

INTERVIEW WITH IBADETE BUNJAKU - AHMETAJ

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Duration: 70 minutes

Present:

1. Ibadete Bunjaku - Ahmetaj (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (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

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Mrs. Ibadete, can you tell us... first introduce yourself in front of the camera and then tell us about your early childhood and your first memories.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes. My name is Ibadete Bunjaku, now Ahmetaj. I was born in Pristina, I grew up, I grew up in Svetozar Marković Street, former Svetozar Marković Street near the former Miladin Popović school, now Pjetër Bogdani. I finished elementary school there. Then I finished two years of the Technical School, and I finished the two last years, the third and the fourth in the *Shkolla Normale*,¹ in the department of Secretary of the News Desk Program.

My early childhood is very interesting because I come from a family of former political prisoners. I mean, as children we were inspired by patriotic ideas. I often remember my older brother, Xhavit, travelling far away to film Albania so that we could watch them and get educated in that spirit. We were good students, but we also were surrounded by very, very, very good people in the neighborhood where we lived. I mean, we were lucky to have grown up in such good, quiet neighborhood, they were all intellectuals since we were also an intellectual family.

So, we grew up learning poems, listening to various interesting stories from our father... our father telling about the war at Kitka, which is a very important war... telling how he used to be a *ballist*² at that time, how they fought and so on. I was always curious, maybe I was too curious because I was the youngest child at home, I always put pressure on my father to tell me what war was, what happened back then, everything... how much did girls get educated back then, and so on. Because I usually got

¹ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during WWII, these were the first schools in Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

² *Ballist*, member or supporter of *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

to hear stories of how women had very few rights back then, not to say at all. And so, my father was very interesting, he motivated and inspired us to study, to finish the University and get aheads.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did your father tell about that time?

Ibadete Bunjaku - Ahmetaj: He usually would tell about the Kitka wars, how they happened at that time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where is it?

Ibadete Bunjaku - Ahmetaj: The area of Hogosht, it is near Hogosht.³ I don't remember the year right now, but he told us how old brave ladies, *burrënore*⁴ as they were called at that time, did very interesting things, and how they hid, I mean, didn't tell the Germans and Italians at that time... and so on. Those were illegal areas. And my father had some marks on his head, and I always would ask him, "Father, why do you have them?" "Eh, these are the marks of the war, but I was fortunate enough to survive."

I noticed in my family that my father never put pressure on my mother, you know, to say, "You are a woman, you should do this, you should do that..." But I know he always told her, "You are a woman, but that doesn't matter, you should work with our children, especially with the girls." My mother was often jealous of the fact that my father left money under my pillow... "Go buy these books and those books and read them because they are really good for you." And so on, the years, not '81, but earlier years than the '80s...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When were you born?

Ibadete Bunjaku - Ahmetaj: I was born in 1969.... And I saw that many men were gathered there, to be honest also women, in my family, in my home and talked. But we were children, I was in the fifth grade or something. But, interesting, because of our curiosity and our readings we could understand something. And we would always ask my brother, "Something is happening," you know, "but you aren't telling us." "The time will come for you to understand it."

And I remember it as if it was today, it was '81. I was in sixth grade. I remember that day very well. We quit all classes, because demonstrations took place. And it was around six in the evening. I was with the daughter of my paternal uncle... because I live, we lived in the same yard. "Where are we going?" "Let's go," she said, "to the center." My house was near the Technical School. We went to the shopping

³ Village in the area of Gjilan.

⁴*Burrënore*, when a woman has so-called more masculine features. Used to describe a woman who is not conventional in the sense of stereotypical gender roles.

mall, where it used to be. What to see there? Interesting. Many students, so many of them. And they gave us some bread to give the students. Their will was very interesting, their bravery, yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In the center, in the street, or how?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: In the street, in the street, here in the Mother Theresa Square. It was covered with students. And some people who gave us the bread, “Go and give it to the students because they haven’t eaten all day.” And the evening came, it became dark, the daughter of my paternal uncle remained among the students. How, she was only in sixth grade. I started crying, and my brother came quickly, I don’t know how he saw me.... They already started launching teargas. He was dragging a woman because she had fainted.

“What do you want here?” “But,” I said, “we wanted to be wherever you are.” You know, we always wanted to go there secretly so that they could not see us. And we made sure with the daughter of my paternal uncle, she made her way out somehow. Then, my paternal uncle grabbed us by our hands quickly and sent us home. And so, we were always motivated since then. But it is interesting that I was very dynamic as a child. And in the neighborhood where I lived, there were some Turks and as children we had some conflicts, not big conflicts that could not be solved. Maybe we would fight a little there because they would say, “Sultan Murat,”⁵ and I would say, “Skandërbeg.”⁶ As a child, you know? These are some stories... now I have good relations with them, with the friends from my neighborhood. And my friend often tells me, “You know when you used to tell me that Skandërbeg knew how to deal with you?” And so on.

Then, the first year, the Technical Middle School. They started imprisoning the members of my family.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What for? Were they imprisoned before or was it the first time?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: It was the first time that they were being imprisoned. Ramadan Bunjaku was the first one who was imprisoned. He was imprisoned with the group of Naim Shala. Two years later.... But when Ramadan was imprisoned, they took all the men of my house for informative conversations,⁷ and they stayed there for an entire day until the next morning... I don’t even know

⁵ Murat is the name of several Sultans of the Ottoman Empire. It is likely that in this context he would be Murat I, the Sultan killed in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.

⁶ Gjergj Kastriot – Skanderbeg (1405-1468) was an Albanian nobleman and leader. Taken hostage as a boy by the Ottomans, he served the Empire until 1443 when he became the Chief of the League of Albanian People in the League of Lezhë. He led a resistance to the Ottoman Empire for the next 25 years until his death, and is considered a model of Christian resistance against Ottoman Islam throughout Europe. He is the greatest Albanian national hero.

⁷ People of different backgrounds were interrogated by the back then ruling power, usually people who were activists of the national cause or somehow related to it. Often, these informative conversations carried within themselves physical torture as well.

how many police patrols. They sent us to a corner and kept insulting us with the worst possible insults. “You know nothing, what are these books?” They found books by Kadare,⁸ books that were forbidden at that time, but we somehow were provided with them and would read them, every member of the family would read them, starting from the youngest to the oldest. And then we would always report to each-other about what we had understood, and how it resembled the situation we were at.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Which year was this?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: ‘83. All the women remained at home without their husbands. It was a really difficult situation at that time. And that was the time when I decided to engage in the *Ilegalja*.⁹

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell me more details about why they imprisoned them? What was the pretext?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The reason of their imprisonment? Nationalism was the pretext, irredentism. Ramadan was an excellent student in the fourth year, I mean, he was almost at the end of the Faculty of Law, I don’t know how many exams he had left... they locked him up. He was sentenced to ten years of prison for irredentism, nationalism, and so on, according to Belgrade’s machination.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was he your paternal uncle?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: He was the son of my paternal uncle, because my paternal uncle was very old. My father was too [an old man], because I am the youngest child. Nuhi Bunjaku was sentenced after two years with the group of Kafexholl, Rifat Kafexholli, Ajshe Gjonbalaj and I don’t remember the name, I guess Sadik Jashari was the last one. He was sentenced to 15 years of prison. He was in the prison of Peja. And so, we had no other option, because we were constantly persecuted in schools. The daughter of my paternal uncle was expelled from school in the first year. To me they applied measures...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Disciplinary?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The Disciplinary measures. I mean, I had no right to be a member of the leadership of the class, no matter my excellent success [grades].

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What were the groups which your family members were part of?

⁸ Ismail Kadare(1936-) is an Albanian novelist and poet. He has been a leading literary figure in Albania since the 1960s.

⁹ Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito’s Yugoslavia.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The illegal groups were various, *LKÇK*¹⁰ [*Lëvizja Kombëtare për Çlirimin e Kosovës*]. The Movement for Liberation...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean what kind of values did they promote?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Patriotic values, nothing else, but patriotic values. And so, we were raised with that spirit. Maybe we had no time to engage in leisure activities much. I mean, we mainly read and reflected on that, and what we could say to our peers was, “The book *Dasma* [The Wedding] by Ismail Kadare is phenomenal, read it because it is like this, or the book *Gjenerali i Ushtrisë së Vdekur* [The General of the Dead Army], or *Fshati Midis Ujërave* [The Village Between Waters], *Sikur të isha Djalë* [If I Were a Boy].” At the time we were in elementary school, and so on.

It’s interesting, the book that mostly impressed me was the first novel that I read when on the second grade, it’s *Lugjet e Verdha* [Yellow Lilies] and *Verorja* [Of Summer] , a book which I can never forget, never. And the last book that I read now, that I finished now is *Gjuetari i Balonave* [The Kite Runner] which is a book (sighs) *no comment* [English]. No matter who offers me a book, not to talk about the books that I have read before, there were many of them, I cannot say... I don’t even know how many I read until now.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did your involvement in the *llegale* happen?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: It all happened by accident. It happened... the son of my paternal uncle, before getting imprisoned, they had stickers, various books, brochures, a kind of... I remember it now, kind of campaigns, to do various campaigns, and distribute some small brochures. For example, I was lucky to have had the chance to meet Halil Alidema¹¹ when I was very young, I was very lucky to have met Ukshin Hoti,¹² whose value is.... He is great, and when one has so many interesting things, one has no other chance but get motivated. Today I transmit these things to my children.

He would always bring me some pamphlets, “Go give these to *baci*¹³ Halil.” I never knew who *baci* Halil and *baci* Ukshin were. Do you understand? I was a postwoman all the time, and unconsciously, you know, because when you know it.... And so I started the second year of my middle school. I began to understand things differently. In the second year, we already got involved. We got involved. We were, Shemsi Veseli, now he is a representative at the Municipal Assembly in Pristina, Ramadan Avdiu now

¹⁰ The National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (Albanian: *Lëvizja Kombëtare për Çlirimin e Kosovës*, *LKÇK*) was a radical left-wing nationalist political movement in Kosovo during the 90s, as well as a political party after the Kosovo war.

¹¹ Halil Alidema (1936-1996), historian, lawyer, politician.

¹² Ukshin Hoti (1943-199), philosopher and politicians, was sentenced to five years in prison in 1994. He disappeared at the time of his release and his whereabouts are still unknown.

¹³ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

lives in Switzerland and is a member of *PDK*¹⁴ [*Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*], and so... with these... there was Behxhet Kelmendi as well, he lives in Sweden now. He is married to our best friend, Valbona, who was in our group. There was Afrim Zhitia, but this was later, I met Afrim Zhitia when I was in the first year of my studies.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do, what kind of organization did you have? What kind of activities?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We usually had...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Brochures?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj:... yes, writing brochures, we had a kind of news desk, where we edited them, because it was our task to check typos, because we had, we were very strict when it came to Albanian language grammar mistakes... Afrim Zhitia was fanatic in that respect. We had... there were many others, but these ones are the ones who closely collaborated.

We organized the demonstrations of '88, if I am not mistaken. We organized them in the entire center of Pristina, we started from the Students Center. I was a first-year student in the Faculty of Philology, in the department of Albanian Language and Literature. And from there, we started being noticed. I was called to an informative conversation once, and the group decided for me to go abroad. I fled. I stayed in Switzerland for one year. Not exactly one year, but a little less than that. Afrim Zhitia was killed two months after I went to Switzerland. He was killed in the *Kodra e Trimave* [Hill of the Braves], together with Fahri Fazliu. And so on...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the life of your family in these years, from '83 to '88? Some of your family members were imprisoned?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No, it is interesting that people had a lot of love for each other at that time, and that is what kept us going. There was not, and I might even be mistaken, today everyone is driven by interest. Back then it was different, we loved each-other. Imagine, around 30 people slept in the conditions of this room {points to the room}. And the respect was extraordinarily high. You didn't have to think that something would happen to you if today you shared the bed with a guy friend of the group. Absolutely. You could sleep with them without any problem and not think that something would happen to you because you are a woman. The respect was extraordinarily high. And we didn't think, we didn't even have time to think about such things, absolutely, because we had other things to do.

¹⁴ *PDK* - *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*, Kosovo Democratic Party.

And like this, we began to slowly get involved in blood feuds reconciliations. I was a member of the Council, a member of the Leadership, at that time, of the Council for Human Rights Defense. Then, I moved to the Writers Association, they had the offices near the stadium... LDK [Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës]¹⁵ had the offices there. I was lucky to meet Ibrahim Rugova.¹⁶ We were very close to each-other. We exchanged many opinions and ideas.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did he support the *llegale*? I mean...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: He didn't know that we were part of the *llegale* at that time and we didn't get the chance to talk about it. But I have deep respect for Fehmi Agani.¹⁷ He was one of... also, a professor of the University, he was a person who strongly and dignifiedly supported us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Sorry, what did you study ?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Albanian Language and Literature. And from here we decided, some of the friends from the Writers Association, we decided and after talking to Hava [Shala]¹⁸ and Myrvete Dreshaj,¹⁹ who at the time were recently released from prison, we decided to begin this Action, considering that the situation in Kosovo kept getting worse. We saw nothing good anymore.

And, because I forgot to mention something... the ruling power back then, if a family had a political prisoner, they tried many ways... if there were women in the family, they degraded them in different ways, they didn't spare the means. We fought this fight for at least those families who had children, to save them from these things. Degradation. Many people, many civil police, would get close [to the families] and so on...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did they propose, something more concrete?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: First to go have coffee, to go to various coffee shops, which at the time were not... I mean, alcohol was absurd for women at that time, because today it is not a big deal... it is

¹⁵Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

¹⁶ Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

¹⁷Fehmi Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

¹⁸Hava Shala was interviewed by the Oral History Initiative in 2016 and you can find the transcript in this link: <http://oralhistorykosovo.org/hava-shala/>

¹⁹ Myrvete Dreshaj was interviewed by Kosovo Center for Gender Studies in 2005, and her interview can be found on the website of the Oral History Initiative, in this link: <http://oralhistorykosovo.org/myrvete-dreshaj/>

very different, Erëmirë {addresses the interviewer}, maybe I cannot describe it so well, because a long time has passed. Then, not because a long time has passed, but there are many things I have experienced during the demonstrations when our friends were killed. I mean, we suffered very much, or when you couldn't give the first aid to your friends...

I am one of the persons who was also part of the miners' strike... when the students had the strike... I was a member of the leadership, when Surija Pupovci delivered speeches in front of the students, when we decided to lock ourselves in the 25, former 25 *Maji* [May 25] hall.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To solidarize, right?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: To solidarize with the miners. At that time, it was led by Fadil Kryeziu who now I guess is a representative in the Municipal Assembly of Prizren. He was older than I. I had good relations with him and we all managed to stand stoically for one week, seven days without eating, and maybe without even drinking.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us more about how did it start?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: It all started by accident. We as a group decided very quickly, a very small group, and other students from the dormitories joined very quickly. And the crowd kept getting bigger so that many people would faint during this time, because the hall is, you know how big it is... I guess now it is called 1 *Tetori* [October 1]. It was really big, but we had around 20 thousand students there at that time. Maybe I can be mistaken about the number now, but there were enough students and... we had the courage and hoped that many random people would join the students as well.

So, we stood well... there were faintings... it was a lock down, because we couldn't open the doors, because the Regional Committee at that time already began, it fell, I mean they resigned. We were afraid that the police would come inside... so, the atmosphere was heavier than other times. And from there we began, the last time when we left the hall, we demonstrated. We expressed, we showed our concerns and what we did not want. And so on.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did that meeting go?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We began... we began the negotiations when, when Hava and Myrvete were released, there was Flamur Gashi²⁰ who now lives in Albania, because it's been a long time since I haven't met Flamur even though we had very good relations, now we meet via Facebook, thank God

²⁰Flamur Gashi was interviewed by the Oral History Initiative in 2016 and you can find the transcript in this link: <http://oralhistorykosovo.org/flamur-gashi/>

we have social networks and we met... there was Adem Grabovci,²¹ we decided. We didn't know that it would become so big. We took some very small decisions for them to start from Peja with the first family, to forgive two-three misunderstandings.

Because considering that Kosovo was at risk of war, and how could we enter the war with such enmities. We decided to divide in areas. After going to the first case, where a misunderstanding was forgiven as far as I remember... Erëmira, I am sorry because I might be mistaken here, the first case. But I have the footage of what happened, somewhere at home, because I could only save a few of the photos and videos from that time. Because I jealously took care of them.

And I personally wanted to work in the Drenica area. And they often ask me, "Why? The reason? Why the Drenica area?" I had heard that the Drenica area was an area where women had no rights at all. I was the only woman among many men. And it started expanding, the movement started expanding. The demand was very big and we started expanding the circle. I mean, we involved the whole Kosovo. There was one organizer in every part of Kosovo and beside the organizer there were other people, around ten of them.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was this spontaneous?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: It was very spontaneous, I mean not very spontaneous, the formation of the large group was spontaneous. Because it wasn't spontaneous if we decided to go to a family because there was a misunderstanding... But we saw that there was a big need.

You know, when you start a conversation and, "This works, this works," do you understand? And they started being talked about a lot. Then, the demand was big. People would come themselves and not leave you alone. I went to the Drenica area. I slept in Komoran for three months. But, I don't know, sometimes I even hate myself for being so courageous. I went to a family that I didn't know at all.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did they accept you?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Aiii, you know how God sometimes brings you your kind. I didn't even know what kind of family they were and we went... I was... I also took Adelina Badivuku²² with me, maybe you know her? That is her family's last name...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Toplica?

²¹Adem Grabovci was interviewed by the Oral History Initiative in 2015 and you can find the transcript in this link: <http://oralhistorykosovo.org/adem-grabovci/>

²² Adelina Badivuku (1974-), was a reconciliation of blood feuds activist. Currently she works as a life coach and is based in London, UK.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, Toplica. I worked with Adelina all the time.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You both stayed at that family's?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We both stayed at that family's. There was Fatos Gashi, Fatos died when he was really young, and Mentor Gashi, his brother. Then the landlord of the house joined us...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you all coming from Pristina?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We were all coming from Pristina... Fatos was from Klina, but was studying in Pristina, then there was Agim, from Peja, studying in Pristina as well. We became a very good group and decided to get done until the end every case that we decided to go to.

Adelina was very young, but very curious. She wrote very good poems. Because I also wrote, she would ask me, "Please *bre*,²³ can you become my professor, is this good?" "Yes, Adelina, don't worry at all!" Because she was very good as a child, and Adelina comes from a very good family. I was at her house, I stayed and slept there. Because Adelina was poisoned²⁴ at that time. And...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was she studying [at the university] at that time?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No, she was a school student, she was young. Adelina is way younger than I.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how did you meet?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We met by accident at the Writers Association, in LDK. She came as a young girl. You know, young girls come full of emotions and enthusiasm. And I liked Adelina and I never doubted her achievements, you see where she is today. We haven't met each other since then. But we communicate on Facebook. She often writes to my daughter and says, "Are you like your mother or not?" And so on.

²³ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

²⁴ In March 1990, after Kosovo schools were segregated along ethnic lines, thousands of Albanian students fell ill with symptoms of gas poisoning. No reliable investigation was conducted by the authorities, who always maintained no gas was used in Kosovo and the phenomenon must have been caused by mass hysteria. The authorities also impeded independent investigations by foreign doctors, and to this day, with the exception of a publication in *The Lancet* that excludes poisoning, there are only contradictory conclusions on the nature and the cause of the phenomenon. For this see Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a war*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1999.

And we decided, we went. We went to Komoran, to the family of Bislim Zogaj. Bislim Zogaj is now a representative at the Kosovo Assembly, he is.... Never in my life would I believe that they would welcome us so warmly in Drenica. Drenica gave me the impression that it is full of gold.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You hadn't been there before?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No, I had never been there before. And we began.... We slept there that night. The mother and father of Bislim, the mother of Bislim cooked for us. We were around seven people, plus *baci* Anton²⁵ was with us as well as Mujë Rugova,²⁶ Shefqet Canhasi, professor Murat Bejta²⁷ Shefqet Pllana, a professor of the Institute of Albanology.

And we slept there that night, and *baci* Anton, just like *baci* Anton, he was a really quiet man, said, “Eh, Ibe, would you like to stay here? Are you afraid?” I said, “No, not at all. I have decided,” I said, “we will get this done.” But, very interesting. The work began, we started meeting people.... Eh, the family of Bislim was very interesting, very different from other families.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In what sense?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: They were intellectuals, higher people. Maybe they were intellectually higher. We started going to deeper areas of the village. It was very problematic because feuds and misunderstandings there would only be forgiven by one person. For example, we had around 18 feuds in the village of Gradicë, eight wounds and around twelve misunderstandings [to be forgiven by] one person, the misunderstandings would only be forgiven by one person. It was very interesting.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of justice system was this?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: They made justice themselves according to the *Kanun*²⁸ of Lekë Dukagjini.²⁹

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, but this one according to which one person decides?

²⁵ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

²⁶ Mujë Rugova (1945-) is a Kosovar chemistry professor. He was the Rector of the University of Prishtina from 2009 to 2012.

²⁷ Murat Bejta was interviewed by the Oral History Initiative in 2016 and you can find the transcript in this link: <http://oralhistorykosovo.org/murat-bejta/>

²⁸ *Kanun*, customary law, the unwritten law that regulates all aspects of life in the mountain areas of Northern Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. A written version, the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, was compiled by the Franciscan monk Shtjefën Gjeçovi in 1910-1925.

²⁹ Lekë III Dukagjini, mostly known as Lekë Dukagjini, (1410- 1481) was a member of the Dukagjini family about whom little is known and who is thought to have been a 15th-century Albanian nobleman.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Like that, one person decided. And we started going to houses. A woman entering the house {shakes her head}, it was very problematic.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were these consequences, did Yugoslavia leave the Drenica region behind economically?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, of course. It left Drenica behind. They left them behind, because a people's word, "Rule and Divide," was the motto. And with full responsibility I say that there was no case that wasn't related to the ruling power. I mean, "Rule and Divide."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: And especially in the areas... it is already known that the Drenica region was one of the regions most affected by both World Wars. We know well that it was so damaged. And maybe the greatest spying took place there, because usually these people are consequences of the war. There were, there were terrible cases that I often wondered whether I was living in Kosovo or not! Was I living somewhere in Northern or Southern Africa?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us any case?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The case in Kisna Reka is an extraordinary touching case. They urgently called us to go to this case and Adelina, Agim, and I went, I think *baci* Anton was with us as well. And while listening to the story of the man... because the blood feuds reconciliations was very interesting when it happened live, not behind the cameras... because an extraordinary magnificent work was done. Maybe we had to go to a family ten times until we managed to get it done, then they would come out publicly. But I always like the natural more, because it had its emotion. There were tears, sometimes tears of happiness, sometimes tears of sadness. There were offenses, compliments. There were various things. It was very moving.

They invited us to this case and we went. They notified us before that it was a very difficult case. I forgot to mention that in these cases, the general of *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*,³⁰ Xheladin Gashi joined us in the reconciliations in Drenica, he never left us alone in the Drenica region. Bislim Zogaj and Xheladin Gashi were with us all the time, be it during the night or during the day, whenever we needed them. Besides that, the family of Bislim had three available cars, so they provided us with them whenever we went.... We had no problems whether we would be able to make it to Tërstenik, because there were many mountain villages there, but the landlord of the house where we slept took care of it.

³⁰ *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, Kosovo Liberation Army.

And while listening to the case we had in Kisna Reka, imagine, after 20 years the husband asked his wife for compensation, his wife's family for compensation. And, "What for, [you know] what you did to your wife?" When we went to the other family now, to the victim, that is how we called them, the family of the victim, the father of the girl told us, he said, "He burned [my daughter] with a cigarette." We had the same case somewhere in Llap. Because after finishing the reconciliations here, I went to Llap and Peja. My place was the only one where I never worked, the place where I am married now. There were cases that...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was it, what kind of compensation did the husband ask for his wife?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Now since.... He wouldn't tell why he killed his wife...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Ah, he killed her?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, he had killed her with an iron, [burned her] with cigarette, an iron, this is what her father told us, the father of the girl. Because we would go and listen, for example, to the perpetrator, then we would listen to the family of the victim. Because without listening to both parties, and without taking someone from that family... or they would give us conditions, "I want to have Rexhep Qosja."³¹ We had to come to the Institute [of Albanology] to pick him up. Uhh, we had to pick up Rexhep Qosja many times, Rexhep Qosja, Shefqet Canhasi. We took many of them, professor Murat Bejta, many of them. Emin Kabashi, he never left us by ourselves, the professor who is... I don't know, I have no words to describe professor Emin Kabashi. He never left us by ourselves. He usually called us, "My daughters." And so, this is how this case ended.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many times did you go and was this case reconciled?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: We went there around ten times, and yes, it was reconciled. Another case was in Tërstenik. An old man, he was just before his death and he didn't accept us inside. He chased us with a stick. He told his sons... doing... we always insisted, and we went inside. He had a big eagle {explains with hands}. The eagle. Very patriotic. And during the conversation, during the conversation, I got angry. I said, "Put this eagle off, because you are not a man!" I took the eagle and stepped on it, I said.... And he chased me outside and didn't accept me in anymore.

One week later, there were various groups. He said, "No," he said, "Without that girl," he said, "I will only forgive it to her," he said, "to nobody else." I even have the photographs, I will show them to you. And then many televisions were there at that time. And I went. "Why, uncle, why exactly her?" He said, "Eh, to put my eagle off there," he said, "one must have real strength."

³¹ Rexhep Qosja(1936-) is a prominent Albanian politician and literary critic from a part of Malësia in modern Montenegro.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the case?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The case, murder. Murders, murders, murders. And all of them because of property. You know, morals weren't the motive of any murder, absolutely not. But, only murders because of property... "You have taken one meter more from me." I say that it is here, "Rule and Divide." The state was involved in all of them, the back then ruling power. Always.

The other case that I wrote about is the mother Hajri from Llapushnik. It is a very moving case. When they called us to go to that place, they told us not to send many of us. And considering the situation, how people explained it, I decided to take Adelina and professor Drita Statovci. And the three of us went... many of us went there, but only the three of us went inside.

Catastrophic. What to see in that house? Children were playing outside. And their sight was extraordinarily interesting, they would usually ask, "Who are these, why are they here, what do they want from us?" And very interesting, as soon as we entered, you know the old lady, {imitates the old lady with gestures}. We understood it right away, professor Drita even said, "Ibe, don't be long." At that time, Ibe was my nickname. And she understood why we were there. And she said, "I ask..."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What had happened to them?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Two of their sons had been killed with an axe. And their mother had collected their limbs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who had killed them?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Ha?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who had killed them?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Their neighbor had killed them... two-three other cases were connected to that case, because of revenge, you know, many murders had to be forgiven, but also many feuds of wounded people. Her name was mother Hajri, and mother Hajri had only one son, but we didn't know. And she told us, "I know," she said, "Why you are here." She said, "But I have a question for you, please." It was a matter of half an hour, she said, "Wait until my son comes from work."

And we decided that, "Yes, okay. We will wait." I had that part on my book, if you can read, or I can read it for you, it is not very long. And the boy came. And he understood why we were there, because there were many cars outside, there were the honorable professors. And he decided, he said, "In your name and in the name of the blood that was shed, I forgive the blood of two of my brothers. It was not easy

at all, it happened, a lot of blood was shed there. Together with them, we as well.” But this is a case when [the blood] was forgiven the first time [we went]. They didn’t ask us to go there again.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did they find the strength to forgive it right away?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: A very interesting feeling.... But history shows that women are very *burrënore*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, mother Hajri forgave?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Mother Hajri, yes, mother Hajri, and it was very challenging. So, I am not much of a feminist, but I support...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you explain us that, that you told us that a man could decide whether a blood would be forgiven or not? What kind of mindset was there?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: An extraordinarily shallow mindset.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Who was that person? What kind of social value was required from him?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: He had to be old, with his beard until here {points towards her chest}, and talk... I had read the *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini, and according to the *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini, women are not even allowed to enter the men’s *oda*,³² not to talk about how in the *oda* of Drenica I found the *kuprone*,³³ and on both sides, the part in the middle was for walking. I mean, we exactly got to experience a century old life, that I couldn’t even imagine. I had never seen such things in my life before. Not even dreamt about them, not to talk about experiencing them, but I hadn’t even dreamt about them. And I could absolutely not perceive their mind, in what situation those people were.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was life in Drenica that archaic?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: He?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was life in Drenica that archaic?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Honestly, yes. And when I went recently, I was positively surprised, I mean, people started getting an education. Their level was extraordinarily... now their level is high. Back then... only a few women got an education, not to say none. I mean, you could count them on

³² Men’s chamber in traditional Albanian society.

³³ Literally, the clay dish placed on the fire of the fireplace. Here, it indicates the indoor fire, a poor people’s fireplace.

your fingers. And that's what caused it, the low level of awareness, knowledge and the concept of knowledge made people so shallow. And there was no other option, that person would forgive and the others had no say. Or, if they were just about to die, they educated their children that, "You should definitely take blood, kill that person." And so, a murder after another, I don't know if I am clear. And that, that murder maybe involved up to eight friends.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how old were the cases that you usually reconciled?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, there were 20 and 25 years old cases, there were various cases. You also had cases where the perpetrator died in prison. There were scary cases, I mean three years, five years. The last case was at Verrat e Llukës where it was on the daughter to forgive her father's and two brothers' blood, it was a specific case. And so on...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you tell these people about the *Kanun*, I mean something more specific?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Usually professors talked about the *Kanun*...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you tell them about the *Kanun*, since looks like it was really powerful in that *rreth*?³⁴

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Professors spoke about it, professors spoke about it...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you tell them to change the perception about *Kanun* a little?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: They usually started the conversation with it, that the action was initiated by former prisoners, people who had suffered and were suffering a lot. It was obvious that the situation was getting worse every day. They saw that the police were persecuting us, but honestly, they couldn't capture us. And they saw them themselves, and we had to use all those scenes and cases to convince them to forgive because war was just about to start. We didn't even know it... the war just started. And so, there were... don't think, Erëmira, that it was easy to reconcile those cases. A lot of work was needed...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And how... from what burden were people relieved when they forgave, something more specific? What did you see, what kind of relief did you notice?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: When they forgave, it was difficult when they said, "Yes, I forgive," and started crying. Because they would often ask us, "Would you be able to do it?" You know? "But you

³⁴ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

should do it in the name of the youth who have such will, and for the sake of this action in the name of all these activists who are working in it.” They put us in uncomfortable positions as well. The cases were really difficult. And we always started off from that aspect, the war is coming, we should be prepared, we cannot kill each other during the war, we must take arms and fight our enemy. Some would be convinced, some would get convinced later, some earlier. So, this is how it was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did avoiding the murder of another person seem more honorable to those who were convinced? Was it easier for them because they didn’t need to kill anyone? You know...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: ...were there such cases that people didn’t like killing?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, there were such cases. I remember one case, we were in Prekaz, they invited us at two at night. It was a very difficult case that they didn’t even allow children to go to school.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: They were locked in?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, they were locked in. We had many cases like that. And we went there at three at night and we had to stay with our legs crossed until six in the morning, because you could not enter the *oda* otherwise. You had to sit with your legs crossed like men do. Yes, honestly! And thanks to professor Anton and professor Murat Bejta, he was there as well as professor Shefqet Pllana, if I am not mistaken... and we won the case, we took a seven days *besa*.³⁵

Erëmirë Krasniqi: For how long?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: For seven days.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: For seven days.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes. And, after some time... because other the reconciliation activists were working in that area... we notified them about the case, but again with our interventions, with us going there to help the others in Skënderaj, that case was concluded.

³⁵ 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. In this context, it means truce.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did the fact that they were locked in influence them in a way that they were getting poorer?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, of course they got poorer in many ways. They got poorer in knowledge due to the lack of education, also in the way of working their fields. Because for example, it was summer or spring, the time of planting essential things. And they had to rely those things because seeing that you have no food to eat nor water to drink... because they had no water inside. They had to walk a pretty long road to go to the well to fetch water. There was no safety there anymore! Will they kill your son, your wife?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were women killed as well?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, women were killed as well.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To avenge for the blood?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, to avenge for the blood.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, can we go back to the case when people didn't want to kill and remained locked in just because of that? The case that you reconciled?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, there are cases. The one in Prekaz is not the only one. There are other cases that happened in Drenica when people didn't want to take revenge. No matter that, the worst thing was the pressure they had from their *rreth*. "See, you don't dare." You know? They had various kinds of pressures...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: To make them do it...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: To make them do it. And the ruling power of that time had it very easy to influence them, because they pushed them, they pushed them very much. For example, one about whom we were informed that he was part of SUP³⁶ at that time, honestly, yes, and they pushed them to do that. It was very, especially Drenica was very damaged. I am very happy today when I listen to, when I go for visits, I hear that many women work and are intellectuals, they are.... At that time it was pretty problematic.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you hold gatherings in Drenica?

³⁶ SUP - Služba Unutrašnjih Poslova, The Secretariat of Internal Affairs

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, we did, in Drenica, yes. There are also some videos on youtube from the gatherings where feuds were reconciled. But, the one at Verrat e Llukës was the last one. Yes, we held two or three in Drenica as well.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You are talking about the February-May period?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: 1990?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Okay. Can you tell me how did you summarize the work on the field and how did you continue then in Peja and Llap?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes. After we thought that we were done with all the cases, since we didn't conclude it because it was not something that could be concluded because the needs were high. Maybe, I don't know... *baci* Anton noticed that I was more insistent, and once I decided to do something it had to be done. He would often warn me, "Ibe! {explains with hands how he told her to slow down}." I said, "No, if I listen to you that means we have to spend the night, *baci* Anton!" Because he was good to everyone. There were cases when it was really worth it, his presence, because people in Drenica respected *baci* Anton very much.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Because he had studied them?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, he had studied them but he also had those...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Sayings...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: His proverbs. So, we were very happy to have *baci* Anton with us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did people know him there?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Ha?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did people know him there?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, they knew him, they knew him. Of course, some of them knew him. Some of them would even ask for him. They would not accept us in some cases, "We want *baci* Anton."

We had to bring him. Maybe we had to come to Pristina to pick him up, or go at Bislim's in cases when he was there. So, this is how it was at that time.

And I... because we usually helped each other, when those in Peja invited me, I went to cases where they thought I could give my contribution. I could invite them to Drenica, for example when I knew that Myrvete and Hava could give their contribution. So, we were free with each other. Because we knew each other. The main of us knew each other and there were no problems. I was also in Llap and Peja. In Peja I attended a reconciliation (sighs)... I cannot remember the name of the village. That is where I met Flamur, Flamur Gashi.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Isniq?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No. I will remember it in the meantime. I am sorry, I apologize but...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: No, no, it's okay.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: These things can happen now. And we finished that reconciliation. It was very interesting. That was the time when they invited me to Llap. Professor Shefqet Canhasi and Murat Bejta worked in that area. They never left it alone, only in some cases when we invited them to come and join us. And the last one was at Verrat e Llukës, and I will...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they differ... before going there, did cases differ from region to region? The nature of the cases?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, they differed. There were cases, for example, the case of mother Hajri was the one that moved me the most. There were many more difficult cases, but the one of mother Hajri is the one that moved me the most because she showed generosity, she didn't make it difficult for us, she didn't offend us. She accepted us in her house. That impressed me deeply. And it impressed and still does how we, women, are braver and harder to be corrupted. I believe it that being a woman, we are more sensitive, more different from men.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I thought more because different regions had different mindsets. Did this affect the cases as well...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Drenica and Peja, the region of Peja, of course the cases there were more difficult. Not to talk about *Kanun*, it is known that in the region of Rugova *Kanun* dominated every aspect. Maybe in Drenica you had some space, in that area they had more... I think that all around Kosovo, at the level of Kosovo, the regions of Drenica and Peja and Dukagjin had the most difficult cases.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: So, they differed.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Of course, they differed. The region of Gjilan, I don't want to say that there were no difficult cases at all, but in general they were easier. The region of Llap, not to dig deep, but there were difficult cases though not that difficult. Because, of course one death differs from the other a lot. For example, we had the case of a child, he had been crushed by a car in Pristina somewhere in Vranjevc, I even was there when the new name was given to Vranjevc. And he thought that his child had died because of the car crush but when they went to the court, after the autopsy was done, it turned out that the child had died before the crush. He had died, I don't know. And he thought that, "No, he intentionally killed my kid." Albanians tend to create messes which they no longer know how to get out of.

One cannot kill by intention, I cannot believe that. At least not now, in the twenty first century, absolutely not. Even though, there are still some cases. But they are rarer, they ask.... And from there, from Verrat e Llukës where it was concluded, we didn't get involved in any other case, because all of that was concluded...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was it at Verrat e Llukës, can you tell me? What is your personal experience?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Verrat e Llukës was the greatest surprise of my life of which I can say, "Uau!" [wow], it was Verrat e Llukës. Because the presence of so many people itself and their support made you feel proud and prouder. Just they, having papers with the eagle printed on them and walking... and we were all surrounded by police, armored cars and to be honest even tanks. But nobody knew... nobody was afraid that they could be shot at any moment. That impressed me deeply.

Part Two

[The speaker continues her story from the first part of the interview]

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: In the morning, we usually had the meetings in front of the Institute of Albanology, Adelina, Fatos, Mentor, Agim and I. From there we would continue. There were armored cars everywhere on the road. I remember well that the professor was with us as well, professor Hajrullah Gorani. We left with around five cars, with the greatest pleasure and patriotic songs in order to get motivated. We arrived in Verrat e Llukës after many adventures, going through various roads because there was no other way to arrive there. But we were fortunate enough that we had a person from Peja with us and he knew where it [Verrat e Llukës] was, otherwise we didn't know that...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: He showed you the way?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj:... the streets, yes, the streets of Peja. Before even entering Peja, there were armored cars everywhere on the way from Pristina. The police asked, “Where are you going, why are you going?” They asked for your Identity Card, “Are you from Pristina?” And so, there were various conversations which... they also stopped people from coming. But they couldn’t manage because Verrat e Llukës was full, it was too crowded. It is said that around five hundred thousand people were there.

It was a day full of life. Maybe we went there to die, but we are lucky enough to be living today. Because we absolutely thought we were going to die, and if we died that day that would be the best thing we could give to Kosovo. And...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How many feuds were reconciled?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: In total?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean that day?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No, that day all the Kosovo-wide feuds were announced to the public.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were they all presented there?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: All the feuds were presented. There were some that were reconciled there quickly.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: All the cases that were reconciled previously were presented there?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, all the cases that... Verrat e Llukës was the conclusion.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I wanted to also ask you something personal. You mentioned that as a student you went to solidarize with the group of miners...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi:...and, they also mention the blood feuds reconciliation. Was it a direct reference to the miners? The initiative...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, it has...

Erëmirë Krasniqi:... of reconciliation?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj:... yes it came out of there as well. Because, almost many of us who were there, were also the first initiators of the blood feuds reconciliations.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean, were they also inspired by the miners, if they had any connection to...

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, of course.... They were inspired because they constantly made calls. We made calls together with them and supported them in the meantime, because, maybe you were younger, but if you know a delegation from there went to meet the miners in Trepça. Fadil Kryeziu led them, they wanted to solidarize with them and he returned and told the student. There were around five-six of us. I wasn't down in the pit, I guess Fadil went there with four other boys...

And of course, this was a motivation. You take a little motivation there... may be a hit on your back by the police motivated you to fight against them. Not to talk about the miners who were a great motivation, many days locked in the ninth, eighth horizon, without eating nor drinking, that is quite a big deal... only Albanians can do it. We are known in world's history for this, for this gesture.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When the movement ended, did reconciliations end for you or did you continue with activities?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: No, we didn't have any activity worth to be mentioned. There were some cases here and there, even though Verrat e Llukës was the conclusion. The police looked for us. We were persecuted. I prepared the case of the rector of the University, the Catholic....

Donjeta Berisha: Marjan Demaj?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Marjan Demaj. I was at his family's, I, personally. Bislim, we were.... His two brothers were killed. If I have the list there, I have everything written down on the list because I don't exactly know them. We went to his place two-three times then left it to the team of Klina because I guess he was in Malisheva, somewhere near Malisheva, near Klina. And we left this case to the team of Klina, we let them deal with it.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you then persecuted after the reconciliations?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you free to move?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj:... no, absolutely not. We could never be free. We always had some others who were following us to see how we were and defend us. All the time. Because you could not move freely... especially not I, I was in their eye also because of my family.... But then I got married and got them confused. I got married in '93. I got married in the village of Hogosht. I have four children, two daughters and two sons, and my older daughter was named by *baci* Anton, her name is Urata.

Urata is a student in the Faculty of Architecture, the fourth year. Doruntina is, she has graduated from the Faculty of English, now she is studying at the Faculty of Law, the second year. Atdhe is a *maturant*,³⁷ tomorrow is his prom night. Doranti, my youngest son is in tenth grade. He is a soccer player, a goalie for the team of U17 Pristina, and at this age, he is inspired, maybe by me, and he is proudly supporting us as part of the U17 Pristina.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How were the '90s until the war for you, for your family?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: For my family? Hogosht is known as a village with many patriots, Isa Kastrati is one of them, he is from Hogosht, it is known for its very intellectual people. I saw that women were not denigrated there. If you wanted to work, you had the space to get educated, work and everything else. But in the place where I got married, there were not many educated people. My husband is an engineer, he holds a Master's degree in Geology. We fell in love in Pristina and got married. But people with whom we lived were not at our level of education.

And we started thinking how to raise our kids... because Urata was born one year after I got married. And we thought about how to manage, how to educate that child? I was used to a totally different kind of education. I found some of them wearing *kule*,³⁸ I couldn't imagine where those people were living.... So we started talking to the *rreth*, to the community nearby. And people started getting aware, wearing dresses, to be honest they even started wearing short skirts. But I guess they achieved a high level a little faster than they should, because I think that everything that goes step by step is safer, *step by step* [English].

I was unemployed for ten years. After finishing my studies, I got my Master's in Education Management with an average grade of Nine. After ten years I was accepted at the school of Hogosht, in the school Skënderbeu as a teacher of Albanian Language. I tried to give my contribution in many ways, by explaining... because the class doesn't attract a student's attention if you don't make it interesting, but it is different if you motivate them.

³⁷ *Maturant*, refers to students who finish the *Maturë* or *Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (high school graduation).

³⁸ *Kule*, similar to Turkish *shalvar* trousers, baggy trousers worn by women in order for their body parts not to be emphasized.

Eleven years of experience in education and I never had any trouble with any of my students and never did I expel students from my class, and I don't like that. Never did I know how to offend any of my students, I don't offend my children either because offending a youngster is the shallowest thing one can do.... And after that, after eleven years, they recommended me to become the director of the school... of the kindergarten Filizat in Kamenica, where I currently work.

Three years ago, in 2015, 2014 I was elected as the leader of the *Grupi Joformal i Grave të Kamenicës* [The Informal Group of Women from Kamenica], the budget was... we had enough funds with the help of the Mayor. The municipality together with *Grupi Joformal i Grave* obtained a fund of 20 thousand Euros. That fund required detailed information about what and how was the work. I decided, together with my collaborators, to dedicate a part of this fund to the informal education of women who couldn't continue their education due to economic or various other reasons. And so, it went really good. We sent around 24 women to informal education, they finished the fourth year of their school, various professions, economics and so on.

We began to support this initiative again with four men and 20 women. I mean, we have two stories about this group, those of them who finished middle school continued their studies, they are university students. Acquiring knowledge is not only here, it is various and different. Three of them have become businesswomen. One of them is the businesswoman *Tradita* [Tradition] where they produce traditional food. As soon as she finished middle school, she opened, I mean, she sells homemade food. The other one, two other ones have opened their small tailoring businesses. I mean, really good work is being done in this respect.

We have also had the hairstylist course led by *Kaci*, around 15 women were part of it. Five of them went without paying, and 15 others shared the payment together with us, I mean half of it was paid by the *Grupi i Grave* and a half of it was paid by them. We paid 50 euros and they paid 50. We decided to give another part to the elders without care. We had elders from the municipality of Kamenica, five elders from the Elders' House in Pristina, from our municipality, we gave a solid box of 25 euros to each of them. There were around 25 elders, women and men, to whom we gave that, and also five Serbs.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: All this as part of?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: The *Grupi Joformal i Gruas*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And parallel to that, you are the director of?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: From the budget...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The director of the kindergarten.

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, yes, and right after... I was not the director of the kindergarten at that time, I was only a member of the Municipal Assembly. I mean, we are talking about '14, 2014, then I become the director of the kindergarten. And at that time, we gave aids to mothers with breast cancer and for the families... for children with disabilities. We gave five hundred euros to the Association of People with Disabilities, and an excursion around Kosovo, we gave... I don't remember everything, to people with serious illnesses, we had children with serious illnesses, unable to move, we gave money to them as well, we also participated in the mobile...

Donjeta Berisha: Mammogram? Mammogram?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj:... for the mammograms, we gave around two thousand euros. It was in Kamenica, as part of the Informal Group of Deputy Women. And this is how it is...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the war for you in that region? Was it calmer, right?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Yes, the region was calmer. I didn't get the chance to go to war. I was in the eighth month of my pregnancy, with Atdhe. It is very interesting how the war wouldn't be felt so much there. They would make baklava on the day of Eid,³⁹ until they [Serbs] crashed into the houses and saw what was happening. My elders were both sick. One of them, my mother-in-law was epileptic while my father-in-law had thrombosis. When the offensive crashed inside, Urata was little as well as Doruntina...my husband even asked me, he said, "Are you afraid?" I said, "Not at all, we are going to die one day, it doesn't matter if it's today or tomorrow."

But, what concerned me mostly was how can we die without killing any of them! Let them enter our houses, and honestly, they enter your house to massacre you and you let them leave... this concerned me mostly. But...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did they do to you?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: They took us outside, I mean... we were inside, my husband, two of our children and I. But, the elders were unable to move. And they asked in Serbo-Croatian, "Who are these?" My husband said, "These are my parents." The ones who entered our house were part of the regular army. They didn't do as much harm as those of Arkan. About four houses were burned. They killed people there and sent them, imagine, to a whole other village, to Karaçevë. They kept them in the mosque of Karaçevë for an entire night and then transferred them to Hogosht the next morning.

³⁹ *Bajram* is the Turkish word for festival. Albanians celebrate *Ramadan Bajram*, which is the same as *Eid*, and *Kurban Bajram*, which is the Day of Sacrifice, two months and ten days after *Ramadan Bajram*. On the day of Eid, there is no fasting. In 1999 it fell on 28 March, four days after the beginning of NATO bombing.

The war is never welcomed. It is never welcomed when things can be solved in the right way, but the Albanians cannot stand the occupier.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Would you like to add something at the end? Is there anything left that has not been heard?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: What to add at the end? I would add that parents and mothers should work with their children more, because they are not working enough, not to say at all. The education of children is not at the right level. Especially, I see many mothers, “I go to work just because I don’t like staying at home.” I cannot agree with them, allowing their children to get engaged in bad things. I am a mother who works as well. I work for eight hours.

But, if there is a need for me to dedicate time to my child, I will stay up until six in the morning, and will never say that I am tired. Or, I can’t, I had a lot of work to do... managerial works, you know how tiring they are, the pressure you have, how.... But, I am always *online* [English] for my children. Whenever they need me, because children always need their parents. For years in a row, I stayed up until six in the morning with my daughters. We talked about everything, we solved every problem together. And thanks to that, to communication, they are where they are today.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Are we done?

Ibadete Bunjaku – Ahmetaj: Thank you very much for giving us the chance to exchange our thoughts from the past. Maybe we weren’t the way we should’ve been, we apologize for that, but however, thank you!

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you!