

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH EMIN BIKLIQI

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Duration: 96 minutes

Present:

1. Emin Bikliqi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.

Other rules of transcription:

[] - addition to the text to help understand

Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.

Part One

Emin Bikliqi: Childhood at that time, as in all our regions... it wasn't easy, meaning the socioeconomic conditions were not at a desired level. However, Janjevo was an environment of an intersection of two-three civilizations: Byzantine, Roman and Oriental. I grew up and developed as a child in those circumstances in Janjevo.

But Janjevo was distinguished by social and economic development in comparison to other places, because we lived with the Croats. Croats were more civilized. They were permanently connected to Croatia, Zagreb, and Dubrovnik.

You probably have already heard from other people that the Croats of Janjevo are originally from Dubrovnik. They came to Janjevo in the 12th century, so in the period of the Nemanjić.¹ They brought them as traders and craftsmen. Then, we shared their luck and we got some material and spiritual values from them.

I remember a good childhood, living together. Croats were our neighbors, their kids were like... they were good neighbors. We had a good time with the Croats, Albanians, and Turks. There were also Roma who lived here, there are still Roma in Janjevo. So, the way we lived together was a good example of how people should live and work.

Anita Susuri: In which part of Janjevo did you live as a child?

Emin Bikliqi: Which part?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

¹ The Nemanjid Dynasty were a royal family and rulers of medieval Serbia. It was a great Serbian dynasty. The first ruler of the dynasty was the great prince Stefan Nemanja who ruled from 1166-1196, later he became a monk.

Emin Bikliqi: I was born in a house, how do I say, not near the *çarshi*.² Our houses were near the *çarshi*, near the mosque. Maybe other people told you. So we're autochthonous there, almost 600 years. Maybe you absorbed this part, now I don't know if you remember where the people of Janjevo are from. Where is my family from, for example, the Bikliqi family? Did other people tell you?

Anita Susuri: Something about mustache?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: You can tell us more about it.

Emin Bikliqi: I can tell you later, I can tell you now. These will all be written down, right?

Anita Susuri: They're all recorded and...

Emin Bikliqi: I believe my cousins also told you about our origin. According to legend, since 1453, so when the Ottoman army came, that's when our ancestors came, and according to legend, they came from the Caucasus. Shortly, or to be more clear, from today's Georgia, a place near Tbilisi, it's called *akaska* in Turkish, in the Georgian language it's called Akalistiki. I was interested in this, I didn't take notes but I searched on the Internet. So our origin is from that place.

Anita Susuri: Just your family or...

Emin Bikliqi: No, the Bikliqi family.

Anita Susuri: Or the Turkish community?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, the Turkish community. Some say that they came from Syria at that time with the Ottoman army, while our people say they came from the small Caucasus. And now it's interesting to tell you, if you haven't already been told by others, what about us? Until recently a number of Bikliqi families didn't speak Albanian. Recently... I mean 50-60 years ago, or 70 years, they didn't speak Albanian, so they spoke Turkish. Some of them spoke Albanian. My family spoke Albanian. My mother was Albanian, my father was Turkish, and we spoke Albanian. I have seven sisters and they all spoke Albanian, and now the question that comes up is, what are we?

We came, we've lived here for about 600 years... Now from a sociological point of view, if you analyze this situation, what are we? On one side Turks who spoke Turkish, this and that... but in the circumstances of the Kosovar environment, so in the Janjevo environment I didn't have much contact with other people, Turks from Janjevo, so with Prizren, Vushtrri, Mitrovica where... or Gjilan where

² Literally a small market, usually in the old part of the town.

Turks lived, and they mostly married Albanians. Janjevo was considered a city, and the conditions were better than in other places.

And now, what? Maybe they explained the differences to you. Our last name was Biekli until the Balkan Wars. Biekli means *musteçok*.³ After the Balkan Wars they added the affix “q”, the Serbo-Slovaks. And for some time, our last name was Bikliq. To this day some people’s last name is still Bikliq. There are a lot of families that are in Turkey, their last name was changed, you know that practice. But a family of ours was in a better financial situation so when they went to the border, they gave them money and said, “Can you please not change our last name? Leave it Bikliq.”

To this day they live in Istanbul with the last name Bikliq, which not changing Albanian last names is a rare case in Turkey. So, there are Biliq in Turkey, in some places, some centers, then there are some in Europe who went there in the ‘70s to work and so on. And now the question comes up, what about us? I finished elementary school in Janjevo, up until fourth grade in Albanian. There was a teacher for the Albanian language, but not for the Turkish language.

Then, after the fourth grade there wasn’t school in Albanian, just in Turkish, from fifth to eighth grade, so the second part of elementary school. So me and Skender, you were in his office, and some other cousins from here or around here, we went to school in Croatian. We weren’t able to travel at that time, there were no buses, we would have had to go to Pristina or I don’t know... maybe to Gadime, but Gadime is far away... there were some elementary schools fully in Albanian. So we finished the last four years of elementary school in Croatian, as we used to call it Serbo-Croatian.

Anita Susuri: In which building in Janjevo did you finish school?

Emin Bikliqi: Up to fourth grade... maybe you were in Janjevo’s church, there’s a building there, the Youth Association?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Emin Bikliqi: I went there for four years, it belonged to the church but after the Second World War the government took it and that’s where we finished four grades.

Anita Susuri: Did it have a name? Was it a school or...

Emin Bikliqi: Vladimir Nazor.

Anita Susuri: It initially was called Vladimir Nazor.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, yes. It was called Vladimir Nazor. So, we continued fifth grade in that old building, I don’t know if you remember?

³ A person who has a mustache.

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes.

Emin Bikliqi: That school isn't functional now, it was destroyed, there's a new building. We finished four grades in the old building. So, I finished elementary school, and now I don't want to brag, but I was head of youth back then. I was considered Albanian, I'll tell you why later, and why I feel like that today. I was an excellent student. Teachers would take me to other classes for Croatian language.

I learned Croatian, I spoke Croatian, grammar, how students should speak, or questions about grammar. Croatians weren't interested in learning. So, it is kind of like bragging, it's not okay like this (laughs). Then I registered at *Shkolla Normale*⁴ in Pristina in...

Anita Susuri: Before we move on to Pristina...

Emin Bikliqi: Talk more about Janjevo?

Anita Susuri: I want to go back to Janjevo. Can you explain...

Emin Bikliqi: No, I'm going to explain this to you now. Excuse me. Let me finish this. What about my being? Our being? My last name is Bikliqi, so with an "i" in the end. This is the period when I came to Pristina, that's when I was more aware of some things, and I made a request at the Municipality of Janjevo, it was the third year of *Normale*, so I didn't want the last name Bikliq, but Bikliqi. I hand wrote the request, and I was the first person who added the "i" affix, and then some others continued. I was one of the first people there who enrolled in high school, then I continued with the others.

And now we go back to Janjevo. Janjevo, what's my impression? Or before that, let's finish with the national being, which means the origin, circumstances, relationships, and all of these. So we, we created... people from Janjevo, mostly the Bikliqi family, not all, that's how it is, right? We created this social Albanian being. Albanian mother, school in Albanian, weddings, not only mine, others also, and other impacts... so, press, literature and everything, the origin... I told you. But, today we have an Albanian being, and we feel Albanian.

We go back to Janjevo again, what's my impression? For example, for the Croatian neighbors that we had? I think it's an important element. I remember, for example, at that time, a guest happened to visit and we didn't have coffee or sugar, at that time, it was sometime after the '50s. The mother would say to me, "Go to Marta's..." Marta was a Croat neighbor, and she added, "Ask her for some sugar or coffee." It really left an impression, that's why I remember it. If she did not have it, for example, a cup of sugar or coffee, or a land tool, a fork or something, she would say, "Wait a minute." She went to her other Croat neighbor to obtain it and she would bring it to me. In other words, she did not let you go without finding you a solution. This is a human value, universal, right? It is culture, it is civilization.

⁴ 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 WWII, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

That's what stuck with me. I always mention, or I have mentioned it when I came here, to Pristina. Then, what else impressed me in Janjevo? For *Bajram*,⁵ for St. George's, maybe they told you? It was very interesting because we had some means. We had *tarabuk*,⁶ we had a tambourine and guitars. At that time, before World War Two, my uncle was in Germany. He brought us a gramophone at that time. He worked there, he brought it and other means from Germany that others... I don't even know what it was.

As I was saying for Eid Mubarak, for St. George's and such, the elderly went out into the street, we as children would go after them and sing in Janjevo streets. You have seen how the streets are in the Dubrovnik style. Narrow streets, perhaps you have never been there?

Anita Susuri: Yes, we have been there.

Emin Bikliqi: Good. The cobblestone streets, now they are paved with cubes, but they used to be with cobblestone. And, in the streets, we sang Turkish songs and Albanian songs. That left a huge impression on me. Then for St. Georges, for example, mothers would make us wake up early to collect flowers, and wash up with that water, and so on. And we made swings. You have seen it, there are many trees, pear trees, tall walnut trees. The St. George's celebration lasted for three days, St. George's Day. But Roma people would accentuate the beauty of St. George's Day. They considered it a Roma national holiday. They came with drums, with their musical instruments, they made the occasion even more beautiful.

Something else that's important to say about Janjevo, I remember it and always mention it in Pristina, and everywhere when I talk to people. Everything was in order, to be fair, the Croats, they had it as an obligation on Friday evenings, everyone cleaned up the cobblestone in front of their doors, and left no bits of it dirty... as for the dirt, God forbid, but there was no dust even. They cleaned it up with water and on Saturdays the streets were... those narrow streets of Janjevo were clean. This is what I remember, in other words, that is a material value, it is culture, right?

Besarta Breznica: Why exactly on Fridays?

Emin Bikliqi: On Friday so it is ready for Saturday and Sunday... on Saturday they worked, but on Sunday the Croats, Catholics don't work. And they, if you ever went to do business with them, they said, "I am sorry, but this is my day off, it is a holiday for me." They considered it a holiday. And I asked them, as you are asking me now, "Why on Friday?" Because the priest goes for a walk in the streets of Janjevo on Saturday at a certain time. When the priest passes by... now I don't know. But when the priest passed by, everyone went out in front of their doors to salute him.

⁵ *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.

⁶ Goblet drum.

Anita Susuri: Also maybe because Friday was the market day? Does that matter?

Emin Bikliqi: No, that... maybe it got more dirty on Fridays (laughs), people from the suburbs came there. But there was another aspect to it, the roads had to be clean for the weekend. There was another important moment, I asked my friends, "Why?" At that time, but also later I discussed it with my Croat friends. They always led, and we tried to do something while following their example. So they said, "On Saturdays..." the church is very organized, it was like that and it still is. At that time, 50-60 years ago, or what do I know, it was very organized.

Maybe you have already been told, the Janjevo choir in the '70s, I don't exactly know, won first place in Yugoslavia, and the church had a professor of music education, there weren't any graduates in that field. Those moments that I mentioned Janjevo people, a cultural, civilizational awareness. They led. Not only for us, but also... they were an example in Kosovo, while today Janjevo is left at the bottom of the well.

And I asked them, "Why?" Since you asked me, "Why on Fridays?" Because the priest goes for a walk in the streets of Janjevo on Saturday at a certain time. And when the priest passes by, when he used to pass by, now I don't know. But when the priest passed by, the Croats went out in front of their doors to salute him. But us, who did we salute like that? (laughs) That was a tradition and culture and of course it affected the cleaning of the roads. So, there was a connection there, there was an obligation, a responsibility and so on. But then it became a value. Like an educational, cultural, hygienic value. So, at that time, 60 years ago, it was a practice. I remember that, of course even earlier, but I am talking about the period I remember.

Anita Susuri: What were Fridays like, market days?

Emin Bikliqi: The market was great.

Anita Susuri: What was the atmosphere like there?

Emin Bikliqi: Very good, the roads were filled... the market was near the *çarshi*, now you know where [Skender \[Bikliqi\]](#)'s office is, but it was a wider area full of people. Especially the Croats, we didn't, they had money because they were traders and traveled all over Yugoslavia. They manufactured, each house was like a small factory. At that time there were no spoons, or when Albanians used wooden spoons, they manufactured aluminum spoons, and different aluminum dishes, and different things.

Then they started to manufacture plastic, maybe you remember. So, people from Janjevo were the first to... then the market from China was opened, that's something else, it's another period, a new period, and so on. And this is the interesting part of the market. What they brought, for example, Albanians and Serbs... the villages around are Albanian and Serbian, you know them. They brought their products there, eggs, chickens, calves, and so on. Different products and they were all sold.

Something else interesting I mention every time, something which made an impression on me — If someone lost their wallet with money and if a Croat found it, he took it and gave it to the church for safekeeping. And people went to the church and the priest asked them, “What does your wallet look like?” He described it. He said to him, “Here’s your wallet with all your money.” Or if you lost your ax or something else, at that time, an ax was quite valuable... or you forgot your tote with something in it and if a Croat found it... I am not talking about other people, if a Croat found it, he gave it to the church and you could get it at the church.

Something else, which has left a great impression on my childhood was the Masked Ball⁷ that was organized, they were organized sometime in February. Have they told you about it?

Anita Susuri: No.

Emin Bikliqi: Oh, the Masked Ball is a cultural value, it is civilization. Imagine 60 years ago. You might’ve seen them on television. In Dalmatia, they organize carnivals to celebrate spring when mimosa flowers bloom. In Janjevo, during my childhood years, they were also organized. And there was a problem... I was in the second grade and we would go to the church where the school facility was. For carnivals, men would dress up like women, women like men. Then men would wear animal skin turned backwards, with torn clothes, and a set of bulls’ horns on their heads, so that they look as scary as possible. And we were scared of them, oftentimes I said to my father, “Take me to school because I’m scared.” At that time there were *qeze*, a two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle. They used to go around with *qeze*, they would sing, like witches, like... for us, it would be scary to see them today, let alone as children, that impressed me.

That’s what I told my friends here, they would just look at me with their mouths open. They didn’t know because it was a new experience... It could have happened in Prizren, I don’t know about Prizren, I am talking about Janjevo. It sounded like a movie when I told them in *Normale*. Something else that is important...

Anita Susuri: Were these organized at the church and then continued to the city?

Emin Bikliqi: Well the church was probably an initiator, the church...

Anita Susuri: Or the culture center?

Emin Bikliqi: No, no, I don’t think so. Maybe it was the initiative of the culture center, but I don’t know. At that time I think I could have been the promoter for many things. But the church organized them, oriented them and so on. Maybe even the culture center, I don’t know what it was like back then. But, another interesting civilizational value... Everything is tied to Pristina, when I came to Pristina and told my friends who came from different parts of Kosovo. There were serenades back then.

⁷ *Marškare* or Mardi Gras refers to events of the Carnival celebration, beginning on or after the Christian feasts of the Epiphany (Three Kings Day) and culminating on the day before Ash Wednesday, which is known as Shrove Tuesday. *Mardi Gras* is French for “Fat Tuesday,” reflecting the practice of the last night of eating rich, fatty foods.

I was also in the parallel system. I told you about Croatian language, at 13, 14, 15 years old, you feel like falling in love, or meeting girls. There were beautiful girls, they were dressed better than Albanian and Turkish girls because they had more money. Everything is tied to that. They wore beautiful dresses that they brought from Zagreb, or what do I know, it was like a movie. Of course, I had girl classmates, I had crushes, of course. But the other Croat boy classmates also had crushes.

And I want to emphasize this is a very good, civilizational value. So during the night we would go by their windows and sing... to each their own. We would go together, two or three people with guitars. We didn't know how to play guitar, but we would make noise. We went to their window, they would come to the window, they would throw water or flowers at us. But, the parents never came out and... if we went to the families there would be blood. We stayed there and sang until we got tired, and then we would go home. So these are the values, those things that impressed me and I can't forget them, I always emphasized them with people who I met and I was proud of Janjevo. There are a lot of other moments.

For me, for example, I remember being very impressed, Janjevo is something else now. I want to relate to why Janjevo is like this, maybe they told you this anecdote? Did you also ask for anecdotes? Nastradin⁸ came here, he heard about Janjevo. Janjevo people did mining and metallurgy for centuries. Nastradin says, "I want to go to Janjevo." He meets a shepherd in the entrance of Janjevo, not at the canyon, but in part where the cattle graze.

He meets the shepherd with sheep, Nastradin talks to him and he gets information about Janjevo. He says to the shepherd, "I have a cabbage..." he says, "instead of this tree..." wood or whatever it was, that his sheep were grazing under. He says, "I have a cabbage, and just a single leaf of that cabbage is enough to provide shade for the sheep." The shepherd is surprised, he asks, "Where are you from? He said, "I come from a place..." what do I know, "we have huge cabbage," and so on.

But even at that time since they worked with metallurgy, with metal and so on, they also produced carts or who knows. From metal... they melted the metal and made copper products and covers for the church and mosque. And of course, they worked with hammers and so on and you could hear the noise. Now Nastradin wanted to know, he said, "For God's sake..." he said to the shepherd, "What is this noise?" He says, "This noise has nothing to do with your cabbage. They're making..." he says, "A huge cart for your cabbage." And apparently he said, Nastradin, "May you never become neither a city nor a village."

I think this is interesting. So Janjevo is left as neither a city nor a village. It was a city, it was a town in the Middle Ages up until the Turk period, and so on. But, especially after the Croats moved away, after

⁸ Nastradin also known as Nasreddin or Nasreddin Hodja was a Seljuq satirist, born in Hortu Village in Sivrihisar, Eskişehir Province, present-day Turkey and died in the 13th century in Akşehir, in today's Turkey. He is considered a populist philosopher, Sufi and wise man, remembered for his funny stories and anecdotes.

the war in Croatia with Serbia... Šešelj⁹ went, maybe they told you about this. Šešelj threatened... Šešelj went with the paramilitary, "We will burn you, we will..." this and that. And within a week more than four thousand people left, they left their houses, that to this day are left empty. You saw the condition they are in.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the institutions in Janjevo. Do you remember, were there any institutions? For example, the culture center...

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, the culture center. The culture center existed in my time. We had... we watched movies, so time after time they would come with a projector, we had projectors at that time. Where Skender's office is today, they used to be a wall I remember... the market was there also, and we would watch movies with the projector. They used to show movies... there used to be the culture hall, did they tell you where it was?

Anita Susuri: Approximately...

Emin Bikliqi: A Roma lived there now, near the post office. You know where the post office is?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Emin Bikliqi: Next to the post office... it's destroyed now. There was a big hall there, I remember we used to recite there as students. So in the '60s, '60, '56, '57, '58, '60. I was there until '62. So, this is the period that I remember. There was the culture center, they had electricity there some time after the war, they had generations there for... for the culture center, and so on. And then when it got electricity... But, partly there was electricity with the generator, from what I remember, so more than 50 years.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the municipality building?

Emin Bikliqi: The municipality, yes, where the police station is today... next to the police station on the right side. Now I don't know what house, but the municipality was next to the police station, as far as I remember.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember were there other cultural events or activities that were held at that time? That you were part of...

⁹ Vojislav Šešelj (1954-) is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party. In 2003 he surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), where was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2016 he was acquitted of the crimes.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, sports. As students we used to run, of course within the school curriculum. Something else worth mentioning... weddings were very interesting. Interesting, Croats, to tell you the truth we envied them, they were better with dances, music, and the way they manifested the wedding. They used to go into the streets of Janjevo. For us, Muslims, Muslims in general, Albanian muslims, Turkish muslims, the weddings were inside. To this day we have them inside, now we started having them in restaurants, they used to be in houses. They walked in the streets of Janjevo with the bride, then they went to the church where they held the ceremony of the engagement and marriage, they did it all in the church. So the church was the fulcrum of many activities, something else that was interesting about their weddings were their clothes, the diversity, the prosperity, the materials and so on.

Anita Susuri: Were their clothes similar to...

Emin Bikliqi: It is interesting how important the impact of the environment is. Whenever one lives, they adapt and appropriate cultures. We took something from them but they also took something from us. Their traditional garment was similar to ours, the *dimija*.¹⁰ And you wonder, "How come Croats from Dalmatia?" The influence of Ottoman culture had its impact. The distinction is in the lower part of the *dimija* — theirs had an extension with detailed embroidery. Even today, you can see those in Prizren, those *dimija*... you know, they mainly wore *dimija*. And the other parts of the garments are the same as the ones our brides wear.

Anita Susuri: What kind of impact on culture did... so the Ottoman period, Turkish culture. Did it have other impacts?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, it had an impact, so there was taking and giving, so taking and giving of cultural, civilizing values. In the beginning I told you that there was the interweaving of three civilizations, so the Byzantine influence, the Roman influence. Because their culture was influenced by Dalmatia, by... Roman culture and Ottoman civilization. Ottoman civilization had an impact, what did it do? For example, it had an impact on food and other things. In clothing, in some events, as we said, there were similarities. For example, *dimija*. Croats didn't have *dimija*, in Zagreb or Croatia there were no *dimija*, they don't even know what they are. But cultures influenced other cultures, they interweaved each other, they became common values and so on.

Anita Susuri: In terms of infrastructure, the style of those houses, do you remember what they were like?

Emin Bikliqi: Well, usually, they were one-story houses, or two-story houses, some even were three-story houses. They had verandas, you know? Or they were with, they had an open space outside on the second floor. The style of construction was a combination of Ottoman...

¹⁰ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember any houses that impressed you, a house that seemed interesting to you back then?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, maybe you have seen a building there? It has the construction year written on it, that impressed...

Anita Susuri: I think it was a café?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, it used to be a shop as far as I remember, it used to be a shop and then a café, but they changed the destination. That was interesting, and also a house near the mosque, it is still there, it had a cross until recently. A two-story house, or three-story house, the style of the house was Oriental, Dalmatian or... So, there was also an impact on construction. This Oriental style was also intertwined with the ancient Roman.

Anita Susuri: I think there is also a tower there?

Emin Bikliqi: Skender talked about it.

Anita Susuri: Do you have any memories of that tower?

Emin Bikliqi: No, I don't, I was in that tower only once. It was inherited from our ancestors. The Croats inherited it, I don't know in which year. So, they sold it, they started going to Turkey, so after the Balkan Wars, so it was probably brought by the Croats after the Balkan Wars. Croats were richer. They had the financial means and bought it, but it was built by our ancestors. Skender probably talked about this.

Anita Susuri: Not that much. What was it like inside?

Emin Bikliqi: I forgot, I forgot. I was there when I was a kid, I want to ask for something from the owner, my father sent me. I went inside a room, it seemed very interesting in comparison to how other houses were built in Janjevo. It is still special, even today. It is very high, it is built like an actual tower.

Anita Susuri: What else can you tell us about Janjevo's *çarshi*.

Emin Bikliqi: Janjevo's *çarshi*... it was very lively, even other people said that the *çarshi* was a good corner, and it was always like a celebration. Because the traders always traveled to Yugoslavia and when they came back, they brought money and always... there was music, singers, drink, but something else is also worth mentioning about the Croats. Foreigners would come to the *çarshi* that you asked me about. Some foreigner would come and sit down in the cafés, there would be Croats, Albanians and Turks drinking together, while he [the foreigner] was alone, and they would say, "A coffee or some other drink for the guest." And he would come meet them, they would befriend him, he would thank him and so on. So, hospitality was a value.

It was, because now things have changed. It still is like that, now when Croats from Zagreb come... who were born here, they come time after time, they have some celebrations like St. Nicolas, on June 1st or I don't know when they come... or 10th, 12th, I forgot, they treat them, people who they know, and those who they don't. But at that time, *çarshi*, *çarshi* was lively until recently. There were people until 00:00 in the years... imagine in the '60s, and in the later years then the conditions were better, so it was even more active.

Metalac, they probably told you how Metalac started. First that factory was called Edvard Kardelj,¹¹ it was near the post office, they probably told you, I don't know. Then the factory was built and they changed the name, instead of Edvard Kardelj... you know who Edward Kardelj is, from history, right? Tito's number one collaborator, he was Slovenian. Yes, yes, he was Slovenian. He was an ideologue, an ideologue for the building of socialist society or, more specifically, the socialist self-government in Yugoslavia. So, he gave those ideological and political orientations of development, and they headed toward the democratization of society step by step. He had concepts, but he died. The changes were seen after the '80s.

He had concepts of building Yugoslavia on the go. An economical, cultural, and political development. Not like the socialist systems of Albania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union, those that were similar to our system. Maybe this is another topic, so that system could be used as an example of how a society should develop in every aspect. When Kardelj was mentioned, he was one the main pillars of the development of society in a political, ideological, and social aspect. He even wrote books. Then they were approved by the Central Committee of the Party, or the Communist Association, as we called it later, and so on.

At that time Yugoslavia was moving at a fast pace, and we, so from the '70s, '80 we moved... they moved at a fast pace, we moved at even a faster pace to catch up with the others. But, the changes that were done... But, that ten-year period was very important for... so, when we're talking about Janjevo, we are talking about Kosovo entirely. That was a very important period when it came to education, culture, and everything.

Even at that time people got an education, they got scholarships, they got loans, they had opportunities for hospitalization... you heard about these things from others. It was great, the system was like that, the system... if someone couldn't get operated on in Pristina, they would pay the patient's expenses to go get operated on someplace else. If they couldn't get operated on here, they sent them to Germany, France, England, with a person who accompanied them, and paid all of their expenses.

Now these things for young people like you who haven't experienced it, it sounds like a fairytale, like a dream, but it's true. Or when it comes to freedom, democracy... I remember we used to go to Turkey

¹¹ Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979), also known by the pseudonyms Bevc, Sperans and Krištof, was a Yugoslav politician and economist. He was one of the leading members of the Communist Party of Slovenia before the Second World War, and after the war, he was the main creator of the Yugoslav system of workers' self-management.

twice a year. We would go to the sea and... when we came to the Bulgarian border, in Yugoslavia, we used to get tired waiting there in the middle of night, we would just go on the side of the road and sleep there, with a blanket and that's it, without fear. Today that's not that case (laughs). Anyway, that's another aspect, this is not interesting to you.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about education in Janjevo, when you were a student. Were there many students? Were there more girls or boys? Do you have any memories, can you tell us about this?

Emin Bikliqi: There were just a few girls, in the first four grades there were very few girls. Since we continued on the Croat parallels, there weren't any Albanian girls. It was very easy to fall in love with Croat girls. You could be in the same class or the same desk as them, and so on (laughs). We didn't have, we didn't have much contact with other girls. So, education wise, there weren't many girls, or there weren't any girls in higher grades of elementary school. At that time they couldn't even imagine letting a Muslim girl go to... when I say Muslim, I mean Albanian and Turkish, in the Croat parallel at that time. Today, even today, letting an Albanian girl go to the Croat parallel {shrugs} time will tell. So, education wasn't at a good level. I had seven sisters, I went to, after *Normale*... but you're not interested in this, this part of my life?

Anita Susuri: Yes. Yes, whatever you want to share with us.

Emin Bikliqi: Anyway, let's finish with Janjevo first. Do you have any other questions?

Anita Susuri: Yes. Since we were talking about school, was this a characteristic of Croat women to continue their education, or did they just go to elementary school...

Emin Bikliqi: No, no. In general, maybe other people also told you, Croats weren't oriented towards education. They had their crafts, their resources for life. Almost none of them continued with their education. You can... you can count those who continue with their education on one hand. What I remember from my generation, only two people... two or three people who went to high school, the others didn't. Especially not girls. Even the Croats, they were not oriented towards education. They had their crafts, they had money, they traded, it was enough.

Anita Susuri: What was it like to grow up in Janjevo, because they say there were many children here. There were a lot of children in families. What was that like? Did this only happen with the Croats or...

Emin Bikliqi: No, that was a phenomenon for us also, and the other. But, it was more present with the Croats, they were more privileged, or so to say, to have 13, 14, 15 children. Maybe they told you? They would have up to 15 children if they could afford it. We also had a lot of children... for example, I'm the eighth child, I have seven siblings. But many other families were like this, five [children] minimum. So, we had up to ten children, eleven children, but Croats would have up to 15 children. Maybe even the church affected this, more or less. It's the same in Islam, for example, having as many children as you can, children are wealth, what do I know. Croats, they also had their own interest, they wanted to be as many Croats as possible, it's normal.

Anita Susuri: What did you do after your education in Janjevo?

Emin Bikliqi: In the school year '62-'63 I was enrolled in *Normale*, and when I came to *Normale*, there was an exam you had to pass and... there was a common Albanian-Serbian commission for accepting the students. Mathematics, language, music, physical education, these were tests to see if a person could be a teacher in the future, are they musical, can they teach students about instruments and singing, language or mathematics, and so on. There was a teacher, Mithat, who is still alive, he sees my last name is Bikliqi, and says, "Excuse me..." he says, "you..." well, "What are you asking me about this and that." I tell him, just like I'm talking to you. He says, "Okay..." he says. I told him, "I want to be in the Serbian parallel." The professor was surprised. "How..." he said, "You in the Serbian parallel." "Professor, I..." I explained it to him, like I explained it to you. "I finished this and this..." He says, "No..." he says, "You can speak Albanian. No, it can't happen. You will enroll in the Albanian parallel."

And I became acquainted with the language in a short time, because that period of time impacted the grammar and so on. Then, I was lucky because I had a very good professor, Rexhep Hoxha,¹² I don't know if you remember *Lugjet e Verdha* [Yellow Troughs]? He was my Albanian language professor, and for a short period of time I learned literary language, literary language. And then that helped throughout my life, Rexhep Hoxha. Then I, and my other professors always bragged about my reading and my writing. I write very well, I believe I am as good as linguists when it comes to writing. It's different when you write and when you speak. You are more careful when you write, you respect the rules. While communicating you can make mistakes.

Now we are left with neither the unified language nor the... right? Nor this language that we use. Like half... actually literary and Gheg language. Now Gheg and unified language are mixed, we don't respect it. Mostly we don't respect the rules, so Gheg language and so on, but the important thing is that the norm of language must be respected sociologically and so, meaning that language is an important element as a sign of the nation's unification. Speaking the same language is a very important factor of unification.

Sometimes they make jokes, "They go to Albania, they speak..." people who are not very educated, when it comes to the dialect, "Can you translate it for me?" The conversation between an Albanian person from Kosovo and an Albanian from Albania, they say, "I don't understand, explain it to me." (laughs) In other words, "What is he saying?" So, a moment of language. I finished *Normale*, I was Head of Youth¹³ for two years. We called it the School Youth Committee...

¹² Rexhep Hoxha (1929-2019) was born in Malishevë, Kosovo. He studied Albanian Language and Literature in Belgrade, Serbia. He worked as an editor for children's literature in Rilindja, and produced children's programs in the Radio Prishtina. He wrote many children's books which were part of the elementary school curriculum.

¹³ After the Second World War, SKOJ - *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* (The League Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) became a part of a wider organization of Yugoslav youth, the People's Youth of Yugoslavia, which later became the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia.

Anita Susuri: What was Pristina like when you came?

Emin Bikliqi: Pristina was a city. A city...

Anita Susuri: What kind of impression did you have?

Emin Bikliqi: As a city... I came to Pristina, we traded in Pristina. Janjevo traded in Pristina. We had fruit, and we usually sold it here. We also had family connections here, it was an unknown environment. It was an environment where I adapted rather quickly. I finished *Normale*, after that I enrolled at the Faculty of Political Science, Sociology Group in Sarajevo. There we formed the Student Club, it's that booklet there {shows with his hands}. Then there was the Albanian Citizens' Club Bajram Curri, they gave us the spaces we needed. Shortly, Bosnians helped us in every aspect, and they said, you just have to ask, if you want the building, or the hall, they gave us the opportunity to buy books or bring them from Kosovo, libraries where Albanians could gather in Sarajevo. There were 20 thousand at that time, when I was there.

So, I went there in the school year of '67-'68, and at that time we organized events, concerts and so on. In the first years of university I was an excellent student, I got the silver badge every year. Excellent students got it from the rectorate, they got the silver badge from the University of Sarajevo, and in the end I achieved an excellent average, and I finished university in three years and a half. I got the gold badge from the University of Sarajevo. And I was a demonstrator of learning, I don't know if you had demonstrators of learning? So, I was some kind of a teaching assistant as a student, and I got a salary.

I got a salary for a year as a student that I substituted for classes in the branch of sociology. The professors in Sarajevo also wanted me to stay in Sarajevo, I was an excellent student. Those four years of school in Croatian language helped me, so I didn't have any trouble. So, I freely lectured for my colleagues in the Serbo-Croatian language, as we used to call it then, at the University. And they invited me to continue my education there, but I had seven sisters and I wanted to come here and help them, and so on. Anyway, this is another topic.

Part Three

Emin Bikliqi: I remember as a kid, they used to say that a rabbit entered Janjevo and exited in Gadime. Did they tell you this?

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes, but you can tell it also, no problem.

Emin Bikliqi: We had a piece of mountain and a vineyard at the entrance of Janejvo. That... that part is called Zhabica, that's not important. That hill, there are two big hills there. On the right side, we had a mountain and vineyards, and as a kid when I went to the vineyard I would pass by, there was like a ravine. And as a kid I would go near there, it was very deep, I would take a rock and throw it in, and

listen to the noise it made. At that time, so approximately in the '60s, this happened then. And they used to say, "A rabbit entered that ravine in Janjevo and exited in Gadime."

Then it turned out to be true in the '80s when they discovered Gadime's cave and the explanation... This is connected to Janjevo. So there was some truth to it, people... so the rabbit went in there because a dog was chasing it, and the rabbit came out in Gadime. Now... but this was verified when they discovered Gadime's cave, after almost 50 years. So, that's an interesting moment. Also you have seen that huge hill in the entrance of Janjevo on the left, where they dug the soil in those caves in the Roman times, when the ore was extracted. I don't know what else is worth mentioning. You can ask, I don't know.

Anita Susuri: We were talking about *Shkolla Normale*, were you the only one from Janjevo who continued school? I mean from your generation.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, yes. There were people who came after me, but they came later, I was the first.

Anita Susuri: Why were you the only one?

Emin Bikliqi: Well, who knows. I can only speak for myself. Education was important to me. So, my uncle worked in Belgrade at that time, the uncle who was in Germany, he came... during World War Two he came here with the Germans and killed Serbs. He went to Gracanica, he was wearing the uniform. They killed him on his way back to Janjevo, we don't even know where he is. Anyway, this is a story on its own. So he was killed and we don't know anything about him.

My other uncle, he was a soldier in Belgrade, in the military hospital, and he served as a soldier there. They asked him to stay there, so he worked there for a period of time, then he went to Zagreb. I want to relate this to how much of an impact he had. Anyway, education was important to me, but my uncle was also an influence. He lived in Belgrade, he saw life differently. That's how it is, right? He supported me. When he would come from Belgrade he would bring me something, "If you learn you can come to Belgrade and wherever you want, you can become a doctor and so on."

When I enrolled in *Normale*, I had a Montenegrin teacher, he taught me physics, he asked, "Where are you going to school?" I say, "*Normale*." He says, "*Normale* for you..." he said it in Serbo-Croatian, but I'm not gonna say it in Serbo-Croatian, I'll translate it into Albanian. He says, "It is like a cat's cough for you," he said, "A trade school or..."

Anita Susuri: Easy.

Emin Bikliqi: But I wanted to go to *Normale* because of the scholarship. At that time the municipality needed educators, teachers and they gave scholarships. So that had an impact on my decision to go to *Normale*. Maybe it would have been better if I went to trade school, or somewhere else. However, that is done.

Anita Susuri: What was life in Pristina like? What were the conditions here?

Emin Bikliqi: It was good, I lived in a private... I had my scholarship, so I had a modest life. I fulfilled my needs for living and for books and notebooks and for things that were needed.

Anita Susuri: Was there any particular place where students lived?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, in the *Normale* dormitory. I didn't live in the dormitory. I could have lived there, but I preferred private housing. I lived in the city, here on Niš Street. Now it probably has a different name, I don't know. I lived there with a family from Pristina, we were acquaintances. There was only an old woman and an old man. I lived with them and it was good. For four years they considered me their son. I would wake up in the morning to go to school, I would turn on the stove, make tea, when they would wake up the tea would be ready. I would go to school, they almost adopted me. I mean, I had a good time with them, and they had a good time with me. That's how it was.

Anita Susuri: Did you go out at that time? Did you go out in the city?

Emin Bikliqi: In Pristina?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, there were so many lovers and so many *eiii* [onomatopoeic].

Anita Susuri: Can you describe that time for us. Describe that time for us.

Emin Bikliqi: What aspect?

Anita Susuri: In any aspect that you want.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, Pristina was...

Anita Susuri: About going out, about life...

Emin Bikliqi: You would have different opportunities, right? For a better life. Then the contacts with friends. We would go to the cinema at that time, of course. We would go once a week to the cinema. In the beginning we dealt with studies, then we started to like ourselves and like girls and so on. Then we started to fall in love, it was a big deal (laughs).

Anita Susuri: How did you continue after *Shkolla Normale*, did you immediately go to Sarajevo?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, immediately.

Anita Susuri: Tell us how this changed.

Emin Bikliqi: I was interested in studying physiology and I went to Zagreb... I went there, because my uncle was also there, as I told you. My grades were excellent and so on. They asked, "Do you have a scholarship? Only those who have a scholarship..." because the physiology branch had a limited number of students. That was a condition I did not meet, so me and my friends went to Sarajevo. I went to Sarajevo, I enrolled in the Political Science Faculty, and I finished it.

Anita Susuri: When was the first time you traveled out of Kosovo and what was your impression of that place?

Emin Bikliqi: When we were in elementary school, we went to Ohrid for the first time.

Anita Susuri: From Janjevo?

Emin Bikliqi: They took us to Ohrid from Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: Did the school organize trips like this?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, it was interesting to me. Then we also went to Belgrade, in elementary school, we went there at that time. We visited these two places then, in elementary school. While things were different in *Normale*.

Anita Susuri: In elementary school in Janjevo, did everyone go on these trips, or did only particular people go?

Emin Bikliqi: Well, no, almost everybody went on these trips. Trips to Ohrid, to Belgrade, in Kosovo, to Pristina. Pristina was very near, there were no problems.

Anita Susuri: What about your studies?

Emin Bikliqi: The period during my studies was a little intensive. It was intensive because I wanted to finish it as soon as possible, also students with excellent grades got to enter the exams without going to lectures. So I finished the exams one after one, so I finished university early. So, I tried to finish it as soon as possible because of my family's needs, but also for Kosovo's needs for teachers and what do I know, and so on.

Anita Susuri: You started a family after your studies, right?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Much time after your studies?

Emin Bikliqi: I was hired by the Provincial Committee of the Communist League and after a year I went to Prizren. It was the school of reserve officers, that's how it was. Every municipality had a few. We finished military service but also the school of reserve officers. I finished it then I continued work at the Provincial Committee and... so I started working in '72, I worked in '73, in '74 I went into the military. The moment I came back from the military I got married.

Anita Susuri: How did you meet your wife?

Emin Bikliqi: Different connections, different connections. I moved around a lot and... now I don't know, it's not a shame, they say people have one life, but more than one love, only one life. But this is the love that turned into marriage. I had different relationships and dates. At that time we used to go out with guarantees. Families, the person and so on. So everything was a factor. My wife is from Gjilan. Don't ask me too much because if someone reads it, or if my wife sees it we will have trouble in our old age (laughs). You shouldn't tell everything.

Anita Susuri: How did your profession develop after?

Emin Bikliqi: I didn't have much luck in my professional development, in short, I have worked for others more than I have worked for myself, in comparison to my friends. So, I had predispositions for science. I came here, I had seven sisters and I worked for their education to help my father, so I got employed at the Provincial Committee. I worked there for others. I would write their speeches, reports, analyses. These kinds of things. I didn't know I should do things for my own professional growth. Then the troubles we had in '81, political problems, the Provincial Committee was the epicenter. They would tell me to do this, do that, they invited me to Belgrade to continue with my studies, but then I had children, responsibilities, that's how life is. In other words, I didn't work for myself.

In addition to working I also lectured at the Political School of the League of Communists as it was called, you don't know this. It was for workers, regardless of their education, even those with bachelor's degrees, workers and so on came to the Political School. The committees of municipalities delegated people there, no payment necessary, and I was one of the lecturers. In addition to the job I had, I also lectured at the Political School until the end. From beginning to end. I got paid for it.

Anita Susuri: Do you have any memories of the time when you worked before the '80s?

Emin Bikliqi: Before the '80s?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Emin Bikliqi: I have good memories. At that time Kosovo burst in every aspect of development, in economical, political, cultural, civilizational development and so on. That's when we started, Kosovo, Albanians. Otherwise, after the '80s there were other trends.

Anita Susuri: What was your role during the demonstrations of '81, did you take part in the demonstration or were you more neutral?

Emin Bikliqi: No, no. I did not take part [in the demonstration], we didn't dare do it, because we could have lost our jobs or even gone to prison. Because I worked in a sensitive institution, it gave direction... not the Provincial Committee but based on the decisions of the Party's Central Committee in Belgrade, they gave the orders in republics, in provinces. So, we didn't dare do it, we had to be careful. There's one interesting moment... there are a lot of moments.

So, that time was a time of development and spiritual satisfaction for Albanians with perspective at every step. You enrolled in school, you had maximum job opportunities, you worked, you registered there and you would know your place and when you could get an apartment. So, it was an advanced democracy. Democracies are different and bourgeois democracy is, we can take the democracies of previous societies. Each period had their own democracies. But I'm talking about Kardelj and Tito, in the '70s, '80s, this was an advanced democracy, we called socialist democracy. Why? Because people... people in general in Kosovo decided on their own fate.

So you were employed, you voted, discussed and proposed among your colleagues. You talked about the salary, living conditions, apartments, holidays. Everyone took part and the lists were formed. You were a subject, that's what we call it in sociology, you were a subject not an object. Now, in comparison to that time, we are objects. You understand the best {shows with his hands} but you probably know what being a subject or object means. We are a political subject for four years, or before the four years when we hold the elections and you go vote, nothing more. Who asks.... Who asks me. That's why we are in this condition, because we're not subjects.

So, those functions alienated us. Someone else... we trusted them. And now you can see how we trusted them, and what they are doing to us. This was not possible at that time, in Kardelj's time. We decided. I want to say that it was a period of perspective. People were pleased. You were employed, you knew you were going to get an apartment, create a family, and you will be happy. Today, there's wealth... for some people, right? They get that wealth within a night, or a year, who knows how they do it, honorably or not, they're not all the same. You are a witness, there's nothing I can tell you about the present. And all of these were alienated. What are they saying about the assembly? I don't want to repeat the parliamentarian's opinions. What is this assembly? Who are these people? I don't want to discuss that topic.

In other words, I want to say that in comparison to that time, we were subjects and we were happy. Today even the people who have millions aren't happy, because I don't know how they earned them. Right? You can't be satisfied. There are some cases where people are satisfied with other people's suffering and so on. But I mean at that time we were satisfied. And when I talk to young people like you about these things and other things like this, they say, "Is it possible that it was like that?" But we are witnesses, of course it is possible.

To my children and you this sounds like a fairytale, right? Like a story you think it may have happened, but we experienced it, we know. Maybe I talked a lot about it but since you asked me to compare that time and now, that time was a period of perspective. I used to say it often, when we were in America, we had a passport that we could travel everywhere in the world with. What about today? For how many years...

Anita Susuri: Did you travel?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Where did you travel to, and what did you like the most?

Emin Bikliqi: I went everywhere. In '73 I went to Berlin, I was a youth activist at that time and I was in the political youth delegation of Yugoslavia. We traveled by car. Three or four delegates from the republics, also from Kosovo, stayed in Berlin for fifteen days, at the International Youth Festival. So, youth from all over the world, except for Albania which didn't participate at that time. Every other country participated. I was in that delegation with Ukshin Hoti,¹⁴ Agim Zatriqi.¹⁵ You may not know Agim, he was the television director, it's not important. You know Ukshin. I slept in the same room as Ukshin Hoti, and so on.

So, I was in that delegation, it was official work. I got paid for it. I traveled, I created contacts with youth all over the world, and so on. Then, privately, I traveled to Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, we used to go there just for a coffee on the weekend, so to say. Except Albania, we couldn't go there. Especially to Turkey. I went to Turkey for the first time as a student in the '70s, I went to Syria, to Damascus, because I had a friend that I met in Sarajevo, Arabian.

We met, we drank tea and coffee and hung out. He says, "Do you want to come to Syria?" "Yes." And I go to Syria, in Damascus as a guest. From there, "Do you wanna go to Lebanon?" "Let's go." We went to Lebanon by taxi, in Beirut. At that time Beirut was called East Paris. Then you know about wars, we're not talking about that. I mean, I traveled to these places. Especially Yugoslavia. At that time, I traveled to all the beautiful and important places.

Anita Susuri: How long did you work there in the position you had?

Emin Bikliqi: I didn't have a position there, I was a professional associate.

Anita Susuri: I mean in that position?

¹⁴ Ukshin Hoti (1943-?), philosopher and politician, was sentenced to five years in prison in 1994. He disappeared at the time of his release and his whereabouts are still unknown.

¹⁵ Agim Zatriqi (1950-2016) was born in Pristina, Kosovo. He was a journalist and former director of Radio Television of Kosovo.

Emin Bikliqi: Well until... As long as the Provincial Committee existed. Until '89. Then I traded and I worked whatever I could. I worked all kinds of jobs.

Anita Susuri: Was that a hard period for you?

Emin Bikliqi: That period? It was very, very hard...

Anita Susuri: Can you describe it?

Emin Bikliqi: A period of many troubles, many troubles. All kinds... all kinds of troubles. Existential, political, will they imprison me, will they kill me, and so on. And in this period, so '90 to '89.... So in '89 my second son was an English student in Pristina, and he and his friends decided to go to war when Prekaz¹⁶ was first attacked. He went there when that happened, they were wearing their uniforms ready for war and so on. After three or four months, they got caught like rabbits with Iljaz Kodra, he was their commander. And they take them to prison in Mitrovica. He was there until June 10, when the Serbian military and police withdrew. They took them from the prison in Mitrovica and sent them to Požarevac.

So, he was in prison for three years, he was sentenced to seven years for irredentism and for terrorism. There are pictures of the boys in newspapers. Newspapers all over Belgrade wrote about these boys. They used all kinds of expressions, terrorists and so on. It was a very hard period of time for me. It was hard because we didn't know... first, when he went to Prekaz, we watched the news, in the evening they would announce who was killed, who was massacred. We would listen carefully in case they said something about our son, my son, or his friends. It was very hard. Then when they imprisoned them, that... it was hard, it was hard.

Anita Susuri: Were you in contact with him while he was in prison?

Emin Bikliqi: Only through the lawyer. To tell you the truth, some lawyers were very rude. I don't want to mention them by their names, but they took our money on the promise of setting him free, a typical lawyer. He was a well-known lawyer... I remember it clear as day, we were waiting there with the lawyer... we went with the lawyer, he would go in and then tell us in what condition our son is. One of them wanted to make a deal, "I want ten thousand euros beforehand," I don't want to mention his name, the late lawyer, he was well known. I had a very bad impression of him. Anyway, that time has passed. They took them to Požarevac, they maltreated them, when the prison burned down, they were saved by seconds. All these moments traumatized me and my family. It was as hard as death, like this.

Anita Susuri: How are you tied to Janjevo? Do you go there often?

¹⁶ The events of Prekaz in March 1998 Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marked the beginning of the war.

Emin Bikliqi: My house is in Janjevo. But I wasn't born there, because my father built it in the '70s. But we had a yard and vineyard there, then my father built the house there. My parents have died, my sisters have gotten married. I live in Pristina, the house is there with all the means needed to live in it. Water connection, phone, everything. I go there time after time, more often during the summer. As you saw, I go out to drink coffee, I meet my cousins, my friends. Sometimes I work in the vineyard or in the yard, and so on. It seems interesting now that I'm retired.

Anita Susuri: Were you present when Croats started leaving [Janjevo]?

Emin Bikliqi: No, I wasn't there.

Anita Susuri: During the 80s.

Emin Bikliqi: I wasn't. I am mentioning '81, maybe this is not convenient, talking about '81, then the '70s, but I have a very bitter experience when the demonstrations happened. They had appointed me... I was a collaborator in the Provincial Committee... I went to the Municipality of Lipjan to discuss these developments with young people and so on. And I went to a village where my [maternal] uncle lived, it's called Akllap, I don't know if you know it? Near Janjevo, doesn't matter.

My uncle lived there, and I went there, there was a meeting where the current political developments were explained and so on. They said, "They are asking for you..." there were young people there, I remember it, "You should speak as a sociologist, what do you think about it." They were comfortable with me, as I was with them. I was asked all kinds of questions, and I was talking about the sociological aspect of society, the development of society, the contradictions, the problems, the society moving forward, how it can be left behind, the perspectives of development, globalization.

At that time I was talking about these things. They were talking about borders and so on, future borders... they were interested in the Republic of Kosovo. "Borders will change there in the future..." This and that. "Will Kosovo be a republic?" History moved forward, developments moved forward. They listened to me. There was someone... today they say some people got paid to spy, and others did it for free. There was someone there and they asked about the Republic of Kosovo and so on.

I did not mention it. "Society has its own development laws." I say that, and so on. But I told them that every issue has its development when the time comes, I did not say anything about the republic. I finish the meeting and the next day I get a call from Lipjan's Internal Affairs, "Will you come to drink a coffee?" I said, "What happened?" The Serbians who were officials there told me... we met through the Provincial Committee, we had contacts, meetings. "Did you tell them that Kosovo will become a republic?" I said, "I never mentioned the Kosovo republic." "You said it." "I didn't say it."

The Head of the Party Committee was there in the meeting, he was... Hasan Lekiqi from Gadime, he is still alive, he supported me. He said, "They misunderstood Emin. I know what he said there." This and that and he helped me. Otherwise, I would have gone to prison, I would have lost my job and everything. A very bitter experience. So, there weren't any Serbs there, they were all Albanian. But

someone worked without even getting paid, and they almost ruined my life. After that I was very careful.

Anita Susuri: After... you said you weren't present when the Croats left.

Emin Bikliqi: No.

Anita Susuri: Did you notice the difference?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, yes. The week that happened... they left within a week. They were so scared, they took their main things, valuable things, and they put a lock in their houses, as you have seen them. To this day they're destroyed, half destroyed, ruins, zombies. It's very hard, very hard. Then when I went there, I noticed immediately. The *çarshi* was emptied out, it wasn't as lively as it used to be, there wasn't the life we were used to in Janjevo.

Officials of Kosovo went to Janjevo to drink coffee or eat breakfast or dinner there. While today, it is like Nastradin said, "Neither town nor village." It is left nowhere. So, if there's something left... not if there is something left, but if there is any place that has gotten worse, it's Janjevo. It could even keep the level... it almost sunk. It's sad. It should be sad for other people, it's sad for us. A place where I was born and spent a good part of my life.

Anita Susuri: Janjevo is known as a place where there used to be a lot of cafés and nightlife. Were you part of that?

Emin Bikliqi: No, not much. I didn't have time to tell you the truth, I wasn't one of them. I told you, I worked in an institution where I was careful about my behavior, my morals, about everything, and at that time we had huge responsibilities. We had party responsibilities, various responsibilities. I mean, you didn't dare do whatever you wanted and so on. I was disciplined. I participated in activities related to the work of the institution I worked for, we worked all day. We worked for the good of the country, during the time we were there, as I said Kosovo's America. We held meetings, we fought for the rights of Albanians in education, emancipation and so on. For many things, it was the party's program that gave nations the opportunity, especially the opportunities for a faster, more genuine and better development.

Anita Susuri: During that time...

Emin Bikliqi: And I was in service of that, both myself and my needs for professional development were given in those minimal circumstances. I committed my whole being to society development. We gave the democratic society what it deserved, our aim was independence and so on. But, the way we lived as a society, we generally had a good life. At that time, most people were employed, very rarely were there people who were unemployed. People had the opportunity to go to Germany and work, if they didn't find a job... at some point they used to give money, the employed people in Germany and France would corrupt people to work here. We had good salaries. Around one thousand and 500

marks,¹⁷ two thousand marks, one thousand marks, at that time marks had a very high value. So, all of that was... what we did for society. I also sacrificed myself, instead of getting a master's degree and a Ph.D... I could not commit to my professional development, you asked me earlier, I answered twice.

Anita Susuri: What was the period of war in Kosovo like for you?

Emin Bikliqi: Horrible, horrible because I... Our son was in Mitrovica, so where would we go? You aren't parents [addresses the interviewer] you're young, you don't know what being a parent is like. For example, during the bombing, the war, we couldn't leave our child in prison and go to Macedonia or Albania or... I told my wife, because we have two sons, "You go, I'll stay, maybe they let him go," you know, I would dream about it. Maybe they let him go, so where would our son go, "I'll stay." "Either we all stay, or..." So we stayed, it was horrible. They came to kill us, or massacre us so many times. I don't know if they knew about our son. I live on the fourth floor, there were 20 policemen on the first floor. Someone put their apartment up for rent, so they stayed there all night drinking and so on, they would come to our door and so on. I don't know if they knew about our son.

They would come with masks. I knew their mentality. They would come with masks, "Come get a coffee. I'll pour some *raki*¹⁸ for you." I had *raki*, now the danger... I would open the *raki* to please them, so they wouldn't bother us. They liked drinking *raki*, so it was okay. Once they took our oldest son, because the younger one was a kid, and they maltreated him to find out if we had weapons. There were all kinds of moments that almost... we have trauma, when it was over, everyone was asking, "How are you?" "We don't know if we're okay." After all those things.

Then they sent them to Serbia, and like this, just waiting. My wife would go... only women were allowed to visit them. Taxis would come from Presevo and would send them to Požarevac within the say, they would come to get them early in the morning. We paid 200 marks to our brothers from Presevo. In the midst of all that anxiety and trouble, but for us it was important to see our child. We gave 200 marks for transport to Požarevac and we came back. They would earn 800 marks in a day. I hope no one needs anyone else the way we need them.

Anita Susuri: How did you experience Liberation Day?

Emin Bikliqi: Aiii...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember that day?

Emin Bikliqi: Of course I do, of course I remember, it was a miracle, a miracle. Yes, it was a miracle, as they say, we were brokenhearted that we didn't have our son, but we still had hope, you know? We had high hopes that they would be freed, then later they were pardoned. He was sentenced to seven

¹⁷ *Deutsche mark*, a German currency used in Kosovo before and after the war in 1999.

¹⁸ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

years. Then they pardoned them and only were imprisoned for three years. He came back healthy and well. Waiting in Merdare and (cries)...

Anita Susuri: How did you wait for him?

Emin Bikliqi: (cries) The parental motive is... you learned this in school, it's the strongest motive in the world. You know the experiments in psychology that were done with mice. Mice always sacrifice for their offspring. They went through fire, now imagine what it's like for people. Since there is even a higher consciousness level or what do I know.

Anita Susuri: How many children do you have?

Emin Bikliqi: Three sons.

Anita Susuri: Did they go to school, what do they do?

Emin Bikliqi: Yes, yes. The oldest, Albion, is in IT, the middle one, Artani, the one who was in prison, had a master's in English language, and the youngest, Yllori, is an English language professor.

Anita Susuri: What was your life like after the war?

Emin Bikliqi: Like this, with troubles, troubles with employment, with... I couldn't find a job, I couldn't find a job. Employment happened with connections, and I dealt with trading before and later. And at some point I decided... there was an opportunity to apply as a translator at the Supreme Court, and I went there and applied. I can speak both languages, I was very good at both of them, I had no competition. I get accepted. And out of curiosity I also applied where I used to work before, and retired. But, when my son was released from prison, he finished university...

Anita Susuri: After the war?

Emin Bikliqi: After the war he finished university, and he took part in the war and so on. He applied and they didn't accept him anywhere. In other words, so, it didn't matter... then he got a job in Oxford. You know Oxford, a private institution for foreign languages. This is what the institutions did for people who fought in the war, while when it comes to their brothers and cousins, it's another thing, they did everything for them.

Anita Susuri: Now... sorry for interrupting you.

Emin Bikliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What do you do now?

Emin Bikliqi: Me?

Anita Susuri: How do you spend time?

Emin Bikliqi: I have a good way of spending time. I translate. I'm not a translator, but I translate. I think I translate well. I collaborate with some companies, but not very often. Sometimes people who know I'm a licensed translator bring something to translate, and so on. I read as much as I can. I go to Germia and drink coffee with friends, usually at Freskia. I go to Janjevo, I do physical activities like viticulture...

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you one more thing about Janjevo, I heard there were a lot of fruits and vegetables in Janjevo...

Emin Bikliqi: True. Not vegetables, but there were a lot of fruits. Something else... Now that you asked me, I remembered. The hills in Janjevo that now look all empty, at that time when the Croats were here, they were like parks with flowers. The vineyards all worked well, they had grapes and other fruits. They went all over Yugoslavia and brought all kinds of fruits, all kinds of fruits that other people around us could only dream about.

I don't know about others. The Municipality of Lipjan didn't have any fruits, they came here for grapes, pears, peaches, cherries, plums, and so on. So Croats brought them there. Those vineyards were amazing, but something even more amazing was when the grapes were collected, I mean for Janjevo. Not for Albanians and Turks, but for Croats, they had more vineyards than we did. Because there were 80 percent Croats, and we were 20 percent. Beautiful girls would collect the grapes and they would sing Dalmatian songs.

You can imagine it. And those hills of Janjevo, they would sing in one hill, and the voice would travel almost all over Janjevo. Wonderful, for me it was wonderful. I remember that. And something I say to my Croat friends, I say, "Do you remember that time?" And those beautiful girls would come back home, or to *çarshi* with baskets of grapes or other fruits. I was wonderful, wonderful. My [maternal] uncles and aunts lived in Banulla, do you know Banulla? A village.

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Emin Bikliqi: They only had berries in their yard. And in the time of cherries and grapes they would come here. And I remember, "Aunt, why don't you plant peaches and apples?" "They don't ripen there." Imagine what kind of information they had, they didn't have information. Life is information. Life is information. They didn't have the information that peaches and grapes ripen in Banulla, Lipjan and anywhere, right?

If you go to Banulla today it's wonderful, they have all kinds of fruit. But, I'm going back, Croats opened our eyes, then Lipjan and Banulla and so on opened their eyes. There's an interesting expression, for you and for the opinion, information is the key to success. Even today, if you have information you're successful, if you don't have information, you don't have anything. And at that time

they didn't have the information that peaches and grapes can be planted in flat ground, not just in hills.

Anita Susuri: Do you have anything to add in case you forgot to say something?

Emin Bikliqi: I do. But now it depends what. There probably are some other moments, but these are more dominating, because one can't say everything. Those you can only say in writing, when you sit and write them down one by one. It's hard to include everything in one interview.

Anita Susuri: Okay, thank you very much.

Emin Bikliqi: You're welcome.