

## INTERVIEW WITH VEHAP SHITA

Pristina | Date: July 8, 2013

Duration: 141 minutes

Present:

1. Vehap Shita (Speaker)
2. Anita Prapashtica (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (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*

**Anita Prapashtica:** Tell us something about your childhood.

**Vehap Shita:** I was born in the winter of 1923, in a family of craftsmen. My father was a tailor, but our ancestry was really intellectual because my grandfather was a hoxha,<sup>1</sup> a haxhi.<sup>2</sup> Back then, that role was intellectual for the time, and that is why my father was interested in education. We were two brothers, my father supported the education of my older brother Hyseni, but the plan he had for me was to keep me in his tailor's shop. I had to be a tailor according to my father's wishes, my father naturally needed a good worker at the time. And that was the time of a great economic crisis in all Yugoslavia and also in Kosovo. This is why my father had to emigrate to Albania, where he worked for ten years. He worked only with the son who had gone to the then gymnasium of Shkodra...

Meanwhile I was the best student in elementary school and a classmate friend of mine was this son of the hoxha, who went to the big madresa of Skopje, and he asked me to go with him. I was dedicated to become an apprentice in the shop of my father, but the desire to go to school pushed me to go with my friend and I won a rather great competition.

Imagine that from Gjakova there were twelve candidates applying, six passed, out of those six only one won a state fellowship. And without a fellowship it would have been impossible to support oneself because in that school only the boarding cost 250 dinar per month, while the highest salary in Gjakova was 150 dinars. It would have been impossible for me to go to school. And I was happy that I did not win the fellowship and went home to my mother, but the father of that friend fought also to get a fellowship from his Vakëf.<sup>3</sup> Because of the contribution of the Islamic community at that time, despite everything, I went to school.

The teaching was in Serbian language, they taught me Serbian in elementary school, but I was done with

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim clergyman, muezzin.

<sup>2</sup> Or Hadj, pilgrimage. This means he made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>3</sup> Literally holy ground, land dedicated to religious institutions under the Ottoman Empire. In this context it might mean the religious community.

elementary school, in the gymnasium it wasn't like that. That's why in the first semester I got three Two [low grade on a scale from One to Five] that for me were...I was the best student and got three Two. And with three Two I went to Gjakova, I had my maternal uncle in Gjakova, because my father emigrated to Albania, and they told him that the boy, his nephew, his boy, had gotten Two. At the time I did what I did, and at the end of the semester I had better grades, and this way I continued in the madresa. Now, I am telling you one thing... to continue this work, I am telling you that out of the 120 students in the first class of the school that was called semimaturë,<sup>4</sup> I finished elementary school with the other 24. There was a very strict standard, especially for Albanians, I was one of those 24, one of those 24 who had... Thus, at the end, out of that generation that finished the school I was the only Gjakovar, there were Albanians from elsewhere, there were Albanians who had passed, for example one of my classmates was Rexho Mulliqi, you have heard of him for sure, one was Hasan Kaleshi, they were very good students and excellent students who had a working career in their field.

Meanwhile I was connected to Albania, but my father, because of me, had not taken his family with him, thus he was there without his family, and I without my father here. Thus my childhood was not too happy, because a childhood without a father of course is not easy, especially at a time it was very difficult, nevertheless I somewhat put up with it moved on.

In 1941, when Yugoslavia broke up, the gymnasium of Pristina opened. All the students who had the certification of the last class came here to the gymnasium of Pristina. We, from Skopje, did not have this certification because Skopje was under Bulgaria and the Bulgarians did not accept our diplomas. We had these report cards, but the director accepted our report cards for the previous year, not the coming year. For this reason a boycott of classes began in the gymnasium of Pristina to force this director to accept us in the class also on the basis of our report cards. It was good that we immediately protested, but the protest was very wrong. It tried to boycott school, it boycotted classes so that they would accept our certification, our reports cards, but the initiative was taken by a group that unfortunately was communist, they were a little older. It tried to close the school with the pretext that the gymnasium was fascist, because at that time it was fascist.

But the director and the faculty were among the best educators in Albania, at that time all educated abroad. The director was Rexhep Krasniqi, a doctor of philology from the University of Graz in Austria, they were all educated people. And we organized against staying in school, even though we had waited for an Albanian school to open, and now we cried to close that school.

That was it at that time, but I began this conversation in order to tell you that at that time I was against the part that had organized the protest. Three people left the school, the three who were the leaders of this protest were all in the eighth grade, they were formed people, among them also Alush Gashi for example, who became a factor after the war, but the school survived. The school survived because all the others, all the students, no matter the political or ideological orientation as they say now, stayed in the school and

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<sup>4</sup> (Old) Set of examinations formerly given to students after the fourth year of secondary school.

the school continued until 1944.

And all those who left school at the time of Yugoslavia and who did not finish school, practically finished school. Thus the gymnasium of Pristina, the gymnasium Sami Frashëri that even today keeps that name, was the gymnasium Sami Frashëri but with the idea that it would become a Shkolla Normale,<sup>5</sup> because at the time there was a need for teachers in Kosovo. Thus this school of Pristina became Normale, but we were the only ones to finish the gymnasium when [the Normale] was created. Then, after entering the Shkolla Normale, I tell you also one thing: the power of the time, although we were under Fascist occupation, the occupation of Fascist Italy, had a very good policy regarding the development of Kosovo. Kosovo needed cadres, there were no cadres. The year 1941 found Kosovo with 60 students who had finished university in Yugoslavia. Kosovo had 60 graduates, the majority of them lawyers, some economists, but all of them mainly lawyers, or those who had finished theology, because if one came from the madresa he could study theology.

The Ministry of Education at the time was led by Ernest Koliqi<sup>6</sup> and it had a very good policy regarding the organization of education, of schools. It opened a gymnasium in Prizren, a technical school in Mitrovica, an agricultural school in Peja, a pedagogical school in Pristina, then they developed all the main branches. They did not calculate that this time would last three or four years, it would not last, but their perspective was that those schools, that profile of school would continue also after 1945, when Kosovo would become autonomous.

Now, in that situation, at the time, I was a student. In 1941 I was not with the Albanian National Movement, but in 1942 I became one of the known activists of the movement. Thus I came to meet and participate in the demonstrations against the Fascist regime and against the occupiers. Look, although this was the Albanian National Movement, it was headed by Communists, and Communists had few Albanians, thus... But with time, the movement developed, I also took part in the demonstration in Pristina in February 1943 and I spoke there, and after that demonstration I was sent to jail.

Now, where are we here...I was talking about...after I took part in the demonstration, I was sent to jail. However, although it was wartime, the Albanian state of that time was the Albanian state and worked on the basis of laws, of the Constitution, even though it was the occupiers who were in power. Thus, the staff, from the ministries down to the local level, all of them were interested in educating the youth. But at that time, and even before, whether a kid or a student in the gymnasium - after what they called elementary school, because at the time the gymnasium was eight classes -, I was very interested in literature and especially the theatre. Thus I was oriented towards literature even though in the beginning, after the year I graduated, I graduated in 1945, I went to prison again.

I was in prison also at the time of the Germans. I had completed eight grade and they gave me my

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<sup>5</sup> School of pedagogy, specialized in training teachers.

<sup>6</sup> A writer and a poet educated in Italy and a citizen of Italy after the advent of Communism in Albania.

diploma. I was in prison in Pristina, because the Gestapo was looking for me in Gjakova, and I was illegal in Pristina, but I was illegal for the state, for the police, not for the gymnasium (laughs). However, I was jailed. Anyway, when I got out, we now thought Kosovo was freed, we did not know that we were entering a new occupation. Because at that time the Albanians really were the ones who made the National Liberation Army of the time, they were partisans, to begin with the commander and down [to the rank and files] they were all Albanian, and I was part of them, I was a partisan because I worked with them, I was an activist as they say now in politics. There was a need for propaganda, for writing, and thus, because I always wrote easily, I wrote as they told me.

And now, what was needed to improve Kosovo? We needed cadres who could revive the economy. It is interesting that when we got to 1944, 1945, the first job for us was to revive the economy. For example, I was secretary of the district of Gjakova,<sup>7</sup> secretary also of the municipal council thus...the secretary was like Isa Mustafa,<sup>8</sup> who is the head of the Party but also is the head of an institution, and I had executive power. Also, out of a group of four-five to twelve tailors we formed a cooperative of tailors. The cooperative that we formed sold clothes from Gjakova not only in Kosovo but also beyond in all Yugoslavia and outside.

I will give you a detail: this cooperative that we formed later, that we built, was called Përparimi [Progress], and it came to make contracts with Germany to sew the uniforms of the German Wehrmacht and it was a great success because they were traders. They managed to improve their technology, to free the price. And God wanted that we Albanians have children to one's heart's content, and we have a youth as it should, and the power of the freest workers in Europe was in Kosovo. Maybe we could have competed with the states of Latin America or Africa, because nobody has more youth and more workers. Thus happened that...

And now I am mentioning this because in 1945 instead than enrolling in the Faculty of Literature or some other Arts, I enrolled in the Faculty of Mining to become mining engineer, because I knew we had Trepça, we had Obiliq, we had these natural resources in Kosovo. Regarding our mining and farming economy, we have a very beautiful climate, we have enough water, we have enough sun, we have very good weather, Kosovo has resources for an extraordinarily great development.

We are moving from theme to theme. When I became a journalist it happened that I met with a group of Japanese journalists who had arrived to see the situation in Kosovo, because Kosovo had become an attraction in the world, as an unknown place. And they visited us, studied the situation, the resources that Kosovo has and wrote a report that Kosovo has the possibility to grow to five, six million people, who live and work there. And at that time we were no more than five, six hundred thousand people in all of

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<sup>7</sup> All these public charges refer to the provisional government established by the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council for Kosovo and Methoia.

<sup>8</sup> Politician who from 2007 to 2013 was both the secretary of the Democratic League of Kosovo and Mayor of Pristina.

Kosovo. You had to add only one zero to become five six millions.

So, Kosovo today for example has a great need to find work for people, we have many unemployed people, we have many young people. Today we read in the papers that they go abroad, there are buses that go to Belgrade and from Belgrade they go abroad. Today we are going, “And why don’t we have work here?” and we don’t have work here because we don’t have development. When I was young, I enrolled in that faculty. It did not pass much time that they withdrew me from that faculty and they put me in some class, and they withdrew me from school....

**Anita Prapashtica:** Which class?

**Vehap Shita:** It was a class for cooperatives, to train leaders of cooperatives. And I was a leader of cooperatives in 1946. Imagine the political activity, I was twenty years old then, (laughs) and after that they put me in jail. Do you know why they put me in jail? {Addresses the present} It is interesting to tell you also this detail: I was secretary of the district of Gjakova, although I had not made a name for myself as a fighter, and I was young, I was twenty years old, I was not 19, and the leader of the partisans at that time was Fadil Hoxha, he was the commander and he asked me to be executive secretary of the Council of the district of Gjakova.

I was in that position. We took orders from Belgrade, from Belgrade, not Pristina, that we should not let the colonists return to the villages but we should stop them in the city, because they returned to the villages and said they were returning to their land, and this was their land, given to them by the agrarian reform, where they had taken Albanian land and given it to the Montenegrins. But they saw there was a very big ploy at the time, to continue also later, why? A large part of the urban rich at the time of Turkey and all times were urban rich, with money from the city or gifts given to them by the Turkish power that took the land from the villages, the land that villagers had worked and worked with qesim,<sup>9</sup> they rented it, or they worked it as çifçi.<sup>10</sup>

Now... however, that land was registered in the name of those rich people, and when the agrarian reform came in 1932, '33, '34, the times were very difficult in Kosovo as everywhere else, those years were difficult in the whole world. You surely learned {addresses the present} about the [Great] Depression and what happened, and at that time they took the land from the peasants who worked it and from the sharecroppers, the peasants were not owners but they had taken it as the land of the Beks, of the Spahias, of the Agas<sup>11</sup> and in reality it was like that, the workers in reality were simple villagers.

Now, in this situation, when these Communists from Montenegro, who had gone away during the war, returned in 1945, they went to the villages. In the villages they said they wanted to have their old things

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<sup>9</sup> Old term: buying and selling without measuring, at one price for all of it.

<sup>10</sup> Sharecropper, tenant farmer.

<sup>11</sup> Beg, Spahia and Aga are all Ottoman titles, holding privileges.

returned, and they created great divisions which culminated in an insurrection, you heard of the insurrection of Drenica, the insurrection of Gjlani, Ferizaj but Drenica has been the greatest.<sup>12</sup> Now, at that time, as secretary of the Council of the district, I did not let them return to the villages, these Montenegrins, the Montenegrin colonists, but I stopped them in the city. This was the beginning of 1945, the time when Miladin Popović was still alive.<sup>13</sup> Miladin Popović was killed in March 1945 and Gjoka Pajković arrived in his place, and Gjoka Pajković had never been to Kosovo, not before and not after the war.

Gjoka Pajković arrived in Kosovo in April 1945, although he was a Montenegrin cadre. Now these Montenegrin colonists, whom we stopped in Gjakova because we did not let them go to the villages, complained to this secretary, he was everything in Kosovo, “We call him the gauleiter of Kosovo.” The gauleiter were the German Nazi leaders who were appointed in an occupied state and did what they wanted and they were everything. He was the one who was doing everything although he was not the mayor, he had the final word as leader of the party, people could complain to him.

And now when this [Pajković] comes to visit Gjakova, comes to the Council of the district where I was the secretary and the executive as I mentioned before, he said, “Where is this secretary who is kicking out our people?” Oh sure! I was kicking out the Montenegrins, I was not letting them go to the villages from the city. I said, “I am sorry, I have not kicked out anybody but I am following orders. I am following the directive that came from Belgrade to the Regional Council.” At the time it was like now, that is, now this Council luckily had that order in writing. He could not do anything to me, it ended up as a sort of humorous thing and not a big deal.

However, one month later they relieved me from this post and they transferred me to be a translator in the Central Committee [of the Communist Party] of Albania. Now, when I went to Albania, all the Albanian-Yugoslav relationships passed through me. Why? All that was in Serbian had to be translated into Albanian, all that was in Albanian had to be translated into Serbian. I did not have any function there, but as translator I had a very big role, I was a trusted man otherwise they would not give me such job.

And there I worked, for example, in the office where the head of the office was Mehmet Shehu’s wife,<sup>14</sup> perhaps you heard of her {addresses the present}, she was, she was a personality too, a member of the movement, one of the educated women of that time, when there were few educated women also in

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<sup>12</sup> In late 1944, an Albanian insurrection against the Yugoslav National Liberation Army broke in Drenica against the threat of violence from returning Serbian and Montenegrin colonists and it was finally quelled only in February 1945.

<sup>13</sup> Communist leader from Montenegro who worked in Albania and Kosovo alongside Albanian Communist and was assassinated in 1945.

<sup>14</sup> Albanian partisan and powerful Communist leader very close to head of the Communist Party Enver Hoxha. He was found dead from an alleged suicide in 1981, after which all the members of his family, including his wife Fiqirete Shehu Sanxhaktari, were imprisoned and he was denounced as a traitor.

Albania. Mehmet's wife and Enver's [Hoxha]<sup>15</sup> wife were friends, and I happened to meet her, in the circle of the block<sup>16</sup> as they call it in Albania, I also had Nako Spiro as a colleague in the office, I had Mehmet's wife as head of the office, thus I became a fonctionnaire there, not a fonctionnaire with particular duties, but with practical work.

And now, in the meantime, the University of Belgrade opened, and I tried to free myself from these duties and go to University. And I was free thanks to Enver Hoxha, who came to the office to see Nako Spiro. Have you heard of Nako Spiro? He was a personality back then. He was the head of Agit Prop, meaning the head of propaganda, and he was head of the Polit Bureau, of the Central Committee and all that, he committed suicide in 1947, after I came back from Belgrade. They let me go with difficulty. Enver Hoxha freed me to let me go back, to let me go to school.

At that time Enver Hoxha, I am speaking about that period not a later period, had not committed the crimes he committed later, it was still the beginning, he had committed crimes, but sparingly. However, I liked Enver, he let me go to school with all his people who had grown through different functions, whether the army, the administration, the police, and were offered the chance to go to school. This was the right direction, the creation of leaders in the economy, in other activities, not leaders just to have leaders, but because they must lead the economy, education.

And I returned to university, I am telling you everything, and I would like to tell you something else. Now, when I was in the university, they withdrew me from the university and the head of the Assembly of Kosovo, who was a Montenegrin, said to me, "You went there, you put the bag there and came to brag to us." They were not educated, they had completed fourth grade. For example, there was one man who had a function [and fourth grade education], and fourth grade was the level of elementary school, today it is elementary school, but back then there was nothing else, it was not like today.

And I came back, now, I had made a cooperative that was not linked to any cooperative, and later it happened they put me in jail...do you know why they put me in jail? A brother-in-law in our house, the brother-in-law in my family, was the commander of the Prizren police at the time of the occupation. This is true, he was what we all thought of him, but our brother-in-law was hard-working, and when I was in jail...

And now, when they killed [ten people] in Gjakova in '44, in August '44, they killed ten people in Gjakova, ten in Prizren, I was in prison in Pristina, imprisoned by the Gestapo. The Gestapo asked, "Who is the one who came from Gjakova to organize the youth of Pristina?" It was I, but I had an illegal name, my name was Fatos, which is the name my son has today, his name is Fatos, and they asked for Fatos, they did not ask for Vehap Shita, because they did not know me. As Vehap Shita, I had gotten my diploma, and slept illegally in a house with Shaban Hashimi, maybe you remember, he was an engineer and doctor of

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<sup>15</sup> Leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death in 1985.

<sup>16</sup> Central neighborhood of Tirana where the Communist nomenklatura lived.

science, professor at the Technical University here. He was in jail with Selami Hallaqi.

Selami was killed, they killed Selami, he was one of the killed. Now, when they killed them, I was in Pristina. However, as it was said a long time later, I was in prison in Pristina, I was in the hands of the Gestapo, the Gestapo locked me up, thinking that I was Fatos but they did not recognize that I was Fatos, because I had the necessary documents. Well, now the accusation was, that my brother-in-law, the brother in law of the house, took me from the hands of the Germans and they killed Fadil Hoxha's brother instead of me. The brother of Fadil Hoxha was killed, but was killed as the brother of Fadil Hoxha, not because he had done anything. I was spared and they took me from the Germans and put me in an Albanian prison, when they put me in the Albanian prison I escaped from there alive, this is what happened, they returned me later to that prison, but I wasn't there when they were killed.

Now, I was in jail for eleven months, I was in the prison of Oslo [not identified by editors] for eleven months and a half to prove that I wasn't in Pristina when they were killed. And he [Fadil Hoxha's brother] was in prison in Tirana, not in prison in Gjakova or Pristina, he was a trader and they captured him because he was the brother of Fadil Hoxha, not because...To prove this, at that time they threw me in jail and sentenced me five years.

I was in prison when Gjoka Pajković came to this house, and I bought this house in '46, really not I, but my mother and my older brother when I went to Tirana, they bought this house in Gjakova, they purchased it in Pristina. And now, they took me out, and he came exactly because this house was at that time very beautiful, one of the most beautiful at that time. And I was sentenced five years, but did not stay in prison, because this wife of mine had an old father, in particular she was smart enough although she did not have any higher education. We're together since the gymnasium, I fooled her (laughs), she went to Belgrade and all of the sudden they reduced my sentence and then they let me go.

Now, I went back to work, that work when I was a student. When I was a student, I went to the theatre regularly since first grade, even my habits were such then that I became a theatre critic. I became a theatre critic and I never studied theatre, I studied, but I studied language and literature and not the theatre (laughs) and began to do it. Now when I came back from prison my entry level job was copy editor, later journalist, then editor and up, but all the time outside the Party because I was expelled from the Party in '47. Now, I had a particularly great luck because in '48, when Albania broke with Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia with the Soviet Union, I was in prison but did not go to Goli Otok,<sup>17</sup> I was spared Goli Otok.

When I returned from prison I entered the printing house that in the end became Rilindja, and from there I moved to the publishing house. From the publishing house I became journalist of Radio Pristina, but was always expelled, there was always a pretext. Indeed they wanted me to teach me more, but I didn't fall for that, I had gone through this phase. Thus the people of Adem Demaçi would come to me, and I'd say that

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<sup>17</sup> Island on the Dalmatian coast which was used to intern political prisoners from 1949 until 1989. It is known as a Yugoslav Gulag.

I left the topic for two years. (laughs).

Now, I naturally had a career in the field of journalism and in the field of literature. I began to publish two books on theatre, two books on literature, but I also did many translations. Why many translations? After the first time I was let go, I could not have a career, I had a political career until I was in prison, but not afterwards. However, in '66, when there was the Plenum of Brioni, have you heard of the Plenum of Brioni? {Addresses the present} The Plenum of Brioni, when they denounced these distortions of the state security in Kosovo against Albanians. When the Plenum of Brioni happened, there was a turn, there was a liberalization in all Yugoslavia and this liberalization was reflected also in Kosovo, it was reflected in Kosovo.

I returned to the Party in '66, when I returned to the Party I was an intellectual at that time, and I became member of the Committee for Ideology. I began to write reports on those workers who had a function, I made reports, I wrote those and read them naturally (laughs). However, what is baked cannot be removed [what is done is done] and I started very quickly to feel free, and began to write for myself.

And now I was journalist of Rilindja, Radio Pristina took me as a cadre, when Rilindja began, it had to be strengthened every day with cadres. I was one of them, and it was manageable although I was not in the Party, but when they asked me I went because it was an order, you had to. And I became the editor of Rilindja, I became head of the Association of Journalists, I became undersecretary of the Club of Literary Workers, I became undersecretary of the Association of Writers, I became member of the board of the League of Journalists of Yugoslavia, I mentioned that, I went through all that without being a member of the Party.

**Anita Prapashtica:** Can you tell us a little more about the Association of Writers, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, of Yugoslavia?

**Vehap Shita:** Now I will tell you. So, during this time I was not a member of the Party, now, I was from '66 but now, I am coming to '72, the time when I, for the second time, was expelled from the Party. And when I was sacked from these functions in '72, it was the time when Kosovo was flourishing, there has not been a greater blossoming in Kosovo than in the '70s.

So, after the demonstrations of '68, which were the first students' demonstrations - Kosovo had not been calm either from '44- '45, but those were the most popular - from that time, Albanians began to breathe more freely and I felt freer, I wrote what one group did not like, but another group liked, because Yugoslavia always had an opposition. The opposition was more silent at time, at times it was not, and especially it was not silent in Slovenia, it was not silent in Croatia, in some parts of Serbia, in Vojvodina, in some parts even of Belgrade.

In that situation there wasn't a Serb who accepted that Kosovo separated from Serbia, regardless whether he was a Communist, a democrat, a radical, whatever, they all wanted so. But there were people who wanted that Albanians were equal to others, had the right to go to school, to work, to develop, to speak

and all such things. And I began to write for example about one film director in Belgrade, a professor of the Academy of Arts, a film professor who made the film, Takimi i Shekujve [Meeting of the Centuries].

Meeting of the Centuries was a documentary, but a long film, which had been prepared to feature as a representation of Yugoslavia to the world, to show how the centuries met in Kosovo, how relics of the past were left behind through the progress brought by today's regime and today's development. And that film was screened in Kosovo by the Writers' Club where today is the movie theatre ABC 1 and 2, because there was a big hall, that hall that is still there, but it was a closed screening, only for intellectuals. I wrote theatre reviews but also movie reviews, without ever being in the Academy, and I did not even know where the Academy in Belgrade was.

I wrote a review and published it under the headline, "Who is looking for the jungle in Kosovo?" He said, "Meeting of the Centuries," I said, "Who is looking for what? He is coming from Belgrade to look for the jungle, for people who eat each other," and I published it in the Albanian newspaper Përparimi [Progress]. However nobody was paying attention, because the Albanian language does not have a strong audience, and because Albanians read only a little, and politicians only if something is political or that which interests themselves, so, it did not have any echo.

But I translated it and published it in Vijesti Srijeda in Zagreb. It was a newspaper that published 250 thousand copies and circulated all over Yugoslavia, it was a very attractive newspaper, people like attractiveness, and after reading first who is killed and who has killed, who separated or was separated, it was also politically of a high level, it was practically the opposition. This was a newspaper that in 1971 led that mass movement, masovni pokret<sup>18</sup> when the secretary of the Yugoslav Youth and high ranking leaders and political ideologues were all removed.... so, they were this category of people, they published in Serbian and Croatian.

However, I came to the surface as a sort of opposition, I was in the Party, I was editor in chief. However, that klapa,<sup>19</sup> as that category of people in Zagreb and Ljubljana were called, preferred me. For example, we are moving from one thing to another, on the 50th anniversary of the Slovenian Literary Association, I went there as a guest and brought the greetings of the writers of Kosovo, the Albanian writers, and I spoke in Serbian, the director of the Association who was also the director of the Slovenian Academy came and said to me...

That film was made, as I said also before, with the goal of showing the progress made in Kosovo during that time, I mean, during the previous twenty years, in '67, twenty years. To me it showed that they had found a very backward place, especially the Albanians are presented as Vandals, whatever you call them. One of the scenes of that film is when the tip of the mosque of Sinan Pasha in Prizren falls down the

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<sup>18</sup> Mass movement in English, also known as the Croatian Spring, or the movement that demanded economic and political reforms, especially more rights for Croatia, and was violently repressed by Tito's Yugoslavia.

<sup>19</sup> Popular form of a cappella singing in Dalmatia, Croatia.

frescoes of Sveta Petka [Our Lady of Ljeviš] in the monastery of Saint Petka in Prizren. This was the goal of Meeting of the Centuries, I mean the Turks arrived, or now the Albanian Turks, and they destroyed the frescoes which are one of the greatest wealth of the Serbian Middle ages, their cultural heritage.

I am telling you this also because there are enough of these Orthodox churches that are called Serbian in Kosovo, there are even in a place where we don't think that they could. How come, for example, that in Dević in Drenica, and Drenica is completely Albanian, there is an Orthodox Church? Or in Boletini of Mitrovica, in Isa Boletini's<sup>20</sup> place there is a church? Serbs have built churches wherever they went, but those that have value are those I mentioned, Saint Petka in Prizren, in Deçani, and Graçanica they are Orthodox, but they are not Slavs. Why aren't they Slav? Because before the Slavs arrived here, there were different Illyrians tribes that accepted Christianity 30-40 years after Christ, they were among the first in the Balkans to accept Christianity, not because they were Christian, they did not know what Christianity was, but they built churches. And no, in these buildings there was destruction, such as, idols for example were destroyed, or busts were destroyed, monuments were destroyed, all those things. But the goal was for me to show this way the issue that I dealt with in the review, in connection with this faith, and that went to Vus and made a big noise.

The Ministry of Information, which is like the Ministry of Culture but also deals with information, organized a press conference where it attributed to my article the responsibility for the withdrawal of the film. The film was not shown because, they said, the author of the film had been tendentious and he wasn't a professor or a director, this I knew. However, the state security or SHIK<sup>21</sup> that we have here, the security and the intelligence took notice of those things, thus I entered the list of those who were marked.

Sometime later, there was an assembly here in Pristina, an assembly, a conference of the League of Communists of Pristina, this was in 1967. Now, in 1969, I also wrote about that conference, the leader was Mahmut Bakalli. I showed the article to Bakalli. He said, "I signed that it is good." However, when that article got in Vus do you know what title did it have? "Who is implanting betrayals in Kosovo?" And now, I was against the implantation of betrayals because this was a time when we began to breathe a little more freely, because Albanians had been put in jail or followed by those who followed Albanians only because they were Albanian, or it was an action of the army or different actions.

And now, I now was in the security's index as a man who was Communist, but was doing these miracles, and a Communist not from yesterday but from earlier, I was expelled in May but I had started in '42. And now, and even today, they call me Communist here, although I was expelled twice, and went to prison, and was sacked sometimes, yet, they call me Communist. I have not been Communist, not because I did not support Communism, but because I did not know Communism, and for me to be Communist one must know that Communism is applicable. Everywhere Communism won as an ideology and took power

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<sup>20</sup> One of the leaders of the 1910 rebellion against the Ottoman Young Turks, and a major figure in Albanian nationalism.

<sup>21</sup> Albania's state security.

as an ideology, it failed, it is true that it failed.

Take all those places which are still Communist, for example, North Korea or Castro's Cuba. Why? Because Communism cannot be realized, because it must raise people's consciousness, not of some people but of the entire nation, it is known that one has to work according to his possibilities and be rewarded according to his needs, but if one does not commit to work, one will not get more. And now, the klapa, those who were in the leadership, those who could, they took a lot and created great inequalities which resulted in destruction and there was no development. Now, these forces that I spoke about, I am small compared to them, because big nations give also big people, how can small nations give big people? They cannot, because their environment is still growing. You know that also biologically, big things grow in big places and not in small places.

And now in 1971 there was the mass movement I spoke about, the mass movement in Croatia and they expelled the whole leadership, from the higher leadership, to begin with the secretary of the Party whose name I have forgotten, all the people I had somehow collaborated with. Well, here they removed me from the position of editor, and moved me to simple journalist, where I earned my bread with sweat, not holding a [political] function, because in that function there was no need to sweat much (laughs).

Well, this was 1971, when they expelled them in Zagreb, to me it happened first in 1969, in 1969 for that article that was titled, "Who is implanting betrayals in Kosovo?" and here I mentioned the name of Ali Shukriu, I mentioned Jovo Shotra, the secretary of the Party, I mention Sava Percenović, who was the head of the municipality of Pristina, the Ambassador of Yugoslavia in Tirana, all the names. So, I confronted the leadership, but was also silent, why? A simple journalist. Also, no, those in Zagreb took me to court for that article.

In the meantime this border police in Macedonia in Qafa e Thanës,<sup>22</sup> at the border, stopped all the trucks that came from Albania for Rilindja, including the book by Dante Alighieri {addresses the present}, perhaps you have heard about Dante and the Divine Comedy. And keep in mind that I had an article that they stopped and the Ministry of the Interior of Macedonia organized a press conference to crash me, and to sue me in court, in the court of Rijeka<sup>23</sup> because the owner was in Rijeka, this Zagreb newspaper was registered there.

Imagine, it had been published in Albanian here, but nobody said anything, because nobody read, but when it was published there it ended up in court. I did not go to court, and I was defended by the publishing house that published the book, they hired a lawyer and the lawyer went in my name and in their name, and I did not do anything because there was freedom of speech then. However I remained in the index for the whole winter.

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<sup>22</sup> Mountain pass on the shores of lake Ohrid in Albania.

<sup>23</sup> City in Slovenia

They were telling me, “Leave Rilindja!” because they had begun to follow me in Rilindja, but in Rilindja I had not written anything wrong because I knew that I was followed a little, I went through two phases. However, I wrote outside Rilindja, and outside I came to be the head of the Association of Journalists once, then member of the League of Journalists of Yugoslavia, there was a delegation there of journalists who visited the Soviet Union, Germany etc. I created a circle also outside Pristina. They still hadn't harassed me in Pristina, they were waiting for the right moment.

The moment came. When did it come? The moment arrived in 1971, no, in 1972, in 1972 what happened in Croatia was happening in Serbia. Tito decided to purge also Serbia, even though it was very difficult, I am saying that Tito has been a balanced leader. He toppled and liquidated Croatia, the Serbo-Croatian leadership for the only reason that they were Croat. When the turn of Serbia came, he toppled also Vojvodina, now he had to topple Kosovo too. Kosovo, these Albanians who were in the leadership were swimming, and he balanced those who were swimming. And whom did they eat? They ate the small fish, they spared the big fish, I was caught among the small fish.

And in 1972 they expelled me from the Party because I wrote good things about Albania. I was not writing good things nor bad things, but I wrote what I saw, or what I was excited to see. It is true that I wrote what I was excited to see. I was the secretary of the Association of Writers of Kosovo and I invited a delegation of Albania led by Dhimitër Shuteriqi, he was a member of the Presidium, he was the head of the League of Writers but also was a member of the Presidium.

These were the '70s, for example, when an Albanian ensemble of singers of the songs and valla<sup>24</sup> came here to celebrate, like we celebrated also when the Partizan<sup>25</sup> came to play in Pristina for example, that the people had the need take it out on something. And the Partizan had a certain Jusufi who played soccer and because of Jusufi the people supported the Partizan club of Belgrade, it was not the league but it was Jusufi, or when Prekazi<sup>26</sup> came. Naturally Albanians are not the only ones to behave like this, the whole world does the same, but Albanians, you can see, they have always been occupied by foreign powers.

Now, in 1972, I was expelled, and they assigned me the task as a journalist of doing translations, and do you know what translations? In that second shift, in the final shift that began at 3-4 pm and ended in the middle of the night, it was the most difficult part. And do you know why? They wanted me to resign, and I did not give my resignation. Yugoslavia was what it was, but it was a state, there was no chance for them to sack me if the contract had expired. Now, for example, if your contract expires you go home, back then it was not possible, at that time they needed reasons to sack you, either you resigned, or they forced you

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<sup>24</sup> Albanian folk music.

<sup>25</sup> Belgrade soccer club.

<sup>26</sup> Xhevat Prekazi, born in Mitrovica, popular soccer player with the Partizan and later manager of the Turkish team Galatasaray.

to resign.

There were cases... there was this case, I'm mentioning this. There was this director, the editor-in-chief who congratulated me for the article that was published in Vus. Before I even saw it, he bought it and saw it. This person criticized me in the assembly where I was expelled from the Party for that article, however he had a bad conscience and told me, "Why brother, like this?" "Look" I said, "I am able to perform from the lowly job of a doorman to yours, and I know that you know that I am able to do that. I can perform the duties of the doorman because it is a simple job but I can also perform your duties, and he knows that I can." "But don't think that I'm quitting" I said. "I am not giving you my resignation, even though they proposed me this in Zagreb, 'Come to work with us, you can stay in Pristina and you will get even a better salary than in Rilindja.'"

And now the time came when, now, imagine that I stopped appearing in Rilindja, not only Rilindja but all the publications published by Rilindja, and Rilindja was the publishing house that also published Jeta e Re, where for some six year I was a member of the editorial board. There was also Fjala, with which I collaborated, and there were all the others. I had no right to work in any of them until 1978, I did not have the right to appear with original writing in the newspapers published in Pristina for six years. However, they did not sack me from the editorial board of Sina in Novisad, where I was a member of the editorial board and where I wrote about Albanian drama and theatre, and when I speak of Albanian theatre I speak about all the theatre, not only about Kosovo, because we are a nation, a house here and a house there.

I did not write about Serbs even though they asked me to, those up above {shows the shelf of books} they are four sequels, and out the four I was a member of the editorial board for Albanian literature. There you have from Bogdani of Budi and the Qiriaz sisters and until Ali Podrimja who died a little while ago, but you can read what Ali Podrimja wrote. And you don't have Serbs, and they sued me because I wrote about Albanians and did not write about Serbs. But I wrote about Albanians because I followed Albanian literature, I followed Albanian theatre, let other people write about the others. This is the truth, though I write Serbian very well.

And now in this situation I was, I was in the editorial board in Belgrade, I was in the presidency of the League of Writers. Why? In the League of Writers of Yugoslavia there was a Croatian writer, a member of the presidency was a Slovenian, they were all, I was there in the name of Kosovo, I was the member of the jury of the "Festival of Work" in the name of Kosovo in 1972, but I was chosen, and in 1980 I was expelled. Do you know why I'm mentioning this? Because at that time in Tito's Yugoslavia there were liberal cadres who were not extremists, they were not ideologically rotten. There are cases for example, with us for example, if you are the member of the Democratic Party and the President of the Assembly is a member of the Democratic Party he chooses you, but if you are a member of the Democratic League they don't want you even though you are good for the job.

There were cases for example, there was a certain Jovan Çirilov, I don't know whether you heard of him. He was the director of the international theatre festival in Belgrade called Bitef. This Bitef was like what we now call alternative theatre, not a theatre that presents only Shakespeare, Moliere, but that presents

also Ionesco, etc. etc. Bitef was like that. And I was a member of the editorial board. He was a member of the editorial board, and he was very committed, he was a Serbian nationalist, but that did not bother me, because he was not a chauvinist. He could have been a chauvinist, and chauvinist is something else, someone who hate other people, he was not like that. Also the editorial board chose me year after year and we made an issue in English for the outside world, and he said to write about the theatre in Kosovo. But when he talked about the theatre in Kosovo, he did not talked about an Albanian-Serbian theatre, but the theatre of Kosovo. I said, "Brother, I will write about the theatre in Kosovo, but the Albanian theater in Kosovo" (laughs).

Now, this Çirilov who was a Serbian nationalist, said, "How nice, we have to show the world," and this English book with 300 pages had 30 pages on the Albanian theatre. I shrug my shoulders and say, "I wrote for them, now let me write once for the Serbs, I cannot do it because I do not have following. For them to follow me they must to do it continuously, not today and tomorrow, because I did not write." And with his insistence that the article be in Serbian, because from Kosovo we published in Albanian and in English, they wrote from the beginning of the Albanian theatre in the past centuries, not in the XX century but in the XIX century. All of these are things that I follow.

Imagine that in 1972, when they expelled me from the Party, the Secretary of the Interior took my passport. My entire family did not have a passport for six years, without being guilty of anything. However the Secretary of the Interior had his own channels and he did what he wanted, and with an administrative order he violated also the law and everything else.

We did not have passports until 1978. In 1978 the League of Journalist included me in a delegation, now, I had been in East Germany, they sent me to West Germany. And I said, "I don't have a passport." They had their eyes wide open, "How come you don't have a passport?" (Laughs) and I tell them that I don't have a passport. And they got me a passport, in 1978 they gave passports to the whole family and we had passports until now.

What an anomaly, you belong to literary, artistic, cultural circles and you have your place and your house, but your country takes your passport, not only yours but your wife's and the children's and everybody's. And I worked during all this time, I did literary, artistic work, I wrote about the theatre, at night I saw every performance, the next day I wrote a review, and the next day it appeared in the papers. During the time that I have been at the radio, at night I saw the plays, and the next day I prepared a review, all that time I have been an active journalist. And after I was expelled in 1981, when the demonstrations occurred, why did I leave? Because I knew that I was able, '81 was 30 years ago, and during these years that I have been retired, I retired in 1981, all this time I have been active, and even today I am active.

Now I continue to work in the fields I know, Albanian and Serbian translations, but mostly about literature, theatre and film. I wrote, I organized the week of Albanian film in Pristina in the year 1970 or '71, I don't know, and for every film we showed, I immediately wrote a review the next day. Those about whom I did not write positively did not sleep well at night, this is the truth. This is the truth, those filmmakers in Albania picked up the papers and read the reviews. They were not happy with what I had

written, it was another atmosphere. For us in 1970 it was something else, I was sacked in '72 but continued to work.

In 1980 I have been a member of the jury of the Festival in Pula, it was not only a Yugoslav [festival], but international, and I wrote about it. But my goal, and not only mine but our entire editorial board's, the board of Jeta e Re when I was a member of the editorial board... imagine, I was chosen member of the editorial board in 1954, this is about 50 years ago, the editor-in-chief was Esad Mekuli, Ramiz Kelmendi said, "We have all come out of your sleeves," because I have been close in age to him, but he was a very smart man and he knew that our people must succeed with their own value, our value at the time, when non-values were appreciated, non-values were applied, non-values were criticized, and when values were preferred.

And we made the effort of putting values, for example I have in front of me right now, I published in Serbian Kështjella [The Castle] by Kadare, it was published by Nolit in Belgrade, Jedinstvo in Pristina, but Nolit was the better known publisher even now. And we chose together The Castle by Kadare. I published Kronikë në Gur [Chronicles in Stone] by Kadare and published that in Sarajevo. I published Dimri i madh [The Great Winter] by Kadare, this in Zagreb. Look {counts with fingers}, Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, three centers. I talked about...

Ali Podrimja, with a certain Jakuvo Skoti, produced an anthology of Albanian literature in Croatian language, but the translation was in Italian, it was published in Rjeka in Italian, and I wrote a preface. This was my first contact with Ali Podrimja as a poet, but also with Albanian literature in a foreign language. Italian is a western language, even though it was the Italian of Rjeka, it was western. And this was in the 1960s, I don't know exactly which year but I remember I published that book.

In Novisad I published a novel for children by Vehbi Kikaj, Sarajet e bardha [The White Buildings], it was one of the best books in Albanian literature which I published in Serbian. The White Buildings became a text book, it was read and was given to children even in Slovenian and in Bosnian as a textbook, the textbooks were in common [in Yugoslavia]. These were the cradles of unity that we had. Later, I have published the poetry of Ali Podrimja, Në Zot e hetuan gjarpërin [They Discovered the Snake in God] a collection of poems and this also was published by Nolit in Belgrade.

Imagine in this collection ... in Belgrade, because it was not published in Albanian, you know why? Do you know who God was? God was the lord of the whole world, but God is also Tito (smiles). In God, therefore in Tito, they discover the snake. Here they did not write, "In Tito They Discover the Snake," they wrote, "In God They Discovered It," but those of you who read, it could immediately understand what it wanted to say. This was published in Serbian and I have translated the whole book in Albanian. Keep in mind this poem of Ali Podrimja was published here with us, but not as a book, and this is not only for... the book has other poems.

Imagine that I wrote four volumes by Ali Podrimja, but it is also one volume, there is no need to tell you, but I am telling you, that Matica Srpska published it. Matica Srpska is one literary organization that is

published in Novisad, Vojvodina, which was a state before Serbia, it was a state in the context of Austria-Hungary, it was later that it became what it became. And this Milisava is one of the oldest Academicians in Serbia, and he published Ali Podrimja. And I mentioned that our goal was to succeed, but we were the whole team of Jeta e Re, and in our team of Jeta e Re at the time when I was there, the editor-in-chief was Esad Mekulli, a member of the editorial board was Zekerija Rexha, who earlier had also been the director of the publishing house where I was trained; there was Tajra and I, four people, these four with the power that we had we could.

Look, I must remind you also that, for example, a collection of Albanian tales was also published in Sarajevo, it is called Gjurmimet [Investigations], in Serbian Traganja after my translation, but prepared with Rexhep Qosja. Rexhep also wrote the foreword. The novel by Anton Pashku, Oh; Koha e ilaçit [Time of the Drug] by Ibrahim Kadriu; Dhuna [Violence] by Rexhep Zukaj; Lugjet e Vverdha [Yellow Valleys] by Rexhep Hoxha, maybe you read them, I mentioned Sarajet e bardha by Vehbi Kikaj etc etc. So, that period of my work from 1972 developed a lot in this field.

I worked like that until the 1980s, when the Kosovo autonomy was revoked, then I was one of those who signed the Appeal of 215<sup>27</sup> maybe you have heard of that, it was an Appeal when [announced that] we stopped publishing in Yugoslav publishing houses against the revocation of the autonomy of Kosovo etc. etc. And now, I begin to get to current politics, see? In 1989, after this Appeal - the Appeal was at the beginning of 1989, in February 1989 - in November 1989 we formed the Council for the Defense of Human Rights.<sup>28</sup>

And this Council for the Defense of Human Rights followed all that was happening in Kosovo and published it in Albanian, in Serbian, in English and [its publications] went from Kosovo to the world and they have gone also to personalities such as Kofi Annan; to Yugoslavia; to Ante Marković;<sup>29</sup> etc. And now, at this time I was the head of information services in the Council for the Defense of Human Rights, and I prepared 29 issues of the bulletin with all the information of what was happening, with all the other comments. I was also engaged in the Association of Veterans.

**Anita Prapashtica:** Can you tell use more about the Council?

**Vehap Shita:** We formed the Council as the first of the pluralist organizations, as we called them at that time, when pluralism came to the masses of Yugoslavia. The President was Idriz Ajeti first, after Idriz it was Bajram Kelmendi. Adem Demaçi was President and he is President also today that the Council practically

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<sup>27</sup> The Appeal of 215 Kosovo Intellectuals opposed the 1989 amendments to the Serbian Constitution that revoked Kosovo's autonomy in all but name.

<sup>28</sup> The full name of this organization is Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedom. KMLDNJ is the Albanian acronym.

<sup>29</sup> The last Prime Minister of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1989-1991).

exists only on paper, and limits its activities to the executive director and the staff that works there, while we work as a board, whose head was Pajazit Nushi and still is.

In the Council we really worked a lot because we formed from the circles of Kosovo intellectuals, we began from Ibrahim Rugova<sup>30</sup> and Vehap Shita (laughs), we were the founders, while the late Zekeria Cana was secretary and was one of the pioneers of the Council and he also signed the Appeal and he went house to house for the Appeal and it was not a small job to have the Appeal signed. The Appeal was against Milošević and five days later we formed the Democratic League. In the Democratic League there were all the people of the editorial board and I was editor, to begin with Jusuf Buxhovi, who was secretary, to Mehmet Kraja, Musa Ramadani, and Xhemajl Ahmeti, who was later killed.

So, this group of Kosovo intellectuals met around Rilindja and around the Academy of Science, and also around the Institute of History, but lesser there. The Institute of History helped a lot during the war, but did not do much because it went fast. They liquidated Ali Hadri who was also at the head of the Institute but also had the capacity to face the situation in which we happened to be. However the Academia, the Albanological Institute, Rilindja, all of them met in these two organizations.

We, who were in the Council for the Defense of Human Rights, wanted to be outside the parties that began to form and also other parties, because the Democratic League was a democratic association and it was not a League but took the name of League to be like the League of Communists, because at that time it was a popular movement not supported by ideology, because there was no need for it. When it was clear that the situation was not good, practically when the parties began, we had 30 parties, in America there are only two parties, we did not stop at twelve (laughs).

And thus in this situation this Zekeria Cana, Avni Spahiu and I began to give daily information on the situation in Kosovo. After the daily information, we began with the weekly, the weekly collected information on the whole week and they circulated in order to be very effective. We had a Minister of Information in the Federative Executive Council, he was a Hungarian. He began to criticize us, to criticize the Council, not us personally because our names were not public. In this case Idriz Ajeti was the secretary, "I don't know anything," he said, and I said, "Brother, you know we are going to go public (laughs). If they catch someone, they will catch you." (Laughs). Idriz was especially good, he was not a pushy man, he became the President of the illegal Parliament, and I said, "From President of the Council you have become President of the Parliament."

And not only we from the Council gave this information that I am talking about; all the international delegations that came to pay a visit, all those that visited Rugova, visited us too. Those that visited the government that was in power came also to us, the one who was responsible for human rights in Europe came to see us. Those abroad began to trust us and also helped us, they helped financially, because we

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<sup>30</sup> Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.

worked, but we were not at work, they had sacked us all, nobody had anything (laughs).

I began to develop the work, and our delegation had been to Geneva to the Committee for Human Rights, the international committee that had also a subcommittee. We participated in the subcommittee, but we did not have the right to vote, and do you know why? They told us to become member of the Helsinki Committee in Belgrade, we did not want to, we wanted to be in our Kosovo, but not in Belgrade. They kept us out, while we formed the Helsinki Committee of Kosovo, but as members of Belgrade with Gazmend Pula as the head. He did not develop any activity because our Albanians did not want anything to do with Serbia, this is the truth, it was a silent boycott, it is not nice to say it was a boycott, but it was.

Now, in Geneva, in this subcommittee for human rights, there were also our delegates, they could not participate as independent because they did not have the right to vote, but we did, as members of the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights, and we participated in the name of this FDA. And our activists who knew foreign languages usually went there, those who knew at least French if not English, God wanted it this way. For example, there was Zejnullah Gruda who was Ambassador in Panama, somewhere in Latin America, and there was Ymer Jaha who studied in Paris for his doctorate, there was Ibrahim Rugova who knew French, we were not all zombies in our team.

We who had studied at the time of Yugoslavia, I know how to use three foreign languages, French, Italian and German, but I don't know how to speak any, that's how we were taught, using them through literature. In high school I could learn five foreign languages, among them Arabic and Turkish, keep in mind. I learned from poetry by heart (laughs) and took three with one as they say. But I mentioned, we were intellectuals, if you wish. I was editor-in-chief, I produced 29 issues [of the bulletin], 29 issues with 150-200 pages, I have edited, read, translated all that in Serbian and gave it to the staff to translate it in English, we had two very good English translators.

The authorities here, but there were authorities also abroad because there were parties outside, were almost all intellectuals, not completely, but mostly intellectuals, it was the cream of our intellectuals, this is true. With the arrival of Adem Demaçi as President, the Council began to engage in the field, because someone had to make public the situation in the field. And naturally they were not professors or doctors, there were ordinary people.

But a lot of work was done by our sub-Council in Mitrovica organized by Halil Bajrami. He was a man who has survived a lot, he was smart because he managed to stay alive despite the fact that he was under surveillance but he survived, he was capable. However, he recorded everything, everything that happened in Mitrovica, because many things happened in Mitrovica and happen now as well. He prepared a bigger book than we did because we were more like that... (Laughs) but this was his volunteer work. He engaged the whole family, in my mind he was like those proletarians who gave all after work, the work they had.

However, inside the Council we had different analyses of the situation, we proposed, we met, our people went abroad in the name of the Council, they went to America, to France, everywhere, even to Elizabeth Wren who was responsible for human rights in the cadre of OSCE or the European Council, or it was

Mazowiecki,<sup>31</sup> who was Polish but also he reported on human rights in the European context. Then there was the Federation of Human Rights in Paris which sent regular information out, all the material we had. Everybody went abroad, all this work was done while Milošević was in power. Our prisoner, for example, is a prisoner who is now dead, he was general Shaban Shala, he died a year ago, he was the undersecretary of the Council and they imprisoned him, he fell for telling what we were doing, what we did.

This he told but we all worked legally, there was no need to hide, we did not do anything in a secretive way, what we did we all did it in the light and they could identify us with all this security that surveilled us with electronic means, or also non electronic. For example, the police came to pick me up at home and you know for what? They asked me for my weapons. The chief of police came to the door, I “How can I help you?” “Are you Vehap Shita?” Yes” “Do you have weapons?” “No,” I said, “I was a partisan, when they put me in jail they took everything.” And even if they took everything, later I did not have any because I did not know how to use them.

I remember once I fell down with a gun (laughs). I said, “I have a weapon” and I showed the pen, “This is my weapon, I know how to write.” They wrote it also in the newspapers later, “They sent him to jail because he showed a pen.” I said, “Come on, I have everything inside,” and I had all the material, the computer of the Council at the time with all I had written. But the diskettes, when the bombing started, my wife had taken all the diskettes, put them in jars and put the jars under the flowers, not the flowers but she dug the soil and hid the jars. Then she replaced the flowers and so the diskettes survived until KFOR arrived. When KFOR arrived, also a CNN team arrived and photographed my wife who dug them up from the garden, this was improvisation because we had dug up those diskettes earlier. They had everything we recorded from 1997, ’98, ’99. From 1997 we were all computerized and had all in the diskettes and all in the computer, and I did not leave a computer even during the war.

I survived two wars. In the last war, during the entire war, I was a member of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and there I held the position of head of information services. In the war with Serbia, in the last war, which I consider from 1990, from July 1990, when Serbia arbitrarily revoked the autonomy of Kosovo. At that time I was in the Council for the Defense of Human Rights, I was a member from the beginning, and at the same time I was the head of information services, and this information services office, from April 1990 until July 2005, recorded all the violations of the human rights of Kosovo citizens, naturally the Albanians, who were the ones under occupation, they were practically under Serbian occupation and Serbian military and paramilitary power.

That time found me performing this duty, in the beginning I worked also a little in the Democratic League of Kosovo, but I had the goal of being a member of the Council. Especially we, who were members of the board and who led the active work of the Council, we were not members of political parties. Thus, during

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<sup>31</sup> Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1927-2013) was a Polish author, a leader of the Solidarity movement, and the first Prime Minister of democratic Poland after 1945. In 1992, Mazowiecki was appointed the first U.N. envoy to Bosnia, from which he resigned in 1995 in protest for the lack of international intervention to stop the war.

all this time until the end, and also after the NATO bombing, I have continued this activity, gathered notes, edited the bulletin, the bulletin of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights about which I spoke earlier, which until July 1, 2005, published 29 issues, and in those issues there were in average 200 pages. It was published in Albanian, Serbian and English, someone else translated it in English, I translated it in Serbian, thus this activity of mine was concentrated on this, and during this time I stayed in Pristina, also when the bombing began.

Now, during the bombing, the Serbian police sometime came, but my wife had hidden all the diskettes in the manner I told you, and they were in the garden, and we have a small garden here behind you, she put them under the flowers, thus they were saved and we did a great job I think. Later, I tell you, later, after taking notes, we published a big book with 1000 plus pages, where we recorded all that, but there we recorded also the names of the people killed, shot, tortured and also the mass massacres in every place where they were committed, in Izbica, in Likoshani, in Prekaz etc. etc. Also the prisoners are recorded, those whom Serbs took with them when they withdrew from here, a little before withdrawing, we have all the names.

Thus I think that our Council - and the bulletin which I edited as editor in chief, which in June, July 1999, came out with a list of all people killed, shot, imprisoned, and of course disappeared, and all we had come to record until then, later we recorded also the investigation or the search to complete those lists, but this that we had in June 1999 -, was the first authentic documentation of what was done during that period.

My activity during the war was thus concentrated on this, but in the meantime we organized also different rallies, through which we informed the Kosovo public opinion, but also foreign [public opinion]. For example, we had another rally also in Zagreb, where all the representatives of the Councils for the Defense of Human Rights of the republics, of the provinces of former Yugoslavia also came. There, we held lectures to give information about the events happening in Kosovo, that was part of my job.

Here some Croatian personalities of the time participated too, it was the Croatia of those who held power, they were the party of Tudjman that held power, he was a friend who worked to support us also during the war, this was a job for someone else, not ours, we did not open a front against Serbia until the appearance of the Kosovo Liberation Army. With the appearance of the Kosovo Liberation Army, we [the Council] had a link with this army, for example our vice president was also an army general, but he was legal, Shaban Shala, now he is dead, this was during the war.

An activity of ours that was very important during the war was the meeting in Sarajevo with the Councils for the Defense of Human Rights of the republics and the provinces of that time, where we presented documentation, I had the documentation, but we also had a team of lawyers headed by Bajram Kelmendi,<sup>32</sup> whom Milošević liquidated on the first night of the bombing, together with his wife, the late

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<sup>32</sup> Bajram Kelmendi (1947-1999) was an Albanian lawyer and human rights activist, he was assassinated by Serbian police on the first day of the NATO bombing together with his two sons, Kastriot and Kushtrim.

Nekibe Kelmendi, who after the war was also Minister of Justice, a very active, patriotic family, which gave much during the war. Naturally, as an officer of the Council, I too was involved all the time in this activity.

I also told you about our international activity, where we in the Council were led by Mazowiecki who was the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, they were informed about what was happening in Kosovo. This information was important because it sensitized European and the world public opinion, and especially the opinion of the United States and they followed the situation because they saw that they were not subversive groups, but on one side there was a regular army and on the other intellectuals, leaders of political parties, but also activists for the defense of human rights. I am telling you this because at that time our Council was the main actor that informed the world about what was happening here, my personal activity was concentrated in this field.

We also published flyers, we published them in English naturally, English made us closer to the entire world and we published them with our name and last name and they could have caught us, because the flyers spoke against them, they could not send us directly to court because our Council was also a member of the Paris-based International Federation for the Defense of Human Rights, that was an international federation, we were not members of the Helsinki Committee, because at the time the European Union asked us to become members of the Helsinki Committee of Serbia, we did not accept that, but we found support in France, also, I tell you the truth, we were the factor that made us [Albanians] closer to the West, also to England and America and also France that constantly supported Serbia. It was the first time in this last war that we became allied with the United States, France and Germany.

Beside this, we also tried during the war, in 1998 - I consider the war of 1998, not just the time of bombing - to meet representatives of the government of Serbia to inform Serbia of the decisions taken by the the Parliament of Kosovo for the rights of Kosovo as a federal entity like Serbia, like Montenegro, like Croatia, Slovenia, we kept trying but we could not reach any agreement in this meeting. In this meeting with the representatives of Serbia, on behalf of Kosovo there were: our delegation, a delegation of the Council; a delegation of the Democratic League; and a delegation of the UDJ,<sup>33</sup> which was the party of Veton Surroi. The leader of the Serbian delegation was Tomislav Nikolić.<sup>34</sup>

It very interesting that at that time Tomislav Nikolić was with the party of Šešelj,<sup>35</sup> while the head of our delegation was the late Bajram Kelmendi who was killed after the war, and Pajazit Nushi, there was the late Fehmi Agani,<sup>36</sup> Fehmi Agani spoke. There the vice president of the Serbian government also spoke, he

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<sup>33</sup> Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, party founded in 1990 and led by writer and journalist Veton Surroi.

<sup>34</sup> A long-time member of the Serbian Radical Party, Nikolić founded the Progressive Party in 2008, taking a decisively pro-European stance. He is the President of Serbia since 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Vojislav šešelj is the founder of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party, in 2003 surrendered to the International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia, where he has been indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

<sup>36</sup> Agani (1932-1999) was a philosopher, sociologist and politician, one of the founders of the Democratic League of

was a law professor at the University of Belgrade, an expert of Constitutional law, I cannot remember his name. Keep in mind that we were confronted with the right of Serbia to decide the revocation of the autonomy, and Bajram Kelmendi was the respondent in that talk, because he was a strong jurist, but also a very good public speaker.

I participated in all these talks as editor-in-chief of the bulletin but also as translator from Albanian to Serbian and from Serbian to Albanian, because those among us, for example Fehmi Agani, who had studied in Belgrade, knew Serbian but in the talk with Tomislav Nikolić he spoke Albanian to show that Albanian was an official language, as he was speaking also his own language. So, in some way we tried to affirm our identity as Albanians and as members of a community which was equal to all other communities.

This was the time before the war, it was 1998, sometime in May 1998, after the events of Prekaz,<sup>37</sup> which fueled the whole situation, when about 200 thousand Albanians from different parts of Kosovo were expelled from their families, from their homes, they were in the mountains of Drenica, in the mountains of Dukagjini, they were in very bad conditions, when Kosovo was threatened by a humanitarian catastrophe, humanitarian catastrophe means death from hatred, death from the cold, death from weapons, from killing, all that.

They followed us and we got to a situation when this President of the Committee of Human Rights comes, comes and visits this place where our families are sheltered. After this, there was a general mobilization, activists of the Council came here to my house and brought me the information they gathered from the field, I worked and I organized the material, translated it in Serbian, followed the situation, they all came to this window that you see here, for example Linka came, this one who now is an Ambassador, Mimoza Ahmeti, came and others, naturally women came because they were less noticeable.

In March 1999, a little before the bombing, an officer of the CIA who knew me came, we knew him, and asked me to meet with Adem Demaçi as representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army and with Fehmi Agani as representative of the Democratic League, not with Ibrahim Rugova because Ibrahim Rugova was in his house and did not want to get out because of course he under surveillance, they knew Fehim Agani but it was a little different. And they met her in this room one time, another time, after talking with Adem Demaçi they told us, now take care of yourselves, leave here that the war will break out, the bombing will start too in two-three days, I cannot say now whether it was only after two-three days, but we knew that there will be an intervention.

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Kosovo. He was assassinated by Serbian troops as he attempted to flee Pristina disguised as a woman to avoid detection.

<sup>37</sup> In March 1998 Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marks the beginning of the war.

Perhaps it is easy for you, because you were young, but we knew that it was happening, that he told us to leave, but we did not leave. The boy who was in the house [my son] did not want to get away and leave us alone, we begged him to go because we were at risk because we were known. The police took me after this happened, but it is interesting, I don't know whether I told you that the police came and took me because of weapons, I did not have any weapon, I only showed my pen, "This is my weapon, I write with this, please come in, I have much material."

I could not hide the material because they knew that news and information came from here, I could not hide it, this I told you, at the time of the war we hid from fear that we would disappear, because people left, because otherwise we did not hide, the police took me and kept me for two hours, this is the truth, they did not lay hands on me, they only forced me to bring the weapons that I did not have anyway, I did not have them, everyone told them, they said that we did not have any, but after they brought them, I mean, they brought them when we were tortured, this could have happened to you too.

It didn't find me because I was known that I was from the Council and so on. And from the Council otherwise remember, Shaban Shala was imprisoned and he was kept in prison and beaten and he did not say anything, they asked him what were we doing, but he did not say what we were doing, he said you have the documents. They took Xhavit Haziri<sup>38</sup> and he was not known, he disappeared, and he was in the staff of the Council but he was not taken for the work in the Council, he was taken for his own work, he had been an activist of those political organizations inside and outside Yugoslavia. When he was freed from jail he came to us like everybody else came, he was with us in the Council, but I think Jakup Krasniqi who is known today, he was a member of the Council.

There were also all the others whom we don't remember, but among the members of the Council those who were liquidated were all our collaborators, the collaborators who provided information from the field, for example they took and imprisoned this one from Ferizaj and beat him and threw him out the second or third floor of the police station, they dropped him to the ground and they said he killed himself, he committed suicide, but there was no suicide and they lied. There was this Topalli, now, he was candidate for mayor of Ferizaj, he survived, this Topalli. I can't remember, others were also killed, now, they were killed more as collaborators in the field than members of the Council, because the members of the Council had some international protection, later maybe them too [were killed], but they could not at that time, they killed Bajram Kelmendi, but they killed Bajram Kelmendi after the bombing began, during wartime, thus we survived.

In my street, 30 houses were burned, in this neighborhood, our house was spared, was spared because we stayed inside since they'll demolish it, here close to mine the house of one man quite simply was burned, he was a dentist, they burned his house because an international activist lived there, he rented it, after this we spent the wartime this way, and this is the truth.

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<sup>38</sup> Haziri was kidnapped and disappeared during the war.

I continued to work, I continued this activity until the end of 2005, we did not publish more than eight issues of this bulletin, because in the year 2004, when the events of Mitrovica happened,<sup>39</sup> you know what happened then, we had information, our information differed from the OSCE and the OSCE at that time was helping us a lot, they helped us also materially and when we came out and contradicted the OSCE, but we contradicted those who violate human rights, whoever they are, we dissolved the Council and today it exists because even today there are violations of human rights. We were a Council for the defense of human rights not only of Albanian, Serbs, but everyone, whoever was violated, but we gave help to those who asked us, because we have helped international organizations from 1997 and after, all this I am telling you, they asked us to pay, we have all been people expelled from the workplace, people with any pension we had.

Thus, now the Council lives with some projects, but they don't regularly come, while when they began to give us help, we had a monthly salary, and little by little that was how we could, it ended, it ended, it was a big mistake, but it seems to me that this mistake is mostly the internationals' fault because if we wrote a report as power at that time liked it, we would not be the Council. We did not defend ourselves, but defended those who were violated, and those who have power and force mostly violate human rights.

**Anita Prapashtica:** Tell us what your dreams were growing up.

**Vehap Shita:** Yes, like any young person, but the youth in my generation lived in a time of poverty and foreign occupation, we all dreamt to be free and when we played with pola, [editors could not identify the game/toy] we were sure that nobody could touch us. And we had dreams of freedom also when we cooked in the family, because the family was under this weigh of oppression, and the poverty it created, despite the fact that we had health, for example, my father had to emigrate and all that. However, the time of failure came, the time of going away, like dad after a while, when I was a child, he was an economic migrant, like we have today many Albanian immigrants all over the world. My dream was to visit my father in Albania, but also see Albania.

When I saw Albania which I wanted very much, because I had dreamt of it, and there was no flower, it was poor then, it was under another occupation, Albanians were killed by Albanians at that time, but an Albanian state existed. This Albanian state was attractive for us and we had the dream of uniting with it. One of our dreams was the unity with Albania, the removal of the borders.

I went to Albania the first time in my life when I was a third grade student in the gymnasium, that is, seventh grade. And we had a uniform, when I went with a uniform, that was a normal uniform, but it had a

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<sup>39</sup> In March 2004, riots broke in Kosovo following rumors that two Albanian children had been chased by Serbs into the river Ibar, where they drowned. While the only evidence alleging the attack was the testimony of a surviving boy, fear and resentment spread quickly, mobilizing thousands against Serbian individuals and property. A subsequent UN investigation, led by Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, recounts the events.

hat that looked a little like the Yugoslav soldiers' cap, only not the same color. When I arrived, as I entered the border they stopped me, they put a white plis<sup>40</sup> [on my head] and I have this photo, perhaps I have it somewhere. For fun it seems that it was good because I was young (laughs) and it fits well, when you wear civilian clothes. I wore civilian clothes, I did not wear tirq,<sup>41</sup> thus that it was the first experience of my encounter with Albania, this was near Zhur, in today's Vermice, where there was the border.

I remember that we passed the border also in 1971, now, with my wife and my daughter, my daughter was a student. My daughter got out of the car, because we had a car, we had one because the Albanian Ambassador had given me the visa. I went, now I am talking about 1971, now I was going as a member of the official delegation, but went, and they gave a visa also to my wife and my daughter who was a student. She leaves the car and kneels and kisses the Albanian soil, it was not just my generation but also your generation, my daughter at the time was 20, a student at the University of Belgrade, Medical school, it was something else. I had seen women with all those clothes, all that stuff, workers who worked in the field, workers in the factories, they went to work, unlike us, who had to go to find work somewhere else because there was no place here (laughs).

I did not have the dreams that today young people have, for example to have a beautiful woman with whom go to stroll and have a life, I did not have that at that time, because I did not have time to think about that. First, I didn't have internet when we were all kids, there were no girls. In the evening, when we were together, we had a musical band formed by the first grade students up to eight grade, there were also older people. And the musical band played tango, foxtrot and all that and we danced boy with boy, there were no girls. To go out, we were Muslim earlier on, but Albanians, Bosnians, Macedonians, but also they did not apply to us.

Some of the grownups had a chance also to have a girl, because they were very beautiful boys. For example, there was Hajdar Xhema, mature, beautiful, all the girls around the dorms looked at him, however they were all domestic help, there wasn't a woman owner, they were workers. However although they did not have anything as women, first, the majority of those women who worked as domestic help were educated. There was a school called, "School for girls who were domestic help," so there was the case to dream also about girls of my age, but I did not do that because I went to Pristina (laughs) as a seventh grader, there was another environment.

However, there was always the nostalgia for the motherland. I also spoke about that time before, I had a good friend, I had a very good friend, together with the anti-fascist youth he wanted me to go with them, not with others, because the others were Serbs. And my father at that time was a tailor, he recited Spring Flowers by Naim Frashëri, I did not know who Naim Frashëri was. Because I was educated in Serbian, I had a link with Albanian through my parents, and also the hoxha. How through the hoxha? I learned from

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<sup>40</sup> Traditional Albanian white felt cap

<sup>41</sup> Tight-fitting embroidered white flannel breeches with decorative braids at the bottom of the legs and on the pockets, traditional Albanian wear.

all the religious rites from the hoxha, I learned for example Elhamdulillah,<sup>42</sup> however, the hoxha explained that in Albanian to change the teaching of all schools which was in Serbian. Then I began to learn Albanian from my father, my mother and the hoxha.

I was still a student in '41 when one part of Kosovo and my place, Gjakova, where united [with Albania] and professors arrived from Albania. Now, the nostalgia for Albania increased because we heard lessons also on Fishta<sup>43</sup> and Fan Noli, and Naim Frashëri and all that opened the horizon of knowledge and nostalgia, the nostalgia in particular was fueled by new elements.

These kids that arrived from Albania, those who had been to Albania and were in Kosovo under Serbia are educated to come back to Kosovo, to return and work close to their families. However, they are educated also with this Communist ideas as they say now, but they had been not only Communist, they were liberators and they started the war for freedom and for independence and also for social rights. Why social rights? Because Albania was a feudal place, but small feudal, there were no large properties in Albania, only small, but there were feudal relationships, the peasants were oppressed by the Aga, Bey and all those who were rich. These workers, like in all the world, became Albanian Communists, they began to propagate communist ideas among us.

We didn't immediately share those ideas, we had studied in the time of old Yugoslavia, because we did not call that a priority. Priority for us was to free ourselves from Serbs and unite with Albania, this was a piece of my dreams that naturally I also had as a kid. The phase also passed as we started to take part in the war, we went to the gymnasium, here to the Albanian gymnasium and we also had women in the Albanian gymnasium (laughs). Also keep in mind I got my wife in the gymnasium but lived with her as married people from 1946, 70 years ago. Plus there are two years before we knew like that, plus there is a year during which we approached each other, because I did not want to marry at that time.

I had the dream to go to school and by chance when WWII ended, this Fadil Xoxha who was the general commander, and I at that time had been released from the fascist camp, not a nazi camp, I am telling you, they called me to the state, I went to work, they called me to Albania, I got closer to Albania, now I wanted to live with Albania all the time, the time arrived when I went to the faculty and what happened, happened; later I did not have much time for dreams.

And later when I fell in the dreams that I realized very fast, I married also without completing my studies, I got a wife, then a girl, she was 16, 17, married at 17, was a mother at 18 (laughs). So, I didn't have dreams of youth like you have them, but they left their impression.

**Anita Prapashtica:** What do you consider your bigger dream?

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<sup>42</sup>Arabic, Alhamdulillah: All Praise and Thanks to God, common Arabic sentence, but especially among Muslims.

<sup>43</sup> Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero.

**Vehap Shita:** I consider that the family is the cradle of society. In my family I have achieved the top of that I wanted, I married when it was time, I had a son when it was time, I had a daughter when it was time, another son when it was time, a daughter who took a very difficult direction of studies, not the economy, because I worked, and I created the condition for a normal life. She studied in Belgrade, at that time when she was a student I was in big trouble here, political trouble which put me in conflict with the regime which was in power and this conflict was before my daughter was born.

So, my wife was pregnant, she was a pregnant wife without being eighteen years old. And look, at that time, I came to a very difficult situation, after which I also went to jail but managed to send my daughter to school, to become a doctor, to become professor. The second son finished school as an electrical engineer, the other became an artist, married and had a family. My family life was completely good, I don't have anything to worry. And my grandchildren are good, one granddaughter is a prosecutor in Cleveland, in the state of Ohio. Another granddaughter is a lawyer in New York, another one is a psychologist [and lives] near NY. One boy is engineer in Texas, one grandson studies in Texas, one granddaughter finished here in Pristina and finished in Pristina and finished here in AUK, the American University of Pristina, everything is fine.

I reached the top with my family. Outside the family I managed to create a name, this is the truth, politics hurt me in my intellectual development. Why? Because confronting the state took a lot of my time. But I also told you that before that I was in jail at the time of Italy, at the time of Germany, and at the time of the partisans and like I was only a student and all that did not have to happen to a student, but during all that time I managed to work and made a respected name for myself.

For example, one day I was in Plavë,<sup>44</sup> and was giving some speech there. Afterwards people knew me, people knew who I was. So, there is nothing better than someone remembers me, someone respects me and respects me well, not to say this man survived three regimes, three wars and reached what he reached. On the other side, I managed to write my original book in Albanian, but I did not limit myself to literature. For example, I published a book by Hasan Mekuli, which did not have the courage to publish his book, he was the President of the League of Writers and did not have his own book. I told him on one occasion, "Hey Hasan, I have three books about your work and you don't have one." "Yes, I cannot." After Hasan died, I edited a book, *The Albanian Novel* by Hasan Mekuli. I took everything he wrote about the novel, because he was a critic like me, he was a literary critic, I was a literary critic, but also a theatre critic, a theatre and film critic. He concentrated on literature, but world literature, he followed and studied world literature.

I studied Albanian language and literature, he did world literature and was influenced by Slavic literature and followed Russian literature a lot. Russian literature is very rich, it is as rich as it is involving, you must study it, you must work a lot. And I read Russian literature, Tolstoy. I translated *Lëndina e Lavrume*, which I had studied, and I remember it was interesting, I translated *Lëndina e Lavrume* by hand, I wrote it by

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<sup>44</sup> Locality in Montenegro with a large Albanian population.

hand, I did not know how to use the typewriter, because there was no computer.

**Anita Prapashtica:** What do you consider in general the greatest achievement of your life?

**Vehap Shita:** This work for human rights and the activities for the national cause damaged my professional life, because I began to write when I was a student, and I did it in a critical way, the writing that we did during class, during language class, I did it usually as sort of criticisms. I reached some results in this work, because I was committed to reach something more than what I had achieved. Thus, I put my mental and intellectual energy in some parts, so I can't say that I've achieved the most.

Maybe the greatest work that I have done is that I managed to lay the basis for covering artistic performance, the theatre in the first place, later also film and literature. I achieved more in the field of literature, because I published in total two books, a total of 400 pages, but I could have done more. Why could I have done more? I could have done more because I studied literature, I studied literature so that they said something, that they honored me as a writer, but I also studied our rich literature. In the field of literature, I published *Gjurmëve të letërsisë* [Traces of Literature], perhaps I did also one, two [editions] I published *Gjurmëve të letërsisë* twice, it sold, it is out of print, now you cannot find it. I have only two three copies here.

So, in the field of theatre I also did two books on film, in the field of literature I did many translations from world literature into Albanian. This is the truth, I did all the novels from Serbian and Yugoslav literature. I did stories, I did essays, usually I made a sort of selection of the works that could have been of interest for the Albanian audience, especially if associated with us as people and as a nation. Do you know who Krleža<sup>45</sup> was? Miroslav Krleža was a contemporary writer, of course, he is dead now, at 80 and some years, he died some years ago. He wrote good things about Albanians, for example he wrote about the killing of 200 Albanians in 1944, he was a soldier of the Yugoslav monarchy and wrote, "How can the Yugoslav government, the Yugoslav state, kill its own soldiers?" They were Albanians, but they were Yugoslav soldiers, they must have been killed in their barracks, he wrote about many things.

On the other side, he was a world-renowned writer, he was translated in some languages, I translate his novels, I translated also *Ciklin e glebajve* [Glembay Cycle] which is a family destroyed by the conditions of petite bourgeoisie, when the petite bourgeoisie wants to become bourgeoisie and there is no money, there is no support from any inheritance, I think, there is no economic support, no intellectual support. It presented in very interesting way a life in transition that was interesting for us. On the other side, it is his best work, I chose the main works of Croatian literature that at the time was called Yugoslav literature.

I translated from Serbian literature the novel *Prijatelji* [Friends] by [Slobodan] Selenić, where an Albanian who goes to work as doorman in Belgrade and cleans the house of the wealthy there, puts coal, cuts wood and become engineer in Belgrade. He wants to represent the biological, intellectual power of the Albanian, who has come as simple worker and ends up as an engineer, not any engineer, but a civil

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<sup>45</sup> Leading Croatian writer (1893-1981).

engineer. But keep this in mind, there is this Albanian who arrives as simple worker and puts coal in this chimney, owned by the Serbian petit bourgeois in the novel. He achieves so much, while this Serb is a lazy man, he reads the newspaper, at the time there was no TV, and he is a bluff of a man and he compares him with the Albanian, who achieves a lot without means, his fate interested me much, and [the book] is called Friends because they become friends.

As they become friends, it happens that this Serb develops a love for this worker, a homosexual love. Nothing more serious happens, but it is shown, he shows that he is the love of his life, he does not love him only physically, but he sees this young boy who achieved all that, and with this he shows the power that exists in people. Look, this has a little deeper origin, because only Albanians who are the descendants of Illyrians did not disappear, but also other people lived here. The Germans too came, the Italians and the Goths, also the Slavs. The Slavs existed as power, the Albanians as autochthonous people, and you can see this in the novel Friends, those who become friends with the locals and have lived side by side. Something has grown from a simple worker who became an engineer, the other had education and had everything and lay in his bed.

Thus, this is one part of my work, but I have translated from world literature the History of Chinese Philosophy, The History of Indian Philosophy. I have translated Plato, I have translated Giordano Bruno. I translated Brecht, the German theatre, I have translated Russian Valleys, I translated Turgenev, I translated Dostoevsky. Look then, a range of many works in the field of translation, regardless of the interpretation of foreign works, but it was art, because you must go deeper into them to be able to interpret them and it was also art in our language. This is what I can call the climax of my work in this field.

In the field of literature, I succeeded in presenting our writers in Serbian language, in Croatian language, in Bosnian language, in Slavic language and also in other languages. I have followed the greatest work of our culture, of our literature, to begin with Ismail Kadare and Anton Pashku, Ali Podrimja, Azem Shkreli and others. But on this, for example, I published a collection of poems by Ali Podrimja called Një Zot e hetuan gjarprin [They Found a Snake in God], I published that in Serbian, it was not published in Albanian, it was published somewhere else. But They Found a Snake in God has a very deep meaning, God is the ruler, it was Tito. Also, They Found a Snake in God, because he was a snake to us, because all the other parts of Yugoslavia were independent and they took our independence, and whose fault was it? It was God's responsibility, but this word "God" is not a word for the divinity, but God as the individual who rules. So, I wrote about Ali Prodimja, a writer who died, I published a lexicon of Yugoslav writers.

The title *Pesnik pobuna i otpora*, translated in Albanian, means Poets of rebellion and resistance. Look, this was published by an editor who was a member of the Academy of Science in Serbia. You know that the Academy of Science is the cradle of Serbian nationalism and chauvinism and they published it, but I had them publish it because I did not tell them it was about Albanian rebellion, Albanian insurrections. But I talked to them about rebellion as a world phenomenon that exists also now, we had rebels, but positive rebels, not destructive rebels, yes, rebels who wanted to be spared from occupation, from oppression. Because of my efforts, as modest as they were, I managed to present to the Yugoslav

audience 15 works in Serbo-Croatian, and beyond that also in other languages. And here I was not alone, this was more difficult. Why? I did this work also with Esad Mekuli, now, we took also some young [collaborators] such as Ismail Smaka, who translated it in Serbian.

I am talking only about success as if nobody came after me, as if it ended with me, it is not right. Thus it was in the field of theatre, but keep in mind the theatre, because I wrote about the theatre once, also they asked me to write, but I could not because I did not have the time. I did other work, it was good that I did a thing here, a thing there and things aren't finished. On the other side, now, there are young people who work, there are some young names I did not mention and someone may be upset, there are especially some young people, although when I wrote, I said, "Ah! This was written." Now these young people must favor me more than those who still work.

In my life I succeeded in recording everything, every violation that was done to our nation, from 1990 until 2005, whatever was done, whether it was done by the Germans, the Italians, the Serbs, the Croats or the Albanians, I mean many. I think that the world will be governed when the borders are eliminated but not human rights. But this is a utopia which I did not manage to achieve, and I believe you will not achieve (laughs) because of the interests that exist.

**Anita Prapashtica:** Do you consider your political approach or political activity as an achievement?

**Vehap Shita:** I have talked about politics earlier, but I can tell you now, one of our writers that perhaps you know, Faik Konica, said, "Oh God! Save Albania from the Albanians, because we can defend ourselves from the enemy." Kosovo is like what you call a good girl {addresses the present}. It is not the Kosovo that we dreamt of, but it is a free Kosovo, it is true that Kosovo in the end succeeded and his independence was supported by today's Great Powers that rule the world, not just us. So, this is a very big victory but Kosovo as a state is not what I dreamt of, or what those who came before us dreamt of. Why? I follow history a bit, and I have translated history, but I see that the situation is the same as the one that Faik Konica was in, when he said, "We were saved from this enemy, now we must save ourselves from each other," unfortunately, as many Albanians are fighting with each other as many are confused because they don't know what they want.

In Kosovo we have some political parties which say they are all right-wing, they say we are all left-wing, they all say we are center. Now, I don't know how one can be right, center and left, that they are all also right and left and center, but each is out to get the leadership, to get power, to get the trust and the economic benefits, material benefits. And we, who fought once, a long time ago, we did not fight for this, even if we had such cases at that time, there was and there is change, principally economic change, among people. I will tell you an anecdote, the plumber came to fix this pipe, the faucet, and when I asked how much I should pay, he said, "Five euro." "What?" I said, "Five euro? He took 20." He said, "The value of the work is 20, but you are an educator and this 15 I give it as a contribution to education because you have a small salary."

Keep in mind this, that those who educate my children take a disproportionate salary in comparison with

mine, I make much more for the same work, and he makes much less. And we haven't saved either, I don't know when we will save, but this divergence brings us to a situation where people must fight for a morsel of bread. What should happen, what has happened to that group of our emigrants who have been locked in Hungary, this will happen to us until we come to our senses.

And I am telling you, because I know that I said this before, a group of Japanese experts came to Kosovo twenty years ago, they studied the economic, natural resources that Kosovo has, they told me that Kosovo has room for five million people. And Kosovo now had two millions and it does not have two and a half. And he said that this place has the possibility to feed, to grow on the basis of its resources and why? We have fertile terrain, we have water, Kosovo does not lack water, we are suffering from lack of water but because we have not fixed the water situation. Kosovo has seasons, seasons, there is also spring and summer, it has all the resources for living, Kosovo has a very rich land. We have been free for 12-13 years and we don't have a factory where we can give work to two three thousand people, because we are oriented to build houses, to build buildings, many buildings are empty today, because people rented at that time when we were many foreigners and few locals, and now there is a lot of room because we have built much and the foreigners have gone and [the buildings] have remained empty.

On the other side, we are in a situation in which we have not built anything, but I am telling you this for the reason that the situation is not better in Albania either, the Albania which we have dreamt of, and Albania today also is under supervision. Until when will we have somebody? When the partisans came, we came and entered, we were a few Albanian partisans who had participate, the command was in the hands of Serbs. I could not decide what I wanted, I had to wait and even today we have the same situation. Today also Albania is under foreign supervision, we don't have only EULEX and UNMIK and they have the OSCE and why? Because we don't know how to make agreements. Looking at this situation, we, in Kosovo, haven't taken off Serbia's hat. Maybe I told you a little earlier that we practically are still in Serbia, how? We are in Serbia because [UN Resolution] 1244 left us under Serbia, we also have not broken from the conference of London of 1913, today we are in the situation in which the 1913 London Conference left us.

We must work, decide for ourselves on Kosovo and unite with Albania if we like. We can exist like other states with two or three nations, for example Germans have Austria and also have Germany, they have Switzerland. One piece of Switzerland is German, one piece is French, one piece is Italian, they can coexist. We have two Koreas, we have two Macedonia, one Macedonia is the one that is here, one is in Greece, Greece does not accept Macedonia because Macedonia is Northern Greece. So, they can exist but can exist on the basis of human rights. If you like human rights in your state as a person but also as a nation, as a municipal community, as the community of a district, the community of a county, the community of a province, the community of a state and as an international subject, it is not important who has what, but that the majority has what the minority has. For example, the official language of France is French but there are Arabs, Algerians, Germans. In Germany, German is the official language but there are also French and Poles, we also can exist but the official language must be the local language. Then when we reach this, I am saying this is good, but to be like this we need to have a good basis. The

basis is what we created on June 12 1999.

From June 12 1999 we have been free to create a better Kosovo, we could not and the responsibility is ours, to tell you the truth. But unfortunately, we are not the only ones to share this responsibility, there is also Albania because also Albania did not work very well. Thus, Oh God, save Albania from the Albanians that from the enemy I can save myself, because when it comes to take the gun we know how to take the gun (laughs).

One of the first books that I published in Albanian is called *Skena Shqipe* [Albanian Scene], it is a review of the regional popular theatre as we called at the time. The book was published in 1964 but contains only performances of Albanian authors. The second book about the theatre is *Kur ndizen dritat* [When the Lights are Turned On], on plays of Albanian drama and popular regional theatre of Kosovo or National Theatre, as it is called now; it contains critical reviews of the theatre but also of other writers, not only Albanian writers, but also world writers, whether Yugoslav, where from other parts of the world. This book was translated in Serbian, was published in 1977, so rather a long time ago. And I list as an important book *Shkëndijat e para* [The First Sparks], which I have prepared together with Zekero Rexhon and Mehmet Gjivori, which contains writings of Kosovo writers published until 1956.

Later I have published my book *Gjuha dhe letërsia* [Language and Literature], which has been republished with the same content and the same title, but was republished a little later and this is an original work. I have prepared also another book, the third book of *Gjuha dhe letërsia*, but I did not publish it because it was during the war. Truly before the war of the '90s, when I began to do other work and not only work of literature, meanwhile I also continued to translate, I have translated rather a lot, but in the 1980-90s I also prepared the book *Chrestomathy*,<sup>46</sup> which I have translated in today's language and have published all. I mention all because this book was published in Albania but with some censored pieces, because the Albanian regime at the time censored anything that seemed too religious, but Albanians were religious, not only the Christians.

And in 1980s I have re-sang and transcribed the Psalms of David, from *Djata e Vjetër* translated by Kristoforidhi,<sup>47</sup> and I presented on one side the original of Kristoforidhi and on the other the transcript and the translation of Kristoforidhi, and in the end I re-sang the Psalms of David because the Psalms of David were written in original, they are poetry and Kristoforidhi made them into prose, we can list the Psalms among the first original artistic literary prose in Albanian language. This is a piece of original work, I also said before that I have done much translation and have many works translated from Serbian,

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<sup>46</sup> *Kristomaci*, handbook of poetry and songs written by Gjerasim Qiriaz, late nineteenth century Protestant educator, who established the first Albanian schools with his sisters.

<sup>47</sup> Born Kostandin Nelko (1826-1895), an Albanian scholar and translator who translated the New Testament in the Gheg language first, in Tosk later. He taught Albanian to famous German Albanologist Johann von Hahn and collaborated with him on writing the first German-Albanian dictionary.

Yugoslav and world literature.

Now I am listing some titles from world literature and culture, for example you have The History of Chinese Philosophy, published in Albanian language by Rilindja and translated by me, you have the History of Indian Philosophy, you have a very interesting book by Immanuel Kant, Mbi të bukuren e të madhërishmën [On the Beautiful and Sublime], you have Giordano Bruno, Optimizmi i mendimit të lirë [Optimism of Free Thought], you have Filozofinë e marksizmit [Philosophy of Marxism] by Gajo Petrović, Gajo Petrović is a Croat even though he has a Serbian name. From the literature of Albanians who wrote in Croatian I have translated Uria në lëndinë [Hunger in the Valleys], a novel by Augustin Stipcević. I have a set of works from Yugoslav literature, I have also translated novels by Miroslav Krleža.

From Yugoslav literature I have also a novel by Slobodan Selenić which is very interesting because the subject is an Albanian worker, who goes as simple worker, who cuts woods and puts coal in the basement and end up as a civil engineer and as a friend of the family in which he works as servant. This novel interested me much because it was very well written by Slobodan Selenić who is a good Serbian writer, a good writer who as an individual did not interest me much, but he showed the mental intellectual power of an Albanian who from being a simple worker comes to settle down, forms a family, forms his character.

I have a novel by Mirko Kovacić, this is a Serb who grew up and worked in Croatia, a big friend of Albanians who at the time of the great tensions between Albanians and Serbs took our side. I also have Kronikën e traunikut [Bosnian Chronicle] by Ivo Andrić, I told you also before I translated Kroniken e traunikut because it is beautiful literature and for this Ivo Andrić won the Nobel Prize for Literature. It is written very well, unfortunately it was revealed that Ivo Andrić, as an officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, had a program, a project to share Albania between Serbia, or Yugoslavia at the time, and Greece and Italy, and there he failed as a man, but as literary man he has managed to win also the Nobel Prize for literature. I told you enough before about Miroslav Krleža. I have very beautiful essays by Miroslav Krleža, where he wrote of the brutal goal of terrorists, state terrorism against Albanians, of the execution of 300 Albanian soldiers of the Yugoslav government when Yugoslavia killed its own soldiers because they were, they were Yugoslav citizens, but of Albanian origin. Later, they were killed only because they were Albanian, it was a racist policy, Serbian power killed to achieve the right of occupying Kosovo's territory and expel Albanians from Kosovo, and this is one very good document which confirms what Dimitrije Tuković said ten years ago with the well-known work Srbija i Arbanija [Serbia and Albania], where he wrote the Albanian golgota via the Serbian golgota. But I continued working also with the translation of Albanian [writers] in Serbian language, as I have said in my biography, in addition to 40 books of translation in Albanian language I have translated about 15 in Serbian, among them I chose those that I thought were better and especially those which could present the common Albanian literature written in Kosovo but also in Albania. From Albanian I translated Kështjella [The Castle] by Ismail Kadare, Kronikë në gur [Chronicle in Stone] by Ismail Kadare and Dimrin e madh [The Great Winter] by Ismail Kadare.

From Albanian literature, together with Rexhep Qosja, I have edited the book Gjurmët [Traces], an anthology of prose from Kosovo, where we presented Albanian writers of Kosovo with a very good

introduction by Rexhep Qosja and with my translation, translation in Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, and the Bosnian variant because as you know Serbian has some variants. Here there are the stories of Hivzi Syleiman, Ramiz Kelmendi, Anton Pashku, Azem Shkreli, Rexha Surroi, Mensur Raifi, Teki Dervishim and Jusuf Gurxhovi. These are some among the stories that we, as editors of this anthology, selected. By Anton Pashku... we published also stories that I have called very good for that time, fantastic stories, Nën qarr po rrinte vasha [The girl sitting under wood], Ura [Bridge], Floçka [The Water Nymph] etc. etc. it is interesting that I translated the novel Oh by Anton Pashku which was not published in Serbian, but I translated it and left it translated.

In the '80s, toward the end of the '80s, in the '90s, I have done enough monographic work, wanting to show the identity of some figures of the national liberation movement and the nationalist movement, but all participating in this liberation war from Serbia or then Yugoslavia. In this context, I published a monographic book on Zekerije Rexha, a patriot, a humanist, an intellectual and persuasive. I published a book about Emin Duraku, Qëndresa për çlirim e bashkim kombëtar vizion lufte e flijimi, shënime memorialë [Resistance for National Liberation and Unity, Vision, War and Sacrifice, a Memorial]. I prepared for publication the book, Fadil Hoxha një jetë në shërbim të atdheut [Fadil Hoxha, a Life in the Service of the Country].

I published a book together with Halit Shabani, because Shabani of Beci is a bright figure of Albanian nationalism, he was an old fighter before WWII who was a kaçak [outlaw] in the mountain, he fought against the Ottoman Empire, he was as a kaçak and fought against the First Serbia, against the Second Serbia, and he fell fighting against the Third Serbia, therefore in the end of WWII. I wrote about Qel Shabani, I worked on it with his grandson, I did not know who was Qel Shabani until I left the Nazi camp and slept one night in his house and he was a nationalist, a member of the Second League of Prizren, a fighter on the Montenegrin front for the defense of the ethnic border of then Albania, Albania of '41-44.

For the Association of Veterans I did the book, Krah i luftës, Vetëvendosje e shtetësi Kosovës [A Side of War, Self-Determination and Statehood of Kosovo]. Why? Because in 1990-2012 the ex-fighters of the LRQ confronted each other, took the side of the movement for the liberation of Kosovo, whether the side of the peaceful movement led by the Democratic League with Ibrahim Rugova as its head, whether the Kosovo Liberation Army led by Adem Jashari, these were protests that the National Liberators, the antifascist in Kosovo, did and supported the movement for the liberation of Kosovo with the Security Council of the United Nations, the European Union, and all the European public opinion and the United States. They supported [the movement for the liberation of Kosovo] in the documents that were issued during the war, one of those documents is called Resolution of Bujan.<sup>48</sup> The participants in the conference [of Bujan] were from all the nations and in the presence of an English military mission, they issued a resolution in which the right of self-determination until the breakaway or separation from Yugoslavia, the

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<sup>48</sup> The Conference of Bujan (31 December 1943 – 1-2 January 1944) was a meeting of Yugoslav partisans in which a resolution was passed that promised to let the people of Kosovo decide democratically whether they wished to be part of Albania or of Yugoslavia after the war.

separation from Serbia and the unification with Albania, was recognized to the Albanians of Kosovo.

During this period about which I am talking, I had the pleasure to work with friends, colleagues who have done work whether for the Academy of Science or Rilindja, or the Faculty of Philosophy, or other political institutions. I mentioned for example the book of Mark Krasniqi *Kujtime e përjetime* [Memories and Experiences], I did this work as reader and editor, I helped him as much as I knew and as much as I could, because he was well known and I worked on a book which is rather big, it has 600-700 pages. I also helped Pajazit Nushi with his book *Psikologjia e përgjithshme* [General Psychology], but not only here, I helped him also for the book *Kujtesa* [Memory] and for his work also on the thought of Freud, because he was a psychologist and connected with the library of psychology that prepared the book in Albanian and I could help him.

This is a book of selected poetry from *Divani i Shapsita Brezit* [Shapsita Brezi's Couch], translated by baba Qazim Bakalli of Gjakova, he is a Bektashi baba. My father was Bektashi and also because of my father I got this book in my hands but the translation was Qazim Bakalli's, who translated it in the dialect of Gjakova, I translated it in literary Albanian, anyway it is a very beautiful book with an oriental poetry translated from Persian. This Qazim Bakalli was a teacher and once a baba, but he was fluent in Persian, Arabic and Turkish. So [we received] an ancient culture from a simple man, a simple teacher who left his teaching behind and did not have any need to do this because he had become a Bektashi, and he died a Bektashi, but wanted to publish this book only after his death. I contacted the Association of Bektashi of Tirana and they published it on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the birth of this author, he was a Persian author, known in world literature, and UNESCO celebrated his anniversary.

With this story I'd end the interview, thank you for coming.

**Anita Prapashtica:** Thank you for the time you gave us.

**Vehap Shita:** With pleasure.