometimes there were thirteen people in one cell there, two meters forty or fifty. Three beds on one side, three on the other side, and some of us slept on mattresses on the floor. Just imagine, when ten cigarettes were lit at once. There was a tiny opening, a small window there, and you could see the smoke drifting out as if from a chimney. I never smoked in my life and I was almost allergic to cigarette smoke. I constantly had to lie down on the floor because of the smoke from the others smoking.

Anita Susuri: And what were the conditions like, for example the food, the bathrooms?

Ajet Duli: The food, the food was very poor. And for hygiene, we had to relieve ourselves in buckets. In twenty-four hours they took us to the toilet only twice. Extremely difficult conditions. In Mitrovica there was one thing, for example every two weeks we changed the sheets and washed them. Sometimes they let us wash them, sometimes they would not even let us wash the blankets. Not all the guards, but some who were filled with chauvinism. When we went in to wash ourselves, before we had even soaped up properly they would turn on cold water and we would all jump aside. Then when we entered, they would release very hot water, almost boiling, and scald us. We would run away. So sometimes half washed, sometimes not washed at all, sometimes washed. When the guards were those who behaved somewhat correctly, then we washed and they did not do such things as the others did.

Anita Susuri: How often did they take you to wash?

Ajet Duli: Once a week, once a week.

Anita Susuri: The whole group together?

Ajet Duli: The whole group.

Anita Susuri: And did you have the right to visitations, for example, while the investigation was going on?

Ajet Duli: Visits were allowed for close family members.

Anita Susuri: Could you talk freely there at all?

Ajet Duli: No, no. Always under the supervision of a State Security officer.

Anita Susuri: For example, when your family first came to see you, what did they say? Since they had not known.

Ajet Duli: Very briefly. "How are you? Are you well? Do you have any problems? Are you okay?" Things like that. And we asked about the family, "How are they, are they all healthy, how is this one, how is that one?" But it was very quick. Four or five minutes...

Anita Susuri: They did not allow more than that.

Ajet Duli: They did not allow any more time at all. No.

Anita Susuri: What interests me now is that month or so that you said you were under investigation, when you were continuously subjected to physical violence. Afterward, when you went to court, I am interested in how large the group was. Actually...

Ajet Duli: Fourteen.

Anita Susuri: Fourteen. Tell me a little about that, about the indictment, about what it was like.

Ajet Duli: The indictment was for association for enemy activity. That is what it was called. They linked it to Article 144, for the destruction of Yugoslavia. That was it. For everyone it was almost the same, because it was the same group. They took statements from one person and transferred them to another. The accusations were mainly those formulations: for the destruction of Yugoslavia, for destroying Brotherhood and Unity, for undermining the economic foundations of Yugoslavia. Those were basically the core charges.

Anita Susuri: How many years were you sentenced to?

Ajet Duli: Seven years. I did not serve all seven years, but six years, three months, and five days. At that time I was married and I had one daughter. My daughter Vjosa was fourteen months old when I was imprisoned. When I came out of prison she was in the second grade of primary school. Six years, three months, and five days without ever going home, always only in prison.

Anita Susuri: Did your daughter visit you, for example?

Ajet Duli: Yes, my daughter came once to Mitrovica, but they did not allow her to enter at all. In Gjurakovc I saw her through the window, from an upper window. She was standing back there. I saw her. Then after I was transferred to Lepoglava, they came there once and I met my daughter.

Anita Susuri: And when they handed down the sentences to the fourteen of you, who received the longest sentence?

Ajet Duli: Fifteen years.

Anita Susuri: Fifteen years.

Ajet Duli: Yes. Fifteen years for Kadri Osmani.

Anita Susuri: Kadri Osmani. From there you were sent to?

Ajet Duli: From Pristina to Mitrovica.

Anita Susuri: To Mitrovica. When you were sentenced, were you already in Mitrovica?

Ajet Duli: Yes. Whenever there was a hearing they brought us from Mitrovica here. From Mitrovica I was sent to Gjurakovc and stayed there for about five months. However, the conditions, the food, everything there in Gjurakovc was extremely good compared with the investigative prisons. After nine months in Gjurakovc they transferred me back to the Investigation Prison in Gjilan. From Gjilan they sent us to Zagreb. The group from Gjilan consisted of me, Xhabir Morina, and Fehmi Lladrovci.¹⁴ They shackled us with...

Anita Susuri: Handcuffs?

Ajet Duli: Not handcuffs, but chains. With chains. They brought us here to Pristina, and from Pristina they sent us to Zagreb. In Zagreb we stayed two or three nights, and then from Zagreb they sent us to Lepoglava. I stayed in Lepoglava for eleven months. From Lepoglava I went to Gospić for about a month. From Gospić to Stara Gradiška. About two and a half years in Stara Gradiška. There we stayed with Adem Demaçi and many other political prisoners. There were more than fifty political prisoners. There...

Anita Susuri: And from there you were released?

Ajet Duli: While we were there, in 1990, then, two nights and three days before they released us, they transferred me, *Bac*¹⁵ Adem, and four others to Slovensko Požega. From there they released us and we returned home.

Anita Susuri: I would like to go back a little to the prisons you mentioned earlier, for example Gjurakovc. When they transferred you from one prison to another...

¹⁴ Fehmi Lladrovci (1956–1998) was a Kosovo Albanian political activist and commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army. A member of the People's Movement for the Republic of Kosovo, he was arrested by Yugoslav authorities in 1985 and sentenced to ten years in prison, but was released under an amnesty in 1990. He later fought with Croatian forces and helped organize the KLA before returning to command fighters in Drenica. Lladrovci and his wife and fellow fighter, Xhevë Krasniqi-Lladrovci, were killed fighting Serbian and Yugoslav forces near Gllanasellë on 22 September 1998.

¹⁵ *Bac* (also *bacë* or *baca*) is a Gheg Albanian term for an older brother or uncle. In Kosovo, it is also used outside the family as an affectionate and respectful form of address for an older man or someone held in particular esteem; its use does not necessarily imply a family relationship.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Did they...

Ajet Duli: Under escort.

Anita Susuri: Did they notify you in advance, or did they just take you?

Ajet Duli: They just took us and, with guards in front and behind, transported us to the prisons.

Anita Susuri: And you said that Gjurakovc Prison had better conditions...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: It is a prison that functioned even before the Second World War. How do you remember that prison?

Ajet Duli: Well, to some extent, there we were almost half-free. We were not locked inside rooms, unable to go out at all. We spent the whole day outside in the garden, and there we talked among ourselves, debated, and read books as much as we could. The air was very good there in Gjurakovc. The water was very good too, because it helped digest food, and people quickly gained weight. I think there was some limestone in it and it aided digestion. So, when political prisoners arrived there from the investigative prisons, pale and exhausted, you could immediately see it on their faces, they looked worn out and drained. Then, as soon as they arrived there, they began to come back to life again.

Anita Susuri: Was the garden enclosed with wire fencing or was it...

Ajet Duli: No, the garden was inside, but on all sides there were walls, making escape impossible. They were high walls, there were barriers, and there was constant surveillance.

Anita Susuri: Was it a large prison?

Ajet Duli: It was quite large. The rooms were bigger, and the hygienic conditions were much better compared to the investigative prisons. It was much better there.

Anita Susuri: I am interested in this thing you mentioned about going out into the yard, into the garden whenever you wanted. Was that not forbidden or...

Ajet Duli: It was more forbidden to stay inside. We washed the windows, opened them, went out in the morning, ate there, and then stayed outside until lunch came. Then evening came, and we only went inside to sleep.

Anita Susuri: Were there dining halls, for example?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes, there were dining halls, and the food was mainly prepared by prisoners.

Anita Susuri: By the prisoners.

Ajet Duli: Yes. I even remember a man from my own area who was the cook there. He had been imprisoned for murder, and then they made him the cook. He prepared the food.

Anita Susuri: Did every prisoner have assigned duties or work?

Ajet Duli: No, with us political prisoners they did not interfere. They did not want to engage with us or enter into discussions. The guards had a certain attitude toward us.

Anita Susuri: They did not bother you either?

Ajet Duli: No, they did not bother us either... only rarely, if some incident happened. Otherwise, no.

Anita Susuri: How long did you stay in Gjurakovc?

Ajet Duli: About five months.

Anita Susuri: Five months.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And during that time you had visits, of course. They brought you books to read, I assume, since you said you were reading, or did you have them there already?

Ajet Duli: There were books in the libraries too. Interestingly, every prison had a library, and we regularly supplied ourselves with books. Most of them were books from that period; there were older ones and newer ones. But we especially read Rexhep Qosja's books.¹⁶

Anita Susuri: Was the library in Gjurakovc large? Could you take whichever books you wanted, or were they censored?

Ajet Duli: No, books were also brought to us from home. They brought them from home, and then we exchanged them among ourselves.

Anita Susuri: Was there any book that was forbidden, for example?

Ajet Duli: The forbidden ones were not brought, and they would not allow them inside. Most of the books had themes that were not national issues or anything like that, but rather books, for example, about Aristotle and Socrates. There were books about Bakarić¹⁷ and Tito as well. We did not read those. We mainly read books that interested us more. For example, we read novels.

Anita Susuri: Was there, for example... I have heard that in some prisons they showed films. Was there any activity like watching a film or...

¹⁶ Rexhep Qosja (1936–2026) was one of Kosovo's most influential Albanian literary historians, critics, writers, and public intellectuals. Director of the Albanological Institute in Prishtina from 1972 to 1981, he published more than thirty books encompassing literary history and criticism, novels, drama, political essays, and polemical writing. His works, many of which addressed Albanian culture, national identity, and Kosovo's political status, had a major influence on Kosovo Albanian intellectual life.

¹⁷ Vladimir Bakarić (1912–1983) was Croatian communist partisan and a politician, a close collaborator of Tito.

Ajet Duli: No, not where we were.

Anita Susuri: That never happened for you.

Ajet Duli: No.

Anita Susuri: And after Gjurakovc you were transferred to...

Ajet Duli: Gjilan.

Anita Susuri: Gjilan.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What was Gjilan like then? Were you sorry that you had left Gjurakovc?

Ajet Duli: To tell you the truth, Gjurakovc was the best. In Gjilan, in the investigative prison, it started all over again, except for the violence, which we no longer experienced. The investigations had already been completed for us. But again, we were in closed prisons, staying inside all day long. Only when they took us out to wash up, twice in twenty-four hours, and then back inside.

Anita Susuri: Then Zagreb, a bit farther away.

Ajet Duli: Yes, then it became a big problem for the family.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: Such a long journey. And whenever they came, they traveled by train, because that hatred toward Albanians had already started, and they would mistreat your family too, insulting them. The children did not even dare to speak; as soon as they heard them speaking Albanian, "They insulted us," she said, "they shouted at us." So it was a very difficult and very unpleasant situation.

Anita Susuri: How often, for example, did your family visit you there?

Ajet Duli: Not often. Once every two or three months.

Anita Susuri: And what was your family's situation like then? Because you, as the head of the family, the provider and the one who supported the family, were no longer there. What was the family's economic situation like?

Ajet Duli: Listen. That concerned these State Security people a lot, because I really did not have difficult living conditions at that time as... My brother and sister were at the Faculty of Economics. I had completed the Higher Pedagogical School, my father worked at the school as a courier. My older brother worked in some provincial education position...

Anita Susuri: Were you still living together with your brothers at that time?

Ajet Duli: Yes, with my brothers. The eldest brother had already separated by then. Before I went to prison, he had already moved into his own house. He had built it and moved there. But we were all

young and educated, and the family's conditions were quite good. I was married, my wife worked as a teacher, I was a teacher, so we had two salaries, and my father had another salary. Plus, we kept cows at that time. We had two or three cows here. We had milk and dairy products of our own. We even sold a little milk. Not calves or anything; we slaughtered those for ourselves. My conditions were not very difficult, mostly quite good. My absence was felt after I went to prison, because one salary was gone. But for a long time, around three years, I received 50 percent of my salary, until the court decision became final.

Anita Susuri: And regarding your wife, for example, when you were sentenced...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did she take the news?

Ajet Duli: Well, listen. The hardest part was for my wife. Because her brother held a position at the time, while I had organized myself completely on the opposite side. That relative of ours was not pleased, because his position was put at risk. Then after I was imprisoned, my wife's brother was imprisoned too. When Mentor Krasniqi, my wife's brother, was arrested, that relative of ours was immediately removed from the police and transferred to the Economic Court as a judge.

Anita Susuri: Was your wife originally from Pristina?

Ajet Duli: Her family is originally from Mazgit.

Anita Susuri: And how did you meet her?

Ajet Duli: We were in the same generation at the *Shkolla Normale*.

Anita Susuri: You studied together.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And then you said that in Zagreb they were not able to visit you very often.

Ajet Duli: Yes, in Croatia.

Anita Susuri: Then how did things continue in the other places? For example, you said you were in Lepoglava for eleven months.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did it continue there?

Ajet Duli: Much the same. They came rarely. We communicated mostly through letters.

Anita Susuri: Did you send them regularly?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: Did the letters always get through?

Ajet Duli: They did, but they read them. They read them. So we had to be very careful about what we wrote.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever use a code, for example, to write something?

Ajet Duli: I did not.

Anita Susuri: Because some people did?

Ajet Duli: Maybe they did, I do not know.

Anita Susuri: I mean something that would say one thing but mean another.

Ajet Duli: No.

Anita Susuri: The letters were mostly about how everyone was doing, I assume.

Ajet Duli: Yes. Are you well, what are you doing, how are things going, how are you managing, what is new, has anyone been born, has anyone died.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: You said that in Stara Gradiška you were with Adem Demaçi.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did you feel when... because he was, in a way, the leader of that organization. Not the leader exactly, but you had declared him the marshal of the organization.

Ajet Duli: I was among the twelve or thirteen people who were brought to Stara Gradiška, but in terms of age I was the oldest among those who were there. When we arrived in the pavilions, we met Bac Adem. Adem asked, "Who is the oldest?" Meaning by age. He started talking with me first, just as I started talking with you, from the beginning...

Anita Susuri: About your life.

Ajet Duli: About my life. And after I got to know him and explained things to him, I regarded him as if he were my own parent, and I hid nothing from him. I told him the whole reality exactly as it was. Even then, Bac Adem was so farsighted, so devoted. Listen, there are no words, no vocabulary capable of describing Adem Demaçi. He was the spirit and the heart of humanity and of Albanianess.

Anita Susuri: What was his conduct in prison like?

Ajet Duli: Exceptional. No one could say, “Adem did this.” He was a political prisoner, but even the *shkijet*¹⁸ would say, “An enemy, an enemy, but credit to him, he is a man.” For example, he never waited for someone to tell him, “Go get...” When we came back from work, we worked assembling pens, they sent us to work just so we would not spend more time reading. We assembled those pens. When we returned, Bac Adem would not go straight to his room. He would pick up some wood, stack it here, and carry it to the room. Bac Adem was always reading, reading. He was like that with everyone, with every person.

It is worth mentioning that before we were there, after I had finished telling him my story, he said to me, “Look what I’m telling you. We do not know what the future holds. Maybe,” he said, “when we get out, we will not have the chance to meet, because our road is long and uncertain. But if someone comes to you whom I have sent, and he asks, ‘Are you Ajet Tullari?’¹⁹ you should say, ‘No, I’m not Ajet Tullari, I’m Ajet Duli.’ Then, when you see his attitude,” he said, “tell him, ‘Yes, yes, I am Ajet Tullari too.’” That was our agreement. I asked him, “Why, Bac, Ajet Tullari?” He said, “My friend, our tower is large, and that tower is built of bricks, and one of those bricks is you” (laughs).

Anita Susuri: And how did others treat him? I mean both the prisoners and the guards.

Ajet Duli: Correctly. There were even some among us whom Bac Adem did not fully trust. There were some who avoided conversations and debates with him. There were people like that. I even remember once, speaking about someone, he said, “I hope this one never comes to power, because he’ll become worse than the ones we already have” (laughs). Because personal interests and career ambitions come into play. As a people, we suffer somewhat from that tendency toward careerism.

Anita Susuri: You said you had some kind of work there?

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Perhaps eight hours a day, like a regular job?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes, eight hours of work. For a while we worked in carpentry. We polished chairs and tables there. But imagine spending the whole day there. Very often I was with Fehmi Lladrovci, Fehmi Shala, a certain Abdyrrahim Magjuni, Abdullah Dërguti, and Nuhi Ahmeti. We would stand there talking, and maybe polish only three or four chairs. The purpose was simply to keep us occupied and not let us read too much.

Anita Susuri: Did you receive any punishment if you did not complete the work?

Ajet Duli: No, there was none. Stara Gradiška was almost like a camp.

Anita Susuri: There were several buildings?

¹⁸ *Shkijet* is the definite plural of *shkije* (singular: *shkja*), a derogatory Gheg Albanian term used in Kosovo for Serbs. Historically derived from an older term for Slavs or neighboring non-Albanian speakers, it has acquired a strongly pejorative meaning and is now considered an ethnic slur.

¹⁹ Tullari - from *tullë*, brick.

Ajet Duli: Many buildings. Those imprisoned for other offenses were assigned heavy labor, and they were given incentives. Especially visits; they were allowed to go home. They were also paid something, so they worked hard jobs. For example, they built tankers there, large tanks for transporting oil and such things. Those workers worked there.

Anita Susuri: In the conversations you had with Bac Adem and the others, were you careful in case there might be an informant? So as not to talk about another person?

Ajet Duli: Look, we always spoke in general terms. I remember one occasion when quite a large circle of us gathered. I think it was a Sunday. The topic of birth rates came up. Someone said, “Bac Adem, can’t you see that the birth rate is falling? This phenomenon should concern all of us.” A debate opened up, and we discussed the subject for more than an hour, maybe two. In the end Bac said, “Look, it is obvious that our mothers were greater than us, because they had ten children each. But when we get out,” he said, “we will get out, and we will promote the idea that no one should stop below five children.”

And it is true that after I got out of prison, colleagues from the Zenel Hajdini school came to visit me at home. My wife worked there too. I asked one colleague, “Shehide, how many children do you have?” She said, “Three daughters and one son.” I said, “Listen, we made a decision in prison that no one should stop below five.” She replied, “I swear, I’ll have one more.” And indeed she later had another child, ending up with two sons and three daughters. Gent has now grown up and completed, not a doctorate, but a master’s degree in technical sciences. I think he is in Norway now, somewhere abroad.

Anita Susuri: You said that after Stara Gradiška you and Bac Adem were transferred to...

Ajet Duli: Slovenska Požega.

Anita Susuri: Slovenska Požega.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did that transfer happen? Without warning?

Ajet Duli: Without warning. They simply told us, “Gather your belongings, whatever you have.” We did not know where they were taking us. They just took us. When we arrived there, they told us that we were in Slovenska Požega. We stayed there for two nights, and on the third day the decision arrived that we had been...

Anita Susuri: Released.

Ajet Duli: We were released from prison by order of the SFRY.²⁰ At that time they called it some kind of abolition.

Anita Susuri: And why transfer you there for only two or three days?

²⁰ SFRY is the abbreviation for the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Ajet Duli: Who knows what their purpose was. Meanwhile, here they had spread the news that Adem Demaçi had been released and was receiving people in Lupç. A large number of citizens had gathered and gone to Lupç, thinking that Adem Demaçi had arrived. But he had not. We heard there too that something was happening.

Anita Susuri: That is what I wanted to ask you: did you have news to read, newspapers?

Ajet Duli: Newspapers, yes.

Anita Susuri: So you were informed.

Ajet Duli: Newspapers came to us and we read them. We also kept a radio illegally. That radio was passed from one person to another, and when we went to bed, one of us would listen late into the night and then the next day, when we went outside, report what was new.

Anita Susuri: To tell everyone, meaning?

Ajet Duli: Yes, to tell everyone because...

Anita Susuri: They never found the radio?

Ajet Duli: As I said, there was not much discipline there, not much inspection. In the investigative prisons, forgive me for saying this in front of you, they stripped us naked and searched us thoroughly.

Anita Susuri: Did you know the exact date you would be released a little earlier, or did it come as a surprise?

Ajet Duli: It was a surprise. We followed the news and knew some processes had begun, but we did not know exactly. Until the day they released us and informed us.

Anita Susuri: Did some decision arrive or...

Ajet Duli: The decision arrived, they gave it to us, we signed there, and they said, "You are free."

Anita Susuri: Were you happy? How did you receive that?

Ajet Duli: Listen, somehow we were not satisfied, because Bac Adem was right when he said, "We have been in a closed prison, and now we are going out into an open prison." When I arrived home, for example, my brother came out to Fushë Kosovë, waited for me, and picked me up. When I got home, my brothers had built a house for me and put a roof on it. They had somehow repaired two rooms. When I arrived, I went home and found my wife, my daughter, and my two parents there with her. The house was half-built, half... like that until late. After I got out of prison, conditions were very difficult and very hard. Again I had to start buying some cows; we kept the cows downstairs in the basement, slept upstairs, and sold some milk. That was how we survived, with great hardship.

Anita Susuri: You said you came from Slovenska Požega by train?

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How long did you travel? Was it a long journey?

Ajet Duli: A long journey. We left in the morning and arrived in the evening, around then.

Anita Susuri: Did your family know? Had you informed them beforehand?

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes, they knew.

Anita Susuri: And when you arrived in the family, how did they receive you?

Ajet Duli: Well, the family received me well.

Anita Susuri: Were there many people who came to visit?

Ajet Duli: There were, because at that time some kind of liberalization had begun in general. People also wanted a little to show themselves. During the time when I had been arrested and sentenced, people had hesitated somewhat. They were afraid to come near my family or be seen around us, because in a way we had been declared enemies.

Anita Susuri: You said that after prison you were forbidden from working for a time.

Ajet Duli: Yes. I was forbidden for six years, but in 1990 they began working according to Kosovo curricula. Then came that...

Anita Susuri: The house-schools that were created...

Ajet Duli: Yes. The house-schools were created, though the elementary schools had not been closed. A vacancy opened at the school then called Nazif Gafurri. I had come from there, but it had been called Zenel Hajdini, and then a new school was created and took the name Nazif Gafurri, and it still exists there to this day. In 1992, in September, I returned as a physics teacher. I worked there until 1999. In 1999, or rather in 2000, because by then I was also in the military police...

Anita Susuri: Was that when you joined the police, after the war?

Ajet Duli: No. On June 16, 1998, I officially joined the KLA. Because during that period, in the 1990s, from 1996 onward, I was in the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo. Bac Adem had joined the Parliamentary Party, and Bajram Kosumi was chairman of the Parliamentary Party at that time. He gave up the position, and Adem Demaçi became chairman of the Parliamentary Party. Then all of us who were there, because I had first been in the LDK,²¹ an activist of the LDK. After Bac Adem moved to the Parliamentary Party, we joined the Parliamentary Party. The reason was that at that time the goal was to form a party that would support the KLA.

²¹ The Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK) was founded by Kosovo Albanian intellectuals in December 1989, following Serbia's dismantling of Kosovo's autonomy. Led by Ibrahim Rugova, it became the principal political organization of the 1990s nonviolent resistance to Serbian rule. The LDK also helped coordinate Kosovo's parallel education, healthcare, social, and political institutions after Albanians were expelled from public institutions.

It is true that the Parliamentary Party, in its program, had the solution of the Kosovo question through other means as well, not only nonviolent means, but other means too, meaning even war. In that organization I was chairman of the Parliamentary Party, Germia Branch. It covered the upper part of Germia. Nysret Pllana was responsible for Kodra e Diellit. Liman Veseli was responsible for Kodra e Trimave. Shefqet...there was a Shefqet here, I cannot remember his surname now, was chairman for the center. A man named Hashani was responsible for Dardania. So five or six branches of the Parliamentary Party were formed, and we held meetings together with Bac Adem at that time. Our parliamentary offices were near where Ibrahim Rugova²² was. This was during 1997, around then, 1998...

Anita Susuri: I am also interested in these house-schools. How was the organization? Where did you have classes, for example?

Ajet Duli: My brother Gani Duli had given up his house and turned it into a school. He gave one floor to the school and lived on another floor himself, because the house had two floors.

Anita Susuri: Were you there?

Ajet Duli: Yes. Mainly students from the secondary schools came there; the school Eqrem Çabej held classes in our house. But in 1991–92, in Mitrovica, there were some boys and girls in the Mitrovica orphanage, and with the collapse of the system they wanted to send them to Serbia. Through the LDK, a notice had been spread asking who was willing to take those children so they would not be sent to Serbia. My brother and I agreed to each take one child. My sister-in-law, now deceased, took one girl, but then it remained for me to speak with my wife and convince her that we should take one too.

My wife said, “By God, I can barely take care of my own children, and now I should take in someone else’s child? I’ll flee from a good deed and end up in sin.” Then my sister-in-law was put in a very difficult position. She said, “Fine, I will take both of them.” She took them both. I do not want to mention their names now, but the main thing is that we raised them. One of them is married, has children, and lives in Hajvali. The other works at the Academy of Arts as an official, employed there by my brother, but she has not married yet.

Anita Susuri: Very good.

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: And the other children who were there...were only these girls at risk of being sent away?

Ajet Duli: No, there were others too, but we took these girls and raised them, and in a way we saved them from being sent to Serbia.

²² Ibrahim Rugova (1944–2006) was a Kosovo Albanian literary scholar, political leader, and the principal architect of Kosovo’s nonviolent resistance during the 1990s. As leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, he pursued independence through civil resistance, parallel institutions, and international diplomacy. He was elected president of the self-declared Republic of Kosovo in 1992 and served as president of postwar Kosovo from 2002 until his death.

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes. And working in the house-schools, what was the most difficult part? Since it was not a regular classroom.

Ajet Duli: Yes, yes. The conditions were difficult. No desks, no chairs, everything improvised. And teaching is different when there is an organized education system.

Anita Susuri: How did things continue later, in the final years as the war approached? You said that...

Ajet Duli: Let me just give you an example. At the Nazim Gafurri school, we worked in four shifts. We started in the morning with ninth-grade classes, then the lower grades came; the timetable was shortened to thirty-minute classes. Then the university students came for another shift, and then another shift very late. Imagine the dust, the noise, the chaos. We had to work in those conditions. The workers had to clean and maintain some kind of hygiene, but with so many people coming in and going out, so much noise was created, God help us.

Anita Susuri: Did you ever have problems with the police, perhaps?

Ajet Duli: Yes, indeed, with the police too. We often had problems with the police. I remember that at that time there was also a kind of local police. In that local police there were some Albanians as well, and they would come and monitor us, follow us, see what we were doing and where.

Anita Susuri: And personally, did you have more problems with the police? Did they take you in for questioning again after prison?

Ajet Duli: After prison, they took me in for questioning twice. Once in 1993, because I was chairman of the LDK local branch called 9/1. We had held a meeting in Bledi 2, at Miftar Krasniqi's place, a gathering with citizens. Someone went and reported that we were holding meetings with citizens at such-and-such a place. They took me, since I was chairman, and they also took the secretary. They brought us to the Muhaxher Neighborhood, and there was a policeman there who questioned us.

"Did you hold the meetings?" I said, "Yes." "Well," he said, "it's not a problem, we know about it too." I said, "We know too," I said, "that the LDK is registered in Belgrade. You know that we have a presidency, a chairman, these branches and sub-branches. I am somewhere near the bottom." But the secretary who was with me, when they took him, at that time he worked in customs, as a customs secretary. He had not admitted that the meetings had taken place, and then they confronted us there. I said, "Rexhë, we have no reason to keep this secret..."

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: "This is legal. We held them. They have the duty to observe, to know about them." Anyway, they brought in a citizen from our neighborhood and told me, "From now on, you can hold meetings, it's not a problem. But just so we know, just tell this citizen, and he will tell us, and that settles the matter." I refused and said, "No one gives anyone an account here for this matter. I do my work, you do yours." They released the secretary, but they took me down to the 92 police station. They questioned me there. I remember that I wrote two A4 pages about it and submitted them to the second branch of the LDK. [Selatin Novosella](#) was chairman at the time. That document is somewhere in the Council for Human Rights, and it is preserved. If someone went to look for it, perhaps it could be found.

I explained everything: how the police took us, how we went, what we discussed, what they said to us...I described it all and submitted it to the branch at that time. They did not mistreat me then. But later one of my students brought a car and told me, "By God, I have nowhere to leave this car. Can I bring it into your yard?" I said, "Look, Agim, be careful, because you know my situation. If there is anything suspicious, do not get me into trouble." "No, teacher," he said, "I am just going abroad, and when I return I will come and take it. I just have nowhere to leave it."

The Serbs had... There was a postman who delivered the mail, but he was not only a postman; he carried out many other tasks as well. He saw the car parked in my yard and asked my father, "Whose car is this?" Then the police came. "Who, how?" It turned out that my student had brought it, and I had to tell them. I said, "So-and-so brought it and left it here, here is the car." They took the car, and then they took me too. We went with the police to that student's father. Then they took me to the 92 station and beat me, beat me, made a wreck of me, saying, "Do you know that weapons were transported in that car?" That was only a pretext, because they were very angry that I had written that report...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: And submitted it there. They took revenge on me. This was in 1994, around the time my son was born. I remember that... My wife was already forty years old then, at the last possible moment. We had two daughters, and then a son was born.

Anita Susuri: And from these tortures, the physical violence, did you suffer any lasting health consequences?

Ajet Duli: Yes. Forgetfulness appeared in me in a major way. I told you earlier how they put that substance in my tea, and from then on serious forgetfulness began. Now perhaps old age plays a part too. But let me tell you one thing: since I became an adult, never once in my life have I stretched out my hand to anyone or bowed before anyone. Always through effort, sacrifice, and work I created the conditions for living. Difficult conditions, very difficult, but without anyone's help. Even today I have a garden by my house, a vegetable plot, and I keep some chickens. So I have always been very active, always worked, and lived from my own sweat.

Part Five

Anita Susuri: Earlier you mentioned that in 1998 you joined the KLA...

Ajet Duli: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Where were you? What brigade was it? What was the situation like then?

Ajet Duli: Look, I was in constant contact with Adem Demaçi...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: I did not take a single action in my life after prison without consulting Bac Adem. Bac Adem often came to my house as well. As an organization, we were interested in engaging as many people as

possible and sending them to the front to fight, because it had become clear that the Kosovo issue would not be resolved by peaceful means. We constantly held meetings and informed Bac Adem about how developments were unfolding, how things were going. We would always test the situation a little, whether there was anyone who wanted to join. Meanwhile, I came into contact with others, and three of us who were members of the presidency of the Parliamentary Party, Germia Branch, came together: me, Sabit Mushica, now deceased, and Nexhmedin Sherifi, a lawyer who now works here in Pristina. Nazim Cakolli and Fadil Dibrani also joined us. We became five men ready to go train with the KLA. I informed Bac Adem, saying this is the situation.

On June 16, 1998, we had the last school meeting at Nazim Gafurri. We prepared what we could take with us in a suitcase, some sneakers and other things, and we went. We left Pristina and went to Podujeva. From Podujeva we went to the village of Zabërgje in the municipality of Mitrovica, an old village there. Along the way I met and spoke with someone who had been in the KLA earlier there, Commander Korabi. He is known by the surname Parduzi. I told him that I had been a political prisoner and that I had been imprisoned with Mehë Uka. He had been a school friend of Mehë Uka. When we arrived in Zabërgje, we spent the night there. He had informed Commander Kadri Kastrati, who was commander there, saying, "There is a former political prisoner here. He came, and he was a friend of Mehë Uka." The commander said, "Bring him to me tomorrow morning so I can speak with him."

Early the next morning, Commander Korabi came and brought me a KLA beret with the letters on it and placed it on my head. So we were the first group from Llap to go train in Zabërgje. I was the first person (smiles) to have the KLA emblem placed on his cap; he put it on me. I went to speak with Kadri Kastrati. When I arrived, he received me well. He had understood that I was a former political prisoner and said to me, "You are a little older, and we need people like you, but we need them to work in the city. For one soldier here, ten people are needed in the city to support that soldier. You see, we do not have enough weapons, food, conditions, or adequate people. And if our people are wounded, where do we take them? What do we do with them?" He said, "You should return and continue working in the city." The next day I returned, came home, and left the others there.

I returned with Nazim Cakolli because he too was about my age. The two of us were the older ones, and together we took on tasks to work in the city. I went and told Bac Adem what had happened. Kadri Kastrati had also asked me about Sylejman Ajeti, a fellow villager of mine who had held the rank of colonel, or lieutenant colonel, or something similar in the Yugoslav Army. In fact, I had put Sylejman Ajeti in contact with Ali Duli, a cousin of mine and the grandfather of Albulena Haxhiu. I had connected Sylejman Ajeti with Ali Duli and with Haxhiu, and that military man gave Bac Ahmet information about the Yugoslav Army, how it was organized, where the depots were, and what the situation was. Ahmet Haxhiu received that information through Sylejman Ajeti.

The commander there said, "If possible, bring Sylejman Ajeti. He is a graduate engineer," he said, "and he completed his studies in Zagreb. He is very capable in engineering, and we would need him very much." I went and told Bac Adem. I said, "This is what he told me about Sylejman." Sylejman Ajeti, however, was Adem Demaçi's adviser on military matters. Bac Adem told me, "Look, if he accepts to go, he will accomplish a great deal there at the front, more than by being my adviser. But do not impose it on him. Go and explain the situation to him; if he thinks he should go, let him go. If not, let him stay."

I went and contacted him, Bac Sylë, and explained the situation. I said, “They would like you to go there.” He said, “No,” he said, “I am Adem Demaçi’s adviser, and I cannot be in two places at once.” I said, “All right, Bac Sylë, wherever you think you can give a greater contribution.” He said, “No, I can contribute more here.” Not long after that, the police took him. They arrested him and Albin [Kurti], both of them. Fortunately, because where Bac Adem and Albin stayed, we had the same offices there, and that was where we carried out the activities of the Parliamentary Party.

Anita Susuri: And what was the war like?

Ajet Duli: The war...I... not long afterward, two men from Shala were wounded at the front and they brought them to me here in Pristina. We placed them, found places for them, and sheltered them in private homes at extraordinary risk. For a while we had placed them in the house of Nexhmedin Sherifi, the one who had stayed to train there. Meanwhile, I changed their location because we were afraid the police might catch on, or that someone might inform on us. We took them to a mathematics teacher, a colleague of mine, Afrim Shehu. I mention his name with respect; he was a very good man. He later got Covid and died. He took in that wounded man and risked his whole family, perhaps even the whole neighborhood. But thank God, somehow that passed.

He is still alive, Sherif Rama. He is disabled now; one of his legs is gone, and he lives in Mitrovica. For another five or six months I was connected with them. There was someone responsible for social issues within the LDK, and I would go, take the money, buy whatever was needed, and bring it to the wounded. Other people dealt with the issue of their medical treatment. My responsibility was supplying them with food and assigning them places to stay. There were two wounded men.

I mostly dealt with them, but not only them. Whenever people came at night from the front, they would be placed here in the city overnight. They would be loaded with food, medicine, whatever was needed, and we would escort them at night to a certain point. Then they would go on to the front, and we would return to our homes here. I stayed in Pristina, in fact, with my whole family, even though it was very dangerous. But we had decided that we also had to think about the KLA. If the KLA did not have people, it could not operate.

Anita Susuri: Were you in your own house, or did you move around?

Ajet Duli: We moved around. No, most of the time we were at home.

Anita Susuri: And when the bombings began?

Ajet Duli: When the bombings began, that was when Albanians woke up a little. When they saw that there was no way out except either to submit or to go out and fight. I had the task, both from Kadri and from Bac Adem, to recruit as many people as possible and send them to the front. But once NATO began bombing, there were no weapons; we had nowhere to send them. I sent two young men to Zllashë to see what the situation was. When they came back, they said, “No, by God, there is nowhere to send them.”

Anita Susuri: You were telling us about the bombing period...

Ajet Duli: Yes, during the bombings some young men began to show interest, but I received information that there were no weapons there, and even food was a problem, so I told them, “I cannot

send you now; it is already too late.” But it is interesting to mention one case. There was a neighbor of ours, Ramadan Brajšhori. I regularly went out, talked with people, and tested the mood a little—what they were saying, what they were thinking. During a conversation I told him, “Dan, the time has come when it seems we need to change our way of acting, because with peaceful means we are not accomplishing anything. We need people, but they are not ready to take up arms and go fight. This is not life.” He said, “Look, Ajet, I am a parent and I cannot,” he said, “but you speak with my son Remzi. If he is ready, let him go, because truly, freedom cannot be won without fighting.”

Then I spoke with that Remzi, but even that was late. Because listen, by my honor, very few of us were really for war. I spoke with him and he said, “Yes, I am ready,” but it was already late after NATO intervened. As I said, I had sent people there and they came back and told me it was impossible to send others because people there did not have weapons to fight. The danger increased after NATO intervened. For example, Bajram Kelmendi²³ was killed, Fehmi Agani²⁴ was killed, and [Mehmet Hajrizi](#) and...

Anita Susuri: [Hydajet Hyseni](#).

Ajet Duli: Hydajet Hyseni. I created the contacts, and one evening I said, “Come, because I will escort you.” Mehmet and Hydajet came, and one night I took them through Gërmia and brought them as far as the village of Mramor.

Anita Susuri: And what was the wartime situation like in the city?

Ajet Duli: Look, in Pristina there was no fighting.

Anita Susuri: For example, when they removed people from apartments and forced them to leave...

Ajet Duli: Yes, they constantly exerted pressure. The first time they expelled citizens and chased them out of Pristina, I was in Zllashë.

Anita Susuri: Alone, or with your family?

Ajet Duli: No, I had gone alone to Zllashë, and there I met a former student of mine, Rrahmon Dini. In fact, I had been in prison with him too; in Mitrovica we had been in the same room. I went to that village near Mitrovica to train. I had spoken with him, but he and Fatmir Sopi began organizing things in Zllashë. I had gone there with some tasks, though I do not remember now exactly what. I met them there... Yes, after I had taken Hydajet and Mehmet out, I went as far as Zllashë to see what the situation

²³ Bajram Kelmendi (1937–1999) was a prominent Kosovo Albanian lawyer and human-rights defender who represented political prisoners and journalists prosecuted by the Yugoslav and Serbian authorities. He was a founding member of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms and supplied evidence about crimes in Kosovo to the international war-crimes tribunal. On the night of 24 March 1999, Serbian police abducted Kelmendi and his sons, Kastriot and Kushtrim, from their home in Prishtina; all three were subsequently found shot dead.

²⁴ Fehmi Agani (1932–1999) was a Kosovo Albanian sociologist, professor, and co-founder and leading political strategist of the Democratic League of Kosovo. An advocate of nonviolent resistance and Albanian–Serbian dialogue, he represented Kosovo in international negotiations, including the 1999 Rambouillet Conference. On 6 May 1999, Serbian police removed him from a train carrying displaced Albanians toward Macedonia and killed him near Lipjan.

was. I met that student of mine, and he told me everything about how matters stood. The next day I returned to the city.

When I reached Kolovica, there were columns of people coming, fleeing toward Gollak. Meanwhile, I also met my family there: my wife with the children, my brother, while my father and mother had remained at home. We placed the family in a village there. The next day, even though it was very risky, I returned to the city. I went to my parents to check on them. I entered the city in a way I had not imagined possible. I used to think we would enter only through fighting, otherwise not. But circumstances changed, and again I entered the city at night. I went to my parents, stayed there, and then returned again to my family. I kept that kind of connection. But I had a kind of intuition that it might become more dangerous there, because an offensive could come, than to return to the city.

I spoke with my wife and said, "Look, we are in more danger here now than we would be in the city. Why? Because the city has emptied." There were only dogs, chickens, and roosters; you could not hear a living soul. No one appeared in the part where we were. Some elderly people had remained in their homes, and they were also at risk. I took my family and brought them back, placing them again in Pristina.

Anita Susuri: Did you travel on foot? How did you come?

Ajet Duli: All on foot, all on foot. After we settled there, a teacher from Nishevc was killed by the door of my house. I was there, went out, and covered his face with a towel. His wife was there too. I took her and brought her into the yard. News spread that I had been killed. In fact, I do not know how many radio stations reported that Ajet Duli had been killed by the police. But in reality they had not killed me; they had killed that teacher from Nishevc, a neighbor of ours.

Anita Susuri: They just found him there, on the road?

Ajet Duli: By God, they shot him from about 250 meters away. There was some kind of unit operating there, and during the war they mainly stole more than anything else. But it seems his fate ran out; they killed the man. His name was Isa, teacher Isa.

Anita Susuri: What happened to him afterward? Because even burying someone was dangerous.

Ajet Duli: Yes. He remained there. Then a special unit came to carry out the autopsy. When they arrived, they turned to me: "Why are you staying here? Why are you staying, what are you waiting for? Why don't you leave? Get lost so we don't see you, so they don't come and find you here." Again we took our things and prepared to leave. Word spread that we too were fleeing. We changed direction and went to another neighborhood (smiles). We settled there, and then I would still go back because we had some livestock, some cows, and I had to check on them a little.

Anita Susuri: Until the liberation, like that.

Ajet Duli: Yes. And the worst of all was the night when the agreement was signed in Kumanovo.

Anita Susuri: The agreement.

Ajet Duli: The agreement. There was not a neighborhood, not a house in that part of Gërmia that did not have Serbian soldiers in it. They made as much noise as they possibly could, banging on metal doors, making terrifying noises, firing automatic weapons and other arms. By God, my eldest daughter has had some trauma from that night ever since. We were terribly afraid. My wife was very frightened too, and so was the eldest daughter. The two younger children...

Anita Susuri: They did not understand.

Ajet Duli: They did not understand much. But the eldest daughter was left with a kind of fear.

Anita Susuri: Was the city ruined, destroyed?

Ajet Duli: Not very much. Here and there they burned a house. But there was one thing: paramilitaries would enter houses and turn on the water everywhere to destroy them. Here and there they also burned houses.

Anita Susuri: And the day NATO forces entered...

Ajet Duli: The greatest joy in my life was when NATO intervened and when their forces arrived. British forces came to us and were stationed right at the house of Afrim Shehu, the mathematics teacher I told you about, where the wounded man had stayed. From there they monitored Sofalia, where the Serbian army was burning as many houses as they could. It had formerly been a Serbian village, and meanwhile they began withdrawing. But the number of vehicles, armored vehicles, and military equipment in Gërmia was unbelievable. Columns and columns of people and military equipment, an astonishing sight.

Anita Susuri: While liberating Kosovo...

Ajet Duli: Yes. While fleeing Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: And how did you settle afterward? You returned home, and the house had not been destroyed or anything?

Ajet Duli: No, it did not.

Anita Susuri: Then you said you started working in the police?

Ajet Duli: Yes. To tell you the truth, I was still working as a teacher. But meanwhile some friends told me, "You have to come into the military police too." "Why?" I said. "I am in education, I am fine there." They said, "Look, by God, those from the Llap Zone have brought all their own people and want to place all their own cadres everywhere." I went to Bac Adem and again explained the situation to him. He said, "No, my friend, right now it is of extraordinary importance that we manage to form a real police force, one with dignity, integrity, culture, and wisdom. And do not think," he said, "that the foreigners are coming here for us. They are coming to protect the Serbs, not us. So you must be careful how you work and act. You must get under their skin and win them over, and show them that we too are capable of building and maintaining a state. For now," he said, "it is very important, a very important pillar. The police," he said, "is very important." So I said, "I must go."

That day we went and I submitted my resignation at the school...no, perhaps I did not submit it that day, but later. I went and filled out the application to join the police. Later, when the order came for me to attend the police school, that day I went to the school, resigned from my teaching job, and went to the police school in Vushtrri.

Anita Susuri: Did you retire as a teacher or as a police officer? How long did you work as a police officer?

Ajet Duli: I worked as a police officer until 2019, until I turned 65. I worked nineteen years as a police officer.

Anita Susuri: So you retired as a police officer.

Ajet Duli: Yes. To tell you the truth, I also earned a pension as a teacher. The work we had done during the 1990s was recognized as service, and I had fifteen years there. Prison time was also counted: one year and a half of service for each year in prison. I combined my education service and prison service and received the pension that way. In reality, I retired from the police.

Anita Susuri: In the police, were you in administration or what role did you have?

Ajet Duli: No, no, I was a police officer.

Anita Susuri: A police officer.

Ajet Duli: A police officer, yes. But there was a paradox there too. You cannot imagine what quarrels and sharp debates we had among ourselves: the “war wing,” the “peace wing.” Many times I became disappointed, very disappointed. Often I was left alone, with everyone against me. They accused me, “Why did you come from education and take the place of a police officer?” (laughs). Yes, that is how it was.

Anita Susuri: And how did you receive independence? The day of independence? Were you perhaps on duty somewhere?

Ajet Duli: Yes, I was on duty. But we received it like every Albanian did. It was a very joyful moment, a great advancement for Kosovo’s cause, and we were truly very pleased that the day had come, that the moment had arrived when something was being crowned for us, even though with great delay. Eight years passed while we quarreled and fought among ourselves. Because of our lack of unity, independence was not being declared. I remember having debates with some colleagues, entering into polemics. I defended the cause of the war more, while they defended the peaceful path more. But when Ibrahim Rugova’s government was formed with Ramush Haradinaj,²⁵ the same people changed within twenty-four hours. I was amazed. “But you said this and that about Ramush,” I would say. “No,

²⁵ Ramush Haradinaj (1968) is a Kosovo Albanian politician and former commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army’s Dukagjin Operational Zone during the 1998–99 war. After the war, he founded the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo and served twice as prime minister, in 2004–05 and 2017–20. In 2005, he resigned as prime minister and surrendered to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to face war-crimes and crimes-against-humanity charges. He was acquitted of all charges in 2008 and, after an appeals court ordered a partial retrial because witness intimidation had undermined the original proceedings, was acquitted again in 2012.

look, at last he showed himself to be a man and now they are forming the government,” they said (laughs).

Anita Susuri: And that day, what was it like for you, independence? How do you remember it?

Ajet Duli: Listen, it was joy, extraordinary joy, because it was clear that something very great was being crowned. What is greater than freedom, than winning freedom? To be rid of and saved from a bloodthirsty power like that. Look, there are no greater criminals, no greater bloodsuckers than the Serbs. What they did to us from 1878 onward: they drove us out of Prokuplje, out of Niš, out of Leskovac, out of Jabllanica, out of everywhere. We somehow managed to survive. Then the war happened, and how many crimes they committed, how many demonstrations, how many people they killed, how many were imprisoned! How many children they killed, how many innocent soldiers they killed and sentenced! We had cases of soldiers who had been sentenced and with whom we stayed in prison. They carried out all kinds of experiments on us, and in the end they still are not able to accept reality. I follow some debates, and it is unbelievable. These are mad people. They think that they are the only ones to be right. For them there are no good Montenegrins, Bosniaks, Albanians, or Croats.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Ajet, I would only ask you, if you would like to add something at the end, or something you think is necessary to mention or tell, please go ahead.

Ajet Duli: Honestly, it seems to me that we’ve gone on quite a long time (smiles), yes.

Anita Susuri: It was a pleasure, thank you very much!

Ajet Duli: You think so?

Anita Susuri: Yes. If there is anything you would like to add, please go ahead.

Ajet Duli: No, I just want to thank you as well for your patience and your dedication. I wish you success, because your success and our success are shared.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: And hopefully we are leaving a good legacy to the younger generations, and hopefully they won’t stop at fewer than five children at least (smiles). Listen, girls, because here there are boys... actually, it seems to me you’re all girls, right?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Ajet Duli: The greatest credit for our victory belongs to the Albanian mother, who gave birth to seven, eight, even nine children. She gave birth to them and raised them with extraordinary effort and sacrifice, and we became a very important factor. Because one of the main factors is the human factor. We emerged from very difficult conditions. Little by little, we became educated, we grew in number, and we became what we are today; we achieved what we have achieved.

Anita Susuri: Yes. Thank you very much!

Ajet Duli: There is still a lot left to be done, but we should be satisfied with what we have while continuing to work every time to create even better conditions and never stop. The main thing is not to stop until national unification is achieved.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much!

Ajet Duli: That is everyone's goal (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Yes, that's it, what else? I thank you once again, for the third or fourth time (laughs).

Ajet Duli: May you be honored!

Anita Susuri: It was a pleasure for us.