

INTERVIEW WITH HYDAJET HYSENI

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Duration: 147 minutes

Present:

1. Hydajet Hyseni (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Rina Krasniqi (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the speaker explains something using gestures

Other transcription conventions:

[] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names, or expressions.

Part One

[The first part of the interview is cut out from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker to state the date and place of his birth, as well as talk about his family and childhood.]

Hydajet Hyseni: I'm Hydajet Hyseni Kaloshi, as I am currently in the Register of the Civil Registry, and this has sometimes puzzled people, "What's this strange last name?" In fact it's the result of an anomaly that was often present, and very widespread, in the Civil Registry of Kosovo citizens, with the specific aim of messing up the official, institutional functioning. Maybe that's why, until very late, my last name, according to its origins, was Ibrahimimi, like my grandfather, but when I went to high school, I saw that it couldn't have been that last name, because in the civil registries the recorded last name was Iseni. And Isen is the name Hysen, which the Serb administration - which didn't use the letter Y and was especially irritated by the letters y and ë, as purely Albanian letters - had written as Iseni. But Isen wasn't in my genealogy. Hysen was my uncle. As a result, they had registered my father in his brother's name, my father's name, his brother's name as his last name! It was like this until after the war, when a new registration took place, the first genuine one for us, that there was the opportunity of correcting my last name, and we agreed to get a family last name. It's the family, the family name Kaloshi, which is the name of our *fis*,¹ the *lagje*² where I was born, I lived.

I was born in a village in Gjilan, called Përlepnica. It's an old, medieval village, or maybe even older than medieval. According to historical accounts and legends, there was a town or city there, Përlep, sometimes with the Slavic suffix, Përlepç, which according to chronicles and legends, was also the birthplace of Prince Lazar, more accurately Prince Laz, who was also one of the leaders of the Battle of Kosovo, the

¹ *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that like the Latin gens includes individuals who share an ancestor. *Fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common. Membership in a *fis* is based on a common mythical male ancestor.

² *Lagje* in this context means just neighborhood, but more specifically, in the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor.

main leader of the Battle of Kosovo, and who's been entirely appropriated by Serbian historiography, and is considered as one of the historical, mythological figures of Serbia, although I found in Serbian sources, it was in *Politikë e Ilustruar* [Illustrated Politics] around the year '83 maybe, a piece of writing by a Serbian author, where he said that this Prince Lazar, until the year, until the nineteenth century, was really named Las, and his last name was Hrebelan. And this "ar" and the name Lazar was created, and Hrebelan turned into Hrebelanović, precisely at that time when in a way Serb nationalism also aimed at, and also managed to, appropriate figures who weren't Serbian. According to this article in *Politikë e Ilustruar* that Prince Lazar was of Vlach origins, or of some other ethnicity in the vicinity, but he wasn't Serbian.

However, this is ancient history, but is connected to the fact that the village of Përlepnica is a really beautiful village, with mountain springs around, with the remains of some castle or fortress, with very special fields, fertile and beautiful, surrounded by hills and mountains covered in verdure, filled with birds. It really is one of the beautiful places that are worth visiting.

I was raised in Përlepnica and I'm very connected to Përlepnica. I spent my childhood there, and for me it's unforgettable. In my childhood... and with now immortal figures, very beloved to me, such as Zija Shemsiu, the martyr Zija Shemsiu, one of those who died from torture in the infamous CZ, *Centralni Zatvor* [Central Prison] they called it in Belgrade. And with Xhavit Ahmeti, an intellectual and renowned activist who also, who passed away in a car accident, in the end of, in '97, during a trip which was undertaken then to meet with diplomatic representatives of the world, and so on..

And my memories of Përlepnica are always also connected to two very beloved and respected names for me, who were older than I, and who were in a way also members of a young generation, which at the end of the years of terror of the '60's, after the fall of Ranković,³ was bursting in every sense, also in the form of a patriotic, progressive spirit. These two were students of the Normale,⁴ and with many other friends, on every road we travelled - and the road was long, more than an hour in each direction - we travelled with songs, with mandolins, which they tuned like the *çifteli*⁵ and the *sharki*,⁶ and they sang songs without censorship, songs that were forbidden, for which you could be severely punished.

Përlepnica is also renowned for its patriotic and resistance spirit towards all kinds of invaders. It was also the hearth of earlier rebellions. Many residents of Përlepnica participated in the war of Idriz Seferi,⁷ and other battles in that area, Kaçanik and Karadak...While in the Second World War they took part in grat

³ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

⁴ School of Pedagogy, specialized in training teachers.

⁵ Two-string instrument with a long neck, played in Northern Albania and Kosovo, used to play folk songs and epics.

⁶ A plucked, fretted long necked chordophone used in the folk music of various Balkan countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia.

⁷ Idriz Seferi (1847-1927) was an Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter. He was Isa Boletini's right hand and was one of the organized of the Albanian Revolt of 1910 of Kosovo *Vilajet*.

battles that occurred in the Malësia at the time of Gollak and Hashani, as they were called in Kikë, Ushë, and elsewhere. But also the greatest number participated in the battles for Gjilan. The headquarters of the Albanian rebels was in Përlepnicë at the time, it was precisely at the family of Zija Shemsiu, of Zija Shemsiu's grandfather, and at one part, at another respected family as well, which is the family of Reshat Emini, one of the torchbearers of Albanian education. As a result, the number of casualties during the Second World War in Përlepnica reached nearly 24 individuals. Whereas, afterward, troubles never ceased there...

Përlepnica, which was also the recruiting center of rebels before they stormed Gjilan. This cost Përlepnica more casualties, around 24 civilians, mostly the leaders of the village, and a labeling of the village, how to put it, as an enemy village, which cost the village a lot. It was a big village, it had many intellectuals, and supplied intellectuals to practically the entire area. But they were allowed to engage in political careers with difficulty, because they were considered an enemy village.

I was raised in such an environment, in which there was a great distance between the village, the people, and the authorities. But in *the rreth*⁸ we were in, and in that village overall, there was a freedom to speak openly against the authorities. And strangely, there weren't a lot of denunciations or spying, which was a very widespread practice at the time. UBD⁹ was a hydra that had released its buds everywhere, and a belief was created that one couldn't even say something, without it being heard. Yes, the village of Përlepnica was in a way an exception.

In my childhood, there was also another constraint, apart from what gave that generation a poor youth in a way, a youth without youth. From my mother's line, there was also a heritage, the fact of a continuous patriotic and resistant spirit towards the authorities, it was in a way the atmosphere I was raised in, and it was, to speak sincerely, it was also always a source of inspiration and pride, along with other surroundings that characterized the village of my birth. For entire centuries, in the village of my birth - which is a big village, with more than 400 houses, and that has four five *fis*, which means they aren't one *fis*, one family - there weren't killings amongst them. And there were many intellectuals.

In my childhood there was also another line that determined my later life: my mother's line. My mother comes from a patriotic family from the Dardana side as they now call it, Kamenica, the village of Rogana. She's the granddaughter of one of the leaders of that region, shot by the power of the Serbian authorities after their entry into Kosovo, in a spectacular way, on the day of the Gjilan Fair, as one of the leaders of the Albanian resistance, Murat Kryeziu. My mother's father, meaning my grandfather Zylfi Kryeziu, was one of the distinguished fighters and war leaders of that region, and for a time he was also one of the *kaçak*¹⁰ of that side, a very respected man from that region. His sons, Sejdi Kryeziu and Vehbi Kryeziu, were

⁸ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

⁹ *Uprava Državne Bezbednosti* (State Security Administration).

¹⁰ Outlaws, bandits, also known in other regions of the Balkans as hajduk or uskok, considered simple criminals by the state, but often proponents of a political agenda of national liberation.

members of one of the earliest organizations of our Movement, renewed after the reoccupation, after the Second World War. Sejdi Kyreziu was politically punished three times. He was a close friend of Metush Krasniqi and his son-in-law. Whereas his brother, Vehbi, was also a distinguished member of the organization, and during the investigation process, he also ended up dead in the Gjilan hospital, in very suspicious circumstances, under the observation and the constriction of the repressive institutions of the time, the infamous UDBA.¹¹

My mother was engaged to my father on the eve of the Second World War. At the time, my father was a soldier of the Yugoslav Kingdom, *Kraljevina Jugoslave*, and in this capacity he was arrested in Slovenia, after the dispersal of the Yugoslav Army. And after a year of Golgotha in different camps and so on, he was sent to a concentration camp in Germany. My mother waited for my father for six years, but they were only engaged, and they had never seen each other. The belief was that he was killed and wouldn't return.

However, the stories of others around, as well as my mother's, reveal a very interesting case: as a 16-year-old, regardless, she decides not to marry anyone else under any circumstances, but to wait for her fiancé at whatever cost. And since it was war, and that part was under an occupation that shifted between different occupiers, including Bulgarian occupiers, who had a black reputation not only for wild, brutal behavior but also immoral and so on, they say it was a practice to marry off girls as quickly as possible, just to take care of them somehow, to protect them in that way.

During the entire time, my mother held two bombs around her waist, ready, if it came to it, to blow herself up with them, but she refused to get married, and not to wait for her fiancé. Fate willed that after the Second World War, my father would return healthy and well, to marry and create a healthy family, a loving one, and they lived in extraordinary reciprocal harmony, love and respect.

My father brought from Germany a liberal, progressive, forward-looking, to a certain point also Western spirit, which was then demonstrated in his attitude towards the children. My father was very liberal and open-minded. He did everything for us children, he gave everything, even though his family was ruined during his imprisonment and other losses that had happened to the family. A brother of his, who was an honor guard in the army at the time, because he was tall and so on, came back dead from the army under suspicious circumstances.

Meanwhile the family was economically destroyed, as often happened, and my parents started their lives from scratch. My mother was very devoted, she was an amazing believer, she knew the Quran by heart. And she was a whole encyclopedia of stories, legends, historic songs. I learned the entire cycle of the

¹¹ *Uprava Državne Bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "A" for *Armije*, referring to the Yugoslav Army.

Këngët e Kreshnikëve:¹² the songs for Gjergj Elez Alia, Oso Kuka, Sali Shabani,¹³ and many rhapsodies that were sung, and parts of epopees, I absorbed them along with my mother's milk.

All these things took root, how to put it, in my soul, in my late brother who died young, and my sisters who were raised and educated with special care by my parents. My mother was very religious, very devoted, but also very interested in educating her daughters, and she didn't obstruct them in anything. I was raised in this kind of atmosphere: in poverty, with privations, but with an abundance of love, respect, care, and for me it remains a pleasant part of my life. It's not always abundance, wealth that makes a life and family. Spiritual warmth makes them above all. And I had plenty of it!

But my maternal uncle passed from jail to jail. His family suffered a lot. Jail, politics... that time brought also many other things, boycotts, isolation, financial ruin, the authorities ruined everything. And my late mother was exhausted in her efforts to also raise us tooth and nail, and to help her brother's family, who she loved very, very, very much. I see many families, but a love like in that family... maybe because she was followed, persecuted, with many killed family members, with many hunted, and some of them escaped to Albania. That's also maybe why they had that amazing closeness. A part of that spirit was also carried over to my family.

But they remain unforgettable memories for me: those evenings when my mother would read her holy book the Quran under a lamplight, and she would sing different *ilahi* [prayers] to us, or she would sit and, how to put it, fold tobacco or she would roll tobacco, depending on the season. Because this was the work we did in the village, we lived off tobacco. It was very difficult work, very bothersome. And she would hide her tears from us, but she cried, cried, cried, without a sound, for her brother who died young, for her sister who died as a young bride, for her sisters-in-law who died as young brides, for a family that was being destroyed because of the political repression that was exercised in Ranković's time, and after Ranković.

I grew up with my brother who was older than I, who in a way was my first teacher, and my inspiration, because he was six years older than I and molded in a patriotic, progressive, education-loving spirit. He read a lot, he did what he did, he bought me the new books that came out. And those were the years when they came from Albania, Tirana, after '66. And that literature that arrived legally, and also started coming in illegally at some point, had an extraordinary effect on the patriotic education of the generations of the time and not only in terms of patriotic education, the molding of a freedom loving spirit, but also of an overall cultural emancipation. That's why you'll see many names which were given to children at that time, which you may not know, but in fact those names were given precisely after the names of the characters in the books that were read everywhere.

¹² *Këngët kreshnike* (The Songs of the Frontier Warriors), an oral epic of folktales and legends based on mythological or historical events, which is sung in *oda* (men's chambers) in Kosovo, especially in the northern mountains, accompanied by *lahuta* (lute).

¹³ Albanian folk national heroes of the Ottoman period.

And I think this is the time to also express appreciation, an extraordinary acknowledgment, for other generations of teachers, education lovers, the teachers of those generations, who did the work of *Rilindas*¹⁴ on educating, preparing the generations that would later continue their journey, and play an important role in different circumstances. My deceased brother, his name was Nezir, that was his name... he was one of the young teachers of that time. And he did everything for me to connect with books, to be educated in the spirit, as he said, “Of the instruction our uncle gave us, and the debt we have to him.” This is kind of what my youth was like. . . my childhood, sorry! This is kind of what my childhood was like.

Part Two

[Part of the interview is cut from the video: the interviewer asks the speaker about his youth.]

Hydajet Hyseni: I was born in '54. I went to school a year earlier, also thanks to the atmosphere that we had in our house. My mother spent all her time with her holy book in her hand, but she requested of us that we also kept our books in our hands. And we had learned the alphabet...I had learned the alphabet even before I was of school age, that's why I went to school a year earlier. And I had the luck of having intellectual village teachers, who were known and are known in the entire area not just as role models of teachers and educators, such as the teacher Reshat, Reshat Emini, who was one of the most distinguished teachers of that region, but also other teachers, who were the elite of the village. I had the opportunity during my childhood to be exposed to the spirit, as well as the anguish, of the closing of schools, but I was very young. It was rumored that schools in the village could be closed. However, this didn't happen, because the changes that were expected happened. The clique of Ranković fell, the Ranković group and others, and a period of some kind of relief came, a kind of liberation. Literature broke through then, and even national history was gradually beginning to be taught, and I was a lucky generation, to be growing up in these conditions, along with my peers.

Then I continued high school in Gjilan. Gjilan was seven, eight kilometers from the village, and we needed to travel together, as I said in the beginning, it was a good opportunity during the trips, we socialized during them, we embodied one another, we had unguarded conversations, we sang forbidden songs, we even traded books, legal books with positive patriotic content, but we also occasionally started being brought into contact with banned, illegal literature, which was seeping through. And that especially was devoured with, how to put it, extraordinary passion. Not only because it was forbidden, because it was the repressed dream of generations, of our parents, and later generations, and also generations that were to come.

At the high school of the time in Gjilan, and in other schools, there was a tradition of activism. Gjilan was the heart of the patriotic resistance throughout this period - renowned figures of our patriotic movement originate from that area - and throughout all periods, I repeat, including the constellation of the *Lëvizja*

¹⁴ Figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian political and cultural movement for national liberation.

Nacional-Demokratike Shqiptare.¹⁵ Later, organizing with distinguished figures, such as Halim Orana, Haki Efendia, Hamdi Berisha, and others. Then, in a later period, with patriotic figures, such as Metush Krasniqi, Sejdi Kryeziu, Mark Gashi, and others. With the generation of Kadri Halimi and Ramadan Halimi, and others, who were also sons of the Ramiz Cërrnica family, who was one of the most respected figures during the war, and immediately after the war. Because of the historical answer he gave at the Prizren Assembly,¹⁶ “Not with Serbia, but with Albania!” his whole family was persecuted, including him. They had spent decades in jail, whereas his son was sentenced to execution by shooting. And regardless, they had remained a hearth of inspiration and resistance in those regions.

I was lucky to be taught by one of his sons, and by many figures who were involved in the patriotic movement of the time, and either had indirect family connections, or direct ones, or they had connections with figures who were our teachers, and this created an atmosphere of furor. There were also activists who were a bit older than I, for example: Rexhep Mala, Isa Kastrati, Zija Shemsiu, and others, who were engaged in different forms, and who later became protagonists of the spring-like autumn, the spring-like November of '68. I was a student in the first year of high school that year, we had just started going. And I experienced the demonstration of '68 as a spiritual liberation, as special. But we were very young, and they stopped us, and we went out through windows, as we could, it was in fact a dispersal. We experienced a sort of, just a sort of scorching, a kind of, how to put it, among the youths who were dispersing, and so on.

But this was sufficient to become one with that spirit of rebellion, of rising, how to put it, it was a small rebellion of its kind, but that left deep impressions on the young generations, and created an uncontrolled desire to grow up as quickly as possible, to strengthen as quickly as possible, to be emboldened as quickly as possible, so that they could also become part of a movement like this. The literature we read and distributed hand to hand made this even more powerful. The songs we listened to on Radio Tirana, which we wrote down and also distributed hand to hand. Programs were broadcast by Radio Tirana later on, Radio Kuksi, which as soon as we had a bit of a technical basis - because back then there still weren't enough recorders, and other things - we would also record, and we distributed them. That's what many other teachers did in different schools, and this is how that patriotic spirit was reborn, which the Yugoslav authorities had tried to constrict throughout entire decades, had tried to repress, crush, bury deep under the earth.

I then had the luck to be in contact with Rexhep Mala, Ilmi Ramadani, and other friends, and in that way to also begin a kind of organization and regular and politically organized activism. With Rexhep Mala, Kadri Zeka, Ilmi Ramadani, we made the first circle, I'm talking about us, I mean, we were organized. I was organized for the first time in this circle with Kadri Zeka, who was a classmate, a desk mate, a family friend, we were household friends, and with other friends. And this is the way one acted at the time,

¹⁵ The National Democratic Albanian Movement aimed at unifying all territories inhabited by Albanians and was thus considered illegal by Yugoslavia.

¹⁶ Ramiz Cërrnica (1903-1979) was a representative from the region of Gjilan at the Prizren Assembly of July 1945, gathered by Yugoslav authorities to decide about the annexation of Kosovo to Serbia.

primarily in groups of three, because in case we were, how to put it, we knew each other, we were connected to each other, sometimes we ended up being four, and so on. Then this came and it was transformed into ... after the circles were broadened, into other cells as well, because every cell was made of another cell, or every activist was one cell, two cells, and those expanded, and in this way our Movement expanded.

Here and there, we also met friends who came from other cells, which were formed earlier, or were in the midst of forming, and it was transformed in a movement of various names, but which we called mostly *Lëvizja* [The Movement], *Lëvizja Çlirimtare e Kosovës* [The Liberation Movement of Kosovo]. That's why also the actions that were undertaken were mostly done under this name. That's why the first tracts that we distributed in this capacity were titled, "*Lëvizja Nacional-Çlirimtare e Kosovës*" [The National Liberation Movement of Kosovo] and below, among other calls, there was also the call, "Long Live the National Liberation Movement of Kosovo!" With the National Liberation Movement of Kosovo, we meant not only the area we lived in, but we were also aware that there were other organized areas of Kosovo, with which we weren't in contact, we didn't know each other, but we knew that they were active, and we believed that going forward, one day we would meet, we would get acquainted, we would connect, we would unite, and then the Movement would be even more powerful, and more effective. In a way, that's also what happened.

Later, during my studies...I was initially registered at the Technical Faculty, Construction, but since I had a desire to register in Journalism, but at the time there wasn't a journalism school in Kosovo, they were only outside of Kosovo, and we didn't have the means to go abroad. And the journalism school opened. I transferred to journalism and studied journalism and diplomacy. And as it was trendy at the time, also a second faculty, a foreign language, the French language. We learned French in elementary school as well, from our very good teachers, and this made it easier for me.

As students, we continued our patriotic activities, which were focused... how to put it, on reading different literature, discussing it, rising, the theoretical, professional, and activist debate, and so on, the organizational debate, the expanding of the circles, I mean, with other activists. Different acts, like the distribution of literature, or the various actions that were primarily of a propagandistic nature. Slogans were written, the slogans of the authorities were damaged, the photos of their respected figures were ripped, the photos of figures we admired and idealized were put up and distributed. And with the passage of time, we wrote different pieces of writing, articles. We published them in a pamphlet that we started publishing, *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo]. And with the passage of time and the distribution of tracts, which [were distributed] also in an earlier period, how to put it, the distribution of tracts, but in the '70's, they began and turned into actions that included all of Kosovo, for example all of the student dorms.

Slogans were written in all the corridors, room to room, and none of the authors managed to be found out. I can say that this was the first time that such phenomenon happened, which is due to the fact that our Movement, had now transformed into an organization, and was strengthening organizationally. And this was due to the care of leaders with more experience than we had, who were also learning from the experiences of other organizations, had also prepared instructions and practices, which also

demonstrated why UDBA was really powerful, present everywhere, with many collaborators, with its many branches and many microphones places in people's mouths...how to put it, who spied and reported everything they heard, and with the powerful technological apparatus they had, and with the endless financial support they had from the state, they had created the impression that the patriotic Movement couldn't withstand the pressures of UDBA, and if more than three or four people were to come together, they would immediately be found out, fall, be jailed, and everything would end.

In fact, our experience demonstrated that this happened, among other reasons, also because of the weaknesses we had in organizing. But when work was done carefully, with the necessary secrecy, with the necessary discipline, with what we called the proper conspiracy, meaning respecting the rules of secret operation, according to which sometimes even people who were brothers. A brother wouldn't tell his brother what he was doing, what connection they had with others, they wouldn't tell any members of the family. My family knew nothing about my connections, and that's how it was with my friends as well. We met with our best friends only in secrecy, at night, in specific places, but during the day we would pretend that we didn't know each other. And it continued in this way even after the successive arrests. Although one link was jailed, the others continued.

This was complimented also by the crisis that was deepening in Yugoslavia at that time, an all-encompassing economic crisis. A repressive politics was followed at a slightly less intense pace after the fall of Ranković. But then, at various periods, even more, how to put it, that repressive anti-Albanian zeal would manifest itself again. But this was also complemented by the strong influence that the Republic of Albania had, its tools of information, Radio Tirana, its press, which nevertheless penetrated through different channels, and especially through our migrants.

Yugoslavia in those years had invested a lot in opening doors for many of our people, mainly those who were uneducated, without any intellectual formation and so on, who would do a professional course and then were sent to Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere. Passports were given to them easily, but they weren't given that easily to, let's say, intellectuals. And it was clear that the purpose was to empty Kosovo elegantly, and in this way to execute Čubrilović's¹⁷ plan to change the ethnic structure of Kosovo and Albanian territories, and to Serbianize them.

And maybe this would have happened, if it wasn't for the fact that then, as it happened in our history with the Albanian colonies, they played an extraordinary role in the rising of the *Rilindja* [Renaissance] in developing the spirit of the *Rilindje Kombëtare* [National Renaissance]. I repeat, [it was] this spirit, also thanks to the care of Tirana at the time, which in different ways supplied our members with literature, with press, with films, with documentary programs, photos and others. And gradually those clubs that Yugoslavia had set up everywhere, such as Yugoslav clubs for Yugoslavization, and their instrumentalization, in fact, began transforming into becoming into patriotic clubs, which was practically

¹⁷Vaso Čubrilović (1897-1990) was a Bosnian Serb political activist and academic, a member of the conspiratorial group Young Bosnia, which executed the assassination of the Hapsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. He advocated the ethnic cleansing of minorities from Serbia, notably the Albanians of Kosovo, in a memorandum published in 1937 and entitled *Iseljavanje Arnauta* (The Expulsion of the Albanians).

the liberation of migration. It was easier there, because even though UDBa was present and threatened them, it was enough for them to take the passport and to cut, which meant the source of life, they cut the possibility to contact one's family, they endangered families. But regardless, those who lived in the West, at least, they had more space and could, how to put it, liberate themselves spiritually, by seeing their worker friends, who had the same grievances as them, but expressed them in a freer way, more open. And in this way, the diaspora played an extraordinary role in obstructing plans to Serbianize Kosovo and ridding it of its Albanianess.

This gave an extraordinary power to our patriotic movement. Our Movement created strong ties to the diaspora and different organizations were formed there, often without any connection between them, but they had a shared cause, and they often met in the midst of their efforts, in the midst of their work, in the midst of their resistance. At that time, I also was an illegal activist, and I studied, and since we had material needs, I started working as a young journalist, at the only daily paper at the time, the *Rilindja*¹⁸ newspaper. And for me this was also an extraordinary opportunity to meet distinguished figures of our intelligentsia, of different schools, but that as a whole served as an equally important form of schooling for me, apart from student and university life. That's what it was like for my peers as well.

But in the meantime, many imprisonments had happened, and something that didn't happen before happened. Friends such as Rexhep Mala, Ilmi Ramadani, and others, were jailed, they were inhumanely tortured. They were jailed as a result of haphazard arrests that happened after some actions... The authorities at the time and the detection machinery of UDBA weren't really concerned about who the real perpetrator was, but according to the style that was also practiced by generals in different colonialist countries, as they say, "If you can't catch the fish, grab the water," meaning the people, "and you'll find the fish inside."

At the time, UDBA organized mass arrests, haphazardly, of well-known patriotic figures, who had just gotten out of jail, or occasionally their loved ones, with the hope that they would discover the perpetrator through them, that they would talk and then they would be discovered. In fact, in the first case it happened that even after their arrests, others were punished, but the activities continued. Those of us who remained thanks to their endurance, would then organize other actions to show that they weren't the perpetrators of those acts for which they had been incriminated, punished, so that they would eventually be freed. But the authorities at the time were repressive, they weren't concerned at all, they continued to hunt down others and to jail them here and there, and they kept them in jail, even though it was proven that they weren't guilty at all. That's how Adem Demaçi¹⁹ and friends were arrested the last time, and so on

¹⁸ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

¹⁹ Adem Demaçi (1936-) is an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

Jeta Rexha: What year was it exactly?

Hydajet Hyseni: '75. Those of us who had remained - and sometimes a few of us remained after many arrests... at that time there weren't a lot of us who were activists, in our line, there were other active lines, but there also weren't many overall - we considered to be more committed an even more important duty, even holier,, because now, apart from the cause of our predecessors and their *amanet*²⁰ to us - we can take my case as an example, the generation of my uncle, who was in jail for the third time, now punished in Macedonia - I was also... or we had a debt towards our friends, who were there. So the cause of freedom was everything to us. We also had a motto then, "Everything for the cause, nothing above the cause, nothing apart from the cause!" It seems excessive now, but it really was like that! And, this would cost the families, it would cost the individual, his career, and so on.

You know, I'm at my student life, and at that time there were also grievances among the students about the state in which Kosovo found itself, its political situation, even after the improvement Kosovo experienced after the fall of Ranković and the constitutional changes of '74, when the expectation was that Kosovo would become equal and would be turned into a republic. And even if this were to happen, for Albanians this wasn't considered the right solution. Kosovo and other Albanian territories were separated unfairly from the national trunk, from Albania, and their unification, respecting their will, was considered everywhere as the only right solution, a lasting one. This is exactly what was promised by the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia before the Second World War, and after the Second World War. And the fact that afterwards this was drowned in blood, by jailing the best sons of the movement at that time, of the antifascist arm and also that other one, which was sometimes more or less attached to fascism, or wasn't attached to fascism but had a pro-Western, pro-English, pro-American orientation, to put it that way. Regardless, for the Yugoslav authorities at the time, those who wanted a just and enduring solution were all the same. That's why Gjon Serreçi was executed at the same time as Marie Shllaku, and Xheladin Hana, who was the director, the first editor in chief of *Rilindja*. And Bedri Pejani²¹, who was also a protagonist of the National Revolutionary movement of the 1930's, and of the National Committee for the Protection of Kosovo, and one of the protagonists of the third League of Prizren, was jailed, for example, Omer Qerkezi and Nexhat Agolli were liquidated, they were anti-fascist figures, but in the eyes of the occupiers, these youths were all the same.

For the occupiers of Kosovo, especially those Serb chauvinists, ideology was never the primary thing. Ideology was occasionally used for political scores, but the real criteria of evaluation was whether someone was really for the freedom of their country, their people, or not, whether he's ready to be a servant or a collaborationist, or not. That's what happened, including between the two world wars, when the then different kings of the Serbo-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom, also supported the opponents of Fan Noli, who was a bishop, Orthodox. And in the practice of Serbian chauvinist politics, in which the

²⁰ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

²¹ Bedri Pejani (1885-1946) was an Albanian politician and one of the signees of Albania's Declaration of Independence. He was one of the founders the Second League of Prizren, a nationalist movement whose ultimate goal was the establishment of Greater Albania.

Orthodox church played an extraordinarily important role, it's hard to understand this. They ravaged an Orthodox bishop with all their means, to ensure a leadership which seemed more oriental, which at first sight seemed very far away from Belgrade, but the reason was that Fan Noli, with the spirit he embodied, a pure patriotic love, and a progressive spirit, the connections he had with the progressive world at the time, everywhere, represented a real danger for the monstrous plans of Belgrade. That's why they debilitated him in every way.

This logic was also followed after the Second World War, a new occupier with new attire, in fact continued the same policies towards Albanians. Sometimes it's hard to understand this, especially for foreigners, maybe for the fact that in Tito's new government almost all the staff changed, and many real intellectuals were executed, including Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, and others of previous regimes. But regardless, one of the ministries... the only one who kept his post was Vasa Čubrilović, the author of the project to deport and cleanse what they called ethnic Kosovo, meaning its de-Albanification and Serbianization. He was one of the participants in the attack on Prince Ferdinand, a representative of *Crna Ruka*, the Serbian Black Hand - meaning an extreme, radical, terrorist organization - who then comes and becomes a minister of, for the demographics of the new Yugoslavian authorities, which was installed with Tito at the top, and so on. And in this capacity, as a minister in the new government, he brings forth the second project for the expulsion of Albanians, with the same motives.

Those who had the illusion that Tito's government, which pretended to be more liberal, more pro-Western, better, can find an argument here and there to illustrate this. Every period has its pluses and minuses. Circumstances also impose them. Sometimes circumstances also work with the other side. Albania was exercising pressure on the other side, and something needed to give. But no one should forget a fact that is often forgotten, that only during the end of the Second World War, and immediately afterwards, meaning those years '44-'45, according to the evidence now published by our historians, the number of executed and massacred Albanians is approximately 70 thousand individuals. Imagine! In a population of almost half a million, a number that high, which can hardly be compared with any of the neighboring countries. And most of them were civilians, women, children, the elderly, totally innocent, or distinguished intellectuals, again, of all orientations, of a right wing pro-Western orientation and the other side, which they called at the time Cominformist,²² and others. It was enough to be a patriot, and for the authorities of the time you were an enemy.

This spirit is... it evolved in different periods, but in its essence it hasn't changed. After the fall of Ranković, a more relaxed situation was created, a fall in repression, a carrying forward of some of the rights and freedoms and of Albanian leaders in Kosovo, and this created, it also created an appropriate atmosphere for cultural and educational development, which was made possible by the unsparing help of the Republic of Albania, which had many problems of its own at the time, also because of its international

²² Cominform, or Communist Information Bureau, stands for Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, the international forum of the Communist movement founded in 1947. After the expulsion of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from Cominform in 1948, those suspected of sympathies for Moscow were prosecuted as Cominformists.

position and others, regardless, for Kosovo, as was said by her highest leader, “Nothing was spared and nothing should be spared!” That’s why, most of the staff that kept the university going here, especially in Mitrovica and other places, as was said later on by its Kosovar leaders, in fact came from Tirana, and worked for free on everything, and they offered scholarships, specializations, as many as Kosovo needed.

Also thanks to the engagement of our intelligentsia, a part of the Albanian bureaucracy was growing and institutionalizing, this really brought an impressive change until ‘74, which was expected to be a year of turning and of the full equalization of Kosovo with other republics, something which was an expression of the demand of the demonstrations of ‘68, the demand for self-determination, and the aim for equality, as its *modus vivendi*. It was something that was also demanded by the leadership of the time, by one part of the institutional leadership of Kosovo, especially respected intellectuals of Kosovo and others, this was a general demand. Here everyone was united, which was or wasn’t the best, becoming equal to other republics was a status, how to put it, a *modus vivendi* is a kind of solution, it is a kind of satisfaction, and could be a good basis for further development, and other things. Maybe it would be here, had it been allowed. But ‘74 and its constitution, as much as they... it was an important step forward, it really disappointed the expectations of the more patriotic part, the more dedicated part of the National Movement in Kosovo.

Kosovo remained in a hybrid state: it was an element of the Federation, but a constituent part of Serbia. There was an advancement, there was also a constitution which was demanded during the demonstration of ‘68, there were some rights, in some aspects almost equivalent to those of other republics, but in fact, in its main respects [Kosovo] remained discriminated. Kosovo remained discriminated politically, but especially economically. The level of Kosovo was not only many times lower than the average Yugoslav level, not to mention more developed republics, but after it experienced a relative improvement, a continued stagnation began. The exploitation of Kosovo’s resources continued with unabated intensity. Kosovo was exploited as a source of raw material, but not also as a place where manufacturing would happen and where Kosovars would utilize the extraordinary resources of Kosovo. I believe it’s well known that Kosovo had particularly important mineral reserves, it produced more than 70 percent of all zinc production, 100 percent of chrome, magnesium, a high percentage of silver was produced in Kosovo, let’s not even mention coal and so on. Had they been exploited by Kosovars, Kosovo would have quickly caught up with the other republics, and maybe would have become like the Ruhr and Saar of Germany.

But this wasn’t allowed. As a result, the people of Kosovo in a way were forced to abandon the country, and to leave to work. Education was attempted but with many privations, and many were discriminated compared to their peers. The level of unemployment in Kosovo was much higher, its level of income much lower. Kosovo had the highest density in terms of population, the least fertile land per family, per head of population. So, apart from political dissatisfaction, there was also social dissatisfaction, which continued to grow, and deepen.

During the ‘70’s, this [was the case] even more, because of the economic crisis that enveloped Yugoslavia, after the debts Yugoslavia took on, credit in the tens of billions from abroad, a part of which were also

used by that red bourgeoisie of Kosovo as it was called, like all of the elite of that time in Yugoslavia. There was proportionally less in Kosovo than in other parts of Yugoslavia, but here it was created, like elsewhere, an illusion for at time that, “No, we’re fine!” Of course, when a family takes on debt, there’s wellbeing for a time, a calm. But when it comes time to pay off debts, interest, and also add corruption to this, many abuses and so on, that, for that period of time... were unusual. Compared to other countries, maybe even compared to today, there could be less [abuses]! But this caused a general dissatisfaction, which then led to the Movement of those years, the ‘70’s and ‘81.

Jeta Rexha: And now to ask you Mr. Hydajet, where were you during the ‘70’s?

Hydajet Hyseni: And here precisely, at that time, as I said, I was a student, I worked at *Rilindja* and was an activist for the *Illegale* Movement. But, in ‘78, in April of ‘78, I was following a meeting of the Chamber of Cooperatives of Kosovo, I was accredited in the then Kosovo Unions - the organization of the Kosovo Unions was much more influential then, more powerful and so on - and similar organizations. And I realized that one of the investigators of that time, an inspector with the State Security, was watching me. I was informed a few weeks earlier that I was in fact under the surveillance of Security bodies. And, that’s why I took measures to change my apartment and live in Pristina, even though my family was in my place of birth, and I was cautious about everything because I expected them to arrest me.

Later on, I had heard that apart from other suspicions, they had also intercepted a letter that was sent to me from jail, by my friends at the time, Xhafer Shatri, Rexhep Mala, and it had gotten into their hands. It happened that Rexhep Mala was caught with some letter right then and there, in his hand, and he would swallow it. But is also happened that a letter we sent in the ways available to us at that time, sometimes through prisoners who left the jail and who were considered trustworthy, would be caught on someone, or maybe even here and there it fell into unsafe hands. But they then came to the conclusion that a piece of writing, as they told me during the investigation, some work that was prepared for publication in ‘74, I mean, three, four, years earlier, in the “*Zëri i Kosovës*” [*The Voice of Kosovo*] newspaper, which was caught on our jailed friends at the time, Xhafer Shatri, Kadri Osmani, Binak Ulaj, Jashar Aliaj, and others, and which they had not discovered that it had my handwriting, in fact a graphologist found that it was my text.

That’s why, in that meeting I said I was at, I concluded that I was being followed by... I was being watched step by step. I pretended like I wasn’t looking, and to establish what the case was, if it had changed or if this was routine surveillance, as they did with certain durations, I went out during the break in the meeting and went to the city market, which wasn’t far from there. As they were thinking that I would buy something, I pretended that I was buying something, and I looked to see if this person was following me, or not. But they didn’t wait, and it happened at the entry to the market. A large number of investigators surrounded me, and in a spectacular way they paralyzed me, they grabbed me by the arms, saying to me, “Don’t move, because it’s impossible for you to do anything! You’re in the hands of [state] security and every movement is futile! It will only go badly!” Of course I didn’t even have a chance of moving. I pretended that I didn’t know what was going on. They took me out of there, they put me into a car and they sent me... I thought they were taking me to the city jail. They passed Pristina, they passed Lipjan. I thought they were taking me to the jail in Lipjan... they continued and they sent me to a kind of building

they had, I didn't know earlier, in Blinaja, Lipovica as they used to call it. I mean it was a kind of reserve that was maintained as a national park, where the state security had their own building, especially for these cases.

We knew that they had also used methods like this to kidnap and treat people whom they considered suspicious, or those opposed to the regime. There I found out that something had leaked. They also took out my notebook with the work that I had written, a long work, "Kosovo under the Titoist regime." I can show it to you later. It was a long piece of writing about the state of Kosovo at that time, the political, economic situation, and others, as much as a youth of my age could write, I was a little older than 20. And, it was insistently requested of me to admit that it was mine. They showed me the findings of the graphologist, the expert, that the writing was the same. And to compare, they took a form I had filled out to get an ID card. A form had to be filled, and then the letters one by one. It's true that even to a casual glance it was the same. It was proof that we weren't as cautious as we should have been then, to change eventually even our writing. We had a typewriter at the time, and we used it, but at that time even a typewriter was a big deal. And there were periods of time when to get a typewriter... However, a record was kept of who had typewriters. In today's circumstances it's difficult to accept, to understand this.

They kept me all day, all night, and around the morning, since they didn't know where my apartment was, they demanded to know where my apartment was. It seems they wanted to go and search it. I had changed my apartment, I had always moved cautiously, I mean, not directly from work to the apartment, and it seemed that they didn't know. That's why at around the morning, they said, "Fine, you can go, but you can't escape us. You won't run away anymore! You either have to come yourself, or you're in our hands! And you can only make your situation worse." The threats were that I would be severely punished, they would destroy everything, you would destroy your family. I was married, I had children. I was the only son in the family, in a way the keeper of the family. And they used all this to exercise pressure.

Regardless, they released me and I went home. I pretended like I was sleeping, but a police officer always accompanied me and when I said, "Now I'm going alone," he wouldn't separate from me, he wouldn't let go of me, "No, I'll escort you because the weather is bad, before the morning. We don't want anything to happen to you." But in fact when he got close to testing me, I knew the way that went directly to the house, but I went on a faster way, which was a narrow alley, dark, without lights. And he retreated a bit, because it seems that he wasn't sure what was happening, why I was getting in there, and when I said, "You can turn back here, because it's here, now the house is close and there's no other road, just this one." Regardless, he said, "I'm sorry, but it's my duty to learn where your house is, where you are." And he openly told me that in fact, he hadn't come to accompany me, but to find out where I lived. And then it was so, when we went to the apartment I thought it was over, and he turned, and said, "I'm sleepless, I've been left with no sleep," etc.. I pretended to turn off the light and sleep in the apartment. In fact, I stayed awake again and looked out the window. They were circling the apartment the entire time, and I understood that I was practically in jail. But now I was in jail in my apartment, waiting for when they would take me and continue.

Then I took advantage of the opportunity and I went out as if I was buying bread, when it started dawning, and I then met a car with police who were staying and waiting. Not police, they were plainclothes, plainclothes police. And when I passed by, they moved, they got up, they mobilized, they turned on the car. I pretended that I didn't see them, didn't hear them, I went down another road, another car started, it was approaching. And I understood that they were on the move. But since I knew that neighborhood well, I had walked everywhere, I had an advantage. Road after alleyway, I threw myself into a yard, another yard, and came out to an abandoned house, which I entered and locked myself in. They drove their cars with... how to put it, an unusual dynamic for that time and so on, but regardless, they didn't find me. And then I waited all day, and late into the evening, and with extraordinary care I left [to go] where we had our connections then with the friends of the organization. And from that point on I went underground. This happened on 15 April '78, and I remained underground until December of '81. That was an unusually long time to remain underground, but because of the organization we had, the care of our friends and others, this was possible.

Part Three

[The speaker here began to talk before the camera started shooting: he was elaborating about other people involved in the underground movement.]

Hydajet Hyseni: Miners from different places²³... there other people didn't know me and so on. Sometimes and in different cities in Kosovo, and a certain time, a little bit because of the health problems I had, but also to exchange experiences with the friends we had there. When I had gone underground, Kadri Zeka, with whom we undertook all this activism together, went to Switzerland, we had an agreement and so on until his death. Then I moved, sometime during the summer of '80, to Switzerland for a time. I stayed there illegally as well, until the beginning of the year, March of '81, after the first demonstration, on 24 or 25, around there, in March, I returned to Kosovo.

We had an agreement that if one of us entered Kosovo, the other remained in Switzerland. In Switzerland the organization had also expanded, whereas in Kosovo we had also managed to grow our circles considerably. We had created many cells, in almost all Kosovo's cities, and we had managed to do actions throughout Kosovo, for example: distributing tracts on the occasion of the Albanian League of Prizren,²⁴ the obstructions that were set up on the occasion of Tito's visit to Kosovo, a tract we had also distributed throughout Kosovo, in all cities, it was the first time that tracts were being distributed throughout Kosovo.

You asked me earlier about the issues of differences, orientations, and so on. At that time there weren't that many differences, because in a way, issues were looked at in a grand scheme. Kosovo was in a discriminated state in Yugoslavia at that time, and that's why this was considered one of the main issues

²³ Hydajet was speaking before the camera started shooting. He's elaborating the organizations and other people involved in the underground movement.

²⁴ The centennial of the Albanian League of Prizren, the 1878 alliance that fought against border changes decided upon at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.

that needed challenging. The economic situation, the social situation, as a result of this as well, was difficult and getting worse, and this was continually emphasized. The acceptance of the principle of self-determination was demanded, and at that time the fact that Kosovo wasn't equal began in a way to be formed [as an idea], whereas Yugoslavia was considered a country based on equality, and so on.. Tito won prizes, not prizes sorry, but the title of Doctor Honoris Causae, at the University of Pristina for his extraordinary contribution in solving the national issue in Yugoslavia. This wasn't the case! And as was said at the time by the leader of Tirana, "The truth of the national issue in Yugoslavia, will terrify Tito in his grave, after his death." The national issue wasn't solved with the slogan, "Brotherhood, Unity!" and with the discrimination of peoples, particularly of Albanians. The truth was, and emerged as such, the truth of the national issue in Yugoslavia, was a big deception. Especially after what happened in Bosnia, and elsewhere.

It was proven that Bosnia was considered a model of the Yugoslav experiment, Brotherhood and Unity, what a sort of grafting. By deforming their Albanian identity, turning it into a new identity, the Yugoslav... What did I say, Albanian? Albanian also. But their identity, let's say, Bosniak, Croatian, Serbian, a new Yugoslav identity was being created. People started giving Yugoslav names, even an Albanian here and there. But Yugoslav was a Slav of the south, it could have had a meaning for others, but what meaning did this have for Albanians? And that which was very fashionable, and what was very important on paper, very important, Yugoslav patriotism, had no meaning for Albanians. On the contrary, it had an anti-Albanian meaning. Because Yugoslav patriotism, meaning, was the undoing of Albanian patriotism. And furthermore, it wasn't just in the ethnic sense, but also in the social, economic, and societal sense. It was the elimination of a future for an entire people. That's why this also united people of different orientations into this minimal program: national freedom, national and social equality, and the protection of the spirit, and the dream of our predecessors, to be free and united. Because we were separated unfairly, we were separated by force, we never declared that we wanted to be separated. And this was in practical terms the platform that united Albanians at the time. And that's why during the demonstrations of '81 mostly these slogans emerged.

Back then we had started publishing a newspaper, an organ, [of the organization]. We published it like a pamphlet, it came out rarely. We called it *Liria* [Freedom]. We had discontinued *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo] because of the arrests, to not give the impression that they were also responsible for the things that were happening, because they could have also suffered consequences. And, during those years we also started publishing the organ *Liria* [Freedom] since we had discontinued publishing the organ *Zëri i Kosovës* [The Voice of Kosovo]. And there we laid out some of the demands that came out and then became the slogans of the demonstrations of '81. For example, we had published an article, "We're Albanians, not Yugoslavs" which came out and became one of the main slogans.

The population census was being prepared, and this was preceded by an orchestrated,, very well organized campaign to influence, apart from those who would register as Yugoslav, in line with the orientation of Yugoslav patriotism, the Albanians, so that especially they would register as Turks, Torbesi, and specifically as Muslim. A certain Njazi Limanovcki came out at that time, he was one of the intellectuals of Macedonia, and he proclaimed that, "We are Muslim and we will register as Muslims." In

Bosnia there was pressure that made the majority of Bosniaks register themselves ethnically as Muslims. This seemed like something with no mischief intended, nothing wrong, they're Muslims with regards to their religious beliefs, but later on this was also proven to be malicious. On the one hand, they were encouraged to identify with a Muslim identity, a simply religious [identity], but on the other hand, the Movement for Independence in Bosnia was accused and ruined, it was demonized, as an expression of Islamic fundamentalism and an anti-European movement, which along with the Albanian influence would constitute a risk, being placed as a wedge to endanger Europe, like in the time of medieval Turkey, and so on.

This double game was also used in Kosovo, at the time. And it came later, it was used especially in Milošević's²⁵ time, when Albanian education was blocked, secular Albanian education, and at the same times four five madrasas²⁶ were opened in Kosovo. And at the same time, a very dark campaign propaganda was directed at our movement, as a fundamentalist, anti-European, anti-Christian movement, and so on. That's why we had to react to this, in our way. The tract we distributed at the time, and the main article... the article we wrote in our newspaper, spread everywhere, and one of the slogans of the demonstration of '81 was, "We're Albanians, we're not Yugoslavs!" Then another version, "We're Albanians, and nothing else!" In the sense that nationally we're not Yugoslav, or Muslim, or Turkish, or Torbasi, or what... everything that... They could have wanted to re-baptize us with. Then there was even a... it's forgotten now, a big investment to register a number of us as Malësorë.²⁷ Malësorë,, they said, aren't Albanian. They're something else. An attempt was also made with the *Mirditas*²⁸ like this, to play with their identity, and to make us break apart, piece by piece.

Or the Albanian political prisoners at the time, they sent them out of Serbia and kept them in different jails outside Serbia, even though a jail was built in Kosovo, which was called High Security jail, in Dubrava. It was a big investment at the time, and a lot of propaganda for them. And the release of the political prisoners, and their return to Kosovo, was a demand of ours, which also then became one of the slogans of the demonstration of '81. Or the writings that had to do with the economic inequality of Kosovo, they were placed in our press as well. But they were also published in different articles were put forth as issues in different articles in Tirana's press. For example, the magazine *Ylli* [Star] published at the time a main article about the severe economic situation in Kosovo, etc. And here a vicious campaign started against the press from Albania, that it was distorting the truth, etc.

The truth is, these [things] complimented each other. And they created that oneness of engagement from all orientations, groups, which despite the differences that they had here and there, regardless, the most important thing was that thing they held in common. And in this way the spirit that erupted in the spring

²⁵ Slobodan Milošević's ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became the President of Serbia.

²⁶ Muslim religious school, the only school where teaching could be conducted in Albanian until 1945.

²⁷ Literally mountain people but it can also be used to refer to people from *Malësia*, or *Malësi e Madhe* (literally Great Highlands), a region largely inhabited by Albanian speaking people, which lies to the East of Podgorica in modern day Montenegro, along the Lake of Shkodra in modern day Albania, next to Kosovo.

²⁸ *Mirditas*, people from the region of Mirdita in northern Albania.

of '81 managed to be created, which then united every stream of dissatisfaction into a powerful river, to which the movement also contributed greatly in student circles. Different groups that were active there, those that were self-organizing, unorganized groups which acted spontaneously, half-organized groups, parts that remains of jailed organizations, and all sorts of other influences, united and then created a spirit of eruption, which lead to the spring of '81. Figuratively speaking, I always compared this to the eruption of spring. Spring doesn't arrive on only one plain, on only one hill, but how to put it, it erupts naturally: one flower there, a flower here, one blossom here, one blossom there, and then united everything changes.

And that's how it was with the eruption of the spring of '81, in which the organization in which I was a militant played an important role. It was either the most organized organization, or the most widespread, or the one with the most longevity, with a greater array of activities. But regardless, we always valued the spring of '81 as an eruption of all contributions, from all orientations, all organizations, groupings, and so on. And above all, as an eruption of Kosovo's youth, which... which then was joined by the people of Kosovo. The working class of Kosovo joined, and it is really an extraordinary power when the youth unites with the working class, with the peasants. And it was a very authentic movement, very much of the people. There were also attempts to demonize it, to discredit it, especially by exponents of the official policies of the time, who may have been also surprised, because they lived in a kind of illusion of paradise at that time, which it was for them to a certain degree. It's something an ancient philosopher said, "Satisfied slaves are the greatest obstacle to freedom." Those who were personally satisfied, they then in a way tried to obstruct every attempt to change the situation, because they felt like they were threatened. But it was a natural eruption of an unsatisfied majority.

And the fact that they regardless weren't able to find a single essential argument, a serious one, for these speculative, demonizing accusations against this movement, shows that it was one of the few movements in history that was really natural, of the people, pure, like the youth. That's what the November of '68 was like, as those of '89 were, the student movement of '98, the nonviolent political resistance of the 90's as well, and especially then the armed confrontation, with the Kosovo Liberation Army at the head.

The history of the world has many glorious pages, but these of Kosovo maybe have this distinction: that they're authentic, they're of the people, they're original. They're not creations of agents, they didn't come out of different laboratories. This is where their power lies in my opinion, but it may also be their deficiency. Because those [movements] that are created by agents, that are from different incubators, they then have different stimulants, which can make them more succesessful, and so on. Regardless, especially this authentic, original nature of the movement, its coming from the roots, truly from the people, imposes respect on me...

Part Four

Jeta Rexha: Mr. Hydajet, maybe we now we could talk a bit about '81 specifically, when you were also imprisoned.

Hydajet Hyseni: Yes, I was one of the participants, one of the actors of '81, but only one of them. At the time, I had just returned from Switzerland, and we had agreed that the movement was continuing, and we attempted to keep it going. We tried with all the ability and influence we had, for it to be mature, restrained, to be at the service of the entire process, which according to us would continue, for the solution of the unresolved issue of Kosovo. That's why we aimed to have our influence on those processes, without excluding others. During the spring of '81, more formations that were active then in Kosovo emerged to the surface. And there were a few like this. We were one of those formations. We were initially called groups, then organizations, with the aim of becoming a unique movement together. And we were in the process of this unification. We had established contact with some of them, especially while staying in Switzerland and Germany. Kadri Zeka had done a colossal task, which was practically done together with Jusuf Gërvalla,²⁹ and others, Bardhosh, and others. They were the promoters of unification, in a way, of a design, it was taking shape.

I had stayed for a time in Switzerland, seven, eight months, during the years '80-'81, and I was also engaged in this process. Our goal was to unite with all groups and organizations, depending on their nature: with those that we had more correspondence, similarities, in vision, and in orientation, as well as in the manner of organization, to unite in a closer circle; whereas with others, we could unite in a wider circle of action, with the aim of creating a nationwide unification, as a nationwide movement, with a program that was the right solution for us, a final one for the unresolved Albanian issue, but with the option of having a few strategic periods on the way, to go through several stations. And within this frame, we also saw the demand that we had carefully put forth also during the year '80, about Kosovo's need to become equal also in status, and everything else, with other republics, and the people of Kosovo with other peoples, in the space of the former Yugoslavia. We considered this as necessary and possible for the period we were going through. This seemed more appropriate to us strategically. And it turned out like this! But without letting go of our insistence for a just and enduring solution of the Albanian issue.

In the year...in the spring of '81, this unification happened. There was even a mobilization in the movement of a large number of patriots, youth, devoted, courageous, self-sacrificing patriots, who had not been organized. The problem was then how to manage all of this energy. Then this also brought in a way a falling away of the rules, of the conspiracy, of discipline, and this also brought as a result many arrests. The truth is, we were aware that this would happen. We were also aware that this could hit us personally as well. But we thought that even this tax needed to be paid, this levy, just for us to cross the Rubicon, and to unite the movement. Then we had faith that it would go forward. In a way, this also happened. But it cost the movement a lot.

I was in the demonstration of '81, on April 1, and after that I moved back into the underground. And thanks to the help of some demonstrators, activists, and thanks to the care of families that sheltered us on the nights of April 1 and 2. It even happened that I found myself in the midst of a Turkish family. But

²⁹ Jusuf Gervalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and nationalist activist killed in Germany with his brother and a third person. All these killings have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

they were very hospitable. They offered us everything they had, the house was full. When they saw we were in danger, they said, “They’ve started searching house by house, so figure out your own way.” But they didn’t denounce us, they didn’t obstruct us, and so on. We even found out later that they had someone who was working for Internal Affairs. But a very positive spirit was created everywhere. There were even cases... a friend of mine, who during the protest, after the brutal intervention of the police... because we went through this part, that was the main part... he got... because there were also children in the demonstrations, and the attack was brutal, with no discrimination, and to save himself he grabs a child and goes through the yards of the houses that were there and a family says to him, a woman came out, and said to me in Serbian, she said, “Where are you taking the child?” she says, “leave him here, I’ll watch him like his mother. Don’t worry!” He said, “But how could I dare leave the child with a family that speaks Serbian. Yet she came out and offered.”

There were also examples like this. The hate that was sown later, especially within the Serb minority, was the effect of the politics of special propaganda against the movement. But it wasn’t present in the majority of citizens at the time. Because objectively there was nothing against citizens, of any nationality. Tens of thousands of protesters were in the center of Pristina those days and in the centers of other cities. I’m talking about where I was. But there wasn’t a single anti-Serbian slogan. There wasn’t... anti-Serbian in the sense of being against Serbian citizens, against their identity, their culture, their language, against their rights. No! It was against Serbia. Against Serbia, yes! And it was like that everywhere, read even the press of the time! There wasn’t hatred among the nationalities, there was hatred against the regime. And this was an important message of our movement, that’s why a lot was invested in demonizing it.

The students movement started as a social protest, which also had political demands in the background, but they weren’t at the forefront on March 11. And students had many reasons to protest as students because of their social economic position, the conditions that were visibly worse than those of their peers. But they also had reasons as citizens of Kosovo, and the youth always leads in these processes. But the violent intrusion of the police, and especially the attempt to demonize, to discredit them, by calling them thugs, vandals, disturbers of the peace, and so on, raised ill feeling even higher. Especially the brutal intervention on March 26, and with special units, especially against male students, female students protesting, and so on. It created ill feeling then in all the people. And then naturally that ill feeling gathered and erupted on April 1 and 2, and practically turned into a nationwide rebellion.

But the character they had is best described by their slogans. They were slogans of a national character, because national rights and freedoms were demanded. But they were slogans of a democratic nature because even those demands of a national and democratic nature, were of a democratic nature. They were the best expression of the aspirations the citizens of Kosovo had. For example, the demand, “We want equality!”, “We want work!”, “Stop Prices!”, “Trepča³⁰ works, Kosovo, Trepča works, Belgrade is built!”, “Kosovo is ours, Kosovo of Kosovars!” Kosovo is ours also in the sense of the industrial complex of Trepča, because at the time it was a great resource of coal and energy. It was called “Kosova,” but it also

³⁰Trepča in Serbian, a large industrial and mining complex in Mitrovica, one of the largest in former Yugoslavia. It was acquired by a British company in the 1930s and nationalized by socialist Yugoslavia after the Second World War.

meant Kosovo as a territory, "Kosovo is ours, Kosovo of Kosovars!" Then to have the political prisoners be returned to Kosovo, "We are Yugoslavs!" I'm sorry, you'll have to correct that, "We're Albanians, not Yugoslavs! We're Albanians and nothing else!" And similar demands. But there wasn't any demand that was an expression of hate towards any people, any collectivity, any identity, language, culture, or likewise. There weren't acts of this nature. That's why it was a democratic movement par excellence, and nonviolent par excellence. Tens of thousands of protesters didn't cause any damages. No one was wounded before the police intervened. Violence then started, after the police intervened in a brutal way, especially...including in the previous incidents of March 11 and March 26, but especially on April 1, when the whole square of Pristina was full.

There were promises that talks would be held, that a group of demonstrators would be invited, to talk to them. And then, without any warning, even though there were old people, women, children, bombs with tear gas exploded, shots went off, maybe not all targeted at flesh, in the air as well, but it was really terrifying. I was one of the participants, and one of the speakers in the demonstrations of '81. Thanks to the care of others around, some knew me, other didn't know me, because I was also tired, nevertheless I evacuated in one of the nearby houses and stayed there until the morning, and then from there, again luckily through, how to put it, the police patrols that were everywhere, strangely, nevertheless we managed to escape, to retreat. And, then I was underground for another six months, or more, seven months, and I was arrested in December of '81.

I can't create a true tableau of that time. But it was really an indescribable time. A state of emergency was declared, a police curfew was put in place, a total war started against everything that was Albanian, the youth was jailed everywhere, it was discredited in the harshest forms and the most insulting labels, the intelligentsia was being hunted, being fired from their jobs, everything that was Albanian was being demonized, even Slav figures were being watched and contested, even collaborationists. It was a total anti-Albanian war. It became clear that the Albanian was truly only a dead or jailed Albanian.

And, in these conditions, it was difficult to be out of jail, as well as to be in the hands of the special police of the time. It is sad that we have not managed to describe the hell of the chauvinistic prison. But it is truly indescribable! I spent about four - five months in a state of isolation, which they called "detention in a special place." One would not even know here one was at times, you didn't know what day it was. Because one had nothing! One had no possibility of contact. It was complete separation. And only the investigators changed, but the tricks, the ploys they had perfected for decades ... After about five, six months, I had the first contact with the investigating judge, the lawyer ex-officio, but one did not know whether it was a real judge lawyer, or what was he?! Bottom line, it seemed it wasn't important at all! No contact with the family or anyone else.

My position was particularly difficult because I came after four five years, or somewhere around there, of being underground. And, it was concentrated, how to put it, an extraordinary pressure (sighs). It was an ongoing pressure, terrifying, in which you would've wanted the jail, because in jail you had a period of time in which you were with other prisoners, and you could exchange words with them, to find out what was going on, to find out what happening not only to you, but to the country, what was happening to your

family, with your movement, with your friends. And all this of course was impossible in... And it was accompanied by a war, how to put, by a special effort to plant beliefs that weren't real about developments, about the situation, and this wasn't always done without consequences.

After a time of being held in buildings like this, which we, in a way, later verified that it belonged to the State Security, [I was held] for a time in Skopje, for a time they said Sarajevo, but it could have been in Belgrade somewhere, and they returned me and placed me for a time in Leskovc, then in Pristina. And a kind of judicial procedure starts, investigatory, after five six months, but in a very difficult situation. And after this they send me to CZ [*Centralni Zatvor*], where they hold for months on end, a part of, as they called it, "The investigatory jail of CZ." It was the Central Prison of Belgrade, a terrifying jail. And, then, for a time, in the Psychiatric Clinic of the Belgrade Prison, in which they also held people who were considered unaccountable, incapable of being judged. And for a time, they had given me this status, which was a terror of a special sort. I don't really want to remember those moments. I want one more time, if I have the chance, to put it down on paper, to write. But really, it's something seen in different Second World War films in Nazi camps, sometimes in different films about revolutionaries after the French Revolution, and the state they were brought to.

What was even more difficult was the belief that your friends were also being held in this state, many of them were younger than we were. Many of them, in a way, were jailed because of the influence we had over them. That which made us proud before, when they acted with that much courage, with that passion, which made us feel guilty about the fate they were experiencing. There were young people we met in jails, they were very young, green. How to put it, your moustache sweated in prison, they grew up in jail. And they had to expose their chests [face] the Yugoslavian UDBa, which was terrifying. Not only for Kosovo, but the entire space of former Yugoslavia, even further afield.

It was a difficult period for our families as well. The punishment wasn't only directed at the individual, in reality the whole family was punished. For a long time during my detention, I believed that my entire family was in prison. That's what I was told, and I had come to this belief in different forms, and the documentation, and so on, that they threw in front of mine. Sometimes they improvised or staged the voices of my children, and so on, and I was convinced that the whole family was... held in prison. There were also cases in which the families were imprisoned. They imprisoned also my family members, I found out later on.

And sometimes the pressure was even more, not only with your personal execution, which you could come to terms with, you could even brush it off, if it went forward. To threaten you, to convince you they would also destroy your entire family, and everything you had beyond that, even, even everything beyond that! They would destroy your name, your sacrifice and everything. All this, sometimes was harder than physical violence. The total isolation, being left with yourself, the external influence and pressure, filled you with hallucinations, sometimes it turned into a harder form of torture than any physical torture, [it was] spiritual [torture]. That's why this spiritual torture was a form of torture difficult to fill with anything. It could only be filled with the dream of freedom, with the belief in your honor, in your movement, in the righteousness of the movement you belong to, and eventually a spiritual attempt to imagine the future, to

believe that the day would come, and to dream not only of your free nation and country, but also for your freed people, sometimes even oneself! Sometimes, when I see myself today, I say, “You look at some of those dreams that I had, and I didn’t believe I would make them come true. Nevertheless, I made some come true!” And it’s an extraordinary feeling of satisfaction.

After the initial years of investigation, later there was a slight relaxing, which meant you could read something, you could be in jail with someone. I was held for about three years, something like that, totally isolated. It was much later then, I was in a room with another prisoner. And that was a big change. And then we could work on something, read something, even exchange literature, share a thought. And for me that was also a very important period, and in a way a rebirth.

I was in jail with many respected figures, such as Halil Alidema, Ali Lajçi, Bajram Kosumi, Gani Koci, and many other friends, later in open jails. And then we started filling the emptiness of jail with our lives, with our dreams, with our ideals, and with our creativity, sometimes even through different forms of communication, organization, and so on. And then we found this manifested exactly what Balzac said in his novel, that jail is a terrifying emptiness, and the fact that this jail, this emptiness, can be beaten only by filling it with your soul, with your dreams, with your spiritual world. And the youth of Kosovo at the time, for me, I’m removing myself from it, I’m talking about those who were younger than my generation, it was heroic from this aspect as well. Not only it had brought about a historical turn during the Albanian spring of ‘81, like those that came before, but it had also managed to beat jail with its spirit, with its unity, with its solidarity.

Before my eyes they now appear... Let’s take the CZ jail, when military and police superiors came, distinguished figures, and ministers and so on. They opened the doors, they banged on the doors, colossally big doors, everything echoed. And they did that on purpose to make one feel small, powerless...to be terrified. And then officials visited as if from another world. And you’d see very young boys, tired, skin and bones. Sometimes they were sick, sometimes they had sick lungs, and they’d straighten up, they’d pulled up their chests {pulls up chest and head}, and looked them straight in the eye. And when they said, “What are you in for?” he’d say, “For political activism.” “What did you do, this article of the law, this, this, this...Do you repent?” He said, “No!” “What?!” “No!” he said, “we’re within our rights.” And he said this without trembling an eyelash. One, another, and so on, and then you’d see, it was as if that imposed theatrical greatness of theirs, in a way, it seemed that it wavered, weakened, it wasn’t...it broke, how to put it, that myth of the majesty of the repressive authorities and so on, [broke] before the spirit of a few very young boys. Today many of them still suffer from severe health consequences, physical, and so on. I have, how to put it, *debolezza*³¹ for that generation.

Part Five

Jeta Rexha: What did you do after jail?

³¹ Italian: to have *debolezza*, to have weakness, sympathy.

Hydajet Hyseni: There came a time when we were in jail with other prisoners, including other nationalities. There was a time when that was horrible in itself. The prisoners, they say, are worse than the prison. They're a bigger evil than the prison itself. And often those who were sent there were like that. They made prison unbearable. Each of them had stories, about how they were only in the company of two, three, five, 15 ordinary criminals, each sentenced more harshly than the other, each more disturbed than the other, deviants, with different illnesses, and ordered to make your life impossible. And often, people were forced to find a way, sometimes even by committing a minor offense, to go into solitary confinement, and there to be on concrete and so on, but at least to be safe regardless, and spiritually calmer. But this couldn't last forever, you had to return there again. It was a terror of its own kind, and this terror lasted a long time.

But at a certain time certain changes happened in the world as well, changes also happened in the space of the former Yugoslavia, and a kind of opening started, and they left us with other prisoners as well. And what I want to emphasize is, in the beginning there was total hatred towards us. They considered us enemies, nationalists, irredentists, they identified us with the worst "isms." Often, this cost us physically as well, attacks, provocations, and so on. But with the passage of time, even they started understanding that they were living in the same skin, and we started communicating with them. And today it seems impossible, there came a time when the political prisoners were respected by the vast majority of the other prisoners. They were respected because they thought differently, they were unique, they were more dignified, they were more mature, they read more, they were more humane towards others and they also helped those of other nationalities when it was necessary, they were more correct towards them, and their opinion of us gradually started changing, to the point that for a period of time in the Niš jail and in other jails, in the Niš jail where I was, we managed to gradually win the respect of practically the vast majority of the other prisoners, and even of a number of the guards.

There were guards who read, they were different people from those who were real beasts. And when they saw them reading all the time, they admired them. And when they went to their cells they didn't bring their clubs, because he didn't want to see himself, how to put it, as a policeman before this man who reads, because he reads as well. They discussed books, they discussed the protagonists, etcetera. And when he would go the store, [where] he had to make sure nobody talked, he would close the window on purpose, and he'd make a sign to say, take advantage of the chance [to talk], and so on. There was also this side, alongside that awfulness that the majority of the guards, who were under orders, who were heartless, truly hangmen, had. And there was this part of the prisoners, who also reflected positively, to the point that in the end, we even had common strikes, in which it happened that a political prisoner, with a severe sentence, was shoulder to shoulder, and was in confrontation with the police in the jail, with the authorities of the jail, alongside someone who had been a police officer and was arrested for a traffic accident, and so on. And then there was even a barricade, along with the prisoners, including the political prisoners, against the authorities. It seemed like a scene made up, how to put it, in a novel or a film, but in fact it was reality.

And it wasn't an entirely isolated reality. *Politika e Ilustruar* wrote at the time. . .no, not *Politikë e Ilustruar*, sorry, but *Ekspres Politik*, it was a newspaper, *Ekspres Politika*. They had done an interview with me as

well, and they accused us, they wrote, *“Irredente ne miruje,”* “Irredentists don’t let up, don’t behave.” And the text said the irredentists organized the strike and the big protest in Deligrad. Deligrad was the name of the prison workshop, there were around two thousand prisoners there, who were workers, it was really a place, how to put it, an industrial [department]. Because a lot of work was done in industrial units. And the organization of a strike was also done with our indirect influence, but it was attributed to us as a hostile act, as a continuation of our hostile activism, in Niš as well, with prisoners. And then, when the jail authorities called me and interrogated me, “You organized this!” they also accused me directly, my answer was, “This is the biggest compliment one can give a political prisoner, and that can be given to me in this case. I only fear that it may not be entirely true, don’t honor me excessively with what you’re saying!” It was also a little ironic, but the truth was like this as well. It wasn’t totally us. But it was also the fact that we had built good relations with other Albanian non-political prisoners as well. And through them we managed to make easier, how to put it, the influence over the prisoners as well. There were also Serbians and Montenegrins there, but there were Bosniaks, Vlachs, and it was easier, how to put it, for them to identify with us and come closer to us.

At a certain point this was also the reason that created the belief that it would be better to return us to Kosovo than to leave us there. Because they were afraid the truth about ‘81 would spread, because as they say, in every war, the first to die is the truth. After the ‘81 events, the first one that was killed was the truth about what had happened in ‘81. And in political war, even more than in armed war, the truth is killed. And I didn’t find until later, I read, that there were also distinguished Serbian intellectuals, like Srdja Popović, who from that time, ‘81, raised his voice against what was happening in Kosovo. And they had the courage and vision to say that nonetheless, what Albanians were demanding was right. And with its policy towards Kosovo, Serbia harmed not only Kosovo, but harmed Serbia and others as well. It’s a pity that this voice didn’t have more power. And it wasn’t a coincidence. Occupiers also oppress their own people. That’s why they’re afraid of the truth and of the occupied, because the truth can make even the occupied in their own country, their people, raise up against them. That’s why they did everything to make it impossible for the truth to penetrate there. I am convinced that even today and every day, we haven’t been able to tell our truth before... before the Serbian people as well. When we managed to tell it, the effect was surprising and positive.

I got out of jail in the year ‘91, during a time of great changes. We were following in jail the changes that had started. We followed them, we discussed them, we welcomed them. Thanks to a kind of understanding, how to put it, with a prisoner, usually not Albanian, because they had the abilities, we had ensured some kind of transistor radio that we secretly kept in the rooms of the jail we were in. And through them we heard news, information, that were given by radio stations, and also [radio] Tirana, which again, we listened to with special care. And we distributed that news in... we wrote them in letters and distributed them amongst prisoners from pavilion to pavilion, of course risking to be punished even in jail, at least with solitary confinement. There were prisoners who, although had been sentenced with political imprisonment - Xhafer Shatri, Isa Kastrati, and a few others - were punished also after they were sentenced, because of their activities in jail. Sometimes they also shared propaganda, a book they had read, then they were punished with more years in jail. So this wasn’t excluded either.

But we waited for [changes] and welcomed them. And we were ready to be engaged in pluralist life, which we considered a success and a historical chance for us to legalize our political activism until then. And that's what happened. After leaving jail, I had decided for a time to just watch. Most of my friends were engaged in the alternative of the time *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* [LDK, Democratic League of Kosovo], and in other political forces. And we had agreed in jail to be engaged in different political parties, but once there to function as a kind of catalyst to protect unity, to protect balance, to protect the orientation towards the immediate and long-term national goals, to protect the national spirit as well, and the morale which a political movement of this kind needed. And I think that, *summa summarum*, it did function like this. We waited longer. I also waited a long time. More could have been done, but nevertheless, political prisoners, with a few exceptions, proved themselves to be a cohesive, positive, progressive and mostly honorable force.

The nonviolent political alternative seemed appropriate to me at the time,, at that juncture. And the movement of '81 was politically nonviolent, as well as '68, and other movements, they were mostly nonviolent. But they weren't slaves to the concept of nonviolence. It wasn't a Christian form of nonviolence: if someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other. But it was mostly respecting the message of Sami Frashëri, "Let us demand kindly, because our rights may be demanded with kindness. But let us also have our rifles ready!" To demand with kindness, to try with kindness, to exhaust all opportunities given to us by the nonviolent path, but to not become slaves to it. And the flaw of the alternative of the '90s was precisely this, that the nonviolent strategy was overdone. And they say, the best way to discredit something just, is to take it to the level of the absurd, to turn it into absurdity. It's true that the nonviolent political strategy of the '90s didn't turn into a nonviolent political movement, as Gandhi and others said... Even Gandhi said, "If the situation is to choose between cowardice and war, I choose war!" Gandhi wasn't like the Adventists who didn't want to hear of weapons, of violence. But he believed in the potential of nonviolent violence, that's why he used it maximally, and was a model of it. But turning into its opposite means to pacify and passivize a nonviolent political movement. I think this was the mistake, and it was noticed during those years, and it cost us a lot. It cost Kosovo as well, and it also cost the nonviolent political movement itself.

I was for this second [option]: a nonviolent movement yes, but active, as well as passive, a combination. and institutional. We created the parliament, that's why we thought the parliament should be called into session, even if they jailed us. And in this sense we had a disagreement with the leadership of the LDK at the time. I was a vice-president of the LDK, and I had consideration, respect for other leaders as well. It was never anything personal between us, but in regards to the path that needed to be followed we had differences during this period. We held elections, and there was hesitation to call the parliament into session. There was even a stance to not call the parliament into session, that's why I offered, "We'll call it into session, and we'll take the responsibility. If it turns badly, we get jailed, we may even get killed, but let the process go forward, and let the others continue." However, it wasn't allowed.

And Adem Demaçi agreed to enter this game, to be in the parliament and take responsibility, because at the time he won the Sakharov Prize of the Council of Europe, and he had the opportunity to engage Euro-parliamentarians in this game. There were even promises from them, "If you call the parliament into

session, we'll come!" And in my opinion it was a very good opportunity to challenge in this way with our nonviolence, passive, as well as active, and institutional, comprehensive [action]. Perfectly Gandhian!

This didn't happen, but as a result entire generations were running away abroad. They were being expelled! Serbia was becoming well accommodated in Kosovo. It either wanted an ineffective form of nonviolence, which started happening at the end of the '90's, or an armed adventure, which it could have easily broken. We needed to give neither a chance, and I think we did well by not falling into either of these traps. We didn't take, or we didn't hold the flag of the nonviolent political movement, as progressive, advanced, and then the alternative of the student youth emerged. The students took this initiative in '97. And we still had a division there. The student movement was right! It demanded education, it had a basic right. It risked a bit, but it needed to risk. That's why we separated: those who opposed this, and those who supported it.

And furthermore something that shouldn't have happened then happened. The nonviolent alternative was democratic and had the very strong card of the democratic dimension. But a democratic being has to be proven first and foremost in its democratic functioning, in its consistency, in its democratic functioning. Its democratic functioning was degraded! It was turned into a kind of formality that was controlled, managed, and abused by the circle of the leadership. The continuation of this logic made the paralysis imposed by the authorities even more dangerous. And that's why all the conditions were created, I repeat, and especially the undemocratic functioning at the end, when Belgrade offered a kind of agreement with Kosovo, but within the scope of Serbia, with the return of a few rights that were taken away. And they were taken away from Kosovo at that time when practically all its rights, all the institutions were destroyed. And according to this logic, when a child demands cheese, he takes the bread, and forgets the cheese. Kosovo was in danger of being satisfied with having its bread returned, and nothing else. Serbia at the time was giving signs that it was ready. And official Serbia, and the quasi-opposition of Serbia, was ready to bargain with Kosovo's leadership but only with a part of Kosovo's leadership, under the condition that the solution be found within Serbia, with a few economic, education, cultural rights, and so on, but without independence and a republic, and under the condition that those whom they called irredentists be removed from the table – which means the representatives, or the members of the patriotic movement who had come from different generations.

This is the reason why we couldn't continue together. A division happened in the *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* and the *Lëvizja e Bashkuar Demokratike* [LDB, United Democratic Movement] was formed, which aimed to the unification of the entire Albanian political spectrum, and during this time also the UÇK [*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* – KLA, Kosovo Liberation Army], because as a result of what I said, the strong pressure of Belgrade and the continuing secret political movement of the *Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës* [LPK, People's Movement of Kosovo], and others, *Lëvizja Popullore* [LP, Peoples' Movement] later on, it protected that line of patriotic engagement, also outside the institutions. That's why there was a pressing need to unite all this potential, which the LDK wasn't ready for at the time. And in this way a reordering

was imposed, a repositioning in Kosovo, which then lead to the Rambouillet Conference.³² However, things moved positively, and in my opinion without these developments there wouldn't have been this change also of... and [this] stance of [our- international partners, or of the international decision-making centers..

Adequate representation was ensured then, there was LDK representation, LBD representation and KLA representation, with a role that we insisted be respected, for the special position of the KLA, because at the time the KLA was the most deserving force for the changes that were made, because they made the greatest sacrifices. The KLA was the most at risk of being discredited, and of being hit. That's why it needed to be favored. That's also what the agreement at the Rambouillet Conference was like, with its representation, there would be no talks without the KLA, and for the KLA to have its leadership in the delegation, and for the KLA to send a representative to lead the government we wanted to create. It was a prior agreement we had reached, before we decided to go to Rambouillet.

With all of the objections we had, the reservations we had, the Rambouillet Conference ended up, however, being positive for Kosovo. It made the turn and thanks to the fortitude manifested at the conference, even though there were also sides that could have been abused both by Serbia and its friends. We were aware of them, but we were convinced that it would pass. And it objectively passed, to a great extent. But that separation that's often heard of pro and contra, I objectively think that both sides were right in their approach. Those who defend Rambouillet have reasons, but they ignore the fact that if it wasn't for the continual resistance during the conference, and also afterwards, certain challenges, some pitfalls left by Rambouillet, wouldn't have been overcome. But those who were against could ignore some of the achievements of Rambouillet, but in fact, if I don't overdo it, they still did something good and treated that process as a link of the [overall] process, like a station where had we failed, we would have floundered, we would have been left behind. That's why I think they need to be seen in motion, as a process. This is how the opportunity was created for the great turn that Kosovo took, with NATO intervention, and maybe for the first time the creation of an interaction between the main armed force of the world and the patriotic, freedom loving, liberating forces, which together then with the alignment of Albania, also created the first historical alignment, how to put it, after the Second World War, which had also brought an alignment of this kind. And Kosovo wouldn't have been here without this interaction.

I'm happy that I was a part of this process, of the Rambouillet Conference, and of the process that preceded it. In my engagement I specifically had... and I, with my modest abilities, with my role as modest as it was, I aimed for precisely this: the protection of the process of solving the unresolved Albanian issue in its continuity, without burning benchmarks, and without sleeping through those benchmarks, without falling under the influence of any political force, but without excluding any political forces, by seeking their unification, and in this way optimize our missing potential in practical terms, in terms of activism, and war, very often also empirically, and so on.

³² The Conference of Rambouillet (Paris) in February 1999 was the last, failed effort to negotiate a peace between Milošević and the KLA.

Part Six

Jeta Rexha: Now if you could tell us about your family, meaning how did you meet your spouse, and where were you after the war, and during the war in fact?

Hydajet Hyseni: And now, this, how to put it, the family line is particularly painful, in many cases. My case may not be the most painful because maybe I had the luck, despite all, to have my whole family, even after jail. I managed to see both parents. Many people didn't have this luck, I mean, I managed to keep my family, not thanks to me, but my family managed to preserve itself. And I credit this first and foremost to my wife, who sacrificed a lot. It was very difficult for her to live in the village, during a time of lynching, isolation, boycotts, demonization... And his cause, with the lowest slander, which continued to be true in continuity. They never stopped! Because the mischief of UDBA never stopped in Kosovo, unfortunately even after jail, unfortunately even after the war, or today. Only the forms change, the ways, but its mischief goes on incessantly, with slander, intrigues of the lowest sort, of the most unbelievable kind. And it functions everywhere.

I'm very happy about this fact. My wife raised my children, our children, tooth and nail. We had three. And then, since we had two boys and one girl, we wanted to have one more after jail, with the hope that he would be raised differently. They grew up without me seeing them. And now he is a university graduate, Lirik, who is our fourth child. I'm very indebted to my spouse, and I try to compensate her. Without fake modesty I can say I've repaid her to a great extent.

But it wasn't only she. There was also the suffering of my parents, now deceased. My father, who himself spent five, six years in concentration camps, and then he had his only son in the same position. And he held himself up strongly, stronger than I thought. And my mother who had her brothers, her entire life [dealing] with jail, and then her only son. However, she never faltered. And I attribute this great endurance first and foremost to my family *rreth*, my village, my Përlepnicë, which is really unique in everything. There was never any boycott, there was never any isolation of families, there was no lynching. On the contrary, there was unprecedented solidarity. The youth of my village went like work brigades, they worked on my father's land. And I now see the happiness I saw in his face when he told me, "Son, don't worry! Everything is going well!" And he would mention this fact, "Young men and women came as a work brigade, and the fields were worked well!" They did the work as a sign of solidarity with the old man, but also with his son, and the cause for which he was sent to jail. And even today this puts me in their debt. Many of them are in different parties, they have different positions, but we're very close to each other, and I love them very much. And they respect me I think, to the right extent. And the individual can endure, a family can endure, only if he has an environment, a *rreth*, if he endures for the people.

This also explains what Kosovo has achieved. Kosovo achieved what it achieved because it proved that as a people, as a country, it's ready for fundamental change. Kosovo can achieve what it has only by demonstrating that it's ready for the changes that await it, for the integration into Europe, and for national integration, because these things don't exclude each other. It's absurd to think, "We need to

integrate into Europe, but we can't talk about integrating with each other." And why? Whom does it harm? How did Germany's integration into Europe harm anyone? Would Europe be integrated without Germany's integration? No! Europe wouldn't integrate if Germany didn't integrate. But even we, with our abilities, by integrating with each other, with our brothers on the other side of the border - which isn't ours, which we didn't create, which we do not want, which no one needs, even its removal doesn't harm anyone - it would only help in normalizing relations in our surroundings, even with our neighbors. Everyone around would benefit. And I'm sure that this will happen, but only on the condition that we rise to the level of responsibility that time demands of us.

I have many reasons to be unhappy with many things we did, and to... very often I, I'm often unsatisfied with myself. But regardless, I'm an irredeemable optimist as they say, unchanging, that even though we will be late, we'll maybe lose our way at some point, we'll slip somewhere, left, right, but regardless we'll overcome. I have this belief not just because I love our people, but because I have a lot of faith in them, that in moments of crisis... and as Adem Demaçi said, a person with his experience has proven... how to put it... he has created a model of consistency in resistance, "When they throw you at the bottom of the well, then you can't go any lower! Then walking forward comes, a revival, a return!" I'm convinced this people, regardless, will generate new forces, and is generating new forces, which will rise to the mission of historical responsibility demanded of them. And they will make this country its own master.

Jeta Rexha: What do you do today? What are you engaged in?

Hydajet Hyseni: I have... I have a good portion of my work, including the one from jail, that I haven't published, and I'm preparing it. This work has taken me a bit of a long time. There's a part very close to my heart, it's children's literature. And there are some poems, and each of them is a book in itself. And I'm thinking of gathering them into one shared publication. They're very close to my heart, because I really love children. And, the more I have to... how to put it, to deal with adults, the more I'm attracted to... how to put it, the spiritual world of children, which is pure, clear, without mischief. And I feel much indebted to them. I write a bit consistently. I also have other plans, I have, how to put it, an adequate opus also of journalistic writings, and others, which I haven't gathered, I haven't published, and they wait for me. I work at the Association of Former Political Prisoners, of course, pro bono work, but that motivates me a lot, because it gives me the impression that I'm doing at least a little bit for my people who also suffered the same, for my fellows in chains, and for those whom I didn't know, but who had their hands chained. It imposes a commitment upon me.

I'm also engaged in the party *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* [Self-Determination Movement]. I consider it a political force that... it's a political essence... how to put it, which is part of the continuum of these efforts of entire generations, and I think it's good that someone else represents this spirit. It's youthful in every respect: in age, and in mentality, and in vision, and in the demands it puts forth, and how it responds to the demands of the time, and of course, here and there also sometimes in the displays of youth, which some may not like. They can even be controversial sometimes, but regardless, it seems to me I too have to do my part. In a way, I feel like being with my children. Sometimes I may have small differences with them, but that which unites me with them is much stronger, special. Some tasks I can also do, as they do, but

when they do it, it seems more certain somehow. I'm a driver, a chauffeur, but when we go on family trips with the car, I always prefer one of my boys, or my daughters-in-law, or my daughter, to take the wheel. Because they are...I trust their eyes more, I trust their instincts more, I trust their hands more, and so on. And I feel good! Here and there, I might give them a warning, a suggestion, and so on. They don't misunderstand me!

Jeta Rexha: Thank you very much! For the end, if you have something to add?

Hydajet Hyseni: No, not...Now I'm also a little bit all over the place. To be honest, I feel like I had a conversation with two girls not for a recording, not for the media, but just a conversation like this. This doesn't always come out well, but well, that's how I felt!

Jeta Rexha: We're pleased to hear that! Thank you very much!