

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**JANKO NIKOLIĆ-ŽUGIĆ**

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Andrea R. Maestrejuan

at

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center  
New York City, New York

on

12, 13, and 14 November 1996

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is part of a series supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts based on the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences. This collection is an important resource for the history of biomedicine, recording the life and careers of young, distinguished biomedical scientists and of Pew Biomedical Scholar Advisory Committee members.

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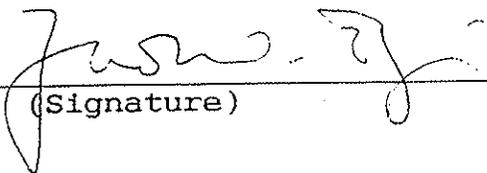
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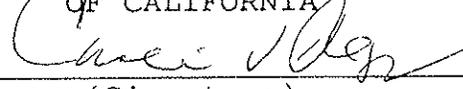
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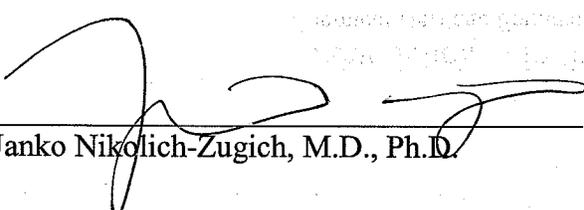
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## JANKO NIKOLIĆ-ŽUGIĆ

1960 Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in November

### Education

1984 M.D., Belgrade University Medical School  
1989 M.Sc., Belgrade University Medical School  
1993 Ph.D., Belgrade University Medical School

### Professional Experience

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1984-1987 Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute for Microbiology and Immunology  
1982-1983 Teaching Fellow

Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla California  
1987-1990 Research Associate, Department of Immunology

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, New York  
1990-1996 Assistant Member, Immunology Program  
1990-1996 Head, Laboratory of T Cell Development  
1990-1996 Head, Flow Cytometry Core Facility  
1996-present Associate Member, Immunology Program

Cornell University School of Medicine, New York City, New York  
1990-1996 Assistant Professor, Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences  
1994-present Assistant Professor, Division of Molecular Medicine  
1996-present Associate Professor, Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences and the Division of Molecular Medicine

### Honors

1984-1986 Postdoctoral Fellowship, Scientific Council of the Republic of Serbia  
1991-1995 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant

### Selected Publications

Burkly, L.C. et al., 1985. T cell regulation of light chain expression: Preferential enhancement

- of Igx in a primary thymus-dependent response does not require affinity based selection. *Journal of Immunology* 135:1573-76.
- Nikolić-Žugić, J. and M.J. Bevan, 1988. Thymocytes expressing CD8 differentiate into CD4+ cells following intrathymic injection. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 85:8633-37.
- Nikolić-Žugić, J. et al. , 1989. Characterization of the subset of immature thymocytes which can undergo rapid *in vitro* differentiation. *European Journal of Immunology* 19: 649-53.
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- Nikolić-Žugić, J., ed. 1994. *Intrathymic Development of T Cells*. Austin, Texas: R.G. Landes Company.
- Dyall, R. and J. Nikolić-Žugić, 1995. The majority of post-selection CD4 single-positive thymocytes require the thymus to produce long-lived, functional T cells. *Journal of Experimental Medicine* 181:235-45.
- Dyall, R. et al., 1995. CD4-independent priming of murine CTLs by optimal MHC class I-restricted peptides *in vivo*. *International Immunology* 7:1205-12.
- Dyall, R. et al., 1996. T cell receptor (TCR) recognition of MHC class I variants: Intermolecular second-site reversion provides evidence for peptide/MHC conformational variation. *Journal of Experimental Medicine* 184:253-58.

## ABSTRACT

**Janko Nikolić-Žugić** was born and raised in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, which, at the time, was a relatively open Communist country under Josip Broz Tito. His father was an orthopedic surgeon and his mother was a researcher at the Institute for Cultural Development Studies. Nikolić-Žugić was interested in science from a young age, perusing his parents' extensive library and finding issues in molecular biology and the like quite fascinating. He went to his primary school for eight years before moving into a specialization in the natural sciences in his secondary school (Yugoslavia had a *Gymnasium* system). At the age of fifteen or so he became a competitive volleyball player, practice for which occupied most of his nights and weekends. While all of his coursework was intense, and while he enjoyed science, Nikolić-Žugić realized that there were no careers for molecular biologists in Yugoslavia, so he decided to enter the medical track to become a physician.

He entered the Belgrade University Medical School and undertook his medical studies while still having an interest in the practice and study of science more broadly. He received guidance and advice from Miodrag L. Lukić and Marija Mostarica-Stojković, who studied immunology, to do some scientific laboratory work abroad in the United States. Nikolić-Žugić took this advice and went for a few months over a few summers to work with Henry H. Wortis at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts; this was Nikolić-Žugić's first laboratory experiences and influenced his decision to leave clinical medicine and pursue a scientific career in the United States. He received a master's of science while still in Belgrade, though his studies were interrupted by the civil war, and then a doctoral degree under Lukić, during which time he completed his compulsory military service, working on T cell development. After meeting and marrying his wife, he went on to a postdoctoral position in Michael J. Bevan's lab at the University of California, San Diego studying intrathymic T cells, and then accepted a position at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, where he began his research on specificity in self-peptide selection by T cell receptors.

Throughout the interview Nikolić-Žugić discusses his views on Yugoslavia, its culture, its educational system, its political structure, and the state of the country after the various social and political upheavals. In addition, at the end of the interview he discusses his experimental method; his wife's work as a flow cytometry operator in his lab; the science-oriented environment of his home; the necessity of animal research; and balancing family life and his career. The interview concludes with his thoughts on his own mentoring style; the way his medical training frames his research, the role of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences in his work; the "illogic" concept of gene patenting; funding and its relationship to the direction of research in the United States; publishing; and more on science and politics in the former Yugoslavia.

## UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

### INTERVIEWER:

Andrea R. Maestrejuan, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., History, University of California, Irvine, 1988; B.S., Biological Sciences, University of California, Irvine, 1988; C.Phil., History, University of California, Riverside.

### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

**Place:** Nikolić-Žugić 's office, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

**Dates, length of sessions:** November 12, 1996 (122 minutes); November 13, 1996 (159); November 14, 1996 (106).

**Total number of recorded hours:** 6.45

**Persons present during interview:** Nikolić-Žugić and Maestrejuan.

### CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series with Pew scholars in the biomedical sciences conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program in conjunction with the Pew Charitable Trusts's Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Oral History and Archives Project. The project has been designed to document the backgrounds, education, and research of biomedical scientists awarded four-year Pew scholarships since 1988.

To provide an overall framework for project interviews, the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Maestrejuan held a telephone pre-interview conversation with Nikolić-Žugić to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and to agree on an interviewing schedule. She also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Nikolić-Žugić file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including his proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members. For general background on the recent history of the biological sciences, Maestrejuan consulted J.D. Watson et al., *Molecular Biology of the Gene*. 4th ed. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1987, and Bruce Alberts et al., *Molecular Biology of the Cell*. 3rd ed. New York: Garland, 1994.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Nikolić-Žugić's family background and his early education in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and continuing through his graduate education in Yugoslavia, his postdoc at Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California, and the creation of his lab at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Major topics discussed include the civil war in Yugoslavia and its effect on science research there, Nikolić-Žugić's work on intrathymic T cells, science funding, and publishing in the sciences.

### ORIGINAL EDITING:

Gregory M . D . Beyrer, editorial assistant , edited the interview. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Nikolić-Žugić reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Jane Collings, senior editor, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history.

Jennifer E. Levine, editorial assistant, compiled the index.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Years through Medical Education	1
The civil war in the former Yugoslavia. Family background. Early schooling in Yugoslavia. School authority figures. Parents' influence on career choice. Parents' educational background. Develops an interest in the natural sciences. Plays volleyball competitively. The Yugoslavian <i>Gymnasium</i> system. The Yugoslavian medical school system. Immunology.	
Scientific Research, Medical Practice, and Moving to the United States	22
Early scientific training. The Communist Party in the Yugoslavian educational system. Important mentors: Marija Mostarica-Stojković and Miodrag Lukić. Internship in the Henry H. Wortis lab in Boston. Progress toward completion of M.Sc. interrupted by the civil war. Applies for postdoc positions in American labs. Graduate study with Miodrag Lukić. Research environment in Yugoslavia. Serves in the Yugoslavian army. Marriage. Wife's role as a flow cytometry operator in lab. Science-oriented environment at home. The necessity for animal research. Preference for the social climate of New York over that of Southern California. Work in the Michael J. Bevan lab on intrathymic T cells.	
Faculty Years	53
Experimental method. The question of whether science researchers are born or Made. Bevan's mentoring style. Attracting graduate students to his lab. Ways his M.D. training affects his research. Teaching responsibilities at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Discovers a specificity in self-peptide selection by T cell receptors. The reasons for doing risky science. Work on T cells funded by Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences. Sloan-Kettering's support of exploratory research. The politics of publishing in the sciences.	
Final Thoughts	72
Animal research. The illogic of the concept of gene patenting. Receives a high level of institutional support at Sloan-Kettering. Philosophy of lab management. Determining the payoff of an investment in science. Publishing in the sciences. The difficulties facing the sciences in the former Yugoslavia. The political situation in the former Yugoslavia. A comparison of cultural attitudes toward doing science.	
Index	99

## INDEX

### A

acquired immune deficiency syndrome, 85, 89  
AIDS. *See* acquired immune deficiency syndrome  
Albania/Albanian, 39  
Amish, 39  
Appalachian Mountains, 39  
Association of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia, 24

### B

Balkan Immunology Congress, 35  
Balkans, 4, 90, 97  
Basel Institute for Immunology, 49  
Bear Mountain, 55  
Belgrade University Law School, 42  
Belgrade University Medical School, 26, 40, 57  
Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 26, 27, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 44, 50, 55, 57, 89, 93, 96  
Bendera, Zora, 9  
Berlin Wall, 39  
Bevan, Michael J., 27, 30, 44, 52, 53, 55, 56, 59, 64, 65, 81, 98  
Bosnia, 3, 4, 40, 92  
Boston, Massachusetts, 25, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 40, 41, 46, 52, 55, 56  
Bulgaria, 5, 35

### C

California, 49, 50, 54, 57  
Carbone, Francis R., 54, 65  
Caudy, Michael A., 61  
CD4, 53, 85  
Central Intelligence Agency, 24  
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 94  
CIA. *See* Central Intelligence Agency  
CNRS. *See* Centre National de la Recherche

### Scientifique

Cohn, Melvin, 71  
collaboration, 94  
Communist Party, 24  
competition, 12, 22, 78, 86, 87  
Cornell University School of Medicine, 61, 62, 64  
Croatia/Croatian, 2, 3, 6, 40, 90, 91  
cytotoxic, 65, 67

### D

Danube River, 5  
Doherty, Peter C., 26, 65, 96  
Drinka Pavlović, 8  
Dujčić, Aleksandar, 37  
Dyall, Rubendra, 29, 67

### E

Eastern Bloc, 1  
Eastern Orthodox Church, 6, 46  
England, 30  
Eskimo, 49  
Ethiopia, 12, 42, 92  
ethnically cleansing, 3  
Europe, 4, 7, 9, 15, 36, 48, 49, 50, 77, 90, 91, 95  
European Community, 90

### F

FASEB. *See* Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology  
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, 30  
Fiat, 92  
First Belgrade Gymnasium, 7  
flow cytometry, 42, 45, 53  
France, 7, 13, 15, 42, 94, 95  
Fulbright Commission, 24  
Fulbright Scholar Program, 24  
funding, 35, 68, 70, 78, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 95

## G

Germany, 50, 91, 94, 95  
Greece, 35  
Gypsy, 97

## H

Harvard University, 30  
herpes simplex virus, 31  
Hillary, Edmund, 76  
Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 68  
Human Genome Project, 69  
Hungary, 39  
Hunter College, 45

## I

*Immunological Recognition*, 26  
Institute Rudjer Bošković, 48  
institutional animal care and use committee,  
75  
Iran/Iranian, 51

## J

Janković, Brana, 31  
Jelić, Svetlana, 41  
Jerne, Niels Kaj, 71  
Jewish/Jews, 25  
*Journal of Experimental Medicine*, 26, 33,  
38

## K

Klein, Jan, 26

## L

La Jolla, California, 34, 42, 51, 56, 71, 78  
Lausanne, Switzerland, 49  
Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, 49  
Lukić, Miodrag L., 25, 30, 31, 34, 46, 58,  
98

## M

major histocompatibility complex, 27, 65,  
66  
Mario, Maja, 44

Markovi, Ante, 4  
Marušić, Matko, 26  
Matkovich, Dobrila, 25  
Matkovich, George, 25  
Max-Planck Institute for Biology, 26  
Medical Military Academy, 40  
*Medicinski Podmladak*, 27  
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center,  
36, 42, 61, 62, 63, 68, 69, 77, 78, 79  
Messaoudi, Ilhem, 98  
MHC. *See* major histocompatibility  
complex  
Military Medical Academy, 33, 36, 37  
Milošević, Slobodan, 3, 24, 41, 91, 92  
Montenegro, 2  
Moore, Mark W., 54  
Mostarica-Stojković, Marija, 22, 30, 58, 98  
Mount Everest, 76  
Mount Rushmore, 76  
multiple sclerosis, 30  
Muslims, 3, 4, 40

## N

National Institutes of Health, 66, 69, 71, 73,  
79, 82, 83, 84, 85, 89  
First Independent Research Support and  
Transition Award (FIRST), 79, 83, 84  
New Orleans, Louisiana, 96  
New York City, New York, 5, 9, 42, 44, 50,  
51, 77, 78, 81, 95  
New York University, 44  
NIH. *See* National Institutes of Health  
Nikolić, Mirjana (mother), 5, 25, 42, 98  
Nikolic, Žarko (father), 42  
Nikolić, Žarko (father), 5  
Nikolić-Žugić, Dragana (wife), 1, 30, 41,  
42, 44, 49, 52, 54, 77, 96  
Nikolić-Žugić, Mina (daughter), 12, 43, 58,  
96  
Nikolić-Žugić, Stefan (son), 12, 43, 51, 58,  
96  
Nikolić-Žugić, Tijana (daughter), 29, 45,  
46, 75, 96  
Ninkovio, Dušan, 8  
Nobel Prize, 26, 65, 88, 96

Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, 37, 39  
NYU. *See* New York University

## P

Pantich, Dejan, 51  
Paris, France, 77  
Pasteur, Louis, 56  
patent, 76, 77  
Pennsylvania, 39  
Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical  
Sciences, 64, 66, 68, 79, 82, 84, 94  
psychoneuroimmunology, 35

## R

Rajan, T.V., 70  
Renault, 92  
Rifkind, Richard A., 63  
Ristić, Zagorka, 11, 25  
Ritter, Gerd, 95  
Rockefeller University, 26, 62  
Press, 26  
Romania, 5  
Russia, 1

## S

Saint Nicholas, 6  
Salk Institute for Biological Studies, 71  
San Diego, California, 31, 51, 54, 55, 78  
San Francisco, California, 51  
Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina, 2  
Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation, 42  
Scripps Research Institute, 8, 42, 54, 57, 59,  
79, 81  
Seattle, Washington, 54, 78  
Serbia, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 21, 23, 24, 35, 38,  
39, 40, 42, 49, 72, 90, 91, 93, 94, 97  
Simić, Mirko, 31, 35  
Slava, 6  
Slovenia, 2, 3, 4, 40, 90  
Smithsonian Institution, 58  
South America, 91  
Spren, Jonathan, 58  
Stamford, Connecticut, 25  
Stojković, Branimir, 22, 25

Switzerland, 49, 71, 77

## T

T cells, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 52, 56,  
61, 65, 66, 67, 85  
thymocytes, 53, 64  
thymus, 25, 27, 29, 31, 52, 56, 65, 83  
Tito, Josip Broz, 1, 2, 23, 35, 40  
Tübingen, Germany, 26  
Tudjman, Franjo, 3, 91, 92  
Tufts University, 25

## U

U.S. Army, 85  
U.S. Congress, 71, 82  
United States of America, 3, 4, 7, 10, 20,  
22, 23, 25, 30, 38, 42, 47, 48, 49, 50, 76,  
77, 78, 81, 91, 94, 96  
University of Connecticut, 70

## V

Vojvodina, Serbia, 39  
volleyball, 5, 15, 16, 17, 28, 38, 41, 54  
Vukmanović, Stanislav, 44, 47, 98

## W

Waksman, Byron H., 31  
Warsaw Pact, 1  
Washington, D.C., 4  
World War II, 1, 25  
Wortis, Henry H., 25, 30, 58, 98

## Y

Yugo, 92  
Yugoslavia, 8, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 22, 25, 27,  
28, 30, 31, 36, 38, 39, 42, 46, 48, 49, 50,  
57, 89, 91, 94, 95

## Z

Zagreb University, 26, 48  
Medical School, 26  
Zagreb, Croatia, 2, 4, 20, 33, 89, 91  
Zavodi Crvena Zastava, 92

Zinkernagel, Rolf M., 26, 65