

## INTERVIEW WITH REXHEP BUNJAKU

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Duration: 90 minutes

Present:

1. Rexhep Bunjaku (Speaker)
2. Lura Limani (Interviewer)
3. Rina Krasniqi (Interviewer/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

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** My origins are from the village of Bicaj, in the vicinity of Kaçanik. My father was the first to move in 1926, to Skopje. Once he ensured a room there, he brought along his brothers and parents. I was born in Skopje, in 1928, on June 10. My father lived together with his brothers, until they got married, later on they separated as brothers. [During my] childhood, until '41, I was in Skopje and [attended] elementary school there... back then elementary school had four grades, I finished them in Skopje. [For] high school, I registered in *Velik* ...it was called the Great Medresa. The medresa was more religious than secular, but with that schooling we had the opportunity to register in any faculty in Yugoslavia, because we had five more subjects than the real high school, [the] secular [ones].

In '41, I remained in the second grade, war was declared, the Second World War, the Bulgarians came. The Bulgarians closed down the school, I couldn't continue because it was forbidden for Albanians [to go to school] alongside Bulgarians. No work, nor normal schooling until '44, when Skopje was bombarded. We moved away from the bombings from fear, because the bombing was very heavy bombing, very (inc.). On January 20, I'll never forget it, we went to Kaçanik. There, our so-called freedom arrived, the partisans came. Because Kaçanik was also under the Bulgarians. We even joked, "Our Skopje, Kaçanik of the Bulgarian" because as children we went out, we were waiting for the Albanian army, in '41.

Eh, in '44 I joined partisan detachments, the Yugoslav national liberation [detachments]. Because, it was sudden liberation, compared to the Bulgarian period when we had absolutely no rights, no national or citizen's rights. It was a pleasure for me, I sang the Albanian hymn on stage in Kaçanik. The administration in the Albanian language started. We freely spoke Albanian. The first school was opened, it was opened in Kaçanik, the elementary [school] I think, I even showed you the photo of my first teachers, Avni Hasani, Isak Dobranja. And then, there the period of my involvement began, and later on, of my imprisonment.

In short, my father was a trader for a while. Then, he failed as a trader, he became an official, [at the] municipality of Skopje. [My] brothers, one of them was an official, the others were helpers in a pub, they distributed drinks throughout Skopje, Ahmet and Idriz. This is my family in short.

**Lura Limani:** You mentioned that you were also in Skopje, you were... you went to elementary school. Can you tell us a bit about the time before the war, meaning before war was declared and what exactly changed when the Bulgarians came, in '41?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I said that I finished elementary school, back then it was four grades, in Skopje and of course in Serbian, not Albanian. Back then it was forbidden. When I registered in the Great Medresa, called Kralj Aleskandar [King Alexander], that's what the medresa was called, there four languages were taught, except Albanian. We had Serbo-Croatian, French, Arabic, Turkish. And Latin in fact, five languages, but no Albanian. Until '41, when Bulgarians came and closed that school as well, I started working as a helper to a trader at some friends of my father's, until '44 when we arrived in Kaçanik, that's when my second chapter began, when I was jailed and started my life in the jails of Yugoslavia.

**Lura Limani:** You mentioned that...

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I told you that regardless it was a chapter... compared to the Bulgarian period, when the partisans came it was a kind of freedom for those of us who were under the Bulgarians. And those who had been in Albania, it was called Greater Albania in quotation marks, it was naturally different. And for those of us who were under the Bulgarians there was an absolute freedom of people. That's why most of us got involved in the liberation movement.

**Lura Limani:** Can you tell us a memory from... during the Second World War, especially during the time when you were still in Skopje?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Lura, in Skopje our war was for existence. My father did all sorts of work to feed us. Because as I said, the Bulgarians absolutely forbade work and education. My father fed us by working in contraband, as they say, transporting goods from Bulgaria to Albania, and from Albania to Bulgaria. He traded fox skins, sugar, *basma*, I don't know what, and on foot from Skopje to Ferizaj, from Ferizaj to Skopje, all through mountains, through forests, to secretly go across the border. Because there was no survival otherwise. The only way was with contraband. So my father suffered a lot until he improved living conditions for us, let's say. We were in Skopje, our nuclear family. Father, mother, myself with two brothers and two sisters. Five children. Two brothers died at a young age. It's interesting, my brothers were killed by a doctor. He was captured in '44, he had... 58 poisoned children, he killed them in Skopje, a Serb doctor. And Bulgarians caught him. Now our lives were really terrifying, like it was for all Albanians, not only us (laughs). We're used to suffering, not enjoyment.

**Lura Limani:** Yes, yes without a doubt. When you moved to Kaçanik was it... who was in Kaçanik at the beginning? Was Kaçanik occupied by the Germans or the Italians? Was it already liberated by the communists?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Kaçanik?

**Lura Limani:** Yes, in '44.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Yes I said that... and in Kaçanik our roots are from the village of Bicaj, in the vicinity of Kaçanik. And in '44 we ran away from Anglo-American bombing, they had bombed Skopje very badly and out of fear we moved to Kaçanik with some of my father's relatives. This happened in January, we stayed there until November when they came, the Bulgarian army came, and after the Bulgarian army the partisans as well. It's interesting that Kaçanik didn't experience any big damage from the partisans. That misfortune happened in the village of Bllacë, in Elez Han of Kaçanik. Because there was a headquarter of Albanian volunteers who fought against the partisans. And when the partisans returned, they massacred 128 [people] in the village of Bllacë. And in Kaçanik we didn't have a single victim, it's interesting, not a single victim fell in Kaçanik. Because there were some men like Shukri Dogani, Fuad Spahiu, who were ambushed by the partisans and they promised them that they would do no harm. That's how no killings happened in Kaçanik, no shootings. And in Bllacë yes.

One case is interesting, as I was in Idrizova, the *kazamati* was a Serb from the villages of Karadaku of Skopje. And he told me about a case, an Albanian mother went, they had taken away three of her sons. The youngest son was 15 years old. And she goes to the commander of the partisan detachment, saying, "Please, do what you want with these two. The young one, will you spare him for me?" Vera Aceva, a former commissary of the brigade, says, "What is she saying?" There was a Qefsere Shukriu in that detachment, the daughter of Hasan Shukriu, a woman from Skopje. The demonstration of '41 against the Bulgarians was even organized in her father's cafe. But this is interesting. She asks, saying, "What is this woman saying" to Qefsere. She says, "She's asking for you to pardon her youngest child." She says, "But, who is he? Let him come here." The

boy is brought to her. In front of his mother, she takes out a revolver and kills the boy. With her own hand, Vera Aceva. This is a short episode from that period.

I'm saying, in Kaçanik when the partisans came, it was a big change compared to the time of the Bulgarians, so we joined partisan detachments in great numbers. It was also in March, April, we had great hope in non-attacking brigades... it was until May. In May we moved, we left under orders. I had even openly spoken with the commander commissary because I was an OZNA officer. Because the communist party appointed me secretary of OZNA. And OZNA was a bloodthirsty institution. However I say, there was not a single killing, luckily.

And I said, "Why don't you insist on us uniting with Albania?" They [said], "Bunjaku, please, please don't!" Because they were afraid of the security officer from SHIK. There was an Albanian Orthodox man at the time, "Please Bunjaku don't..." Of course, I was young, inexperienced, enthusiastic, idealistic, I was asking for unification with Albania, at that time (laughs). Then they went, we stayed until we created the National Democratic Albanian Committee, in April '46. And then the period when I joined that movement.

**Lura Limani:** Before continuing I would like... because you mentioned, rightly so, that you joined the partisans after they entered Kaçanik. Were you registered with the party, were you a member of the party, how did you become for example the secretary of OZNA? I want to say, how did the recruitment go?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** No, I was familiar with the communist party as a student through the Great Medresa in Skopje. We had a few friends who were involved in the communist party. However, I wasn't, because I was young at the time. I was thirteen years old in '41 when the Bulgarians came, at the age of thirteen. However, when I came to Kaçanik, then they organized us, they... in a word they mobilized us As the local command, as in every city the partisans entered, they immediately created the local command. And we got involved there.

I as a young man, with a future, and there rarely were intellectuals, even older (inc.) in the eighth grade. And the three of us who formed the Committee of the Kaçanik District, we were the most educated [ones] at the time. Imagine! It's also interesting that for a period Ilaz Hoxha was the head of the municipality of Kaçanik. And I sent him a letter, because I was in the District Council with Halim Misini, Halim Sopa. I said, "Uncle Ilaz, here's this [letter]..." "Bunjaku..." he said, "You're going to get me in trouble." Imagine he was the head of the municipality and he only knew the letter "i" and that in cyrillics {imitates drawing the letter by hand}. Do you understand what the issue is? He went, "Jaz Mulla Ilaz, eight Mulla Vesel wait and see where he is getting to." (laughs). He was the head of the municipality. Imagine what kind of a time we were living in and in what kind of conditions. Kaçanik didn't have any [educated people].

So I got involved there and later when OZNA was created, in Serbian *Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda* or The Department for Protecting the People. I took Protection of the People literally. It wasn't... they didn't have a secretary, in the meantime I was accepted in the communist youth, it was called SKOJ, *Savez komunističke Jugoslavije*, *Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*, SKOJ, the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia. And afterwards, they accepted me into the party as well. And the District Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia elected me the secretary of OZNA. And I didn't know what kind of institution it was. Then, until July I think, or maybe August, with these two teachers, Avni Hasani and Isak Dobranja, we contacted each other every day and sometimes we downed a glass together. And Avni Hasani played beautifully on the accordion.

And that night when some were arrested, we were together until twelve. Close friends, day and night with them. We returned, at eleven and a half at night the phone rang. I got up, of course as the secretary, the boss was sleeping. It said, "Accept the telegram." The telegram was [written] in

number, not with letters. I knew them by heart...those codes. And it said, I'll translate it into Albanian, "Arrested with a series of *Balli Kombëtar* leaders, Avni Hasani, Isak Dobranja and accompanied to Ferizaj." I was horrified, [my] good friends! How to jail them? As I'm thinking, confused, he, on the phone, "Did you understand?" said. "Yes." "Explain it to me again!" And again I [communicated] in code, but I knew them. Even they were surprised that I knew them by heart. These were the reasons why they transferred me to Ferizaj. And now I was thinking what to do. Is this a trap? I'm not convinced. What? Why? Why were they being jailed, I wondered, were they *ballist*? I knew them both. And I woke up the boss, I said, "We have a telegram." I translated "*Da se uhapse balisti (inc.)*" [To capture the *ballist*] He read it. I fell asleep hoping I wouldn't be woken up to jail them myself. Let them break their necks.

As soon as I fell asleep, he woke me up, "Wake up!" With an automatic weapon on his shoulder, dressed, with shoes on. I said, "Why?" "To jail them." I said, "Forget it... what *ballist*. Are you crazy? But weren't we drinking together an hour ago?" "Wake up!" He said, "Have you gone insane or what? Are you well?" I got up, a soldier, and like a soldier I got dressed. I left my revolver, I didn't take it with myself. He said, "The revolver..." I said, "No, I don't need a revolver."

When we went outside, a squad of soldiers had been organized. I said, "What are these soldiers doing?" He said, "Are you insane? Are we going to jail them?" (inc.) "Those boys are traders" I said, "What... are you insane?" "Come on..." he said, "Don't talk a lot!" We went. I left my machine gun in the school courtyard, at the entrance. One with a submachine gun under the window, because they were on the second floor. They had a room in the school... now there's a multistory [building] in that place in Kaçanik, they tore down that school. And at the entrance, one with a submachine gun. And they surrounded the entire school with soldiers. There I saw how they value their freedom, so-called freedom, in quotation marks for us.

We went, and he took out his revolver again. I said, "Put that away in the case, what... don't be a child." He said, "Come on, walk!" We went to the door, knock-knock, I knocked, Avni opened the door. "Who is it?" I said, "It's me Avni." He said, "What do you want, we separated an hour ago." I said, "You'll see." There were a lot of us. He opened the door, he saw and put {imitates putting a revolver in a case}. "Comrade..." he said, "in the name of the people you are arrested." Avni started shaking. Isak was a bit braver. They got dressed, put the shoes on, they gave me the key to the room.

And we went out with Isak, I, Avni, Rajko Vidacic, my boss. His uncle was the secretary of the District Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Kaçanik. I forgot his name, he was also a Vidacic, I think Vida because I don't know, I'm not sure. I said, "Isak, for the love of God..." And Isak said, "They're not giving you a brigade Rexhep? Just a squad?" I said, "Come on, there's a lot of us, be quiet for God's sake, Isak." We went and jailed them in a room with hay. And I was thinking, "What do I do?" I went and got two blankets, to their room, I came and gave the blankets to them. That after a year Rexhep Bunjaku will be 15 years old and [will lie] not on hay but concrete, without bedding or covers, I wouldn't have imagined. (laughs)

The next day they came and took them. I took a loaf of bread, a half kilogram of cheese, I went inside and gave it to them. And when we met in Niš, I found them there in Niš, they said, "We knew you would come, but not as heavy." (laughs) He said, "That bread saved our life Rexhep." Then we continued the period of creating the NDSH Committee and the imprisonment.

**Lura Limani:** Yes, yes. So, this was in '45.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I told this because of the transfer to Ferizaj there was a telegram regarding how I knew the codes by heart, 30 letters. Because every letter had two codes. But I was good, they weren't a problem for me. And so on.

**Lura Limani:** Meaning when you were transferred to Ferizaj, they changed your post as well, you were automatically...

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** In August '45 after this incident they transferred me to Ferizaj.

**Lura Limani:** What duties did you have in Ferizaj?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** In Ferizaj the same duties, secretary. And I was with the County, not the District, the Secretary of the County of Ferizaj. There my boss was Vuja Sekulović, he was a student and a criminal that his deputy Jovo Bajat...

**Lura Limani:** Jovo?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Jovo Bajat. I had as a *Načelnik*... I had Ali Shukriu. [He was] *Načelnik* of the District OZNA. Ali Shukriu, the butcher of Albanians. Then he became a public prosecutor for Kosovo. And he sentenced hundreds of people to execution by shooting.

Day by day, one day Jovo Bajat knocks... to return to me, to make a 180 degree change, for me to confront Yugoslavia was the story of this Jovo Bajat on how they killed Albanians. Because until May 9, when Germany surrendered, they killed and massacred without trials. And then, since Germany fell, the order came, "There will be no executions by shootings any more, there will be no liquidations without a trial." One night he told me, he said, "We laid the victim down on his back {opens arms and imitates lying down}, we pinned him down with nails like Christ and with a pole we hit his chest, splashes of blood splattered on the ceiling, we were exalted, we would go into a trance from the pleasure of killing Albanians." I was, "Oh God..." I thought, "Is this person sane? What kind of a beast is he?" But how to react, [I was] in their den. I entered a den of beasts. I covered my head with a blanket, crying like a child. And there I swore on God and the devil that I would work against Yugoslavia.

And I got sick in the meantime and went to Skopje, my family was in Skopje. I met with Kemajl Skenderi. His brother was my close friend. Since childhood, because we were in the same neighborhood. I went to ask about my friend, his brother, his name was Alush. He was a soldier in Bosnia. Meanwhile, how word got out, and he freely... knowing who I am, although I was the secretary of OZNA, a bloodthirsty institution, he openly said that a Movement for the Unification of Kosovo with Albania was formed. Not Kosovo, but Albanian lands in Yugoslavia with Albania. But based on that document of the United Nations, regarding the right of self-determination. There, we supported [our cause].

And one day or two [later], I then went to visit him again, I found Hamdi Berisha there. I didn't know him. Hamdi Berisha, he played the role of coordinator between the Central Committee of the National-Democratic Albanian Movement and Committees in Kosovo. His father and brother were executed during the shooting in '44, after the war that took place in Gjilan. Albanian volunteers with Mulla Idrizi, attacked Gjilan and didn't have success, they retreated, and when the partisans entered they wreaked great carnage. Approximately eight thousand Albanians were massacred in that time in '44. And in their midst, there was also the father and brother of Hamdi Berisha. It's even interesting, the brother of Hamdi Berisha, Esat Berisha, a rare intellectual, a graduated jurist also a member of the Second League of Prizren, you know the Second League of Prizren that was formed in Prizren, they tore him with a bayonet to the stomach. They filled him with embers from the barn. And that's how they killed him. And this Hamdi Berisha revised his position later, he became a communist in jail and went out on the podium publicly and said, "My father and brother were reactionaries, that's why they were shot." This is Hamdi Berisha.

I returned to Kaçanik, after I got a bit healthier. I returned to Ferizaj. From Ferizaj I did what I did, I left OZNA as an ill person. I pretended that I was sick from tuberculosis. Even though I wasn't

unwell at all. They transferred me. The district secretary, asked for me from Macedonia's OZNA with a letter. Because they transferred me from the OZNA in Ferizaj to the OZNA in Macedonia. It [the letter], I submitted it, and the *načelnik*, the main boss, he said, "Will you return to Kaçanik?" "Yes I'd like to return" I said, "Because the air is cleaner, I'm sick." He said, "Good." And I returned to Kaçanik. There I became the general director of the Section of Internal Affairs, in Kaçanik. And some friends without my knowledge were connected with the Central Committee of Skopje, the NDSH, of the Movement. And one day Hajrush Orllani came, "Rexhep..." he said, "Today we're gathering to form the NDSH Committee in Kaçanik." I could hardly wait. And we gathered, seven people. We talked, made the program, created the Committee of the Kaçanik District, NDSH.

And after about three- four months, Hamdi Berisha came to Kaçanik. And I didn't know that he was underground. If he had brought it to my attention, "Hey *more...*" I would have been careful. He slept over two three nights at my place in Kaçanik. And we played football, freely with him. On the third day I accompanied him to the train and on the train they were ready, they jailed him. I didn't know anything. I returned, knowing that Hamdi Berisha went to Ferizaj, he went to Gjilan and Pristina. After about two weeks, we agreed that he will find me some bullets because I had a revolver, but without bullets. I only had two bullets in the revolver. I said, "I'll give them to you at Lazër Josipi's," the brother of Katarina Josipi, the artist. I had contact with her. And I went. When Lazër saw me, "You animal what are you doing?" I said, "What's gotten into you, what's wrong?" He said, "They jailed Hamdi Berisha!" Auuuu! {looks down} He said, "Quick go away!"

I didn't wait for him to say it twice. On the train, in Kaçanik, I got dressed, put shoes on and went to Skopje with the aim of running away to Greece. However, the connection that I had... was a friend of my father's, Mehmed Ali Gashi, from Gjilan, who meanwhile was in Belgrade. I lost the connection. I met with Azem Morana - Azem Morana was the secretary of the Central Committee of the National-Democratic Albanian League, the National-Democratic Albanian Movement - in... near Vardar. And I greeted him, because I saw that he looked lost. "Azem..." I said, "What's wrong?" "Rexhep," he said, "They caught Hamdi Berisha and considering the torture of UDBA he'll reveal everything." I said, "What can we do? Should we run away?" "No!" He said, "I won't run away Rexhep." He said, "I'll cast my fate with the fate of my people." He said, "But we started, we got the terrain ready, and one day our work will come to the surface. For now, we've lost the war." I thought, if Azem Morana won't run away, why should I run away? I returned. They jailed me that night. They could hardly wait. They had followed me everywhere but couldn't find me.

And I ended up... it was the month of August, August 15. No, August 16, when they jailed me. A friday. It was Ramadan. I was in summer pants, in a shirt with short sleeves. The month of August! On a stroll someone approached me, he said, "Bunjak, [I need] to ask you something." That question lasted 15 years and 25 days. They caught me, they jailed me.

For five months I didn't have shoes, no socks, no bedding, no covers. I even got through the winter in that shirt with short sleeves, until I weighed 20 kilograms. I also was lucky...I lost myself. Luckily an Esat Lubishta came, I met him in '45. They judged a Shaban Smira, he was a contra-*Četnik* they said. Bulgarians had created armed platoons against the partisans. They called him a contra-*Četnik* Against the Serb *Četniks*. And, I remember, I was present when they tried Shaban Smira. The Serbs had gathered as was their custom. They yelled, "*Smrt! Smrt! Smrt!*" [Death! Death! Death!] This Shaban Smira rose up... this Esat Lubishta. He had a coat, with a purple colour. I'll never forget it! "*Šta se...?*" [What's going... ] [He was] brave, I've never seen [a] greater [man]. He said, "What has this man done? Are you not ashamed! *Smrt, smrt!* [Death, Death!] You've only gotten good from him."

And they brought that person to my room. I had fainted. And they said to me, "You to leave jail alive, no!" And honestly I would have died. If it wasn't for Esat Lubishta and God that brought Esat Lubishta, I would have died. He felt it, he took me into his lap and cried. He didn't know me. I did.

“Oh, my son! Oh, *sokoli i babës* what have they done to you! Oh, my son!” And the tears on his cheeks {touches his cheeks with his hand}. I woke up, I looked at him. He with his own food, slowly, he fed me, he took me under his arm, he taught me how to walk. In two weeks I was up on my own feet. After a month they released Esat Lubishta, but I was healed. With his bread, with his mouthfuls!

It’s interesting, the day they were going to release him, that night I had a dream. The guard came, opened the door and asked, “What’s your name?” He said, “Esat Lubishta.” He said, “Take your clothes and get out.” Before my dream ended, the guard came, asked him and took him out {laughs}. Interesting! [Thanks to] him and God I’m alive today. I’m 87 years old, thanks to that Esat Lubishta. God bless him and his family! I’d like to take the opportunity [to do so].

This...this period and...then we can continue when I came to Pristina.

## Part Two

**Lura Limani:** But before we continue [with] that, they took you to Pristina, in jail, I wanted to ask you if they tortured you when they jailed... when they arrested you in fact, in Kaçanik?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I mean, well...Lura, their torture was the cold and hunger. We had 150 grams of bread and boiling water once [a day]. Not a dish, but boiling water. With that water...it was for washing one’s face and to wash entirely. My body didn’t see water in seven months. I was all scabby, my body. Without bedding, without covers. Calculate it now, one would say, “So what, big deal!” But let one try it in the summer, not the winter. Let them sleep on a mattress, not on boards or concrete, without a bedding or covers if they can endure it. I endured that for 15 years. However, until I almost surrendered. Of course! And the body, the organism has its own limits. But I was young! 18 years old! And I withstood it somehow. But thanks again, I say, to Esat Lubishta and God, who brought Esat into my cell. Because I was going to die.

And after the formalities ended, they united us. In the meantime, on the first day they put us together, the head of UDBA came to Kosovo. When he saw me...he didn’t know me. He said, “What do you want in the midst of these honorable people, you sworn enemy of Yugoslavia! March, alone!” In a cell of course, they separated me. And my friends were sent to Gjilan, at the Circuit court, and me to the martial court in Pristina. After seven days, on the February 1, February, they sent me on February 7 to trial. And within a day, they sentenced me to death. They put manacles on my legs. But here’s one detail. The court was... my trial was a secret. A secret. Without the public. However my father saw me. He came to bring me food, he saw me being sent and then... without me knowing, they let my father inside.

When they sentenced me to death, and the head of the court asked me, “Are you satisfied?” They sentenced me to death and [asked me] am I satisfied! And I looked behind me {turns head back}, when I saw, my father. Ooh, of course I was hurt. I felt bad, [for my] parent. I said, “I am satisfied. Now you are being questioned are you satisfied?” And I said, “Please, can I just see my father?” “Yes.” He said, “No hugs!” “Fine,” I said, “I know.” I approached [him], my father was crying, a parent, of course. I said, “Don’t cry *bre*, man!” I said, “Because tears don’t suit you. You have two other lions.” Two more brothers. “Oh, my son!” he said, “If I was in your place I would have said the same words. But I’m a parent!” I’ll never forget those words. I wasn’t a parent. Eh!

And, when they returned me from the trial, immediately a gipsy waited for me with manacles,

Ottoman manacles, eleven kilograms heavy (silence). He braced them with barbs. Like in a black smith's venue. Believe me, the gipsy who was bracing them was also crying. And I came, I entered the cell, they saw me with the manacles, they knew that I was going to be executed. A man came, he said, "Oh Bunjak, may you carry them with honor!" I said, "For as long as I can man, I will carry them with honor." Time after time...the Supreme Military Court, confirmed the death [sentence] again. And the prosecutor came, he said, "What do you think?" I said, "What am I supposed to think!" I said, "What, you and them!" "Yes" he said, "For death, again!"

And the time came to shoot me, of course. We were five people sentenced to death there. There was Mulla Ramadan Govori, an imam. He was forty-something years old. There was Isuf Visoka, the grandson of that famous Visoka in our history. Abdurrahman Gërguri, Sabit Qazim Llashtica and myself. We were five.

When the day for my execution by shooting approached... it was expected any day, an old man approached me. "Oh Bunjak!" He said, "You haven't washed in a long time. Can you wash?" And I thought the aim was... to have me kill time, to not be engaged, to not be preoccupied in the moment of execution. He said, "My man! He hasn't seen water for seven months." "But how to wash with manacles on my legs?" He said, "Oh, don't worry about that."

Lura, if they had told me, "Go home, undress," I wouldn't know, I swear to God! But these people of ours have lived in manacles their whole life. I stretched my legs, I was naked in 15 minutes, with only manacles on my legs. Now I know, I undressed! They took me with a blanket over my shoulders, you know, they took me to the toilet, because we didn't have a bathroom. They washed me with cold water. They dressed me again... then I realized why they insisted on washing me. As a Muslim, not to go to execution by shooting without being washed. And I, as a young man expressed this. 70 year old men cried, sobbing, they mourned there, ah, ah {imitates the sobs}. I was 18 years old! "Oh men!" I said, "Don't, please" I said, "To spite (laughs), the guards." So, the Presidium spared my life by one vote.

**Lura Limani:** Who?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** The Presidium of Yugoslavia. It was the Directorate. That's what it was called, the Presidium. Albania also had this institution. This was the third instance [institution for appeal], the last instance was the Marshalate, Tito. There you saw... if the Presidium confirmed the punishment again, then you had the right to send an appeal to Tito. If he accepted. However, the Presidium [pardoned] me, because I was young, surely. However, and in the meantime, not only had my youth... as Sylejman Aliu, says, "It was a humane regime. They spared your life!" No, not their humanity, but in the meantime, Gjon Serreçi, Ajet Gërgurri, Ukë Sadiku, Osman Bunjaku were arrested - they were the men who led the movement - with the orders of the Central Committee in Skopje. Of course! However, here in Pristina, in Kosovo, they were the ones who led the Movement. They were executed by the firing squad, they spared us. *Egjeli*, as old man said, is theirs, lives are ours.

In April, in '47, they transferred me to Niš. I was kept there for twelve years in Niš. Then, with the pleadings of my parents, because my parents were in Skopje, Niš was 200 and some kilometers [away], here I was closer. They didn't let me go to Skopje. The head of UDBA, said, "Yes, to free him! For you to go and also ruin those Albanians in Macedonia. No, here, here you'll leave your bones!" However, they freed me after 12 years, I went to Idrizova, in '59. There I then found some friends of mine. And these could... in the other period. In Niš, what to tell you! Twelve years! During those twelve years, I spent three years in isolation. Precisely three years: April '52, April '55, because [I was considered] dangerous in jail, they isolated me.

After three years, a person came, entered there and... I got up. I reported because we were ordered, "I the convicted Rexhep Bunjaku, present to you that I am so and so, identification number." He said, "Leave that! Do you have the decree, that you were placed in isolation?" I said... I didn't know, what decree! I said, "No." He turns to the guards, he was with the guards, "How..." he said, "there's no decree?" "How do you not have it?" "Forgive me," I said, "who am I dealing with?" "I'm the new director."

He had come from Sremska Mitrovica, where he was the deputy director and there were better conditions there. In Sremska Mitrovica. Because there were also foreign nationals who were convicted. There were Germans and Hungarians and... he said, "Take your things, get out!" I had nothing. Things, nothing! (laughs) As soon as they caught me in the cell, they sent me like that, three years. We only had a bed there. We had a bed of straw and a blanket. We had that there. I got out that day. And he left, he looks around in the direction of four people, further, he said, "Who are these?" He asked the guards. They said, "They are activists." "What activists?" He said, "For revisionist stances." He said, "March, to work! What revisionist stances, what activists!" They really were activists.

To tell you, a Daut Feka from Goli Otok of Yugoslavia brought us this system. Goli Otok is where the other communists were. It was a desolate island. That's why they call it Goli Otok. All the communists were there, all the high officers were there. And we nationalists were in jail in Niš, Pozarevac and Sremska Mitrovica. They were activists, they forced you to revise your stance and become loyal to Yugoslavia. And if something was lacking, that you didn't accept during the trial, now show that you are sincere. And they were activists. It was, unfortunately, the son of Isa Boletini, Kapllan Boletini, one of the activists! Hamdi Berisha, whose father and brother they had killed. A Milos Čalasan, a Serb *Četnik* who had cut people with saws. And another who killed his father, Boško Slukić. There were four activists. And he, as soon as this director came, he unorganized them (laughs).

I was in isolation every two months, the head would punish me... that director... the deputy director of the jail, the head of UDBA in fact, he was the head of UDBA. Milorad Obrenović. I'll never forget his name. The idiot. He came one day, I was in isolation, he said, "Why are you wasting your life for one million miserable people, for Albanians?" And I, for my own trouble, read a book before going into isolation from Dolores... from Tomáš Masaryk, the shaper and creator of modern Czechoslovakia. He had gotten his name... the last name of his wife. His wife was American. Tomas Garik. The title of the book was *Zapise Tomasa Garrika* [*The writings of Tomas Garik*]. He said, "The greatness of a person, just like the greatness of a nation, is not measured by millions, but by the quantity of values that the nation has or owns." He said, "This is a Marxist stance." Now, I was also a loudmouth, I said, "Marxism has nothing to do with this. This was said by Tomáš Masaryk, in his book *Zapise Tomasa Garrika*." "*Bando jedna!*" [You bandit!] and closed the door.

After about five minutes the guard came, he called me. He beat me, Lura, like this... here {touches both sides of his neck with his hand}. There I endured it somehow, but when he grabbed my head and... to the wall {imitates beating a head against a wall}, I totally lost consciousness. I grabbed him with these two hands. I said, "If you hit me one more time, I'll choke you like this, you idiot!" I pushed him. I really endangered myself. I was a goner, but at least I was leaving bravely (laughs). He was bewildered, he left me. I returned. I struck, I didn't eat food for eight days thinking they would have mercy on me and ask me why I was striking.

Luckily an officer from the Yugoslav Army came. He had tried to run away to Bulgaria, they caught him at the border, they sentenced him to 20 years, they brought him to my cell, in isolation. He looked at me, and looked at me, day and night, he said, "Bunjak, I thought you were a smart person." He said, "You surprise me with your stupidities!" "Why?" I said. He said, "You will die,

but how will prove why you died? Are you crazy? Protect your health, go out and write about what you experienced with these idiots.”

He was an Cominformist, I don't know if you know what the Information Bureau was? The Communist Party isolated Yugoslavia as reactionary. I was convinced and started eating. After the years, I say they freed me from isolation, but before isolation I was... they had formed a disciplinary battalion, for six months. We worked 16 hours a day as a punishment, as convicts. I was the only Albanian in that battalion. I (inc.) in every stew (laughs). There I experienced, because there they even did... in the meantime they brought... this was in '49... they brought some Albanians from Albania who had run away from Albania, and they brought them there in the prison. And they got in touch with me. They had found out who I was, we decided to run away from prison. But because of one them who had connections with UDBA in the prison, they had... had informed them, they mowed us with submachine guns. And that was interrupted, we didn't do that job [the prison break]. We stopped, we didn't run away. Then I went to Idrizova. And during these times in Niš there was also... every day of course had its own details, its own importance. Twelve years! But these, some details are more noteworthy.

There was a Svetko Stelić, from Zagreb. They called him *subotari*, on Saturdays they didn't work. Adventists... now you call them the Jehova's Witnesses. I don't know if you've heard of them? Jehova's Witnesses. They don't take up arms, they don't want war, they're only for peace. And I took him one day, to convince him that the time hasn't come yet, that the whole world is getting armed and we have no choice but to also be armed, to fight. Because your time hasn't come yet. Humankind hasn't reached that level of consciousness, to know that it's a crime to kill a person. An hour of me [speaking], believe me my mouth got dry talking to him. We said, "Svetko, what do you think?" He spoke slowly, "Bunjak, everything you said, you spoke, you came in here, and went out here {gestures to ears with hand}." Me. "Ka, ka, ka!" "What's wrong?" I said, "This animal made my mouth dry for one hour...I laughed" (laughs). We had cases, when the director told him, "Just one day, work one Saturday, I'll free you!" Heaven forbid, he didn't work. No.

And when they sent me one day, one time in a cellar, downstairs, it was under the stairs. It was called "zero," the cellar. It didn't even have windows, just a door. And you went in, but you couldn't move. Because the stairs obstructed you. As soon as I entered, I stepped on someone. I said, "Who is it, who are you?" "*Ja sam, Svetko.*" [It's me, Svetko] When, what happened? And on the door [I went], "Bam, bam, bam!" And the guard came, "What, *banditu!*" I said, "What did you do?" He was working outside, the sun, believe me his skin was falling off. Wetness below, there was no place where he, it was wet. I said, "Look," I said, "Not even the Germans did this." I said, "Please, the director or..." I said, "I'll strike again. I will do something." They called the director, the director came. I said, "Look..." He was a Miso Vasiljević... he was a partisan, he had lost his hand here {touches his left wrist}. Of the year '41, a partisan. But he was very just. And he freed us, both me and him. They sent us to another cell. He said, "I didn't know Bunjak," he said, "I'm sorry!" The director told me he was sorry! I was well known by then. These are some details...others...

**Lura Limani:** Just tell me one more time. Because you mentioned these activists... what kind of system was that system of activists, which the director apparently removed? How could he?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Lura, those activists were ordered to force inmates to revise their stances, to be loyal to Yugoslavia. Or, if you hid something during the investigation, to tell it now. And they had success. Because the prisoners were beaten, they beat the prisoners. Do you believe me when I heard the screams of the prisoners, they could be heard up to the heavens throughout the prison cells?! With those idiot people beating them, the prisoners.

**Lura Limani:** Meaning they themselves...

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** The prisoners beat prisoners. They had privileges, they had a room filled with food that they took from other prisoners... cigarettes, bread, lard, jam... they had a whole room at their convenience. And the saying was, "Kill the enemy, no more than 14 cellars." Not the court's punishment, but 14 days in the cellar.

One day...and this is an interesting detail. For around two years they fed us, in '52 and '53, with the waste from the Juhor factory, in Kraleva, with the waste of pigs (silence). Two years, '52 and '53. And I was in isolation, without a package. Of course, skin and bones, skinny. And every month, every two months, they punished me with 14 days in the basement, on concrete, of course without bedding, without blankets. But it was easier for me because I put one shoe on my foot, and sat on the other shoe. And in Ferizaj no, I didn't have where to. Here, I would go out...I wasn't that upset in Niš. But here in Ferizaj it was very miserable.

And in my room, in my cellar they brought a man from Drenica, he had just arrived to the prison. Of course he, still didn't know what hunger is. He wouldn't eat that waste. Believe me Lura, it had... the hooves of pigs in mud. I swear! The skin of a pig, that had its lard taken away, as they call it bacon, it was covered in mud. The muzzle of a pig with a ring, the muzzle. That... that's what they fed us with. The waste of a pig! However I saw its worth. Why?! Because he wouldn't eat the food. Rarely any of us would take it. Only those who were hungry. And I said, "Oh brother..." I said, "Do you see what I've become. Skin and bones! Can I have it?" He said, "I'm sorry, I swear to God!" And he... I had two plates of pork.

I took that skin between my teeth, like this {brings hand to mouth}, I gnawed at it, the bit of lard that remained. On the 15th day, I had done my 14 days in the cellar, I went upstairs. The man who punished me appeared in front of me. The head of UDBA, Milan Obradović. He asks me, "Who are you?" I thought he was joking, I swear to God. I said, "Are you joking with me?" "Who are you, bandit?" And he swore at me, as is the custom of Serbs. "Bunjaku." When he did {grabs head with both hands}, "*Komandiri! Komandiri!*" He called the guards. They ran over. "Good, you idiots. Where was he? Was he in a sanatorium, or the cellar? Idiots!" I didn't noticed that I had improved, with pork (laughs). I built up of a reserve for about six months in isolation, then I continued, thanks to pork (smiles).

(Silence) These are some interesting details. I...I suffered a lot. Albanians especially, because of the poor economic situation and *šiptarski paket* was different, the Albanian package and the Serbian package. The Albanian got bread and half a kilogram of sugar, if he took it or not. And Serbs got lard, pork, chocolate or something. It was miserable! Poverty played its part. Hunger. There were people who didn't have who would send them food packages. I'm saying so, I didn't get one in three years. I only received one package. Every two months the head of UDBA would punish me by not allowing me a package. Two months without the right to write a letter home and without [access to the] canteen. We had a canteen in the jail, we had the right to buy cigarettes. Or sometimes they would bring an apple or something. Not other food. Not bread, of course. Because even these, every two months they punished me. For 36 months, I only got one package of food. I turned into skin and bones, of course afterwards. Until the new director came and freed us. Luck! That director was changed.

**Lura Limani:** Which year were you freed and what did you do afterwards?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** The strike?

**Lura Limani:** No, when were you freed? When did you leave the prison?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** No, I went to Idrizova afterwards, Lura.

**Lura Limani:** Where?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I went to Idrizova. In '59, because of the pleading of my parents, they transferred me to Idrizova. There...because I also had a...I forgot a detail. My war in Niš was to speak Albanian with my parents. However the order was [to talk] only in Serbian, and I didn't speak Serbian. I couldn't speak Serbian with my mother, Lura. And my poor mother cried. "Please, just to see you Rexhko!" Because my mother called me Rexhko. "Mother, I'm sorry, please forgive me but I can't talk to you in Serbian!" And of course, as soon as they went back, they immediately punished me to 14 days in the isolation cell two, two, two. I did this for about four or five times until I forced them to bring an Albanian police officer in order for us to speak in Albanian.

When I came to Idrizova, the first visit...And for the first time, I sat like a human being in a chair, a table in between, in front of my parents in chairs. I talked sitting down. Twelve [years] in Nis, it was like a stall for animals, Lura, like a stable for tying up animals. Here, one there. We could barely hold each other's hands. The noise! You couldn't hear anything. And here first of all I sat down like a human being and I was almost surprised, Idrizova. And I immediately spoke in Albanian, of course. The guard, behind me, "*Zboruvaj makedonski!*" [Speak Macedonian!] And I didn't know Macedonian. Because in Kosovo, and then in prison all in Serbian. I only looked at him. Mother [said], "Rexhko, please don't start here as well!" You know how she begged. "Mother," I said, "You speak!" Now he was confused, because he hadn't seen a case like this. I said what I said, directly to the director. The director, "What are you thinking? This isn't Niš." "For me," I said, "This is Yugoslavia." I said, "I, don't want anything. My right to speak my mother tongue. Since the constitution allows it, please don't cause problems for me here too!" "Eh, bandit, don't, because it isn't like Niš here..." or something. However they didn't punish me. During the second burst, they had brought some Albanians from Reka, Gostivar, who were slaviced but who still knew Albanian and we spoke in Albanian. And there I broke the ice. In Idrizova too.

And in the room they put me in, I saw the group of NDSH members from Skopje, Tetovo and Gostivar. They all were intellectuals. Raif Malaziu was there, [from] the Faculty of Philosophy. Adnan Agai was a teacher. Sherafedin Agai, his relative, an architecture student. Naxhip Purta, a French language professor. Abaz Dukagjini, an English student. Eshref Hoxha, a teacher. Later they also brought this Hamzë Shala. And this period with Hamzë Shala was interesting. It was really an environment...we had around two spies there but we didn't pay them much mind. And every room had a separate toilet and, excuse me, a water closet with doors like this, separated. One day, Abaz Dukagjini came, he said, "Rexhep, we heard who you are, we want you to socialize with us." I said, "Abaz, with great pleasure! But do you know who I am? I'll cause you trouble!" He said, "We know, that's why we want you in our company." And I started socializing with them.

After about three, four months, they brought Hamzë Shala. Hamzë said, "Kapllan Resuli is in the temporary room." Because when you come into the prison, you spend about two weeks in that [so-called] temporary room, to learn the rules of the house, of the prison, to learn the rules of the house and adjust. However, he said, "He says he's not Albanian," Kapllan Resuli. And I, unfortunately, had read a story of his in Nis. "*Pogaça*." I liked the imagination of that idiot. Precisely an idiot now, he turned out to be an idiot. In short, the partisans went and entered a village. One of them enters a room, and finds the chimney hot. And takes a hot *pogaça*. He puts in his bag. Because the people ran away quickly, out of fear and the order arrives, they continue their journey. And while travelling, at rest, he calls his friend and said, "Come, because I took a *pogaça*. I found it when we entered that room." They try to break it, they can't. He tries harder... the *pogaça* has rough edges. It is a rough edged *pogaça* (laughs).

And for trouble's sake, they came and brought Kapllan, when I was in that room, room number 21. I didn't know him. Eshref Hoxha, the brother of Mehmedali Hoxha, was a poet in Skopje, he knew Kapllan. When he came, he called me, "Rexhep, come!" I see a short little man, and, "Yes Eshref?" He said, "To introduce you to Kapllan Resuli." I looked at him, I said, "You're Kapllan,

ah?" "Why," he said, "Am I not impressive enough?" I said, "No, not really." I said, I put him, believe me, in the same row, in that turn where the washstands were, in the room, and closed the door. I said, "Kapllan, when you came you didn't have to choose. You had one road. To get out, you have two roads: you have the road of honor and the road of shame. If you choose the road of honor, you'll suffer..." He had one more year left, because he was sentenced with a year and a half. I said, "You'll do heavy work, they'll follow you, maybe they'll punish you the same way the punished us, they persecuted us. We work heavy work." I said, "If you choose the road of shame, then you have two friends in our rooms." "No," he said, "I'm with you." I said, "Think well!" And no, he honestly never separated from us, Lura. The year that he stayed, he didn't separate from us. However, he never received a package with food in Idrizova. We fed him, we shared our mouthfuls. Because Adnan Agai, Eshref Hoxha, I...

Those of us that were, that got packages there nearby, we fed him. He even became like an otter, I called him fatty, he became fat, he became...And he went out, he was good with me, he slept at my house for two weeks, when he left the prison. And I didn't know how miserable my condition was, even though we read the newspapers, Lura, we thought that milk and honey were running through the streets of Yugoslavia. When I got out, one room – my parents, brother, sister and myself, all we had was one room, I went crazy.

**Lura Limani:** Which year did you get out of prison?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Excuse me?

**Lura Limani:** Which year did you get out?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** In '61 I got out of prison. [It's] even, interesting, on Sunday my parents came and my father said, "Rexhep we didn't measure the food package" I said, "The package, father you are obsessed with it." And the next day, I was at work, they called me, they called me to the directorate. And I had argued with a guard, I thought I'm going to get hit with isolation, God damn it!(laughs) And I got ready. When I went, a guard told me, "Go get your clothes and come here." Clothes, again I thought, isolation. "No," he said, "surrender your clothes." I said, "What's going on?", He said, "You're free!", "What?" "You're free!" I couldn't believe it. The next day I went, I left my food package to my friends. I took, I had a notebook with electro-technical notes, I took that notebook with me, I left. A Macedonian, as soon as we exited the door outside, went "O sloboda" [Oh freedom] and he fainted. I saw him, I said, "How long was he in prison?" "Six months." I said "What? Six months, I haven't been out of prison in 15 years!" (laughs). I mean ... it was interesting, he fainted, I lied down, the corn had just ripened, Saturday, I was freed on Saturday. On my back, looking at the sky, I still couldn't believe I was free.

When the bus came, I got on the bus, we had a little money from our work. And I don't know... I went to my house on a market day, there's a bridge there, I don't know if you've been to Skopje, when you leave Skopje. My aunt was there, and in front there, the river called Serava flowed, a small river. When I saw her, I greeted her, I went home in that direction. I opened the door, the door creaked, mother, father, sister and a relative of mine were breaking walnuts, for money, to live. They kept the shells to light the fire, and the walnuts they preserved, I mean the nuts, to sell. I don't know how many kilograms, I don't remember. Father said, "Who's at the door?" Mother said "The children, probably." I laughed and went in, without thinking. When mother saw me... I thought she would lose her mind, I swear to God, yes. "Mother," I said, "why are you quiet, I have returned [did I]?" "Oh," she said, "son, 15 years were enough." I hugged her.

And now, the fight for existence, when I saw what life my own [family] had, because they don't give me work, they don't give identification cards. I swear to God, Lura, I went to the head of

UDBA in Skopje. I said, "Look, you either find me work, employ me, or I swear on the Albanian *besa* that I will do a scandal, that you'll remember for as long as you live.

**Lura Limani:** A what?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** To remember for as long as you live. There I thought, to throw a bomb, to... the situation was catastrophic. I'm saying, a room, me, my parents, sister and brother, one room. Because my father's brothers in the meantime moved to Turkey. And father's part was in a building with only one room and one narrow corridor there, that's where it was. He said, "Look, I know who you are" the head of UDBA, picked up the phone, called the municipality, "So and so will come, give him his work booklet, without an identification card." I would end up being the first to get a work booklet without an identification card. And I got the work booklet, I went to the labor bureau, they found me a job as a fitter, I started there, I slowly started work. They gave me a shed, because the earthquake caught me in '43, the Skopje earthquake. That day the earthquake, I went as a soldier, they drafted me, (laughs) 33 years old I left the prison.

According to Yugoslav law, he [who] was in prison and in the hospital, had to do their military duty up until the age of 40. And I finished my military duty. I settled down slowly, I got married, I have two daughters. Lirjeta works in the Academy of Sciences as a graduated economist, she does finances. The youngest, she doesn't work, takes care of the grandson.

### Part Three

Rexhep Bunjaku: And now is the period with Kapllan Resuli. Shall I tell you?

**Lura Limani:** Uh huh.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** When he left the prison, he came and lived with me for two weeks, and with Eshref Hoxha for two-three nights, and then he returned to Ulqin and ran away to Albania. I convinced him to run away to Albania. I was determined, I thought regardless, that's our homeland, that's where he has the library, his motherland, and he can be lauded as a writer, better [in Albania] than in Yugoslavia. Because they sentenced him in Yugoslavia, I don't even know for what, he said because of propaganda, but no, and also it's not important.

And in '93... in '90 he got out of jail. Milaim Zeka wrote an appeal asking why Kapllan Resuli was still in jail in Albania and I read it. And I remembered the time we were together in Idrizova. I have the appeal here. "Free Kapllan Resuli!" However, that historian Muhamet Pirraku corrected me on something. And I didn't say anything, they published that article too. In '93 Adem Demaçi called me, he said, "Rexhep *abej*," and why Rexhep *abej* I don't know, he said, "angels have brought a person, he's with me." I said, "Who is that person?" He said, "Kapllan Resuli." I said, "It really is an angel." And we still don't know why he declared that he isn't Albanian. And I found Adem's house, there I found Shaip Beqiri, Shaip was the editor in chief of the *Forumi* magazine, with Adem Demaçi they published it together. We embraced, "I'm glad you're out." We stayed for as long as we stayed, Adem Demaçi, me, Shaip Beqiri, Kapllan Resuli and Ibrahim Krajcova-Leci, our comedian, Leci. And he, he even took us around by car, here and there.

The time came to leave, he said, "Rexhë, I'm coming with you too." Adem said, "Stay Kapllan, I have room for you." "No," he said, "Rexhep is my friend" and he slept with us. Even Adem came, Shaip, and we hung out until twelve at night. The next day Kapllan went to Ulqin. When he got out of prison he gave me some books. I saved them. I got them ready for him. "No," he said, "I'll come back, when I come back, I'll take the books." And he went, we accompanied him

together, Adem, me, Ibrahim and... when Shaip Beqiri called on the phone, he said "Did you hear what Kapllan Resuli said?" "No." "He publicly declared that he isn't Albanian." In Ulqin with Ali Lljunja in a press conference, Ali Lljunja was leading the conference, he declares that he isn't Albanian, but Montenegrin.

And in the meantime I wrote an article, "The Betrayal of betrayal," his novel *Betrayal*, I don't know if you read it, but it made this Kapllan famous. However, it wasn't his novel in fact, but that's not the topic, another time maybe. He came one night with his sister, at the door, knock-knock-knock. I knew who it was, but as an Albanian I welcomed him, "Welcome!" He entered, his sister said, "Now I'm sure that you're in safe hands." I turned away. His sister left, he entered, he slept over that night, the next day I accompanied him to the bus station and I gave him the books of his I carried.

And later on our relationship soured, I wrote another article, "The Metamorphosis of Kapllan Resuli." Now I'm preparing a book against him, because he's interesting, as as soon as it was proven that he wasn't the author of the novel *Betrayal*, or as soon as he got out of prison, he never wrote another novel. Not a novel, not only novels, only pamphlets without arguments, against Albanians, against Ismail Kadare, against me, against Agim Gjakova, against Ruzhdi Rushaku from Ulcinj, against Albanian history, imagine in one place he says, "Albanians came to the Balkans, one thousand years after the Slavs," the greatest absurdity. But this period of Kapllan, maybe my book will come out, I believe I'll finish it, may God give me health to finish it because that idiot deserves it.

In short, this is my life. Now I am in Pristina. I'm a pensioner, I get 140 euros a month (laughs). We manage to get through the month somehow. I don't smoke, I've given it up. This detail is also interesting.

In '90, in '91 there was a big inflation, the dinar fell, the mark went really high. My rent was in marks, the boy's name was Agim, a young student, he said, "Spend this money." "Oh Agim, I can't set them aside." "For God's sake spend them." Lura, one month, two, ten months, he doesn't collect rent, he saw I was short on money, and I took [money] from people who worked, and I smoked, I would say like a gipsy. I smoked fifty cigarettes a day. I lit a cigarette, Sebahate at work, girls at school. By myself like a crazy person I swear to God, like an idiot, like the lowest, but does a cigarette in your mouth suit you, when that man, that great worldly man doesn't collect rent from you. I put it out and I haven't put it in my mouth in 24 years, it was worth it...

**Lura Limani:** For the past 24 years?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** (Laughs) The landlord!

**Lura Limani:** What did you work as when you got out of prison?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I'm sorry Lura, I don't hear well.

**Lura Limani:** What did you work as after you got out of prison?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** I worked in Skopje first, in Macedonia, because in prison, since I didn't have a diploma, I insisted on getting into electro-technology to have a vocation. And with that vocation, I got hired as a fitter. I finished the electro-technical high school. And I came later, because when I married I came to Pristina, I got work at the Energoinvest of Sarajevo.

**Lura Limani:** At what?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** At Energoinvest... of Sarajevo, I got employed. And here, until I took my pension, I remained there, that enterprise also gave me this apartment, I mean, it cost a bit more because when [they] came... violently, the Serb took it violently from me.

One day the guard came and said, "Kapllan, you have a visitor." And we were happy because it was the first time someone came to visit Kapllan. I'm saying, he never got visits. And when Kapllan left, he came after half an hour, he was so worked up, and he said, "What happened Kapllan, who was it?" "My brother." "Well that's good." His brother was a major for KOS. KOS is *Kontra Obaveštajna Služba* [The Counterintelligence service of the Yugoslav Army], his brother was Xhevdet Resulbegoviç. He told me, he said, "Of course as soon as I entered the director's office, because he's a major, a person with a position." I said, "That's good Kapllan." He said, "I went into the office there, and we embraced like brothers, his first words, Why do you fraternize with Rexhep Bunjaku, the sworn enemy of Yugoslavia?" Of course, the director told Kapllan's brother. And I said, "Did you come to visit me or to choose my friends, brother?" "No, to visit you, but you can't fraternize with Rexhep Bunjaku and with Rexhep Bunjaku's friends." He said that they argued a bit there, but they somehow separated [well]."

And now I'm thinking, I had an incident that was almost identical in Niš. I said, "Write a letter to your brother and reject him, he'll reject you." "Wow, you're overdoing it." I said, "Listen, he has no choice but to reject you because you fraternize with Rexhep Bunjaku. You're fraternizing with Rexhep Bunjaku and with members of NDSH, you either reject him, or I'll reject you." He wrote the letter, he said, "Brother, with this letter today, you are no longer my brother." But the letters intersected, he rejected Kapllan, and Kapllan rejected his brother.

However, when the idea came to have Kapllan reject his brother, in Niš we had formed a room of intellectuals, the only Albanians in that room was Bunjaku. There everybody was *Çetnik*, almost all of them, and those Cominformists, all Serbians. Among them, there was also a Croat. Excuse me?

**Lura Limani:** Ibeists?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Cominformists.

**Lura Limani:** Ah, Cominformists, yes.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Cominformists, yes, communists who were with the Soviet Union against Yugoslavia. There was a Romaldo Manola, a Croat officer, he was a major too, but he was sentenced five years as a collaborator of the occupier. And I didn't know that he was the brother of Secko Manola, the vice-admiral of the Yugoslav navy, one was a partisan, the other a nationalist. And he hung out with me, Romaldo Manola and Nuri Shahu, occasionally. One day the guard came to Nuri Shahu and says to him, "Romaldo Manola, a visit." And when they called him to the directorate, something happened, someone in the family died, or his wife left him, or they would punish him with isolation. He only said, "Who spied on me?" And it hurt me because he only fraternized with me. I said, "Oh, no one said anything. It went... in the mouth of UDBA, to the ears of UDBA." I went out for a walk, he went, after twenty minutes he came back, he was fuming. I said, "What happened?" He said, "*Pusti me!*" [Let me be!], "Leave me alone!" And it really hurt me, really. I continued to lie down, he came out after five minutes. He said, "It was [my] brother." "But that's good [your] brother, and who is your brother?" He said, "Secko." Then, the wheels started turning, I said, "Secko Manola? Your brother is Secko Manola?" He said, "Yes." "Oh my god," I said, "Bunjak, who are you hanging out with?" And he started laughing (laughs).

And he told me, he said, "I went into the director's office," he said, "I introduced myself, 'I the convicted Manola.' Romaldo and the director [said], 'Forget that, come on, your brother came.'

‘Mister director, I’m sorry I don’t have a brother.’ His brother, Secko, gets up, ‘Ramo?’ ‘Sir, I don’t know you.’ ‘Bunjaku came and gave me a chocolate.’ The idiot mentioned me, for four years he didn’t think about whether I was alive or not. And he says, ‘Mister director, I’m sorry, I don’t have a brother, I don’t have a brother, let me go.’ And he came. And this incident gave me an example to say to Kapllan, ‘Free him, because he has no choice but to reject you.’ And then they rejected each other. Some details I’ve forgotten, others I remember.

**Lura Limani:** It doesn’t matter, if you remember them, tell them.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** And with that he cried greatly. Eh, we went, that year Esad Mekuli died in ‘93. Adem, Adem Demaçi, Kapllan, me, this Shaip and Ibrahim Krajkova went to Esad’s wife, Sadete Mekuli. That woman welcomed us, and we gave our condolences and stayed, for as long as we stayed. Adem Demaçi said, ‘I read while I was in prison, while eating, that you can’t eat rice and meat. When you eat meat you can’t eat bread or rice.’ He gave those principles he read in prison, a doctor or I don’t know who. Sadete said, ‘Adem, leave the meat, because we don’t have it on the table anyway.’ (laughs)

Then it really so happened that Vesel Uka, when his son got married, he invited Adem, me and some close friends. And with us, meat and rice is a custom, he came and served it there on the table, Adem said, ‘Honestly, regardless, I don’t eat meat with rice.’ (laughs) She got up, she got him a plate with meat and put it in front of Adem, close to me, he ate the meat and left the rice (laughs), Adem said a few sayings and some... [that] don’t suit him, to be honest. But... that’s another topic, Adem is no longer interesting.

**Lura Limani:** You’re still friends with Adem, certainly?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Yes, Adem, from Albanians here not even Zef Pllumbi was more important than Adem. He spent almost 40 years in prison. Father Zef Pllumbi, Adem was 27, I was 15 and something. And now some money came to us as prisoners (laughs). Yes, I was happy about that, to be honest with you. They came precisely because one can’t live with 120 euros, Lura. Adem got 170, Nuhi 19 thousand for 15 years and they helped me, I made some renovations, furniture, things like that. We settled well, also thanks to the friends who helped me, especially Hydajet Hyseni and Mazllum Baraliu helped me a lot, of course the government as well. If it was [up to] the government, they wouldn’t have given it, if they didn’t want to, and Hashim Thaçi with his government, with his friends. That money came to us, and overall it helped us, it helped us.

And so on Lura, if you have anything, please go ahead.

**Lura Limani:** I would also like to ask you, if you remember the ‘90s, were you...

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Lura I’m sorry I can’t hear you.

**Lura Limani:** In the ‘90s were you, did you work together with other former political prisoners, in resolving blood feuds... what were you doing? Were you in Pristina, where were you during that time?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** As far as I understood you, I said I worked at Electro-Macedonia in Skopje, they endured me and endured because I worked for two-three people, and I was a hard worker. I came here to the Energoinvest of Sarajevo, I also worked with Fadil Hoxha’s son – Leka, Leka was an electrotechnician. My boss was Nexhmedin Behluli. It was an enterprise with almost 150 workers, it helped Kosovo.

With the arrival of Serb impositions, in the ‘90s I took my pension, I left. They even gave me this painting then as... I was the first one to take my pension at that time. They destroyed that enterprise, the Serbs came, they took it. Now it’s an industrial zone there. And this apartment I

have from the enterprise, it cost me a little bit more because inflation played its part. When they dismissed Emin Duraku the construction enterprise of Kosovo, then they took it over, they gave it to an enterprise in Skopje, I think to Mavrova, I don't know [but it was] in Skopje. They did that recalculation, they asked us 50 thousand marks for the apartment, and we paid them, we paid all of it, that contractual agreement with Emin Duraku in Pristina. I was broke, I didn't have money, but I had some in the Ljubljana Bank when I sold the property in Skopje, I deposited it in the bank of Ljubljana. I had around 25 thousand marks there, but the banks were frozen, I didn't have a way to get them. I had to get into debt to buy it, this apartment cost us 40 thousand marks. However, at that time it was still cheap, compared to...

And so, I have this apartment, my daughter Lirjeta worked with foreigners, she bought a one bedroom apartment, she gave it to her sister. And now with the money that I got, I got my daughter Lirjeta a two bedroom apartment, around 15 thousand euros. So it's good, what our elders always said, we were "God's poor." With health, I'm still on my feet, I'm not a needy [man] who needs to ask for a glass of water, I still get up on my own feet. I go out with friends, at the Radio Kosova cafe, we meet there, we let out everything, it's not that we do anything, we let loose there (laughs), disappointed. It's a good environment, everyone there is an intellectual, I hang out there time after time.

**Lura Limani:** I would like to ask another question, this is maybe a bit... Were you in Pristina during the last war in '99?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Excuse me?

**Lura Limani:** Were you in Pristina during the last war in '99?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Yes, in Pristina I was sentenced...

**Lura Limani:** No, I'm talking about the last war in '99.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Yes, in Pristina.

**Lura Limani:** Yes, but were you here during the war?

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Not always... from April of '83 I've been in Pristina. I've been in Pristina for 32 years, yes, I say I confirmed it from that [question], "Where are you from [my] man?" "Where my wife is from." (laughs) My wife is from the Mumxhiu family, her brother was a deputy rector, Muhamet Mumxhiu, a mathematician, she was also a mathematician. Isa Mumxhiu, her brother, was a construction technician, and the youngest brother Sherafedin is a mechanical engineer, and is now working in the ministry. One of her sisters is a teacher, one wasn't an intellectual, the oldest one, she was a housewife. So, I spent this time like this. In Skopje I have some relatives, I have a sister and a brother in Sweden, I have a sister in Turkey, she died the year before last.

And when I got out of prison, my father was hot for as they said, to go to Turkey. I had three brothers, father had three brothers there. My mother had two sisters in Turkey, and both of them wanted us to relocate. And my father said this to me, I said, "Father, I won't separate from you. You shared that bit of bread you had, you've looked after my health for the past 15 years. I thank you! Because of that, my answer is no. I would rather be in prison again in Yugoslavia, than free in Turkey." "Why my son?" "Because in Turkey, my children won't learn Albanian, there are no Albanian schools there father. And here I am under the occupation of Serbs, but at least they allow children to learn the Albanian language in schools." He never mentioned it again. So we remained, we didn't go.

And my father died in '84. My mother told me when she was young, in the '70s [when she was] 59 years old. Valdete had just been born, after two-three months my mother died from cancer.

And my mother never put a cigarette in her mouth. It's interesting, she passed away from cancer. And my father smoked his entire life, and passed away because of his heart, 81 years old (laughs). And I smoked for 40 years, 50 cigarettes a day, I'm 87, I'm considered younger, they say to me, "How old have you become?" I say to them, "102 years old." They look at me confused, my 87 and 15 from the prison, make 102 years (laughs). And so on Lura...

**Lura Limani:** Yes, do you have a question?

**Rina Krasniqi:** No.

**Lura Limani:** I don't have other questions. I'd like to thank you very much for this conversation, and we'll remain in touch. And thank you again for your time. Feel free if you have anything to add.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** Lura, one thing, God forgive me, I'm not a big religious person but I believe in God, that my mind is sound (laughs). I remember they asked Din Muhamedi, have you heard about Din Muhamedi? The *Četnik* Serbs massacred I don't know how many members of his family, in 1811 [sic]. And he goes to give condolences, "Are you sad?" He said, "No." "How?" "Had I realized it, I would never had gone to express my condolences! I have a nephew, and from that nephew, the family got back on its feet again."

And so the best thing at this age, I still write, I read. Reading has remained with me, in prison reading saved me too and it does here now. I can't sleep without reading. I have quite a rich private library. And my friends helped me, they gave me [books], and now I buy them myself because I have the means. And so all the time, I would say it's a sin. It will get even better.

And, another detail that is interesting, and now came to mind, in '47 a man from Kaçanik came, he was a friend of Shefki Hoxha, the nephew of Mehmet Hoxha. And he had sent three books, *Capital*. Lura, imagine, *Lahuta e Malcisë* [*The Highland Lute*] we had in jail, Fishta's *Lahuta e Malcisë*. The poems of (inc.) *Lufta e çetave serbe e shqiptare në Çamëri* [*The war of Serbian and Albanian bands in Chameria*]. It fell into my hands, these are even poems you've read, if you read the feuilleton. I read on the first page, "If I didn't believe Albania would live forever, I would have wanted God to demolish the whole world".

I lived long enough, I've read enough. I've never come across a poet in the world that spoke these words for the motherland. And I was eternally inspired, continued, "If I didn't believe that Kosovo would unite with Albania, I would want God to turn the whole world into char and ashes." And this is my wish. For us to unite one day, to form that ethnically Albanian state, granted to us by God himself. We deserve it. If it will happen, maybe I won't reach it, God willing you will reach it. God willing, you will achieve it. I believe it will. This people will become aware.

Even though Halil Matoshi came out, he says "the Kosovar nation," and we in prison, our greatest war was, "*Vi ste Šiptari, a oni su Albanci*" [You are Šiptari and they are Albanians]. They separated us into two nations. Now Halil Matoshi and this [Nexhmedin] Spahiu came out saying, "The Kosovar nation." God punish you, why? We are in the state of Kosovo, absolutely, however, in terms of nationality, we are Albanian. Just like Germans, Austrians don't say my nationality I'm Austrian, but German, of course Austrian nationals, of course. We are nationals of Kosovo, but we are of Albanian nationality. And this makes us Kosovars. However, there's no chance, they're around four-five people [who believe in Kosovar nationality], not more. Lura?

**Lura Limani:** Yes, thank you very much.

**Rexhep Bunjaku:** You are welcome, thank you as well for your effort.

