

## INTERVIEW WITH ZYMER NEZIRI

Pristina | Date: April 15, 2016

Duration: 138 minutes

Të pranishëm:

1. Zymer Neziri (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
4. 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

[The interviewer asks the speaker to introduce himself and talk about the environment where he grew up. The question was cut from the video interview]

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, my name is Zymer Neziri, but in most cases I sign, Zymer Ujkan Neziri. I mean, the last name Neziri is just a random last name, I mean, an administrative last name, since my great-great grandfather was Neziri, at the time of my grandfather they registered him in the administration as Fazli Neziri and we are registered like that also in other birth registers. We belong to the *barku*<sup>1</sup> of, how we call it, Nilaj, the great *vëllazëri*<sup>2</sup> of Lajç, I mean the Kelmendi *fis*.<sup>3</sup> And these divisions of course are still present in the deep mountainous areas, in our mountains, but also in our hilly areas, they are less present in the plains, and even much more less in the cities.

My family lived in three places when I was born, in Shtupeq, in Rugova, they lived in Peja in the *lagje*<sup>4</sup> of Kapeshnica and in Zahaq, a village around seven-eight kilometers from Peja. They lived in a family community, a community of seven families in one single group. My father was the sixth brother in a family community. The craftsmen lived in Peja; the cattlemen, I mean, the farmers, lived in the village of Zahaq, according to the new effort we made after the war to replace Slavic names and nationality and replace them with other nationalities, you know, Albanian; while the cattlemen lived in Shtupeq. The family functioned I would say as a small state, because everybody had their tasks, their job, and everybody finished their tasks the way they were supposed to be finished and that's how the family functioned, as a small community, a small state-community. We gathered together only on family holidays or other holidays, on the occasion of celebrations, on the occasion of weddings or deaths, because you could rarely see them all together, since there were too many of them.

At the time when the bread was split,<sup>5</sup> I mean, in the early '70s, we were already seventy people in the community. This family community spread, I mean, in the early '70s, we dispersed in seven units. But it was also big at the beginning of that century, precisely in 1908, I mean, at the time while it was still a big community and it split, the bread was split. And another time, it must be somewhere around 1860

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<sup>1</sup> Albanian: *Bark*, literally stomach; ethnologically, the family genesis.

<sup>2</sup> Literally brotherhood, small subgroup of the *fis*, which consists of a group of related families.

<sup>3</sup> *Fis* is the Albanian exogamous kinship group that like the Latin gens includes individuals who share an ancestor. *Fis* can be defined as a patrilineal descent group and an exogamous unit whose members used to own some property in common. Membership in a *fis* is based on a common mythical male ancestor.

<sup>4</sup> *Lagje* in this context means the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor. More in general, it often means just neighborhood.

<sup>5</sup> The house was divided, as communal living ended and families began to live in separate houses.

when it was still a big community, and the bread was split. I mean, my father went through two of these processes, I experienced the third process, during the early '70s. I mean, in one century and a half, the bread in our family was split only three times. This Nilnikaj's branch, that's how we are called, Nilnikaj, after the fifth brother of...or the fifth son of Nik Deda. In this case Nik Deda, in the ethnographic sense, has the status of *vëllazëri* and Lajçi has the status of great *vëllazëri* or the status of sub-*fis*.

Of course there was also happiness in our big family community, but there was even more sadness than happiness, there was desperation. There was very great desperation, for a life in a condition of slavery, I mean, the conditions of occupations and wars, the situations I mean, at the time, at the time when poverty was great and these were experienced not only by the Rugova region, the Peja region, but by Albanians in general, especially the part of the Northern area at the border with Montenegro, but also the area at the border with Serbia. So, this is of course part of the oral tradition which unfortunately is not written and should be written because there's a big need to build a new history of ours which we don't have, because one book is not enough to write about the sufferings and the sorrows of a family. Almost all the Albanians families have been through the same fate, through the same processes of history, I mean, through deep sorrow.

My family...(coughs) in 1940, during the Second World War, while I was not born yet, went through the war and in the defense of the border with Montenegro, at the mountain pass of Cakorr, in Mokna, in Smilevica, in Hajla until Kulla. So, a border that only encloses the Rugova region, but not other Albanian regions which today are in Montenegro. Unfortunately, the government, the Commission for Demarcation<sup>6</sup> says that, "No, the border is not at the mountain pass of Cakorr, but farther down." The border is not at Kulla, but it goes down until half of the Plateaus of Shtupeq. Six hundred Rugova men defended this border. There were members of my family among them, two or three of them, my father was also among them and this unfortunately is that unwritten part of our history. It's of course a history of pride, because that border was defended since April 1941, after the fall of Yugoslavia, until November 1944, after the [partisan] brigades entered the Gryka e Deçanit, but then of course, they entered Rugova too. The following part [of this history] of course is a very difficult period of detentions, of killings in prison. And the Rugova region together with the Peja region went through very tough days, but however, at that time the Committee was organized, the sub-Committee, that's what its status was, of the NDSH [Albanian National Democratic Movement]<sup>7</sup> in Rugova, or of the National-Democrats. And that sub-Committee in its first phase gathered 43 men led by Sylë Mehmeti, a political prisoner later on, and one of the bravest men in Yugoslav prisons from Niš to Goli Otok.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How old were you when you lived in the family community?

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<sup>6</sup> In 2015, Kosovo and Montenegro reached an agreement over the border demarcation between the two countries after behind-closed-doors negotiations. The agreement sparked a heated debate in Kosovo society. The opposition holds that the current deal causes Kosovo to lose 8,000 hectares of land, while the government insists that the border demarcation was done in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of Kosovo.

<sup>7</sup> *Albanian National Democratic Movement*, known by its Albanian initials as *LNDSH* or *NDSH*, was the anti-Yugoslav resistance in Kosovo between 1945 and 1947.

**Zymer Neziri:** Could you repeat the question?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Until what age did you live in the family community?

**Zymer Neziri:** Until the early '70s, as I said, I mean back then I was over 23-24 years old, I was an adult already. They were seven, my father with his brothers, we were 17, I mean, the generation of my paternal uncle's sons and daughters, together with the girls there were around twenty-four of us, we were the second generation of the family. Then there was the generation of women, of my mother and my paternal uncles' wives, the generation of brides who had come as brides into our family and this way then the generation of children, the third generation.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Could we go back to your education, where did it happen, were you in Peja or in Zahaq?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, I was in Zahaq for my first four years [of primary education] since my father was in charge of the land, we had over twenty hectares of land there, and of course my mother lived there too. I started my elementary education in Zahaq, with Bajram Shala as a teacher in my first four grades. He was a very good teacher, of course one of those teachers who were not qualified enough, but had great will, a great will, and made great efforts to lift a generation after the Second World War. I am very happy for having been a student of Bajram Shala, my teacher in Baran and Zahaq. After Baran I went to Peja to continue the second part of my elementary school, in the high school of...in Ramiz Sadiku elementary school, at the end of the city now, but with Lutfi Kotorri as the main teacher, the class V/3. I had the historic luck and honor to have friends such as Jusuf Gërvalla,<sup>8</sup> then Skender Blaka and some others who later on carved their names in history. We were students of the V/3 class. I finished my fifth, sixth and seventh grade there, then I automatically passed to the gymnasium for pedagogy of Peja.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was this period politically? I mean, it was the post-World War II period, but also a time of great changes. How did you experience it?

**Zymer Neziri:** At the time when I was in elementary school, I mean in that first stage, the emigrations to Turkey had already come to their end, not completely, but that big dynamic phase had come to its end, how do I say, the one that was long prepared by Yugoslav power, with the big pressure of detentions, then... damaging people's bodies with great tortures, the weapons collection, in which my family of course was a target and the heaviest weight was carried by my father, because he was the youngest among his brothers. Due to the big pressure on this family, this family prepares to go to Turkey, they trade a house in Skopje and spread the word in Peja that they were selling everything, they were going to Turkey and they were selling the property in Rugova, Peja and Zahaq. Now, of course this pressure got lower, it was understood and known, because now they knew that this family would not be there anymore, this [family] consisted of a very big family, as they say in Peja, "from Peja until the river Drin [White Drin] and up from Peja until the mountain pass of Cakorr."

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<sup>8</sup> Jusuf Gërvalla (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.

And at that time, thanks to the sharpness of uncle Beka, that's his name, he avoided a tragedy, let's say a family tragedy, because it was expected that a cousin, and my paternal uncle who was at the border, he was always there but also earlier and participated in the uprising during the First World War, would be executed at the border. The person who was tasked with their execution was someone who was loyal to our family and told them the intention of the [ruling] power to execute Kasa Fasila, my paternal uncle, and Shyt Ahmetaj, my cousin. He told my cousin, "Since we are the same age, let me tell you something in *besë*,<sup>9</sup> this money was given for your head and for Kasa Fazlia's head. That is why," he said, "I will give you half of it, and you get lost somewhere, don't tell anyone where you are going because it can happen that they will beat me more and then I will tell." Of course, he left towards Rozhaja then went to Kotorr and lived there for a long time loading and unloading ships, and I mean, that's how his execution was avoided. Then he tells my paternal uncle, "Stay home and don't move much, say that your leg is hurting," because he was also injured during the war. And this way, my paternal uncle realized that the only salvation was tricking Yugoslavian power [into believing] that we were going to Turkey and that's what he did.

As I told you, he went to Skopje and traded for a house there, he appeared to make the papers and so on. This of course was a tough phase, the family worked a lot, all of them were able to keep some other families with their work, but the state with its taxes, with its difficult taxes took everything. We had one mill in the *lagje* of Kapeshnica and my family was renting two other mills. We had another mill in a house-*kulla*<sup>10</sup> right over the one we had here in the center, but the state took it after the war and said, "You have enough!" That is to say, they nationalized the property, the mill and the house, that surely was the toughest thing for the family's food, I mean, let's say the mill worked for 24 hours, but the products were taken for the army and there was a partisan guard guarding the door. You know, my family suffered from [lack of] bread, this was the second time my father's generation experienced suffering for [lack of] bread, it was exactly at the time when I was born, and the first tough suffering was at the time of Austria, when they removed Montenegro from Rugova, from the Peja region, the Austrians collected the food for the army, and people remained, remained without food.

The issue of wealth was not a big deal for our family, fortunately, our family always had [wealth], they also had it in the most difficult circumstances, since mental and physical power were put together with property, they were put together in one place and they had, they had enough to even give to others. Let's say, maybe in Peja we are one of the families to have kept a men's *oda*<sup>11</sup> till recently, if you tell this to someone, they will say, "It's impossible." We kept a men's *oda*. At some point, poverty in Rugova reached a level that, especially until 1969, that we couldn't wait for people to come all night, holding some timber in their arms which they would later sell in illegal ways, because cutting [the trees] was done in illegal ways, but they did it in order to survive and carried it for long hours, let's say to arrive in Peja, and they needed some shelter and of course, our family was a safe shelter. At some point, the door was never closed, "Let them come, whoever comes, they enter, sleep, wake up and go." We kept the same men's *oda* in Siperan, known as Zahaq, for Drenica, for Llausha, especially for

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<sup>9</sup> In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

<sup>10</sup> Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

<sup>11</sup> Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

the small Wednesday market, for the big Saturday market, so we practically were not seventy but one hundred [members].

The other part of the pressure was of course rather big because, because just as all our families, this family suffered in the earlier time, that is why power, power to them was the same as the one at the time of Second Yugoslavia, I mean, as it was called at the time of Tito, to them the time of First Yugoslavia or the time of *Kral*<sup>12</sup> or *Mbret*<sup>13</sup> was the same as the one during the occupations of Montenegro in the Rugova region and Peja region or the North Dukagjin until Gjakova, it was the same. There was no ideological difference, let's say these are partisans, they believe in Communism, those are not partisans and they believe in, let's say, Djuricic, their commander, let's say, and....I mean, there were no differences, a concrete case is the Second World War, they didn't allow them, let's say, to get closer there, and Germans didn't take their weapons, neither did Italians. They were the guards of the border, and like this, when the time came for the [partisan] brigade to cross that way, they didn't let the brigade in. They said,<sup>14</sup> "But, if we allow you," they were talking to an Albanian brigade, "If we will allow you to pass, you and the ones from Montenegro are partisans and you collaborated with them. That is why, let them come as well. But to us, the partisans from Montenegro are the same as *çetnikët*."<sup>15</sup> I mean, they had an established concept over time, and to be honest as a concept it was more right than the one of my generation, which in the beginning thought it would turn out to be differently, but that's not how it actually turned out to be, it turned out to be bad for us. That is why my generation grew up at the time when the first status of the unity of Albanian lands was written in Peja.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** By whom?

**Zymer Neziri:** By Adem Demaçi, Ramadan Shala, Ramadan was in charge for the Committee of Peja, this happened in the beginning of the '60s and at that time we grew up not with them, but we grew up with their courage to do something, that something was the distribution of the flags in Peja and one of the flags was put on the locomotive of the train in Peja which continued its journey during the night until near Belgrade. This was it, and if you tell someone that it was a game with the flags, they will say, "How was it possible for you to play with flags and what were your benefits?" The flag, let's say, is the greatest symbol of Albanian identity during the centuries, of course an identity of Europe's and world's flags as well, since Europe doesn't have an older flag than the Albanian one, it's only the flag of Denmark, then it's ours as a 1444 national flag, March 2, when Skanderbeg became the leader of the Albanian territory, the leader...the leader of let's say, peace and war. I mean, from that time, this very

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<sup>12</sup> Serbian: *Kralj*, king.

<sup>13</sup> Albanian: *Mbret*, king. Here the speaker refers to t Alexander I, the King of Yugoslavia.

<sup>14</sup> Speaker's clarification: They, the volunteer forces of Rugova, defending the border in Qakorr-Mokna, in the village of Smilevica and of Murgash.

<sup>15</sup> *Çetniks*, *Cetniks*; *Qetniks*; *Çetnikët*. Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

old flag and Iran's flag are some of the oldest flags in the world. I mean, this was banned by the Yugoslav state. And of course, you suffered years in prison because of the flag, my generation and I were raised without the flag, without a national identity symbol and of course that generation made us alive, it gave us courage and of course after we finished secondary school, when we were students of the first year [of university], eventually students of the second year, we organized the first demonstration of post-World War II in Yugoslavia, in our area, precisely in Prizren, I was a student back then.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which year?

**Zymer Neziri:** In 1968, on October 8. This was the first demonstration. The second one took place in Peja.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the demands?

**Zymer Neziri:** The main demands were for the Kosovo Republic. But there were also demands for self-determination, for the university, demands for equality between Albanians and Serbs, demands for employment and so on, a part of which were fulfilled. But the main demand for the Kosovo Republic was not fulfilled because the Albanian political elite was not ready for the Kosovo Republic. They were ready to have it available, as they say, (smiles) to use it, but they were not ready to fight for it and that's why they stepped out, the intellectual elite stepped out, even though there were only few of them, we remained all alone. The students remained alone, the high school students of course, the grown ups, the people remained alone and that's how we started and I think we did the right thing, that was the first post-Second World War step, thousands of people went out to protest, to demonstrate and demand the Kosovo Republic. And then of course we thought that it would be the first step towards unity because until my generation, let's say, the generation of Adem Demaçi demanded the unity of the lands and we found another way which I think wasn't found by us, but it found itself, that if we became a republic, they are a republic too, and we know that they would not live together, then one day when they split, we will split too. They split, as you know, with the great bloodshed that happened in Europe after the Second World War, and of course there was our share of bloodshed as well, maybe smaller than what was planned for the massacre of this nation.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you persecuted during your political activity in 1968?

**Zymer Neziri:** Of course, our 1968 generation didn't suffer as much as the generations before us, we didn't suffer that bad. Since there was a softer political climate in the districts of the Yugoslav Federation, it was softer and we went through that situation, we went through it easier. But we didn't go through the others that easily, it was not easy for us let's say, to work, we were students but we also worked, and of course we were fired, then we faced other problems after prison.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How long did they keep you in prison?

**Zymer Neziri:** The prison did not last long, let's say for us, for us in Peja it only lasted one month, one month, in Prizren fifteen days - one month, and in Peja around fifteen days. But the other ones then continued, another revenge against the generation of 1968 but also against the generation of Demaçi,

which had just started coming out of prison, it was the fall of 1972, in the fall the letter which came from... the Central Committee, from Tito himself, "The Letter of Tito," was executed, a big purge happened there then, especially in education. Two hundred and fifty teachers were fired from elementary and secondary schools, who were, you know, coming from Demaçi's organization, or were its supporters, or former prisoners members of that organization, or participants in the 1968 demonstrations for the Kosovo Republic. It was a big group. Kosovo suffered a lot in the fall of 1972, this lasted until March 1973.

In March 1973 the University of Pristina was their target, the just founded university after the demonstrations of 1968, it was a demand of these demonstrations, famous people were targeted, especially patriots such as Sami Peja, a political prisoner, in the Faculty of Law, of Economics, Hajrullah Gorani, a political prisoner of the post-Second World War generation. Then Mark Krasniqi was targeted, because he was perceived as one among the professors who supported the demands of the students, there were the Agani brothers too, professors, both of them deceased now, professor Qosja and many others. There were many of them targeted, but in the end, in the end...the Committee...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you able to keep the status of student at that time? Were you able to continue your studies?

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**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, I am finishing, I understand. I am finishing, because now we probably need to restart the camera.

**Noar Sahiti:** No, you can finish your sentence but I mean, we have three minutes of time after this.

**Zymer Neziri:** Well, it ended the way it did, but the list of expulsions from workplaces, universities and institutes was fortunately not executed. Except one case, that case was I, but fortunately I was alone and not with the others. Of course they expelled me from this Institute and I only came back to it nineteen years later, but of course I worked for the Institute during that time, I saved my intellectual and professional condition, I worked a lot, I worked in two shifts, I still do and I am used to work, and this was the part that is directly related to my early youth and to the student movement of 1968.

## **Part Two**

**Zymer Neziri:** First I was a student in Prizren, in the pedagogic high school of Prizren, I registered there in 1967. I went to Prizren, I finished the Shkolla Normale, that school lasted five years. I finished four years in the pedagogic gymnasium, then I finished the fifth year here in Pristina, of course without leaving work, and then I worked as a teacher for one year. At that time I wanted to go to Zagreb. I am telling this now, because I wasn't thinking about telling it, I mean, stopping just at Albanian Language and Literature, I wanted to register in linguistics in Zagreb. And I showed up there, but I had no scholarship, no credits, as most of us were at that time, and I didn't go to Zagreb, instead



I worked as a teacher in the village of Zllakuqan of the municipality of Klina for one year, and I finished my fifth year here.

Then I couldn't go to Zagreb the next time either, and I went to the army. I finished military service and I couldn't stop in Zagreb after the military service either. I took the papers and came back to Prizren where the opportunity to finish school quickly, to those who worked and had knowledge, of course was good, because there were exams almost every month. I used this right, I was a student by correspondence and I finished [school] faster in Prizren. Of course, I joined the short summer classes and this is how I finished it in Prizren within one year, almost one year, I finished it in Prizren. But during that time, the activity was very, very intense. Besides my studies, [political] activity was intense, there I found...I mean, students, the generation of Meriman Vrasa, Isa Demaj, Fadil Sylejmai, Safet Rama and the others who had worked in the drama group *Plaku i Maleve*, they had worked in, in the group of students, I mean in the literature group and you know, it was of course one of the best activities conducted in Kosovo at that time, but of course the national activity was a priority. And on Flag Day as we mentioned, the flag of which we had very little knowledge...now I will tell you the anecdote that came up after it.

On Flag night, on November 27, 1967, we decided that we would mark Flag Day, a more trusted group...there were around twelve of us, but we also thought about the other part, that if the police noticed us of course they would arrest us and said, "What are we going to say? We are going to say that we are celebrating Zymer's grade." I passed the literature [exam] with professor Demush Shala, he gave me grade 10<sup>16</sup> in the written and oral exam. And we said, "Let's evaluate the situation like this and we believe we will go well through it, since Zymer also works and is also able to treat us." That's what we said, but of course the police was not tricked.

We gathered and after midnight the police surrounded us, they arrested us and kept us for around one month. Two others, Isa and Merimani, were kept for some more days, around five days, then the case remained with the prosecutor for six months in order for them to raise a criminal indictment. But during all that time and even after we came out, we were planning the demonstrations of 1968 and where to mark our first demand for Kosovo Republic on June 10, 1968. But because of the experience we lacked and the very modest knowledge we had of the work of the underground, they noticed us, we couldn't send a wreath to the League of Prizren<sup>17</sup> and we couldn't go out in the streets. I am saying, "Let's decide for another date which is not known by the state, it shouldn't be Flag day, neither should it be the day of the League of Prizren, but it should be a date they have no idea of." That's how it happened, and we decided for October 6, 1968.

Now, what I said in the beginning (coughs) is the most interesting part, girls started embroidering the flag, exactly like the *Marigonas*<sup>18</sup> of 1968 in Prizren, they thought that the eagle doesn't have...{shows

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<sup>16</sup> Grade A on an A-F scale (Ten-five)

<sup>17</sup> The 1878 Albanian Alliance that fought against border changes decided at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. The building where the Albanian leaders made their *besa* (sworn alliance) is on the river, upstream from the center of town. It is now a museum. The current building is a reconstruction of the original one, which Serbian troops burned down in 1999.

<sup>18</sup>Marigona is the woman who has embroidered the Albanian national flag, which was first unveiled on the day of Albania's independence on November 28, 1912.

with hands} its heads turned to the left and the right, but it has its heads turned on the inside and said, “How can *gegnia*<sup>19</sup> and *tosknia*<sup>20</sup> go in different directions? *Tosknia* and *gegnia* go like this, but also Albanians from the north and the south go like this. They must be together.” This was what they had thought about, it had crossed their minds and they put us through a dilemma. Then we went to the Meriman family and took a *napolon*, that’s how the currency that was used in the First World War was called, there was the eagle printed on them and we showed it to them [to the girls], I mean the eagle, that the eagle is like that {shows with hands} not like this, yes, and (smiles) they were convinced at last.

I mean, the flag was embroidered, the flag of Prizren, it was embroidered on October 6, 1968. The flag of Suhareka was embroidered, it was embroidered and its central part was filled with ink. Haxhi Bajraktari worked on it and took over Theranda or Suhareka,<sup>21</sup> as for the flag of Peja, we still had time left to think about it and we found a solution, of course we took a manufactured flag, of course produced by an Albanian manufacture, because among the sources where we took books at that time there was one, I forgot to mention it earlier... we also took books in the Pedagogic High School and of course I had the luck to take, let’s say *Sintaksa* [Syntax] by Stefan Prifti which was the first, probably the first text we had inside. Then that book, when at the time we didn’t not have the way of copying it that we have today, we copied it by hand, we made two copies by hand, the groups worked for 24 hours, if your hand was tired, another continued.

And let’s go back to the flag, that flag is still alive, the flag of Suhareka, the flag of Peja was alive until the last war when it was burned, it was burned together with the whole house where it was. This period was of course one of the periods, one of the healthiest periods, let’s say, [one of the healthiest] political period for the Albanian youth and one of the most courageous because, let me say it again, for the first time after World War II, the Albanian youth goes to the streets at the time when the political class was not with them, and unfortunately even those few intellectuals they had, were not with them.

And going to the streets was planned to cost us a lot, to cost us even our heads, but it was a great luck that we had thousands of people behind us in Prizren, and the marching in the city didn’t only last for one or two hours, it lasted for three hours and a half, four hours with the national flag in the front, the flag that was embroidered by ours *Marigona* of 1968, and [we marched] to the League of Prizren, where we turned back, because we started from the square. There were also speeches, one speech was given by Bashkim Laqi who was the leader of the craftsmen from Prizren, one of the best activists who unfortunately is now deceased. Then another speech was given by Gjergj Caman, who was the Secretary of the Students’ League, there among us I had the luck to be the author of those texts, of course the texts are not only personal but also collective, because we analyzed them together, we

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<sup>19</sup> *Gegnia* or Albanian Gheg is one of the two major dialects of the Albanian language. Gheg is spoken in Northern Albania, Kosovo, northwestern Republic of Macedonia, southeastern Montenegro and southern Serbia, by the ethnographic group known as Ghegs. Gheg does not have any official status as a written language in any country.

<sup>20</sup> *Tosknia* or Albanian Tosk is the southern dialect of the Albanian language on which the standard Albanian is based. It is spoken by the ethnographic group known as Tosks.

<sup>21</sup> Suhareka, also known as Theranda, is a town and municipality in the Prizren district of southern Kosovo.

edited them together, and in the end we gave them the last hand and those were said in the gathering that was held in front of the building of the Albanian League of Prizren.

After that, of course we did not have good days, I mean I was fired from work after the arrest in Peja, because I was in charge of Peja, and of course I did my part in Peja with great fear. I was afraid because I thought that Peja could fail and this could be one of the greatest failures because let's say, I mentioned Gjakova, they said, "No, Gjakova can easily rise because there is an Albanian majority, but Peja, it is difficult for Peja to rise since 39% are Montenegrins and Serbs there." And that's how it was, I mean, the composition of the population was pretty high, I mean, the population, the Slavic population, and they were afraid of them much more than they were afraid of the police, we were afraid of the civilians, that they would attempt to take our flag, to step on our flag, to burn our flag, and we thought of the flag, not of ourselves. That is why in Peja, let's say, we created a unit for the protection of the flag and that unit of course needed to prove itself at the train station, when they attempted to take the flag, not Serbs and Montenegrins, but the policemen themselves.

That flag was put on the roof of the Shkolla Normale in Peja and then the firemen came and took it there, I mean, they had to use their ladders to go upstairs and take it from, from the roof of the school. Yes, we had already made a plan that if they came and wanted to take [the flag], then we will take it back from them, I mean, we would remove the flag before them and of course we removed the flag through the internal stairs of the buildings and like this that flag was saved until spring 1999, the flag of Peja, but it was burned in a house, in the house of my friend of that time, in the house of Ramadan, Ramadan Blakaj.

This generation, this generation of course lived a bad life. I came here to Pristina, continued the second level, they only recognized a few exams, seven of them, and the others were retaken. There were also other exams, but I passed them quickly, I passed almost one year and I reached, I reached the fourth year since I had enough time, I was unemployed. After finishing my studies, I applied for many jobs, I applied here in the Institute, I applied to the United Bank of Kosovo... then newly founded, its headquarters were in the center where the Ljubljana Bank is located now. And I liked it here in the Institute, I loved the job, I mean the research and scientific job, and I decided for it. Then it turned out that I had passed the exams in the bank, I mean in the bank, I had passed the tests and I was ranked first.

There was only one position there as well as here in the Institute, there was a position with Anton Çetta, I mean, folklore and ethnology assistant, only two people, he and I. I decided for here, and of course let's say I asked my family for permission and I know that my father said, "You have to work with children," he meant with students, I said, "No, the professor..." He was giving lessons here in the faculty, he was afraid that they would fire me since I was fired three times during my studies. Yes, the first is the one that I told you about in Klina, then the other one was in Lipjan, another one in Peja, I mean we were given the job, but as soon as they investigated us, "Leave, leave, leave!" Even when you were a good worker, "Leave, leave, because you are unfit!" You know, they called us morally-politically [unfit] at that time. And I mean, he was afraid that they would fire me from the Institute as well. I said, "No, I will not work with children there." And I came here, of course the salary here was the same as the one in...let's say the gymnasium, I mean, the assistant was payed the same

[as the teachers in the gymnasium], while in the bank the salary was twice or three times higher, of course the opportunity to take an apartment as well, but I didn't decide for the bank, I came here.

And as I talked in the first part about the purges that were done in the fall 1972 until spring 1973, I was fired from the Institute in that wave, this was the part of my studies when I was a student and I was not a student at the same time, because I went through waves as they say, and the studies here, let's say, I attended the classes of professor Isak Shema who had one of the most difficult exams in the faculty because there was literature together with prose, poetry and drama, nowadays they are split in specific exams. But Yugoslav Literature was another very, very difficult exam, where there were around 24000 pages of text from Slovenian literature until the Macedonian one, and it was so difficult to pass it [the exam] and it was one of the most difficult departments I mean, to get a diploma in Albanian Language and Literature. And to me, with all the readings I had done while in high school, especially in Serbian, it was not a problem, I didn't need to read at all, I mean, I managed to pass the Yugoslav Literature exam with the knowledge from the gymnasium, I didn't have any problem with our literature either and I mean, this was the first phase of the studies in Prizren, and the second one here in Pristina.

The third [phase] was a hard time for me, it was probably the hardest of my life because I was fired from the Institute, I mean, I had no revenue, we only had one salary in the family, and they lowered his [father's] salary to the level of the high school [teacher] just because he supported the demands for Kosovo Republic, and they said, "You are not going to be paid the salary of a pedagogist anymore," he had graduated in pedagogy in Skopje, "But you are going to be paid the salary of a teacher!" And that's how it remained...My sister was a student in Pristina, my brother was a student in Zagreb, I mean we didn't have revenues, we had a lot [of wealth], we had everything, but we didn't have cash. This was an obstacle to me and of course I finished the third phase in very difficult conditions, four semesters here...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which year?

**Zymer Neziri:** It's precisely the fall of 1972, the fall of 1972 until, until spring 1974. It was the best series of, how to say, the preparation of the generations in Albanology, in Albanian Language and Literature, the professional preparation of lecturers from Tirana, who lectured within the framework of professor Qosja's classes. Seven or eight [lecturers] lectured, they came from Tirana, from the generation of Bihiku, let's say like this. Then the lecturer for Five Aesthetics from the ancient time to the modern time was an educated professor, a specialist from Germany, Nigeo Gestardolov, who later on became a member of the Academy, the head of the Academy of Sciences of Macedonia. Then theories as well, they were lectured by a Jewish professor from Sarajevo, Ivo Tartala, and like this, I mean, there was a, a, a, a knowledge, a knowledge at the European level. Yes, it was a great luck being a student in that period, but it was a misfortune as well because some of us couldn't afford it. The ones of us who had been through waves, through waves, demonstrations, prisons, expulsions from our workplaces, we were in a bad situation.

As far as I remember, tens of scholarships were given by the Provincial Unity of Education and Science or I don't exactly know how its name was, and they remained, some of them remained untaken

because they didn't give them to us, the ones who were part of the process of, the students movements. Of course, I used, let's say, the *Hani i Dilit*<sup>22</sup> in Pristina, in order to sleep one night and attend classes the next day. I mean, these were the circumstances in which I finished the second stage [of my studies] and of course I had a great will, but in addition to my will I had *inat*,<sup>23</sup> a very strong *inat* which I still have and of course that *inat* was what brought me to where I am today because otherwise I would end up way earlier, just as many others did, tens of people ended up badly because they cut their studies off, they didn't move on and they felt fulfilled with those, I mean, with what we had then.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did 1989 find you?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, I applied as soon as I finished the third phase, I am finishing this too, I applied to the Fulbright Foundation and I applied to finish my Ph.D. in the Milman Parry Collection within the University of Harvard which is one of the greatest [folklore] collections of the Western Balkans in the world. The Milman Parry Collection was constructed in 1932-1935 in the Western Balkans with Bosnian, Albanian, Croatian and Serbian materials. I thought of going there and there was only one Albanian Ph.D. holder who graduated from that Collection in the far 1967, he was Gjon Kolsti who was born in America and still lives in Texas, he lives in...now he is a retired professor of the University of [Texas at] Austin. And I thought of being, of being the second one.

This didn't happen, because in Peja they told me, they told me that, "You don't have the right to have a passport." "But why?" "You have a ban of ten years." I complained about it in Pristina and they said, "They did the right thing to you." How could they say that. And of course, I had no passport and I could not go and this went, I mean too far, I went to Harvard after the war in 2002, I mean, after 28 years. Yes, and of course I am an external collaborator of theirs, I worked on a project, the project of those 1930 materials is almost coming to its end.

So, this was a hard time for us because we continually had consequences, I mean, you are not in prison, but you are surveilled day and night, you are working, you are not allowed to work in education, you are not allowed let's say to work in scientific institutions, you can work in administration and then after refusing the job in the bank in 1971, I waited until they opened the call, then they had one vacancy and I continued working as a translator and editor for 14 years there, but I worked for bread before midday, and here for this Institute after midday. Then I got used working in two shifts, on Fridays I travelled for 200 kilometers in the Rugova mountains and collected the materials for the Ph.D. dissertation and this lasted for around 700 days of work, or nearly eight years, and now it's the greatest collection ever done among Albanians since Gustav Mayer and ever after 1987.

I am saying that it's the greatest, because this kind of regional collections had not been created by Albanians, and I created it in the form of research, and also the form of writing and recording. That material is saved today in the Institute. Luckily, there is one copy, of course I have another copy because it was in danger of being destroyed, precisely the archive copy which was here, was taken when the Institute was robbed in the spring of 1999, another copy was burned in my sister's house,

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<sup>22</sup> *Hani* was a type of a boardinghouse equivalent to today's motels.

<sup>23</sup> Turkish: *inat*, out of spite, stubbornness.

near Peja, in the village of Kiliqina together with the library that we sent there from Pristina. Another copy was taken in Peja at [the house of] my collaborator Qel Bardhaj, and I luckily had another one left, besides those ones, I created three other copies as soon as the war in Croatia began. Of course I started with copies, they were ten minutes long tapes, , some of them one hundred minutes, I mean, I had over 230 hours of recording, you know, I mean, the greatest collection created among Albanians from one region. That collection is luckily alive, the writing form and the recording form of it, but it is not all published . There are only three volumes published, only three volumes, that's where I revealed [to the public], how to say, the three last Homers, the last Homers of the Albanian legendary epic, let's say I found five [people] in Rugova who knew over ten thousand lines, but we luckily published one of them here in the Institute in 2011.

As for the other work, I mean, during my studies and during my struggle, to come back to the Institute, it was really difficult. It was really difficult to think about the Institute and, let's say, your wife, your daughter, your son, your other son, to leave them alone when people rested, let's say on Fridays after lunch, they spent Saturdays and Sundays taking walks or visiting people. I did at least thirty hours of work in the field , I mean, on top of the forty [hours] of work I did for the salary from the bank, I did at least thirty more [hours] on Saturdays, Fridays and Sundays, three nights during which you're supposed to get at least twenty hours sleep, not only did I not take twenty hours sleep or ten hours of sleep, but I took way less than ten. . It happened that I slept only two hours at night and this way I created the collection and the research for the dissertation and like this I created one of the greatest collections in the Balkans and probably in Europe as well.

And I luckily finished the other collection now, but this collection now came up as all the Balkan regions, in the five countries where Albanians live. It is equal to the Rugova collection of forty years ago, I mean, we're talking about an ethno-cultural heritage which is not increasing. But what happened to Germans, to Nibelungs, to the French *chansons de geste* to Finland's Kalevala, that will happen to us as well. But however, Albanians began this third millennium, you know, with this unit which ranks among the greatest poetic, artistic beauties of the world, I also finished this project for UNESCO.

It is delivered, the government stands in silence saying, "I want to enter UNESCO." (smiles) Yes, enter UNESCO, but let us know what do you want to send to UNESCO. But it's not only this, there are opportunities to do other projects as well. They stand and think that UNESCO goes to watch Barcelona, let's say, they go and watch a football match, or Paris Saint-Germain, let's say, or another team, and in UNESCO, they don't know what they want to do in UNESCO. "I want to go to UNESCO." I want to go, but you have to be prepared to go to UNESCO, and they are not prepared at all. I started the project, there was no document approved in the Kosovo Parliament regarding UNESCO, let's say that the main document of 2003, let's say the [document] of Paris was not approved, I sent the request, "Yes, beside the Albanian and English, the text in Serbian is required as well." I wrote the Serbian text and sent it, I it in the archive of the Kosovo Parliament at the time when Jakup Krasniqi was the President of the parliament, still to this day, they haven't approved it yet.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What does that document contain?

**Zymer Neziri:** Sorry?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What does that document contain?

**Zymer Krasniqi:** That's the main document on spiritual heritage, yes, of UNESCO, approved in Paris, but there are other documents as well, let's say about architecture, archaeology, let's say, and other criteria upon which UNESCO and heritage are built. And no, they haven't, they haven't finished them, but I finished the project, you know, in order to apply, but we decided that if we don't have...if we don't have the status, then Tirana has the status and let them finish the work, let them finish the work for us as well as for all Albanians, but they didn't accept it and the project remained like that, waiting for better days which are not coming right now in these great clashes of Europe with itself. Especially with the Russians, there are no, there are no better days.

And it was easier when I proposed it in 2009, it was easier to get to UNESCO, it was way easier at least with the unit that we attempted now, I mean, not under the status of member of the United Nations but without that status, I mean, applying as a region. "No, we don't want, it means like the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija." "Alright." And now they tried with the province, but it was too late. Of course, we expect to send other units to UNESCO, we have very beautiful dances, from the dance *Shpata e Rugovës* [The Sword of Rugova] to the one of Deli Agushi which is played in your area, I mean in Dardana and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did you conduct this research in Rugova?

**Zymer Neziri:** The research in...I started the research in Rugova in 1976, 1979, yes I was right, 1979, and finished it in 1988. As for the other one, the other project with 15 volumes, it started in 2012 and officially ended in 2014. I worked with 15 [volumes] and I still do, let's say three weeks ago I had a recording of five units of *kreshnik*<sup>24</sup> songs which are sung in Switzerland as well as from our emigrants. While the other project of UNESCO's dossier started in 2009, 2009 and ended in 2012, and, a short, a short publication of the thirteenth of the recordings in the film for the documentary movie which was conducted in the province of, in the province of *Malësia e Madhe* which remains within Montenegro, close to Podgorica, respectively in Tuz.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Let's go back a bit, I wanted to talk about 1981 first.

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, 1981 was the question...I see.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then maybe about the Institute?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, in '81, I mean I was already [working] in the bank, I was an employee of the bank, the United Bank of Kosovo. I worked in the eleventh floor (smiles), in the office number 005. Yes, I worked there for 14 years. The service was really good, the staff was really good, and I think it was one of the best staff I met in Kosovo, women, men, youngsters, elders, every category, educated at a level, as they called it, of preparation, of preparation, a European level, a world level as well. Let's say, QLE or *Qendra e Llogarisë Elektronike* [Center of Electronic Account] was one of the best -equipped centers

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<sup>24</sup>Original: *Këngët Kreshnike* (the songs of the frontier warriors).

in the whole Western Balkans. An amazing staff. You could even have a pleasurable morning coffee with the housekeeper who was the first person you met in the morning.

There, I mean in '81, in the demonstration of '81, I was there. But before this, before this, there was 1978, the year marking the 100th anniversary of the Albanian League of Prizren. And that time, let's say, big demonstrations were planned to happen in Kosovo, to repeat another '68, a 10th anniversary because we didn't get what we demanded, we didn't get Kosovo Republic. The university came out, the flag was set free, the use of Albanian in the administration was set free, there were many freedoms but there were some secondary and tertiary ones still left out, of course to us they were very important because we didn't have them, but however, the main one wasn't achieved. And I mean, '81 could happen let's say in '78 as well. The *Lëvizja Ilegale*<sup>25</sup> in '70 was very, very energetic, it was very active. There were many detentions, sentences of many years in prison, you know, in the '70s, when you count 100 years under occupation, Albanians were doing well in the '70s.

It was not good, it was not enough. It was bad and it was enough. But compared to the following years, the ones you mentioned, the '80s and the '90s until the war, [compared] to the previous years, I mean to the '60s, the '50s, about which we talked, the '40s until 1912 when Kosovo was completely occupied, you know, by Serbia and Montenegro, these were again, let's say, better years, but however, the resistance movement, the students movement didn't stop. Of course we took action, our group took action, and '81 could happen even before '81. It could happen on the 100th anniversary. The 100th anniversary could have been the opportunity to see what would come up, the 100th anniversary...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you do, did you distribute slogans then, in those demonstrations?

**Zymer Neziri:** In the '70s, yes. And there were writings, there were slogans, there were underground magazines, I mean, the '70s was very fulsome. And of course it generated one of the most powerful links for establishing the modern history of Albanians in 100 years of occupation, to get out of the occupation. It was a strong junction, a powerful one, which perhaps left behind many other earlier struggles showing the a political maturity of the student class, but also the school youth and the farmers and tractorists, of craftsmen and all teachers until the university. But again, in '81, this most recent one, the intellectual class was not at the desired level. It was not, I mean, the class of my professors who had taught me earlier in '81 were not at the level of national duty, they were not.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The political class had left you alone?

**Zymer Neziri:** We, we, the political class, the political class of course was the same as the one of the '60s, of '68, the same one who was not fulfilling its duty. Then they went wrong, especially with the declarations, which they shouldn't have given even if they were under the barrel of a gun. They shouldn't have said those words about this youth, about the "fertilizer" of history and so on and so on. But however, '81 was the end of the separation from Yugoslavia. It was an end of the separation. I mean, there's no life with Yugoslavia anymore. And of course there were arrests. We were arrested, the

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<sup>25</sup> Known also as *Ilegalja*, it is a constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito's Yugoslavia.



other ones who were targeted, around 200 of us were arrested based on the decision of the Government of Kosovo, of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

That time is called the time of isolation. In the prison of Pristina where I spent around five weeks, then in the prison of Mitrovica, those were hard years, but years of pride. I think Albanians never had a greater national pride until the last war than the one of the great year '81, which was a really bloody spring, one of the bloodiest springs of the Albanian nation.

And in the following years, in the following years the National Movement, the National Movement pays a high *tagër*<sup>26</sup> of the struggle for freedom, because the book which came out now in the Institute of History which is good to have, is titled, I mean, there are the political prisoners of this period which I am talking about, and there are 666 centuries and 72 years and 15 days of political prison. This is one of the most stunning numbers for the political world, for the foreign diplomacy that lives in Pristina and doesn't know this fact. And you should know, and everybody should have such a book in their office. 660 years... eh, six centuries. And this only for the period of post-Second World War, without counting the period between the two World Wars, and the other period before the First World War. I mean, the Albanian nation paid a lot, I mean one tax, one *tagër* which I am sure was not paid by anyone I can say in Europe or the world..

They admitted it themselves that there are half million people in their black lists. And they went through those processes with half million people, you know, around 500,000-600,000 people. You can imagine that there were as many children as that, there were also women who weren't engaged in political activism but they loved it, let's say, the political activism for the better of Albania's freedom, and for the better of Albanians and the unity. Yes, I mean, something that cannot be imagined. Of course, the Yugoslav service was very strong, not only the weapons, but also the security service because they were among four or five biggest units of Europe then, I mean, they were well-equipped, they were prepared. And see now, the empty-handed Albanian youth, students, pupils and this nation had to face a machinery of that level. And they courageously did it, they faced it and didn't stop. A demonstration and the other, and the other, and the other. And that's how the 80s continued in a very hard situation until, until 1989.

A political overturn happens in 1989, [a political overturn] of Serbia, and Kosovo gets revoked even that little autonomy it had, of course by Milosevic. The protests didn't stop since then, demonstrations, protests, demonstrations and of course the first organized armed groups start in Kosovo. And in Peja with its region, in the Rugova mountains, in the Dukagjin Plain, in Drenica, in the village of Llausha, in the Kosova Plain, in Llap, in Gallup and like this elsewhere. That's where we have the first beginnings of the military organization, of the confrontation, of the confrontation, how they call it, with weapons against that Yugoslavia which was represented by Serbia.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are you talking about the times of Rankovic?

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<sup>26</sup> Turkish: *tager*, literally means tag, mark. However, in the given context, it means paying the highest price for one's ideals.

**Zymer Neziri:** No, I am talking about right after '81, you know, it came to its end in 1989, the autonomy was revoked and they started, the wars in Yugoslavia started. The wars in Yugoslavia started with Slovenia first and here in Kosovo, I mean, we had our first organized armed groups in Kosovo as well... I mean, they all connects with the process of '81, which didn't end but continued. It continued and that continuity, you know, brought out the first armed units in the early '90s when the wars were taking place in, let's say, Croatia, Bosnia, we had our first units as well, but they didn't grow like they did later on, I mean, the brigades, 33 of them which were active in our areas, because it was the beginning of the very beginning, and there was a more modest opportunity than the others that prepared the war.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were those underground groups the ones to organize them?

**Zymer Neziri:** Of course, the organized underground groups here. The LPK<sup>27</sup> was leading, yes, the LPK was leading from the other side after the LKÇK<sup>28</sup> split. And there were also independent groups which were active, because there was no other way for Albanians but the armed struggle, because every other way had been tried and they all fell on water, with Yugoslavia, also with Europe. This was the only one left unused, and no matter if we wanted it or not, we tried it, because there were many people at the time of the Blood Feuds Reconciliations, we didn't get the chance to mention them yet, which happened in the beginning of this period, and I mean, this nation really had a, a pride, a dignity, I will repeat, of an epic level in that gathering of May 1, 1990, when 500.000 people were gathered to reconcile with each other in order to have their backs, how to say, safe from each-other when the time of war comes, in order to go to war as brothers of the same blood, of the same language...but, that happened as well but...

But...but, but, but then the pacifist side did its part and they didn't do it in a good way, they also did damage, because (coughs), because there was no room for it of course and the comments, the comments then had a very bad influence also at the time when it came to its end, when the wars between Yugoslavs came to their ends. I mean in 1995 we were, we were, you know, in front of the wolf's mouth because we didn't know whether we were Pristina, or Skopje, or Skopje and Pristina together. And the data came out at that time and managed to reach us here in Pristina in this small hall where the Albanian Intellectuals Forum was active, that Skopje is untouchable, because the Bulgarian Army is able to defend Skopje, to defend itself and Serbia doesn't have the courage to face the Bulgarian Army. And that's how it happened, Skopje remained without any bullet fired, while Pristina...woe betide it, that is, why we were bad, the Albanian Army was destroyed on behalf of democracy, so, that was the greatest mistake in the history of Albanians, the destruction of the army.

They destroyed the army with 25 divisions, yes, in Tirana they destroyed the army, they spread it and left only seven divisions, two of them were left in case of emergency, the one of Kukës and Gjirokastra, and what could Kudusi Lama, the general of Kukës, do? One...one...a man of extraordinary army, human and intellectual energy defending the whole Albania, a country with only one division which could defend only Kukës with its region, but not Kosovo as well, no matter their great activity and

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<sup>27</sup>Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës (Popular Movement of Kosovo).

<sup>28</sup>Lëvizja Kombëtare për Çlirimin e Kosovës (National Movement for Kosovo Liberation).

contribution. Albania decreased its army precisely to two divisions, the high North, the scrimmage with Serbia and Montenegro decreased in only one division.

So, we knew our opportunities, they were very small opportunities, very modest. Albanians had gathered a small amount of money for the war, the *Tre përqindëshi*,<sup>29</sup> *Vendlindja Thërret*,<sup>30</sup> as well as other funds, the one of *Aachen*<sup>31</sup> and others. I don't want to mention all of them, you know, they had a very small amount of money, too little, compared to let's say that collected by Croats who established a modern army, invited good advisers, the best ones from America, Canada and established an army and liberated the province that needed to be liberated, I mean, the province of Knin, and Shahovnica, the Croat flag waved there within 24 hours.

We were not able to do that, because we had no money. Unfortunately, a part of that money wasn't used in a proper way and now there are vipers are coming out, there are words coming out of course because there is another reason behind them, because here in the front it was very difficult. It was very difficult, and for the weapons we needed, let's say, to rest a bit until the barrel...let's say...to...to...to...in order for the big heat to go away, and, and, until it cools down a bit, I mean the organizations of war happened here in very bad conditions. And of course, that war came out, the first war came out, I mean, the one we triumphed at. Of course with the International Union in the head, with the United States of America, but however that was as well, it was, I mean, a struggle, let me say again, of a level that no one could imagine that we had to fight Serbia, but with the conditions we had, Serbia still has depositions of money. Now they talk about Cyprus, about one billion, I myself eyewitnessed Serbia robbing Kosovo, they robbed the big funds, the bank funds, the fund of Trepça, the fund...of Kastriot, of Obiliq, they robbed funds from accounts and in the end they robbed the fund of the Federation. And they said, "No, they have taken everything!" And said, "Let's...devalue the Dinar forty percent," and it, I mean, Serbia was given around forty percent of the money, when they had already robbed billions. Serbia prepared for war and they say that its preparation went over 50 billions of dollars. But also the others...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you prepared for war?

**Zymer Neziri:**... No we were not, I mean we were not, we were the ones who were waiting, you know, we were waiting as they say, "As the goat waiting at the slaughterer," and it caught us up very badly. Our nation state, with a thousand years of existence, you know, destroyed the army, they destroyed everything, in the end they destroyed the railways, they loaded the railways in trucks and sold them (smiles) in Montenegro, in Niksic, yes, they destroyed the libraries.

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<sup>29</sup>The three percent fund was a creation of the Kosovo government in exile during the 1990s. All Albanians in the Diaspora and Kosovo were duty-bound to pay three per cent of their salary into this fund to finance Kosovo's parallel institutions.

<sup>30</sup> Homeland Calling, was a fund created by the *Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës* (Popular Movement of Kosovo), the exile movement in 1990, to support the Kosovo Liberation Army.

<sup>31</sup> Aachen Fund, was one of the financial fund of solidar aids collected by Albanian workers in order to help Kosovo. It took place in Germany.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Could we slow down a bit, could we go back to the '90s, where the Reconciliation [Movement] started, can you explain in more details your involvement in that Movement and your role during that organization, if possible?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, the Movement of Blood Feuds Reconciliation came as a response to that big repression of the Albanian youth, the Albanian nation. It was the ingenious idea of a group of youth, of Hava Shala and Myrvete Dreshaj, but also of Brahim Dreshaj, Et'hem Çeku, Adem Grabovci and Lulzim Hetemaj, who right after coming out of prison said, "Those 32 [people] who were killed in the demonstrations, they opened 32 graves, let's try and reconcile 32 blood feuds and not open 32 new ones with our own hands, Serbia killed those, let's not kill each-other now." I mean, this was the motto and the symbolism of the beginning of the Movement Blood Feud Reconciliation on February 1, 1990.

I think that it was, as I said, ingenious, an idea that was of course implemented by the Albanian youth in those more different circumstances, but this was the beginning. That is why the honour of history remains to those who start it, and they have the honour of history, the beginning, the group, the core. This core then expanded to the scale of eight hundred activists, you know, that participated in the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Movement. From the Lake of Shkodra, in our areas, to Montenegro and to the Lake of Ohrid, we have many records, of course they could have been more, but there were tens of thousands and millions of supporters of the Movement, around three millions, just as much as we were under Yugoslavia.

This building where we are at today, the Albanologic Institute was a technical as well as a spiritual core, and a core of the activities which were conducted in the field in every area. Why? Because professor Anton was active here, professor Zeqa was active here, Zekerija Cana, the others were active here as well and I can say that almost every employee of the Albanologic Institute of Pristina was involved in the Blood Feuds Reconciliations Movement. Here, in the institute, the first filing of Blood Feuds Reconciliations Movement was established here, which is good luck. Today that index cards we had have transformed into a book in very difficult circumstances, it got out of print at the time of war and there are data of around five thousand families on it, precisely of 2500 forgivers and just as many forgiven families where there are blood [feuds], misunderstandings and also wounds included as well.

The Movement was necessary, I mean, it was a historic necessity but also a historic act because, because the soul, how to say the freedom-loving soul of Albanians to obtain freedom from themselves and liberate each-other was seen there, because they had to forgive one blood, two bloods, three bloods. The key to the Movement's success was of course the way we approached the problem. What was it? It was not the traditional [approach] which were used until then by others before us, other generations, the generation of the Albanian League of Prizren which had a Reconciliation Council and they were active with advices, and others earlier but also later.

But I think that the key to success was the way you approached the problem itself, you didn't treat the problem as, "he killed you, did he have the right to kill you, did he do a mistake by killing you and so on, and so on, it must, let's say, the damage must be washed, the blood and so on, and so on." I mean, those were not taken into consideration. Forgiving was brotherly, forgiving was done on behalf of the

nation, forgiving was done on behalf of the youth, forgiving was done on behalf of the flag, see how beautiful it was? And they lived in unity as well and as beautifully as in every corner where Albanians lived in former-Yugoslavia, in Montenegro, in the Albanian part of Serbia, in Macedonia and here in Kosovo. This was very functional, on behalf of the nation, the youth and the flag (smiles). Yes, when the flag was mentioned, there were applause, they were long applause, very long applause, they were stunning. People stood up and sang patriotic songs, and in these cases, even the hearts of the families which were not there got melted. But it was not easy preparing a case for such meetings in the field.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You were a mediator. Could you describe the experience a bit?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, I had the luck of participating in many cases, you know, during the time I spent in the Reconciliation Movement, I worked directly, I was directly in the process. I intentionally mentioned the case 63, we attempted 63 times with three teams in Rugova, one in Peja and one in Pristina, and another one that time-after-time helped us from Switzerland. Of course. the blood was forgiven but you had to invest a lot, there was another case again, another case again similar to that one, no matter that it was a case of a woman, where she kills her son-in-law because of her daughter who commits suicide or her son. It was really one of the hardest cases, but there were other cases that I don't know, but I am talking about the cases that I know, I didn't have easy cases.

There were also cases where the state itself directly held the situation in its own hand, and you, I mean, struggled during a whole day with the teams, you invested hundreds of hours and in the morning you could not even see a foundation with your eyes, I mean, you didn't even put a rock in the foundation. The respective case, one man who wanted to kill the other in order to avenge, didn't manage to kill him but just injured him and the state arrested him, detained him and sentenced him. And they said, "If you forgive the blood, you should stay in prison and if you stay in prison then probably..." He says, "It's going to cost a lot." Or they told another version that you can forgive [the blood] at another point, but don't forgive it now, you know, if you want to not stay in prison, for an injury, let's say, made to the family, the family of the enemy, this case was one of the hardest cases.

The state then made the other payment, they went to the streets, "Stop, give us your documents, where are you going?" "Here." "Why are you going there?" "This for." "You are not going. Turn back!" They gathered, let's say, they prepared to gather and they stopped them from going to the gathering and there were many cases and circumstances when they didn't allow the gatherings or there were many cases when they interfered in the gatherings, but in most of cases, they stopped the gatherings, especially in the first stage of the beginning, in March 1990, I am talking about the precise case, let's say, the Rugova gathering in the village of Shtupeq in March 24, there...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you introduce it...

**Zymer Neziri:** But there...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** This new approach to Reconciliation, since there were other experiences which were not that effective.

**Zymer Neziri:** The new approach, I say that the new approach was of course the approach...how to say, probably the one with the most important decision-making, never did a group act before us in history like this time, why, I mean, nothing was taken into consideration but the blood, that there should not be bloodsheds for another blood, that's it. And these convictions, these convictions were of course easier even though they tried to justify themselves, they killed me in a very bad way and so on. They left me in a very bad condition, they left orphans behind and so on and so on, reasons which were all true but this closed all of their doors.

I mean the door was closed because the blood should be forgiven and there should not be more bloodshed for that blood because we have the other one over our heads who is causing bloodsheds] with our blood and let's not be those who cause bloodsheds] in the equal way as Serbia is doing over us and out of our blood, and this of course stimulated people and in spite of that, it convinced them easier than starting and doing, let's say, measurements. This comes out here, this doesn't, this is equal to this, this is not. And in the end it took a lot of time as a process and in spite of that it could not bring results. That is why in 1990 there were no blood feuds, in 1991 (smiles) there were no blood feuds, in 1992 there were no blood feuds, there were not. But not all of the bloods were reconciled, of course some of them continued with consequences after the war.

There were also cases of the misuse of the Movement, because the Movement held three assemblies, the last assembly was held here in the Institute on March 17, 1992, when the Assembly of Blood Feuds Reconciliations was closed, because as I said, it started being misused, there were others whose concern was not the Reconciliation of Albanians at all, there were some whose concern was not the slavery of Albanians. But with their arrogance, especially their oral arrogance, yes oral, there were cases when they told one, "One slap in the face and I will close your ears. We will go to Anton, he will reconcile us and that is it." Yes, I mean, a misuse (coughs). But however this...this stage came to its end...I apologize, could you stop for a bit?

**Noar Sahiti:** It's not a problem, we cut it later.

**Zymer Neziri:** We cut it later and...{drinks water}. The key to success was the method itself, the key to success was the approach towards the problem itself and the key to success was the will of those girls and boys who were over eight hundred. The key, the success was the engagement of this Institute and of the teachers of all the faculties but also of the secondary and primary schools. They key to success was the family which forgave the blood itself, the ones who came with us and saw the others. And the precise case of Marian Demaj, now the rector [of the University of Pristina], yes, they killed three brothers in his family, and he acts like a man and on behalf of the family, again, on behalf of the flag, the youth and the nation, forgave the first blood, the second blood and the third one. We took Marian then Marian became one of the best activists of the Movement. That's how we acted precisely until the three days before the final assembly of the Reconciliation Movement, until May 14.

When we went to the families in the region of Gjakova, where we supposed that if we succeeded in the first case, there was a possibility to succeed also in four or five other cases, because they were related,

we said, “Let’s bring a new result at the end of the Movement,” and we went there. Of course we had problems with the police for one hour, two, three, seven and eight hours, we had problems with them at the bridge of Rakovina , the arrest of, at, there, in the court of Gjakova, let’s say, check a tape with patriotic songs and then the judge concluded that there was no banned song. But however, I mean, we had, we had problems with the police until the very last moment, with the Yugoslav police, I mean, in this case Serbs were the one who did all of these. And I return to this generation again, I say that it was a really big fight with oneself, it was a big fight with the tradition, it was a big fight with the history of culture and techno-culture of Albanians. The part of blood feuds reconciliation, to reconcile with yourself and the reconciliation with yourself was not easy, it was very difficult, but let me repeat, the credits of it remain with those who forgave], and with those who organized in order to bring the families closer and reconcile them.

### Part Three

**Zymer Neziri:** The group that was active in Rugova was a group that worked a lot and had almost conclusive results for every case. There were not many cases, but it was good luck because in 1970, the *Besëlidhja*<sup>32</sup> took place in Rugova, and the process of revenge and killings stopped in that *Besëlidhje*. This influenced that fact that in Rugova there were not many cases, there were a few cases. This was the most special case that happened in Albanian areas, the *Besëlidhja* of Rugova, together with another *Besëlidhje* which was organized in the same year in *Malësia e Madhe*, in the part that remained under Montenegro, with the headquarter in Tuzi. Of course both these *besëlidhje* helped a lot.

Let’s go back to the case of Rugova. In Rugova, the team was lead by Isa Nikçi, an Albanian Language and Literature professor, also by Sali Lajqi, who later becomes the commander of Brigade 163 Rugova, then Zyrafete Muriqi and some others who were active there. We thought of making the gathering as early as possible because there was a need for the ground to feel good, I mean, not to say, “Let’s forgive the bloods and let’s not let anyone know about it,” because police siege was very rough. And people’s movements were very little during such sieges, there even was a lack of movement, and we said, “However, let’s do it,” and we spread the word that the gathering was being held.

But, what happened? The police, as they say, controlled the entrances of Peja, so that many people didn’t manage to make it to there. Some of them gave up while others were forced to give up. But however, that gathering gathered around 7000 people and that was it, how to say, the first breakdown of Yugoslav police in Peja and its region, because the gatherings were held nevertheless. I mean, it was impossible to stop them. Their aim was to stop that gathering, their aim was to scare people in order for them not to go and the second one to stop them from going there. The case of the camera is very

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<sup>32</sup> *Besëlidhja*, League, is an agreement whose goal is the common good, as such it rests on the solemn commitment of the participants for common actions. In Albanian national history, the first recorded alliance of this type is the *Besëlidhja e Lezhës* [League of Lezhë], a military alliance of feudal lords in Albania forged in Lezhë on March 2, 1444, initiated and organized under Venetian patronage, with Skanderbeg as leader of regional chieftains united against the Ottoman Empire.

interesting, how we had a camera there. All of them failed and in the end one of them, Qerim is his name, now he is living in Switzerland, Qerim Sheli, said, "I will put a camera," "How are you going to do that?" He said, "Very easily." He met one girl whom he didn't know in the street, grabbed her by her arm, "If the police asks, what are you two, tell them we are engaged." They didn't even know each other, "We are engaged," with the camera on his arms, "We are not going up there in Shtupeq, but we are going for a walk." And they left towards the right side of those plateaus in order to of course go down and join us after. That's how it happened, that's how we had the camera, you know, in Shtupeq, one of the cameras.

The gathering of Shtupeq was not that big compared to the other gatherings which gathered tens of thousands of people, 100.000, 200.000 to 500.000 people, but the greatest of this gathering was that it was a breakdown of Yugoslav police's struggles to stop the gatherings. A breakdown of them and at the same time it was a great triumph for every activist in the field and at the same time a great triumph for those who had forgiven [blood] and wanted to do the ceremonial forgiving in that gathering. Professor Anton [Çetta] was in that gathering, he participated, he held a speech, he greeted. Professor Zekerija Cana was in that gathering as well, he was the right arm of professor Anton in the field. But there were also other university professors, teachers, students, pupils, lectors, farmers and so on. And those gatherings were undoubtedly the ones who gave power to the Reconciliation Movement, because they kept stimulating, how to say, the Movement, to organize them in almost every region. And they were organized and successful.

But the detail that is usually not mentioned at all but which is very important, especially nowadays when life is getting materialistic, when everybody is tending to equalize everything with the Euro, or not, with money. At that time, there was no reward for any of the girls or the boys. Sometimes they didn't even have money to buy water, but as they say, they had to wait until they reached a spring, let's say, or a natural fountain in order to drink water. They didn't even have money for food. Many times we ate our food in our hands, let's say, some leaf of bread with some cheese. And the greatest problem of the Movement was with cars, the gas was expensive. Yes, it was a great pleasure when someone gave you ten liters of gas, let's say. But, even this part stands in the spirit of what is called a real human movement first, then a national [movement] of that youth. Nobody cared about money for 26-27 months as the Movement lasted. No, and of course, it was this that brought it very clear in the face of history as a modern movement, as a human movement, as a human movement, but why not, also as a national Movement.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How many cases were reconciled in Shtupeq, and what, what kind of disagreements were they?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, the disagreements were the same as the ones in other areas. Some of them were mainly of a scale, what it's called?, that it shouldn't have happened like that, but when the blood gets warm, as they say, the unexpected happens. There were also cases, I mean, of family misunderstandings, of a more extended circle, there were also cases of bloods, how to say, that were called bloods at that time, blood forgiving for deaths that happened in traffic accidents. I mean, there were various, but the main thing was that the team was welcomed, it was welcomed by each family, it was welcomed very well, and the team was really without, how to say, it was tireless and worked a lot.



And then after they were done with their region, that team worked in Podgura, I mean in the villages of the region of Istog. They worked in valleys which partly belong to Klina, now, in the Valleys of Peja. They worked in the village of Reka, until Reka e Keqe, but they also worked in other regions, wherever there was a need. And this is how the teams worked, when they were done with their region, they went to the other regions and helped the Reconciliation Movement.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did your studies serve you to reconcile people, I mean, to better know the case?

**Zymer Neziri:** To be honest, how knowledgeable a professor was at that time, even those who knew as much as a student knows became almost equal...Let me mention the case...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I thought about studies of certain regions.

**Zymer Neziri:** Of course they were useful. But in the precise cases when it came to, let's say to the one that is called, that is called, investment, moral investment, human investment, national investment for reconciliations, that's when, that's when the voice of the young generation came up, of course it was way more efficient. Let's say the case, let's say the case of Hava, Hava Shala, the case of Myrvete Dreshaj, but also of the others, as I said, of Zyrafete Muriqi and many, many other girls who were active in the Movement. It was very interesting, a girl speaking in a men's *oda*, talking to men, about men's concerns, bloods caused by men, and also of course because of women. Their true voice was a very important voice, in the gatherings, as I said in the *oda* with men, but also in the gatherings where there were tens of thousands of people, but also [the voice] of the boys [was important]. That is why I am saying that the most refreshing thing in the Reconciliation Movement was the voice of youth, their own age itself, but also their voice, their word. Of course all of them leaning on the national and social field. We have to agree because we can live better and we have to reconcile because that's how it will be easier for us to liberate, you know, from, from the occupier and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was the women's participation in the Movement encouraged, or did it happen in a spontaneous way?

**Zymer Neziri:** No, it was en...it was, there was spontaneity and at the same time there was not, I am talking about the youth group. I don't remember boys having had an advantage, there were cases when girls had an advantage, I mean, the group of girls was a very active group. Of course they were mixed groups, they were mixed together, but the group of gender, I mean, the group of female gender especially the one of young age was very pretty significant (smiles), even in the sense of the number of members. If they were not more than boys, at least they were equal to them. But also other women, teachers, other teachers, women who were part of the Movement, students, professors, of course this group was smaller. But the group of students was a very big group, it was very big, of course as I am saying, it didn't differ from the group of boys at all, that it [the group of boys] was bigger than the ones of girls. The opposite, they were equal. And as I said, their word was very important.

When I was in the gatherings, let's say, one of the girls spoke, let's say a student, I knew that their word was way more effective than one of two boys speaking together. But they listened to them very carefully and took the reasons, they took the reasons with their hearts, because it was difficult in some

cases if you didn't weaken their hearts and touch their soul. I mean, the case should be weakened, how they say, in that sense, to weaken the soul of that one in that sense, and glorify it in the other hand that he says, "Yes, yes, we forgive the blood."

So, the role, the role of women in the Reconciliation Movement was truly of the highest rank in history, I am saying this because women participated in Blood Feuds Reconciliations even earlier, but less than this time since they had no right to be part of men's gatherings. As we know, in the League of Prizren, during *Rilindja*<sup>33</sup> and after, also before, in the gatherings of 600 years ago, but even earlier, especially in the times of Skanderbeg, I mean, his struggles for Albania's freedom, the woman stands equally to the man, you didn't have this in Europe. You didn't have this in Europe, they had the right to speak among men, even the shepherdess, not to talk about the ones from royal families, of course they had that right, but the shepherdess had the right as well, if they were gifted by nature to be smarter than a man, as they say, they were even better than men.

This tradition continues in the Reconciliation Movement as well, I mean in this last phase of the reconciliation, in 1990, the past century. And I believe that in the near future a special study on the woman's role on the Reconciliation Movement will be conducted, a role of really important weight for history as well as for Europe itself. Europe, I mean, and the tradition, the European tradition of equality, gender equality.

I told you that the students, teachers and women who were part of the Reconciliation Movement, who were activists, I told you that their role had a very important weight, from time-to-time it was of a decisive weight. But what you've heard, what professor Anton said, many other activists have said it as well, that the girls, the women activists of the Reconciliation Movement, entered more easily into the families, especially into the women's world, you know, the mothers who had remained without their sons, the wives who had remained without their husbands, the sisters who had remained without their brothers. They reached them in an easier way. They spoke to them in an easier way and their work in this case was, you know, really, really great and when the family was prepared to forgive, of course the first attempts and results came exactly from the women's world. And I think that this was the double role of the women activists, I mean they did double the work because they went deep into the family. And of course when a "Yes" came from the mother for her son, then another "Yes" came from the sister for her brother, another one from the wife who had remained without her husband. This was a great "Yes," it was a decisive "Yes," that made that blood be forgiven and that made those families not remain in enmity any longer, or as they say, in enmity.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mentioned that during the years of the Blood Feuds Reconciliations Campaign there were families that gave you *besa*. Could you tell us about that?

**Zymer Neziri:** There were not many cases that remained unforgiven. There are regions where there is no case left, but there are also regions where there are cases that remained unforgiven. But in those cases, I mean, we had no result each time we attempted, once, twice and many times, we had no

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<sup>33</sup> *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the the nineteenth century Albanian national movement.

results, but however this one that you are mentioning was a result, because we were told from those families that, “Don’t worry, we are not even considering killing them, and they have our *besa* and if there is a need, we will give them the *besa* again.” I mean, “We will not avenge blood during the time of the Reconciliation Movement.” And it’s true, they kept their promise.

I don’t know a case, during the ‘90s, after the beginning of the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliations which later turns into a Movement, after February 1, 1990, that someone avenged blood. I don’t know, I mean, there were not [such cases]. Even though I am the one supposed to know, professor Anton as well, our team here in the Institute, since I was the one responsible for the Movement’s archive. This was the good within the bad, the bad was when the blood wasn’t forgiven, but the good was that they gave their word that they will not avenge blood, or in the traditional way, they gave the *besa*, just the way it is given today, and in these families, I mean, people go out freely, finish their daily works in the market, their daily works in the land, you know, they are under *besa*. So, we didn’t have the chance [to reconcile] but still, this was the other face of the medal of the Movement, that it was not completely successful, but however, it had its successes, killings are not going to happen exactly because of its success.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You mentioned that the Institute of Albanology was the main pillar of...that supported the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. Could you speak about the role of the Institute in a more detailed way?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, since professor Anton came from this Institute as well as Zeqa, Zekerija Cana and the late Muhamet Pirraku. I am mentioning this trio because they are deceased, but there were also others who came from this Institute and of course this Institute had another name, another name. In the sense that it was a greater voice for the struggles it was doing, because this Institute really, beside the Reconciliation Movement and other actions, during the ‘90s, this Institute published 88 times. While we were working without salaries and in occupation conditions, we also worked outside this Institute, in a private house in Kodra e Diellit, and this is a record case of what is called the intellectual, research, scientific world, to publish 88 times. Even in comparison with the Academy of Sciences in Tirana and the one in Pristina or with all the faculties within the University of Pristina. I mean we were the ones who went out in the field every day since we were not doing anything else, so we went out and researched. We had to publish *Gjurmimet Albanologjike* [Albanological Research], our magazine which had begun in 1971 in three series and is fortunately still being published. It was the time when the 45th issue just came out of print, we were working, we were working without any money because there were no salaries.

But, when it came to the printing house, we had some backing, but not for all that needed to be paid, we went, let’s say to Theranda, Peja, the region, and elsewhere. We had a friend to whom we went after dinner and collected [the money], someone five [Deutsche] Marks, someone ten Marks, someone fifteen, we collected the money and gave them to that printing house so that the book could be published. Then we distributed it in the field for the children and for the schools as well as for the children. In other words, the Institute had a popular voice in this respect, that is why, that is why the workers were ready to be in the field. And like this, it became the central pillar with professor Anton

Çetta the central pillar of the Reconciliation Movement within it. This Institute had its special merit because as I said, the archive of the Movement was founded here, this is the place where the data was collected, where the first books about the Movement were composed, of how the notes should be kept, and fortunately, a big part of those papers are saved today in the archive of the Institute, while another part of them is saved in the archive of professor Anton.

That is why the weight of this Institute was multiple, not only in the Reconciliation Movement, but in the Movement in general, I mean, in the National Movement, until the last, war when a part of what is called the emergency drug store was situated here, of course, with the knowledge of only two or three people, but until then, there was direct engagement in the war as well as for mothers in labor, an engagement for the newborns. My colleague Emin Kabashi took care of this report together with Flora Brovina. And this Institute, for real, these merits which are not extraordinary but are ordinary for an institution and its people, they were really great, and then the post-war came, the time when we were paid back in a very bad way with UNMIK and with others who did just the same thing as UNMIK, with our ministers from the first one to the last but one, the last but one, who executed the law which was the law, the law that discriminated intellectuals in Kosovo the most, where the employee of the Institute is paid 39%. The aim is, leave if you have a place to go, and for you who aim to come, there is no place for you to come.

Then the embargo, with the recruitment of the new generation of researchers and now the situation in the Institute is almost a quarter smaller than what it was in 1999. But however, the merits are really great for this part of the history of Albanians, because this institution was really great, it was assigned with great tasks before history and albanology. That is why it stands proud today with its around 600 publications which it conducted during its journey since its founding in 1953 to today. We have to take into consideration the interruptions it had, so, also taking into consideration the interruptions and the prohibitions it had. But today this Institute, I mean, for its historic merits, which weren't, I mean, which weren't that little, but let me repeat again, they were a duty towards history and albanology, are not respected nowadays. They are not respected by the government of Kosovo nowadays, they weren't respected yesterday, they weren't respected since 1999 and after, because this Institute was considered to be the second centre of European Albanology, this Institute lives badly. The library that you had the chance to see earlier {addresses to the interviewer} with the given books has survived for 17 years now. They are not 17 times, the times that this Institute has bought books, no, it has nothing to buy them with. It has nothing to buy them with, because the state says, "I don't have it! And whether you buy books or not is your business."

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you and the institute spend the war, if you could describe that?

**Zymer Neziri:** The first time when students and teachers of all faculties were forcibly taken out [of the buildings] and the University was occupied, this, this time. Of course they told the Institute, "Leave!" And they went out from the Academy of Sciences as well, but this Institute said, "No, we're not leaving." Letters with red lines, as they call them, were delivered to us, we delivered them back, we are in our building, the Institute is ours, it belongs to us with papers [titles] and we will continue our

work here. And we survived, I mean, in the time when all the institutions of Kosovo were occupied, we were here.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You returned at that time...

**Zymer Neziri:** No, we didn't return, we were here, we didn't leave at all...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean, did you return to work here in the Institute?

**Zymer Neziri:** No, I didn't. I returned in the time, in 1990. They fired me from the bank and then I spent here, I spent the time here together with professor Anton, in 1991-1992. And the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliations came to its end on May 17, 1992, I didn't have the status [of employee] yet, because they were afraid someone would wake up as a phantom and unite Yugoslavia again, and I got given the status back in June, 1992. I mean, precisely on June 26, 1992, I had the status, even though I was here, I was active in the Movement as well. And at that time the Institute, the Institute was standing very good with the internal organization it had, and that was called, I mean, the versatility that was evident within in order to resist, I mean, to say, "No."

But, when we reached the bad point, when we were expecting, I mean, the moment they would attack us, that's when we took 17 bags of the archive, the best part of what we had, the rarest books we had, and took them out during the night, after midnight. Then we put them in some points in the city, of course we photocopied them in order for what was called the fat of handwriting in the Institute, its core, to be out, and we successfully did that. Then we decided to take the books out, we took a truck of 15 tons, we took flour sacks and some Chemistry students helped us, we got so tired, it was the month of Ramadan. Some of them were fasting and we loaded almost 300 bags. The police patrol came, "What are you doing?" "We are loading books." "Who do they belong to?" "They are ours." "Where are you sending them?" "We are taking them out, we are sending them to the warehouse." "Alright." The other patrol came after, with the same questions, "Stop!" The other one came, "Unload the truck!" This was the hardest part because we were tired and had no more energy left. The book, it's heavy as a rock weight, we unloaded around 100 bags, they left.

The time of *iftar*<sup>34</sup> came, we stopped at this...how do they call the bakery here in *Kodra e Diellit*, the first bakery there, and took some food, we took whatever we found first, we ate enough and then we loaded the books again. The patrol didn't come, after midnight we sent them to *Lagjja e Spitalit* in a family's house there, and we put them there (coughs). Some of them woke up in the *syfyr*<sup>35</sup> time, they helped us, they kept us for tea (smiles) and like this. Then they didn't, they didn't interrupt us with the books anymore. In the first stage we were really, really prepared, with the removal of the papers, handwritings and the rare books. In the first stage we were really, really successful, but what happened after? There happened other [things]. The decision came again with three red lines, 1994 found us here, we spent 1993 here, yes.

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<sup>34</sup> *iftar*, meal consumed after dawn, breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan.

<sup>35</sup> *syfyr*, pre-dawn meal during the same month.

I mean this Institute in that period of, of the occupation of all cultural, educational and scientific institutions in Kosovo to the Academy of Sciences, this Institute survived thanks to insisting on not giving up the building of the Institute. At some point they lost their patience with us, and of course they organized their paramilitary units that came here and swore, but also broke the windows with rocks, time-after time they threw molotovs towards the upper floor. I mean we continually were the target of the hooligans, or the police, however, we still kept going. But, what happened? Just before the Institute was occupied, they put a machine gun in the kindergarten here in front of the Institute, in the upper floor, the mezzanine like this {shows with hands}, and they constantly controlled us from there with the barrel, how they said, with the weapon's barrel and cameras at the same time. And of course they were wondering, "What do they do here? They resist this much with only one pencil in their hand. No one resists in Kosovo but they do."

We stayed here until five in the morning, we were guarding, five of us. There were fifty of us staying here until midnight, I mean, we stayed here in this hall and in the other halls. In the morning we continued normally, the police of course surveilled us and on March 8, 1994, we realized that something had changed. I was on guard that night, the main guard and in the morning I went to my flat to sleep, but I stayed here until three. And we said, "What's going on? There is something going on." We noticed and at three they told me, "Go, take a little rest." They said, "if something happens, we will call you on the phone and tell you if they come." I went to my flat, I only took my coat off and I laid down the way I was and caught some, as they say (smiles) sleep. It didn't last long, it lasted so short, too short, because my wife came and said, "They are calling, they came." She didn't know what, "They came," meant (smiles). I took the coat in my hand and caught the first bus in the *lagje of Qafa*, I came here.

Yes, I came here and found them in front of the door, around ten more had come, they were already inside, they had beaten the employees, the one in service, and they had taken a big chain, a thick one and a big lock, they had put it and had closed the Institute. What did we do then? We broke the lock (smiles), got inside, bought a new lock, then we locked the door ourselves with another lock. I mean, this was the other action. We told the women and some old men here in the hall downstairs, professor Idriz Ajeti who was the director of this Institute, our professor was among them, he became the rector of the University, and we told him, "Professor, go." Yes, we also asked professor Anton and some others, "Go," we had disabled people and people who walked with a limp, one of the researchers and another one from the administration, we told them, "You as well, go." "No, let whatever happen to you, happen to us as well." And women didn't leave, neither did men, no one left. We were over 44-45, I guess, there were 43 of us precisely, if I am not mistaken. There were 15 of us drinking coffee in my office and discussing when we heard a very big shout coming from the entrance downstairs.

They had broken the door for the second time now, the door that we had broken before, the same door that was locked by them, now they broke our lock (smiles). Yes, and they beat, how to say, the employees they met there, the director among them. He said, "I am the director." "You are?" "Yes." And they beat the director, they bloody beat them, they broke his jaw, they broke his teeth, his nose and made the man wash in blood, they did the same with the others. Then they went up to the library, just where you were {addresses to the interviewer and the cameraman}, they made a line there as they

call it *szpaler*,<sup>36</sup> in the left and in the right and you had to go through it, of course they beat all of those who went through it. We tried, let's say, to defend one of our women colleagues with another man colleague, of course they beat her less and us more. We went like that to the stairs. I found professor Anton at the stairs, in the first landing, he was laying on the floor with his head down, and his legs this way {demonstrates}, I took him, and I asked the colleague, Emin, "Can you take the professor?" He said, "Yes," and left towards the garden.

Down on the other landing, I met professor Idriz, "Professor, are you fine?" He said (smiles), "Yes, yes, where is the door?" {shows with hands}. The door was right there, close to him. He was beaten in the third floor, right where we are at now, I mean, in the director's office. One of the assistants, "*Nemojte profesora!*" you know, "Don't beat the professor!" They pulled him by his hair and bend his head like this {shows with hands}, they pushed him down on the floor as well. This was the Institute's struggle, you know, in, I mean, on March 9, 1994, when we went to the door. One of the colleagues, Ragip was his name, Ragip Mulaku, one of the best employees of the Linguistics Department, probably as he was defending himself, they thought he wanted to fight with them, they grab him by his hands and bend them {shows with hands} turn them around, they throw him down, they put their feet on him and punish him very much, really hard.

Again, another woman colleague, her name is Myzafere, Myzafere Mustafa, says, "They killed Ragip." Sadri Fetiu, the director, we were inside, we were still here, I mean, we had not left, and I said, "We should not leave!" "No," she said, "I want to. Let them kill me." He was covered in blood and together with Myzafere and with the three of us got inside, but they were already done with Ragip. They didn't set him free just because we entered, but they set him free nevertheless. When we went near the windows, next to the door, they attacked us so badly, I fortunately raised both my hands {shows with gesture} and defended this part like this. That is how we got out of there, all covered in blood, with our teeth broken, with our jaws broken, with our hands broken, with our legs, our bodies injured, we went out. They had locked the entrance near the traffic light, up there close to the students canteen, and there were no cars or people at the traffic light down there either.

But when we went out, just as we left for the hospital, to get first aid, when we went out there, the streets were full of people, people circulated, oh my God, it gave us the impression that it was a holiday. We were of course covered in blood, we continued our way to the hospital where each one of us needed to get first aid at, and like this, I mean, we experienced the re-occupation of the Institute and they didn't allow us to come back here anymore. Then they gave us the Institute back just before the war began, according to some agreements which were also a game of Serbia and the others of course. But that didn't last long, until that time we worked in Kodra e Diellit, my office within which I was responsible for twelve workers, was twelve meters square, the exact space that belongs to you in prison if you go there. But, we worked there in three shifts, that is why I said we had many results, extraordinary results, and today we deserved to have a better status today (smiles) in 2016, better than the one we have.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Shall we talk about the war, how did you and your family spend it?

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<sup>36</sup> Polish: *Spazler*, fence. Otherwise, a ceremonial alignment of two rows facing each other. In this case, gauntlet.

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes my family, of course my large and close family here in Pristina didn't spend it well, because during that time, there were many people and many families that had to flee Pristina, especially the ones of us who were in worse financial situations than others. At least for the biography we had, but also the activity of very deep circumstances, of how they call it, of what is called the connection with the headquarters of the brigades, connections, connections with the soldiers at the frontline, we had, we had to take more care. Let's say, they suggested me to leave, I said, "No, I am not going to leave, because that's how I will become a bad example for 600 families in the *lagje of Qafa*, I am not going to leave." And imagine, a family misfortune happened exactly at that time, and it was not a very small one, my wife broke her arm, yes, while trying to clean the boiler, her feet slipped and she fell down on this part {shows with hands}, she broke it in two pieces. And now, it was all covered in a plaster cast {shows with hands}. Our children were little, one of our sons was ten while the other was eleven, our daughter somewhere around that age, I mean, it was a family that couldn't face Serbia empty-handed.

But we were giving a moral and national example, to not flee. And this lasted as much as it lasted. And you know, NATO's bombings started, in the time of the bombings, we spent the first night in our apartment. Yes, I had calls coming from Germany, America, Switzerland and other areas. "Please, don't curse your children, if you leave, at least let them survive, cause you are cursing them as well." Alright, I went across the street, to one of my relatives there, we spent the second night there and I changed my mind, I wanted to go out and return to my apartment again. And the five of us went out, my wife, three of our children and I. We crossed the street and entered, when we came, my big son said, "Father, the *milicia*<sup>37</sup> are at our entrance." Alright, we returned and entered through another entrance, we went upstairs to the last but one floor, at one of my friends' and spent some time there.

After two or three hours, we went out. I told my son, "You continue that way, I will continue this way." I mean, in order to check whether the entrances are safe or there are policemen. And my son comes out and says, "No," he says, "They are not there." The police had gone upstairs and asked people to give them chairs to sit on, yes, I mean, there were no police until on the second floor. My son said, "They are not there," and we went upstairs. When we went upstairs, my wife said (smiles), "The *Milicia* are inside." "Where are they? She says, "They knocked on the door." "What did they ask for?" "Chairs." She said, "They needed them for the orphanage." Because it's not that we had very good chairs, she said, "And they went upstairs." We had no idea what was going on. They had come, two patrols of 24-hours police, I mean, to patrol and guard.

One, one of them in the entrance and the other in the sixth floor, they came because of the sixth floor, because there was a police commander living on the sixth floor, of the rapid reaction police, one whose name I never forget, his last name either, Bajraktarević. And now, because of him, I mean, they were guarding, one of them downstairs and another one upstairs. And now, I mean, they located a headquarter, because it seems like their friends in NATO had notified them of the day of bombings and they had removed some of their commands from the point which they attacked from, from the commanding center in the garden of the Ministry of Internal Affairs now. And that man, I mean, was located there before the bombings of NATO, yes, I mean, they had already known and later on it

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<sup>37</sup> Serb: *Milicia*, literally police.



turned out that a French general had betrayed, and he had notified, I mean, what was left of Yugoslavia at that time and told them that, he told them, I mean, that there will be attacks over, over Serbia.

Now the problem was how to get out of, of, of, of the building. My wife together with the wife of the only friend who opened his door for us, he was one floor under us, because no one dared to go upstairs, I mean, without the knowledge of the police, and one of them went to the bakery *Te Sahiti*, that is how it is called, and the other...a little garbage, we became, I mean we became two families in that tiny apartment of 30 meters. Plus, they had an old man sick with kidney disease, I mean, he was in a, in a not very good condition. The fourth day passed, and in the fourth day, I mean, the whole matter was taking me out of there, not the family, but me, because I was the one to put everyone in danger.

And there was a policeman from Bosnia who they rewarded with an apartment there, I mean, a policeman who had probably massacred people in Bosnia, and he was one, a man who didn't know what the police was, he followed you from behind just like a dog once he saw you. Yes, yes, he didn't look at you in a professional way and then tails you, yes, just like the police does. And it was dangerous, let's say, for him to know that I was there. Let's say, because some other policemen...so they said, "Let's see, let's do something," and we went out of there. In fact I went out, and the wife of my friend, of my friend, I am saying, a man to whom I owe, as they say, my whole life and my children, for having the courage to accept me and my family inside. There was a point in the street we saw, you know, from the window, and if you didn't stop there, that meant that there was no danger, and if you had to stop, you had to always stop at that point.

And we followed my wife and his wife, because if, I mean, there was danger, we noticed the danger. I took the signal, I mean, the signal that there was not, that the police were not at the door, because a gun was fired. They left their checkpoint and went to the middle, because in the middle of the garden there was another roofless car, with a machine gun that rotated there. Again the other unit, they filled the warehouse down there, I mean they made a warehouse for weapons down there where we had, I mean, where the garages are now. I went out, when I went out she almost fainted, and said, "Oh my God," she said, "They will call us traitors for our lifetime." "If they catch you." "Yes, don't worry at all." I went through the tunnel. I crossed the street, I went to the family where we stayed earlier, the family's last name is Iberdemaj, they are my relatives from the village of Shtupeq and you can imagine, a flight distance of eighty meters, I mean, my family was moved from that point to the other in over eight hours, I mean, in order not to be noticed. Go to the bakery, take a child, go back and leave the child to the corner, go there again, come here alone, go out with the other child after lunch, the other one, I mean in order not to be noticed.

We went there, we settled down, they welcomed us, there was enough room and we spent two-three nights there until a gang of paramilitaries came and robbed the family that was wealthy, they robbed all of our things as well, all of our papers, with the barrel of the gun here to the throat {shows with hands}, I even took my little son, I was afraid he was a bit too big, I said, "Leave the little one with me," to my wife, "take the other one." Yes...and they were done after some time and said, "Get lost, get out,

you have five minutes!” And we went out, around 17 of us because there were already three families there, we went out, the patrol stopped us, “Where are you going?” You didn’t know where to say you were going to, we told them that they kicked us out, he said, “During the curfew?” They left, then we decided to return. But not return and be noticed by them, but spread around the *lagje of Tophane* and get inside of it slowly as if we were stealing, and we did so, we gathered together at some point.

We spent that night, we spent another night, but what happened? Others came, they came in uniforms, in military uniforms, there were paramilitaries among them, and they acted just like the first ones, but they said, after they were done, they said, “You only have three minutes! We are not the ones of five minutes.” I mean, they knew that there was someone before them there and we went out again, and the same thing happened to us again, the patrols stopped us and said, “It’s a military curfew, no movements are allowed.”

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Didn’t they direct you towards the trains, or somewhere?

**Zymer Neziri:** But listen, that patrol right away (smiles), I mean, right at the exit of the house, at the exit of the house...no, we weren’t going to the train [station], we decided, we decided, we decided to remain there, but we decided that both our wives and the children should go. But of course, when we had the chance, we checked and it turned out that it was safe for the car to move, but it couldn’t move because its tires were flat, he didn’t have a reserve tire and like this, I mean, this new situation was created. Then again we acted just like the first time, we went there playing alive or dead and we didn’t give any signal after midnight. We spent another night there.

The next night something not good happened there, just because of me, with one of those who came there. He started going crazy and said, “See, just because of Zymer, they will kill my wife, my children and me,” because you know, “Zymer didn’t behave, he did something wrong, he did wrong to Yugoslavia, and if Yugoslavia finds out I am living here, they will kill us too.” And just as I was taking my first sleep, my wife came to me and said, “Filan went crazy.” Then I went to talk to him and said, “Yugoslavia deserved much more than what I did to it, but I couldn’t do more, I did, but I couldn’t manage to do more. As for you, may you, your wife and your children have health, because you will surely survive because I don’t put you in danger.” And I told my wife, “As soon as we see the dawn, I will follow you, you know, from the roof upstairs, you will go out, you will take our son with you as well, the big son, yes, and you will walk towards the bakery.” I mean, it was at around five in the morning and “If you don’t stop at the checkpoint, I will know that the street is safe, and I will go out with the little son,” he was ten years, and I said, “and we will leave from here.”

I had a connection in the *lagje of Qafa*, to go to some family that was coming from Vushtrri and that had one, with one paralyzed man in the family, they were the only ones who had remained in the *lagje of Qafa* in this, in the third building, and my wife got along with the other woman who was, she was the sister of my friend’s wife and she told us that if we reached the point where we had no other solution, we would have a shelter at their place. I left there. I went out, my wife didn’t give any signal that there was the police, I went out with the little son and just as we approached the building A, the first one, I mean we walked for around 50 meters, and left towards the building B, “Father,” he said,

“*milicia*,” my son...just in the direction where my wife left , how to find a way to go to the bakery, there was a bunch of policemen, around seven or six of them, I said, “They have nothing to do with us.” We continued, they couldn’t imagine that we went out at that time, and we got closer, we entered that building, the C building. They welcomed us in that apartment, when my wife went there for the second time she sent the other child, the other one, the other one. Then again, we walked for a whole day, I mean, in order to come together in a 200 meters long street.

Yes...and we only came together in the evening, in the evening, in the evening...the door knocked just as they served the *sofra*,<sup>38</sup> and it knocked for a pretty long time, the owner of the house went out and I saw a police cap or a military one at the door, like this {shows with hands}, I saw it, I mean, a uniformed person, I mean, I only saw the cap, but I couldn’t see anything more than that, because during the conversation, he moved from the corner from which I could see. Turned out that he was a Bosnian who at the time worked for the custom, as a customs official, he said, “Neighbor,” he said, “Things are not looking good for you,” he said, “Neither are ours, Bosnians,” he said, “Ours are not that good,” he said, “But, your businesses are very bad, you only have one advantage because the group that robbed and raped in the direction of the stadium and in that part of the station” he said, “That group is not anymore, the police itself removed it, something else.” He said, “You have nothing more.” He said, “You have no reason to stay here!” And we were forced to leave from there in the morning, I mean, from the *lagje of Qafa*, we left towards the train station, of course, with great pain. We met two or three police patrols but none of them stopped us. There was no man alive at the train station, and once the train arrived, I don’t know, it only took 30-40 minutes, not more, it seemed like people were coming out of the ground.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which day of the bombings was that?

**Zymer Neziri:** This was the date, the 3rd, April 3, yes. And we jumped in the railway carriage, but of course the others did so too, and I helped them to jump in and we were around over 20 people in one like hen-roost, yes. So this is how this journey was, one of the most difficult journeys of my life, not for myself, but because of my wife, because as I told you, she was all dressed on one, {shows with hands} on one side with a plaster cast, the children were small, I mean, of a very young age, and of course the other pain was for Pristina and also for Kosovo. We travelled like this, we passed Fushë Kosova, Ferizaj, Kaçanik, until Bllaca. We passed Bllaca, I spent five days and nights there, it was a great misery, I mean, of what is still called Europe, with the Macedonian police, especially with them, with the deaths of the people, I mean, tens of people died. There are over five hundred graves there, there were also newborns and whatnot?! It was terrible, it was hell.

Then from there they said, “No, cholera is spreading and we will set them all free,” because they used not to, they didn’t allow you, and then we travelled during the whole night to Korça, to the stadium of Korça. The buses turned back from there. We had very bad conditions on the buses, it was also there, I don’t want to end up in stories and drama again. You can imagine, people couldn’t do their physiological needs and you had to take a bottle and do your physiological needs in a bottle, and

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<sup>38</sup> Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

throw it out, and so on and so on. I mean, you had a worse status than the ones in prison. The journey was too long, I don't know which road they took, I guess they passed through Ohrid and Korça.

Then we went to the doctor because of my wife. "No, the administration should give you the papers," until they gave us the papers to go to Tirana or Durres, but there were no apartments in Tirana and Durres. We found an apartment the price of which was as high as during the summer holidays (smiles), yes, the owner of the apartment was even a soccer player who was living in Italy, from the Qendro family. But we had no money, but we had the opportunities to have it, because my brother was living in Germany, my nephews were in Switzerland and America, so we had the opportunities to have it.

Because we had some, but even that little money we had was taken from us on the first night, in the first robbing, and then of course in the hospital of Durres, the treatment was very good there. I continued to Tirana, I went to the Institute more often, I met the boys in the who had mobilized, I kept the connection with them. Then the ones of our 136 Rugova brigade resurfaced and set-up the military hospital there, with the help, again, of the General, as I said, Kudus [Lama]. This was the part that of course hurts, but the most painful part was that Pristina had no organization for self-defense, Pristina had not. The boys of the unit *BIA*<sup>39</sup> which was very small, they had no opportunities, and this part was not planned at all, that Pristina should be emptied. This was the most painful part, very painful, but the war was the way it was, now they can bring the vipers out, "It could have been like this, that, like this..." It's over, I mean, as a historic process, it's closed. But this doesn't mean that the problem of Albanians with Serbs is also closed.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did you return from Albania?

**Zymer Neziri:** Yes, we came back... yes, the bombings came to their end, I was in a mission which was organized with the people who had fled Kosovo from the Academy of Sciences and the Institutes, I was in the mission for a few days and we returned together with them, of course, at the time of the return. You know what conditions it was on, and our families outside of Pristina? There were two members of my family killed. In the large circle of the family, the *kushëri*<sup>40</sup> as they call it, there were four members massacred as well. One of them was a political prisoner and he was sentenced to death after the Second World War, he spent his time in prison, came out, and they took him. His older son said, "Don't take my father," he was an old man, around seventy-years-old. He said, "No, your father is speaking too much." And it's true, his father spoke too much, because he was deaf, he went deaf because of the big tortures in prison, he didn't know how to coordinate his tone when he spoke to others. "Yes, the old man speaks too much, come here, you as well." He stands up, the second son, "Don't take my father and my brother because they are old, take me," you know, to be shot. "Okay, come, but we are not setting them free." The other one who was my age stood up, his name was Shaqir, and said, "Set them free, take me." And they said, "Come, you as well." And they took the father with the three of his sons and massacred them in a house at the entrance of Zahaq, with the

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<sup>39</sup> BIA [Bahri-Agron-Ilir] unit was a KLA unit for freedom and liberation. It was named as a sign of respect after people's heroes Bahri Fazliu, Agron Rrahmani and Ilir Konushevc.

<sup>40</sup> *Kushëri* is a way of referring to distant relatives without having to name the distance in order to keep them all in the closer circle of the family.

eyes with...then they burned them as well, so when we buried them, we had to arrange the three corpses ourselves.

This was the part that was experienced by many Albanian families in the last war, it's a war that has ended, but a war such as the centuries old conflict with Serbia, many wars, many battles, hasn't ended because Serbia doesn't want to stop, and they don't know and they don't even have the slightest will to say, "I did wrong, I am going to stop now," just as the whole Germany knew after Hitler.