

INTERVIEW WITH HALIL KAJTAZI

Pristina | Date: May 21, 2016

Duration: 62 minutes

Present:

1. Halil Kajtazi (Speaker)
2. Abit Hoxha (Interviewer)
3. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
4. Veli Kajtazi (Speaker's son)
5. Prozë Kajtazi (Speaker's daughter)
6. Noar Sahiti (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

Halil Kajtazi: Welcome.

Abit Hoxha: Thank you so much Uncle Halil. Can you...

Halil Kajtazi: You came at the most exact time, when three-four days ago we celebrated the 45th anniversary of this book's publishing {shows the books}, "Drencia's Folk Prose". But, apart from the book publishing, our daughter was also born. My wife and sons agreed, so did my mother, to name her as the title of the book, Proza. So in our house, 45 years ago two proses were born. One, "Drencia's Folk Prose"; and my Proza [Prose] { points at his daughter } a girl. She is a girl. We celebrated her anniversary, in the name of this book, four-five days ago, the 14th of this month. Thank you so much.

Abit Hoxha: Thank you so much. It's a very good start...

Halil Kajtazi: I was born in a village of Drenica, Vitak. A village which didn't have more than fifty-sixty houses. I spent my childhood there. I was born on June 23, 1935. My mother told me that it was a harrowing time when I was born. I grew up there. I grew up with four of my peers, my brother's son, Haxhiu, and the two sons of Uncle Ramë, Musliu and Islami, and Muhameti. I grew up with them. We finished primary school in our *oda*¹ with Uncle Ramë, who taught Serbo-Croatian in the army in Vrajë. When he came back from Vrajë, an illegal book came to our house, an *Abetare* from Rakenica. They got it in Shushicë. He taught us the first Albanian letters comparing them to Serbian ones.

And we had a big *oda*, a door like that with soot {points at the door}, with rocks, wherever we went we wrote those letters the way uncle Ramë taught us (smiles). We even tried to write them on the peels of poplar trees. That is how much we loved learning those letters.

And through that time we were taught to write, read. So it was during Germany's occupation to say, Italy, for us those days were liberating. Because the first Albanian *Abetare* came, we had never seen it

¹ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

and it was forbidden to be used. So that's how our life went. Later, after the war in 1946, the first official school was opened, to say, in the *mejtep*² where imams used to be taught .

The first teacher who came in 1946 was Haki Raci from Gjakova. He came to our *oda* and begged my father and other family members to help him, and agree as a village to let him use the *mejtep* and turn it into a school. The villagers talked to each other and used my father's authority, and my brother's authority, who back then was entrusted with the education in Skenderaj. And we gave the *mejtep* to the teacher so he could open the primary school.

Students from Kotorr, Qubrrrel, Rakenica and Glladernica started school in that *mjetep*. After two months, our teacher, asked to start second grade, our family, the four of us. Me, Haxhi, Islami, Musliu. We were happy, he said, "No, you start..." Because he formed the class with two grades. We were lucky and went to second grade, then we finished it.

That's how my life went through primary school and my childhood. We were really happy. Even though the conditions were hard, the *mejtep* was a large room, we didn't have places to sit. So each of us had to take a stool with us, bring it to school and sit on it. There was no floor, it was all mud. Each of us that went there, we came with stools, we would put it there and sit in order. The teacher would lecture there. Sometime later they brought a blackboard to write. But we didn't have anything to write with, our teacher would advise us to get clay, you know what clay is? And make the clay like a pencil, to form it, because it is soft, and with that clay we would write in the blackboard.

And that's how we started life there. In 1949, I finished primary school. And I continued in Skenderaj's gymnasium in 1949. With a few words that's how primary school went. Now I'll tell you more about my education.

Abit Hoxha: Can you tell us what you remember from the period of war, from the Germans arrival that you mentioned, and Italians? That period of time, what characterizes Italians, Germans, what do you remember?

Halil Kajtazi: I remember that period of time very well. I was about eight-nine years back then. I remember when they came through the old street, which links Mitrovica with Peja, with motorcycles. Then they said that the Germans came. I remember when they came to the years near the street, and they got into someone's yard, and an old lady came out, an old lady, and said, "Get out of here, don't come into the yard because when my sons wake up, they'll get mad that you came through our yard."

I also remember when they came to our neighborhood, they said, "The Germans came!" And we were okay with it, because we were kids, we didn't know, et cetera. I remember a lot about them, and I remember when Mitrovica was bombarded. They said that they were coming, we would see American airplanes bombarding Mitrovica. That's what they used to say. And we would see the airplanes flying in the sky, and heading towards Mitrovica to bombard it.

Abit Hoxha: What about the partisans, do you remember?

² *Mejtep, Maktab* (Arabic transliterations include **makteb, mekteb, mektep, meqteb, maqtab**), also called a *Kuttab* or school, is an elementary schools. Though it was primarily used for teaching children how to read, write, grammar and Islamic studies such as Qira'at (Quranic recitation), other practical and theoretical subjects were also often taught.

Halil Kajtazi: Yes. The partisans came later.

Abit Hoxha: Yes.

Halil Kajtazi: The partisans sometime around...

Abit Hoxha: Yes, yes...

Halil Kajtazi: Partisans came... Albanian brigades came first, I remember Albanian brigades in our *oda* [men's chamber]. It was interesting for us to hear them talk in Albanian. Because most of them were from south Albania. But I've heard from other people that Tosks were born for war, they're born for it, not bought. I've even heard that when he goes to the front, he says, "I'll go first, you after me." So they did not put their friend first, and after me, he says, "I'll go first, you after me." So they were warriors, but mainly warriors of that regime that they had in Albania at that time. So communism. A, yes? [Addresses the interviewer]

Abit Hoxha: Do you remember the airplane, when an airplane crashed, the one they talk about?

Halil Kajtazi: I remember the airplanes, and when they would shoot there was some kind of smoke, like wool, you know, that's how it looked in the air. We would look at them going towards Mitrovica from here, et cetera. There are cases when the bombs went off in villages.

Abit Hoxha: When the plane crashed...

Halil Kajtazi: Yes, I remember. For example, when a plane crashed in Polac, you know Polac. Every time I went to my [maternal] uncle's house, I would beg my uncle to stop the dray, and to go get on that plane. It had its wings like this {opens his arms} and I, "You're gonna fall, Lilo!" My uncle would say, "You're gonna fall!" And I would happily jump on those airplane wings, its body, and I really liked seeing that plane. I always remember it. It's good that you're reminding me of these things. So, yeah.

Abit Hoxha: Apart from the partisans do you remember other *çeta*³ of Drenica, or the Albanian resistance that existed in Drenica at that time?

Halil Kajtazi: I remember. Because I've lived the war of Shaban Polluzha there. I've also taken other historical notes. Although, I went to villages pretending to get folk tales, but I have a lot of notebooks with historical notes, that I talked about in my novels. For example, I remember when Shaban Pollusha's army fell apart. And they fled through our village, through Kllodornica, through our village they went to Kotor, Krenikader, then went different ways. I remember that time very well.

I remember when they came to our house in the evening, Shaban's brigade, and within an hour, two hours they left, *chetniks*⁴ immediately came, alleged partisans. They were *chetniks*, we called them

³ The South Slavic *četa* is a loan word from Ottoman Turkish and it is derived from *çat*, *çet*, to hit, strike, steal. Comparably, see *çatmak* or its reciprocal form *çatışmak*, to provoke a conflict. It commonly means band of irregular fighters.

⁴ Serbian movement born in the beginning of the Second World War, under the leadership of Draža Mihailović. Its name derives from *četa*, anti-Ottoman guerrilla bands. This movement adopted a Greater Serbia program and

partisans, but they were *chetnik*. And they came to our *oda*, the cannon was shot, I know they shot a cannon to evacuate to neighborhood, the street. That's when Shaban's brigade fled, how and where did they go, only God knows. I remember two, two boys, my uncle's sons, they killed them in Prrue t'keq, and to this day their graves are there. They were going back home to Plluzhina. You know Plluzhina?

Abit Hoxha: Yes.

Halil Kajtazi: They are Ilaz and Isuf Hajfari... Ilaz and Shaban Hajdaraj were their names, those two boys.

Abit Hoxha: Do you remember those *çeta* [bands], Shaban Polluzha's army, where they dressed, or how...

Halil Kajtazi: The majority of them, were wearing traditional Albanian clothing, traditional Albanian clothing. They say that Shaban used to wear *plis*⁵ with the star. Because at first he was with the partisans, but when he saw what's happening in Skenderaj, he quit because he did not want to agree with the partisans, do you understand? I'm saying this in a simple way, you know.

Abit Hoxha: These occurrences in Skenderaj, do you remember as a young man, what did they talk about these occurrences in Skenderaj?

Halil Kajtazi: I remember, I remember, Veli if you could bring me "Shtalbakët e Vitakut" [addresses his son], I have it on my book. It will refresh my memory, good that you're reminding me of these things. Before the war three partisans came illegally to our *oda*, we housed and fed them. As children, we always had to go out to the yard, and the neighborhood to see who is coming to the *oda* to tell them, so they could go through the ceiling in the room where men slept with their wives. And we had to tell them, so they could take the ladder and get up to the ceiling, because they had a two-floor house.

One of these partisans was a character that I wrote in this novel, Qamil Hoxha from Gjakova, Dervish Kopriva from Kopriva and Brahim Terrnoci from Terrnoc. But, all they talked about them to our parents later, freely, we would listen to them as kids, they did not ask us to leave the *oda*, you know. And my father would always tell him, "Don't Qamil, you're young, these things don't work out this way. Be careful because you're young." But he had his enthusiasm, his orientation and did what he wanted. Until the end, when Shaban's war happened, when the river was filled with dead people and blood, Klina, and people saw it, Shaban saw it. And they called other people to tell them what the Albanian *chetnik*-partisan brigade is doing, Albanian also. Then Shaban did not agree with them, he called Fadil Hoxha and Milan Popović to stop that terror. But, the terror did not stop. Then Shaban Polluzha formed his battalion, his brigade and became their opponent. Shortly.

And now about this {holds the book "Shtalbakët e Vitakut" in his hand}, he said, "Long live the brave Drenica", at the time, I took these notes at Sherifi. Sherifi told me. And he didn't want to give up the goods, and all the food he ate in Drenica.

was for a limited period an anti-occupation guerrilla, but mostly engaged in collaboration with Nazi Germany, its major goal remaining the unification of all Serbs. It was responsible for a strategy of terror against non-Serbs during the Second World War and was banned after 1945. Mihailović was captured, tried and executed in 1946.

⁵ Traditional white felt conic cap, differs from region to region, distinctively Albanian.

As you could see the beginning of this book in this notebook {holds a notebook in his hand} and other notebooks, folk tales. Here, in this book there are, for example proverbs, tales, anecdotes, et cetera. Here's a proverb, I was with Veli and we wrote it down, "Oak, cannot be sold without being engraved." I wrote it in 1952. Or, "Good words, oat bread." Or the book, "Lay a hay straw, and you'll find six." Lay a hay straw, and you'll find six, et cetera.

Then come the other tales, for example, wherever I saw proverbs I would write them down, and different things. Then I summarized them in other books and I systemized them. I waited 25 years for this book to be published {holds the book "Drenica's folk prose" in his hand}. But it didn't get published. It was as a manuscript at the Albanological Institute, that I sent in 1954 as a manuscript, handwritten, because back then we didn't have a typewriter. And after the Albanological Institute was opened, I asked them to give me that notebook, because they want to publish a book, to offer a book.

I took that notebook and I wrote down, I wrote everything from that book in this book {flips through the book pages}. But when it came to publishing the book, they didn't. I waited, and waited, a long period of time went by, I came exactly where we are in this living room, a little sad, my mother asked me, "What's wrong son?" I said, "Eh mother, this, and that... The book I wrote in Vitak, in our *oda*, that I gathered from Et Paliqi, from Arif Tahiri, from Sefer Shabani, from him and him..." I say, "They're not publishing it, that's why I am a little..." "Can I ask you something son?" she said, "Yes, mother. What?" She said, "Can you publish it with your own money?" I said, "Yes mother, if I had the money I would publish it immediately." "Eh," she said, "My son, you could sell the house, and publish the book."

Those words gave me courage, they motivated me, and honestly all night long I talked about how could I find the money and publish this book {shows the book}. I went to my friends' workplaces. I talked to my friends as you do in your circle. Some wanted to help me, but not a dime, I didn't take a dime from them. I created an opportunity, I got a loan to repair the house, two million was a lot of money back then, two million. I used half of it to repair the house, half was my money, and the other half for the book. This book at the time cost me two million Serbian dollars, we calculated it with Veli, two million back then would cost to build our house, this house as we have it. The press was that expensive then.

And when I published in May, I brought it here, I brought two packages. The journey with books from Mitrovica was interesting. When I came to Radio Prishtina with a bus, I found a boy, he spoke Serbian. "Young man," I say, "Can you help me carry these packages there," because back then you could see, there weren't any houses here, from Radio Prishtina you could see my house. "To that house over there." He says, "Yes." He carried one package, I carried the other, we came and get them inside, we unloaded them here. They saw the packages, and I say to the boy, "Let me pay because you did me a huge favor." {Puts his hand in his pocket, pretending to take money out} He said, "No, uncle. I did not come to get money." "No," I said, "I want to give you this money. I also wanna give you this book. Do you want me to give you a book?" He said, "What kind of book is it?" I said, "It's a book with Albanian folklore. It's Albanian." He said, "But I can't read, I can't read in Albanian." And I said, "Let me pay you for this, this favor..." "No." He said. "Can you tell me what your parents do?" I said. "My father," he said, "is the bank director." "Well, thank you for doing me this favor. I will never forget it." Do you understand, and we both parted happily, me, and him.

Then we flipped through the book, our whole family gathered around the books. Just like today that they are published (smiles). And that's how it was then. And then our daughter was born {looks at his daughter} Proza (laughs). And life in the family continued like this. After 13 months, she was sick, with the money I got from the two books I published then, "Folk prose", the second volume, and "Drenica's lyrical folk" it's there {points towards the book}. I used that money for this, I sent her to Ljubljana for healing, in the hospital. But she wasn't lucky enough. I took her there with my wife.

This is her luck, because we approached a life with food, she didn't walk for five years, for five years she didn't walk. We continually gave her carrot, grated carrot, carrot. When she turned five she started walking. She started walking, but got scared, she fell, she was scared to walk, she started walking. And since then she started walking, we didn't take her to the doctor anymore. With the money I got from this book and the book with folk tales I took her for healing in Ljubljana, but this was her luck.

The story of this book is {holds the book in his hand} also the story of, a part of Drenica's story. When I started to write the stories and songs, in my *oda* I had difficulties, because there in the computer I have the book that I dedicated to this book, and Proza. Its title is "The Growth of Prose". I have it written on the computer, I just have to publish it. I wrote it over these past three months. I published it from that, this is a growth for me. This is a time that I am happy where I could live.

And I've come to the conclusion, and I wrote a poem, that my birth was a lucky birth. And Proza's birth was a lucky birth. And the births of all the family members were lucky, I looked at how lucky it was, and we lived a good life here. We adapted to this place, we adapted to this education, et cetera. And most of them are educated. I came here because of the education, because I used to work in Likovc, I was a teacher. I told you back then [addresses the interviewer].

Abit Hoxha: Can you tell us in detail when did you start to work, to gather these stories, or the prose? How did you get motivated? How did you start?

Halil Kajtazi: I got motivated, I have this one written down, because my professor, Sali Kolgeci, in senior year in high school, here in Pristina, always told me, "You Halil, Drenica's folklore." He'd do this {points with his finger}. Always Drenica's folklore, Drenica's folklore. It was stuck in my head. And when I started in '52, it was winter, it was the winter break. There I wrote those proverbs that I told you, around ten or fifteen proverbs, I wrote them in a new notebook and I gave them to the professor. I said, "Professor, can you read these proverbs that I wrote, I wrote in Drenica?" "Yes." "But look professor, did I make any mistakes?" "No, no. They're good. But take it and send it to the 'Pioneri' newsroom, and they will publish it."

I took them to the "Pioneri" newsroom, and after two weeks, or three "Pioneri" was published and my professor calls me, "Halil, Halil! Come here. Take the "Pioneri" magazine because they've published those proverbs." Ou when I saw my name there, Halil Kajtazi in the "Pioneri" Magazine, I was happy. The students asked what happened, "Nothing, nothing, nothing. A few proverbs here..." This and that, and since then I systematically started writing folklore, gathering, and publishing of it, I never stopped. And so on.

Abit Hoxha: Tell us more, how did you travel in Drenica, it isn't easy...

Halil Kajtazi: I always travelled by foot in Drenica. Never had any other means of transportation, just by foot. I went to Obri, by foot. I went to Qerez, by foot. I went there, by foot. Only some parts that I could travel by train, for example to, here, Qyshemurr, and I went to Obri for example, I passed by there. Or I went by, Gradica, Likoshan, and I stopped in Dokoshefc, I went by train, it passed only that way. From village to village, I went by foot. Even Anton Çetta travelled by foot for a long time, then they found him a jeep, the committee. You might remember that time, people might have told you...

Abit Hoxha: They told me...

Halil Kajtazi: So they took him around in that jeep, he went to villages and gathered folk tales and published them.

Abit Hoxha: How did you stay in people's houses, in *oda*? Because you couldn't go from Vitak to Obri and come back in the same day for example.

Halil Kajtazi: I stayed overnight, I slept.

Abit Hoxha: I'm more interested in these, how did things go in the *oda*? Did the people come, did you invite them, did you know? How did you identify them?

Halil Kajtazi: I always asked in villages, "Where can I go?" For example when I came to Likovc, I was with two boys, with Xhaviti and Besimi. When we got to Likovc, where I was a teacher, I say, "Do you have some water *bre*?" We were tired because we came by foot through Bezhaniq to there. They barely found some water, barely found some water to give to us, and we rested there. But we did not find that salesman, Jonuzi was there, but the other salesman. Because I was going from Pristina now, I left Drenica. I did all of these after I came to Pristina, most of the work.

When I go there I see on the door of the cooperative there a huge picture, John Travolta on a motorbike. I asked a guy there, I say, "Who is that in the picture there, I don't recognize him?" "Eiii," he said, "You don't recognize him? John Travolta *bre*, John Travolta." "I've heard of him, but I didn't recognize him. John Travolta got to Drenica?" (laugh) And they said, whispering, "Who is he?" I say, "Thank you for honoring us, and giving us water."

So we went, we started going downhill, you that area by the school. This one guy was coming behind us, "Where are you going? Where are you going?" He was from the Nurak family. I said, "Man, go ask in Pristina, at my house, they know where I am going, and where I am, I told them. If you want to come with us, come and we'll get there." He stopped. And again, "Where are you going? Where are you going, at whose place are you going?" I was going to Arif Tahiri. When he saw that I wasn't answering, I said, "Man, go away. I told you, go to my house and ask." He said, "It's far away, but tell me..." "I won't tell you, but come with me and I'll take you there." He went away.

It was my principle to not tell anyone where I am going, because my father always told me that someone could come and not let you do what you planned to. And I went there, I stayed there for three-four nights, I wrote stories, this and that. But then I took Arif to stay over at my house for a whole week. I wrote a book for a week with Arif Tahiri, my typewriter was there {points with his finger} Veli knows, the table. The room was full. I published them, just like I typed them on the typewriter.

⁶ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

But then Arfi told me, he was sick for three months, he was sick for three months because he was too tired. Then I visited him time after time, I visited him, I sent him the other books, et cetera. Then I went to other neighborhoods, but with Arif's reference, building confidence in me, "You can go there, you can go there." Because I couldn't see people. For example, I went to Tica, to Plluzina, I went... Always with, for example if your father would send me somewhere, I had to be done through people, because I didn't have... He's from Vitak.

Eh, I remember a case. When I began to write down the stories in my *oda*, an imam from Pedalishte, he was known as Mulla Qamil of Gjakova, he was an imam during Ramadan. These guys asked him, 'Mulla Qamil, is it a sin to give to this boy, he wants the folk tales, songs, and these...' 'No, no...' He said. He would speak as if through the nose. 'No, no, it's not a sin. Give them to the schooled people, they need it.' They felt a bit liberated when the imam said that.

But, you should understand, always in our *oda* we were followed, the Village Council knew from there, another neighborhood, someone would tell them, "Look in Veli's *oda* the light was on all night long, somebody was there." He would come through the neighborhood with a long, Bugar rifle in his arm and ask, "Who was in Veli's *oda*?" "It was him, him." And we had to go and report it at Runik's police station, that him, him and him were in Veli's *oda*. We were continuously followed I swear. My parents would understand, I wouldn't understand much, but later later I found out how riskily we spent our lives.

But that village council, I remember as a kid, they took our bread, our flour, and our lights, and for three months, thirty family members, we had nothing. My father would go out with a Serbian army backpack, illegally trying to buy, secretly, to bring us a bag of food. I remember when my father would bring that bag, hang it on the door, and would say, "Take this, do whatever you want." To the women, you couldn't make bread out of that, but they would wash the flour, put in beans, or make *laknor*, make *lakor*. For three months in our house we didn't even see bread. Only when the new barley grew, that we reaped and we dried it, and then we milled it, only then we ate that bread, all yellow. It was this yellow {points to something yellow}. But there was no wheat, there was nothing to eat, that's how life was.

Abit Hoxha: What year was this, do you remember?

Halil Kajtazi: In the year, the year... '47...

Abit Hoxha: '47?

Halil Kajtazi: '47, '48, yes.

Abit Hoxha: Who took your bread like that? The partisans, the Germans....

Halil Kajtazi: No, no. Communism, when the communists came. They would take the bread, the food. And in conferences they used to say that we are taking your food, and taking it to people in Albania because they're dying from hunger. The lad should pay attention to this.

Abit Hoxha: Yes, yes.

Halil Kajtazi: But that wasn't true. They would take the food to wear us out. So we wouldn't go to war anymore, to not protest, et cetera. To calm us down in a way, so we would do whatever they wanted. But we won the school, that was a big win. In reality they had sent food to Russia, or who knows,

because they had debts from the war, and they left us with nothing. But they took the surplus to cities, to villages, and everywhere, and the Albanians suffered from hunger for a long time. It was a difficult time, a time that only we know how we survived.

And they used to call us *kulak*. How could they call us *kulak* when we couldn't even provide ourselves with bread, as my father used to say, my uncle and my big brother said that for six months we could provide bread from our land, and for six months we could, go into debt. They sold some apples they had there in Mitrovica and from that they bought bread, the bread. This is how it was then.

Abit Hoxha: Who, who called you *kullak*?

Halil Kajtazi: The communists would call us *kulak*, and the partisans. After they came, after freedom. Because before we didn't even know what *kullak* is. Now I have those written, "The growth of prose", I have all these events documented. For example, the *ferexhe* time came. The conferences would be held in our *oda*, did you have a tower or *oda*? [Addresses the interviewer]

Abit Hoxha: We had an *oda*.

Halil Kajtazi: *Oda*. We also had an *oda*. They talked about removal of the *ferexhe*⁷, and most of us agreed to remove it. She doesn't understand the *ferexhe*, but you'll explain it to her later.

Abit Hoxha: She understands, she understands.

Halil Kajtazi: There was this Hasan Carani, a poor man, and he says, "Ho, ho, when my wife removes the *ferexhe*, I'll tell her *fiu, fiu, fiu*." The secretary of the committee asked, "What is this 'Fiju, fiju, fiju'?" He said, "Who's that?" "Leave it, leave it Veli because he never even had a *ferexhe*, not him, not his wife." And he got out, he left the *oda*. He left the *oda* (laughs), he just said that, "When my wife removes the *ferexhe*, I'll tell her *fiu, fiu, fiu*." And he left the *oda*, he got out.

The *ferexhe* was removed, but it was hard for women to go out without one. When I let my wife go out without *ferexhe*, when I got married in '54, it was the talk of the neighborhood, when all the women in the neighborhood in the windows would look, "Get out out, Veli's son let his wife go out without *ferexhe*." They would say, excuse me, differently but... I have the photographs there, the book, proverbs, the first photograph. Look Veli, let's look at it [addresses his son]. When I went out with *alla franga* clothes. And then as a teacher I told my wife, "I can't be a teacher and go out in Drenica's clothes." I told her from the beginning.

They never let her see the light of day. They did not let her get an education, the Albanian woman didn't even think to go to school for a long time. But the sad thing is that we didn't even have any schools open, especially in Kosovo, and the other places of Albania, from 1912 and on. We were in the dark. We were in a prison. Books couldn't get here, not even the *abetare*, or anything. In Albania, there wasn't a single book published in Albania at that time, most of the books were published elsewhere and were brought to Albania. And indirectly even here, sometimes some book would come, in Albanian if someone could read. Because the Turks were here from 500 and more years, we were in slavery, we didn't have anything in Albanian.

Then, when the time came for Albania to be independent, 1912, education started. Education started in Albania, not on the other important branches that were cut from Albania. We achieved as much as

⁷ *Ferexhe*, a veil concealing the whole face except the eyes, worn by Muslim women in public.

we could, and maybe if that angle, that state wasn't formed, maybe we wouldn't have existed. Or who knows what would have happened, maybe better, maybe worse, for us. I said this shortly.

Abit Hoxha: Do you remember when the Italians came? Because we still didn't talk about the Italians, that period of war...

Halil Kajtazi: Eh, I remember the Italians when I was in Likoshan, the police station was exactly where the cemetery of 14 people killed is, among them there are also ten members of my uncle's family. As children we went to the police station because it was there, they, Qirezi, and it was Hani i Qirezit, and at Hani i Qirezit it was the Italian's police station. We went there and we would present ourselves, we would see the Italians. I remember that with their cans, that they would eat, meat, we would play pretending it's a ball. On that hill, were you ever in that hill? [addresses the interviewer]

Abit Hoxha: Yes, yes.

Halil Kajtazi: I remember really well. And I remember their language. I thought it was very fast, they would talk fast, it was a melodic language, you know, I remember it as a kid. And we would speak a whole different language, our accent is thicker. Especially the folk accent, it is very thick. But now we are softening the language, we speak it a little differently, calmer, with some other sounds. I remember that.

Abit Hoxha: I have one more special question maybe.... You wrote prose and tales how they were spoken, how they were said to you, not in the standard language so to say, I know that standard language didn't exist in the '50s... yes?

Halil Kajtazi: This folk science prefers to preserve the folk language the way it is spoken and pronounced. People everywhere wrote it like that, even Vukaracic, and other Italian folklorists, Greek, et cetera. So the accent was the same as people would say it. But we don't have suitable marks to write all the accents. Lately we removed all the accents. Nobody writes the words with an accent. It was, "*Ish kanë...*" [It was] for example, let's say, "*Ishin konë...*" [They were] or "Hi hi hi" with that fast accent. There were three accents in the Albanian language.

The French still use the accents. Because I learnt French, I know that my professor would stress the words with the same accent as we did in Albanian before. Now they're extinct. Nobody uses them anymore. It softened, for example, "*Ishin kanë*", they write it with a silent "ë" that is understood, and the stress falls on the "a". Our language is difficult, our accent is hard. That's why they're out of folk literature. I have them all published with the accents before. Even in these. Eh, since you asked about this.

We started translating them into the standard language. I worked with Veli on a fable book, we translated them, for kids, and we translated them all in today's standard language. It's a book called "The Flu and the Lion". It will be a very good book, that I chose all the best fables that I read throughout my entire life, and put them all in one book. This is it, {holds the book in his hand and shows it to the camera} this is it.

Part Two

Abit Hoxha: That you started the second grade. There with those four cousins, or relatives, your family members. How did school continue? From the second grade? How did school continue?

Halil Kajtazi: Yes. We were enrolled in the first high school opened in Skenderaj. There was a high school opened in a healthcare building, in the suburb of Skenderaj. Maybe you've seen it sometime. But we didn't have space, we were too many students from different places, from Rozalla, from Vitak, from a lot of places. We didn't have where, how, this and that. But the new high school was being built.

When we went to the new high school, it was still being built, we went to the first floor. Like that, it was just painted. And I know that we were three classrooms full of students. So three classrooms, full of Serbian and Montenegrin students. There used to be a lot of Serbians and Montenegrins there, almost half of them. Half of them were Albanian, half of them were Serbian and Montenegrin. You don't know these things. Rexhep Geci was our principal. He was once a teacher in Likovc, and from Likovc he came and established the high school there. He was from Peja, but he was very hardworking, and punctual and very capable. Then other professors came, we called them professors, they had only graduated from high school but we called them professors.

I remember there was a wooden ladder, so the workers could get to the second floor to continue building the school. We would get on that ladder, it was with oak wood, you understand. We would get on that ladder and we would swing, it would swing. And our principal would tell us, "Don't get on that ladder, it can fall and you could fall, too." But as kids, we still got on that ladder. I was on the ladder, and it fell, we fell, too. And one under the ladder yells, "*O kuku*⁸, *o kuku!*" He was Shaqir Behrani, he was in our generation. Maybe you've heard of him?

Abit Hoxha: Yes.

Halil Kajtazi: "Oj *kuku*, I'm left without schooling!" The principal heard, he says, "Let's take him to the hospital, fast." The janitor ran, Ferizi from Llahusha, and a few students, we put him in a blanket, four-five people, we went to Skenderaj. He was yelling, "Oj *kuku*, I'm left without schooling! Oj *kuku*, I'm left without schooling!" He survived, he finished school, finished university, and he even established a high school. At some point he opened parallels of *Shkolla Normale*⁹, until finally he came as a collaborator to the Albanological Institute, he lived in Pristina, and his life ended like this. This is how it was, how it was back then.

Abit Hoxha: Do you remember when Skenderaj changed its name, changed it to Serbica.

Halil Kajtazi: I know that it was called Skenderaj. But when they changed its name, they didn't ask us, they didn't ask anyone because they named it after Serbia, because of the Serbs that came here, that moved here. So the same would be Serbian. While in reality that was Polac and Klina's land. Polac had that part, where it was that, that huge oak, they had land there, do you understand? Kids played there, Albanians up and down, when they came they named it Serbica. But after the war, not before the war. There was a prefect, Lubiani, from Kukes that named it Skenderaj. This is what they said even when we were in Kukes.

⁸ Colloquial, expresses disbelief, distress, or wonder, depending on the context.

⁹ 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 WWII, these were the first schools in Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

Abit Hoxha: After school in Skenderaj you went to Prizren to school, high school.

Halil Kajtazi: Well, in '49... After we finished the first year in high school, then the best students were chosen to be sent to Prizren for three months to finish the second year. And then continue to the third. In, a few people there, thirty-forty people, we were chosen as excellent students and we were sent to Prizren. For three months we finished the second grade of high school as it was called back then. In '51, '52 they brought us back to Skenderaj, we finished the third grade of high school. Then from the third grade, I came in the year '51, '52, I was enrolled in the Prishtina high school on the fourth grade, in the Prishtina high school. And I continued high school. But there were very few people from our region, we were only three people from Drenica, at that time.

Abit Hoxha: Do you remember the names?

Halil Kajtazi: Yes, I remember. I remember there was Hasan Hoti and he was known as Fazjeqeli, Fazeqelaj, Falzi Haxhiu, from Pokleku. Hasani Hoti from Polac, and Fazli Haxhiu, Qelaj, like that, he was from Pokleku, I remember.

From high school, I finished the fourth year, and enrolled in the fifth. Our pension was closed, I couldn't afford to continue and I had to go back to the village. When I came back at that time, my father was in prison in Niš, he was in prison. If we talk about my father's business, it is really deep. I was....

Abit Hoxha: Tell us more about your father's business, if you could.

Halil Kajtazi: I was stuck there as a worker, I would work in the land we had. Honestly, I cried alone many times, when no one would see me, that I quit high school. I took my books, there isn't a shadow in Vitak that I didn't pass with a book in my hand, reading, and crying for quitting school. How things turn out, a day comes and I talk to my big brother, Rushiti, in Skenderaj. We were tired, our father was in prison, we wanted to send him some packages... My brother was taking a salary there, he was a warehouse keeper. But that wasn't enough. Talking, and talking, he says, "Halil, can I talk to Shaqir Beqiri so he could hire you as a teacher?" "Yes, bother you can, of course."

We went out, I know we met, because I didn't know him, my brother did. And he hugged me like this, just as I am hugging Proza {hugs Proza}. He said, "Do you want to be a teacher?" I said, "Yes, even my brother told me to be a teacher." "Do you want to work in Llausha?" I said, "Yes, wherever you want me to." He said, "You will go work in Llausha." He said, "Go home, wear something nice, fix up a little..." Because they would also look at our appearance a little, if we were handsome, et cetera. Because if you were short and stuff, you would be rejected, it was their duty.

I wore the clothes that I had, and I came. When he gave the paperwork {pretends to write}, "Go there." The road from Skenderaj that goes straight to the mosque, not the other way, I cried the whole way to the mosque. For how it happened for me to quit school, and be a teacher. I submitted the paperwork, I gave it to the principal, and they told me, "Yes. You will work with the second and fourth grade." And I continued working there.

I didn't... It was luck, even in the second semester, I worked there for two months and a half. From there they sent to Rakenica. But I didn't like it in Rekenica, but I couldn't object, but we took, we took two salaries. My big brother was very happy, he was happy that we were financially a little better. And they sent me to Rakenica. In Rakenica we were friends with the family of Dajak, and Durmish. My

fiance was from the Dajak family. Things got bad because of the primitivism, they had those slogans. There comes a guy from the neighborhood of Dajaks with a hatchet. We had a classroom and a small office. When I see him with a hatchet in his hands, Bali Dajaku. I say "Hey, do you know where you have come? Do you know that this is a school, you can't come here with a hatchet. Here are my students. How can you come here with a hatchet? Leave that hatchet there, what do you want?"

He leaves the hatchet, he got to the office which was like from here, {points with his hand} to here. I say, "What are you? Are you crazy?" He says, "Who told you to come here?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Who told you to come here?" His daughter was engaged to someone in my neighborhood, she was in school, in that classroom. And when I went to the classroom she had gone under the tables so I wouldn't see her, I didn't even recognize her, or see that she got under the tables, but they told me later. I say, "Look man, I didn't come here by myself. My father didn't tell me to come here, neither did my brother. But the circle sent me here. Take this hatchet, and don't come here with a hatchet anymore. The hatchet is to be used in the mountain, it isn't for school, you scare the students, you scare the students and..." He got out of the school.

It was a really hard time, but it turned out well, you know, shortly. From there I went to speak with person who was entrusted with the education, it was Besim Hajzeri from Tica. He said, "Yes Halil, why did you come?" I said, "O Beqir, can I ask you something, to send me somewhere else, from Rakenica." "Why Halil?" "Well, this and that..." I told him this story, I say, "An old man came, we friends, my fiance is from there, and a guy from my neighborhood is engaged to someone there and I don't want them to talk." He said, "Aii, but it was near you house." "Well, what can I do Beqir?" He says, "Do you wanna go to Likovc?" I say, "Yes, immediately." He gave me the decree, {pretends he is writing something} and I went to Likovc.

I didn't know where Likovci is. I came to Tushila, at my brother's uncle's, "Yes Halil, why did you come?" I say, "I came so you could take me to Likovc, because they sent me to work as a teacher there." "Do you know where Likovc is?" I said, "No, I don't know." And I really didn't know, I was 18 years old, I didn't get out much. I know Ilaz came with me and took to Tica street where you have to go uphill, and said, "Pass through here, and you will get to Tica."

But I forgot, and I went through another way and got to Rozalla. When I saw the school in Rozalla, I was happy. The school was nice. I was wondering if the school I was going to was this nice or not. And I ask them, "Where is Likovc?" He says, "Go straight through here, and it is there on that street." I went and I saw the school in Likovc, and I liked it. I put out my decree and continued working there as a teacher, I was there until '53. Then in '53 They sent me to Rudnik, near my house. I spent four years in Rudnik. Shortly. Yes?

Abit Hoxha: Tell us more how these three-four years in Likovc were. Where, where, how many times a week did you travel? Did you sleep in Likovc? More of these. How was it?

Halil Kajtazi: In Likovc we had a room where six teachers slept {sips tea}. I had my bed in Llausha, where I slept, when I was a teacher there. After a months I tell Ilaz, "O Ilaz, go and bring me my bed, my bed with my sheets, because I don't have a place to sleep." Because I was sleeping in a bed with them, two people, so bad. He brings me my bed. When he brings my bed, it was out of hay, it was out of hay. Put the sheets over it, a pillow, sleep there and that's it. He brought my bed without the sheet because someone had taken it, but since I had my blanket I didn't care (smiles). Somebody slept there are they too it.

And I slept there in that room. We didn't have anyone to cook for us, where to eat. What do we do? My big brother tells me, "Go to Mursel's." A guy from our neighborhood, "He is a millworker in Syl'a's mountain." Maybe you know that mill, down at the lake. He says, "Tell Mursel, pay for the wheat and he will grind the flour, take the flour and send it to..." We had some friends there, it was Isuf Hajdari. Maybe you remember. He says, "They will cook it for you."

When I go to Murseli I tell him, "Uncle Mursel, did you know I'm a teacher?" "When did you become a teacher?" {puts his hand in the forehead} I said, "I'm working as a teacher in Likovc, but I came to you for something." "Why did you come?" I said, "So like this... I will give you the money, for you to grind flour and sent it to Isuf Hajdari because his daughter in law will bake it for me and Ibrahim Çitaku, for two people. Because I don't have anything to eat." He said, "Yes. But get out of here, I don't wanna see you here anymore because there are spies. You give the money to Isuf, he will give it to Qerim, Qerim Hajdari, and Qerimi will bring it to me, Qerim will bring you the bread, bake the bread. Don't come here anymore."

He knew I would be careful, because Murseli was with *Balli Kombëtar* [National Front], he was in the national liberation of Vershac, he was scared they would kill him. I never went to that mill again, only when I went there after 30 years I saw that mill (laughs). This is how life was. He would bring me the baked bread in the morning, fresh.

And there was Ibrahim, he liked eating, he would put the bread {touches his stomach} he would say, "This isn't enough for me only." We would laugh at him. But this was life in education, a lot of suffering, but also a lot of joy and love for work. Love for work, enthusiasm, we worked with a lot of love. We would read all night, we would read and asked each other how to teach that, how to teach this, we would consult so we wouldn't make mistakes with the students. Because we were also young. And so on.

Abit Hoxha: You told us earlier for the first bread that... Before you ate corn bread.

Halil Kajtazi: We didn't go out in the field there. We were forbidden to sleep in villages. I know they sent me to Obria, in a conference. And when the conference was over, I got ready to go to school. But it was winter, it was hard, it was freezing cold. I tell the man of the house, I don't remember who he was, I say, "I'm going." "Where?" I say, "To school." He say, "No, I swear, it's freezing cold, I won't let you go..." "It's forbidden." "No! You're going to sleep here, tomorrow is a new day, new luck they say".

I decided to stay there. He says, "Listen to what I'm telling you, good man. Don't say anything against the party and partisans because my son is in the party and will send you to jail, me and you. I stopped, and thought to myself, "Is the party bad? Are partisans bad?" But I didn't talk, I stayed in silence. He said, "When my son and wife go to sleep, we will talk freely." The son went to sleep, and it was just the two of us. We ate dinner and everything, this and that, we stayed up till 2 in the morning. Everything he said, I wrote it in my notebook, but I lost that notebook. But I always remember his words.

He said, "Listen to what I'm telling you, good man." And he hit knee like this {hits his leg} three times. "For as long as there were people on Earth wrong was ahead of right, and it will always be ahead. And you will see it with your own eyes, and you will say, 'Ja mashallah, ja mashallah, ja mashallah...' Three times, 'How wrong is ahead of right.' When will the wrong fall behind the right we don't know. When will the right overcome the wrong, we don't know". I materialized this and I wrote a poem how for a long time the wrong was ahead of right. Because every war was won for the right, and will continue to

be won for the right, now they say, “The right is not even in the well” and they used to say, “The right in the well” (laughs). Maybe this is boring..

Abit Hoxha: No, no. It’s a pleasure to listen to this.

Halil Kajtazi: And then when I went to Rozalla, in our village, I don’t remember who I was with, they served us, we call it *sillë* [lunch]. They brought us *krelana* with cream and bread. Bread, cheese, with *long*, when I saw the bread, I didn’t even look at the *krelana*. Fluffy bread, it seemed like it came from heaven not like a woman baked it. They put the food in the table, I said, “I only wanna eat the bread, nothing else. Even if I eat just bread, thanks for the cheese and things, I would eat only the bread.” I will never forget that bread I ate in Rozalla. The other bread I ate at Rexhep Halili’s house, in Kosterc. In these two places I ate Albanian bread (laughs).

And we would play with toy cars there, we would put them downhill, our cars, our toys, but sometimes we would go up to Kerstina and go downhill. And that girl came, I know my mom would caress her hair, and she said to her, to her mother, “I want this girl for my son.” “No, Dinore, you don’t want to marry your son with my daughter.” “I am telling you Zylfie I want this girl for my son.” And I heard my mom there, when I came to high school, my mother and father was scared that I would marry a Serbian woman, they wanted me to get engaged, “Get a bride they would say, get a bride for our son so he doesn’t marry someone else, he’s our only son...” Because I was with the second mother. And my father goes to Skenderaj and tells the man of the house, Nezir Dajaku, he says, “Wait for me tomorrow night because I will come to your house and ask for Sadri’s daughter.’ He says, “Veli, I swear...” “No,” he says, “God gave her to me, you will, too, just wait for me because I’ll be there.”

He took a kilo of sugar, because then it was a tradition to take a kilo of sugar, a kilo of sugar and went there. When we went there they argued, *dum e rrum e dum e rrum e* {onomatopoeia}, the man of the house, Ibrahim Dajaku, said, “Will you marry her to him, will you marry her to him, you marry her to him?” Somebody said that, somebody said this. “I say marry her to Veli Vitaku’s son, and with no one else.” And it was luck, they had engaged me. When my father came here to tell me, I was in school, I didn’t know anything, I didn’t say anything, I said, “Don’t worry Dad because to please you, I would marry her even if she was a gipsy.”

I married her and we had eight children. She is our seventh kid, Veli, Proza, right? [addresses his son] I have one more, I have eight kids, five sons and three daughters. They’re married, Proza is here with us, we eat and drink together. She has her brothers, and sisters, she has all of. And so on. She is stuck here, but what can I do.

Abit Hoxha: She’s nice, it’s a pleasure...

Halil Kajtazi: {Reading a book} “The vanity cannot be carried in their car, the clothes can.” “When you enemy falls to their knees, forgive them.” Don’t shorten the lamp’s fuel, because it requires poorness.” “Many are known about their shops, but they have nothing to sell.” “When you are spoiled at youth, it looks good, but at an older age, it only does harm.”

I will read this short story to you. “What’s the name of Lekë Dukagjini’s horse?” Forty students were singing in one place, and one of them says to the rest, “I know the story better than all of you.” When one heard him, he said, “Let me ask you something.” The one who said he knows the story wondered what he will ask. “What’s the name of Lekë Dukagjini’s horse?” He asked. He started talking and said, “I don’t know.” He turned and said, “We know that you can’t know more than all forty of us.”

The other story is “Lekë Dukagjini’s writers”, short. An Englishman and a Frenchman go, a Frenchman, excuse me, an Englishman and a Frenchman go... That’s how people call them, because I almost made a mistake, don’t cut it. Both were writers to go see Lekë Dukagjini and ask him something. When they go near Leka’s house, when they go near Leka’s house they saw that his house wasn’t nice. They thought that when Leka will come out they will start touching each other and said, “He is nobody.” When they called him, Leka got out immediately and said, “Welcome in God’s right and *hoşgeldiniz* [welcome].”

Leka was very welcoming, and they said, “Lekë, we are here to see you and ask you something.” “Before you ask me, I’ll tell you, ‘Don’t look at my beauty because it is how God created me, my clothes, bad or good, that’s how I can afford them.’” Then, “Excuse us,” said the writers, “We are gonna go because we have nothing left to ask.” And this how the story ends. So they didn’t have what to ask because Leka gave them the answers. I can read a fragment if you want where we have Sherif, the one about Qamil Hoxha.

Abit Hoxha: I wanted to talk about your work when you came to Pristina, to finish the interview because we talked more, to continue when you came here. Can you tell us when you came to Pristina, what did you start working?

Halil Kajtazi: Of course. I came to Pristina from the primary school of Rakosh in September 1963. I was accepted as a journalist at Radio Pristina. But I couldn’t work there for more than a year and two-three months, I asked for a resignation and I was accepted in Kosova Combine in Obiliq then. When I went there, I was immediately accepted as a translator from Serbian-Croatian language to Albanian, but then there two or three newspaper issues published of the newspaper in Albanian and Serbia, and I was offered a job as a journalist there. I worked as a journalist there for thirteen and half years in Obiliq.

We published the workers newspaper once a month, sometimes twice a month. After thirteen and a half year I left there and I came to BVI¹⁰ in Kosova’s streets. And was done with work there, and two months before turning 40 I was retired, forced retirement, but I was retired nonetheless and my mission was done. Here I built my house, I started in 1965, 1964 I started, sorry it was a mistake.

In 1965 I brought my whole family from the village and put them in this house, and we started work and education here in Pristina. All my sons were here for their education. They finished school and our life was good since we came here. That’s why, remember this, I read a book by Paul LaFrage, he says, he is French, a French critic, he says, “You even to change a tree’s place and plant it somewhere else, because it might like it better. Even people have to change places, because they will progress more than before.”

Then I heard a very interesting story, it says, marriage was in question, for example, a woman from Prekaz said this to me, she said, “What led man up to a black horse?” I said, “Ah brave woman, I do this work, I deal with sayings like this, but I don’t know, can you tell me” She said, “Yes, I’ll tell you, listen to this old lady, an old lady in Prekaz told me, that a bad woman and bad land lead a man up to a black horse.”

So a bad woman doesn’t mean that she is not pretty, but when she doesn’t have mental creativity, when she doesn’t think, because a smart woman says, “I came for you, I am yours, where you are, I will be, too but I think that here, where we are, there is no life, let’s go somewhere else.” And a dumb

¹⁰ Bureau of Self-Governing Interests, now the Public Housing Enterprise in Pristina.

woman agrees and adjusts to her husband's environment and lives a poor life forever. She said that a bad woman doesn't think and she left me those words. I wrote this down, she said, "A bad woman will lead you to a black horse, a good woman will put you to light." And it is true. Since I've come here, everything is going well, and I'm staying away from farming, from land. Maybe I told it like this, but this is reality.

Abit Hoxha: And your work with the Albanological Institute...

Halil Kajtazi: I was a collaborator of the Institute since 1953. I have the letter in the computer when I was accepted as a collaborator of the Institute. I also have the letter that I sent them in the computer, we can read it but you will read all about it in the book. I collaborated with them. But they couldn't publish my books. They weren't ready to publish my books and I withdrew and published them elsewhere.

Abit Hoxha: Did they have an explanation?

Halil Kajtazi: The explanation was that it was a hard time back then for me to come out in front of people with a book. Even when I published the "Drenica's Folk Prose" the students were shared the book, when my classmate saw it, he threw it and said, "Who is Halil Kajtazi?" Because we are like that, very subjective to our circle and we don't let our circle widen, he was from our village. But the book was written, the notebook is written and no one can deny how science how is used, no one can deny it. Is it true? If you denied all those books, then no one needs to write books. But we are going to write books because a nation which does not write books, does not live, does not exist, there's no perspective, no life.

So with a strong reason, my mother told me, may she rest in peace, that I could sell my house for a book. This is a principle, that's why we should publish books. We should publish as many books as we can, as many books as we can, as many as we can so we can serve them to these people, because these people are eager for freedom and book freedom. Book freedom has arrived, but book freedom is being violated. There was no book freedom before. The book that I published was submitted to The Internal Affairs Secretariat's procedure, "Drenica's Folk Prose". I heard about it later. They had to give an opinion about the book, didn't even know what the book was, and then it would be published.

And when the book was published, excuse me, the director of the printing house told me, Burhan Gashi, I'm a little emotional, he said, "Come here for two, three hours to get book out of my printing house because if someone says something we have to throw it in the Ibar river." And you paid, that's it. I say, "Wait for me there!" I took a cab, I took the books, I brought them in my house and that's it. That's how it was. In a few words.

Then I published the other books by myself until recently. Later they started publishing, one, and one, and... I published about thirty books. I should not forget to give you "The novel in...." I gave it to you back then [addresses the interviewers] I didn't forget. I'll give to the lady and him [addresses the cameraman]. And try to send it to the library, or if you can send it to Jimmy Carter because that character, I told you, you read it [addresses the interviewer]. And I tried to translate it, but I couldn't.

Books are translated at the Embassy, but we don't have a tradition for that. Because the Albanian Embassy can find people who translate, it isn't about money, it is about communicating because in that book I predicted that our fate, Albanians, will get into the White House. And even if it gets out of the White House our bad luck, there is no more life in these lands. That's the objective of my book

which I published after 45 years. That's why I don't regret I what I said and what I wrote. In the regime that book wasn't allowed to be published, because I would have to take responsibility.

Abit Hoxha: Was it sent somewhere to be published or...

Halil Kajtazi: I sent, he's my neighbor, "Halil, I'll take responsibility, me and you..." And I withdrew, nothing, nothing. Then he published it after the war. I have it here published after the war, he said that he will publish it, how you wrote it, that's how I will publish it. But actually I published it in Albania, in '67.

Abit Hoxha: From '99, '98, '99, with your family, where were you?

Halil Kajtazi: Yes. The war caught us in Pristina. We didn't flee from here. We didn't leave. The reason why we didn't leave are these, my [paternal] uncle's family was in Matiqan. More than thirty family members. Most of them females and kids. When they got them out of Matiqan, there's a village near here, they didn't have somewhere to go and they came to my house. When I came inside I saw them all here, like birds, like ants, "Welcome my uncles, welcome my uncles." The old lady got up and said, "O Lilë," because they called me Lilë, she said, "We didn't have where to go, except here." I said, "Don't worry my uncle's wife, since you came to me, God will save you and me."

They came, they stayed here, forty or more family members of my uncle's, and friends. We were all in these rooms, three rooms upstairs, we went to the basement, they were here. This room was full of mattresses, sleeping sponges, blankets, this and that, we lived here.

And during the bombing, and all. When it happened, they say, "We wanna go to Matiqan and see if we can go back." Now I was scared to tell them to go to Matiqan. No, yes, no, no, no, this and that, and someone comes to get them and they say, "Everybody went back, we are going back, too." I say, "Okay, let's go."

We didn't go through the street, we went the short way, through the village, through paramilitary, to tell you the truth. And everybody would notice us, I was in front, they were behind me, women and children behind me. I sent them to their homes. The old lady stayed here, Dinorja. Later, she got sad, "Take me there, take me to my children." I didn't know how to take her. There was no one who was brave enough to drive to Matiqan. Lumja was sleeping here with her, she says, "Dad, she is going crazy, she is going crazy. Let's take her there by all means." I say, "Lume, I don't know how unless I put her in a cart with you and take her there, otherwise I don't know how." And I decided to take her there with a card.

My uncle's wife, sleeps freely tonight, the one whose family members disappeared in the yard. I say, "Hopefully, if we're alive, I will take you to Matiqan, to your children, to your family, to all of them." She said, "How are you going to take me?" I said, "Don't you worry how, how..." I said, "I will take you with a cart, with a cart, I'll push the cart." "How?" I said, "I will put you there, and cover you with a blanket and take you there." I take Lume, and one of my grandsons, and I went through the *Mahalla e Muhxherëve* to the street, will the paramilitary kill us here, or here. They would stop here and there, we would mind our business, our road, when I took her to Matiqan, believe me or not, I saw Serbians on both sides of the street looking at us, while we were talking that eighty-year-old lady there.

They looked through the window, they knocked *rrak, rrak, rrak* {onomatopoeia}. I saw that they were there, I say, "Come on, tell which way to enter the yard so I can bring the old lady to you." They told me. I took the old lady there. When I took her there, I said, "Listen to what I'm telling you..." They have

a daughter, she was in Switzerland, I said, "I took the old lady here, I had enough room, because when I had room for all of you, thirty or forty people, I had enough room for her, too, but she was going crazy for you, to come here." I tell my uncles' wives to come here, "I have 4000 marks in my pocket, that your daughter Sadija sent." Because they parted, they were four separate houses, then they were together. I say, "But she said this, 'If you flee, don't leave my mother. And if you flee, I will come to get you in Skopje.'" I say, "I'll give you the money under this condition." I took out the money, "Who should I give this one thousand marks?" "Give it to this woman." "Who should I give this one thousand?" "Give it to her, give it to her... I gave them the 4000. "Is my work done?" "Yes." "Did I give you the money? Don't say that Halil didn't give you the money." And that's it.

And I came back with my daughter and grandson from Matiqan, we saw dead animals, starved. I came home and continued my life. But what's more interesting, I forgot to tell you, when we went to Matiqan with my two [paternal] uncle's daughters, I met a friend from work in Sunny Hill, and she said, "Where are you going?" I said, "To Matiqan." "O Halil, where are you going, they killed a man here yesterday and you want to go to Matiqan." I said, "They won't kill me Igballe, I was an only child, God will save me." "Qy qy." She said. And I went there, I went there and I know I took some salt and sugar, they had it there, and we were okay.

But then, when the ration happened, it meant, she understands, you do, too... Police persecution of suspicious people, that's what it meant. I went out to buy food for my family, we were a lot here. When I got out I see that *Mahalla e Muhaxherëve* was surrounded by the police. I come here fast, where you came, and I say, "Look boys, in one or two minutes we will be surrounded, too, if you want to flee and go to the city okay, if you don't want, I swear the police is taking the young man to *Mahalla e Muhaxherëve*." I saw them taking them in the cars. They couldn't flee, they couldn't get out, and they came here.

When they came here they opened the doors of the rooms, they opened the door to my library, where I have my books, I hid my computer in the attic. They took Besim and Veli, they put them like fish to a van bus, we cried a little, they didn't do anything, they did, this and that. They took them, they beat them up in the police station, they let Besim go, not Veli, they sent him in Lipjan's prison. From Lipjan they sent him to Srem prison. After a year and a half, we tried and with money they let him go. It was horrible.

But the most dangerous day was when we signed the agreement with Kumanova. That night, they shot so much, the Serbians shot with guns so much that we thought they would come to our house and shoot us. We didn't even move, we were all laying down near the walls, not moving through the rooms, but laying down so the bullets wouldn't hit us. When we woke up in the morning the shooting had stopped. The Serbs and Montenegrins were going through the streets in a good mood. After a week, heads down, heads down, we didn't know, heads down. "*Dobro jutro*". "Good morning, good morning." Not like they used to greet us.

KFOR came, KFOR came, they surrounded every house listening if someone is moving, if they find weapons, where their weapons are, where is it, where isn't it, this and that, and they found weapons at our neighbor's house, they filled trucks with weapons. They found some there, and here, in a few places. After two-three weeks, they started to leave. I meet my first neighbor with his car, leaving, he stopped, and says, "Halil, here are my house's keys." He got them out, "Take my house, either take care of it, or burn it down, it is yours, I'm leaving." "No man, I don't need your house, nor your keys, I have my own house, thank you." He said, "Take the keys." "I don't need them, I don't need them, I have my own house, I don't want someone else's house. I can't take care of my own house, let alone yours,

please don't burden me." He said, "I didn't know you were like this." I said, "I don't want it, I don't want somebody else's things." And he turned on his car, *krrap* [onomatopoeia], I never saw him again. They left, everybody left and we continued living.

There's this case, to tell you, I had a neighbor here, when he saw an Albanian neighbor building the foundation for a house, he called him, "Mujo come over, what are you building?" He says, "My brother wants to built a house." He says, "Let's drink coffee." He goes there, drinks his coffee and says, "Mujo, don't be dumb to built a house here, I swear on the Sun, the Moon, I swear on my mother, I swear on everyone who is alive, if Serbs win, not a single Albanian has a place here, you have no life here, it will be a purge." In Serbian, *čistka* [purge], three times, with his hands like this {rubs his hands}. And we parted with him, three months before the bombing, he left his house, he fled. So we parted with Serbians and Montenegrins like this. While we honored them, and we respected them until the last moment. But they weren't true neighbors as we had thought. Will you excuse me? Thank you for listening to me, and ask me if there's anything because I will tell you, even if you put a rope here, I will tell the stories honestly.

Abit Hoxha: Thank you.

Halil Kajtazi: Also there was his, in Milošević's time, he was juror in the court, he went downhill with a, we call it a leather jacket, he would say, "I'm going to court to bring Albanians down." He was a juror in court, Milan Rajcevići, he was from Llap. And that's how we parted, be it the past, and be it a good life for all of those people who fought and helped us stay in this ancestral land.

Abit Hoxha: Mr. Halil, thank you so much, you honored us, you gave us precious time, you gave us precious material...