

## INTERVIEW WITH SHKËLZEN MALIQI

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Duration: 361 minutes

Present:

1. Shkëlzen Maliqi (Speaker)
2. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
4. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

*Simbolet e komenteve në transkriptë te komunikimi jo-verbal:*

*() - komunikim emocional*

*{ } - i intervistuari shpjegon me gjeste*

*Simbole të tjera në transkriptë:*

*[ ] - shtesë e tekstit për të lehtësuar kuptimin*

*Fusnotat janë shtesa editoriale që japin informacion mbi vendbanime, emra apo shprehje.*

*[This part of the interview was conducted on October 20, 2018]*

## Part One

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Shkelzen, start with an introduction, first where were you born? When? Where? Then tell us a bit more about the place where you were born and your family.

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** I was born on October 26, 1947 in Rahovec. It was a strong winter with a lot of snow. My father was there on duty and I lived there for two months. Otherwise, my father is from Prizren, his family is from Prizren, whereas my mother's family is from Gjakova, so I was born kind of in the middle. Back then, Rahovec was more like a village, a town, big village or a town with houses that were covered with planks...houses were covered with planks.

I was very *proud* [Eng], I mean, I was very proud of my birthplace, until I turned five, when I turned five, they took me there to see it and I lost enthusiasm because it seemed like a village. My family is from Prizren. A step-step grandfather of mine had come to Prizren from the Kukës region sometime in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Four-five generations of my family lived there [in Prizren]. My mother's family come from Stavilec, Gjakova. The famous Stavileci family are all close cousins of mine, they are the sons of my mother's paternal uncles. What else can I tell you about my family?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Tell us a little about your parents.

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** Yes, my parents, my father was an orphan, that is, his father died when he was five-six years old. My grandfather Hazër was on duty in Istanbul, Turkey. A *çauşh*<sup>1</sup> there, a sultan from Turkey who in 1908 had to flee there during the Turkish regime, he left his house, his fortune. He only had one daughter, my older paternal aunt. He came to Prizren, his birthplace, and then he was caught by the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and so he never managed to go back to Istanbul to claim his property back or something. In our family, there was always a myth that he had a big house there and

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<sup>1</sup> An Ottoman title used for two separate soldier professions, both acting as messengers although differing in levels.

that one day we can sell it or find the ownership papers. They had the ownership papers but my grandmother, as the other women who remained without their husbands at that time, gave them to a person with the last name of Pasuli, the Pasuli family from Prizren, he said, "I'll see whether I can find the ownership papers and sell it," but he couldn't do anything.

He had lived up to the '50s, '52-'53, then he died and the ownership papers were lost. My paternal uncle's family and my paternal aunt went to Turkey in the '50s, by the end of the '50s, and attempted to find them, but they never found them. So, some time in 1924 he died, so like that, my father, my paternal uncle and my paternal aunts remained orphans. My father started working in his early childhood to maintain his family. He worked on many crafts, but then he became a bakery worker. He was around, how old could he be? He was around 18 when he went to Skopje to work in the bakery, where he would make *simite*<sup>2</sup> and other things. That is the time when he connected to, how to call them, the *medresa* from Kosovo, I mean, they were from Prizren, I am talking about Ramadan Vraniqi and co., there was Gjergj Beci as well, they were part of a leftist movement. And he didn't get a lot of education, but he knew how to read and was influenced by them, so he was an antifascist because he would tell me how he read the news about the occupation of Abyssinia, Ethiopia and Havi Salasi, the war and so on, but he became close to them also when Albania was occupied.

But he was in the military service when the war broke, he was part of the Yugoslav Army. Back then, military service was two years and something. In 1941, he was in Zaječar, in eastern Serbia, near Romania, but he wasn't taken hostage because he happened to be, I mean, he worked...I am telling you these details, maybe they are interesting. He worked while in the military service, he was a skilled person, he was very lovely and so he worked in the command, he distributed salaries. Since the attack took place on April 6, Germany attacked Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941 and the [Yugoslav] Army was in chaos. The salaries arrived exactly around those days, and he said, "I was left with sacks of money," so he went and bought some civilian clothes and started walking from Zaječar to Prizren. He spoke Serbian so he made it somehow by traveling mainly at night, he would find a safe spot to sleep during the day because, if they caught him....Yugoslavia was defeated very quickly, in less than a week and the Army was in total chaos, but he somehow made it to...When he arrived in Pristina, he said, "OK, I survived!" But then he connected with the back-then Progressive Communist League in Prizren, and a few months later, he was caught and imprisoned in the prison of Tirana. This is it...He stayed in prison there, until...those prisons were like communist schools, he learned a lot there.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did he end up in prison...because of...?

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** Those were the groups of communists that prepared for uprisings and such things.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Prizren was occupied by Italians at that time, right?

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** Yes, Italians were there. But they were released when the Italians were defeated in 1943. Then the Bulgarians who had occupied Macedonia came there and said, "We ask those who are Bulgarian to come up." They didn't have any evidence, so he came up as a Bulgarian since he spoke Macedonian after having lived in Skopje. He came up as a Bulgarian, they named him Spaso or something like that. And the communist cell arranged for them to get out of the line because the line

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish bagels.

of prisoners from western Macedonia, Dibra and what do I know was 100-200 meters long. He managed to get out of the line thanks to some signs. He only had one problem, when they started calling him, he had forgotten his [fake] name that he was given there and they had called Spaso, Spaso ten times or something, until he remembered, “Ja, ja,” then it was alright, they released them with...Because what do I know, Bulgaria took its people, like that...But during the time he was in prison, he heard about the case of the murder of the famous trio, that is, Sadik Stavileci, Gjorgj Martini and Vojo Kushi.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Can you describe this murder in a more detailed way?

Shkelzen Maliqi: They were one kind of a cell of the Communist Party. That kind...they had a kind of gathering at *Kodra e Kuqe* [Red Hill] in Tirana, behind the 15-floor building, 200-300, 500 meters in its lower part, they held a meeting there. I don't know whether somebody uncovered them or whether the house was raided...They fought as much as they could, but the three of them were killed. The legend was that they got into the tank, but maybe the story has been a little twisted. But it is true that in a house there in Ija, this is how they referred to it, they visited it as a family later in 1971 while they were killed in 1942. Later on, Sadik, my maternal uncle, was declared a hero.

My father knew this story and was very impressed by it. When he returned to Kosovo, he became a partisan immediately, he didn't stay in Prizren because he knew that they would still look for him, so he decided to go to the Mountaineers of Gjakova. He fought there, mainly in the areas of the Shkëlzen and Valbona Mountains, whenever he was needed. That is where he also decided that, had he survived, he would name his first son, that is me, Shkëlzen, then that's how it happened. But alright, war is war, and there were mainly small groups who stayed around the Karadak Mountains and in the Sharr Mountains...My father also attended the Bujan Conference, which was the first conference in which the status of Kosovo was discussed, that is where the resolution that the people of Kosovo want to unite with Albania and that they would exercise that right of theirs right after the war was approved. But he wasn't among the delegates because he was relatively young, he was a cook, he prepared the food, cute, but that's how it was. This is the story of my father...

Then when Gjakova was liberated in '44, he took part in the Gjakova attack and then while fighting near the door of the mosque, somebody threw a bomb from the minaret and he was hurt...He lost one eye and had many scars on his body, when I was a child, they would show up or..He had also had his eye operated on, but he couldn't see with his left eye.

Right after the war, he found out because he even met them once in the Gjakova Mountaineers. The Sadiku family, my maternal grandmother, together with my maternal grandmother and the children and my mother, they left Gjakova immediately because they were afraid of oppression, they escaped with horses and so on. Once, my father had seen my mother getting on the horse, she was still...My mother was born in 1927, my father was born in 1918 or 1919, '19, I guess she was around 16-17 at that time and was a friend of Ganimete Tërbeshi. They were like activists who carried out things. He saw her on the horse and he knew that she was the sister of Sadik Stavileci and after the war, he sent out a message to her family that he wanted to marry her and that's how they got married.

I had an older sister who was born in Suhareka in 1946, but she died one year later because of a cold or something like that...maybe the conditions weren't that good back then. When my father was injured in 1945, he spent four-five months in hospitals seeking treatment. When he got cured, all partisans from Kosovo were taken somewhere in Vojvodina and kept in Kikinda, the famous brigade that wasn't sent to the war, I don't even know what they wanted to do with them, maybe they just wanted to take them out of Kosovo, and when he returned to Prizren they had told him, "We cannot send you there now because you are the only one who is going to be OZNA. You will be part of the Secret Service, the Intelligence Service." OZNA - *Organizacija za Zaštitu Naroda* ["Organization for the Protection of the People"], it was an acronym for an organization for the protection of the people, however, the organization was notorious, they, they, {coughs}, the *ballist*<sup>3</sup> and all those who were against the new regime...He even got a nickname Mehmet OZNA. He had two nicknames, Mehmet Cikuli and Mehmet OZNA. The Cikuli was one he had since when he was a child...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What does it mean?

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** Nothing.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What does it mean?

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** There are Cikuli last names, I have heard it in Albania. Whereas the Mehmet OZNA is one that says that he holds a position [in OZNA], like that. When I was born in 1947, he didn't happen to be home, he was in the Berisha Mountains for two-three weeks chasing the *ballist*, the *ballist çeta*<sup>4</sup> and when he returned, they told him, "Congratulations on the birth of your son. We have named him Bajram," because I was born on the Eid day. He immediately responded, "No way, his name is Shkëlzen. He cannot be a Bajram!" My cousins from Prizren spoke mainly Turkish at home, you know, they were like, "Aw, aw, aw *nedir bu ad*," which is, "What is this name like this?" They didn't even know how to pronounce it, "Skender", the Turks couldn't pronounce "s" and "sh" at the beginning of the word, they would always add an "l" but then somehow they got used to it, this is another story.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What kind of childhood did you have? What kind of childhood did you have?

**Shkelzen Maliqi:** It was good, I was relatively privileged. I mean, we lived in Prizren when we were very little, but my father was like war staff and he was very close to Katerina Patonogic – CICA, she was a Serbian heroine from Prizren, she loved my father very much. She got married to an Albanian partisan, Hajrullah Ishmi, but he was one of the leaders of the Serbs, maybe the most influential ones and he always wanted to advance and stuff. At a very early age, somewhere in the '50s, he went to a school in Belgrade. That was the Party's school, but I don't know how long it lasted, I guess one year but, you know, they were like short courses, what one learns in high school, they learned for one year or something, it was combined like that. Because he was obliged to complete three classes, but he did

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<sup>3</sup> *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

<sup>4</sup> The South Slavic *çeta* is a loan word from Ottoman Turkish and it is derived from *çat*, *çet*, to hit, strike, steal. Comparably, see *çatmak* or its reciprocal form *çatışmak*, to provoke a conflict. It commonly means band of irregular fighters.

it just for the sake of it between two wars, because there were no Albanian schools but just like...and he did it there...

Then, when he returned, he had a work position in Prizren, he was in the police force in Mitrovica for like a year and I was then three-four years old and I remember, I have the first memories in Mitrovica. Maybe the first image that I have was May 1... I think it was 1951 in Mitrovica when I went for a walk and I remember a school there that has a wide yard, where I saw some flags and stuff. Like the first image that I remember, I can't reconstruct it completely, but I remember that and the river. Our apartment was near the river, there was a slope, and I used to play down there, and on the side there was corn and things like that, I used to go and steal corn to take it home and bake it, like this. I had some chickens in the yard, and a bike. I actually have pictures with those chickens, they're very interesting you know, I was wearing some short *kule* [balloon pants] for women, but I was a cute little boy.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** When did your siblings come? How many siblings do you have?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** My sister was also born in Prizren in 1949, my brother was born in Prizren in 1954, and my little sister was born in Pristina in 1961. My father became a high functionary, because then he became the chief of... so, some kind of ministry of order in Kosovo, it was *pokrajina* then, they used to call it a province with limited autonomy, but it had some kind of... its own police force. It was mostly under Serbia's command, but then it was there for about two years, exactly where the Police Center is today.

I remember, I enrolled in first grade in Pristina, we lived here in Velusha near the school. I started school, I went to Elena Gjika, it was called Vuk Karadžić back then. I started school in Albanian, but my father used to work for two-three years at a job, then they would transfer him, Prizren-Prishtinë, we were in Mitrovica only once, very early on, when I was born he was on duty in Rahovec. Later I started school here, the first grade, then in fifth grade I was in Prizren, then from sixth to eighth grade in Pristina. I finished elementary school here, then the two first years of high school in Prizren, and the last two here.

It was relatively good because it was all nomenclature back then, Kosovo was not that rich either, I think even the leaders at that time didn't have great privileges, but they were nevertheless privileged. I don't remember having a bad experience. Sometime in '56-'57 we started going to the beach. We used to go to Ulqin, the first and second years, we went with tents and stuff. I had a sensitive throat, and my brother Gazmendi, who was born in 1954, he was also sick, so they took us to the beach. Then we went every year. It was rare back then, you know, we went to the small beach and there was always enough space, people from other places of Yugoslavia used to come, but tourism wasn't as it is today. I wasn't problematic. I liked Prizren a lot, Pristina not at all.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Tell me a little about both cities.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Prizren was interesting, you know, it had a diversity like today. Ever since childhood, so since I was six-seven years old, I could speak the three languages that were spoken in Prizren. Albanian firstly because my family spoke Albanian. My mother was from Gjakova, then Turkish, because the majority of my family is from Prizren, but my grandmother and mother also. My mother

was from Opoja, but her father was, my maternal grandmother, my grandfather got married, my maternal great-great grandfather lived in Prizren, and my grandmother got married in Gjakova from Prizren. She spoke Albanian very well, but she also spoke Turkish, and we used to talk to my [paternal] aunts in Turkish.

It's interesting because, at that time in Prizren, the citizens who used to be called **kasabali**, they mostly could speak Turkish and Serbian, the languages of the city, this was it. The newcomers were mostly Albanians from villages or something, they spoke Albanian, but to become citizens of Prizren, they had to learn Turkish as well. Turkish, even today, it's like the language of **kasabali**. For example, my paternal grandmother, some Serbs lived in her neighborhood, she could speak Serbian, but not Albanian, she understood it but, no, Turkish yes, but she didn't speak Albanian, only Turkish and Serbian.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Tell us what the city was like.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The city was relatively clean. There weren't many cars. The house we lived in was my grandfather's, my uncle with his family lived there, it was in a part of the city where the gymnasium is, there are some alleys. All those alleys, at that time, they used to clean the yard in the morning, it was very clean. But our house at my uncle's was very old, I think it was built sometime in the beginning of the 18th century, because it had a big veranda in the entrance that it was covered with hay, with... and they used to put rugs and stuff. Then there were stairs on both sides, you used to get through the stairs, and the rooms were a little higher, very interesting.

And there you could also eat. Often... when guests were about to come, back then in guest rooms, there were some rooms back then. Those rooms were interesting, oriental furnishings, with those closets in the walls, with those teapots mostly made out of potter.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did you live, did you all live in rooms together, or what?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, we did not live there.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Aha, this was your grandfather's?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** My grandfather's, my uncle's, but I started there a lot as guest. My father had troubles like this with people because they wouldn't give him apartments. In the beginning, we had... there's a road there Saraji Gubaz that takes you somewhere around Famipa. There was an empty house, someone who left, who was with the ballists or something. We lived there for about three years, then when my brother was born, we lived, and that house was very interesting, it had a big, long yard, I have a lot of memories there. This was when I was in preschool, I think then I started going to preschool. I used to go to a school near the Papaz Çarshia, where the boulevard of Prizren is, where the fountain is, when you go up, there is the Papaz Çarshia, it is the Çarshia of Papaz, because there is the Catholic Church, further down, there is the Orthodox Church, and there is the school that we used to call Bajram Curri, because during the war it was called like that, I think it was, I think it had another name, but it is there in the Catholic neighborhood. That's where I finished elementary school.

It was interesting because up to fourth grade I went to school in Albanian, but then a teacher of mine, Xhon Vorsh, he said to my father, "Your son is very smart. Why don't you start the fifth grade in

Serbian, he will probably go to university, so he can get prepared.” I don’t know why, what convinced my father, how do I know, he talked to me, “Would you go?” I could speak Serbian, but not that well, “Okay.” I was eleven years old, I had no resistance, no judgement, I also had Serbian friends in the apartment. My apartment was at the bridge, not the stone one, but further down, where the lock keys are, there was no bridge there. Once the water took over, and for the longest time, it was only left with the pillars, the...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Wood planks?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** There weren’t even wood planks. But then they fixed it, later, they fixed it the way it is today, and just there, one of the first collective apartments, that’s where my school was, I used to go up that road where the hotels and stuff are now...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And you started going to school in Serbian, how was that?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** That was a little... it wasn’t easy, because sometimes I would pronounce a word wrong, they would laugh, it wasn’t a good experience, but I got it over with. But only later during my schooling I strayed away from... you know, I got into another world, the language, my friends. Then, the fact that every two-three years we moved from place to place, I never made actual friends, to have my friends. I have people I know, but I have very few friends that when you grow up for seven, eight years in a school with your classmates. I had some in Pristina, some there, and like this. I didn’t even go to high school like I should have, but I went to school in Serbian. Then I learned the language well, because I was little, learning it wasn’t a problem. And there were many more books in Serbian than in Albanian back then. But I could speak Albanian, we still spoke Gheg Albanian, our version, but then I had trouble with these, I am a little withdrawn, so I became even more so. I am an introvert, I always was even as a kid. And...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What about memories about Pristina... because I’m interested to know the comparison?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I didn’t like Pristina. I was in Pristina when I was very young, I don’t remember the first memories, those from ‘53 or even earlier, ‘40s, because we were also here at the end of the ‘40s, but before... They tell me that before we went to Mitrovica, we lived in Pristina where the big ABC is today, actually it was built at that time. And people tell me I fell into a grease pit, and they barely saved me. You know, I was a kid. I only remember people telling me, I don’t actually remember it, I was probably two, two and a half, three years old. You can’t remember at that age. But, from the first grade, when I turned seven-eight years old, I remember very well, the Vuk Karadžić I used to go to, and everything. I used to live in the building next to Swiss Diamond, I lived there for about two years, I remember that Agim Zatriqi was our neighbor.

Pristina was relatively small. The city ended where Grand Hotel is. Where the University is today, the University campus, there used to be the Army, the Rectorate was the headquarters of the army and there were some barracks there. There was something at the new Post Office, some building and stuff, but they were far away. Where Rilindja is today, the big building of Rilindja, there was the end of the city. Where Dragodan is, there was nothing there, and they used to have motorcycle races in mud, it was interesting, the whole city gathered to see them. Later, at the end of the ‘50s, ‘60s, they started

building those houses, and as usual, it was done without a plan, the narrow alleys, like this, it was very small.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What about the old city?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The old city was interesting. I don't have... I don't remember now where the Assembly is, they say that there was the Kapani Çarshia of Pristina, maybe the second biggest in the Balkans. I think in the time when I lived here, the time I remember, I don't remember that it existed, or that they started to build the Assembly. I just remember that it was from Union, where Union is today, in front of it, there was a small alley, there was the first *korzo*<sup>5</sup> and there were some stores and stuff, and where the new Post Office is, there was the People's Warehouse, *NAMA*, *Nadoni Magazin*, and there was a big store, there you could buy anything. I know I went there often. And until lately that was the main alley, in front of a small boulevard behind that alley, on the side where the Gërmia shopping mall was, there was a big garden. During the summer, there were places to drink coffee, and things like this, summer coffee. Near there was a theatre, a kid's theatre, a hall, those things don't exist anymore. Once I asked... Malon Lami was an Albanian actor, he was staying here, he was taking a course or something, and the theatre group for young people...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Where was this theatre exactly?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Where Gërmia is today, or a little further down, that area. Maybe where Dit' e Nat' is. Somewhere there. Now that area is destroyed, the new building and Bankkos are built where the government is today, somewhere there. But those houses were small, one-story or two-story houses, and they fit a lot... Malon Lami took me to that show, but I was very disappointed because they just made me a rabbit costume, I just passed through the stage once and I went out (laughs) like this. Then I lost my ambition to become an actor. But it was good, I'm just kidding because kids at that... I saw how others were playing, but I was very young, they were older.

And then when I didn't stay in the same place because, as soon as I started something, I went with my family to Prizren because I had only finished one year here back then. Now Pristina was small, summer was interesting here. The stadium used to be there even then. There were two rivers that came together near the stadium and... No, the stadium wasn't there, there was a swamp there, and we used to go there to play, we used to go further, the other part that is becoming the new Pristina, the part around Dragodan. There were some... some gardens with plums, we used to go as children to pick the plums, not small green plums, but big blue plums, we used to make trouble as children.

This road, back then it was called Belgrade, now Fehmi Agani, it used to end there, there wasn't any city any further, you know. It was like this, Pristina was mostly a town, but then the center started getting built, the main road was done then. The second time we came to live here, I was in elementary school, I lived in the building in front of Swiss Diamond, the offices of Ramiz Sadiku were downstairs, where we lived, the construction company Ramiz Sadiku, they had their offices there. I lived on the third floor.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And the bookstore was?

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<sup>5</sup> Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The bookstore was under, and Varteks, the bookstore and Varteks was at the corner. But it was a small city. At the end of the '50s, '60s it started to have kiosks, buses on the streets and *korzo* moved there. When all of these buildings were built in the '50s, Tregtia, Jedinstvo, Rilindja back then was where the museum is today, the court, Rilindja was there, we, I went to school I passed by Rilindja. I went to school from fifth to eighth grade to Vuk Karadžić, or Elena Gjika, in Serbian, like this.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Was it different to go to school in Serbian in Pristina compared to Prizren?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, no, there wasn't a big difference, but I was a little more grown then, I read books and stuff.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What did you read?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I read everything, books for school, but also those crime novels that used to come out once a week, *Lun, Kralj, Ponoć*, they were all in Serbian. And comic books, I read a lot of comic books at that time. And the newspapers for youngsters *Plavi Vjesnik* from Zagreb, it was more beautiful than this *Politikin Zabavnik*, more beautiful in a sense, you know, it was designed differently. Even though *Politikin Zabavnik* had more information, I liked *Plavi Vjesnik* more because it had the main comic *Flash Gordon*, with a spaceship and things like this, more like futurism and like that. While the *Politikin Zabavnik* I think, if I'm not wrong was, for example, *Princ Valianti*, or something, and Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck from Disney.

It's interesting there were no comic books in Albanian, *Pioneri* [Pioneer], I remember *Pioneri* the first few years was a very primitive model. I was surprised when I came back from Belgrade to live here again in the '80s, it was the same with a few changes... but when the newspapers came... because they came from Belgrade later with cars and stuff at like 10:00-11:00, even later in Prizren. We would all wait in line for *Plavi Vjesniku* or *Zabavniku* to come, so we had something to read.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Where did you buy them, in bookshops or kiosks?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In kiosks, in kiosks, in kiosks, they didn't sell them in bookshops, but in kiosks. Those that I told you that I didn't read there, I prepaid from Novi Sad, *Lun, Kralj, Ponoći* these, I read a lot, but my mother wouldn't let me read you know.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Why?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, I was reading a lot, I would damage my eyes. I damaged my eyes a little, I wore glasses, she would say, "Don't read!" But I got my flashlight and would read under the covers secretly. I read them in a day, like novels. It is a fun read, but it was useful for learning the language. I read serious stuff, for example, in Prizren, when I was in the first and second year in gymnasium, I used to take some books to the library, and I started reading some philosophical books that I almost wouldn't understand at all, but I read them nevertheless, I read Aristotle or Plato, I used to take the books to the library. At that time, I started some sort of... and I read more serious literature. In Prizren, the first and second year of gymnasium, I was in the editorial office of that leaflet that the gymnasium would publish, you know, it was published once a month.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Which gymnasium?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The gymnasium was... I was called Jovanka Radivojević - Kica back then, a partisan heroine from Prizren, where the gymnasium is... there was only one gymnasium in Prizren back then. We used to make illustrations, we made them with a typewriter and I used to translate something. It was interesting because then in Prizren in primary school I learned French in school, here at Vuk Karadžić, we wouldn't learn English then, French and Russian I think, but mostly it was French. English started being taught in school then, there were no teachers. When I went to Prizren in gymnasium only Russian was being taught, there was no English or French. Then, I started learning just Russian. Russian was more similar to Slavonic, I understood it, and we make a... they connected us with some school in Russia and we would make correspondence with them.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** You would write letters?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, with letters. I made a friend in Odessa, in Ukraine, I remember her name, Maria Vjolstova, we also exchanged pictures with something, it was round.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What would you write?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I don't know what we would could write. But I got bored fast, I only wrote to her two, three times, I read a little in Russian. When I came to Pristina, there wasn't any Russian, but I was glad, here we learned English in gymnasium. And then there was an exam at the end.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Which gymnasium did you go to here?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Ivo Lolla Ribar, Sami Frashëri today.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Was it the only gymnasium, or were there others?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I think it was the only one, the other one was opened later... the city was smaller, it wasn't that big. '63-'64, I was at the gymnasium here.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** So you went to gymnasium here and in Prizren?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, two years in Prizren, two years here. Here I didn't have... when the French class started, yes... when they would read I used to go out, and at the end of the year I would pass an exam in Russian, but I could read Russian but not speak. And then later I read that it is close to... the Slavic language, like this. What also are you interested to know?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** This part... the gymnasium period.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The gymnasium... I was more mature when I was in gymnasium, I also started writing poetry. I had a friend in Prizren the first two years, a little older than me, Adem Zapluzha, he is a poet, he published a lot of books. And when he published them, he published four, sometimes five in a year. But he was **impatik** and a boxer, we was very strong. And we had a conversation, I always did, and once I told him a few of the poems I wrote, I used to write in Serbian, and he liked them, "Oh they're very good..."

I was mostly influenced by Jasemin, and some poets I read, but I read some other things. I also read Mayakovsky, I found him in an article, I was in gymnasium, I don't know where, maybe in Prizren, where he explained, he gave advice to new poets, about rhythm and like this, and I liked his poetry

with Serbian translation and like this. Back then I used to think I'm going to be a poet, and I wrote a lot of poetry. I still have some of the poetry, they're good, I wrote them in Serbian. I translated them later, but I never published them, I published later only two or three just like that. And there, I had thoughts like this, I also liked figurative arts.

Here in primary school I had a teacher, I forgot his name, in the figurative arts class he... he liked what I did so he would give me tasks to make copies of some works, "Do it like him," and those were a little hard to be done, the way he wanted them. I tried to be like her, but it wasn't that good, then he would say, "No, it's not good." (laughs) But the scenes were complicated, a yard with a lot of chickens, a lot of details. But figurative arts attracted me always. I had books with pictures, and I read a lot of things. I was interested, especially at that time in Prizren and Pristina, I was interested in what happened with Stalinism, why did the Yugoslav communists part from there, the impact of the ideology in schools was almost direct, you know, they indoctrinated us.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Explain to me how this happened.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well you know, it's normal because you don't know... You weren't opposed, the contexts weren't so you could think in a critical way. Plus I came from a family of progressive communists, we didn't, we didn't think... you didn't have other alternatives of what to think. We had the indoctrinating classes, they weren't rough, but the atmosphere in school, in holidays imposed some sort of... These holidays in the '50s impressed me, the ones in Prizren, especially these were not like that or here later. For example, when there was a holiday, like May 1st or some other, they had some sort of, they called it **vaklana**, so they made fire torches. All the students with cans, they put a little bit of oil or something there, and the fuse, and stick it to a stick and the fire torches would burn.

Then, that's how fascists and them celebrated because it was some sort of ritual of... And we, youngsters liked going to cities, in Prizren and like this, from *Papa Çarshia* and we would throw those in the river, and the river would be on fire, you know, it was interesting, some smoke and something. Things like this. Plus the speeches, when Tito's relay came, it was a big deal, or those would be held during the spring, the preparations, it used to be called *slet*, they were like events where people would gather in the stadium and there would be music in Tito's honor, in the Party's honor, there were some activities.

## Part two

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Before getting to the studies period and your decision to go to Belgrade, I would want to know how was the atmosphere at home. You had sisters, you had a brother, you had a mother. How was the family life?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was, to say, a typical Albanian family, a little more advanced or progressive. My mom was a housewife, she didn't continue school, or immediately after war, she would always regret it, you know, because all of her friends... but she had children early on and like this, and she moved from place to place, so she didn't get to finish school. She could read a little, but she forgot even what

she learned, you know. But she was very intelligent and... but she had some discomfort of her own, that's why it wasn't realized with nerves and things, like this.

My father was a typical Albanian authority (laughs), uncontested authority. He did not apply that, but some kind of... the family, the environment creates that "If my father finds out..." You know, like that. Actually, I never had with him... I very rarely had some sort of, you know, when I would make big trouble, he yelled at me a few times. But he grew up as an orphan, you know, and... he was more, he wasn't very tough, or show his power. And he didn't have much time, he was working and stuff all the time. And as a child I remember some sort of, he respected me more than the others. But...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What about your sisters and brother?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** With my sisters and brothers it was all okay. But I was more closed off always, even when I... these excessive Albanian rituals started bothering me. In Prizren and in... Especially in Prizren. As kids we didn't notice, you know, because as a kid you're not involved. But, for example, when we used to go visit our our aunts or anyone in Prizren, there's a horrible ceremony of greetings. When they start asking, you know, one by one, you know, if we are ten guests and ten people in the house, "How is he? How is he? How is your brother? How is he?" And the other one with the same questions. All of these formalities seemed too much to me, you know, in general.

Then, the city... in Prizren, I started as a gymnasium student, the first two years, feeling the pressure, because you know when... my father was in power there, one of the five-six more important people in the city, and as a party secretary and mayor of the city, as they said, *Bog i Batina* [God and Slap] in Serbian (laughs) they were all afraid of him. And then I did some stuff for my father, not for me, you know, for example, they pressured me into some party courses, preparing, like a school, what do I know, political in Prizren when I was and I went a few times, but then I was bored, I wanted to read by myself, learn, by myself... And there were some sort of... I didn't like school at all, school as school, the more I grew up, the less I liked it, the oral exams and those. The system was like that, it put you down, I didn't like, I even wanted to quit, but there weren't many choices then. The exams, and when they called you to take an oral exam, I don't know...

I always wrote very well, and I got good grades in writing, while orally, I somehow was too lazy to speak, what to know, I actually was outgoing with my friends, I would play football until I started wearing glasses, and basketball and like this... In Prizren street friends were more interesting than this. As a kid, they wanted to take me to music school, violin or something, I was embarrassed by my street friends to start with. I had that kind of friends that like that, I said, "No, I don't want to." This is one thing, the only thing that later I regret not learning music because I might have needed for something.

I don't know if I'm musical or not, but I think it would have been better if I could read music right. I like it, but not like some people, you know, music. Music, even during, when I considered myself a poet, it bothered me, because if I listened to music in the morning, it would be stuck in my head. It would bother me, it would disrupt my inner rhythm, some sort of, but music is imposing, it takes you with it. What else did you want me to say?

Mostly, then it starts, the mentality is so primitive that my family and people in the street would tell me, “Hey, why do you have long hair, do you know whose son you are?” They annoyed me. It... Prizren and Pristina were very provincial then, but Pristina was a little more advanced, I was also older, while Prizren was more conservative in that aspect, it is like that even today.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** How did you decide to go to Belgrade?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, I had to study something, and there were no choices here. But some faculties opened in 1966. There weren't many choices here, there was the construction faculty or something like that, there were faculties for language, literature, history I think, but it wasn't. It was normal to go to Belgrade, there was no place else, what was the reason? You know, but I'd have a few variants, I had literature or philosophy, and then I decided philosophy. I considered art too, but there was a more specific preparation for art, so I thought philosophy is a little wider, and I started reading a lot then, and topic that I had, the topic of graduation, it was Kafka and Camus, it was about existentialism.

Kafka is mostly a writer, but Camus has those philosophical books, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, I read all of them. And I wrote 66 pages, which wasn't typical, because others would write 15-20 pages, but I read here and there, it was interesting and I lost it. It wasn't something on top, but my professors assessed it as good. And I wrote, those, when I wrote the essays that we used to do in Serbian, my philosophy teacher would read in the whole school here in Pristina, for example, and they also sent me to those competitions, you know? The city competition. I know I once went to *Shtëpia e Armatës*, I won some sort of competition, the second place, but they said, “Yours was the best, but, you know...” I wrote something about Freud and Marxism (laughs), my teacher mixed it up and then read it to the whole school. So I was known for being a good writer.

And I read a lot, because reading is the root of life for everything, literature... As a gymnasium student I read, for example, I used to read those most advanced cultural magazines of that time, *Oko* from Zagreb, and *Književne Novine* from Belgrade, and some magazines that I found in kiosks here. I read those, literature, poetry, essays. I was very interested in Buddhism and Zen Buddhism back then, and the philosophy of life, how a person builds themselves as a creation, you know, and Satri and these, I found that man is a project, you know, back then in those times, you also have these kinds of pessimistic thoughts and like this. Dealing with death is very traumatic for young people, that you can't understand that life as you're living, one day you will die, and life had no meaning, like, and we somehow got over those.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And then you went to Belgrade from Pristina and Prizren?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I left Pristina, I always have had connections to Prizren, even here. I have stayed, I was in the third, fourth grade, every weekend, I would go Prizren, I have had the best friendship there, we would play football or something else. And here I got prepared about that... for... I have always kept up with movies, I haven't forgotten one part that is very important, movies from Prizren. Because since the year, there, '56-'57, when we lived there, in the new building in Prizren, it is close to the cinema, where Lumbardhi is located now, so there in that cinema, there was a cousin of my father working as a director, Shefki Gështenja, this is how he was called so I was there every day.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What did you watch?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I would watch all movies.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What kind of movies would there be?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, all that would be in the town, serious, and we would prefer more those Westerns, cowboys, but there would be other interesting movies. But I would also watch those which were prohibited for youngsters (laughs.) There was this famous movie Alan Moreau, he would show up naked and this kind of stuff.

But I would watch all movies and... because we used to live there 50 meters away from home [cinema] so I didn't have to pay to go in, I made myself at home there, so I watched a lot of movies. Then, I have watched movies in Pristina.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** At which cinemas would you watch movies in Pristina?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I would go more to that one small cinema, at the small ABC.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was it called back then?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** What was it called... It used to be Kino Rinia and...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Is it Kino Vllaznimi?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Perhaps, I don't know, I have forgotten now. Here in the center because there would come more artistic movies. Back then, when I was in Pristina, third or fourth year, I would watch artistic French, Czech movies and so on. They would play them for too long, one day, two, there wasn't any big audience, you know. I would miss school and I watched them not to miss them. Then I would watch them a lot, while here at the big Kino Rinia, I would go even in elementary school, this is when I mentioned that one heroine Katerina Patanogić Cica. We would all call her Cica, she was like a man, and her husband wouldn't want to go to the cinema, I don't know why, not to go alone to the cinema, so she would always call me, you know, would borrow me, not to go alone in the cinema, she would take **lozhen** and we would watch movies there; she would watch every movie, so I'd join her. I befriended her, but then in Belgrade I came into conflict with her when we held the protest of 68, but I'll tell you later about that.

But, this way, good. I would keep up with movies and the writings about the movies and the Yugoslav movies, some of which I liked and so on. Kosovo didn't have any movies back then, there were these that would make them like a co-production with Kosovo topics, you know.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** They are very early movies of the '60s.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, of the '50s. Then, when they were being shot in Prizren, as kids back then, we would go after the cast and stuff, and so on.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, they were either war-related or with World War II or something. In general propagandistic war-related movies would prevail, in the '60s, they had started here a little like... but that, more or less, has been the year, more or less, when I signed up in 1966, it was quite an interesting year because it was the fall of Ranković, and a commission was created to investigate what they did in Kosovo. Ranković had fallen a little earlier, but then it was that period of time when... my father was vice president of the crime or murder commission, all that had happened in the '50s, '60s and in the gun collection action, and in the processes, such a Prizren process, and so on. Where, you know, the police, the secret services applied repression and had around 70-80 murders as suspected deaths or murders that the police had committed [but] that had [other] men investigated.

That year I signed up in Belgrade, during the summer, I went and signed up, but it was some kind of period when my family members would be scared because they, that they have worked here in the Secret Services in Kosovo, the Serbians that they have kicked out of their jobs, they sheltered them there in Belgrade.

Even my father was scared of fascism, but he had given me those, some documents to read before I left for Belgrade to see that report that they made. And then they started to change the course, about, towards Kosovo in Yugoslavia, towards Tito and, on the other hand, had started to put here those changes, simply, I had some...

Once I got lost here, one day I went for a visit to a Russian family, they had... Russians that have left Russia, there after the revolutions, thereafter, some thousands people were sheltered in Yugoslavia. One of their families had been in Prizren, and I knew them from Prizren.

Sometimes I would go to visit them because in years... they really called me one day. A daughter of theirs had committed suicide, that family had only that daughter, she committed suicide, what do I know, an affair was going on. She fell in love with an Albanian, I don't know what happened, but they suspected that even hers was a suspected case and had presented it for investigation. So perhaps that was the reason they called me, but I would go there anyway sometimes. That day I had stayed by their house a lot, they prepared some kind of dinner and stuff, so I got late for home, I wouldn't show up until 12:00.

Back then, they didn't have any mobile phone to find me where I was, so they went to my friends' that I had, some Zlatko and some others, they wouldn't find me anywhere only when I came late around 12:00 at my house, their blood ran cold. And then my father said, "See, this, this, this..." He started telling me what was going on and he was scared for the family because he was brave, you know (laughs). And then he said, "Are you going to Belgrade? Be careful because you don't know what they are," and so on. But it wasn't that much, how to say, still the mood, that this Serbian nationalism that they have worked in a way or another during the night, not opened.

Because Yugoslavia had two kinds of politics, one of them was official emancipatory for Albanians, that they should have schools and so on, but at night since '48, this other line has started to say that Albanians are an unsecure element, they are not loyal, they support the union with Albania against

Yugoslavia, against Tito, and such things. And those poor villagers were the one who mostly suffered, they did everything, it is known more or less.

I knew a little about these things, I have heard even then, we knew even in the '50s, it was some kind of a period, now we are going back, but it doesn't matter. The 50s, when the moving from Turkey had started, then I was, I don't know, eight, nine, ten, eleven years old, so my relatives started to go, these, uncle, aunts with their families plus some other cousins, my mother's, and her uncles and so on. My grandmother after that, my mother's grandmother, had a lot of cousins, she would go every year.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** To Turkey?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In Turkey with some boxes and stuff, she would go and come back, with some presents and so. Regarding the other grandmother, she used to live with my uncle because he was the big brother. He also went there, to Turkey. Even these friends that I have had on the road and so, during the year, they would go two, three, four, five, but, what do I know. Back then I didn't understand it all, you know, but there were also cases because some cousins would come when they would put them in jail or something so I know that they had something to do with nationalism and ballists, there was jailing and so, but I was aware. I was more interested in knowing the regime and Stalinism myself, especially about that I have read a lot of books, because my father had his own library, because when he studied he was in Belgrade, he bought some interesting books.

To tell you one idea was, to say like, a phenomenon of the cult's personality, the edited processes, those I have studied this way and some, you know how, the suspect's crime with communism back then was shown to me, but I didn't... I didn't think that it was some sort of deviation that now can be fixed, you know.

And another topic that would open regarding this was Albania. Albania, where I had, there a hero communist uncle, he died during the war and so, but which in the family circle, especially at my uncle, my cousin with whom we were the same age, a little younger than me, was Valbon. Valbon Stavileci, we have often discussed it with him that, he was one of the founders of one of those youngsters groups in the Communist Party of Albania when it was founded.

This group was against Enver Hoxha being a president, then in a way or another, he took revenge and so. Nevertheless, the family legend said that, in fact, they left out my uncle, Sadik, they wouldn't give him the right importance because he was Kosovar and so, because I heard from my grandmother that they are judgemental against Kosovans. So yes I wouldn't pay much attention to it.

But anyway, I had some sort of negative attitude towards Enver Hoxha even then, because that's what they would say in the family, and from the propaganda or from the materials I have read back then, the books and stuff.

Now, I knew there was some Stalinism regime, the personality cult, and I didn't have at all some sort of, to say, a positive attitude towards that kind of regime. I thought it was fake because Tito is a little

bit more liberal and didn't stop you from reading books or something, because you could read as much of world literature or see a lot of things that were relative for those liberal conditions.

So my preparation was until 18-19 years old, very open to the world, and I had relatively little, to say, respect or affinity for the local values or... not only in the context of Kosovo, but even in Yugoslavia, I read little from Yugoslav authors. I have some of them of course, I was imposed such as Danilo Kiš and so and some of them who are thought of as classics, Krleža or... yes and Andrić, some tales, some things, even though back then I didn't know that Andrić had those. Later on I understood, by the end of the '60s and '70s, that he was, he did some jobs like Serbian officials of the back-then Ministry for Albanians that were, like, too negative, almost like Čubrilović. But he had interesting and good literature and so on. But I mainly read the world literature that was wholesale translated back then and those which are like modern and avant-garde by Joyce and...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Beckett...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Joyce, Beckett, Hemingway, as a stylist, I have adored him even today I adore him, so good but... this was my pre-preparation, because I read these early and I had some sort of window into literature or into world thinking, too early. They... there was some sort of selective canal and in the following of world thinking, because even those opened magazines and they mainly had the emphasis of... or followed more leftist literature or the critical Marxism and so, but nevertheless, it was completely different dogmatic Marxism or... in fact, in the Yugoslav system itself, there were oases where this kind of dogmatism prevailed, you know. But these, how are those the most qualitative publications mainstream of that time was relatively open or critical or would raise some problems. Plus, in arts and culture, there were some tendencies that, in fact, would criticize Yugoslavia reality of that time itself in the sense of Zagreb's philosophy, or Black Movie school, how they saw it *Crni Tales*, the black Yugoslav movie wave.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** They then got put in prison...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Some of them were put in prison, but they later on got put in prison, even in the '60s, were some like that when I was in gymnasium, these trends got started in literature, in movies, in art, etc.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was prohibited?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Prohibited, later on, when we got to '68-'69, was that, some movies were prohibited such as this movie Lazar Stanovićit's *Plastični Isus*, I would befriend him, then when he got out of jail, I knew him before but we weren't friends back in '68, but this was a late story of Belgrade, when I went to Belgrade in '66 in fall. So when I went in the fall, I went there a little bit ready from my father, that I should be careful because there is some sort of reaction quite stronger, that's how he'd interpret it. He didn't like that I was studying philosophy, but he wouldn't mess with it, "You decided yourself..."

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Why?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, later his friends in Belgrade told him, those with Kosovar functions, what do I know, Ali Shukria and the others, because... or Kolë Shiroka and those from Prizren, as friends they told him that at the University of Philosophy where I'll enter is a group of professors that are anti-Tito they are suspicious there and so on. There later on would get created some sort of, how to say, core, where the uprising got started in '68, but this is a story on its own, to say the least.

When I went there, I got faced and then after, for instance, after one year when we started in '66 right when I arrived at the faculty, protests against Vietnam and so on. Protests against the war in Vietnam, against Americans, then I was, when we got out of that room where we held the meeting, the police were waiting for us in surprise, we didn't know, we spoke against imperialism, or what do I know. But during that time Yugoslavia was in a desperate state to win some kind of status of cheap market with the States, which is a big privilege and to the regimen, as a police regimen he said, "Don't create any troubles with the States," and so on.

They, as soon as we got out, they placed two, three buses by the University of Philosophy to divide the crowd into two parts, you know, and as I got out there instinctively on the right side, I didn't even look, when they immediately walked away from me.

When immediately I saw a policeman, there **shlemín** as a German (laughs) He'd hit me on the head, he made a bump this big {shows it with his hand.} But okay, I wouldn't faint or anything, it's just that I saw those stars and walked away... There then I saw one, around 5 policemen beating him, one of them had fallen down and they'd beat him, this way chaos was created.

I entered in some sort of alley there, and after that, I fought with those policemen, around five, six hours wandering in the street. It was like winter, like ice, I think there was snow, we'd throw at them, we'd make those snowballs as rocks and throw at them around the eye area, we'd hurt them {show with hands} them at us, us at them, so on. For the first time in that alley, they wanted to go to, to... to the street Knjaz Mihajlova, in the center by the corner, near our faculty, there was the American Library *Američka Čitaonica*, American Library, good books and everything, but it was surrounded by the police, they wouldn't allow. There, for the first time we saw that the horse doesn't go to the man, you know, when I got near, the police was with horses, he stood up and quashed the policemen. And a friend of mine that they wanted to capture, nothing happened to her.

This way then we went, us, the students gathered somewhere else, we created a group and went by the American Embassy, they wouldn't let us, and so on in the city, and you know, the first big protest I was part of. Later on, we created a movement at the faculty as a group that organized such protests against... for different cases, for repression of students in Germany for **Lindçukën** when they got wounded and these, for Nipista Dorakstin whom they put in prison in Greece, he is some kind of a famous composer. I was part of it myself, in that action, because we painted the Greek Embassy with some banners against that, I was in charge of guarding, I didn't paint it (laugh) A girl would spend time with me, like a couple, we'd tell them if anyone was coming (laughs.)

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Was it scary for you to change the environment, what was it like to go to Belgrade from Kosovo?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, it was, that city was interesting. Back then, it was a relatively open city for some sort of... I believe that in the communist regime, there wasn't a city more open than Belgrade, all Yugoslavia, but especially Belgrade, it was the center of Yugoslavia but even the most important center, but also the youth of all places from Yugoslavia would come there. It was more or less... plus it wasn't far to go, for instance, to Hungary or in, even to the West because when I went there back then, there wasn't any full visa liberalization.

But around two-three years Tito made it happen, all EU places, entire traveling system without visa, except, only some countries Spain and Portugal, they were further from the Soviet Union and America, there we had visas. In other places, you could go and come back as a student. Every year, I would go during the summer somewhere, I would collect those like 5 *dinars*, like 5 *marks*, for instance, in a money box, when I collected 200-300 of that money, we'd exchange them for *marks* and went to Rome or somewhere else to stay... or at a friend's or some cheap hostel, and so, or we'd sleep on our bags in the street somewhere in parks, so on.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What about university?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I enrolled at the University of Philosophy, but I didn't like it that much, the professors either, I only liked a few, the other I didn't. But it wasn't a strong regime. During my studies, I had like 18, 19 exams, some were easy paramilitary, don't count the philosophy courses that were too...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Loaded?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, a lot of literature to read, so it wasn't easy to pass an exam, actually, instead of choosing the easy way, I would start reading the literature and everything seriously, I didn't have time to read it all, I read half by the time of the exam, you know?

While in some courses I couldn't learn because they were pointless, the pedagogy and the bad professor and the book, you wouldn't understand anything, and something about ethics, there was a book which also had Marxism, Andrea Stojković, he was very dogmatic and you couldn't read that, but in that course, I passed the exam just like that, I would look at the questions and respond. I once spoke to him, he gave me a six, so I was content, but I didn't try very hard in university. When I reached the amount of exams I had to pass, I would pass three exams and one would be left, you would pass to the second year and like this. I was a graduate, for about five years, I had a lot of exams left, but I didn't... Then I started working during the summer to finance myself, until the fifth year, my parents financed me, they sent me money, I didn't have a scholarship, I didn't even ask for it.

Later I worked. I started working as a **fresco** conservator in monasteries in Serbia and Kosovo, but more in Serbia. I worked for about six, seven years like that, I got the hang of the craft, but I did it just to live, survive. And I worked, as a student, I worked in the morning, I woke up early to distribute milk

to houses, there was the student cooperative and the pay was relatively good. We would wake up at 5:00, 5:30 and distribute [the milk] and then I would go home and sleep a little.

I almost didn't sleep at all during the night, I would distribute it and then sleep until 13:00, 14:00, I was more, more of a night owl always, all the time, reading, writing and even learning, during the day, I was more... What do I know, that's how I lived back then. Belgrade then during those years... '70s and '60s when they opened the borders and the thieves left Belgrade, and the criminals went all over Europe and would cause trouble there, because they didn't have anything to steal there. It was a relatively quiet city back then, until they didn't, they started putting some bombs in a cinema there in Belgrade, they started blaming the *Ustaša*<sup>6</sup>, maybe they were *Ustaša*, Croatian nationalists, Croatian immigrants or something. But no, you could walk around late at night and... then I made friends, it was interesting, all kinds of friends, especially visual artists, I had a lot, I had a... then some philosophers and some other in the coffee shops of Belgrade, some sort of bohemia of that time...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Did you write?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I used to write a little for myself, but not much, I started publishing later, in the '70s, '72, '73, '74, I think I published a writing, a reaction, but it was more about a German artist, Joseph Beuys. I commented on a lecture he held for the first time and, like this, at that time, I published something, but I mostly wrote for myself, and for school and seminars.

### Part Three

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** You said an incident happened with *Ustaša*?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** With?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** With *Ustaša*.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** That was...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** I'm interested to know, was it prominent, were the nationalist and fascist movements prominent, was there awareness?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, look, the end of the '60s were blurry for the regime and... also the beginning of the '70s in Croatia and Slovenia, especially in Croatia, started a kind of, they said *maspop*, massive movement, you know, some kind of massive resistance, that, initiated by the Croatian communist movement themselves, but then the nationalists and kiaro fascists got in there, too. Simply, the federation didn't function anymore as a, you know, these were only explained in theory or something because... this first development, the first communism, the first investments, you know, a little with enthusiasm, built factories and stuff, this period of time was okay.

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<sup>6</sup> The Ustaša – Croatian Revolutionary Movement was a Croatian fascist, ultranationalist and terrorist organization, active between 1929 and 1945.

But when it started to... this planned centralized investment system or something, it started to limp in many aspects, either they made the wrong investments, or the system wasn't functional. Back then some economists from Slovenia and like this... firstly in the '50s the concept of self-determination, not self-determination, but how is it called, self... *samoupravljanje*...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Self-government...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Self-government. So the workers had, not only the directors, but also the workers had the right to lead factories and workers, there where they produced. This was a little, in the '60s, it was decided to bring in new elements into the market, because planning that we will make mistakes, the bureaucrats make mistakes, you know, they can't plan the needs of the city and the citizens as they should. And the market economy started, some sort of combination and directed market economy.

But that then, also the borders opened, people who weren't working could leave, go to work in Germany. And then there was a, a, for a year, more than a million and a half people went there, the first wave of Kosovars, Albanians from here, from Macedonia, from all Yugoslavia went abroad. That is the first big migration of Albanians. But this damaged the foundation of the federation that was earlier centralized, that's why the republics asked for more independence. Even after the fall of Ranković, they stigmatized him as the unitarist who wanted to keep Yugoslavia strong and in favor of Serbs to a point.

Then they decided, in nonpublic transparency, the communists among themselves, that the country would be decentralized. Instead of democracy, they decentralized it. This was some kind of (sips water) election, maybe not the best from Tito and Kardel and the leaders because democracy was needed, but they didn't dare to do it because they would lose power (smiles). But they decentralized it, Tito did some sort of system, almost confederation as we say, but I think collectively. To get away from the model that all communist regimes end up with dictatorship from someone, a personality cult and so on...

Tito himself had a personality trap, like look at how they soften, how (sips water)... they did the leading and placement collectively. For example, the Yugoslav presidency while Tito was alive had eight deputies, from six republics, and two provinces which with the '74 constitution were linked more to the federation than with Serbia, the two Serbian provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina. This was a passing model, which then, during the '80s, would cause another crisis, where Serbia would attack them and they said (coughs), they still said, "Either Yugoslavia should be more united..." Because then the Serbs seemed like the first nation... "Either we would ruin this federation". Meaning, the famous memorandum of Serbia's Science Academy in the '80s, yes, '80s. This was after Tito's death.

But, then extremism... meaning, Yugoslavia in the Second World War wasn't at war with the occupants, Germans, Italians, and a few Bulgarians, I don't know, there are some others, they took a part of Macedonia and so on. But it was a brother-killing war, between slaves, between nationalists or

fascists that were in Croatia and Serbia, and these regimes that were with us... And then, Yugoslavia communists and Tito won that war with this slogan that New Yugoslavia will be built on other grounds and just as “Bashkim Vllanim” where every nation and nationality has equal rights. But until there was Tito, this functioned to a degree. However, from the late ‘60s, ‘70s, these tendencies appeared, national egoism, or when the Slovenia model of development and mentality, in Croatia more, it was pro-Western and searched for the best market.

Serbia even then was very close to Russia and invests from that zone. Since a big majority of Serbs lived in Bosnia and Croatia, or something, they tried to, to... even though Serbia during the ‘70s had the same liberal movement which leaned more towards democracy than decentralization, but even Tito made some sort of equality when he kicked out the Croatian communists, he kicked out Serbs as well, ikezićin, and Latinka Perovićin, and so on. There was an Albanian with them, Orhan Nevzat, a secretary. There were a lot, a lot of situations, let’s say politically dynamic, but the elite was developed.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Meaning it wasn’t felt in everyday life these big dynamics?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was felt when it exploded or when something happened...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** No, I mean in those years specifically, the end of the ‘60s, ‘70s.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was felt because in ‘68, there were protests, that was a reflection from those worldwide. But even in Belgrade when they started in June, in ‘68, we did not know then, we were leftists and we mostly watched the world and so on. But they sort of were a reaction of that nationalist side of Belgrade, which was unsatisfied because, in those two weeks in May, they held some sort of Central Committee meeting, where two writers, Dobrica Ćosić and Antoni Isaković, and a historian, there were three people. They openly opposed the communist policies of Serbia towards Kosovo. Ćosić had said, “If these policies go on for a few decades, we will lose Kosovo. Or we do something or..” The communists did not agree, they kicked him out or something and the process continued how it had started in ‘68, so Kosovo’s autonomy grows.

The protests started on June 2nd, with some sort of incident, a concert or what was it, the police intervened... meaning there was a double **indukim**. And then, at the Philosophy Faculty which then became the center of this protest, we had the idea to make it like in France or Poland, even in America they had students... ‘68 had many big protests. Students were more like anarchists, like... (sips water). Whereas here in Kosovo, they had them, even when I came here after a while, in January actually, the protests were for Flag Day, in Tetovo as well.

But when I came in January to Pristina, it was a long-term break. Then, I was doing research with a friend from Belgrade about the social position of miners, somewhere in Hajvali and Kosovo. I met my cousin, Valbon, here. Valbon used to say. “These protests in Belgrade, they were in support of Ćosić not...” (laughs) And my friend, Vlada Mijanovići, was seen as one of Tito’s biggest adversaries, his regime and went to prison. Even he said, then he said, he said to me, during conversations, “Tito gave

orders from here, from Belgrade to Sarajevo, or where there was some meeting, he sent the army to intervene against the protesters in Belgrade in '68.

“And that’s how he did propaganda,” my cousin said... They were really nationalists, in reality, they were interpretations, at this time, we see how each nation interprets each event from their point of view. Economically and ideologically, and how there were so many reasons for dissatisfaction from the population. Some were used to that regime or with that system, or they had a good job. Now we know that after the '70s and so on, those who were used to that system, they could take loans, build houses, pay those loans... and after a year or two, they had to pay back the loan as small as a matchbox, because the **implacion** had fallen, yes, that’s what had happened...

Meaning some were privileged in that regime, some were not. And there was part of the population that was relatively independent because Yugoslavia had never stopped private property, it was just limited. How to say, the land, 10 hectares was the maximum I could have. But to have shops, small businesses, there was a chance, meaning... This instance couldn’t survive it, it could get partially rich, to be independent of the impacts or fall into other impacts or to resurrect nationalism or I don’t know. Us students were on 7th heaven (laughs).

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** You were a graduate in '70, right?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, I was a graduate I think in '71. Then I had four exams left, in each year, one or five, from 17-18 that we had all. Some were hard classes, philosophy one, two, three, like this, some were a little bit stupid, pedagogy or ethics, they were one or two too. Some I passed, some I didn’t. And then every year, I passed an exam or two, until '78, that’s when I graduated. Then I had my thesis, somewhere before... in '75 or '76, I took on a thesis since I was working in monasteries and so on and I was close to medieval Byzantine art, I said, as a philosopher. And occasionally I contradicted the art historians on medieval art and so on. Then they were saying it was a Serbian inheritance or something, it seemed to me... I used to work in some places where they had this kind of antique art impact, you know.

I had some sort of memory from Deçan as a kid. There we had some cousins, we used to visit the monastery. The priests there used to be scared, I thought it was interesting. Even in Prizren, it was Saint Petka, or Bogorodica Ljeviška, how they called it, in the old city. That’s how I was thinking of taking something, look at it, that idea that I had based on what thoughts, ideas, art was supported, not interpret those pictures but {pretends to be writing} these aesthetic contributions. All my philosophy friends used to say, “This does not exist, there was no aesthetic during medieval times.” But when I went to a professor, he wasn’t a good professor, but yeah. He was disputable, a dogma. He was Dragan Jeremić. He would argue with [Danilo] Kišin, and Kišin was my idol. But since he gave me aesthetics, I sat down to him.

I told him, “I have come to submit a topic that does not exist: Byzantine Aesthetics.” He jumped off his chair and said, “Who has misinformed you? How come it doesn’t exist? (laughs)” “Alright,” I said. He said, “Write me an outline.” I had already started reading some stuff. When I submitted my draft, it had

two-three topics that I wanted to work on. And he looked at it and said, “You will end up writing a book” (laughs). I said, “No, no, just like that...” He said, “Ok, go ahead!” During that time, I didn’t work that much. I researched for about six months... I didn’t know English very well, I learned a little in the Army, ‘74, ‘75 in Zagreb. During the night where I was a *požarni, dežurni* [“guardian”] that was told to look after the barracks, that’s where I learned it. But not as well.

I knew Russian and I found some works, original works. A bulk of editions named *Greek Pathology*. “Greek Pathology” meaning all the medieval Greek writings during the early Christian times and later, France published them in English in the 18th century. Latin, Greek, I was interested in those Greek ones, Greek writings. I found more than half of them, translated into Russian, Serbian patriarchate had it, in a basement in the library. I went there almost every day, I read because there were no other places. But I researched the other libraries as well.

So this way I collected the materials and got them prepared. In ‘78 I graduated. But that work really turned out, I didn’t even finish it all, for the material I had, but it turned into 360 pages. When I submitted it to them, they said, “But this is a PhD.” You know, because it was with volume. And it was interesting. I would always do it the other way around. The people would always criticize me later on, “Why didn’t you do it for the thesis first, around thirty-fourty pages. Then for the master’s you’d add some fifty more...” (laughs.) But then I did it that way, and it was okay.

Back then all my colleagues and all would appreciate me, because they said that was interesting. That work wasn’t that perfect, it missed a lot of real things... The relevant literature that when you work on something serious, should include, what do I know, that in German language and so. I would take something from the translations, I understood a little bit of French too, but not that much, you know. But, it was quite a pioneering work because there wasn’t any in the world literature, except for some in Russian, for the aesthetics of that time, books precisely about aesthetics, to analyze the thinking more than...

And back then I was, they, in reality, even at the Philosophy Faculty and Institute would say that it is good, that no one had ever dealt with that topic, you can go on or something. The Philosophy Institute in Belgrade even gave me some kind of scholarship to finish one part, that looked more interesting for iconoclasm, it is a period when Byzantine, it even had an Orthodox birth, some kind of big schism had started. So some theologians rose against the icons to ruin them and they did so. But then it was the reaction and so, that period too was interesting. And I think even that part that I had published back then around ‘80 from this work was more elaborate, the best in that research I had done.

Somehow I wanted to become a Byzantine scholar, learn Ancient Greek. I started taking some courses there, but we got into the ‘80s, the political circumstances changed in Yugoslavia and my status as a... In ‘78, I was employed at the Philology Faculty in Belgrade, in the Albanian Language Department. Now, you know, we were all caught up by the politics and these things, and to me it no longer seemed interesting to study that, you know. Although I always had the ambition to finish it, to publish my work, to work more on it. Only after 20 years, you know after 1999, I published the first volume of *Byzantine Aesthetics* in Albanian.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was the atmosphere like back in the '70s?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** What?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was the atmosphere like back in the '70s for you?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was like this, the idea to finish studies. I didn't have any idea to come back to Pristina, I had a relatively interesting life. During the summer I would work in, like a conservatory or something and, because I would travel abroad, to Rome, Venice, Turkey and so.

I would often times travel in the middle of Europe... But in a way I wouldn't know what either, what I worked, you know. I have some girlfriends, some girls I used to date, they'd say, "You passed an exam come, finish all the exams of the second year, come in the third year..." So, slowly, like this, I got near it and I graduated. It wasn't, it was a period of time where I pulled back, I mean even from... In '68, from '68 until around '69, '70 I was active even in those youth movements there, in '68, it was all around the world, we had them even in Belgrade and Slovenia.

Then I got disappointed a little bit with them, or I was forced to, because in '69, since I was in that small group, they would call it... of the Philosophy Faculty mainly, the regime back then would call it anarcho-liberal at the University of Belgrade, we were around 20-30 people, they would mention us by name. And they would mistreat me like this, because from those groups, it was only me and another friend were {drinks water}... Our parents were from those in that communist nomenclature. He, the guy's name was Udevički, and his father was Danilo Udevički, his father was some kind of ambassador, and so, some kind of Central Committee member. Even my father was on the Central Committee of Serbia back then and member of the Federation Council and was called back then, some kind, he, Fadil Hoxha's cabinet let me know or something, "What are you doing here, why..." You know, they would pressure me, "Your father resigned, this is no good."

And I noticed that even my colleagues immediately would mistreat us, they would put us at the front, like we are... sometimes when we would hold a protest, during, when the police would make the reports... because reports would come to us, even those the police had made, because they had some connections in committees, something. They, for instance, would show, because in some slogans that were said, someone screamed, screamed, "May Enver Hoxha live long" and such things, you know (laughs.) And it was all manipulation presenting those groups. So I said, "Let it be, I will pull back." You know, so I pulled back from that active life.

This fact itself that I would go to work in monasteries, I would say, "I'm going to the monastery." Like, you know, when the youngsters get disappointed with life, "I'm going to the monastery." But it was more symbolic. I would withdraw thinking what to work, what, I didn't know. I also had literary ambition, and I made some movie screenplay that I never elaborated on, I haven't pulled off, those that... But you know, life would go itself and only, or meanwhile, I think Belgrade back then was really open, even though it had crisis in Croatia and so. Even in Belgrade back then, the liberals were thrown

out of the government, some of this staff a little bit more dogmatic and so, but Tito still would have it under control.

Earlier on, I had talked about that system he created, instead of democracy, he supported decentralization, which made stronger the federal units. There Kosovo was lucky to get into the federal units with a smaller status, and it was openly discussed back then that Kosovo has all the republic's status, it only doesn't have the name. This way later on we understood that Tito said, "Take all you can, just don't ask for the name because Serbia will go crazy." Serbia had tried it, to, to change this situation with Kosovo, which was created with the constitution of '74. Because for real it had, it was some kind of full parallelism between two republics and provinces. And they had representation in, in the Federal Presidency, proportional representation with the Ministry and in the Ministry of, and in the Yugoslav government, federal. And in, in the assembly, Yugoslavia's parliament, they had, practically the right to vote. Not even one law, or a big action couldn't, couldn't pass without the consent of... for example, the budget and this stuff.

It was difficult to do it in practice because it was, and the party which mediated, some decisions with more compromises, but there were situations where even Kosovo for real has blocked the annual budget approval and so... Asking for more help... For instance, that help that it took from the Federation for the development of provinces, of less developed something. But it was a short period of time, '74 was when the law got approved, '75 when it started to, to get implemented for real, and in '81 when this reversible process started, anti-Titoist and so, it was like this only until '80.

I used to come rarely to Kosovo back then, sometimes five to six times a year, but even Kosovo would benefit from it. I didn't experience that autonomy, but it could be seen that back then, I said that today when we see all the modernism object, they were built back then and the institutions started to get built, those of that high autonomy. We had some more, we didn't have a foreign ministry, but a sector that in fact worked as a foreign ministry. And for instance, we didn't have the Civil Ministry of Defense, that was some sort of, it wasn't directly responsible for the army, but for the reserves. And Kosovo had that Ministry, my father was one of the first ministers that led this sector and had trained some kind of spare army in Kosovo in case of war. This was the doctrine there.

But the tendency also was that all the Yugoslav republics have their own army, the armaments and weaponry. While this Yugoslav army was centralized and even Tito would delegate to save Yugoslavia in general, even though these federal units would ask for their big independence or {drinks water.} In the life aspect here, it seemed to me that gradually, as much as we got nearer to the '80s, there was a state, first of that the University was opened and Pristina got a, a city where a new era started. Before there was, it was more in the '60s, more like **kasabatë** and now it... And there were the influences, it had the first clubs, you know, it had happened sometimes that, for instance... and there weren't many places that... the places you could drink tea would prevail, with those of Tatlis movies, that those many were like...

There was this one time, for instance, I met Enver Petrovc there and so on when we would come here we'd meet in Pristina. There was this one time we went out in the evening by Grandi, they said there was music or something. We went there in the hall where there it that, that one mural, Muslim Mulliqj

mosaic, when we got in, the hall was covered in smoke, back then they smoke {pretends he is smoking.} And there are, for example, 500 men all over... There was some **pevaljike** that was a singer... We got inside for some and we got back like {laughs}...We weren't as used to it as in Belgrade that we went you know, with mixed group of friends, it still seemed like because women here are still trapped. Maybe you would see them during the day, there were some coffee places back then, and when. They would go out there, you could see more Serbian women, the emancipated Albanians rarely. That is why when I came back in '80. In '82, I came back here in the fall. This situation got advanced even more, but again the political crisis started.

*[This part of the interview was conducted on October 21, 2018]*

## Part Four

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Before entering the '80s, do you recall some kind of, '81 is presented somehow like a surprise year, do you have that impression, because the ground was gradually getting created...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Look, '68 was some kind of turn in Kosovo, because, for the first time, republically, the request for the republic got out, even though they didn't put enough emphasis, but you could imagine who... John Doe, John Doe, John Doe has requested the republic. But it calmed because the intervention from below came immediately, "It's not the right time, maybe with time it will do, you should teach Serbian with those..." So on. For instance, they said Rezak Shala requested, he was a prosecutor back then, or Ramadan Vraniqi or so, even publicly in meetings... But then invited that wide autonomy and now two lines are made here. There was a line of apparatchiks, Albanian partisans that fought in World War II. The generation of Fadil Hoxha and Xhavit Nimanit and of these, in one way or another, they were in charge of building now this autonomy and to adapt it to the Yugoslav system, but to ask for as many rights as they can and build this Kosovar subjectivity.

While in the background it was raised... in background or illegal, because it wasn't... the issue of the boundary foundation couldn't be raised openly or that Kosovo to be part of Albania and so on. Some, they, it was this group, for instance, like Adem Demaçi and them who got punished even in the '60s but even re-punished later on, and some intellectuals and so that had started to talk, why with Yugoslavia when we are not slaves, when... even Yugoslavia back then acknowledged that the name, but especially the anthem, was quite problematic., that back then as kids we wouldn't know when they made us sing, "*Hej sloveni, još ste živi*" and I knew it by heart because I was also an observer and I went to the mountains with them, you know. Each morning, we would raise that Yugoslav and Serbian flag, and we would sing "*Hej sloveni*" but later on when we grew up we said, "But why? Why am I singing to Slovenians?" (laughs)

In one way or another, in '70, I, the '70s and these, not the crisis, but intellectual tendencies which I had, even though I never published, even those that I have had written, poetry, or... I had started to

feel myself in conscience somehow incomplete that I wasn't writing in Albanian, you know. Since I stopped reading in Albanian since childhood, it was some sort of an issue. I started to read then any book that I found interesting, for instance, when Kadare became famous, I tried reading in Albanian too, even though it was easier for me to read those in Serbian when they translated it there. So, I felt like I wasn't precisely complete, and I would hold back a little bit like publishing or I thought it wasn't yet, what I am doing is not complete, you know, some sort of... or I would think I was still young, I shouldn't, but simply that I believed. Some who saw it would say, "This is interesting..." But hadn't, I hadn't published almost anything of the '70s, even though I wrote.

Nevertheless, I started to realize that, even though, the situation of the '70s itself, some political conversations that I sometimes had and some very strange contacts because I couldn't believe that those kind of people exist, for instance, some historians, some young students of my age that study history. Sometimes I would have some kind of very rough polemic, he would talk like those who knew from the books about that time... in the beginning of the 20th century. Those who Tucovići would criticize, extreme Serbian nationalism that Kosovo is a Serbian land, that the Turkish brought us here, and gave us the power, we did to Serbia everything, Shkodra is of Serbia, and such things, Durrës and so on, you know. It looked to me like an anachronism, I couldn't believe that these kind of people would ever have power or be in charge, but rapidly it would happen since, in the beginning of the '80s, they began to publicly show up on stage.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And you were in Belgrade in '81?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I was still in Belgrade in '91, until '82, I was there almost to the end. Then the atmosphere started to get destroyed and stuff. My group of friends was very normal and 90% of them even today are like that, normal, but some kind of I don't know – got raised, that nationalism demon got raised. I have it in those of my writings and I described it in my book that, how to say, that raising or the first showing up of this nationalism or Serbian fascism in the situations that I went through in the '70s. Some contacts and some things that now I don't know how I can express, but I told them, I made some kind of parallel with some kind of famous play that got played in that, back then in "Atelene 212," it was a cult, the play of Radovan Treći, he would play, I forget about the names sometimes.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** At what place did it play?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** He played... He's the best Serbian actor from that time, he passed away... Zoran Radmilović, you don't know him, Zoran Radmilović...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** No...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, Zoran Radmilović, yes, yes, it is him. He was such a good actor, and he would improvise a lot with those plays. He'd play some kind of Serbian villager that came to the city and now that sort of vision of these national Serbian rural myths, not that opened, but precisely like that, the opposition to civilization with some kind of interesting humor. But, Zoran was spiritual and had, for instance, in some moments, would stop the play from developing and for 15 minutes would

improvise, all colleagues that would play in the play would laugh, to the point that there never were any tickets for that play, you would rarely find them because everytime you would see, there were such good things. But I am starting from this, I did some sort of analysis that some of my friends still use it in lectures like, an example of this, how can...how can a society to enter regress in... that people, to say the least, to downgrade and the elite and the way society functions and what do I know. I don't know if I'm being clear, but luckily I wrote them. When I write, I am more careful, I go back to one sentence or idea ten times, but when I speak, I have some *laguna*<sup>7</sup> that I can't even recall the name of Zoran Radmilović. Now what else was I saying, the '70s, right?

This way I, when you are young and you study, that you turn 27-28 to 30 years and you are there and you leave it behind, and it was that kind of atmosphere in all of Yugoslavia that you are not in the system to become a member of the Communist Party and so. I was some half of dissident because, so from '68 and then, and I wouldn't even care to come back here, to become... because here my father and my family were the ones who were called nomenclature, they had some positions, but not even there... there you couldn't go ahead much. Only in '78, I had the chance to get a job a little bit more consistent, there in the Albanology branch, there were many problems there too.

The first time that I applied, they had canceled the announcement with the excuse that... I am a suspicious element of '68 and so, that the police, the service or what do I know. There, they have my record... Then, when I told my father there, for some time, I didn't talk from '68 until '72, '73, '74, I didn't talk, you know, about the family contacts, I kept them, because....

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** You weren't talking to your father?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, because he would say, "I'll help you, I'll send you the money," but I was against my family, against the Communist Party (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** I wanted to go back to the '70s, mid- '70s, beginning of the '80s, because the story you're telling seems like the period when you articulated a political stance...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I articulated it even earlier, in '69, but I said that I withdrew. I followed it even when I was at the monastery and.. No, I wasn't at the monastery, but when I worked with arts, with **frescos**, when we fixed those **frescos**, cleaned them and stuff. But, I followed politics all the time, I had friends in politics either dissidents or some were imprisoned. I wasn't imprisoned, they questioned me a few times, but I wasn't imprisoned. But I withdrew, so there wouldn't be any consequences for my family, and then, after a few years, we made up, you know, I did not create any more problems, but I still followed what was happening.

We didn't believe that the Federation of Yugoslavia would be destroyed, you know, but there were problems. There were problems, then they became economic, but the position that I was hired for four years, you had no idea when could you get an apartment for yourself, or something to live there. And my father was still a member of the Federation Council for more than ten, twelve years, and we get an apartment, he earned it. He could get an apartment in Belgrade, he tried, but he was indecisive,

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<sup>7</sup> Mental lapses.

“Yes, no, yes, no.” He would say, “If you get an apartment, you’re stuck there forever.” My mother talked to him, “Don’t get an apartment there, you won’t come back.” (laughs) These kind of talks. But I, how do I say, I had those dilemmas, “What do I do with my life?” “Should I go West like most people back then?” I had...

While I was in a relationship with a girl, she was from Dalmatia, but born in Belgrade. Then I was more stable, we lived there, but then we broke up in ‘78 when I graduated, so now I was in a dilemma. Fine, I got a job, but I didn’t have perspective. The people from the University, there was the chief of the department, Tërnaci, Halit Tërnaci. He was an idiot professor and he was winding something. Kosovo sent him there and now he wanted to return to Kosovo in some position, and stuff like this, he started writing letters, but then he connected with them, people from Belgrade exploited him. He started after ‘81 to make some denunciations, he made a list of malpractices, but I didn’t sign it, I was on bad terms with him, and I wanted to leave that department of the University and everything.

Even my father told me, “Come back here, I’ll finance you, or stay there but don’t hang out with him anymore, I’ll give you money until you find a better job.” Or they told me to come back and like this. But the atmosphere started to get worse, writings, newspapers, things. And then when you’re 35, you get tired and think. I still had the idea of going to the mountain and living or even reading (laughs)... I don’t know, I said, I thought of going to France, but I thought the moment I come back to Pristina, because my parents were left alone, my sisters, my brother lived with his wife for a while.

Then they got an apartment, since usually brides and mothers-in-law don’t get on well, something happened, my sisters got married, so my parents were alone, they said, “Come back, you’ll have everything here, we’ll give you one story of the house.” And I thought I’d try it. So I came to Pristina, a little confused and that was the end of the ‘80s. And then it happened when I came back, even when I was in Belgrade I worked at the Albanologic Department, and for the first time I had literature in Albanian, either for Albanians, either for...

And those writings for one hundred years ago, and when they made... And when the disputes started after ‘81, they said the Albanian requests, Kosovo’s statute, why is our autonomy so high and like this. I wanted to write so many times, and I wrote some reactions, but they were unfinished. When I came back here, I wasn’t working, so I was just staying. I didn’t work for about four months, and one day, I read an article by some academics that I knew were nationalists, Pavlević who was criticizing a book published in, in Tirana by the Academy of Sciences, *Albanians and Their Lands*, something like this, you know. He was attacking it, not from a normal point of view, but from a Serbian nationalism point of view. They were so strong now they started doing this.

I wrote a long letter to *NIN* and told them, “Why are you publishing these kind of writings?” You can’t fight Albanian nationalism with Serbian nationalism,” and things like this. I was surprised, they published that article, there was an editor of those letters to the readers section at *NIN*. Weekly *NIN*, a famous newspaper of Belgrade, *Nedeljne Informativne Novine* [*Weekly Informative Newspaper*]. Who was named Ljuba Stoić, he was a psychologist, I knew him from university. Back then, my nickname was Zen, Serbians couldn’t pronounce Shkëlzen, either Zen or Xen. He didn’t know it was me, he had a

colleague named Nait Vrenezi, he called him and asked, “Do you know him? I got a very interesting letter. Do you know who Shkëlzen Maliqi is?” “Yes, I know him, he was my friend.”

We knew each other from Prizren, we were, maybe he is a year older, but we were friends from high school. Then, also in Belgrade, he studied psychology. And he published that letter, but he did... no, not only did he publish it here in Pristina, but after a few days, my letter was all over *Rilindja*'s page. And they also published the one from Pavlević, so it had equilibrium, but that had a bigger echo. For the first time, someone openly [took part] in an intellectual discourse. Then people here did not know me, most of them said, “Who is he? It's probably a pseudonym.” And you know, barely, yes, but that made me famous. Then we had a...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** This was the only exchange that you had with...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, this was the first, the first. Then I wrote a reply, and they replied, then I replied and stopped. Then they started knowing me. Some people from here knew me, like Rexhep Ismajli and these Albanologists would come once a week to teach in Belgrade, I knew some, and I got into the intellectual matters immediately, and I started to know some philosophers and like this. Then I started getting into some publisher network. When I was 35-36, I started.... I published that study about iconoclasm in 1980, but that was with a small ride, only some philosophers read it. But when I really got into publishing, I started writing some other articles, then I became a known publisher in the Yugoslavia region.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What did you write about the most?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, initially in the '80s I didn't write that much, just some reactions, some things from '84, '85 when a book was published, for example, the book about Kosovo from Dimitroje Bogdanović in Belgrade, the Academy of Science published it, and he was an academic. And I discovered that it was a copy of another book which was written by a Serbian-Montenegrin immigrant, Stjepčević, about the needs of Serbian nationalism propaganda at that time. And I published a very long article in *Thema*, back then it used to come out as a magazine of the Association of Philosophers, or in *Gjurmët Albanologjike*.

They published it in French, but then *Vjesnik* from Zagreb took it and published it. Then we got into a dispute, then the people from *NIN* attacked me, some editors, I had a dispute about this with them also, but it was the same thesis. You can't fight Albanian nationalism, which is benign in comparison to Serbian nationalism, if you give the space to Serbs to fight Albanian nationalism. It was something like that. But that is just something...

Then I wrote for magazines in Croatia and Slovenia, but sometimes even in Belgrade. Then Bosnia had press that was interested, I gave interviews and like this. There came out a magazine in Sanjak, I wrote for them too. In Novi Sad there were mostly publisher writings, but those writings of the '80s were relatively good. Then I summarized them in a book, *Nyja e Kosovës [Kosovo's Knot]*, that was published in 1990 in Ljubljana in Albanian. Ljubljana supported us, Slovenians.

We were at a fair in Belgrade with Ali Podrimja, we had some Slovenian friends, and he said, “Why don't you publish Shkëlzen's writings that you publish?” And they called after a few weeks and said,

“Bring them for a month, a month and a half, we will publish them, just to prepare them.” But I wrote most of them in Serbian, they translated and published them in Slovenian, because here they did not publish my critical writings directly, only when they were published in *Danas* [Today], they took it somewhere because it was published in *Danas*, in some places, they would not take the responsibility. I wrote, for example, I took them to Zenun Çela, editor at that time, I would send a writing about the flag, what do I know, about the curriculum, there were some disputes back then, some sensitive subjects. He would read then and said, “You wrote it very well, but we can’t publish it. I have a drawer where I put these writings, and I will publish them when the time comes.” But at least he was honest.

Then yes those, Ali Podrimja has the merits because I said, “I can’t translate those in two months.” Because there were a lot, he said, “No, I will organize them, just give them to me.” And he distributed them there. He gave some to Rexhep Ismajli, some to Gani Bobi, some to Hivzi Islami, Vehap Shita. We used to say Vehap Shita translates with ten fingers, he was very fast... But in three weeks, they finished them, and we took them to Ljubljana, they published them all. It was an interesting book, there was a defect in the title page, that’s why it was two-three months late. Some editor, an Albanian who published *Alternativa* [Alternative] in Ljubljana, some kind of alternative magazine. We initiated it here with Ali Podrimja.

When we were in, we went to Bled a few times, there were the meetings of the Slovenian International Club and they used to call us. And Ali and I used to say, “Why don’t you...” Back then we had some... it was the end of the ‘80s, ‘90, where there were people who left Kosovo and lived in Slovenia, and some writers or something, “Why don’t you make a magazine for those of us who live here?” I actually prepared it earlier, at the end of the ‘80s, a magazine here named *Alternative* but back then you couldn’t publish magazines just like that, you had to have permission from the Socialist League of Working People of Kosovo.

Sali Nushi was the chief at that time, or head responsible for culture, or something like that. When I sent him my proposal or something, he knew me personally from Belgrade. He was charming, he started cursing me, “*Kakva alternativa*, what kind of alternatives are you looking for?” (laughs) “But the title *Alternative*, not like this, but like this,” But no, they didn’t let us. I actually prepared an issue or something, and Ali said to the Slovenians, “We also have the title *Alternative*.” “Good, good.” (Laughs) We didn’t do it. Here, *Jedinstvo*, local Serbians were criticizing us because there was news that *Alternative* is coming out, with a capital A, like a graphic choice we had, they said, “This A means Albania.” That’s why they made the design, and the local Serbians had a very bad vibe and like this.

## Part Five

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** I have one more question about the ‘80s. During the ‘80s, a cultural scene began to develop in Kosovo, especially in music and then the trend in literature there are trends also in movies and...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, when I came here I found the scene very quiet, dead, like this. There were trends also in the ‘70s, I’ll mention some, for example, Ali Podrimja, Eqrem Basha, Mensur Arifi, Rexhep Ismajli, even Ibrahim Rugova. They had some and they were still... they just got out of students, they

launched some kind of demonopolization campaign and instilled a new spirit, but they did not let them, there was a dispute back then. I didn't know, but when I came here, I was friends with these people mostly and... In general, I say that culture in Kosovo is like a reservation culture, meaning, like Indians that were put in reservations and said, "Take them with you." So... 90 percent of PhDs were Albanology, folklore and things like this.

I criticized it publicly, for example, in an interview I gave for *Delo* in Zagreb. Then some intellectuals that here were appreciated as cordinants, like Rexhep Qosja, like this. When I read them it felt like I was reading the Bible or something... not only out of style, but with rhetorics, with repetition. They might have had a role in awareness or something, some novels, some things that they wrote for the emancipation of Albanians, but they themselves were closed. Then they were against alternatives in every sense, culture spreading or something.

When I heard, for example, exactly Rexhep Qosja and others didn't let *Rilindja* as a publishing house to publish the translation of [Herbert] Marcuse or someone, he was a Marxist, like it or not, but simply, "No, why do we need it?", and like this. They had some kind, it seems like rigid thinking, and looking at them in Albania, the stands there. I had... in '86, I was a member of the editorial *Fjala*. *Fjala* was the only biweekly magazine, it was about culture and social matters, that's what it was called. Initially I was just a member because it was Vehbi Kikaj, a kid's poet, writer at that time.

He was given this magazine, he was in charge, because I started some disputes or that I was affirmed in the Yugoslav press and here, they thought it's good to have me. And I started editing philosophy and other social sciences, but I was also writing about some movies and stuff. It was a period of time, in the beginning, in '86 when I wrote about some movies in a critical way, about Agim Sopi's and Isa Qosja's movies in a critical way, where the dramaturgical errors are, or the way of conducting the movie was. It got really big, it almost... They appointed a, how do I say, gathering where they wait. But the Socialist League did not let them...

But the charges were that, for example, Agim Sopi's movie, I was still writing in Serbian you know, but Vehbi Kikaj translated it, I could write in Albanian, but it took me a long time to articulate. He wrote the title *Dramaturgjia e Pandehur - Njeriu prej Dheut* [*The Defendant Dramaturgy - Man of Soil*], or whatever was the name of Agim Sopi's movie about Albanian emigration, about depression in Ranković's time or something. This title, *Defendant*, it is more connected to legal terminology, and there was an affair, they were attacking me. Then, they started attacking me as the outstretched hand of Belgrade, attacking Albanian culture or something, that was not my intention, but that's how they read it.

I always had disputes with Mehmet Kraja and with these existing clans here. For example, once there was the world premiere of a Schneider drama, a playwright from Croatia. They ordered Isuf Buxhovi and these to write the culture rubric. I wrote well and affirmatively, they, "No, we're not publishing it." They didn't like it, they thought that I will write badly, I found it very interesting, it was the topic and everything. I didn't have much about them... I didn't have much support from those who controlled culture in, but there were some others who thought that that is reasonable, it isn't only...

Actually I remember back then, when I wrote the critic about those movies, Azem Shkreli as a director of Kosovafilm resigned because he was on the council of *Fjala*. But after a while he was more reasonable. We met once, and he said, "If you wrote your own thoughts, it's okay, but if someone made you, it is wicked." "No..." Then we made up, but the artists could not understand it. There wasn't normal criticism or normal life, maybe because the whole culture was monopolized. You had a publisher, one and a half practically, because the School Textbooks Entity would sometimes publish some book like this, it was all monopolized and it didn't...

Then, when they wrote criticism, or friend to friend, or rarely when they had problems with each other they would express it through newspapers and like this. This was some sort of quiescence, plus the times were hard, I was prosecuted, every mistake you'd make in newspapers they would attack as an irredentist. There was pressure on all intellectuals to declare and write against Albania, some did not want to because they did not take orders, because that's where they stood, you know, like this. It was very hard to... At that time, I was more, not braver, but I came from another environment, and I did not understand those limitations, and sometimes I didn't care.

When I published my book sometime in '84 or something, people from *Rilindja* came to me and said, "Do you want to make a critique of Enver Hoxha's book *Titoites*?" I said, "I don't know, I have to read it first." They brought it for me from Tirana. I read it and it seemed primitive, a political book, like a pamphlet, it had many weaknesses. But back then, I was reading Kardelj, and I said, "I will write under one condition, when I criticize Enver Hoxha, I will also criticize Kardelj because it's the same..." "Aaa, no, you can't do that, then we will look like..." (laughs) and then I said, "No, I'm not going to do this..." I was engaged in Yugoslav press in that I was criticizing Serbian nationalism, Milošević and... Milošević came later, but it started then. So....

Then something else happened because Vehbi Kikaj got sick and died, and then *Fjala* was left without a boss. Then they made an announcement, and my friends said, "You take it, you take it." And I applied. They chose me. They, some people from the magazine sat and talked, what do I know, they appointed me. They hadn't asked me if I was a member of the Party, they thought I was from the family and everything...If they had known, maybe they wouldn't have chosen me. But, apparently Azem Vllasi intervened, and they didn't dare choose someone else, because he was Chairman of the Committee, with my knowledge or something, and with *Fjala* that we started publishing in '87, for the first time, a press from Kosovo starts publishing, started to reply, become like them, not on the level of those from Belgrade, but to reply, not leave it open, in a more beautiful platform, more substantial.

I took the magazine, first, I changed the design, design, it was very beautiful. I hired Nekra as a designer, he didn't work as a designer back then, I just like the way he did the comics at *Danas*. And this was a small revolution in the press of the time because those first four, five pages were selected texts from Slovenians, Croatians, and Serbs, of course, against the regime, and they wrote comments. And the first four, five issues came out and no one reacted. One day they came and said, "Ali Shukria asked from Belgrade..." He was back then at the head of the Party in Belgrade, "It's not good," he said (laughs), "we can't do it like *Književna Novina* in Belgrade." "It isn't like... we are just telling where the excesses and stupidities are, they're doing there." The anti-Albanian campaign was at its peak back then, that was a little before...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Can you talk about the nature of this anti-Albanian campaign?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It started when Milošević came to power, it was insufferable. For example, he let the press in Belgrade open sections with reactions from citizens and like this, from scientists, when he published everything. Really, like attacks against the Albanians, insults, titles with slander, like fake news [in English]. Pretending that Albanians are mistreating and violating Serbs every day, it's indescribable what... There were reactions, *Politics*, as a more prestigious and the oldest daily newspaper in Balkans, downgraded so much, you have no idea. If you open those extreme Serbian newspapers today like *Kuriri* like that happened every day, but there for us, it was a little... To our ears it sounded weird the extremity and accusation they were making. So this was a preparation to take the autonomy of Kosovo.

Serbia's problem was that the '74 constitution, because they couldn't just turn the situation around, Kosovo formally was part of Serbia, but they couldn't make the army, or like this, on the border you had to stop and you couldn't come in without the permission of the chairman of Kosovo. The main problem, for example, in '81, for Serbian Police to come here, not Serbian, but Yugoslav Police to intervene, Xhavit Nimani had to sign. Xhavit Nimani didn't want to sign and they were stuck at the border for three days. They waited in Merdare, then they had to find a way, someone else signed, I don't remember who, I mean I wasn't here, but they told me.

This and, they couldn't change it, they had to change the constitution and the system to bring back Serbia's control in Kosovo. Twice a state of emergency was declared, once in '81, federal forces came to control the situation, and after two-three years... My father, Mehmet, was chosen as an internal minister in '81, and he somehow managed to bring the situation under control, and then after two or three years, they removed the state of emergency. But Serbia wasn't content, later, they were provoked again and brought it back, but they couldn't change the constitution in a normal way, because now they weren't only against Kosovo, they were at risk from Slovenia and Croatia, they didn't let them. And the other replies were from Macedonia and Bosnia, they had other stands, they only initially could do for themselves with violence in Montenegro and Vojvodina because they couldn't change the situation.

Therefore, when Milošević came to power, one of his slogans was "I will change the situation and constitution, the situation in Kosovo, by all means, even if violence should be used." It's a paraphrase, maybe he said it differently, but that's how it was, by all means, legal and illegal, and that's what he did. First, they started the war between the opposition inside the party in Serbia with a famous meeting when they charged Ivan Stanbolić and others that were for softer measures, they weren't against, they wanted to discipline Kosovo or put it... But, they thought that this can happen gradually or not provoke the destruction of Yugoslavia.

In the meantime, in '85 or '86, another project of the Academy of Arts and Science of Serbia was published, where there was a famous memorandum illegally, a version of it, was published and it was big, in the beginning, Milošević and Serbian communists were fighting it, they were against it, but later, they took its platform. In that document, the Serbian Academy had this... some finding that the Second Yugoslavia, this Federal Yugoslavia was created on anti-Serbian premises. So, a premise like, a

slogan like, "Poor Serbia, strong Yugoslavia", that was the formula, as if Tito had built that federation with that formula, and they thought the opposite.

If the rapport does not change, the rapports in the Federation, then Serbia will look at other ways of fulfilling Serbia's national interests, even with the destruction of Yugoslavia. This platform was later taken over by Milošević, but also by a part of the Yugoslav army, a former General Lubičić who was the main authority at the time, with... he supported Slobodan Milošević and and built a platform through the military through this mass movement, the organization of rallies, the pressures. It started here in Fushë Kosovë when local Serbs starting to protest, two-five hundred people, these local Serbs, demanding an ultimatum on Serbia, or going to the Yugoslav Assembly there to complain about the situation here and like this.

I mean from a relatively small municipality, I don't know if it was a municipality, or if it was a Pristina neighborhood, maybe it was still a Pristina neighborhood, they shook the whole federation. Then there were some incidents in the Milošević regime that we then denounced as the "Burning of the Reichstag." There was an assassination of four Yugoslav Army soldiers in Paraćin in September 1987, after which, it was taken as a pretext for, to, to...first of all, to cleanse the ranks of the League of Communists of Serbia from those opposed to the Milošević line and then to extreme populism with the whole of Yugoslavia. Paraćini's case was allegedly that an Albanian soldier killed four people who were chosen, a Croat, a Bosnian, like this, Kelmendi was that soldier's surname. In vain, it was a scheme, and then, as if he committed suicide in the woods, it was all staged.

So Milošević came to power with violence and could never be removed from power without violence, and then caused some, in a series of forced wars, that is to say with impositions... The Constitution of Kosovo and Serbia to be changed and so on. But that, then it was an act of annihilation of Yugoslavia at the same time, since Kosovo's autonomy had not functioned under the Constitution of '74 and the Federal Assembly. Any decision would have had the approval of the Assembly of Kosovo, the Assembly of Kosovo, and Slovenia and Croatia would not allow it to work without it being complete, in accordance with the Constitution of '74, this procedure was not needed ...

In the meantime, they had begun to approve the separatist laws themselves, and whoever prevented them from doing so created a violent situation and Serbia tried, forcibly occupying two federal units, Vojvodina and Montenegro. In Novi Sad, they organized a large demonstration, then called the Yogurt Revolution, because they threw yogurt and stuff at the Assembly, and so on, but then they surrendered themselves, those autonomists handed over power. In Montenegro, however, there was also a scheme so Serb forces would take over. They did not have much success in Bosnia, they just organized the element Serbs there. And they have tried, for example, to make anti-Slovenian demonstrations, sending Serbs who lived there and with buses there, but it was unsuccessful because the police and Slovenian policies didn't let them. It was a very dramatic period of development where everyone, so the element of that federation had been homogenized around the major goals of defending the nation, advancing the nation.

So the same thing happened to us, '89, '90s, and they all came together on the idea that we don't want to stay with Serbia, and that was clear. There was still a chance up to '89, for example, when they had, when the demonstrations were held in Kosovo like... Serbia was organizing big meetings in Yugoslavia

and Serbia, and Ushqe. Kosovo at the same time said that in Ushqe two million people were gathered, Ushqe is in New Belgrade, it's in Belgrade. Kosovo reacted with marches. People from all cities semi-organized started, organized from the factories and so on they walked to Pristina, from Gjakova, from Prizren, from Mitrovica and gathered here at that time to protect the Kosovo leadership because they wanted to remove Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha Jashari from power and bring someone else.

They managed to do it, but kind of in that demonstration for the first time, you saw that they linked our Kosovo flag with the one that was there, a compromise was made so we can have the Albanian flag, the two-headed eagle, but had a bigger star. Kosovo had a star bigger than Albania, they used to call it Azem Vllasi's star because he had put it there to distinguish it from theirs. But, in those demonstrations, they had symbolically linked Yugoslavia's flag, no Serbia and with a picture of Tito, a lot had gone out with workers and those.

Even some smart people in Belgrade, like Koča Popović and these, a former Foreign Minister of Serbia and so of Yugoslavia, they used to say, "Albanians, we can do it with Yugoslavia, but not with Serbia," this was the last moment when they had this.... They, Kosovo's less moderate leadership with Kaqusha Jashari and Azem Vllasi, they were trying to sell this idea that we could stay with Yugoslavia. Then this broke down, the Albanians came out of it, those who were in the Communist League at least some were left, but everyone was homogenized and Yugoslavia actually had no chance of surviving in those circumstances, even under the pressure that Serbia made to impose elections.

In that situation that Serbia would provoke, so they encouraged a... elaborating on that Yugoslav crisis, it was proven to be unified, almost simultaneously, or almost illegally conquered by most in the Yugoslav presidency since there were eight units. Three were against the constitutional changes and left Yugoslavia as it was in '74, while Slovenia, Croatia were with Serbia, Macedonia against, and Bosnia was a question mark. Serbia took this, it had Vojvodina under control, changed Kosovo and put that strategy in place, introduced a figure, Gogoli, Sejda Bajramović, in vain, a man representing Kosovo who was not even elected nor, the question was... Montenegro was three, there are four, but Bosnia, they had hoped in Bosnia, that at that time there was a Bosnian Serb president, one Bogič Mogičević, but he did not vote and four against four remained.

They had a few sessions of the Yugoslav presidency, but they did not achieve it. They have even thought of a military coup, but it would have had bad echoes in international circles, they didn't dare. Then they went with other scenarios, separatism. Serbia, in fact, then first fully adopted the laws that made them independent from Yugoslavia, and the constitutional amendment was of that nature after it was changed, imposed the amendment of the Constitution of Kosovo then prepared itself to be an independent state, but in the field, they worked to prolong and create a Greater Serbia with the uprisings of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, but then it didn't work. I don't know what to say now.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What year did *Fjala* close down, at the same time as the other newspapers?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** *Fjala* did not close, I led *Fjala* for a year. After a year, they put a lot of pressure on me and removed for example two pages. At night, that night's censorship, they would come and say, "They removed them," or they stopped publishing it. Later, I decided to resign, but they didn't accept it, but then I published my resignation as an illustration, a photograph. I put it in the middle of the

illustrations, because it wasn't like that, they wouldn't let me publish it. But those printing workers have spies who would read it before it came out. Someone saw it, they had it completely printed, then removed the illustration and reprinted it. When it came out tomorrow, there was no... but I got a handful and have those issues with my resignation,

Then I was no longer the editor-in-chief, I was still left in the newsroom for a while. It continued coming out for a while, but when they all closed, when *Rilindja* closed in 1993, it stopped for a while. Later they were allowed, but now it was declared like Gračanica there, they allowed *Rilindja* not anymore, it was published like *Bujku*, it took the role of *Rilindja*. *Bujku* was a newspaper about agriculture. *Zëri* had a special status, and it continued to be published for a few more issues. But that was only in the years when autonomy narrowed and they allowed it just so they would have facts when Americans or foreigners, "What are you doing to them?" "No, do you see they have their press, they publish whatever they want. They're insulting us here." And honestly we were free, we wouldn't censor anything, we could publish whatever we wanted.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What were the '90s like for you?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The end of the '80s, the beginning of the '90s were very, very intense, so many events, even then we were almost completely into politics. In '89, the whole year from February until the fall, somewhere was very heavy, because when the last extraordinary measures were broken, around four hundred intellectuals were imprisoned, somewhere at the end of February or beginning of March. They were put in solitary confinement and beaten in Vranje, and somewhere in Serbia's prisons, the scene was almost completely shut down. These public gatherings were stopped at the end of... Now I don't know if I have the chronology in order or not, but in '89, in Yugoslavia, it was a little different because they started...

The Communist system collapsed, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia disbanded in January '89, but the last Communist Party Congress failed. The Slovenians left and it broke down. Now the state remained, but the meetings of the presidents of the republics did not come to any conclusion. But at the end of '89 ... do I have to ... yes, I'm okay. Not at the end of '89, but at the end of '88 at a Yugoslav-level meeting, I was also a representative of Kosovo with the help or organization of the U.S. Embassy, we had some consultations in Zagreb with created some platforms as a way out of the crisis that Yugoslavia was in. We had a consultation in Zagreb sometime in November, Branko Horvat, a professor of economics in Zagreb was in that group, and there were others from Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana and all.

Horvat actually had the idea that Yugoslavia should be reconstructed and establish a two-party system. He used to say, "The Socialist League should be made into a party that would compete ..." an idea that was almost boring, but he tried to legalize it. And the rest of us and Slovenians talked about starting something, so an organization that fights for the democratization of Yugoslavia. They didn't want to be a political party, and... There we agreed to organize it after a while, it was February 2, I think, February 1990 in Zagreb, this congress was held, an organization called the UJDI, *Uruženje Jugoslavenska Demokratska Inicijativa*, so, the Association for Yugoslavia's Democratization, an association. It had a hundred signatures, from Kosovo, it was me and Muhammad Kullashi.

That organization was supposed to be gathering here on February 20th, to form a branch here. In other countries, meanwhile, it was... it was one of the organizations that promoted the process of founding parties in other countries, but they could not stop it because it was an association, but we remained in Slovenia, the Social Democratic Party was created by itself. But we were all organized, they called people to the rally the same day when the miners at Trepça started the strike, I had organized with some other people ... there were barracks there, now where the Writers' Union is, the barracks of the Cultural Educational Community of Kosovo where I worked. I had this small hall and I called a lot of people, the well-known political figures, it was probably the first public gathering.

In fact, before that, we had started at the Faculty of Philosophy to hold tribunals for about six months, no one did it after that, perhaps a tribunal on the situation in Yugoslavia and so on. I even went to talk, they did not tease us and the situation was that we couldn't wait, we had to have something, a representative body. The only one in operation in '89 was Ibrahim Rugova as president of the association. There was no other address that anyone admitted they could talk to. I, as an individual, often spoke to the BBC when foreign journalists came, but it didn't weigh. But Ibrahim Rugova was President of the Writers' Association of Kosovo, when he made the statement, the *Spiegel* took it, and the whole world took it, and Belgrade then would insult him (laughs), there were the others who didn't talk because they were scared of the consequences.

## Part Six

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In the fall of that year, '89, we saw it fit to begin with preparations for *UJDI*, the Organization for the Democratization of Yugoslavia, a branch in Pristina. And in December, we invited someone, and the president of this organization, Žarko Puhovski from Zagreb came, and other guests. I had taken a room at then-Boro Ramiz at the Youth Palace, which cost 200 marks. But I somehow doubted that maybe, it may be closed since it was Saturday, you know. Because I even had to present at the rally, it was all okay, I presented there, I brought the rule, I paid for it.

But I doubted that they wouldn't open it for us, you know, we would have some obstruction. I then asked Ibrahim Rugova, who was president of the Writers' Association, the headquarters of the Association was near Boro and Ramiz, a couple of hundred meters away, "I think they're not open, can we come here, can it be opened, inaugurate it there?" Because it was important to do something. And that's what happened, when we went there, the doors were closed, we couldn't even go near the hall. Then we went to the Association and we held the meeting there.

There were also Serbs who came because they insisted on coming from Sarajevo or something, Darinka Jević, or something, Ismet Marković, "Can they come also because we want it to be multiethnic?" "Sure, let them come." But then they started talking, asking, "Who is..." You know because we made a registration sheet, "Listen, who is a member, see if I will register..." And he started reading some names, the first one was Ali Podrimja (laughs). I used to tease him about his, I said, "You are the first democrat of Kosovo." (laughs).

So they did not agree to get in, Rugova did not want to attend the meeting, but he was there. Some others did, what do I know, Bujar Bukoshi, and so on... There, the presidency was simply established and it became a first body. But it encouraged others to do the same... even when we were preparing for this meeting, we would hold them at the Elida Cafe in Boro Ramiz. We would gather there during the day and would plan what to do.

And now when we were preparing for this, our organisation, *UJDI*, there Jusuf Buxhovi and some other from *Rilindja* saying, “Why are we making it Yugoslav, let’s make one of ours.” I said, “Okay, it’s good to do something, but I’m scared they will stop you... And this is an organization that already exists, and we have to have someone who speaks on Kosovo’s behalf, or is engaged in a platform that is kind of okay at that moment.” And they continued, and they were the founders of the LDK<sup>8</sup> later.

And so when we created this organization, within ten days, the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms was established, which had a key role, and played a very important role. After a week or two, I think on December 20... We had the *UJDI* meeting on December 9th, two weeks later, two more organizations were established. LDK was a complete success at once. They started with, they held press conferences. Ibrahim Rugova luckily was elected chairman, even though it wasn’t foreseeable, but all the organizing was done there at the Writers’ Association after that... The founders, the initiators of the Democratic League, also called Rugova there, and from some candidates, he eventually emerged as the only one who met all the criteria, and they either rejected it or were unsure.

Then when those meetings were held every week, they immediately echoed, all the journalists were there, too, and the Human Rights Council was very... the crisis was at its peak in Yugoslavia, here too. Then Jusuf Buxhovi was secretary of the Part... of that, they held the meetings in Serbian because journalists were usually from Yugoslavia, from centers of Yugoslavia. He started every meeting with one sentence, he said, “*Imam jedan radostan vest.*” “I have some happy news, we have made one hundred thousand members.” After a week, he said two hundred thousand, and then it reached seven hundred thousand, at the end of January.

And we at Elida continued staying and discussing, you know, one day, we were sitting there with Gani Bobi, Rexhep Ismaili, I don’t know who else was there, maybe Isuf Berisha, some kind of friendship. Gani Bobi said, “Look at them, they became like them, that party of, of, of Radio Yerevan,” he said. Because from the one-party system, they all went to that other party, now again party was... He said, “Let’s start and form a party...” I said, “some normal party to make competition, they are seven hundred thousand, there is not anyone else,” you know... Really, a bit as a joke, a bit... but no, Gani Bobi started giving us some chores. He was looking at Hifzi Islami who was across from him, “Hifzi, you are a redneck, you will make the village party.” “You, Xen...” He said to me, “You look to me like a social democrat.” “Do you agree?” “Yes.” And like this, as a half joke, half serious, but really it was the moment to start something.

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<sup>8</sup> *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.

And that was, we started forming a party. I did it with Muhamed, and some other friends of Arben Xhaferi. Fehmi Agani also helped us a lot because he also had social democratic thoughts, and, at the LDK, it was, that was a national party. But, he understood the importance of having pluralism and not going from one Communist Party to the other. For a couple of weeks, those parties were founded in January, February 1990. And I think on February 10, the party, the founding of the Social Democratic Party, Muhamedin was elected as its leader. I did not want to be a leader anywhere, neither in *UJDI*, nor here. At *UJDI*, Veton Surroi was elected, here Muhamedin. But after a while, Muhamedin went to Paris for something, like a short stay, and he stayed there. Then I became the leader for a while...

**Aurela Kadriu:** All of these parties were created for the same of the effect...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, for the sake of the effect, but also...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, was there also content...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, there was content, there was content that was not... I think maybe it worked, but somehow they too became part of the LDK itself, and they hardly accepted anyone else. And there were different voices, and we just wanted to have a plural scene. Later the Demochristian Party was formed, the initiator was Mark, not Mark Krasniqi, there was this, another {drinks water}, Lazëri, Lazëri Krasniqi. And... I even attended every meeting that the Social Democratic Party held, in the sense that you have to have whole spectrum, right...

It is interesting that the Democrats started a little later, sometime in March 1990, they consulted me and Lazëri would call me ... There Mark Krasniqi, who later was the leader of that party for many years, but he wasn't then. He used to say, "I can't make this party, it will instill religious divisions." I listened in the beginning and I said, "This was probably the situation a hundred years ago or something, but now it's good. We have a minority of Christians here, Catholics, just so they have a subject, maybe even those who are not Catholics." And that's how we formed it, because Abdullah Karajgliu was the vice-president of the party and some others in the party.

But I said it's like our Social Democratic party, it's small, but we had sister parties all over Europe, they call us to their weddings and (laughs) ... Now what matters is that the Demochristian Party was in Yugoslavia, they had good contacts with Croatia and everything, it's good to have it, one more voice that hears us. Because the Demochristian Party in Italy was strong, in Germany, it was an ideological party, so it's not only ... Well, it went passed somehow, like this.

But it then enabled us to create a body that was a little bit larger, that this Party Council, the Party Council, the Party Council in Kosovo {drinks water}, and a larger Council, the Party of Albanians in Yugoslavia. So people from Presevo, Macedonia and Montenegro would also come there. Two councils were created at the time, Yugoslavia was still not destroyed, and even then, those three options were formulated, if Yugoslavia was reorganized as a federation, these parties, there were nine or ten, so all together, in Kosovo, there were only five. They wanted to create a republic of Albanians in Yugoslavia,

with Montenegro, Montenegrin Albanians and Macedonian Albanians if, no... not if, the first was if Yugoslavia remained, Yugoslavia as a composite, Republic of Kosovo as part of the Seventh Republic, it wasn't us who (laughs) ...

If it is reorganized on an ethnic basis, then it will make the joint unit of Albanians in Yugoslavia with the same, with the integration, the Albanians of Macedonia ... And the third option, if all of Yugoslavia breaks down, to come together with Albania. There were... somebody laughed at it, somebody not, but they were just like, open options. We had tried then at the same time with Veton Surroi and others, even with Fehmi Agani, to form a democratic forum, as an alternative form, it took off, a lot, LDK and few were... blocking this, some kind of approach with, with, of some people who were very important, but did find a place in the LDK or in the parties.

We thought we would do some sort of forum according to the model of the Czech Democratic Forum and some other countries, together with all the forces and make... because, on the other hand, with some other factors, Demaçi and others, at the same time, they would hold meetings with LDK members to create the National Liberation Council as the main body of the Albanian Movement in Kosovo.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What does that mean?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The Council. So to be...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** I understand, I understand. But what is the Council?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, they said that the LDK is a party, LDK was declared both as a party and as a movement. However, you could not integrate some people who could not stand Rugova or Fehmi Agani, like Qosja, knows. And now they would say, "No ...". There were not only Qosja, there were many, also these Stavileci and others, twenty people would gather to discuss this. But it didn't pass, some platforms were created, but it didn't pass. This forum was a little bit different. It was more debatable, but where we can also articulate things. So, I mean {drinks water} ....

The issue was that it had to be organized like, the resistance, the movement of Albanians here, to be as comprehensive as possible. As far as the institutional part is concerned, we still had some initiatives there... in 1990, we agreed to, knowing that Milošević is preparing to shatter both the Kosovo Assembly and the government, and all, we tried in June 1990, at the end of June. I think, no, it was July or 5... no, I don't remember the date now, but we tried to make a big gathering for all parties in Kosovo, to have some kind of alternative assembly with five hundred people.

We invited them there, where there were five parties, LDK had three hundred... With quotas, we couldn't know who it was ... We gave 300 quotas to the Democratic League. There was a Parliamentary Party with a hundred, there were Democrats with 50, we were with 50, I think the Republican Party also had 50. So we had... Another 50 for freelance intellectuals and so on. That meeting was held, it's weird that I can't remember the dates in the red hall of...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Boro Ramiz...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Boro Ramiz, with 500 people... No, it wasn't the Republican Party, it was the Green Party, they also accepted. And now there was an initial document prepared, read by Mehmet Kraja, there, in front of everyone. And they knew that the day is coming, the day ... will, will ... The existing assembly will be dissolved or annulled by Serbia. We wanted a body now from the self-proclaimed democratic entities that we had there, and the international factors knew us, to make some kind of...

And the gathering went well. It didn't last long, applause and everything. The next day, the LDK itself and Mehmet Kraja himself wrote an article against it just for one reason, that the head of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, was humiliated at that meeting. Because he was there in the line of the chairmen, we all were there, even I and social democrats, while here, here... Veton Surroi had the main speech. Veton Surroi, as one of the organizers of this, also younger, assumed the function of that conference... Open, collect, and so on. And they got the impression, some in the LDK, maybe even Kraja, Kraja himself has read what...

And so it is, on the one hand, it also points to the interpersonal relationships and the envy that Albanians have at these crucial moments. So much didn't come out of it. Fortunately, we didn't need this, because, even though our assembly was shattered, they fled, after they declared the Republic of Kosovo in Kaçanik, they fled west, in... first, then when it was Yugoslavia, in Zagreb and Ljubljana, later in the world, and so on. They had, it continued, the government in exile in Kosovo... We had this idea that the institutional structure that Kosovo had in the former Yugoslavia was worthy, worthy of preservation, advancing it, preserving it, make it part of the plural system.

While people from LDK often underestimated it, "What do we need it? They're communists, we don't it." You know, like this {drinks water}... But, then later, the LDK took everything into their hands, it didn't... They controlled the three percent, and all. We had an agreement with the Coordinating Council for a long time for small parties to be helped, to have an office, or something. But it didn't, they didn't... we had to do it ourselves.

That made sense at the beginning, for me personally, to ... I led the party up to two thousand... one thousand and nine hundred and... By the end of '93. Meanwhile we co-opted Luljeta Pula Beqiri and Kaqusha Jashari as, to be in the leadership. Luljeta Pula was also elected as head because they had remarks from the party that I was too liberal or working against the interests of the party. With some, in a moment, it was, in the fall of '93, I gave interviews in Belgrade, when the elections in Serbia were being prepared, I said that Albanians should probably think of going out to elections in Serbia, extend the spectrum of resistance. From the experience of the Irish, something they had for long, the war side, the parliamentary wing, so they have the same goal.

And that idea wasn't just mine, but also, actually Gani Bobi's idea. Gani Bobi was like a mentor for us, he was a calm person, good, but very... he would say, "What is happening with the LDK, and these... To hold that, it was stuck resist... let's widen it, let's send some people because, that with the idea of

the independence of Kosovo, let's go give arguments about it every day, let's make Serbs mad and..." I put it out there. But I said to go at that, in that meeting, as an independent group, no, so you don't compromise anyone, so it's some kind of personal engagement that... or group.

But they said, I said to Gani, "Would you campaign?" "No, no, this isn't (laughs) for me." "You probably could, because you write..." "He wasn't of the day (laughs) reacts a few days. And so it was, these were like the ideas. Coincidentally, at the same time, Veton Surroi also had something similar ... This happened because these diplomats and so on were pressuring us, "Help the opposition in Serbia, you know, don't let..." That they... they... even the opposition in Serbia, these leaders of these other non-communist, non-socialist parties... They said that Milošević was coming in with a ten percent lead automatically. Because he would win all the 30 MPs in Kosovo, you know, more than ten percent of them, 25 or how many did we have. And then he would get all the votes here for yourself.

But us, when we talked to foreigners, they were saying, "But it is impossible for us to accomplish here, to vote against Milošević when he controls the whole territory, vote... Or provoke him somehow, one provokes an incident where Albanians do not vote... they won't vote." But it's okay as an idea, you can think, if that occupation continues for ten, twenty years, you can't stay without {drinks water}... And they would criticize me then, "You do things on your own..." I gave many interviews, or something, "You are harming the party." The party either way never won more than a percent (laughs).

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And then after '93?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** After '93, I withdrew from the party and Arbën Xhaferi, Arbën Xhaferi went to Macedonia and became successful there. We advised him earlier to go there because he was connected to Tetovo. His friends created that, the citizens of Tetovo, Gostivar, mostly Tetovo. But, they chose an English teacher as head of the Party of Democratic Prosperity, you know, from the village, because the area of village thought that he, somehow... some people hesitate to get into politics, and all are okay like that, but they hesitate and that's how they were.

Arben was like that at the beginning with a bit of ignorance. But then he was all disappointed with that Nevzat Halimi. He didn't even present this issue properly, not everyone is a born politician. Arben didn't go at first, then the next year when there was a convention he went to, but they broke it up and became some kind... But, he had a very successful career, and he normalized the discourse and the organization of the party. Of course, he couldn't have made wonders, but either way... We were still in contact with him. But he was also a social democrat, you know for a socialist state. But the conditions at the time would not let you even think about benefits, or keep the system how it was before, not that perfect, but Yugoslavia was still a social state.

But this destruction of socialism and the installation of this neo-liberal model of the state, privatization, and even savings for, for social pensions, for health, and so on were terrible. When we had the Social Democratic Party, when we looked at what we could accomplish from our program, it was zero, you know, almost zero, nothing. Just to take care eventually for those workers who have lost their jobs, that union was created for them. Even so... and with the national program you couldn't

compete with anyone. That was fighting for the rights of Albanians, but they were represented by someone else. It is more or less like this even today (laughs) as far as creating a socialist state is concerned {drinks water}, now at least you can push them, to lay down some cases about pressure or improving the health system and so on.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How does it happen that in those years, in some way, you decide to be the articulated voice of visual artists, a lot of artists...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Ah, no, like this. See, I was very involved in politics and when I resigned from the party, then I had the opportunity to be more, to do, to get info on the Soros Foundation. From the very beginning, I was at that foundation as a board member in Belgrade, when it was for the Foundation for the Survival of Yugoslavia, because Croatia and Slovenia left. I was on the board, but now I was left without a job, and the founder of the Foundation of Yugoslavia was Sonja Licht, who was also my friend from studies. And I said, "I would want to start working on programs." Programs, there weren't many critics, before you could survive, because I was writing for Slovenian newspapers, and I was a correspondent on some radios, Radio Berlin from... and for Radio International and like this, I used to take some money, especially Slovenians paid well, because I wrote every week.

But then I was left without that money and the big foundation started here and like this... Surviving was a problem. I started working there, the salary was not that high, 700 marks, but you could survive. Plus, I had some payments from other activities... so I also took from there some, a lot of active programs, among them culture and art, media and like that. Even Soros, at times, we have helped these civil society organizations, and these activities that started with culture, to start to, to be more alive, this place. They, Soros without being part of it they helped us to publish some issues of the magazine of the Association of Philosophers, it was *Thema*. Later on, I started publishing with some young intellectuals here in the magazine *MM*, meaning "two M," this was in letters, in Latin numbers, it was two thousand, so I imagined the third millennium as a hope so we could come out, and it happened that way (laugh). Not that it was a warning but some (coughs)....

So this way culture has always been before politics. Even earlier at *Fjala* when I resigned I started writing about... they would tell me... a, a, I don't know what his name was, an Albanologist, editor-in-chief, would say, "Which section do you want to get?" I said, for about two-three months, I said, "Then, I will write about culture and art, about exhibitions and like this..." I started writing. But I was very close with artistic access, even with those Belgrade conceptual artists, I was close friends most of them. I also knew this Marina Abramović, who is one of the most famous artists in the world. I also wrote some, two short articles, more for the festival newsletter, and later published in the book. So I was close. Actually, then I had the idea to do some projects on those, they were some, a festival that was held every year in April at the *Aprilski Susreti*, so the April Meetings at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade.

In the context of Soros, I also met some new artists here, such as Sokol Beqiri, Mehmet Belulin and others. Even at that time, while I was at Soros, they came to help them travel somewhere and so on. When I became, at that program, I wrote for the newspaper *Zëri* then, when it renovated, when their

publishing restarted in 1994, *Koha* and *Zëri* restarted. So, from Soros we helped with letters, with some... because they did not have it. They were maintained by foreign funds, and a little bit by sales. I started a trend in culture in '94, I started a trend with artists, they started organizing exhibits in coffee shops. The academic artist did not approve of it initially, "What, how do you get into a coffee shop"... I wrote an affirmative article, with a bombastic title, *The Art of Resistance*, for an exhibition of Ilian Loxha, he held it at the Gal... at the cafe-gallery *Koha*, it was here, in front of *Rilindja* somewhere.

Then some other exhibitions started in Peja, at some coffee shop called Evergreen, and a Multimedia Center, or what was its name, Jeton Neziraj's {drinks water}. And like that, I helped with funds as much as I could. Dodona was also active, Dodona as Dodona, but also as a theater, Faruk Begolli was then director. And not only did I help them with funds from Soros, but I was also writing the program as a whole, just the, the application, Faruk Begolli would just bring them to me, anytime he wanted to organize something, which shows are, he will prepare just the list, "I don't know, do these and find me some money," (laughs) and so on.

Later, there, near the Dodona, we found a beautiful place to make a small cultural center, a gallery, which is Gallery Dodona. And I ensured there in Belgrade, the board, those leaders gave me even some money to arrange it, to fix the place, we needed 20 thousand marks to fix it. It was, how should I say, a private house. Incidentally, they were Faruk Begolli's cousins, that woman, that man was some Stavileci, my cousin. You know, not that close, but... And we made a deal with them, we fixed the place and, from January '97, very beautiful exhibitions were held. There were two and a half years of work, almost three, '97, '98, '99 in the spring, it couldn't... the mess started, the big war. A lot of beautiful exhibitions were organized, with criteria... and plus some promotions were held, and other cultural activities...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was it like for you...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Huh?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was it like for you to be outside of the institutions?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I was always outside the institutions. That's how I grew up, and then in '87, when I was hired, somehow.... I mean, I haven't worked in institutions for 35, 36 years, it's not been such a big deal. In '91, '90s, I went to America for six weeks, they had a special program, a visitors program, they got two or three thousand people from all over the world, all over the world, people representing something, promising something. They even have a list when you go there, they go around America and it's kind of like propaganda. And when you go there, when you meet them, they say, "Here was, what do I know, younger Willy Brandt, or..." These kind of people, maybe not Willy Brandt exactly, but known figures that went there young and became...

This how the journalists chose... I was invited once, in the '90s to go, actually, they appointed me to go with some Yugoslav journalists back then. But then, then, because sometime in the '90s, in January, I went to Zagreb to the Kosovo Students Association there, they had some gathering there. I

also had a speech there that said, among other things, what do I know, I felt like it at the moment, “Yugoslavia is falling apart, but the demand for a republic is no longer what the moment begs, but more the unification with Albania...” You know, no, no, no, not that I am for that option, but I always mostly talked or wrote about trends that existed.

Of course, if that happens, then or today, or whenever, if there’s a vote for Kosovo to declare independence or unite with Albania, I would have voted to unite with Albania, I would rather vote for uniting with Albania, not... Because I think that factoring in Albanians would be better, because it would be a bigger state, more stable, rather than in pieces like this. But okay, that’s another option, I’m not someone who insists on this. But, it’s interesting, they followed a few newspapers, it was like a small affair. But in the bulletin of the Embassy of America in Belgrade, then a note came out or something. Plus they evaluated it, I don’t know why, in their lines, CIA or someone because....

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** So you went to the Embassy?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, yes, no, the Embassy called me, the secretary of the Embassy who was in contact with me, I forgot his name, “We changed your program, you’re not going with a group, you’re going alone, we will give you a guide, who will be with you all the time. And we will make you a special program.” And I sat down, we were making that program. It was different, but I knew that maybe they had interest to have a person who engages to unite Albanians (laughs), I’m kidding (coughs). But that’s what happened, then I went in May and June, I was there for six weeks.

Then so it happened that the day when I was supposed to come back from that journey the war in Slovenia started, it was short, like a week. Planes weren’t flying to Zagreb, because I left from Zagreb. So I stayed there for two or three weeks, there were no more planes. But after like three weeks people at Pan Am told me, “If you want, you can go to Munich, and from there find a way to go to Kosovo.” I said, “Okay, I’ll go to Munich...” Because I also met Agim Mana back then in America, and his family wanted to come back, in Europe somewhere, then in Pristina. I traveled with his wife and children to Munich. Then from Munich, the first day, the next day, the day after that, the first train to Ljubljana would leave after a few weeks.

I went to Ljubljana, Zagreb is near Ljubljana. There was... I waited in Zagreb for one more week since trains were stopped, some kind of a first war started in Slovenia, neither trains nor planes would go to Skopje. But after a week somehow, they said that trains are traveling, and I went to Skopje like that, I came back, I stayed for a month more than I should have.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Let’s go back to 1997.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In ‘97, I was ...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Do, when a parallel life started organizing in Pristina...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No... I, so in '94, '95... Parallel in every meaning. So those basic functions of society, trade and so on were not affected as much by the regime, but the moment they got some firms, they expelled all Albanians who worked there, both in administration and in factories. But it was not only in '91, schools and these. When schools started organizing, other things started organizing in parallel, even sports.... But also culture, then I started organizing, so this was one of the organizations.. We, from Soros tried to help raise this civil society. So we helped women's organizations, schools, we made a project in 1996 for a special fund, Soros gave us two million dollars to help parallel schools.

And we did a very interesting program, I mean with the aspect of help, we directly supplied schools with equipment, computers and the most successful project there was... there were two, actually, one was that we organized one-month computer courses for Kosovo's high schools in all centers. Those were the times when people started using computers, the Internet started... I wrote that project in one morning, they called me from Belgrade, they said, "Soros wants to help parallel schools in Kosovo, can you do something today..." It was nine o'clock when they called me, "Finish it by two, because then it's the meeting in Budapest where it will be decided. We just need a letter, a page and a half, two."

I sat and thought of some projects, we had thought of some, but... And that, I thought that a computer course is preparation for the future, because in every field you work, even if you are a cashier, you had to learn that, like mobile phones are today, they didn't exist back then, but... And somehow a new technology came in, because in the beginning of the '90s, fax machines were very useful. I know from the Chinese revolution that there was some kind of attempt to have big protests, and they called the protests the Fax Revolution, through fax, the network was prepared... and the new technology is more advanced, it's good to familiarize youngsters, to, at least, touch the computer, you know.

Because I also had my experience, because I was maybe one of the first people who had personal computers from '87 or '88, you know? I had an American friend, Janner Rainick, I met her in Belgrade when I worked as a librarian at the Faculty of Philology. We met accidentally there, she was interested in Kosovo, even though she came to visit Serbia, she was a folklorist. Then I took her to my family, like this. Then she came here and made a study about music and games in Opoja. Now whatever I talked about...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Did she bring you the computer or...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** She finished a mission here, stayed here for a year or something... And when she went she said, "I have an IBM computer, one of the first, 186," she said, "I would sell it for one hundred marks." I said, "Okay, I'll buy it." And I worked on it for about a month, it seemed great. My main problem before when I wrote texts in letters, when I would write something wrong, get the whole paper out {pretends to be writing on keyboard} from the beginning (laughs). While on the computer, I could go back and fix it, ohh, I fell in love immediately.

But that computer didn't even last a month, it broke down, it took to Agron Dida at the University or something, they looked it weirdly, they had never seen... I said, "I'll give it to you, just fix it." He said,

“No, we don’t have the parts...” “Ok, good...” But I went to London at that time, maybe a conference in London, it was something about Balkans, Kosovo, how do I know, I held a lecture there. And with the money I had, I bought a computer. And since then I have never parted from the computer.

And I know that it was very valuable, and I think this contact had an effect, because at one time, Kosovo was first when it came to using the computer. So, most of them used it, even those because we have a lot of *Gastarbeiters*<sup>9</sup> or something, for contact or something, even today with Skype and things like this.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** I doesn’t matter, I mean it matters that...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** This was one of the best programs that I think was very successful and good. But we had others, one of them was, what later is known as the Gani Bobi Center, it became some sort of like a social science institute or something, with analysis, opinion research and so on. After the war, they immediately gave a spin-off, they said, “Be independent because we don’t need you here at Soros.” Like this, then there were some programs about, in the ‘90s, girls in villages were not allowed that much to go to school, there were problems. And work with them a little, make them more aware, make them realize that it’s good to continue school and give help, pay the buses, for example... But fieldwork was good, plus with a curriculum, with stuff, we tried all the aspects... but it was good, so it was something useful at that time.

*[This part of the interview was conducted on October 23, 2018]*

## Part Seven

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was the year ‘98, ‘99 like for you? What was the atmosphere like?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** ‘98, ‘99 were... in ‘97, I organized another activity that was important within Soros, but even outside of it, like Dodona, we organized for the first time a contemporary art of Kosovo exhibition in Belgrade at the Center for Cultural Decontamination with some artists, so, when we had briefings, preparations for the new season. I said, because I couldn’t, how would I send our artists our artists out into the world, there were no invitations, it was a problem, not many people knew them. Sokol went on the invitation of Gjelosh Gjokaj somewhere in Augsburg, some kind of exhibition, but there were no other possibilities.

And I said, “Let’s do it in Yugoslavia.” Because Soros had four offices in Yugoslavia, the central office in Belgrade, in Novi Sad, in Podgorica, in Montenegro, and in Kosovo. Then I said, “Let’s make an exchange, there’s no sense. Art is art.” They approved in January, then after two, three months, Sonja calls me, says, “Where is the exhibition project?” I said, “You didn’t notify me if it’s approved or not,” I

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<sup>9</sup> German; literally meaning guest worker.

said, “Okay, we will prepare it, but we need someone who does it.” They, “We thought you would prepare it,” I said, “Okay, I’ll try and talk to some artists.” And that’s how I became a curator.

I talked to some artists, Sokol, Mehmet, Maksi, the one we met. They immediately accepted, and we called Ilir Bajri to play music. Some other, “Yes, no, yes, no...” But didn’t deal with them, we did the exhibition with the ones who were there. It was really good. And that, in a way, affirmed those artists, us and the scene itself, because then they started calling us in Albania, in Ljubljana, they found out that there’s interesting art in Kosovo, they called us in *Onufri*. Then in June, the exhibition in Belgrade was held, they called us at the Cetinje Biennale, I went there with Mehmer and Sokol. Good, this was one of the activities, and we made a good catalog.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was the exhibition?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Huh?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What was the exhibition?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The exhibition, in the exhibition, there objects and installations and mostly objects, and some painting Maksi did, completely conceptual. Sokol had some installations, he took some cans where cheese is processed, and he made a rooster from tin and they looked like ethno-bombs, like *grandes*. This was his comment, and its title was *Flies, flies...* He had some old windows that had fallen from old houses, he found them. Then there, he also put some ethno-bombs and other things, and he would paint them with pastel colors a little, like this.

And he had a space installation that he did here in Pristina, he did it for the ninth anniversary of Gani Bobi’s death. He had four wet cherries, someone plucked them down, and he took them home and kept them. Then he thought of painting them with pastel colors. Even here in Qafa in a corridor, he exhibited them, marking the anniversary of Gani Bobi’s death, and he was there.

As for Mehmeti, Mehmet Behluli had some installations. One installation was dedicated to Sarajevo, April 6, 1991, when the bombing of Sarajevo began. There he made like a room, but he mainly covered it with black, as a memory, like with jackets and some old graves. It was beautiful, he had the exhibition also in Dodona. He also had some chairs, and over the chairs there some books, mostly of Stalinist communism, whatever he found, Enver Hoxha and other, there weren’t many of Enver Hoxha here, but some books and put them in tar, and had a series of paintings with tar and things. While Mak had some replies of Malevič’s paintings, a beautiful ensemble. While Ilir Deda had a space composition, do you know what it is?

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Bajri?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Bajri, yes, something it, maybe that I’m a little tired, I’m coming to my end (laughs). You have to make another session (laughs). Like this.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What did Ilir do?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Ilir had a very beautiful composition named *Përtej* [Beyond], like the exhibit, *Përtej*. You have to have that material because it's really good, I found the recording.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** What year was this opened?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In June 1997.

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** And then, it's '98.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In '89, I...

**Kaltrina Krasniqi:** Maybe not, before '98, do I remember that there was a reaction to this exhibition?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Of course, there were people against it here and there, there were reactions, some from the University, Xhevdet Xhafa attacked and had a dispute with, with Sokol. Mostly, "Why go there, in Belgrade at the occupant? Exhibit there for them and say that these are..." And, Kosovo Information Center, the famous KIC, and in newspapers, they wrote that they came here, at the time when hundreds of people here were being imprisoned and convicted, artists went to Belgrade to do it. While Belgrade was chosen like this. I proposed, for example, Subotica and Budva, just to go somewhere, Sokol and Mehmer said, "If we're going to go anywhere, let's go to Belgrade, there is more publicity there, more interest." And the content of the exhibition was relatively explosive and provocative, more provocative there, rather to her...

What do I know, we risked it. There were people even at Soros, but they wouldn't dare say anything to me, because I was like a boss, but to the artists and Soros workers, "Do you know what you're doing, where are you going? Do you know what they're going to do to you here?" They said, "We know what we are doing, we chose it ourselves, it's not like..." Exhibit here or exhibit in Belgrade, sometimes you will have to tell some stuff to them there too. Now with the logic that I said earlier, "We are going to the Serbian Parliament to tell them that we want independence," not a defensive, but... in fact, there isn't the need to always fight either with guns or... with an enemy like them maybe we would have to resist with arms, but the political war also has its different degrees of expression. What do I know, maybe we were wrong, maybe not, in essence, no.

After being elected, the LDK was founded and Ibrahim Rugova was elected chairman, sometime in February, we had an invitation, Ibrahim Rugova and me, to take a European tour, so in Vienna, Stockholm and Oslo at the invitation of the Committee of Helsinki. This visit should have taken place a little earlier, somewhere in the fall, some of them were confused... some circles there in Sweden and Norway, because I had been in contact with committees during those years through which I had also contacts with Berit Becker, an anthropologist from Oslo. She used to visit during the '80s often, she would come almost twice a year to Kosovo, and I was usually a stringer... Should we come and talk to me, and she suggested that I and Rugova be in that delegation, but Milaim Zeka or someone who had

contact with them ruined it, “Not Xeni, we need Qosja.” Then they talked, he left this visit for later in February. We embarrassed ourselves, but it’s okay.

When we went to Europe, we had a lot of meetings. The first was in Vienna, perhaps Rugova’s first visit as LDK chairman, not as the president of the Association as he represented earlier. And it was some... we had a lot of meetings, I mean, we stayed there for three, four days. The journey lasted for almost two week with the writers, but also with politicians and statesmen. It was a visit followed by media in Vienna, we had some press conferences that echoed. We also met Zoran Đinđić in Vienna, back then was more of an opposition person. We had a very private conversation, because we also were in some public tribunals together. I remember all the details, but it [his murder] was expected.

For me that visit was very very interesting, or these meetings that we had with Ibrahim Rugova, because he had a story, he would always speak first because he was an official, I was only civil society, something like that. He had like ten minutes, he had a story that he would repeat word by word, like a turntable plate, what Kosovo’s requests are, what we have done until now. And it was interesting because he would appropriate even those actions that LDK didn’t make. LDK was usually against, you saw the massive protest they would invite people to come to the streets, and they came out and controlled the situation. They were even scared of what was going to happen, but there when he was counting the League’s success, he would appropriate the, he would say, “We did this, we did that...” It was cute.

When he would be done with his speech, he would be quiet, for every question they had, he would say, “Here is Professor Maliqi, he is a sociologist and philosopher and will answer your questions.” And this impressed me, how precise it always was, almost the same always. But when we went to Stockholm, there was a political gathering, then an incident happened, we talked as much we did. Then, some Serbian extremists came and started yelling, the leader stopped the meeting, so there was no excess and so on. So, it was the first presentation of the scene, the scene had just started to be pluralized. We formed the Social Democratic Party and other parties were formed, and that’s how we introduced ourselves, that Kosovo has democratic capacities.

Then, in April was the visit to America with the American Congress, a hearing, and Rugova was a star there. Plus the circumstances made him a star, because someone notified the American Secret Service that an attempted attack is going to happen because the Serbian extremists, the Chetniks<sup>10</sup>, their organizations, were preparing to attack Ibrahim Rugova. They gave him a security of a higher profile. There were 15-20 men, all two meters tall, not even us the members of the delegation, 15-20 people, were allowed to go near him. If you went near him accidentally, they would push you away.

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<sup>10</sup> Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from četa, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

This increased Rugova's fame in Kosovo's population. When we came back, each of us said what we talked about there. We had a big meeting with diaspora after that hearing, that us and Serbs testified in front of the American Congress or Senate about Kosovo issues. Ćosić and these people were there, Rugova was from our people and so on.

There was Agim Gashi, a rhapsode, he took a text of Halil Matoshi, published it in *Zëri* with our speeches, it romanticized our visit there... There was a rhapsody called *Sheraton* because our meeting was held at Sheraton and then Agim Gashi made into a folk song with *çifteli*.<sup>11</sup> I joked and said, "We are on the legendary team," (laughs). So, it was cute, the first months of legalizing pluralistic movements. So, now we didn't only have LDK, but six-seven parties that were formed.

**Aurela Kadriu:** And how did you present the Kosovo issue? It was the first time that Kosovo was represented internationally in the 1990s.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Well, they told us what was happening. So, the repression of the '80s, mass imprisonment, but also that they started taking the autonomy with violence and the whole process was forced... when the convention was by the Assembly of Kosovo then, the neighborhood was surrounded by police, and those who were at the hall voted, the delegates voted. And then there was a violent period when they reduced and annulled Kosovo's autonomy. I mean, this happened in '89, but it was an emergency state. After that we opened up, we created some parties and the Human Rights Council. This was the first visit of a large delegation to Washington, and this visit with Rugova was more specific, at the beginning of the year in February.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can we talk about your family life, how did you meet Alisa?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** When I came back from Belgrade, so sometimes in fall '82, 1982, and I... In the beginning I didn't go out, I stayed home, read the newspaper. When I started to go out to coffee shops with some friends I had, and we walked around. Once I accidentally met some friends of my friends at Grand Hotel, outside of Hotel Grand, where the coffee shop in Zahir Pajaziti is today, that's where we met and we started hanging out. And we were just friends for a while, but then I went to a... during the summer I think, I went on a journey through the Adriatic Islands with archaeologists visiting the Greek Adriatic colonies, in that area. And I wrote a card to her from there, and when I came back, we got closer and so on.

It was not my purpose to create a family or something, but I don't know, it happened. She was a cute girl, we had a 13-year age difference. She, 22? I think, I was 35, or almost 36. My friends from Belgrade, Sylejman Kllokoqi, our famous cameraman, he used to say, "Here if you go out with a girl twice, they will say, 'Are we going to get engaged because I can't go out?'" (laughs) The circumstances were then more conservative, they did not let girls go out later than 21:00, 21:30, even in Pristina. We used to go

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<sup>11</sup> Two-string instrument with a long neck, played in Northern Albania and Kosovo, used to play folk songs and epics.

out with Alisa until late, I said, “She is emancipated, three weeks went by...” until one night, “My father told me, I’m having problems. Maybe it would be good if we got engaged.” But then I was tolerant and said, “Okay.”

**Aurela Kadriu:** Then you decided to get engaged?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, good, she was emancipated. Three weeks! And sometimes I tease her, she gets mad when I mention it, but it’s a joke that shows the reality then. She was a very good girl. There was only one problem that I was a little older, and she was too young, I said to her, “Why are you with me? Look, I’m an old man!” (laughs)

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you hang out in Kurriz in the ‘90s.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In Kurriz, in Kurriz we went out in the ‘90s, the ‘80s, actually, and in the ‘90s. Then we hung out here in Qafa, Kurriz was less popular. In the ‘80s, we used to go to Laibachu in... at the tunnel, a bit further. I don’t remember where it was exactly, but Hani I Dy Robertëve was there too, we went there in the ‘90s. Then, we went out all the time.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was Kurrizi like in the ‘80s?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was an interesting oasis. The music was mostly alternative, sometimes Yugoslav, they used to listen to Bijelo Dugme. At Laibachu, there was the, the main thing was the phase when Slovenian rock and the Laback band were really popularized. But they weren’t a big band, but like that. We went out almost every night, there were sometimes police controls, but we didn’t care then, we were younger. That part of Pristina, it was... it was connected with rock and jazz music, Western music. But there wasn’t much jazz, in that aspect, that it needed a different space. Coffee shops were small, narrow places.

It was interesting, it gave me the feeling of Sarajevo, because only in the Sarajevo of the ‘70s were there these kind of local gatherings, a little in Zagreb, Belgrade was a little different. In Yugoslavia, I knew the capitals well. In Pristina, there was something new, it was concentrated in Kurriz, at the tunnel, there were five or six places that echoed. Then, there were pizza places and things. It was very specific for Pristina in general, while the old zones, like Old Pristina or so, the *çajtore*<sup>12</sup> and Tatlis and these movies still dominated...

Then we had some restaurants a little more serious, like Restaurant Rugova. Back then they wanted more family restaurants to eat dinner or something. There were also old coffee shops for alcohol drinkers. Pristina was mixed. Later coffee shops were dominating more and more, later Image also became famous, it is one of the most interesting places to this day, but it was in Bregu i Diellit.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What about Qafa?

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<sup>12</sup> Tea shop.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Qafa then, when these buildings were built, I think in the '80s, this complex where we are now, was part of that. Then even here, there were built some, some kind of tunnel... but some restaurants started opening here. And from the center, from the '90s, and there was a time here in Qafa, in the center, there were some shops, like Rozafa, then there was Shaipi here at the Youth Kino, there was a place we used to hang out often. We switched places, also Elita in Boro Ramiz is relatively close.

But the center was occupied by Serbs in the '90s, and we passed by there rarely, it was annoying, there were no more shops where you could go and sit, even at Hotel Grand Arkan and these criminals got in, Serbian paramilitary, it wasn't exactly... Only when the foreign delegations came and stayed there because there was no better hotel, we went to meet, but the Albanian waiters at Hotel Grand would say, "Be careful now because there's a lot of policemen..." And so on.

Once I was, Joseph DioGuardi came maybe for the first time to Pristina and I scheduled a meeting with him at Hotel Grand, because that's where he was staying. He said to me, "All the others whom I called did not dare come? Only you came." "Yes," I said, "What do I know, I don't listen to them, they come and talk." And he wrote some texts. Joseph DioGuardi was the President of the American Alliance in New York. He lead Albanian lobbying at that time, until diaspora divided. Some denied it, some... He was for a period of time in the American Congress with our people, because diaspora found out he is originally from Southern Italy, from Calabria, Albanian descent. They elaborated on it a little, they gave him some information, and he remembered that his grandparents were from there. He worked a lot, he is still active in this sense.

## Part Eight

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where were you during the war?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In '99?

**Aurela Kadriu:** In '99, yes.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** In '99, I wasn't... when the bombing started I wasn't in Kosovo. A week before the bombing started, I went to Switzerland with Mahmut Bakalli, by invitation from the German Union, to explain to Albanian workers there the Rambouillet Agreement. We weren't together, he went to the place, I went to another. But we went at the same time and had the same return date, that's what we agreed on. We were in Zurich, Lusanne in meetings... and that's where the beginning of the bombings found us. I was at Lusanne that night, at 8:00 that tribunal was supposed to start, the hall was filled with people. And as we wanted to start, someone saw the news and came and said, "The bombing started!" I got pale, not that anything, but my whole family was here.

And I told Alisa to take the kids and my mother, because I was living with my mother, to go to Skopje, or Tetovo. I talked to Arbën Xhaferi, but actually Alisa had gone, but the others were here, my brother, family, sisters were all here. Alisa left a day before. While I was there, it was known that there will be an intervention or something. If Milošević and Holbrooke had negotiations, that they will allow the signing of the Rambouillet Agreement. Until the last moment, there was hope that he would sign it, but he did not sign it and I knew that there would be a bombing. I said to Alisa, “Go there!” My mother didn’t like it, she stayed to guard the house as always. But even Arbën’s family here, Arbën Xhaferi, they were also like Alisa, puzzled.

But here was the news that Macedonians were not allowed to go there. Arbën spoke to Alisa and told her, “If the Serbs let you go, I’ll fix it so you can go there,” and then we had cell phones or something, “But just report that you crossed the Serb area, then they will let you go.” They, however, left with Ali Podrimja’s family and so on. We were friends either way, our children, my son with his son, Petrit, Ali Prodimja’s son were very close friends and so. And they let some others who were from the same area pass, and then one of the Macedonians came, Arbën Xhaferi sent them, and they found shelter in Tetovo. But the rest of my family was here.

I joined them in Tetovo for more than a week, and they didn’t want to let me leave, but I was okay, I had no refugees. I had a regular line of aviation, I got off in Ohrid, but they didn’t want to let me leave, they said, “No, you can’t.” Because then there were many refugees coming back from Bllaca and beyond, but Arbën intervened again and they let me go, not just me but also another 20 people. That’s how it was. But I also knew that the Soros office in Pristina was moved to Skopje and then continued working. I wasn’t a refugee for day, but I worked as a Soros worker and moved there. Then, when the bombing stopped, Serbia surrendered, but we worked there for a month or more with refugees and so on. We came back to Pristina around July.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did you find it?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** My mother and Agon came first, and then Alisa and everyone moves here. The house was okay, a little bit... they used it, apparently the cops slept there, because in front of the house, there was a small object, where there’s now a Western Union, a shop, where a Chinese Quart was, as we used to call it, there was a police checkpoint that controlled the road. Apparently they slept in my house, they stole all the things that they could, starting from the books, at first I thought there aren’t missing any, then I saw that they took some series, you know, Dostoyevsky or Nietzsche, these kinds, someone who...

Someone who seems to know what they’re taking, or took the whole series to sell them easier, because they were worth fifty-one hundred marks, two sacks. We found the furniture and these items that had value or the technique in the basement. Where our fireplace is, instead of the fireplace, they put some wood to prepare to light it, but apparently they did not have time, they did not light it. The house was left like that, stolen. We had to start buying things all over again, furniture, blankets and all.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did they leave any messages? They used to write on walls...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, we just found blood in some rooms, but it was a neighbor's dog who was hurt, and it hid in the house, they tied it there. It was the Dedaj's dog, it was named Mollos, we heard from them that there's a dog there. Then later I discovered that also in my office at Soros, they took all my computers and disks, they were all small. Plus I had some bigger disks, that were like USBs, with a bigger capacity, they were, what do I know, one hundred kilobytes or something like this, not with gigabytes, but I kept all the text up there. I didn't find those.

Usually, I would take one of those disks when I traveled or something, then I left in a hurry and forgot to take it, I thought Alisa might have gotten them, but she didn't either. I have a... then I found them, they only threw the letters, and I had almost all of them, newspapers, writings, I found like 95% of them but only as files, because I started very early on to work with the computer. I don't have them between '95 and '99, but from '90 and earlier, up until '94-'95, I found them on some big copy disks, they were like plastic. I barely found them because they were on the bookshelves, they did not find them. I found a computer at *Zëri*, an old one that was not being used, it took me a week to load the texts of that time somewhere else.

Those from '95-'99, I don't have them in an electronic form. I have to scan them somehow and put them. Lately, I've been working on making an archive of my writings, there a lot, I mean there are duplicates, but there almost 4000. Maybe two-thirds are original texts, but those four years are missing, to have a personal archive. Actually, I put them in that file and organized them, I had like series, but they're messy. A big drawer full of stuff, someone has, if I don't get to fix them myself, it's good, if not, they will be left like that.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I wanted to ask you before getting to the war period, I want to know when did you move to the house at Club M?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** We always lived there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Oh, you always lived there...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, since '65.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Ah okay, I don't know why I thought you moved...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, we lived there. When I came for the last time in Pristina, in 1964, temporarily for a year, a year and a half, we lived there where the *pishat* are, I think it was called Moše Piadem then, now I don't know what it's called. But, then we moved because my father was a minister or something, and he wanted to have a house... they were considered like state villas. Actually, in the '90s, when all these buildings were privatized, everybody stayed to them for one hundred, two hundred, fifty, three hundred marks. We got the verdict that we have to pay 150 marks, that's how

they valued them based on when the house was built, for how many years we paid rent. They were all counted and we had to pay 150 marks.

Then came the decision that these state villas, so those of Fadil Hoxha, Xhavit Nimani at the center of them all, they cannot be privatized, but they will give us apartments instead. But this was in the '90s, it was a mess here. Then they didn't even have apartments, they were all privatized and we stayed there, what do I know. After the war, it took us about seven, eight, twelve years until we turned it into private property, and lawyer and the expert who valued the house then cost a lot. I made the lawsuit the '90s, that was more expensive than the countervalue I paid in euros, I still bought the house for 150 euros. The lawyer and all that cost me 2,500 or 3,000 euros because they represented me during those years in court hearings, then turned it into family property.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was that neighborhood like, do you remember the transformation...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The neighborhood was like this, it didn't change much. It started changing after 2000. It was good, we had the first block in front. Until the beginning of the '80s, that Chinese Quart wasn't there, those stores and stuff. There was the gas station, the road to Gërmia was relatively busy, but narrow. It got smaller and smaller because Pristina widened, from Velania's side and, what's the name of the one in front... Then there were private houses built on the road up there to Gërmia at Vneshta, but it was more quiet, what do I know. And they cleaned it every night in the '60s, '60, and during the summer, when I came here, it was relatively quiet. They cleaned it every night except during the winter when they didn't need to, it either snowed or rained. But it was very interesting during the summer, I used to stay up late at night, I liked it, there was not a lot of noise. Sometimes you could hear youngsters yelling when they would come back late, but I liked that atmosphere.

Our street had linden trees. It smelled really good during spring. Even now, we have a big linden tree in front of the house. We also had a big field in the backyard, where my father planted pears, apples, also corn and strawberries. And we always had things like onion and parsley. He was... he always worked on the yard in the afternoon when he came back from work, he liked manual labor. I sometimes helped him, but I didn't care much for it, I read and wrote more.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember the construction of Hotel Grand?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** No, Hotel Grand was already built, I don't remember that construction because I would come here for a day, or two. These big buildings like Boro Ramiz, Hotel Grand started getting built in the '70s, but... I just saw that it's developing, it's getting better somehow. The [national] Library was built later, the shopping mall, all in the '70s, all these representative objects were built in the '70s, because earlier it was more of a provincial architecture, like the central street, it's still there.

The only object that was better was Božur, and some building there, but they were mostly residential buildings, maybe a store here and there. Later, I saw that they were like a pattern of some provinces of Russia, that's what it seemed like to me. Where the Committee is now, the central street now, that's where *korzo* used to be. *Korzo* is in the pattern of the beginning of the century, in Italy and everywhere.

And in the evening, at 19:00-19:30, we went for walks. Pristina had a wider sidewalk for Albanians, and on the other side, Serbians had a more narrow sidewalk, because they were fewer, and in the middle, those who were in neither side walked, mixed.

**Aurela Kadriu:** During what years was it separated, or was it always like this?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** It was like that until late, yes, until the '90s. Then in the '90s, it all got ruined because we didn't go there anymore.

**Aurela Kadriu:** They took it all?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** They took it all, but they were also scared when they walked there, because it seemed too big for them, they weren't used to it. But I didn't go there at all, I went directly to Kurriz or Qafa, we would skip the center.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like to find alternative streets in the city because it wasn't that developed?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** This alternate route we took during the day, because it was shorter going Grand Hotel or somewhere, it's not like we completely... but during the night, they would gather there, more safely, or they had some coffee shops there. In the '90s, sometimes even those of us who were crazy about coffee shops would still go to Serbian coffee shops because they were better than ours, you know. It happened, what do I know. Especially these who went after girls, it was easier. Even though we were *zabrana* [forbidden], you know, we separated from Serbs, but there were no open conflicts, but politics separated us. Those who were friends from before and had no judgments used to go to these places, not in all the places. For example, where Zanzi Bar is, there was a Serbian club, and I never liked it, the design and everything, it was very primitive.

After the war, we went there several times and I complained, it was too Cyrillic, you know, not in the negative sense, I have nothing against it, but a very distinguished design. For example, what characterized the artistic or design sense, we could not build anything outside, only outside. The coffee shops that opened in Qafa and Kurriz, and anywhere in the city, they followed a world trend. And they were more modern than local Serbians, they didn't have much taste, or a completely different taste and materials. Our designers, our architects followed as much as they could, they went to fairs or something. They were different, our scene was more creative, even though they pushed us into the margins, into the margins, it was much more creative, and you could see that in art, and activities in the theatre.

The whole Albanian movement was a wonder, it was spontaneous and had a will to show, as much as they could. From not just the culture, but sports also, crafts, and like this, there were a lot of small traders, and big ones, that in a way kept Kosovo alive. There were a lot of, how do I say, not only economic interest, but it was some kind of act of resistance, if I'm not wrong in 1992-'93, when there was the biggest inflation and the biggest crisis in Yugoslavia, they put sanctions on Yugoslavia, there was a shortage of articles. Our traders were smart and brought goods here, for example, even Serbs

were complaining, from Vojvodina, about flour or sunflower oil, and they made bigger stocks here, rather than they did in Serbia.

There were private traders here that could corrupt the directors of the factories in Vojvodina, especially the flour ones. They would give them 1500 marks, they gave them flour. It was very interesting in '92, for example, Sali Bana, a popular trader from Peja, together with people from Dukagjini, and Ekrem Lluka, he made a contract with almost two thousand private traders in Kosovo to open stores in their houses, small stores. They would supply them with goods, the trucks went, and they worked and sold, cigarettes or whatever was needed. That's why people called him Sali Banana, because that year they bought so many bananas and they were so cheap, families could buy them very cheap, you could buy kilograms on the streets or anywhere.

They bought a ship, and some stocks with the ship and then they brought them. They bought them immature, and they would get ripe in the meantime, in the period of that big crisis, it's said we went through it with bananas, but there were also other things. It was that kind of inflation that it was worse for Serbs, rather than Albanians. And everyone had someone abroad, family who would send stuff from there, or they had businesses here, they all kept marks or francs in reserve, or more serious currencies. While Serbs who worked in the state section, professors or something, they took their salary in dinars, inflation would bring their life down in a day. Sometimes you had to carry big bags of dinars because the inflation was just like the one in Germany, maybe worse. A mark was one hundred billion, or something like that. It was staggering, within a day...

I know once, a little later than '94, we decided to publish, Pristina's Soros, Ekrem Murtezaj made a philosophy dictionary, manuscripts, around two thousand pages and I said, "Let's publish it." Even though it was prepared earlier, in the communist phase. And he started to reduce it. We told him, "Remove this, shorten it..."

**Aurela Kadriu:** When was this, '95?

**Shkëlezen Maliqi:** It was '94-'95. And we prepared them and we went to get the money there, they said, "We don't have marks..." It was marks then, "We don't have currencies, but if you want, we have some dinars..." he said, I was with people from Dukagjini with work or something in Belgrade. They wanted Soros to help them buy a printing house, not a printing house, but a machine, a printing machine or something. They tried to win a grant or something to help them. But that didn't happen, they said, "Okay, it can help us," they said, "Can we give you dinars because we have it?" I asked them, "Do you take dinars?" "Yes, because we exchange them to marks immediately." And they gave us two of those, or three, plastic bags with money.

We didn't have a place to put it, we didn't even put it in the trunk, we put them at my feet in the car. And sometimes police would stop us, and we thought if they asked we'd say, "We went to buy a car in Belgrade, but we didn't find one." But they didn't ask, they would open the trunk, "What do you have here?" "Nothing." "Do you have weapons?" "We don't." And nothing, they got the job done too, the

moment we came here, we exchanged them to marks because there were people we did exchanges everywhere.

## Part Nine

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** The value of the project was maybe twenty thousand marks, and when they gave them in dinars, it was, what do I know. It was a weird time. And then we would organize... my friends had clubs and these, Hani i Dy Robertëve was opened later as a restaurant, not in Kurriz, but that part there, what is it called?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Santea...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Santea, at Santea. Santea was the first shop there, then Fadil Dragaj and Merita opened that restaurant in the basement. It was good, diplomats would there for, it was like a meeting center. Then we... Fadil was our friend, sometimes we would go out stay 'til morning, until late, and when there was a police hour or something, we would stay 'til morning. Then we had a more close friend circle, but they all were... Arbën Xhaferi had like a villa or something like an atelier of his wife's in Hajvalia, Violeta Xhafera, she was a painter, but she went with the children to Oslo, Norway, the moment war started in Slovenia. Their son was grown up, to get him put into the army, and she couldn't stand it here, so Arbën was left alone.

We went to that *hacienda* [farm] he had in Hajvalia, Pacolli was his neighbor when he built that big house at the entrance of Hajvalia. We would organize there... we would give like five marks each, we would cook meat, and there was a big hall there, there was a ping-pong table, but we liked breaking the bottles, you know, then the next day we would clean it up. A little, sometimes we would even say, what do I know, "Occupation seems good" (laughs). You had to have some kind of...

We often lived in fear, some kind of, exactly in that building, in Arbën Xhaferi's *hacienda* we prepared there some, some, we worked. For example, for like a week to prepare the establishment of the Democratic Forum of Kosovo in '90. There were the representatives of all the parties, Fehmi Agani, Hivzi Islam from the village party, with some others, Blerim Shala from the Parliamentary Party, Veton Surroi, was still more with *UJDI* or something. So we prepared it a little... I think I mentioned it earlier about making that Parliament of Kosovo in relative proportional representation. So we worked once before and we had the comfort of sitting like human beings, drink a little, pass time.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did your life continue after war? What did you decide to do?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** After the war, first I had to leave Soros, not immediately, but after the war and during the war, immediately after the war, from Macedonia, from Skopje and Tetovo. we went to a meeting in Budapest with Soros. And George Soros told me that we'll have to see what we do, we were

still a branch of Yugoslavia's Belgrade. When we met Soros, he said, "NATO occupied you, right? Now you can make Soros, the independent branch of the Open Society organization, Kosovo has to be independent from Serbia." So, the decision was taken. Then they sent a few people, started organizing something.

I was second in the hierarchy, Luan Shllaku was first. Then when some people who gave consultations came, they told me to prepare the new board, and then assigned me as a member of that board. And they assigned me to do a project, to choose what to work on and give like a 25 thousand dollar scholarship. I did not need to work, but just a board member and finish that project. I chose a topic of Albanian nationalism, I worked for a year, but they said it had to stop after a year... you take the scholarship, but you're not a member of the board anymore, but you're free. And they said that the Gani Bobi Center that we had, which was part of Soros, they said, "We'll make a spin-off [English], so they can become independent." Someone else was leading it at the time, Astrit Salhiu, they gave him means to buy some computers and open an office, and that's what they did.

I realized that there, since at the old Soros I had a direct connection with the founder of Yugoslavia's Soros, who was Sonja Licht, my friends, the rapport was ruined. Now you know, when someone wants to remove you in an elegant way, they make you an ambassador or give you something... I wasn't interested. After the war, I was hired as a correspondent for *Radio i Evropës së Lirë* [Radio Free Europe] from Prague. For a year, I was here chief of correspondence. Later, even that job seemed hard, but I worked on other things.

But then I came back, then from '94, I was part of the publishing house Dukagjini and I published many books and series of philosophy, sociology, **kolana's** books, *Fryma* [Wind], and a **kolanë** with literature and some special publications. I was there until 2005-2006, but then when Astrit Salhi became vice director of RTK. Then, I went back to Gani Bobi, and I did research, polls, media projects and so on. Until 2010, 2011, 2012, we were relatively successful, there were a lot of funds.

I worked in these fields, and I wrote for the newspaper. First for *Zëri*, I wrote [for the newspapers] in the '90s also, especially for the daily. And immediately after the war, in 1999, I started for about six months, when daily *Zëri* started, I wrote a short column everyday, it was titled "Question Mark." But when six months went by, for those six months, I said, "Pay me as much as you have, it doesn't matter. After six months, we'll contract a price." Then they paid me, for example, thirty marks. And when six months went by I said, "Let's talk about it." They said, "No, there's nothing to talk about it." They didn't want to raise it. I said, "Okay, then I won't write anymore." And like that we separated.

Then Baton, Baton Haxhiu became editor-in-chief of the *Koha Ditore* [Daily Time] and he asked me to write for them. I wrote for them, for about a year or two, then they fired him, and I left too. Then, later we founded, I was one of the founders of *Express*, Petrit Selimi was director in the beginning, then Baton Haxhiu again. While two of them were there, I was with them, later I wrote sometimes, but no.

At one point I was editor of culture and of *Express's* columns, but I always had two-three projects at the same time. In 2003-2004, we started the *Missing Identity* project about contemporary art, but

except the art courses I had with the students, I edited an art magazine called *Arta*, around twelve issues. So I was active, I wrote for catalogs and things, for exhibits continuously.

And I published two series of the magazine *MM*, we started in the '90s, eight issues were published 1995-1998, then I stopped. Afterward an attache from the French Embassy wanted to help us with that series, we published it for about three years. First, they wanted to publish it as, like a formal newspaper of a bigger format, something like the *New York Review of Books*, that kind of quality, but as a format... But it wasn't very successful. Then we went back to the magazine format. Later *ProHelvetia* gave me a grant for four issues, so I also published a few issues there. Then I stopped because there were no more funds. So I applied at the Ministry [of Culture], they never helped us, so...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What topics did *MM* address?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** *MM* was a mixed magazine of philosophy, sociology, art, literature, everything. And in the '90s when I started this, I was never editor-in-chief, but I was a producer, I was always... Then I thought that in each field we have three, four, five people who write well, to summarize everything, and it was like a postmodern open concept, a little poetry, prose, translations, and there was always... I remember, in the '90s we published issue two to eight with Albania's editorial office. When their Soros saw the first issue they said, "We want to help you." So they created an editorial office with Bashkim Shehu, Lani, Piro Misha and a Qapojev... And like this, they prepared a part of it, we did the rest, and it was good, it was that magazine after 2000, I took some collaborators there, I collected some texts, but we did not continue the collaboration. I was all over the place with jobs, and I never concentrated only on one thing, maybe it was wrong, I don't know.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Does, I'm interested in one more thing, does the approach change, does some kind of threshold mark the war where your approach to writing changes?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** My approach... So I was very active in politics, in the first period, when the plural scene and in the '80s, I affected the freedom of Kosovo's discourse, so there wouldn't be complexes to Belgrade, you know. My approach was more, to say, understandable or more... what I talked about earlier. My viewpoint was that, if you want to fight Albanian nationalism, you can't fight Serbian nationalism, which is more dangerous than the Albanian one, like this. This passed to the Yugoslav context or something. They couldn't accuse me of being like the irredentists or something. But for a long time, some people who had Serbian nationalism tendencies but were more normal defended me, they said, "No, Maliqi had an intellectual analyst stand." They wouldn't put me in the same line with the Marxist-Leninist groups.

And I didn't say that Kosovo should join Albania and things like this. I might have said it privately, but for example, in an interview in the '90s in a book that a Serbian journalist published with the title, *I asked Albanians what they want, they said, Republic if it's possible. Pitaoh sam Albance šta žele, republiku ako može*. Like that he revised a little. In that interview, I said that I didn't even think of being a nationalist, when I was younger, to join Kosovo and Albania, because I grew up in a communist family, anti-Enverist and I didn't think about it. But, when I read at the beginning of '80s and so, those attacks

against Albanians, those accusations that Albanians want a republic because they want to join with Albania or something, when I thought about it, then I said, “Why not? Why not join?” Because the idea was that if you made, Serbia, made those discourses, this was it. What was the question because I forgot...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did war mark a threshold where...

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Yes, I said then I was deep in politics like this, but it wasn't, politics isn't my vocation. For example, when I formed *UJDI*, I didn't think of myself first, but for Veton to be the head. Because I saw he was a more ambitious person, politics is in his blood, because I didn't... I'm not for politics. Then I realized also in other situations, for example, in the '90s, once with one of the Albanian generals from Zagreb, we went to **Zara** in some meetings... I think that even Croatia wasn't completely independent, but we went to some meetings and took part in the gathering in **Zara** and now I had to talk, you know.

I couldn't even speak how I was supposed to, I started developing a thesis to oppose Serbs, but the thesis was a little weird, I didn't know how to articulate it in front of people, they were yelling, I said, “Albanians are the oldest nation in the Balkans, one of the oldest among Greeks, and youngest by age, the oldest and the youngest.” But I said, “They're like a rare flower that has to be protected.” An aesthetic argument. They stared blankly, they didn't know how to think about it. And I heard some *ustash*, Croats who said, “Professor, don't be afraid, talk, hit those *chetniks*,” I didn't know how, I'm not comfortable with that discourse. The same thing happened to me when we were in New York, at a hearing in Washington where the gathered diaspora, we called it the Symposium on the Kosovo Issue.

When I got into a hall, they lined us up, we were like 30 people, Qosja and all, I don't know if Rugova was there, I think so, Repishi was there, an Albanian scholar. He was more normal than the others, all the others were also patriots, I'm not saying they weren't, but he also talked... I started developing a thesis there, because then they asked for, “Free Kosovo, free Kosovo.” And, “Kosovo Republic.” I said, I don't know why I tried to develop a thesis, “Because republic is not the most we should ask for,” because Yugoslavia still existed, “Maybe this can't end with republic, but with joining [Albania].” Again I had the idea that that's how processes with Serbia were going, if Yugoslavia dissolves, then what?

But I couldn't finish it because they wouldn't let me, in every case *uuuu* [onomatopoeia] yelling, “Free Kosovo, free Kosovo!” Now I stopped and said, “I am tired, I can't speak any longer.” For me, it wasn't, I'm not the type who can work like that, I am the type to ask, answer, not knowing how to answer in a small group. This didn't fit me. I know how to make analysis, but I can't make decisions or become a leader or something. So I didn't have ambition in this sense. And when I started to engage, I always looked for ways to avoid politics. Like that time in the '70s that I said I avoided that first policies of the Yugoslav regime, in the monasteries dealing with the Middle Ages and so on. In the '90s, I also wanted to deal with art, culture, it was the same even after 2000.

I always had to deal with polls to survive, sometimes they would put me on the top of the agenda when we were, for example, in 2005 in Albania, somehow the dice fell on me to do the first exit polls in

Albania. Erion Veliaj is to blame a little for this, indirectly, not directly. Erion Velija came here a year before, I met him sometime in 2004. He was looking for someone who does polls, he was interested in someone here who makes exit polls. He came back from America where he saw how important polls are, he was looking for somebody, I told him, I said, "We can do it, but we have never done it before." And then he connected to Top Channel in Albania, and he convinced them that they have to make an exit poll, they advertised it.

The competitor, Albania's Klan, Alkesandër asked Baton, he said, "Top [Channel] wants to make a poll." They took Gallup from Albania, some organization, "Is there anyone else who can do it for us?" Baton said, "Yes, Shkëlzen, and those who make..." We were researching and they called us. Plus in 2004, when Ilir Meta from the Socialist Party took us, when he separated, Baton convinced him to do the first research, to tell him where he is and how much will he win in the election.

When we researched, he was very disappointed, "You're not right..." Because he had taken one third of the party, in numbers. He said, "I have 25 thousand members of the party that passed from the Socialist Party. Which he had 70, 80 thousand members, and he counted each member of the family as six votes, he'd say, "I have 200 votes." While it was very low in our research, it isn't automatic. He was very mad, but those were the results after the elections. Now, in the meantime, we worked on two other research projects like that. We had an idea of what was happening in Albania, and some time in May they called us from Klan and said, "Can you make an exit poll for us, like the one they're advertising?" We said, "Yes..." And we started preparing, and it was all okay. Top [Channel] didn't do it, they gave up, and so on.

Now Erion had organized them, and we continued doing it until the penultimate day, when it was all ready on the penultimate, the leaders, Klan had three founders, one was French, one was Albanian and Aleksandër, the director of Klan, Frangaj, Aleksandër Frangaj. The penultimate day, they argued with each other, "We should, we shouldn't." [Fatos] Nano's Secret Services were there all the time, "It shouldn't happen, because they want to do Ukraine's scenario, declare Sali Berisha as winner." Nano was in power on the television, then people changed it.

We didn't know what was happening, we just said, "We can do it." Then they decided and told us in the afternoon, "Okay." We had it all prepared and we did it. We worked all day, we collected the results at 16:00 and told them approximately what the trends are, they said, "Okay." You could see that the Democratic Party was winning, they said, "It's okay," they said, "We can't publish it for all the places. Can we publish it just for Tirana?" "Okay..." I said, "the results are yours." Tirana was worse because they were all blue, he was convincingly winning, he won only two zones, it used to be with zones back then. And we were right that Sala [Nano] didn't win, the power changed and things. But it was very interesting, later sometimes we would be right, sometimes we wouldn't.

Now we did things like that here too, but this activity was simply to make money to school my kids because I didn't have a permanent salary. A little from newspapers, a little like this. But you would gain a lot from these projects. I also worked for Bujar Bukoshi's New Party in 2003, time after time. So

we would research in the beginning, tell them where they stand, what they can improve, things like that. But, not a stable job or so.

I had that house so residency wasn't a problem, but sometimes I would earn a little more. But simply I was trying to stay away from politics. And once when Ora called in 2007 to help them get into list, I accepted. So in 2007 Ylber Hysa from Ora said, "Do you want to be part of the list, to help them or something?" I said, "Okay." But I accepted under one condition, if they can and if they get into the parliament, I wanted to represent civil society. Maybe it was idealistic or something, but good.

We weren't successful, we didn't win, we didn't pass the census because Surroi and they made a mistake when they asked for five percent, they thought they would win more than five. I knew from research that there were around three, four percent. Ylli Hoxha would always come when they voted on those surveys, "You're wrong, we are very..." "Maybe..." Now with these small parties, we can't always know because their votes are concentrated, I said, "To work more in the field, to defend our votes because maybe you have those votes. But you have to defend those 200-300 that you win in a town, we have to defend those because they erase them. They don't count those." And we didn't pass.

The last time I wanted to get into politics even later when Edi Rama called me to be his consultant of the region, it seemed interesting to me because I was thinking of living in Tirana. I always liked Tirana, but he didn't meet all the conditions he promised like having a second salary, because the salary was small, and also find me an apartment while I'm there. So with the 750 euros I got, I had to pay for the apartment and like this. I couldn't do it. I had some savings, but I also had some problems with my leg, some surgeries, and those savings that I mostly suffered with some translations and these kinds of jobs to survive. Then I came back here because it is easier for me to live here. Politics wasn't my biggest ambition, but I became an analyst so to say, but it isn't my main passion.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Is there anything you want to add, that we haven't asked, or that you haven't mentioned?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** There are a lot of things, I don't know.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Something that is very important?

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** I don't what is important... I don't know, there are a lot of things. This is the problem with me, when someone interviews me and knows what to ask me, or whatever interests you. I can answer, but I can't remember anything to say.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I don't have any other questions, thank you for your time.

**Shkëlzen Maliqi:** Very good, it's probably enough. If you have anything more, we can continue, but maybe there's no need. I think we covered everything more or less.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, more or less, unless you have something more. Thank you very much.

