

INTERVIEW WITH AGON MALIQI

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Duration: 41 minutes

Present:

1. Agon Maliqi (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (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

Agon Maliqi: Hello. I am Agon Maliqi.

Aurela Kadriu: Agon, can you talk about your early childhood memories?

Agon Maliqi: My early childhood memories?

Aurela Kadriu: Life in Prishtina, what was your childhood like at that time, that period of time? Your family? So everything that includes... what kind of a family were you raised in, your parents background and how life was in the *mahalla*,¹ in your house? Everything you remember.

Agon Maliqi: So, I was born and raised in now Nazim Gafurri street, then, then it was called Miladin Popović,² it is there at the Technical High School. Today, that house is “Club M.” Early memories! My early memories are, I don’t know... I mean, the house yard was some sort of Olympic field for the whole neighborhood, they came to play there. I mainly grew up in the yard. These are the most, the most important memories... But also at the First Block apartments, which is in front. So, that was the habitat, the neighborhood where, where I, hung around as a child.

Early memories... I don’t know, I mean, there are more or less two areas of the city that I remember. I mean it is this, the old part of the city at the First Block, the house yard, and Bregu i Diellit [Sunny Hill] because there... My grandmother lives there, I stayed at my grandmother’s and there a lot and, yeah, also Ulpiana because I had friends who were there. My early memories are mostly, I remember some

¹ Word of Arabic origin that means neighborhood.

² Miladin Popović (1910-1945) was a Communist leader from Montenegro who worked in Albania and Kosovo alongside Albanian Communists and was assassinated in 1945.

things since school started in a way. From there, maybe because of socializing more, a new *rreth*³ of people, I remember there the first details.

The first memories here usually are, I don't know, are connected to politics sometimes, we were children but we, we grew up in some sort of tension. We heard. Even though we didn't understand what is happening, we were a generation that felt a tension around us. Seeing the people around us in some sort of stress, I also remember that. Maybe...

Aurela Kadriu: What childhood years are we talking about? You were born...

Agon Maliqi: Maybe because I come from a family that was politically engaged, and informed. The news was constantly on. I mean, my father was also politically engaged and he would travel through ex-Yugoslavia, abroad, to conferences. Maybe there I became conscious of what was happening, some sort of stress. I am talking about the end of the 80's, the beginning of the 90's, when there was some sort of... the removal of autonomy.

I went to first grade in 1990 when there still was the Yugoslav system. And I remember that, at the Elena Gjika elementary school, I remember that we still had Tito's picture in, in, in school. However, we were the first generation that went the school and weren't pioneers. It was some sort of tradition, when they got into first grade, they would put on the red [bandana] {demonstrates putting on the bandana around his neck } that of the Pioneer. And we are the first generation that when we got into school we didn't, we didn't become Pioneers. I remember that.

And, but when I was in second grade we started with the parallel system. I remember for a while, a, a thing that I remember is that for a certain period of time we didn't go to school anymore. Something, I say again some sort of memory, tension, some kind of worry of my parents. And I remember that we held classes in some houses in Bregu Diellit with a teacher there for a certain period of time. Until we came back to, to school, to Elena Gjika, as part of the parallel system. And Tito's picture was not there anymore.

These are some more, more political memories. But something else that I remember for example, since we are in this area of the city here, near the [football] stadium... I remember as a child the cheering in Pristina's stadium. When Pristina played, the city was quiet, and sometime, if we listened to the game on the radio or something, if you were not at the stadium, and when Pristina scored a goal you could hear it in the neighborhood, our neighborhood. It was a small city, very different from today's city. Pristina played here in the stadium, you could hear in the whole city. It was more of a village, to put it like that, than today.

³ *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.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about your family background, so the family composition?

Agon Maliqi: Okay, the composition. When I grew up. So, when I grew up we were with my grandmother, my grandmother lived with us, with my parents. I grew up with my grandmother, my grandfather died in the 80's, with my parents, my mother and father. And later, in '94, later, my sister was born. So, I spent ten years as, as an only child. We were four people for ten years in a house. But it was that kind of a family that, where all, all of the extended family gathered there. So, every night my aunts and uncle were there. So, I grew up with my aunt's kids, my uncle's kids together... as I said in that Olympic stadium in, of the neighborhood, in the house yard. This is the sort of the environment I grew up in.

Aurela Kadriu: You mentioned that your family was politically engaged. I'm interested in more details about this, your parents background and how this influenced you growing up?

Agon Maliqi: My father was, I mean, in, was engaged actually since... a little before I was born, since the 80's, with writings... Shkëlzen Maliqi so, with analysis, with newspapers, later politically with the Social Democratic Party and as part of the civilian resistance, of the protests that happened at the end of the 80's, the beginning of the 90's. How that influenced me? Now I can think retroactively, because then it's not that I had some sort of, of, of consciousness about this. But now, I mean, I was constantly aware that he isn't here for example, that he went to conferences, he went... outside of Kosovo.

Often, for example... I remember he was stuck in America for a year [no], for a month, because the borders were closed, he couldn't come back. You know, all these are memories, that as a child you understand that something is not okay. Or memories of the kind – I think it was the year '91, '92, or something like that – he took me to Macedonia with him. A conference, I don't remember what it was, and while we were coming back the police stopped us somewhere around Ferizaj. We were with my father's driver, and I was there. Somewhere around, at the border, somewhere around Kaçanik, and it was night time, two o'clock. Then it was very dangerous. And they searched our car. They held us there for about, about two hours.

They took the "Republic of Kosovo" documents. "What is this?" And I remember some kind of tension. But my tension was that I had a water pistol that I bought in Macedonia, and I hid it under the seat (laughs) because I was scared the police would find it. I mean, these kind of traumas, these kind of memories... because as children we could not escape politics. And I blame this situation for why as a generation we are so politicized, because politics was everywhere. And the police stopped you and as a child you had a water pistol, I remember it as a very traumatic thing that I hid it. And I prayed, "I hope they don't check under the seat because they will find my water pistol."

So his political engagement and these, you know, got, got to you. But also the house environment influenced me a lot, meaning the books, the newspapers, the discussions in the house, I mean they were constantly about these topics. So obviously this influences you on what, what interests you and

what, I mean maybe it influenced also on what I am today a lot, in a way.

Aurela Kadriu: But then when you went to school, was there a different treatment towards you taking into account this political background of your family? I am talking about elementary school memories.

Agon Maliqi: Me personally?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes.

Agon Maliqi: I don't think there was a different treatment, I didn't, I didn't feel it. Maybe, maybe I'm a little more...

Aurela Kadriu:... especially throughout the period when you went to home-schooling...

Agon Maliqi: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Was... How was the narrative, the discourse at home? Did, did you feel more in danger throughout those travels?

Agon Maliqi: I mean, as an Albanian, you know, I didn't have a different treatment within the Albanian community, we didn't feel it, it was a period of homogeneity, meaning, there was no difference between one who comes from a communist family, and one who [comes] from whatever, I mean, there was a form of tension with the Serbs, the police and so on. The danger was felt. In the 90's in Pristina in general you did not feel safe. So, people did not move far from the neighborhoods, I remember as a child, I mean. The center of the city was especially dangerous. There were more Serbs around the center, and you know, as children, there are these small groups of hooligans, they chased you, and we were a little bit scared.

But, to go to school, to be more specific in Bregu i Diellit, I do not remember if there was any danger. However, the tension was present because the police was physically present back then, I mean, they were at every corner, in the entire city. I remember even by my house, where the Technical School is, at the triangle that connects, I mean, when you go to Velania and to Vranjevc... there was, throughout the 90's there a checkpoint. The police were there every night. There was a, what did they use to call those, a very big police vehicle, there randomly, you know, they stopped people randomly.

And so, it all went – let's say from the age of five until six years old in '99, every time I passed the road the police was present there and... it's not like there was any case, I mean there were cases when we were chased, we were chased by this gang or that gang, but for me there was more the noise of this, how they used to call the police's... those talky-walky, how they use to call them, those that, that talk... *Përrllëp-përrllëp* [onomatope] they had this kind of noise. That, that...if I hear it nowadays too, it's kind of traumatic because it was this sort of ordinary noise of terror in a way, of tension that you

felt every time you saw, you saw the police.

And that same reaction I have even today towards any kind of police, I experience it whenever I go in the world, I get petrified, because it is stuck from that time. Even though police in different countries of the world are generally polite, with no bad intention towards you...I was traumatized by them and that fear of, of the police as something you should be afraid of. So the fear was like this. More like something you felt in the air other than something concrete. Or naturally your parents warned you, you know. "Careful where you go, with whom are you staying? Because you are the son of somebody and maybe someone wants to do something to you." These I remember, actually a couple of cases. And that impressed me, you know, that you had to be careful. So, these I remember, yeah.

Aurela Kadriu: Then, which high school did you go to?

Agon Maliqi: Sami Frashëri high school.

Aurela Kadriu: And how was that period for you?

Agon Maliqi: I am the last generation to have finished school in the [homeschooling] in Sami Frashëri, up in Kodra e Trimave [Hill of the Braves]. I started high school in '98, we were still under the parallel system.

Aurela Kadriu: In the homeschooling⁴ in Kodra e Trimave?

Agon Maliqi: Yes, at the Hertica family house, under the parallel system. It was a very difficult experience for me because I lived thirty seconds or one minute from the Sami Frashëri Gymnasium.⁵ And I had to walk by Sami Frashëri Gymnasium...and see Serbs going to school to the Sami Frashëri Gymnasium, they were so few that they couldn't manage to fill the school...and passing by it and taking the bus – we would take the bus somewhere or sometime small cabs, sometime we would also walk to Kodra e Trimave.

I mean, I had to pass by it first, and then walk for twenty minutes, half an hour in order to go to the [school] in the parallel system. I mean it was a...today we joke about that time, the conditions in which the houses were... I mean, two hundred students in one house. We had to take our shoes off at the entrance, there was the room of shoes which had a heavy smell (laughs). And, I don't know. I

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.

⁵ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

mean, this is my high school experience. Then, by the end of the first year, the war began and...But I have many memories of that time because I was more grown up, fourteen years old, I remember it very clearly.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you spend the wartime in Pristina or...how was the period after the school was shut down and the war began, for you?

Agon Maliqi: I don't exactly remember the moment it was shut down. I know that, I know that I left for Macedonia on March 23, one day before the bombings. I wasn't here during the bombings. We left because my father was in Switzerland and because of the fear that something would happen, he pushed us to go since he couldn't manage to return. I was in Macedonia during the war and....But I remember the tension, because the Hertica family house is in a very strategic position and from there you can see a pretty big part of Llap.

And when there were fights, let's say, in Llap, we could hear it at school. Those were very abnormal times. But I left on March 23 and returned, if I am not mistaken, on July 4. It was the 4th of July [English], when I returned to Pristina in '99.

Aurela Kadriu: How, I mean, the period in Macedonia, did you stay there as refugees, did you...

Agon Maliqi: Yes, yes, yes. We were refugees. I remember we had the green cards which were called *zgrizeno lice*.⁶ They called us *begalci* [refugees]. We were displaced to Tetova, a family from there welcomed us back then. And for some time we went to school in the gymnasium of Tetova. We improvised, we went to some classes in order not to miss much...

Aurela Kadriu: Did they take those classes into account when you returned here...

Agon Maliqi: No, I guess they didn't take them into account. It was difficult to govern it after the return, who went where, you know. We were spread as refugees, some in Albania, some others...

Aurela Kadriu: What happened to the school when you returned?

Agon Maliqi: When we returned, if I am not mistaken, we returned during the summer and then we started in September at Sami Frashëri. And we held something like two weeks to compensate the previous year. I believe it was something like that, they somehow formally finished our first year. We

⁶ This is the expression the speaker remembers as the Macedonians called the cards. There is no good translation for it, but it is likely referring to the special status of the refugees who had no other identity card.

did something for a certain period of time in order to finish the year that we had cut in half and then we continued normally the next year. But of course, this time in the school building of Sami Frashëri.

Aurela Kadriu: And, do you remember anything from the period when you returned to school? Do you remember the *matura*⁷ evening or anything similar? I mean, the environment?

Agon Maliqi: Yes...

Aurela Kadriu: The atmosphere...

Agon Maliqi: The atmosphere, I don't know. I remember very well the first day we entered the Sami Frashëri gymnasium. For us it was an experience...I mean, because many spaces of our city were forbidden to us, now suddenly we saw them for the first time. I remember well when I entered the gymnasium, I was amazed by the hall... I mean, compared to Hertica's house, you know, it looked a royal palace to us. I remember when we entered Boro and Ramiz,⁸ for example, the sports center, which was... you spent the whole life and you didn't, your road never sent you to the sports center. Now, as a 15-year-old, entering the sports center for the first time was an extraordinary experience.

I mean, suddenly, a whole new dimension of the city to which we had no access before. What else do I remember from Sami Frashëri? I remember, teenage details, you know. I remember various projects, donations coming to help us. Kosovo was a hearth of such things at that time. They had installed a system, an audio-system in every classroom, there was *sound-system* [English], speakers and a central system in the cellar where there was a kind of mixer, as a DJ. We also did DJ...and I often got to play music...school DJ. Between classes, the ring would bell, and a song would play. Or during the long break. The announcements were made...and so on.

I mean, I remember such details, you know, a whole new period began for us. Things that we never imagined could happen.

Aurela Kadriu: Then how...can you please tell us more details about how it happened, how did you hear about Post-pessimists and how did your involvement there happen?

⁷ *Maturë* or *Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

⁸ *Boro dhe Ramizi* refers to two friends, Boro Vukmirović and Ramiz Sadiku, who were executed during the Second World War. They became the symbol of the Brotherhood and Unity of the Serbian and Albanian people. In Yugoslav times it was common to name institutions after the heroes of the anti-fascist war.

Agon Maliqi: I had heard of Post-pessimists even before the war. I mean, I was thirteen-fourteen and somehow the information reached me. Maybe through my parents, maybe...I knew that it was a youth organization that produced the newspaper and such things, but I didn't have any direct contact. I had more detailed information, I mean, I heard more of it after the war, when some friends of mine joined it. And, I mean, I don't remember how and what, the circumstances, but they invited me to go to a meeting of Post-pessimists.

And from there, I started going regularly and I became a member. I have a blurry memory of it, the context, but I know that for the first time we were at the Red Hall of the Youth Palace. In the second floor of the Red Hall there were some rooms, like offices. We held a meeting there, that is where I went for the first time. It was 2000, I believe it was 2000. Summer or spring of 2000 when I went for the first time to this meeting.

Aurela Kadriu: Where did you hold the other meetings? Did you have an office, did you have...

Agon Maliqi: First there was that one in the Red Hall. Then we changed the office, as far as I remember we changed three or four offices during those years that I was part of it. First we were in Bregu i Diellit, near the city clinic, in a flat in front of the clinic, we were there for a summer. We had an apartment which we used as an office. And then we were, for the main part of the activities that I remember, we were in Dardania, in the part that is called Santea, in the yellow building in Dardania. We had a furnished apartment on the second floor, we had an office, computers, the living room which was a meeting spot where we gathered every day. I remember that as a longer period, it was somewhat, the whole 2001 until the end, or half of 2002.

Aurela Kadriu: I am interested in knowing, now, you are part of what is considered the second generation of Post-pessimists. Were there members of the post-war Post-pessimists who were even before the war, how to say, as leaders, or somebody who advised you? Did the line of thought continue to be similar to the one before the war? How did it evolve? If you can, if you remember it, if you can tell me?

Agon Maliqi: I don't know in fact, maybe in the beginnings when I was there, there were some members who were part of the transition, who had been there even before. But they slowly started withdrawing, because the context changed, the interest changed as well as the social circle. I guess when I came, the main group wasn't there anymore. And then the others started slowly leaving, I am saying, war shook everything in Kosovo, and people's priorities changed...So, as far as I know, when I went in the beginning, when I started being more active, the group was completely different from the one before the war.

I mean we were one, as a group of people we were...as a group of people but also as a type of activity we were completely different. Perhaps the only connection was the Norwegian organization which was Norwegian People's Aid which was the founder and which continued being the main financial supporter. And here and there old contacts with Post-pessimists from the region which were held by some of our members, but not by all of us. I mean, the connection that used to be with the other offices somehow was cut and it is not that we functioned as a regional network any longer, we were more like a local organization.

Part Two

Aurela Kadriu: Can you make an order of, I mean, how do you remember the activities, of the type of activities and respectively your role within Post-pessimists? What did you do at Post-pessimists?

Agon Maliqi: I don't remember the activities. It is not that I remember the exact structure, it is not that...I don't know whether we had a coherent and well-thought structure of the program. More or less, we dealt with everything that crossed our mind. But it was, I mean...what I remember about myself mainly, as a media person, I dealt a lot with the newspaper that we produced, I was its editor-in-chief for a long time. But if I am not mistake, I was also the leader of Post-pessimists for two mandates, in 2001, if I am not mistaken, we had six-months mandates or something like that. And I dealt with the coordination of all the activities.

So, besides the newspaper, we had awareness-raising projects regarding AIDS awareness and so on. We had some projects concerning the inter-ethnic coexistence. We produced a radio show, we also did humanitarian activities sometimes, if I am not mistaken, but I don't remember anything specific. I mean, a little of everything, more or less...a typical youth organization, you know, that deals with youth concerns. That was the time when the awareness about drugs started as well, these problems started showing, you know. Awareness-raising campaigns for drugs effects and such things. But projects weren't the most important to us, but their socializing effect yes, the fact that we were in the same office, we had fun. Perhaps fun was what brought us together more than the engagement and projects.

Aurela Kadriu: What was mainly the nature of the articles that you published in the newspaper?

Agon Maliqi: The nature of articles reflected the concerns that we had. It was a period of exploring the freedom that came suddenly in front of our eyes, an explosion of enthusiasm. A desire to break taboos, to break limits which to us were maybe, I mean, everything was very new to us. Besides the

fact that we were young, the world around us was completely new for Kosovo, we had a kind of enthusiasm to deal even with more satirical things in order to break taboos, but also with political issues. I mean, we dealt with social, political issues as well, freedom of speech, I remember we treated this issue in some editions. We dealt with what else, with the alternative-cultural scene, with bands, things that we were preoccupied with, music, mainly this kind of topics.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you organize cultural evenings, or similar events?

Agon Maliqi: Yes, there were evenings. I remember we brought a DJ...our campaign against drug, we brought a famous DJ, I don't remember the name now, he was an English DJ. That was the beginning of the electronic scene of Pristina. We were the organizers, we did it at Kino Rinia [Youth Cinema], in front of...Then there were some concerts that we did. One was for the release of Albin Kurti.⁹ I don't exactly remember the year, but I remember we did it at Santea, in the corridor between coffee shops. We were pretty active with this concerts part.

Aurela Kadriu: I heard that those who were part of Post-pessimists got to travel a lot within Post-pessimists, which for that time was something unusual. Can you tell me about this part, how was it for you personally?

Agon Maliqi: To me personally, I mean, I didn't get to travel until I got to travel for the most important things. Because as an organization, we often received invitations from various international organizations and most of us got to go to conferences and so on. I got the chance to go to New York in 2000, the preparations for the Convention for Children's Rights were being made. And I went there as a representative of a youth and children's organization from Kosovo, I was 16 or 15-16 at that time, I don't exactly remember, and I went to New York as a representative of youth organizations from Kosovo twice, [to attend] to two preparatory sessions at the United Nations. This was, I believe, in 2000 and in 2001. I was once in Geneva in a similar conference, connected to this activity, but I mean, I saw New York and America for the first time with the help of UNICEF at that time.

Kosovo was a kind, at that time it was an interesting topic internationally. Because the war was just over, wherever you went as a youngster, you would mention Kosovo, everybody knew where it was, it is different from the way it is now, we are outside the map of places that are known. And we had an interesting story that is also the reason, I believe, why we received many invitations, not us as youth but as anyone else from Kosovo. And this is what I remember, I remember New York.

⁹ Albin Kurti (1975-) leading activist and former leader of Vetëvendosje!, is Member of the Assembly of Kosovo. In 1997, he was the leader of the students protests against school segregation and the closing of the Albanian language schools.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember your approach...did you speak at the conferences that you were part of? What did you speak about?

Agon Maliqi: I don't remember it very well, but there was a themed roundtable, if I am not mistaken, about children and conflicts, something similar. I remember that since we were a post-conflict area, they invited someone from Kosovo to speak there. I know that I was in the panel in one of the halls of the United Nations, and I said something, but to be honest it is not that I remember anything specific. And so on, yes...

Aurela Kadriu: In Pristina, where you were active, what was the opinion on Post-pessimists, as something new, what was people's approach? First your family's, about these travels, the activities that you were part of as a youngster? What was their reaction? Did people know about you? Did you have any support from the intellectuals of that time?

Agon Maliqi: Of course, I was supported by my family, I was even encouraged to be engaged. From other circles, I am trying to recall now, maybe those were people who knew the organization. I mean, we were recognized as an organization, mainly because of the older generation's work, because they were the only youth organization at that time. And wherever you went, for example you needed something, *Koha Ditore* [Daily Times] for example, for an announcement or something, people knew who Post-pessimists were, because most of the members were journalists for *Koha Ditore* and the word was spread. I mean, we didn't have any problem mobilizing media for an activity or invite them to come, they knew us as an organization.

Then about the perception, I don't know, maybe often the criticism doesn't reach you, I don't know how to say it. When you are a closed group of people and hang out with them, it is not that you listen to those who curse you. It is possible that there was the perception that we were a closed group of people who brag about themselves and are not open to others. But it is not that I remember it that way, because we were open for membership, it is not that we had an exclusive criterion or something like that. Whoever wanted to be engaged, had the chance [to join], but usually people hesitate if they don't know anyone or something. We were small friendship groups, you know, and our friends went, they... I also went for example, because my friends were there and this is how they were created...

Aurela Kadriu: The chain...

Agon Maliqi: The chain. It is not that we were an exclusionary organization that bragged about itself. At that time new organizations started being founded because there were opportunities, I mean, we

are talking about the time of donations explosion from the international organizations that came here. I mean, the country changed completely in a way. I don't know about the outside perception, maybe that is something that somebody who wasn't part of us can tell you better about, than I, who was part of the organization.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember the final phase of your activity at Post-pessimists? How did that transitional period happen, when you left it?

Agon Maliqi: As long as I was there, I worked very actively, I mean, I worked a lot because I was really interested and driven to publish the newspaper, to work on a documentary and deal with such things. And you know how the attraction happens at that age, you are interested in something for a period, you listen to a genre of music and then you leave it. It was a natural cycle where the phase of interest about something passes and you start withdrawing. I don't remember, I don't exactly remember why and how, but I simply started dealing with other things.

I had a kind of interest in dealing with directing, I wanted to study directing, I produced video, I took cameras and experiment, I closed into myself and I worked on my experimental projects and I left aside my engagement in the organization. Then I went abroad for my studies, and that is where I was totally lost. Then, in fact, since I left Kosovo, in that period, the organization as such was shut down in a way, there were no more people there. There was no generation after us that could continue the trend.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about your studies, how did you go abroad and what did you study?

Agon Maliqi: I went to the American University in Bulgaria which is in Blagoevgrad, around four-five hours from Pristina. There was an open call for application which was usually made through the office of Soros here in Pristina. They administered the application. I had heard a lot about the University from people who had been there before. Because of my parents' insistence, I applied, because as I said, I wanted to study film directing here in Pristina. And I applied more to make them happy, not that I really wanted it.

And I remember, I took the TOEFL and SAT tests, which were administered here in Pristina, and then I was accepted. Then again, with a lot of hesitation, maybe more because of the pressure from my parents, I decided to go there.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you study and can you tell us how was that time for you?

Agon Maliqi: Political Science and European Studies, it was a *double major* [English]...but many subjects were connected. It was maybe, I think, the most important time of my life. And I thanked my parents a lot. On my second week there, I told them, “Thank you for pushing me to come here, for taking me out of Pristina.” It is, it was a whole other world, because there were around one thousand students from all around Eastern Europe. Many different countries.

I also didn't feel very far from home, because we were near. But there were also many students from Kosovo and Albania. We were a lot of Albanians in the community. I didn't feel much like a stranger... but on the other hand you had the diversity, you could meet different people. But the education system was the most revolutionary part, I mean, the idea that when you go to a class you discuss, in a way, the professor asks you, “What do you think?” Which to me was {mimics surprise} ...the first class when the professor came and asked me, “What do you think?”

We weren't used to that kind of pedagogy. The idea that you can participate and you can write and that your opinion is valued, was very refreshing. Those were four years in which I learned a lot but I also grew individually because of the people, because of the social life that I had there.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you do after your studies?

Agon Maliqi: I returned to Pristina where for one year I worked for various projects. More like ad-hoc, until I started working for the Youth Initiative for Human Rights. There I worked as a continuity from Post-pessimists, I wouldn't say it like that, but there was a similar spirit of work. Because the Initiative was a regional network which dealt with, a little with *transitional justice* [English], of, I mean, transitional justice. Yes, also with the development of critical thinking among the youth. I mean, I worked there for around one year.

And then, in a way, the part of work, engagement and activism starts falling and I started working, I joined the industry of development, the so-called, of donors and development projects. First, I worked for the Norwegian Embassy, and then I continued with...I mean, I went to America again for my Master's, in 2010.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you study?

Agon Maliqi: Development Policies. This is where I start developing professionally in the field of public and development policies. I was in America for two years. And when I returned, I continued working in that field. I mean, I worked for UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] then, since there as a

consultant for most of the donors in Kosovo. Studies, analysis, reports. But always, never forgetting the engagement...I mean, it is a continuity with Post-pessimists, I don't know how to put it, which keeps and I feel it is haunting me.

I mean, with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, then with...now with *Sbunker* maybe, a kind of beginning of activism, a similar ideological spirit, this is how I would call it, which comes out time after time, as a kind of another platform. Not that, I mean, life is divided in the professional part where in a way you work to survive and so on, and the others that are the fun part, that are more part of activism than, you know, simply work.

Aurela Kadriu: What do you currently do? How is your life in that respect, can you tell us?

Agon Maliqi: Now I am, I mean, I continue working as a consultant on public policies, which is what I make a living from. I work for...It is more like a freelance [English] engagement, I have projects from time to time, which make it possible for me to have the life that I want. I also have *Sbunker*, which is a project, an initiative we started with a colleague of mine two years ago, which is more like a *passion project* [English]. And these two are what I currently do.

And how does my life look? It is a life on constant move, because I live between Pristina and Tirana since three-four years ago. I mean, I am one of those, maybe there are not many of us who do this life, I mean, the *Rruga e Kombit* [National Street] had made it possible for us to move from here or there. So, it is a new phase in a way, living between two cities. I travel almost every week, and I manage to experience two cities parallelly. This is it.

Aurela Kadriu: If you don't have anything to add, I would conclude the interview here.

Agon Maliqi: OK.

Aurela Kadriu: Thank you very much!

Agon Maliqi: Thank you!

