

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN ÇUNI

Pristina | Date: May 30 and 31, 2022

Duration: 176 minutes

Present:

1. Martin Çuni (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Renea Begolli (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

[This part of the interview was conducted on May 30, 2022]

Part One

Anita Susuri: Mr. Martin, if you could introduce yourself, your birth year, the place you were born and anything about your family, your origin?

Martin Çuni: Martin Ndrec Çuni, born on May 14, '48 in the village of Ujzi in Has, where the Holy Bridge is. Ujz, some people think that its meaning is about a place with water. But, that is not the meaning, the meaning is “black water,” because people from there go get water somewhere else that is one kilometer away, some 500 meters, some might carry it on their backs and... so, very difficult conditions since it's a place with no water, it has no water and that's how it got the name Ujzi, but for some time now it's become... {coughs}

We didn't have a school in our village, it was in our neighboring village and I was one of the students who lived the farthest from the school. I had to cross water streams in good and bad weather. And when I was in eighth grade, my father was working in Gallap in Pristina, it's in the mountains of Pristina, and he took his family [us] with him because my grandfather died and there was nobody to take care of us. I finished elementary school there, and then I worked there as a teacher for four years.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: Mr. Martin, you told me about a family story, about how they came from a place around Ohrid, to Ujzi I think. If you could talk about that?

Martin Çuni: Yes, Albanian families usually remember two or three migrations at most, but two is too many, right? And almost everyone who migrated came from the Malësia [region] of Albania, which is illogical and not true at all because how could all those Albanians come from tiny Malësia where there is no food, no food. There's food for only a few people, right?

And my family's history is very interesting, really interesting and I remember it well. I remember the migration, several migrations. They first migrated about 400 years ago. There was a war in the highlands of Ohrid and our family had been in the parish of the Saint Paraskevi [of Rome] Church. And you know what is interesting? We still celebrate that holiday even now after four or five hundred years. Saint Paraskevi had Illyrian origin, pre-Christian. But, Christianity didn't throw that away, they accepted her and took her under their embrace so they wouldn't lose people.

And then, a war happened, between Albanians, it was between Albanians and the invaders at the time, and they were forced to migrate. They migrated to Dibër and they stayed in Dibër for about one hundred years or more, around that, but it was good, it was very good. There was another war, and wars happened often in Dibër. They fought there again and they went to Malësi e Madhe, namely to the deepest part of Malësi, in Kthellë. That's its name, Kthellë.

They stayed in Kthellë for some time, for a century or longer. But not because of the war, but because of the financial situation, they had nothing to eat and they were forced to move to Rrafshi i Dukagjinit. In Rrafshi i Dukagjinit, they first went to Krusha, but not all of them, not all of our family, only a part. A part remained in Kthellë, [while] a part moved to Krusha e Madhe. But, in Krusha e Madhe it was a bit late, it was the time when the slavs started to dominate.

They came into conflict with a family there, apparently the last name was Balošević, not sure though, but with an orthodox family. But, so there would be no bloodshed, in order to not cause bloodshed, they decided to leave Krusha. They left Krusha and went to Has, in Ujzi today. It was a difficult place for [acquiring] water, it was difficult to live in, but they decided on that, Përdrini or Podrimja as people here call it. Përdrini is a wonderful place, if you plant something backwards, it will grow in the right way. Meanwhile, Has is the opposite, the ground ruptures so much during the summer that if you step on it, your leg would get stuck, you would get really hurt, and they live there. So I was born in Ujzi, yes.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember life in the village?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: You said that it was quite difficult.

Martin Çuni: Of course, of course. As a seven year old, I would go to the mountains with my mother to carry wood, for example on my back. I would take one piece of wood, and she carried a load of wood {describes with hands} on her back. Because in Has and that area, the women work a lot, they have always worked but the men are a little lazier, but they also were abroad. Who would work? The women had to work and we had land, but it was hard to work it, hard to maintain. You would plant things, but it never grew because it didn't rain, the end.

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know if your parents had some kind of education at the time?

Martin Çuni: My father had finished the four year school, my mother didn't. But it's interesting because my father was autodidactic and everything I had to read [for school], he asked if he could read as well so he wouldn't read just about anything. Because he discussed history and different things with my faculty friends, he really loved education.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that after some time you came and settled in Pristina.

Martin Çuni: Yes, from... no, we didn't settle in Pristina, we came from Ujzi to Keçekollë [village].

Anita Susuri: Yes, in Keçekollë, near Pristina.

Martin Çuni: Yes, near Pristina, yes. But back then, you had to go from Pristina to Keçekollë byhorse and carriage or by foot. It's about 23 kilometers away from here, it's a wonderful place to live in, but it's isolated and there's wonderful mountain people, wonderful hill people. They're not far behind the people from Has and Luma (laughs).

Anita Susuri: How did your life continue then? You mentioned that your school was very far from where you were in Ujzi, but did something change for the better for you?

Martin Çuni: In Keçekollë, my school was very close. My father was a police officer back then. He was in prison three times because he didn't want injustice. At first he was, this isn't very interesting, but I will mention it anyway. He was in Belgrade and he was given an apartment and everything [he needed] to take his family with him and move to Belgrade. He said, "No, I can't. My children don't know one word in Serbian, but if you can, only move me there, to work there." They didn't want to.

An unfortunate event happened to him there. He came into conflict with a military officer because he had a difficult duty, and he [military officer] belittled him [my father] or what do I know, but he belittled him. And it's the Albanian's character, you finish them, but fortunately he wasn't killed, he was only wounded and my father was sentenced to six months in prison. But after that he said, "Either send me to Kosovo or I will quit my duty altogether." They brought him to Kosovo. After Ranković¹ fell from power, they sent him to Peja.

But, unluckily, he had a Montenegrin commander in Peja. He was an enemy to Albanians because an Albanian had killed his father, an Albanian from Has exactly and he hated him a lot, he had it out for him and one day he decided to kill him. He went into his office, but fortunately for him, there was Gani Bytyqi from Malisheva, Kravaria in Malisheva. I'll never forget it, because I knew him and he grabbed his hand and didn't let him. And then the commander, out of fear, the police commander out of fear, got out of the window and said, "I will kill him."

¹ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

Gani Bytyqi was such a good friend that he kept [my father] company for a month at work, but also after work he took him home. He never let him go back home alone until he [the commander] promised that he won't kill, and he [my father] escaped and was sentenced to six months for those problems. They sent him to serve his sentence in Keçekollë. When they sent him to Keçekollë, there was a commander, a commander of *milicia* [Serb.: police], he was from Junik, Tofaj. He was a good man and called him to his office. He said, "Your report came, you will go back home [and get fired from the job] with the smallest mistake." "Is that so?" He said, "Commander, for God's sake tell me if you will treat me like they did, I will take off the uniform right here and go home because I cannot stand injustice." He said, "No." He was a [decent] man, he said, "No, you're like a clean white paper to me, but I'm just letting you know." "All right," he said, "then" and it passed.

And then I finished elementary school there. I had a really good time. I had a lot of friends. Now my friends are more from Llap and Gollak than from Has and Dukagjin... And there was a really interesting experience. I was in the seventh grade. There was an imam of the Sekiraqa family, Ilaz Sekiraqa. I had a discussion with him like I was a grown up. And he stopped whenever he ran into me, and we would talk for at least half an hour. And one day he gave me, he told me, "I will give you something to read, but don't tell anybody." I said, "Alright."

He brought me *Jeta e Re* [literary magazine], two copies, where Adem Demaçi's² *Gjarprinjt e Gjakut* [Alb.: Blood Snakes] [was published]. I read it back then, I mean when I was in seventh grade, and then I returned it to him. For me, that was something... anyway, there is nothing hostile about anyone in *Gjarprinjt e Gjakut*, but there is something against enemies from within. Blood feuds, it fights against blood feuds. But, the novel was condemned for the author, for the author's stance.

Anita Susuri: At that time, did you know who Adem Demaçi was?

Martin Çuni: Of course, of course. The martyr Idriz Rrahmani was my classmate. It's a special story for him as well when they brought me for the [prison] sentence the second time in Pristina. Now we are jumping way forward, but we will go back to where we were again. They took me to court there and at the end of the hall, there was Idriz. When he saw me, he went pale like lime [the material]. We passed near him with the guards, I was with the guards by the judge and I greeted him, but he couldn't greet me back. On the way, as soon as they took me to the judge, he went to Prapashtica to his family. He didn't come back home here in Pristina and he told them, "I saw Martin like this" and he was really distressed about it. This was a chapter, a short chapter that is related to elementary school.

Anita Susuri: Was this the time when you started to develop, how to put it, the feeling that something is not right with the system in which you were living or was it before that as well?

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

Martin Çuni: No, it wasn't earlier, it wasn't earlier. I mean I read a lot, I read a lot back then. Actually the books, when I would go on holiday I would take a bunch of books to read while I was there because I would spend my holiday in Ujzi, at the Holy Bridge, and I read a lot, I read all the time. There were people who saw things, but also ones who saw through books, but you can't see much in books, but more in real life. Maybe the spirit [I was brought up in] because my father was a very honest person, he was very honest, but he didn't, how to put it, that's why he never advanced in life because they didn't let him. But it's good that he survived.

Meanwhile my circle, I always had a good circle [of people] here in the village as well. I had a cousin who was a total autodidact, so he didn't attend even one day of school. But, he read so much that you can't believe it. He was a valet to a very progressive priest, who was a political prisoner from our village. Actually the neighboring village, not exactly our village because there was a church there and there were several villages, there were several villages around.

And now [I will talk about] when they imprisoned him. The priest had a lot of old books, a lot and he gave them to my cousin to hide so the police wouldn't find them, and they imprisoned him after, they didn't find the books. But, he didn't have nylon. There was no nylon, no rubber to cover the books and he hid them somewhere, and when the humidity got to them, it damaged most of them. But there were some really interesting books and he gave them to me to read.

I mean, as a child and as a student in elementary school, and then as a high school student of course, but he also talked a lot. He saw it with his own eyes, he was, he was guarding the livestock on the street, the street down Drin [river], before arriving at Zym and there was a [water] source. He saw Shtjefën Gjeçov who returned from Prizren drinking water from there, and a person killed him while drinking water, which doesn't happen with Albanians, killing someone while they're drinking water or without a warning. But he was paid by *shkijet*.³ He was paid by *shkijet*.

He would always tell me about that moment with tears in his eyes and he was young, so 15, 16, 17 years old, I don't know how old. He knew a lot of stories. So, he would describe these like he really had an education. Maybe that's where it started, I don't know.

Anita Susuri: What about the pile of books you mentioned the priest had, what kind of content did they contain?

Martin Çuni: All were publications in Albanian, the first publications in Albanian by the *Rilindas*⁴ which he had.

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know, for example, your Catholic community who lived in villages. Were they villages who had an entire Catholic population or was it mixed?

³ *Shka* (m.); *shkinë* (f.), plural *shkijet*, is a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

⁴ Figures of the *Rilindja Kombëtare* (National Awakening), the nineteenth century Albanian political and cultural movement for national liberation.

Martin Çuni: No, there were two Catholic neighborhoods in Ujzi, and a Muslim neighborhood. But, now I will say something I experienced, which I experienced myself, because I could talk about what somebody else told me, but that's not it, it's what I experienced myself. For example, on Easter, when we were children we would go out and they would give us candy, they would give us red [painted] eggs, and as children, we would also go to the Muslim neighborhood because we didn't know if they celebrated it or not. Nobody told us that they're something else, that they have a different religion, nobody told us, and their children would come to us for Eid. So, that's how religion was experienced, as something personal, whoever wants to practice it does, whoever doesn't want to, doesn't. Not to say this person is different, that person is different, absolutely not, absolutely not.

With a family that was there, we were in that mountain, that family {extends hands} was of Muslim faith, it was in the other mountain. The head of the house was called Sali Shuti, [and] my grandfather Zef Çuni, the mountains were so close, and my grandfather would whistle with his two fingers {puts two fingers close to his mouth} when guests would come. There was never a case when my grandfather didn't invite them when there were guests and vice versa, there was never a case when they had guests over and didn't invite my grandfather for dinner or lunch, I don't know. Even now when I remember it after several decades, when I remember it, it feels like it's in front of my eyes.

Anita Susuri: Were there any differences, for example in clothes or...

Martin Çuni: Nope, nope, it was national clothing. But what's interesting about it, they called it national clothing. Why? Do you know why? Many people don't know why.

Anita Susuri: Why?

Martin Çuni: Because *shkijet* called us Turkish because of religion. Turkish coffee. They call Turkish coffee *arnavut kafesi* [Tur.: Albanian coffee] in Istanbul, it's called *arnaut*⁵ coffee. I've known about this for 50 years. A neighbor of mine, Hajrullah Gashi, his sister had moved to Istanbul and he went to visit her, 50 years ago. He went to visit and was asked, "What do you want to drink?" At a coffee bar there, "What do you want to drink?" He said, "Turkish coffee." The waiter got confused. His brother-in-law said, "Here they call it *arnaut*, *arnaut* coffee." For us, this is misery. They call it *arnaut* coffee in Istanbul, and we call it Turkish coffee. Where did it come from? Or national clothing. What kind of national clothing is Turkish clothing, *a la turka*?⁶ What *a la turka*?

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about the school you mentioned in Keçekollë. You finished elementary school there, right?

Martin Çuni: Eight years, yes.

⁵ *Arnaut* is a Turkish ethnonym used to denote Albanians.

⁶ *A la turca*, which in Albanian meant "Turkish way." In the 19th century, this was perceived as the exploration of backward-looking traditionalism and was culturally positioned as the opposite of *a la franca*.

Anita Susuri: And then what did you decide? How did you decide?

Martin Çuni: And then we came to Pristina, we had to go to high school in gymnasium.⁷ I was in the gymnasium of...

Anita Susuri: Did you come [by yourself] or with your whole family?

Martin Çuni: No, my whole family came. My father continued to work, but the others came because of me, because of me and my sisters, we had to go to school.

Anita Susuri: What year did you start high school?

Martin Çuni: That happened in '64.

Anita Susuri: '64. How did you experience Pristina at that time? What was it like?

Martin Çuni: *Ahh* {onomatopoeia} Pristina. Pristina back then was, there were graves above the railroads, imagine what kind of city it was. It was a great misery because that whole part, so most of the part above the railroads, houses were built over graves. It's a bad thing that in Pristina, the oldest graves of Albanians aren't even from 50 years ago. I mean, the care for graves is zero, the care is zero. I don't know if this is because of poverty, or what kind of culture, but we have the best antique graves because they're from the Middle Age. That's it. And it was convenient for the occupiers, it was convenient for us to have no roots, for us to break away from the trunk. And then I continued my studies but I also worked. I worked in Keçekollë, simply because of the economy.

Anita Susuri: You continued in Keçkeollë after finishing high school, right?

Martin Çuni: [I stayed] To work in Keçekollë, yes. Actually it was also because some friends became a reason... But then I worked in *Ramiz Sadik* and lastly, actually I had applied at Radio Prishtina before *Ramiz Sadik*. I worked until I started working there [at *Ramiz Sadik*] because it wasn't easy. I worked at Radio Prishtina for eight years. I worked in the editorial office for culture, the children's program. There was an excellent editor, Zejnullah Halili, a friend, a person that only God could create and he was a good creator and sensible and everything. But also a very good person, he passed away too soon. He left a lot of work, wonderful work for children. He was a children's [books] writer.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about high school. Were you in *Shkolla Normale*⁸ in gymnasium?

⁷ A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

⁸ The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during the Second World War, these were the first schools in the Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

Martin Çuni: No, in gymnasium.

Anita Susuri: You attended gymnasium. Where did you live in Pristina?

Martin Çuni: For more than 60 years, I've been here near Emin Duraku school. That's where my house has been since then. My father bought it.

Anita Susuri: What was that neighborhood like at that time and if you could describe Pristina a bit?

Martin Çuni: That neighborhood, our neighborhood was wonderful, especially the street, our alley. We felt like brothers and sisters with each-other there and it's something you never forget, and that neighbor is very good even today, it's very good even today. Well, there are changes, but not too much. For example, I worked on my house, for some years I didn't have a fence or anything, no door and not even one nail went missing. My neighbors watched over it, because nobody else could. You can't watch over it yourself.

Back then it was simpler, maybe because the way of life was different, but even the discussions were different, they were... for example, once, I was a journalist back then and there were some cultural groups who started coming for Albania, artistic groups and there was the group of singers who came from Shkodra. With Bashkim Alibali and Salih Mani, who has passed away, and others.

My house wasn't that far from the Television [offices], only the market was in between us. And I somehow decided to take them, to take someone. And I told them, "Come!" There was Bashkim, Salih, a cousin of Gjergj Fishta, but he wasn't a singer, he was a technician at Radio Shkodra and we told them, "Will you join us for a coffee?" "No," they said. "We would put you at risk." I said, "Don't worry about me, you don't worry about me." This and that. At some point, the cousin of Fishta said, "Shall we go?" "Yes, let's go." They came, but when they came, my neighbors saw me and all the young neighbors gathered, my generation. The people inside were left standing.

And on my television shelf, I had *Historitë e popullit shqiptar* [Alb.: Albanian people's histories] which was published in two parts, and Tonin saw the first part. He asked, "Can I take a look?" "Yes *more*,⁹ look. Why not?" My parents were there and my mother was serving us drinks. I said, "In the part of the new *History*," the new *History* was smaller. The first page of the *History*, in the pages that were blank, in one of them I attached Enver Hoxha's¹⁰ photograph, I glued it and he opened it. He opened the first one and looked at it. When he opened it, he saw Enver Hoxha's photo and closed [the book] *trak* [onomatopoeia]. And the young people there, "What did he see that made him close the book like that?" And a girl said, "Give it so I can see." "No," he said, "you shouldn't" and he took it and put it

⁹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

¹⁰ Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

back. The young people there were much more connected, much more connected. They were more loyal. That's what maybe kept us together also.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that even in '72 you went to Albania for a visit?

Martin Çuni: Ah yes, yes when I was there as a teacher, yes that was extraordinary, yes. It is an event in my life that I remember with a lot of nostalgia. For example, I remember the names of the people who I hung out with for maybe a brief moment. For example, you go to the photographer to get your picture taken, you take the pictures, you get out. How long does that take? And the name of the girl that took our picture in Krujë, Dëshirë Seseri, I will never forget. I won't forget the leaders either, I won't forget. I wrote about my life, I've never written better than I did in my diary, a ten day diary. We were there for ten days.

Anita Susuri: You were there for ten days?

Martin Çuni: Ten days, yes. We were meant to stay a week, but they extended our stay for a few more days. While we were there, the commission came to our school for a visit... and we visited. We were guests of Elbasan's *Shkolla Normale*,¹¹ and the schools near Elbasan. We had a team leader and a work leader during our trip. Gani Bedhia was the founder, back then the founder of the alphabet book in Albania and Lumnie Shehtila, the deputy director of Elbasan's *Shkolla Normale*.

There is this interesting story. I had some very good friends, both of them, they are no longer alive. In Keçekollë, there was Halil Osmani, who later became a principal in Keçekollë, and there was Zejnullah, a boy from Keçekollë, Zela proposed, actually he asked. It was me, Halim, Zela, and the other two leaders from Albania and then he asked, "Is it possible to see Enver Hoxha? For five minutes." Then Gani said. "Yes, it is, it is possible. But don't let anyone find out, so the whole group doesn't find out," because not everyone in the group was meant to go, alright. It got heated, the situation got heated.

Then Lumnia said, "No. Martin," she said, "not [Martin]." "Why not Martin?" She said, "He is [his parent's] only son. Information could be leaked somewhere and then they will lock him up." (laughs) Do you understand? We visited Elbasan, Vlora, Fier, Fushë Kruja, Durrës, Kavaja. Did I mention Kruja?

Anita Susuri: Yes, Kruja.

Martin Çuni: Shkodra [as well].

¹¹ Elbasan's *Shkolla Normale*, opened in December 1909, is the first school of professional education in the Albanian language, created based on the decisions of the Congress of Elbasan, which was held three months earlier in the same year.

Anita Susuri: What circumstances led to your visit there? How were you selected?

Martin Çuni: So we waited for one year until they gave us the visa. There was a group there, and we were invited. Shall we go? We shall go. But they didn't, the school staff didn't appear, because they were a big staff and after one year they told us, "Send us the list." From the Albanian Embassy, "Send us the list and you will go," meaning that we were allowed to go. So now we made a list that was three times longer. To go there with two buses. When the lists were delivered, only those of us from the first list were selected to go.

Anita Susuri: How... I mean back then it was something, as you said, going there was something extraordinary.

Martin Çuni: In '72, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How did you experience the entire trip and what was it like at the border?

Martin Çuni: Believe it or not, we only had a few hours of sleep each night. There were times when we had no other choice but to rest because we couldn't continue any longer, because there wasn't, how to put it... when we went there, because we went for a visit, we participated in teaching classes, because we went there as teachers. So everywhere we went, there was some sort of waiting. In terms of the development, we're speaking about '72, development didn't differentiate much from us. In some places it was better, and some places were worse, it depends on the place, depends on the place. Elbasan was magnificent for example. In Fier, I met someone from my hometown Ujzi.

Anita Susuri: How did he get there?

Martin Çuni: So now I will tell you. After the war, there was a group, some of my relatives were members of that group, and there were others, people from around where we were from, accused of [aspiring of] a union with Albania. So there was Mark Tuçi, I mean he was known back then, he was friends with Fehmi Agani¹² in school. And one day, during an evening there in Fier, yes, they said, "We're going to see an Italian movie tonight." I was very interested in watching an Italian movie, but that was part of the program there. I said, "Honestly I am not well, I don't feel so well." I said, "I want to rest at my hotel." "Alright." I stayed there and as soon as they left, I went out *fap* {onomatopoeia} to the bar, thinking maybe I would get to meet someone, and make some conversation.

I saw two people. As soon as they saw me, they knew that I wasn't, that I was a tourist, yes. "Where are you from *bre*¹³ young man?" I said, "From Kosovo." "From Kosovo? Do you have free time to hang out?" I said, "Yes, I came here to hang out." One of them was from Skopje, a person who fled. The other one

¹² Fehmi Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist, and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

¹³ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion.

was somewhere from the area of Dukagjin. Both of them were political fugitives. The one from Dukagjin said, he asked, “Do you have any time to stay?” “Yes, yes I do.” “There is this one guy from Gjakova,” he said, “he wants to see people from his homeland,” he said, “he will be so excited, poor guy. Do you have any time, I’ll go call him?” “I have free time, I will be here until dawn, I’ve got the program in the morning. Otherwise, I will be here until the morning, don’t worry.”

He went to get him, when he arrived, “Where are you from?” “From the Gjakova municipality. Which village are you from?” I said, “From Ujzi.” “From Ujzi? Me too,” he said, “I am from Ujzi.” I said, “So what is your name?” He said, “Mark Marku.” Mark Marku, I have never heard of this name before. I said, “Nope.” He said, “You haven’t heard of me?” I said, “No, I’ve heard of Mark Tuçi, but not Mark Marku.” “Oh,” he said, “I am Mark Tuçi.” He got so excited, poor guy (smiles).

Anita Susuri: How did... I mean what was it like going through border control? Was there any patrol? Or anything?

Martin Çuni: Regarding the border on our way back? No, no, only towards the end.

Anita Susuri: Or just in general?

Martin Çuni: No there wasn’t any patrolling there, there wasn’t. I also met someone from the Sedllari family, the father of Agron Sedllari and Agim Sedllari. Agron Sedllari worked as a cameraman at our Radio Television, he was a neighbor in Kavaja. Actually not in Kavaja, but in Fushë Kruja. He was a teacher, an old man. We stopped there just to drink some water and he asked, “Where are you boys from? Is anyone from Pristina?” I said, “Me.” It was only me. “Do you by any chance know Agron Sedllari and Teuta Sedllari?” I said, “They are my neighbors.” “Is that right?” He said, “I am their father.” *Paaa* {onomatopoeia}, “Could you come,” he asked, “to get some stuff that I want to send to them,” he asked. I said, “Absolutely yes.” I didn’t even ask the others if I should go, because I knew that they wouldn’t let me, and I got the stuff. He came with me, and he had a room. He said, “I have asked a number of people to get the stuff, but no one took it.” I said, “Honestly, only if they take away the stuff at the border check. But I don’t believe they will.” So I met two people... I also met this other guy, who is still alive, Idriz Zeqiraj. He was [there] back then, he graduated from two universities, and we met him in Tirana. He used to work in Keçekollë. Then he went to prison.

Anita Susuri: During your way back, I think you mentioned that there was some sort of a patrol?

Martin Çuni: The guy from my hometown said, “What do you want me to give you?” I said, “Just books, nothing else.” He gave me somewhere around 40 books, he gave them to me and they took them all at the border check, they didn’t even let me have one, they took them all.

Anita Susuri: Was there any sort of consequence?

Martin Çuni: No, nothing visible, but my file opened since then, since then.

Anita Susuri: During that time, were you also involved in the movements, the underground ones?

Martin Çuni: Listen, not in movements, no. But, my friends were. I don't know why that happened, but that was not so recent, for example in '68 with Muhamet Shatri and Xhafer Shatri... So, I was with the flow of organizing the demonstration, the group that we had back in the day, but not as an organization no, not as an organization. I knew [Jusuf] Gërvalla¹⁴ quite well, because he used to collaborate with us in the editorial office, he illustrated our shows. I knew he was involved, but I never asked him, maybe because of all the stuff regarding illegality, some stuff that, what had to be told, I told people on my own, there was no need to ask, even if you would ask no one would tell you anything.

There was this team from the Radio Television that went to Albania. Jusuf wanted to go as well, but they didn't allow him. Now me, and Zejnullah Halili were at the buffet. The buffet was on the ninth floor of the building. He came there and sat down with us to have a chat. He was frowning, I mean in a sad way. Zejnullah asked him "What's wrong *bre?*" "Ah," he said, "for once I just wanted to go to Albania," he said. "Come on man," he said, "you will go next time." "Nope," he said, "me, never" (smiles). That's when I knew, I knew that he was involved. Plus even Kadri was there, but for a short period of time. But with Kadri I didn't have, I mean. With Jusuf we had multiple conversations, not about illegal activities, but just ordinary talk.

Anita Susuri: Yes. You mentioned that after you went to those three schools, it was interrupted.

Martin Çuni: No, they weren't allowed anymore, they didn't let us. Nobody that year went anymore and I don't know how long after they didn't allow us to go.

Anita Susuri: Do you happen to know the reasons as to why this happened? Why did the interruption happen?

Martin Çuni: Well the vigilance was always like that. Of course, nothing happened anymore. Maybe that was just a test, it was just a test how... because they applied after, they applied after.

Anita Susuri: Yes, so could you tell me more about how you remember the demonstrations of '68? What was it like?

Martin Çuni: Yes, I was together with Xhafer and the others, whatever we could do in our power back then. They did more, but I was a supporting hand, I was a supporting hand, shoulder to shoulder we were together at the main square. I was there shoulder to shoulder with one of my cousins, [paternal] uncle of Anton Çuni, Fran, back then he was also a student. But while the students, the youth, were

¹⁴ Jusuf Gervalla (1945- 1982) was a poet and also nationalist activist killed in Germany together with his brother and a third person. All these killings have been widely attributed to Yugoslav agents, though no investigation has come to a conclusive identification of the killers.

throwing [rocks], they would sometimes throw with no... and they threw these squared tiles. But one of them also...

Anita Susuri: The cobble street tiles?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes. He couldn't throw it far and it fell, it fell right on Anton's uncle's leg, *tak* {onomatope} and in the end he couldn't... I carried him in my back and sent him to his apartment (laughs). And then, recently I told him, I told him this story and he said, "I couldn't remember who sent me to my apartment (laughs). I have forgotten", he said, "who sent me back to my apartment".

However, in my shows, how should I put this, I was lucky, I had good editors and a very good editor. We did a lot of work that was not very direct, but it was quite significant. Towards the end, it exploded. *Karavani i fshatit* [Alb.:The caravan of the village] was a show about grown ups that I worked on for some time. It had a sort of folkloric anecdote, it had that... sometimes I received criticism, "And what did you want to say with this?" "What did he want with the people, why does he mention the nation, how would I know what the people were saying?" As if they didn't get it.

One example from when the events of '81 took place, there was an order that we received to play a Serbian song in the Serbian language during the *Karavani i Fshatit* airtime. "Yes, alright," I said, "but I won't take the responsibility of [picking] a Serbian song {touches his chest}, I'm not familiar with it, I'll play whatever they send me, I won't pick it on my own." And [they said] "The music editor will give you a list, and you will pick from that list." "Alright."

During those days, sometimes it comes down to it. They closed the high school in the municipality of Peja, Glllogjan is part of the municipality of Peja.

Anita Susuri: In Deçan, Glllogjan near Deçan.

Martin Çuni: In high school, yes near Deçan in the municipality of Deçan, anyway.

Anita Susuri: That's right.

Martin Çuni: In Glllogjan, I remember it well. They closed down the high school there, the classes and I went to do a news report outraged. The report was about five minutes long. Because I had to report, I had to report there, the traditional anecdote, the discussion with... I mean some very interesting topics, short but on a traditional note. The songs were tip-top as well. And I wrote in the report, "The latest: a school has been closed down, now children will become shepherds and may God help them." They picked to play the song *Ćobani, ćobanice* [Srb.: shepherds]. I found it. And at the end, after saying that, I played the song *Ćobani, ćobanice* in Serbian (laughs).

When I went to work the next day, there was the editor-in-chief, [in fact] two editors (laughs) were waiting for me at the front door of the Radio, "Martin, what did you do?" I said, "What did I do? Didn't

the show go through?” I was aware it did. “How come,” they said, “you haven’t said even one positive thing.” “Why?” “Say one positive thing.” I said, “What is there positive to say when a school closes down?”

[The interview was interrupted here]

I was invited to the director’s office, but the director was waiting for us at the editor’s office. It was Shaban Hyseni and some [person] Dimić, Slobodan Dimić. Shaban said, “Martin, what did you do?” “What did I do?” I said, “Did I say anything that’s untrue?” “No,” he said, “but you didn’t say even one positive word.” “I didn’t have anything positive to say.” He asked, “Where did you find that song?” “Ah,” I said, by God’s will {puts his hand on his chest}, “I won’t take responsibility for the song, I said I don’t know anything about it.” He said, “Don’t ever play a Serbian song again.” That was the first and last time a Serbian song was played during *Karavan të Fshatit*. When luck is on your side, right? (smiles) Because it would become a thing, if you would play it two or three times, it would become a thing.

Anita Susuri: Yes, I want to go back a bit to your university years because you haven’t told much regarding that period.

Martin Çuni: I am a pedagogue, yes I am a pedagogue. There was quite an exceptionally good amount of youngsters in the university, not just Kosovar youngsters, but from Macedonia, Preševo, from Montenegro and it would be nice if it was like that today as well. I might be wrong.

Anita Susuri: What kind of professors did you have, for example?

Martin Çuni: The professors were good.

Anita Susuri: Did you have any professors from Albania?

Martin Çuni: The professors from Albania came from time to time. They came from time to time and on specific days, not every day. However, they left their mark, they left their mark.

Anita Susuri: I am interested to know what the cultural and entertainment life was like during that time for you personally. For example, there was the cinema, theater. Did you visit them? Were there any events?

Martin Çuni: Yes, but not much. Not as much. In the theater a little bit more. The others, you didn't have any movies to watch. The theater was the best, yes the theater was better. There were some cultural associations that were booming, the regional ones but also the local ones.

Anita Susuri: Were there, for example, various shows from the different ensembles [when] you attended?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, there wasn't anyone who didn't attend the Albanian Ensemble shows. There wasn't enough room to fit all the people.

Anita Susuri: Could you describe any memories you have, for example when the Albanian Ensemble came here, if you remember?

Martin Çuni: Yes I said, back then...

Anita Susuri: Back then, yes.

Martin Çuni: Back then it was that one time when I insisted that they would come over to my house.

Anita Susuri: Did they come often?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes they came here very often, very often. However, I invited them over, I can't recall why now... Every day I went to [Hotel] Grand to meet them, every day, every day, even if it was a day off for me. But interestingly, I mean something else came up. There was also this one exhibition regarding the League of Prizren¹⁵ at the Palace of Youth. I was on my annual leave, but a friend of mine, Ramadan Muçolli in *Kolovajza e së dieles* did a reportage there, for that exhibition, and that reportage was simply something phenomenal. The show was usually made by me, but I was on vacation, so I didn't do it.

Everyday I would go, I would go there, I had nothing else to do, I would go to the work office although I was on my annual leave, I didn't have the financial means to go on vacation so... Then the show aired. It became a problem at the Committee. So then the tape was sent to Mahmut Bakalli,¹⁶ Ramadan and Zejnullah Halili who was the editor, he was the Culture editor, they were both at risk of losing their jobs. Then after a day or two I went there, on Monday, one day after, and they said, Zejnullah said, "We're finished." "Why?" He said, "They are after us because of the show that was made." He said, "Do you know anyone in the Committee?" I never went to the Committee, but I had some friends because Agim Zatriqi used to be my classmate, we were in the same class. Agim Zatriqi, a former executive of the television back then and the closest colleague, Mahmut Bakalli's main [guy].

¹⁵ The 1878 Albanian Alliance that fought against border changes decided at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. The building where the Albanian leaders made their *besa* (sworn alliance) is on the river, upstream from the center of town. It is now a museum. The current building is a reconstruction of the original one, which Serbian troops burned down in 1999.

¹⁶ Mahmut Bakalli (1936-2006) was a Kosovar Albanian politician. Bakalli began his political career in the youth organization of the League of Communists of Kosovo, eventually becoming its leader in 1961. As he rose through the ranks, he was elected to the Central Committee of the party's Serbian chapter, and to the Presidium of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia's Central Committee.

I had this one friend, Tahir Geci who was a journalist for *Rilindja*.¹⁷ He was the executive of information or something in the Committee and I went to ask him what to do next. I went to Tahir, and then Tahir told me, “Martin, this is the deal.” It became an issue in the committee. The tape was given in Mahmut’s office and the situation doesn’t look good.” I said, “So how could I get it somehow?” He said, “If there is someone who could help you,” he said, “only Agim Zatriqi, because Mahmut listens to Agim.” I said, “Alright.” So now I had to go to the radio to tell them... and he said, “Please don’t tell anyone. Don’t tell anyone that I told you.” “No, no, don’t worry.”

On my way up, in the elevator, I told them, Zen [Zejnullah Halili] and the others, that I was going to Agim. I never went to his office before. Think about it, I have never been there, he had invited me over hundreds of times, every time he saw me “Come over for a coffee someday, come over.” Ssss {onomatopoeia}, I didn’t really get along with the executives, not that I didn’t get along with them, but I didn’t want to be all over them, sorry for putting it like this, it’s kind of a heavy way to put it like that, but to kiss up, to kiss up to someone as they say... And I told them and I was in the elevator going down. And the elevator stopped *trak* {onomatopoeia} where Ismail was, Ismail Bajra. Ismail was the general director, that’s where his office was. So the door of the elevator opened. Agim came in, “What’s up Martin?” I said, “Nothing.” “Why don’t you ever come for a visit?” I said, “Actually I was just on my way to you.” “Ah good,” he said, “I have my car so we will go together.”

As soon as we got inside the car I stopped the small talk and told him, “So here’s the deal Agim.” “Martin,” he said, “you’re finding yourself in these sorts of positions too huh?” I said, “What do you mean, what kind of position?” And we had an argument that lasted until we arrived at the Television station *bam-bum, bam-bum* {onomatopoeia}. When we stopped at the front door of the station, I didn’t shake his hand and he didn’t shake mine, he neither said yes nor no, but they never had a problem with Zen and Ramadan again. He didn’t dare to say anything to me (smiles).

Anita Susuri: So, what other kinds of cases did you guys have, for example other journalistic reportages that you produced?

Martin Çuni: I, I will say it anyway. I can say this with responsibility, it is not modest to say, but I don’t believe that there was any other journalist that explored Kosovo more than I did. I did the same things even during the war (smiles).

Anita Susuri: Do you remember anything that has stuck with you throughout time?

Martin Çuni: Yes, a lot, a lot I should say. There were some cases, but it’s better to not share this one. But I will tell another one. I went to this village somewhere near Prizren, I went there with my driver, Nazmije Hoxha’s brother, she is no longer alive, and we went to a school there. The principal of the school was in his office there and I saw this *kragujevka* [a type of assault rifle] in the corner of the room that captured my attention. This was after the demonstrations of ‘81.

¹⁷ *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

Anita Susuri: And what is this *kragujevka*?

Martin Çuni: Ah you don't know what that is? It's a rifle.

Anita Susuri: A rifle. No, I didn't know that.

Martin Çuni: (smiles) Rifle from Kragujevac, with only one, with one bullet. I asked, "Why is this here?" "Ah this one, in case a demonstrator comes here, to put them down" {mimics a body falling}. If he slapped me, I would've given him my blessings. So I was thinking to myself since I came all this way already, now I will explain to him why I was there and everything. I said, "Let's start the interview." I was interested to know everything about the village, the activities and stuff. Before the interview started, he had a request, there were some huge tape records from Switzerland. They were named Nagra, the big tapes {moves his finger in a circular motion} you could record for one to two hours with those tapes.

He asked, "Could you pause it if I make any mistakes along the way?" I said, "Nah, I cannot stop it at all." The whole reportage was meant to last for only five minutes. Then I started *bam e bum, e bam e bum* {onomatopoeia}. [He was] dripping in sweat. And I was telling him {signaling with hand that the interview can't stop}. When I noticed that he was almost about to faint, I stopped it *trak* {onomatopoeia}. "Have a nice day" and we left. When I went out, Nazmi's brother came up to me and he asked, "Martin," he said, "what did you do back there because that man was about to faint." "Did you hear what he said to me back there?"

Anita Susuri: And you probably asked him about the demonstrations?

Martin Çuni: No, not at all, not at all about the demonstrations. I was just asking him random stuff about the activities in the village and other stuff, but... no, no because the topic wasn't political. I mean, only the activities in the village.

Anita Susuri: I thought you probably asked him something [related to the demonstrations].

Martin Çuni: No, no, the whole thing wasn't even five minutes long, and another time, there was this one guy who stuttered a bit. I was with a friend, Dani. Dani was asking the questions, but in order to make it easier for him, he asked "Could you tell us..." This was after the events. After the events, meaning that the whole situation was horrible. "Could you differentiate between the past and the present situation?" He stuttered, and we wanted to interview someone else there, but he insisted on talking. Anyway, very well, and he began, "Yes I will compare the two," he said, "the past and the present sss {onomatopoeia}... excuse my language," he said, "it's shitty" (laughs). Honestly, it was like that.

Anita Susuri: I wanted...

Martin Çuni: There were all sorts of occurrences, all sorts of occurrences.

Anita Susuri: I was wondering how things functioned in terms of work, for example?

Martin Çuni: So listen, now I will, I will make a conclusion about the day I was imprisoned and this will give insight about all the work prior. There were times when I was covering the shifts of four to five people, not four to five, but let's say three to four people from the editing crew. Meaning, [I was] at work day and night. It was Sunday, first day of spring in '82 around 10:00 AM.

Anita Susuri: The anniversary of the demonstrations? Is that right?

Martin Çuni: No, no, it wasn't the anniversary of the demonstrations. Some time after that, and the phone rang *xërr* {onomatopoeia}, Muharrem Beqaj, the editor, came up and said, "Martin," he said, "come to the Radio premises." So, now in my head I was guessing that there might have been something wrong with the tapes since I would substitute several people at work, and I would have to get something done for the show. My wife said, "Martin *bre*." she said, "you aren't even able to spend one Sunday at home." She said, "One Sunday *bre*, at least one day for us to spend together." I told her, "Don't worry my wife, I will come back quickly. An error must have occurred somewhere," I said, "and I will be back soon." And I went back after nine years {pauses to drink water}.

I worked a lot, a lot, but we had this drive to work. But there were nights when I couldn't sleep because of the stress about something [at work] that I wasn't sure of. So, I am not a professional linguist, I am not a linguist. However, Ramadan was a linguist, he studied literature. He told me "Martin, despite not being a linguist, you make fewer mistakes than some people who are linguists themselves." Meaning I was very careful. What is the dictionary for? You could reduce [mistakes], but everybody makes mistakes. Intentionally or unintentionally, they happen.

Anita Susuri: So, I am very interested to know more about how your activity progressed and how did things lead to your imprisonment?

Martin Çuni: There was this one case, after I went to prison, a person had said, "Martin should've been imprisoned a long time ago because he didn't stop." I didn't, I mean I always spoke my mind and I didn't really pay attention to *rreth*.¹⁸ I wasn't looking around my *rreth* to see who someone might be, or might not be. I said the things that should have been said, but I never spread hatred, I just spoke the truth. The moment, everything was planned, meaning that my writings had a really humane touch to them, my writings were very humane. Because you could be standing on the right side of things, you could, because in the *rreth* of course the things that should have been said were said, but not in the name of the organization. In the name of the organization was much later.

¹⁸ Rreth (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

I went, right before I was imprisoned, I went and did a show in Junik. And in Junik there was a gathering, the Secretary of the Committee was there, but I didn't know him and no one told me anything so I just started doing my own work. I was there for a short time. So then I finished my work before their meeting. And one guy said, "Ask a question related to Brotherhood and unity," "Sure," I said, "No problem. Are there any Serbs around here?" I already knew that there weren't any Serbs in Junik at all. He said "No, there aren't any Serbs." I said, "So how are you going to speak? What will you say?" I said "What are you going to say? It needs to be something specific that..." {moves head} And to tell you the truth, when they took me to prison, because I was imprisoned just a few days after that encounter, I thought to myself maybe they were the ones who denounced me (smiles).

Part Three

Anita Susuri: I'm interested to know about when you began engaging with the so-called illegal organizations at that time, where did it all start?

Martin Çuni: I was aware of the [underground] organizations for a long time. Not directly, but indirectly for a long time. I had many friends, I had many friends who had my back, to be honest they had my back. However, when it came down to committing to the cause of my country, I never hesitated. Whereas I started getting involved in organizing with the underground movement at a time, I mean when the turmoil started, maybe a little before the turmoil. Because in '68, it was a time of demonstrations and there wasn't, there wasn't anything [after that] while organizing the demonstrations. However, I didn't have a dominant role anywhere. I was an active participant, with my friends I knew who the leaders there were, but I wasn't [part of it].

During '81, I had a neighbor who worked for the Security, State Security,¹⁹ he was a very nice guy, much younger than me. I used to be friends with his friends, friends but not for the association. However, when the situation blew up, they became open and told me everything. I was never assigned to go out [on any activity], but when the time came for a more serious engagement, I was asked, "Martin, can you refute the article of the *Borba*'s²⁰ editor in chief in Belgrade?" He had written a full newspaper page with intrigues and lies about Albanians. I said, "Of course."

They gave me a copy and I read that article. I carefully read it and I replied to him word by word in Serbo-Croatian. Whereas he denounced me. But even in the Radio, even there I had a bit of an attitude, that was maybe a bit too much, however it wasn't out of place. Differentiation started happening in the Radio, because back then I used to be Head of the Youth for the Radio Television. Friends chose me because they knew that I was a person with principles, I was... what do I know. But I

¹⁹ The State Security Service - *Služba državne sigurnosti*, also known by its original name as the State Security Administration, was the secret police organization of Communist Yugoslavia. It was, at all times, best known by the acronym UDBA.

²⁰ Serb.: *Borba*, in translation, "the fight", was a Serbian newspaper which was also the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

was also very fair and I had good relations with everyone. They differentiated Salih Qilerxhiu. Salih Qilerxhiu was the editor of culture, a professor at the Higher School of Pedagogy, he was a very calm person, with very good qualities, but they simply wanted to devalue him.

Ismail Bajra was also part of that meeting, the general director and the other ones who were there. Some of them *bam-bum, bam-bum* {onomatopoeia} against him, and I was fed up {touches his nose}. I stood up, I said, "I don't know how anyone could bear to speak a bad word about Salih Qilerxhiu, even for the smallest thing." And I said, "Everyone who knows him," everyone knew Salih, but no one was brave enough to defend him. I said, "I don't know where he was mistaken. What did he do wrong?"

Ismail Bajra was very kind and mind you he was really brave. He said, after I finished talking, he stood up and said, no he didn't stand up, but he said in Serbian, "*Dobro kaže ovaj ćelavi omladinac.*" Do you understand? I don't know if you understand that. He said, "The bald guy is right." *Hëë* {onomatopoeia}, because he also knew Sali. And the situation was over {rubs hands signifying it was over}. They wanted to fire him, because back then they would isolate and fire people from their jobs. When I was imprisoned, it became a big deal, my colleagues told me, it became a very big deal in the meeting of the League of Communists, "Who was that man? He was the only one who spoke up?"

And then, I wrote a response to him, I wrote it in the best way that I knew how. Not a single insult, just facts, all facts.

Anita Susuri: What did you write about?

Martin Çuni: He wrote something like this, "These are Albanians {counts with fingers}, irredentists want this and that, they want to do this, they want to do that." So I...

Anita Susuri: You argued why you defended them.

Martin Çuni: I argued the opposite of what he said, yes. Why? We weren't asking for anything, anything other than being equal to the others. Where is the bad in that? We didn't want to step on anybody, we didn't want this and that either. And it's interesting because I did some research in the archives, and I found everything that I've written in prison, I mean the acts that I sent to court. I found my defense in front of the court, twelve pages of text in writing. The only thing I couldn't find was Marko Lolić's letter. I am trying to find it, I don't know what I could do to find it because it's an authentic document, it's one and a half pages written on a typewriter, it's not much, but it's very significant.

Anita Susuri: Was that ever published somewhere?

Martin Çuni: No, no, not at all, where would that piece get published, nope. If it was published you could find it somewhere. It isn't in our archives, it should be somewhere in the Belgrade archives, it should be. So I distributed the letter, I distributed it in many places, but I never found it. I knew that

something was going to happen, something was going to happen so I hid all my letters and writings in one place. However, after some years, unfortunately, we had this small cabin in our yard, my father destroyed it so he could turn it into a big room instead, a bigger one. So when they were working, they found the documents and burned them all out of fear, all the documents I had were burned.

The friends who I gave the documents to, none of them could keep them. I gave some of them to a neighbor because I didn't leave them all in one place, because I knew that... and he didn't dare [to keep them] and lost them. They were lost, unfortunately they were lost. But I have all the other important documents, I only couldn't find that one. They were young. And then, the inspectors, "How were you brave enough to trust someone from SUP?" And their suspicion was that I made those documents or Tahir Geci did. Tahir Geci was the brother-in-law of Abdullah Praprashtica, who founded PKMLSHNJ back then, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Albanians in Yugoslavia, who demanded for an Albanian republic within Yugoslavia, but not only Kosovo, but all the Albanian inhabited territories all around to become one republic just like the other republics and...

Anita Susuri: So how did that organization function? You told me that there wasn't anyone who spoke up that much or who asked a lot of questions?

Martin Çuni: No, no, in the organization it was just me and Abdullah, [while we met] with the others in their meetings {shakes head in sign of denying}, they protected me, they did. Then the question was that... they wanted to imprison Tahir by any means, that me or Tahir have done everything. My answer was quite logical and factual, it was a fact, it was that me and Tahir couldn't make mistakes like the ones in those documents, they couldn't be ours. You understand? But, we didn't write any of it. I don't know who did.

Anita Susuri: And what happened then...

Martin Çuni: Like that...

Anita Susuri: You mentioned it was Sunday when they arrested you?

Martin Çuni: Yes, listen they did a lot of monitoring. I mean, the movements, they saw what people were doing, they imprisoned whoever they targeted. But then in prison, in prison I said everything openly. I didn't speak that openly while in the underground. I don't know anyone who spoke more openly. It's the documents, I have the documents that were in the archives, I don't need to talk about it, there's actual documents, I only don't have that letter.

Anita Susuri: What about the imprisonment, did it happen at home or at your workplace?

Martin Çuni: No, no, I said that they called me at work.

Anita Susuri: Yes at your work. So they took you from there and sent you to...

Martin Çuni: To Skopje.

Anita Susuri: First to Skopje.

Martin Çuni: In Skopje, the SUP center in Macedonia.

Anita Susuri: Why did they send you to Skopje?

Martin Çuni: They know why, I don't know. Maybe ask them? (laughs)

Anita Susuri: I mean to ask why did they take you that far and how did that go? You mentioned that you were expecting to get fired.

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, yes I was expecting that, because you can't get into the sea, in the water, and expect not to get wet. To be completely honest with you, the experience wasn't as tragic for me as one might think. I didn't experience it as something very tragic.

Anita Susuri: So how long were you in detention for?

Martin Çuni: I was in detention somewhat... I was in the investigative prison for a long time, for like five years. In detention, around one year yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How were the conditions in detention?

Martin Çuni: Well, the conditions, torture everyday, there was torture every day. Especially in the beginning, day and night. For ten days, I endured torture during the day, while at night, I was forced to stand on my feet. To be honest, I heard that people could sleep while standing. I didn't believe it, it didn't seem possible to me. But it happened me, I slept while standing, and I would fall down when I slept. After a few days you feel hazy {turns his head in circles}.

[The interview was stopped here. This part of the interview was conducted on May 31, 2022]

Anita Susuri: Mr. Martin, we were talking about the time period when you went to prison, but before we move on to that, you have also told me about another period in your life which was the military, in the Yugoslav Army where you were and you had a role which I could say was more special, related to the career you chose, so you worked in the Radio.

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: If you could talk about that for a bit?

Martin Çuni: Yes, so I started working at the radio after I finished the army, after the army I started working, but I was lucky there [in the military], I had the luck [of working in the radio] which was useful later in life. I led the radio station of the army. It was inside of a vehicle. The studio and the cabin were in the back, and the size of the space was almost as big as a bus, a big bus. Like cutting the bus in half, the big buses, and for example the studio had everything it needed, all the tools, everything needed for working was there, and there was this antenna. A huge antenna that could be heard from a distance of 150 kilometers, so there was this medium radio that could be moved, that you could work with, even if it was moving, and during that time, during my service there I was part of two army maneuvers with a Yugoslav character. One took place in Jahorina in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the mountains of Jahorina, whereas the other one was in Vojvodina in an area with field conditions.

I mean, a skill, a moderate practice [of work] for that line of work which [was useful] later on, I didn't even dream of it back then. However, that experience saved my life later, because the enemy, even after the bombings, every day from morning until the afternoon they, the Berisha field, they threw grenades and rockets on the highlands of Berisha, with minesweepers, with crowbars, with every weapon that they had. Even by airplane when they attempted to carry out the last deadly attack on March 27, '99, and we were lucky that they couldn't hit us. There, that day, seven or eight people were injured, and one boy died, he was a *hasret*²¹ boy, as the people say. He was inside the house, but when he heard the airplane sounds, he thought they were NATO airplanes. And his mom tried to stop him, she shouted, "Stop, don't go out! Don't go out!" He didn't stop, and as soon as he got out, the bombs fell on his yard. You know, he was hit by the bombs.

The airplanes were equipped with cluster munition, which were banned by the United Nations Convention, and one bomb was almost the size of, very small, but very deadly. They launched the bombs, I have some pictures that I took, they fell just like the seed on the field, as the people say. The bombs didn't even fall two meters apart from each-other, one meter or two, and the whole highland of Berisha, the village that had two neighborhoods, both of the neighborhoods were hit. One was hit by one plane, and the other one was hit by another plane, because they didn't know which neighborhood we were located in exactly. However, we were lucky that we weren't hit directly. They got injured, in one of the neighborhoods seven, eight or nine people were injured, and a child was killed.

That happened approximately around eight in the morning, and one of my friends said, "We are not going to air the program anymore." Because truthfully, they didn't stop all day with rockets and mine launchers. We were in a lot of danger and they said not to air it anymore. But, around noon, around noon *Tanjug*²² gave the news that *Radio Kosova e Lirë* [Alb.: Radio Free Kosovo] was bombed and destroyed. Now, if they wouldn't air the program that day, even for five minutes, who wouldn't believe that *Radio Kosova e Lirë* [Alb.: Radio Free Kosovo] was destroyed and it would be like a punch to the

²¹ Turk: *hasret*, craving or longing. In Albanian traditional families, the only son is called *hasret*. The term describes the patrilineal logic, the desire or the longing for a son, a male heir.

²² *Tanjug* (The telegraphic agency of the new Yugoslavia) now the current news agency in Serbia, was a news agency led by the partisans during the second World War.

people but also the soldiers, because we weren't very far from the headquarters. The headquarters was bombed one or two days before that.

The general headquarters in Klečka was also bombed, but then they bombed us too, they bombed us and I said, "We have to air the program today." The listeners should know what happened. And my colleagues agreed. And we prepared a short program, we prepared a short program with information, news and stuff. And then, we always transmitted the programs away from the residential areas, because, I knew, and it is known, that there are rockets that follow radio waves. In order to not put the civil population in danger, but my friends too, you know? Only three or four people went to the place where the program was supposed to air, we didn't go there very often.

And in the middle of Berisha, there is a quarry, there is quite a big hole, should I say {looks around}, similar to a room like this. And in the beginning we aired the program from there, in the corner of that hole there was a pear tree and we put the antenna there and... Yes, and Nusret Pllana, my colleague said, "Martin," he said, "we will air the program from that hole and maybe the mine throwers won't detect it there." {smiles, and shakes head} I said, "Nope, I won't air it from there, I will air it from the middle of a meadow." I wanted to air the program from different points, the reason is known right? "Alright," they said, "however you want to."

And we put the antenna in the hay mill, there was a fence at the corner there, we... because it was raining as well, [we] covered the tools, so they wouldn't get damaged and wet. We were facing the hole in the quarry. It was somewhat around two hundred meters away from us. A street, the village street was in the middle {describes with hand}. And while broadcasting the news, while Nusret was reading the news, (smiles) the mine thrower shell fell into the hole, smoke and fog. None of the four of us {raises four fingers up} would be here today (smiles). Me, Nusret Pllana, and two other young technicians who we took from the army. That sense of foreboding, the sense of foreboding.

Then we aired the program from a bunker, we built a bunker. We worked hard, the people who lived around helped us with the bunker, the youngsters, civilians, but soldiers as well. At the highest point of Pallanik, exactly at the highest point, that's the highest hill in the Berisha mountains. The terrain was very difficult, a lot of stones, but we set it up somehow. We built it around two meters high, and on the top we put two sets of wood. And that base was never hit. It was very interesting, they tried to hit us, rockets fell, but they fell around the base, they couldn't hit us exactly at the base.

There is this interesting moment, in one case a boy came, Riza, Riza Berisha sent his son to bring us food at the new base, because we built the bunker for the team too. It was shaped like an umbrella, both bunker and an umbrella, the tent {describes with hands}. It was protected from every side and then the boy came, he was barely 13 or 14 years old. And I said... I yelled at him, "What are you doing here?" He said... because they called me Anton during the war. "Uncle Anton," he said, "dad told me to bring you some food." "I never," I said, "want to see you here again. Go home!" And when he went back home he told his father, Riza Berisha, he said "Uncle Anton is angry at me about something, I don't know, he yelled at me" (laughs). He knew why I yelled at him. It was hard. But something was

interesting, all those grenades, all those... the children were not afraid anymore. They got used to it, they got used to those things.

And something else that is interesting, after we built the bunker, I was out in the fields somewhere in Drenica, around Qyqavica... And then in that mountain, I asked the owner, although no one said no, about cutting the trees. However, I didn't cut the trees in order, I was being selective, not making them flat to the ground, as the people say. And the soldiers went as well, to get some wood in that mountain, for their own bunkers around Berisha. The owner of the land came, "What," he said, "what are you doing here?" "We are waiting," they said. "Who told you to?" "Honestly *Baci*,²³ Anton did" (smiles). And then he believed that I told them, but I never did you know. "Martin told you?" Ah, Martin, "Anton told you?" They said, "Yes." "Cut them all, no worries."

Anita Susuri: Why did they call you Anton?

Martin Çuni: My pseudonym was Anton during the war. Anton, while people who knew me better called me Martin, however in Drenica they call me Anton even to this day.

Anita Susuri: So you wouldn't encounter any problems or?

Martin Çuni: Yes I went to... listen, my family was in Prishtina. Although after some time I publicly moved to [working for] Tirana's Radio Television.

Anita Susuri: So in the Radio you presented yourself as Anton, right?

Martin Çuni: No, none of us introduced ourselves on the radio. Nope, nope, no one introduced themselves on the Radio.

Anita Susuri: Oh, oh.

Part Four

Anita Susuri: Mr. Martin I wanted to go back to talking about the prison story, because that's where we stopped the last time we talked. You mentioned that they took you from the Radio [building], arrested you there, and then sent you to Skopje first. I'm interested to know more about the circumstances and the charges, and then your prison days, those long years?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes. They called me, it was Sunday, March 21, the first day of spring '82. I went to the entrance of the Radio, at the gate, in the front yard you know? In the front, exactly in front of the Rectorate [building], a little before entering the Radio, they took me into a police vehicle. But they

²³ *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

were civilians, I mean civilian police. And they took me to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs. And after a bit, they took me out again, in a vehicle. There was Lorenc, Lorenc Selmanaj and Hasan Mehmetaj, he was head of the police unit back then. Not the police but of the Secretariat back then, so a senior leader of the Secretariat. Together with Lorenc, who was a worker at the Secretariat, they took me to Skopje.

In Skopje, there, there was a... so my eyes were tied... before sending me there, they tied my eyes and I didn't see where I was going. But I guessed that it was a place above Skopje. Not Idrizova, because Idrizova was a prison for incarcerated people. And the way I found out, I mentioned I heard the cops at the door, it was the center for Internal Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia. That was one of their units, two cops would guard me at the door day and night, when the inspectors weren't there. [There were] Tortures all day, at night I had to stand still in the corner of the room and the door stayed open in that cell, {looks around} it wasn't any bigger than this [room]. Two cops at the door.

Until then, I didn't believe that a person could sleep (smiles) standing up, but I experienced it myself. But when I fell into deep sleep, I would fall down and they would wake me up with kicks. It was like that for about ten days. How do I put this, there were some Macedonians there too, however, our people had the main role there, yes ours. Tahir Geci was also there, Tahir Geci was in that prison. Their intention was for me to become a witness for Tahir Geci, as if he was also involved in that thing, but they didn't manage to. They released Tahir once, but then they forcibly found some witnesses and they brought him back in again.

As soon as they gathered that evidence, what do I know, that evidence wasn't even important at all, here's why: only a word, only a sentence from you was enough for them to make stuff up. For example, my testimony was there, it wasn't even one page long, they made it several pages longer. And me, for myself, I didn't care at all, to tell you the truth. I didn't care about myself, because when one decides to do something, it's over. But I tried to protect my friends, I tried to protect my friends. They were suspicious that me or Tahir made the statute and the documents of the organization.

I got tortured a lot because of that... but it was, I mean the conclusion had a base, the conclusion had a base that denied their intentions. And I told them, finally I told them, "Even if Tahir and I wanted to, we wouldn't be able to make the same mistakes found in those writings." And then finally that didn't work out for them. Anyhow that was the truth, it was true. Their behavior in prison was also... those tortures time after time, but the sentence was made, I managed to write a twelve-page statement in my defense using a clandestine method of writing, because we would steal pens and find ways to do it, because writing wasn't allowed.

And when I went to court, I brought out my self-defense statement. I said, "Can I read this?" His eyes widened (smiles). Imer Tërçoku was the leader of the trial panel. "Alright," he said, but when I started to read, (smiles) that was all, it didn't have anything to do with my sentence, but it was an accusation regarding all the injustice towards us. To the population, not me personally. And he interrupted me. He didn't allow me to speak, it was barely one minute or two. He stopped me. I said, "Can I hand this in a

written form?” {stretches hand as if he was giving something}, “Yes,” he said, “in a written form, yes.” And I found a copy of that letter in the archives after, yes. It was around twelve pages long.

And something else that was really interesting is that I didn’t have a lawyer during that time, I didn’t have one, I mean, I didn’t give my family permission to get me a lawyer and they gave me an official lawyer, because back then you had to, the lawyer was Serbian. But then, the Serbian lawyer, and he wanted to help me (smiles), he said, “Çuni,” when it was the lawyer’s turn to speak he said, “do you support the platform, the demand, the republic, that they are making?” I said, (smiles) “Yes,” I said, “who am I to go against the demand of my people?” He stopped, he didn’t ask any other questions, and he helped me a lot.

From there, in all the forms I could of course, I didn’t, I didn’t submit. How do I put this, I was never harsh or said any offensive words, or what do I know, no, no. I tried to be more cold-blooded, and to speak facts. In my self-defense statement I said everything in a written form. Even when I went to Niš and Prokuplje. The inspector came to Prokuplje during the time I had been in prison for only four years, and he told me... I skipped to this [story] now because I have another story during the time I was in Prishtina, but I’m skipping to this story now since it relates.

The inspector of the place called me and he said, “Çuni, take this and write an amnesty request,” he said, “apologize, say that you made a mistake, you will not do it again, and that the demand for a republic is wrong.” I said, “No, I can’t go against my people’s will.” “More,” he said, “this is for your own good, I promise that half of your sentence will be reduced.” He didn’t invite me to collaborate with him. He didn’t. But he said, “You [have to] look after yourself, go to your family,” he said, “and don’t bother with this whole thing anymore.” I said, “Nope, I can’t,” and that was it.

So then, in prison in Pristina, there came some... they came there from time to time... because when I first went to Pristina’s prison, I was in the cell with Jakup Krasniqi.²⁴ They sent me there, I didn’t go there by myself (smiles). And that’s where I met Jakup, and I stayed with him for several months. Then they came for, for... during the two years I was in Pristina, there were a lot of prisoners, all kinds of prisoners, they brought them to that cell. Mehmet Hajrizi, and many other young ones, old as well. And Muhamer Shabani came there, he was a student, and one day he told me, he said, “Martin” he said, “I’m thinking about breaking out of prison.” I said, “Let it be a blessing.” He said, “I will secure the saw,” he said... “Yes sure,” I said, “I’ll be your worker.”

Anita Susuri: What year was that in?

Martin Çuni: That was during ‘83, ‘83.

Anita Susuri: So, it was only a year [after you went to prison]?

²⁴ Jakup Krasniqi (1951) is a Kosovo-Albanian politician and former acting President of Kosovo. He is former Chairman of the Assembly of Kosovo.

Martin Çuni: Yes, a little over a year. Over a year. And someone brought him the saw. Anyways he told me that it was someone from the family, his family, his sister, or someone yes. However, no one else knew. So, in order to cut the prison bars, we couldn't do it during the day because the guards were only ten meters away from us. It would be impossible to not hear. So we decided to work only during the night, when it rained. The gutters would make a lot of noise and we could work without an issue, that's what we did. It took us around seven months to cut the bars.

In the beginning he said {describes with his finger}, "We could cut only one bar, one bar is enough. If the head can get through, a person can go through it." I said, "No, I don't want to get beaten up for nothing" (smiles). Anyway at some point, "Alright," he said. Two bars needed to be cut, we planned to cut two. And we covered up the cut marks with gum, chewing gum. The color was almost the same, not almost but identically matching the color of the bars.

We worked, other political prisoners helped us as well, and other felons. What was interesting is that a Serb helped us as well. A Serb from Ferizaj, Rade. He was removed from our cell before we could finish the job, but nobody said a word. Who knows what kind of reward they would get if they reported us. And we did the job, and then the last night arrived and we cut it, we removed them [the bars]. That night we had to make a, out of blankets, out of blankets, we made a rope, because we needed to break out from the roof. We got on the roof, Muhamer was first, I was behind him. And we tied it to the chimney, that kind of rope {describes with hands}.

[The interview is interrupted here]

Martin Çuni: I was holding the rope, {pretends he's holding the rope}, while holding the rope there, I tried to make it weigh less so it wouldn't rip apart, because we were scared that it was going to rip apart. As soon as Muhamer went down the wall, the rope ripped apart in my hand. He fell down. At that moment I had a guard behind me, because on the platform above there was always an armed guard. He shouted, because he didn't think there could be someone who got out of the windows (smiles).

He shouted, "Hey, who is there?" I told Muhamer, "Run!" He wanted to grab the rope and throw it at me {describes with hands}. Which was impossible because the rope was too light, it couldn't be thrown that high. I signaled him {moves his hand} "Walk away!" And I was slow on purpose, I walked slowly, going to the guard. But he was scared to come close to me as well, because he didn't know what was going on. And he left me there to go to the phone... to see what was happening.

I was going towards him slowly, while also making sure that enough time had passed. He then again... I went down from the roof, because the roof was like this {shows the size with hands} to get down from the platform, the roof was sloped, it wasn't an ordinary roof, it was sloped. He was moving slowly closer to the phone to alarm the others, so until the others came, I figured that it was enough, enough time for Muhamer to run away, and he ran away, you know. Then the torture started just like in the beginning, I got a sentence again.

Anita Susuri: So how did he escape, were there any wires...?

Martin Çuni: No, no, he fell in the yard. Lucky that there weren't any locked doors there, because that was the police yard, you understand? There wasn't any need to have something... he was lucky and he escaped.

Anita Susuri: Did they extend your sentence after, or...?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, they did. They sentenced me again. They sentenced me at the time when I was almost done with my [prior] sentence. So this break out, we broke out on August 14, August 14, '83. And Muhamer went abroad using his brother's travel documents. But the Italians almost sent him back. He sought help from the church, someone taught him, he sought help from the church and then the priests sent him, because they had the right to do so, they sent him to Switzerland. To Switzerland or France, I'm not sure. But they sent him from Italy, because Italy didn't accept him.

Anita Susuri: So he got away.

Martin Çuni: Yes, he got away.

Anita Susuri: He got away.

Martin Çuni: Yes.

Anita Susuri: So I'm interested to know, if you could elaborate more about Pristina's prison, what was it like, the system inside the prison, the organization? For example, how were the cells? Visits?

Martin Çuni: The cells were miserable, they are different today, they've made them bigger. There was no water in the cells, there was nothing. And we slept on the floors, we slept on the floors. There were times when there were so many people that you couldn't even lay down. Yes, that was my experience. The prison walks were very short. They let us out only once during the day, to go to the bathroom. Other than that, we had this, this plastic bowl there in the room, that was miserable, it was miserable.

But there was great solidarity between the people, there was help. And we had this kind of system, a system of agreements, we immediately knew if someone [new] came, or someone went out, what was going on, we did this by making signs on the walls. For me it was a system similar to the one in Pristina... just the food was a bit, a bit different. Very weak, but it was cleaner, it was cleaner. In Prokuplje, Niš, it was weaker, very weak. We only ate meat when it was some kind of a holiday. They would put some skin there, or something, but that wasn't edible at all, it was very miserable.

I mentioned people's solidarity in prison, there were people, some people who couldn't take it for example, they couldn't bear it. They weren't prepared, they were also very young and... During my

time in prison, I saved three people from death, from suicide. I won't mention any names, one of them was Serbian, in Prokuplje, he was Serbian. He made the noose. Because in Prokuplje they put me closer to the guards, because I attempted to break out. This way they made sure that they could hear everything without any problems. And in that room, that room had a toilet, it was the only room that had a toilet, the other rooms didn't have one.

So that boy was inside because of theft, and not even one or two weeks passed by and his partner informed him that... {signals with hands that something was over}. It was over. And he got very sad, and he started to prepare it. Now I noticed that he was getting the noose [ready], he made the rope, so he could hang himself during the night. So he worked on it, and I let him, and one day I stole his rope. I stole it. He went to the bathroom, he kept it under his pillow. He went to the bathroom and I took it, and when we went out for a walk, I threw it in the trash. There was no chance to finish what he started. Then, someone in Pristina wanted to touch the electricity in the bathroom. {Looks up and describes with his finger} You know where the electricity wires are, he got up and he started touching the wires, I brought him down. Anyways, I convinced him. I convinced another one by talking, two Albanians and a... life makes you strong, you know.

I can't not mention another interesting case, because the medical profession is a very humane profession, and they have this oath, the Hippocrates one, that has been said through the ages, and yes... I had a conflict with the head of the ambulance in Niš. How did I end up in a conflict? When the poisoning started in Kosovo, I got sick because I've always had problems with my throat, and Myslim Dobruna from Gjakova was in the same cell as me. They sent me to the doctor. As soon as I walked into the room he asked, "What happened," he said, "that theater there in Kosovo?"

I asked, "What theater?" "They are acting," he said, "as if they are poisoned, as if..." I said, "One can act," I said, "you are a professional, you know. A grown up can act, a student, a high school student, a student from an elementary school, but a child in kindergarten cannot act." We started having an argument there, he raised his voice, I raised my voice, we almost had a physical fight. But he didn't complain about me to the guards. He said, "Let's get back to medicine now," I said, "I don't want anything from you" (smiles), "Excuse me?!" I said, "I don't want anything from you." And I went back, he called the guard, I went back to the cell without taking any medicine.

Myslim asked me, "Martin," he asked, "what did they give you?" I said, "Nothing." "What do you mean nothing?" I said, "I didn't accept anything from him." I told him. "Why *bre*," he said, "didn't you take anything, you are suffering." But, it passed. Then the second time, I suffered from kidney inflammation from the cold. Not even on earth, or the sky, does medicine know any other pain that hurts as much as kidney pain. Myslim immediately noticed, because he had problems with his kidneys. He said, "Martin, hopefully you have kidney stones, and you don't have kidney inflammation, because that can lead to dialysis."

For three consecutive days and nights, I found myself in an agitated state, constantly on the move, unable to endure standing in one place for more than a minute or two. My limbs grew cold {touches

limbs}. On the fourth day, they sent me off to the doctor. We arrived at the ambulance, to the head, one of his colleagues was there. He examined me closely, and you know what he whispered to his colleague? The doctor said, “*Ovaj je gotov,*” which translates to “This man is done for.” I was wondering what that meant. If I was weak and allowed fear to consume me, I would have truly been doomed. However, the doctor administered a single injection, and nothing more. They then sent me back to my cell, where I gradually started to recover.

When I later traveled to Germany after my time in prison, medical professionals informed me that one of my kidneys was damaged and displaced, rendering it less functional than the other. Nonetheless, they provided the necessary treatment, and since then, I have never encountered any further complications (smiles), because I developed resilience.

Anita Susuri: Maybe all the violence could be the reason as to why the kidney got displaced?

Martin Çuni: Yes, for sure, for sure.

Anita Susuri: I’m interested to know more about the time of the prison break out, I mean, when you were helping the breaking out, was that the time when they sent you to another prison? Or was it later?

Martin Çuni: No, no, later. I was in Pristina first, later on they sent me to Prokuplje.

Anita Susuri: Why did this change of prisons happen?

Martin Çuni: The prison became crowded and there was nothing else to do. In the Prokupje prison for instance, there were only Albanians most of the time, there were no Serbs. When someone was imprisoned for theft, for example, they would be there for a month and be released. A lot of prisons were filled with Albanians. They were imprisoned during that ten-year period, every third Albanian. From three days to 20 years in prison. Somewhat around... only journalists, there were more than 300 journalists alone, now you can imagine. In prison, the profession... there weren’t less than journalists.

Anita Susuri: How did you manage to maintain communication with other Albanians who were serving as political prisoners while inside the prison? Was there a specific code you used or did you speak openly?

Martin Çuni: When we were face to face, otherwise through... we rarely spoke, almost never, no. Even communicating once was a big deal, we talked to each other but not to the point where we revealed too much. Because if it was something that shouldn’t be known, there was no need for anybody to find out.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned that you also wrote letters to your children?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes. In both Pristina and Prokuplje, I wrote letters. The pen would be lent to us for a very short period of time. However, in Pristina, I found a way to discreetly deliver letters as well. For instance, I would carefully place a piece of paper between the pages of a book {placing the palms of his hands together}, I secured the glue from the envelopes. You know the envelope glue?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Martin Çuni: To prepare the letter, I had to moisten the envelope and rub it against the book page. Then, I carefully placed my densely written letter within the book pages. Nine years after my release from prison, I found some of these hidden letters within the pages of my books.

Anita Susuri: So your family didn't find the letters?

Martin Çuni: No, my family couldn't find them, the investigators weren't able to find them let alone my family (smiles) and they didn't have to. However, those weren't letters for my family. I've written letters regularly like the ones here {looks upon the table}, I wrote regularly. Every two weeks...

Anita Susuri: You wrote your memories, or what?

Martin Çuni: Excuse me?

Anita Susuri: Your memories or...?

Martin Çuni: No, no, letters, as many letters as I could, yes.

[The interview was interrupted here]

Martin Çuni: During the whole year for example, they received two letters a month, amounting to a total of 24 letters, only about five or six of those letters made it through by the end of the year. And the ones who were sent during the end of the year were received all at once (smiles). Meaning that, only a small fraction of the letters got delivered. But I never stopped [writing]. In Pristina and Prokuplje, that's what we could do. The situation was different in Niš, where pencils and notebooks were allowed. When I was transferred from Prokuplje to Niš, I made it clear to them, "If you won't allow me to go out and work with my friends, then I won't go out at all." They denied my request, and I didn't go out anymore. And I wrote all the time. But the problem was that they didn't let us keep anything from all of the writings that we did, all of the writings, they didn't let us keep any of them, it was... When we were just hanging around, we were more free to do whatever we wanted to, no big deal. I remained in isolation the whole time, a prison within a prison.

Anita Susuri: For how many years were you in isolation, in total?

Martin Çuni: The entire duration was eight years. Because within the investigative prison, you remain isolated. There was a special unit primarily designated for Albanian individuals, but there were also those incarcerated. I always made copies of all the letters I wrote, keeping one copy for myself while sending the other, because I knew how many letters would be delivered. But when luck is on your side, I always had a sort of hope that I could one day retain them. And six months before my release, the International Red Cross Commission came to our prison for the first time after 45 years, after the Second World War. And then in order for solitary confinement to not be closed, they didn't leave anyone there, they brought me out as well, but since I refused to work, they moved me with the old men. The old and the ill, because there were prisoners with all kinds of illnesses, what do I know, and they were unable to work.

My friends sent word immediately the second day, "Martin if they don't... If they give you labor, don't refuse, you might get ill and you only have six months left," you know. "Alright," I said, "yes." Not even five days went by, and a guardian comes up to me and says, "Çuni," he says, "do you want to work?" I couldn't say yes immediately. I said, "Where?" "Not here," he said, "you will be at the economy section, away from the walls." That was their goal, so I wouldn't be in contact with any of the other prisoners who were there, to not leave them any sort of message.

"Yes," I said. "Gather," he said, "the stuff that you have, the clothes and put them in a blanket, I'll come and get you in half an hour and will send you there." I took the writings that I had, I put them in my clothes. I was thinking to myself, if they frisk me they will find them, there's not much I can do, but I won't tell him myself now (smiles). And he came to me and said, "Çuni, you got anything that is forbidden with you?" I said, "What could I have with me that is forbidden?" I said, "I'm out of solitary for three days now" (smiles). He didn't check on me. I took them all with me, when I went there, to the economy section. The place where we were was full of barbed wires, just like the barracks. There were guards but they weren't too harsh. And there were greenhouses, there were farms, there was everything.

I was looking around the place, in that huge yard. There were a lot of trees there... I took all of my writings, placed them in a plastic bowl and I buried them near a tree, ensuring that I would be able to retrieve them during the night. There was this notebook that... in one case, Sherif Konjufca, because Sherif was also there with me, his brother came for a visit. He got to town and said, "Martin, I'm coming to the corn field," he said, "and we can give him something." I entrusted Sherif's brother with a notebook that he had previously shared with me before. Two months after getting out of prison, during the night, I went and took the other ones that I put in the plastic bowl. I retrieved them from the ground. A very rare case, indeed.

Anita Susuri: Now you have them?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes. Yes, yes I published some of them, some of them aren't published yet.

Anita Susuri: What about the letters to your children, did they receive them, did they get to them?

Martin Çuni: The ones that I have here, the originals, these ones yes, the other ones no. However, I got all the letters, the ones that I wrote. But they were all literary, they were all literary. I also wrote to my wife. I wrote to my wife a lot.

Anita Susuri: What was the content of the letters, for example how you spent your days or...?

Martin Çuni: No, no, no, literary writings. I didn't keep a journal, because it was a little bit absurd and kind of impossible to think that those writings could ever get out. But, I never lost hope nevertheless (smiles).

Anita Susuri: You mentioned before that in the beginning you were sentenced for eight years.

Martin Çuni: ...yes, a little before being released, it was two years after the break out, for this offense they brought me to the investigative judge in Pristina. And I asked, "Why now?" He said, "We lost the files." It was impossible to lose files back then. But, in order for the case not to exceed its statute of limitations, because in case two years would pass by and no decision was made... you were there, if you weren't that's different... and if the trial didn't happen, no consequences. But, after two years I was still under investigation and for the third time, they brought me to trial and that was a little before I served my sentence. But at home I told them... my friends would say, "No you won't get a sentence because it exceeded its statute of limitations. It's been three years or four. You won't be sentenced again."

I said, "They didn't take me under investigation there just for the sake of it, and to take me on a walk and bring me to Pristina for investigations at the investigative judge." At home I warned them, "Don't expect me to be released on a set date, because I will be put on trial once more." And that's what really happened. I mean, I had to prepare my family because it was something... a judge from Sarajevo oversaw the trial. Back then they got help from all over Yugoslavia, judges and prosecutors came from across the country. I even remember, Markulj was his last name. He was old.

I asked him, "Throughout your career, have you ever put someone on trial for something like this?" "No," he said. "No," he said, "but I will tell you something sincerely," he said, "according to law, your offense is foreseen to be sentenced to one year minimum, twelve years maximum." *Hmm?* {onomatopoeia} If the judge was Albanian, he probably wouldn't dare to give me the minimum sentence. He would never dare to do so. He said, "I will sentence you to one year," he said, "I can't go under that," he said, "but, by adding another sentence, we reduced three months." So, I served nine years minus three months. I served it all.

Anita Susuri: You mentioned before, that you were chained to the bars for three months?

Martin Çuni: Ah yes, after the break out, yes. I was chained to the bars for three months by the order of Mehmet Lumi. Back then, he was Head of the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of Kosovo. And how did I

find that out? There was Demush, a very kind guard. Actually he once told me, “Martin,” he said, “the statement you gave about the breaking out on our behalf,” he said, “we couldn’t have articulated it better ourselves.” You understand, I mean, it was such a relief for the guards on duty that they were blamed the least.

Anyway, Demush said to me one day... I was chained in cell number 3 and the bars cut {touches his wrists} into my skin. And I told him, I said to him, “Loosen them up a bit *bre*.” He said, “Swear to God I can’t, because you’re here by the order of Mehmet Lumi. If they find out that they were [loosened]... I will be fired”. I had a wooden board to sleep on, night and day.

Anita Susuri: You were [tied] for three months non-stop?

Martin Çuni: For three months non-stop, while I was in cell number 3.. Eh, do you know how I got out of there? (smiles) Because for more... A prisoner had a year and a half left in prison and... but before the final verdict came, he wanted to spend the last part of the prison sentence in solitary. In his mind, the last weeks or months in prison, he wanted to spend them in solitary and in case he was questioned, he would say, “I got out of solitary, I could not pass any messages” or how would I know (smiles). Smart guy.

He insisted and insisted. Since I was held in solitary, they got me out of there and sent me to cell number 1 where he was staying, and they brought him to cell number 3. When I went to cell number 1, I saw that they shaved the prisoner’s heads, but their scalp was bloody {pretends he’s scratching his head}. I asked, “What is going on?” “The lice,” they said, “are killing us.” “How come?” They said, “Well, yes.” “Well, why didn’t you ask to...?” {touches his head}. “Well...” {shrugs} They didn’t dare to ask for help.

When the prison warden came, I said some harsh words to him, “This didn’t even happen during the Ottoman times, to leave someone in such a state.” He said, “Why haven’t they told us,” he said, “how would we know?” Anyway, when it was time for him to be released from prison, I mean to serve his one and a half year sentence, he received the court’s final verdict which sentenced him to three years, double of his last sentence. But, I was fortunate that I was out of solitary earlier, because who knows how long they would have kept me there (smiles). And he was... eh, that cell. Cell number 3 didn’t even have light, since it was covered with plywood {describes with hands}. There wasn’t even light. You never had it. There was light only when it was turned on, whether to eat or...

Anita Susuri: The cells were made for prisoners who committed heavier crimes, or why were they so...?

Martin Çuni: Yes for... they were... it was only one cell {gestures with one finger} because there was no possibility to have others. That’s why, there were so many prisoners that... the people could barely fit in the cells. Time after time they would take them out. That’s why all the investigative prisons in Yugoslavia were filled with our people, Albanians.

Part Five

Anita Susuri: So when you were close to finishing your prison sentence, did you know that the end was near...

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, as soon as the second sentence was over, yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: How were those days when you knew that you were going to be released?

Martin Çuni: Ah yes (smiles). There was another occurrence there just before I was about to leave. So then in the pavilion of economy, the guards spread the word to the felons, “Be mindful, because Albanians are poisoning our women,” you know, where the animals were. Someone told us. I immediately requested that I go back to solitary. Without any further discussions. I became undisciplined, meaning that I didn’t abide by the rules. It was totally forbidden, because we had a kitchen in the garden there, not in the building where we were staying. So, in front of that kitchen there was a small electric stove where the ones who had the farms used to heat their milk, not anyone else. If someone were caught there, they would be sent to solitary.

And then I would go and take it in the middle of the day, they would give us [milk] because we used to give them vegetables. Me and Sherif tended to the vegetables. And I would take milk, I would prepare a stew. They would pretend they didn’t see me, because they thought that before I went home, I wanted to go inside and contact the other prisoners. And in the end, to relax the end of this discussion, the last day I was preparing a stew and somebody had come... because they didn’t release us the exact day we were going to leave. And Sherif was looking for me all around. They came, they called to let them know both of us were going to be released. Me and Sherif Konjufca were released on the same day, the chairman of the Assembly’s father.

Anita Susuri: *Mhm* {onomatopoeia}, Glauk Konjufca’s²⁵ [father].

Martin Çuni: Glauk’s [father], yes. He was my colleague, because he was a journalist for the Television [of Pristina]. He was looking for me everywhere and when he found me, I was there making a stew for dinner. “Martin,” he said, “where are you?” He said, “they have released us, I’ve been looking everywhere for you.” “Oh,” I said, “damn it! Now we won’t eat our dinner” (laughs). He started yelling, “Are you... how can you even think about dinner right now.”

Anita Susuri: So that was sort of your job there, your activity?

²⁵ Glauk Konjufca (1981) is a Kosovo-Albanian activist, journalist and politician serving as chairman of the Assembly of Kosovo since March 22, 2021.

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, in the garden with the windows, it was covered. There was another interesting occurrence with Sherif, one day he told me, “Martin,” he said, “how did you never get angry, not even once.” I said, “Look Sherif I’m going to tell you something, even if Niš would burn to the ground right now I wouldn’t get mad,” “Forget it, who would get angry if Niš would burn!” (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs) So how did you arrive in Pristina after, were there any...

Martin Çuni: Eh yes, that’s very interesting (smiles). While I was waiting, at that point we knew that as Albanians we had to get the release papers, release papers or what is it called. And we were waiting outside the doors of the executives together with Sherif. A friend came, a lawyer (smiles). I used to work with him a long time ago as a teacher, I mean we were colleagues. When he saw me he gave me a hug {pretends he’s getting a hug}. “What are you doing here?” I said, “They released us,” I said, “but they will leave us waiting here all afternoon, because they won’t give us the release papers. So we will be here until night time.” Meaning that all night we would be just going around Niš.

He said, “Don’t worry,” he said, “I will wait for you until tomorrow, there in front of the doors outside” and he waited for us. He brought us, Ragip Gubetini, he was a good friend. I told him, “Could we go to Niš so I can make a call home, because my mother doesn’t know, they don’t know. I’m scared she will faint.” “Yes sure,” he said, “I am your worker.” What good luck. I made a call home and my wife was so surprised that she didn’t tell anyone. There were some friends there and my mother, but she didn’t tell them. But she told my father and some guests who were hanging out in the garden, without telling the other ones inside. And when I came back, my yard was full of people waiting for me, the whole neighborhood, everyone.

A woman from the neighborhood, because these are... I wrote everything. She was ill, and she found out that I was coming and she told her son, around noon, she said, “Could you bring me the small chair and put it near the window, because I want to see Martin when he comes home.” And she waited for me until the afternoon. After a while her son told her, “Mom, you have to eat something, come,” he said, “I will keep watching and I’ll let you know.” As soon as they switched places, I arrived, and she didn’t get to see me (laughs).

Anita Susuri: I also wanted to ask you about something else... what was it...

Martin Çuni: I didn’t expect prison... I expected that prison would be even more, that it would be even more difficult. But when that doctor said “This man is done for,” you know, he wanted to... he knew the weight of those words very well. They wanted to, not for us to only be done for, but to [go mad] {moves hands near his head}. But they didn’t succeed.

Anita Susuri: It was already ‘90 when you were released.

Martin Çuni: ‘90.

Anita Susuri: Year '90.

Martin Çuni: In '90 there was an interesting occurrence, that night, that day Rrahman Morina was murdered. And when friends would come by, my friends would say, "Why didn't you come sooner?" (laughs).

Anita Susuri: While you were in prison, did you have any newspapers for example or could you hear the news about what was going on?

Martin Çuni: For eight years I didn't have a radio, television, or anything. I was separated from the world for eight years. I didn't know who the new actors were, or who became what, nothing.

Anita Susuri: So after you found out about everything that happened, because the '90s were difficult years. In 89' the Constitution changed, Kosovo's autonomy was revoked, and people were fired from their jobs. What were these years like, how did you experience these years?

Martin Çuni: It was nothing surprising for us, we expected all of it, we expected it. When my friends would come [to visit], I would usually learn new information. But you couldn't get any other information from news devices or anything, no. I had no TV for eight years.

Anita Susuri: So how was it during the '90s, I think you mentioned that in '91 you went...

Martin Çuni: In the '90s. '91, in '91 I was there from Kosovo, I mean from the Radio Television of that time, I was fired. I was sent to Tirana as a reporter to report on the Assembly of Albania, I was reporting for Radio Zagreb, for around two or three months. Because I had visited Albania a long time ago. I had some friends there, I did. I will tell you an interesting story. Those friends never forgot me, and I didn't forget them either, from Shkodra, I had some friends from Shkodra. Together with Ali Bali and Gjergj Fishta's cousin, Toni Fishta, they were working for Radio Shkodra back in the day.

So then when I went there, I thought about visiting them. Rikard Larja told me, "Martin, tell me when you're planning to go because I also want to join you." Being from Shkodra himself, he expressed his wish to accompany me. I replied, "Sure, no problem." Our first stop was Toni's house, located in the center of Shkodra. Rikard and Toni were close friends, *bam bam* {onomatopoeia} on the door, the door was open, he went in {acts as if he is opening a door}. At the kitchen door, he opened the kitchen door, and a woman was lying on the couch. She was dressed, not covered [religiously], but dressed.

And he told her, "Please stand up, Martin Çuni has arrived," and with a sudden movement *baff* {onomatopoeia}, she stood up. We greeted each other as if we had crossed paths 500 times before. It was a heartwarming moment, and she made coffee for us. "Tonin will be back very soon, he went to the market to get some things and he will come back soon." As she was preparing the coffee, Tonin came back. When he saw me, he was left speechless. His tears {gesture of touching his eyes} just like rainfall as people say. After some time, he composed himself. He said, "Martin Çuni, I'm grateful that

God has sent you. It has been three months since my wife has been able to stand up unassisted, but she stood up from the emotions.”

Now, how many times have they talked about me? How many times... she’s never even seen me. How many times was my name mentioned among friends, acquaintances, or... they told me, “Martin, during those nine years while you were in prison, every time we encountered friends from Pristina, our greeting was simply ‘Martin’” {raises his fist}. Nine years {raises index finger}. Because that’s a psychological phenomena that out of emotions you could, something could happen. His wife stood up.

Anita Susuri: Did you have any contact with them before your imprisonment, I mean not just in ‘72 when you were in Albania, but...

Martin Çuni: After ‘72 I did... I was in contact non-stop with the people I met in ‘72. Ah, it's good that you brought this up because it reminded me of a case that happened in the military, the military. A friend from Drenica received a magazine titled *Shqipëria e Re* [Alb.: The New Albania], but in English. The magazine was very comprehensive, with illustrations, incredible. Metush Kolshi was the one [who possessed it]... the soldier. However, he hesitated to keep it in his own drawer, so he entrusted it to me instead, at the Radio Station.

He told me, “Martin, perhaps no one is going to check here,” he said, “keep it.” His friends were well aware of the situation. And I left it there. Unfortunately an officer happened to come across it. So he reported it straight to the lead commander. This officer was a young man from Mitrovica, of Serbian descent, I still remember his surname, Bašačević, he said, “Martin, you should hide the magazine,” he said, “because someone saw it.” Ralič, he was a ranked officer. And I said to myself, I know what I’m going to do. I realized that hiding it would only worsen the situation. I waited, after some time the commander summoned me for a report, the main commander {raises index finger}. And I went, I knew what it was for.

So he started going in rounds. I was acting as if I was unaware of what happened. He told me, “Did you happen to see a magazine from Albania?” “Uh, yes” I said, “yes, commander.” He asked, “Where did you get that?” “Ohhh,” I said, “I had prepaid for Albanian magazines through *Yugoslovenska knjiga* [Yugoslav book]. For *Arsimi popullor* [Alb.:The Folkloric education] pedagogical magazine and for *Mësuesi* [Alb.: The Teacher].” That was rare back then. I said “I’m subscribed to Albanian magazines,” “What do you mean” he said, “prepaid?” I said, “Through *Yugoslovenska knjiga* you can order anything you want from all around the world”. “Is that right?” He didn’t know.

Anita Susuri: So this was true?

Martin Çuni: That was true. That was true. I said, “Yes, well, regarding this magazine that I currently have,” I added, “whether they sent it to me by mistake or intentionally” I said, “I don't know.” Do you understand? (smiles). Oh, yes, my friend [became nervous] when he found out, fearing that I might

disclose his name. As if (laughs) that would be so disgraceful. He asked, “Could I take a look at it?” I replied, “Of course, there's no need to return it as it's in English,” I said, “I don't know English at all,” “Oh.” He never called me again. After a month and a half, the commander summoned me once again. I could sense that something was up. He asked, “Çuni, do you know why I called you?” I replied, “I don't know.” He revealed, “We received a letter in English,” and continued, “from a British soldier.” He then asked, “Could you translate it?” “Oh, I'm truly sorry, commander, but as I mentioned earlier, I don't know English. I don't know.”

[The Interview was interrupted here]

Anita Susuri: You are also one of the founders of *Radio Kosova e Lirë* [Alb.: Radio Free Kosovo], if you could tell us anything about the circumstances which led to the founding of this radio?

Martin Çuni: When I was coming back from Germany, to be honest I didn't even know that there were opportunities or the required technology for radios. I couldn't even imagine it. However, I made a deal with *Deutsche Wellen*²⁶ to work for them as a reporter, and I started working. Only for a short period of time because as soon as the military headquarters found out, they told Jakup [Krasniqi] and they immediately called me. So I went to the border, in Albania, in Pashrik and... To the Sultan, meaning the Drenica operative zone, and as soon as Jakup found out he called me, the martyr Rasim Kiqina was the one who accompanied me on our way. We went to Vuçak in the middle of the day, do you know where it is? [addresses the interviewer] Near Komoran.

Anita Susuri: Right.

Martin Çuni: Yes. And we went. Jakup told me, “Martin, did you come here as a tourist or...?” (smiles). “Not at all,” I said, “I didn't come here as a tourist.” He said, “We have the tools for the radio,” he said, “for the radio,” he said “do you think you could?” I was very happy. I was happy, because that's what I did best, I've seen it. Not even one week went by and... my friends did the preparations before. Ahmet Qeriqi, [Berat Luzha](#), and some friends from Krojmir came. The tools had been there since August, so since summer.

He came from Kumanovo, he went through a quite bizarre road trip, here and there around Kosovo until he arrived at Berisha. A lot of people were involved in that job. We tried to do something for the 28th of November²⁷ but we didn't have a chance, we couldn't make it. Because we needed something extra. He helped us, he helped us in many aspects, even some friends from Pristina, I wouldn't like to mention everyone, some of them I can and some I can't mention, so it's better... (laughs)

Anita Susuri: (laughs) None of them.

Martin Çuni: But I have everything in my writings, everything. And we started on January 4.

²⁶ German international public broadcaster.

²⁷ November 28th, also known as Flag Day, is the anniversary of Albania's declaration of independence in 1912.

Anita Susuri: In '99?

Martin Çuni: Yes. We tried to do some preparations to present the radio as more professional, and not make it seem like we were going to a wedding or something. And our biggest problem was with the opening theme music, what do you call the opening theme music?

Anita Susuri: The jingle or theme music?

Martin Çuni: Yes. We enjoyed doing it for three days. It looks good even today, if we tried to do it with today's technical supplies we couldn't manage to come up with something as good as what we did back then. We did it. Me and the soldiers of the field, meaning that I prepared them to do the technician's job. However, luck was on our side, as my previous experience working in radio and performing various roles such as technician and journalist made the task relatively easy for me. We did some promotion, there were a lot of military leaders back then, that day in Berisha.

We worked day and night, because we were a small team, a very small team. But we managed, we managed to achieve, we were fortunate because we didn't have a back-up piece. And working in those conditions there, every day assembling and disassembling the radio. It was truly awe-inspiring when everything functioned flawlessly and we encountered no technical difficulties throughout our entire endeavor. When we came here after two weeks we encountered a problem, because back then they went to Skopje and they found some tools, what do I know. But we were very fortunate while we were staying there because... we were very protective, we were very protective.

Anita Susuri: So during the war you were working as a reporter for Deutsche Welle is that right?

Martin Çuni: During the war, during the war. I was working there during the war and then I started working for our radio, so then I couldn't manage my time to do both.

Anita Susuri: You stopped it during that time?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: And the radio...

Martin Çuni: Although Deutsche Welle paid really well, you know?

Anita Susuri: You mentioned the radio before, that was interrupted during that time when....

Martin Çuni: When they bombed us?

Anita Susuri: Yes, you mentioned that you announced that the radio wasn't stopped?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: I'm interested to know, did it continue after that?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, yes, because we really stopped it there. Then my colleagues said to not air the program that day. Until we built a bunker, because it was time, it reached that point where it was impossible to continue working without having a bunker. I told them, "We can't just not air the program." So we aired the program. The last piece of information transmitted through that program was, "Dear listeners, due to tactical reasons, we won't be able to broadcast the program for a few days." Eh, if the radio was destroyed we wouldn't be able to give that information right? The listeners were aware that we wouldn't be able to air the program the next day. Because Serbs announced that *Radio Kosova e Lirë* [Alb.: Radio Free Kosovo] was destroyed, and the listeners were also informed that we would be airing the program again after a few days. And that's what happened (smiles). That was a, that was a great blow for the Serbs, yes.

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned that you encountered various incidents during the war...

Martin Çuni: Yes, quite a few.

Anita Susuri: And you survived...

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes, yes. I mentioned that case with the radio, yes. For example... because I was going out in the field [as a journalist] a lot, I went out in the field quite often. Sometimes when I went out in Drenica, it would take me a week to feel like my normal self again. Always on foot and the terrains were difficult, they weren't normal roads. On one occasion, in Qyqavica, I had to go to the front lines and they told me "You can't pass by in daytime, you can't because there are Serbs in that area," our people were down in the valley. I told them, "No, I have no other choice but to pass there, and I don't have any more time to waste." "Alright then, your responsibility." I went down there and nothing happened, I stayed there for two or three hours, I'm not sure how long and then I came back again. I did what I had to do, I finished my work, some interviews, some information. I was making my way up the valley and I saw a soldier coming down.

Anita Susuri: Albanian?

Martin Çuni: Yes, one of our soldiers.

Anita Susuri: Ah.

Martin Çuni: One of our soldiers. Because that side was ours, {describes with hands} the Serbian slope was on the other side. And I said to myself, why not interview this soldier. I put out my audio tape recorder and {acts as if he was placing the microphone closer} and I started making conversation. At

that moment we heard some snipers in the back *bam* {onomatopoeia} firing near us, the bullets were dum-dum²⁸ which are prohibited by international norms. It fired near us, but it didn't hit us. The soldier was young, "Zig-zag to the mountains {gestures with a zig-zag motion using his finger}, running as much as we could."

I didn't have any time to turn off my audio tape recorder while we were running up *bum* {onomatopoeia} here, *bum* there no one could manage to strike us, because we were in motion and it was more difficult. However, we stopped and they didn't hit us, that's a phenomenon. And when we arrived there in the mountain, I told that soldier, "Ah," I said, "those idiots were soldiers, they had weak aim and couldn't hit us" (laughs).

Anita Susuri: (laughs) So, where were you when you found out that war was over, how did you process this news?

Martin Çuni: It was a great surprise, we didn't expect it to end so fast, it wasn't expected so fast, because without the arrival of the ground troops, there's nothing to it. So when this turn of events unfolded, it was truly a monumental moment. Upon my return to Pristina, I found my house destroyed to the ground. Not completely fallen, but all the valuable possessions had been looted. But what I feared the most was that my books would be taken or burned. They took everything, but they didn't take my wife's traditional attire and they didn't take the books. Nobody even touched the books.

Anita Susuri: Where was your family during the war?

Martin Çuni: During the war, they remained here, but when all the Albanians were displaced, they were displaced too.

Anita Susuri: I'm guessing they went to Macedonia?

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: I want to talk a bit about your family and go back to the time period when you were in prison, what was your family's situation like? For example the financial situation but also how did they receive the...

Martin Çuni: Not good. I'll tell you why it wasn't good, not only do I not have any brothers, but I don't have any [paternal] uncles either. But my friends, my family, my broad circle, they always tried, they tried. However, initially people were hesitant to openly offer help. It was a rare occurrence for someone to dare. My wife once confided in me, sharing how she longed for a simple conversation with anyone during those early days. People were afraid to come forward. There was an occasion when a

²⁸ Expanding bullets, also known as dum-dum bullets, are projectiles designed to expand upon impact. This causes the bullet to increase in diameter, resist over-penetration, and produce a larger wound, thus causing more damage to a living target.

beggar, a young Roma girl. She came to our house seeking alms, she said, “I took her to the garden just to make conversation, to talk to her.” My mother struggled a lot, especially while I was in prison, because, because my mother had to carry things on her back for nine years {touches his shoulder}.

Anita Susuri: Did they come to visit you often?

Martin Çuni: No, they couldn't visit me often because they didn't have the chance. However, they came to Prokuplje, they were also in Niš, but not so often, no, not so often. I didn't want them to visit me very often, and they also couldn't, they couldn't. For eight years they didn't let me see my children, they didn't sit on my lap for nine years, they didn't allow me to... no.

Anita Susuri: Did you see them, did they visit you?

Martin Çuni: Yes, they came to visit me, they did. Very rarely, but they did.

Anita Susuri: I think you have two sons...

Martin Çuni: Two sons and one daughter.

Anita Susuri: And a daughter.

Martin Çuni: Yes.

Anita Susuri: You had all three children back at that time?

Martin Çuni: No, no. I had one of them later, in my old years (laughs).

Anita Susuri: Your daughter perhaps, or your son?

Martin Çuni: My son, my son. When I was imprisoned, I left my daughter when she was just eight months old, my son was two and a half.

Anita Susuri: Have there been any instances where maybe they couldn't recognize you in prison?

Martin Çuni: Nope, no, no. It didn't happen because they were talked to about me a lot, they had my pictures and... There was this one time when they came to visit me in Niš, my son was a bit older than my daughter, and my daughter goes... because when they would receive letters, my wife got more than them, you know. My daughter expressed her concern, saying, “Dad, it seems like you love Mom more than us because you write to her more often,” you know. I said “No,” I said, “you are my children, she is...” And my son said, “Pay her no mind because she's dumb, she asks stupid questions” (smiles). That's what he said (laughs).

Anita Susuri: So, you mentioned that after the war you were an acting director at RTK.

Martin Çuni: Yes, named by the government, yes.

Anita Susuri: How did that go?

Martin Çuni: For me it was something very troublesome because... it was very unexpected. But with all I could, I accepted what I didn't have. I didn't accept the loss of even one centimeter of the Radio Television's wealth, nor the loss of any workers. And then if we didn't need them we would let them go. But, that didn't happen. But we... I mean, initially at the television, at the radio and television we forcibly entered, because they were still there after the war, they were there. But fortunately, that passed by well. But when we entered the Radio, they expected us with AK47s, inside they had AK47s.

Anita Susuri: When did you come to Pristina? What was the date?

Martin Çuni: Immediately after the announcement. Yes, I came to Pristina a few days after the announcement.

Anita Susuri: Was it dangerous then, immediately after?

Martin Çuni: Yes it was, it was. So, now you can imagine they were there and... but we passed. But then we had to find the employees, most of them were not here. We had to go to Ferizaj, then to several other places, to find the people, to form a team.

Anita Susuri: How did work progress after that?

Martin Çuni: Well listen, when I saw that our demands were simply overlooked, they were overlooked. I couldn't bring myself to simply give in and submit, I just couldn't. And I took the initiative to gather all the workers from the Radio Television at the Red Hall, located in the Palace of Youth. In addition, I extended an invitation to Dan Evers, who served as the executive of OSCE at that time, or something of the sort. We held a meeting, not necessarily in complete privacy, but within a close circle of trusted individuals.

Anita Susuri: The collective...

Martin Çuni: No, no, it wasn't solely with the close collective, but rather with the leaders of that time. However, it involved some of them. There was also the executive, a Serbian woman from Radio Paris, who attended the meeting. Dan Evers' advisers were also present, seeking information and they were interested in hearing my perspective on various matters. I shared everything with them openly. After I shared everything openly, the Serbian woman from Radio Paris joined another meeting that was exclusively held only with the workers. I am recounting the experience of this woman. Dan Evers left the meeting, and then she couldn't hold back her tears. She said, "How" she said "could you not say

anything positive?" I responded, "Miss, please tell me, what positive words could I have possibly said?" {raises hands in confusion}. Unfortunately, some others could have been more reserved, keeping their thoughts to themselves. Sharing everything openly is not necessarily beneficial. I, on the other hand, couldn't just hold back. Even though I comprehend the weight of it all, I still believe that leaving the situation was the right decision. I walked out the same way I entered.

Anita Susuri: You left the...

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: So what were the demands that weren't approved?

Martin Çuni: None of our demands were approved. None of the demands from Albanians.

Anita Susuri: What were the demands for example?

Martin Çuni: The return of our wealth, as they appropriated all of it. Returning our wealth, and the reinstatement of our employees. These two were the most fundamental demands.

Anita Susuri: They didn't reinstate the employees?

Martin Çuni: No, no.

Anita Susuri: So after this, following your departure from RTK, what did you pursue after your radio career?

Martin Çuni: So, then I continued, before the war there was political activism but it was about national politics not, not for specific parties. However, post-war, my focus shifted towards cultural activities rather than political engagement. I was never fond of politics, I have always strived to avoid getting imprisoned due to political affiliations, but... {shrugs}. I never aligned myself with any political parties... because the term "parties" inherently implies divisions. I never wanted to be merely a fragment of my homeland, I aspired to embody the entirety of my homeland. Why settle for being just a part of it? I hope I'm conveying my thoughts clearly, do you understand what I mean?

Anita Susuri: Yes, yes.

Martin Çuni: Because parties in French means parts. Parts.

Anita Susuri: After that you were engaged with an organization, is that correct?

Martin Çuni: Yes, with some of my friends, some of my writing friends, we founded the Association of Albanian Writers and Creators in Germany, which was fairly successful, fairly successful. It was all

self-financed, all self-financed. We didn't receive anything from anyone. But the gatherings we held back then, they were mostly with writers, mainly writers. They weren't dozens [in number], but they were hundreds. And then what's really important to me is that there were sister organizations of this sort founded in other countries in Europe. And the writers found themselves. Almost all countries in Europe had an association like that. But we also met. Many works were promoted, many of them, great works, many works were promoted.

Anita Susuri: Those works belonged to the members?

Martin Çuni: Of the members, of the members.

Anita Susuri: I would like to ask you one final question, how did you personally experience Independence Day, and what emotions did it evoke within you?

Martin Çuni: I was on an airplane on my way to the United States (laughs). And I wrote a poem.

Anita Susuri: (laughs) Yes because it was quite unexpected, we didn't know the exact date.

Martin Çuni: Yes, yes.

Anita Susuri: So how did you experience it?

Martin Çuni: Very good, very good of course.

Anita Susuri: Did you think it was going to happen sooner or later?

Martin Çuni: No, I had actually anticipated Independence Day to occur earlier. It seemed a bit delayed, arriving later than expected. During a meeting with a German politician, who was a representative of Europe and was involved in talks between Belgrade, with Milošević,²⁹ a certain revelation was made. However, the politician expressed it discreetly, avoiding explicit mention of names. After the war concluded and Serbia was compelled to retreat, there was a meeting in Belgrade to approve the subsequent separation. But this meeting occurred much later, as several years had passed before the topic of independence was addressed. Interestingly, when the time finally came to discuss independence, the leader of Belgrade was questioned, "Why didn't you do it immediately?" And the leader responded, "If we had done it immediately, it would seem as though Kosovo was lost under Milošević. So now it signifies that we lost Kosovo, not Milošević" (smiles). Honestly, it was a significant delay, happening much later than it should have. It is true that it occurred at a considerably late stage.

²⁹ Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006), Yugoslav leader whose ascension to power began in 1987, when at the Communist League of Yugoslavia's Plenum, he embraced the cause of Kosovo Serbian nationalists and immediately afterwards became President of Serbia and revoked Kosovo's autonomy.

Anita Susuri: Mr. Martin, would you like to share any additional thoughts? Would you like to share something that hasn't been covered in my questions thus far or anything worth mentioning?

Martin Çuni: It is often said that talking is easy, but when it comes to work it's quite difficult. I did what I could, as people say, I tried to do whatever I could, I didn't spare myself. Not at all, and if I did something bad to somebody, I only did it to myself and my wife. And if I owe something to somebody, I only owe it to her, not even to myself, may it be a blessing. But I owe it to my wife, I dedicated a piece to her recently, which are the letters I sent to my wife from prison and I titled it *Mrikë, jeta ime* [Alb.: Mrika, my life].

Anita Susuri: That's her name?

Martin Çuni: Yes, my wife's name. Those are letters that are dedicated to her only. And only Albanian women do things like that. I mentioned before that the wife of that Serbian prisoner there told him "Bye-bye!" (smiles). Yes, that's right.

Anita Susuri: Thank you so much for the interview...

Martin Çuni: Please, please.

Anita Susuri: ... and for your time.

Martin Çuni: Because attempting to recount everything would be impossible, as it would require a lot of time and volumes of books. I'm not certain if I could ever fully articulate the entirety of my experiences (laughs).

Anita Susuri: That's right. Thanks a lot once more!