

INTERVIEW WITH XHEMAJL PETROVCI

Pristina | Date: November 28 and 29, 2018

Duration: 179 minutes

Present:

1. Xhemajl Petrovci (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Aurela Kadriu: Shall we start... maybe just tell us something about your early childhood memories. How do you remember your childhood?

Xhemajl Petrovci: My childhood... As a kid, we stayed in the neighborhood all the time, we played with other children. I know that we simultaneously learned Albanian, Turkish and Serbian. There were also Gorani people¹ in the neighborhood, so I also learned the Gorani language. I learned the Romani language the same way, because they used to come by here, and then we thought... I thought it was interesting. I always wanted to communicate in their own language, for example, the Romani language or Turkish, Serbian, and what do I know.

And of course I remember during my childhood what was really hard for us as children and those who left and moved to Turkey, with their family... horse drawn carriages, *režnika*² were called those on the side, some clothes and things like this. Some things that they could not take with them, I know that they left to the neighbors, those of us who stayed here and I am convinced that the Gërguri family that lived here, here in front of us, none of them could speak Turkish. So they didn't go because they were Turkish, but surely the pressure from different things took its course.

We almost suffered the same fate, we got what we used to call, *visika*,³ so they sent us visas from Turkey. That happened around '55- '56, but our luck, my brother was a soldier and when he came back from the army, he said, "We're not going!" So we decided not to go. Otherwise, in this land all of us, eight children were born. Of course, the house has changed. Of all of us, five have lived quite a long life, I mean, three of my sisters were gone early on. I mean, they died, one of them was five-six years

¹ The Gorani or Goranci are a Slavic Muslim ethnic group inhabiting the Gora region - the triangle between Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. They number an estimated 60,000 people, and speak a transitional South Slavic dialect, called *Goranski*. The vast majority of the Gorani people adhere to Sunni Islam.

² Serb.: *režnika*, the term refers to the director, in this context the speaker uses it to refer to the parts of the carriage on the side that keep the vehicle on its track.

³ A type of travel document issued to migrate to Turkey.

old, the other one two-three years old, like this. Who knows what kind of diseases they had back then, but they were, I mean, earlier on. While the five of us, three brothers and two sisters, we were all alive till recently.

My oldest brother died when he was 51 years old. While this year my older sister, and my older brother died, our age was close. And as children, how you get attached, brothers with one another, but also the fights between us in minutes and things like this. Now, of all of us, just me and a sister who lives in England are still alive. My oldest sister was in America, when my brother got sick she came, he died, and she died after him. This, this is a story, I mean, my family's story.

My father and my mother... my father lived over one hundred years, we don't know exactly, 101-102 or 99-98. My mother, she also died quite early, after my brother died, she didn't even try anymore. It was really hard on her, and since my brother's death she never smiled again. And we used to tell her, "You have the rest of us, should we..." And it's true that he was the oldest, and she loved him very much. He was an intellectual, he was a director for many years in Kosovo, Pristina. Ee, so they brought up five children quite... after them.

Now I... I also have five children, four girls and a boy. You saw my son [addresses the interviewer]. My oldest daughter lives here in Pristina, my youngest daughter as well, the middle ones, so the second and third daughter have lived in Germany since '93. I went there in 1993. I went there with my family as three people, and we came back as four people in '86. I didn't like living abroad. So, there was a crisis when I went, but it was the same when I came back, so I knew, but I couldn't stay there any longer. We experienced war here...

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell me how you remember this neighborhood as a child, where were you...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well, when we came there at the beginning, at the bakery was Shyqri Begu's house. It was a two-story house, but back then it seemed like a palace to us. Even with them... to see things at that time I know I got in front of the house... you see we are on the down side. I used to go in front of my house and I used to see three-four mosques when the lamps used to turn on back then, and now you can't see any of the mosques, which means all the houses were one-story houses. In '69 we built this house. My brother was financially better off, while my father and my other brother worked and built this house, but mostly my older brother. So, in this neighborhood, this house was more like... this and the one they used to call Pasjaqa's house, and now our houses are lower than others... like this.

Then, as a kid I remember, near Shyqri Begu's house they built... I found it there, I mean I remember it, I don't remember when it was built, but it is built with bricks, it's there even today. The police of Pristina used to be there, I don't remember that, I remember when Pristina's boxing club was there, and the club was called "Milicioner," meaning the police. There were Albanian boxers then others,

there were also Serbs, and Roma and like this. The boxing club in that building was turned into a dormitory, some students used to sleep there, but very shortly.

After that it was The Office for the Publication of Texts of the Republic of Serbia, the branch in Pristina, that's how it was called. Then it was the Provincial Body for Publishing Texts. In the meantime, I don't really remember the years, the Media Palace was built and the Provincial Body for Publishing Texts moved there, and some people who worked there stayed, so like this, the Municipality took it there because it is quite a big building.

Aurela Kadriu: Is it the one at the beginning of the street?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, one the left side...

Aurela Kadriu: The one that was with bricks, and the upper part was white, I think it was like that...

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, no it's entirely built with bricks, burnt bricks. It is one of the old buildings, I mean, in this part, Shyqeri Begu's house was burnt and flattened, and they built the two buildings that are there. They were turned into the solidarity buildings, that's how they called them, they used to give them away. There were also those, like this. That is on that side, on the other side {shows with his hands} the Kacallari's Fountain used to be. That object is somewhere there. You couldn't drink that water, just like the fountain at the Katër Llulla on the Bajram Kelmendi Street, there was Katër Llulla, meaning, four springs, there were four pipes with water, and there was a stone trough which cows and horses used to drink from. And it isn't... It wasn't drinking water for people, you could wash things, but mainly it was for animals.

Çeklik's fountain was a good one. It is at the intersection at Dodona Theatre. Dodona Theater was a house of culture, it used to be called *Dom Kulture* [House of Culture] in Serbian. A few activities were held there, some... people from the neighborhood were more active. Ibrahim Krajkova's brother was there, I forgot his name, but I know that Ibrahim played roles there with Ramush Berisha and others that were involved in such activities. Sometimes even concerts would be held there, small concerts, not like... like today. Ibrahim then continued with comedy and these things, while Ramush withdrew. It was a mixed neighborhood, but mostly, even today, are people who were born and raised here, I mean, there are very few from... who changed. Mostly some Serbian houses, who were Roma, who were most likely involved in war issues, they fled during the war, so like this.

From here, from Çeklik or from here where you would go to was called Bregu [The Hill]. This hill was a little like a forest, before going to Taukbahçe on the right side. It was like a forest, I mean, there were all kinds of trees. I know at the time most people would go there during the summer, make *fli*,⁴ and stuff, some would go to Taukbahçe, some even further, to Gërrmia, I remember that people used to hang out

⁴ A traditional dish in Albanian cuisine consisting of crepe-like layers cooked with cinders under a lid.

there, I mean, it was common at the time. We had a lot of fun in these places. And I think that the Kacallar neighborhood, so Katër Llullat, Kacallari, this part here is quite old, I don't know which one is older, and at that time the Muhaxheri neighborhood was also mentioned. There were, those are pretty old now too, but the beginning of the Muhaxheri neighborhood was at the mosque, at the roundabout, now it is like a city on its own there.

While here beneath the memorial, on the right side, Tophane, that was also an old neighborhood, and completely on the right side, the road to Pudjeva, not Kodra e Trimave, but on the flat side, it was called Hani i Dilit, so, at the end of the Posderka. That part was called Posderka. Llap's Mosque and like this...

Aurela Kadriu: What does *posderka* mean?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Prishtevka river...a?

Aurela Kadriu: What does *Posderka* mean?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Neighborhood. *Posderka* means "river" in Turkish, but I don't understand, I can't connect it.

Aurela Kadriu: Probably near the river...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Something like that. The Prishtevka river was there, here where we are, Velusha was very close, and they eventually joined together, at Lakrishe, on the left side, and the one on the right side, they would join somewhere in Fushë Kosova, but down there, so in Vetërnik on the right side. And I that from... This building, Elektro Kosova, that's here... everything around there were gardens.

Aurela Kadriu: Where Elektro Kosova is, right?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, from there, even Gradić Pejton [Peyton Place] as we call it, that too was a garden. That, downward from the building of Elektro Kosova, there too was a huge garden that belonged to the Army, there at the Lakrishtja... you know Lakrishtja and to the left there was a garden, it was private property, but this other one belonged to the Army, this... there was also a White Spring, near Elektro Kosova that street...

Aurela Kadriu: The White Spring, the King's Spring as they call it now...

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, no, the White Spring, the White Fountain was what it was called before, it had a lot of water, even after the war, it was there, I don't know what happened to it. Up until... we used to

raise animals, cows and sheep, someone would raise sheep, they mostly grazed where the Adem Jashari Barracks are, that part there used to be called *Kuptim*, or *Kuptin*, with “N”, something like that. Maybe I’m wrong. I remember one of the shepherds, I mean, there was also Sabri Fejzullahu, Sabri was behind the bazaar, so, *Posderka*, because there was the river which was covered, I know that *Posderka* was that way.

And we often, the kids, took them to Taukbahçe, or to *Kuptin*, or often even to *Matiqan*, but *Matiqan* was always empty. Because as kids, as shepherds, as grass, you had to eat something, to have something green, do you understand me? Here it was a little more empty, there wasn’t even water where *Mati* is. On *Taukbahçe*’s side there was, while on *Kupini*’s side there was mostly a garden and there was an orchard at the KPC, but it wasn’t there for long, I don’t know what they did, the Army took it, like this.

And I remember the train to Fushë Kosova had a few tunnels when... no, not tunnels but like bridges. And as kids we used to go underneath to hear how it passed over, like this, and the road was...The bridge was at *Lakrishte* from *Kuptin*. We used to let them free, because usually when animals are full, they go straight home, and we used to go back playing, like this, everybody’s cow would come home, two cows, three cows, depending, sometimes I used to have two.

Where *Grand Hotel* is located, it was a bit like a hill, of course, as it is today, but back then from *Grand* and onwards a pit, a big pit, right to the end where *Rilindja* is... leather was reworked in that area, and it had a terrible smell, you cannot imagine it. At the top, in front of *Grand*, there was a small marketplace that sold fruits. And the street that took you to the old shopping mall, somewhere there the road would connect to up there, near the park, I would take it to get home.

Gërmia always... a big park of Kosovo’s population, I mean, yes also Kosovo’s, for May 1-2 used to go to *Gërmia*. Back then with *saç*,⁵ and stuff, and like this, because they cooked and took it. While on *St. George’s day*, *Roma*, but also others used to believe in something, they used to go to, to *Sultan Murat’s Türbe*. I remember back then there used to be horse-drawn vehicles, not cars, I don’t know how, and the horse-drawn vehicles would carry people but there were also horse-drawn vehicles designated for carrying people, it was a little more bent down, and it fit ten-fifteen people and took them there.

They used to go early for *St. George’s day*.⁶ And as a kid I remember that for *St. George’s day* we would go to... to find nettle plants, to pluck them and hand them on the door. On this side, on the other side of the door, how do I know, at the yard door, but also inside. And your mother was supposed to wash you with those nettle plants, to spray water on you from the mill, do you understand, like this some, some... There used to be some stuff.

⁵ *Saç* is a spherical metal lid used for baking.

⁶ *Saint George* is also known as *Herdeljez (Erdelezi)*, the combination of the names of two Muslim prophets, *Hizir* and *Ilyas*, who met every May 5 (*Saint George’s day*), to welcome the end of winter.

Aurela Kadriu: Was there a mill near you?

Xhemajl Petrovci: The mill was... Where the Technical School is, not the first road on the left, but on the second road was the river, so from Kolovica the river flowed where the mill was, it used to be called Bankovic's Mill. Otherwise, that mill was last owned by Latifi-Godanci, it was Godanci's, and then his sons were clockmakers, some... all kinds. Then it closed, when the river was covered up. Then they were compensated, all of the people whose yards were close to the canal, each bought the part in front, and they were compensated, and like this.

And there were mills later, but of course electrical, there was Tortoshi's Mill, here in Tophane where Bahollët had a bigger working place. On the other side, leading you to the cemetery, that narrow street, there was one at the beginning on the left side, the other one on the right side. I remember a mill, but it was probably the state-owned, where *Tre Sheshirat* [Three Hats] are now, and the management had started, Novoberda, and I always remember some big rock there on the front. Because who do I know maybe if the one inside would get damaged they would put this one, this is how I think now.

And of course there were wooden wagons, and iron, how would I know, with horses, with cows, with... that either brought the flour, or was waiting to take it, like this, they brought the grains to grind. That was also a little bit more... And the Army was from the Bank of Ljubljana, the one in front of Hotel Grand, where the rectorate and everything is uphill. There were some horse barns, how do I know, but they were like barracks.

So there were barracks, that later when the universities were opened, they were turned into dormitories. Because one of the buildings... the rectorate is also like the heritage of that army. Even as a kid, I remember that we were always scared of the police, we were scared... of the police and the army.

Aurela Kadriu: When would you take your cows there?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, and as a shepherd you wake up at 7:00, for example, you take the cows grazing and you eat, but as a kid until 12:00, you get hungry again, and on the way back home, we used to eat a little cabbage here, a tomato there, do you understand, other people's gardens, you didn't have your own. But we were in danger from the Army, and it was around Gradic Pejton, that's how it used to be called, I don't know whose garden it was, a very tough Roma. We never got in there, if we did it would be a big deal. And this is somewhat it.

Part Two

Xhemajl Petrovci: From here the street uphill to Matiqan, it was all empty, I mean the Roma neighborhood, the Moravska street, it used to be called, and the other one was in Aqamerdak opposite of Leci. Uphill from Leci's house. You could be stuck in mud there, it was horrible, so there wasn't... and often to go there, you couldn't take the short way, but you had to go through the Jewish cemetery, you know where Jewish cemetery is?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes.

Xhemajl Petrovci: But, you know, the cemetery, we were always scared of hearing something, always scared. So from the Jewish cemetery on the right side to Matiqan, it was horrible, while Matiqan was good. There was greenery like this. I remember we had some land in Matiqan, but after my father bought that land... I remember my father's salary was somewhere, the currency used to be banks back then, 700 banks, he took 600 extra for kids. And whoever had land would not be given the extras, so he bought the land but did not put it in his name, and at some point the mister who, "Come on, put the land on your name," he says, "Do whatever you want with it," My father says, "I can't afford it." Because you wouldn't get a good salary.

That land did not have great value at the time, and there wasn't that much produce so he had to... Maybe it was the politics of the time, trying to strip them of properties and stuff, because there's also criteria for how much land you have, how many kinds, to make some sort of yes, no, no, no...

Aurela Kadriu: Which year?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: Which year?

Xhemajl Petrovci: This was for sure...

Aurela Kadriu: I mean approximately..

Xhemajl Petrovci: Sometime in '65. Even though the land didn't have much value, not in Matiqan, nor in Veternik, it did not have any value, do you understand, so it was very, very, very cheap. And I know that in Veternik and in... Matiqan, they call it Gypsy's Field, and we owned one of those fields, but my father never put them in his name, the one in Veternik was about 16 acres, it was never put in his name because of that, it is left like that even today. I don't know if there is anything else (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: Were you somewhere near the Roma neighborhood? Somewhere around here.

Xhemajl Petrovci: As I said from where you came from the bakery on the right, say, more than one hundred or more, they were Roma.

Aurela Kadriu: And now there aren't any?

Xhemajl Petrovci: A few. Then this continues to Leci's house, you might know where Leci's house is?

Aurela Kadriu: Approximately yes...

Xhemajl Petrovci: From Leci's house, the street uphill, that was also a Roma neighborhood. And it was a phenomenon a week before St. George's Day, a week after St. George's Day would last the ceremony of their holiday, Roma's. And then lately they started using speakers and it would get noisy... But, the politics of Serbia tried from the beginning to turn Albanians into Turks, so there would be fewer Albanians, and the moment you declared yourself as a Turk, you would be privileged. So I was born and raised here. I know a lot of people who removed their white hats very recently, and call themselves Turks, because it is the same thing today, they are very privileged, because it's being declared in the name of the minority...

Aurela Kadriu: When you say white hats do you mean *plis*⁷ or what...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes *plis*, yes.

Aurela Kadriu: You came in '25, I don't think, til there...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, we are getting off topic sometimes...

Aurela Kadriu: It's fine, no problem.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Maybe I don't know the years, but none of us were born yet. My father used to say when he came from Toplica, Petrovc village. They got mixed up because we were in Petrovc all the time, and they wrote my father's name as Ramadan Ramadani-Ismael, and as a young man I used to ask my father, "Father, this, where are these two Ramadan now?" He used to say, "My father's name was Ramadan, he..." Like this. We are Petrovci. Some people from Petrovc came to Talinovic, it's next to Ferizaj, Muhaxher's Talinovic. From there, after a while... But when they went there, there were only Circassians,⁸ not a single Albanian, not a single Serb...

Aurela Kadriu: From Chechnya?

⁷ Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

⁸ The Circassians, also referred to as Cherkess, are an indigenous ethnic group and nation native to the historical country-region of Circassia in the North Caucasus. They have been in Kosovo since the 19th century.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: From where, Circassians from?

Xhemajl Petrovci: From Kyrgyzstan. Those bargains that Hashim and others are trying to make *buni tyri tamo*,⁹ Turks used to joke. There were bargains at that time as well, they were suffering from Russia probably, to not get them, how do I know, Circassians who were in Kosovo. But they used to tell us that when they came, so in Talinoc there were only Circassians. The Petrovci family came first, then in '39 a big part of them moved to Turkey, probably there was pressure, or something. From there we came to Pristina, sometime in '20, because I know that me and my siblings were born here, all of whom were my mother's and my father's. I know that my brother was born in 1936, my oldest brother, my oldest sister was born around 1930, and I know that my mother didn't have children for some time, and my father got married in Pristina. I should have said this earlier but it's done now (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: It's okay...

Xhemajl Petrovci: You can edit it. I forgot one thing, we used to call them *ylpeze*, you know kites, the Japanese or I don't who let them fly, kites or we used to call them *ylpeze*. There were some really small ones, but there were some who were one, two, three hundred meters long, and on that hill that was like a forest, the space was open back then. Now it's filled with houses, I remember we used to fly them at Taukbahçe, I mean, from the beginning Taukbahçe, on the left there was the house of that writer who turned his house into a museum, not a museum but a library...

Aurela Kadriu: Hivzi Sylejmani?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Hivzi Sylejmani, yes. From there uphill, there weren't any houses, only grape vines, peaches, cherries, pears and things like this, there were fewer apples, up to *Shkolla Normale*¹⁰ on the right side, so, the road to Gërmia on the right side there wasn't much, there were grape vines but they weren't healthy, they were very weak.

And I know that now is the Gërmia pool on the left side, a huge area where there were rocks, they used to dig out rocks and there was a spring. Back then winters were much colder, I remember the ice there... because the water was also clean, they used to break the ice and it would fall piece by piece... Muamer's and Xhamabaz's father, I don't know, do you know Xhamabaz's that are up there? But once they used to be here in the Roma neighborhood, before getting to the Roma neighborhood, it was...

⁹ The expression the speaker uses is local Turkish, it means "take this, send it there."

¹⁰ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

They had a thing where they kept the ice for summer, they used to cover it with hay and I don't know what else, them and Hilmi, they used to call him Hilmi Sivrikozi, Muamer's father. He, he had ice in the middle of summer. He knew how to cover and preserve it, I don't know...

Aurela Kadriu: For what did you use it then?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: For what did you use it then?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Firstly, they used it because it was clean, they used to make lemonade, put two pieces of ice inside, I don't know what they put there and they would sell it when it was hot [weather]. During the winter he used to sell *salep*,¹¹ he sold juices, not during the winter, but he used to sell *salep*, ice cream and juices, it used to be called lemonade, now... it was...

Aurela Kadriu: Where did he sell them?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: Where did he sell them?

Xhemajl Petrovci: He sold them at the market, at the train station, in front of the school, he got out on the street with a cart with ice cream, for example, he did very well financially at the time. While the other one didn't use it, he sold it to others, so there were others like Hilmi Sivrikozi. Dragoni or Dardania that...

Aurela Kadriu: Arbëria.

Xhemajl Petrovci: What today is called Arbëria, there was a hill there, it was also empty, motorbike races were done there. It lasted for a few years probably. I remember as a kid, motorbikes, there were only two or three motorbikes, someone from Prizren, someone from here, and here was a Serb who had a motorbike and they used to race. The road was more... but they were masters of that. I can't think of anything else (laughs)...

Aurela Kadriu: Where did your father work?

¹¹ *Salep*, also spelled *sahlep* or *sahlab*, is a flour made from the tubers of the orchid genus. *Salep* flour is consumed in beverages and desserts, especially in the cuisines of the former Ottoman Empire, notably in the Levant where it is a traditional winter beverage.

Xhemajl Petrovci: My father was a worker at Ramiz Sadiku [Construction Company] and at the same time he worked on the land.

Aurela Kadriu: Which year did he start work at Ramiz Sadiku?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Since Ramiz Sadiku was established, he worked there until his retirement. But, Muhaxher usually, they could rarely do anything. My father had five children and there was a time when he came to Pristina on rent, he worked on someone else's land half and half. Once the produce was so good from the land he worked on, with that produce, half from him, half for the owner. He bought this place from that profit, and then they built the house, it was...

Aurela Kadriu: Did your mother work?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you know how they met?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, it was an arranged marriage.

Aurela Kadriu: Your mother was from Pristina?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, my mother was from Drenica, Krojmir village, it used to be called Kimirovc.

Aurela Kadriu: Yes...

Xhemajl Petrovci: As every family in Pristina, almost 95 percent or more of women did not work. They would work as teachers here and there> I remember as a kid, the others worked, Roma, Serbs, the city people rarely... the textile factory Predionica was opened, what used to be called textile processing factory at the Economical School, now it's the Technical High School I think, further down and it's an old building, the Economical School up... there was the Agricultural School...

Aurela Kadriu: At the... where? Further down Lakrishte?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Further down than Lakrishte. So heading to Fushë Kosova...

Aurela Kadriu: Yes, on the left side.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, behind that big roundabout, so more towards Fushë Kosova. There were quite a lot, but in the meantime Albanians started more, like this. So, as a family, we were, there were three brides, my mother, and none of them worked, and it wasn't because we didn't need it but... life was

always a little bit harder, but we didn't, it wasn't tradition, do you understand? And often, I had more children, and my brother used to say, "Get your wife a job." She was educated, I used to say, "You're intellectual and your wife doesn't work, let alone mine." You know, I mean to make your wife go to work, it was a little more... and at that time my sister had finished the Technical School, and then *Shkolla e Lartë*.¹² She started working as soon as she finished the Technical School, later she got married but she worked the whole time. While my wife... I then opened a service shop for household items, because, when the crisis of '81 started, working wasn't enough, I mean the income from state jobs wasn't enough and then I opened the service shop.

Universal, everything, boilers, machines and things like this. And then at a time it was more... My wife worked there, to answer calls, take notes and things like that. So I don't regret it much, raising five children is a little hard, it's not just feeding them, you have to also educate them. You have to commit more to children, so if she had worked we would have had other problems probably. Some things would be better, others would be worse.

And now I notice in my family, my wife has died a year and a half ago, if she were here, the house feels again empty, you saw the kinds, one of them is in kindergarten, the other at school, the daughter in-law is at work, my son is at work, all the time you're... but my late wife was very lively, she always found something to do, and I said, "She died and now I have to take all her work, besides my work, I have to take hers as well." And it's easier like that, you know, so being alone is easier, I do things at home, I have retired, I mean, I am still active, I don't have to be anywhere. I have free activities, so I'm a free artist. I feel like doing this, I'm gonna do this, like that.

Aurela Kadriu: These grape vines and the gardens that you mentioned, were they state property that people took to make gardens, or were they private land?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Those were... the colonization of Kosovo, the migration of Albanians to Turkey, Serbia knew, it was so cunning, it knew how to put the name that, sign that you took this much money, and then it gave them what they brought from... there were many Montenegrins, there were many Serbs from Croatia, not from the last war in Croatia, but way before that, from Herceg Novi and other places from there. The lands, when they went, the land and houses, mostly they left them to the municipalities, because it didn't happen only in Pristina, in other places as well. A lot of them went just like that and didn't sell them, it was left to someone. This land in Matiqan, and one that we used to call Vneshta, I found the landlord in Istanbul.

He was very stiff. I went there, he was not home, his wife told me, "My husband is at the mosque, kom come on in." She hosted me in an Albanian way. And when he came, we talked about the land, this and that, I can speak Turkish. And he was a hairdresser for women, so, a hairdresser, he was one of the first

¹² *Shkolla e Lartë Pedagogjike*, the High Pedagogical School was founded in Pristina in 1958 as the first institution of higher education in Kosovo.

hairdressers in Pristina. This was 15 years ago. But so dishonorable, I said, “I came for that land, this and that,” he started describing it, “That is my neighbor, that land there belongs to them...” Things that I knew. He said, “I did not sell it, I did not sell land to anyone,” and he said, “Let’s not forget that Albanians, always...” he said, “They bought it but from the beginning, they bought it from Serbs, but the Serbs took them again.”

He did not know the situation here. He said, “Do you know where my house used to be?” I said, “Yea.” There is a small mosque in Tophane, in front of the court, there is a small mosque, down the alleys. I knew where his house was by chance. I said, “Yes.” He said, “I could go take tomorrow if I wanted to.” I said, “Did you sell it?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “There’s nothing to talk about with you.” I said, “I thought you came from the mosque...” You know, “A person who prays and stuff.” He says I could go take the house that I sold, if you just think about it, it isn’t human, it isn’t anywhere, like this.

So, those lands from Toplica that we were thrown out and here wherever I was, they found a way and took you off, they brought someone else or they brought Serbs around. I remember very well when a Montenegrin came, two meters tall, me and other kids were playing with a ball. If the ball were to fall there, it was horrible, he used to come out with a gun in his hand...

Aurela Kadriu: Is that right?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes. He... when I think about him, he was a coward because he was scared of us all the time, that’s why he came out with... He wanted to scare us, do you understand, since he was scared. And on our street, if nothing, 12-13 houses were Serbs. From the mosque at Katër Lullat and here on, further up there were Serbs-Roma, what we used to call them. They were black but spoke Serbian and had Serbian names, because when you are... you are in someone else’s house, on someone else’s property. They brought them and even gave them salaries, and gave jobs to populate more, in this case I’m talking about Pristina, it was the same in villages, and other cities, like this.

Aurela Kadriu: Which year were you born?

Xhemajl Petrovci: I was born in 1949, which means I’m almost 70.

Aurela Kadriu: Where did you finish elementary school?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Elena Gjika, then Gjergj Fishta was opened, at that time, it was an experimental school, with labs, and these. And then a part of the students went there, some were left at Elena Gjika, back then Vuk Karadžić, the other one was Branislav Nušič, Gjergj Fishta.

Aurela Kadriu: Was it an elementary school?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Elementary school, yes. In the fourth grade, I went to Gjergj Fishta.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember elementary school?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Of course. I remember that more than what we talked about yesterday, do you understand (laughs), it's interesting...

Aurela Kadriu: How do you remember elementary school? What do you remember?

Xhemajl Petrovci: What do I remember? One of them... as a kid, as I said, I was skilled in languages. I spoke Romani, Turkish, Serbian and Gorani. So, I knew all the languages that were spoken in Kosovo. I know I was the best in Serbian, because I knew the language and I know there was a teacher who taught us Serbian, because I think we used to learn Serbian from second grade, I know when he asked someone and they didn't know, they didn't know, "*Gledaj ga u obuću pa ga pusti u kuću*" do you understand, "Look at his shoes and then let him in your home." And it used to bother me at that time, he was looking at our shoes, you know, it was mainly poverty. There was no family that was under five-six and even to ten [kids].

And they couldn't all wear shoes. And at the time I thought he was mocking us, you know, our shoes. And then I found that, I mean, that it is also education because even those that were ripped, even they were very burdened a, a, a... that was also their responsibility. Imagine, you would learn Serbian a lot from the second grade, then in high school more than half of the subjects were in Serbian, it started later, having, having all subjects in Albanian.

Aurela Kadriu: What year did you go to elementary school?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well, in '56...

Aurela Kadriu: '56, yes...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well now, I know I was in the first grade, when the neighbors in front went to Turkey, one of them was my age, we were in school together, my brother, may he rest in peace, was the same age as his brother, his brother was named Rexhep, my friend was named Faik. And when Rexhep went to Turkey, his maternal uncles were watchmakers, and he also mastered that craft. I never saw him again, since '56.

My son is working with some clock towers and some buildings... renovations, restorations of buildings and a master from Turkey is fixing a clock of the clocktower in Mamusha. And he asked the boy, "Where are you from?" He said, "From Pristina." "Exactly from Pristina?" He said, "Yes." "Where is your house?" My son told him, "Do you know that my house used to be in front of yours?" He says, "What's

your last name?" My son had heard, he says "Gërguri." He says, "Do you remember anyone from the neighborhood?" He says, "Yes. Haki." My brother. They never saw each other again.

And after a while, he came back and my son called me and said, "He is in my office. Are you coming? Rexhep wants to see you." So from '56, it makes 62 years. After 62 years, I could still see some lines from his childhood. He had freckles, like Norwegians, do you understand, those that they have... he was fair skinned, his hair was blond, but now it was all white, but I still found him. He said, "If I saw Haki, I would have recognized him." And it had come, he had passed that way, he saw the picture, the [death] announcement, he said, "I recognized him without reading his name." Like this.

I remember the year they went to Turkey, before going, a year or half a year before going... now my brother, Rexhep, took his brother and my brother took me to register for school. And that day my father took flour at the market, he bought it, and it happened to be wild flour. There's a plant that has more, it isn't poisonous, but it can make you sick, you can get nauseous, you feel like throwing up, how do I know. And we went, and my brother started, he wanted to throw up, he was nauseous, and now it was them two and some others from the neighborhood, they carried him home. Then we came to the conclusion that the flour was mixed with that plant, I don't know what it is. I would know if I saw it, I knew back then too, but I don't know what it's called, you know, and like this some...

Aurela Kadriu: Which high school did you go to?

Xhemajl Petrovci: I went to the Technical High School, then I left there and went to Shtjefën Gjeçovi. It's interesting, all the time, always... Because my brother was in Belgrade as a student, where with the scholarship he had, he could only pay for his apartment. So my father with the salary he had, he fed my brother in Belgrade. And as a kid I worked in the market, as a barber, I worked, everything, just to get money. Do you understand? To earn, bring something home.

My second brother finished elementary school and did not continue school. We had to do something to get him an ID so he could go work in Obiliq. Back then the first and second phase were working I think, power plants. So, it was quite a help in our house, I was also working in the private sector, here and here. I remember I used to do trading too, I took five-six crates from someone, went further away, sold peaches, I sold something, to get money. So school, it wasn't for me, because you can't do both (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: And when did you start working as a barber, because you told me you worked as one?

Xhemajl Petrovci: My father took it before I started all of these jobs. I worked, it was here, where Sllovenia Sport is. There were two-three shops, then the turn to the memorial, in the other corner there was a fountain back then, so it was quite far away. And back then that place was called

Panaxhyrishtë, some sort of a market probably, I don't remember that there were many... cars usually, there were five-six horse-drawn vehicles.

I know that I worked there as a barber for about a year. My salary was two reds weekly, which means 20 banks.¹³ And I know that one of the workers there, because there were two, the main master, he didn't do much, he was older. And one of them was a laboratory technician. There was the organ, like a laboratory, where they kept tools for... dealt with fumigation and things like this. He was also a laboratory technician, and worked as a barber.

Of course, that was in front of the entrance of the market till lately, even today there's an object, I don't know, empty. He would torment me, he would make me wash an ashtray three times, four times and when I would bring it to him, he would look at it, "Do you see this?" "I didn't see it." "Go wash it again." and since then I would just think how could I in secret go and hit him with wood, to... I had had it up to here {touches his nose}, my life was miserable. And I left that craft, because of him. And then I remembered, when I got older, that he... because soldiers do that, "Go because you left this shoelace longer than the other." Like this, they break you, to break yourself, because every young man... So today I justify him, do you understand?

And the Army, now I even see problems here that our youngsters don't have any army activity. While the army usually... It is not important where you serve because people are shaped in the army, we were shaped even more, Albanians, because we always knew we were serving someone else, but it was a school for us even though we were put down by all of them, but that again was in our favor...

Aurela Kadriu: Which year did you go to the Army?

Xhemajl Petrovci: I also did that... I went in '68. I went there very young so I could get a passport. Back then, you couldn't get a passport if you didn't finish the Army. So a lot of my friends who were a few years older than me were running away, they would do things to avoid the Army, while I wanted to go. Only until I got my passport, when I got my passport... I went as a soldier and came back.

I went to France, at the time presented as being from Albania, because I didn't want to ruin my sport here, I wasn't sure, I didn't know how, what is it, what the west is. Because at the time as youngsters we used to talk about there's this guy in America, this one in Munich, Germany, like this. At that time I remember only Mannheim and Munich, at that time, they started taking some to work in mines, so, sometime around '67-'68. And I remember these two German cities and, of course, it was discussed a lot. And we went, we found a connection, they sent us forged documents from there, a driver's license as if I was from Albania, pretending to seek political asylum, "We are from Albania and like this," because they used to say that they treat people from Albania much better than Yugoslavs.

¹³ Another name for *dinar*. *Dinar* was the Yugoslav currency. Now it is the basic monetary unit of Serbia.

We started that procedure, they treated us very well, all the time... they provided us with food, a place to sleep, I thought, "What will they ask from us now?" Do you understand? You were scared from that good welcome. But I saw there that with the work that is being done, I could do the same thing here close to my family and I wouldn't have to pay rent. If you get little by little, then the income will be quite good here...

Aurela Kadriu: Why did you want to go to France?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Hah?

Aurela Kadriu: Why did you decide to go to France?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, because you could go to America from there. We were thinking of going to America, we were three friends.

Aurela Kadriu: And then it didn't happen?

Xhemajl Petrovci: One of them was in medical school, the other in *Shkolla Normale*, he left halfway in the fifth year...

Part Three

Aurela Kadriu: We left off at, at, when you went to France with your friends, to go to America.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, then we went to France, I came to the conclusion that with the work we used to do there, I could do that work here, I would not pay rent and [would] be close to my family. Then I didn't like being an emigrant much. With my late wife, we met before I went to France. And at the time I thought I would fix my documents, then I'll come get her and go back. My brother was older than me, he wasn't married, but I thought it would not matter when I took her...

Aurela Kadriu: Which year did you go to France?

Xhemajl Petrovci: '71. And I came back to get her but, in the meantime, my mother also missed me. It was early morning when I came, I crawled up, this door here, I crawled up to open the door, do you understand, like this {shows with his hands}... this object wasn't here, there was a tap, my father was getting ready for morning prayers and he assumed it was me, he said, "Wait, I'll open it." When he opened it, he couldn't even say "Welcome!" He ran to tell my mother, up the stairs, and he said, "Wake up, the puppy has come home."

My mother woke up and fell down, she opened her eyes and wanted to hug me, she fell again. That's when I thought why do I need France, why do I need America when someone misses me that much. Even though there were five of us, whichever finger you cut, it hurts. And in the meantime my wife didn't get the passport, I mean the girls I was getting to know. At that time there was *korzo*,¹⁴ my wife was from Podujeva... you went out to *korzo*... Youngsters had *korzo*, the sweets shop and the cinema. Often when I was late, I'd come back to find my mother on the balcony.

One day I took out my passport and said, "There, I don't plan on going anywhere." Because in the beginning I told them that this and this might happen... but to make her feel better I said, "Here, take my passport, I don't plan on going anywhere." And at that time to get married, how to get married? My brother wasn't married, you know, but he was engaged. And my family said it was too early, I don't know what, her family was like, "No, you should get engaged..." And I don't know what...

And one day I decide, I say, "Let's finish this? Let's not ask anyone and let's get married." "But how..." This and that, I say, "Either let's do this, or let's leave it for good." Do you understand? So, we had known each other for two years, there were always obstacles, because from this side... Everybody had their opinions, like this, because you can never meet all the conditions. And we decided, we got married. So next year would have been fifty years. We were thinking of having a wedding in 2021, but she didn't make it. Because we had a celebration back then, but we wanted an actual wedding for our fiftieth anniversary, she didn't make it.

My son is very religious, of course he was sad for his mother and... but he would comfort himself that at least God gave him this many years to live with his mother (cries). Now I'm also saying that we lived together for 46-47 years. Just when there was the condition to actually live, you know, I mean not now, but maybe in the last ten years, the conditions got better as my son was living in Germany, I mean at home. My daughters were living abroad, they helped a lot, they're financially good there. Then my son came back, he works and stuff.

We had some good years. We went to Turkey to all inclusive hotels for six years. My second daughter, she does these things, "I bought the tickets, if you want to go, go, if you don't want to, don't go." Even though me and my wife talked about this when communism fell in '88-'90, but even before we talked about the Albanian sea, we said, "If the roads to there open, we'll never go anywhere else." I went to other places too, but I also went to Albania every year, either before, or after Antalya or Izmir and others. So... my wife also had some issues with blood pressure and heart arrhythmias. Interestingly, every time we went to Albania, she would say, "I feel like throwing away my medicine." Because she was getting therapy, that's how good she felt.

Around a year and a half before she died, my daughter bought an apartment in Durrës, and based on their promises, usually construction workers, but it is even worse in Albania. Six-seven months went by

¹⁴ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

and it wasn't finished. And all the time I was worried because she would get mad, you know, on our way there, I prepared her, I told her, "Wife, your husband was..." Because I worked at Ramiz Sadiku for quite a long... "Construction workers lie a little but they have no choice because of the work conditions..." And it was cold that year in Albania, it even froze the Palmas... I was trying to prepare her, when we went, nothing had moved forward. She said, "It's fine, we'll sleep somewhere." I mean we would find an apartment. She wasn't bothered much.

It didn't happen the next year either, she died. And all the time she used to say to me, "Look at me, I swear to God I'll stay there without you, because you won't stay. I have a stronger bond with the kids, with my grandchildren, I have eleven grandchildren, six granddaughters and five nephews. I am used to the noise, and stuff, you saw earlier [addresses the interviewer]. She used to say, "I like the quiet, you will get bored and come back. But I'm not coming back to Pristina with you." "Okay, wife, we'll do as you want." Do you understand? Eh, like this.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you meet?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: How did you meet?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, how we met... a friend of mine was in a relationship, actually I found out later, she had her aunt in Pristina, she was going to school here. I saw her two-three times, I stopped here once, this and that, we started something. She used to go out with a friend of hers, and her friend would read what her boyfriend wrote to her, declaring his love. And at that time I was working in Elektrana. And I used to write poetry for a friend, and now when she was reading it, I noticed...

Aurela Kadriu: Yours?

Xhemajl Petrovci: That they're mine, but I didn't mind, on the contrary I felt... but of course I didn't tell her I wrote them. Actually I told her it's so good (laughs)... and we started going out with the four of us, like this. Then I met her family and... When I went to meet her family, they had a coffee shop in Podujeva. I went and asked for her brother, went into the coffee shop, got a drink, and I asked the waitress, "Will Mehmet come, where can I meet him?" Her father was sitting in another corner, and she served me, told me something, and went to the owner. He probably asked her, "Who did he ask for? And she told him, and he came and said, "I am Mehmet's father." He said, "You can say to me what you have to say to him." I said, "If you look at it, I actually have to talk to you but..."

He gave my wife troubles and stuff. "I took you there to go to school, you did this, that..." Stuff like this, like all Albanians (coughs). And I said, "If you look at it, this has to do with you, not Mehmet," I said, "I am that Xhema from Pristina." He said, "Are you a *shehirli* [townsman] or an Albanian?" An Albanian

shehirli, imagine? I understood what he was getting at, his question was, “Are you a Turk or an Albanian?” I said, “I am an Albanian from the *shehir* [town].” “Hey, I am asking you straight in Albanian!” He said (smiles). Anyways, he says, “How did you just come here by yourself, do you not know how these things go?” I said, “I didn’t want anyone to finish my things. I came by myself to tell you this and that, I know your daughter, this how my situation is, I can’t marry her right now since my brother...” Things like this, back then...

This and that, and I took my wife to a cousin of mine who didn’t have her husband there, she said, “I’ll go take her, and she’ll never go to Pristina ever again.” I said, “You can take her, but you can’t find her.” “What?!” He rolled up his sleeves, and I told him, I said, “Like this...” He wanted me to take him where she is. We went there together, I wasn’t scared and stuff but I wanted to tell him that if I wanted to, he couldn’t even find her, but here... And he came, they met, he said, “We can meet through people.” I said, “No, I’ll come by myself again, and until then, take her, because it is my fault.” Like this, I didn’t last long and I took her forever. Like this, then after two-three weeks, they were okay with it too, we had children.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you become an electricity installer?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Electricity installer... My first neighbor when we didn’t have a fence was a guy from Prizren, he understood electricity, when the lights would go out, he would call me, “Come on, hold my lamp...” Or something, and I started liking that job. Then there was another guy in the neighborhood that worked as an electrician, I would say, “Can I come help?” This is what I say, I coveted money, we needed it. I went after him, whenever I saw someone working with electricity, I would ask, “Can I help?”

It’s interesting because usually all electricians show solidarity, I have that opinion, they don’t just let you help, they pay you something. I did the same thing. I had four-five students when I opened the service. Five-six of us worked there, one of them was my son. But he also went to school. Very early, from the third grade he started coming to the shop, second, third.

Aurela Kadriu: Which year did you start working at Termoelektrana?

Xhemajl Petrovci: In ‘70. ‘70 at Elektrana, ‘71, ‘72, ‘73 at Elektro Kosova. Then in ‘74, you know when the Television opened...

Aurela Kadriu: Yes, ‘74.

Xhemajl Petrovci: I worked in Television for around five years, from then in Ramiz Sadiku.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you work at Television?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well, I dealt with the lights, as a doorman, everything.

[This part of the interview was conducted on November 29, 2018]

Aurela Kadriu: We left off yesterday when you started working at Television. Yes, yes, we started [recording].

Xhemajl Petrovci: I worked at Television from '74 to '79. But they wouldn't give me a stable job, and back then it was, for example there were more people from Peja, Dukagjini in the television, a good part of them from Gjakova, it depended what kind of newsroom it was. I didn't have a particular job, more of a doorman, like this. Then it was also convenient for them, because I spoke all languages, back then they used to have television programs in Roma, Turkish, and like this. But I didn't feel like I belonged there.

And then I started at Ramiz Sadiku. I found a place exactly for me at Ramiz Sadiku, so I liked it. Ramiz Sadiku was a big enterprise, it had almost nine thousand workers. It was quite a big company, and people were mostly... of all social structures, but exactly that diversity made it more cheerful. Usually, wherever Ramiz Sadiku worked, they had their canteens, there was food in large quantities and it was good food. I remember these as positive sides of Ramiz Sadiku. Up until sometime in '81 when the first strike started, and stopped working, and people would complain about this, about that. They all started in '81, with the demonstrations,¹⁵ this, and that...

Aurela Kadriu: Why were they on a strike?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well, firstly for the working conditions, there were misapplications, people started, when the people from the syndicate came, from committee and stuff, then whatever was happening here, they spoke freely, then you couldn't speak exactly freely. I knew a case from earlier, a head worker who had reported the director of the workplace in Novi Pazar, they paved the road to his village, and fixed things for him, which all happened illegally.

He comes from there to report him to the directorate, and tells the Serbian director, "This, this..." "You go, we'll take care of it." "Don't tell me to go," he says, "But come with me with the commission..." He says, "Go, you're trying to tell me what to do..." This and that, they discuss and the Albanian head worker punches him and he falls to the ground. He was suspended and convicted.

¹⁵ On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

And now when they were on a strike, they would say, “Talk freely where the problem is?” I said, “Don’t report anyone because you will go to jail and leave your kids without food.” Unfortunately the head worker did not have kids, I knew, but I had to tell them that you leave your kids without food, and here in Albania the wife is a kid too (laughs), I mean that’s how it was at the time. So it was updated, we had good results from that strike, among others he was freed from prison, back to work, and like this, some, some... we wanted better conditions.

Aurela Kadriu: Ramiz Sadiku was a construction company right?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Construction enterprise, yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Which... which neighborhood was built while you were in Ramiz Sadiku?

Xhemajl Petrovci: At that time we built in Plava, Andrijevica, Prizren, Pristina. The complex in Bregu i Diellit was almost 90 percent built by Ramiz Sadiku, I don’t know what the school is called now...

Aurela Kadriu: Hasan Prishtina.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes. Then the Kurrizi complex with all the levels, all those buildings were back then built by Ramiz Sadiku. I was one of the people who maintained the technology which worked, so the electro technik. Who do I know, all kinds of equipment, machines that worked, that were with electricity, I maintained those. There were cases when there were over one thousand workers in one workplace, because a lot was built, 700 apartments at once. At that time was Ramiz Sadiku. Often even Rad from Belgrade, a very well-known company, borrowed technology and workers from us, we had reached the peak. And then politics took its course, started gradually, until they closed it, within six-seven years.

Aurela Kadriu: Those canteens that you said would be wherever you worked, in each neighborhood...

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, not in each neighborhood, wherever there were bigger workplaces. They were in Bregu i Diellit, in Dardania, the canteen was very big. There also was one inside Ramiz Sadiku. So, only in Pristina there were three-four worker’s canteens, also in workplaces abroad, like in Andrijevica, there was, there was a cook, there were canteens. There weren’t many workers, 20-30, but food was provided for them. Like this.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember when the Monument at the Brotherhood and Unity square was built?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, I don't remember. But I remember when it was there. When you went to that side, for a time there... now there is some kind of social security, a little further away were the... Regional Council, but on the right was, there was a covered *çarshi* back then. And, of course, to remove our trace, to reduce the presence of Albanians here, they were removed. And I remember there was a bookshop and an optics shop. In that optics shop, they also sold cameras, camera films. That was in that setting where the Social Security Building is now, and the bookshop used to be.

I mean, at that time, it was something new because earlier there was nothing there. And I remember, in that bookshop, my mother had given me ten dinars to buy a notebook, it used to cost seven dinars at the time. Two or three days before my mother had sown a pocket inside my jacket, and when I left my house, I put the money in my pocket. When I went to the bookshop, I looked inside my pockets and I didn't have the money. On my way there, there's that drinking fountain, and I drank water there and I thought they had fallen somewhere there.

And I started walking around, and certainly as a kid I started crying about what happened, I mean, what happened to me. And an imam, "What happened?" I say, "Nothing, I'm looking for the money I lost," while crying. He takes out ten dinars and gives them to me, "There, because, even if you lost them, somebody found and took them, go." And I went to the bookshop, I bought it, and now I put the change in my pocket, when I touch the pocket the ten dinars were there, *kuku*¹⁶ what happened, do you understand? And I came home, I told my mother, she either way would give me the change, and like this, it was very... how kids are, you know, when you lose something. But they weren't lost, I just forgot, like this.

Aurela Kadriu: You forgot that you didn't have the pocket in the front?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember when the shopping mall was built?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Of course, the Shopping Mall Boro Ramizi.¹⁷ The shopping mall was built when I had my second child, I mean it is sometime around... I associate things with when my kids were born because I don't remember the years, but often I associate things with my kids. My daughter was one year old, not even one, when the second daughter was born... I know I got more money, a surplus, from my job, that in the beginning we were planning to use the diapers of the first daughter, for the second one as well. Even though they were about the same age, so like a year, a year and a half. So that money came out of nowhere, and with my wife from the hospital we went with a taxi to the shopping

¹⁶ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

¹⁷ Boro dhe Ramizi refers to two friends, Boro Vukmirović and Ramiz Sadiku, who were executed during the Second World War. They became the symbol of the Brotherhood and Unity of the Serbian and Albanian people. In Yugoslav times it was common to name institutions after the heroes of the anti-fascist war.

mall, since you mentioned it. So we planned that, now I told my wife to pick new things for the second daughter, you know.

But also when I went to get my wife and daughter from the hospital, there are those traditions to buy chocolate, a chocolate box for the one who helped her give birth, how do I know... And of course I bought a flower bouquet for my wife, it was rare for me, I didn't use it, but I didn't want her to feel bad that she gave birth to the second daughter, do you understand? And I had people I knew there, at the maternity hospital. And then people talked, "Xhema, I was scared he would be sad, this and that..." Do you understand, I thought he would be sad, on the contrary, he came prepared, very... Like this.

And from there to the shopping mall, so I also surprised my wife with a lot of things. Then my third daughter was born and again no... I am religious, I mean I believe in... I am religious, I don't see a reason to get sad over that, to ruin things. Then after the third daughter my son was born. That was a big surprise. There was a company, "Inzhinering" in Pristina, my brother was a director, may he rest in peace. They equipped the new maternity hospital, gynecology with everything, with sheets, beds, everything. And I took my wife there at night. It was 4:00 in the morning or later, and I was looking to find a place to drink coffee so as not to go to sleep, because it was almost time for work.

I drank coffee in Bozhur, stayed there a little, and read the newspaper. I thought about going to see what's happening before going to work. And the workers there were mainly young, they were probably Serbian, but they all spoke Albanian. I said, "This, this, Fatime Ramadani, what's the gender of the baby?" She said, "Boy." And I took out some money and gave it to her, "*Kuku!*" She was scared, I said, "You didn't ask for it, I gave it to you, don't be scared." And as we were talking I found out she was Serbian, but it wasn't important. It was important that I was happy.

And from there I came home and told my family. It was very joyous, since my older brother had only one daughter, the second didn't have any, I had three daughters, so it was a little delicate. So everybody was happy. I went to work, from work I went to the hospital. When I went there, my sister's son was working in my brother's company, that enterprise. He sees me, he says, "Uncle, why are you here?" I said, "This, this..." He said, "Come with me." And he gave me some sheets that the workers were carrying, and I got them to get inside freely.

When I went upstairs he said, "Now, wait here." He went in, no he didn't, the door was closed, a girl who worked there came, he banged on the door, called her, said, "Look for Fatime Ramadani." She says, "We have three Fatime, two gave birth to boys, and one to a girl." I said, "*Kuku*, the one who had a girl is mine, the worst part is that I lied to my family, horrible." (laughs) I felt very bad. She goes to check, and I saw my wife walking down the hallway, of course tired and stuff, she had given birth only five-six hours ago. And I used to mock her when she was alive, I used to say, "Her hands were longer than her feet." You know, when one gets tired? (laughs) And then I knock and ask, "What is the

gender?” She said, “Don’t you know?” I said, “Speak, what?” She said, “Boy.” Thank God I didn’t lie, do you understand? (laughs) Like this, life...

Aurela Kadriu: Did you go to Bozhur?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes

Aurela Kadriu: Was it a cafe, I mean, more, more...

Xhemajl Petrovci: It was more exclusive, until Hotel Grand opened. I had a habit, besides going out with my friends to these cafés, oftentimes I took my wife with me to these outings. On one occasion, the Grand Hotel had just opened, a year or two... my wife’s sister got engaged and they organized a party at Grand. There was an Arife, she sang Romani, Turkish, Italian, Albanian. And my wife started having a headache, probably I have gone out more often, you know in comparison to her, and I said to her, “I go out very often and I am not complaining, you got your first night out with music and you’re complaining.” Do you understand? Like that.

I was one of those who tried to always see the funny side, to entertain my group of friends. We were like seven or eight of us... or once we were at Grand for the New Year’s second night. Many family members, three brothers, my cousin with his brother-in-law and his daughter, otherwise Enver Petrovci’s father, and some other in-laws. There was a big table, Nexhmije Pagarusha was singing with Bashkim Paçuku. Now, when Bashkim Paçuku sang, Nexhmije would hold her ears, she also had a high-pitched voice, but he was also a lot, Bashkim.

In the meantime, I got up to use the bathroom, and to the kid, I said, “I’m going to make a call.” Back then there were phones there, and in houses. He says, “Wait, I’ll come with you,” you know, “Because I left my son at home alone, I want to see if maybe he went out and left the house empty.” He didn’t want to leave the house empty. And he came after me, I started laughing because there was no phone there. I was walking in the fort, he was behind me. When we went into the bathroom he said, “Where is the phone?” I said, “Uncle, I felt bad saying in front of everybody that I’m coming to the bathroom.” “Pha, may God curse you!” (laughs) That’s how it was.

When we came back, he was a little disappointed, my older brother said, “What did you do to him?” (laughs) I said, “Nothing, he followed me...” And I told him, this and that, not for the phone but for... So much laughter there, like this.

Aurela Kadriu: The second night of the new year?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you always go there, or only in the beginning?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, it was always held there. New Year's Eve was very interesting back then, even though the main one was the first night, the second one was also cheaper. The singers were different as well, I mean somebody sang the first night, then somebody else the second, like this. Even the third night was celebrated. These things are part of socialism, even though now we have a lot of celebrations.

Something else from my life, as children, they talked about Adem Demaçi, his house is behind ours, 50 meters from here... He was released, I don't remember if it was sometime in '62... He was released from jail, and we would hear people, "We are going from one house to another..." back then *kapicik*,¹⁸ "to see Adem because he was released from jail." They couldn't go straight to his house, because you would be considered his associate.

And when he used to go out, his sister lived at the park, he would move, you know, sometimes, as kids, you know, Adem. And now you know, all the important figures, we were expecting him to be big, and Adem was shorter, but even like that he seemed like he was big to us, do you understand? So the entire neighborhood was inspired by him. The Novosella brothers, Sabri and Selatin were also in prison. They were always prosecuted, they held some secret meetings in houses, looking if someone was coming by, or, do you understand? Because they had meetings, some... regarding events, especially around Flag Day. They used to write slogans, put up the flag at night, when they would wake up the next day, they'd see it. And the police would come...

Aurela Kadriu: To find out who...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Ask around, where, who, did you see anyone passing and things like this. But it is interesting that even kids know that they shouldn't tell, do you understand? Even if you saw something you didn't dare tell, like this...

Aurela Kadriu: Yesterday you told me that you went, as a young man you went to the cinema and pastry shop. I wanted to know which cinema you used to go to?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Well there was Kino Vllanimi and Kino Rinia. Kino Rinia is the one at Qafa, and Vllaznimi the one on the boulevard, where ABC is today, is it called like that?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes.

¹⁸ It literally means small door in Turkish. These small gates existed between the houses built next to each other, which ensured intimacy, and closeness. The word is also used to refer to easily reached places.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Our fun, the fun of young people back then, was going out at night, from 6:00, 7:00, walking two or three times in the *korzo*, from there to the pastry shop, from the pastry shop to the movies. We went to the cinema, so we watched movies.

Aurela Kadriu: To which one did you go to the most?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Back then movies with cowboys were more interesting. Then there were all kinds of dramas. People even went to the theater much more than they do now. I know that people waited in line to get tickets for the theater, and of course for us the artists who were back then seem better, but even now there are good ones, but there are few people who go to the theater, a few... back then they had more time to dedicate to culture, so that was also a... Even though for a certain strata, people with three-four children, five, the theater and everything it was difficult to go... but I found ways. Then it was like this for us, Enver [Petrovci]¹⁹ had finished the academy here, then when there was a show more like... We went there gladly, but we also went when Bekim or Faruk came. Then movies at that time, like this.

But after all that, so at that time alcohol wasn't in, it wasn't cool, it wasn't current. I became a father of five, I became a grandfather, I didn't know what drugs are, we heard that people got caught, like this, like that, but what drugs are, how drugs are (coughs) we didn't know. And now it unfortunately is a big issue, it's current, very destructive.

Part Four

Aurela Kadriu: Which pastry shop did you go to?

Xhemajl Petrovci: There was a pastry shop, when you came from the memorial at the corner where the cinema was, now the street, the street that now is a two-way street, back then it was a one-way street and it wasn't even open. Exactly on the street that you go to Kino Rinia on the right side, it had a few stairs down to get inside, a small shop. There was a shoe repairman, a tailor and that pastry shop.

In that pastry shop worked... My sister-in-law's uncle owned that pastry shop, my sister-in-law was Gorani. Me and my friends went there, three or four of us, or five, and we always knew whose turn it was, and to say it was my turn, I asked them what they wanted and I ordered. And since I spoke Gorani, but it wasn't the uncle, there was someone else, I didn't know if he was an employee or what, and I ordered in Gorani, in their language.

¹⁹ Enver Petrovci (1954) is a Kosovo-Albanian actor, writer and director. He went to high school in Prishtina and completed acting school in Belgrade.

He served us and asked, “Where are you from?” I say, “Gllloboqica.” In Gorani, he says, “Which family in Gllloboqica?” I said... Gorani’s last name for example Tahirovski, do you understand, he said, “I know all of them, why don’t I know you?” I said, “You don’t know me, what can we do...” At some point I said, “I’m kidding because I’m Albanian,” you know, I said, “I just speak Gorani.” He said, “Now you’re lying to me even more, because you spoke very confidently.” This and that, “I swear I’m Albanian.” This and that, and the old man hears and comes out, he says. “What is happening?” He said, “Nothing, this boy is saying, he first said he is Gorani, now he is saying he is an Albanian.” And he, he knows me and says, “A yes, Xhema is ours.” “I am also saying he is ours.” Meaning Gorani (laughs). He says, “No, no, Xhema is from Pristina, he is ours...” You know... These kinds of jokes, they died laughing, the other because they saw what the purpose was.

Eh, throughout my life I used other languages two-three times, when I was a soldier, I was a soldier for three months and I was upgraded, I became Corporal. It used to be called *razvodnik*²⁰ and I was very young. And another generation came, three months after I had gone, also a Roma among them. And I saw him, and I asked, “Where are you from?” But I asked him in Romani, this and that, after a while, we met and stuff. After a while, he probably talked to others and he said, “He is Roma.” And they told me, this and that, I said, “Okay, let them say that.”

One day I told him, “You know what, I speak Romani but I’m not Roma, and I wouldn’t be embarrassed if I was.” He says, “But you speak the language better than I do.” Usually, like now, we think people in Albania speak Albanian better than us, but actually they use Greek, and Italian, and God knows. Their Albanian isn’t pure, neither is ours, do you understand? So I knew... The Roma thought that they used more words in Serbian, while here back then Roma also used Turkish, a word here and there, Serbian and also Albanian. That’s why he thought he was more original than me.

In another case, I was off from the Army. Now imagine, there aren’t even 85-6 from Krushevc, and you would waste your whole day to come to Pristina. Because from Krushevc, you had to go to a station where they had a train, you went there by bus, you had to wait for the train for two-three hours. From Stallaq to Kraleva, from Kraleva to Fushë Kosova, from there to Pristina, round and round. So, it took six-seven hours, sometimes even ten.

I went to that train station, it was a small station, a shoe shiner was there, Roma of course, I didn’t have anyone to... I took my ticket and I didn’t have anyone to talk to and I went to him, put my shoe there to be cleaned, we had boots back then. And I asked him in his language, “How’s it going, brother?” He said, “Good, good. Where are you from?” I said, “From Pristina.” He said, “You have it better there.” So, you, meaning Roma, he meant that Roma people lived better there, in that context, he said, “Here...” He started telling me how they’re not nice to them, so yes also here, but there it was more drastic, they hated them a lot.

²⁰ Serb.: *razvodnik*, rank in the military that controls eight people.

And we were talking like this and he was finished. I wanted to pay him, “God, no...” he said, “I’d eat my children’s flesh rather than take money from a soldier.” Do you understand? Now I felt bad because it seemed like I lied to him, but if I said, “I’m not Roma...” Do you understand? I felt bad so I left it like that (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: Did they fire you from Ramiz Sadiku in the ‘90s?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, they ruined Ramiz Sadiku, on purpose, on purpose so they started asking for loyalty from Serbia, so, to sign that I’m loyal who do I know and they formed a new enterprise. So... It was named Grading, so in Serbian. And we started talking about what we should do, what to do. We got up and went, Hajrullah Gorani was in the syndicate, and it was far from where we are, at Ramiz Sadiku, almost all the departments were there.

We wanted to talk to them, they didn’t know what to say, someone like this, someone like that. From there we went to the flower shop Rugova had, we were welcomed by Skender Blakaj, and he said, “Can I ask you what’s your income? Is it more than a bag of flour?” He said, “If it is more than that, sign it.” Do you understand, because they would provide up to a bag of flour, do you understand, so like that?

And I don’t know, that lasted, because even after that some of us were more set on not signing it and not leaving there, do you understand, and that was worked out without signing anything. That lasted for about five-six years, and I was lucky, because if I hadn’t worked those years, I wouldn’t get my retirement money. So we worked until, I worked until ‘93. In ‘93...

Aurela Kadriu: In Germany?

Xhemajl Petrovci: I asked for days off without payment, I said, “I’ll take my children and go to Germany.” And it was a problem. My daughter had separated from her husband, she had a kid and she was the reason, we gathered and left. It was hard getting from Romania to Hungary. That journey lasted for seven days. Let’s go to the other border, come here, let’s go there and we were left nowhere. But we were stuck on the road for seven days and when we came back, it was December, and there was a huge snow and we were stuck on the road. My youngest daughter was six, almost seven years old, my niece was a year and a month, two. We only had as much food as you get for a journey, but luckily it didn’t last long, they came and cleaned the road with trucks and stuff. Now people needed to go to the bathroom and stuff, the snow was more than a meter tall, but that was done.

We came back, my daughter, niece, and my daughter’s uncle, so, my wife’s brother, they got off in Sofia, I said, “Try going back by plane.” Sofia - Prague, “We’ll go back...” I said, “At home, then we’ll see what you did so we’ll come too.” It was Friday when we came home, and I know how much people cried when we left, people, friends, family, neighbors came out to say goodbye. I felt like in the years ‘55-’56 when they used to migrate to Turkey.

And we came back after a week, and of course I wasn't financially stable, the first time I left I had to borrow money, I also had to borrow money the second time. And after a week I was informed that they went from Sofia to Prague by plane... We went there next week, with Tourist Kosovo to Sofia, there we went to the airport. Of course we dressed up, you know, to look a little like tourists, not like people who flee (laughs), you know, to make an impression. And we went to Prague.

I had all my children in my passport, my wife had hers, my daughter who had a girl also had her passport and her daughter's. My wife went on, and I was left with the others. They took my passport and went to talk to someone, my passport was valid for 20 more days. But they didn't take long and came back and said, "Okay, go on!" Even though I talked to a lawyer here and told him how things were, "Even if it is the last day you have the right to go, but coming back will be a problem." Like this. We went, we settled there.

My wife had a brother there, we stayed at his apartment until we started those procedures, where I ask for asylum or how do I know, but luckily... not luck, but I was one of those people who don't like being emigrants, also I didn't have a work permit, so I worked illegally from time to time, but always scared. But, they helped us, so for every family member, they gave us the apartment and we were settled. But back then when I quit my job here, the value of my salary was five marks divided by two, now we took a million but it was no longer money, from there we had to... I helped, my brother was here with his wife, my father, I had two sisters, like this.

When I worked there, I could help a little, because I knew that five marks was a lot of money here, let alone sending 50 marks, it was huge. So, every time I talked to someone, I would contact them very often, it was hard because we had to do it after midnight. The connections were weak, whoever I talked to, they heard that I wanted to come back, "Don't you dare come back, it's horrible here..." Like this. But I still came back after three years...

Aurela Kadriu: In '96?

Xhemajl Petrovci: '96. I left three daughters there, because they got married, two of them are still there, while my oldest daughter came back after the war. And when we came back, I used the money I saved to renovate the bathroom, change the washing machine, change the freezer, and the fridge. It was time to change them, and soon I was left with nothing. I opened the store, but people forget you for three years, they went elsewhere. Now I had to get new clients and it was a crisis, horrible.

Now my daughters who were left there stayed to help a little, it was hard in the beginning but it started getting better. Then during the war, when the war started and people started feeling, I say, "I don't plan on going anywhere." This and that... they evicted us from our house. I stayed at the border for seven

days, neither here nor there. We stayed in the neutral area for a night, it was, whoever was there remembers, horrible. It started raining at night, and we left our cars in the yard of the cement factory...

Aurela Kadriu: In Hani i Elezit?²¹

Xhemajl Petrovci: In Hani i Elezit. And I tell my wife, "Let's go back, at least we will have a roof over our heads." She said, "Nobody will pick on us here." And we came back. I took my car, I went into the street, only two-three people had phones back then, because those 063 phones started then, and we talked to people. But always hiding the phones, because they were expensive but also if police saw you had one, they would take it away.

It was interesting, we were in a line of cars the first night, all the lights were down and I saw Hani i Elezit, there were three lanes all with cars, there weren't even lanes, but that's how close to one another we were. A car came down, on the left side where you go to Hani i Elezit, a car came down and turned on the lights and turned them off, and some people got out, you could see their silhouettes in the dark, something moving. And they came and got between the cars and stuff. We had a car on the side, there was a wounded man there, we thought he was a soldier who was wounded, and now he wants to go get healed, we gave them something, helped him.

When they banged on his window, "*Daj pare!*" [Give us your money!] It was so horrifying, on the other side, because there five-six of them, [Ramiz Kelmendi](#), the writer, may he rest in peace, was behind us. They went to him too, they saw he had a nicer car, I had an old Jugo.²² Then I say they came like this, you just saw them as figures because you couldn't see their faces or anything, dark. My wife was like this {shows with his hands}, the children were in the backseat, my son and daughter were in the backseat and my wife, when they came, my hair *vuhh* {onomatopoetic} went up. My wife wants to get her hair up, I say, "Don't move!" "No, but what happened?" "Don't move because..." (laughs) Do you understand? It was horrible. And thank God we got off easy. They just took their money, got them out of the car to search, like this.

Aurela Kadriu: So during the war you came back and didn't go to Macedonia...

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, we didn't go to Macedonia. On the seventh day, we were in the first or second row to get to the other side, there came an order, "Go back!" From the Serbian police and we went back. I was so happy, my wife told me, "Don't get too happy, because God knows what..." "Whatever happens, happens..." I said, "We are going home." And we were around three-four families from our

²¹ Hani i Elezit is a border village between Kosovo and Macedonia where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days in March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either move into Macedonia or re-enter Kosovo.

²² The Yugo, also marketed as the Zastava Koral and Yugo Koral, is a subcompact hatchback formerly manufactured by Zastava Automobiles, at the time a Yugoslav corporation.

neighborhood, and we went back together, one of them was my wife's sister's husband, he lived in the skyscrapers in Ulpiana.

First thing, I stopped at the skyscrapers and told him, "Look at your apartment, did they break in or not?" He said, "No, I'm not going, let's go to your house." I went there alone, nobody had touched it, and I told him, "Go!" He said, "Better if I stay down..." And we came here. All the people from the neighborhood gathered, I mean those that came back, three-four cars. We gathered and I said, "However it is, it is best if all of us go to our houses. If someone attacks us, they get into your place at least, we can run away. I hear the sounds and I run and hide, or if it happens to me, you run away, it's worse if they find us all together." And they got up and went to their houses. We turned on our boilers, or what do I know, because it had been a week since we washed, or ate, or... horrible.

In the meantime, one day... it was interesting, one night, it wasn't in the daytime. It's interesting how you can hear, if someone walks around 200 meters from here in the neighborhood you can hear it, from Leci's houses and onwards, before even getting to that corner I heard it. And I got up, the cat had jumped, it was night, there was a pear tree at the door, the cat jumped there, and it seemed to me as if a person jumped the wall and *bap* {onomatope} got on the ground. I got up slowly, my wife was still asleep, it was night, very late probably, I don't know what time.

I got up and went out not seeing anything, knew the path by heart and by feeling around, and I went to the door, I put two bricks and stepped on them to see what's happening in the neighborhood. I stepped on them and saw nothing, I was going back very slowly, and my wife had also come out slowly, very quietly, and we bumped into each other, and both of us (laughs) horrible. I said, "Why did you get up?" I said, "You scared me." (laughs), she said, "You scared me, too!" Because you didn't see anything, we were both walking by heart. This was one of these.

The second one, it was morning, around 10:30 a.m., we ate, drank tea, and I heard them talking in the neighborhood. As I said, it's weird how we could hear everything very far... we don't notice the noise, but when there is no noise, you can hear much more and much further. I heard some people coming and I went out in the neighborhood, believing they had 30-40 more meters to get here, two tired people, all yellow, exhausted. "How are you? Where are you coming from?" I said. "From Koliq." I saw that they were tired, "Come on inside, drink something?" "Okay."

They came inside, I asked them where they are from, this and that, they were from Podujeva, Blakqori, but not like my wife, further away. Do you know this person and that person? We were talking, my wife was asking about her mother, about one of her nephews, how do I know, and he said, "You don't know, Koliq now has more people than Pristina used to have." That's how many there were. So he didn't know who was still there, who wasn't.

The line was so long, so a part of them got to Pristina until they got up to go their way and I had... My daughter was around eleven years old. I said to my wife, "I'll drive and perhaps I'll be ahead of them and I might meet your mother..." Do you understand? "Or Muhamet with his children." He had four young daughters. She said, "No, I'll come too." "No, you stay home because our daughter will be left home alone." The guests were still there, and my wife and I got up. I told my daughter, "Give them something to eat... Do you understand? We had bread and everything. And my wife and I left and walked, and walked..."

There's a village near Makovc, there were barracks, there the police were parked. And I was scared to go with a car, so I wanted to park there. One of the policemen had taken off his hat, I didn't realize he was a policeman. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Oh, my wife's mother had one of legs amputated, they're probably coming this way." "Ok, then why don't you take your car?" I left the car and wanted to walk, you know. Then I went back, took the car and continued.

When I came to the front of the line, exactly how they told me, whether they still left, or not. The husband of my wife's sister from Podujeva, he was the principal of a school, he was on a tractor, and around that tractor, so on top of that tractor, where it has a seat, but around it, four or five people, he was there. I say, "Can you stop?" My mother-in-law was there, with another twelve women there. She was a little older. I say, "Can you stop so I can get her off?" He didn't stop, he didn't even know from the confusion. "Do you not hear the shootings?" You really could hear the shootings.

And I got her down while the tractor was moving. And I kidded with her, "Do you have *deviza*?"²³ "What are those?" I said, "Money, do you have it?" She said, "Yes, I do." "Where?" "In my socks." "how much do you have?" "300." I was kidding, I had... "Well, since you have money, I'll take you." I took her and got into the car. While we were going back, I saw an old woman with another woman, a 15-16-year-old boy. I got them into the car, too. And we came here.

We communicated by phone, but phones here didn't work. One guy at the skyscrapers had a phone that worked, I would talk to people in Tetova, and my daughters in Germany, and my wife's brother in Germany. They were telling me, "Leave everything and come. Come here and don't wait." At some point, my wife's brother said, "Well get my wife and the kids from there and you... you whatever you want." Do you understand? From, from... and his mother.

And so it happens... Here in the neighborhood we saw each other every day. One of the neighbors says to me, "They're thinking of fleeing." I was trying to encourage them all the time, "It's going to get better, this and that..." Like this. People were scared. He says, "They want to flee." He said, "I would not want to leave you, Uncle Xhema, but my wife is insisting." I said, "Get your kids and leave." He had

²³ *Deviza* was a term for all foreign currencies that circulated in Kosovo. The American dollar, Swiss franc, and German deutsche mark were the most stable currencies in former Yugoslavia during the economic inflation of the 1990s.

two kids, and I said, “Tell them and I’ll take two or three rounds there...” The buses would pick them up at Rilindja to Macedonia.

I sent two or three rounds there, and I came back home. I took my wife and we went to talk on the phone, to see if they left. When I went, they were still waiting, the bus had gone, but they agreed to come back and take them, they would pay for them again. And when I talked to him, my brother-in-law, “At least get the kids out of there, do whatever you want...” I told them, “I’ll just finish this call and I’ll come back and bring my wife, kids and mother-in-law.” Kids... only my daughter was left.

And I took them there, they got on the bus, my wife said, “How did I now make you some bread, so you would have it for longer.” “I’ll make it myself, don’t worry.” And they went to Tetovo. Then for a month, almost two, I was alone here. This cousin of mine {shows with his hands} had three people with rent in his house, they had closed the door. And when they found out I was here, they said, they brought me a small pot, no, a bowl, “If there is any danger of throwing it, we have the rope, we’ll go into the ceiling and close the hole. We’ll pull the rope and close it.” And that’s how we would communicate.

Then they didn’t have food. I had flour, the other one had... And I told them, “Take flour freely.” You know, I offered them whatever I had. Like this, until the war was over, we were dealing with these kinds of issues. Of course, I felt more comfortable alone. After a while, this guy’s {shows with his fingers downwards} son came, he came with his mother, his stepmother, and four children. It was very problematic for people who came into houses, they would ask for your ID, if that wasn’t your address, it would be a problem. That’s it.

Aurela Kadriu: Did they come to your house, or not?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, yes. They stayed here.

Aurela Kadriu: I mean did the police ever come?

Xhemajl Petrovci: They did.

Aurela Kadriu: And?

Xhemajl Petrovci: I wasn’t here. One of the two women, one was Serbian, but spoke Albanian. She had the biggest problem with the police, “How did you marry an Albanian?” These kinds of things. They didn’t say anything to anyone else. A family was here in my sister’s house, close to here, from Matiqan, they got in and mistreated them quite a lot, they didn’t even stay there for a night. A murder had happened there, and they left from there, came here. And then that day that happened, and it didn’t happen often.

At the time, it was from 10:30, to 2:00 you could go out into the city. Back then, Žito Promet²⁴ had the bakeries. Some private bakeries were working, people who never worked in bakeries weren't good at it, other people would work, make some break, like this. But we didn't care much, compared to that bread, it happened within those seven days... My wife's sister and some women went to Elez Han and cooked. They baked the bread. And I said to her, "How did you now..." Because we didn't have salt, nor baking soda, or... How do I know, it was like wood, you couldn't eat it when it was cold. And I told her, "How did you not get..." They had pickles, and made the bread with juice of pickles, "*Kuku*, how did I not think of that?" I said, "I thought of it..." You know, at least the pickle juice has salt.

And it's interesting, because at that time I had some issues with my stomach, and stuff, it went away. For those seven days I'm not sure if I ate 150-200 grams of that bread. Because we were five-six people now, my wife's brother and two sons, and others. I had my daughter, a relative... And it was time to go to the other side, while we were on the border, because I'm jumping from here to there...

Aurela Kadriu: What...

Xhemajl Petrovci: But I remember now. He was only with his wife, he didn't have kids. And he says, "Xhema, how many of you are there?" I said, "We are one hundred." And I said, "Let me look..." He said, "No who..." Because he had a lada, and he had mattresses there, flour, and some cookies, he prepared to go into the woods. And he says, says, I say, "Let me ask..." I asked my son, "Do you want to go with them?" He said, "Yes, I'll just get my backpack." When I saw his backpack full of books, heavy, do you understand, I didn't know what he took with him. He got into the car.

The husband of my wife's sister had a son, a year older. And it was problematic for young people, and my son wasn't still a child, but he wasn't grown up either, 17-18 years old. And I told him, I said, "Will you let your son go, since my friend is going, he can get on the other side..." And then he took the two boys. I had my sisters in Tetovo, also a sister of theirs was there, I told them, "You go straight there, ask for..." I gave them the address, "They'll take you in." Even though there was no problem, people in Tetova took people in.

But his wife started complaining, "God knows where they will send us, where my son is..." And in the beginning we communicated with people in Tetovo, we called the people they were heading to, they hadn't gone yet. My friend who took them had thought, "Let's not go at night, let's sleep in the car, and I'll take them in the morning." And until then she was telling me, "What did you do to me..." This, and that... At some point I say... And then her husband started doing the same thing, I say, "Oh, come on, you have two sons, at least you have one. I have only one, and I sent him away." Do you understand? "I hope God protects them..." So like this, war problems.

²⁴ The state-run company that managed the entire flour market in former Yugoslavia, and also owned bakeries.

We found out the next day, I said, “Are you at ease now?” He said, “No, because God knows where they will send us now.” I said, “Well, I can’t ensure that you all go to Hotel Bristol in Skopje.” How things happened, he went to America with his family, he is there even today. My wife had come back from Tetovo. And it was interesting, I contained my emotions all the time, so well, two or three times the police came here and went through stuff, I didn’t feel it. So, I wasn’t scared, or horrified, or...

Eh, I failed the test when they started, when the first neighbor came, after the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement.²⁵ The neighbor in front came, with five-six children, grandchildren, his son, his wife, they came with a van. Then I started crying, from happiness, from... I don’t know how. And there was a neighbor here, he was mentally ill, he stayed here all the time, but he was very skillful, we took his medicine and... So he behaved normally. And it was also interesting when a Serbian woman in front, she was with her husband, one of her boys was a soldier, not paramilitary, the other one was a businessman, his mother said, “Give me a bottle of oil, I’ll give you a box of cigarettes.” Do you understand? (laughs) Her son worked with cigarettes.

And now when the agreement was signed, they had to leave. The woman came out with the soldier, he was nice even though he looked tough, he was nice before the war, and during the war. And she closed the door and gave me the key. I said, “You know that in this neighborhood three-four houses got closed, I would go close to them, even though I didn’t have keys, I’ll guard yours as much as I can also, without a key, I don’t...” Do you understand? So they went. Eh things went south then.

Another thing that wasn’t good is that there were more thieves doing harm, rather than Serbs. Because Serbs didn’t go out at night, I was freer to go out at night than them. They were more scared. There is a beautiful house here, it belongs to Gëzim Puka, but it had a strong door, the garage doors were also strong they couldn’t break them... the police tried to break them during the day, and left it. Then I heard them at night going through the roof, and I went to the other yard and I threw a rock in the roof tiles. They heard the noise and ran (laughs). So that was also, in that way you also protected some stuff. Like this.

Aurela Kadriu: How were things after the war?

Xhemajl Petrovci: After the war, like the whole world, all people from Kosovo pretended to be KLA.²⁶ People started coming, “You are protecting Serbian houses.” And I was saying, “No they’re Albanian, they haven’t come back yet.” Like this, there were a lot of people who were ready to steal, to... like this.

²⁵ The Military Technical Agreement between NATO (KFOR) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), commonly known as the Kumanovo Agreement, was the accord concluded on June 9, 1999 in Kumanovo that ended the NATO bombing campaign of FRY.

²⁶ Albanian. *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* - Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you continue to work after the war?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes, I started working, I had that shop, the service, but not a state-run job. After the war, I worked only in the private sector. These connections that we had with Gorani people, we were friends. Korzo [pastry shop] in Pristina, do you know? There was that pastry shop, Korzo, I don't know if you remember it...

Aurela Kadriu: I don't remember but I know...

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, like that. There was a border, to Llapi, Drenica, to operate, to take what's not yours... And we were friends, and when you went to buy eggs and bread, we used that pastry shop's name... I took bread for the whole neighborhood, eggs and bread, oil and things like this. Because we stayed like that for almost three months. They asked, "Who are you taking these for?" And I would pretend to take them for Korzo, so... And often so they don't ask a lot, I used to say, "Give me a receipt so I can tell them how much this cost." I didn't really need it.

Even marks, for example, I forgot how much it was but they used to take half value, but it was important to be supplied. And this Žito Promet had everything. The market at Ulpiana had some things here and there. But at 2, 2:30 there was no one in the city, it would close again.

Aurela Kadriu: After the war?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, no, I'm talking about during the war. Because after the war, they came to "Korzo", there's Serbian music here, I don't know what, just to find a reason to...

Aurela Kadriu: Close it.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes. They started eating, drinking, commander whoever signed this, do you understand? At some point, "You have to leave the shop, give me the keys." Like this. And a lot of mistreatment. And you couldn't fight with them at the time. Because whatever happened, even though the initiator of that was killed, he was killed at last over a stand. Commander Murrizi [Agim Murtezi] killed him, a person who worked for, he was the one who signed when I took things, Leli from Bregu i Diellit, he was from Matiqan, a drug addict. Well, that drug addict killed him, actually Commander Murrizi. Because they were fighting over a stand, which was a bit further than *Tre Sheshirat* [Three Hats], he killed him. So they always get what's coming to them, but sometimes it takes too long.

I had children living in Germany, I mean two of my daughters. I was financially stable, I worked, I had the service again. So after they took Korzo away from me. Because I owned Korzo with another

neighbor here, whose son was one of the commanders, I don't know if he didn't want to do anything, or he couldn't, how do I know, and I gave up. I went back to the shop, my job.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you sell Krozo, or did they take it away from you?

Xhemajl Petrovci: No, no, they took it from me. They used it for about ten years. And unfortunately, they were big commanders. And they weren't even ashamed, Sylejman Selimi had something to do with it. Sylejman Selimi, Sabit Geci's father-in-law. He then, from Sabit, gave money to Sylejman Selimi. One of the activists here in the neighborhood, so I went and told him, "This is what's going on." And I told him, "You are involved here too." And to prove it to me, he took to a, to a police that was formed back then, and said, "Uncle Xhema is Adem Demaçi's²⁷ associate, they're doing this and this, he is blaming me..." He says, "Take Uncle Xhema, and go to Sabit Geci."

When I went to Sabit Geci, he was in his underwear. Two of his bodyguards, one of them was putting his socks on him. And a girl, like Bleona Qereti, or whatever, like that... so some kind of harem there. And he says, "Uncle... Fadil said we should come to you, Uncle Xhema is this and that, Uncle Xhema during the war supplied all those," he says, "he has problems, this and that..." The illiteracy here... And he says, without even asking him, "Look Sylejman Selimi is my son-in-law, but that would not matter, I would kill him," he said, "But he is a good man." What does this mean? So Sabit Geci, it's Sabit Geci's order, he sent Commander Murrizi.

And later it was clear, because they traded, he gave it to Sabit. Sabit then was asking for this much money from Gorani, no I can't give it to you, no I did this here, I... What are you doing in a place that doesn't belong to you? And at last it cost one hundred thousand marks to give to them, as if he had invested in that shop. And now lately, I don't know what is happening to "Korzo", they went to Sarajevo...

Aurela Kadriu: Where was it?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Huh?

Aurela Kadriu: Where was the shop?

Xhemajl Petrovci: The shop, "Z mobile" or what is that in the center...

Aurela Kadriu: Ah, yes, yes, yes...

²⁷ Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Eh, it was next to it.

Aurela Kadriu: Yes, yes.

Xhemajl Petrovci: Back then it was the most frequented shop in Pristina, before and after the war. These are some of the unsaid things.

Aurela Kadriu: How is your life now?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Now as I said, I have grandchildren, my wife died a year and a half ago. I visited Germany now, I came back on the 22nd [November, 2018]. I go to Turkey, but I go to Durrës more often. I don't have much free time (laugh) the hours in a day aren't enough, the wood, the garden, like this, my sister is also near here. I deal with flowers during the summer, but even during the winter, to put them away, clean them, fix them, that's what I deal with. This is how time goes by, when you work... And I walk quite a lot, at least once a day for an hour and a half, two, I split it in half.

I go from here to Bregu i Diellit walking very often, I take my nephew, because I prefer coming back by bus. And once, he says, "Can we go there by walking?" I said, "Yes but maybe we will get tired?" He said, "No, but you might get exhausted." (laughs). That little thief.

Aurela Kadriu: Kili?

Xhemajl Petrovci: Yes. Like this.

Aurela Kadriu: Thank you very much, Uncle Xhema!

Xhemajl Petrovci: No problem!