

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH MÜNİR CURI

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Duration: 65 minutes

Present:

1. Münir Curi (Speaker)
2. Ebru Süleyman (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

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

Part One

Münir Curi: I am Münir Curi, born in 1949. I was born in Mitrovica, but I have lived in Pristina for almost 65 years. We moved from Mitrovica to Pristina because of my father's work in '51. In Mitrovica, we had a huge family there, from my mother's side and father's side. My father's father, well, my grandfather, he was a famous barber in Mitrovica, barber and he also pulled teeth. In those times, barbers used to pull teeth out, perform circumcision surgeries, and make medicine. So my grandfather was one of them, Salih, the barber. He was one of the most famous barbers.

Ebru Süleyman: Did you get to know your grandfather?

Münir Curi: I did a little. I grew up with him until I was ten, fifteen years old, but, on the other hand, we were separated because we were living in Pristina and they were in Mitrovica. We used to visit them on holidays and such, I saw him only at those times. I used to go to his shop and hang out there. The shop was located in Mitrovica.

Ebru Süleyman: Where was it exactly?

Münir Curi: The shop was located in the old bazaar, where the mosque is now built in Mitrovica. There used to be a street, where all the craftsmen's shops were located, so there was a barbershop. He used to pull teeth out, make medicines, perform circumcision surgeries. He was a surgeon. So my father learned all these crafts by working there, and he also learned to play mandolin there.

Ebru Süleyman: Who taught him how to play mandolin?

Münir Curi: My grandfather used to have a helper there who used to play mandolin. He, my father really liked it so he bought a mandolin when he was young and started to play it with him. My mother's side was known as Russians in Mitrovica. Because when there was a kingdom in Russia, they, the Muslims were expelled from the country. They went to Konya, well, after Uzbekistan, two brothers, they were from Uzbekistan, so they moved to Konya and from Konya to Kosovo.

Ebru Süleyman: This happened in which years?

Münir Curi: These stories are 500 years ago, 600 years ago. Two brothers, one of them was Zaim and

the other one was Hodja. So Hodja used to be a teacher in schools, Hacı Ahmet and Mustafa. Two brothers, they came to Konya, from Konya, they moved to Kosovo. And here they started their families. So here in Mitrovica, everybody knows them as Russians, they often call them “*Ruski, Ruski*”.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, so there are still people from this family?

Münir Curi: They are two brothers, two families, Mustafa and Ahmet. There are two families. Well, the grandkids of Mustafa and Ahmet. They have built a house there, started their lives and got used to living here.

Ebru Süleyman: Is there anything left from Uzbek culture?

Münir Curi: Not that much.

Ebru Süleyman: I guess a long time passed.

Münir Curi: Yes, a long time passed and they are in Mitrovica now. They got used to our culture. The Russian cultures and traditions no longer exist in their family, grandkids and grandfathers got used to the region’s traditions and life...

Ebru Süleyman: So this family is on your mother’s side?

Münir Curi: Mother’s side is related to Zaim’s family.

Ebru Süleyman: And your father was born in Mitrovica, right?

Münir Curi: My father was born in Mitrovica, my mother was born in Mitrovica, but at that time we had to move because of my father’s work, the radio was established in Pristina. There were a lot of minorities here, Albanians, Turks, Gypsies, Serbs, and so on, because this area was Yugoslavia’s area, a private area. So after that, radio was established. In the year ‘48, radio was established in Pristina. So there was an Albanian orchestra, a Serbian orchestra but not a Turkish orchestra. That time there was a single-party regime, the Communist party, there was no other party than that. So we had our representatives there, Turkish deputies. Then the council was established in Kosovo, administration, Kosovo’s council was established, we had folks in that administration. Here there was a Turkish orchestra, but they played only folks songs, *vauuva* {onomatopoeia}, they didn’t fit the radio well.

My father really liked Turkish classical music, while he was listening to them all day on the radio, he improved himself and he started playing banjo. After the mandolin, they bought a banjo and he started playing along with the radio, he didn’t have a professional degree. Music notes and such, he picked up playing banjo and improved himself. So in those times the associations were established, cultural associations. In Mitrovica, there was the *Birlik* [Unity] Association, my father with his three friends, four friends together started an orchestra in that association. They started their music there.

My father used to sing, he was a sound artist, he used to have a really nice voice, really nice. And while he was listening to songs on the radio, he was enjoying and learning. So while playing music together, he soon became very famous in this area. “Oh, there is a Rasim, Rasim, his surname is Rüşüt, but who is Rasim? Rasim is Salih’s son. Rasim, Barber Salih’s son, Master Salih, Salih’s son.” Rasim and Rasim Salih, that is how they started calling him, Rasim Salih. Now this orchestra, this orchestra in Pristina, Turkish orchestra didn’t really fit the radio format. Folkloric song, *talava*¹ songs, *bam bum bam bum* {onomatopoeia}. But here, they did vocal art music with tunes.

So we had our deputies here, deceased Kadir Rauf, [Şerafedin Süleyman](#), Haşim Mustafa, they were managers in administration. So they asked to establish a Turkish classical music orchestra. There is an Albanian, a Serbian, but not Turkish orchestra, why not, there is a Turkish community living here. There were more Turks living in Kosovo back then, unfortunately, a lot of them migrated. Then the [Executive] Council makes a decision which Rasim Salih has to move to Pristina and establish an orchestra. The entire group of four friends, they wanted them to move to Pristina. Yes, no, yes, no, the final decision was that in the year ‘51 my dad moved here to establish the orchestra.

Ebru Süleyman: They invited him?

Münir Curi: Yes, they invited, they gave us an apartment here. Three friends came, there was Bayram Kirveş, Adem Macula and Bedri Tumbak, who played tambourine, Sister Suzan’s brother.

Ebru Süleyman: Was he also from Mitrovica?

Münir Curi: He was also from Mitrovica, our close relative. He used to play tambourine, but he didn’t stay here because he had a really great job back in Mitrovica. Before his music career, my father was a barber at his father’s shop. I told you before, he started playing mandolin there. So his profession is barber. But he enjoyed music so they, four friends, they came here and established an orchestra. They progressed over time. My father used to sing and he also played banjo. The first radio was established in the year ‘48.

Ebru Süleyman: Where was the radio back then?

Münir Curi: Radio was in Prizren. From Prizren, they established the radio in Pristina in ‘48. There was a small house, they used to call it *stambeni* block [residential block], in the first block, there used to be a small house...

Ebru Süleyman: Where is that place exactly?

¹ *Tallava* or *Talava* is a music genre originating from Albanian-speaking communities in the Republic of North Macedonia as well as in Kosovo, with a presence in Albania. Having originated in the Roma community in Kosovo in the 1990s, it is oriental-sounding. It is becoming increasingly popular in Albania and North Macedonia. It is identified as part of the wider Pop-folk genre of Southeastern Europe, which includes Chalga from Bulgaria, Skiladiko from Greece, Manele from Romania and Turbo-folk from Serbia.

Münir Curi: Those blocks were located on the way to *Tavuk Bahçe* [Chicken Garden], so I remember there was a small house there, at that time, I was two-three years old. So there was a small house, like this {explains with his hands}, they established the radio there. Then they moved to an apartment, because the small house did not have the acoustics needed for making music. They couldn't do a thing. So they moved to an apartment in front of the small house, today that place is kindergarten. Exactly where the house used to be, now there is a kindergarten.

Ebru Süleyman: So it's in front of *Staraçki Dom* [nursing home]?

Münir Curi: In front of *Staraçki Dom*. After that, they started there in the building, in the basement, and on the second floor, they had studios and stuff. At that time, there was no recording, it was direct. They were doing live shows because they didn't have proper studios, but they still tried hard and worked, eventually, they improved themselves. It was a big thing, they established an important orchestra. Because my dad trained singers and taught them how to play reed, the ones who he trained became reed masters. In Prizren, in Pristina, there was established an association in '51. The *Yeni Hayat* [New Life] Association was established in '51. Also, there, my father educated artists, choir groups and stuff, he always worked and worked and worked with them... Today its name is *Gerçek* [Truth] Association. The *Gerçek* Association changed the name to *Gerçek* in '69. Because there were music artists, even before my dad came there. Well, music artists, but they did not know about tunes or methods, so they used to gather there.

But after they invited my dad here, Turkish classical music really improved. On the radio in the year '55, the deceased master Reco Mulic, musician, asked my father, my father used to play violin and oud,² he said, "Do you have an education in the music field?" "No." "Can you read music notes?" He said, "No, I cannot read." So he started to teach my father the music notes, after that, my father improved himself with magazines from Turkey, with new songs, and music notes. Thanks to Reco Mulic, he was a professor, music professor, he always took care of my father, I guess he adored him. He also liked Turkish classical music. He was Necmiye Pagaruša's³ husband. After that, they made a lot of progress, the Turkish orchestra was alive until the war.

Ebru Süleyman: So until the year '99, there was an orchestra?

Münir Curi: There was an orchestra. After the year '99... they said that there is no budget, no money, they couldn't afford to pay the musicians. On the other hand, they were perfect musicians, İtir Birvenik was educated there, there are a lot, Ramadan, İlyaz, a lot of artists, Zeki Sadik from Ohri. Ziya Bekir

² The Oud, is a short-neck lute-type, pear-shaped stringed instrument (a chordophone in the Hornbostel-Sachs classification of instruments) with eleven or thirteen strings grouped in five or six courses. The oud is very similar to modern lutes, and also to Western lutes. The modern oud is most likely derived from the Assyrian Lute. Similar instruments have been used in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia for thousands of years.

³ Nexhmije Pagarusha (1933-2020) was a Kosovar vocalist, musician and actress from the Republic of Kosovo, often referred to as the queen of Kosovan music. Pagarusha gained acclaim as a recording artist in Kosovo and neighbouring countries for her distinct soprano vocal range.

from Gostivar, they were all educated here.

Ebru Süleyman: In Pristina?

Münir Curi: They were educated in Pristina. They were valuable musicians, but unfortunately, they said that there is no budget. There is no Albanian orchestra, there is no Serbian orchestra nor should a Turkish orchestra exist. What a pity! It is a little bit our deputies' fault, the deputies of today. Deputies that were there before created this, they established schools, they did everything. Deceased Uncle Kadri, thanks to him Turks here made a lot of progress here. Even in the 1974 constitutions, there were no Turks in the constitution of Kosovo, but thanks to him they included Turks in the constitution.

Ebru Süleyman: So they were recognized, how did he include them in the constitution?

Münir Curi: Who?

Ebru Süleyman: Turks, in the '74 constitutions?

Münir Curi: In the '74 constitutions, the Turkish minority was not recognized, but deceased Kadri Rauf was in the administration of the group of the council, he said, "Turks will be included as a minority in the constitutions. After all these years, you cannot say that there is no Turkish minority." They supported him because there was a single-party regime, Communist Party, what was his name... Fadil Hoca, Cavit Numani, they declared that he was a nationalist, "Look, you are creating a problem." Not a problem! News came, they also have rights, they are living here, they will be recognized as a minority. Turkish minority, after that it has all been the same.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you remember when you first came to Pristina, you were so young, I guess?

Münir Curi: I was one year old. Well, I don't remember Pristina that young, but I have been living here for 60 years now, I grew up here.

Ebru Süleyman: You grew up in which neighborhood, where?

Münir Curi: Back then there was a bazaar, today's bazaar, green bazaar, there is an old building, Municipality's building, we used to live there. That neighborhood, all of it, it was the bus station back then. Before 40-50 years ago, the bus station used to be there. We used to live there, I grew up there, there were Serbs, Albanians and a lot of Turks in that neighborhood. So Serbs used to speak Turkish, Turks used to speak Serbian, it was a life like this, the whole neighborhood was like a house, it was a really nice neighborhood.

Ebru Süleyman: But I guess that area was considered a bit far away from the city center?

Münir Curi: The city center was smaller back then, not like nowadays. Smaller, so it was almost in the city center. It was a small town, everybody knew the neighborhoods in Pristina. Pristina used to be like

a zoo. *Çeçiler* [goats] neighborhood, *Maçkalar* [cats] neighborhood, *Siçanlar* [rats] neighborhood, *Tavukçilar* [poulterers] neighborhood, Pristina used to be a zoo.

Ebru Süleyman: These come from surnames, right?

Münir Curi: Surnames, they named neighborhoods after surnames. *Çeçiler* neighborhood, *Tavukçilar* neighborhood, *Maçkalar* neighborhood, *Siçanlar* neighborhood, now it is called Sirius or what the old Božur Hotel used to be.

Ebru Süleyman: Swiss?

Münir Curi: Down that road, the street name used to be Belgrade, it was *Siçanlar* neighborhood. *Maçkalar* was in Tophane. *Tavukçilar* neighborhood was also a street in Tophane. Like that, Pristina was a zoo. Goats, cats, poulterers, rats neighborhoods were named after the greatest family living in that neighborhood.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you have a brother or a sister?

Münir Curi: We were three siblings, one of them, the smallest, Fikret, passed away. I also have a brother, he lives in Turkey, Avcilar.

Ebru Süleyman: But you grew up together here in Pristina?

Münir Curi: We grew up in Pristina together. Fikret was born here in Pristina, but me and my brother after me, we were born in Mitrovica.

Ebru Süleyman: So you are the oldest?

Münir Curi: Yes, I am the oldest.

Ebru Süleyman: What did you do in the neighborhood?

Münir Curi: In the neighborhood, we played football with other kids, we played hide-and-seek. There was a park in front of our home, now [RTK] television bought that land, there used to be shops around. It was a pioneer center, a pioneer center. *Qendra Pionerëve* [pioneer center], there was a big park, we used to play football there, we used to play ping-pong, all the kids gathered there, like this...

Ebru Süleyman: Do you remember the building there which is half destroyed now, in front of this park that you are describing?

Münir Curi: They are restoring it now.

Ebru Süleyman: What was it?

Münir Curi: It was a military building. Military, in those times, Yugoslav soldiers used to live there. But...

Ebru Süleyman: *Zabit's* [officers] home.

Münir Curi: It is from the Ottoman Empire period, I also stayed in that home for a few months. The basement was a prison in the Ottoman times. Then it was used as a school. It is a historical building.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, I asked about that building.

Münir Curi: It is a historical building. Military building, guards would go out from there to the various parts of the town but before that, as much as I remember, it was a prison in Ottoman times. Because at the apartment where I stayed, when I was going down to the basement, I saw the prison.

Ebru Süleyman: So in the basement.

Münir Curi: In the basement. So after that place...

Ebru Süleyman: How did the building collapse?

Münir Curi: It never collapsed.

Ebru Süleyman: Was it burned?

Münir Curi: No, it's an old building, it is rotten. Now they are repairing it, as it is a historical building, they are restoring it now. But in, where the Museum is now, the mosque, Ottoman thing, the government house was next to the *Çarşı* [bazaar] Mosque, just like a municipality now. That place was a Ottoman mansion, a government house. Administration was there, Ottoman administration, it was a government house. Now there is a museum there.

Ebru Süleyman: It is a beautiful building.

Münir Curi: It's really old, it's Ottoman architecture.

Ebru Süleyman: Now when you were growing up, when your father came here, he was working at the orchestra. So he was going to the radio everyday and making music.

Münir Curi: Yes, naturally, it was his job, everyday going to the radio, he was preparing everything, preparing musicians, preparing music.

Ebru Süleyman: Did he take you with him sometimes?

Münir Curi: He did sometimes, when I was little, he did take me with him, but in those times, the studio was created, I mean records, the program was not live, they were using records. So I used to sit in the studio with my mouth closed, I couldn't make a sound {shows his mouth with his hand}.

Ebru Süleyman: This was when they moved to the new radio building.

Münir Curi: In the new radio building.

Ebru Süleyman: It was more modern there, right?

Münir Curi: It was more modern. Because this is the first, like I said the radio after the *stambeni blok*, today where the television is, it was that building. Until the year '70, '71-'72. That time, the radio department was over, they all moved away and this building was left to the television. In '69 or '71, I cannot remember exactly, Pristina television broadcasting started. There were Turkish programs but not in Pristina, on Belgrade radio, programs were made on Serbian television. There were programs held on behalf of Pristina news. Turkish, Albanian and Serbian, Belgrade radio would broadcast in every language. Our one of the first journalists Şakir Maksut presented the news in Belgrade.

Ebru Süleyman: This is before television was established here, right?

Münir Curi: Yes, before television opened, it was in Belgrade. They broadcasted programs from Belgrade. Then here, in the '70s, television was established here. So that programs were held in Turkish, Albanian, Serbian, and Romani.

Ebru Süleyman: When did television become popular in people's houses?

Münir Curi: In people's houses, those times, televisions started to work here around the years '61-'65. In the '70s, people started watching the broadcast directly from Pristina, there was the program RTK.

Ebru Süleyman: So you were watching Pristina's programs, there was also Turkish.

Münir Curi: There was also Turkish, yes, there was...

Ebru Süleyman: What kind of programs were made?

Münir Curi: There was news, once a week, there was music, entertainment programs, child programs, they used to broadcast sometimes, not a lot, just like once a week. There was a two-hour or half-hour program.

Part Two

Ebru Süleyman: Which year did you start your school?

Münir Curi: I started school in the year '56.

Ebru Süleyman: Which school did you go to?

Münir Curi: I first started at Emin Duraku Primary School in Pristina, I started the first grade there in Turkish language.

Ebru Süleyman: So there were Turkish classes also there?

Münir Curi: There was one Turkish class there. Then we all were transferred to Meto Bajraktar Primary School, there in Meto Bajraktar there were two classes. Two Turkish classes, 8/5 and 8/6.

Ebru Süleyman: Your classes?

Münir Curi: We were two Turkish classes, we were almost 40 students, there was a lot of students.

Ebru Süleyman: So this is before the migrations?

Münir Curi: What?

Ebru Süleyman: They did not start migrating in those years yet?

Münir Curi: They did not migrate until the years '50-'54, because I finished my school in '64. I completed primary school in the year '64, then there was only one middle school [high school] in Turkish language, lycée {shows with his hands}. I registered in lycée but I really enjoyed art, and I enjoyed spending time working with electronics. I liked those things more. There was not a technical school in Turkish, so that's why I started lycée. After the first semester, there was a television technician school established in Pristina. The military established the school, trade school. So I dropped out of the lycée, and registered at this school in the second semester, television technician, that one...

Ebru Süleyman: How did your curiosity begin?

Münir Curi: I don't know, from childhood, I really liked physics classes at school. So in physics, I was learning how electricity worked, how it came here, what {showing with his hands}, I worked with them a lot in physics. I got inspired, so I tried to work on some stuff at home. After that, I went to the television technician school, I finished high school.

Ebru Süleyman: This was in which year?

Münir Curi: In '63-'64.

Ebru Süleyman: You started in that year?

Münir Curi: I graduated in the year '66, it started in '64 or '63... I don't know, I forgot, I cannot remember now, I have my diplomas around the house. After that I opened a shop, today where the Cathedral is, I used to have a shop there. I opened a shop after school with a friend, a radio and television repair shop. Right where the lights are now. There used to be some sheds, shops, but it didn't last long, I went to do my military service in '78. I went into the military. After coming back from the military, I also worked as an electrician there, I fixed radios... communication. With airplanes, because I did my military service in aviation in Sombor, contact aviation. With radios and such, they separated us according to our professions. So when I came back after the military, I searched for a job, there was an electrical factory here named Energo-Invest.

Ebru Süleyman: What was the name of the factory?

Münir Curi: Energo-Invest, they were making electrical fuses, things like that. High voltage fuses, I don't know what fuses, so I really liked that job and I applied there. Because my father was Rasim Salih, with a little support from him {smiles}, I got accepted. So I started working there.

Ebru Süleyman: Where was that place?

Münir Curi: It was seven kilometers past Obilić, there is a village named Crkvena Vodica. In those times, the thermal power station was there. In that building, then this factory opened, these fuses and stuff, so I started working there. I got better and better, for being a manager, I needed a master's degree. There was a technical school in Mitrovica, Higher Vocational School, so they sent me there. There were the same things, electronics, automatic machines...

Ebru Süleyman: You studied automatic machines...

Münir Curi: We had to study it, two years there, I finished the Higher Vocational School. Then I returned to the factory, I was working as a chief in service and administration. Maintenance of machines, damaged machines and stuff, there were three more friends there, we worked together. I was the chief and they took care of the machines, but today those factories no longer exist.

Ebru Süleyman: Those times, where were the workers from, were they from different places of Kosovo?

Münir Curi: From everywhere of Kosovo, everywhere...

Ebru Süleyman: How was the work life?

Münir Curi: Good, really good! Work, you had to go to work at seven o'clock, until three. Sometimes first, sometimes second cycle, there were different shifts. Sometimes we worked from three o'clock until eleven at night, at eleven, a bus would come and pick us up, and would take us to our homes.

Ebru Süleyman: How long did you work here?

Münir Curi: What?

Ebru Süleyman: For how long did you work at the factory?

Münir Curi: I worked for 30 years, from '69 until the year '99.

Ebru Süleyman: So you worked until the year '99...

Münir Curi: In '99, there was a war, but after the war, we came back to work at the factory again. In 2003, the factory was privatized, it was sold. In 2003, the factory was closed for us.

Ebru Süleyman: So after it was privatized, did they fire the old workers?

Münir Curi: Some of them were fired, some stayed, just a few, the ones who bought the factory, they continued working just for a few years, they did the same work. We were 10-15 people remaining, the others were fired. Like that...

Ebru Süleyman: Does your retirement count? All those years?

Münir Curi: Yes.

Ebru Süleyman: It counts? Great.

Münir Curi: I retired {smiles}. 30 years of work... it's even too much...

Ebru Süleyman: When you were young, where did you go in the city, with whom did you go out?

Münir Curi: Oh, in those times, the city wasn't like this, it was smaller, there was Korzo for the youth. Today, it's Sheshi Nëna Tereza [Mother Teresa Square], we would go out there. We, the youth, would gather there around seven, until ten, we would hang out there. We would meet there, hang out there and have friendly conversations. Like this... but today, there is no such thing.

Ebru Süleyman: So you say that nowadays there is nothing like that?

Münir Curi: Nothing like that.

Ebru Süleyman: Who were your friends, with whom did you hang out?

Münir Curi: There were Serbs and Albanians, at that time, there was no discrimination, we were all together with Romani people and everyone. There were three Romani neighborhoods in Pristina.

Serb, Albanian Romani, and Turkish Romani. This Divan Yoli Street, this one {shows with his hand}...

Ebru Süleyman: So you are saying they were living in different neighborhoods in order of the language they were speaking?

Münir Curi: Yes, Turkish Romani people were on Divan Yoli Street. Serb Romani people were in Moravska, there above where the park is. Albanians, they were above the Lap Mosque's in the Hashkali neighborhood. So there were three things [neighborhoods]. Divan Street, Turkish Romani people, there were Romani who came from Turkey, they were also living there.

Ebru Süleyman: So they were speaking Turkish?

Münir Curi: They were speaking Turkish, going to Turkish schools. In my class, there were three Romani, but they were speaking Turkish. Divan Yoli Street was where the Turkish Romani were. Above in Moravska, there were Serbs, above Lab Mosque, above Pruga, there were Hashgali, Albanian Romani. They were speaking Albanian...

Ebru Süleyman: Do you remember when the city around Korzo started to change, when they were building new buildings, maybe you were too young back then, but do you remember the innovations in Pristina?

Münir Curi: I remember when they built Sirius Hotel, it was Bozhur back then. There used to be a mosque.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes. Do you remember that mosque?

Münir Curi: I remember the mosque. So that mosque was demolished, after that, they built a hotel there, the mosque's name was Lokaç. As a matter of fact, there is still a fountain in front of the theater, I remember that fountain really well. So in Pristina there was a children's theater. Today, where the government's building is, there was a street {explains with his hands}, there was a children's theater, Boshko Buha. There were programs in Serbian and the Turkish language. After school, we used to go there {smiles}. A lot of...

Ebru Süleyman: So this new building didn't exist? The government's building?

Münir Curi: No, no, no. Post office, there were the old post office, it was destroyed in the war, there was a road, down the road {explains with his hands}, you could go to the municipality. That road was going to the municipality, so on that road, there was a children's theater, Boshko Buha {smiles}.

Ebru Süleyman: So you used to go there?

Münir Curi: We kids, we used to go there and watch the shows. There was a theater called Puss in Boots, the deceased Hamdi Begolli used to perform in that play {smiles}. There we used to...

Ebru Süleyman: After that, later, when you were going to lycée and then when you went to the technical school, what were you doing there?

Münir Curi: I dropped out of lycée, I liked crafting, I continued my studies in crafts, art, after that I went to the High Vocational School in Mitrovica, the technical school, the High Vocational School, then I returned to my job again, because my work sent me there to study in order to be a manager.

Ebru Süleyman: When you worked there at the *Tre sheshir* [Three Hats], the shop that you opened with your friend, how was it? There was a school before this cathedral.

Münir Curi: Yes, there was a school, but we were just right where the traffic lights are, next to KEK [Kosovo Energy Corporation] there was a space, the road which goes down it didn't exist [anymore]. There used to be another road, behind the Cathedral, the road was going to the shops, the new shops. There used to be our shops, stores. At that time, there weren't any traffic lights, there was nothing. The traffic lights were placed there in the '70s, after the '70s, when I came back from the military, they put in the traffic lights and they made the road and the intersection.

Ebru Süleyman: When did you meet your wife?

Münir Curi: What?

Ebru Süleyman: With your wife, when did you meet her?

Münir Curi: We met at work, she was working there, she was a typist, we met there. We decided to marry {smiles}.

Ebru Süleyman: Which year did you get married?

Münir Curi: '74.

Ebru Süleyman: Where? Where was your wedding?

Münir Curi: We didn't have a wedding, we {smiles} handled it in a cheaper way.

Ebru Süleyman: So you married in '74?

Münir Curi: In '75, we had a daughter, Neşe. After that we had three sons: Berkant, Bülent, Coşkun.

Ebru Süleyman: Together in Pristina. You lived in Pristina, right?

Münir Curi: In Pristina, for 65-70 years in Pristina. It was '49, so now I am 70 years old, almost 70, just in a few months, I will be. For 70 years, I am living in Pristina.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you remember when the streams were open?

Münir Curi: There used to be two streams, and they were really good. Prishtevka and Velusha Streams, behind the theater on that road, there used to be Velusha Stream and Prishtevka used to be behind the bazaar. But in the '70s they were closed because the city was filled with different kinds of nations, they were connecting the drainage to the streams and, unfortunately, the town started to be smelly. So they had to close the streams. Like that...

Ebru Süleyman: Did you learn to play any instrument from your father?

Münir Curi: I didn't, but the grandkids did {smiles}. Kids learned, I am not a master like him, but I do play a little bit.

Ebru Süleyman: How was it to grow up like that, were musicians coming to your home often, when you were little, did you participate in musical entertainment?

Münir Curi: Ohoo {onomatopoeia} a lot! *Tavuk Bahçe*, Gërmia [national park], people from town used to gather there, they used to make music, food and everything. We had a lot of cheerful days there. They gathered at *Tavuk Bahçe*, Gërmia. At that time, there were not a lot of cars, we used carriages, in big vehicles, we took *saç*⁴ and pots, "Let's go to Gërmia." In Gërmia, they used to cook meals, all people from town would gather there, musical entertainment, games and music. Back in time there were a lot of events in *Tavuk Bahçe*. Above here there used to be vineyards...

Ebru Süleyman: Where?

Münir Curi: In Dragodan. There they would gather in the vineyards, they would play music there, we would look at the city view of Pristina from there {smiles}.

Ebru Süleyman: Very good, what else, I guess here, there used to be a lot of gardens?

Münir Curi: Where?

Ebru Süleyman: Here, where are we right now, around the stadium.

Münir Curi: Yes, around the stadium, there used to be gardens, there were gardens. There used to be cabbage fields. There used to be gardens. And today where Dardania is, there used to be big gardens as well.

Ebru Süleyman: To whom did the gardens belong?

⁴ A domed round iron plate for cooking.

Münir Curi: It was autonomous, there were nations, it didn't belong to the government. People used to have gardens there.

Ebru Süleyman: Did you celebrate the new year?

Münir Curi: Oooh {onomatopoeia}, what New Year's we did have! Turks would celebrate it at the Grand, that time there was Bozhur, the big restaurants, it used to be like this {show with his hands}. What a great New Year's we had, eeeh! {onomatopoeia}. It's all over now...

Ebru Süleyman: Why are these activities fewer now? Is it because people migrated and we are a small number now?

Münir Curi: No, the *Gerçek* Association continues these activities but... Now people's financial situation is not really great. Before we all had, everybody was working, there used to be a lot of craftsmen and everything. Here {shows with his hands} where Spomenik is, there used to be an old bazaar, old bazaar. There used to be craftsmen, the road used to be like this {shows with his hands}, until to Kastriot, to Skanderbeg. There used to be rope shops, they would make ropes. There used to be tinsmiths, tailors, fountainer shops, barbers. There used to be a lot of different kinds of craftsmen, but in the '70s the place was shut down and now there are these buildings.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, so that place started from in front of the bazaar mosques, that's why...

Münir Curi: From the bazaar mosque to the Spomenik, there used to be a road, there where they used to have bicycle things...

Ebru Süleyman: Bicycle races?

Münir Curi: Bicycle races, motorcycle races. That street's name was Divan Yoli, from Gërmia, all along that way to the stairs where you could go to Divan Yoli Street. So there used to be shops, old and small shops of craftsmens, tailors, ethnic hat stores, a lot of different kinds of crafts, watchmakers and everything.

Ebru Süleyman: So all the town's craftsmen were there?

Münir Curi: Yes, they were all there. Many kinds of artisans. Various kinds of crafts. Now there are no such crafts left.

Ebru Süleyman: They are gone.

Münir Curi: No more. At that time, we didn't buy ropes from the bazaar, we would go to the rope shop. There used to be some Romani, they used to make ropes. But they are not there anymore. There used to be barbers, watchmakers...

Ebru Süleyman: In the '70s, right?

Münir Curi: In the '70s, at that time, the Municipality started building new buildings, those buildings [in the old bazaar] were built at that time, also, the Post Office was built.

Ebru Süleyman: What are your thoughts? Was it necessary to build them right in the old bazaar?

Münir Curi: Not at all, it was not necessary. But that construction used to be Ottoman architecture.

Ebru Süleyman: Around the old bazaar?

Münir Curi: The bazaars were built in Ottoman [style] architecture, so now to erase the Ottoman remnants... It's a little bit about nationalism against the Turks. So they had to destroy that place so there won't be any remnants left from the Ottomans.

Ebru Süleyman: So was this a policy of Yugoslavia?

Münir Curi: No no, it was Kosovo's regional policy. Regional policy was like that. Because Kosovo in the '70s had its own administration. Kosovo had its own constitutions, '74 constitutions, in those times, this was not a thing that was related to Yugoslavia.

Ebru Süleyman: Then do you remember the 80s, was the first grand protest in the year '81?

Münir Curi: First protests were in '81.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you remember how the situation was, in the town?

Münir Curi: I heard about the protests randomly when I was outside on the street. It was a little tense. It was a tense situation. Now the requests of this group, and the other groups' opposition, Serb's opposition, Albanians were right {raises his hands}, what now, that time there was a single-party regime, Communist Party system. Kosovo was recognized by its own constitution, '74 constitutions, but this situation was not okay for Serbs. Because at that time, Kosovo took on all the administration by itself. Serbs did not have all rights to themselves for Kosovo. At that time, only the formal name was not there, it [Kosovo] was not a republic, but it was functioning as if it were one.

Ebru Süleyman: So the life, living, decisions were free?

Münir Curi: Yes, it was more free. The decisions were made here, neither Serb police nor the others, no one could make a decision except Kosovo itself. When there was a need to make a decision, the council made the decision. From those times, a little bit...

Ebru Süleyman: How was life back then? Was it normal?

Münir Curi: For us, it was normal. We had no discrimination. I said it, we gathered together with Serbs and everyone. We organized parties, young people gathered in homes...

Ebru Süleyman: When they started to be separate, why didn't they gather together anymore?

Münir Curi: After the year '81. So after the first protest, it started after that. Even Korzo was separated, Serbs on one side, Albanians on the other side, Korozo was separated into two. In fact, I can say that after the year '81, things started to go bad.

Ebru Süleyman: So those groups who hang out together separated?

Münir Curi: They were separated, everyone did. There was only one Korzo, and Albanians, Turks and Serbs, we all walked on the same road... After that, after '81, they separated, Serbs on one side, Turks and Albanians, Muslims on the other side.

Ebru Süleyman: After that, this separation continued?

Münir Curi: '89, the second one was in '89, in '99, when Milošević was the head of the government, he started to oppress. They fired, unhosed people, they fired people, because a lot of people did not accept the Serbian constitutions. So then Milošević fired them, hundreds of people were fired. He closed down the schools, that was enough. After that, the wars started.

Ebru Süleyman: Were you here in the war?

Münir Curi: We went to Blace first, after Blace, we went to Macedonia, from Macedonia, we went to Turkey. My uncles were in Turkey, we had relatives there, my brother was there, so we stayed there in a camp. In '99, when the war was over, we came back here. In those times, the deceased Kadri Yusuf helped Turkish community here a lot. When he was a deputy in administration, he did a lot of things for Turks, he established schools, radio and associations. Like that, he did a lot of work in various issues.

Ebru Süleyman: Were Turkish communities schools established in the years '50-'51, then what changed, what was different?

Münir Curi: In '51. Nothing changed.

Ebru Süleyman: So the '70s were not a period of regression...

Münir Curi: In '51, there was only primary school and lycée in Turkish language, there was nothing else. Nothing more. In some cases we had to, I finished middle school [high school] in Serbian. Because I knew Serbian and I wanted to study crafts, also in Mitrovica I finished the High Vocational School in Serbian, because there wasn't any education in Turkish. There was only lycée in Turkish. That's why I ran away from lycée, I wanted to study crafts and I was successful. We studied Serbian

language there, I knew Serbian really well because I had many Serb friends in my neighborhood. They used to talk in Turkish too. They taught me Serbian and I taught them Turkish. So that is how we learned, here 90 percent of people used to talk in Turkish.

Ebru Süleyman: So all people from town knew how to speak Turkish?

Münir Curi: All towns used to talk in Turkish, people from town.

Ebru Süleyman: So after the war, when you came back here, how did you adapt to your life?

Münir Curi: I don't know, we were used to it. We were numb, we could only trust our luck. We came back to our jobs, we had work. Some workplaces were shut down, my wife used to work in television, after the war, she couldn't go back to her job, the orchestra was not established again. In some places like this, people were against us, but our deputies, they are nothing, they cannot do a thing. They can't or they don't want to, I don't really know, but I think if they really wanted, they could have done something, the radio could have been established because there was a whole orchestra there.

Ebru Süleyman: So they could have continued their music?

Münir Curi: Yes, they could, but there is no budget, there is no I don't know what, there is no Albanian orchestra, so there can't be a Turkish orchestra. Is there such a thing like this? But I blame our minister, the minister of KDTP. He...

Ebru Süleyman: So they didn't work enough?

Münir Curi: He is not doing his duty. He is not finishing his work.

Ebru Süleyman: So you are retired now?

Münir Curi: Yes, retired.

Ebru Süleyman: Home, together with your family.

Münir Curi: Home, five people, with my family there {smiles}. I go outside to walk around a little bit. I go to the bazaar, but I cannot find a friendly face in the bazaar. I walk around the bazaar for an hour and there is not even one familiar face, there is no one from Pristina. I don't know if everyone has migrated, or went to some places. Life... not few but very few, I see only one familiar face in a week or not at all. None... we don't have certain locations and that's it.

Ebru Süleyman: I don't know what to ask anymore, do you want to continue something that you were saying or say something new?

Münir Curi: No, nothing, I don't know what to say either. You asked about writers earlier, right?

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, if there is someone that you knew. Or maybe you can say what traditions we used to have and now we don't?

Münir Curi: We had writers. Sürreya Yusuf, Professor Doctor Sürreya Yusuf, man of letters, a writer. Then there is Hasan Mercan in Kosovo. In Macedonia, there was Şükrü Ramo and Necati Zekeriya, we read their books. From Kosovo, deceased Sürreya Yusuf and there is Enver Baki. There was Naim Şaban, deceased, from our writers. We read their books. Who else, I have written some names down... Naim Şaban, Hasan Mercan, Fahri Kaya, they are our writers from Macedonia. Necati Zekeriya, Şükrü Ramo, they are from Macedonia, but they wrote Turkish literature. I also have a question for you. What does it mean to be a townner?

Ebru Süleyman: What does it mean?

Münir Curi: Do you know, in your opinion, what does a townner mean to you?

Ebru Süleyman: Maybe everyone has a different opinion on this one. What about you?

Münir Curi: When you say townner, you know that there is a civilization, more civilized society, a step higher from peasants. Someone educated, more civilized. When you say townner, you immediately think of a more civilized educated society.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, so a little bit more elite. So why is it like this, is it because of the education or traditions?

Münir Curi: Now, when Ottoman Empire was here, the official language was Turkish here. So civilization was taken from them. We took civilization from Ottoman Empire traditions, back then, Serbs and Albanians, everybody knew how to speak Turkish. So they are more civilized.

Ebru Süleyman: Now, it's not like that. This has changed...

Münir Curi: Now the official language is Albanian. It is used more, but there is Serbian and other languages are also recognized as official languages.

Ebru Süleyman: What about those people who we are called townners, what are they doing now?

Münir Curi: There are some people left, who are still using Turkish language. There was a Albanian historian, Osi, Osi... I forgot his name. He finished his doctorate in history in America, he says that when I go down to the city for understanding, if the person is from the town or village, I ask only one question, "Do you know Turkish?", if the person says no, then I know that person is not from the town. He is an Albanian historian in America, Osi, Osi... Because all townners used to know Turkish. More civilized more...

Ebru Süleyman: So it shows that they have been here a long time ago.

Münir Curi: Yes, here for a long time, a townner. In the Ottoman times, Turkish was the official language, because it was Ottoman Empire's land until 1912. And the official language was Turkish.

Ebru Süleyman: Do you have something else that you wanted to share with us?

Münir Curi: I don't have anything, that's all it.

Ebru Süleyman: Well, if there isn't anything, thank you a lot for your time.

Münir Curi: No, dear, I did it for you, otherwise...