

INTERVIEW WITH SELMAN BOÇOLLI

Pristina | February 7, 2017

Duration: 60 minutes

Present:

1. Selman Boçolli (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (Camera)
4. Aurela Kadriu (Research Assistant)

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: Mister Selman, can you tell us about your family, your early youth memories and what kind of family was yours?

Selman Boçolli: My name is Selman Mal Boçolli from the village of Raushiq, municipality of Peja. Just like all other traditional families, the Boçolli family is settled early in the village of Raushiq, where it has a great reputation, when they lived in family communities at that time, and it has always been positive towards the state and towards humanity and such.

I finished elementary school in the village of Raushiq, and I was in the first generation that finished the gymnasium¹ in Deçan. Then from Deçan I enrolled in the Faculty of Civil Engineering, which I successfully finished in five years and at the moment of our misfortune...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Let's not move that fast. Can we try to build the background of your family...

Selman Boçolli: Ah, once again from there...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Any details...

Selman Boçolli: Yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Life in the village of Raushiq...

Selman Boçolli: Yes, the village of Raushiq has a very good geographical position and all its people are hard working, skilfull, so they have always given their contribution and kept their families with their own work independently from the state, from [a state] job and so on.

So, those were traditional activities, they were mostly engaged in agriculture and farming, later in trading as well. Our family was really similar to the others. I was born in 1959, from an almost poor family at that time. They were poor because my father was taken hostage by the Germans in 1941. He was in the military in Belgrade and stayed in Germany for four years, during the Second World War. So...

¹ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us something from... did he tell you anything about his stay in Germany? Do you know any story?

Selman Boçolli: They are very painful stories. Not only did they take my father, but they also took two other people from the village of Raushiq. And there they said that, "Almost everyday during the time we spent there, which was a critical time, if something happened in Yugoslavia and its surroundings, they would try to shoot us." This is what I heard from those friends who were with them, their friends. Even if only one German was killed in Yugoslavia or somewhere, in Kosovo especially, they said that there were cases when, "We only survived thanks to the fate of odd numbers, one, three, seven." So, this is how they survived from being shot, they took the others, the two, four, six.

I mean, those were only stories I heard from them, my father had been more psychologically prepared as well as in other ways. He kept friendships, not only did those two come, but after his death many people came from the villages of Graboc, Loxha, to visit my paternal uncle instead of my father and us. So in the end when it ended... they survived by eating potato skin, there were cases they survived by eating leaves of the mountain, so difficult were the conditions they lived in. Then they were dispersed in Germany, working for private business, working in the entire fields, planting potatoes. So, they worked in agriculture there as well, and the moment the war came to its end, they were released and he returned.

It is important that the wife of the owner of the land where he worked sent us letters around seven times, where she asked for the children of Mala to go there, because she heard that he was dead, for the children of Mala to go to Germany and work. But they didn't go, so they offered a pension to my mother, it is true, "Come, you just have to sign," but she didn't go. So they remained poor from that time, and they only lived and survived from manual labor, because they had many children and they had to survive. This is the history of my close family. We lived together with my paternal uncle who had three sons, we were six, together with them we were nine children, too many, and that was the way we lived.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Anything more detailed, do you remember anything about your childhood?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, I will tackle a little that period of time. We had some help during elementary school in the village of Raushiq, just like all the others, we were given some aids, they said that they came from America, we constantly took one meal, and that kept us [strong] at school because to be honest, it might sound strange now, but back then we went to school without eating breakfast or anything. And poverty was great at that time and you had to go home and work together with your other brothers as soon as you finished your working hours. And we had to work no matter how little we were, or go and look after the cattle or something, so we never had a free minute.

Not only our family, but such were almost all the families of the village. There were even poorer families, so that period of time is a very painful one, and when one looks back and recalls what we went through... but however, no matter that, I had an excellent success, together with my friends and with two or three boys of those [the other family] with whom we experienced misfortune. They were my classmates, I mean they were good students, very hardworking and we had to work. My family as

well as all the other families of the village of Raushiq made a living out of their own work, nothing else. No salaries from the ruling power, no trade or whatever, but only physical work. So, then the time to go to the gymnasium came, to middle school.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where did you go, to Peja?

Selman Boçolli: I went to Peja for one semester, but then they pull me out [of school] because I had to work. Back then we considered our paternal uncle as our father and I had to stop going to school after one semester and return home. Then, one week later I went to the gymnasium of Deçan that just opened, we were the first generation to finish the gymnasium there, with an excellent success, not only I, but that was the best gymnasium in Yugoslavia at the time, it was ranked the first one in every competition that was held back then. So...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of competition took place back then?

Selman Boçolli: There were competitions about scientific subjects, I will never forget it, our class was the only one in the scientific department, mathematics, physics and so on. We won the first prize in Yugoslavia for these scientific subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology. And each one of our classmates, let me not focus only on one classroom, but the others of the social studies department were good as well, none of them was without a degree, all of them graduated either in Medicine or from the Technical Faculty. Eh, unfortunately four of them have passed away, two of them during the war, and two others from natural death, so all the others are alive. Every second year we celebrate the first generation of the gymnasium of Deçan.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you choose your Faculty?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, to be honest back then the time began when Albanians were favored in the communist system, I heard that there were more scholarships for Technical Faculties being given. I went to Zagreb to register, but I was late, I didn't know the deadline and I returned without registering, then I had the chance, they helped us and everything else, I thank them now for what they did back then, because we had no money. The standard was higher there, so I returned from there together with my friend, we stayed there for two weeks, then we came to Pristina.

In Pristina, the second call for Civil Engineering was opened and we took the qualifying exam as it was called back then, so we enrolled in Civil Engineering. Maybe without our own will, how to say, without a definitive decision and we remained there. We had success, the friend I am talking about is from Deçan as well. I mean, we finished it in the right term, because it is difficult to finish Civil Engineering and every other [department] of the Technical Faculty without losing one year, or remaining a little behind.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What years are we talking about, when did you finish the Faculty?

Selman Boçolli: Please?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What years are we talking about, when did you finish the Faculty?

Selman Boçolli: We are talking about 1971 to 1976, five years.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us any details...What times were those?

Selman Boçolli: Well, in fact...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you mention some [times] that were better for Albanians, can you tell us with some more details?

Selman Boçolli: We had the luck that the Constitution of 1974 was approved at that period of time and the '68 demonstrations happened. Two years before that, two years before '74, a great liberalization happened for Albanians in Kosovo. They were given freedom, how to say, to sing, decide, walk freely... and to freely... without knowing what violence is, and without knowing what...

I remember this, we played and sang Albanian patriotic songs many times together on our way from the dormitories to the canteen, the canteen was located near the Faculty of Law, but nobody called or questioned us, neither did they stare at us.

So, we should be thankful for that period of time, maybe thanks to the back then leaders who knew how to create and the 1974's Constitution was approved, until '80, '81, the political situation was very good for Kosovars. That period of time counts as the greatest progress of Kosovo, a great progress happened in Kosovo in that period of time. People got employed, people were also free to go abroad, faculties were opened, I mean, doors [were opened]. The opening of the University of Pristina, people who wanted to, registered in faculties, so that period was welcomed by all of us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you in the military service?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, they took me to military service before graduation. I had no excuse at that point because I had finished the semesters here. I went to military service in Belgrade, I finished it there. I finished one year. When I returned here, I started working right after three weeks, then I finished my graduation thesis in six months and graduated.

But unfortunately we are now moving to the more critical period, I was in the military service when this, how to say, the difficult moment happened for us, for both families, a double murder on both sides, my family with our cousins. So, one man of theirs was killed by my brother, and on the same day they took revenge on the hills, where they went and killed the son of my brother who had killed their brother.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What brought them to the murder, can you explain that in more details?

Selman Boçolli: Eh, land property was the reason that brought them to the conflict. It was there, this originates even earlier, but the courts didn't solve that issue, but at that time the *pleqtë*² of the village, I was a child, the *pleqtë* of the village mediated and divided it in two parts, "No, it's ours. No, the land is ours," how they called it back then, the land of the Beleg, the lords of Peja. Back then, he had given

² Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin

it to our paternal uncle, my father was in Germany at that time and they were given it on the condition that they finished two-three bad businesses that they had done as a justification. They cut some nut and apple trees and so on, they didn't finish them in the end and they occupied one path as well, I was not there, but they call it a street going to... it was an internal path for the three families, another one was used to send the cattle to drink water, another internal path was used for the women to go wash clothes, there was a good water spring there at the time when they had those paths.

They stopped the water spring when they split it among themselves, my brother and my paternal uncle were always the ones whom they called when in need for help, but they didn't invite them when they split that street, I want to tell it as a motive, and they objected the street could not be split because it was within the cadastre and everything else...

So, with the mentality of that time, they went to a *hoxha*³ in Peja to ask him, he suggested that they split the path, the path can be split in twenty places, but if it is split physically, it doesn't have its own function, so that was the moment when their relations were ruined and they asked for the land, people from my family asked it from the *hoxha*. "Alright, we have forgiven them," my paternal uncle had given half of the land. "Can I take it?" He said, "Yes, feel free to do that, you go take your own land, and don't deal with the path because that is already split," and that was the end of that discussion.

They had troubles when they came here, our people said, "We cannot allow the path to be split," their people, "We will never give the garden, because that was already done." They had a five ares and sixty meters garden that was split in the middle. So, they called the police, and when the police came to the scene they said, now I am coming to the most critical moment, they said, "None of you is allowed to work the field until this is solved by the court." But, two weeks later, I was in Belgrade, I greeted my brothers who were about to go, because they were always prepared for misfortune, the three of them were living in Germany. They came to meet me in Belgrade on their way to Germany, and the solution of the problem was allegedly left to the court.

But they didn't wait, and started working the land with the tractor, my big brother, now deceased, was told about that by a child, "They are working the land with a tractor," because that was a garden and it crossed through their fields. There were around 15-16 of them, they were prepared. They saw that he was not okay, he was mad, "Do you have any paper, any decision?" They said, "No, we don't, but we will work the land until the court decides whether to give it to you or not." "No," he said, "I can work it as well, but I don't want to cause misfortune, because I didn't work it since they told us so." One of them said, "*Babush*,"⁴ this is how they called my older brother, they loved him so much too, and they said, "Okay, we will take [the tools], just not to allow the worst to happen, please." They started leaving, fifteen minutes later, they called him, "Come, today is the day of blood," and so on. I wasn't there, but this is what those from *rreth*⁵ tell. He went and killed the one who was driving the tractor. That was the moment when they left, on the other side, five of them were organized and went to kill

³ *Babush*, literally father; Similar to *Bac*, an endearing and respectful term for an older person.

⁴ Literally: Father, similar to *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

⁵ *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.

my brother's son on the hills, they took revenge in front of the cattle. I am sorry (he cries)...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Nothing, rest a little...

Selman Boçolli: He had just returned from military service, I went to military service. We didn't see each other for two years. Eh, he had just finished military service at the age of 19, he was 18 when he went there, back then they would take them from middle schools, and he was murdered in front of the cattle... they took their revenge.

Now, everything else, that environment there, both families were powerful economically and in regard to their men's physical power, their family, as well as ours, was powerful. So they waited, how to say, the whole mindset of that side was expecting us to destroy each-other. And I remember the moment I returned from military service, there was only my paternal uncle, my older brother was in prison and they said, "He died," because their son did not die the day he was shot, but ten days later. The news that he was dead came, but they wanted to send some of their people to you, some elders with a lot of respect, "Can we allow them freedom until they bury their son? Then see you once again and we hope all will be good." We gathered with my paternal uncle and an older son of his, we discussed about it and said, "Feel free, and if they accept, we will come to the funeral as well."

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You gave them *besa*?⁶

Selman Boçolli: Yes, one *besa* and mediation from both sides. And from there, on my own initiative, before I left, I was still in my break from military service, and two days before leaving, a group of people came and we said to them, I was the initiator, "We will not take revenge, the way they did, but we cannot reconcile until the dispute is solved. In case the issue doesn't get solved, we are not..." So it was stuck, that was stuck. When I went to the military service, they had agreed for both sides to work the land but not to take revenge, and we were careful as well as they, because their house was here {shows the distance with his hands}, our houses were around one hundred meters from one another.

We were mixed, I mean the weddings, we had mutual friends and everything, I don't think it would have been more difficult for anyone else in the world. But it often happened that we greeted each-other at weddings, "How are you, how are you doing?" But that was only in public, we were still mad at each-other. The misfortune happened on June 4, 1976, in the village of Raushiq, precisely close to our houses.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What happened, what happened in the meantime then, was this property dispute never solved?

Selman Boçolli: It went to the court but was never solved. Now it was more, the court took care not to adjudicate the case in favor of any side, so the dispute was never solved. But there was no perspective without solving this issue, it was an obstacle for the reconciliation as well as for everything else. There were many people, we were friends, we shared maternal uncles, they were all connected. Because my

⁶ 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.

father was born in this common land, we weren't far, the fourth page how they called it, now it's called generation... the fifth generation, back then there was the fourth generation.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I mean, the fact that the court did not define it to whom the land belongs it helped the two families to stay angry at one-another?

Selman Boçolli: They didn't define it in order not to give any motive, I mean, I am of the opinion... I never saw it as a court solution, because the verdict would have burdened more one of the parties, in case it gives the land parcel away, historically the land was never split, if our parcel was given to them, and they didn't want our parcel; they only wanted the part that was allegedly entrusted to them by the village back then, but the other party would have been damaged [by the verdict] if the land were to be taken away and so on. I mean, the situation would only get worse.

So, we didn't work in that direction that way, neither did they. The tractor remained there until the last year. The last year before reconciliation, they carefully took the tractor...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was the sentence for your brother?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, he was sentenced. My brother was sentenced twelve years of prison, he only did ten. Their man who killed the man on the hill, he admitted it, he was sentenced fifteen years, actually twenty, but then they decreased it to fifteen the second time, and their paternal uncle's son was sentenced eight years of prison. Three other friends of theirs whom we know went [to the hill] as well, they were their laborers and they didn't take it over.

So, the three of them were released, they were safe and sound, they lived and worked, my brother as well as their men together after reconciliation, but all of them are deceased now, they passed away, one by one in turn.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us about the moment of reconciliation, how was it and how did they approach your family?

Selman Boçolli: I was in Pristina, at the moment of reconciliation as if it was written by God or something, not only for us, but for the whole Kosovo. I heard the whisperings about it in Pristina with the professors, either way I went home every weekend because I was careful, I went there every Friday and returned to work on Monday. So, I was constantly here in Pristina working in order to be careful and not to allow any other misfortune or swearing or something happen because the wick was ready, it only needed a little...

But, that...I will never forget when those three people came that night, on Friday, they came from the village of Strelc, there was Ymer Alimusaj, Niman Alimusaj, Niman was in the leadership of *LDK*⁷ here, and Haki Alimusaj. The three of them were coming from the village of Strelc, because it is not far from there. The three of them were educated. And yes, suddenly at around 10:00PM, it was only me and my

⁷ *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.

older brother, my second brother and I. Our other brothers were in Germany and some of us were here, some were there.

And we stayed up until 1:00AM. I took the lead to be honest just in case there were mistakes, to let them be my responsibility, not to allow them to get angrier. I was younger, even if they said something, even if they swore, it was not a big deal to me. But a very constructive conversation was opened with them and I never said anything bad about them, because they were raised together. They were, how to say, all their brothers were the same age as my brothers, they were the same age, and maybe it is not good to say, but it was true that both of them were fed by our mother's breast.

But they were mostly influenced by the *rreth* of friends and relatives, more of the mindset, "No, they will win, no, they will not win," so they got worse and reached that point, because they didn't care about wealth. And this is what I started the conversation with, I continued the conversation with them. But in the end, when they said that they wanted to give up on the property, "Let's not talk about whom it belongs to and so on, what do you say?" I said, "That is another conversation, I cannot talk about that, because I am the youngest of my brothers." I had to give the honor to decide to my older brother and my paternal uncles who were there, I said, "As far as deciding goes, I have those two for that. I cannot decide alone." That is where my older brother, whose son was murdered, helped me. "No," he said, "Even if there are one hundred bloods, in the end we have to agree again." He said, "If they reached the point where they want to withdraw [from their claim], because we cannot discuss about it without solving the dispute, then tomorrow we will go and forgive them."

So it ended at around 1:00AM, they [the mediators of reconciliation] went to their house from ours, we went with them out in the yard and they said, "We will go to their [house] as well." I don't know how long they stayed there, because we couldn't see it from our house, but that is irrelevant now, but the next morning we were notified that, "Do you want them to come to your place, or do you want to go to their place and gather with the aim to reconcile?" And always in the name of the nation, when the Action for Blood Feuds Reconciliation⁸ started, the principle was the best, in the name of the nation, not to rely on this or that, but in the name of the nation.

Part Two

Selman Boçolli: I initiated going to their place. We did it, my brother, "Yes," he was very strong, he led us and we went to their home. When we went there, and that was one good thing we did, because we found our paternal uncle while going there, he was even an old *haxhi*,⁹ the one who had given them the land, he was still alive, we found him and went there together with him. They were already there, the *oda*¹⁰ was full of young people, the initiators of the Blood Feuds Reconciliations Movement.

⁸ In 1991 a mass movement for the forgiveness of blood feuds (*pajtimi i gjakut*), was launched among the Albanian population of Kosovo. It was initiated by a group of students, former political prisoners, who approached folklore scholar Anton Çetta and others seniors figures in academia to lead the process. The movement reconciled thousands of cases, and it became a movement for national unity.

⁹ Local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

¹⁰ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

Anton Çetta¹¹ was the leader, Ramiz Kelmendi,¹² Bekë Lajçi, Flamur Gashi,¹³ who is now in Albania. There was Hava Shala,¹⁴ Nurije Zeka from Raushiq, the village of Raushiq, because you are younger, and there were many others, I remember and know all of them.

The conversations started. I will never forget one word of Anton Çetta, he asked the *haxhi*, our paternal uncle, he said, “How old are you?” He said, “Eighty-three.” He said, “I hope I will live that long.” Then a funny situation happened there, you know. So, they stood up, “Who is thinking about,” he said, “reconciling, stand up now, men,” and they stood up, hugged each-other, I was among them as well. They served us lunch, but there is a very difficult moment, not difficult but interesting, as soon as we hugged each-other and sat to have coffee, the children ran yyyyyy {onomatopoeic} from the second floor, they ran and went to our garden and called our children and played soccer together all day long.

That was very interesting, I said, “*Ku-ku*,¹⁵ look what we were, how did we not think about the children.” There were cases when our children were classmates with their children. When they were running in one side or like this, he said, “They stopped *trrak* {onomatopoeic} and not to come to the...” you know such moments, they were very difficult. The most difficult was holding ourselves, I mean them and us, until reconciliation happened, holding ourselves not to allow a worse conflict or bigger tragedy.

From there they took four of us, two from their side as well as my brother and me, and we went to the village of Lumbardh. They wanted to use [our case], now they had the encouragement that the first bloods, the first bloods in Kosovo were the ones that were forgiven in the village of Raushiq by us, and this way they were able to have stronger authority and greater encouragement when they went there, because nobody in the *rreth* believed that we would ever reconcile. We went to Lumbardh.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it a ceremony, a gathering or what?

Selman Boçolli: There were murders there as well...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I know, but was the moment of reconciliation organized as a ceremony?

Selman Boçolli: To be honest, the organization was spontaneous, I mean they organized, they welcomed everyone, but we went to the village of Lumbardh right from there [the house where they reconciled]. They had previously prepared that some people had to go to Lumbardh in order to reconcile people from there as well. We went, we stayed there for two or three hours. We started with some younger ones throwing words that...” Do you know who are the Boçollis? Do you know how difficult were the bloods that they forgave? and so on.”

But they didn’t want to forgive there, and we shut it down. And we said, “When you are ready, we will

¹¹ Anton Çetta (1920-1995), folklore scholar, and leader of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement.

¹² Ramiz Kelmendi (1930-2017), a journalist and writer, also leader of Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement

¹³ See oral history interview.

¹⁴ See oral history interview.

¹⁵ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

not leave you alone, maybe we will come and stay at your place day and night, but we will not give up your reconciliation.” But still to this day, they haven’t reconciled, so...I mean, on the weekends they only took me, I went to many blood feuds reconciliations, I indirectly influenced people, I even...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you have any concrete case?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, I have one case. The Balaj family from the village of Isniq, his brother was my friend, his name is Tafë Balaj, my middle school friend. There was Mark Krasniqi,¹⁶ as well as three-four other people, at some point they were very angry that his father slammed the door [in their face] because Tafa’s brother had been murdered. I mean his brother had been murdered as soon as he came from Rijeka on vacation, because he was studying there, and he was murdered, he was murdered in the yard in front of his father’s and mother’s eyes, without knowing the reason.

And then I took over discussing with them. I had also drafted the plan of their house without asking them for money just because...and their father liked talking to me, I hung out with them, his father became more a friend to me than he himself. His son came and said, “You are the only one who can convince our father,” he said, “Because he is not even thinking about reconciling, about forgiving the blood.”

I went, I talked to him, he said, “I cannot say anything to you,” he said, “But I cannot reconcile,” he said, “No way.” *Bre*¹⁷ here and *bre* there, I convinced him, and Tafa showed up at Verrat e Llukës and forgave his brother’s blood.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was it emotional?

Selman Boçolli: Words were very interesting there. My friend Tafa said, “My father is telling me that when the murderer is free from the war, I mean prison, as soon as he is released for his break, he goes out in Deçan and whenever my father, my brother or I are there, he comes in front of our eyes in order for us to see him.” I looked at him and said, “Tafa, you are an intellectual, if you kill him you kill yourself. Don’t think that killing him is an honor. You cannot bring your brother back to life. And it is difficult for the father, it is mostly difficult for him, because you and I should understand. Do you think it was easy for me?” I said, “But is it easy for you to have him in front of your eyes without reconciling, or is it more difficult, take whichever you want, after you reconcile? because everybody then will say, ‘Let him go wherever he wants, they are already reconciled.’” He said, “To be honest,” he said, “This word that you said...” I said, “Yes,” I said, “Because when you are reconciled and he shows up in front of you, someone will say, ‘Don’t you have the courage to kill him?’ They will push you.” I said, “But when you are reconciled, you are reconciled and that is all, you didn’t forgive the blood to him, but to the nation. And the nation knows who you are and everything, that’s the greatest honor.” He said, “You’ve put me in a bad position now,” he said, “I will show up at Verrat e Llukës and forgive it.” And he showed up and forgave.

¹⁶ Mark Krasniqi (1920-2015), ethnographer and writer.

¹⁷ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

The cases were very touching, each one of them had its own specifics. I didn't know, neither did I ever think, I thought that there was only ours and some others like that. But other specific cases were very, a lot more difficult, *hasret*¹⁸ son, boy....They all had who knows what, terrible cases, and the work that was done, I think, that a bad side of our nation, a black side that was buried, remained, or survived traditionally, became a tradition because it was not our tradition, it was, it had suffocated our nation.

So after that, I have one, I had the case of meeting one of my friends here, whose daughter had finished her Master's degree in America, in Ohio or I don't know where, and he told me that when she finished her Master's, her professor asked her about the thesis, he said, "Write a thesis about Kosovo." She chose the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Movement, and the whole hall was surprised when he said, "I have never heard a better thesis because there was never such a public organization like the one of blood feuds reconciliation there."

So, thanks to the intellectuals, the professors and the youth, because the initiative began in the village of Prapaqan in Deçan, on February 2, 1990. We had a ceremony recently, I was there that day that I told you {addresses the interviewer}, I was in the village of Lumbardh as well, in the municipality of Deçan.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you at Verrat e Llukës?

Selman Boçolli: I was at Verrat e LLukës in the first place. I was, the ceremony was organized two years ago.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Yes, on May 1, 1990?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, I was there. There was, I don't know if there is greater pride than seeing such a wide audience. I saw people from all around Kosovo arriving there, there were people coming from Macedonia, from Montenegro, a little less from Albania. But it was spring, it was as if they were previously organized because the doors of all the yards of those villages were opened. The doors of fields, gardens, communities and so on, they were all opened. So, nobody remained and nobody faced any obstacle with each-other, but everybody went to gardens, yards and so on....And the greatest pride when it was closed, the ceremony, I mean, the greatest pride was the act of forgiving, when they showed up on the stage and all positively forgave the blood.

I remember one scene there, Zekerija Cana,¹⁹ three or four meters from him, a school friend of mine, a friend from the gymnasium, he was a secretary in the Internal Affairs Secretariat at that time, his name is Bedrush Shala. Then they were afraid of potential incidents with the police and so on. Because it was....

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you besieged?

Selman Boçolli: Yes, we were besieged. But I always said that there would be nothing to worry about

¹⁸ Turkish: *hasreti*, drought. Context: This word is adapted into Albanian vocabulary and refers to the only boy/son in the family.

¹⁹ Zekerija Cana (1934-2009), historian.

if that friend was still a secretary there and hadn't resigned yet. Don't be afraid. And fear doesn't solve the problem, you know. So, they went with a kind... all of them went without any fear, even if they were to be killed, they went that way.

But when the time came to leave, when the field was getting empty, there were two bridges, one canal right at Verrat e LLukës and someone from the crowd shouted something about the police, "Leave from here," they were like, "Rrrp" {onomatopoeic} and went from both side to take the ones who were shouting out of the crowd. Zekerija Cana, the now deceased professor, took his coat off and threw it to the people, "Shut up, nobody should say anything at all!" He went and talked to them and said, "I take the responsibility, they were young and emotional..." and that ended it without any trouble, and then all of us went to our houses.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you physically show up and talk in the front there, or not?

Selman Boçolli: Me? No, the first time, the first time then I was never out there, I didn't want to be public because it's not something you should brag about, it's not...you should finish the job, one should only finish the job. And to be honest it was very important when we had the ceremony on the 2nd day of this month, in the village of Lumbardh, participating there was such a pride and people came from all around, there were people from Albania, Don Lush Gjergji,²⁰ the rector of the University, and all of those who are alive, the deceased are dead now. We thought, I thought if only half of them were alive now to freely celebrate this, there would be nothing better than that. But there were values, I want to come to this point, how it is good to maintain values, to advance them because that is still a virtue of our nation, it was.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of life did your family have in the '90s, but also the wider family?

Selman Boçolli: Right after the reconciliation, our family was invaded by people who came for condolences, I could not imagine it, people from all around Kosovo came for condolences, we had huad no mourning. I needed to take three weeks off in order to be here and welcome the ones who came here and we said, they first came to us, then to them, because he was a very sensitive boy, the one who was murdered on the hills in front of the cows without knowing anything. But their son was good as well, but the misfortune, and they said, "Would you be mad if we went to their home as well?" I said, "Not at all, I will come with you." There were cases when I went, and there were cases when my older brother or my younger brother went together with them there.

There was one case when we even found them, we went there at around 12:00 AM and found them sleeping. "Aiih," they said, there were over 25 men who went out of our house, they stayed a little longer because they had coffee. They said, "We cannot come anymore, because we are coming from far away." "No," I said, "Let me wake them up." I went and knocked on their door with a courage, I entered from a *prelaz*²¹ and opened the door, I called and they came out.

They were afraid, I saw that it was a fact because everybody [would be afraid]. "What happened?" You

²⁰ See oral history interview.

²¹ Serbian: *prelaz*, crossing, transit.

know, we woke them up after they had fallen asleep and they always say, “You never did a better thing. We will never forget what you did, because if you didn’t wake us up but let the men go back home, that would leave a bad mark for the Boçollis.” So, they came out, crowds didn’t stop coming for six months, we had to go to the street and wait for the ones who came for condolences as well as to congratulate us for the reconciliation of these bloods.

You also had to be prepared to maintain that reconciliation, because the moment is easy, but maintaining it with children, men, with various mediations, with friends, there can be a lot of different words and everything else. I was the one, how to say, I was the youngest among my brothers, but I wisely and patiently tried to ask my people, “There is no business with them, not that they are our enemies, because that curtain is now removed, but when you are engaged in a business with someone, be it good or bad, then there is no other way but argue with them about something, so that means stepping over what we have achieved until now.” We will freely go to their dinners, weddings and everything, to the official events, but not go there for random things, enter their yards whether someone is there or not? Taking things from them and so on...

So, we had to be prepared in order not to have any trouble in the long term, no trouble and I think that it is an example for all the regions, they are all impressed, because we never said any bad word about them, neither did they say any bad word about us. So, the reconciliation fit very well and it is a good example, not only as a formality, but it was truly real.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How were the ‘90s then?

Selman Boçolli: Sorry?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How were the ‘90s for you after the reconciliations, I mean, your personal lives?

Selman Boçolli: But after reconciliation, it didn’t take longer than six or seven months and they split from each-other. I drafted the plans for their houses, the three of them wanted to build houses. I drafted the plans, I followed up the work when I went from here, they are very pleased. Eh, we had no chance to approach each-other in a brotherly way that much. Then, one year and a half later we split as well. Even though we split, everything went in the best way possible.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you fired in the ‘90s?

Selman Boçolli: I was fired in ‘93, just like the whole staff. I worked for the Public Housing Enterprise. They took a little longer to fire us. The reason was a Montenegrin director, let me not say it like this, but he held himself more and openly said that, “If I get reappointed as a director, nobody will be fired!” That is why he was fired and that is why they took a little longer and fired him... then right after firing him, we were fired within one month, 28 Albanians. They kept two or three who were their collaborators, we know who they were, it’s not a problem.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: In which organization? In Ramiz Sadiku or where?

Selman Boçolli: The Public Housing Enterprise. We built all the buildings in Pristina at that time

through our enterprise. We sold them to social, public organizations, then they gave them to their employees. So, we were the only ones without any competitor, it was a little unfair because we had no competitors in construction, it was only us. But such was the system back then, each city, each municipality had its enterprise that was called BVI²² for residence and for profit shops. They were here as well as in Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, there was the same legal system.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was the war, in '99?

Selman Boçolli: In '99...we were there in '93 until... I had to go to Germany for one year and a half to work. I couldn't imagine [working] here, because wherever you went, you had to be part of their [Serbian] organizations, or under their shadow somewhere and so on. And not much for patriotism as for the fact that I couldn't be that way, I couldn't be submissive, I couldn't allow them to step over me the way they wanted...that is why I had to go to Germany. First I was on vacation, I earned enough to be safe for seven or eight or ten years. I mean, we weren't prepared back then either, and we had just split from our brothers there.

I was in Frankfurt, my brother was there and I returned one year and a half later, we kept going. I returned in '96. I opened a shop with that money, I rented it, I brought my children closer, but in '99, '98, I had to close the shop because of the demonstrations of '99 and we all had to go to demonstrations and protests. So, we left in '99, our entire neighborhood moved to Macedonia, we were organized and went to Macedonia.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they chase you from the neighborhood?

Selman Boçolli: Sorry?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did they chase you from the neighborhood, or did you leave in an organized way?

Selman Boçolli: No, no, they didn't chase us from our neighborhood, but we had agreed that nobody leaves the neighborhood until they violently make us leave. But they had shot in some surrounding neighborhoods and somebody called me on the telephone, because telephones were working back then, maybe they relied mostly on me, "If you don't go anywhere, then we will not go either," and things happened in a chain. The day we left from here, I received a call from Krasniqi, the brother of Avdyl Krasniqi, the one who is a doctor, Xhemajl, he said, "Things have gotten worse for three of us and we have no other option but leaving, because there is no place where we can stay."

And this way, the same happened in another place and another one, and people were already in a queue, they said, "We are only waiting for you to lead them, because they don't seem to know." I returned, now some more details, there were three boys, they were students, they were living in the basement of my neighbor's house and they had left a message, "We cannot know when you leave, but for God's sake, please let us know, otherwise they will kill us here and we will not know anything."

And my youngest son, the third one, told me, "Father, did you tell them?" I said, "But I don't know

²² Bureau of Self-Governing Interests, now the Public Housing Enterprise in Pristina.

anything.” He said, “But they are there.” One of them had joined the UÇK,²³ and the two others remained there. I left my car on and returned to take them as well. I took one of them in my car, he was the seventh one in my car and I sent the other one to my neighbor’s car. Nobody asked at that time, they went wherever there was room. And I will never forget, we sent them until there and they had the luck to be the first ones to cross the border because they had no obligations, each of them had one bag and they went there, they told me that they crossed the border.

So, we didn’t enter the [camp] Bllacë,²⁴ that was the time of Bllacë, we stayed in our cars. The order for us to return came, they didn’t allow us to go there and returning was our only option. We returned, he was very young. I knew that it was a big deceit, but there was nothing we could do. When we attempted for the second time, we were better prepared. I split all the money I had with my children and my wife, I gave them addresses. You know, there were no mobile phones back then, but only landlines, you have the telephone number, there were three-four families that stayed there. It was like a kind of center and they told us about the others as well as each-other, so we didn’t know where we would split and what would we do, but each of us was independent. My children were, the oldest one was in the second year of the gymnasium, the other in third grade, and the other one was in the six grade of elementary school. My children were young, such was their fate that the second time we left after ten at night, we waited all day long and then we left to the village of Stankovec.²⁵

In Stankovec we registered, there we were on guard, we organized being on guard, “*Shkije*²⁶ can come at night and slaughter us or something.” I myself guarded with three-four people, we were friends and met each other there. But that is not important because we were a little euphoric. And my son had registered us to go to Canada. Our names showed on the list, we were almost the last ones on the list to go to Canada.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How was it in Canada? How long did you stay there?

Selman Boçolli: In Canada we were welcomed so well, that even God doesn’t know better, we had everything we needed. There were around 1280 people in our group and we went there to a military cantonment where more special training was done, the highest level army of Canada, for two weeks during the summer, two weeks, but it was all available for us. The restaurants, hotels, I mean, television, halls and everything else, but mentioning that luxurious situation is not good now. We had to organize there as well, because it was a big group. People started stabbing each-other with knives, they had forgotten that...

We had no other option but to organize and lead them. They appointed me as the leader, without me

²³ *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, Kosovo Liberation Army.

²⁴ Bllacë is the border crossing between Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days in March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either moved into Macedonia or re-enter Kosovo.

²⁵ Stankovec is the location in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where a refugee camp was established for Albanians who were forced to leave Kosovo during the 1999 war.

²⁶ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

knowing any of them. They appointed me as the leader of the camp. And I chose four or five people whom I didn't know and we had meetings twice a week with them. I organized the schools in the yard there, they even said, "Just for one month because you will go to houses, you will be spread to cities." And I never forget it, I told the director of migration, "One day of school is better than 29 days in the streets running here and there and causing troubles for each-other." He said, "That is true, what do you need?" He said, "We have the desks as well as the tents." I worked very hard that afternoon.

I had to identify who was a teacher, who was an elementary school teacher and who could teach in the school here, I had to check the evidence. Not to be too long, I checked what we had and with all the qualified staff we had we established the school, the director of the school, there were three people there who said, "We have never seen such quick and yet good organization." But people do [well] when they want to, you know, because it was the good behavior, and besides the English [Class] that was organized, schools started as well...the issue was not learning, but people started giving bicycles and children started fighting with each-other, then their fathers, their parents, not to be too long. Thank God we overcame that in the best way we could, and we held meetings with them and everything was alright, okay.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you move to your own residences to Canada, how long did you stay there?

Selman Boçolli: They constantly talked to us and they also communicated with various cities. We were said to go to Calgary. In Calgary we had our own four rooms apartment, which we had to pay the rent for, but you could live well with the money that they gave us, if you knew how to manage it. You could pay the rent and everything else, but if you wanted to buy more things then [the money] was not enough either.

So, they gave clothes for the children and then when the schools were open, the news and everything else, and the children more, I thought about it... I thought, I don't know, sometimes one...and I didn't think right back then, now I think how I did harm to them. Because I said, "I don't want to be the reason that leaves my children in Canada, would I be the author of harm to my children? I would loose them. They will never return there." If they want, they can go whenever they want, but I don't want them to have this from me, because the schools were opened here and they wanted to [return] as well, so we returned.

I was accepted to teach mathematics in the gymnasium because...our children had to take a few tests. They turned out to be, because it was not only that year, but there hadn't been quality education for three-four last years, and they turned out to be unprepared. The results were very bad, so mathematics and physics, I gave additional classes in these subjects in their gymnasium. Eh, I had my advisor for Albanian Language, I respect him because they have a set program, and all of them were there, and I mean this is how we ended three more months in Calgary. The time came to return, and we did so.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did you return in September or June?

Selman Boçolli: I returned in October, I returned in October.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What did you do here then?

Selman Boçolli: In October, it was Sunday right the next day, on Monday, I was invited by some friends I had there, I went to work. And when we went there, we started everything from zero, there was nothing. We had to organize everything without salaries, or anything else. They had gone in September, one month earlier and met Serbs there for some time, then all of a sudden they got organized and didn't come anymore.

Thank God I didn't meet them there. They went before me, so we started to work without salaries for two or three months. I even finished around seven buildings that were left from them, I finished them after some time, not all at once, one by one. And like that, our profit was the legal percentage that remains from there, and this is how we got salaries and expenses...We were, not to brag about it, but those of us who worked, worked with banks, with bank accounts, not with cash money.

And now, they were being followed by all the Western countries, when six people came from Belgium. They saw that it was progressing, since ProCredit was the only bank back then, they saw the circulation, "This firm is successful," and they came to collaborate with us, to help us. "You should come to us as well, organize and come, what do you need? We will give you construction material or whatever you need for some set period of time because we feel safe, we will not ask you for money, just for you to recover it."

But, we unfortunately didn't have the director, I am not only talking about the first one, but all the others as well, they were not good, they only had an eye for mismanagement. And we didn't go there, we had to do everything with our own powers. We maintained it until recently. I retired one week and a half ago, I am out.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: When was it...was this enterprise privatized?

Selman Boçolli: No, no, this is a public enterprise, a public enterprise, and it still works today, but it doesn't do constructions. It was founded to do constructions, but since four or five years ago it doesn't do anything, but collect the rents of the shops.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Ah, because it has a lot of property.

Selman Boçolli: It has a lot of property in the city, around five hundred shops are under its management.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: And it can survive from them?

Selman Boçolli: Half of them or more were occupied, the rent was taken by someone else, but slowly-slowly I had to...so now, they are only living with those rents, there is no construction being done by them anymore. Maybe I bore you, but I apologize, thank you.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I think that the interview is done, but if you would like to add something, anything you think you didn't say, feel free...

Selman Boçolli: This is it, I don't know, even if I spoke one hundred times, maybe one word early, one word forward, still there, reality.