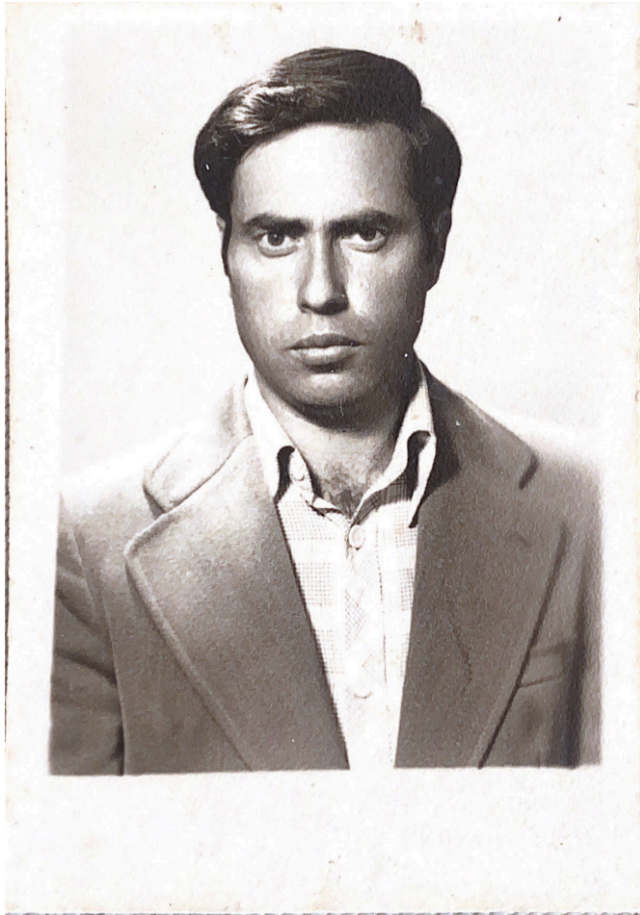


Islam Vuniqi

Proofreader and translator



In the photo: Islam Vuniqi
From the personal archive of Islam Vuniqi

My name is Islam Vuniqi. I was born on the 5th of May, 1943, in the village of Blinaja, in the municipality of Lipjan, and I've been living here in Prishtina since 1962. In 1960, I enrolled in the *Normale*¹ School, and in 1965, '66, I graduated from it, after that, I continued with Higher Education here in Prishtina. I became involved as a teacher and worked for eight years, and after those eight years, I joined *Rilindja*. A job opening for a proofreader-translator was announced at *Rilindja*'s printing house, and based on the announcement, I was accepted and started working on August 1, 1975.

¹ *Shkolla Normale* was a teacher training school in Kosovo that played a crucial role in educating Albanian-speaking teachers, contributing significantly to the development of the education system in the region.

When I started, it was the old *Rilindja*, the building, and while it was being built there, where the Press Palace is now. Just as they began to move and relocate there, I worked here for three months, but there was some moving here and there. When I went, around October or November of 1975, I settled there, and everything was wonderfully organized, and there was work, good workers, good colleagues, and good people, whom I will never forget in my life. But now, time has passed, and those are things of the past.

Rilindja was an exemplar, a university of today's era, *Rilindja* was a university. From the newspaper editorial office, since I worked in both the printing house and the newspaper editorial office, in the newspaper proofreading section. When I joined in 1975, the entire administration was in the Serbian language, all the official documentation was only in Serbian, however, from '75 onward, there was a revival of *Rilindja* [laughs], for the Kosovars. Together with my colleagues and coworkers, we managed to arrange all the documentation in the Albanian language, I did all the translations into Albanian until 1990, unfortunately, in 1990, the oppressive authorities returned, and it reverted to Serbian. To be honest, I felt it so deeply, a spiritual pain that I cannot describe. However, for the sake of existence, they would tell us, especially Professor Fehmi Agani, with whom I had very close contact, told me that I must not leave my job under any circumstances, so I did not leave. They dismissed me for about three months, but after that, I returned, and we continued under that system of oppressive authorities. But we never accepted a single document from Serbia, like being forced to recognize Serbia, we never accepted that. During this period, it's interesting to note that there was such a significant development, revival, and positive progress at *Rilindja* that it's indescribable.

People were educated there, as I mentioned earlier, *Rilindja* was like a university. There were journalists, writers, people from all kinds of professions, you could find them all there. It was a source of knowledge, from administration to education. However, fortunately, after the liberation, I started again in 1997, '98, even though we distanced a bit, but luckily, we returned after regaining freedom. I worked until 2008, and in 2008, I retired.

<<<Work scene in the Printing House>>>

My job was to check the book sheets, every book, every brochure, every form that was printed, I had to sign off to ensure that everything was linguistically correct. On the other side, the technical editing was done by Ali Govori, who managed the technical editing of the books, while I handled the proofreading and translations into Albanian, as I mentioned earlier. Not a single book or sheet was printed without my approval. As for the newspaper, it was managed by a separate department where the newspaper was printed under the Editorial Office's supervision. But I also worked a lot there, I would work in the printing house in the morning, and in the afternoon, I would go to *Rilindja*, at the newspaper. The typos seemed like they needed to be sifted through [laughs], like a sieve that lets things through, and we would correct them. The collective was exceptionally good there too, we had about eight or nine proofreaders.

Back then, there was also a great deal of responsibility, not a single error was allowed to appear in the newspaper or books. It was like sifting through everything [laughs], unlike now, where

things come out of computers, and no one checks whether there's an error or not, it was different then. We had a language editor to check for mistakes, for example, and everything was typed and printed. Then, when the documents arrived at the printing house, they were printed with lead, using manual machines that... were similar to calligraphic ones but with a different system, we called them *shpatulla* (galley), and we would read from them and compare to see if we had missed any mistakes, cleaning them up before they went to print. When the book sheet arrived, as I mentioned, it was already cleaned and filtered, and there were about six or seven departments in the printing house, starting from manual typesetting, typesetting, offset, bookbinding, chemigraphy, to the rotary press. The newspaper was printed on the rotary press, the daily newspaper, yes, that's it, *rotacion* it was called.

Each department had its own environment, well-supplied and with all the necessary facilities, there were never any issues, and they formed an excellent working-class community. However, times are changing.

Look, there were negatives, like censorship, back then, there was a law that prohibited you from making any political mistakes or from misusing materials as they are misused now, for example, things were more controlled, there was a law for that time. But now, what law, only those who experienced it understand. There were cases where, after a book was printed, it was prohibited from being released for political reasons. That was the biggest challenge because there was no misuse like today for example, we see what's being done. If there was any material misuse, it was immediately corrected and stopped. For example, I'll give you one example: there was a book, I think by an author from Ferizaj, but I forgot his name, called *Lulet në Ballakn* (Flowers in the Balkans), after it was published, it was banned by censorship. I still have that book in my library, I keep it to this day, but we used to hide them, in any way we could. We would put them in crates, among other items, and go around distributing them on buses and... we had people back then who worked with us.

The building, for example, had dedicated offices for the administration, you know, and the departments I mentioned each had their own space, well-equipped with all the necessities. They were all interconnected. There was plenty of space, and the printing house had everything you could ask for. I'll share one moment with you, though I can't remember the exact year, but professors from Albania's University and scholars started coming to the printing house, one of them, a well-known professor, [thinks] I can't recall his name at the moment, gave Agron Jakupi, the production manager, one or two kilograms of the national flag, which we put up here. He trusted me a lot, and he had gathered quite a bit, so he handed them over to me and said, "Distribute them." Back then, it was prohibited, but he said, "Distribute them." Oh, when I went out to the department and handed them out, they took them with so much joy [laughs], but we couldn't put them up immediately. Later, [thinks] around '85 or '86, I remember things started to improve, and we began collaborating more, they² would bring different kinds of books, and we distributed them to each other as per agreements, handing them over one by one.

However, it was really something, you know, we had trust in each other, and there was never any betrayal, like someone reporting or anything like that. I can't remember any instance of that,

² Refers to Albania

I don't know, maybe some people cooperated with others, but there weren't many problems here. People were genuinely interested in working, developing, and prospering, that was it. I'll share another story that just came to mind. I was working in the newspaper proofreading department, and the head of the department, Jusuf Humolli, had made an error, it was in the author's text, written by Mahmut Bakalli, and at that time [laughs], it was interesting, he wrote, "The border," saying, "At this time," referring to that era, "cannot be united with Albania," but the "s" with an apostrophe had fallen off, and it ended up reading, "The border can be united." Interestingly, Mahmut Bakalli was a very good person, really good.

I was with Enver Kelmendi, my colleague from Peja, working together, we went to the Grand Hotel, where Mahmut Bakalli was sitting in a corner, he waved at us, saying, "Come here." We approached, and he said, "Look, last night I wrote this article, it was printed," and he showed us the mistake, but he said, "There hasn't been any reaction, keep it," adding, "Do you have that document?" "Yes," we said. "Keep it safe, in case anyone reacts," he said, "someone will need to take responsibility." So he said, "If no one reacts, don't make any noise," Mahmut himself said. We went back, checked our documents, found it, and kept it for one, two, or three months, nothing happened, and we were safe. I just remembered this case, it's quite special, but overall, people were very aware, they got educated, progressed, worked, and earned a living.

There was also the Editorial Office of the Book Edition, which prepared the complete works of all writers, from Naim Frashëri and others, all their collections at that time, they prepared them, and we in the printing house printed them.

Even today, for example, I have them up in my library, all of them, they are truly like diamonds, like... There were also nights when the morning would catch us at the newspaper, and we wouldn't even notice. Honestly, years have passed, and now the building is just a structure, but my heart beats for it as I walk by. You spent your whole life there, and you had life, joy, good times, and, of course, difficulties too... and those things can't be forgotten. I remember them well, I don't forget them, then there are my friends, for example, those who are still alive, and when we meet at the retirees' café, sometimes we end up spending the whole morning there until it closes, losing the day in conversation, but there are only a few of us left now, very few.