

INTERVIEW WITH IBISH NEZIRI

Pristina | Date: March 5, 2016

Duration: 121 minutes

Present:

1. Ibish Neziri (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (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

Ibish Neziri: I am Ibish Neziri, I am officially called Neziraj, but never in my life did I call myself differently than Neziri. I was born in July of 1957, in Bardhaniq, a village that more or less has approximately the same distance from Gjakova, Deçan and Klina, it's a mountainous region, in the middle of mountains. Through history it has been known as a freedom-loving place and as a place which has given its contribution to freedom, whether by keeping, saving or hosting fighters, from the Kaçak Movement,¹ to the soldiers of the last war, the soldiers of the KLA,² it was a KLA zone during the last war.

I was born in that village in a family....in a relatively big family, when I was born, my family consisted of around ninety members, we split from this big family unity during my childhood years, then I lived with my father, my brothers and my sisters. My father lived for 103 years, my mother lived for 86 years. I finished my primary school there, then I finished the gymnasium³ in Peja and I studied Albanian Language and Literature until 1980. In 1980 I was imprisoned because of my activism, of my activity in the underground organization which in that time was called *Fronti i Kuq Popullor* [People's Red Front],⁴ its center was in Bochum, Germany. When I got arrested, I got caught with some books and some posters which were prepared in order to be spread on Flag's Day.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you conduct this activity?

Ibish Neziri: We tried to conduct the activity in...all around Kosovo, we spread the posters all around Kosovo. While the group was the group...the organ...the branch of the group or the branch of the group of the organization *Fronti i Kuq Popullor* was in Peja, it had branches with which we actually didn't have contacts because of the illegality and the secrecy [of the movement], but we tried to

¹ 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.

² Albanian: *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosoves* (UÇK), Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

³ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

⁴ One of the groups of *Ilegalja*, a constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.

conduct our activity in Peja and in Pristina, however we got interrupted because I was arrested on November 19 and...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you get involved first, how did you get involved in this political activity?

Ibish Neziri: I just told you that I was born in a village which had always been a freedom-loving village, a place that had hosted and sheltered freedom fighters, they also stayed at my father's house during the war. I grew up among those stories, I grew up among the stories that I heard from my father and his friends, who often visited him, but also from my mother's side, who told me how she prepared food, how they came, how they came in and left. They had so many stories, now I cannot not tell you about an event which also has its funny side.

The paternal uncle of...to be concrete, Mehmet A. Grashkoci is the paternal uncle of the father of the current president,⁵ he was one of them, then Dema Liposhzari, Ramë Binaku from Dashinoci, there were other *kaçakë*, I am calling them the way the elders who stayed at our house for a long time used to call them. And in one case when they were at home, at the end of the [Second World] war, the Brigada e Bogës,⁶ Bogelska Brigada [Serbian] besieged the village and rounded up all the people in front of my father's house, because my father was sheltering *kaçakët*...this happens sometime around '45, it must be the beginning of '45, '45. "Halil, where are the *kaçakët*, where are the *kaçakët*?" They forced the village to bring the *kaçakët* out, you know. And an old man says, "More,⁷ comrade Vuçk," he says, "your rounding up of the village is useless, your rounding up of the village is useless, they have no food to eat for themselves, not to talk about the *kaçak*, *kaçakët* don't eat everything, they want meat and pita, and there are only two people who host *kaçak* here." "Who hosts the *kaçakët*?" He says, "I host the *kaçakët* and this old man here," a tired old man holding a stick and leaning on it. When he says, "I host them and this old man does," the old man raises the stick to hit him and says, "Don't talk! Why are you talking, Halil?" and wants to hit him with the stick, and this is followed by a general laughter then they say, "Let's leave because there's nothing here."

Next time they go and enter the *odë*,⁸ "Halil, do you know where the *kaçakët* are?" He says, "Yes," "But where are they?" "They had never been closer to you than now." "How come they had never been closer to me than now?" He says, "They had never been closer to you than now." He says, "You must be kidding me." He says, "I am telling the truth." The truth was that they were on the other side of the wall, I mean, there was only a wall separating them from the soldiers....the *kaçak*, from the soldiers of Yugoslavia. So, I grew up among these stories, this was one of the factors... one of the factors that had an impact on my formation. Then there are the books of the *rilindas*⁹ Naim,¹⁰ *O malet e Shqipërisë* [Oh

⁵ The interview was conducted at the time when Atifete Jahjaga was the President of Kosovo.

⁶ Partisan brigade.

⁷ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

⁸ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

⁹ Figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian political and cultural movement for national liberation.

Mountains of Albania] and so on, all the books, all the books that went, other books that came from Tirana, which we today unfairly deny, because to be honest we grew up and educated ourselves with their books, so this was also my formation.

Then there is another story about a teacher from Albania who was in our area, my father told us about him...When the teachers were expelled after the relations between Yugoslavia and Albania were cut off, he left an amanet¹¹ to my father and said, "Help education as much as you can, help education, because without education reaching its peak, Kosovo will never get rid," as my father said, "of the shkau."¹² He said, "When the education goes out, when the education reaches its peak." He said, "when the father works for the police and his child goes to school and when in the evening the child doesn't tell his father what he learned in school," he said, "that's when it reaches its peak."

And my father supported education very much, when I say he supported education, I mean in this regard, teachers came from Gjakova and the surroundings of Peja, so, they came from far away and he often told me, "Go to the hill of the village and check whether the light is on at school or not." And if the light was on at the school, that meant that there were teachers at the school. Since they couldn't go back since there was no other way of traveling but going back by foot, and walking home lasted three to four hours, he would send one of my brothers to pick up the teachers, he wouldn't leave them at school, you know, during the winter he kept the teachers more at his house than they stayed at their houses. These things all had an impact on my formation, they influenced my interest in further researching, in learning more and that's how the path of my formation happened.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened with...your imprisonment, how did you get there?

Ibush Neziri: As far as my information goes, I still don't concretely know. As far as I know goes, a friend of ours who came from Germany with an order for us was arrested and was released after three days and he blew our cover. I only found out later from an interview of his that he had been imprisoned at that time...in 1980. And it looks like...it looks like he was followed, it looks like he was followed and then the surveillance expanded after his meeting with me, then I started being surveilled and getting tailed by the State Security whose original name was UDB.¹³ And in November of 1980 I was arrested while preparing an action, there were two of us who were sentenced at that time, we were sentenced for enemy propaganda according to the famous Article 1100 ...sorry, I was punished for enemy propaganda according to Article 133 of the Penal Code of Yugoslavia which was a, a....a notorious Law or Article of the Penal Code, because one got punished just because of one's opinions, I mean, one didn't even dare to think, and we were sentenced according to that Article. I was sentenced two years of prison while the friend who came from Germany was sentenced one year and

¹⁰ Naim Frashëri was an Albanian poet and writer (1846-1990.) He was one of the most prominent figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the the nineteenth century Albanian national movement, together with his two brothers Sami and Abdyl. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Albania.

¹¹ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

¹² *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

¹³ *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration).

a half of prison. There were two more who were sentenced, they were from the Gjakova region, and that's how we remained in jail.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you...

Ibish Neziri: Four people in total, but we weren't connected, I mean, they couldn't establish a connection among us in order to sentence us under the same indictment, and their struggle to establish this group of the four of us failed, so we were sentenced two and two, we were sentenced under Article 133.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: It was surely more important, in order to punish you as a group, to construct a greater case.

Ibish Neziri: For sentencing, yes. For sentencing but...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, could you build a story of this political initiative? I mean, how did it start? How did you start engaging in it? Who was it organized by? What kind of ideals did it have?

Ibish Neziri: This was part of Fronti i Kuq Popullor at that time, there was not a major need for someone else to organize anything, just the contact with the literature was enough at first, the contact with the organization's statute, and friends found their friends, but without having some connection, something that brings friends close to each other, it was difficult to...bring friends together, that is why...I mean, this was, "Here I got a good book," or, "I was given a program which was interesting, here, read it. Is it good? Shall we do something?" This is how the way of creating the groups and the organizations was. At least I am talking about my group in this case.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who was...yes, if you could tell us who was part of the group?

Ibish Neziri: Who was part of the group, right? Yes, Malush Ademi and I were the first ones to be imprisoned, I mean Malush Ademi and I, Malush was in Germany and I was here. We were arrested first. Two or three others were questioned in the beginning of the '80s, they had contacts with us and that's how they were noticed. This is as for the first detention, at that time I was caught with a tract whose content I still remember, let me say it:

"Our century-old enemy, Yugoslav Titoism, is filling the prisons with Albanian patriots, but let them know that they cannot scare us and they can never take us away from the sacred war for national and social liberation and for the unity with our motherland, socialist Albania. Long live the Albanian people, long live the Party of Labor..Long live Albania, long live the Albanian Party of Labor with Enver Hoxha at its head."

This was the content of the tract I was caught with when I was arrested, it was a ten by ten centimeters card, it was red with black letters and it was a sticker, you just had to peel it and stick it wherever, that was that, that...let's say a poster, a tract.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How old were you when you were imprisoned?

Ibish Neziri: Let's count now... I was imprisoned... I was born on July 24, '57, imprisoned on November 19, '99, that means I was 23 years old, I was 23 years old when I got arrested. Then in the spring of '81...some other things happened, Yugoslavia's foundations started shaking exactly here in Pristina, where we are conducting this interview. Demonstrations started on March 11...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you part of them?

Ibish Neziri: I can't say I was part of them since I was in prison, at least I was not directly part of it, but I can say that...there was not, I mean it was not that my influence was not present, my influence and the influence of the organization in which we were active, I mean, those had influence too, the situation of Kosovo had influence too, also the circumstances which were created in Kosovo at that time. A hundred percent change happened in Kosovo in the year that marked the 100 anniversary of the Prizren League,¹⁴ people got enthusiastic, I mean they started to see things from a different point of view, they started to understand freedom in a different way, they started to see that.. Understanding necessity is freedom itself, Kosovo's liberation from Serbia was a necessity. That was, I mean...those events brought new circumstances, they brought new arrests and...there was someone who couldn't make it to the end and my name was again declined.¹⁵

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mean the protest of '81 affected the conditions of your detention? Did it bring...

Ibish Neziri: Did it cause me trouble?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean, did it affect it...I mean, were you suspected again? Did they....try to connect you to other groups?

Ibish Neziri: Yes, in the very beginning, in the very beginning, no. I started being questioned again after the arrest of a group from Gjakova, I got questioned, once I got questioned for a....I mean, someone among them mentioned my name...and they didn't just coincidentally mention it, they didn't mention it without reason. Then, there were others who were arrested and someone else also mentioned my name, and my name was declined, "Whom from?" "From Ibish." "Whom by?" "By Ibish."

The two last summers before I was arrested, I myself followed their footsteps in order to create connections with illegal organizations who were active in Western Europe. In 1978 I went to

¹⁴ Alb. *Lidhja e Prizrenit*. Alliance of Albanian beys founded in 1878 as a reaction to the decisions of the Treaty of Santo Stefano and the Congress of Berlin which redesigned the borders of the Ottoman Empire and neighboring countries. The League asked for Albanian autonomy in the Ottoman Empire and awakened demands for self-determination.

¹⁵ Reference to the Albanian grammar, which has declensions for names. Ibish changed form according to the answers given to the interrogators by other political prisoners who incriminated him.

Switzerland but got back from there without creating any connection, then in 1979 I went to Germany and I brought enough literature from there, I brought books, I have newspapers, various magazines which were handed down from one person to another, then they were read...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did they contain?

Ibish Neziri: The content...it's known what they contained, for example: *Lëvizja Patriotike e Kosovës dhe Hasan Prishtina* [The Patriotic Movement of Kosovo and Hasan Prishtina], *Kosova vatra e shqiptarisë* [Kosovo the Hearth of Albanianism], Ramiz Alia's¹⁶ Speech on the Albanian League of Prizren on the 100th anniversary of the Albanian League of Prizren, then *Shqipëria e Re* [the New Albania] newspaper, *Zëri i Popullit* [People's Voice] some numbers, then the *Lahuta e Malësisë* [The Highland Lute] of Gjergj Fishta,¹⁷ there was the *Tradhtia e Kapllan Resulit* [The Betrayal of Kaplan Resul], a book whose authorship was actually stolen because Kaplan is proven not to be the author of the book, but it is a book that was passed down from one person to another, and had an extraordinary influence on the youth of that time. There were books by Enver Hoxha, there were books by Enver Hoxha, especially *Pjesa e shtatë* [The Seventh Piece], which talks very much about Kosovo and the directives that Enver Hoxha or the Central Committee of the Albanian Party of Labor and the Albanian Government sends to their diplomatic representatives at the United Nations, especially to Mehmet Shehu and the others: what their statements should be, what they should say about Kosovo, and then I remember well an expression there that says, "Rregulloja mirë samarin atij revizionistit të Beogradit" [Fix the saddle of that revisionist from Belgrade], he was talking about Tito, fix the saddle of Tito in the meeting of the United Nations Security Council, which is still held nowadays.

These were the books, the books that actually talked a lot about Kosovo, they talked about the arrests because there were always arrests in Kosovo, even though there was silence on some of them. Adem Demaçi¹⁸ was imprisoned in 1975 for the third time with many other young intellectuals, also Metush Krasniqi, Kadri Osmani and Xhafer Shatri. I mean, there were many others who were imprisoned and they always updated these issues in books and various things, various magazines, or special editions, that is why they were handed down from person to person, the books that showed the need for the creation of the Republic of Kosovo, the seventh republic within Yugoslavia, the creation of the Republic of Kosovo, which I still don't think is the right thing to be, because the Republic of Kosovo or the independent State of Kosovo wasn't the Albanians' project in the time of illegality, when my friends and I were active, but their project was the unity... the necessary unity of all Albanian territories in a single state, because it's not so long since...at least not historically, that our territory was separated and occupied and these were not those...

¹⁶ Ramiz Alia (1925-2011), successor of Enver Hoxha, the last Communist leader of Albania and the first democratic President (1991-92).

¹⁷ Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero. Notably he was the chairman of the commission of the Congress of Monastir, which sanctioned the Albanian alphabet. In 1921 he became the Vice President of the Albanian parliament, and in 1937 he completed and published his epic masterpiece *Lahuta e Malcís*, an epic poem written in *Gheg* dialect of Albanian.

¹⁸ 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.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How...

Ibish Neziri: This is what made us get engaged and organized, even though we always found an excuse, let's say November 28, "Let's mark November 28 in this way," or, "Let's protest, let's start the protest for food," as it happened on March 11, while food was not the issue in the background, but the issue was...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The protest in the canteen...

Ibish Neziri: Sorry?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ..How the food in the canteen was taken as a pretext, can you explain that?

Ibish Neziri: The pretext was that the food is allegedly bad, that the food is allegedly not good and the long waitings in the canteen and so on, at that time I was imprisoned, I mean, I am imagining it, based on the conversations with other friends, but in the background there was...the beginning... the goal, the beginning of the goal of the demonstrations, against Kosovo occupation, against keeping Kosovo under occupation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was your time spent in prison at that time?

Ibish Neziri: My time spent in prison at that time? If we talk about the period of investigation, it was a horrible period. During the investigation there are tortures that a healthy mind of a person cannot accept, they are worse than the Gestapo of Hitler, and they are worse than the investigators of Stalin in the Soviet Union. The tortures that the youth of Kosovo went through...and the questions were mainly these: Who, whom with, where and stuff like this, because they were always interested in creating...creating connections and expanding the circle of the people in prison.

They had a special method, they talked to you, they told you that, "You did this, this, this, this..." I mean, they made up the action, as if you did it and... You denied that you did that, then they had worse tortures that one cannot even imagine and then they repeated the same thing, "You did this, this, this, this," and the torture began again, that is to say that after the denial they brought people to the point where in order to stop the tortures, "What did you do, tell us or do you want us to start again?" And then they...one repeated what one heard from the investigator or the investigators, I mean, one repeated, "Yes, I did this, this, this, this," and this happened only because they wanted to stop the tortures, to avoid the tortures, and they denied those things again in court, but the court, actually the Yugoslav courts didn't care about anything, the charges of the Yugoslav UDB were enough for them.

In this case, I cannot not mention one concrete example to study and prove this, you can find it in the book *Këtu jam për t'i luftuar armiqtë* [I am here to fight the enemies], a monograph about the martyr to the nation Xhemal Fetahaj. He was imprisoned when he was seventeen years old, when he was

seventeen...I mean, his activism stopped before he turned seventeen, and it stopped ten days before the war came to its end, since he fell by the Serbian army's lines, while fighting very close to them, that's where he was killed. You know, I had the exchange of letters, which is in the book, it was put in the book, among the State Security, the investigating judge and the prosecutor, you know, a triangle-shaped exchange of letters giving each-other instructions of how to act in the case of Xhemail Fetahaj. You know, a copy of the documentation is also published in the book. This was their method.

At that time, after the investigation, I was imprisoned in November, then on March 22, 23...on March 22 I had the court hearing, on March 22, 1981, you know, ten days after the beginning of the demonstrations in Pristina and I was sentenced two years of prison...two years of prison, while new investigations started in August, again...this time not with two people, this time they made up a group of 13 people including me, and the same procedure of investigation again...the same procedure of investigation again, it lasted from August to February of 1982, and the second time I was sentenced with a single sentence, I mean, the first sentence plus the second one was six years as the leader of the group Fronti i Kuq Popullor for the Peja region.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mean that now they made a kind of connection between you and the new prisoners?

Ibish Neziri: Yes, and me....?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Like that...

Ibish Neziri: They established a connection between the new prisoners and me, and the Fronti i Kuq Popullor for the Peja region came out, because I was sentenced six years of prison as its leader, and...with this case I... because, of course, you are interested in the details and I mention this case, I was sentenced...in February, the court hearing lasted three days. My father died at the age of 103 on March 17, I found it out in an extraordinary visit because the ordinary visits were made on the 1st and the 15th of the month, a visit that lasted for five minutes, it didn't last longer, and it was between a metal grill, I mean we had a metal net between us, which didn't allow you to even put your fingers between its holes in order to touch the finger of, let's say, your mother or your sister when they came to visit. I mean, I found it out in an extraordinary visit of my brother which lasted only three minutes, until he managed to communicate the news of my father's death, that's how much the visit lasted and they cut off my visit and not that day, but the next day, they put me in the dungeon just to break my soul. You know, the dungeon is a small room where you stay alone without anyone else, without...you know...maybe one wants to exchange two-three words with someone else in such situation, but I was totally alone there, and it was done just to break my soul, it was done with an order from above and the order from above was the order from the State Security.

My investigations were led by...I mean the investigations about me were led by Slavković Milim...Milivoje, the deputy director of the State Security in Kosovo and Asllan Sllamniku, a criminal,

because I wasn't surprised by Slavković being such a criminal, but a *shqipfolës*¹⁹ criminal such as Asllan Sllamniku, a criminal who came to my investigations with some hairy hands, like a gorilla, he came close to me and said, "You are not even salad for my lunch. You have no idea how many corpses have grass growing over them...you have no idea how many people's graves have grass growing over them because of these hands," and showed me those hands of his {shows how he held his hands}, he showed those hands of his to me like this, "You're not even salad or my lunch, you're not even salad for my lunch." He would fold me well, nail me well, take my glasses off and then smash me...like this...When they came for the first time in August, both of them, because they finished the investigations for the first and second time, but when they came for the second investigations in August 1992, pardon, August 1991 [this must be 1981-1982], Slavković Milivoje told me, "*Gde si mi Ibish Neziri? U novembar si me prevario ali dajem ti reč ne možes više.*" [Where are you Ibish Neziri? You tricked me in November, but I give you my word that you cannot anymore], and that's when the second series of investigations started and were followed by the sentence of six years of prison.

My only stay in Peja was one week. If we talk about the wardens of the prison in Peja, I have deep respect for all of them except two-three of them, I have an extraordinary respect for them...extraordinary... extraordinary respect because they really deserved it, they treated us as well as they dared to, they treated us... extraordinarily well, as much as they had space to do so, two-three others identified heart and soul with UDB. And at that time there was a violent director in the prison of Peja', there was a violent director, a violent director, and a warden who is now deceased, a warden who kept the contacts between me and my other friends in prison, his name was Bilal Përgjegjaj, he goes and warns the director of the prison, "We have one person who hasn't eaten for a week," and the director comes to me at 9:00 PM and asks me to give him an account of why I haven't eaten and I was forced to say, "Go away, get out of here, leave me alone, get out of here, I haven't announced a hunger-strike because if I did so I would take notice of you but I haven't, and leave me alone." He leaves cursing, "May you never put anything in your mouth."

And two days later, together with twenty-six others from the prison of Peja, among whom two or three others were from Prizren and two or three from Mitrovica, I took off to Zagreb by bus. For us it was an unknown direction, we didn't know where we were, by total coincidence in a place where...the bus stopped upon the request of some of the prisoners who had physiological needs and I saw a plaque with Nova Gradiška in it, that's when I guessed we were... we were in Croatia and they were sending us to the Zagreb prison in Petrinjska 7...it was terrible inside and outside, but they kept us there for a long time, they kept us there in a van for three-four hours, chained, chained and locked with padlocks which often cut deep in our skin and our hands swelled, they put us inside a refrigerator truck, they put us there and sent us again to an unknown direction for us, we only found out where we were one week later.

When we got inside the prison yard, they got us with our backs to the wall and there were buildings on four sides, one of my younger friends with whom I was sentenced and who was close to me says, "They want to shoot us," because he saw them armed and with dogs, they were prepared. He was

terrified. I say, "Don't worry," as the door opened before we left that place and from there the director of the prison, Mileš Polarić, a criminal...a...a...a terrible criminal says, "*Je li, ovi su patrioti Envera Hoxha, je li?*" [They are, are these are the patriots of Enver Hoxha, are they?]. I mean, this is how they put us with our backs to the wall and I was the one to stay there the longest among the prisoners. Before us they had sent another group and the transfer of...of the first group had started, of the people of the first group to other Croatian prisons.

And when we went there, the first day, the moment we went there, we were put under... terrible torture, every prisoner was beaten, they were all young people, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23 year old, there were also old people, but very few of them. 75 Albanian prisoners went through that prison in total, and also people came with monthly shifts from the prisons underst[and]...pardon, there were monthly shifts of wardens coming from all over Croatia, from all the prisons of Croatia, under the slogan, "Who wants to beat Albanians?" And the torture there didn't stop, day and night, we were tortured day and night.

The corridor was over sixty meters long and people were forced to clean all of it with a toothbrush in the most mocking possible way. They brought the blanket to the corridor, a mattress on...on the blanket, they put a prisoner on the mattress and forced two other prisoners to drag the mattress as if they were cleaning and polishing the corridor. You know, this was the way we were treated, they forced us to stand for long hours. There was an Albanian warden who was not known by anybody there and was named Pero in order for us not to understand who he was, however the world is small and people eventually get to know each-other, he would come to the door and listen to what we were talking about in order to spy. He was Agim Sejdiu from the region of Istog, from...If I am not mistaken, he was from Studenica, and we only found out who he was because of the Albanian desire to light cigarettes....

We smoked cigarettes, we were all smokers and they didn't give us cigarettes...they gave us the cigarettes but not the lighters, they didn't give us the lighters and they came and lighted our cigarettes whenever they wanted. Once, in an evening, they opened the door to light our cigarettes, he lighted the cigarettes, it was he, Pero, Agim Sejdiu, zvani Pero, or Agim Sejdiu called Pero, and when he lights his cigarette, his hand instinctively goes to his heart which is an Albanian gesture, and this way...this way he gets unmasked. Agim Sejdiu is unmasked, he is not Pero but Agim Sejdiu, then the news circulated room after room, that Pero is not...but...Pero is not...Pero is Albanian, Pero is Albanian, in order to let the other prisoners know and be careful.

After two hundred and thirty days in that prison, in the end I remained all alone, I got out of that prison weighing sixty-six kilograms and dressed in warm winter clothes, prison winter clothes which also included heavy boots, the shoes...the shoes that are used in... construction sites. I mean, such was the Croatian prison [it must have been Gospić - added upon request of the speaker] and from the prison in Croatia [it must have been Gospić - added upon request of the speaker] in December 1982 I was sent, also chained, I was sent by train, to the prison of Zagreb, and from the prison of Zagreb I was sent to the prison of Starogradiška. There were some of those with whom...with whom we had been together in Gospić. There we found Adem Demaçi, our symbol of resistance, the symbol of our

freedom, and I stayed in that prison for four years, ten days less than four years. I was in the same room with Adem Demaçi for some time.

Labor was required from everyone in that prison. The living conditions were extraordinarily bad, the beds were very bad, very old mattresses, very old blankets, a terrible dirt. These were the conditions and circumstances in which the Albanian youth were imprisoned. It was an abnormal prison, it was a prison for recidivists. There were people who had been sentenced thirty-two times, there was one person who had been sentenced up to thirty-two times, I mean, in that prison there were people sentenced from two times to thirty-two times. And there were no rooms with one, two, three or four people, but with thirty-six, thirty-eight people in one room. There were people of all categories that one cannot even imagine now. It was a real human baseness, a violation of the prisoners' rights in the worst possible way.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How were the days spent in the same room with Demaçi, I mean, did you keep any connection with other Albanians, did you have a certain articulated political resistance during your time inside, how...how...

Ibish Neziri: Resistance...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you resist all of those?

Ibish Neziri: Our political resistance was the same without any change {coughs}, each according to their beliefs. There were no variations among the political prisoners. There were no breaks, there were not, I mean, we all stood stoically. The prison of Staragradiška was not an ordinary prison, in fact it was not a prison for Albanians, no matter the conditions which I described earlier. The prison of Staragradiška was a University for Albanians, transformed into such by Adem Demaçi and the prisoners themselves, because we went out for walks except during the winter. There were no walks during the winter, in the labor department, in the pavilion, while during the spring, summer and fall we had the afternoon walks, twice a day on Saturdays, there were walks on Saturday and Sunday. During those days we went out for walks and we never let Adem Demaçi walk alone, he walked together with us. That is to say, two-three people were with him, and those walks were a school, because Adem Demaçi gave various lessons, he gave various explanations, Adem Demaçi explained. The topics were: the history of Albanians, the geography of the homeland, human rights, various stories, various political, historical, sociological, philosophical topics, also international affairs.

All kinds of topics were discussed in the prison of Staragradiška. The prison pre-paid the daily press, one copy for each language, also Rilindja²⁰ came there. But Rilindja was the speaking trumpet of *Lidhja Socialiste e Popullit Punues të Kosovës* [The Socialist League of the Working People of Kosovo] which today is so glorified, but in fact was nothing more than a talking trumpet of Yugoslav organs. We took the press, we pre-paid, each of us had a pre-paid magazine. And if I read Duga intervju, Nin or

²⁰ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

Ilustrovana Politika,²¹ then I highlighted the articles that each-one of us had to read, the articles that had a useful content. The others did the same, and Adem Demaçi was unsurpassable on this, he would highlight every article, with the motto that don't you dare not read them, with the message of don't you dare not read them, and the press would be handed down from one person to another. We read it, it was officially pre-paid, and it legally came to us, then we handed it down, it would circulate, we would exchange the newspapers with other pavilions. But surprisingly, the prisoners knew how to do other things as well, we also managed to have a radio in the prison.

The radio was all made up. There was a carton box in the prison. The knobs for the volume and the stations were toothpaste caps and we listened to it during the night with our heads under the blanket, with our heads under the blanket, with headphones, and the next day we told our friends the news. I had the chance to have that radio for a long time, and first, when we told the news to Demaçi, he would carefully listen to it, but after two-three times, he came, "Where are you getting this news?" He asks, "Where are you getting this news?" And we couldn't lie to baci,²² we had to tell baci the truth. "Bacë, we have a radio, this and that..." Then his reaction was a bit harsh, for nothing else but for the fact that he felt pity for us, because, "If they catch you with the radio, then you will be put through something really bad in the lockup, you will be punished." But when he was convinced that we weren't thinking about giving up in that direction, he said, "Keep it in turns, and the one who keeps it the longest, let him keep it..." I had it for one month, I kept it longer and I was updated about the events, when I reported the news, I said a bit more, and maybe I even made something up, some more words (smiles), he told me, "Keep the radio."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was reported in the radio?

Ibish Neziri: I listened to Radio Tirana, I listened to Radio Tirana, I listened to the BBC, I listened to Voice of America, I mean, I listened to what all the foreign radios said about Yugoslavia. And...I mean, the first news we got, the first news was when the Belgrade group was imprisoned, the Djilas²³ group with 28 people, it was known as the the Francuska 7.²⁴ They were imprisoned, due to a platform, how am I supposed to know, with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and those, I mean, I interpreted this news to Demaçi in the morning. They were imprisoned on Saturday, and the news was spread on Saturday evening, and the next morning, on Sunday, I told Demaçi, "Bac, this happened," and word by word he said, "See Bac," he calls me with another name, he only called me Ibish once, and never again, he still calls me, "Kërlezhë" [Krlëža]. Krlëža is a Croatian encyclopedist, and he still calls me Krlëža and he never called me differently than that, he told me, "See Krlëža, Belgrade is trying to burn the flames in Kosovo today, but don't forget that that fire is going to explode in Belgrade." And there's no place for my comment here, we all know what happened later, what happened on March 24

²¹ Serbian newspapers.

²² *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful term for an older person.

²³ Milovan Djilas (1911-1995) was a Yugoslav politician, author and dissident. Although he was a communist and had fought as a partisan, Djilas became one of the most vocal critics of the Yugoslav communist elite.

²⁴ "Francuska 7" is how the readings and discussions at the Serbian Writers Union were known. It was an important venue for dissenting authors.

or 28 in 1999, I mean, the fire exploded in the middle of Belgrade, and I mean, so...The prison of Starogradiška was a school for Albanians, it was a university led by Demaçi.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did he continue staying there while you were there?

Ibish Neziri: Adem Demaçi, Adem Demaçi, Adem Demaçi stayed there, I left him there in the room number 28 of the fourth pavilion of the prison of Starogradiška, the day I got out of prison. Adem Demaçi got out of prison four years later, on April 12 or 13, 1990.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened with you after prison?

Ibish Neziri: After prison I joined the organization again, but this time not the Fronti i Kuq Popullor, because the Fronti Popullor merged with other organizations, the *Lëvizja Nacional-Çlirimtare e Shqiptarëve në Jugosllavi* [National-Liberation Movement of Albanians in Yugoslavia], the OMLK, *Organizata Marksiste Leniniste e Kadri Zekës* [Marxist Leninist Organization of Kadri Zeka]. The first one was [the organization of] Jusuf Gërvalla's,²⁵ it merged and they established the *Lëvizja Popullore ... the Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Shqiptarëve në Jugosllavi* [People's Movement for the Republic of Albanians in Yugoslavia], and I was a member of that organization from then on. I continued my activity within the organization, but right after the military service, only four months later ...right after I got out of prison I was forced to go to military service, and I think there was no older soldier than I in Yugoslavia, because I was thirty and the secretariat of People's Defense, the Municipal Secretariat of People's Defense was forced by UDB to send me to military service.

I finished my military service in Ljubljana, and it was a special chapter of my life, a chapter where there were provocations everyday, various provocations, they tried to make up some excuse or reason to arrest me again. But I had a long experience behind myself, I was careful and not only did I take care of myself, but also of the Albanian youth who were in the military service. Because during those years many Albanians were arrested and I was careful not to become a target of the courts, neither I nor the other prisoners, pardon, nor the other soldiers, the Albanians who were serving in that cantonment. And many years passed, it was 1987-88, I mean, from March to March, and still to this day in one way or another I have contacts with people with whom I finished my military service, we are always in touch since that time, because we were bonded by an extraordinarily tough time.

After finishing the military service, I saw that I was not likely to find a job, I counted the profession of a lawyer as my profession, because in the end of the day I was thinking of opening a law office, that's why I started studying law by correspondence at the Faculty of Law. I did not finish the Faculty of Law and I worked, I continued until 1990. During that time, a friend, with whom I was together in prison, led - he was not a political [prisoner] but [had been jailed for] something to do with communication, if I am not mistaken -, led a discotheque in Pristina and made me an offer, "Choose your position...I am doing all I can do, choose the job you want to do in the discoteque, be it a DJ, or whatever" I didn't

²⁵ Jusuf Gervalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and also nationalist activist killed in Germany together 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.

know what else to do but be a coat-checker and I worked as a coat-checker during the winter season in that discotheque until the '90s.

I was always active in the organization, I led the District Council of the *Lëvizja Popullore të Kosovës* [People's Movement of Kosovo], of the *Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës* [People's Movement for the Republic of Kosovo], because it constantly changed its name, today it is only *Lëvizja Popullore të Kosovës* after two....after 1990. I was the leader of the Council for the Peja region within this organization, and we continued with banners, slogans and various actions.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was its character now, because we are in another political situation?

Ibish Neziri: The character of the split, the character of the split from Yugoslavia, the character of the split from Serbia, I mean, the Kosovo Republic began to be seen as a step towards [national] unity, the declaration of Kosovo, the status of Republic for Kosovo was a step towards unity, a step towards the implementation of the first project, or the first program of the *Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you feel the fall of Yugoslavia?

Ibish Neziri: Could we feel it? No, we didn't feel it...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, because the changes had already started in '88...

Ibish Neziri: No, we didn't feel it, we didn't feel it, we didn't feel that, but we worked for it to fall. This is when the downfall of Yugoslavia began and ended, and I was active in that organization until 1990 and after, but in 1990 I started working in journalism.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which newspaper for?

Ibish Neziri: The system changed in Croatia, people changed in Croatia, other people came there. There came people with whom I was in prison, and one of the prisoners of the prison of Staradiška founded a newspaper called Hrvatska Danas in 1990, not Danas, but Hrvatska Danas. It was the first independent newspaper in the former Yugoslavia of the post-World War II period, and it was engaged for confederalism in Yugoslavia. Ante Taljančić was its editor and I was hired by him in order to...to cover Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. I wrote for that newspaper under the nickname Jore Misić, then I worked for another Croatian newspaper, for Marko Veselica's newspaper, a biweekly party newspaper, I published in this newspaper under the nickname Sokol Nika. So, in this newspaper I wrote about the situation of Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, I have some articles published on it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you report about it?

Ibish Neziri: Sorry?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you report, did you go to the sites of events or...where did you work?

Ibish Neziri: A roundtable was once held in the Informative Center of Kosova, which was led by the LDK,²⁶ they discussed it [my reporting] and I don't know whether they intended to warn me for criticizing them too much. You know, I criticized them too much at that time, and I don't know whether they wanted to warn me or fight me, I still don't know... But I know, Ibrahim Berisha and Milaz...Milazim Krasniqi, one of these two took me as an example, because at that time I was working for some... because I didn't finish telling about all of the jobs I held... He said, "We have information from the field that the colleague from Belgium, where is he from? From Belgium? Where is he from? You can always see him at the site of the event, while all of you, the others, come here and wait for the report that we are giving at 3:00 PM." I worked... besides these two newspapers, I worked for Radio Copenhagen, Radio Voice of Kosovo from Copenhagen, a show in Albanian. I worked for Zëri i Kosovës, the newspaper of the Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës here in Switzerland. Then I worked for the Australian radio-television EBC, they had their headquarter in Zagreb, the headquarter for Southeast Europe, and I reported for them too, I mean...

Then my job situation changed in 1990 and after...I got pretty involved in journalism and I mean, I was well-situated. During this time I was in charge of contacts with the Croatian government for the organizations to discuss certain issues, because the organization to which I contributed was an organization that had every means of liberation on its program, the armed fight too, if the democratic ways didn't give results. I was in charge of the contacts with the Croatian government in order to talk about arming the Albanians. I was in charge of this for the organization and I had contacts, I started from Djuro Perica, he was the leader of the Republican Commission, the Parliamentary Commission of Croatia for the supervision of the legality of the work of the State Security. I was in prison together with him for a long time, the contacts started with him, then Janko Bobetko and Zlatko Bobetko and so on. I mean, I was... I always used it, I went on trips to Zagreb under the guise of a journalist, [as if] I had to show up in the editorial office once a month, although I did not need to, and I always used that as an excuse to travel to Zagreb. And that's how it happened.

Then in 1990 began the...the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation began in February. Here I want to give, or I want to specify something that I almost always happened to see as a...to hear news, to hear incorrect news as something incorrect. They say that the reconciliation [Action] began in Lumbardh. The Reconciliation didn't begin in Lumbardh because no one reconciled in Lumbardh. In Lumbardh, if I am not mistaken, because I wasn't there that day, they took seven days of besa,²⁷ but no one reconciled. I mean, that's why in... Reconciliation began in February, 1990. The demonstrations that happened at that time in '88 were the motive, the protests and the demonstrations of '89 and '90... I participated in all of the demonstrations and the role of the Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës, not only in Peja, but all around Kosovo was extraordinary in all of those...in the organizing of those protests in a direct and indirect way. Then we all know that two of the greatest militants among the leaders of the

²⁶ *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

²⁷ In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for

Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës , Afrim Zhitia and Fahri Fazliu, were killed in Kodra e Diellit here in Pristina on November 2, 1989. These people's role in organizing these demonstrations was extraordinary, also in the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. I mean...not to say all of them, but a big part of those who participated in blood reconciliations were part of the Lëvizja Popullore t'Kosovës...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did the reconciliation start for you, I mean the Movement for Reconciliation? How was the first contact?

Ibish Neziri: I can't talk, I can't talk about the first contact, because I am not part of the first contact and the first five, I am not. That is why I cannot talk...I don't know...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you get in touch with the Movement?

Ibish Neziri: We got in touch because there were people who knew each-other, we knew each-other and we joined them without some special procedure, there was no procedure. It was an organization of goodwill, it was a group that actually transformed into a movement which again for the sake of correctness, for the sake of truth, I have to say it wasn't founded by the intellectuals of Kosovo. The intellectuals of Kosovo were taken out of their cabinets. Respect for Anton Çetta! He is the first person, the person, a person who deserves everything, every good epithet, Anton Çetta is the person who always said, I mean, maybe he is the first person who always said it in the best way, in the most right way, in the most loyal way, "The youth is doing this, not I." I mean, people were taken out of their cabinets, the intellectuals...and Anton Çetta who didn't wait for the second word but went out right away and led this action, he was put at the head of this action by the youth and Anton Çetta served it and led it in a brilliant way.

I mean, they were taken out, the intellectuals were taken out of their offices. And Zekeria Cana, Mark Krasniqi, Ramiz Kelmendi and Mehmet Halimi joined the youth, and the youth being the way it is, it is a honest youth, they ran, they finished the work and put the professors at the head. There were cases when they mobilized to stretch out the hand of reconciliation and we said, "Thank you very much, but you deserve another honor because you are doing a great act, a great thing, and you as a family, this family deserves to be honored by Anton Çetta. That is why we will come here with Anton Çetta or with other professors." This is how it was, regarding the... because many times... you might've heard about this, the intellectuals, the youth did it, and they put the intellectuals at the head of it. Meanwhile, if we talk about the structure of the reconciliation çeta,²⁸ of the reconciliation activists, most of them were political prisoners, people who just got out of prisons, people who suffered, people who proved themselves in different situations and circumstances. That is why this was one of the reasons why the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation was successful. The other reason is that Albanians have traditionally reconciled before wars. It's known at the time before the League of Prizren when the reconciliation of blood feuds began with Binak Alia and other mountain people, it is known by the name Islihat²⁹ and bloods were reconciled, and Sylejman Vokshi took the besa for those

²⁸ Armed band, by extension, a band of people united by a purpose.

²⁹

who didn't manage to reconcile, he said, "All blood feuds are in my besa, and whoever kills someone for revenge, will have to deal with Sylejman Vokshi." Sylejman Vokshi was a Minister of War. We didn't have such power, we didn't have such capacity.

Part Two

Ibish Neziri: It's the issue of the structure of the participants, all of them were prisoners...not all of them, but most of them were political prisoners, people who had proven themselves in some of the most difficult circumstances, people who had participated in various protests and demonstrations, they were students, members of families who were persecuted by the ruling power, who... did not tired of working in the field day and night. There were cases, when there were the demonstrations that happened in Kosovo during those periods and there were those who said, "I would be pleased to participate in the demonstration, but I am afraid to go out because we are in blood feud and I am afraid I can be killed by the enemy." He didn't have...he was not afraid to be killed by the Serbs, because he didn't mind about it, but he was afraid to be killed by the enemy, but not from the Serbs. These were the factors that motivated us to take action.

Then, the Belgrade press in the cheapest way possible, in the most unprofessional possible way, in the most inhuman possible way, showed up with reports that people were killed because of revenge, "They are being killed because of revenge, they are killing each-other, we are not killing them." And that's when it started, these were the reasons why the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation started, and this Action caused a great concern in Belgrade. Belgrade was concerned by this Action. This Action attracted many international media outlets, they came...here I met the journalists of the radio station...of the Australian radio-television that engaged me to work for them.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you write about Reconciliation while you were connected to many television agencies?

Ibish Neziri: Yes, we reported, and there was no international agency that didn't give a report about what happened here, about the reconciliations that were happening, including Verat e Llukës, the reconciliation at Verat e Llukës or the gathering which gathered around one million people, the gathering of Rugova, the gathering in...all around Kosovo, the gathering of Karaqevë and many various other gatherings. I mean, these gatherings were reported everywhere, there were reportages about them everywhere, there were comments about this Action. And this lasted for one year. It reconciled over one thousand bloods, conflicts and so on. When we talk about blood feuds reconciliation, I cannot not mention two cases, there are many cases to be mentioned, but two of them are more characteristic.

One of them, an old man stood up right after we told him that we were from Kosovo. I acted with a service team, part of which were, I will start, there was Ramë Buja, Bejadin Hasani from Bujanovc, Avni Dauti and Atdhetar, or Guximtar, not Atdhetar but Guximtar Burnishti from Struga, Murat Lumani from Struga, Sadete Zhitia, the sister of Afrim Zhitia. There was Rrahmon Dini, who is no longer alive, and

who died as a result of war wounds, he died after war. A very great man, a man in whom I always found something new when I met with, I always found new virtues, a former political prisoner. Then there was Isuf Halimi in Presheva, there was Adnan Abdullahu together with his brothers, with Tahir and Xhemaj in Tetovo, there was Xhevat Ademi and the other group, the group of youth from Tetovo, whose names...I cannot remember all their names.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which area did you operate in ?

Ibish Neziri: We operated...we were a service team. We operated almost everywhere where there were the most difficult cases, in the areas of Llap, Gollak, Gallap. Then some relatively difficult cases, in the surroundings of Pristina, in some villages of Pristina, in Grashtica and such. Then we were active in Presheva and Bujanovc, we went through all of those villages of Presheva and Bujanovc by foot, we were active in Tetovo for days, in Tetovo's surrounding until Gostivar, and I don't remember failing any case of reconciliation where we intervened. That is to say that we were a mobile team, we moved, we weren't concentrated in one place. Then I mentioned another case because as I said that the Albanians traditionally reconciled with each-other before wars. We had a case where they constantly struggled to reconcile two families and it was impossible for them to reconcile, known people had intervened, pleq³⁰ as they called them...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the reason behind their blood feud?

Ibish Neziri: A misunderstanding, they had a kind of misunderstanding, it was not blood feud but it depends on how you interpret it, it could be a blood feud and it could not be a blood feud, but the misunderstanding had gone so far, that there was no one to reconcile them. One child had died, and the child was suspected not to have died naturally, but to have been killed, how do I know, I mean, we never looked for the ones to blame, because we would reconcile no one if we looked for the ones to blame. And the old man would leave the house, he only waited once for us and would leave the house, during that time the old man had pushed his son to go out and take revenge, kill the enemy and... our concern was how to catch the old man while he was at home, because once we caught him, he wouldn't be able to leave.

Then the...the preparation of the ground happened this way, we sent the friends of the old man at his place earlier as guests, they went and we talked to them and asked them that when they get there, a couple of minutes later they take the old man and go out to see the fields, how are their fields, how did they work their land and so on, and when the old man opens the door of the *odë* for them after they come back, to see us there, and...I mean, to have no other solution but deal with us, to not be able to leave. And that's how it happened. They went, we entered the *odë*, we sat there and waited for them to come back with the old man, and when they came with the old man, the old man was shocked, he opened the door and was shocked when he saw us inside, he had no way out now. He entered with his friends, and his son was with us in the *odë*, talking to us, he was feeling very nervous,

³⁰ Selected men's council in a village or a neighborhood who decided for the issues of the village, reconciled blood feuds and resolved disagreements.

and stood up and took his shirt here {shows his chest with his hands} and opened it, he plucked all the buttons off his shirt and said, “Kill me please, may you have my besa, you are forgiven!”

I intervened in this case, I started speaking and talked to the old man. In this reconciliation we were, let me start from myself because it's tradition to say so and so and I, so it was Hava Shala, Rexhep Kelmendi, Rexhep is not alive anymore, Et'hem Çeku., and I think there was...Myrvete Dreshaj, I am not sure about Myrvete, but I mean, we were... five of us, Et'hem Çeku, Rexhep Kelmendi, Havë Shala, I guess Myrvete Dreshaj too and I, and while we were talking to the old man, he says to his son, “Stand up, and shake their hand.” And when the old man said that, his son turned around and said, “No, father, I will never do it before you!” And he tried to stand up and shake our hand, he wasn't able to stand up, he didn't have the strength because he lost it, and I stood up to help him, he shook my hand, hugged me and said the word of reconciliation and started crying...We sat, he cried, then we all sat and the old man sat too, the old man's son who was forced to go out and avenge bowed down and kissed the feet of his father, he kissed both feet of his father and cried and the son left, went out of the room and got back five minutes later, I still have that scene in front of my eyes even now that I am talking about it.

He came back five minutes later and fell down on his knees in front of me, he bowed almost down to the floor, and with his hand folded, he put his hand in front of me and opened his fist {shows it with his hands}, when he opened the fist, he left five bullets of kalashnikov in front of me and said, “Take these bullets for Kosovo, they were prepared for the head of the enemy.” This is the word that that boy said to me. Then the emotions did their job and none of us could...hold their tears, we cried all together. And it was the first time that we were served the sofra³¹ in odë and celebrated together with the whole family, with women, girls, children and everyone else, they all sat together with us around the sofra and we had dinner together. You know, this was one of the greatest experiences of mine during the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. We had dinner at that house then we left from there to the Peja region.

In the Peja region we went to the family that was forgiven the blood and that person wanted to slaughter a lamb in order to celebrate the forgiveness, but we didn't accept it. I mean we blocked it, “No, we already had dinner,” and we... we usually didn't eat with the ones who were forgiven the blood, we only ate with the ones who forgave it. To us only a slice of bread and cheese and a glass of water on the sofra was everything. And he asks for the conditions, “What are the conditions?” “There is no condition, the conditions are that you behave like a good man, don't provoke, don't badmouth him, don't harass him, these are the conditions, there aren't other conditions.” “ No, he did not forgive me.” “More, he did forgive you, we just came from his house.” The same thing was repeated three times, “No, he did not forgive me.” Then when he said it for the third time, I put my hand in my pocket and took out five bullets and placed them in front of his face, I said, “Do you see these?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “These were prepared for you, mister,” I said, “we took them with use.” I said, “We took them with us,” I said, “That is why you have to behave like a good man and don't harass him,

³¹ Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

don't...if you happen to see him in the street, try to avoid him, don't show up in front of him, don't provoke him!" When he saw the bullets he said, "Really," he said, "He forgave me," he said, "because recently....the last days...he went out to wait for me many times," he said, "I noticed that he was waiting for me and I tried to avoid him, I escaped." He said, "He really forgave me," when he saw the bullets in front of him. I mean, there are these things, this is it, the greatest, when he says, "Take these bullets for Kosovo, they were prepared for the head of the enemy," This is something really magnificent.

I mean, this is how it is, there are many cases. I owe you the mention of some members of that mobile team, of the service team, there was Abdullah Zhegrova, I also didn't mention Akile Dedinca, both of them political prisoners, I also didn't mention Fatmir Sopi from somewhere in Mramor, from Zllasha. This team was the one to move up and down, that moved all around Albanian territories to send the message of reconciliation. I was in Gajre of Tetovo, I was in Çegran of Gostivar, I was in Novosella, I was somewhere in a village of Malisheva, I was in some other villages too, I have the photographs but I am not sure right now where...then I was in the region of Gjilan, somewhere in the mountainous part of Gollak, I don't remember the names of the villages at the moment. But I will make the photographs, because I have the photographs and I will send you the photographs together with the name where the reconciliation took place. I was in Kodra e Trimave here in another reconciliation. But I didn't follow big gatherings much, I...our team didn't follow big gatherings, we were on the ground.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, I wanted to ask you about Macedonia, about Gajre and Çegranë, because I understand that in Kosovo people forgave the blood for the sake of Albanianess, but more for a stronger Kosovo, since there was an internal disunity. Where did people in Macedonia and Lugina e Preshevës find the motivation to forgive, was it the same?

Ibish Neziri: It was the same, for example it was Kosovo and the motivation was the same. And let me mention something with this case, this Gajre of Tetovo, the university of...the opening of the University of Tetovo was first mentioned in Gajre of Tetovo by Fadil Sylejmani, there it was mentioned for the first time in 1990, and it got opened five years later.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how...the activists...how did you find them, how...did you create a network of people from those regions ?

Ibish Neziri: The motivation brought people closer to each-other, the motivation brought people closer to each-other, people came themselves and got closer, they informed where the cases were, do you..."I can help in this case," and that's how people came closer to each-other.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of cases were there, the nature of the cases?

Ibish Neziri: You're talking about...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Enmities....

Ibish Neziri: Yes, but are you talking about Kosovo or other areas?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: About other areas...

Ibish Neziri: About other areas...they were similar to the ones in Kosovo, there was the team, let's say the team of Adnan Abdullahu, the first blood was forgiven in the village of Qellopek and Adnan Abdullahu with two of his brothers, he wasn't only available himself, but also offered his house and we slept at Adnan Abdullahu's house. The team was established there and they had identified where the cases were, and another one mentioned...because one word takes out the other and the memories unfold...but it happened to us in Macedonia... We went there to ask for a reconciliation, the damaged party was a police and when we went to his place to ask him to forgive, "Man," he said, "I am demanded this from the people, from Kosovo, and for the people and for Kosovo I am not only ready to forgive the blood of my killed brother, but I am ready to forgive the blood of all of the 13 members of my family, but you have no one to forgive it to, you have no one to forgive it to, because of course I forgive it when the people and Kosovo demands it, of course I will forgive it for Kosovo, but go there and see if there's someone to forgive it to, go and forgive it to them, they're forgiven from my side."

And when we went to his place, his house was surrounded by a wall, and the wall of his house was covered in slogans in Macedonian, "Long live to the Communist League of Macedonia!" "Long live to the leader of Macedonia!" who was then Mojsov and Gligorov or who the hell were them, "Long live to the Communist League of Yugoslavia!" And this and that, his house was covered with all these...all these slogans. It was covered, the wall of the garden was covered and we didn't even bother entering his house, simply because we knew that if we got inside, then we would end up at the Macedonia's police and we returned to him and said, "You don't do anything, not for him because he doesn't deserve your forgiveness, but for you, you don't deserve to carry the weight of a not avenged blood on your shoulders, forgive it to the people of Kosovo." And we happened to experience the other, there are two other cases that were mentioned, but one of them in Tetovo where I was present myself when they said that in Çegran the mother whose only son was killed shows up and says, "May the killer of my son live in heaven together with my son." These are glorious things which cannot be found in any other nation of the world.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Could you explain it why the Albanians didn't approach the law, I mean, because I can notice that also in other zones where the blood feuds happened, or was the system always an enemy to them, the legal system?

Ibish Neziri: The legal system was never effective for them. The bloods, the blood feuds were promoted. It happened... that there were situations in which seven people got killed with the same gun, not that a person killed seven people, but they took the gun from the one to kill the other.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mean that the system was involved?

Ibish Neziri: I mean that power was involved in these cases, because they didn't resolve the contest and people didn't trust power to resolve the contexts. I mean, the malfunction of the law...the

malfunction of the law was the one to cause all of these troubles, the boosting for different things, for different actions. Another case happened, an old misunderstanding, because of an old misunderstanding, the member of the involved family, this might have happened twenty years...twenty years earlier or thirty years earlier, they took the passport from this person, they took his passport and told him, "Kills this man and d go abroad." He was working in Switzerland, two brothers were working in Switzerland, they took their passports, and I can say the name of the one who took the passports and the one who pushed the other to kill, it's someone that shows up on TV and talks about patriotism, some UDB member from Peja called Mehmet Loci. Mehmet Loci took the passports of the brothers, he kept one of them longer than the other, he kept it for over one year and put him under the pressure of taking revenge, and the one who was supposed to be killed was a political prisoner.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened to him?

Ibish Neziri: What happened? It happened what should have happened, the person didn't surrender to the pressure. He remained unemployed for one year, he spent one year at home, he didn't give up for one year then after one year they had no way out...they had no way out and gave the passport back to him. And the person unfolded this case in...and this happened in the region of Peja. It happened, and in this case when they went to the family to ask them for forgiveness, the mother of those children, a malësore³² woman, a malësore woman in the way they refer to it in Peja, they call malësore a woman who is noble, she says, "They are my sons, I forgive it, they are my sons because I raised them and they won't break my word." And then the boy says, "If I wanted to take revenge, I would have and would enjoy privileges from the state because this is how it happened." I mean, that these are the things they did, unfortunately Albanian members of UDB did so as well. I mentioned his name, and I am ready to face Mehmet Loci in every media and prove this, to say that, "You forced filan fistek to kill filan fistek with name and lastname," and tell him how long he kept his passport, I mean all the structures of Yugoslav power played a role in the misunderstandings between Albanians, because that's known from the time of the Romans divide et impera, divide and rule, I mean that's how they acted.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did the initiative of the reconciliation come to its end, when was the activity wrapped up?

Ibish Neziri: Yes, after one year...it came to its end after one year. I mean, it ended after one year, in February 1991, [the last gathering] was held in the Osek village in the house of one who also forgave blood. The last gathering was held there, we either call it gathering, or meeting or congress, whatever you want, but we refer to it like this, because it had no certain name, but the last meeting of the activists of Blood Reconciliations was held there. There, we reported the achievements of that year,

³² 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. In this context, the meaning is metaphorical, as in the Balkans mountain people are considered nobler and more virtuous than others.

but in that meeting another action was announced, which was also extraordinarily successful, it was the action Family Helps the Family. It was announced by the same people who were part of the Action for Blood Reconciliations, the Medicine Faculty professor Xhevat Hasani from Prizren announced it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you explain a bit what kind of initiative was this?

Ibish Neziri: It was the initiative for the affluent families, for the affluent families to help the families that were dealing with poverty, because of the dismissal from their workplaces during 1990 and especially the families of the North of Kosovo, Mitrovica and that area, because that was an industrial area and thousands of workers were dismissed from their workplaces. And the intention was to keep them strong, to not let them surrender to the [ruling] power, to not let them surrender to the occupier.

I was not that active in this action, they were mad at me for not being active but at that time I was not in the right conditions [to help], because I dealt with financial difficulties myself for a long time, after being released from prison, and I didn't mention it earlier but at that time I used to work in Tuzla's fields during the summers, I worked in gardening and I couldn't take over keeping a family. Because all of them then..my family members were unemployed because we suffered like the others and I had to...keep my family and my revenues were not enough to keep two families, and I couldn't allow myself to ask someone else to take over the keeping of a family, while not being able to do it myself. Then there were some of my friends and my co-activists who got mad at me for not being active here, but I had my reasons which were totally objective and I haven't got much information about it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was it...?

Ibish Neziri: For example the reconcili....I mean, if we go back once again to the reconciliations, the best example of religious brotherhood of the people were two names that deserve, always, deserve to be honored: Don Lush Gjergji and Bilall Krye...pardon, not Bilall Kryeziu but Xhevat...Xhevat Kryeziu, Mulla Xhevat Kryeziu, they are two names that truly deserve...deserve great respect. They deserve to be honored for a lifetime for the mutual action, for the mutual fight, for the mutual struggles that they have...that they did in this direction, but also in others.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was your political activity or your life after Reconciliations?

Ibish Neziri: I worked in parallel, I worked in parallel with the reconciliations and the organization, I worked with the reconciliations and the organization. In 1991 I was a member of the group...,because with the political changes that happened in Yugoslavia, with the political changes that happened in Kosovo, with the fall of the socialist system, there was only one opposition party, it was in... until 1991 there was only one opposition organization, it was ... of all of this, there was the *Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës* [LPRK, People's Movement for the Republic of Kosovo]. With the appearance of...the LDK on the scene, I have to say what I feel and what I think, which is more or less...there was a confusion created, because the illusion was created of Kosovo's liberation with peace and two fingers [in the sign of victory] and then there started a...a silent conflict. The conflict between these two subjects was silent.

The Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës was considered a red organization or an ideological organization, a leftist organization or something like this, but we never meant starting a conflict with Albania, no matter the system in Albania, because just as it turned out in the end we had the support there, that's where our head was, it was a pillow to us, it was a lap for us and we didn't want to start a conflict with Enver Hoxha or the system because it was red or left or whatever it was. And here people started being labelled and all the political prisoners without any exception were labelled red, a group of political prisoners were somehow forcibly taken into the Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës but I honestly say, I am convinced that they never gave their trust to it and never had trust in it because they were...let me say it in quotes, even though they cannot be seen, but I conditionally say because they were red.

And... I continued my activity. At that time somehow the organized illegal ranks...weakened, there was a need for more effort, there was a need for more work to keep them standing. In 1991 a group for organizing and reorganizing was established, which led to the third general meeting. A general meeting was held prior to that, until that time there was the OMLK as an organ...as a forefront organization of the LPRK, it was like an...ideological organization, a Marxist-Leninist organization and it was held in Dabishevc. A meeting was held in which they decided for the OMLK not to be part, not to be a forefront of the LPRK...of LPK, I mean not to be part...a forefront organ, those who want to, you know, to totally detach, they became totally detached from any kind of ideology. The Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës and the decisions that were taken in Dabishevc, the consultation meeting which was held in Dabishevc and I cannot say the date right now because I don't remember it, but it was February and I have the date written, I have my notes in my archive, and then it was organized during 1991.

And the group for organizing and reorganizing for the preparation of the third general meeting of the Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës the Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës I was also part of that organizational group, we were together with Xhavit Haziri, no one knows where he is, no one knows about his fate, he was kidnapped in September 1998 in the middle of Pristina, I was together with Xhavit Haziri, Ahmet Haxhiu, about whom later on I wrote a monographic book, with Emrush Xhemalji who came from Switzerland with...as a reinforcement, to help here, with Shaban Muja, with Ramadan Avdiu, with Azem Sylja and other names that I don't remember. And as an organizational group, we prepared the third general meeting of the Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës which was held on the night between October 3 and 4, 1991. The decision for the establishment of an armed force, which to me is the decision that led to the founding of the KLA, was taken there.

There they brought out...today I see them bringing out different dates and different things, but to me the founding of the KLA remains...remains the date when the decision for the founding of an armed force was taken and this happened in the house of Sadri Shala in the village of Ujëmir, municipality of Klina, in the night between October 3 and 4, 1991, where delegates from all Albanian areas occupied by Yugoslavia participated. There were delegates from Plav and Gucia, there were delegates from Struga, from Kërçova, from Presheva, Bujanovc, from every area of Kosovo, there were even delegates from the diaspora in that meeting. And with the resolution of that meeting...the founding of an armed

force came out, the next day in the first hours of the morning I sent the communication, the content of that meeting to the then Bujku's newsroom... because Rilindja wasn't working any more ...in the then Bujku's newsroom, and I sent it to Dush Gashi and Bajram Kabashi.

I gave it to them but neither that press release nor any information about it was ever published in Bujku. You know, this is one of my activities within the...political field. Then I am a participant in the consultation meeting, one of the most important meetings of the Lëvizja Popullore për Republikën e Kosovës, which was held in Kërçovë of Klina, in the village... in Kërçovë of Macedonia, in the village of Kollarë, of Kërçovë, it's a meeting which was talked a lot about in various gatherings, and there were delegates from all the Albanian geographic space which was occupied by former Yugoslavia and from that meeting I also came out as a member of the group for organizing and reorganizing, in charge for program and statute issues. In the same year it was also held...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What came out of those meetings?

Ibish Neziri: The decision to hold the fourth general meeting and it has to do...I mean, because during that period we were always attacked by the state but also by the legal politics of Kosovo, the legalist [politics] of Kosovo, we were attacked in various ways. I told you that we were considered red, we were labelled with labels that...not to us, but they don't do any honor to the ones who made them, neither today nor ever, because we were the people who put our head in a bag for this country, at the end of July from the meet...after the third general meeting a fraction split from the Lëvizja, I will not mention the reasons of the fraction now, but a fraction came out of the Lëvizja, a group which later on founded the LKÇK [Lëvizja Kombëtare për Çlirimin e Kosovës/National Movement for Kosovo Liberation] split in 1993....'93... .

Then for...arrests followed, but before the mass arrests followed in February of 1993, in January, in the end of January, there was an attempt to arrest me in Peja and I escaped from Peja. In the meantime Macedonia appeared as my residence, more for objective reasons because I always expected them to look for me, and I had my Croatian papers from Zagreb, I had the passport and the ID card, creden...credentials, I was accredited as a journalist there, I was accredited as a journalist at the Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës and the Informative Center of Kosovo, ICK (QIK) how it was called back then. I escaped from Peja and came to Pristina. Here in Pristina I lived with a member of the organization who was a student, he was also a student continuing his studies after prison and at the same time was a member of the Leadership of the Council of the Region of the LPK for the region of Peja. I lived with him, I did my job as a journalist, I moved around Pristina with fake papers but in Dukagjin Plain, during the day I never... I never crossed the Klina's bridge, in particular I never entered Peja during the day, I stayed underground during all 1993 until...until August 3...I stayed let's say semi-illegal or half-illegal, call it whatever you want, let's say here in Pristina until August 4.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you emigrate?

Ibish Neziri: Sorry?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When did you emigrate?

Ibish Neziri: When did I emigrate? Now I will say this. Here in Pristina I've lived for some time in Dragodan, then in Taslixhe in the house of Avdyl Rama, I lived with the same person, with another friend who was also a political prisoner, and I finished my job as a journalist on August 3, my job as a journalist was finished then...my job as a journalist, because the second arrests happened in August 3. The group LKÇK got arrested on July 27, if I am not mistaken about the date, because I am sure about the group, just the date, the group of LKÇK got imprisoned on August 3, the Movement was attacked after the holding of, how was it called, the fourth general meeting and many people were arrested .

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You too?

Ibish Neziri: No, I didn't get arrested because I was semi-illegal and I had the luck of not being caught by them and that morning I went out in the center of the city from Taslixhe. We had our base near the gymnasium, it was a touristic agency, a travel agency and the owner of the agency told me that he would go to Ulcinj for vacation on Monday. And as I was heading down to the city, I saw on the other side of the street that the door of the agency was opened and I asked myself, "What happened, why isn't Nehat on vacation?" I crossed the street and got close to the door, when I got close to enter, I saw on the table...I saw the radio of the police and instead of stepping on the stair and going in , I just turned around and left quickly, I got away from there.

And then in the meantime I found out about the arrests that had happened, the contacts, the informations, I found out the arrests that had happened, friends of mine had been arrested, Ahmet Haxhiu had been arrested, also Xhavit Haziri. In the meantime I got information about the arrests in Ferizaj, the arrests in Theranda, in Suhareka, about the arrests in Prizren, the arrests in Vushtrri, I mean, the arrests included all Kosovo. I didn't move from that moment, when I called home they told me that the house had been raided and my brother had been taken. And that's how it happened, I mean, my brother was taken. They took him around twelve to thirteen times for interrogations.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was he also in Pristina, or [was he] a member?

Ibish Neziri: No, he wasn't a member, he waited for us, he escorted us, he waited, he escorted, he took messages somewhere which he didn't specifically know, but he was not directly in the organization but it's not that he didn't know anything about my activity. Then I passed to deep illegality. At that point I didn't move without great security . And one day from Pristina here, that way in an organized way, with papers...with fake papers I left for the Dukagjin Plain. I only found out later, I don't know who managed to get that information, but I was told that I was followed from Pristina until beyond the bridge of Klina.. I was followed, and when we left , now that I recall that way, I remember it well that we passed two trucks, two big trucks. We passed them. And right away, after we passed them beyond Klina I asked the driver who was driving the car to Dukagjin, I told him, "Turn left here." And he immediately turned left. But since there was a bend in the road, the trucks were in the bend, the people who were following us didn't dare pass us and put themselves in danger, I

continued to Peja but I turned left through the villages. They continued to Peja, and when they did not catch us, they got alarmed.

But I always followed those roads, you know, because I knew them since I went through them by foot that year, I went through them by foot many times, from Klina to Deçan, from there I moved, I went to Raushiq. In fact, not Raushiq, but I went to Raushiq, where the person with whom I lived in Pristina was, he was on vacation and was part of the Council of the Region, the Leadership of the Council of the Region of Peja, Gani Fetaj. And I say...I notify Gani of what happened, I mean, what he should do and what he should be careful of. But I didn't tell anyone where I was going. Neither did I tell the driver. The driver only drove me to the village where he too was allowed to enter, and I talked to him, he was someone who only wanted to work with me and not anyone else. I mean, "I will finish every task you give to me, but I don't want to take tasks from or report to anyone else but you." He was not organized, but was someone who trusted me a lot and finished the tasks that I gave him. That day was the last task he finished for me, to take me to the Dukagjin Plain and I went to the village of Beleg.

I was sheltered in the house of Ismet Neziri there. I stayed there for some time, then I crossed to Albania escorted by my friends from the organization where we worked together.. In this case I think that I have to mention two names in order not to owe them anything because I used their houses during my underground stay in Pristina. It was Demë Ibërdemaj. I sat at the same desk during my four years in the gymnasium with Demë's brother, we were good friends. And I met him at the funeral of Esat Mekuli. When he asked me how I was doing, I replied, "I am very bad, and I am waiting for them to sally on me any moment in order to arrest me." "Call me anytime at this phone number." And he came and brought me, because I left my apartment, he came and brought me the keys, and I had....I took...first I used the apartment of his sister. They were on vacation too. I stayed there for some days then from there I got in touch with a friend from Beleg, who was also not a member of the organization and we kept him out of the organization and I met with him.

I told him, "Go!" And I gave him the task to go where he was supposed to go and I never told him specifically, without him knowing specifically where he was supposed to come... where my connection of the organization was supposed to come and he took, he took the message and I passed from that apartment to the apartment of Demë Ibërdemaj, also in Kodra e Diellit, I stayed there for some days. When the people of the Council of the Region of Peja came, they got in touch with me, the person who knew where the apartment was came there. Then I immediately followed that person, and I changed the apartment again. Because I only stayed at the same place for ten minutes after each meeting. I moved after each meeting, I didn't stay in the same building, I went from there and got sheltered in the house of...his last name is Ismajli, he works in the Post Office here in Dardania, and his brother is a professor at the Faculty of Law, I don't remember his name right now (smiles). I lived at his house for some time, then from there I passed to the Dukagjin Plain. In the Dukagjin Plain I stayed in Beleg for around one month, then escorted by Binak Dina and other friends I crossed the border and went to Albania. From Albania, I mean, in November 1993, I went to Switzerland. This is a summarized chapter, even though it's shortly summarized.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: With what kind of papers [did you have to go] from Albania to Switzerland?

Ibish Neziri: I went to Albania through the mountains.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: But, from Albania to Switzerland?

Ibish Neziri: Albania, Albania, I never asked for permission to enter or to exit Albania. I crossed the mountains there and when I was arrested there, because I was arrested there as well, and when they arrested me there, I said, "I never ask for permission to going through my lands, through my fields. These are mine, and I cross them wherever I want." And I crossed there with no fake papers. I went there with no fake papers but with my original papers, with one person with whom we were, at that time, we looked similar physically (smiles). And as for the behavior and the activity, we used to be similar but we are not anymore. He is on the political scene today. He is in a very high position, I don't want to mention his name. Analyze my face, you will find out yourself. Because he is a public face, a public face...and I crossed the border with his passport, I went inside the plane without changing the photograph, without anything, I arrived in Switzerland (smiles). And after a short time in Switzerland, I was recognized the status of political refugee and there I have...what do I say now...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And what happened to the underground activity?

Ibish Neziri: There I continued my activity in the organization. I was a member of the newsroom of *Zëri i Kosovës* [Voice of Kosovo]. I continued working for *Zëri i Kosovës*. I took various courses, integration courses, language courses. There I led, in the period February 1998 - August 1999... I led a show in Albanian language at the Radio Channel K. I was editor-in-chief, leader of the show in Aarau, Switzerland, a show that supported the KLA in every kind of meaning, it was a small voice of the KLA in Switzerland. After the war came to its end here, I was not interested in leading that radio anymore and I quit. Later on I took over another radio, also a show, another show in Albanian, it was in Zurich, it was called Radio Vlora, I worked there for only two years.

I took language courses and I started working as a German Language teacher in German Language courses for adults. To be honest, I learned German more during the time as a teacher than while I was a student myself. Because I felt ashamed going in front of the students unprepared. I had students of all levels and all categories, from high school students, to students who had graduated, the students who had finished the 8-year school, from high school students to Ph.D. holders. They were students in my German courses and I learned German more while being a teacher myself. And after one year and a half...yes, after one year as a teacher.. as a teacher of German, from being a German teacher I moved to teaching social relations. I worked for six more months, and then I...the project came to its end, then I went to the newspaper *Arbeitsmarktes Agenda*, *Axhenda e Tregut të Punës Agenda of the Labor Market*] when translated into Albanian, that was the title of the newspaper where I worked as an editor of the section for one year.

It was difficult for me because I had to work not for nine hours, as the working hours were set, but for eighteen hours. I wasn't forced to work for eighteen hours, but I worked more than they did, in order

to achieve the level of my colleagues, I did double the work because German was their mother tongue while it wasn't mine. and for my pleasure, after some time I quit that newspaper, no matter how much my boss insisted, who tried very hard [to keep me] by promising that he would help me with whatever I needed, I didn't stay, I mean, I quit...I told him that, "You can help me for one month, two, three, six, but not for my whole life, maybe after six months you will quit yourself, because you will find a better job and you will go on, then I will have to work for eighteen hours a day again."

There were articles that spoke about the problems of the foreigners in general lems in the labor market, and the Albanians' specifically. I mean, it was the first time the foreigners' problem in the labor market was talked about and after this I passed to the field of translation and intercultural mediation. In the meantime I got certified in this field, I was employed, and after some time period I graduated in the field...as the first generation in the field of translation and intercultural mediation. Even today I hold a diploma of the federal level, I am among the group, among the group of 40 people, of 40 people whom I graduated with, also with two other Albanian women, we are the first three Albanians to have graduated. I graduated in the field of German and the two women in the field of French, and since that time I work, partly as a translator and partly as an intercultural mediator and I work partly within a project as an animator and lecturer in higher education. It's a project financed by the organization that helps refugees, it's an organization at the federal level with the headquarters in Bern, it's the Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe.

I partly work as an animator and partly as a lecturer within this, it's a project that continues since eight or nine years ago, and I am engaged in that project too, and at the same time I continue my work in the movement, for a period....for another long period of time. I was part of the fund *Vendlindja Thërret* [Homeland Calling] for Aarau and the region because the canton was wider, I was responsible for the fund there and not only then but even today I am ready to give an account of every cent that made its way into the fund and out of it through me. I mean, the ones that made their way into the fund and out of it, how much came in and how much went out, I mean, I am ready every moment because I delivered...I delivered all the money, I delivered a copy, and I held a copy for myself, I have all of my folders that I created. I was part of that fund, and I feel very good for having been part of it, I struggled to not let the soldiers of the KLA starve and without gunpowder, and this is how it is.

On the other side, besides my job as a journalist in these two radios, in the *Schweizerische* [Swiss] newspaper, and the *Arbeitsmarktes Agenda* [Labor Market Agenda] newspaper, I worked in other newspapers too, first until March, 1997 I worked for the newspaper *Bota Sot* [The World Today], and in March, 1997 when *Bota Sot* started getting worse and aligned on the side of those who caused all the bad things in Albania in 1997, it had the position of swearing at KLA soldiers who had started the action...the action since 1993. I detached from that newspaper, but I worked for the newspaper *Glob* [The Globe]. I led the newspaper which was not published because of objective reasons, for material reasons, I was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper of Albanian clubs and associations in Switzerland called *Bashkimi* [Unity]. I worked as head of the newsroom there. I worked or I was a member of the newsroom of the newspaper *Republika* [The Republic], of the magazine *Republika* [The Republic], we are used to referring to it as the *Republika e Sali Kabashit* [The Republic of Sali Kabashi]. That newspaper is unfortunately what Albanian journalism is missing a lot nowadays, ... I worked... I don't

know whom else for, I mean, I didn't waste my time. I published six books up to now, the first book is a collection of interviews with a co-author, it's called *Spektër Shqiptar* [Albanian Spectrum]. It's with Emrush Xhemajli as a co-author, the book is introduced by the interview of Ukshin Hoti and there are politicians and intellectuals from Pristina and Tirana involved in that collection of interviews.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What's the year?

Ibish Neziri: It's 1992-1993, it's...it ends...it begins with Ukshin Hoti and ends with Ramiz Kelmendi. And it's strange seeing the opinions or the statements of two extremes in Albania on the issue of Kosovo, seeing the extreme right and the extreme left, both of them come together when it comes to the issue of Kosovo. My second book is *Fytyra e dhunës mbi universitetin e Tetovës* [The Face of Violence on the University of Tetovo] which is a...more a photo-album because a photograph speaks more than words do, it's a collection of those events that happened around the University of Tetovo in February, 1995. This was co-authored with Tahir Abdullahu, it's published in Albanian, the comments, the legend, the prologue, yes the legends and the prologue were published in Albanian, German and French. This book was distributed for free in various European institutions.

The third book is *Hamit Haxhiu, një jetë të tërë në Lëvizjen Ilegale* [Hamit Haxhiu, A Whole Life in the Underground Movement], it's a monograph dedicated to Hamit Haxhiu, who for the first time was imprisoned when he was 14 in 1945, and was imprisoned for the last time on August 3, 1993, the time when I escaped, and he died on July 6, 1994. The book, this book was estimated, I am referring to the reports of *Koha Ditore* [Daily Time], it was one among the ten bestsellers in Pristina for one year, it moved from the fourth place to the sixth. My fourth book is a monograph of the Albanian cultural association *Mëmëdheu* [Motherland] of Saint Gallen, an association which to Albanians in Switzerland was a true piece of the motherland. It's a monograph that mainly came out of its archival documents, a...an association that did a lot for the Albanian question, that did a lot for Albanians in Switzerland but also for Albanians in Kosovo, and which is still actual.

My fifth book is the book...the school ... is on the book *Vallet në funksion të ruajtjes së identitetit kombëtar* [Dances to Save the National Identity] is a monograph dedicated to the Albanian dance school Shota in Switzerland, which is or was and still remains an excellent ambassador of Albanian culture in Switzerland and participated in many cultural and intercultural manifestations, which participated in some international dance festivals, and recently participated in the festival of Gjirokastra. After their show and the show of two other groups from Switzerland that performed together on the stage of Gjirokastra, the next day the newspapers wrote, "Albanians from Switzerland conquered the castle," and in that dance school, besides writing the monograph which was translated into three languages, Albanian, German and English, I am an adviser of the leader of the school, of the choreographer of that school and that school continues, it continues under the slogan, "Let's learn how to walk in Albanian." And I mean, that school has been working for more than twenty-three years now. It's a school which brought out over five-hundred dancers, it brought out...it taught over

five-hundred people to walk in Albanian, wearing *tirçe*,³³ and wearing women and men clothes of all around Albanian areas.

My sixth book is, the book *Këtu jam për t'i luftuar armiqtë* [I Am Here to Fight the Enemies] a monograph on the national hero Xhemajl Fetahaj, who as I told you earlier, started his activism before turning 17, ended up in the Serbian army's lines while fighting face to face with them in Koshare in May 31. The title of the book came out of what he said in an interview for a German radio-television, when to the journalist's question, "Why are you here while your children and your wife are in Germany?" He responded, "I am here to fight the enemies." This is my sixth published book, I didn't mention two unpublished ones that are staying shelved. One of them is part of my memoirs *235 ditë në burgun e Gospiçit, burgu pjesë e jetës* [235 Days in the prison of Gospić, Prison as a Part of Life]. *235 [ditë] në burgun e Gospiçit*. This stays shelved and unpublished since 1989 and is the last book.

There is also the last book, an unpublished archival material, it's *Masakrat Titiste në Kosovë në periudhën 1942-1951* [Titoist massacres in Kosovo in the period 1942-1951]. It's the statement of Xhafer Vokshi, who was a minister here and escaped to Albania in 1949. It's his statement, given by him, which brings the very interesting testimony of an opinion that didn't know them [the events], and that in many cases the events are misinterpreted. This book is prepared in the original language, the transliteration was done in standard language and all the documents and pages were inserted, they were inserted as facsimiles and the book will be translated into English and will be published as such, I mean, these are ... I have other projects on my hands, I have a very rich archive, mainly electronic, but I also have papers.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much!

³³ Tight-fitting embroidered white flannel breeches with decorative braids at the bottom of the legs and on the pockets, traditional Albanian wear.