

INTERVIEW WITH SKENDER BIKLIQI

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Duration: 71 minutes

Present:

1. Skender 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

Anita Susuri: What are your earliest childhood memories?

Skender Bikliqi: First of all hello, welcome. So, I've lived in Janjevo since I was a child. I'm a citizen of Janjevo, a citizen of Janjevo. In the time of... I was born on 26.05.1947 in Janjevo. So I was in Janjevo during my childhood. There was a nice atmosphere because back then there was an old city and as children, there were a lot of children... maybe in the neighborhood, there were approximately one hundred children around there. It was fun.

Today, you can't even see ten kids around the neighborhood. That's how we lived. When we started going to school, my education, the first year... back then we didn't have schools, we took classes in a building in the center, it had two rooms, and in the mosque and church...

Anita Susuri: Where library used to be?

Skender Bikliqi: No, no, here in the mosque, inside the mosque. There were three parallels, and we started the first grade there. Then in the third grade, we had four more rooms in the church. At that time, during the communist era, both the church and the mosque were state property. But then, after liberation, I mean, now the building of the church and mosque, have the function of the church and mosque.

Actually, the school opened after that. School started... there were a lot of students in Janjevo. Back then in Janjevo, around '68-'69, there were approximately five thousand, up to eight thousand residents in Janjevo, so they built a school. The old school, they built it there. So, when we were... I want to tell you that when we were kids, we were all in... two or three rooms like that, because there was no school. We were forced to...

I completed the fourth grade in Albanian, in fact, the Albanian language school was used here in Janjevo. Actually, Turkish language was also spoken, but there was no school in Turkish, just in Albanian. After I finished fourth grade here in Janjevo, citizens of Janjevo started to migrate, within a year around 60 families were forced to move to Turkey.

Anita Susuri: In which year?

Skender Bikliqi: It was '57 - '58, they went. It was, it was Ranković's¹ time, they beat up a lot of people, so they were forced to leave. And a lot of people left. The number of students was reduced...

Anita Susuri: Do you remember that time? How did you experience it?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, I remember it very well. Our school was, as I said in... at the church, while I was going there, we knew a policeman because my father worked at the Municipality, so there was a policeman from Drenas, and we knew him. So he took me... I went there as a kid in the first grade.

He gave me a *bisht shpend*,² a colored *bisht shpend*. I was so happy I saw it. He gave it to me and put me in a room there, but they also took a weapon from the citizens, it was in front of the doors of the police station, because the police station was at the church. So, I can never forget all those weapons that were gathered from citizens, as a child in the first grade I went there and they gave me that *bisht shpend*. I remember that a lot of people left then. I want to say that after the fourth grade, the number of students was reduced.

Back then we didn't have teachers. Maybe, the teachers who taught us up until fourth grade accepted the task of teaching us in primary school. There were some workshops they did, and after that they started teaching. After we finished the fourth grade there were no classes in Albanian language. Five of us had to go from Janjevo to a village, Shashkovc, where there were two students. In Pristina, I went to high school, back then called Ivo Lola Ribar, now Elena Gjika is there...

Anita Susuri: Sorry, but before we talk about school, can we go back to your family? Your family, your memories? What was it like?

Skender Bikliqi: My family, we were, for example here in Janjevo people were known for agriculture. But Croats were mostly working on crafts. As a family, my father was always, since he was 22 years old he was in Pristina for about five years, he was a policeman, he was a prison guard. Then, he came back here and continued his life in this municipality. We were an intellectual family because of my father. Then we got an education, we started dealing with crafts, and so on. It was good, we didn't suffer, we had land, we had [paternal] uncles, we worked. So it was good, it was good.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the relationships among the neighbors? Inter-ethnic back then, what was it like?

¹ 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.

² An ink pen made out of a bird tail feather.

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, we didn't have any problems in Janjevo, mostly Croats lived here, they were the majority. There were Turks and Roma. But there were eight other villages in the Municipality of Janjevo, because back then Janjevo was a municipality, it was a municipality up until '61, we also had a police station. So Janjevo had a mining tradition, ore, factories, working, they worked with all kinds of crafts, they worked.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember where the municipality building was?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, the municipality was where the police station was, but now the building is demolished, it was demolished recently, it was like a municipality. Now, actually it was in the police station because the police station moved there after the municipality was moved to Lipjan, now the police station was there, they had two or three offices. The offices are there, they're there, and since then they have continued like that.

Anita Susuri: Is it the same building, or was it demolished?

Skender Bikliqi: It is the same building, it was renovated a little. That had *çardak*,³ with... there was an open space, three-story, the basement... because there used to be, the post office was also near the Municipality. But then the post office was built further down and that building was demolished.

There was a nice atmosphere in the center of Janjevo. There were cafés, butcher shops, there were *qebaptore*⁴ that when you entered Janjevo you couldn't, you couldn't even stay here from the smells, it was... there were around butcher shops that were grilling meat. The Croats went abroad. They worked during the summer for six months outside of Yugoslavia. There were no places where they didn't go.

They came here during the winter and ate here, they had more money, I mean they had the most income in Yugoslavia. Each family had around eight, ten, 18 children, Croats and Albanians, so it was very lively, it was a good life here. We had the will to work because the factory was also here, but there were also craftsmen.

Anita Susuri: Tell us a little about cultural life? About... I know that there was a library in the Cultural Center. Can you tell us about this?

Skender Bikliqi: Janjevo, to tell you the truth, back then there was communication among young people but also elderly people. They screened movies every two or three days, we had the library, we had the Youth Center, we had the pensions in '67, in '57, imagine, with the contribution of the association of pensioners formed by three or five people. They started with a, as they say, with some coffee and sweets and opened an office as a café-tea office. Then gradually with their own contribution they widened it and they built the second floor. That association of pensioners still exists with the

³ A covered space located in the first floors of the dwellings, mainly above the porch – *hajat*. This area may be open, surrounded with timber columns and fences, or semi-closed with timber skeleton and windows. The English translation of *çardak* is gallery.

⁴ A shop where they serve kebabs.

contribution of the citizens who worked there. There was a lot of work, back then there was no tax for pensioners, that's why they circulated more because it was cheaper. Maybe, for example, on a day when Croats and Albanians would have celebrations, especially Croats, 200 crates of juice would be sold, Coca-Cola, beer, what do I know.

Anita Susuri: You said that you went to Pristina to continue school after the fourth grade. Can you tell us about that period of time?

Skender Bikliqi: After I finished fourth grade, the school in Janjevo closed down. It closed down when citizens moved to Turkey. Then we were forced... it was only in Serbian. We didn't want to accept Serbian, so we went to Pristina. We went to the school where the Elena Gjika Gymnasium is today, back then it was called Ivo Lola Ribar. We started there for like a week. We were three friends from Janjevo, and there were two other people from Shashkovc, so the five of us were forced to go there.

We went there, as you know back then there was the discussion of employment, work, how do I know, we didn't have enough income to live here. The state didn't have a boarding school for us or anything. After a week we agreed with the school there, and came back to school here. We talked to our parents, what they can do, how they can do it. I went to school in Janjevo, the school was in Serbian. Then we asked them if we can continue school here, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade. They accepted us so we continued school in the Serbo-Croatian language.

Anita Susuri: There was no Albanian...

Skender Bikliqi: There wasn't. It started after three years.

Anita Susuri: You said you only stayed in Pristina for a week, right?

Skender Bikliqi: Only a week.

Anita Susuri: How did Pristina seem to you for a week?

Skender Bikliqi: Pristina was very nice back then, especially for the youth. The only reason we didn't stay there was because we didn't have conditions to do so, if we did, we would have stayed. If we had had shelter we would have figured out something about the food, but shelter at that time was... there weren't places for rent like now. Now you can rent a place and three or four people can live there. Back then it was really hard to find a place.

So we were forced to go back to Janjevo and continue school. But after we finished elementary school, some of my friends went to *Shkolla Normale*.⁵ I went... I got a job as a student in economy in the

⁵ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

factory. The factory was in Janjevo. There was a perspective and we continued our education here, then I went to the Technical School in Pristina. The factory gave us scholarships because they needed cadres. So the crafts, and the technical cadres... still they weren't in Albanian. After I graduated from the Technical School the school in Albanian started...

Anita Susuri: So in high school?

Skender Bikliqi: I went to high school in Albanian back then.

Anita Susuri: After you started working, what was the factory where you worked like? Which factory was it? Can you tell us about that?

Skender Bikliqi: The factory was, the craft's factory was called Metal, Metal Factory. I experienced it here too because the factory was in Janjevo, yes. The space was small here. There were 300 workers here in the factory. But in the meantime, the municipality, Kosovo then had built a building outside of Janjevo. Look at that, that building was planned so other villages could also join in, so they could come from the Municipality of Lipjan for example.

Actually, when we moved down there, there were workers from Obiliq, from Golesh, from Lipjan, from Gadime, from Ferizaj, from Plitkoviq, from Banulla, Llugagjia, everywhere... there wasn't a village that didn't have workers in Janjevo's factory. There was, that factory progressed, from 300 workers we had somewhere around 800 workers.

The salary was pretty good, we had the cadres, so work went well, we worked, it was good. Because after I finished school, they hired us to work there immediately. I was working there from '66, I was an employee there. Then the factory was finished in '67 and we moved there. I worked here in the center of Janjevo for three years...

Anita Susuri: What was the factory like back then? You told us that four Croats established it, can you tell us...

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, yes. That factory... Because people from Janjevo were craftsmen but after the liberation in '47, the year 1947, the craftsmen agreed, there were five of them. One of them took a few tools, what do I know, they were the best craftsmen. So they formed a group, from the group in the center, just there, there was a shop around four by five meters, that's where they started. They started and... because after the liberation in the Second World War, the cooperatives started immediately.

Agricultural cooperative, crafts cooperative, how do I know, so they registered as a crafts cooperative. They started there, gradually, slowly, but they started. Because back then aluminum spoons, trays, plates, bean pots and all that was produced in Janjevo, they all started to be produced back then, so the work was good. Then gradually it widened, they started... door locks and so on, other elements for washing machines and everything.

We started with engines for cars and so on, everything. But, I want to talk about the fact that they started back then, because back then, Ivo Lola Ribar created that cooperative, but after '57 they were allowed, they were registered in court and they left Ivo Lola Ribar, the factory.

So gradually, slowly...

Anita Susuri: The factory, was it Kardelj?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, Kardelj Filip, now Kardelj or Ivo Lola Ribar there... but then in '57 they opened it, they widened it because they registered in court. So, they started and continued until they reached that number, around 800 employed at the end.

Anita Susuri: What was it like here? So when you went to work? Did you always go there together or what was the atmosphere like in the morning, or the working atmosphere in the factory?

Skender Bikliqi: Well here, there used to be an atmosphere, weird, but back then there used to be more Croats. Back then, in '55, '57 only two Albanians worked there but then gradually there were five or six. So, employees took their food from home, they went there as a group and so on. It was a pleasure, we went there happily, we were working. It was a very good atmosphere, we also worked well, we worked in a way... there was produce, there were sales and they started to progress, they respected the employees, not like today.

I was a leader, I was the supervisor of around 300 employees and head-employees because I was a shift leader, but you could communicate with every employee. While today it is harder. You can't talk to five people at a time today, back then there was respect, there was... work... I, I remember, as an economics student back then we cleaned, we worked, we worked with all kinds of machinery, we weren't embarrassed. We even cleaned, we did everything so we could learn.

Anita Susuri: Before we continue, I wanted to go back to the time when Turks, so when they left Janjevo, to tell us about your father when he left with his family. Can you tell us about that?

Skender Bikliqi: I wanted to tell you this, because to tell you the truth my father, my [paternal] uncles... the neighborhood, the neighborhood is called *Saraj*,⁶ the neighborhood up here. There were two Turkish neighborhoods back then, me and my uncles, my cousins who are in Turkey today, there are around 60 families, 60 families. We, my father worked at the Municipality as a defense secretary, military. So my father wasn't allowed to go to Turkey since he could give statements about Yugoslavia or something so they didn't allow us to go. My father said, "Yes, you do now allow me to, okay. I want to continue working." They wanted to not allow him to work either so, "I," he said, "Are you those people that told me to stay here, I will live here and I will not leave the job, I will continue working here." So, we stayed here, and to this day I don't regret that we stayed. Now, a lot of guests from Turkey

⁶ Turk. *Saray* means palace, but also adopted in Albanian to name the neighborhoods.

come over and say, “Thank God you’re here, at least we have a place to come to.” So, it was a pleasure that they had a place to stay when they came.

Anita Susuri: What was Janjevo like when you were young? Were there cafés? Did you go out? What was cultural life like, night life?

Skender Bikliqi: When I was young, to be honest, Janjevo kept those old traditions. As young people we weren’t allowed to go out to cafés, what do I know? There were five or six cafés here and those cafés were, there was the craftsman’s café. There was commerce there, they stayed there, there wasn’t any noise, where the politicians came. But there was also the café of the people who drank, there were the average cafés, but as youngsters we mostly leaned on movies.

We had the Culture Center, the library, and actually young people did sports, they went to the library, and movies. So, we had... Janjevo was developed. And, as youngsters, to be honest we even had more money because young people worked, they could work for craftsmen. They would take them on Saturdays, or Sundays after... employers needed them, craftsmen needed them, they had a good time. We all had a good time in Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: You said that you watched movies at the Culture Center, what kind of movies did you watch? Do you remember what it was like?

Skender Bikliqi: They were the most Yugoslav films, how the wars happened and so on. Back then the movies were more, they weren’t like today where you can watch any movie you want. Back then there was a program of movies that you could watch at the Culture Center.

Anita Susuri: Did women also go out in Janjevo, or did only men go out to cafés or on walks?

Skender Bikliqi: In Janjevo Albanian and Turkish women didn’t go out, I mean, Croats went out to the Culture Center and so on. Croats went out.

Anita Susuri: In terms of cultural life, they also told us about the library and these, but what else, so sports also. How did this develop in the youth? How many young people were involved in sports? What kind of sports were they involved in? How was it organized?

Skender Bikliqi: We had these sports, sports as sports, I mean Janjevo, we didn’t have much space but to be honest we opened the factory in ‘66, ‘67, when we moved, we made a stadium there, that even Janjevo came. We, when there was football, we used to go, for example, to the villages Akllap, Banulla and Lipjan and... We had... football played an important role in Janjevo and I remember the factory well when we won, to tell you the truth, I gave away some medals.

We melted them ourselves in the factory, if I had known, I had some medals from ‘77, ‘79 that we distributed, we melted them ourselves. We processed those medals, so we had... then from there we

also took drinks and food with us. I said, cafés were, women and men worked, we worked, youth wanted everyone to be involved in sports, football, basketball and so on.

Anita Susuri: As for cohabitation, so Turks, Croats. What were these neighborly relations like?

Skender Bikliqi: We had good relationships, we didn't have problems. So, there was the market here, Janjevo had a mosque that was left by the Ottomans, there was the Friday market, but also the mosque. People from villages came to Janjevo to shop, they came to pray in the mosque. So, we always had contacts with other villages.

But even at weddings, Janjevo always had weddings with the villages around. My mother is from Mramor, my wife is from Bukovica, other were from Gadime, Akllap, they had wives from all kind of different villages, back then there was some kind of pleasure to be married in Janjevo, or to... so this is how life continued between Janjevo and other villages.

Anita Susuri: Tell us what did you do after you finished high school?

Skender Bikliqi: After I finished high school, I found a job immediately, after I finished it I worked for a year, I got married, I created a family...

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us which traditions were used by the Turks? Were they, so, were they the same as the Albanian and Croat ones? What were the wedding traditions?

Skender Bikliqi: The weddings, traditions and so on were the same as the Albanian ones. We, we had the same traditions as Croats, but they also had an old tradition. They had clothing with *dimija*,⁷ how do I know, they went out in the center with those vests. As a custom they went to the church, they got married there, and they went out in the center everywhere playing music. They had good music. Croats always had good music, good food, good drinks. For us, even for us the weddings started from Thursday.

Part Two

Skender Bikliqi: Weddings started from Thursday, so the weddings started, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Until Monday when it ended and they baked bread and so on. That tradition was the same as in other villages and here, it was the same.

Anita Susuri: So, the same traditions as today...

⁷ Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about twelve meters of fabric.

Skender Bikliqi: We had the same traditions as Albanians.

Anita Susuri: As for, did you go, so, these relationships, I said earlier, neighborly, did you go to Croatian weddings? Did they invite you? Did you have friendships?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes. The Croats had weddings, we went. They always invited us, but we also invited them when we had weddings. When I got married, to be honest, there were five Croats, they also had cars, because back then we didn't have cars. They had their cars and we went to take the bride. They came. In weddings, as in funerals, we always were there for them. Especially the locals, we went to weddings and funerals, how do I know, we were guests at their weddings.

Anita Susuri: After the job, so, the job you had at Metalac, how did your life continue? Did you... Were you focused on the job you were doing, or did you have any other commitments?

Skender Bikliqi: To tell you exactly, it's good that you mentioned that when we started there 98 percent of the employees were Croats. In the meantime Serbs also started working there, but when we came, sometime in '69, '60, we started to get some higher qualifications in Obiliq. Back then Ismail Dumoshi was an engineer and we were forced... but I was never selfish. So, I had friends and I went there and got a high qualification there. After I did that, I made it possible for four of my friends to do that. Because back then they didn't have qualifications, neither the Croats, nor them, they worked in factories and it was possible that they were leaders who only had elementary school finished.

But, then it became law that no matter what, if you are qualified, you could get the job. So we started, I started, I mean the moment I finished getting a higher education, I got the job position that I deserved. But gradually my friends, and everyone who had these qualifications got jobs. After we got there, to tell you the truth, it was more lively. Because back then it was the party, the syndicate, and we started with tasks right away. And we started, we started, we hired young men.

Then when we were, when I was a leader, I started to employ young people and educate them, guide them to what kind of qualifications they need, what branch, and Janjevo started to get better. With the arrival of the director, Luan Krasniqi, he came from Lupq, the first technical director. He came, he was an engineer. He was the only Albanian who came there. So, we started, we started, we started working and we reached a point where it was filled with Albanians.

Anita Susuri: In which years was it mostly filled with Albanian nationality?

Skender Bikliqi: In the '80s. There were some up until the '80s, but not as many, but in the '80s it started to get filled with Albanians.

Anita Susuri: What was Janjevo like at that time? The Bazaar, was it the same as when you were younger, or what changed at that time?

Skender Bikliqi: Janjeva progressed all the time, I mean there were more, there were more craftsmen each time, more businesses, there was more income, more factories... I want to mention this too, to tell you about this, there are around 70 villages in the Municipality of Lipjan, but none of them had tax like Janjevo... all the villages that were like Janjevo didn't even pay the electricity bills... because we, our electricity was connected to Ferizaj. Ferizaj and the Municipality say that all of those villages didn't pay as many electricity bills and taxes as Janjevo did. So, every house paid tax, and tax was very high back then for craftsmen and... so they paid it, they could afford it, as I said, it was always lively.

But, I want to tell you, you are younger, this happened more recently. For example, when they wanted to take, when we started to use *marka*,⁸ Janjevo and the villages around had to buy tractors with *dinar*⁹ or *marka*. Because we got *marka* from those who worked abroad, they had that kind of money. So they came to exchange *marka* in Janjevo, because they couldn't do it anywhere else. So they came to exchange 20, 30, 50 thousand *marka* to buy tractors.

Anita Susuri: So, craftsmen were richer or...

Skender Bikliqi: Richer, craftsmen, Croats were richer, they were richer.

Anita Susuri: Tell us, I asked you earlier about Bazaar. Was it paved with cobblestone? Those years, so in the '80s, '70s.

Skender Bikliqi: Here, from Janjevo to Lipjan was paved with stones. There's a quarry here over Janjevo, back then they forced them to move, as a municipality, they were assigned when the school was built, every family that had horses carried stones. The school was built with stones, the road to...

Anita Susuri: The old school?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, the old school was built with stones, and to Lipjan the road was of cobblestone. It was paved with stones, then it was paved with asphalt, they had narrow streets, so even before they paved it in cobblestone, with stones. But even the mosque that was built now, even the stones, everything had its old story, they mostly went to work with stones.

Anita Susuri: Even the mosque is built with stones, right?

Skender Bikliqi: The mosque and everything. The walls and everything that is left, since they came from Turkey, because the place is here, the walls are built with stones, maybe you've seen it? If you step outside now you can see the stones, the walls with stones. If you go up this neighborhood you can see everything built with stones, because we had stones here and they used them more, also because they are stronger.

⁸ *Deutsch marks*, a German currency used in Kosovo prior and after the 1999 war.

⁹ *Dinar* was the Yugoslav currency. Now it is the basic monetary unit of Serbia.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the types of houses, were they dominated by Turkish culture? How did houses look back then?

Skender Bikliqi: Also that, to tell you the truth, Janjevo had an Ottoman style. I had many visitors that came from Prizren and here... if you went into their houses, they had these, ceilings and so. They were all surprised. From the Ottomans. There were those buildings, the houses...

Anita Susuri: With wood or how?

Skender Bikliqi: With wood and so on, battens and what do I know, they all had...

Anita Susuri: What about the exterior, were they one-story houses or two-story houses? Did they have *çardak*?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, yes, yes. Here, it was the same as Croats and Albanians, they had *çardak*. There was *çardak*, there was wood and that's how it was. Two-story houses, one-story houses, no bigger than two-story houses. The houses were mostly two-story houses.

Anita Susuri: Until when do you remember Janjevo having a nice atmosphere? When did that change?

Skender Bikliqi: Up until 1990, there was livelihood, there was a lot of work and income. After '90, they fired us from our jobs, but also Croats started leaving Janjevo.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us why this happens? How did you experience it?

Skender Bikliqi: We, to tell you the truth, our job there was very nice there but the political situation was, actually ever since the miners started in Trepça, we all joined them. Then the Serbian aggressor started attacking us, treating us differently wherever Albanians went, and whatever we were part of, so we had problems. But, we endured them. They tried to put me up to commission but they couldn't do it, especially when it came to Janjevo, I can say that they didn't... the Municipality appointed someone, as if he was, he took part in a strike and he was fired from the party. Because back then, if you got fired from the party, or if you weren't in the party, you would also get fired from the party.

But, back then we all left the party so... Well up to the '90s, it was, Janjevo was very... on Fridays, the Bazaar when the market was here, because they came from Suhareka at 3:00, from Studençan, Mamusha, from everywhere. Whatever they brought to the market here, they never took it back, because they sold everything. Because they were, they had money, they worked. So whoever came to Janjevo was, was content, they were content. There was trust back then, there was.

There you... the market was here, from here into the Bazaar, all over the center. They came from Suhareka, Studençan, Mamusha at night, and left their goods here, tomatoes, peppers, watermelon, they left everything. Nobody ever touched it. Even when they woke up in the morning and somebody had taken something, they would go and say, "Look, I took a watermelon, I weighed it, I owe you this

much.” Now that doesn’t exist. There used to be respect. It has happened that people have lost ten thousand *marka* and people who found them took them to the church.

Anita Susuri: These happened before the ‘90s?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, before the ‘90s. They found the money in the Bazaar, they took them to the mosque and church. People went there, and so on.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us a little about Metalac? It was a huge factory, but I think there were branches of it in other cities...

Skender Bikliqi: Well, after we started, to be honest, some cadres started to come because people invested where there were more cadres. We had them, all, almost all of them were the sons of our leaders. Like Fadil Hoxha’s son, Metush Ballaban’s son, Gëzim Kazazi, they were from Dobraja. He, a general director, came from the shock absorbers factory, there was a Bosnian from Plava, he was also very hardworking. So we started like that.

A lot of engineers came so work was very good. There were big investments. From there, there was a plastic factory in Skenderaj. They worked with toys, but we opened a factory in Skenderaj where we processed chairs and tables. You can’t find those kinds of tables and chairs anywhere. Then we opened one in Pristina at the Ljubljanska Banka, we moved into an object there and we started to work.

Anita Susuri: Was this within the factory or...

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, it was.

Anita Susuri: What year did these happen?

Skender Bikliqi: These were before... around ‘83, ‘85. In ‘82 cadres from Pristina started to come.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the time, after the ‘90s, when Croats started leaving? Can you tell us about that?

Skender Bikliqi: The migration of Croats, I told you, even when they fired us, they were a little worried that... We were used to working together in Janjevo, but they were also scared. So they continued but sometimes in 1998, ‘97, now in 1995 when Croatia started to fight Serbs because actually Croats had a strong bond there. Because when Tuxhman won, people in Janjevo were big businessmen and they butchered two cows so now Janjevo was known to support people in Croatia.

They had wars with Croats in Vukovar. And they came here, Šešelji¹⁰ with some people, policemen... and they killed Zoran Đinđić¹¹ They came here in Janjevo and said what they didn't say anywhere else, "We have to kill them. The Croats of Janjevo because they supported the war against us..."

Anita Susuri: Šešelji?

Skender Bikliqi: Šešelji. So they left Janjevo within the night, within the week.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember that time?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, I remember, I remember when they came. Actually, on this street here, they wounded an Albanian man and a woman. That man went to Switzerland after that, while they wounded them just for fun, they were going to Shashkocv with a donkey, and they wounded them. From then we started, Croats got scared. Croats used to say, "The First and Second War happened and we didn't leave Janjevo, but this war was the first." That's how mean they were, you didn't even know who was fighting. They were radical, the paramilitary and so. But again, it wasn't like it was in other places, there were no shootings, but we were scared.

We were scared, we couldn't even leave because they blocked the exit in Gusterica, you couldn't leave. The roads were blocked, down and up. So, we were here until the last second just seeing what was happening. The villages, for example in Sllovia, or in Akllap is here. Akllap is over Janjevo and people were shot there. They burned it down, they burned 90 percent of it down, the village, Akllap.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the time when they left with trucks? As I understood, Croats left with trucks. Do you remember that time?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, yes. They went and left everything behind. They sold whatever they could, their houses are still here. They're demolished. Actually when they left before the war, because we were also fired from our jobs, in the '90s, I got two, I got two machines from Croats, "Take it, you can give it to me whenever." Then after like five...

Anita Susuri: They gave them to you?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, their machines, then I gave them the money. It was good, I made clothes pins, toys, I had a lot of them, even today I have many of those things I made, like plastic flowers, pins and so on. I made little cars, I didn't have a job, we didn't have jobs, so I worked with those until after the war. I mean, until after 1999, 2000, but we had problems... I continued doing that, but we didn't have

¹⁰ Vojislav Šešelji (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.

¹¹ Zoran Đinđić (1952-2003) was a Serbian politician who served as the prime minister of Serbia from 2001 until his assassination in 2003. He was the mayor of Belgrade in 1997, and long-time opposition politician and a doctor in philosophy.

electricity. Electricity ruined it for us, because when plastic melts... we didn't have electricity, it would stop, it was horrible, the machines would get blocked. I was forced to sell the machines after two years, and even though I wasn't oriented, I started getting involved in commerce. A shop, I opened it, grocery so...

Anita Susuri: So, after you were fired you started processing plastic, right?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Did you have your own place or did you work somewhere?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, at home. No, I worked on my own, I had the machines, I also had two employees. I started, I started, work was good...

Anita Susuri: Were there a lot of people who did that job?

Skender Bikliqi: A few, a few. Whoever could. It was just me and another Albanian. Some started doing crafts, they would make pans, because they needed pans back then. Croats left so Albanians started doing it. There were many requests after the war. There were so many requests. Kosovo was burned almost everywhere, so everyone needed pans to bake bread and so on, they used them for everything. So they worked like that. But I worked until after the war, two years, then I was forced, I sent my son to England, in London, before the war, so I worked with my daughter. After that I opened a grocery store, but that shop is also here, down here, it is mine, my house is down there. We work like this.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about work here in Janjevo. Most of them were involved with crafts, so they worked in the factory...

Skender Bikliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Thanks to the craft they did. Was this the only way, so how did they live? Processing metal, or did they do something else?

Skender Bikliqi: They were also involved in commerce, they were involved with metal processing, but also with agriculture. Regarding education Croats didn't want to do it, they had the opportunities, the income, but they were oriented more to crafts. Because each house had machinery, they had workshops, and they needed their children to work too. The children worked too. That's how it worked. Each did their part, they needed seven or eight workers, so they worked there and education... but for us it was the opposite. We didn't really have much opportunity to get an education, very few people went to school, most of them started working in the factory or for Croats.

Anita Susuri: Yes, were you here during the war? The Kosovo War, were you here in Janjevo or what was Janjevo like at that time.

Skender Bikliqi: During the war my house was down at the Metalac. I had two brothers and a neighbor near there. Serbs worked in the factory, they were all Serbs. When the war happened, when the bombing started, we had to leave. We left our houses there and came to Janjevo. My daughter and her husband were here, they were in Germany. We came here, so we had to leave our houses because the factory was there, and Serbs were staying there, the army. So we left there, we came here.

Here we were isolated, we couldn't go anywhere. But, here in the center, the market was on Fridays, we went out without problems, we didn't have problems inside here. So we would get supplies like flour and other groceries, the Croats supplied us with everything. As citizens of Janjevo, we didn't lack food. But, I remember that we had the headquarters here in Janjevo. We sent Izjadin Gashi from Mramor and I. We were inspectors and from here we organized and sent tractors with flour to Mramor. Because when they moved a lot of people went to Mramor, so we organized and sent flour here, because the mill of Janjevo was still working.

There was a man named Eset, he was a very good man, they didn't give him trouble, he helped Albanians, and it was convenient for Serbs too because they didn't have a place to grind it so they said, "You will work here." But he contributed a lot through this mill, Eset, so we all contributed in the way that we could. We were isolated, but however we could. If I had five bags of flour, I would keep two for myself and give away three of them, this is how it was.

In '65 as a worker I was a good master, they awarded me with a medal, there's also a letter but I don't know where it is. A work medal, as a good example.

Anita Susuri: Was it common to award employees with medals?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: What was it like?

Skender Bikliqi: They gave us from the chairman of Tito... Actually, the factory chose the workers. Back then I got the medal as the best worker.

Anita Susuri: Did many people get medals like that or...

Skender Bikliqi: Around 15 people get them. Back then I was head of the syndicate, even at that time, '78, '80, I had sent many workers to Ulcinj, and so on, because we had a good job, we had a good salary. The syndicate had some funds to send ten or fifteen workers to summer vacation yearly.

Anita Susuri: You told us that after you were fired from your job you started processing plastic, did you do anything else?

Skender Bikliqi: No, at that time my whole family was working, my wife and daughter also. The material, I got some material from Turkey. I had made some beads, some hair clips, and I had clothed some...

Anita Susuri: What was this job like? Did you have the tools or?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, I had bought the tools. I had bought the tool, the Croats sold them. I gave them more, the Croats. I gave them all that I worked for. And to tell you the truth I was thankful to them, but then I also sold the machine because of the electricity. Maybe you remember, we had problems with electricity. So I was forced to sell those machines, if it weren't for that I might have never sold them. After I sold them, it was imposed on me to open the shop, because I had it even before the war..

Anita Susuri: Which year was this?

Skender Bikliqi: Sometime before '90, I had the shop then. I worked in the factory but I had... In the time of Marko Maković, Yugoslavia started to have shops like this, so I opened it but then it was closed down. Then, after the war I opened the grocery store, but no one could work...

Anita Susuri: The store was in Janjevo or...

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, I had the store, but also a shop at the entrance of the factory, on the left. I had worked there, but I bought this place after the war, I made some shops here and I started working. Until we started doing wholesales, there weren't wholesales in Lipjan back then. Now these big shopping centers have opened. I saw them for the first time in Turkey, big centers started opening, shops, I mean, grocery stores started... These kinds of centers also started opening here, like ETC and so on, then I closed mine down. But luckily, I started again.

Then in 2006 it opened, the center of Prizren wanted to form a Turkish party. I had the shop here, so they came. "We want you to be with us." "I have the store, I don't have time." So I had to take the responsibility of the head of the branch back then. After I started working as head of the branch, my daughter was old enough to get married, I told her, "You can get married!" I said, "You have helped me enough, thank you." So I had to... so they rented the place, I became head of the branch and we've been here for 17 years.

Anita Susuri: So you told us that your father was a defense secretary at that time, and you continued, so to say, the family tradition in politics or...

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, yes. Even while I was at Metalac I was always involved with politics, I was always a leader. But now, I used to tease my father, I told him, "Enough of..." Even when he retired he was always active. But I'm the same way, even though I am 72 years old, I never believed I would continue like this. I am still the head of the community in the municipality.

Anita Susuri: In the Municipality of Lipjan?

Skender Bikliqi: In the Municipality of Lipjan. We have monthly meetings to talk about the problems the community has, but there are members of the LDK [Democratic League of Kosovo]¹² and PDK [Democratic Party of Kosovo] there. So, we make recommendations in the assembly, the assembly approves them and so on. I am the head of the Association of Pensioners, and so on.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us more about these activities, what do you do?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, look, now to tell you the truth, we've started and we did a, how do you call it, a foundation. Now when you have a foundation you can build the building as big as you want. After we formed this party I always tried to contribute to the place of Janjeva here. First of all, after a year, after two years a road there where the Albanians are, the Croats, the Turkish that couldn't cross the river, that part over there, it didn't even have sewage and stuff like this.

When I called the TICA [Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency] people, the organization TICA, they help schools, build roads, water supply and even mosques. And I invited them, "We as a branch want some help, to have respect toward the citizens as well." And they came immediately and built that 260-meter road there. They placed one-meter sewage pipes, how do I know. After this we didn't have electricity then... we didn't have enough water supply in Janjeva, because they cut the water supply in the '90s. We get the water supply from Lipjan, Serbs cut it off because of the Croats. We didn't have water supply, we didn't have water supply for ten years. Nothing. We dealt with wells...

Anita Susuri: Which years did this happen?

Skender Bikliqi: From the '90s until 2000, those were the years. So we lacked water, but people opened wells and they... and then, after the war I was forced... electricity, as soon as it reached Janjeva, it would stop in Lipjan, we had no electric connection. We were forced to buy a generator, down at the entrance coming from Gushterica, it had a twenty thousand *marka* value and I was able to secure it. After that I was engaged in that activity, it didn't matter, every year there were maybe two-three times that we distributed aid.

We had help from KFOR, Red Cross, TICA and so on. And we distributed it to the Croats, the Albanians, the Turkish, the Roma and everyone else. There were around a hundred packs. Or *kurban*¹³ meat, especially *kurban* meat, I distributed 500 kilograms to thousands kilograms every year. After that it was the ambulance, three years ago I called them and notified them that we are having problems. They helped us, especially in stomatology with inventory, they brought tables and stuff here in the

¹² *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

¹³ 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. For *bajram* the feast is celebrated by sacrificing an animal, usually a cow. Therefore, the speaker connects the distribution of meat i.e. *kurban* with the feast of *bajram*.

clinic of Janjeva. The fourth thing is that the mosque was in a very bad condition, it was all over the place. Experts came from Ankara...

Anita Susuri: Was the mosque demolished or how?

Skender Bikliqi: Yes, we didn't have a choice and so I called them and brought them here, because every ambassador that comes, they come here, we meet and we keep contact. Every KFOR general that comes here we meet like this. Whatever we need... for example schools, clinics, everything. To be honest the mosque is good now, even the Croatians told me, "Renovate this mosque, Skender, it's a shame". When they came from Ankara I took them and the ambassador to the church and told them, "Learn from this, look at how good the mosque is and then look at the mosque downtown." And they took it seriously and they finished the mosque, the value of it being somewhere around 700 thousand euros.

There was a river there and we couldn't pass, so the Municipality gave the land to us. So we worked. They did the project and I didn't bother it anymore. I took it until there, you can continue, I have other obligations so it was fine. Now, this year, we were at the school and I called the Turkish KFOR. The school is a disaster, they don't even have desks. The windows are made from wood. I think that they are coming this month but let's see, he should come, because they do the project and send it to Turkey, and then it depends if they support it or not. And I think that they will support the school and will make a complete restoration.

Anita Susuri: The new school?

Skender Bikliqi: The new school. To tell you the truth, the Municipality last year, because when they brought the tools, they painted the Municipality, because the Municipality was whitewashed, so they put polystyrene and put a facade and...

Anita Susuri: Where the police station is now, right?

Skender Bikliqi: The Municipality, at the Municipality. The Municipality building.

Anita Susuri: Where's that building?

Skender Bikliqi: At the police station, were you at the Municipality?

Anita Susuri: Yes, we were.

Skender Bikliqi: In the entrance of the Municipality, it was very bad, it was whitewashed but put polystyrene, put a facade and renovated it, they removed it last year. I want to say that it's good, whoever it is, even me as a small party here in Janjevo, but everyone can contribute so things stay in this place. The mosque will be here, the clinic, the Municipality. They will give funds, but whoever is hardworking will get those funds. I always, even though I am old, but they're not letting me go, "You're

good here, stay.” So, I tried my best for these citizens, but I am good, my son is in London and some of my daughters are abroad. It's good.

Anita Susuri: So, your children aren't here?

Skender Bikliqi: What?

Anita Susuri: Your children are not in Janjevo?

Skender Bikliqi: No, I live with my wife. I have been with my wife for more than 20 years. But, my daughters got married. They all work, they're good. I have the shops here, and the house, it's a good place, we have a yard and...

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

Skender Bikliqi: Well, I just want to add that we have to have an understanding, a collaboration. While it was like that before it was very easy to work, now with multiparty we can't work. I just want to say this because no one from Janjevo has made it as an assembly member for so many years, it doesn't matter who. Because even if we had at least one assembly member, their vote would be enough and they would fight for their own city. And we still don't have an assembly member, not LDK or PDK have around two thousand votes, while today you can't have an assembly member with 500 votes. But I often say, "It's important that we understand each other, it is not important to be there, it is important to do good things for our citizens, that's what matters."

To tell you the truth I have educated my children, I enrolled them in university, my sons, my daughters. Even in KSF, I have employed seven people there. So, I will give a message, we need a collaboration, an understanding, because the youth is suffering. For the youth, not for me. To have a youth... I educated mine... one got a master's degree, one the doctoral degree, but they didn't find them a job here but in Albania. "I finished so I could come to Kosovo, not Albania."

So... anyway, they found jobs, but if an expert came who could contribute here, so Janjevo would have a cadre, you know, do projects, because they want projects throughout the year, but when there are no projects... but if you have a project, you submit it, the money from funds are there. Some people take advantage of this because I have experience with them and now I am... Thank you.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much.