

# Oral History Kosovo

---

## INTERVIEW WITH SKENDER MUÇOLLI

Pristina | Date: October 12, 2023  
Duration: 140 minutes

Present:

1. Skender Muçolli (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Ana Morina (Camera)

*Symbols used in the transcript for non-verbal communication:*

*() - emotional communication*

*{ } - the interviewee explains with gestures*

*Other symbols in the transcript:*

*[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate understanding*

*Footnotes are editorial additions that provide information about places, names, or expressions*

## Part One

**Anita Susuri:** Mr. Skender, could you please introduce yourself, tell us your year of birth, and share something about your early childhood memories?

**Skender Muçolli:** My name is Skender Muçolli. I was born in the village of Bajqinë, in the municipality of Podujeva, in 1949. I lived in my birthplace village until 1960, after which I moved to Pristina. To this day, I live in Pristina.

**Anita Susuri:** What kind of family did you grow up in?

**Skender Muçolli:** In the village, my family was engaged in farming. My grandfather, in addition to farming, was also involved in trade. I remember that my grandfather traveled for trade to Thessaloniki, Tirana, Istanbul, and Sofia. This was during the time of the Ottoman Empire. Even today, my grandfather's property still exists in the village. One uncle inherited it and lives there with his sons. My other uncles live in Pristina.

**Anita Susuri:** What you said about your grandfather sounds interesting. What kind of trade was he involved in?

**Skender Muçolli:** He traded basic goods for the needs of the local population. Besides food items, textiles were prominent — fabrics from Istanbul, fabrics from the Middle East. Also from Thessaloniki and Tirana. Essentially, it was this trade triangle: Skopje, Tirana, Thessaloniki, Sofia, Istanbul. He conducted his commercial activities throughout the regions of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally, Yeni Pazar, today's Novi Pazar, also came into play, and so on.

**Anita Susuri:** Did he have shops?

**Skender Muçolli:** They had shops in Pristina, in Podujeva, and in the village itself during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. With the arrival of socialism in Kosovo, those activities gradually ceased. There were various confiscations and nationalizations. People had to adapt to life under Yugoslav socialism, until the time of independence, of course.

**Anita Susuri:** After the war, as you mentioned, after World War II, were the shops and goods confiscated?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, not on a large scale. But my grandfather's business partners had their property confiscated. Today's television building in Pristina stands on property that belonged to my grandfather's partners, the Ajvazi family. They were wealthier and operated on a larger scale. Their properties were confiscated in Podujeva and in Pristina.

**Anita Susuri:** How do you remember life as a child in the place where you lived?

**Skender Muçolli:** Life in the village was village life. Most people, everyone, really, were engaged in farming and livestock. Primary school education wasn't anything special. Village games, agricultural and pastoral rituals, trips to the city, that was the life. That's what we did, that's how we lived. And we were very content at the time.

**Anita Susuri:** How was your family organized, and how many people were there in your household? Brothers? Sisters?

**Skender Muçolli:** It was an extended family, my grandfather had five sons, all living together in one household. I had four sisters and three brothers, seven of us in total. Our father worked simply in agriculture. Later, in Pristina, he worked in construction and commercial enterprises as an auxiliary worker. We had land, and we still do, inheritance from the village and land in the city as well. We lived almost in poverty, like most of the population of Kosovo at the time, the majority were poor. I don't know what more to say...

**Anita Susuri:** And what was the place where you lived like?

**Skender Muçolli:** Well, the place...

**Anita Susuri:** Was it a large village?

**Skender Muçolli:** The village is large, located along the Llap River. Life developed there: the Llap River, irrigation, agricultural and livestock production. It was a developed village for that time, with many teachers, pioneers of education for the Llap region. And so on.

**Anita Susuri:** Was the school nearby?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, the school was in the village, a four-grade primary school. It served three or four hamlets, nearly four villages centered there. Later, full primary school was in Podujeva. At that time, there was no secondary school, this was until the 1960s. After the 1960s, with development, secondary schools in Podujeva and later faculties in Pristina emerged, and so on.

**Anita Susuri:** You mentioned that after the fourth grade you had to travel because there was no further schooling in the village. Was that difficult?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes. All students after primary school from these village centers traveled to Podujeva from across the Llap region, five kilometers, ten kilometers, even up to twenty kilometers from more remote areas.

**Anita Susuri:** And how far was your village?

**Skender Muçolli:** Five kilometers.

**Skender Muçolli:** I began my secondary education at the Technical High School. During those years, I came into contact with people, both at school and outside of it, who were engaged with patriotic ideas. At that time, the Technical School was located near the Gymnasium, where it still stands today. That place brought together the main patriots. The school had three departments: construction, electrical engineering, and mechanical engineering. The students and professors of that school would later become the principal carriers of the developments and events of 1968.

Certainly, the students of this school, most of them, had personal contacts with earlier patriots who had gathered around *Bac*<sup>1</sup> Adem Demaçi.<sup>2</sup> We, as a younger group, had those contacts as well, most of us with members of that circle and with the patriots associated with Adem Demaçi. In the mechanical engineering department gravitated students such as Osman Dumoshi, [Ilaz Pireva](#), and Xheladin Rekaliu. Also involved were [Hasan Abazi](#) from Ferizaj; Ismet Ramadani, a martyr who was executed in Ferizaj; the Sulejmani brothers, and several others.

Students from the Gjilan region at the Technical School included Asllan Kastrati, Sabit Sylja from Podujeva, and others whose names I cannot recall at the moment. These were the main bearers of the movement. I forgot to mention Shemsi Rudari and Ismail Isufi in construction, as well as Shemsi Hoxha, Ibrahim Gashi, and [Selatin Novosella](#), these comrades from the *Shkolla Normale*<sup>3</sup> of Pristina, Emine Rakovica and many others as well.

These students, organized, together with others, of course, after finishing secondary school, became the driving force behind the demonstrations of 1968.<sup>4</sup> In 1967–68, they organized actions in Pristina, Podujeva, Gjilan, and Ferizaj. There were mass demonstrations throughout the regions of Kosovo. I should also mention Afrim Loxha, a former student of the Technical High School, originally from Peja, from the Loxha family. He was later executed.

**Anita Susuri:** When was he executed?

**Skender Muçolli:** He was executed in April 1999. He was a mechanical engineer working at the Kosovo power plants, employed at the Kosovo Thermal Power Plant.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

<sup>2</sup> Adem Demaçi (1936-2018) was an Albanian writer and politician and longtime political prisoner who spent a total of 27 years in prison for his nationalist beliefs and political activities. In 1998 he became the head of the political wing of the Kosovo Liberation Army, from which he resigned in 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Teachers training school. The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

<sup>4</sup> During October and November 1968, many demonstrations were organized by the Albanian population across Kosovo. The main demand was to recognize Kosovo's right to self-determination. The first and most massive demonstration was organized in Prizren on October 6, 1968. This demonstration ended in front of the League of Prizren, where for the first time the demand for the Kosovo Republic was publicly articulated.

**Anita Susuri:** I'm interested in how the organization first came about. How did you come together? Through conversations, or how?

**Skender Muçolli:** As I mentioned earlier, the contacts began at school. More concretely, the core of the organization emerged from this group: The Dumoshi family, the Pireva family, the Rekaliu family, the Sheholli family, the Kastrati family, the Abazi family, and the Ramadani family in Ferizaj; the Sulejmani family in Ferizaj; the Shaqiri family in Gjilan; and later the Kastrati family in both Gjilan and Pristina.

The first ideas for such an organization were born in the village of Bajçincë, in the Gjata family. At that time, the Gjata family was very large, with more than forty members in a single extended household. That was where the idea first took shape, preceded, of course, from the symposium commemorating Skanderbeg on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of his death. There, the first nucleus of the 1968 era was formed.

**Anita Susuri:** What was the initial idea, then? The first ideal that took shape?

**Skender Muçolli:** This group of young patriots had contacts with earlier groups and earlier patriots. There was familiarity with the group of Ali Aliu and Kadri Halimi. There were also close ties with Hyrije Hana<sup>5</sup> and her husband, if I recall correctly, Pajazit Boletini. There were continuous friendly and social contacts with all the patriots around Adem Demaçi, and with Adem Demaçi personally.

Thus, the initial inspiration and the molding of patriotic consciousness came from those patriots I mentioned. Naturally, friendly and social conversations were systematized into something more concrete. These became the main points of the demonstrations of 1968. They entered clearly into political criteria, with even militant undertones: The issue of self-determination, the issue of colonialism, and subsequently the rights of every nation in the world to self-determination and freedom. The activity of the 1968 movement was formed on these points. In fact, these were the core principles. They constituted a platform, a political program, expressed through banners.

The demonstrations of 1968 were one of the most pronounced forms of action, legal forms, at that time. I cannot call them illegal, because "illegal" implies secrecy. What characterized patriotism then was legality and public transparency, not clandestine illegality, which is invisible. Our group, or the 1968 generation, preferred legality and was not afraid of the consequences. And indeed, consequences followed, both in 1968 and afterward, in 1974, with harsh trials and sentences of up to 15 or 14 years, ranging from five to fourteen years.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember, for example, how the banners were organized, when to go out, at what hour? How did you do it?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, of course. Concrete organization was preceded by concrete meetings, with specific agendas for each meeting, and by definitive organizational forms. Several meetings were held in private homes: at Osman Dumoshi's house, Selatin Novosella's house, the Pireva family's house, and the Rekaliu family's house in Podujeva. There, the political program was formulated through banners.

---

<sup>5</sup> Hyrije Hana (1929-2004) was a notable Kosovar Albanian patriot, actress, and political activist. Born in Gjakova, she was among the first professional actresses in Kosovo and spent significant periods in prison for her political beliefs under the Yugoslav regime. She was also the sister of activist Xheladin Hana and is remembered for her resistance work and cultural contributions.

They were written as banners in a specific number. The most prominent slogans were: “We want self-determination,” “Down with the colonialist policy in Kosovo,” “We want the unification of the regions inhabited with Kosovo.”

**Anita Susuri:** With Albanians.

**Skender Muçolli:** Of course, all Albanian-inhabited regions within Yugoslavia. This included Preshevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja. It included Ulqin, Plav, and Gusinje. It also included other parts, yes, Skopje as well. One can see that 1968 was reflected in Skopje too. There were protests there about a month later, organized by groups around Agim Xhaferi and Arbër Xhaferi. These patriots were inspired by Gega,<sup>6</sup> his real name escapes me, I only recall his pseudonym. He was, for today’s Macedonia, Tetovo, Skopje, Gostivar, Kërçovë, Dibër, Struga, on the same level of patriotism as Adem Demaçi.

The Ulqin region in our group was represented by Zaim Kurti, who was also a student at the Technical High School in Prishtina, I forgot to mention him earlier. Professor Sadri Fetiu also made a very significant contribution.

As for the banner program, besides self-determination and “Down with colonialist policy,” there were also slogans such as “We want our rights,” “Let no one play with our fate,” and others that I cannot fully recall right now, perhaps some will come to mind later in the conversation.

## Part Two

**Anita Susuri:** Mr. Skender, I would also like to ask you about the day the protest took place. What do you remember from the beginning to the end?

**Skender Muçolli:** On that day, according to the tasks assigned to us as members of the team that organized the 1968 events, I was personally responsible for preparing the banners, writing them and shaping them, together with Ilaz Pireva and Selatin Novosella.

At the designated moment, time, and place, the three of us transported the banners using a horse-drawn cart. Selatin Novosella led in front of the cart, while Ilaz Pireva and I followed behind it. I remember the route, which had been predetermined. For security reasons, we changed the route...

**Anita Susuri:** The direction, yes.

**Skender Muçolli:** The direction and the path. Because it was thought that if the banners or the cart carrying them were intercepted, everything would be ruined, cut short, and there would be nothing to present at the demonstration. Without banners, the protest would be empty.

So we succeeded in changing the route and direction. At the designated moment, we arrived at the target location and distributed everything there within five minutes, less than five minutes. The entire cart was emptied immediately. It was, of course, a horse-drawn cart, about three meters long and one

---

<sup>6</sup> Mehmet Gega (1921-2006), Macedonian of Albanian origins living in Tetovo who was arrested several times for nationalist activities.

and a half meters wide. How many banners were there? Around one hundred pieces. I don't recall the exact number anymore. All of them were taken, and the demonstration began.

We also had national flags and flags on poles, and then it began. From the courtyard of the Faculty of Philosophy, from the yard where the National Library is today, in front of Radio Prishtina, that courtyard, that square. Right where the library stands today, that's where it started, and we moved out to the main street. We turned right and marched toward the city center.

The center at that time was where the monument of Zahir Pajaziti stands today, where the Skanderbeg monument is, near the theater. That was Pristina. The route was led by our members, and the crowd of students and the general population joined them, thousands of people, until late in the evening that day.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember when the police started to arrive?

**Skender Muçolli:** The police reacted from the very start. As soon as the banners and flags appeared openly on the main street, that's where the first resistance from the police began, including shots fired. But of course, the shots were fired into the air, mainly to alert other police units that weapons had been used, or to frighten us. But the crowd continued forward.

It was around four o'clock, a few minutes before four, when it began. Within about an hour, in November, dusk had fallen. The main part of the march, up to the city center, took place while it was still light; later the darkness covered that part. The police acted mostly by trying to disperse the crowd, but they didn't manage to break it up until late at night. In other words, the action, this form of protest, this form of demonstration, was carried out till the end, just as we had planned. It went on until the early hours of the morning.

**Anita Susuri:** Was there violence from the police?

**Skender Muçolli:** Violence, yes, it escalated. With the fall of dusk, there was more gunfire, there were gunshot wounds, there were deaths. One of my students, Murat Mehmeti, a martyr of that time, died from gunshot wounds. Many others were injured, nearly 30 people wounded either by firearms or in other ways.

The activity, or protest, in this form took place at the same time in Besiana [then Podujeva], led by Xheladin Rekalju, Akif Sheholli, Sabit Sylja, Ahmet Abdullahu, and others. In Ferizaj, the demonstrations were led by Ismet Ramadani, Hasan Abazi, and the Sulejmani brothers. In Gjilan, by Asllan Kastrati, Irfan Shaqiri, and Rexhep Mala,<sup>7</sup> who was then a student, as part of the same wave.

**Anita Susuri:** When you planned to organize all this, what did you think you were going to achieve? Did you initially think it would succeed?

**Skender Muçolli:** Of course. The essence of this was opposition, resistance to the occupier, which at that time we considered Yugoslavia to be. It was a form of protest, an articulation that Kosovo, or the Albanians of Kosovo, had their own views and did not agree with the regime, with the occupation of

---

<sup>7</sup> Rexhep Mala (1951-1984) was a prominent Albanian activist in the underground movement. He died in 1984 with Nuhi Berisha in a shoot out with the police when their hideout was discovered.

Kosovo. This was, for us, the most recent occupation, since there had been other ones before. Kosovo had been occupied in 1912 by Serbia, under the monarchy. Then came socialism after the Second World War. So, in that sense, this was our way to say something against all of that.

**Anita Susuri:** At that time, in 1968, there were also arrests, and you said that you too were arrested in 1968.

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** How did that happen? Where were you?

**Skender Muçolli:** As I said, the form of organization was legal in nature, and our activity was not 100% illegal, nor 100% legal. It was semi-illegal, but much more on the legal side, so to speak. All this was done so that our demands would be articulated publicly, not in secret, that the whole world would know there is a population here that is seeking forms of independence. Of course, the regime closely followed events; there were no major pre-emptive arrests to prevent the demonstrations. Perhaps there had been some investigations, but they had no effect in stopping such an event.

After the demonstrations, the arrests began. The individuals were identified and arrested with heavy sentences: nine people in Pristina, three in Podujeva, three in Gjilan, four in Ferizaj. Sentences ranged from one year to five years of hard prison. The sentences were served later across various parts of Yugoslavia, not in Kosovo: in Niš, Mitrovica e Sremit, Pozharevc, Idrizovo in Macedonia, Goli Otok, Lepoglava, Gradiška in Croatia, Foča near Sarajevo. They were scattered everywhere.

I, together with a group of comrades, served time in Niš. The prison in Niš is quite a large facility, at the entrance to the city, it still exists there. The others served in the places I mentioned, all over Yugoslavia. Even in Goli Otok<sup>8</sup> there was a group from Podujeva. That's how we were dispersed everywhere by the repressive measures of that time.

**Anita Susuri:** And when they caught you, was it during the demonstrations or afterward?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, I had been wounded by a gunshot, and in that condition, wounded, someone took me to the hospital.

**Anita Susuri:** Where were you shot? Where were you wounded?

**Skender Muçolli:** Somewhere near today's Zahir Pajaziti Square, in that area, in the chest. In that condition, wounded, they took me to the hospital. I was admitted to the hospital.

The next day, directly, without an investigator [questioning me], the investigative judge came and told me, "You are under arrest," without interrogating me, without anything. I was lying there in the hospital. They brought me a police guard, and he guarded me the entire time I was in the hospital. I stayed in the Pristina hospital for about three weeks. They didn't operate on me, they couldn't remove [the bullet] in that sense, that was the doctor's statement. After that, I was sent straight to prison.

---

<sup>8</sup> Island in the north of the Adriatic sea, from 1949 through 1956 a maximum security penal colony for Yugoslav political prisoners, where individuals accused of sympathizing with the Soviet Union, or other dissenters, among them many Albanians, were detained. It is known as a veritable gulag.

That's how the arrest happened, from the hospital... Arrested in the hospital, and when I was discharged from there, they took me to the investigative judge, who then issued the detention order. In that classic way, with pre-trial detention and so on...

**Anita Susuri:** From the hospital they sent you to Niš?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, I stayed in Pristina. I'm talking about Pristina now, because Niš came after the trial. Once the verdict became final, one day we were transferred, I remember after about four months or so, to Niš Prison together with Afrim Loxha. We were chained together on the train, escorted by the police...

**Anita Susuri:** By train.

**Skender Muçolli:** By train, there was no highway at that time. I remember the morning train; before dawn, before five o'clock, we arrived in Niš. It was June, I remember June. From there, we were taken directly to the prison. And in prison, things are as you'd expect...

**Anita Susuri:** And here in Pristina, how long did the investigation last?

**Skender Muçolli:** The investigation in Pristina lasted until the trial, from November, actually late November–December, until April, until April of the following year, 1969.

**Anita Susuri:** Mr. Skender, you said that from the hospital they took you straight to the Investigative prison in Pristina. How was that first arrival there, did you have interrogations, informational interviews? Was there violence? How was it?

**Skender Muçolli:** As soon as I arrived in prison from the hospital, the investigative procedure began in parallel: on one side by the state security service of that time, and in parallel by the judicial investigation. The state security part was carried out by specific officers of the State Security Service. I had as an interrogator a former teacher from Peja, named Hajri Gjoda. Coincidentally, he had been Afrim Loxha's primary school teacher in Peja. At that time, Afrim Loxha was also under investigation. He had been assigned to handle the investigative file for both me and Afrim Loxha. He was a teacher.

One of his key questions, or persistent points, as a former teacher, was this: that the answers we gave him, and which the late Afrim Loxha stated, were that we had learned the lessons of organizing the 1968 events from our teachers. That implied that the first inspirations for patriotism came from our teachers. The former teacher should understand that. Coincidentally, another interrogator sometimes assisted, someone our family in the village knew. I had also had him as a language teacher, my Albanian language teacher. So our answers always went in that direction: that we didn't learn from anyone else, but from the teachers, teachers like you, we would say.

All this was with the purpose of softening any potential violence. So aside from psychological pressure, which is automatic when you're under arrest and are being interrogated by state security and police. That in itself is psychological violence, the physical pressure was mostly the hardship of prison conditions. Life in prison is hard; that too can be called a form of violence.

As for any “classic” physical torture, there was none. I don’t recall that there was. Perhaps other comrades, in some cases, experienced more specific types of violence. But for myself, that is how the investigation period passed.

**Anita Susuri:** During the investigation, I wanted to ask, did you have contact with your family? Were you allowed visits?

**Skender Muçolli:** I think, if I remember correctly, not for about a month, maybe more. After about a month, they obtained permission from the investigative judge. The investigative judge was simultaneously conducting his own questioning, in parallel with the state security.

A certain Riza Fazliu, at that time, did not insist on aggravating the situation; he did not push harder. Later he became president of the Supreme Court of Kosovo. He was also active in sports, chairman of the boxing club Prishtina at that time. What distinguished him from the main judge who announced the verdict and sentenced us, Nazmi Juniku.

Nazmi Juniku was stricter, harsher, and he sometimes took part in the interrogations with the investigative judge. That was “normal:” the future presiding judge of the panel could participate in the investigation. But the case goes to him and he decides according to his own judgment. That’s where we saw the difference between Riza Fazliu, as investigative judge, and Nazmi Juniku; Riza was much more positive. Later I don’t know how his activity ended, how the system of Kosovo’s autonomy functioned, that’s known. Maybe someone will research these things in more detail someday, their activities, their contributions, both bad and good, of these people.

**Anita Susuri:** If you could describe for us a bit: the Pristina Prison, for example, what were the cells like? The conditions? The food?

**Skender Muçolli:** Every two weeks they brought us food parcels from home. Food at that time was prepared in a primitive way, brought in big pots. We had some metal plates. They’d bring the pot to the cell door, and two prisoners would hold it at the door and ladle out the food like that. There were four of us in a room. Twice a day we were taken out for personal needs, in the morning and in the evening.

The room was small, with four beds. A room of about two and a half by three meters, let’s say. There was no running water, nothing. For personal needs you could knock on the door. If the guard approved your request, he’d let you out; if not...

We had half an hour of outdoor walking, in the prison yard, a small yard. One by one, all the cells took turns. Each cell had its own slot. The yard was divided into two sections. Two parts of the yard. One cell in this part, another cell in the other part. Like that, in halves and halves, until evening, depending on how many cells there were.

The cellblock was in an elliptical, circular shape. The corridor ran around, and the cells were on the inside. You could never really orient yourself to know where east was or where west was. You were always walking in circles, and that circular layout would make you lose your sense of direction, you didn’t know where you were. It took a long time to learn, to figure out which point connected to which.

There were prisoners who had been there four or five years and could tell, just by the sound of the door opening or the creak, which side of the building it was. For us, in a short time, one month, two

months, three months, it was very hard to figure out. They had been there for years, and you couldn't. It was a kind of psychological pressure, a mental violence, being inside there.

**Anita Susuri:** When you went to trial, were you in a large group?

**Skender Muçolli:** The group of accused, the Pristina group, had its own trial. The Gjilan group had theirs, Ferizaj their own, and Podujeva its own. Of course, the trials were conducted in coordination with the center in Pristina. The Pristina Court made its decision and sentenced us from three to five years, according to how the judge classified it in his own mind, this one this much, that one that much—three, five.

Elsewhere, in Ferizaj, Podujeva, and Gjilan, they handed down sentences like one year, a year and a half. So it went. Tetovo had its own trial in Macedonia. In other parts of Kosovo, like Prizren, some people got one month for misdemeanors; in Peja, also around a month or so. There were some high school students demonstrations there, but they were not organized by the Pristina center. The Pristina center had those main points: Ferizaj, Gjilan, Podujeva.

**Anita Susuri:** You were sentenced to three or four?

**Skender Muçolli:** Three years, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** And you said they sent you to Niš.

**Skender Muçolli:** To Niš, yes. I served that part of the sentence in Niš. Then we were released and...

**Anita Susuri:** And in Niš, how was it?

**Skender Muçolli:** In Niš...Niš was a central prison at that time. The building was from the Austro-Hungarian period. It was designed, built as a prison. As far as I know, it dates from the Austro-Hungarian time, not to say maybe even from Ottoman times, the Ottoman Empire period, but I don't think so, I think it was Austro-Hungarian. The architectural style: long corridors, with two big rooms on each side, each with 70-80 people. A corridor to the right and left, and a crosswise corridor as well. Like this {shows with hands horizontally and straight}, so it formed a T.

**Anita Susuri:** Like a plus sign?

**Skender Muçolli:** Like the letter T. From above, a T. Two rooms this way, two rooms that way, and two rooms ahead. On the second floor. It was two stories, maybe even three, I don't remember now. If I had a photo, I'd know right away whether it was two or three. Around 70-80 people per hall, arranged by age. I remember that those under 22 years old, 18-22, were in one wing; those older were elsewhere. There were ordinary prisoners there, murder, theft, assault, fraud, spread across the rooms, of course. And there were also people sentenced for political activities. There were Albanians with sentences of around 17-18 years. The longest sentence I saw was 20 years.

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember if there was anyone there from earlier political events?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** Who was there?

**Skender Muçolli:** There was, at that time, a Lushtaku from Drenica if I remember correctly. He was from the time of Shaban Polluzha's<sup>9</sup> activities, the patriot and fighter from Drenica, someone from that circle. Then there were some people connected to the reforms, to the reorganization of the Ballists,<sup>10</sup> like a certain Baba Ukë from near Banja of Peja, I remember that Baba Ukë.

I remember an old man, all bones and skin, he had served 17 years in prison, at that time, a record. Seventeen years, wow! 15 or 17. They called him Hetem Loxha, by the village name. He was very sweet-tongued, very warm with people. He was around 20 when he was imprisoned; I was 19. He had already served 17 years. You understand the difference. I met that Hetem again, the old man, after prison.

**Anita Susuri:** Is he still alive?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, he's not alive. Hetem Ademaj. That category of prisoners, let's say, for patriotic causes, in one way.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you spend your time in prison, for example?

**Skender Muçolli:** In prison, the organization was like this: there was a furniture factory there, working with wood; there was a foundry for iron and iron products. There was also a factory for producing Deligrad boilers. All the prisoners were obliged to work. They rotated, either in the foundry or on boiler parts. That's how life went there. Somebody worked in the kitchen equipment shop, somebody in the laundry, somebody in the infirmary. It depended on your skills.

If you were a technician or a medical student, you could go there. There was a guy from Pristina, Ismet Berisha, he was there for other offenses, he had gone to prison young. He worked as a medical technician and helped all of us with medicines. There, you could get medical rest and be excused from work. Early in the morning, in the dark, you had to be at the worksite, however you felt, carrying your bread with you. You'd return after noon, take a walk in the yard. Once a month, you had visits.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it difficult for your family to come all the way there?

**Skender Muçolli:** Naturally. By train, by car once people started buying cars in those years, the late '60s, if someone from the family had one. But mostly they came by train. My father was still alive then; he came to visit me.

**Anita Susuri:** And at that time, were you engaged or married?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, no, I wasn't at that time. And that's how that period passed.

---

<sup>9</sup> Shaban Polluzha (1871-1945) was a regional Albanian leader of volunteer forces in Drenica. Shaban Polluzha joined the partisans, but in late 1944 disobeyed orders to go north to fight Germans in Serbia, having received news that nationalist Serbs and Montenegrins were attacking civilians in Drenica. He fought against partisan forces until early 1945, when he was killed.

<sup>10</sup> A member of *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front), an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

### Part Three

**Skender Muçolli:** When we were released from prison, our comrades who had been released before us were waiting for us. The family of Bedri Novosella was there, Irfan Shaqiri after his imprisonment, Ilaz Pireva's uncle, then the brothers and relatives of Afrim Loxha, and some of my cousins, from my family.

We did not all get out on the same day; we were released in different groups. I went to prison with Afrim Loxha on the same day, and we were also released on the same day. As I mentioned earlier, in '99 they executed him near the new post office there, by those buildings. There is also a small monument of his there...

**Anita Susuri:** Like a plaque?

**Skender Muçolli:** It would be worthwhile to interview some of his family, but they suffered a lot, three brothers were killed. One of Afrim's brothers lives in London. Agron is his name, he's active in patriotic causes. Then another brother, Akil, also lives in London. A sister lives in America. She is married to Halil Qosja, the brother of Rexhep Qosja. That's Afrim's sister...

His wife lives here in Kosovo, and their daughter is married to that TV commentator, what was his name, the analyst Gorani, the son of Hajrullah Gorani,<sup>11</sup> the one with white hair. His wife is a doctor, a pediatrician. You could also talk to them; they might say something about the husband who was executed and who took part in all that, you know.

**Anita Susuri:** Before that, when you got out of prison, did you continue your work or your political activities?

**Skender Muçolli:** I continued my studies. Fortunately, they didn't go after us in engineering the way they did in other faculties. In Economics they had decided not to admit political prisoners to the faculty, to expel them for a certain period, actually an indefinite one.

In Engineering, the dean and the teaching staff were supportive; that part of the faculty was in favor of the demonstrations. Professors like Esheref Ademaj, professor Fetah Jahxhiu, professor Muhaxheri, professor Zeqir Rugova. Zeqir was from Plava and Gucia, from the Hakaj family of the Martinajs of Gucia.

So, we continued. I continued; I finished the faculty there and then started working in road construction engineering. I worked there until retirement, all my experience was in roads and bridges and related structures.

**Anita Susuri:** Until which year? When did you retire?

---

<sup>11</sup> Hajrullah Gorani (1931-2020) was a professor, syndicalist and a former political prisoner. He was the Head of the Independent Syndicalist Union of Kosovo. He led the Kosovo workers' strike held on September 3, 1990, after which Milosević's regime in Kosovo terminated all their contracts, and an oppressive decade for Albanians living in Kosovo began.

**Skender Muçolli:** In 2014.

**Anita Susuri:** I'd like to talk a bit about the 1970s. You said you were released from prison in '71, you continued your studies, and the '70s were, in a way, a somewhat better time for Kosovo. The university opened here, which I guess could be seen as a kind of result of the demonstrations, or maybe that was just the politics of the time. How was this period for you?

**Skender Muçolli:** Of course, the effects of the '68 demonstrations are reflected in the years that followed. Certain shifts happened, some issues were liberalized, cooperation began, the university opened, which, actually, we had on our banners: "We want a university!" I forgot to mention that earlier.

You could notice a movement, something positive, compared to what we had demanded in a legal form through the demonstrations. The authorities of that time, at least those who had some space to act on Kosovo's issues, did give a certain contribution within parts of the state structures. We can't say that absolutely everyone was fiercely against us in every possible way.

But the other part of the official apparatus acted against the patriots who were on the radar of the state security services of that time. So the patriots of '68 and those from before '68 were constantly followed, constantly mistreated in various ways, in employment, through "informative talks," all of that.

This culminated in 1974 with mass arrests of a large part of the '68 group, and also part of the '64 group, headed by the patriot Adem Demaçi. Investigations were carried out, trials staged, proceedings organized, and in those trials the patriots received sentences of up to 15 years of hard prison.

Bac Adem Demaçi got 15, Skënder Kastrati 14, then Osman Dumoshi, Selatin Novosella, Irfan Shaqiri, Ilaz Pireva, Njazi Korça, Rexhep Mala, Isa Kastrati and others. About 19 people in total. It's the well-known trial which, at that time, was considered a "supplementary" process to the '68 trials, like the courts in '68 hadn't given the "deserved" sentences, so '75 was there to complete what '68 hadn't done, of course in a broader, more "comprehensive" form, and including people who hadn't been direct participants in the events of '68, by sentencing Adem Demaçi to the maximum at that time, and giving the others a minimum of five years.

So that whole period was accompanied by repression and violence, which then continued into the following years, after '75, with the outbreak of the '81 demonstrations<sup>12</sup> and then on into the '90s, up to the armed organization of the patriots.

**Anita Susuri:** And about '81, the demonstrations that happened then, did you try to take part? I mean, it was more underground, but in what way did you experience that time?

**Skender Muçolli:** Naturally, people from the '68 group had indirect activities and direct and indirect influence on the development of the '81 demonstrations. Groups and individuals continued their

---

<sup>12</sup> On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.

activities in '78, '79. Patriots like Sabri Novosella and Jusuf Gërvalla<sup>13</sup> were persecuted and constantly followed. They were forced to leave, one to Turkey, the other to Germany. Through his writings in *Zëri i Kosovës* and his activities and group work in Germany, Jusuf Gërvalla gave a major contribution to that era, for which he was liquidated in '81.

Sabri Novosella changed his residence from Turkey to Sweden, from Sweden to Canada. He moved around, he didn't stay long in one place. Another member of that group, Metush Krasniqi, or rather, the central pillar of that group, was constantly in contact with students. Certainly he gave them instructions, guidance. But the main burden fell on the students of the University of Prishtina: Bajram Kosumi, Ali Lajçi,<sup>14</sup> Gani Koci, not to list them all, I know them personally, many of them.

**Anita Susuri:** Mehmet Hajrizi...

**Skender Muçolli:** Mehmet Hajrizi.

**Anita Susuri:** And did you know at that time that these illegal groups existed, or that these leaflets were being distributed?

**Skender Muçolli:** Look, this is a development, a process. Up until '81 we had the chance to personally know the patriots. All those I mentioned, Jusuf Gërvalla, Metush Krasniqi.<sup>15</sup> By '81 there were so many. Patriotism "multiplied" so much that it was impossible to know everyone. Later on I met Bajram Kosumi, I met Mehmet Hajrizi, [Hydajet Hyseni](#)...

**Anita Susuri:** Do you remember...

**Skender Muçolli:** ...Ali Lajçi, and others.

**Anita Susuri:** On March 11 it happened for the first time in '81, and then on April 1 and 2 it was stronger...

**Skender Muçolli:** Let me tell you this: the atmosphere, the atmosphere of the March 11 demonstrations... March 11 is basically that period of transition from winter to spring and then to summer. A March day with sunshine.

Naturally, that demonstration atmosphere reminded us of '68, the '68 demonstration. Automatically. It was a kind of joy, that kind of feeling. We knew the process was going in a positive direction. The resistance was really moving forward. All those protests later evoked that same feeling. I mean, we

---

<sup>13</sup> Jusuf Gërvalla (1945-1982) was a poet and also nationalist activist killed in Germany together with his brother Bardhosh and Kadri Zeka. These killings have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Lajçi (1955-2024), political activist and prisoner from 1981 through 1991, was mayor of Peja from 2001 to 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Metush Krasniqi (1928-1986) was a Kosovo Albanian educator and activist. Krasniqi was known for running illegal nationalist organizations such as The Revolutionary Party for Uniting Albanian Territories with the Motherland and National-Liberation Movement of Kosovo and other Albanian Regions in Yugoslavia. Krasniqi was imprisoned several times by the Yugoslav regime between the years 1958-1986. The last time he was taken to prison, the tortures he was submitted to led to his death.

thought a time was coming, a continuous era in the resistance against what we considered an occupier. Because we considered even Kosovo's autonomy as a form of occupation.

In fact, the '68 generation never accepted anything else except what was in the program of the '64 group led by Adem Demaçi. It was always conceived as unification, as he put it, "with Mother Albania." He has that famous expression; he didn't offer any other model. Later on, of course, there were other slogans such as "republic," "reform," this or that, but we, our group, did not take part in those reformulations. Maybe we were a bit more conservative in that sense, but we kept to that original form of that time. Even though later developments brought us to where we are today.

**Anita Susuri:** And during those days, were you at work? Or how did you find out...?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, yes, I was at work.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you later join the demonstrations?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, yes, as a participant like everyone else who took part in the actions. The workers of Ramiz Sadiku were there, the workers of PUT, the construction company where we worked, and from other companies as well, of course. It was massive. University and high school students, the general population and workers. That was the resistance of '81-'82.

**Anita Susuri:** How would you describe what you saw? What was it like in the city with all the police violence?

**Skender Muçolli:** Violence as always, police violence; violence from plainclothes and uniformed officers. But there was always a hope that among those police there were Albanians who did not think like the official state line. It was a pleasure to see the evolution and development of the resistance, stronger day by day. Every day it was more powerful. And so time did its work, the resistance developed and strengthened, leading later to the greater eruptions and direct war.

**Anita Susuri:** During that time, did they call you in for "informative talks" as a former political prisoner?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, there were short "talks" and constant monitoring at the workplace.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you notice, for example, that they were following you?

**Skender Muçolli:** I noticed. Investigators would come to the director and ask, "Is so-and-so here at work?" "Yes." "What does he do? What is he doing? What's his job?" That kind of thing. So we were under permanent observation. But I was dealing with engineering, so in engineering this was not as pronounced as in some other fields. They would send me out to construction sites where contracts were held by Serbian companies, Macedonian companies, Croatian companies. I did not work with companies managed by Albanians.

**Anita Susuri:** They sent you on purpose?

**Skender Muçolli:** On purpose, because of “security reasons.” But I benefited professionally from those Croatian and Serbian firms. Of course, they were more advanced and better trained; I learned the trade from them. And I really did learn their craft. That was to my benefit.

**Anita Susuri:** After '81, relations between ethnic groups in Kosovo changed somewhat. I'm also curious how this changed at your workplace. Did you have Serb colleagues or...?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, yes, of course, many...

**Anita Susuri:** What were the relations like?

**Skender Muçolli:** Look, these were organizational forms. The Party Committee handled those things; the committee represented the state. Among ordinary people... professional relations between colleagues were normal. In our field they were normal. We had Muslims, Montenegrins, Bosniaks, Serbs. We had different professions. Of course, they were often better prepared, because they had someone backing them, and more experience than us Albanians. That has to be acknowledged.

But I was fortunate with one Muslim from Plava and Gusia. He was of Muslim background, Albanian origin, spoke that mixed language, had aunts, uncles, relatives among Albanians. I worked with him continuously until the end. You could see an increase in Albanian employment. Not in the sense of development and real empowerment, but simply in hiring, with half-baked competencies, you know.

Because the companies of Kosovo could not position themselves much, they weren't allowed to develop properly or to advance fully. Everything always went at a much slower pace than elsewhere. These patterns caused a general dissatisfaction, which ultimately led to the collapse of that system. Former Yugoslavia collapsed from within, because of injustices and domination, some over others.

**Anita Susuri:** Now I'm also interested in your work, what was being built most in Kosovo at that time?

**Skender Muçolli:** In the period when I was working, we were building roads, designing roads, constructing roads. A lot of roads were being modernized, around 1,920 kilometers of roads. The main roads. The construction of the road to Peja, the road to Mitrovica, Veternik, the road to Shtime, the road Shtime–Prizren, to Brezovica, to Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, to Podujeva...

**Anita Susuri:** In fact, all the roads were built in that period...

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, that's when it all started. The road-building process began around 1965. In '65 the first roads; in '62 one small section of asphalt was done. A short stretch of asphalt, two kilometers, cold asphalt, cold asphalt from Pozharan to Klllokot. That's when asphalt was laid. Before that, modern surfacing was done with stone blocks, around '56, Stan Tërg–Mitrovica, from Mitrovica to Laposavić, with square cobblestones. There was the Peja–Deçan road, Prishtina–Fushë Kosovë.

Then Veternik was with stone blocks, with square stone, before asphalt. And in '62, hot asphalt was laid; the hot asphalt was done on the Deçan–Gjakova road. There are still good sections of that road left even today, a kilometer or so in good condition, wide, from '62. Immediately after that, construction of the road by Badovc Lake started, from Prishtina to Gjilan, one section. That was before '65. Then year after year there was road building.

## Part Four

**Anita Susuri:** In 1990, did it also happen to you that you had to leave your job?

**Skender Muçolli:** In '90, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** How did that happen?

**Skender Muçolli:** It happened like this: Serbia abolished autonomy in '89. Then from '90, '91 to '92 that process dragged on. The pattern was that you had to accept their union, the Serbian union, basically, you had to accept the imposed Serbian rule. We didn't leave voluntarily, because we considered leaving as something voluntary. We waited to be forced out. We saw it as: "We are in our own place, in our own home, and we do not accept any other form [of authority]." The directors imposed by the regime came. I remember, I was working with [Igballe Novosella](#) in that department; the police came 14 times to forcibly remove Igballe, 18 times even. Maybe she's told you that if you've interviewed her, that detail, I don't know if she mentioned it or not.

We did not accept that setup, we didn't accept that power, and we went home. We left one guy there to formally accept those measures so we could have access to the documents, the road project documents. Because roads were considered state security. If you know the road project, you know the route; and at some point we might need those papers. Which later turned out to be true, we did need them. To defend yourself, you have to know from where the enemy might come, which corridors they'll use, which are the local roads as regional roads, and the main roads. Especially in war, that engineering, that technical knowledge, was very applicable both for defense and for other operations. He couldn't stay more than a year, but for a year he supplied us with parts of the archive.

**Anita Susuri:** He was under pressure and left after that?

**Skender Muçolli:** After that there was different pressure on him, and with our blessing we told him, "No need to stay any longer, if you can't, don't. You've given us your contribution." That guy is somewhere in the West now, he left, got a job straight away there, and didn't stay in Kosovo because his family situation at that time was very difficult.

**Anita Susuri:** Like for many people in that period...

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes. But his life was particularly harsh; it was very difficult.

**Anita Susuri:** By then you had your own family of course...

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** You had children...

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** And you had responsibilities to support your family...

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** What did you do in that period?

**Skender Muçolli:** I worked in farming. My uncle's sons, my paternal uncle's sons, in the village, there were eight brothers, and they were also working in farming, so I worked together with them. We bought some agricultural machinery, tractors, combine harvesters, that kind of thing, and we worked directly in farming. For ten years, until '99, the family's income came from agriculture. I still have those machines, they still exist. That's how I managed to survive.

**Anita Susuri:** How many children do you have?

**Skender Muçolli:** Two daughters and one son.

**Anita Susuri:** They must have been grown up in that period, I imagine?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, no, no, they were young then. Now they're around 30.

**Anita Susuri:** And your wife, was she working as well?

**Skender Muçolli:** She worked at Kosovo Television.

**Anita Susuri:** And she also lost her job?

**Skender Muçolli:** She also ended up out of work in the last phase, like everyone else. She held on until the last possible moment; after that there was nowhere to go.

**Anita Susuri:** I'm curious now: when the KLA started to form and the first groups appeared, were you aware of this, did you know something was being created?

**Skender Muçolli:** All the political groups had these formations on their agenda. Whichever group someone belonged to, that determined how much it was emphasized, more or less.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Skender Muçolli:** In '96-'97 the activity became much more intense. By '97 the need for military organization was already clear. Personally, I was placed in the logistics section, through the Emergency Council at the Kosovo level. There was also Zaim Kurti, from the political parties, because there was also a council of political parties, from the Parliamentary Party. At one point, due to health reasons, I replaced Zaim for a time and was directly involved in the operational side of the Emergency Council's work.

That means forms of support to the military wing in the Llap zone, in Shala, Drenica, and later also in Karadak. Our whole time was spent in those zones, especially in Karadak and Llapi, but also in the Drenica area and the Shala e Bajgorës area. We even managed to reach Gjakova with the help of a

nurse named Ajmana, and [Mevlyde Saraçi](#) in Gjakova, she was an activist at that time, I think in the LDK.<sup>16</sup> Our whole time went into those zones.

We had an operational team with a professor from Drenica, a professor from the Faculty of Medicine, his name escapes me at the moment. There was also Mustafa Gara from the Madrasa in Alaudin, Shaban Hoxha, and others. There were many who never stopped, every day, in the war zones, either in Drenica, or in Shala e Bajgorës, or in Llap. Now I remember the professor, an indefatigable professor, Imer Halimi from Kozhïcë, Skenderaj, now retired. He had started mechanical engineering, or electrical and then mechanical, back in '68. He had his roots in '68, from the technical side, engineering. That was the contribution of these people, another kind of contribution.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like to visit those areas at that time? The level of risk?

**Skender Muçolli:** There was need. The Emergency Council, both with money and other things... Money, of course, there was a need for funds, money was sent; food was sent, clothing, fabrics for uniforms; uniforms were sent, medicines, and weapons of course. Participation in arming, sending certain weapons, the financial part for purchasing them, coordination with the zones or with the zone commanders.

Commander Remi, I know personally, was contacted for this and operations were carried out. In the Drenica zone, our colleague Imer Halimi was in contact with Sami Lushtaku. Shaban Hoxha with Sulejman Selimi. Mustafa Gara with Fatmir Limaj. Isa Kastrati later got directly involved in the war in the Karadak area, Ahmet Isufi also, and of course with us. When he put on the uniform we were constantly linking the city with the commands. The risk, of course, was present in every form; but people were formed by that. You didn't really know anymore what fear was. If you were too exposed, then you had to be placed within a command, or in a brigade structure.

**Anita Susuri:** I'd like to know more about the methods you used to remain, let's say, camouflaged or discreet in organizing all this.

**Skender Muçolli:** The weapons part was secret, they had to be hidden. The other part we tried to do in illegality, but always being careful. Not to waste your chance pointlessly, but to be careful, and when it couldn't be avoided, to go straight in. We would fill out papers: the goods are going, say, to such-and-such company; the company is sending them to a warehouse or shop, a specific place. Then the KLA soldiers would come and take them from those points, or a representative of theirs who knew who that shipment was for.

Or we would go directly to the designated place; we once managed to get trucks all the way to the main headquarters. They were amazed, they said, "How did you get here? How did you find the roads?" I knew those corridors from work. I knew where there were roads and where there weren't; which road was which, where there was a bridge and where there wasn't. That sort of thing. There were also volunteer trucks, families like the family of Mehmet Hërtica gave a big contribution. When there was a chance, they sent trucks... They sent many young men too. They participated directly, but also in this supply side for the army's needs, they gave a huge contribution.

---

<sup>16</sup> Alb. *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* - Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The first political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

**Anita Susuri:** I also wanted to ask about your war experience. The bombings started in March; where were you at that moment?

**Skender Muçolli:** The bombings found us at home. I had about 40 people, we called them “refugees” at that time, in my house...

**Anita Susuri:** In Pristina?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes. They had fled from the peripheral neighborhoods. Once the bombings started, violence began, burning houses and killing here and there, to spread fear. The next morning the neighborhood was surrounded. It was a semi-peripheral neighborhood, sort of halfway to the center. The police came there and killed a person in the neighborhood, who said, “Can I take my tractor? We’re leaving, we’ll go, but I want to take the tractor.” The policeman said, “Take it.” And when he turned his back, they shot him. They drove us all out of our houses.

The night before, there had been some talk about armed resistance, some weapons near the Madrasa, to resist, there was one automatic weapon, but we didn’t resist because the circumstances were such that no resistance took place; it stopped there. So, they drove us out of our homes and I went to the family of Ibrahim Gashi. I’ll mention his name here. Nothing had happened there. Ibrahim said, “You can stay here with us, whatever happens to us will happen to you as well.” I said, “No, Ibrahim, I’m going to Bregu i Diellit [Sunny Hill]. I have an apartment there.” And we said goodbye.

I remember, on the night of the bombings, I called Ibrahim. “Ibrahim, how is the situation over there?” He said, “The bombings have started, and this is a sign that we’ve won.” Ibrahim Gashi said, “A very good sign, we’ve won.” I remember that detail. I went to Sunny Hill and stayed one night. The next day the neighborhood was surrounded again. Surrounded again. They drove us out of the apartments. We went on... maybe 200–300 meters to another apartment. We settled there. Just as we had settled, they taped off the apartment, with those police tapes.

“Come on, out of here too.” So from that apartment as well. That made three places for me: one, two, three. And the fourth, where to go next? So, we got into the car. I had left my car in the yard; I didn’t even try to ask to take the car like the man with the tractor. I just ran to find a solution. We got into that car, nine people. The city was empty. There were some roadblocks; you couldn’t pass via Veternik. Somewhere in the city towards the church area today, in the direction of Fushë Kosovë, not toward Fushë Kosovë, but somewhere near today’s Bill Clinton Boulevard there was a checkpoint; police everywhere, and we didn’t know which corridor we were taking.

When I went out by Termokos and that other area there, there was another corridor by the roundabout for Veternik. Not the roundabout from Sunny Hill; that one also had a checkpoint. There I saw cars and tractors covered with plastic, a column going up through Veternik. There the police, the army, opened a corridor that let us get onto the Veternik road. We went that way not knowing where we were heading, toward the villages or anywhere. Up to the crossroads at Fusha e Pajtit, or what they now call Dardha. At that moment they blocked off the road to Hani i Elezit and Kaçanik; only the Brezovica road was left.

The column on the Brezovica road was long, we were thinking, “They’re taking us to some concentration pit, some ravine in the mountains.” Like in the Bosnian war, those concentration camps

Serbia set up. The column stopped three or four times. We were afraid, “Now they’re going to separate us here: women to one side, children to another, men to another.” But the stops were actually just spontaneous breaks, people stopping to rest; one car stopped, the next didn’t dare drive past, so they all held a kind of discipline.

Like that we went until about four kilometers before the border on the Šar side toward Tetovo. Four kilometers left, and no more column; we were waiting at the border. Night caught us there. Night caught us there. I met some relatives there, my uncles’ families. Someone had a policeman he could talk to. They even came with an offer: whoever wants to go back, can go back, this will “pass.” “Can we go back? Can we not?” We decided that half the family would return. My uncles, one uncle with his daughters, went back. My brother and I... I didn’t know where one of my brothers had gone, and the other wasn’t there at all. We waited to cross into Tetovo. The other part went back.

They returned to the city center, where people had not been expelled in that violent way. They stayed and waited out the war. We waited it out in Tetovo and from there, on the 12th, we came back over Sharr to our home. There we saw everything and we also waited for the KFOR forces to enter. That’s how it was.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have any problems when you came back?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, war conditions, a war atmosphere. But a person got used to that form of life; you no longer knew what fear really was. I remember in the yard, when I came back, the grass was this high {shows about one meter with his hands} on the concrete. Because someone had watered there and no one had been around; the grass grew even on stone.

**Anita Susuri:** And how did recovery start afterward? The return to normal life? Did you continue working?

**Skender Muçolli:** No, we went back to work immediately, we went back to work on the 17th, 17 June, not March. Four–five days later. We went to work and found the offices locked. We thought there might be mines or explosives there, they were thinking like that... there was a military structure, even in the city. The police command was where the Alliance building is today. I already knew the people there. I knew them personally. So, I took two soldiers with me and we opened the doors. We opened the doors and went in, to work.

**Anita Susuri:** And then you continued working?

**Skender Muçolli:** Yes, we continued working. In the meantime, the municipal authority was organized; the zone command was in Kolovicë. There a group was formed to represent the new government. At the head of the group was [Mexhid Sylja](#), he’s a lawyer today. There was Selatin Novosella, he was the deputy head of that group. I had the portfolio for organization in urbanism, public services, inspection. I had three or four directorates at that time.

Fehmi Avolli had the cadastre and geodesy. Akif Sheholli coordinated with the directorates... the late Rexhep Luci<sup>17</sup> had urban development with... Agim Baca had the economy. Education was under Mustafë Sopi, may he rest in peace, Mustafë Sopi. He was a fighter of the “Bija” unit. Then the lawyer Selman Bogiqi had the administration services. From Drenica there are also the Bogiqis. [Skender Boshnjaku](#) had medicine, health. The first contacts of the group were made by four–five people at the beginning; later the leadership structure of the municipality was completed.

In parallel with BritKFOR we entered the municipality. BritKFOR was a British NATO unit. The first Gurkhas came to Prishtina. I remember that Englishman, Colonel Millt, from the British special unit. He was involved. He gave us some ID cards, I still have that identification card. Whenever I showed it... because every day employees would come, wanting to enter the building to see what was happening. A crowd of people would gather there, and the soldiers at the municipal entrance wouldn't let them in... that Major Millt with his team, heavily armed up to their teeth, so to speak. I would just show the card and we would go inside.

We maintained contact with them, our whole team. Then our team was completed and later they also brought in the Serbs. That's how the policy was. So we found them there too... It's interesting what we found when we went into the offices. All the offices were open, untouched. Glasses half full of *rakia*,<sup>18</sup> bottles there, cupboards there. We found weapons. Every office had weapons, of course. We didn't show those to the British; the British were only standing at the door, and we were supposedly “cleaning the offices,” checking what was there, what wasn't. Preparing for normal work, in that sense. We sent that [weaponry] somewhere else, through the secondary windows, out the windows, down to the ground floor...

**Anita Susuri:** Why? To take them?

**Skender Muçolli:** There was still a military system present. They had to be removed, to be given to certain people; you didn't know yet how things would go. And that's how we began, we started. We applied the principle of employment by percentage, who was employed. Seventy to thirty: 70% Albanians, 30% Serbs, supposedly. They started coming: they came one day, you could say one day they came. The second day, one Serb, one of the directors, was recognized by someone at the market, and they beat him badly. Somehow he survived and came straight to the municipality. There were soldiers there. The British gave him shelter. He said, “I am a municipal employee, this and that happened.”

Immediately a sense of fear began among the Serbs who had just started to return to work. The next day, we didn't see a single one of them; none of them came. I introduced myself to the staff, mostly there were Albanians, but also some Serbs. I said, “Yesterday you had one director, today you have another one. It doesn't matter, we're going to work normally.” And that's how life in the Municipality of Pristina started. Then we began... there had been no development, nothing, only identifying

---

<sup>17</sup> Rexhep Luci (1948-2000) was a Kosovo Albanian architect and urban planner, best known as the director of urbanism in Prishtina after the 1999 war. He advocated regulated reconstruction and opposed illegal construction during the post-war building boom. Luci was assassinated in September 2000, a killing widely believed to be connected to his efforts to curb unlawful development, and his death became a symbol of the lawlessness of the immediate post-war period in Kosovo.

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

buildings, burned buildings. We made a kind of organization to identify those buildings. Trade began, slowly commerce started. The market opened, the market.

We also began to collect revenues. The administrative side was overseen by an American as spokesperson. He suggested to us, "How do you work? What do you do? The market is collecting money; we as the municipality should be getting that money." "How?" we said. So he gave us an example: "I have 150 hectares in Texas. 75 belong to my brother, 75 are mine. And the 75..." he said, "I lease them out." I said, "We can do the same." "He works the land and pays me some money like this," he said, "so we can do the same with the market in Prishtina."

Those were the first beginnings...collecting revenue. He would say, "The market earns money, and the market gives us money; we keep it in a cupboard here, and whatever the municipality needs, we use it," this American. I don't recall his name. He had been third, fourth, fifth, maybe tenth secretary at the American Embassy in Belgrade. During the war he had come with the OSCE as a civilian to observe, to see the Kleçka area. He told us the details of his visits there two or three times. An American general. He stayed for almost a year.

Then he went to Haiti, that American; after that a German came. But it was the American who supported us, protected us, and advised us on what was best. The German was from the East. He was a bit different, not like a West German, but more like an East German, on the communist side. Russian influence, that kind of influence... he was not like the American. Over him there was a Mexican, formally; that Mexican was the chief. By then political parties also started to get involved. The LDK, [Edita Tahiri](#), and others joined in. They said, "This is not the KLA's system; it's more of a non-party political system."

So a kind of information took place. Zijadin Gashi came in for education; he was in charge of education. Shefki Gashi came representing the LDK in some capacity. Then the social-democratic parties formed a kind of council of political parties, with an executive led by Mexhid Sylja together with us. That continued until the first elections. After the first elections... I don't remember exactly who came, some Gashi, a professor, came as mayor. Then things continued. Ismet Beqiri and others, for years. Those are the main points, as much as I can remember by years. Then in 2001 I went back to working with roads.

**Anita Susuri:** Until 2014.

**Skender Muçolli:** Until 2014. First in that form, then the competencies were moved to a higher level. We went up to the ministry level and worked like that and it continues the same way today. They didn't apply it as a separate roads directorate, but they made some other kind of structure.

**Anita Susuri:** Good, Mr. Skender, thank you very much!

**Skender Muçolli:** It's an honor!