

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SKENDER BOSHNIJAKU

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Duration: 107 minutes

Present:

1. Skender Boshnjaku(Speaker)
2. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
4. Besarta Breznica (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: Can you introduce yourself, tell us something about your early childhood memories, so the environment where you grew up, your family, what kind of family was it, whatever you remember?

Skender Boshnjaku: Can we start?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes, yes.

Skender Boshnjaku: In short, I was born in 1942. I finished primary school at Haxhi Zeka in Peja, then I continued with primary school, because I finished the two first grades, and I continued at Karagaç, that's how the school used to be called at Karagaç. Then I came back to Ramiz Sadiku school, and finally I finished gymnasium,¹ which was called Gymnasium Real in Peja...

Aurela Kadriu: Mister Boshnjaku, can we stop and talk about your family...

Skender Boshnjaku: Ah, about my family. Family, my father, Isa, passed away, my mother, Hajrie, passed away, I have a brother, Shefqet. I spent most of my childhood in Peja, my early memories are connected to feelings of poverty, penury. Schooling was hard in the sense of not having basic things, say books, notebooks, pens and everything else. But, in that poverty, idealism and persistence existed, so did the thirst to learn, read, for knowledge and so on. So, I finished gymnasium in Peja, it used to be called Real, Bedri Pejani today, and I remember many people from childhood.

I remember my first teacher Hamdi Tabaku, I remember my second teacher, Hamdi Tabaku. And for another two classes the late Kamber Pajaziti was my teacher, Xhafer Karahoda was my head teacher, Muhamet Belegu was my head teacher, Shaban Aliu was my head teacher, Riza Çavolli was my head teacher, Rexhep Geci was my head teacher and so on.

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

I am happy that, especially about Ahmet Meha, Ahmet Kelmendi, my Albanian language professor whose family... I think he got me to where I am today. My knowledge in language, literature, reading, and to whom I will be forever grateful, and always on Teachers' Day [March 7], I commemorate him through my Facebook account. I always remind him on Teachers' Day and so on. And I think I am a generation, a last Mohican who pays respects to my generation, my teachers, for whom I stand up to admire them, and respect them until my last breath.

Otherwise, I remember Peja, I left Peja as an 18-year-old. People, I remember Rama's wood stove, the taxi driver Shahin Goska, I remember the barber Rexhep Bogu, I remember my friends, Faruk... I was in the same class in gymnasium as Faruk Begolli,² Enver Hadri,³ Bajram Sefa, Ruzhdi Spahiu, as I said Enver Hadri, Ekrem Kryeziu.⁴ I am very proud that I was their friend, and that we had a proper relationship, that the generations today did not follow this common solidarity. Jusuf Gacaferri, my friends, I almost forgot, Jusuf Gacaferri was my best friend, we were neighbors, he passed away before me, I think I'll never forget him. Here...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What kind of city was Peja?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What kind of city was Peja?

Skender Boshnjaku: Peja was a city with an extraordinary structure, image. Actually it was an attraction for tourists then, tourists started coming and the main tourist place was Peja, Rugova. As a kid I remember the first tourists who came rushing to try on the *plis*⁵ and kids, we'd go and see what was happening. But, it was always a good memory that they liked Gryka e Rugovës, Peja's landscape, Peja's atmosphere.

Peja is a city which is divided by Lumbardhi, I remember Ura e Gurit [Stone Bridge], Ura e Zallit [Sand Bridge], I remember Korzo Hotel, I remember the walks. It was a tradition back then to walk around *korzo*⁶ as entertainment, like in Pristina where we would go out and meet. Maybe we even looked at our first loves while walking with friends, we talked about homework and so on...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where did your passion for education come from?

² Faruk Begolli (1944-2007), was a prominent Kosovo Albanian actor. He graduated from the Academy of Film in Belgrade (1966), and played in more than sixty films and theater productions.

³ Enver Hadri (1941-1990) was an Albanian nationalist activist, gunned down in Brussels.

⁴ Ekrem Kryeziu (1943) was born in Peja, Kosovo. He is a film and television director. He graduated from the Academy of Film in Belgrade, and directed many feature films throughout his career.

⁵ Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

⁶ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

Skender Boshnjaku: My passion for education, maybe I can say that it was my talent, my personal love but it also was affection, an affection, a reach, it was the energy of my teachers, who even though didn't have supplies or school preparation as teachers... but, an ideal of theirs existed that reduced, hid or masked that lack of papers or diploma, but they loved giving us everything that was possible at that time.

Despite the fact that we didn't have pens and notebooks, we still achieved, we are a generation who achieved something. I can mention a lot, those whom I mentioned, who have achieved in life despite not having anything, we had nothing. Of 10-15 school subjects in the gymnasium, most of them were in Serbo-Croatian. The Serbo-Croatian language was like a native language, actually we only had a lecture less in Serbian. So, the language was also, it was very... they asked a lot, and I remember they asked us to learn the Battle of Kosovo⁷ by heart, and Serbian myths, which we recited.

I read a lot, there was a shortage of books. I... I remember it as if it was today, for example, we borrowed from Naim Luci, the deceased, he left for Albania, he passed away, he had books that he lent, for example, I remember *Sul me Lotë* [Sul with Tears] that circulated from hand to hand. Then, we transliterated "Këngët e Milosaos" [Milosao's songs] with a quill pen, on tables, on the stairs of the Bedri Pejani Royal Gymnasium. There we also described "Bagëti e Bujqësi" [Livestock and Agriculture] by Naim Frashëri.⁸

So, we really did not have books, but we tried with those we had. I had a habit of reading, I actually thought I would go into world literature. I read a lot, I actually read in Serbian in gymnasium, I wrote about Don Quixote of La Mancha, then War and Peace, Dickens and so on.

So we are a generation who loved reading, and it's that way even today. So a book for me is my best friend, biggest joy, and best meeting. If I don't touch a book during the day, it seems wasted to me... to put to use.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Were your parents educated?

Skender Boshnjaku: No, no, no, no, they were not. My mother finished elementary school, but not my father. So, this is the truth. Plus the language inside is a mixed archaic language. So, language, the late Ahmet Meha taught me language, and it was a pleasure to get a good grade on the essay I wrote in his

⁷ The Battle of Kosovo (Turkish: *Kosova Savaşı*; Serbian: *Kosovska bitka*) took place on June 15, 1389 between an army led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and an invading army of the Ottoman Empire under the command of Sultan Murad I. Reliable historical accounts of the battle are scarce. The bulk of both armies were wiped out, and Lazar and Murad were killed.

⁸ Naim Frashëri was an Albanian poet and writer (1846-1990) He was one of the most prominent figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian national movement, together with his two brothers Sami and Abdyl. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Albania.

class. Previously, essays were the mirror of that person. I can say that to this day when I was at the University, University of Medicine, I was committed to my master's degree thesis, I said, you know, the best test is to see everyone who wants to start a master's, to see the test of how they write.

Secondly, I taught, let's go back, for three years at the Psychology Department, I taught abnormality and personality. And for me it was a pleasure that, apart from knowledge, the essay, the test, you write an essay. For the topic that I had, first I looked at the syntax, grammar, how the language and the flow of thought are. So, I think that for each of these people, the first test... I would do it like this, "Do you want to be a minister? Or what do you wanna be? Just write two sentences and I'll give you my hand."

So, I don't know how things with essays are today, but I think they should write essays just like back then. I don't know how it is today, maybe it isn't being applied, and one other thing we didn't have, the Albanian language professor when... To tell you that when I applied to Peja's gymnasium there was an entrance exam, even though I finished elementary school. So, elementary school, eight years, excellent grades, and again I had to take the entrance exam to get accepted to Peja's gymnasium.

And my Albanian language professor from day one, when we finished the first year of gymnasium, he gave us the number of books we had to read during the summer break. So, we always had 20 to 25 books to read during the summer. When school started, "What did you read, Skender? What?" And for every book you had to write an essay, prepare a... keep notes of what you read, what you understood and so on.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: In what... When you say you spoke archaic language at home, what does that mean?

Skender Boshnjaku: Mixed language, Turkish and Albanian. So, the influence of Turkish was... that was a big obstacle for me, and I think that the consequences of a long Ottoman reign is that Albanian language didn't develop as much, and it affected our side, even though captivity lasted long after that, the Serbian captivity led us to be stuck in our narrative. Maybe you can notice it in me too, but I tried being more spontaneous, more fluent...

So, the good part is that Albania got its independence in 1912, and has developed its thinking and lived in Albanian, that's the most beautiful part. And I think if it weren't for Albanian translations, now I'm going back to novels I read, I think we would have gone bankrupt [culturally]. I think they have achieved more, they read more, they speak better. I have said that if I could be born again, I would want to be born in Albania, because I think a five-six year old child knows the language better than I at this age. So we have obstacles.

I think in Serbian to this day, then I translate into Albanian. So this is not a good situation, to this day I try to read as much as I can and believe me that these days I'm reading Adventures of Huckleberry

Finn, I saw the movie, and I read it in Serbian, but all the novels I read in Serbian, I'm reading them for a second time now. This is all thanks to translations. Especially the extraordinary translations of Pjetër Rei who translated... Fan Noli⁹ translated Cervantes, but so did Pjetër Rei. So, there, these things I am talking about I achieved through these readings.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then when you were 18 years old, where did you decide to go?

Skender Boshnjaku: When I was 18 years old, after I finished the *matura*¹⁰ in Peja, there was the *matura* thesis, the preparations. My thesis was "Romani i Kosovës" [Kosovo's Novel], I wrote about "Besniku" [The Faithful] by Rexhai Surroi,¹¹ "Karavani" [The Karavan] by Azem Shkreli,¹² I wrote about "Rrushi ka nisë me u pjekë" [The grape started getting ripe] by Sinan Hasani and whose novel... These were the first novels in Albanian in Kosovo.

And after I finished the *matura* I collaborated with Radio Pristina, time after time the program *Kolovajsa e të Dielave* [The Sunday's Kolovajsa] was broadcasted on Radio Pristina, so I asked my colleagues, "Ekrem, what do you want to study? Skender..." There was Skender Shala, I asked all of them. And at the end, I asked myself, "What do you want to study, Skender?" Medicine was the first time, the first time was medicine. It was spontaneous and I sent the report to Radio Prishtina and there I said, "This many students, this many of my friends are going to study."

I decided... I enrolled in Belgrade [University] without an entrance exam because my grades were... back then I had good grades, excellent, and I got accepted [without entrance exam]. And a colleague, Sejdi Berisha, not the poet, he is a veterinarian, he was at the Veterinary Faculty, and he tells me, "Skender, you are accepted to the faculty and I want to enroll you," because I didn't have the money to enroll, so he did.

Then after I enrolled, I left the Peja train station with my father's suitcase, wooden, all alone to study in Belgrade. Without a scholarship, without any support, so all alone I went to study in Belgrade, and so on.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What was it like going to Belgrade from Peja at the age of 18?

⁹ Fan Noli (Theofan Stilian Noli, 1882-1965) was the founder of the Orthodox Church of Albania and Prime Minister of Albania for a brief period in 1924. He was also a writer and a scholar and died in exile in the United States.

¹⁰ *Maturë or Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

¹¹ Rexhai Surroi (1929-1988) was a Yugoslav Albanian journalist, diplomat and writer. He graduated from the University of Belgrade's Law School. He was also one of the few Kosovo Albanians to become ambassadors of Yugoslavia.

¹² Azem Shkreli (1938-1997) was a Kosovo-Albanian poet and literary critic. He was the president of Kosovo's Writers Association, director of the National Theater and Kosovafilm.

Skender Boshnjaku: It's a, I think life, I didn't have time to think, just like getting into a river, into an ocean, like the sea taking you and you don't know where you're going. That's how I drowned, I mean I got into this game of life and I didn't think much. And I enrolled, actually when I went to Belgrade, Sejdiu told me, "Here is your diploma, Skender," and I competed in... I lived in the dormitory called Vrdovc back then, before the Second World War, and I was in the same room as Ekrem, Faruk Begolli, Enver Nimani, Petrit, Petrit...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Imami?

Skender Boshnjaku: Not Imami, Petrit Begolli, Petrit Begolli, Ali Berisha, we were all in the same room. There was a room, snow used to get into the room, and every morning we had to... we had a bakery, and it was our responsibility to go buy bread in the morning so we could go to the university. So there I was the most random, but when it was someone else's turn...

Then we had to light up the stove with coal, we felt like it was too much work, so we were more cold than warm. Then in the second year I lived in the new Belgrade dormitory, new Belgrade, a, a Student Center of 40 thousand students in five blocks. There were four blocks for men, and one for women. Then I lived, I was lucky in Belgrade, in Ivo Llolli Ribar, it was the center where foreigners mostly lived, but I was lucky.

Then I lived in Svetozar Penezic, and then in the end I came back to Vrdovc, the new dormitory for students, and that's where I finished my studies. I started my studies in 1961 when I finished high school, and I finished them in 1966. I think I finished them on a *rok*¹³ with a 9.0 GPA.¹⁴ Throughout the studies, I was, I said I went with no money, but I applied for a loan in the second year. I carried coal during the summer with Albanians to the train station in Belgrade.

Meanwhile I got a loan in the second year, but after I finished the second year, I was a good student, I worked as an assistant at the Institute of Biochemistry in Belgrade, Biochemistry in Belgrade. So, the salary that I got from working as an assistant was much higher than the loan. And the loan that I got when I finished university I went back to... back then, it was the order where they send you, so they sent me here and I went to the Executive Council, that's how the building where the Parliament of Kosovo is today was called then.

There was a worker there, I went there, I said, "This, this... I finished it, I want to go to Peja. I am from Peja." They just wrote some sort of act for me, almost told me to shut up, "Go to this hospital and that's it, go to this hospital." I... I cried, how do I come here? How do I go? I dreamed of going to Peja, but I stayed here.

¹³ Serbian: *rok*, deadline.

¹⁴ Equivalent to a B on the American A-F letter-grade scale.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Which year?

Skender Boshnjaku: In 1966.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What was Pristina like in 1966?

Skender Boshnjaku: Pristina was a small town with parts, I experienced it with cubes, granite cubes, Pristina's city center. Back then a hotel called Božur existed, then Iliria, the Parliament of Kosovo, I experienced that, I experienced the opening, the opening, they took us there from our high school, I took part when the Brotherhood and Unity Monument was put up in the 60s, now it's Adem Jashari Square, now that it was renovated.

We came by train, by animal's train, they brought us here in train wagons, and we were allegedly accepted in... to attend the meeting of, of, of... Svetozar Vukmanović - Tempo¹⁵ spoke. I remember the road that used to be called JNA, now it's UÇK, all muddy, the station, there's a station... in the corner where the train stop is, where the stairs that take you to Arbëria or Dragodan, there was a train stop, another stop was there, where the train station of Pristina was, also the road, I remember this road. The Grand Hotel was opened in 1977, I remember Bankkos, I remember the Bank of Ljubljana which is here to this day.

The roads were narrow, not paved with asphalt, I remember Mark Isaku, the road was also muddy. All the roads were muddy, but Pristina had a flower park, a, a...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where was this?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where was this?

Skender Boshnjaku: It was here, in front of Behxhet Pacolli's hotel now, that's where the flower park was. Then the linden trees and the other decorative trees, that even nowadays seem to be disappearing, and it's a disaster, now it's... it's not mine, it's not in my memory. It's a Pristina covered with cubes, and dedicated to children's toys and bikers, to... everything. And that is not my Pristina, my Pristina is with linden trees and other trees that grew for years, but they don't exist today, and it seems that they will disappear completely.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where did you live when you came to Pristina?

¹⁵ Svetozar Vukmanović - Tempo (1912-2000) was a Montenegrin leader and a member of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist League.

Skender Boshnjaku: I moved onto the street... there were no opportunities to rent houses back then. I moved to the Aca Marović street back then, a neighborhood where Serbians lived and...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Is it still called Aca Marović?

Skender Boshnjaku: No, now it's called Tringë Smajli, going from Mother Theresa Boulevard, near Behxhet Pacolli's hotel, in the direction of... near Hotel Sirius, to the city park, that was the street, and I lived there a year during... first I finished residency then I was accepted to the General Hospital, back then it was called... I forgot to tell you that when I came here there was only the surgery building, only that building and back then it was called the Hygiene Office. There were no other buildings [in the General Hospital Complex].

I actually have a picture, but I couldn't find it. You can see the Pristina General Hospital building in the background. The Pristina General Hospital was finished in 1964-'65, and I came here in 1966, and I worked there until 2007 when I retired.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Tell me how that hospital changed since you started working there in 1966?

Skender Boshnjaku: Well I, the Pristina General Hospital was at that time the biggest in Yugoslavia, and it had, when it came to autopsies, it had had the highest percentage in ex-Yugoslavia. Pristina's hospital had... and in the hospital, I'm honored to tell you, that I met, and again I have to move, today it's forgotten, the late ophthalmologist, the best of Albanian medicine, Xheladin Deda, I also met Talat Pallaska, also a popular ophthalmologist, I met Sehadete Mekuli there, there I met... Hajredin Ukelli, I met Simon Debreci, I met Gazmend Shaqiri before me, Hysen Ukmataj, in different departments, Gynecology, Eshref Biqaku Radiology...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Were you in the same generation as them or... ?

Skender Boshnjaku: No, no, they were before me. To tell you the truth, I was the youngest because I finished it on time. The others, medicine was hard and the generation which I met practiced a lot during the studies because most of the... I was... Musa Haxhiu was before me, I can't forget him. I think that Musa Haxhiu is the fulcrum and the cream of Albanian medicine. I always said, "I would clean Musa Haxhiu's shoes."

He is a doctor who has a lot of references, articles in various journals but he died in the USA and that's where he is buried. Oh, I should not forget that I met Osman Imami, the first Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Osman Imami. So, there are some people that I'm mentioning who should never be forgotten, and what was created from the 1970s, the return, medicine wise, it has become a ruin, an undoing of the Faculty, which we thought are going to continue the tradition of these people. It has completely changed, let alone other things.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Can you just tell us... since we're young...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: I was born in '81, they were born in the '90s. Can you give us an idea of what was it like when you came in '66-'67? And then how did it develop from decade to decade, what was built around it, because I suppose it was all fields, only Ulpiana was...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. People...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: You went to work every day.

Skender Boshnjaku: People, people who, I mean in politics, even today, whenever I have the chance I mention Fadil Hoxha.¹⁶ There's a portal, where people from Gjakova are, there's where culture is, they cultivate culture, even though I think that Peja and other cities also, I'm not saying to you from where... I'm not a localist, I'm not, I love every one. I also love Gjakova, actually with the last name Boshnjaku they say that I'm from Gjakova, I say, "Yes, yes," because there are people with the last name Boshnjaku there and they think I'm from Gjakova, I say, "Yes," I don't deny it.

I have a lot of friends from Gjakova, I have friends everywhere. But the way of the movement of Kosovo's progress is the fall... On June 1st, no, July 1st, July 1st, the fall of Aleksandar Ranković¹⁷ and his assistant, Svetislav Stefanović at the Plenum of Brion.¹⁸ From '66, Kosovo opened its eyes and developed. Maybe those were the best days of development in the century of captivity in a small light, which was the fall and end of the chauvinistic career of Aleksandar Ranković, who created a lot of problems for Kosovo's people, starting from buying to gathering weapons, etcetera. Also villages suffered from *otkupj*,¹⁹ from... etcetera.

And from there Kosovo starts to bloom, the University is established, the University of Medicine is established, also other faculties, a lot of buildings are built, a lot of famous factories are opened, the shock absorber factory, the engine factory in Gjakova, the bicycle factory in Peja, the heater factory in Gjilan, the ammunition factory in Skenderaj, the brick factory in Podujeva, etcetera, etcetera.

¹⁶ Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

¹⁷ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

¹⁸ IV Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, held on the Adriatic island of Brioni in 1966, mostly noted for the expulsion from the party of the Ministry of the Interior and head of secret police Aleksandar Ranković.

¹⁹ Serbian: *otkupj*, tax on agricultural products.

So, at that time the development was taking place, which, as I remember the University had, there were only in, in, in, there were two hundred thousand employed, there were 15 thousand medical workers in hospitals and institutions of Kosovo. A lot of doctors were doing good, so... PhD, efforts that, people went to America, they went... Gazmend Shqiri got his doctoral degree in Prague, others... I got it in Belgrade, and... I fully developed educationally in Belgrade at the faculty, specialization, master's degree and doctorate.

So we were all without arms, without a back, like it's supposed to be and that's why we practiced an assignment that... I tried to offer people whatever they needed honestly, and we were honorable. This was... Kosovo's development started from 1966 and until 1980. From the '80s and on, the National Chauvinist Movement of Serbia's church started, of the nationalists of Serbia, of the Academy of Sciences and others. To implement the project of Vaso Čubrilović,²⁰ the memorandums of the Academy of Sciences in 1986 and so on. Until Kosovo changed the course, moved forward and achieved...

In 1968 there were labor demonstrations and I was a soldier. So, so with people's effort, the efforts of young people, came what we call freedom, but this is a limited freedom which did not manage to accomplish all that it wanted to, because it was all overturned. The health department was overturned, education was overturned, school was not on that [a desired] level. As I said, we didn't have much but we were committed until the end and we respected them. All of these don't exist today, humanity, love, or mutual respect.

So, I'll refer to you immediately, when Miss Aurela [the interviewer] approached me, I openly accepted. And I believe that what I think is that you are my biography, because the biography of every elderly person is in the hands of young people. And I tried at every moment to get close to young people and wear the same clothes as them, because I think young people and your generation have a harder job, but you also have some advantages that I didn't have. Technique, technology enabled the change that we needed at that time, and today it offers and closes our gaps, and the information is on Google and Wikipedia, you take the information and that's your advantage.

So, these changes are more technical-technological changes, rather than mentality wise. When it comes to mentality, we have another way, we continue living in a natural way, and it's kind of a strut, a fake excitement, living without any effort. So, the Faculty of Medicine is not the same as it used to be in my time, unfortunately. And people are not learning as they're supposed to learn, because at that faculty, at that faculty, the first generation to finish was Alush Gashi and some others who worked well

²⁰ Vaso Čubrilović (1897-1990) was a Bosnian Serb political activist and academic, a member of the conspiratorial group Young Bosnia, which executed the assassination of the Hapsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. He advocated the ethnic cleansing of minorities from Serbia, notably the Albanians of Kosovo, in a memorandum published in 1937 entitled *Iseļjavanje Arnauta* (The Expulsion of the Albanians).

and... there are other students, there are other students to this day that finished it, but all work individually.

They're people who went abroad, they're students that I am proud of, like Afrim Lyta, he's my student, Ferid Agani, my student, I employed them. And I am happy that, I will mention this, too, that I left someone who could continue after me, and I also told them, "During my burial no one can say that I clipped your wings..." that's what I said, "During my burial..." and I believe that the way things are going, they're going to experience my burial, because I will die very quietly and I don't... With no ceremony and I will not allow anyone to come because... I told them.

But, there's something that I don't like about this generation, to whom I offered a lot, even Afrim, and Jusuf Ula, and Ferid Agani but... They're good, they're better than me... I think they're approving of what I think, they all abandoned the university and opened their own private clinics and so on. But politics has also affected this a lot, they have to even decide who will be the guard of a public WC, politics decides for the Faculty of Medicine, politics decides everything.

So, the boss there isn't chosen based on skills but based on political affiliation. I am telling you that anticommunist... I forgot to mention Ali Sokoli, very... extraordinary, great, he finished German language abroad, Xheladin Deda specialized in Rome, and others. But, back then communists didn't tease Xheladin Deda, actually any senior functionary couldn't get close to him. They didn't tease him.

Imagine, nowadays they removed Xheladin Deda from there. This is something... In medicine, order is needed, just like in the army. Here you can't tell who is doing what. All of them are generals there, you don't know who to ask, who to make, you become a director within a night, one goes, the other comes with a political coat. So, the political coat is the worst thing that has happened and unfortunately that continues to happen.

Part Two

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Mr. Skender, when did you get married?

Skender Boshnjaku: Before getting married, I told you I finished practice and I started working at the Department of Neuropsychiatry. I spent my whole life in neuropsychiatry, I worked there for 40 years...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Is this something you chose to do or...

Skender Boshnjaku: I chose to do it, I chose that to compensate for not going into literature and compensate with psychiatry that I'm going there, something that is worth it, to apply and widen my literature in continuity, to know people and human nature, because to be a psychiatrist you have to

read a lot, that's why I chose psychiatry. Neuropsychiatry, because back then it was called neuropsychiatry.

I got married in... in... I got married this... and I registered at the Municipality of Pristina on December 16, 1969, and I got married traditionally. To this day her house is Miqt Pub, do you know where Miqt Pub is? That's her house. She was born there. I took her from there to Peja, she was a traditional bride. From there, the next day, we got onto a train and continued our journey toward Europe by train. We went to Belgrade, Ljubljane, Milan, Paris, then to Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, Fushë Kosova, Pristina.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Who is the lady?

Skender Boshnjaku: The lady's name is Shukran Osmani, now her last name is Boshnjaku. She is a teacher, she graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Pristina. She was a laboratory technician, then she worked as a social worker at the healthcare center, that's what it used to be called, now it's Family Medical Center.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where did you meet her?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me? I met her by chance. Military recruiting was at the healthcare center on the road to Gërmia, there's a... number four, it was station number four. She was taking my blood and she was scared, I told her, "Don't be scared, it's okay." You know, I was a doctor, she was a nurse, a laboratory technician, she calmed down. So this and that, and I liked her, so that's when I got interested in her.

I went into the military. The correspondence started when I was in the military and it helped me to get through... I finished the first part of the military in school at the sanitary school in Belgrade for six months, and then the other part was near the borders of Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. Even though that was the correspondence and when I came back, I didn't let it be too long. When I came back... I started the military in 1968, I came back in 1969, in March and we continued until December. We got married in December and next year will be our 50th anniversary.

From this marriage came two sons, one of them died in 2011, the other is Leon, the late one was Tomor, Leon lives in Skopje. He is married to an Albanian lawyer, he has a son and a daughter. He also lived in London as an asylee, and so on.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where did you live after getting married?

Skender Boshnjaku: After getting married, I moved into my wife's house. I moved into that house and I lived there, I still go there to this day. The pub, that house was turned into a pub, that wasn't the idea,

but that's another story that, maybe I shouldn't talk about it. A story that isn't good, it isn't favorable, it isn't honorable what happened to that house.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What happened?

Skender Boshnjaku: Oh, what happened, a lot of things happened. Maybe you are not interested in this, but I think that a lot of embarrassing and incomprehensible things happened, a lot of impossible but true things happened. From these efforts, the purpose of profit, trying to take it down, to take it, to rob it and other things that that house went through, and it is very significant how that house survived to this day, surrounded. Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Tell us what it was like, because now...

Skender Boshnjaku: That house was the same as it was and they did not preserve that house, in that house was born the mother... Because the mother inherited it, the grandmother, then it was carried forward to my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law was born in that house, she has two identity cards: one from 1908 and the other one from 1912. But, however you see it, my wife's mother was born in that house in 1912, that house is from the 19th century.

And with my strong will, I made the impossible possible, for an oasis to be created. That's my condition to you. I believe that there you breath in Albanian, you think in Albanian, and I think there was... And if you ask Dardan, Dardan Ibrahim, what my position was towards him, he can tell you. He can honestly tell you what I had an ability to do.

There was the Irish Pub first, then Dardan Ibrahim and his brother Alban took it with another colleague of theirs. I experienced them taking it down, yes, taking it down, I saw them taking the beams off the roof, I got them. They tried to take the names of my wife and her sister off, that their mother gave them the property to their daughters, Shukrane and Gjylnaze. She had two daughters. She was a noblewoman who experienced... her husband Zenel had the same luck, he moved into this house, he was a cook and...

He was from Prizren and he was a cook, he had... He fled in 1945 to Albania, and my wife's mother was pregnant. Zenel, he died in Albania, he says, "Wife, let's go," "No, Husband, I can't leave, I can't leave my mother." Because her mother was also with them, my wife's grandmother. So that's how she lived from 1945 until my mother-in-law died without her husband, with two daughters who... My wife and her mother had very bad experiences with communists, because her husband fled, left them.

There was a lot of abandonment, my wife... I'm not saying I was obligated, or I'm not spitting on it, or that I am like this now, but I've always accepted, and I will accept it, that I was a member of the League

of Communists of Kosovo, and I am proud that I was a member of... where Fadil Hoxha²¹ was the head, and people who... I am happy and I said that Fadil Hoxha, his name is going to be, it's going to be engraved in the modern history of Kosovo, that's it.

And this is what I... My wife used to tell me, "I'll divorce you, you have to leave the League of Communists." And... yes, yes, because she had a lot of bad experiences, also the police, the uniform, to this day, it's a bad memory for my wife. And all the time, to this day, she is scared of people wearing uniforms, because they got into her house when she was a young girl... to this day she saved the raid letter. They took their carpets, their food, they took everything. And they lived, only they know how they lived. It's a family, a micro family.

So, I moved in there, my mother-in-law saw me as a son-in-law and as a son. And I was very punctual... I think that women, Albanian women gave much more than what Albanian men gave to women. And I can mention that the Serbian national chauvinism first attacked Albanian women, with contempt... that Albanian women are washing machines. This a very hard contempt...

And I am surprised how that arbitrariness exists to this day. Albanians are arbitrary beings, or authoritarian beings, and they don't have access to... What women gave, what Albanian women gave to... Albanian women mowed and men did other things, women... the husband came back, laid down their feet for the woman to wash them, etcetera. This violence exists even today... it exists and... the police don't have the right approach to violence.

And I saw graffiti. I like graffiti and I have a big collection. And I used to write, I used to do art, and I'm not going to continue with anything else.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Tell me what was it like, how was the house positioned back then in the '60s compared to now? I mean, what was that neighborhood like, because now it's completely different.

Skender Boshnjaku: That neighborhood... that house, it is how it used to be, like other family homes, everybody moved. When I came to that building, in front of it was the already built building, they actually took a part from this house, because this house was built towards, back then it was called Ramiz Sadiku Street, and its yard was to the end of the street, and that road was with cubes, granite cubes. And that house was built in the '50s, and people who were the head of Radio Pristina were moved there, Rexhai Surroi, Akil Koci, Nebil Dino...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Just to clarify...

²¹ Fadil Hoxha (1916-2001), Albanian Communist partisan leader from Gjakova, who held a number of high posts in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, including the rotating post of Vice President of the Federal Presidency, the highest leadership post in Yugoslavia under Tito, in 1978-79. He retired in 1986, but was expelled from the League of Communist on charges of nationalism.

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: We're talking about... just to clarify, we're talking about the building where the Pensioners' Association is now, or...

Skender Boshnjaku: Where the Association is now, there used to be a house... they were old houses, there was Sylja's bakery towards Agim Ramadani Street, then further down, where the taxis are, there used to be a fruit and vegetable shop, a Serbian woman lived on that floor. And then, there was a small house, where to this day a laboratory technician has lived, whose name I can't remember. Also, there was an old, beautiful house, but it was taken down, and in this part... there was another house... the shoe repairman Macula, a shoe repairman Macula, further down from Sylja's bakery, there was a shoe repairman, Macula, the father of Macula, they are...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Composer?

Skender Boshnjaku: Composer and the known band, to this day the brother... or uncle of Njazi Macula, my doctor colleague, Njazi Macula, neuropsychiatrist. And there was an old house, Kelmendi lived there, Kelmendi, now I think his son, Agim, lives there, Agim Kelmendi. He, I don't know... he dealt with literature, with folklore, and everything. And all that order, in the end, in a 90 degree... That part is taken down and built. The construction starts, the expropriation is done, and the construction of the Pensioners' Association starts in 1973 and it is finished in '75-'76. The construction is finished and the residents and the Pensioners' Association move there, that's how it is.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: But, there are other buildings that are being built, right?

Skender Boshnjaku: So that building of Radio Pristina was near my wife's house when I came here, to this day, there's a house where the workers of Ramiz Sadiku [Construction Company] used to live, they built a collective house, dedicated to Radio Pristina. Continuously, there was also an old house, it was taken down, and at the end, in the background of this, in the middle of the collective buildings and the hotel, it was called Iliria back then, first it was called Božur, then Iliria, then Pacolli took it, and at the end of the, the... there's the theater.

And now this construction... I have the written letter which they do now accept... They are illegal, illegitimate. From this building that is in front of Behxhet Pacolli's hotel. That building, that hotel is illegitimate, illegal, inoperative and many other things.

Aurela Kadriu: What was Božur like when it was there?

Skender Boshnjaku: Well, it was, it was an amazing hotel. All generations met there, I even spent New Year's Eve there, yes, yes. This part at the entrance was called Arabeska. There was, in the basement

there was the Association of Fine Artists, there was an amazing terrace, where during the summer Uka Briazni would play, there were many other people, you couldn't spend the summer without going in there to drink coffee, it was a nice building.

And it's interesting because all of this is camouflaged and I told, I asked for... when the exhibit was there, because I am worried about art. I think that, in the end, my life should have belonged to the artistic community. There, the Gallery of Arts is the testament to the collective memory of architecture, Bashkim Fehmiu,²² Qemal Nallbani, and other architects who contributed to Kosovo's architecture were mentioned there, famous architects.

But, there the case of Ilira is closed. Now, don't make me talk more, but I can talk, I can talk. This is something that... it shouldn't have been taken down, on top of that, some other person bought this hotel first, I'm not going to say his name, then he sold it to Behgjet. Behgjet demolished it within the day. He demolished it and built this hotel, which isn't even a hotel. I think that it's a Chernobyl-esque dead end, there's more concrete and iron there than... Chernobyl, when in 1986 in Ukraine broke out that [atomic bomb]... not the hospital, but the nuclear power plant. There is no aesthetics there. It is embarrassing, however you choose to look at it, it's...

On top of that he went out of the *gabarit*.²³ Every square of the ground... I lived there, and even today I go there to drink coffee. I have the sketch that the Belgrade Institute of Geophysics made, they did the calculation of the hotel and all the houses that were around. Also, he exceeded every rate limit, but he has the money, and that's how they did these things.

Aurela Kadriu: What about Union?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Aurela Kadriu: What about Union, because Union was also near there?

Skender Boshnjaku: Union, yes also Union, I took part in many protests that it should be turned into a Gallery of Modern Art but... But the Union is just a skeleton, they have changed its appearance completely...

Aurela Kadriu: What was it like?

²² Bashkim Fehmiu (1930) was born in Prizren, Kosovo. He was a professor, architect and urban planner. His contributions are in the field of education as a professor at the Faculty of Architecture, management and administration, as the founder and leader of the Institute of Urbanism of Pristina, and as the author of many urban and architectural plans of Pristina in the second half of the twentieth century.

²³ *Gabarit*, French term used to describe the floorplan on the basis of which architectural works were planned, in this case the neighborhood plan.

Skender Boshnjaku: It was, the building was Austrian, and the date 1926 is known, it was built, near there was... I have a photo of Llokaç Mosque. Llokaç Mosque was torn down before the Božur, Iliria Hotel was built. And this is all political, political, also you can see Simon's fountain... I also remember Simon Shiroka, Simon Shiroka... also there was a place where you would sit and drink coffee, exchange... I have a project, a collection of projects, I have a graphic of Simon Shiroka, there was the fountain, the Llokaç Mosque.

The Llokaç Mosque was near, near there... I have a picture, but I didn't bring the picture. I love old things a lot and... my mother-in-law tells me that there were many efforts until... Because a lot of water came out until the foundation of the hotel was set. There was a lot of effort because there was a lot of water, because the mosque was torn down, because this... there are legends about the difficulties regarding why the mosque was torn down.

So, this is something that today doesn't even... it would be better if it was the same deal as Gërmia, Gërmia... this shopping mall was built behind, it was built later, sometime in '71-'72, I mean Gërmia was built in the '70s. It was the first shopping mall, it was in front of... in front of the Zahir Pajaziti memorial, the Gërmia shopping mall was there, the other one is the one here.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What was there?

Skender Boshnjaku: There was the elevator...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: No, no, what was there before Gërmia..

Skender Boshnjaku: There were old houses, old houses that were torn down and were built... continuously... To tell you the moment you get out of Simon Shiroka, you go towards the center, towards the ministry, the government building, there was a bookshop, on the right towards the Executive Council there was a tailor, two tailors, there was a... the bookshop was on the other side, then there was a fish restaurant, there was a pharmacy for... agricultural, then there was a general, a general shop for general consumption, on the left there was... from the beginning there was Jugoplastika, clothing and shoe shop, there was initially... there was a small *qebaptore*²⁴... not *qebatore*, but my father-in-law's *gjelltore*.²⁵ Then there was an old house where they say the Consulate of Serbia was, there was a... for example, you went into the *korzo*, or, what was it called...

Aurela Kadriu: The pastry shop?

Skender Boshnjaku: Not the pastry shop, the *qebaptore*. On the right there was a *qebaptore*, then on the left there were some shops, and there was a summer shop Kozara, Kozara, Kozara was there and

²⁴ A shop where they serve kebabs.

²⁵ A shop where they serve traditional dishes; it takes the name after the stew. Literally it translates as stew-shop.

then further along there was the clockmaker Faruk Panduklu, the one who is there to this day. Then at the end of the road there was the clockmaker Daci, Daci, his son today in The Palace of Youth has a...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Store?

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, the store where he deals with watches, and selling watches, and other things that are related to glasses, eyes and everything. Then you turn left and continue... there was a barbershop where Menda's father used to work, Menda's father...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where was this?

Skender Boshnjaku: There, immediately following... there was the Old Post Office, and in front of it there was an old house, Menda used to be there, his father, then his brother, his brother who... now he is in America. Menda, Menda didn't work there, but his brother Meti, Meti. I got haircuts there often, my kids got their haircuts there, too. Then on the same street that still exists, on the right there were some old houses, then there was Sarajeva, on the left there was a meat shop, and then it turned into a pharmacy, Amir Agani.

Then there are some structures that still exist to this day, there's a barbershop, then a shoe repairman and so on. At the end, there was a store where vinyl records were sold, very small, narrow, vinyl. I bought the opera of Mascagni, Giuseppe Verdi and so on. And then on the left there was a building, there lived... That was torn down and this was built... in the corner there is a clothes shop. In the beginning, before getting to Raiffeisen Bank, there was an old building there from 1922, a doctor named Kozarac worked there, in front of Cinema Rinia, in front.

I often went to the cinema there, then the other cinema on the second floor was opened, then afterward there was Simon Shiroka, there were some one-story buildings, small ones. The first construction was in Taslixhe [neighborhood]. Construction that no one dared to divert, but they were small, nice, based on the standards back then. Then begins... I experienced... this part... there were big changes made there, I experienced... when I came to Pristina in '66-'67 to see motocross in... here in Dragodan, it was called Dragodan back then, the motocross track.

That part from the beginning to the end was all vineyards, vineyards. There was nothing in the '60s. Then the first line starts, some doctors and some other people start constructing the first line. Then the second line and so on. So those are buildings that have preserved their beauty, privacy, and greenery to this day. While these that are being built are irrational, irrational, some call it brutality, but it fits what we really are, brutalist architecture.

I wrote about it, Eliza Hoxha wrote about it, I have the book, no I don't, but I have articles about it, a lot of people wrote about it, I believe no one... no one tried to stop this. I am... I am proud that I

preserved what there is, I am proud of that house that was preserved in the center and... and people go by that house like a mouse goes around meat or the Imam around the minaret. I don't know why, but for political and profit reasons and so on.

Other than that, there, can I also say this? Based on reliable information, Behgjet Pacolli wanted to build a twenty-story hotel, and that part of the city to be engulfed, but he couldn't do it because I was an obstacle. I said, I asked while we were talking many times that... I went there with my wife and everything. Because all of the illegal construction there that was financed by him, and there were attempts to move from there, and this illegal construction went through my yard, all that sewage in my yard, I complained but no one called. I have a suitcase, a, a, a bag, two bags that could load a donkey with papers and other things.

Part Three

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Mr. Boshnjaku, you finished your studies in Belgrade and I suppose you continued with a master's degree and doctoral...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: And you decided to study neuropsychiatry...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Can you talk about this in more detail, why did you make this decision, why were you so interested in the human mind?

Skender Boshnjaku: Well I'm... life was always a question mark for me and I always challenged...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: It's fine, it's the printer.

Skender Boshnjaku: Challenge something more difficult. I always... I was never scared of difficulties, I took things as they came and I wasn't scared. I chose neuropsychiatry to prove myself, if I am the one I love, with love and will. The will and love for work have kept me going for 40 years.

During that time, I told you, I got my master's degree, and as a topic... I always had mentors from Belgrade, my professors from Belgrade. And the plan was for me to start working there as an assistant, but I didn't accept, and there was a job opening, my professor, Rakić, the head of Sciences of Serbia, I was a soldier there and he announced it to me and said, "You have to apply," but I didn't apply, I didn't accept.

First I started as a general doctor, then a doctor, they suggested I specialize, I spent two years in Pristina and one year in Belgrade. When I was in Belgrade I got my master's degree and I finished electrophysiology. I came back, I worked day and night without being tasked to work as much, and without obstacles. I had about 100-200 patients a day because there was no neuropsychiatrist. Also the first neuropsychiatrists were Serbians and the... It was my ambition to not go... for the psychiatry building to not be built.

Every society has an aversion to psychiatry, and our society, to this day, judges when it comes to psychiatry, and for mental problems, it shouldn't be like that. But there are other modern societies, more modern than ours, that still judge. But I tried for that building to be built where it is necessary. Firstly we... we always had... in neuropsychiatry there was always a push, there was always... the pavilion was on the first floor, and it was wide... for example in 1996, the typhoid epidemic, and neuropsychiatry was filled with people suffering from it, then the jaundice epidemic, and neuropsychiatry was filled with patients suffering from it.

So, in 1972, I experienced, you don't know, the epidemic of varicella, from a pilgrim that was in Mecca... It appeared in Belgrade and they had some symptoms and they didn't know where it was, it was decided... he had something on his skin, but they didn't know what was happening. So, it was 1972, I actually have a painting that Nebih Muriqi dedicated to smallpox, I took it.

And from 1966 to 1975, I was in that pavilion, from 1975 to 1985, we were in barracks. It was taken down, and in 1985 the neuropsychiatry clinic was opened, the one that is here to this day. I am proud to be a founder, I have all the documents, I even have the idea of the design at home. Anyone can say today that... People tried to forget this, but this is not something to be forgotten.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Tell me... how did the '90s affect the department and professional work?

Skender Boshnjaku: First, it was ideal to be... to serve people, to serve... I felt very proud that I served people at a young age. I went to every house, to every village with my own car. There isn't a place in Pristina that I didn't go to and... I was proud they called me. Also, all people back then, Serbians and Albanian, trusted me. And I always stood by my principles, I tried until the end of my life to at least be half decent, because it is impossible to never make mistakes. But then again I was able to not take part in the affairs and other things that sidetracked my younger colleagues and became part of different affairs, which is something unpleasant.

And I worked. In addition to working in my profession, I also wrote. I wrote about exhibitions. I wrote three exhibition books that I went to around Kosovo and outside of Kosovo. Then I continued with my interest in graffiti, I have a big collection of graffiti and I published the book *Grafitet e Prishtinës* [Pristina's Graffiti] and I dedicated it to young people, the graffiti... and it went, I didn't make much

noise about it, but I dedicated to... It's the first book of graffiti that's been published, I can send it to you.

So... then I continued with... my job, instead of complaining, I don't usually complain, this is how it should be, this is how it shouldn't be. I said, "Skender, don't talk much. Just do what is right and people can take you as a good example." I am very disappointed with the pollution, with the trash in Pristina, in Kosovo. I said, let me be something... and I'm not embarrassed to put my head in the trash can... actually girls and ladies and other people close their nose when they see me around the trash can... retrieving materials and from that I was able to reconfigure, to make all the other compositions that have nothing to do with trash.

And I said how it is possible for something to be made of trash... I am closer to physical trash rather than human trash, and I said in an exhibit that was open lately, "In Kosovo, physical and human trash is increasing. But I tried to form another composition from physical waste, so human waste would be an example to not forget that it shouldn't be wasted."

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Mr. Boshnjaku, where were you during the '90s?

Skender Boshnjaku: I was in Pristina during the '90s, all the time... until... I was in Pristina all the time.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Did you continue practicing your occupation, or what was it like for you?

Skender Boshnjaku: All the time... so, after Milošević's²⁶ violent measures, all the other measures came later, they came to our clinic. To tell you the truth, I thought that we should be resistant till the end and doctors were very naive, they were people that... just like he is naive... now... I don't want to mention... Saying, "In case of an increase... Serbia might recognize us." That's what Albanians did, we did it during those years when the protests against violence started, against violence and Serbia, so if I get out I'll be back to work within two months.

I have met doctors who cried, "*Kuku*,²⁷ why did I get out." From experience, I gathered. And to tell you the truth, I even asked people, I'm not going to say who I asked, I asked them and they told me... I thought so too, we gathered, "It's better if we stay here, because we are just feeding and looking after our own country." And I believe that in the '90s, I told myself, even though I achieved... My own kids spat on me. Leon spat on me and told me, "You are mean, you are this, you hang out with Serbs, you do this." I told him, "No, you deal with your own business." And when we went out to *korzo*, they said, "Look, the traitor, look at the Serb." And so on.

²⁶ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

²⁷ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

I hope these won't be written down, but also... but we're stuck. The most human job is to work with honor. And my most honorable work was at that time, during the '90s, from '89 until the '90s. We worked day and night, I tried everything... And there was so much solidarity, you have no idea. Actually, the violent director used to say, "Someone is telling you what to do," I said, "No. We are not problematic, we want to do our job, that's all."

But, there were people who, "No, you're like this, you're like this..." you have to endure, also other doctors worked in their private clinics, they bloomed privately, they were worse than Serbians. My Serbian colleague used to say, "Look, your friends are taking more *prepodne* [before noon] than we are. We are giving what they offer." I tried to look after them the same way they look after Albanians in Belgrade. So... and it turned out well, we did humane work, better than those who got out, my colleague quit and opened his own private clinic and bloomed.

Even Serbs knew that. They worked with Serbs, they worked with Serbs a lot. We were there as we were. So, I admit it, to this day, it's better that we stayed. Also there was a colleague, we gathered in my room and he said, "They're getting out and let's call the media," I said, "Look, you can leave, but what will the other workers do, what will the nurse who can't find another job do. They have today." But, he did, he left. The other one left, who asked like this, and they left.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Were you there until 1999?

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, until 1999. On June 21, 2000 I came back.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where were you?

Skender Boshnjaku: In Pristina, during those three months I was in Pristina isolated with my wife and her sister. On the 20th... It was the first day of *Bajram*²⁸... I think on March 26, March 24... it was a Wednesday when the bombing started, so Thursday, 25, Friday, 28... March 28 with masks... I was... My wife would say, "Man, look what is happening." I went out, a shooting started, I came back. We went out in our pajamas with no orientation, we went towards the stop lights, where that Italian gas station is, it used to be called Jugo Benzina back then, in front of it, and we stopped at an apartment in front of it.

We knocked on the door, "Do you accept us?" I was in my pajamas, so was my wife and her sister, she was sick, we didn't have a place to go. We stayed there, they let us in, then after two days, it was surrounded by paramilitary forces, we couldn't go out. I was in a crisis, my wife was very... my wife was

²⁸ *Bajram* is the Turkish word for festival. Albanians celebrate *Ramadan Bajram*, which is the same as Eid, and *Kurban Bajram*, which is the Day of Sacrifice, two months and ten days after *Ramadan Bajram*. On the day of Eid, there is no fasting. In 1999 it fell on 28 March, four days after the beginning of NATO bombing.

very strong. For almost a month she supplied us with everything, she went and bought bread and came home all by herself and that house.... A ghost, there were only the paramilitary at the entrance, and those from *Jedinstvo*.²⁹ There was also...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Which building exactly?

Skender Boshnjaku: Which building... so, when you go... Where [Restaurant] Gresa opened, Gresa, when you go towards... when you go on the left side from the gas station, towards the coffee shops...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: The small coffee shops.

Skender Boshnjaku: The small coffee shops, so in front of the Embassy of Croatia, on the other side. So either starting from the Embassy, or from the gas stations, the first collective building, you pass the... there's a shop, a shop, the gas station, the first building, the first floor, that's where I lived for three months. Only I know what I went through and it's something... but, I always think about the fact that people went through much worse, and I tell myself, "People went through much worse, you don't need to complain."

Also, the diary of what happened in the room in front, the neighbors... they went in... there was a... from OSCE... he lived there so they broke the doors and moved in there. Maybe they were taking some documents because a foreigner lived there. Paramilitary stayed there, or the police, how do I know, and I heard them say, "We cut off this guy's nose, we did this to him..." All night long. So, it was horrible and...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Where were your children?

Skender Boshnjaku: One of them was in London, the other one was trapped with his wife in Bregu i Diellit.

Aurela Kadriu: When did you leave the house Te Miqtë?

Skender Boshnjaku: Ah Te Miqtë...

Aurela Kadriu: When did you move?

Skender Boshnjaku: So, I lived at Te Miqtë Pub until 1997, but my mother-in-law continued to live there, you could still live there. And in the house where I am now, in Dragodan, in Dragodan, I moved in 1997...

²⁹ The Serbian-language daily newspaper of Kosovo that was located at the Rilindja Press Palace.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: That's why you ended up here at the gas station.

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: That's why you ended up here at the gas station.

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, at the gas station. From the house in Dragodan, I ended up here at the gas station. And it was a horrible situation, silence, a situation where you only heard chirps from birds, or crows, or something like cats, or barks. It was horrible! So, I experienced when the Russian forces entered the airport on May 11, what the airport there called...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Adem Jashari?

Skender Boshnjaku: Adem Jashari, yes, but also where the army was, the station...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Goleshi Street?

Skender Boshnjaku: Goleshi, yes. It was horrible that night. Shootings, machine guns... from the window there. That was on May 11, because we have to know that on May 10, sorry, June 11, not May, June 11, because on June 10 there was Kumanovo³⁰ with... the meeting starts, it ends on the 11th I think, the forces enter, then NATO on June 12.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What was that moment like for you?

Skender Boshnjaku: Oh, that was a great moment, even from, from... it was a Saturday when NATO came, so it was June 12, Saturday... June 11 was Friday, no... Yes, exactly on June 11, Friday, June 11, Saturday. Usually, I didn't sleep, but from the window of where I lived, you could clearly see the house, and when I saw the tank, it was early. Oh, until this day... now at this moment I have... I felt a lot of happiness, I said, "Oh, wife, NATO came. Let's salute them!" And I was trying to run until I saw the tank, but when the tank turned, I saw the tank and I put my hands up, and it was miraculous. Something incredible. Yes, even for me, it was incredible that such a crazy atmosphere was created that people forget. For me, that was something unbelievable and... something I did not expect. I did not expect people to forget the solidarity like this, to turn against each other, I don't know.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then you started...

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

³⁰ 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 9 June 1999 in Kumanovo that ended the NATO bombing campaign of FRY.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then in 1999 you went back to work at the hospital, right?

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, I did. So the war lasted, so I remember, '99 until January 24, February, March, March 24. Like, the bombing and the war and everything lasted for 78 weeks [days]. March, April... On June 21... because every city had a date for the departure of military forces, and until then they did not allow... Even then I didn't go back to my house, I didn't. And until I came back... because people started getting into homes and I didn't dare get out of the apartment because they started to get in... To be correct there were... they went to Turkey and it was impossible to leave the apartment, and they would enter and they came to another apartment. But the thing is that there is my house, they went in, and I came back on June 21. Before that, I think I came back to the house on June 19, and I went back to work on June 21, 2000. Yes, 2000...

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What year...

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Kaltrina Krasniqi: You didn't go back to work in 1999, but in 2000?

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, 2000. Because in 1999 we abandoned the clinic so... most of us in the beginning of March [1999], before the bombing, we went back to our ways. People who could leave, left, but I couldn't because my wife's sister was very sick, paralyzed, so we couldn't leave. Actually, I don't know how I was able to carry her on my back from the house to the stoplights.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: And then, the next year, in the year 2000 you go back to work.

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, in 2000 I went back to work.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: What was it like to go back to work?

Skender Boshnjaku: Well, in 2000 it was, we communicated by phone for all of us to meet at 8:00 am, get in a row and enter the clinic together... it's now not important who went in, who did what, I don't know, it doesn't matter. But on June 21, I think it was Monday, Monday, we went in and continued working. There we met the violent director, the sister of... Lila, and no one else, no one else. The other... some nurses, but there were no other doctors. Then after a while they left, too. Actually they left... they read that they would get fired, so they left.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then when Albanians came back, they most likely also worked with...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, everyone went back to work, everyone went back to work and everyday life happened, something that continues to this day has started happening then. And I can't say the other things because it wasn't good.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Was there judgment...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, yes, I was judged as a person who was bought off, as a mean person, as everything else. To tell you the truth, it is embarrassing, they wanted to liquidate me and keep me by force, maybe we should not include this here? You know, it doesn't matter much [for the wider public], but I'm telling this to you.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then...

Skender Boshnjaku: And that gave me strength to try until the end of my life, to be left for 39 years and six months. I don't think anyone will achieve that. That made me very dedicated to only work and nothing else. And I achieved that.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Then in 2007...

Skender Boshnjaku: Then I retired, I retired. I didn't open a private clinic, to this day, I don't have a private clinic. I chose something that I gladly worked for, I turned into a small Skender who continues the dreams I had as a child, who continues to search, to be curious, to fulfill those wishes I missed. A lot of things I experience today are big blessings, realizing the wishes that I had as a child.

So, that is the biggest satisfaction, it's what keeps me going to this day. I always move, I walk, because life means moving, the meaning of life is moving, even when you sleep, you're moving, every atom moves, people are moving. I tell myself, I'm born every day and I die every night. I don't know what day it will be, but I wait for death, whenever it comes, it's welcome and I'm here. I'm not scared of anything.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Thank you very much, Mr.Boshnjaku.

Skender Boshnjaku: Please...

Aurela Kadriu: Excuse me, I just have one more question before finishing. You mentioned that you came to the inauguration of the Brotherhood and Unity Monument...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: That you came from Peja...

Skender Boshnjaku: Yes, yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell me a little more? What did they tell you when they brought you as students from Peja?

Skender Boshnjaku: Well, they brought us here as animals. They put us... there were train wagons for animals at the time, they put us all inside at the train station in Peja, then we got off not in Fushë Kosova, not at Pristina's train station, but here, where a small building is, it was... and we got off there, I remember the mud as if it were today, when you pass, the mud up to the knee, then we went to the monument, we were the furthest, they just gathered us to hear...

Aurela Kadriu: What did they tell you?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me?

Aurela Kadriu: What did they tell you? Where are we going?

Skender Boshnjaku: We're going to the victory of socialism, the victory of communism, the victory of Brotherhood and Unity, of Tito, of happiness, of idealism, of... milk and honey, how do I know, the way every ideology praises their own.

Aurela Kadriu: What was the gathering like?

Skender Boshnjaku: Excuse me? There were a lot of people there. They just put us some place and we waited. Slogans, "Long live, Tito", long live this one, long live that one, long live the League of Communists, long live Brotherhood and Unity. They took us back the same way they brought us here. As I said, I remember that small train station as if it were today, and every time I go by that road, which is every day, I remember those days. Svetozar Vukmanović - Tempo spoke there, a sworn anti-Albanian nationalist.

He is also one of the founders, apart from Dušan Mugoša,³¹ founder of the Communist Party of Albania, Dušan Mugoša, Miladin Popović and Svetozar Vukmanović - Tempo. These three are the ones who founded the Communist Party of Albania, and they scammed... When the Conference of Bujan³² was held, in Bujan, in January '42 [sic.], when they promised Albanians, they scammed them, that they had... they scammed them to win the National Liberation War, to gather Albanians... But it wasn't

³¹ Dušan Mugoša (1914-1973), nicknamed Duć, was a Yugoslav Partisan. He and Miladin Popović were the Yugoslav delegates that helped unite the Albanian communist groups in 1941.

³² The Conference of Bujan (31 December 1943 – 1, 2 January 1944) was a meeting of Yugoslav partisans in which a resolution was passed that promised to let the people of Kosovo decide democratically whether they wished to be part of Albania or of Yugoslavia after the war.

Fadil Hoxha's fault, to say, "Look at how Serbs are, it's good I was saved." But it was promised that when the war is over, Kosovo will belong to Albania. But then things happened as they did.³³

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Thank you very much.

Skender Boshnjaku: I don't know if I was clear.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Yes, you are. Thank you very much.

Skender Boshnjaku: Thank you, too. I don't know if I offered you complete trust, but I believe that I saw it as an utmost commitment, I don't know, I felt very responsible. Like I always was in life, I accepted immediately and I felt like, "Don't lie. You are giving a lesson to the young generations. If they hear something tomorrow, they might say, 'The old man lied to us...'" I didn't lie about anything.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Thank you very much!

Skender Boshnjaku: And I tried... And most of them don't mention me, most of the people that I mentioned. I'm not religious, but I read the Quran often, I think, since I don't practice religion, I should at least read the Quran. And I like this part in the Quran where ingratitude is mentioned, it's not part of my personality, so I am grateful you invited me, and I believe that I did not get away from that gratitude, and I salute you.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: Thank you very much!

³³ The pact was not respected. After the Second World War, Kosovo was not part of Albania, but part of Yugoslavia.