THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE WOMEN OF ISA BOLETINI'S FAMILY THROUGH THE YEARS

Pajazit HAJZERI

UBT - University for Business and Technology,
Prishtina, Kosova
pajazit.hajzeri@ubt-uni.net
phajzeri@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the contribution of the women of the Boletini family across different historical periods, highlighting their role in preserving the family, educating younger generations, overcoming hardships, and supporting patriotic activities. In Albanian historiography, attention has often focused on the male figures of families and national movements, while the contribution of women has remained largely in the background. Through an examination of the Boletini family, this paper seeks to highlight this important dimension of history. A central place in the analysis is given to "Ajshja", the mother of Isa Boletini, who is presented as an influential figure in his education and patriotic formation. In addition to their everyday family responsibilities, the women of this family faced a range of difficult circumstances, including wars, family losses, economic insecurity, imprisonment, and restrictions imposed by political regimes. The case of Ajshja, who at one point during the armed confrontation around Isa Boletini's tower was also described as actively participating in providing moral support to the fighters, demonstrates a broader role of women beyond that limited solely to the family sphere.
The paper also addresses other female figures of the Boletini family, including "Adile Boletini, Advije Gashi Boletini, Hasibe Boletini, and Atife Boletini", highlighting their experiences in education, family life, and their encounters with political repression. In this way, the contribution of women is addressed as an integral part of the history and heritage of the Boletini family, as well as of the national memory transmitted across generations.

Key words: Albanian women; Boletini family; Ajshja Boletini; Isa Boletini; patriotism; resilience; sacrifice; family heritage; national memory.

1. Introduction

The role of women in Albanian history is closely linked to the social, familial, and national developments of Albanian society. Throughout different historical periods, women were not merely participants in family life, but also supported and accompanied their husbands in times of war, political confrontation, and significant social transformations. The material presented in this paper places this role within a broader historical perspective, referring to the presence and contribution of Albanian women from the Illyrian and medieval periods, through the modern era, and up to the most recent war in Kosovo.
Within this context, the Boletini family represents an important case for understanding the contribution of women within a family with a strong patriotic tradition. The life of such a family cannot be understood solely through the activities of those figures who directly participated in political and military events. An important part of the responsibility for maintaining family life, raising children, managing property, and continuously receiving people associated with the family's activities belonged to the women.
In this respect, the figure of "Ajshja", the mother of Isa Boletini, occupies a distinctive place. According to the available evidence, she played an important role in raising and educating her sons, cultivating in them a sense of family responsibility, love for their homeland, and the values of freedom. Her influence on the formation of Isa Boletini is an important element for understanding the familial and moral foundations upon which his personality was shaped.
The significance of Ajshja's figure becomes even more evident in accounts of an armed confrontation around Isa Boletini's tower. According to archival sources, she was not only present in the area of the conflict but, with a weapon in her hands, attempted to encourage the

fighters and contribute to the defense of the tower.[1] This episode provides evidence of the active dimension of women's roles during critical moments in the history of the family.
The contribution of women was not limited to Ajshja's generation. Available evidence also highlights the life experiences of women from later generations of the Boletini family, who faced loss, imprisonment, restrictions on employment, and the emigration of their husbands. **Adile Boletini, Advije Gashi Boletini, Hasibe Boletini, and Atife Boletini** represent different examples of women's engagement, sacrifice, and resilience under difficult historical circumstances.
Therefore, this paper aims to bring the contribution of the women of the Boletini family out of the historical background and to examine it as an inseparable part of the history of this family. Through these figures, the paper seeks to demonstrate that the preservation of family values, the education of successive generations, and the ability to endure the consequences of conflicts and persecution constituted an important form of resilience and continuity of the family's patriotic heritage.

2. The Contribution of the Women of Isa Boletini's Family Through the Years

Throughout the course of history, Illyrian, Arbanon-Albanian, and Albanian women have consistently stood alongside their men in every aspect of life, both in times of peace and in times of war.
During the Illyrian period, women who participated in warfare alongside their husbands were known as "Amazon women". In many cases, they were equipped with bows and arrows and took part in, or led, infantry campaigns. One of the most prominent female figures of antiquity was "Queen Teuta", who, following the death of her husband, King Agron, led the Illyrian army in its war against the army of the Roman Empire.
During the medieval period, alongside men fighting against the Ottoman conquest, women were also present in almost every military formation and in numerous battles. One of the best-known legends concerning the sacrifice of women and girls is that of "Gryka e Vajës", also known as "Shkëmbi i Vashave" (the Rock of the Maidens). On 16 June 1478, at a place known as "Gryka e Vajës," approximately 90 women and girls from Krujë are said to have sacrificed themselves rather than fall into the hands of the Ottoman forces, reportedly leaping from a cliff approximately 200 meters high. [2]

[1] Arkivi Qendror i Shqipërisë. F. V. D. fl. IX. Shih, Pajazit Hajzeri, Përmbledhje e studimeve nga Historia I, Prishtinë, 2021, pp. 126, 134.
[2] https://www.balkanweb.com/legjenda-e-grykes-se-vajes-ose-shkembi-i-vashave-cfare-ndodhi-539-vite-me-pare/#gsc.tab=0



Figure. 1–2. Memorial plaque dedicated to the women and girls of Krujë, and a painting commemorating their sacrifice

During the modern period, one of the most prominent examples of a noble and courageous Albanian woman was "Qerime Shote Galica", who remained steadfastly alongside her husband, Azem Bej Galica, throughout his wars and battles.

In contemporary history, during the most recent war between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the Serbo-Yugoslav forces, a large number of women stood alongside their fellow combatants and husbands. According to Amnesty International, during the attack by Serbian forces on Prekaz on 5–6 March 1998, at least 54 Albanians were killed. Among the identified victims were 12 women and 11 children under the age of 17.[3] One of Kosovo's heroines who fought alongside her husband was Xhevë Lladrovci, who fought alongside the national hero Fehmi Lladrovci until the final moments. Together with them, in the same battle, the heroine Fatime Hetemi, from Bistrica in the Shala region of Bajgorë, was also killed.

3. The Women of the Boletini Family

Being married into a family with strong patriotic values, a family that produced prominent figures who devoted themselves to the service of their homeland, was by no means an easy responsibility.

Women were responsible for giving birth to and raising children, caring for the household, the yard, the family's property and livestock, preparing meals, maintaining cleanliness, and ensuring food supplies for the family. One of the most demanding responsibilities was securing firewood for heating, particularly for the winter season, as winters in this region were extremely harsh and long. Women undertook virtually all household tasks, as well as agricultural and livestock-related work, including collecting and storing the products cultivated from the land,

[3] https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur70/054/1998/en/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

dairy products, and everything else necessary to sustain a large household such as that of Isa Boletini. Women were also responsible for receiving and seeing off the large number of guests and various prominent personalities of the time who visited and maintained close connections with the Boletini family.
Mother Ajshja had four sons: Ahmet, Isa, Halil, and Muja. In addition to raising them with the utmost care, she educated them in a patriotic spirit, which was by no means easy under the historical circumstances of the time.
Ajshja, the mother of Isa Boletini, is a respected figure in Albanian history and culture, as the mother of one of the most prominent Albanian leaders and heroes of his time, Isa Boletini. Although detailed and well-documented information about her life is limited, she is recognized for the influence and role she had in shaping her son, as well as for the sacrifices she made for the homeland and freedom.
Ajshja married Adem Boletini, and together they had four children, including Isa, who became one of the most prominent leaders in the struggle for the independence of Albania. Isa Boletini's mother was a strong woman who raised her sons with a deep love for their homeland and a strong commitment to freedom. Because of the traditions and hardships of the time, she and her family faced numerous challenges; nevertheless, this did not prevent Ajshja from preserving these values and passing them on to her children.

4. The Education of Isa Boletini and the Influence of His Mother

Isa Boletini's mother played a key role in her son's patriotic education. From an early age, she prepared him for life under difficult circumstances, instilling in him a sense of responsibility toward his family and the land where he was born. This contributed to Isa Boletini becoming a respected figure and an important leader in the struggle for the freedom of the Albanians. Throughout his life, Isa remained closely connected to the values that his mother had cultivated in him.

5. Ajshja's Challenges and Sacrifices

As a mother in a family committed to the liberation movement, Ajshja lived a life filled with challenges. After Isa left Boletini to fight for the liberation of the Albanian lands, Ajshja experienced numerous losses, as well as economic and emotional hardships. Despite all these difficulties, she remained strong and supportive of her son and of the broader Albanian cause for freedom.

6. Ajshja's Legacy

Mother Ajshja represents the figure of the Albanian woman who supported her sons in the struggle for national rights, made sacrifices, and embodied an example of resilience. She symbolizes the woman who, although often remaining in the background, made an important contribution to the homeland and to the formation of a new generation of patriots who fought for Albania.
During a battle between Ottoman forces and the fighters of Isa Boletini, which took place on the second day of the "Bajrami i Vogël" celebration, Isa Boletini's mother, after having received Mehmet Efendi Qyrdi as a guest at the family residence and having served him a generous festive meal, asked him: "Why have you come with all these cannons and gunfire?" Mehmet rose to his feet and went to command his military unit in an attack on Isa Boletini's Tower, where a fierce battle subsequently took place.

Isa's mother, holding a pistol in her hand, moved around the edges of the tower with the intention of encouraging the fighters, while at the same time looking for an opportunity to take aim at one of the enemy's military commanders.
Amid the fighting, she reportedly moved about while whispering: "Gajret, djalë, se të ka ba nana djalë me luftu me pashallarë"![4]
On another occasion, the German traveler "Karl Oestrich", who visited Isa Boletini's Tower in September 1899, was deeply impressed by what he saw. He described the visit as follows: "The house was two stories high, the rooms very bright, the floor was made of stone, and the beech-wood covering was white as a mirror. The boards were bordered by raised sections covered with carpets; everything was made of fresh wood, the walls had been freshly whitewashed, and the fireplace opposite the door was enclosed by a wall, with small wall cupboards on both sides. Everything was clean, and more beautiful than anything I had seen until then.[5]
This is but one indication that Isa Boletini's Tower received and hosted a wide range of figures - people of power and wealth, friends and enemies, as well as those who came and went to deliver or receive information. The family experienced periods of being surrounded and under pressure, the burning and destruction of the tower, and its subsequent reconstruction and reorganization. Throughout all these circumstances, a very substantial burden once again fell upon the women, who ensured that everything was kept in order.
Ajshja is remembered today with respect for her courage, and her figure remains a lasting example of the contribution of women to the struggle for freedom and the nation.
Isa Boletini had three wives - Qamile, Hamide, and Gjyle - with whom he had a total of 14 children: nine sons and five daughters.
With his first wife, **Qamile Boletini**, he had three sons and three daughters:

1. **Adem Boletini**, married to Adile Boletini
2. **Halil Boletini**, married to Shefkije Boletini
3. **Asllan Boletini**, married to Hasibe Boletini
4. **Ajete Boletini**, married to Yzer Maxhuni
5. **Feride Boletini**, married to Rexhep Bajraktari
6. **Shehide Boletini**, married to Iljaz Murati

With his second wife, **Hamide Boletini**, he had five sons and two daughters:

1. **Mujë Boletini**, married to Gjyla Boletini
2. **Kapllan Boletini**, married to Atife Boletini
3. **Zaid Boletini**, unmarried
4. **Pajazit Boletini**, married to Advije Boletini
5. **Musa Boletini**, married to Shefkije Boletini
6. **Hafize Boletini**, married to Avdulla Maxhuni
7. **Azize Boletini**, married to Avdulla Maxhuni

With his third wife, **Gjyle Boletini**, he had one son:

1. **Faik Boletini**, married to Sadie Boletini.

7. Adile Boletini

Adile Boletini was the wife of Lieutenant Colonel **Adem Boletini**. She was born in Shkodër into a well-known intellectual family of the time. Adile completed her studies at the Pedagogical School in Tirana and subsequently worked as a teacher in Shkodër. She spoke five foreign languages and was a deeply patriotic woman.
In 1947, Adile was arrested by the Communist regime and imprisoned in the prison of Shkodër. She was sentenced to hard labor, as a result of which she became seriously ill and died in the

[4] A.Q.SH. F. V. D. fl. IX.
[5] Fatmira Musaj, Isa Boletini, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 2015, pp. 17, 18.

prison of Shkodër later that same year. From her marriage to Adem, they had two sons, **Enis Boletini**, a doctor, and **Isa Boletini**, a professor.
Adem Boletini was killed on 28 October 1943. From that time until her own imprisonment in 1947, Adile devoted herself to raising and educating her children in a spirit of patriotism and national consciousness.

8. Advije Gashi Boletini

Advije Gashi Boletini was the wife of Captain **Pajazit Boletini**. She came from the respected and prosperous family of **Ibrahim Efendi Gashi** of Mitrovica, a prominent patriot and national figure.
Advije was educated as a teacher in Gjakovë, where she also worked for several years in the villages surrounding Gjakovë. After marrying Pajazit, she continued her teaching career in Mitrovica. With the establishment of the communist regime, Pajazit was forced to emigrate to Egypt, while Advije remained in Kosovo.

9. Hasibe Boletini

Hasibe Boletini was the wife of lawyer **Asllan Boletini**. She was from Skopje, but both of her parents died when she was very young. Her maternal aunt subsequently took Hasibe under her care in Prizren.
Hasibe attended the *Mejtep* in Skopje and, after completing her education, returned to Prizren. During the years she lived in Prizren, she worked as an educator in several schools.
In January 1945, Asllan was arrested and subsequently killed by Serbian forces in Prishtina. Hasibe, meanwhile, was deprived of her right to work in education solely because she was a daughter-in-law of the Boletini family.

10. Atife Boletini

Atife Boletini was the wife of Major **Kapllan Boletini**. Atife was born in Novi Pazar and later completed her studies in Design in Belgrade. Following her education, she worked in several locations throughout the Balkans until the arrest of Kapllan,[6] who spent 15 years imprisoned in Srem and later died in Mitrovica.[7]
Following these events, Atife was also subjected to restrictions on her freedom of movement and was forced to work solely as a seamstress in Mitrovica.

11. MEMBERS OF THE BOLETINI FAMILY KILLED BY SERBIAN FORCES

1. **Halil Boletini** — 1833
2. **Mujë Boletini** — 1892
3. **Ahmet Boletini** — 1894
4. **Isa Boletini** — 1916
5. **Halil Boletini** — 1916
6. **Seid Boletini** — 1916
7. **Jonuz Boletini** — 1916
8. **Halit Boletini** — 1916
9. **Adem Boletini** — 1943
10. **Musa Boletini** — 1944

[6] Gazmend Boletini, handwritten notes, 12 November 2024, Mitrovica.
[7] https://www.balkanweb.com/nente-djemte-ja-vrane-tragjikisht-hasmeria-i-zhvendosi-ne-boletin-historia-e-isa-boletinin-pas-vdekjes/#gsc.tab=0

11. **Skënder Boletini** — 1944
12. **Asllan Boletini** — 1945
13. **Faik Boletini** — 1947
14. **Isuf Boletini** — 1947
15. ***Rasim Dajçi (nephew)*** — 1945
16. ***Hysni Rudi (nephew)*** — 1945

12. MEMBERS OF THE BOLETINI FAMILY IMPRISONED IN YUGOSLAVIA

17. Mujë Boletini — imprisoned for 3 years
18. Kapllan Boletini — imprisoned for 20 years
19. Ali Boletini — escaped from prison
20. Tafil Boletini — imprisoned in 1945
21. Ikballe Boletini — imprisoned in 1945
22. Kumrije Boletini — imprisoned in 1945

13. MEMBERS OF THE BOLETINI FAMILY IMPRISONED AND KILLED IN ALBANIA

23. Adem Boletini — killed in 1943
24. Tafil Boletini — imprisoned in 1945
25. Adile Boletini — imprisoned in 1947
26. Ismet Boletini — imprisoned in Spaç Prison
27. ***Enver Dajçi (nephew)*** **— imprisoned in Spaç Prison**[8]

When we consider such a long list of those who were killed and imprisoned, beginning in 1883 and extending to the period after the Second World War, it becomes clear that the primary burden of sustaining the families fell upon the women of the Boletini family. Left with numerous orphaned children and faced with paths closed by various regimes, particularly the communist regime, it was the women who kept the patriotic spirit alive, raising generations that had been left incomplete and doing so through great suffering and sacrifice.

14. Conclusion

An examination of the contribution of the women of Isa Boletini's family demonstrates that the history of this family cannot be fully understood solely through the activities of its men and well-known public figures. Behind every political, military, or national endeavor stood a family world in which women carried a significant share of the responsibilities, sacrifices, and burdens associated with coping with the consequences of conflicts and persecution. They cared for the family, raised and educated children, managed household affairs, provided hospitality, and maintained the continuity of family life under circumstances that were often extraordinary.
The figure of "Ajshja" represents one of the most significant testimonies to this role. Her influence on the education of her sons, particularly in cultivating a sense of patriotism and responsibility, together with her conduct during the armed confrontation around the tower, moves the image of women beyond a merely passive and domestic role and places them as an important part of the broader resistance.
At the same time, the examples of "Adile Boletini, Advije Gashi Boletini, Hasibe Boletini, and Atife Boletini" demonstrate that this resilience continued in subsequent generations, taking different forms and occurring under different historical circumstances. Education,

[8] https://dosja.al/fati-i-trishte-i-pasardhesve-te-isa-boletinit-si-ia-vrane-djalin-komunistet-e-shkodres-familja-e-perndjekur-ne-serbi-e-shqiperi

employment, the upbringing of children, and the experience of imprisonment, family losses, emigration, and political restrictions constitute important elements of this history.
However, this paper does not claim to encompass all the women of the Boletini family. The family's historical span across numerous generations, together with the richness of individual life stories, makes it impossible to document all its female figures, experiences, and contributions within a single paper. The cases examined here should therefore be understood as an attempt to open a broader field of study rather than as a definitive account of the history of the women of this family.
In this sense, the history of the women of the Boletini family remains a field that deserves further archival, biographical, and family-based research, so that their contributions can be more fully documented and integrated into historical and national memory.

15. Conclusion and Final Remarks

The contribution of the women of Isa Boletini's family constitutes an important part of the history of this family and, in a broader sense, of the history of Albanian resistance. From Ajshja, who influenced the formation and patriotic education of her generation, to the women of subsequent generations who endured loss, imprisonment, restrictions, and various hardships, there is a clear continuity of resilience and responsibility toward the family and its inherited values.
Therefore, the contribution of women should not be measured solely by their direct participation in political or military events. The education of successive generations, the preservation of the family, the endurance of loss, and the continuation of family life during periods of repression also constitute significant forms of resistance. The long list of family members who were killed or imprisoned makes particularly visible the burden placed upon the women and their role in keeping both the family and its patriotic memory alive.
Ultimately, the women of the Boletini family should not remain merely "figures in the shadow" of the men in their lives. They constitute an integral part of the history of the family and of its heritage. Documenting their lives and contributions is, at the same time, an effort to make historical memory more complete and to give women their rightful place in the narrative of Albanian history. This paper seeks to take a step in that direction, while leaving open the need for further and more in-depth studies of the women of the Boletini family and their role across generations.

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