

EXCERPT FROM THE LONG INTERVIEW WITH SHAQIR GASHI

Bloomfield, New Jersey | Date: 7 February 2015

Duration: 127 minutes

Present:

1. Shaqir Gashi (Speaker)
2. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer)
3. Sulejman Gashi (Interviewer)
4. Qazim Doda (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.

Oda

The stories of our *oda*, the *oda* of youth are important, but I will speak about my father's *oda*, which we had there. Wise people came there, they would sit, they would speak about *besa*¹ and honor, about wars, about national heroes, they would speak about everything. They would tell very interesting stories, for instance when we were there as kids, we did not listen much because we did not interfere much. I remember as if it were today when they were telling stories to each other, those stories had to follow the theme of the conversation, and the moral of the story had to be told.

Now, maybe it does not relate to what we are talking about, but I will tell you some stories that I heard then. For example, the elderly of those times used to come to our *oda* - Rexhe Lutani, Xhemë Lutani, Haris Aliti, Sokol Binaku, Sandokan's father,² the ones from Tërgali would come, people from all over the places where there were Albanians would come, the elderly of the time would get together and talk. For example, the master of the house, he was... himself when he had guests, he would prepare coffee himself for fun. Then for instance other guests would come, I remember a very interesting detail, maybe it should be told. I heard that in our *oda*, when a prestigious guest came, the master of the house would take a cigarette and light it up on the cinders and say, "Welcome, guests. Where do you come from?" They would say, "We are from a distant place," either from Dukagjin, or from the Mitrovica side. He would say, "Very well, welcome." The old man would ask, "Are you in the party?" He said, "Yes uncle, I am in the party." "Are you deep or *plitko*,³ deep or shallow?" (laughs) He said, "No, shallow!" And he said, "If you are shallow, we will talk." And then they would start with the stories.

¹ In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

² Alias of Abedin Rexha (1969-1998), a Kosovo Liberation Army fighter, also from Vojnik, killed in a shoot-out with other fighters.

³ *Plitko*, Serbian for shallow.

For example, I remember stories they were telling each other. There is, for instance, a story that I heard about the elderly of the time. One of them said, “There used to be a very poor man, and he got rich very quickly. But after he became rich, after a very short time, he became poor again, and the elderly of the time went to tell him, ‘How is it possible that you were poor and you became rich? And, from rich you became poor again?’ ‘Eh, men’ he says, ‘To become rich and be honest, if you were to earn things honestly, basically I took a mill stone, I put it on my chest and I aimed for the target, with a lot of effort. When I got there, I stopped to take a break, the mill stone nearly slipped and fell, and with a blink of an eye it fell, and I became what I used to be’.” This was the meaning of the story, when you gain a fortune, whether it is economic, military, it means you should guard it and not let the stone slip, because if the stone slips you become what you used to be.

For example, they were telling other stories, for example when Azem Bejta⁴ went to the Assembly of Junik.⁵ They held the Assembly there and all soldiers of that time attended. Azem had a small body frame, he was not that tall and some people who had heard of him were asking, “Who is Azem?” “That one over there is Azem {shows with his hand}.” “Ah, very well,” they could not say he was very small. But Azem listened to those words and while sitting, without saying a word, he took two bombs, “tack-tack” {explains with hands how he clashed the two bombs} and threw them into the fireplace (laughs). Everyone who had said that he had a small body frame jumped and ran out, some ran through the door, some through the window. He took the bombs, he invited them back and said, “Come on, you men, are we going to start the war with you like this? You ran away from one bomb!”

Another story I heard for example, was of one guy from our village who wanted to join Azem Galica's troops. And to know where Azem Galica was, you had to contact Azem's mother. He went and found [Azem's] mother in the village and said, “Come mother, let's have a meal.” And in those times, when I heard this from the elderly, we had some rotten breads, besides wheat, we used to make them from barley, they were very good small breads. And she made a *përpeq*⁶ and every time she produced a small bread like this {describes with hands}, the one who wanted to go with Azem would eat it, he didn't wait for the next one. So just like that, he ate five or six barley breads and *përpeq* and he said, “Where is Azem?” She said, the mother said, “I don't think you are cut for Azem,” she said, “because with all the bread and other things that you ate, Azem and his troops would live and feed for seven days.” There were great lessons being taught by people telling different stories, a variety of good things.

⁴ Azem Galica (1889-1924) was born Azem Bejta but took the name Galica from the village where he was born in Drenica. He was the leader of the *Kaçak* (outlaws) movement against the Kingdom of Serbia first, and then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Bejta's units put under their temporary control a free zone in the western part of Kosovo. He died from wounds received during a confrontation with royal forces. Together with his companion Shotë Galica, Bejta acquired legendary status as a national hero.

⁵ The Assembly of Junik took place in May 1912 and demanded Turkish recognition of Albanian ethnic borders.

⁶ *Përpeq*, a kind of cheese pastry, with eggs, milk and soft cheese, baked in a pan.