

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH LUAN KOÇBASHLIU

Prizren | Date: August 19, 2020

Duration: 112 minutes

Present:

1. Luan Koçbashliu (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (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

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Please start again from your earliest childhood memories and what characterizes your family? Since when have you lived in Prizren?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I was born in Prizren and I come from a family which is considered one of the oldest families in Prizren, according to my grandfather's stories for many generations we lived here. My grandfather was educated, which means he had the title of Myderiz,<sup>1</sup> because he studied philosophy of Islam and religion in Cairo. And I had the opportunity to benefit a lot, not a lot, but as much as I could benefit from my grandfather, because he was in contact with that world, because he lived long. He died, he was almost 105 years old when he died.

From my father's side of the family I had uncles. They were five brothers and two sisters. My father was the youngest of the boys and his house was near the Culture Center, you might know, it is behind Cinema Lumbardhi, in the city center. I told you there were five brothers and two sisters. At some point they lived in the same house, it was a big house, they were rich, they were well off. And I want to mention that my grandfather was for a period of time a religious teacher. He had his bookstore in the center of Prizren, near the Sinan Pasha Mosque, there {shows with his hands} a little further up.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of literature did it have?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It had schoolbooks, schoolbooks. I didn't experience it, but my uncle's son, who was older than me, told me, because he also worked in the bookstore, there were schoolbooks and novels. I remember because my late mother liked reading a lot and she asked my grandfather, because he could speak Arabic and Turkish, old Turkish and of course modern Turkish. Though, even back then the city's language was, how to say, especially Muslims spoke Turkish, although even Albanians of

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<sup>1</sup> *Myderrisi* or *Myderizi* is a term used to describe a religious scholar, professor, or faculty member in the Seljuk world and the Ottoman Empire.

course have... each person in Prizren speaks more or less two or three languages. Now it has changed a little, it's not like before.

I'll continue, she wanted to read them so my grandfather would read and translate for her. I remember, he would come to our balcony because when he was alone, he went over to each of his sons for three months or so. When it was our turn to host him, my mother took advantage to read those old novels and for him to translate them. Otherwise, my father finished gymnasium, elementary school and gymnasium in Prizren. But, during his education in gymnasium, it's the classical gymnasium, he developed an interest in somatology. So, teeth treatment, and at that time, there were around three, four dentists in Prizren, of course not with High Pedagogical School but who completed professional dentistry schools, so they could treat your teeth, to pull out and heal your teeth. He went, he first learned from a Spi... Spiro Čomić, he was how do I say it *vllah*,<sup>2</sup> or something...

Then a Serb, Nikola Mitrović, as my father said because I don't know, and Seb Shkreli, also a dentist. Then after the Second World War, he enrolled at the University in Belgrade where he successfully finished university and was hired immediately at the Mažestik Stomatology Polyclinic in Belgrade, which to this day it is one of the best polyclinics, especially in prosthetics, so making braces. Even though my mother was also a teeth technician. They met there, they got married, they have three children, boys, we didn't have a sister.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When did they come back?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Since '50, '52, they worked in Belgrade for almost two, three years. Then, maybe the nostalgia, or the lack of dentistry professional staff. Fadil Hoxha made a call, he was the prime minister at that time, and Xhavit Nimani and he was obliged to come back. Of course, also the nostalgia for his birthplace, he missed it, so he came back with my mother and so he lived his whole life in Prizren, so he contributed a lot. In fact, he was the founder of the Modern Stomatologic Polyclinic, he contributed to the building of the clinic. He started with his own equipment and opened the first clinic, which first was a state clinic, but he contributed with his own equipment. He could afford a chair, the dental electromotor for teeth cleaning. First, they worked in the former Farmakos Factory.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, they have recently ruined it to build a modern building, even though that part was under the protection of monuments. So, Prizren is downgrading day after day (smiles). He worked there for a short period of time, then he opened the clinic here where Jakup Beu Madrasa was, where now is building the Korneri [Corner] café, it's an old house that you can see now. Didn't you notice it? It has its own history, first it was the Jakup Beu Madrasah, it was part of the Sinan Pasha Mosque, then

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<sup>2</sup> *Vlach* is a historical term and exonym used from the Middle Ages until the Modern Era to designate mainly Romanians but also Aromanians, Megleno-Romanians, Istro-Romanians and other Eastern Romance-speaking subgroups of Central and Eastern Europe

<sup>3</sup> Pharmaceutical factory which was located in Prizren.

during the Italian and German reign, it was the café-restaurant Berlin, then UDBA,<sup>4</sup> I don't know what it was, then the Dentist Clinic where my father with his staff worked. Then when they moved to another location, they moved to a house, also an old house, on the upstairs floor because the conditions were better, it had more space, there's Ali Dula's house near Bajrakli Mosque, and we started living there on the upstairs floor.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So you were born in Belgrade and grew up in Prizren?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, I was not born in Belgrade. I was born in Prizren.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In Prizren.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I was born in Prizren.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What are your earliest memories?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** To tell you the truth, I was born in the navel of the old city of Prizren, near the Catholic Church, thirty, forty kilometers away. Back then it was the Miladen Ugarević Street, today *Rruga e Bujtinave* [Guesthouse Street], there are some hotels there, a street opposite of the church. You know where *Shadërvani* [drinking fountain] is, near *Shadërvani*, you get to *Shadërvani* in two minutes, so I grew up in *Shadërvani*. So, how do I say it, my childhood life was always concentrated in the Castle, under the Castle, the Pantelia part, Shkula part. My school was near there, two minutes away {explains with his hands} formerly known as the Mladen Ugarević Elementary School. So it's considered among the first modern schools, it was built in 1836, something like that, also the Catholic Church is near here.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of life was it? You mentioned that it was a very mixed community. What was life like at that time?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Well life was, for example, the neighborhood I was born in was inhabited by other nationalities and religions. Prizren is characterized as a multiethnic and multireligious city. We had Albanian Catholic neighbors, Albanian Muslims and Serbian Orthodox, even Vlachs. Even though I am more or less not very convinced, but I am convinced because for a period of time Vlachs lived here. They moved from Albanian through Macedonia. So, that's why there were two classes of Vlachs, *Cincar*<sup>5</sup> and *Goga*<sup>6</sup> they said Cincar and Goga. They even joked around "*Cincar, Goga nema boga*" [Srb.:

<sup>4</sup> *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration), with the additional "a" for *armije*, Yugoslav army.

<sup>5</sup> *Cincar*, in original spelled *Tzintzari*, are also known as the Aromanians are an ethnic group who speak an Eastern Romance language, native to the southern Balkans, in Southeast Europe traditionally living in central and southern Albania, south-western Bulgaria, northern and central Greece and North Macedonia.

<sup>6</sup> The ethnic designation *Goga* for the Aromanians was used in Raška, Kosovo, and eastern Macedonia, deriving from a local nickname for stonemasons.

Cincar and Goga are Godless] because they didn't have a church, even though they did have a church, I'll tell you later. Cincar were traders, Goga were builders. Actually, the Ottoman Empire used them during their occupation for the construction of houses, the sewers, and all of these were craftsmen for construction.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They lived in your neighborhood?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** They lived in our neighborhood. So, we mixed, we spoke Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, mixed. I said, since childhood, because at that time, there were no superiority complexes, though some had it. The situation was such that whether you like it or not, you had to embrace that and live normally.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Some other characteristics from this early period of life?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Well, we had harmony in our family, in our entire family. At that time, how do I say it, family relations were such and probably there was a need for it, because then it was, families were closer to each other, especially in Prizren they hung out together with their [paternal] uncles, aunts, everyone. I remember when they came, I couldn't wait for Saturday and Sunday to go to sleepover at my grandfather's, all my uncles and their children came. He had a huge yard, it was interesting, we had a huge apple tree and when we set up the *sofra*.<sup>7</sup> It was interesting. My grandfather was a little serious and strict as we say (smiles), he was a man of principles. The head of the family always starts eating first. As children we touched the bread, or we used a spoon to take soup and my mother or my uncle's wife would say, "No, don't touch it!" My grandfather, "No, children are allowed, you aren't." (laughs)

Afterwards, when those apples fell, especially during the summer, the big apple tree, everyone ran to collect them. I remember my grandfather, I said he loved us very much because we were his nephews, but he had his rules, that's why he lived so long. He lived for almost 105 years and that's a lot. We played, for example, we had the yard where they kept the cows, we went there and those who worked in the field brought us fruits and vegetables, corn and other agricultural produce, and we went in there and he always came out. He had his room like an office, he always read, sometimes he came out and yelled. I remember that. We had friends in school also, then we mixed with Catholics, or Muslims, or Orthodox children, it was normal back then. So not even the parents... we knew our religion, but there was tolerance.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How urbanized was Prizren at that time?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Prizren was urbanized, when I say urbanized, I mean Prizren had been urbanized since the rule of Byzantine Empire, because we have the remains, artifacts that are in museums and some that haven't been uncovered yet, but that Prizren's origin is maybe, let's leave aside the

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<sup>7</sup> Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

Prehistoric period, they are also treated as a civilization, but of the Roman Period, many tombstones, motifs are found in Prizren or near Prizren. Let's say, according to the data, according to written sources, Prizren is urbanized. Now we don't have architectural findings in the city to make a claim that Prizren belongs to the Roman Period, in the Ancient Period let's say. From Late Antiquity, we have the Church of Lady Levisha<sup>8</sup> and all the artifacts that have been found there and which we have encountered. For example, that "K" there, at the cafeteria, the tall building near the bridge, there we found artifacts dating from the period of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium, and these are proof that Prizren had begun the urbanization processes.

Even though, I have an idea how it looked and if I am healthy, I've already started working in reconstructing Prizren, for the Roman Period I can't do much, but the Byzantine Period, Late Antiquity, The Early Middle Ages, the Middle Ages, and the Ottoman Period. For the Ottoman Period, we already have enough data, we have pictures and everything, so maybe I will do a map, the reconstruction of old Prizren. But, I was lucky enough to experience the old Prizren.

Maybe it's my nature, not to say adventurous in a bad way, but I was always attracted to adventures, nature attracted me because my grandfather and uncles also loved nature. I remember my grandfather woke up every morning, there was a neighbor and cousin, Nexhmedin Tada, a close family relative, they're also a family who have been here for a long time. Actually, my uncle's daughter was married off to that family, we were neighbors, only a wall separated us, and early in the morning, he went out and walked up to *Pasha Çeshmja*, there's a flat area on the top of the Prizren Castle. They walked up there in the morning and night, especially during the summer and when the weather was nice, they walked up to the Monastery of the Archangels, it's in Kërkunar. In Kërkunar there is a part of the well which was used and we inherited it, I might have inherited more than anyone else.

I loved nature, I was always in nature. Actually, I remember when I took my oldest brother, my little brother with me, we went to pick flowers for our mother for March 8, primroses and violets, and we put them on a stick and made it like a small bouquet. We came back at night, back then we lived here {points with his finger} as I mentioned, near Sinan Pasha, and my father got mad, "Where are you?" He tied me to the bed to punish me, he said to my little brother, "Come to eat food." I didn't eat all night long (smiles). I will never forget that, because they went crazy, we went out in the morning, we didn't eat or anything, we were in the mountains.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did your mother at least get happy you brought her flowers? (laughs)

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, my mother did. Even though our mother also, my mother supported us, but our father had his role, so did my mother, of course.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was you mother like?

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<sup>8</sup> In Albanian language the church is called: Kisha e Shën Premtes. While in Serbian, Crkva Bogorodice Leviške.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Well my mother was like any other mother, so to say. My mother was really, she was really intelligent, she read and we learned from her love for books. My father was more or less preoccupied with his work. So, not only did he work, but he was ambitious and he achieved everything. Actually, he asked from Fadil Hoxha, because he supplied them with dental equipment from Austria, medicine, the whole clinic, so the dental ward equipment was from Austria. He asked for a mobile ambulance, I have the pictures here. The picture also exists in a book. He visited villages and treated the villagers, we have the pictures as proof.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was your mother a professional [in the field]?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** My mother was a dental technician.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When you went back to Prizren, did she continue to work?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, she did for a while, then we were born, we started growing up, he said, “You go back home, bring up the children.” Back then he worked in his private practice and in the clinic, he had the privilege of also working in private practice, she said, “My ten fingers are enough to bring up my family.” (smiles) So she was obligated to do it. She was always nostalgic about her job, she was a great technician. Not because she was my mother, but there are people who still have the dental prosthesis she did. I remember the late Refet Kiseri, no, Nehat Kiseri, Kiseri family of Gafurr Kiseri Street. They are, have you heard of Gafurr Kiseri? In Kaçanik, when they rose, when they declared the Kosova Republic, he was there. At the time, he was a professor at the Medical University, Dentistry. In his showcase he had what my mother made for dentistry and he treated it as a museological artifact. It was there until recently, but I don’t know if it’s still there now.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean, maybe I can ask you about high school, what was it like?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I graduated from the gymnasium<sup>9</sup> in ‘64, and I remember because, during gymnasium, I began an activity which was a bit different. I remember once we went out to play football in the yard and there was an old gymnast, Ali Qerreti, who then was our instructor and professor of gymnastics. He looked at our physique, our moves and he picked some of us. I remember from my class he picked me and Venemin Llulla. Later he became lead singer for a Prizren band, Telstar, very popular at that time, he was a singer and he still sings with the old clarinet, still, yes, yes... and they picked us to go exercise and we (smiles) did gymnastics and I was very active, I was intensively active in gymnastics for around six, seven years. We [participated] in competitions.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What kind of... or acrobatics?

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<sup>9</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, not acrobatics. How can I say it now, we had a Swedish table for gymnastics like the one you get to see on TV, chairs {puts his hands up} two of them tied with a rope, then parterre gymnastics, somersault, somersault mortal, everything. So, we participated and Prizren's competition was Peja, but we were stronger because we had senior and junior [leagues]. We were juniors, seniors always had the first place in Kosovo. We were first place, second place, but sometimes people from Pristina would cheat (smiles), the referees would, you know, Peja's gymnastics were good. Mitrovica and Gjilan more or less also had [gymnastics], I think Ferizaj didn't at that time, but I know we participated in inter-republican competitions and in national competitions of Yugoslavia.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They took you all over Yugoslavia?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes, though Yugoslavia. We were in Novi Sad, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Belgrade. We had to win here first to be able to go further.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was it like back then to get out of Kosovo, go to other countries?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It was very good then, our passports were recognized all over the world. The most priceless passport you could have was the Yugoslav one. I will tell you, and it relates to my friends, before I started studying and when I was studying, we came and hung out here in front of Theranda Café, we drank coffee, "Should we go drink coffee in Thessaloniki?" "Yes." We got into the car, we went to Thessaloniki, drank coffee, went to the disco, and came back the next day (smiles). We had this kind of freedom. Then we went to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and so on.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I mean was it different, was it a cultural shock to go from Prizren to some bigger city?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** For me Prizren held the first place when it came to culture, but other cities too. Maybe I, no, I'm not talking as a localist, maybe it's also because of that, but Prizren of course had a rich culture, because Prizren was known, Pristina was also a city, but a smaller city. Prizren is considered one of the oldest cities in the Balkans, it had its own urbanism, it had an organized life, it was rich, especially commerce and crafts bloomed in Prizren. Especially in the Middle Ages, starting from 14th, 15th century, only in the 16th century, when it began to fall because of political changes, people moving and wars affected the further development of Prizren.

Still, Prizren has remained what it was in essence because the majority does not know where the soul of Prizren is, the majority. Perhaps I come across as a localist, Prizren's soul is in the citizens of Prizren. You can degrade, devastate the whole of Prizren, but not its soul. Prizren's soul is everywhere, in every part, because of its geographical position and climatic conditions... it is no coincidence that we find road stations and settlements of different time periods here. It has a strategic position, the Prizren

Castle proves it. The Prizren Castle has strong foundations, and it has stood there since the Bronze Age.

When we did the excavations here in collaboration with the Archaeological Institute of Tirana in 2004, it was the first time that Albanian archeologists came together, and so we started that here. Though they mostly came here, we never went there (smiles). It was a bit different, so we encountered traces at the entrance of the Castle, on its right side, we encountered cultural layers of the Bronze Age.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How do you distinguish it?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Well, the layers differ, the cultural layers differ, the soil, the composition of the soil. So, archeology is studied from the bottom, we work from the top (smiles).

## Part Two

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you decide after high school, since you were so involved in gymnastics, how did you decide to study archeology?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** This is how I decided to study archaeology, in the Castle, under the Castle, because I forgot to tell you that the part under the Castle is the beginning of the formation under the Castle, or otherwise known as *város*.<sup>10</sup> It began sometime at the end of the 12th century, the beginning of the 13th where there is architectural evidence. However, in that area are also almost five churches, in the area of the Castle, not in the Castle but around the Castle. As we were playing, there something happened, there was a church there, the Church of St. Alena [Adhjedha], dedicated to Prince Marco's mother. You've heard about Prince Marco in history class. The excavations were carried out by some Georgi Kovalov of Russian origin most probably, but another archaeologist who worked at the Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Kosovo, and they forced him to, he did the excavations in that church. As I was passing by there, I saw my friends, I went in to see what's happening, how the excavations were going and I was curious. I went there to follow the excavations every day.

There I fell in love with archeology, even though I played, we played there a lot and now I'm embarrassed to say it now, but we even played football over a monument (smiles), we also played football in the Monastery of the Archangels, but we didn't damage it. The ground was suitable there, because people from Prizren during the summer, during the heat, went to the Central.<sup>11</sup> Do you know where the Central is? The canyon of Lumbardh, towards Prevala, the Monastery is there, and the area behind the Monastery, there's also a building, you can see it in front of the Central, it underwent restoration and has become the Electro Museum. Maybe the only one back then in ex-Yugoslavia, in

<sup>10</sup> Hungarian: *város*, settlement outside of the city walls typical of the 16 century.

<sup>11</sup> Place for recreation. A park near the Hydro-power-plant.

Serbia, the only Museum, its creation was to Muhamed Shkuriu's credit, so the development of electro-economy. It was built in 1924, so the first hydro power plant and in that area there were big fields at the end, it was cool. We actually jumped from the dam, we swam, all the people of Prizren went there with food and everything. So Prizren was like a fair.

So, I hung out in the Castle. If I touch the Castle, I can feel like a stone of the Castle. To tell you the truth, it's not bad to say so, but some people take it the wrong way, I don't like the work that was done over there. I was even part of the research and everything. The recovery was done well up to a point, now it doesn't have to be ideal, but I don't like covering the stones with cement. The stones should have been more natural, but it still didn't lose its shape. The Castle is a good representation [of the city] but now they have altered it a little for the visitors, but tourism is tourism. You can benefit from tourism, but tourism can also destroy things, it's a fact. In mountain tourism, in cultural tourism, there's also a percentage which damages it. For example, in mountain tourism, if you build a road, there's alleys, let people walk on trails, in tracks. Not to hike with bikes, the road for bikes, the road for cars, you went out in nature to have fun.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And then?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Then I decided to go to Belgrade. Actually, it wasn't, I wanted to study psychology, I also liked psychology. I went with a friend from here. I didn't go on vacation all summer long, my brother went, "No, I'm preparing for the entrance exam." I got on the train. My late father was alive then I went [to Belgrade]. When I got there, where would I sleep? There were some workers then in *Gradska čistoća* [Srb.: City maintenance] where Kosovars worked, cleaning, and we met one of them, we went to his place. He was from Prizren, Kosovar from Prizren, "You can spend the night here. It's not a problem!"

The beds were like army beds, we had to sleep there for two nights until the entrance exam. He wanted to enroll in the Political Science Department, I wanted to study psychology, no, he also wanted to study psychology but then he gave me cold feet, he made me regret it so much, I will never forget it in my whole life, but still I don't regret it. "How are we going to do it, Luan? We come from a province, people from Belgrade are more knowledgeable than us, more intelligent." "Why more intelligent, why are you saying this?" But he said it with that inferiority complex, I had... maybe he didn't want to enter [the entrance exam]. And I said, "No, we're not going, we're not going." We got on a train at night, and we came back.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You didn't apply at all?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, we didn't enter the exam at all. He enrolled in the meantime because he had, I had exemplary grades, he had excellent grades, and you could enroll in university without an entrance exam if you had excellent grades. He was admitted, I came back, I wanted to study archeology at the

same time. I came back and my father said, “What did you do, Luan?” “Nothing, father.” “Did you enter the exam?” “No.” “Are you stupid? Why did you do that? What are you going to do now?” I got on the train to Belgrade again. It was three o’clock, it was the Chinese generation.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What does that mean?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Why the Chinese generation? Back then up to ten, twelve, 15 people at most enrolled in archeology, while that year, at the Philosophical University, the ‘68-‘69 generation had around five thousand students, only in that department, because people enrolled without an entrance exam. People who had a gap year of studies applied, they wanted to get dormitory privileges, and student benefits so they enrolled in archeology, history, pedagogy. I enrolled in archeology because I wanted to. We were around 600 people in the beginning, then they started clearing people slowly until there were only 45 students left.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did your parents think of your choice?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** They were never against it, not even when it came to studying psychology. They didn’t in general, “You want to do that, why not?” My brother studied stomatology, my oldest brother. My younger brother only graduated high school, machinery technician. But he also is a nature admirer and does this, he draws Prizren on plates and his recurring motif is old Prizren.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I asked you because both were rare professions, both psychology and also there were no archeologists in Kosovo until recently.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** There weren’t any until recently and that attracted me, what would I study after? What would I specialize in later, if I had enrolled in industrial psychology, it was organizational, workers’ psychology. I always, even when I made friends, I wasn’t picky, all people were the same for me, whether they were rich or poor. Actually, I always approached more people who came from rural areas because I noticed they were more withdrawn. The city as a city [was not friendly] for those who came from the village, I felt sorry for them, I was always there for them, and I was also a little interested in their psychology, why they are withdrawn, why this, why that. Even so, that’s a complex issue.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was your time during your studies like? What was life in Belgrade like? What kind of life did you have? What did you learn?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Life during studies at the university or...?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** During university and also...

**Luan Koçbashliu:** We had really interesting and attractive subjects in university. For example, we had ethnology courses, history of arts, physical anthropology, which some universities lacked, they didn't have it. The University of Belgrade also had ancient language courses, ancient Greek, Latin, and ancient Slavic. That's my advantage, more or less we can, for example, more or less we can understand the texts, translate while researching because you need it. Actually I advise my young colleagues who are professors there, get in there, write whether it is Slavic, it doesn't matter. Ancient Slavic has many letters of the ancient Greek, even though it is Serbian if you look at it in that respect. It is to your advantage.

We went to classes, after classes, it was the same as in Prizren, how do I say it, it was trendy, so the hippie lifestyle began. We started dressing a little differently (smiles), a little different of course. Like today, even back then, long hair. Actually, may he rest in peace, my father when I came from Belgrade, once I let my hair grow a little longer {gestures as if he's calling someone} "*Makaze*", [Srb.: scissors] he took the scissors to cut my hair (smiles). I leaned in, "No, no I will not touch it but shorten them a little, not this long." It wasn't very long, but anyways that time passed and of course trends change, but why not follow trends when you're there.

We went to *matiné* back then. You know what *matiné* is? It's a music party in the afternoon, not in the evening, it is in the afternoons. We called it *igranka* [Srb.: ball], with night games, for example from eight to ten the latest, not more. For example, in Prizren, there was also the Youth Center, *Dom omladine* [Srb.: Youth House] and the orchestra, vocals, silhouette, and I don't know what else that were considered the best at that time came there, and we visited it. Each department organized their *matiné* or their own party. We went there. I also had some cousins in Belgrade.

With my father's suggestion, "If you want to study and do more serious work you should live in the dorm." And from the beginning [of my studies] until the end I lived in Student City. *Studentski Grad* [Srb. Student City] was in New Belgrade and life there was a little different really, very, very good. Back then the entire Yugoslavia was together {crosses his fingers}, whether Bosniaks or Macedonians, there were even black people. Yes, black people and Africans, but they also had their privileges. I remember an exam once, the classical archeology course, which was taught by Milutin Garašanin, he was from a well-known old family and his grandfather was Načertanije Garašanin, known in Serbian politics.

Though he was my professor, his origin doesn't matter to us... and he came down to the... I don't what his name was, came down [to the blackboard] and he didn't study well and he started *bam-bum, trapa-trup* {onomatopoeic}, "How do you not know the place?" Do you speak any foreign languages?" "Yes." "Which one?" "German." "Speak German." He started *trapa trup* {onomatopoeic}, "You can't speak [German]." And he failed the exam (smiles). So, that's the moment he deeply surprised me, because he could speak German, French, English, he was a renowned European professor, you couldn't pass [his class] like that.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I find it interesting that you mentioned that there were students from Africa, does this have to do with Tito's politics that he went to reconcile...?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** That's also one [reason], but also the condition, the conditions. Actually, some even got scholarships. Most of them got employed here and got married here [Yugoslavia], there were interracial marriages. So, at that time, it wasn't about [skin] color. The hippie movement had those liberal goals, to unify people. Now globalization has ruined everything I think (laughs).

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** It made us more racist (laughs).

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It ramified us a little (laughs). Don't misunderstand me because you're from that part [another generation], while us the older people could be wrong, but globalization has an advantage but also that [disadvantage], but every movement has that.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you use, I mean the fact that you were in Belgrade, because everyone mentions that it was a very metropolitan city, of course it was the capital of all Yugoslavia, but there was also a lot of accumulated culture, there were huge exhibits, important events. Did you also develop through that cultural life?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, of course. For example, where the Department of Philosophy was, the Department of Archeology, in front of it there was the Academy of Sciences, there in Knez Mihailov. That was the favorite street for youngsters but also for those visiting the University, the old buildings more or less, were preserved. The postmodernist architecture was the highlight, and the exclusive restaurants were there, the University, Kalemegdan was near, you could visit Kalemegdan. Excavations happened sometimes during the summer, we went there constantly.

Now when I see the People's Museum of Belgrade, where that popular [monument] of Knez Mihailov is standing with the horse. Now that part is the pre-excavation part, the period of antiquity, they started, they excavated and then the research began, they blocked access in that area. We were there, so when we went out on breaks we preferred to hang out there, there were coffee shops, some drank coffee, some juices. Back then people very rarely drank beer or something. Only when someone celebrated a birthday we would take some wine or something to the students' rooms. So, we were mostly focused there, in the students' rooms in the dorm.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did the school take you to archaeological sites, I mean to excavations? Was there research like that taking place?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, it was mandatory, I was indecisive, and to this day, I regret that I didn't go, I didn't choose to go to Djerdap, the prehistoric Lepenski Vir.<sup>12</sup> It is the Mesolithic period, meaning 9000 Before Common Era. It is a rare settlement in Europe, now [the infrastructure] is great. They did such a great presentation, there's no presentation like that anywhere in the world. A very professional presentation of that [heritage] place and I regret that I didn't go. I actually told my father about this. He asked me, "Why didn't you go?" "I don't know!" You told me, "Come to Prizren with friends," and I didn't go. But, luckily as a first-year student with Edi [Shukriu], we participated in the excavations of the medieval period of Prizren Castle.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was it like? Can you tell us how it was initiated, by who?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** This is how it was initiated, when the Archaeological Museum was founded, the Department of Archeology also opened.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Where?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** So, in Sahat Kulla,<sup>13</sup> which is now a museum. Now, the Institute of [Monument] Protection back then, I told you it even had more staff. So, if you compare it to the Institute of Kosovo, they had more staff, but I think Prizren had the first spots. It had two archeologists. I started with archaeologists, but it had an art historian, orientalist, architect, architecture and construction technician, and conservationist painters. There was nowhere else to be found in Kosovo, there was just one, Afrimi, who still lives in Peja. He worked for a short period of time for the Institute of Monument Protection and then continued to work privately because he has a degree in art history, and he was a painter.

Then he went, Thaiz Drançolli also, he still lives in Prishtina and is a generation older than me, history of art, but he isn't a conservative painter, only Prizren had [conservative painters]. What's interesting is that Muhamed wanted his staff to advance. So, all those conservative painters, there was Ferihaja, Feriha Rada, she's now in England, the late Vefa Hapçiu, he is a sculptor, Rexhep Vërmica lives in Sweden, he has his own atelier, Fevzi Tüfekçi is a professor at the University of Istanbul, he graduated from the Academy of Arts there, Miladen Nedelković. They were five people, but five [professional people].

Each did their specialized work either in the Museum of Belgrade, or in Poglava, actually Feriha went to France for a year and a half. The biologist, we had a biologist, he specialized in Prague, Czechoslovakia for a year and a half. So, staff was very important for him, not like what I see today. I'm sorry to say this, but I want to compare it to how it used to be with how it is now. [Today] They hire

<sup>12</sup> Lepenski Vir, located in Serbia, is an important archaeological site of the Mesolithic culture of the Balkan Iron Gates. The latest radiocarbon data and AMS data suggest that the chronology of Lepenski Vir is condensed between 9500 / 7200–6000 BC.

<sup>13</sup> Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

people who aren't adequate for that job. Jurists or economists who know nothing about heritage are being hired. Now this is our fate, our future.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was that experience like, being surrounded by all these professionals? You were in the first year of university, you were in the Castle with all of these professionals.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes, we learned a lot. So, I visually saw how an excavation took place. Then the professor and students with more experience, only Edi and I didn't have excavating experience, we were in our first year. If you had experience, you would get paid, we worked as volunteers. You had to have at least one archeology [exam passed], one archeology exam. In archaeology we had prehistory [course] which are divided into periods, Oriental Archeology, Classical Archeology and Prehistoric Archeology and Medieval Archeology. Like this, this was the Middle Ages. Even so, we then went deeper and discovered Late Antiquity and Byzantium, and we did more systematic research.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, you started from the Middle Ages?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, the Middle Ages, Ottoman Period, Ottoman Period was the last layer, because it underwent many changes. The Prizren Castle has six phases of construction and over construction in the Ottoman period, during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Then, the layer under is the Middle Ages during the occupation of the Nemanjid.<sup>14</sup> It was a short time, they didn't rule for long, a short period of time. So, as kingdoms, then come other types of rule, which is something else. In prehistory there was the Byzantine period. This period was when the Bulgarians were [here], but Bulgarians damaged heritage the most, they destroyed historical monuments, when they ruled they even destroyed archives. They ruled in Prizren twice, once in the 10th century, once in the 11th century, and our elderly said, "*Aman*,<sup>15</sup> we only hope the Bulgarians won't come here." This is really the case... Then it's the Byzantine period, Late Antiquity and the Bronze Age, more or less with many discoveries, amorphous fragments that don't tell us anything, but we know they are assets of that period.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you learn a lot during that period?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** We learned during that summer, we learned a lot. Then, we began the excavations in Romaj, Illyrian tumuli, the great necropolis of the early Middle Ages is in Vermica. Within the framework of that project that I mentioned which was organized by Muhamed Shukriu. The project was around 660 million dinar,<sup>16</sup> but there was also foreseen payment of land damages, because we did

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<sup>14</sup> The Nemanjid Dynasty were a royal family and rulers of medieval Serbia. It was a great Serbian dynasty. The first ruler of the dynasty was the great prince Stefan Nemanja who ruled from 1166-1196, later he became a monk.

<sup>15</sup> *Amanet* is literally the last will, but here *aman* is used as an exclamation expressing wishful thinking. Similar to, I pray to God this or that does not happen or happen.

<sup>16</sup> Yugoslav currency.

our research underwater. We first did the survey with Edi, in the valley completely, on both the right and the left side.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You did this as students?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes, during our studies, before getting employed.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about this, how did you decide to do this survey?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It was part of the project. The areas were endangered and we had to identify those areas because... so the project could happen to save them, because we didn't know up to where the water would come, up to where would be covered in water, but more or less the area of Vermica. There is also a Paleo-Christian Church there and we discovered about 460 small cemeteries. And it's interesting to say that, apart from that, we have also done anthropological research.

So, thanks to Muhamed Shukriu, thanks to the director who invited a well-known professor, János Nemeskéri, he is Hungarian, who came with his assistant, Laslo, his name was Laslo, I don't remember his last name. It was a privilege for me to participate in the study for six months, to work for six months in anthropological research which was very useful for me and my other colleague, Vefa. He then [got a degree] on the repair of archeological assets, the repair means the conservation of the archeological objects in the Museum of Belgrade.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What methodology did you use to document it?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** What do you mean?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you take pictures, or...?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Taking pictures, measurements, all of these, the same methodology we used there. Actually I was interested, so I said to my professor, "Can you measure my head *in vivo* to see what features I have, what type I belong to?" He said, "Why not?" My oldest son was with me, he was passing by and came to visit. He measured us, he said, "You are the Mediterranean type," because Illyrian skulls {touches the back of his head} are specific, the forehead is like this {touches his forehead}. Also, after them, I will tell you about the anthropologists of Albania who participated in a research here. It was the same with them for almost six months here in *Hammam*,<sup>17</sup> where the *Hammam* is, they stayed there and the results were supposed to be sent to us by them.

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<sup>17</sup> A hammam or Turkish bath is a type of steam bath or a place of public bathing associated with the Islamic world.

In the meantime the situation changed, the riots of '78, '79, '80 began, the anthropologists of Albania came here at the worst time. We waited for the results, the results didn't come, they were stopped in Belgrade somewhere, they said they were the cemetery of the Slavs, the cemetery of the Slovenes. Even though Slovenes lived here, they came in the 7th century, but they weren't theirs, because I talked to the professor.

*[The interview cuts here]*

According to his research, they aren't theirs [Slovenes]. This is... some are mixed, but they are native Illyrians, meaning Arbër, because then the name is changed from Illyrian to Arbër. So this is how it remained, to this we couldn't find [the results]. At that time Muhamet took advantage of the situation, he took them to the grave of Ymer Prizreni in Ulqin, they exhumed the grave of Ymer Prizreni, they brought him here to Prizren. He researched it fully and according to Fevzi Tüfekçi, he was a very constructive painter, he made a portrait in proportion to his bones, because with modern equipment, they now do the reconstruction of prehistoric man, that's how [far] they've gone. As much as he could, according to his photograph and his skull, they made his original photo and then...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I just wanted to finish the period of university. When did you come back? And was it some kind of a big difference? What was life like? How did it develop after graduation?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** After graduation, I got married. To tell the truth, I married young, 24 years old. I got employed there [in the Museum] immediately, and I'll say it again, working in the Museum regardless, because when I began working... the museum was opened during '75, visitors from all over the world would come. It's a great experience, many provocative questions, but I always have a limit, a boundary to how much my knowledge allows me to speak, I don't want anything to come out of my mouth, I'm that kind of a person, I can't talk about something that I'm not sure about.

Actually I remember once, it wasn't a provocation, we had a visit from the mayor of Zagreb in Croatia, a delegation, they came here [to the Museum] and they would always come here, if they visited Kosovo, they would come here. Actually, back then [Robert] McNamara was here, the director general of the World Bank, ambassadors and many people, the Chinese or the Japanese, almost the whole world [came] to the Museum. There's a book, I kept it, I don't know if it's there now, I kept it, I don't know if they've kept it now or not, the book of impressions. It's history, it is a document regardless, each expressed their opinion. They didn't continue doing it, but they should. Now there are other means, orally also. He went, we went outside and I told him, I explained to him the entire history of the Museum, all the objects we had there. When we went out to the yard we had the *çeshme*<sup>18</sup> there, *Çeshmja e Esma Hanmit*, so he is a person who built that *çeshme* dedicated to a woman he loved a lot and he would see her when he went to get water and fell in love with her, but she died young.

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<sup>18</sup> *Çeshme* means spring, fountain in Persian.

Regarding that *çeshme* he said, “I’ll do it, I’ll drink water.” And he told me that, first I’ll say it in Serbian so it makes sense, he said in Croatian, “*Da li je ovaj muzej dostigao nulti stepanj?*” [Cro.: Has this museum reached level zero?”] *Hop* {onomatopoeic} I was dumbstruck. So, the last level, level zero, means there’s no more development. But if we look at the building now, the perimeter, how much space the building has, it actually cannot develop further. It could be developed in case my late cousin’s [paternal uncle’s son] project is executed, he wanted to join the Church of St. Premte with the Museum, because there are indications that there was a Roman bath there. There are indications, but it remains to the other researchers who will come (smiles) to build a complex with a lapidarium, to put the gravestones, stone casts, all that is proper for a Museum courtyard. That’s how we planned it, but then he died and the project didn’t happen.

And I said, “I wouldn’t say so.” My answer was on the spot because I was thinking about what he was talking about, but then I toned it down, because I wanted to bring a conclusion to what I was saying. I said, “Well now as long as excavations continue, the exhibits change, it develops and changes the permanent [exhibition], it depends on archeological development how [it evolves]. Secondly, as far as space is concerned, maybe it will happen at some point, we will expand it and that’s it.” It’s not *nulti stepen* [srb.: level zero] you can say it is, it depends what happens after, the situation changes, just like it has. Does anyone visit the Museum now? Rarely, it’s neglected, but anyways now it has those trails that lead to it, visitors go.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was it like to have a museum with exhibition space in the ‘70s , because we didn’t have that in Pristina, we didn’t have the concept of exhibitions.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** They already had the concept of exhibitions before I got there. So, Muhamed wanted to because Muhamed... the first museum was the League of Prizren Museum where my daughter works. She is an ethnologist, she is in charge of the ethnographic sector there. He developed it. I told you Muhamed was a visionary. The Museum of Manuscripts which existed until ‘76, or ‘75, or ‘77, had showcases of Arabic manuscripts of the locals.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Locals?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, locals here in the region of Prizren. Actually, he asked for my grandfather’s books, but my father was sick then and he couldn’t give them to him and I don’t know what happened, he didn’t get the books. Now we have those books, they’re ours. Then, the League of Prizren, the Museum of Manuscripts, where the small INA [gas station] is, then the Archaeological Museum was. The first Audiovox<sup>19</sup> in Kosovo was applied in the Church of St. Premte in two languages, in French, in Serbian and another language was in the Audiovox. You played it and walked around, the voice tells you what is what. That’s how it used to be back then, actually our institute had, the Institute of [Monument] Protection, five cultural houses, sorry, five camp-houses for field research, a tractor, a

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<sup>19</sup> Equivalent to audio guides in today’s museum context.

truck and two cars. A luxurious car to go to work, a car for the city, field work and so on. These were the museums we had.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You didn't just have research teams, but you also had the exhibition space for it, you also had some touristic ideas as well.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, the idea was always to make an exhibit before the Archaeological Museum opened, we used the space of Mehmet Pasha's Hammam for exhibits.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You went there to unfold your findings?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes, we also researched there, we wanted to make sure there wasn't an older bath there, we didn't encounter older foundations, restoration was done, UNESCO financed a part of it. Now what will they do with it? They're thinking of doing, they're thinking, I don't know what, there's a mess in this aspect and when I talked about the anthropologists from Albania, I wanted to say they were also there.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** I wanted to ask you about that, when there was cooperation between Kosovo-Albania during the '70s, there was some exchange of experts from both countries. Was there also...?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes there was, but for our archaeologists, it was rare. I remember Exhlale Dobruna, she was also a professor at the University, she worked in the Albanological Institute as an archaeologist and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they also come from Albania here?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** They came from Albania a few times during the '70s, Muzafer Kurkuti, Meriton Ceka are well known Albanian archaeologists, and I don't know who else. I wasn't there with them, Kemal Luci was, my colleague, you probably know him. He is one of my closest colleagues, because we worked together in many research sites in Brezovica, it was my project, then in Malisheva, I discovered Parkoman culture there in Kosovo.

### Part Three

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Tell us about this tourist offer that is related to heritage?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** How is it related? We had a prospectus for each heritage site, so the interpretation that the Institute of Monument Protection did, actually then it was the same thing for the Museum. In the meantime, the director's idea was to organize an exhibition on the history of what Prizren has to offer as a city-museum, a city-monument, as the Serbs said.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, you were involved in that?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, we all did, so each of us prepared the material in their profession. It was easy for us because we had the exhibit, we only had to gather [the material]. So, the exhibits are the most indicative, they are better and then ethnologists had the task of gathering traditional clothes, the clothes because Prizren also has city clothes, and the suburbs of Prizren, the villages, and they made it in a way, like a television display, photography in negative color, inside the lighting and a complete space with those garment presentation, so it revealed a fantastic color palette. We had postcards with traditional clothes of women and men of Has, from documents, Arabic, Turkish manuscripts, then some old photos more or less, like this. And we gathered [material], we did it. Then an order from the Committee came that we can't do that exhibit.

It was supposed to go to Japan first, then to Europe. As far as I know this was the itinerary, Prizren-Belgrade-Istanbul-Moscow-Tokyo-Kyoto-Nagasaki *[cut in the interview]* and in Hong Kong and then back in Prizren. This was the itinerary, it didn't happen and so on.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What year was this?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** In '75, '76, it happened when I came back from the military service, because when I was employed it came to an end, as they say, the last Mohican, I went to the military service 36, 37 years old. It was the last [chance] for me to go.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That you had to show your ability for the army. What was it like to go to the military then?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It was good, I could say it was also good there. I was lucky to tell you the truth, I was lucky because I was in pioneer engineering units, with assembling, dismantling mines. Actually when they called me for a check up and there we were assigned in which unit we would go, "You," he said, "*Pionirska inžinjeria*" [srb.: pioneer engineering], so engineering, the workshop to renovate bridges and things related to mines. "What do I have to do with mine?" "You're an archaeologist, you work with trowels." I said, "Look at this logic!" (smiles) I refused the Reserve Officer School a few times, I knew there were responsibilities after it, they would call you to training and so on, there are many complications so then I went to Ohrid, I chose it (smiles).

I did [military service] in Ohrid, I had my son and wife then, they came to visit me a couple of times and I was lucky to be in engineering. Immediately after we gave our oath, they gave me the engineering cabinet and there was a programmed lecture with a camera and a keyboard, like that. I was wearing slippers all the time. When they cleaned, I dealt with my [people], the cleaning happened once a month, the floor and everything. I just {puts his finger towards himself} I called Albanians, “Come on” and they complained. (smiles) There was Ivica Gašparović, he was Croatian but I think he had some Arbëresh<sup>20</sup> blood. Probably, because he had some sort of likeness, he was younger than me. He was a lieutenant.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You were also lucky in the military.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes, I also have memories in Belgrade, as Belgrade is of course. Even though I didn’t get to know Belgrade from [student days]... because we had cousins in Belgrade, I knew Belgrade, but life was different.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** There were no language barriers?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, no language barriers.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Then when you came back you also worked a lot in that, let’s go back to those projects that are related to heritage and touristic offers. What were you trying to communicate regarding the values of Prizren in that offer? Did you try to show that it has more antiquity or talk more about urbanization, it has some kind of..

**Luan Koçbashliu:** You mean what you could have done?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** No, not you, but as an institution what were you trying to prioritize and the most important?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, yes now, of course, we acted according to the conditions. But, the presentation and promotion weren’t all that [good]. It was at the right level because we were required to be guides. Art historians would go to show churches, orientalist went to mosques, even though an art historian also plays a part there because the paintings are related to art history. The orientalist deal with manuscripts, the architect with architecture, but historians could also speak for architecture because they more or less know architecture, what they’re called and so on.

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<sup>20</sup> The speaker means Arbanasi people, who live in the Zadar region, Croatia. They are of Albanian origin, who traditionally speak the Arbanasi dialect of Gheg Albanian. In Albanian literature, they are known as Albanians of Zadar or *Arbëreshët e Zarës* in original.

Of course we dealt with archeology, ethnology [with ethnology], each from their point of view. But, there would come a moment, for example, when we didn't know what kind of projects to do. I want to mention, when we got the [project for] identification of folk monuments, so the folk houses, we started first from *varosh*, from *podkalaja* [under castle area]. The Institute of Prizren was the first to use the UNESCO forms, so there were many. It is something our people still don't do, they didn't find a reason or they neglected it, something happened because they still don't have the categorization of monuments, but the categorization of monuments within a unit [type].

For example, the architecture, monuments, churches, mosques, each has its own category and according to that, the first, second, third category is made, or however many categories it has. We did that. We did that house by house, in places where I didn't have to deal with archaeology, with excavation, because there were two people in the Museum. Sometimes, we prepared the guards more or less to show the basic things to visitors, but not delve into details. We were required to go, for example, in all the houses under the Castle, around the Castle, Panteria, in all these olds neighborhoods, we evidenced the history with the photographs, with the photos from antiquity, two pages with their own sections.

So, something purely, so very professional. This is how we worked back then, I can't say we don't now. Now people want to work, there are people, but what can you do? Thankfully the Institute of Archeology was formed, but the idea started in the Castle of Korisha when [Behgjet] Brajshori was the first Minister of Culture, when the Ministry of Culture was formed, he was the first Minister of Culture. The idea to form the Institute of Archeology and after a year it happened and Jahja Draqolli became the first director of the Institute of Archeology, he is a historian regardless what or how he is.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You couldn't pass down these practices to the next generation, or what happened?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** In the meantime everything stagnated, stopped, the students stopped studying archeology and history of art.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened to your profession in '89? When Yugoslavia disintegrated, what happened to your profession?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** When Yugoslavia disintegrated, we were under Serbia. And we know who made the projects in Serbia, the Institute of Monument Protection of Prizren, but it was always focused, now I have no reason to lie, there, some excavations there, so made rescue [excavations], but we were always focused on the medieval period, the period of ruling mostly. I have to be correct, there were other excavations with a different nature. For example, after the fall of Ranković, we worked in Romaja, Ghonaj, Vërmica, I don't know which other areas...

Then, after the war, we began [doing] something else, but, during the rule, as far as I know. Then here before getting to Hisar there's a village there also. Though, they were interested in what happened during their period. Some archaeologists who worked there have tried to excavate only what could be excavated, let's say the Prehistory period, the Bronze Age, or the Iron Age or churches in general. For example, I excavated in the courtyard of the Central Church here, the one of Holy Savior [St. Spaso] {points behind him} I excavated, in front of the "K" is the Church of St. Peter, there I excavated. But the task, my task I also did the excavations of the Middle Ages after they said so, I gave my reports and everything.

But, we always tried to be correct, to be correct regardless, because I remember in '92 the excavations in the Monastery of the Archangels began. There was a professor here, Mihajlo Milinković, among the best-known experts in southeastern Europe for the period of late Antiquity, early Middle Ages. I had the honor of working with him, and, as I said, due to correctness, while we were excavating accidentally, now while you're excavating it's not an accident, we got to a layer. I thought it was prehistory and so did he. I looked at him, he looked at me, he said, "*Jel se za isto smejemo*", meaning "Are we smiling for the same thing." I said, "I think according to your smile, I think yes." But what will they do now.

Inside the Church we found houses of the Iron Age, floors. I remember it as if it was today, it was two meters and three centimeters deep, so in the space of the Church. Now, they would either praise us or throw us out. But, he was correct, even when he published it, he published it in *Glasnik srpskog arheološkog društva*, meaning *Bulletin of the Serbian Archeological Society*, he wrote it all, point by point. Some could have said, not just there but in many places they come out, whether you want to or not, they come out because culture goes over culture. You can't say, "These are the churches." You encountered churches, but you built over an early Christian church, who was there before you? Even in the... Leshan registers it has it on written when they came here, who they encountered. They encountered Albanians, Vlachs and Dubrovnik people.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That they came to process metal?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, Dubrovnik people, they did all the work regarding mines, crafts, trade.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Very interesting. What else, what happened in the '90s?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I said that we worked in the '90s and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened to the museums? Were they still active?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Museums began working rarely. People started writing things that should not be written in the book of impressions. Then I was forced to remove some [of the things they wrote] so people who understood wouldn't read them. Let's say [they wrote] "Kosovo Republic." Why did you

write this? The visitors would come and so on. When we had visitors from schools, because schools were involved, schools came to learn about archaeological heritage because for other heritages they could [learn] from professors, about the archaeological heritage of Prizren. The delegations would come more rarely during the '90s, or until the moment those riots began. As I said lethargy started in archeology during the '80s, after the demonstrations, interventions, they took power and all that.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is there any experience during your work that is interesting to talk about so we don't immediately get to the period of war, because chronologically we're there? Is there anything you want to return to before we move forward? I mean something that is important during your professional development.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** During my professional development, because I covered life in general. But, apart from working in archeology, I also performed other tasks related to monument protection. I photo documented, for example, the interior of the buildings, the exterior. In case there were any archeological findings, I handled it, each in their own field. The historian studied the historical dimension, the ethnologist studied the garment if there were any garment, the orientalist studied the literature. So I filled in for that job because we couldn't, apart from that, we also guided the visitors in the Museum, we also did that. Time after time we went to excavations whether they were of rescue character, protection or systematic excavations, but they were more rare. It started after the war, a different phase, we were fully engaged every year.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the war like for you?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** To tell you the truth, like everyone who experienced war, we also experienced stress and everything. Nothing to be surprised by, it was ideological. I could not imagine something like that could happen. I couldn't even imagine it to tell you the truth, it was so, we had such a happy life, do you understand. So, without a... but you could tell the difference. More or less it was, it all depended on how people were brought up in their families. There were people who were very politically charged and you could tell they were charged, and felt their time had come and so on. So, I was surprised by that to tell you the truth.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was it like when bombing started? Did you leave your house? What kind of experience did you have?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** You mean my family?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Firstly, my apartment is in Ortakoll [neighborhood], the building as such was of mixed ethnicities (smiles). Differentiation between nationalities had already begun even in the

building. What do we do, my young son was scared, “Father, what will we do?” I said, “Should we go to the grandparents’ house?” My son and daughters were here with us. For my wife and me, it wasn’t a problem, we could go there. I called my brother-in-law, you know Nora [addresses the interviewer], she is the daughter of my wife’s sister. I said, “Sorry, Brother, will you accept us at your place?” Because we were all together, cousins, family, brothers-in-law. My father was also eager to come because he was retired back then.

When we went there, the yard was huge. We sometimes would go out to buy bread. My daughters stayed here {points with his finger} it was very bad, the police were here {points behind}, the military, everything. My brother’s apartment is where “K” is. Now my daughters and son, “We’re going to our uncle.” It was more compact there, also there were people from Prizren there, “Your daughters and son can sleep here.” My wife would say, “No, brother-in law, we’re safe here, we’ve known these people since we were little.” So they stayed there. First from my brother-in-law’s [apartment], we came here, then we stayed locked inside until liberation days, when our army came here. That’s how we went through that period.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, the Serbs who were with you always had a different approach to war, right?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** They weren’t the same as those who came later?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, now look, there are some of them who were very correct with us, and you feel sorry for them. Now, honestly, they were people. Actually, those that knew one another more or less as city people, but there were also people who didn’t believe it, for example, there were some you could [distinguish] by their *šajkača*,<sup>21</sup> the military clothing, and everything. I would pass by, I had this laughter and wonder, why do you need these clothes? Can you see what happened? They came and did what they did and went.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did life began then?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Then life after war slowly began to normalize, we went back to our jobs, and began to work. Of course, we filled those [job] positions with new staff, but professionals. I’m being honest, we hired professionals.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were there [jobs] at that time? It was also a crisis.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** In the beginning it was a crisis for payments, for everything, we didn’t get paid. In the beginning, we worked, so UNMIK would give us a hundred, two hundred marks, like a salary, until

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<sup>21</sup>Serbian: *Šajkača* is a traditional Serbian hat.

the state got more consolidated, until the ministries formed more or less. Then, the archaeological work began, it went well. We gave our best, so the students of history who then transferred to archaeology and then went to do their masters and PhDs in France. Now they're lecturers. I believe that Kosovar archeology has a future, with these [people] there is a future, they got the archeology department.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is it a good department?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, they're enthusiastic, hardworking, they want to work. Of course, if they need the older generation, we're here. We always offered, we always took... they learned with us, they took their first steps with us. I wanted to go back when we talked about Albania and you asked, "Was someone from Kosovo [there]?" As far as I know Exhlale Dobruna and Edi [Shukriu] were there, I think in Apolonia, and the others were there after the war, Pleurat, Arben Hajdari, Arben Arifi and I don't know who else, Milot.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What project did you do?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** In research projects, they went there as students.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which area?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** In Butrint and Apolonia mostly, and now, after the war, they also go to other places, the students [of archaeology] now.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Very well.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** And what we achieved together, we have three archaeological maps of Kosovo. The first one in Dukagjini, Peja, in the second one we continued with Prizren, the second one was Fushe Kosova, the Municipality of Drenica and then on the other side we had Elez Han, Anamorava and Shtërpca, and Ferizaj on the other side. We have three publications. So, I also participated in the drafting [of the maps] from the beginning of the research projects and I was also in Ulpiana for four years.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are these, because I don't understand because I didn't study archaeology, I just want to know. Are these ongoing projects, a site never shuts down?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** It shuts down when it's over, it depends on the progress and tools, because archeology is very expensive, but restoration and conservation is even more expensive. It is, but that is

more painful, kudos to whoever is brave enough to do it, we have to respect them. Now technology has advanced, materials to undergo conservation are too many, you don't need to take it and go there, when there are rocks from the Castle there. How did they build the Castle? They built it from the Bistrica River. Bistrica is a toponym. Now it's Lumbardhi. Does it have any logic to call it Lumbardhi? The translation of it is "White water." Bistrica means clear water, *bistro* in Slavic means "clear." Look in Albania they didn't change the toponyms. Anyway that's normal, the toponyms, odonyms change. Do you know what odonyms are?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Yes, names based on places. Toponyms, yes.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Toponyms, odonyms?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Odonyms, no.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** An odonym is the street, the alley. That's an odonym, it derives from Greek, *odo* means "alley." [*The interview cuts here*] It was about, I said, I experienced the old Prizren. I experienced the cobble stones, the streets, the alleys.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You had many streets and neighborhoods paved in cobblestone. Do you know a lot about those neighborhoods? Did you do research?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I know more or less. For example, I know during, because I followed the design work there, for example, if something is near an heritage site. I have identified some ancient buildings such as where the Assembly of Prizren is, nearby and I researched it and I found many fragments of the mosaic of the Monastery of the Archangels. It was a masterpiece built in the 14th century, but... You have heard of Ravena, the Monastery, a more popular Christian church with a mosaic, with a floor mosaic. When Dušan<sup>22</sup> built it, he built it because the Emperor was his idol, I mean he idolized the West, the Western art, and so he did the same. So, he imitated it and made his own sarcophagus. He did everything imitating the kingdoms of the west.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you find fragments?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** There and in the cities, in the walls. While walking, here it is. I noticed at the church {points with his finger} also at the church. You say that Sinan Pasha's Mosque is built with material, it's true. I have almost a hundred drawings that they made in the Monastery of {coughs}, in the Museum of Kurshumli Hani in Skopje, they drew inside, I have the notebook upstairs, when we went in the '90s, the material and everything. The material is there, because the first excavations were conducted in 1926-27 by Professor Grujić, the one who did it. It was then *Južna Serbia*, Southern Serbia and the

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<sup>22</sup> Stefan Urosh IV, or Dusan Nemanjic, was the penultimate Serbian king of the Nemanjic dynasty. He was the king from 1331 to 1346.

capital of Southern Serbia was Skopje, and they were put there in the Museum. All materials have been placed there in the capital, over 1,800, almost two thousand items are in Kurshumli Han, either plaster stones or even materials. So we went with the director of archeology, in '73, '73, no, in '93, '94. She was the director then, as a Serb.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** You saw what was gathered?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, all that was gathered and I stayed, I drew it, I drew it all. Now I want to publish it, but I want to talk with Enver from the Institute so when they publish the Institute Bulletin, they can publish that too. There are some that are published, and some which aren't.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** When these changes happened, because when I asked you about urbanization I meant more about the socialist [urbanization] and I mean when those destructions happened.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Destructions, yes, yes.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, you were young.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I was young. I remember a meeting in Theranda in '76, before, '76 before I went to the military. In Theranda, the late Bashkim Fehmiu, the architect, held a lecture about Prizren and urbanization of Prizren. He was a well-known urbanist at that time. Even though, my [paternal] uncle's son was a well-known urbanist, how do I say it, his project got the first place in Paris, and his design of the childrens' kindergarten entered the encyclopedia, how do I say it, as most appropriate for children of that age, it works and his project is still relevant. Now let's not deflect, they talked about what to do about Prizren. Socialism began later, it used to be *Narodna Republika* [People's Republic] back then.

Two architects, Kojić and Zoran Petrović from Belgrade did a holistic study of Prizren, and they were very, how do I say it, satisfied with their work in Prizren because it was authentic, nothing was altered in the city and that's why they called it, "Prizren, the museum city" not museum, monument, everything was intact, and they started with their projects. So they were archaeologists who were [politically] not charged, correct archeologists, they didn't want to alter anything, they studied roads, alleys and everything.

But, Prizren first started getting destroyed during the First World War when it was occupied by the Kingdom, *Kraljevina*, again, Serbia. There was a Captain Korunović, a military captain, but he was a construction worker. He built [the city] from Bazhdarane up to this bridge {points} on that road. *Dom JNA* [srb.: House of the Yugoslav People's Army] was also built then, and this boulevard here, the boulevard here and some allies. So when they came, when migration from villages to Prizren began, Serbs mostly migrated.

[The interview cuts here]

Yes, migration from villages and changes in the architecture began in the '20s, when craftsmen were coming back, craftsmen used to go to foreign countries in the West to work, and they earned how they could. So, they worked, they earned money and then they didn't want to live in an old house. Back then there was a law of protection of heritage, but it wasn't in power after the Second World War. Then in '45 the first monuments began [to go under protection] among them is the Castle, it was also under protection the Church of St. Premte, Sinan Pasha Mosque, in the years immediately after the war. So, they were correct, they didn't distinguish whether it was muslim, or catholic, or othodox [heritage].

That was the ideology and people respected it. That's why I said that, while reading the books, I have them here, it was very constructively done and it didn't begin at once. Those who came, especially the Cincars, traders, the rich people, have you noticed they put in the *Shadërvan* some houses that have [written] the year they were built in. It is postmodernism, the domination of eclecticism in architecture. Eclecticism you know is the imitation or to say pseudo, it is somewhat similar.

This is it, and even then Bashkim started demanding that this should be protected, this should not. But, something surprises me, now, for example, it shouldn't be that hard. Imagine now over the bridge, it was called KFOR's Bridge, while this bridge is Arasta's Bridge {shows with his hand} (smiles), at Arasta's Bridge there was the *Kapali Çarshia*, we have pictures, the Covered Bazaar, because the translation of Arasta is the market that sells only one type of material.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Specialized in something.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Specialized in [something particular] for example, that's why the cheese market is where it is now, and because of our findings, we discovered it there by accident. They wanted to make a drinking fountain there, and they began [to build it]. Now we only have the shape of that drinking fountain, they say, "Remains of the Baptistry were found," it's too early to talk about baptistry. They didn't even notice, I found the stamp in a brick and... I have the stamp, not the stamp, the brick with the stamp. I took a picture of it and I voluntarily went to a meeting and told them, "There you have it, this will help you periodize it." "No, this was the mosque, this was that. The priest is saying that it's baptistry, I've read about it." "Where did you read about it? It's impossible to read it." Don Shani, it was him. But he ruined the church. Then they came from the Institute and they worked last year, in cooperation with the Institute of Zadar. I think they progressed and took samples to do anthropological research. It is good because anthropology together with archeology shows you the authenticity, you don't have to move it. You take the DNA sample and it's done.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did Bashkim [Fehmiu] comment the changes in Prizren?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** I don't want to be [bitter], but, for example, building the Eiffel Tower over the bridge. But what they're doing now with the buildings is horrible. I don't know what remains from Prizren, if there are even five or six houses left that are worth presenting as heritage. But, the rule of law, the law doesn't rule and they haven't drafted that law yet. So many experts come from abroad to conduct training, it enters in one ear and out from the other {touches his ears}. The head always says, "We will do what we want." That's not the way forward.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Do you remember when they demolished that mosque?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Which mosque?

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That they only let the minaret up. I don't know the name, but where Theranda was built, in that area, in the center.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** The mosque, yes, I was little. Arsta, Arasta Mosque, here they found a mosaic, the mosaic was found there.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** So, with every reconstruction there were also findings.

**Luan Koçbashliu:** Yes, of course. There's always findings in Prizren. Prizren was dense {crosses his fingers}, the urbanization of Prizren... I refer and take from what is written in literature, they wrote it, I'm not an expert in architecture or something. We find those and make the connections. The first mosque was built there at the bus station in Namazgjah [Namazgâhi Mosque].

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** The constructions that are taking place today, so they serve as a starting point for research? If there are excavations to lay the foundation, overall I am asking if it is happening...

**Luan Koçbashliu:** They demolish the foundation and don't tell us, in case some neighbor tells us, "Please go!" When we go, they have already covered it and it's done. A lot of things have been lost like this in Prizren. I will one day publish everything I've documented. I have registered everything, there are also [registers] in the Archaeological Institute, because we were obliged to write a report when we were out doing fieldwork, what we do, how we do it, the description and everything. Based on those notes you can develop further the research. There, there are elements under Theranda, there are elements here {points behind} where the Sinan Pasha Mosque is, not Sinan Pasha, but Bajrakli Mosque, there are also elements there.

Most people don't know that the Castle has a surrounding wall. You can't see it but I can notice it from here, because I noticed here then I told one of my colleagues, "Let's take pictures of it, draw it and take the report to the Institute." I didn't know it until recently, two rows of protective walls. Wherever they

could [build it], so for protection against attacks, where it was tilted, where there are tilts, where people can't step or where it can't be attacked from there, the walls.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was it like when you retired? Were you sad?

**Luan Koçbashliu:** No, I wasn't sad because I was already engaged in research until last year and this year, but due to the pandemic, and due my lack of participation, my participation, I said until I'm able to, until I can stand on my feet, I can contribute in case I am needed, in case they need me. But, they respect me, they call me when they want to, they're giving me the opportunity [to show] what I know. They have learned, they know how to excavate, they know everything, but more or less, how do I say it, they call me to get an opinion, it's not bad.

From my professor where I took my first steps, Jovan Kovačević, he studied at Sorbonne at that time, because they all studied abroad and he said, he couldn't call me Luan, when he spoke he did this [touches his throat], "H, H, Huan," I said, "Professor, you turned me Spanish, Mexican." (laughs), laughing... And he said, "You will not be an archaeologist if you appropriate an element, an item from the field. Don't say that you are an archaeologist. Like doctors when they make the Hippocratic Oath, it's the same with archaeologists' oath that you will not take anything."

Still, I have my collection. For example, a guy from Prizren bought some rings somewhere belonging to the Roman period in Vojvodina, there's a settlement of the Roman period. I don't know how, his wife is from there and, "Luan, do you want it?" "Yes, I'll buy it." Because I thought he got it somewhere locally. I took it and kept it there for curiosity, but it isn't, it isn't from here [Kosovo] (laughs). Because archeology has many things like this, but it is very, very, how to say it, a joyful profession, it's a pleasure to work. I really don't regret it.

I remember my friend, he lives in Zagreb now, Mensur, Petriti probably knows him [addresses the interviewer] Mensur Gjergjizi, my wife's brother, and he worked here in KSIKOS, then he transferred to Zagreb. There he opened his own firm and worked, he said, "Look, Luan, if I were to be born again, I would choose archaeology. You enjoy it so much." (smiles) And it honestly is a pleasure. That's why I imposed it on my daughter, "What do I study?" "You're a girl, you can choose ethnology, because your husband might not allow you to go on sites, archeology requires more. Study ethnology." And she didn't regret it.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** That's good. Thank you so much!

**Luan Koçbashliu:** You're welcome, I might have bored you.