

INTERVIEW WITH ALBERTINA AJETI-BINAKU

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Duration: 54 minutes

Present:

1. Albertina Ajeti-Binaku (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë 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

Jeta Rexha: Can you please introduce yourself, describe yourself briefly?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Okay, I am Albertina Ajeti-Binaku. I am 47 years old, a mother of three. I am the director of the *Sekretariati i Përbashkët Teknik* [General Technical Secretariat] within the cross-border partnership between Kosovo and Macedonia. This is a little bit about myself.

Jeta Rexha: Now, please tell me, what do you remember from the protests of March '89, from '80 to '89?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: That was the time when it just started... we are speaking about the '80s. From a good childhood, so to say, from a space that we had as children at that time and in high school. The situation started getting worse, considering the situation in the entire former Yugoslavia, of course it also affected Kosovo. And to be honest, I remember it was I think the fourth year of high school when the miners isolated themselves in Mitrovica at that time. I remember we were in the fourth year of high school and the students were protesting in solidarity with the miners. They didn't let us enter because we weren't students, and we did whatever we could in order to enter the 25 May Sports Hall, the current 1 October, of that time.

What I remember, I remember of course that the situation started getting worse. We were no longer as free to move as we used to be. At school, you could notice the bad mood of the teachers, but the same thing was noticed at home, given that my mother is a teacher. She is retired now, my father was also a professor. All the parents at that time were part of the LDK.¹ And no matter what, this situation affected our lives both at home and outside.

¹*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

This started in '81. To be honest, I also remember the year '81. I was maybe, I don't remember but I know that our house was in Dragodan and I remember the students who were escaping the city center, came to Dragodan which is now called Arbëria. I remember the teargas in Pristina at that time and the faces of the students, even though I was a child. I remember the masks and how they escaped, especially the center of Pristina.

Then our parents tried to show them the right direction to escape, because there is a small part right behind Dragodan that is like a small mountain. And they all tried to find them a shelter... be it in garages, basements, so that they could escape because the police forces wanted to arrest them. I mean, even though I was little, I remember these things from '81... then I also remember the following years, always... our childhood and youth were always full of protests, bad news...

I remember the stadium of Pristina, because you can see the stadium from my parents' house and it was full of tanks and police forces... at that time there was the Police of Yugoslavia. I remember one detail, because they would stop us in the street. I especially remember one detail from my father, "The ID card..." They stopped us, I was with my father and they asked us for ID cards. My father wanted to take his ID cards with his full hand and the police said in Serbian, "No, no. You are only allowed to use two fingers." Because they were afraid. There are many similar details that I remember.

The irony of all of this, I am returning to the year '89 again, the protests of October 1, was that at that time, I am speaking about myself, we didn't understand the danger to which we were being exposed. We viewed that protest as a way to enter a circle of more mature people, that is, students and professors. But, as young people of that time, we didn't realize how dangerous it was. It was a time when they were demanding the resignation of Kaqusha Jashari² and Rrahman Morina.³ I know that we took to the streets to oppose that, I mean, not to let them resign.

Jeta Rexha: What were the voices around all that was happening? Was it seen as something natural or something that could...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No...

Jeta Rexha: ...Something that was leading to something even bigger?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, to be honest, that is why I also mentioned it earlier... because when we heard our parents talking to their friends, maybe because of the experience and age, they resonated differently and assessed the situation differently. But we didn't know. For us it was something that would last two-three days and we would return to a stable situation, we would return to our previous life. I am talking about my generation, my friend, we didn't see it like that.

² Kaqusha Jashari (1945-) was a leading Kosovo politician from 1986 through 1988, in 1988 President of the League of Communist of Kosovo, was dismissed by Milošević for not accepting the illegally imposed constitutional amendment revoking Kosovo's autonomy. From 1991 through 2006 Jashari was President of the Social Democratic Party of Kosovo.

³ Rrahman Morina (1943-1990) was a Yugoslav police officer and communist politician. A Kosovo Albanian, he is remembered as being an opponent of Albanian separatism.

In the evening when we heard our parents' conversations, we were listening to Radio Europe at that time. I mean, they saw a different reflection, but we didn't perceive it like that. I mean, we talked about it, yes, but to be honest, maybe it is because we were younger but we didn't think about it like that. Because we grew up in the spirit of brotherhood unity, we were free to travel. We traveled all around Yugoslavia at that time, in Croatia, Belgrade, Vojvodina, Slovenia... I mean, we were free and we weren't educated in the spirit of hatred. For us it was...

Jeta Rexha: Was it disappointing?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Of course... it was unimaginable for us that something like that would follow, the way things developed later. I mean, we didn't, we didn't know how to hate each other. I mean, at that time we went on excursions together, we went to school together. We learned Serbian and they learned Albanian, we got along, we hung out together. I mean, there was no hatred between young people and children at that time. That is why I am saying that it was unimaginable to us that things would develop the way they did.

Jeta Rexha: OK. Now let's focus on the protest with bread, the march to Drenica. How, now, if you remember that entire day from the beginning to the end, how was the process, from the moment you woke up and knew that you were going to the march?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: That protest is strongly related to the death of my father. My father was a professor and he was one of the main leaders of the LDK at that time. And at that time, we started making certificates, the stamps of the Republic of Kosovo and my father was imprisoned several times and in '97 he died because of a heart attack when he was 51.

So the protest and my attendance in that protest was something that was definitely related to the death of my father. At that time we didn't have it, there was RTP [Radio Television of Pristina], but the information was limited. We had no access to information but however, things were happening in places like Drenica at that time, especially in Drenica. Back then there was the daily newspaper *Koha Ditore* [Daily Time], it was the only one at that time and it was the main information source for Albanians. We in Kosovo took the information from that newspaper at that time. That newspaper was the most revolutionary at that time, maybe they had problems inside but information came from it, we received information from that newspaper.

I mean, we found out through RTP and written media at that time that families in Drenica were besieged at that time, they had no food and no access to it, children were left without food. And as a mother, at that time I already had two children, Trina and Gent... but, at that time we didn't have the Internet like now and...

Jeta Rexha: How did you share information?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: The only means of communication was in the morning when we went to take our children to schools or kindergarten, we met, talked, had coffee. I mean, at that time there was a

mobilization of the whole population of Kosovo. And during the conversation, “There is a protest tomorrow for this reason...” And it was decided to protest peacefully, to take a piece of bread in our hands and walk towards Drenica with the goal to give the bread to families who were besieged by Serbian forces at that time.

And this was an initiative of colleagues at that time, of friends and mothers who took children to kindergarten and school together. But, the information was also received through the local television of that time, RTP and Koha Ditore.

Jeta Rexha: Do you remember the context in which that information was spread, I mean what is the difference from what was publicly known and what really happened that day?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, yes... at that time, to be honest, the details, there was a tendency not to give it a political connotation. The idea was to give it a more humanitarian connotation, because families were besieged for days and weeks in a row. They weren't free to move, I mean, to go out to buy food and other basic things. And this was it. I mean, we, as mothers, as females, empathize with the mothers of Drenica of that time, who had no food to feed their children.

And on the other hand, maybe to appeal to the then-authorities to allow humanitarian aid workers to send them food, clothes and other things that they needed, to grant them the opportunity to at least receive help... to allow the humanitarian organizations to go to the village and reach those in need. I mean, it was only a humanitarian matter, humanitarian aid and maybe to touch the consciousness of the then-authorities that we are mothers and the only reason is to help the mothers of Drenica. Because this was specific to the region of Drenica.

Jeta Rexha: Now let's return to the bread [protest]. Where did you take the piece of bread? Did you take it from home, or was it distributed when you gathered there? Where was the meeting point earlier that day, who did you go there with?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Jeta, to be honest I don't remember the meeting point. I know that we took the pieces of bread ourselves. There were some who distributed it there as well. I know that we walked from the city center, I don't exactly remember where from. But, we continued until... back then there was the Show Restaurant where the UN offices are located now, near Jysk, and they stopped us there. The number of attendees was very high, there were so many women. I remember that in the first row there were, I mean at that... we held the pieces of bread up high as a sign of protest, I mean, to ask them to allow us to proceed because children, mothers, families needed food.

And I know that we were, I mean, there was a queue and the police forces were watching us from both sides. When we reached that point, they didn't allow us to proceed any further. They asked for negotiations, but they weren't ready and so they ordered us. They said, “You have to return, otherwise we cannot guarantee you that something dangerous cannot happen to you, we cannot protect you...” But, they didn't allow us to go. I mean, we went near the part where there are the shopping malls, on the way to Fushë Kosovë. They stopped us there and made us go back.

Jeta Rexha: Was there anyone who continued further?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No.

Jeta Rexha: Has anyone continued further?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, Jeta, no. Because there was a high number of police forces. We don't have... and then to be honest, at that time those women who were part of the organizing team, I know that they talked and they decided to go back to Pristina. But I know that it was a dark, cold rainy day and I know that there were so many women, but also so many policemen.

Jeta Rexha: Was there, what was the demography of the women, were there young women, older ones? Were there men? Were there children?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, there were no men, at least not as far as I remember. And when we discussed and were explained the initiative... I mean, I am returning again, because if men were part of it, it wouldn't have the effect that we wanted it to have at that time. I mean, the idea was for us who were mothers, females and weren't engaged in politics to protest, to promote the idea that it was a humanitarian matter. There were young girls, but there were also older women. I mean, the demography was diverse. But there were no males, only females.

Jeta Rexha: Were there women who were part, I guess there were, women who were part of the LDK's Women's Forum, did they initiate, were they a more active voice in the distribution of information about the march, or when it was spoken about the march, how was...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: I remember that in the first and second row were the women who were part of LDK. And when we reached the part where the police were located, I know that we attempted... I mean, we waited for half an hour, 45 minutes for them to let us proceed further, I remember that they negotiated, but they didn't allow us to go.

Jeta Rexha: So, that negotiation was done in peace, in calmness...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, in calmness, I don't... to be honest, they watched us all the time, but they only allowed us to go until some point and then they stopped us. They didn't allow us to proceed further.

Jeta Rexha: How...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: They told us, "Go back, because we cannot assure you that nothing is going to happen. This is war, some things have happened..." Which they didn't tell us about, we didn't know what had happened but they didn't let us proceed. And they said, "If you want to continue, you will be responsible for yourselves because we cannot assure you..." I mean, that we could continue up to where we had initially planned to go.

Jeta Rexha: And you were given this information by the Serbian Army?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, yes. There was no army, as far as I remember, there were policemen. So many of them! I don't remember seeing military forces.

Jeta Rexha: Was this more like a warning that now you can continue on your own responsibility, or was it a kind of threat that if you continue, there will be consequences?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: It was definitely a threat. It is not, we didn't see, I mean, there was no understanding from their side. It was definitely a threat, you could see it from their approach, the way they expressed themselves, how they talked, I mean, with the representatives or the organizers of the protest, it wasn't positive. And even if they insisted on us continuing further... those were troubled times, troubled times...

Jeta Rexha: And you returned just like that, organized how you were?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, we went back....

Jeta Rexha: On the same road?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, we went back on the same road and then we spread. There was a call for us to scatter, to stay in groups because there was a chance we could be imprisoned and mistreated and... so, we were suggested to go home, not to... because first the idea was to stay a little in the city in groups and create... but no. We were asked to go home, with the hope that somehow we had achieved our goal, and we did so.

Jeta Rexha: There was no... you had no information whether someone stayed or was imprisoned?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no. Not as far as I know. It was represented in the media the way our goal was to represent it... we definitely couldn't help the families. But maybe it was again a blight on people's consciousness... also on the consciousness of the government and other authorities of that time and international institutions that were promoting the protection of human rights at that time. So... then, I know that after that protest, thanks to the insistence of some international organizations of that time, I remember there was a CRS, they were allowed to distribute aid and food, after their negotiations. I hope that this protest affected the consciousness of people who had to help those there [in Drenica].

Part Two

Jeta Rexha: Later you didn't see any steps, any occasion, example or a family that you know, a community that received the help that was supposedly given to them?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Jeta, back then we didn't have...

Jeta Rexha: Even after a few years?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, after the war, yes, thanks to the nature of my work. But I mean, at that time, in '98, only people who were employed by international organizations of that time had access. Even though, to be honest, most of them were hesitant to speak about those things at that time, that is, to tell that they helped them, that they sent them food, medicine and clothes. But, I am fully convinced that the protest achieved its goal.

Jeta Rexha: Now, I would like to ask you... you spoke a little about the context in which the march took place, but maybe to tell us, you mentioned that there was a high women's attendance and the goal, the result of the protest was achieved thanks to that. But now, can you tell me the difference between the groups, meetings and the nationwide protest and the one of that day in which only women gathered? You know, what was the context that was discussed, maybe it was more, maybe there were proposals to be more allusive when speaking about a nationwide protest? You know, were the demands bigger and more specific?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: During the years, I am talking about '89 until '99, that was a time of protests. It is impossible now, I am thinking way back... the attendance at the protests, compared to the women's protest, there was high attendance. But when the protests were nationwide, the whole square was full. I remember that they didn't allow us to organize gatherings in the square, not that I organized any of them, but I was always part of them.

Then we would go to the stairs of Dragodan. I mean, when I think about it now, I realize that we were willing, we wished for a better and calmer life and more... and that desire and willingness motivated us to protest and take to the streets. It is impossible, you know, to describe the attendance at those protests... at the women's protest, the goal of this protest was different from the nationwide ones. Because, the demands were bigger at the nationwide protests. For women, the protest which I was part of, the goal was to just protest as females, as mothers, together with all of those who were there and somehow support the mothers who were stuck without food in the villages of Drenica. It was winter, let's not forget that it was winter, a cold and very long one.

Jeta Rexha: Which year are you talking about?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: '98. And let me say it again, when the protest was nationwide, I think the demands were bigger.

Jeta Rexha: Was there any factor that was more motivating, to put it like that, like a national one, or any idea...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes... I don't...

Jeta Rexha: Did you use that factor for the protest, for the March for Drenica? I mean, besides the reason for helping the women in need, did you also use the...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: The national aspect. Yes, definitely. Because we had developed the feeling of patriotism, the feeling of solidarity, to help each other, the feeling that we were all endangered, not

only were they endangered, but we were all endangered. The feeling that somebody who lived in rural areas needed the help of those living in the urban areas. When I analyze it now, it was absolutely like that.

Jeta Rexha: Any difference, I would like to return to '89 or '81, if you managed to go...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, in '81 I was...

Jeta Rexha: Younger...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: But I remember it, I remember it very well...

Jeta Rexha: How was '81, then we continue. You lived in Dragodan?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, in Dragodan. I am telling you that there were so many protests, so many people, I was little. I don't know, in '81 I was maybe... what can I remember? I remember the garden behind the house, because all the houses in Dragodan have their gardens behind them. I remember that it was full of smoke because of teargas and shootings and I saw that from the balcony. And they [protesters] started escaping the center through Dragodan. Pristina wasn't big, I remember that they went to houses' gardens, but even there...

Jeta Rexha: They were chased...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes. And I know that they went through the doors, every house, I mean, the doors of the garages and then they went to Dragodan, where there is a sort of a mountain. Then it became dark, because it was spring, I was a child, but I remember it. I remember that we didn't go to school the next day, we didn't go to school for several days after that and even when we started doing so, we were afraid because we didn't know what was happening. But, I am telling you, the photograph of the stadium of Pristina full of tanks, it was full... *auuuu* {onomatopoeic}. We could see the stadium from our house in Dragodan.

I remember the call to make noise at 8PM with pans, bowls, spoons, to make noise at 8:15PM. It was like that every night.

Jeta Rexha: How long did that last|?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Khu {onomatopoeic}Jeta, I don't remember, I know that...

Jeta Rexha: It went on for a couple of days, right?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, the idea was to protest for several days in a row...

Jeta Rexha: To disturb that silence.

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, that silence. And then the city was echoing. The city was echoing because of the noises of spoons, pans. We would all turn the lights off because the police patrols would come.

They came with the small trucks with water pumps and drove by Dragodan, exactly by Dragodan as far as I remember. But all that noise in the city! Because every family would turn the lights off and *bam, bam, bam* {onomatopoeic}... and the whole city was noisy because of the noise of dishes. These were all peaceful protests, until it escalated into something else.

Jeta Rexha: About that day, do you remember whether you opened the door to invite students inside if they walked by your house yard?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, Jeta. I remember that my parents started giving them cloth to cover their mouths... then they would escape that way. No, because they...

Jeta Rexha: They didn't dare...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Not that they didn't dare. I think that it is also because, I am talking about my parents, they were surprised by all that happened. I remember that my parents were sort of hesitant, afraid, but... then they gave them water to wash their hands and eyes from tear gas. When I was a child, I remember watching them from the balcony, you know, listening to the shootings... Pristina was covered in smoke, tear gas.

So the only way... I know that all of our neighbors helped the students with water and also gave them cloths to cover their eyes, mouth and nose because... you could smell tear gas in Pristina for several days in a row. Then the faculties, schools, tanks in the city, the police..

Jeta Rexha: In the late '80s, the other protest took place, where women protested against the killings of [Albanian] soldiers in the Yugoslavian Army.

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, yes.

Jeta Rexha: Do you remember it, were you part of it?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: What do I remember from that time? All I remember is what I saw on television. There was the news, of course they were reduced, if I can say that.. What do I remember from that time? I remember that some of the men of our family were in the military and that some members of my family were afraid. I know that most of them, my generation and younger ones, had already started leaving Kosovo and becoming diaspora, just so that they wouldn't have to go into the military.

I remember that they were mostly afraid for some of my paternal aunt's sons and my maternal uncle's sons who were in the military. I know that they were constantly afraid that something would happen to them because we heard words that some were killed. But at that time, I am returning to that point again that the media operated in the spirit of brotherhood, unity, communism and socialism. I remember that when it happened, I don't remember, they said that an Albanian allegedly killed some soldiers, they said that the killers were terrorists, I mean, that it has nothing to do with the fact that

they are Albanians, why they were killed. I mean, they tried to make it look like those who were killed had attacked the army and that is why they had been killed.

There was news on TV and newspapers, but they all said that the reasons why they were killed or executed was they were terrorists, Albanian nationalists, that they had killed twelve Serbs, three Croats, four Bosniaks. And then it began, I mean, the conflicts started in Slovenia, Croatia and then in Bosnia. I mean, at that time, in that age, we were convinced, I am especially talking about the younger generations, that those people who were killed during their military service in the Yugoslav Army were all nationalists, that they wanted this and that. But, later the information that it wasn't true started coming to the surface. But, however, in the '80s there was absolute darkness as far as information about such things goes.

Then the situation changed a little in the '90s, not in the '80s when we still had hopes, to say, that the situation will [change], that we will continue living together... maybe we were naïve because we grew up in that spirit, we were educated like that and...

Jeta Rexha: Was it broken, the naivety you are talking about, was it broken when they [conflicts] broke in the early '90s?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: It started after the '90s. We were in the third year of our studies in architecture when the police broke inside and kicked us out of the building. This had already started earlier. It started with the miners, then with the revocation of autonomy at that time. Then at the university, they started kicking people out of their workplaces, asking them to resign... my parents were also part of that group. The economic situation got worse, the health system was destroyed. Then they started, I mean, in '92, '93, the segregation was obvious.

It was very obvious, I am talking about my parents. My parents got along very well with their Serbian colleagues, my mother as well as my father, and they were even friends... but then the time came when they broke into schools and faculties, so they didn't communicate at all. It changed completely. It is impossible, I mean, it is a reaction that should be studied. Suddenly, twenty, thirty years of good coexistence, we... I told you that we went on excursions together. My parents went on holidays together with their colleagues. I mean, that was destroyed all of a sudden, all of a sudden. I think it was destroyed because of the greediness of one side, because Serbs had huge benefits by kicking Albanians out of their workplaces at that time. They got employed, they had high salaries. I mean, I think that it was more because of the economic benefits, rather than the national cause. But then, these two came together and...

Jeta Rexha: When you are talking about the relationship that your parents had with their Serbian colleagues, I would like to go back to your childhood, maybe you had Serbian neighbors. What were your relations in the beginning of the protests, from '81, from '89 to '98? When the protests took place, were there...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Reactions coming from their side? Yes, there were.

Jeta Rexha: Were there reactions coming from their side, but also was there collaboration between you and them to go to the protest?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no, no, no...

Jeta Rexha: How was that...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no...

Jeta Rexha: ...that aspect?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: To my surprise, I am telling you that... no, on the contrary, they looked at us with hatred, mockingly, mockingly, with... and during the protests, they went out and threatened us, and... I mean, it is weird how from a good relationship, it turned into hatred, mockery. And for example, there were cases when, for example, my father, his closest colleague with whom he used to work, I mean she... each time when they, the LDK, had meetings to discuss certificates, diplomas, schools in private houses,⁴ she always notified the police at that time and then they came and...

I mean, she crossed every limit, you know, it was... there was a sort of hatred which I still find difficult to understand. From a life when we were living and working together, we created a pathetic hatred.

Jeta Rexha: Did that happen overnight? How did you feel the hatred that was created, or was it accumulated over time?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no. It didn't happen overnight. No, it wasn't overnight. I think that it was developed according to a plan. A plan that was previously designed and each step was taken with the goal of creating that division. But no, it didn't happen overnight. I can say that it began when autonomy was revoked. I remember that I was in the second year of my studies. The radio stopped at 03:15 PM and they kicked us out of the faculty. I mean, that's when it started. Schools, faculties, factories, people. And then everything was prepared. It didn't happen within one day. I can't specify the time, and I really wouldn't like to judge, But, it happened in a not so long period of time, but in my opinion, it is something that was perfectly planned and implemented.

Jeta Rexha: Okay, so the social context changed and these were the results of protests and even if there were bigger demands for unity, liberation, at the end of the day even your presence, I mean, even your everyday life had another effect... or the effect was brought to your life. But maybe here we can also talk about how...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: There's the effect because I, when I talk to my children and tell them how we were locked at home at 5PM, that we couldn't go out the way they do now, that we didn't dare to go on the excursion around Yugoslavia that was set to happen in the fourth year. In the second or third year

⁴ By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

of my studies, we had organized a trip to Albania and Greece, to see old architecture, its beginnings, but we couldn't go, our professors didn't allow us. I mean, we were occupied in every possible way.

The only entertainment we had access to was the news or the radio in the evening to find out what was happening. I mean, definitely a part of the lives of our generation was cut off, the best part of our lives. Because we went to faculty in private houses, in the fourth and fifth year we went to private houses. I know that my sister and my brother finished high school in private houses. We weren't allowed to go out, Jeta, there were curfews. I mean, it was a very difficult time, very difficult. When I compare my youth with yours (laughs), there are so many differences (laughs).

Jeta Rexha: Can you tell me briefly about your experience, I know that you went to the Faculty of Architecture and then you transferred to a house, at which house?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, in Dragodan.

Jeta Rexha: In Dragodan. And...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: And they came, they imprisoned us, they beat up our professors. I don't remember his name right now, but he was my drawing professor, I can't come up with his name right now. They came inside the house in Dragodan, just where the American office is located, on the street under it. On one side there was the Faculty of Architecture and on the other side there was the Faculty of Civil Engineering. One over one, fifty-sixty students in one room, we didn't even have optimal conditions. The worst part was that we were often visited by the police who would take our professors at that time.

Jeta Rexha: Were the students mistreated, tell me about the road from home to the house-school, when you went to school, in fact, to faculty? How...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: I remember we had, because usually at the Faculty of Architecture we had deadlines to submit projects. I remember the fourth year, if I am not mistaken, it was in the fourth year of my studies when we had to submit a very important project and I worked day and night on it... we had a *Zastava*⁵ at that time and I put it in the trunk and I went to submit it. They [the police] stopped me in the crossroads in Dragodan. Policemen always stayed there, they were so big I was afraid when I saw them, and they stopped me. They asked me, in Serbian, of course we learned Serbian at school, they spoke Serbian, they said, "Where are you going?" I said, "To my mother's." "*Otvori gepek*" [Serbian: Open the trunk]. When he saw the project, he said, "Aaaa, you are going to the faculty?" And he tore apart my project, every sheet of it.

When I went, I remember that I went to my professor crying and I told him, "Professor this is what happened, they tore it apart." He saw the torn project. I mean, it is no more, you know, when you see it, when you know that you are endangered by something, you take better care... at that time, it was a difficult time, we had to be careful at every step. Talking about it now, sounds just like a bad dream.

⁵ Yugoslav car brand, FIAT-based. The cars were used by the police at the time.

When I talk about it right now, it really sounds like a bad dream because it was a really bad time. It was difficult. Maybe I didn't perceive it like this back then, because I didn't know that there was something better (coughs), I mean, but when you compare these days with that time, they are different like the day is different from the night (smiles).

Jeta Rexha: How is it talked about, do you talk with your friends, if you are still in touch with them or with your colleagues, or other people, how is it talked about, in the, how to say, public and private discourse, about the protests...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no Jeta, no. Barely. It is true that we talked about it more right after the war. We talked, we... no, to be honest, no. Maybe people have gotten over it with time, the memories have faded, the photographs of that time have faded. But, to be honest, when my husband and I talk about it in front of our children, they don't have the patience to listen to me either. I mean, they cannot understand the difference and even if I start telling them about all these things, trust me they don't believe me in most of the cases. Young generations don't believe and those of us who are older... we barely talk about these things. Maybe because we are working, we have our own problems of surviving. So, no, we barely talk. And it is even better, I believe it is better, I think it is better this way.

Jeta Rexha: Are there any obstacles that stop you from discussing that, or is it the kind of topic that there is always an excuse not to talk about...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, definitely, I mean, we definitely need to talk about and discuss that time. But maybe people are a bit disappointed because maybe after all those years that we had to go through, all of us, including your parents and mine. Maybe the aspect of free movement, some predispositions, some advantages that you have now, however, I believe that more should've been done, and that is why people are irritated, in the sense of was it all worth it.

Jeta Rexha: It could be that way... even the women's march, since it was organized and led by women. When you discuss all the protests of those years, do you talk about this one that was organized by women, that the goal was to go to Drenica?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: No, no. Definitely not...

Jeta Rexha: So you think it is forgotten...

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: It is definitely forgotten. When you contacted me to talk about that, maybe it is because of the human brain I mean...

Jeta Rexha: Maybe it is a selective memory?

Albertina Ajeti-Binaku: Yes, it is as if we *delete* [English] things that one doesn't want to keep. It is true that I often try to remember some things, especially after the conflict broke, I try to enter my memories, but most of them are erased. So, I think it has a little to do with the internal emotional condition, but also with the brain, in this case, my brain. But definitely, little about what happened is

discussed, why they were organized, what was the goal. I believe that many people who were part of the organizing teams at that time, were powerful, they were...

When I think about those women who were the organizers, because I was only an attendee. But you had to be very brave to organize such protests at that time. I am talking about Vera Pula, Sevdije Ahmeti. There were some women at that time, I mean, when you think about it, you had to be brave to even look at them, because you could end up dead, mistreated, imprisoned, and nobody could help you at that time. So, forgetting about them is a sin, it is such a pity. I mean, forgetting about both the personalities and the events of that time, is a sin. I am talking about so many people who had the energy to organize protests and marches and everything. I don't want to exaggerate, but taking the initiative to lead everything at that time... it was a very difficult time. So, they have definitely been forgotten.

Jeta Rexha: Thank you very much!