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Master's Thesis

ALBANIAN COMMUNIST INFERNO THROUGH LITERATURE

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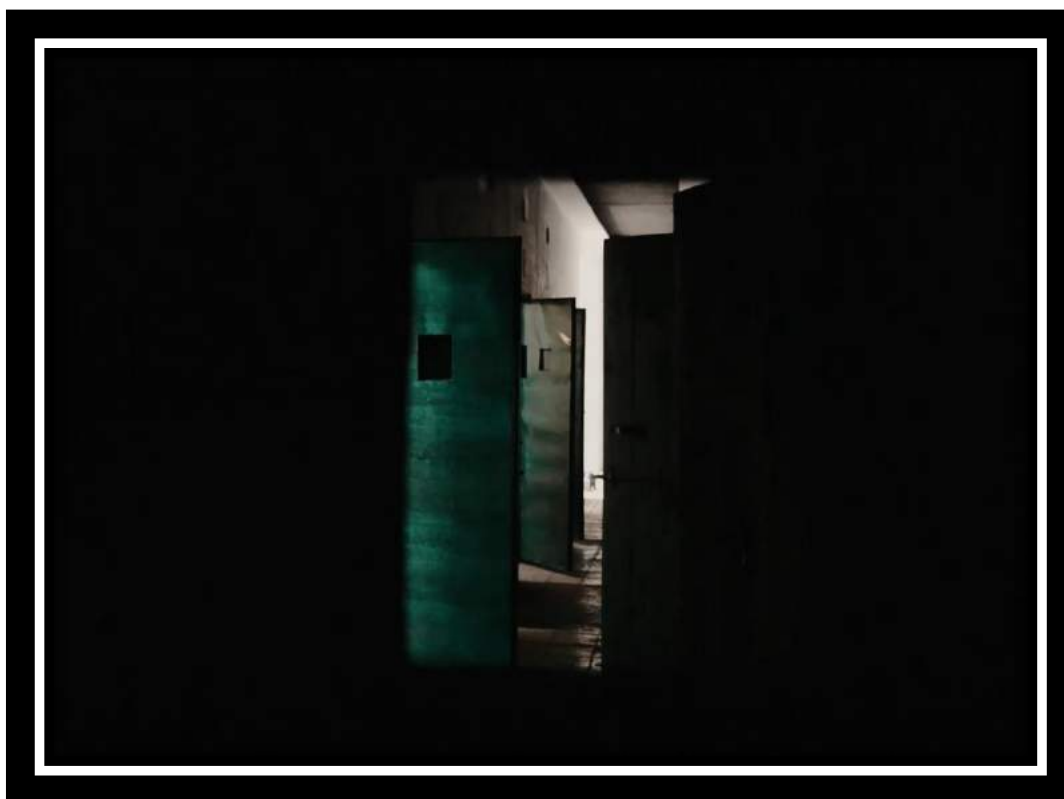


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Introduction

My thesis, “*Albanian Communist Inferno through Literature*,” aims to contribute to the scholarly debate on Albanian prison literature and literary memoirs during the communist regime and its aftermath in Albania as an exclusive testimony of Albanian communist repression. My interest focuses on answering how Albanian communist crimes are testified and represented in Albanian literature written within the prisons and forced labor camps, which is this literature’s role and status in Albanian literary historiography’s general panorama.

By evidencing and analyzing the literary texts preoccupied with the deprivation of freedom, terror, tortures, forced labor camps, internment, violation of human rights, trauma, deaths, and absurdity of the totalitarian regime in Albania, I aim to explore prison literature for its core values in the Albanian literary system, and secondly to introduce it to an international reader in the context of East European literatures under communism, since Albanian prison literature is still overlooked.

Additionally, I seek to open a literary debate that has been politically denied and disregarded for years, even on its basic ethics of memories in postcommunist Albania. Such debate would invite interested scholars to bring this literature to the proper academic attention by arguing and, when necessary, criticizing the limited and biased editions written thus far. Over three decades of transition (since the 90s), Albanian scholars (or Albanologists) have shown limited interest in studying prison literature or adequately establishing this literary genre in the Albanian literature system. This negligence has strongly contributed to the continuous underrepresentation of Albanian literature in the West; hence, it is even more challenging to introduce such a debate to an unfamiliar or misled audience by those very few scholars who have initiated a more superficial than a constructive debate on prison literature.

Furthermore, the lack of translations of many fundamental texts in foreign languages has reinforced the absence of scholarly debate. This absence is strongly related to the lack of interest from Albanian cultural state institutions to promote its culture abroad. For instance, Albanian studies are hardly part of any academic program in the West

The closing of Albanian borders for more than 45 years under the communist regime (1944-1991) revoked the right of Albanians to travel, emigrate, or to leave for exile and constituted by law the harshest sentence to whoever tried to cross the borders from the state's complete isolation. Moreover, the dictator Enver Hoxha controlled the media and banished free speech and human rights by imprisoning those who tried to speak up against Albanian communism. The outcomes of the regime and its propaganda made the process of documenting the history for the next generations extremely hard. In these circumstances of censorship, the 'underground' or prison literature became the most significant witness of these crimes, by documenting the history of Albanian communism; therefore, this literature is a firsthand archival work in enlightening the past.

Although the circumstance of writing in Albanian prison have been quite severe since writers were not allowed to write anything besides some letters to their families—as I will explain in more detail in the next chapter—however, a few texts are known to have been written exclusively within prisons and labor camps in Albania and managed to circulate out of prison cells. One of the most representative prison works is *Prison Book*¹ by Arshi Pipa, which is known so far as the first published book written in prison under communism in Albania. In this study, I argue that Arshi Pipa is the founder of Albanian prison literature, and simultaneously, his book is the most prominent work in this genre. Pipa, who spent ten years in prison, managed to escape Albania and published his manuscripts of prison time (1959) in exile two years later.

¹ Arshi Pipa, *Libri i Burgut*, Rome, 1959.

His prison book has been considered the Albanian Gulag Archipelago (cf. A. Logoreci). Other authors who have written in prison are Visar Zhiti, Fatos Lubonja, Havzi Nela, and some others. After the regime collapsed in 1991, various testimonies and memoirs were published by political prisoners and those who survived²—as the late Albanologist Robert Elsie states—one of the cruelest communist regimes in East Europe.

Regarding prison literature scholarship, some interesting works have been published so far. However, as I mentioned earlier, there are yet insufficient studies about this literature, or in some cases, they are contradictory. Therefore, there is an immediate need to deepen and elaborate studies on this literary genre to help understand one's country's martyrdom in the context of a totalitarian system.

In this study, through analytical and comparatist approaches to selected prison texts written by political prisoners, I try to show what these writings tell us about the regime and how they oppose propaganda and socialist realism. Collected data from the interrogation files of these authors—when the law allows because the files of the communist regime have not been opened yet officially—as facticity will help understand the creative process and circumstances under which these texts were written. Besides literature written in Albanian, I will also expand with other sentenced and then exiled authors who published their books in English, such as Gene X. Kortsha (*One Man's Journey to Freedom: Escape From Behind the Iron Curtain*, Joseph Karl Publishing, 2010), Nika Stajka (*The Last Days of Freedom*, Vantage Press, 1980); and with the specific case of the non-Albanian imprisoned author, the Italian Jesuit Giacomo Gardin, S.J. (*Banishing God in Albania*, Ignatius Press, 1988).

The thesis is divided into three chapters: **1. A Survey of Albanian Prison Literature Scholarship**, **2. Typology and Classification of Albanian Prison Literature**, **3. Representative**

² Fr. Zef Pllumi, Uran Kostreci, Fr. Simon Jubani, Uran Kalakulla, Fr. Konrad Gjolaj, Amik Kasaruho, Visar Zhiti, Luljeta Lleshanaku, Fatos Lubonja and so forth.

authors (Arshi Pipa, Havzi Nela, Fr. Zef Pllumi, and Visar Zhiti), Appendix: *Books' Excerpts, Poems, and Miscellaneous*. It is important to note that my thesis will be limited only to Albanian authors [besides the case of G. Gardin, S.J.], excluding the authors from Kosovo who wrote in the Albanian language and were subject to sentences under the former Yugoslavia. Despite the analogies with Albanian political prisoners' writers, the Albanian Kosovars writers experienced imprisonment in other specific circumstances caused by the oppression of former Yugoslavia. Therefore, these two kinds of literature differ regarding political systems. In the Albanian case, there was internal oppression, and Albanian communism had other characteristics different from communist Yugoslavia. In the communist typology, I would say that Albanian communism was closer to the Soviet Union's ideology, than the rest of the East European bloc. Enver Hoxha personally had a veneration for the Soviet leaders, and therefore he was very eager to apply Soviet (and especially Stalinist) ideologies and propaganda. I think that commencing a study on Albanian prison literature would help to contribute to and widen the literary work written under totalitarianism and, at the same time, recognize Albanian communist crimes worldwide, the persecution, and the resistance against the dictatorship.

A Survey of Albanian Prison Literature Scholarship

As I mentioned in the beginning, Albanian prison literature under communism has known a rudimentary tradition of scholarship due to several arguments related mainly to the Albanian political context. Thus, scholars and academic institutions lack interest in studying Albanian communism and its historical context; therefore, there is a huge gap in Albanian historiography. But there are even fewer studies on Albanian prison literature since Albania has not gone through decommunization yet since the end of communist rule. Nor have laws been implemented to outlaw the communist regime. For this reason, studying the past it is still a sensitive matter since there are cases of both victims and the aggressors are still alive, where the latter have never been set on trial for their actions under the regime. Most importantly, the theme of communism continues to be a despicable matter for the current government. Therefore, scholars are often subject to censure and criticism, and certainly, there is no funding approved to commit studies on this subject. However, some interesting scholarship has been published by scholars like Harold B. Segel, Bajram Kosumi, Myrvete Dreshaj-Baliu, Bahtije Gërbeshi-Zylfiu, and some articles of minor importance.

Generally, scholars treat the Albanian communist regime in comparison to other East European communist countries in the historical studies, yet, it is mainly incorporated as a secondary interest to contemplate the primary focus on different countries or as a supplementary case as the historian Oliver Schmitt argues: “*Communism in Albania is often viewed as a specific special case and thus as exotic among the communist regimes, or the*

country is neglected in comparative studies on communism.”³ A similar statement applies to the literature written during communism and the “negligence” of scholars to study prison literature, adding here the disinterest of the Albanian government itself in recognizing its past and supporting researchers. Many of the current government members who lead Albania have their roots tied deep in the former communist regime, where they (or their family members) have had immense contributions. The fact that secret police files have never been fully opened has caused a prolonged state transition, and certainly, state institutions have failed to recognize the suffering and the status of the victims or persecuted political prisoners, which is a concern that I have continually stressed in some of my articles⁴.

The failure of the state and academic institutions has also been emphasized by Schmitt, who argues that: “*Even though there are official departments for contemporary history, they*

³ Extracted from the Conference *Memory Days* held on February 19th, 2021, organized by Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture, Albania. Oliver Schmitt is a member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and a Professor of South-East European History at Vienna University, Austria. As the conference was mainly held in the Albanian language, the citations from Schmitt’s speech are translated from Albanian into English by me. Schmitt also adds that: “*The Albanian communism is relatively under-researched, not only compared to the Soviet Union and East and Central Europe, but also to Bulgaria or Romania. The number of fundamental monographs dealing with basic questions of Albania based on archival sources using modern methods and theories to treat Albanian communism, can easily be counted with the fingers of two hands*, *ibid*.”

⁴ See A. Kola “Giordano Bruno, mnemopoezia që aludon diktaturën dhe rezistencën intelektuale”, *International Symposium 100th Anniversary of Birth of Arshi Pipa*. <https://cla.umn.edu/french-italian/events/international-symposium-100th-anniversary-birth-arshi-pipa>, December 12, 2020.

Also, A. K. “Opposing the Ideology Through Literature and Language: The Case of Albanian Writers in Exile”, *Change, Conflict, and Dissent*, 18th Annual Graduate Student Conference, Graduate Organization for the Study of Europe and Central Asia (GOSECA) University of Pittsburgh, February 12-13th, 2021.

<https://ucisportfolios.pitt.edu/josephpatrick/wp-content/uploads/sites/394/2021/02/Change-Conflict-and-Dissent-Conference-Schedule.pdf>

*usually deal mainly with political issues that are seen as politically less dangerous, and for which exist some consensus.”*⁵

The insufficiency of the academic research on Albanian communism and simultaneously prison literature is a phenomenon that lies beyond the geographic borders of Albania mainly for two reasons: Albanian studies have rarely had a program of their own integrated into broader East European programs in the West, and secondly, as the result of the specifics of the Albanian language as a non-Slavic branch in the Indo-European language tree, which makes it even hard to place it into traditional Slavic Departments, Centers, or Institutes. Furthermore, the Albanian state’s institutions’ disinterest in studying the aftermaths of its communism converts into an official decline of support for researchers not only in Albania but also researchers overseas. Eventually, Western universities become disinterested since there are no funds and no support for such studies, neither financially nor academically. All these factors contribute to the underrepresentation of Albanian literature and the absence of scholarly debate on Albania’s communism in the international arena. Although some independent researchers have tried to speak about the past, they have faced harsh critiques “*aggressively formulated usually from communist nomenclature and their successors.*”⁶

However, some scholarship focuses on the country’s politics during the Hoxha regime and its aftermath, which can help to understand better the historical context where the prison literature developed, even though this scholarship has no direct connection or mention of these authors’ writings. *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe* (NYU Press, 2016) by Fred C. Abrahams argues the key points of Albania socio-political life, on the also-called pluralism, the Ponzi scheme, the civil war (1997) and Kosovo wartime, and students

⁵ O. Schmitt. *Ibid.* Ibidem.

⁶ O. Schmitt. *Ibid.* Ibidem.

protest in the early 90s, which empowered the new leadership under the name Democratic Party and the “rehabilitated” Albanian communists who changed the name of The Labor Party of Albania into Socialist Party. The country’s “democratization process” that Abrahams argues and the ruthless fate of a small country with no progress because of the corruption and dysfunctional law institutions once more lead to the understanding of the absence of scholarship regarding Albania under communism. The other monograph, *The Albanians: Europe’s Forgotten Survivors* by Anton Logoreci (Gollanzcs, 1977), inspects the struggle of Albanians under the regime in political, social, cultural aspects and emphasizes the need for studies and attention in a crucial time when the regime’s crimes were happening, but his work is *a vox clamantis in deserto* addressed to the United Nations and particularly to the *European Court of Human Rights* to bring to attention the situation of isolated Albania. Nevertheless, over 40 years from Logoreci’s book, little has changed regarding Albanian literature, especially that of prison, which remains (almost) unknown to the rest of the world.

Contemporary Albanian Literature by Arshi Pipa (East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1991), which includes two parts *Albanian Socialist Realism* and *Martin Camaj’s Poetry and Poetics*, argues the politicization of Albanian literature under the “official style” to glorify the communist ideology. Pipa proposes that Albanian socialist realism should be seen under the influence of the Soviet Union, but he claims that the attempts of the Albanian Bureau to “copy” the Soviet models produced a “*miserable result.*” Meanwhile, in the monograph dedicated to the exiled poet Martin Camaj, Pipa positioned Camaj as the opponent epitome of Albanian socialist realism. Interestingly, neither Pipa nor Camaj gained international recognition as exiled writers, despite their not insignificant oeuvre. Indeed, Albanian exiled writers have often been disregarded. For instance, in the meeting organized at the *Wheatland Conference on Literature in Vienna* (1987), which was focused on East European literature and exiled writers, and later edited by John Glad (1990) in the book

Literature in Exile, no exiled Albanian writers took part. The conference gathered writers in exile like J. Brodsky, Adam Zagajewsky, Jan Vladislav, Antonin Liehm, and others to discuss political, linguistic, literary issues and other juxtapositions with the East European émigré community. There is no evidence that Albanian writers in exile (Martin Camaj, Arshi Pipa, Isuf Luzaj, Miftar Spahija, etc.) were invited to this conference to share their experiences with their colleagues even though all three authors were academically involved in the Western universities. It is hard to say that their work had not sufficiently spread into literary circles because they had all been translated into several languages by then. Neither the fundamental voluminous edition of 865 pages by Martin Tucker⁷ focused on exile literature shows no evidence of Albanian exile writers that experienced a similar fate as other exilés.

Another distinguished book by Arshi Pipa is *Albanian Stalinism: Ideo-political Aspects* (East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1990), which focuses on the Stalinization process of Albania, and the adaptation of the Stalinist cult by Enver Hoxha. Pipa uses an analytical style to explain Hoxha's Stalinist views and emphasizes the absurdity of such a process.

Some other political and historical studies on Albanian communism are *Albanian and the Sino Soviet Rift* by William E. Griffith (MIT Press, 1963); *Albania and the Sino-Soviet conflict: Foreign Affairs* by Stavro Skendi (1962); *Socialist Albania since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments* by Peter Prifti (MIT Press, 1978) and so on. These are all important contributions to help understand Albanian communism by arguing the media's propaganda, the Sino-Soviet rift, how propaganda influences literature, the destalinization of the Soviet Union and how Hoxha received it, the broken relationship between Hoxha and Khrushchev, and Hoxha's disagreement with the "liberalization" of Khrushchev's political views, and so on. These facts

⁷ Martin Tucker (ed. by), *Literary Exile in the Twentieth Century: An analysis and Bibliographical Dictionary*, Greenwood Press: New York-Connecticut-London, 1985.

altogether help us to define the historical context in which prison literature was written. Moreover, it is worth noting that Albanian literature did not experience the “thaw” as other literature of the East European bloc did after Stalin’s death in 1953. The state’s harsh censure, banishment, and lack of liberalization explain why Albanian prison literature was published only in exile and after the 90s. Hoxha’s Stalinist rule had increased the vigilance and the persecution against the intelligentsia to the level that it is debatable even if there exists samizdat literature under Albanian communism since the chances to circulate texts within close groups—without being informed on to the state police (in some cases including family members), and for that reason being arrested or even worse executed as I will elaborate in another chapter—was close to zero.

Regarding the scholarship focused directly on prison literature and memoirs, a few studies have touched upon some prison literary texts and their authors. For instance, the scholar Sabri Hamiti has written a monograph about Fr. Zef Pllumi, the author of the book *Live to Tell*, a collection of his prison memoirs. Hamiti stresses in his book *At Zef Pllumi* [Fr. Zef Pllumi] (2018) that Pllumi has coined the “*literature of facticity*,” which I think is a relevant observation that defines Pllumi’s book. Nevertheless, Hamiti’s book mainly focuses on the scholarly work and activism of Pllumi as a Franciscan rather than Pllumi as a writer. Another contribution to Pllumi’s work has been published by E. Doçe and E. Halili⁸ who have co-authored an article focused on Pllumi’s life and religious activity. Just the same, the piece is limited to the moral and ethical aspects of Pllumi’s work rather than literary elements and (non)fictional narrative components or historical references. Father Zef Pllumi, who spent 27 years in prison during the communist regime, describes the historical context of the year 1944, the time when

⁸ Eljon Doçe & Erenestina Gjergji Halili. (March) 2021. “*Remembering the Albanian Communism: The Creation of the Collective Memory through the Lens of the Literature of Memory of the Albanian Catholic Clergy.*” Richtmann Publishing, Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, Vol 10, No. 2.

Albanian communism was installed: *“The Second World War was coming to an end. German soldiers, under the persistent and growing pressure of the allies, began to withdraw all of their units from the fronts to move them back to Germany. The question that arose now was who was going to seize the power after the German troops had fully withdrawn”*. Albanian communists, upon coming to power, immediately closed the borders with other countries, becoming an isolated land with no contact with the rest of the world, and installed Stalinist methods to subjugate its population. The communist Party committed executions with and without trials and imprisoned intellectuals and writers en masse. Arshi Pipa, after fleeing to the U.S., describes Hoxha’s goals to nullify the “enemies” meaning “intelligentsia”, who he feared the most, so he could install a regime with his own loyal comrades and by substituting, e.g., experienced judges with illiterate people, Pipa writes: *“...executing and imprisoning the majority of patriotic Albanian writers and by emasculating the others, the communist leaders were carrying out a specific strategy they developed to destroy the Albanian intellectual elite and its vanguard, the writers, in order to replace them with their own class of intellectuals and with their own writers.”*⁹ Certainly, intellectuals and writers were the main targets of the regime whose strategies and laws were specially adapted to “eliminate” them in a crucial period of the rapid cultural development, as Pipa remarks *“It is an overwhelming tragedy for a little country like Albania, whose culture had just recently begun to blossom.”*¹⁰ Hoxha’s strategy was to

⁹ [Komunizmi dhe shkrimtarët shqiptarë (*Communism and Albanian Writers*), taken from the exile journal *Shqiptari i lirë*, New York, 29 February 1959, p. 3, and 31 March 1959, pp. 2-3. Translated from the Albanian by Robert Elsie.] http://www.albanianhistory.net/1959_Pipa/index.html with my suggestion...

¹⁰ Ibid. See also the claim of the scholar B. Shatro, *“the first writers to be punished by the regime but who expressed a motivating concept of literary art and criticism in their first works even though persecuted — or even executed by the regime — were Sejfulla Malëshova, Kasëm Trebeshina, Arshi Pipa, Musine Kokalari, Mark Ndoja, Trifon Xhagjika, Genc Leka, Vilson Blloshmi etc.”* Bavjola Shatro, *“Aesthetical and Political Aspects of*

target intellectuals and get rid of them by imprisoning or executing anyone who could have supposedly been a threat to his regime. He was particularly against the North Albanian catholic clergy, who were establishers of the most important schools in the country and led other cultural institutions as well. *Albanian Catholic Bulletin*, published annually in the United States (1980-1994), catalogued the massacres by Albanian communists of the Catholic clergy and continuously was a voice in denouncing the antihuman repressions of Hoxha's regime. In the *History of Albanian Literature* by Robert Elsie (New York: Boulder, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1995), which is the most prominent work and simultaneously the first presentation to the international reader, Elsie stresses the condemning of Albanian dictatorship and its crimes through this religious community (Elsie, *HAL*, vol. 2, 529). Elsie's book is an enormous effort to write the history of Albanian literature, following a chronological order that tends to classify Albanian literature from its genesis to contemporary writing. Certainly, Elsie touches on the thematics of prison literature, but since the book was published in the early 90s, it is limited to only a few authors. In that period, there was insufficient scholarship on the field, and also, there were not many publications of prison writings; therefore, he analyses them very briefly.

Ad verbum *The Walls Behind the Curtain: East European Prison Literature, 1945–1990* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), by Harold B. Segel is the only book coming from an international scholar that focuses one of its chapters on the Albanian prison literature. Nevertheless, this chapter is only treated as part of his case studies on East European literature, including Bulgaria, Macedonia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia,

the Relationship between Literature and Ideology in Albania in Dictatorship and in Post-Communism,” Mediterranean Center of Social and Educational Research, Vol.2, No.2, May 2011, 33.

framed from 1945 to 1990, so Albanian literature is not his main focus in this book. Although Segel gives an overview of this literary genre, in the case of Albanian prison literature, he leaves out the most representative authors¹¹ such as Fr. Zef Pllumi, Fr. Konrrad Gjollaj, Don Simon Jubani (all survived the Enver Hoxha's prisons sentenced from 20-27 years each), Havzi Nela (sentenced to death with hanging in 1988), and so on. In addition to that, in his previous work, *The Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945* (Columbia University Press, 2008), Segel treats the case of Albania, and in the sixth chapter [*Writers Behind Bars Eastern European Prison Literature, 1945–1990*,] includes Albanian writers that actually were never behind bars under communism. Among Albanian writers who spent time in prison under dictatorship, he analyses writers such as Arshi Pipa, Visar Zhiti, Bashkim Shehu, and Fatos Lubonja. Interestingly, he also incorporates authors like Besnik Mustafaj (1919-2006). Mustafaj, besides the fact that he never spent a day in prison (Segel stresses this fact too),¹² openly supported the regime, and his writings are greatly preoccupied with the theme of propaganda and glorification of socialist realism, despite his endless efforts after the 90s to reposition his literature apart from communist influences. During the communist period, Mustafaj was appointed translator in the Institute of Marxist and Leninist Studies in Tirana, an institution led by the dictator's wife, Nexhmije Hoxha. Segel notes that referring to the Albanian secret police called *Sigurimi* [Secret police], and stories told by other writers, he states that: “*The Albanian writers who got caught in the Sigurimi dragnet included, among many others, such prominent figures as the scholar and poet Arshi Pipa, the poet Visar Zhiti, Bashkim Shehu, the son of the*

¹¹ Pllumi, Gjollaj, Jubani and Nela were already published and republished many years before Segel's publication in 2012.

¹² Cf. Harold B. Segel, *The Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 160, “*While he himself did not personally undergo the trauma of imprisonment, Mustafaj obviously knew of the horrors of the camps and made them the subject of some of his most important fictional writing.*”

much-feared general and later prime minister Mehmet Shehu (1913–1981), and Besnik Mustafaj, a novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, and, in the post-Hoxha period, Albanian ambassador to France.” (151). He adds, “*Besnik Mustafaj (b. 1958), a few years younger than Fatos Lubonja, has been one of the most prominent literary figures in postcommunist Albania.*” (159). Contradictorily, Segel does not provide any archival material to prove such statement, and to this day there have not been published any documents that indicate that Besnik Mustafaj has ever been persecuted in anyway or form under the regime. Moreover, he has been one of the writers that had the right to publish in the most important cultural entities of the time when many others were denied such right. It is generally accepted that Besnik Mustafaj was by all means a steady supporter of the communist regime. In Albania, his poems, among others “*Abetarja*” (ABCs) and “*Për Partinë*” (For the Party), are widely known as propagandistic poems. In “*Studenti*” (Tirana, December 10, 1980, 4) Mustafaj expresses his enthusiasm for the Party: “*Dhe ti i jep dritë qëllimit tim [...] / Ti je mësimi i parë dhe të gjitha mësimet e tjera / për ta njohur të vërtetën e jetës / dhe për t’u kapur fort pas saj, / me qartësinë e mendimit tënd.*” (And you give light to my purpose [...] / You are the first lesson and all the other lessons / to know the truth of life / and to hold to it, / with the clarity of your thought).¹³ Such definitions from Segel, “*Most of Mustafaj’s work reflects his long and ardent opposition to the Hoxha regime in Albania.*” (159), are contradictory and inconsistent or at least represents a fictive dissidence that many Albanian Socialist Realism writers claimed themselves after communism fell.

However, Segel, four years later, in his edition, *The Walls Behind the Curtain: East European Prison Literature 1945-1990*, revises such statement while stressing explicitly that although Mustafaj “*never spent time in prison, he has been a champion of human rights who has often spoken out against political injustice*” (70). It is true that after the 90s Mustafaj has

¹³ Cf. L. Kola (ed.), *Yllkat e Enverit*, Këns 2020, 46 https://kens.al/revista/materiale_te_tjera/yllkateenverit.pdf

held several political posts and promoted some democratic views. Still, his political views have nothing to do with his writings, in contrary, as a writer he is closer to the Socialist Realism literature promoting state's propaganda of the former regime. Indeed, it has been quite common in Albanian politics to see rehabilitated former collaborators since both major political parties are derived from the former regime government. As a matter of fact, many Socialist Realist writers and excollaborators have joined these two parties to remove their files from the archives; therefore, if state files were to be opened, there would not be found any material to against them. Certainly, such practices are not an invention of Albanian politics but also exist in other satellite states. However, the listing of Besnik Mustafaj among other Albanian political prisoners seems difficult to understand since Segel does not provide enough arguments to support his statement. But in the revised edition Segel updates the list of prison writers, including Jusuf Vrioni, Arshi Pipa, Kasëm Trebeshina, Maks Velo, Fatos Lubonja, Visar Zhiti, and of course, Besnik Mustafaj. In addition, Segel's contribution is important as he translates from Albanian or French (in the case of Vrioni) into English some excerpts from their work, making them more accessible for the English reader.

An Albanian scholar preoccupied with the theme of prison literature is Bajram Kosumi, whose work is the only Albanian critical book. *Letërsia nga burgu: Kapitull më vete në letërsinë shqipe (Literature from Prison: A Specific Chapter in the Albanian Literature)* published in Tirana 2006, and shows the first endeavor to analyze Albanian Prison Literature, including the literature written by Albanians of Kosovo. The author analyses some prisoner authors and gives a historical synopsis of this literature. However, one of Kosumi's shortfalls is the exclusion of Arshi Pipa, the founder of Albanian Prison Literature [APL], considering him as a poet who used the prison as a background or a display for his poems, not as a concept of intellectual freedom. As I mentioned earlier, Pipa's tamizdat, *The Prison Book (Libri i burgut, Rome 1959)*, written in tobacco leaves, was composed while in prison and survived

twice: the prison and Pipa's escape journey from Albania in 1957. This body of poems, contrary to Kosumi's claims in his short study, I argue manifests the sense of freedom and dissidence, making this book an exceptional epitome in the history of East European literatures under communism. Also, in Kosumi's study the criteria for selected works he treats are not clear, and the study does not analyse writers like the dissident poet Havzi Nela or the novelist Fatos Lubonja. For Kosumi, a central author is Kasëm Trebeshina, who earns a reputation as a dissident, however other scholars have raised questions regarding Trebeshina's dissidence, yet such questions are not addressed by Kosumi. Trebeshina was formerly a supporter and a collaborator of the Albanian communist Party but later was expelled from the Party. Trebeshina, according to Albanian scholarship, has no authentic evidence of writing under freedom deprivation, likewise, e.g., Pipa, Lubonja, Nela, Zhiti, etc. Regarding Trebeshina, there is also an interesting article by Bavjola Shatro, that notes that:

The only document that openly confirms as a dissident act in Albania (including literature, science and intellectuals in general) is the Pro memoria of the writer Kasëm Trebeshina sent to the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha on October 3, 1953 and that precedes even the Letter of Solzhenitsyn to the Soviet Leaders. While Solzhenitsyn, in his letter, clearly discussed the heavy burden of ideology on the nation, an ideology that was dead and never a science (Solzhenitsyn 1974), Trebeshina openly called the state's ideology as the cause of ruin of the Albanian nation in every aspect of literature, art, science and social life and openly named the communist regime as knee-deep in blood and crime (Elsie, 2001). There has been opened a debate among Albanian intellectuals and literary critics on the authenticity of this letter (Bejko 2007) but there has not been found yet in the archives any documented prove to contradict its authenticity.” (32)

Returning to Kosumi's article "*Letërsia nga burgu: çështje të identifikimit, të përkufizimit dhe të trajtimit të saj*," (*Symbol 2*, 2014), he gives similar definitions for Pipa's case or other Albanian prison literature with what he treats in his book. In this article, Kosumi proposes that, "*Midis librave të parë dhe vitit 2000 që merret si fund i letërsisë nga burgu, ka një numër shumë të madh të autorëve dhe të veprave, të krijuara nëpër burgje apo menjëherë pas tij, e si rrjedhojë e tij.*" (101) [Between the first books and the year 2000, which is taken as the end of literature from the prison, there are many authors and works created in prisons or immediately after it, and as a result of it]. I would add here that the year 2000 that Kosumi proposes as the end of prison literature might not be taken as the end of Albanian prison literature because the political context of Albania and Kosovo differs. The year of 2000 referred by him is connected with the end of the Kosovo War, where many political prisoners were freed, but some political prisoners/writers were held imprisoned even after 2000. Meanwhile in Albania, political prisoners were released in 1990-1. I would suggest that this contribution of Kosumi is mainly a resumption of his early works. It aims to make a classification and periodization of Albanian prison literature, and he treats both prison writers in Albania and Kosovo. Nevertheless, in his definitions, as I mentioned there are still authors not included (such as Jubani, Gjolaj, etc.), while some others are not analysed thoroughly. For instance, Kosumi considers A. Pipa's works as "*anti-communist*", "*which fight communist's ideologies*" (cf. 105, *ibid.*), while the statement of Arshi Pipa is clearly précised, referring to his documentary in 1992¹⁴ in Albania during his first homeland visit after communism. Pipa states that he was "*against any form of dictatorship*," not only against communism as Kosumi claims. Besides some exhaustive arguments like the chapter on "*Letërsia nga burgu: çështje të identifikimit, të përkufizimit dhe*

¹⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmBn3XnRcTA>

të trajtimit të saj,” Kosumi poses some general statements of a positivist critique dominated by stereotypes and clichés.

Another contribution to this topic is the co-authored article of Myrvete Dreshaj-Baliu and Bahtije Gërbeshi-Zylfiu, published in English.¹⁵ The article brings an updated overview of Albanian prison literature editions and analyses as Kosumi both works of literature cultivated in Albania and Kosovo. However, the claims of this article may be disputed regarding some other minor authors published in Albania who have not yet been affirmed in the literary system (like Fatbardha Saraçi, Sokrat Shyti, Agim Musta, etc.), or who had not had any continuity as writers after the regime. While on the other hand, paradoxically, the names of Arshi Pipa, and Father Simon Jubani, the author of memoirs *Burgjet e mia (My prisons, 2001)* are not mentioned at all. These two authors were both political prisoners, and the latter spent no fewer than twenty-six years in prison; therefore, these are two unavoidable names of prison literature.

Concerning Albanian prison literature, the authors of the article affirm: “*Various scholars consider this literature only a thematic addition to Albanian literature in general; others see it as a separate chapter of this literature, whereas another group point out that this type of literature is not known in its entirety. [...] Considering that this issue has been discussed more from the political and publicistic perspective than the scientific viewpoint, and that this category of literature is not sufficiently known, contemporary criticism has not managed to fully evaluate it and to define the best notions for its analysis.*” (215). To this extent, I think that in Albanian literary criticism, prison literature is overlooked, rather than treated as part of Albanian literature. Another reason for this gap is the generation of Albanian socialist realist writers, some of whom were “considered” dissidents or anti-conformist upon the collapse of the regime. In Albanian culture, authors of the 70s, part of the nomenclature, and state

¹⁵ Myrvete Dreshaj-Baliu, Bahtije Gërbeshi-Zylfiu, “*Albanian Contemporary Literature by Political Prisoners*” (*Balkanistic Forum*, Vol.2/Bullgaria, 2018), 212-23.

communist propaganda, prevail nowadays, and their presence is supported by the government, which has cast into the shadows prison literature and the group of authors that wrote under communism but never published anything until the 90s. Albanian Socialist Realism writers continue to write as they did before the 90s; therefore, the quality of their work is quite dubious since it is dominated by the schematism of the Socialist realism motifs.

A recent publication on Albanian prisons, which includes three authors (Pllumi, Velo, and Zhiti) is Rafaela Marteta's, *Shkrime për burgun: At Z. Pllumi, M. Velo, V. Zhiti: stina e re e letrave në paskomunizëm* (UET, Tirana, 2016) [*Writings about the prison. Fr. Z. Pllumi, M. Velo and V. Zhiti: The New Period of Letters in Post-Communism*]. This essay is focused mainly on the sociology of prisons, thematizing notions like political prison, time, fear, hard labor camps, etc. This work may be considered a novelty for Albanian studies with its perspective on analyzing the political prison of writers. However, the essay's focus is not on themes and literary forms, broadly understood. Marteta writes that: "*In the Albanian context, the writings about prison are a significant contribution to the opening and emancipation of Albanian society; they are proof that freedom is a good that can not be taken for granted when it is not based on respect for every human right, love, and mission to serve to each other.*"¹⁶

1.1 Nonacademic Contributions to Albanian Prison Literature

After the 90s, several texts were published elucidating the works of imprisoned Albanian writers or intellectuals. A significant author is Visar Zhiti, who published *Rrugët e ferrit* (*Paths*

¹⁶ A fragment of the essay is published in the journal *Gegnia*, 3/2017, 7-25. Cf. the Albanian text, "*Në kontekst shqiptar shkrimet për burgun janë një kontribut madhor për hapjen dhe emancipimin e shoqërisë shqiptare, janë dëshmi se liria është e mira që nuk mund të merret e mirëqenë, kur në themel të saj nuk qëndrojnë respektimi i çdo të drejte njerëzore, dashuria dhe misioni për t'i shërbyer njeri-tjetrit.*"

of Hell, Onufri, Tirana) in 200, and *Ferri i çarë* (*Hell Cloven*, Omsca-1, Tirana 2002). Recently, he has published *Kartelat e realizmit të dënuar* (*Cartels of Sentenced Realism*, Uegen, Tirana 2020), a corpus of essays consisting of 420 pages. Zhiti, through the authors' profile, aims to prove the Albanian dissidence which, according to him, was “*hidden, illegal, unorganized and individual*”(363). The author explores topics such as plagiarism and confiscation—a random phenomenon that happened during the Albanian communist regime. Zhiti affirms, “*Dihen që janë marrë Fjalori i Madh i Mustafa Krujës-Merlikës. Janë përvetësuar vepra të Mitrush Kutelit, Lef Nosit, Gjergj Komninos, Justin Rrotës, Hekuran Zhitit, punimet e shkenctares Sabiha Kasimati etj.*” [It is known that *The Large Dictionary* of Mustafa Kruja-Merlika was stolen. Works by Mitrush Kuteli, Lef Nosi, Gjergj Komnino, Justin Rrota, Hekuran Zhiti, the works of the scientist Sabiha Kasimati, etc. have been appropriated] (74). Further, he adds, “*Edhe unë ndjehem i vjedhur. Më janë marrë poezi, tregime, ditar, shënime etj., nja 39 fletore e blloqe, që m'i konfiskuan, kur më burgosën, s'i gjeta më, megjithëse kam kërkuar për to në arkivat përkatëse, në Lushnjë ku banoja, në Kukës ku punoja dhe më arrestuan, në Tiranë*” [I feel stolen too. Poems, stories, diaries, notes, etc. have been taken from me; about 39 notebooks and journals, which were confiscated from me when I was imprisoned, I could not find them anymore, although I searched for them in the relevant archives, in Lushnja where I lived, in Kukës where I worked, and I was arrested, and in Tirana] (75). As I will analyze further below, authentic and significant is also the last edition of Zhiti's prison notebooks in 2021, *Dorëshkrimet e fshehta të burgut* (*The Secret Manuscripts of Prison*, Onufri, Tirana). This edition consists of 608 facsimiled pages of his eleven notebooks written in various prisons. The collection is evidence of surviving poems of the poet, and most of those poems were composed and committed to memory and later handwritten in secrecy. Other works in prose or poems of Visar Zhiti reflect his prison experiences.

Tjetërsimi i veprës intelektuale gjatë komunizmit në Shqipëri: (1944-1990), ISKK, Tirana 2013, by Leka Ndoja is an important work that studies plagiarism as a phenomenon during the communist era and the state's fraud in wrongfully confiscating manuscripts from political prisoners and then publishing them under other names. Leka claims that "This publication is a research project on the seizure, disappearance, illegal alienation of intellectual property as one of the forms of communist crimes in Albania [...] This robbery was done under the name of property collectivization or their labeling as "anti-communist" and "decadent," which could "damage" communist morality. The right to intellectual property was even restricted in the Constitution. Authors were deprived of their rights of ownership of their writings if their work did not conform with the official ideology or philosophy of propaganda and other creative schemes that every writer had to follow to get published. This study highlights the fact that these works have not only been sequestered but have often been used as evidence of propaganda tools against the regime, therefore, writers have been subject to secret police false accusations and have been imprisoned, interned, and even executed for such reason."¹⁷

The Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of communism published a series of imprisoned authors and translators: among them Amik Kasoruho, Hektor Shënepremte, Fr. Benedikt Dema, and the elegant translation in the Albanian language of Ludovico Ariosto by Gulieljm Deda, *Orlandi i çmendun (Orlando Furioso)*.¹⁸ In addition, the Institute has made other memoir publications series, interviews, historical studies, and

¹⁷Cf. Instituti i Studimeve për Krimet dhe Pasojat e Komunizmit (ISKK) [Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism]: <http://www.iskk.gov.al/2014/10/30/tjetersimi-i-vepres-intelektuale-gjate-komunizmit-ne-shqiperi/>

¹⁸ Amik Kasoruho, *Shkëndijëzat mes errësirës*, ISKK, Tirana, 2017. Hektor Shënepremte, *Udha e Kryqit*, ISKK, 2017; *Ferri/Inferno* (by Dante Alighieri), ISKK, 2018. Át Benedikt Dema, *Fjalor i shtjelluem i gjuhës shqipe*, 2 vol. Guljelm Deda, *Orlandi i cmendun* (by Ariosto), 2 vol., ISKK, 2013.

periodicals aiming to explore the communist past and focus on the consequences of that period. In the past three-four years, the Albanian parliament was involved in harsh debates with the former director Agron Tufa of this Institute (ISKK) regarding the legislature and specific articles of ISKK. Later, Tufa sought political asylum in Switzerland with his family due to several life threats.¹⁹ The Albanian historian Çelo Hoxha was appointed as the new director of the Institute, who continued the process of a series of publications of collected interviews. Still, not surprisingly, the process of publication was slowed down. In 2021, Leka Ndoja published a book on the Albanian author and translator of ancient Greek and Latin literature, who spent many years behind bars, Nikollë Dakaj. His study, *Nikollë Dakaj mes përkthimit të antikës dhe përndjekjes* [*Nikollë Dakaj between the translation of antiquity and persecution, ISKK*], is the first monographic work in Albania dedicated to this personality. Dakaj translated Homer, Horace, Vergil, Aesop, Dante, and many others. His work has been the prey of intellectual appropriations by communist scholars.

It is worth noting that Albanian prison literature has no other meaningful scholarship evidence directly related. However, documentaries, newspaper writings,²⁰ and cultural meetings have sporadically shed light on the 47 years of communism, which can also help

¹⁹ See “Shqiptarjam.com” [Dec. 2, 2019], “Agron Tufa ikën në Zvicër me familjen, kërkon azil politik dhe dorëzon me postë dorëheqje,” <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/agron-tufa-iken-ne-zvicer-me-familjen-kerkon-azil-politik-dhe-dorezon-me-poste-doreheqjen>; “Dita” [Dec. 3, 2019], “Largohet nga Shqipëria Agron Tufa, kërkon azil politik në Zvicër,” <http://www.gazetadita.al/iken-nga-shqiperia-agron-tufa-avokati-ka-kerkuar-azil-ne-zvicer/> etc.

²⁰ Velo, Maks, “Letërsia e burgut për të mos harruar,” “Korrieri” Nr. 167, 21 korrik, 2002, 19. Gëzim Llojdia, “Letërsia e burgut ende në terrin e harresës,” “Metropol” Nr. 2556, 7 janar, 2012, 8-9. Aida Tuci (interv.) “Letërsia e burgut si nevojë e brendshme: [kujtimet e burgut, pasqyrë e jetës në diktaturë, intervista] / Fatos Lubonja; Visar Zhiti; “Mapo” revistë përjavshme politike, aktualiteti, sociale, kulturore, Nr. 9 tetor, 2012, 32 -35.

understand the context of prison literature. In particular, the series of documentaries of *Dosja K* (Dossier K), launched on an Albanian TV channel which is not controlled by the state, combines prison and persecution confessions by different survivors or relatives, not only writers. Such is the latest documentary of Admirina Peçi, the same director of *Dosja K*, entitled *Varret pa emër (Unmarked Graves)*.²¹

It might sound a little odd, but as far as I am concerned, Albanian prison literature is not in any college's or university's curricula; and in the over three decades of the post-communist period, not a dedicated conference or publication has been attributed to this literature by Albanian literature departments. Thus, it is quite predictable why the international representation of this literature is almost nonexistent. As a result, it is no surprise that Albanian literature (and that of imprisonment in particular) remains underrepresented among other East European traditions that have experienced totalitarian regimes in the second part of the 20th century.

1.1.1 Vox Komunismus, Vox Auctoris

In the first instance Enver Hoxha and his regime, simultaneously with the prisons, created labor camps, and purges, and implemented the method of socialist realism in Albanian literature and arts, influenced by the Soviet Union. On the other side, prison literature and underground authors or “writers for the drawer”, who remained silent and never published during the regime (e. g., Zef Zorba, Muhamet Ademi, etc.), and the Albanian Diaspora maintained Albanian literature free of propaganda.

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reaiSGeetaw>

Here I will focus on two Albanian authors, Nika Stajka and Gene X. Kortsha, as yet figures unknown to the Albanian reader, and the Italian Jesuit priest Giacomo Gardin S.J., who spent ten years (1945-55) in Albanian prisons. Finally, after complicated negotiations between Albanian and Italian embassies, Gardin was repatriated and continued his ecclesiastical duties in Italy.

As the dust jacket of Stajka's book shows (*The Last Days of Freedom*, Vantage Press. New York-Chicago, 1980), the author was born in Shkodra, North Albania, in 1925. He attended the Franciscan College in Shkodra (1937-46); he was later arrested and sentenced to seven years of prison and labor camps. In 1956 he escaped from Albania, and in 1968 Stajka entered the United States, where he published his memoirs in 1980 of Albanian prison time in memoriam of his "*fellow workmates, who expected in vain to see the light of freedom, but lost their lives through inhuman death in concentration and hard-labor camps.*" *The Last Days of Freedom* consist of 42 chapters over 372 pages, describing the time from the communist installation in 1944 until the author escaped from Albania. The style of the book is mainly grounded on historical records and memoirs, similar to the format of a diary. Stajka's book maybe marks the first contribution of the Albanian Diaspora in the United States, who testified to the crimes of communism in Albania as eyewitnesses. Indeed, the first fictional book which denounced the Albanian crimes of communism in the Albanian Diaspora is *The Red Pioneer* by Michael Marku, 1955. Marku's novella "*explores the topic of indoctrination in schools, to which vulnerable pre-teenagers are exposed, unaware as they are of their potential of producing family and social calamities.*"²² Stajka is a survivor of the Albanian communist inferno who, like many others, after finding freedom in democratic countries, managed to articulate the

²² Lisandri Kola, "*The Red Pioneer, an anatomy of the installation of the Communist dictatorship in Albania.*" *Leters from the Diaspora*, 1/2020, 120.

terrors of a criminal regime. *The Last Days of Freedom* is not, however, translated into the Albanian language.

Giacomo Gardin, S.J., published his memoirs *Dieci anni di prigionia in Albania (1945-1955)* in Rome 1986. An English translation, *Banishing God in Albania* (Igniatius Press, 1988), was published two years later. Meanwhile, two Albanian versions were published in the same year (1992), *Dhetë vjet burg në Shqipëri (1945-1955)*; the first translated by Zef Nekaj Civiltà Cattolica, Rome, and the second by Simon Filipaj, Ferizaj, Kosovo. The two editions were published abroad after 1992 were still vague regarding the democratic process and the critical role of the communist apparatus. In Albania, there have been individuals and authors surveyed by *Sigurimi* up to 1992, such as the case of Arshi Pipa. His persecution Dossier 273/A, 163/2A was created by *Sigurimi* in 1960 and closed in 1992, according to the *Autoriteti për Informimin mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit 1944-1991*, AIDSSH [The Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents 1944-1991].

Banishing God in Albania is a concise narrative organized in five chapters and an appendix including excerpts of Hoxha's Albanian Constitution, a brief delivery speech, and letters of the author. G. Gardin, S. J., was a missionary and a teacher who served in Albania since the early 30s. Like many other Catholic clergymen, Albanians or non-Albanian's missionaries, he was arrested and sentenced to prison by the regime. In his book, Gardin describes life under the regime from his arrest until his repatriation in a condensed and realistic style. In the third chapter (*The Prison*), he details the daily conversations with other inmates reflecting their cultural background. He writes: "*We interpreted dreams and studied changes marked by time, 'read' animal bones and interpreted auspices; we even discussed politics, but carefully, because of the spies*" (69). In another passage, he shows the harsh living conditions of the prisoners, malnutrition, and unhygienic environment; Gardin states, "*We ate in the morning*

before going to work and again in the evening. The fixed ration consisted of a ladle of soup and eight hundred grams of bread. Work was suspended only on Sundays and then we were given a small portion of meat along with the soup. As it was impossible for us to keep ourselves clean, we were all full of fleas” (82). It is interesting to note that the original Italian title of the book starts with “*Dieci anni...*” (*Ten Years of Imprisonment in Albania*), which is the time Gardin spent in prison. In the epilogue Gardin explains (141-5) that, during his time in prisons, concentration and labor camps, he embraced numerous down-to-earth principles. He got to know himself better, became more humble, perceived God in every moment, and got to understand and appreciate humanity in depth.

Gene X. Kortsha, published *One Man’s Journey to Freedom: Escape from Behind the Iron Curtain* (Joseph Karl Publishing, Michigan, 2010) years after he fled Albania, 1952. Gene (or Genc) Kortsha is the son of Xhevat Kortsha, former minister of the Albanian Monarchy, who was imprisoned under the category of “the enemies of the people,” which was the most common form of accusation that communism used to target people who posed a threat to the communist rule; by including them in this category of “enemies” communists found it easier to get rid of anyone who could hypothetically oppose the regime. Xh. Kortsha is the first and probably the only political prisoner who died due to a hunger strike by protesting for his right to get medication for his tuberculosis (contracted while in the cell) and hospitalization. His son, Gene, explains that the communist authorities did not allow him to receive medical supplies that his family had bought in Italy for him (viii).

Gene X. Kortsha, as previously Stajka, confesses his “journey” to freedom in a voluminous 740 pages book, divided into 44 chapters and closing with an epilogue. In the introduction, he clarifies that the first lines of his memoirs were written in 1985. As it comes out, such an endeavor took him over twenty years to be completed. His style is analytic, and rich in details, scenes, and dialogues. Kortsha analyzes Albanian historical moments while being strictly

precise with the dates of such events as he rigorously took notes. Besides denouncing communist crimes and speaking about the inhumane prison condition, he also treats the martyrdom of personalities such as Fr. Anton Harapi (chapter 15) and other martyred Catholic priests (chapter 22). Regrettably, like Stajka's, this book is not translated into Albanian despite being an incredibly important book that serves as a vivid reference for memory studies.

These three books build an overview for the international reader, written in exile, away from the communist censorship (Stajka, 1980; Gardin, 1986) that was still implemented in Albania in those years, while Kortsha's book (2010) gives, in addition, a panorama of post-communist transition. The prolonged state transition from the 90s to the present, however, has often been accompanied by uncertainties and political destabilization, which has negatively impacted the academic environment, and in several cases, applied censorship and control over publishing in the literary fields, particularly those related with the communist regime, for instance, the case of the scholar and ISSK former director Agron Tufa, recently exiled, mentioned earlier in this study. Moreover, such control has been increasing even more over the last decade under the ruling of the Socialist Party—which is a reformed version of the former communist Party/Labor Party.

Typology and Classification of Albanian Prison Literature

*Per me si va ne la città dolente,
per me si va ne l'eterno dolore,
per me si va tra la perduta gente*

Dante, *Inferno* 3, 1-3.

Likewise other communist regimes in East Europe, Albanian communism build prisons, forced labor camps and invented inhumane methods of punishment against prisoners, especially political prisoners who were the main target during the regime. According to R. Gashi, the Albanian prisons were overfull of political prisoners just a few years after Hoxha seized power. Gashi affirms: “referring to the available data for January 1947, out of 4749 prisoners, 3659 were political prisoners and the remaining 1090 were ordinary prisoners so, there is a rate 3 to 1 in favor of political prisoners. This number continued to increase rapidly, so that in 1950 this number reached to 7168 prisoners and 2000 interned, in all 9168 prisoners.”²³ Gashi adds that “In addition to this, Albania had another 1272 people interned because of their political views”²⁴. As a matter of fact, the population of Albania after WW2 ranged between circa 1. 200 000 residents;²⁵ therefore, the imprisonment rate was considerably

²³ Rexhep Gashi, “Types of prisons and labour camps and the position of convicted persons in Albania during the communist dictatorship,” Thesis, 1/2012, 30-1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.32.

²⁵ See Hasan Banja, “Disa veçori të zhvillimeve demografike në Shqipëri në shek. XX,” *Revista Demografike*, “Regjistrimi i parë i pasqirimit në vendin tonë është kryer më 30 shtator 1945 në kuadrin e zgjedhjeve të 2 dhjetorit për Asamblenë Kushtetuese. Numri i popullsisë doli 1.122 mijë banorë [...] Kështu, regjistrimi i radhës është bërë më 3 shtator 1950, nga i cili numri i popullsisë doli 1.218.900 banorë” [The first registration of the

high in proportion to population density at that time. In 1947, less than three years after communists took over, 18 prisons were built in Albania, 8 out of which were exclusively political (Gashi: 31). Among prisons, camps, and places of internment, Burrel prison and Spaçi prison and forced labor camp were considered the most horrifying places for political prisoners because of atrocities, police brutality, and hunger. Due to severe conditions and massive deaths, for instance in Burrel, prisoners referred to this place by adapting a motto in a rhyming verse in Albanian that describes communist goals in regard to imprisoned intellectuals: “*Këtu i thonë Burrel, që hyn e nuk del,*” [This is called Burrel, once you get in you never get out again]. I would suggest that this expression reminds us of the epigraph of a tercet in Dante’s *Inferno* (3, 1-3). Political prisoners were of course well-read, and Dante was quite a popular figure in Albanian literature in the pre-communist era, therefore it is possible that political prisoner had read Dante and they referred to the communist prison as an “Inferno”, just like Dante’s inferno. Burrel prison remained active until 1992, and then it was turned into a memorial museum for five years, but since the country was going through a harsh transition the museum did not gain any popularity among the public. However, with the pyramid scheme failures, economic collapse, and the breaking of the civil war of 1997, Burrel prison was returned to service due to shortages (Gashi: 38). Today it remains only partially active as the building has deteriorated. While Spaçi prison, one of the deadliest, was active during 1968-1990, and in addition, functioned as a forced labor camp where many prisoners were worked to death in copper mines. Due to the high mortality rate, in 1973, political prisoners organized an uprising, becoming the first in the history of Albanian communist prisons. They raised the Albanian flag without the

post-liberation in our country was done on September 30, 1945, in the context of the December 2 elections for the Constituent Assembly. The population came out to be 1,122 thousand inhabitants [...] The next census was done on September 3, 1950, from which the people came out to 1,218,900 inhabitants.] http://revistademografia.al/disa_vecori_zhvillimesh_demografike_shekXX_hasan_banja.html

official communist star, but the outcomes of such revolt were devastating since massive police forces brutally oppressed the uprising; many participants were sentenced to death, while those remaining were re-sentenced from long-term to lifetime imprisonment. Another rebellion happened later in the camp of Qafë-Bari, in 1984, which ended tragically for three participants (executed by firing squad), while 40 others were re-sentenced.

Moreover, regarding the brutality of such events, there are several testimonies collected by various political prisoners of the time, among them the poet Visar Zhiti.²⁶ He describes how a ministerial decree demanded that the eyes of two of the victims Sokol Sokoli and Tom Ndoja be removed and used “for the scientific purpose of Ministry of Health,” certainly without the permission of their families. In addition, many memoir books, newspaper articles, documentaries, and interviews published in over three decade period describe in detail life in prison.

I should emphasize that an effort to classify and bring a typology of these literary texts remains a pioneering effort since the amount of scholarship remains limited even in post-

²⁶ See Kujto.al, *Ariva Online e Viktimave të Komunistit* [Online Archive of Communist Victims,] “*Revolta e Qafë-Barit/ 24 djem trima që tronditën diktaturën komuniste në maj të vitit 1984.*” [“Qafë-Bari Revolt / 24 brave boys who staggered the communist dictatorship in May 1984”], in Zhiti’s quote, “*Me porosi të shokut ministër, dy të dënuarve që do të pushkatohen, sytë e tyre t’u jepen Ministrisë së Shëndetësisë për punë shkencore.*” [“By order of the comrade minister, the two convicts who will be shot should be given their eyes to the Ministry of Health for scientific work.”]: <https://kujto.al/revolta-e-qafe-barit-lufta-midis-6-policeve-dhe-24-te-burgosurve/>

Fatos Lubonja in his book *Në vitin e shtatëmbëdhjetë: Ditar burgu, 1990–1991*, give another version of Qafë-Bari’s revolt, “*the late Sokol Zefi and Tom Noja, who had been the first to oppose the young fellow’s return to work, were designated the leaders of the organization and, after being tortured (some say they were even castrated), were condemned to death by firing squad and were executed, while the other author of this letter, Haxhi Baxhinovski, a partner in the trial with broken arms and legs, was sentenced to twenty-one years.*” See the translation of Segel in his *The Walls...*, 58.

communist Albania. A devoted literary (or cultural) enterprise to speak on the political prisoners' works has not been conducted by the official institutes in Albania yet. Unfortunately, I shall add that this culture and tradition has not been able to embrace an intellectual responsibility and obligation to the country, as Tzvetan Todorov writes in his book, *Voices from Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1999). Todorov emphasizes that: "Every society has a duty toward its past, guaranteeing that it will not be erased or forgotten" (Introduction, 27). Todorov analyzes the collection of eyewitnesses of Bulgarian camps, not specifically of writers, in order to understand the totalitarian societies. And as Edward E. Ericson Jr. states in his book review, [Todorov]"puts his brilliance to analyzing what the Communists' concentration camps tell us about Communism itself."²⁷ Thus, these narrative contributions from several individuals were not primarily a genesis of structuralist literary criticism, as many of his other works were, but are especially important in knowing the past. It would have been quite beneficial if a similar work had been done in Albania as well.

The case of Albanian communism, despite the country's size, is similar to many other East European countries which suffered from dictatorship, and sometimes even harsher repression. For instance, Harold B. Segel states, "*Tiny Albania, isolated from the rest of the world through most of the regime of Enver Hoxha, had a notoriously repressive gulag in comparison with, let's say, that of a considerably larger country such as Poland.*" (*The Walls...*, 10). Segel tries to parallel the fate of some poets who saved their poems from the daily guardian controls that were done in prison. An analogy is made between Albanian poet Visar Zhiti and Czech poet Jiří Hejda (7-8). Since writing materials were prohibited in prison, they composed their poems by memorizing. Later, they found a way to get a notebook and a pen so they could write in total

²⁷ Edward E. Ericson Jr. (reviewed by), "Voices from Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria," *Society*, 38/6, 2001, 87.

secrecy. Visar Zhiti in *Rrugët e ferrit* (*Paths of Hell*, Onufri, Tirana, 2001) narrates how he ensured a notebook from an inmate (231-5), and also how he lost one of his novellas “*Vizatimet e një mësuesi fshati* [*Drawings of a village teacher*] after hiding it in some old dirty wool socks (374), because of a monthly routine control. The guardians routinely checked the prisoners’ belongings and selected the “unnecessary” stuff to burn. That novella is not the only text lost in prison by this author; many of his other works-in-progress projects and others were destroyed by him, as he feared the consequences. Hoxhaist Albania did not tolerate any “facilities” for writers, as might have happened in other countries of the East European bloc. For instance, Václav Havel was allowed to use even a typewriter as he wrote to *Letters to Olga*. However, Segel mentions that “writing papers” were allowed in some circumstances.²⁸

Undoubtedly, the genesis of Albanian prison literature under communism is related to austere and inconceivable conditions. For example, Arshi, in his *Prison Book* speaks about the challenge to write poems in tobacco leaves, in the cruelest phase of dictatorship—the first decade of implementing the draconic rules. A similar experience was repeated during the decline of Albanian communism by Fatos Lubonja, who (re)wrote his *Ploja e mbrame* [*The Final Slaughter*] on tobacco leaves. In addition, many translators rescued their products in secret notebooks.

In an attempt to describe the typology of these texts and try to make a classification of them, I argue that, due to the nature of Albanian communist prisons, the literary genre which prevailed in writings of imprisonment is poetry. The prose, including memoirs, is written after release from prison, which usually means after the 90s; in the case of Lubonja, *Ploja e mbrame*, is a mixed genre, a drama-novel. Pipa explains in his *Prison Book*’s preface,

²⁸ “In many instances, they were able to obtain writing paper and implements and so—like Havel or Šimečka or Djilas—could produce substantial texts during their internment.” (*The Walls*, 7).

Had the author written this book under different conditions from the ones he lived in, he would have liked prose. But under the given conditions, he could not do otherwise. More than once, it happened that he also lacked paper. Albanian communist prisons are not the most suitable places to keep diaries or write novels. Let the reader keep in mind only one detail: there are poems in this book that were committed to memory and only later, when appropriate, were put down on paper. And this did not always happen for lack of paper.²⁹

It might be this a case to generalize other prisoner writers, who in similar condition, as I mentioned above, were able to save those manuscripts. Such a specific case is that of the Albanian poet Uran Kostreci who died last year at 83. Kostreci was arrested in 1961, at the age of 23, accused of “treason.” He was sentenced 20 years of imprisonment and interned between 1983 and 1988. He spent most of his prison time in Burrel, where his father Fuat Kostreci also spent ten years, sentenced for political reasons. When the poet was sent to Burrel, he found the same slogan inscribed on a wall (?), mentioned to him by his father “*Burgu i Burrelit, vendi i shfarosjes së armiqve të popullit*” [*Burrel Prison, the Extermination Place of Enemies of the People.*]

His famous poem *Epopeja e karkalecave* [*Grasshoopers' Epic*] was memorized during ten years in prison and published only in 1992 in the newspaper *Liria (Freedom)*, whose editor in chief was Kostreci himself. In 1996 this poem, circa 2000 verses, appeared with the publishing house Eurorilindja in Tirana. The poet points out that *Epopeja e karkalecave* “*is a history of*

²⁹ Cf. Albanian text in Arshi Pipa, *Libri i burgut*, Eurorilindja, Tiranë, 1994, 9 “*Ta kishte shkruajtë auktori kët libër ndër kushte të ndryshme prej atyne ndër të cilat jetoi, ai do të kishte pëlqye prozën. Por ndër kushtet e dhana, ai nuk mund të bante ndryshe. Ka ndodhë, dhe jo vetëm një herë, që atij i ka mungue edhe karta. Burgjet komuniste të Shqipnës, nuk janë vendet ma të përshtatshme për me mbajtë ditare ose me shkruajtë romane. Le të ketë ndër mend lexuesi vetëm një hollësi: ka poema në kët libër që u-sajuen me mend dhe vetëm më vonë, kur u-gjet volija, u-hodhën në kartë. Dhe kjo nuk ndodhi gjithmonë për mungesë karte.*”

Communism in verse, as concise as possible, about the culmination of that regime. I did it and where did it happen? It was done in solitary confinement where I had neither pencil nor paper.”³⁰ Uran Kostreci was a staunch denouncer of Albanian communist crimes. He conducted many interviews and participated in events advocating the political prisoners’ consequences during the Hoxha regime. His voice appealed to the actual Albanian politicians who consistently neglected this target group of intellectuals. Among many of his prison stories, I am excerpting a passage from Prison of Burrel:

When the food packages came, they spoiled that little food that had come to the prisoners, so they could not eat it. Here’s what they did: The captain would put his hand on the prepared food and call the dogs while controlling the food. They had two dogs in Burrell Prison, named after one Churchill and the other Roosevelt. The dogs licked their hands, the captain put them back in the food... and the hands were washed from the dog saliva and put back in the food cans. Many prisoners died then from diseases and suffering, but their exact number is unknown. So huge was the hunger in Burrel that a prisoner whose name I can not now remember did not declare his dead brother for a few days. He put a cigarette in his mouth so that the guard would not realize that he was dead, just so that he could eat his ration, that 300 grams of cornbread to keep his soul alive.³¹

The famine in Burrel prison was the subject of many testimonies, between them that of the political prisoner Avni Xhomaqi (sentenced from 1946-56 in Burrel) who said, “*I once remember that we were given a dead ox to eat in prison, and all*

³⁰ Uran Kostreci, “*Si e nxora nga burgu, poemën me 2 mijë vargje ‘Epopeja e Karkalecëve’*”, Kujto.al: <https://kujto.al/uran-kostreci-si-e-nxorra-nga-burgu-poemen-me-2-mije-vargje-epopeja-e-karkaleceve/>

³¹ Kujto.al, cf. the Albanian text in <https://kujto.al/uria-ne-burgun-e-burrelit-na-dhane-per-te-ngrene-nje-ka-te-ngordhur-u-semurem-dhe-burgu-u-qelb-i-gjithi/#>

the prisoners got sick and had stomach aches. It stank all the prison!"³² prison time is also described by former Albanian communist members, such as Drita Kosturi. She was among women partisans, together with Nexhmije Xhuglini (laster Hoxha), who contributed to communist Party seizing power. Soon she was disappointed with Enver Hoxha and his group politics and suddenly found herself "a spy of Anglo-American Service Intelligences." Speaking in an interview given to an American author, she recounts her imprisonment "*So I entered prison. The first night I was there the other women demanded that my cot be placed near the door because I smelled so awful. You see, in the three years of interrogation I had never bathed, not even in the hospital.*"³³ Unimaginable is the episode narrated about the Franciscan, Fr. Pal Dodaj, who was imprisoned in an advanced age in 1946 and expired in prison after five years of torture, whose wounds Kosturi took care. Kosturi adds, "*It was also in the hospital that I met Pal Doda[j], an elderly priest who had attempted suicide by jumping out of the window to avoid further interrogation.*"³⁴ This scene makes us think how cruel would have been the communist maltreatment that urged a Catholic friar to attempt suicide. Drita Kosturi was initially condemned to execution, later reduced to 20 years from which she spent 13 years. After release from prison in 1959, she was banished until the end of communism.

³² Ibid.

³³ Susan E. Pritchett Post, *Women in Modern Albania*, McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 1998, 114.

³⁴ Ibid., 113.

Epopeja e karkalecave is a satirical poem opposing the best-seller of the Albanian socialist realism *Epopeja e Ballit Kombëtar* [*National Front Epic*] by Shefqet Musaraj. As Musaraj satirizes the political rivals of Albanian communists, the National Front, Uran Kostreci allegorically ironizes the communists, comparing them with grasshoppers. An implicitly satirical style opens his poem,

U mbush dynjaja

Me karkalecë

Ka mall njeriu

Përdhe të ecë

Kërcejn' përprjetë

Të çajn' turinjtë

Lëvrijnë sheshit

Më keq se minjtë;

Ca bark jeshilë

Kok' kuqalashë

Me yll në ballë

Me këmb' si mashë

[*The world is full / Of grasshoppers / Man yearns / Ground to walk / Jump up / They break your nose / Plow the square / Worse than rats; / Some green belly / Redhead / With a star on forehead / With legs like fire tongs*]

It can be observed that the poem of Kostreci is influenced by the satire and parody of the Albanian Tosk dialect (spoken in Southern Albania) which was also Hoxha's dialect, and the poem is composed of five syllables rhyming. The folk nature of writing the lines is evident in the whole poem. Also, idioms and rhythm are based on the folk tradition of Southern Albania, explored by many authoritative poets such as Andon Zako Çajupi in the early 20s, Ali Asllani in the 30s-40s, etc. Maybe it might sound unthinkable how a poet could produce a parodic and

satiric poem while he was most of his time in solitary confinement. Kostreci recalls that during the winter, when the temperature reached -10 degrees Celsius, he was left with no blanket or mattress. But what kept his mental sanity was the process of memorizing while he walked around those few square feet of the isolation room. The case of Uran Kostreci, who memorized 2000 lines, might be comparable with the example given by Segel for Jiří Hejda “*More astonishingly, the collection of 153 poems that appear in Hejda’s collection Sonety zpívané šeptem ve stínu šibenice: Ruzyně-Pankrác-Mírov-Leopoldov-Valdice 1950–1962 (Sonnets Chanted in a Whisper in the Shadow of the Gallows: Ruzyně-Pankrác-Mírov-Leopoldov-Valdice, 1950–1962, 1993), all issued from the poet’s memory.*” (*The Walls*, 8).

Some of Amik Kasoruhó’s poems have been written in Burrel Prison. Kasoruhó was arrested at age 17 for “agitation and propaganda” and spent seven years in prison out of a sentence of ten. He was banished from 1959 to 1990 and deprived of the right to education. In Burrel, he learned some foreign languages and, after the 90s, he translated several books from Italian and English. While he was confined in Burrel, his father, Qemal Kasoruhó, was executed by the communists in 1951, on fictive charges of attempting to bom the former Soviet Legate in Tirana. Twenty-two people were executed (most of them intellectuals), among them the first Albanian female of ichthyologist, Sabiha Kasimati. All the victims were shot simultaneously and were buried in a massive grave. Kasimati was the only woman among 21 men who—according to testimonies—covered her to protect her from the squad’s bullets. A. Kasoruhó, in his book *A half-century nightmare: Enver Hoxha’s Albania*, written in Italian, completed in 1991 but published only in 1998, mentions this episode, “*On February 20, 1951, the city [Tirana, my addition] had experienced a night of terror. Tens of innocent citizens had been taken from their homes and imprisoned. Some were slaughtered eight days later in a place that remains unknown until today. This event happened because, on the 19th, a bomb was thrown in the courtyard of the Soviet embassy (damaging two rosebushes). Citizens learned of this*

crime on March 1, when they saw military trucks taking the condemned relatives out of Tirana.”³⁵

Amik Kasoraho died in 2014; his poem was published two years later, in 2016, by ISKK. *Shkëndijëzat mes errësirës* [*Fireflies amidst the darkness*] is a collection of poetries. In the preface, Meri Lalaj writes that the Kasoraho’s first poems were composed in prison, but she does not give any further indication of how they were rescued. Regarding the postscripts of the lyrics, twelve of them date from Burrel Prison 1953-5.³⁶ This body of poems is essentially lyrical and composed in different stanzas and rhyming schemes. Like most Albanian poetry from communist prisons, Kasoraho’s lyrics also evoke the deprivation of freedom and echo pessimism. For example, in the poem “*Qe djelli, vlla!*” (*Teufik Gabranit*) [*Here it is the sun, brother (To Teufik Gabrani)*], the poet closes it with a sad rhetorical question, “*I vshtirë, o mik, qe pragu / qi kapërcyem: thue t’jetë kjo rruga e mbrame?*” [*Difficult, oh friend, was the threshold we crossed: do you think this is the last way?*] The Petrarchan triple sonnet *Mea Culpa*, like some other lyrics, is dedicated to the poet’s mother, stating the feeling of culpability

³⁵ Amik Kasoraho, *Un incubo di mezzo secolo: L’Albania di Enver Hoxha*, Besa, Bari 1998, 91-2, “Il 20 febbraio 1951, la città [Tirana, mia annotazione] aveva vissuto una notte di terrore. Decine di cittadini innocenti erano state prelevate dalle proprie abitazioni e imprigionate. Una parte di essa fu trucidata otto giorni dopo in una località fino a oggi rimasta sconosciuta. Questi perché il 19 era stata lanciata una bomba nel cortile dell’ambasciata sovietica (danneggiando due rose). I cittadini seppero di questo crimine il 1° marzo, vedendo gli autocarri militari portare fuori Tirana i famigliari dei condannati.” An Albanian edition published two years earlier than the Italian version. See *Një anëth gjysmëshekullor: Shqipëria e Enver Hoxhës*, Çabej, Tiranë, 1996.

³⁶ See Amik Kasoraho, *Shkëndijëzat mes errësirës*, ISKK, 2016; “*Nënës sime*, 19-22 [Burrel Pison, 1953], *Qe djelli, vlla!*, 24 [BP, 1953], *Edhe një natë po zbret*, 25 [BP, 1954], *Mea Culpa*, 26-8 [BP, 1955], *Motrës sime*, 29 [BP, 1955], *Mbrëmje e re*, 33 [BP, 1955], *Melodi që vjen nga larg*, 34-5 [BP, 1955], *Desiderata*, 36 [BP, 1954], *Lutje për shpresën e vogël*, 37 [BP, 1955], ?????, 39 [BP, 1955], *Takimi i parë pas motesh*, 40-1, [BP, 1955], *Motrës që s’ma flai nëna*, 42 [BP, 1955].”

for the disturbance caused by his sentence. The same emotion is associated with another sonnet *Desiderata*.

Meanwhile, an idyllic composition is evident in *Takimi i parë pas motesh* [*First meeting after years*], which is influenced by Italo-Albanian tradition (known as Arbëresh). The poetic scene between the young girl (*vashëza*) and the brave young man (*trimi*) is redolent of Italo-Albanian erotic motives. Amik Kasoruh's book, has not yet attracted critical interest. In Albania, he is more notable for his translations of Franz Kafka, Luigi Pirandello, Isabelle Allende, Joanne K. Rowling, Dan Brown, etc.

Around the 80s, another Albanian poet, Gjergj Peçi, wrote poems in Burrel Prison. However, he is not well-known, even after being cited (?) by his fellow inmate Fatos Lubonja in his *Përpyekja* (*Endeavor*). Lubonja, in his brief introduction to the poems of Peçi, emphasized, "*These poems were written by Gjergj Peçi, an unknown autograph in Albanian letters. They are part of the poetry cycle, "Prison Lyrics," which he had carved and polished with talent and patience in Burrel Prison. I read them there for the first time.*"³⁷ Despite the indifference of Albanian critics, Peçi's quality is comparable with some other important Albanian poets. Two years later, *Përpyekja* (6/1996, 32-9) published six more of his poems. The journal's first issue included a selection of seven sonnets. The sonnets are Petrarchan, composed in octaves, usually ABAB CDCD/ABBA ABBA, and sestines EFG EFG/CDE CDE; these poems tend to be philosophical and meditative, excluding (a unique instance) the presence of the prison as topos or image. A sonnet, as "*Eksperiment*" [*Experiment*], might have a slight concordance with the famous "*Voyelles*" of Rimbaud.

Merr blunë e prite në katrorë të vegjël

Ndërsa të bardhën në katrorë të mëdhenj

³⁷ See the Albanian text in Gjergj Peçi, *Përpyekja*, 1/1994, 61.

*Trazoje fort të kuqen me të zezën
S'ka gjë se nëpër duar ngelet shenjë.*

*Merr pesë të bardhë e një bojë plumbi
Ngjit blutë në një të bardhë, veç blutë të puqen
Vëri të gjashtë në trajtën e një kubi
Dhe rras aty të zezën me të kuqen.*

*Duro, gjersa të bardhët të hanë zgjyrë
Dhe mijëra herë të jenë ringjallur blutë
Dhe nxirr ç'ke futur, ndoshta je me fat.*

*Flakëroje në mes turmave pa ngjyrë
Po u përpi e t'humbi sysh, të lumtë
Dhe fute prapë po s'pati rezultat. (Për., 1/1994, 63)*

[Take the blue and cut it into small squares / While white in large squares / Stir the red vigorously with the black / There is no problem that a mark remains on the hands. // Get five whites and a graphite / Stick the blue on a white, except the blue to match / Put the six in the shape of a cube / And thrust the black with the red. // Wait until the whites eat the slag / And thousands of times have been revived blue / And take out what you put in, maybe you are lucky. // Through it among the colorless crowds / If it swallows up and disappeared, well done / And try it again if there is no result.]

I think that this corpus of sonnets, like the other selections, of 1996, compared with Kostreci and Kasoruho, manifest a difference between generations. In Peçi, the reader finds that the morphology of lines is detached from Albanian poetic tradition. Moreover, the poet is interested in elaborating a cycle of self-contemplation and scrutinizing his feelings. “Kaleidoskop,” [Kaleidoscope] (Për., 6/1996, 32-3), a symbolic title, is organized in eight

quatrain stanzas anticipated from anaphoras. The tropes and the sound effects of metrics reproduce a binary sensation: diversity/uniformity. This is seen in the laconic quatrain “*Varri ku kallem,*” [*The grave where I am buried*] (*Për.*, 6/1996, 38). The dualistic vectors of human life Thanatos/Eros seems to be present in this short poem,

VARRI KU KALLEM

Varri ku kallem pas çdo poshtërimi

e ku ringjallem - është urrejtja.

Dashuria më lartëson vetëm atëherë

kur gjithçka rreth meje për një çast ka vdekur.

Burrel, 1987

[THE GRAVE WHERE I AM BURIED. The grave where I am after every humiliation / and where I rise - is hatred. / Love elevates me only then / when everything around me for a moment is dead.]

The “I” of the poet here seems to experience these two oppositional drives tending more toward Thanatos. Sometimes, the fragmented I mixed in other poems [sonnets], involving the meditative lines, makes the reader think of F. Pessoa’s possible influence.

Besides this 90s selection by Lubonja, a slim edition of Peçi’s poems appeared in 2002 in Tirana, entitled *In extenso*. This author mostly translated Anglo-Saxon poets and commercial books.

Other less significant writings during Albanian communist prison, are written by Kudret Kokoshi, Zyhdi Morava, Jorgo Bllaci, etc., but they, unfortunately, do not create a case for study, however they should be given credit for opposing Socialist Realism. For example, it is said that the controversial Albanian poet, Frederik Reshpja, wrote poems in prison. Such a fact is not public yet; on the contrary, his devotion to writing lyrics for the Party is well-known.

Nevertheless, two Albanian authors, Lisandri Kola³⁸ and Primo Shllaku³⁹ have analyzed the poems of Reshpja indoctrinated in communism. The latter, in his article “*Kush asht Frederik Reshpja?*” [Who is Frederik Reshpja?] claims that Reshpja represents “*the unification with ‘the new man’ of communist Epoque*” (cf. Alb. text, 54). Meanwhile, Kola talks about two atheist poems of Reshpja “*Zemrës m’i dhe krahë,*” [You made my heart with wings] and “*Zjarri*” [The fire] published in the official cultural communist gazette *Drita* [The Light], in 1967. In that year, Albania was declared publicly the first and only atheist country in the world. Thus, Reshpja, like many others, was part of the prominent communist “cultural revolution” and an enthusiastic supporter of Realist Socialism propaganda.

Most of the prose contributions to Albanian prison literature were published after the writers’ release, thus at the beginning of the 90s. Fatos Lubonja was one of the prisoner-writers who wrote inside the Burrel Prison between 1988 to 1991.⁴⁰ Lubonja was sentenced in 1974 in Spaç to seven years because of his diaries, which criticized the regime of Hoxha. At that time, he was 23 and a student of theoretical physics; also the father of two daughters, one of them only a month old. In 1979, another sixteen years were added to Lubonja’s initial sentence and other inmates, who were accused of “counterrevolutionary” agitation while in prison (Segel,

³⁸ Lisandri Kola, *Sonete*, Fiorentia, Shkodër, 2016, 118.

³⁹ Primo Shllaku, “Kush asht Frederik Reshpja,” *Symbol* 11/2017, 51-72.

⁴⁰ See Fatos Lubonja, “*Between the Local and the Universal,*” (193-202) in Ursula Keller, *Writing Europe, What is European about the Literatures of Europe?* [Essays from 33 European Countries,] Central European University Press, Budapest, 2004, “When trying to answer the question, “What is European in my work?” my mind goes back to Burrel Prison, where I wrote my first novel, *The Final Slaughter*, between 1988 and 1991, and to the diary I kept during my last year in prison, in 1990–1991, later published as *In the Seventeenth Year*.” This affirmation opposes the statement of E. Gjika that *Ploja e mbrame* was written between 1988-9. Cf. Eldon Gjika, “*Ploja e mbrame si shembull i evoluimit të zhanrit dramatik në letërsinë shqiptare,*” *Përpjekja*, 24/2004, 93.

The Walls, 50). *Ploja e mbrame* [*The Final Slaughter*] is a hybrid novel-drama that the author loved so much that he copied it “on cigarette papers to hide it from a possible search by the guards.” (Lubonja, “*Between the Local and the Universal*”). The technique of saving prison writings in Burrel is the same as Pipa’s, mentioned above, but in the case of Lubonja he admits to have done an extra copy just in case if guardians would find and destroy his writings, a routine that would happen daily. Like Pipa, he was short of paper in many cases. Albanian prison writers and translators widely know this practice of extra copies; for example, Fr. Donat Kurti, in his *New Testament* translation from Vulgate, used to copy by hand in prison up to three copies for each version. He did three versions of this translation, multiplying each by hand in notebooks and fountain pens (see *Appendix*).

Lubonja’s *Ploja e mbrame* is unique in Albanian prison literature; it is an Oedipus metaphor and re-use of the ancient Greek myth. No other writer attempted to universalize the communist prison experience. The author himself explains the conception of this work,

The creative germ of *The Final Slaughter* lay in a problem that had preoccupied me for years during my long incarceration: Why was it that the ruling Communists, after they had seen that their idea had failed, did not resign, but clung to power and persisted in their crimes? This was a question of particular relevance to Albania up to 1990, because Albania experienced no de-Stalinization, no thaw, and no perestroika, but on the contrary, only increasing Stalinist terror. In order to express this concern, I chose my material from perhaps the most universal source with which my background had supplied me: the Greek mythology that, as I have said, felt so much a part of me at the “center of the world” where I found myself. Taking as my point of departure Sophocles’ drama in which Oedipus, once he discovers from the Delphic oracle that he is the cause of the curse of Thebes, surrenders his rule, gouges out his eyes, and is left abandoned and banished by the Thebans, I had

the idea of recreating the myth of Thebes and of Oedipus, but taking it in the opposite direction. (Lubonja, *ibid.*)

According to the author, *Ploja e mbrame* is a judge and a prophecy for post-communist Albania, but unfortunately, this book, published in Tirana 1994, did not have the success of his diary published in the same year. On the other hand, Lubonja's diary *In the Seventeenth Year* won the prize 'Moravia' in 2002 in Italy. Besides the publication in Italian, it was fragmentarily translated into English. The author considers the diary's reception a success because it "bears witness," from prisons, which the reader seemed to find it helpful in understanding communism. In the history of Albanian drama, which the critics claim, "*has produced virtually nothing of exceptional interest,*"⁴¹ *Ploja* is a masterful work that tends to universalize its theme and tone. As Elsie claims, "*It is a somber play, devoid of hope and sanguine expectation, and one befitting the tragic fate of its author.*" (Elsie, "Fatos Lubonja, *Ploja e mbrame,*" 412).

Fatos Lubonja is one of the crucial critics of the fragile Albanian democracy, and of course, he is a vivid advocate of the past regime's consequences. Besides his main books, he published short stories from prison as "*Çuçi,*" "*Ahlemi,*" "*Eqeremi,*" "*Nuriu,*" which appeared in *Përpyekja*. These stories are collected with others and published in late 2021 as *Life Prison*.⁴²

⁴¹ Robert Elsie (reviewed by), "Fatos Lubonja, *Ploja e mbrame*, Tirana, Marin Barleti, 1994, 172 pages." *World Literature Today*, Vol. 69, No. 2, Comparative Literature: States of the Art (Spring, 1995), 412.

⁴² Fatos Lubonja, *Jetë burgu*, Skanderbeg Books, Tirana, 2021. Recently, on this latest edition was made a review from the Albanian researcher, E. Sulstarova, who adds, "I have the impression that the memories of former political prisoners on both sides of the border [Albania and Kosovo, my addition] are still isolated. There is no attempt to read and study them interconnected, like the memory of a nation under communism." Cf. Albanian text in Enis Sulstarova, "*Tregimet e burgut të Fatos Lubonjës,*" Faktor (Feb 15, 2022). <https://www.faktor.al/2022/02/15/recension-enis-sulstarova-tregimet-e-burgut-te-fatos-lubonjes/>

In addition, Lubonja, in these last decades, has been translated into English by John Godson (*Ridënimi/Second Sentence*, 2009) and *Apokalipsi i rremë/The False Apocalypse*, 2016). The first is a volume on his prison time; meanwhile, the second is a book focused on the Albanian Ponzi scheme and civil war, which took place in 1997.

Besides these works, Lubonja is known for his long debate with the Albanian writer and Nobel Prize Candidate in literature, Kadare, for many years. In his early writings,⁴³ Lubonja criticized Kadare for his role in communist propaganda through his work. Later he published different articles⁴⁴ in which he revealed facsimiles from his surveillance file (see *Appendix*) and participated in various broadcasting on the Kadare's question. Part of this public debate has been the publishing of his "*akt-ekspertiza*" (act-examination)—a term borrowed from the Soviet methods—which was used against him in his case file. These stereotypic examinations were made by "specialists" of the field, charged by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Interrogation Branch). In the case of Lubonja, to examine his writings (literary notes, poems and diaries) the writer Neshat Tozaj and the journalist and historian Virgjil Kule, who serves as Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the Kingdom of Sweden, Kingdom of Norway, Republic of Finland and Republic of Iceland, were assigned. But it is the third "specialist", Thimi Bare, less known and with a low profile in Albanian letters, who is....?. The conclusions of the three experts consist of such formulations: Tozaj, "*Based on the above, I think that the*

⁴³ See F. Lubonja, "*Kadare's Work Too Must Be Judged in The Light Of The Truth,*" *Përperjekja*, Special ed., 1997 (borrowed from and an issue of *Përperjekja*, 1995), 49-53. Lubonja's article, which is at the same time a response to the Albanian author Bashkim Shehu, concluded, "*there is a vital need for Albanian culture to develop and to free itself from cults. Worship is often nothing more than the fruit of ignorance.*"

⁴⁴ F. Lubonja, "*Sigurimi i vërtetë - Ismail Kadare, oborrtar i dy regjimeve*" [*The real Secret Police – Ismail Kadare, courtier of the two regimes*], *Përperjekja*, (Nov. 25, 2016): <http://perperjekja.blogspot.com/2016/11/sigurimi-i-vertete-ismail-kadare.html>

literary notes of Fatos Lubonja, which have been made available to us for ideo-artistic evaluation, contain hostile ideas in content [...]. Neshat Tozaj Tirana, on 20.9. '74.” Kule: “*These [Lubonja’s poems—my addition] mentioned above reflect his reactionary thoughts written in his notebooks in diary form,*” and Bare, “*In my opinion, all the poems of this notebook are written with a clear hostile spirit, where everything darkens, everything becomes death. The above quotations are some of the ones that highlight this hostile emphasis of the defendant Fatos Lubonja.*”⁴⁵ As I mentioned, this was also the practice of the former regime applied to several Albanian writers, among them Visar Zhiti, whose poems will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Another two essential texts that recount the cruelty of Albanian communism are those of Fr. Konrrad Gjolaj, OFM, and Don Simon Jubani, written and published after the fall of the dictatorship. Gjolaj [aka Tomë Marku], in his *Çinarët [The Plane Trees]*, 1996, 2006 & 2015 narrates mostly the persecution of the Catholic clergy, and he depicts a group of victims of the regime. But he does not speak only about Catholic clergy persecution but also Muslim clergy imprisonment, as in the case of imam Hafiz Ali Tari (alias Kraja)—an intellectual whose library circa 10.000 books were looted and served as a collection of the National Albanian Library. Tari spent 18 years in prison, a part of it in the same location (Burrel) with Gjolaj; the author portrays the imam as an emancipated intellectual. His narrative includes many other prisoners, communist persecutors, and inquisitors.

Meanwhile, the memoirs of Konrrad Gjolaj are empirical and tend to speak the truth even about recruitments of clergy members. The scenes on the “hidden riffles” at Franciscan Church

⁴⁵ Cf. the Albanian excerpts in *Panorama* (Sep 26, 2017): <http://www.panorama.com.al/zbulohen-aktekspertizat-qe-e-burgosen-lubonjen-vepra-e-tij-armiqesore-nxit-kurverine-dhe-bie-ndesh-me-parimet-e-shokut-enver/>

of Shkoder reveal the collaboration of a deacon and a former altar boy with the communists to fabricate an accusation against Franciscans. One of the people who organized the scheme to load rifles inside the Church and then falsely blame priests that they were using weapons to overthrow the government (of course this was a popular strategy used by communists when they wanted to get rid of intellectuals) was later rewarded by the government. He was sent to the United States, changed his name, and passed away in 2016 in New York City untroubled and never held accountable for his actions. Eyewitnesses of that time, such as Fr. Ambroz Martini, OFM,⁴⁶ had spoken about this case. However, the former Franciscan altar boy, who aspired to join the security service in Shkoder, Pjerin Kçira was executed by communists.

The title *Çinarët* refers to the central execution location used by communist execution squads, between Rrmaj, Catholic Cemeteries and Kiri's Gravel in Shkoder. This volume is divided into five chapters and comprises 15 years of prison and a few years after release in 230 pages. It is written in a concise and straightforward style but describes terrifying episodes. The author's narrative is a testimony of calvary and persecution of clergy on the one hand, and, on the other hand, represents the resistance of prisoners by all political categories. The gallery of the victims described by Gjolaj is long, but I will select some of them to see the savagery of the dictatorship. Among others, he depicts the fate of Msgr Ernest Çoba (deceased in prison in 1980):

The radiologist of the Shkodra hospital told how two officers came with a sack to radiology one day. I was asked to do an X-ray. He had prepared the device, and the radiologist was waiting to see which one was there for examination. When he [the doctor—my addition] told them, I'm ready, they opened the sack and took out

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3riU5zt30W4>; Fr. Simon Jubani, in his book *Burgjet e mia* (221), argues for this episode too, adding that Ndoc Vasili [aka Anthony Kapaj] was introduced in the U.S. as a dissident of the Albanian communist regime and pleaded in the cause of the FBI.

of it a child-size body with an old man's face... they put him on the machine and, after the radiography was done, they put him back in the sack. After knotting it, they asked for the film to take to Tirana. The radiologist prepared the film quickly and asked to write the patient's name even though the film was wet. The officers were reluctant to name him. He insisted, as a rule, that the film was not allowed to be delivered without the name. So they, seeing his insistence, said his name: "Monsignor Ernest Çoba"... I wrote it, said the radiologist, he had known it before, but he would never have believed that it was him, if they had not told me his name.⁴⁷

Ernest Çoba was a translator and poet too, and in the late 30s, he edited the cultural journal *Kumbona e së Dielles* [*The Sunday Bell*], printed by the Jesuit Society in Shkoder Albania—. Çoba's file, compiled by Sigurimi, begins in the early 50s and continues until his arrest. It is a vast file including records, reports, interrogations, and eavesdropping and may count over 1200 pages. Msgr Çoba, as it is shown by the facsimile (see *Appendix*), is classified as 2A, which, according to former Informative Services, means requiring the highest category of persecution.

Furthermore, in *Çinarët* various scenes of the torture of clergy are shown, as in the case of Fr. Gjon Karma, S.J., ethnographer and folklorist (107), whom Gjolaj saw many times eating leaves of grass due to the lack of bread. Also, the martyred Albanian Franciscan Provincial of whom he wrote, "*I remember the voice of Father Mati (Prennushi, my addition) asking for water, thirsty for many days without water, locked in the security toilet, and as now it seems hearing Pjerin Kçira giving him pee, which he produced himself in a glass... Pjerin had done this to Monsignor [Frano, my addition] Gjini*" (115). A scene involving Fr. Ferdinand Pali,

⁴⁷ Translated from Albanian in Át Konrad Gjolaj (Tomë Marku), *Çinarët*, 2015, third edition; Biblioteka Françeskane, Shkodër, 130.

recounted by a guard, also emphasizes humility. The priest fed the pigs during his time in internment; he always asked for permission to take some food for himself from those animals. Indeed the bread ration offered by the camp he gave to mendicant kids who came to the gate every day (132). Reading these stories, you often think you are reading fiction and not factual events that occurred in the 20th Century. I would argue that many passages of Gjolaj reflect the overt oppression of the Catholic Church under communism and an inner genocide directed with Stalinist methods. *Çinarët*, as most Albanian prison writing, embraces, beyond the author's experience in different prisons and labor camps, 47 years of persecution and extermination, which remain unknown in Eastern Europe and beyond. Despite the facticity of this corpus of stories, the narrative of Gjolaj manifests a discrete figurative language. As an author, Konrrad Gjolaj belongs to the new Franciscan generation of the period before the communist government. Consequently, his style differs from the middle-generation or senior Franciscans.

Çinarët was published when Gjolaj was 78 years old, and the book was not received well because of the many people or collaborators of the regime were mentioned by name and certainly they did not welcome a book that has data on how these collaborators clearly informed on intellectuals. Gjolaj chooses a different practice unlike his counterparts that usually referred only with initials when writing for real people involved with the regime, in contrary Gjolaj wrote full names for each collaborator, secret agent or politicians. Such fact led Gjolaj to a polemic with the publishing house since the mentioning of the names was seen as problematic, and this caused a delay on printing the book, but only later he was able to finally publish it.

While *Burgjet e mia* of Don Simon Jubani may be compared with Gjolaj, and some other authors, however it is quite distinct regarding his literary style. Jubani was arrested several times and, in total, spent 26 years in prison. Jubani's book had even a worse experience than

Gjolaj's book due to the political context and to the fact that they both mention names of real people who worked for the regime, or were informers to the regime. *Burgjet e mia*, even though printed in 2001 outside Albania (probably in Montenegro), was censored by the Democratic Party of Albania. As L. Kola argues, the reason for the Shkodra censorship in of *Burgjet e mia* might be related to the first pluralist Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, the late Pjetër Arbnori. The latter was imprisoned for more than 28 years by Albanian communists, and after the 90s, he joined the Democratic Party, becoming a deputy and later parliamentary chair. Despite Arbnori reputation as the "Mandela of the Balkans," Jubani claims that he was a spy in Burreli Prison— where both were inmates for a long time. According to Kola, Albanian institutions, such as AIDSSH, should clarify the matter.⁴⁸ After the death of Don S. Jubani the book was only published illegally until 2021 when *Kêns*—an annual critical magazine that I co-edited—edited and republished it under the copyright of Shkodër-Pult Metropolitan Archbishopric.

Jubani was released on April 13, 1989, "*remaining in debt to the Central Committee [of ACP, my addition] for 14 years*" (55), as he states ironically. On November 4, 1990, when Albania was still an atheist country, Don Simon Jubani celebrated at the Rrmaj Cemeteries the first Mass Five thousand people participated in that mass, Catholics and Muslims, making the event "*a memorable day in the hearts and minds of the people of Shkodër and of all Albanians, a day that testified that faith was alive and never abandoned the suffering people of Albania.*"⁴⁹ The first Mass of Jubani removed the fear of totalitarianism, and gradually the people started exercising their right to religion. It was exactly Shkodra, and the location (Rrmaj), where an

⁴⁸ See Lisandri Kola, "*Me rrëfye për burgjet, që me kuptue burgjet mbrenda nesh,*" in Dom Simon Jubani, *Burgjet e mia*, *Kêns* Collection, 2021 (online: <https://kens.al/revista/kolonakens/burgjetemia.pdf>) , 27.

⁴⁹ Ines A. Murzaku, "*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam: The Jesuits in Albania.*" George Fox University, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 37: Iss. 6, Article 4, 115.

event led by a political-religious prisoner brought the freedom to practice religion in all of Albania. During his tour in the United States, he declared, “*Religious freedom in Albania began with a Mass.*”⁵⁰ The University of San Francisco, on May 4, 1991, accorded him the honorary degree “Doctor Honoris Causa” in Humane Letters.⁵¹

Other former political prisoners who wrote on Hoxha’s prisons were Maks Velo and Uran Kalakulla. After being released from jail, the Albanian painter and architect Maks Velo, published several short stories on the incarceration time. Before he was arrested, he was criticized for deviation from socialist realism and prohibited from any exhibition. At 43, in 1978, he was sentenced to ten years, of which he completed only eight in the Spaç labor camp. During the investigation and interrogation, 249 of his paintings and art objects were confiscated and destroyed at the Court’s request.

In 1995 Velo published *Palltoja e burgut (The Prison Coat)*, followed one year later by *Thesi i burgut (The Prison Sack)*, a collection of short prison poems and sketches. His novels *Hetimi (The Inquest)* and *Spaçi (Spaç)* were published in 2010. Before he died, Maks Velo issued in 2018 *Jetë paralele (Parallel Life)*, which consisted of archival sources of his persecution, inquest, sentence and prison. Some of his works are translated into French and fragmentarily into English.

Uran Kalakulla, was arrested in 1961 and sentenced to death on August 11, 1962, accused of agitation and propaganda and betraying the fatherland. However, the Presidium of Popular Assembly on October 1962 (decree no. 3572) commuted the sentence to 25 years imprisonment. He was released in 1982, after 21 years. Kalakulla mostly wrote memoirs like *21 vjet burg komunist [21 Years Communist Prison]*, 2001, republished in 2008, *Për*

⁵⁰ See Aaron Lopez, “A Reflection on the Return of Religious Freedom to Albania,” *Albanian Catholic Bulletin*, San Francisco, Vol. XII/1991, 40.

⁵¹ The University Award Ceremony was echoed in *Albanian Catholic Bulletin*, *ibid.*, 13 passim.

bashkëvuajtësit e mi nën komunizëm [*For My Inmates under Communism*], 2011 and a small collection of poetry *Vargje në pranga (ditar poetik 1945-1988)* [*Verses in handcuffs (Poetic Diary 1945-1988)*], 1995.

Meanwhile, many other Albanian authors published memoirs and novels from prison or interments after the 90s. Among them, Liri Lubonja, *Larg dhe mes njerëzve: kujtime internimi (1973-1990)* [*Far and Between People: Internment Memories (1973-1990)*], 1995, republished in 2007, 2021; Todi Lubonja, *Ankthi pa fund i lirisë: shënime* [*The Endless Anxiety of Freedom: Notes*] 1994, etc. Lekë Tasi Grabjani *rrëzë kodrave* [*Grabjan Near Hills*], 2009, republished 2019; Maksim Rakipaj, *I mbijetuar (Gjallë pas mbyrtjes së anijes)* [*Survived (Alive After Shipwreck)*], 2018; Makensen Bungo, *Këneta e vdekjes* [*Swamp of Death*] 1996, republished in 2009, Ejll Çoba, *Jetë e humbun* [*Lost Life*], 210, 2012, etc.

Representative authors: Arshi Pipa, Havzi Nela, Fr. Zef Pllumi, and Visar Zhiti

In this chapter, I will analyze four Albanian authors who, in my view, are most representative of Albanian prison literature regarding their literary productivity and quality. As was mentioned in the previous chapters, this literary genre is mainly written in verse, while prose is more typical for publications after prison, dominated by memoirs. In this respect, I will be treating three poets who wrote exclusively in prisons and(or) labor camps: Pipa, Nela, and Zhiti, and one memoirist who published after the 90s, Pllumi. In addition, the three poets (Pipa, Nela, Zhiti) are placed together in this chapter because of a common characteristic: their writing has not gone through any kind of editing at the time of publication, but has been published literally as e written in prison. Such a fact has been confirmed through facsimiles of original prison notebooks (Nela's writings partially, while Zhiti's notebooks have been fully published anastatically) published like an anastatic book. While Pipa has published just a few facsimiles from his prison book, the rest of the book on tobacco leaves was inherited untouched by his family and can be found in the family's archives in Tirana to this day. Among other evidence for Nela's notebook's authenticity is the fact that Nela was hanged while serving his sentence in prison; therefore, he did not have a chance to go back and edit his poetry. Moreover, the preparer of his notebooks who took care of publishing them does not mention changes or editing of notebooks during the typing process. To prove that, the book is accompanied by facsimiles. Even though other writers, e.g. Gjergj Peçi, have claimed that his writing was authentic from his prison time, , there have not been published facsimiles or any evidence so far that these writings have not gone through an editing process after prison; therefore, it is hard to confirm if these writing had gone through editing. Yet, in many cases, writers in prison

had exchanged writings with each other (for instance, Fatos Lubonja confirms that he had read Peçi's poems in manuscripts when they were both in prison) or they would say poems out loud to each other—when it was impossible to write them down—so they would repeat several times the same poetry until remembering very well, so when they would be released, they would help each other to write down what they had committed to memory. Political prisoners' attestation has helped in many cases to identify and authenticate such writings.

The first publishing of Albanian prison literature was made by A. Pipa, in Rome in 1959, when he escaped Albania and settled in the United States. Arshi Pipa, poet, philosopher and remarkable scholar, graduated in 1942 from The University of Florence. Upon returning to Albania, he founded the journal "*Kritika/The Critique*" and was appointed teacher in Tirana. But, in 1946, he was arrested and sentenced to 2 years (See: *Indictment*, 5/XII/947 in Appendix), and in 1947 the Court sentenced him to 20 years of prison on false charges fabricated by the regime as a "*collaborationist of the social-democratic group.*" Certainly, all accusations were denied categorically by Arshi Pipa, who reinforces his statement in a letter addressed to The Supreme Military Court while he was in Durres Prison, then called "Enemies of People" (according to the regime, intellectuals were considered the most dangerous "enemies). The letter of Arshi Pipa is excerpted by AIDSSH's (see Appendix) archives, an institution from which I have been able to take Arshi Pipa's file case. However, Pipa spent only ten years in prison due to an amnesty. In 1957, Pipa escaped Albania with his sister Fehime, settling first in the former Yugoslavia. Pipa stayed in Sarajevo for about two years and, in 1959, came to the U.S., dedicating his career primarily to Italian literature and Albanian studies. He was chair of the French and Italian Department for many years at The University of Minnesota, and during his academic career, he also worked in Columbia, Berkley, etc. However, as shown below, Arshi Pipa remained a 'dangerous enemy' of Albanian communism, and he was spied

on intensively until the early 90s while he was living in the US. As shown in his case file, the regime's infiltrated agents reported even the courses offered by Pipa at the University of Minnesota in 1981 by tearing the official university's announcement letter and sending it to the Secret police, *Sigurimi/Security*, in Albania (see Appendix).

Arshi Pipa (Professor Emeritus) died in 1997 in Washington DC, and according to his will, his ashes were scattered in the Adriatic Sea, the water that connects Italy to the Balkans, including Albania, places where he dedicated his entire life's studies.

The case of Pipa might be one of the prominent cases in the prison literature of Eastern Europe. As mentioned earlier, during his imprisonment, he wrote *The Prison Book* on tobacco leaves and managed to get them out of prison with the help of his sister, Fehime Pipa. As Arshi Pipa describes in his book, his sister stitched the "atypical manuscripts" in tobacco leaves in Arshi Pipa's jacket when he escaped Albanian borders. This book describes the anatomy of Enver Hoxha's prison more precisely than any other prison book. The poems of *Libri i Burgut* "are works of arts as well as harrowing documents of great brutality and inhumanity," Anton Logoreci states in his book *The Albanians: Europe's Forgotten Survivors* (1977). Logoreci prophesizes that the stories of Albanian prisons and labor camps "will perhaps be told one day by another survivor like Arshi Pipa who might do it some of the justice that Alexander Solzhenitsyn has done to Stalin's Gulag Archipelago." Pipa never stopped denouncing Albania's totalitarian regime. In this connection, he wrote *The Politics of Language in Socialist Albania* (1989) and *Albanian Stalinism* (1990), two notable books⁵² where he criticizes the Albanian totalitarian regime.

⁵² Cf. Harold B. Segel, *The Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, 153 "The Politics of Language in Socialist Albania was followed by a no-holds-barred attack on the Hoxha regime under the title *Albanian Stalinism* (1990) and, the following year, by *Contemporary Albanian Literature* (1991), a personal and

Libri i Burgut (*The Prison Book*; 240 pages) would be the first Albanian *tamizdat* and the first corpus of poems that thematizes communism and narrates the poet's personal experience. The book is mainly written in Petrarchan sonnets,⁵³ long lyrics (*Andrra e Evës/Eva's Dream*, 528 lines), Sapphic stanzas (*Epsh/Lust; Ballkoni/Balcony*), and some other poems in different lengths and meters. There are 3977 lines divided into nine chapters, of which the first and the last chapters are not from the prison. All other chapters refer to the prison or camp where Pipa spent ten years of his sentence. Also, Pipa adds notes and an explanatory vocabulary.

In the *Introduction* (Detroit, December 20, 1958) Pipa makes clear that those poems do not tend to describe a “*series of chronological evidence on the prison's life*” but spiritualize the human souls through verses (10). He claims that “*the spiritualization of facts is a poetry task*,” and through the prison background, these lyrics develop “*the major theme of freedom*” (10-11). He emphasizes that each poem has a specific story, and all these stories conclude with an adventurous narration. A possible title for this would be: “*How a book was born in the*

obviously ideologically slanted interpretation of the course of Albanian literature from the immediate postwar period to his own day.” Robert Elsie, “*Of greater impact were Pipa's scholarly publications, in particular his literary criticism. Among such works are the three-volume literary study Trilogia albanica, Munich 1978, and a monograph on Montale and Dante, Minneapolis 1968. He also published a controversial sociolinguistic study on the formation of standard Albanian (gjuha letrare) as the official language of Albania, entitled The Politics of Language in Socialist Albania, New York 1989; a collection of fifteen political essays entitled Albanian Stalinism: Ideo-political Aspects, New York 1990; and a study on the Albanian literature of the socialist realist period, Contemporary Albanian literature, New York 1991. In later years, he edited the short-lived periodical Albanica in Washington, D.C., where he lived with his sister in retirement.*”

⁵³ There are 54 sonnets foremost structured as cycles. See Aristeia Kola, “*Korpusi i soneteve të Arshi Pipës*” [*Arshi Pipa's corpus of sonnets*,] Gegnia, Shkoder, no. 2, pp. 36-45.

communist prisons of Albania and how did it travel from there to Statue of Liberty.” (cf. Alb text, 10).

The poetic style of Pipa in this book is classical, conditioned by prison circumstances, as the poet explicitly expresses in the *Introduction*. He writes in a post-Scutarine poetic school (known as Albanian Gheg tradition) opposing the state’s official language and follows precise rhyming and syllables scheme. The dominant theme of these poems is factuality; other minor themes such as erotic, historical, legendary, etc., are also present. Factuality is related foremost to lyrics that evoke prison time, like *Kanali (The Canal)*; *Burgu i Burrelit (Burrel Prison)*; *Nisje (Departure)*, *Elegji për Gac Çunin (Elegy for Gac Çuni)*, etc.

Kanali, a long poetic work structured as a poem with twenty-four units, is the most objective evidence of all the Albanian communist repression. Like everywhere else in *Libri i Burgut*, the author is simultaneously the protagonist and narrator. Pipa claims that *Kanali* was composed in 1948 in Vloçisht Camp. He writes:

In July 1948, I was sent with a group from Durrës Prison to Vloçisht Camp. Most of the prisoners had been sent there since April of that year. They were transformed to the point that they had become unrecognizable due to starvation and the two months' hard work there.

These sonnets are only a vague picture of that state. They were written during the interval of my stay in Korça Hospital and Korça Prison (cf. Alb text, 200)

Kanali is the hypotyposis of brutality against man. In this poem, Pipa has put a detailed picture of prison life. In the opening sonnet, he gives a general panorama of the prison’s conditions. The discourse here is laconic, with short sentences that intensify the drama and the poetic tempo-rhythm, and this sonnet opens the curtain of human calvary. The following sonnets describe scenes that are photographs of that particular circumstance: torture. Pipa’s style, however, does not rely on poetical ornaments, but he tries to transform such experience

into a pilgrimage of the human being and psyche. Scholars M. Krasniqi and L. Ndoja consider this pilgrimage similar to the Dantesque journey, but here it is a terrestrial journey, limited to the *prison-hospital-prison*. So in this trinity, we have a repetitive cycle of all the images and events of the prison life.

Pipa describes man's alienation as extreme in the following verses: “*Njerëz kanë qenë. Sot janë veç zhele mishi, / automa kockash, një bërsí, një pleh*” [*People have been. Today they are just flesh rags, / bone automaton, lees, a muck*] (*Kanali III*). This tragic human fate is described through the figure of metaphor integrating hyperbole. This alienation of man is a general consequence of imprisonment. In another sonnet, Pipa writes::

*Ktu kemi pá si grinden djali e baba
për një kulaç, për një panxhar dy miq;
si vdekja e shokut ásht një sihariq
kur me fundrrít e tija t' fâhet zhaba!*

[Here we see how the son and the father quarrel
for a flatbread, two friends for a beet;
the death of a friend is good news
when with his remains, the stomach is filled!]

(*Kanali XVI*)

Another theme in this sonnet is *death*. Death in prison and labor camps is usually miserable, silent, and insignificant to the wardens. The characters of Pipa's poems, the poet's inmates, usually die in the groves, gorges, and ditches, similarly to the deaths in concentration camps he quotes in sonnets XXII-XXIII: Buchenwald, Majdanek, and Dachau. But, on the other hand, there is another type of death, a heroic one: “*Por edhe tjetër pamë: si burra e çuna / vdesin torturash, pa kallzue, pa u-qá*” [*But we also saw more: how men and boys / die of torture, without delation anyone, without lament*] (*Kanali XVIII*). These deaths show us the

instructions of the regime to guards, who performed every kind of torture that the regime's evil mind could invent. So that the prison guards or communist officials get entertained, they would beat imprisoned intellectuals with shovels (cf. *Kanali VI*), and when the guards would get tired of beating, they would order prisoners to beat each other, as the VIII sonnet of the *Kanali* describes.⁵⁴ Another example of absurdity of the system it is shown in another poem of Pipa. He depicts the death of a young artist in Burrel Prison, a composer from Shkodra named Gac [Gaspër] Çuni, who had been once upon a time Pipa's pupil. Gac Çuni was left to die from an appendicitis attack in 1956, just a few days before he would have been released. Pipa mentions such fact in a letter addressed to the former Secretary-General of the UN, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, on the occasion of his visit to Albania, in 1990. In the letter of May 7, 1990, Pipa writes: “As American citizens of Albanian descent, our respectful recommendation to you, if you visit the Burrel prison, whose cells will be probably rearranged and freshly repainted, is that you ask for the grave of Gac Çuni, a young man who was left to die there in April 1956 from an attack of acute appendicitis only a few days before his sentence expired.”⁵⁵ The elegy dedicated to Çuni, is one of the most sorrowful poems in Albanian literature, describing the end of a 30-year-old composer in a communist prison. Çuni was sentenced because his brother escaped from Albania at the end of the 40s. Indeed, Gac Çuni's case is an example that signifies the fate of many other artists under the regime. *Elegji për Gac Çunin* is an alexandrine poem composed through a couplet rhyming in six quatrain stanzas. In the English version below, the poem is translated into blank verse:

Elegji për Gac Çunin (Elegy for Gac Çuni)

And yet another died! Cry, friends, for the pitiful one!

⁵⁴ See my article “*Rreth tematikës dhe klasifikimit të saj në sonetin e Arshi Pipës*” [On thematic and classification of the sonnets of Arshi Pipa,] *Kêns*-1/2017, pp. 10-24. <http://www.kens.al/revista/Kens.pdf>

⁵⁵ Arshi Pipa, “*Letters to Statesmen,*” *Albanica*, 1/1990, 150.

*Lament mightily his loss! Died long before his time!
At least his suffering ended, after he became wearied
fighting death! He died, and departed with death!*

*They squeeze and shrivel the forces of the fallow lands of Beden,
right over there he was hurled into the marshes of the lake;
the weakened youth fell. . . . He came frail of body,
he wasn't fit for a pickaxe, he wasn't fit for a hoe.*

*May heaven pardon him for not giving to each
the breath of music, the muse of the nightingales.
Oh, how many times amid the gloom of slaves
did he capture a languishing heart and become your balsam!*

*He trembled softly, wistfully, at the sound of the melody
now of the song of Shkodra, now of the Ave Maria.
He tolerated the noise of the room that all might listen closely,
lost in thought amid sweet memories that they awakened.*

*Gac, oh suffering friend, my old pupil,
not to hear my voice again, not to encounter me outside!
They took you away to work in the grain hopper of Burrel
when the fallen leaves crackle under foot. Gac, are you perhaps wailing?*

*Wail a song of freedom for which they shut you up in the camp!
Bewail an artist's life that bore no fruit!
Wail, and right after you let those lament
who proclaimed to us his value, let the youth lament without exception!⁵⁶*

⁵⁶ Harold Segel's trans, see *The Walls*... 29.

As I have stressed in a recent paper,⁵⁷ the Albanian communist dictatorship and the hostility against intellectuals are masterfully represented through Giordano Bruno's figure in Pipa's poems. The 13 sonnets of the poem titled *Giordano Bruno* were written in 1955, and it is evident that Pipa stresses an analogy between Giordano Bruno and Pipa's intellectual fate. Here the poet takes as subject the period of Roman inquisition where the Italian Dominican friar was burned at the stake in Campo de' Fiori in 1600. In this circle of sonnets, Arshi Pipa symbolizes and identifies the history of uncompromising Albanian intellectuals during the regime of Hoxha (and his successor Ramiz Alia), with the epitome of Giordano Bruno, to emphasize memory through poetry. This poem synthesizes the story of martyrdom for the sake of knowledge, wisdom, science, and free-thinking. In my view, throughout this poem, Pipa invites the reader to understand and remember what was happening under the regime by alluding to Enverism (A. Kola, *Giordano Bruno...*, 54).

As a matter of fact, like the majority of poems from *Libri i burgut, Giordano Bruno* it is not translated into English. However, in his last poetical volume *Autobiography* (1988), a collection in four languages, French, Italian, English, and German, Pipa translates a few poems from this book, but not the most representative ones. Besides these self-translations, only Robert Elsie⁵⁸ and Harlod Segel have translated six poems each into English from *Libri i Burgut*.

It is worth noting that, despite Pipa's great contribution in understanding communism and prison literature, Albanian Universities, particularly the Department of Literature, do not have

⁵⁷ See Aristeia Kola, "Giordano Bruno, *mnemopoezia që aludon diktaturën dhe rezistencën intelektuale*" [Giordano Bruno, *the mnemo-poetic which alludes to the dictatorship and the intellectual resistance*], *Këns-V/2021*, 52-6.

⁵⁸ http://www.albanianliterature.net/authors/modern/pipa/pipa_poetry.html. The American webpage PoemHunter.com uses the version of Elsie for the poems of A. Pipa.

any courses designed on his works, while Pipa as a literary figure has only begun to “be accepted” by Albanian literary-critical circles in the last decade, however only regarding his scholarly work, but not as a poet. Maybe this simple fact indicates why the post-communist era in Albania was prolonged. I shall close Pipa’s analysis with skepticism regarding Albanian critics that are hesitant to give Pipa the place he deserves in the Albanian literary system. This will continue to happen as long as literary critics do not distance themselves from the communist mentality, while functional democracy in Albania will be absent, and Arshi Pipa as a poet will be missing in the auditoriums.

Havzi Nela is the fourth executed poet in Albania after Trifon Xhagjika (executed in 1963), Vilson Blloshmi, and Genci Leka (executed in 1977). Nela was hanged publicly on August 10, 1988, one year before the Berlin Wall would fall and just a few years before the collapse of the Albanian communist regime. His body was buried vertically in an open hole created by removing a wooden electrical pole. His family discovered the concealed location only in 1993, about two miles from his native village.

Seven prison notebooks of Nela were published in 2018 in Albania, counting 5,548 lines. Depending on each prison rules, the three other executed poets have not been found to have written any poems. According to the Albanian communist rules, the defendant was deprived of any letter and pen during the interrogation; such was the case of Vilson Blloshmi and Genci Leka, arrested and executed on the same day in 1976. They were accused of “*agitation and propaganda against the power of the people,*” and the Court baselessly found them guilty. The absurdity of the system it is also shown in the court’s verdict for their execution, where paradoxically court decides that, besides execution, there would be taken other measures against them as well: “*wealth confiscation and no right to vote for five years.*” (Kujto.al Archives: <https://kujto.al/personat/vilson-blloshmi/>). Interesting to note how a court would

think that someone executed could still exercise the right to vote (!), but of course, the judges usually would be ordinary people that had not completed any education or did not obtain any degree in law or any other university's program. Usually, a judge would be a laborer or physical worker with no experience in the justice system at all, therefore, such absurdity was quite common.

In a letter, the poet's mother sends an urgent telegram to Ramiz Alia, demanding life forgiveness for her son (*faljen e jetës*), but her efforts were fruitless (see Appendix), since the Presidency refused the request and took account only of the court's decision. The document (see Appendix) contains names and signatures, including the father of current Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, Kristaq Rama who was an artist and a famous sculptor of socialist realism.

Since Havzi Nela was a political prisoner for several years, he wrote poems in secrecy. His first arrest happened in 1967 when he had attempted to escape Albania with his wife Lavdie through Kosovo, but Yugoslav soldiers arrested them and put them in jail in Prizren. A few days later, the couple was consigned to Albanian police in exchange for Albanians from Kosovo, who escaped the persecution of former Yugoslavia's secret police (UDBA). He was then arrested and hanged on the Presidium's order, an institution led by former communist President Ramiz Alia. Nela's poems were published posthumously. Selected works were published between 1966 and 2015 but not integrally. The complete collections of prison poems was published in 2018.⁵⁹

In Albanian literature, the case of Nela constitutes a unique case study because he used open dissidence against the regime. Unfortunately, his poetic corpus still has not s

⁵⁹ Havzi Nela, *Shtatë fletore: vepra e plotë poetike* [*Seven Notebooks: The Complete Poetical Work*], Tiranë, Klubi i Poezisë, 2018, 457 pp.

comprehensive interpretation in Albania. Most of the writings on Nela's poetries are books or articles in newspapers dominated by extra-literary judgments.

The poems of Nela, like other prisoner poets, are memorized first and later written down on paper, notebooks, always while in prison. At the end of the first Notebook, the *note* of Nela better explains his challenge to save his literary product. It is clear that the poet considers the poems as a draft that needed editorial elaboration, and consequently, the lines below enlighten his attempt to rescue the poems from disappearing.

Note: All the works that I have written so far, for years, have remained in my mind, and by repeating them to myself, with my head under the quilt, or in places where I was most lonely, I could memorize them. Nearly half were created mentally, without using a pencil, and were rhymed with the fingers.⁶⁰ These are mainly the ones I remembered in Rrëshen solitary confinement when I was arrested for the second time, and others in Burrel. It is self-evident that those created without a pencil and without a notebook lack metrically, despite the artistic side. Those days when I encouraged myself to put them on paper, I was certainly in a hurry, and moreover, looking from left to right, if I attracted the attention of the friends I have very close to me. Thus, I started to write them down more as raw material, and I did not consider the linguistic side. I did not apply the literary language [official Albanian language, decreed in 1972 - my addition]; sometimes, in Toskë and more in Gheg, I did not even consider the orthographic aspect and punctuation marks, etc. In short, I have to save them as material, and I will try to get them out because I got tired of memorizing them. Also, the title and the division into parts are not as I think they should be. I would leave this task to the future if I came out from here alive.⁶¹

Havzi Nela's poems are composed in a classical form, significantly influenced by Albanian oral poetry and folk verse. Most of them are organized in alternate rhyme, quatrain

⁶⁰ The poet refers to the manner of counting syllables; in early Albanian poetic tradition, the syllables were counted by fingers.

⁶¹ It has been used a Kindle version of Havzi Nela, *Shtatë fletore: vepra e plotë poetike*.

stanzas, and octosyllables—the national meter of Albanian folk poetry. The first *Notebook of Nela* includes two poems that oppose the regime and openly mark a political dissidence. *Tirani ynë* (*Our Tyrant*) is a 32 lines poem and focuses on Enver Hoxha’s satirization. The first two stanzas thematize the illness of the Albanian dictator, who, even sick and pale, never skips Stalin’s instructions. Nela writes, “*There are a few days and quite a bit of time / Our tyrant is not feeling well / With friends and companions as if staying cold / And when he looks at them, he finds it disgusting. // They say he is pale and weak / They say he is sick, with nervous crises / When he lies down in bed more stays awake / He does not miss a red book.*” That red book is the “*work of uncle Stalin,*” says the poet, and the Albanian tyrant never “*released it from the hand.*” Hoxha, claims Nela, wants to overstep Stalin in killing people. But the dictator’s intention is, as revealed in the last stanza, the comparison in hell with the Soviet leader, “*As if he is feeling poor him / He sees his close end / And he wants to take as much with him / To be compared in hell with his colleague.*”

In the same tone is the poem *Sihariq shokë sihariq* (*Good News, friends, Good News*), which describes the poet’s enthusiasm for the “suicide” of the former communist Prime Minister, Hoxha’s right hand, Mehemet Shehu. The “suicide” of Shehu after the 90s is long debated in Albania as a possible state fabrication. Shehu was accused as a dangerous multi-agent even though he served Enver Hoxha and his propaganda for over 37 years. This nearly hundred lines poem is a denunciation of Shehu’s tyranny, and it is an open attack against dictatorship. Moreover, the poem's closure has a didactic function, with association from the bible “*Man, remember, who you are, oh poor you/ You have been dust and to dust you shall return. / Every step you take, consider where you put it / You never ascended the throne of tyrants!*”

The most emblematic poem is *Kur të vdes* (*When I Die*), which can be interpreted as the poet’s testament. This poem seems to predict how he would be buried in an unusual way,

vertically. “*When you ask: ‘Where is his grave?’ / When you try to find it / Say, ‘he hates the Cruel.’ / Say, ‘the soil will not disperse him!’*” With the explicit mentioning of Hoxha euphemistically as “the Cruel,” he canonizes the political dissidence.

Kur të vdes, is the paradigm of resistance, “*Say that he defended the right / A handful of tyrants did not endure. // Say, he loved and sought freedom, / Like a hawk in flight. / Tried handcuffs, the dark cell.*”

Other poems like *Birucat (Solitary Confinement)*, *Në qelitë e burgut (In Prison Cells)*, *Të shpojnë sytë telat me gjemba (The Barbed Wire Run Through the Eyes)*, and so on, describe the bad prison conditions and Nela’s opposition to the totalitarian regime. This body of poems also echoes the student demonstration of Albanian Kosovars against the Serbian troops in 1981. Nela’s poems manifest national feelings and are structured according to the Albanian folk verse.

Havzi Nela remains a poet whose life needs to be elucidated, especially it is necessary that his case file be accessible for researchers to have a better understanding of his life and work. Furthermore, the state institutions should implement programs that would make it possible for his work to be taught in High Schools and Universities in order to educate the new generation about the consequences of the crimes of the Albanian Communist Party (in addition to Nela’s literary contribution as such). Unfortunately, as stated earlier, to this day, the work of Nela and other former prisoner authors has not been properly recognized by the state of academia.

The most well-known Albanian poet who wrote poems in prison and gained international recognition is Visar Zhiti. Under the regime, as a young writer, he initially started publishing poems in different journals and magazines, and after a few years, he submitted a manuscript of poems to the state publishing company also called “Naim Frashëri.” But, unfortunately, these collections, according to the expertise [akt-espertiza: see Appendix], contained grave

ideological errors and were a pretext for his arrest. At the request of the Ministry of Interior, two members of the League of Albanian Writers and editors of the poetry section at Naim Frashëri state publishing company made the expert opinion on Zhiti's manuscript.⁶² Due to these "errors" that did not fit the state's propaganda, but were seen as an opposition to the principles of Socialist Realism; therefore, he was sentenced to prison. The expertise example of Zhiti's poem is a typical process for many Albanian authors.

Zhiti was arrested on November 8, 1979, and sentenced to thirteen years of prison, from which he did only eight years in Spaçi and Qafë-Bari. After being released in 1987, he was allowed by the Party to work in a brick factory in Lushnja (the punishment would continue even after being released, as one should ask for permission where to work and what kind of job was allowed to do, since there were jobs that a former prisoner couldn't perform as he was considered by regime as a person with "no dignity", therefore should not perform decent jobs), a job that he did until the collapse of the communist regime. Visar Zhiti published many books, mostly poems, and his work has been translated into English, Italian, French, Rumanian, etc. Among many books by Zhiti, I would distinguish the last edition of 2021, on which I will focus this analysis. *Dorëshkrimet e fshehta të burgut (The Secret Manuscripts of Prison)*, Tirana: Onufri, is an anastatic printing of eleven notebooks rescued from the prison with the help of Zhiti's family members. In Albanian prison literature history, as far as I know, no one else was able to save a greater volume of writings from prison than Zhiti.

Many of Zhiti's poems were committed by memory and later written in notebooks, always in prison, already a known practice due to lack of paper and pencil. In the note to his *first Notebook*, similar to Nela, Zhiti wrote:

⁶² See Robert Elsie, "Visar Zhiti: victim of the surreal," who adds, "The manuscript was then re-interpreted as 'agitation and propaganda,' and there was nothing Zhiti could do or say to his interrogators to prove his innocence," INDEX ON CENSORSHIP 4/1993, 23,

These are not poems, but they are the tired mutter of an arrested person.

These were first committed by memory, between the cell walls, in solitude and fear during November-December 1979 and January-May 1980. Seven cycles, one for each day of the week (the marks of cell walls daub the captions), to talk by the detainee's breath to challenge the horror. A total of 94 poems—described and remained as the fluttering of birds' wings.

Almost after one year, only half was written in Spaç, just for evidence, not for art.

I wish them a long journey...⁶³

It is undeniable that these notebooks—besides some others that had the bad luck of being burned by the guards due to routine controls of the cells as Zhiti claims—are not just a piece of evidence but a way to live through the poems, the art inside terrifying conditions. Beyond the poet's humble note, it would be an insufficient criterion to consider the Albanian prison literature just evidence. Therefore I argue that this literature is also an aesthetic antithesis of Albanian socialist realism and freed from dogmatism and ideology of the time. If socialist realism was a form of state militancy, prison literature was an expression of inner peace and a pilgrimage to the truth. It narrates the tragedy of communism while demanding awareness about the effects of totalitarianism but in no way advocates for revenge as Robert Elsie's states in Zhiti's first book review. He claims that: "*This chronicle of contemporary horrors is devoid of*

⁶³ See Alb. text, "*Këto s'janë vjersha, por janë mërmërima e lodhur e një të arrestuari. Së pari këto u bënë me mend, mes mureve të qelisë, në vetmi dhe frikë gjatë mueajve nëntor-dhjetor 1979 dhe janar-maj 1980. 7 cikle, një për çdo ditë të javës (të zhgarravitur titujt me shenja në muret e qelisë) për t'u thënë me vete nga i arrestuari, që të sfidohej tmerri. Gjithsej 94 poezi, të përshkruara, të mbetura si fërfëllima e krahve të zogjve. Gati pas 1 viti, në Spaç u shkruajt vetëm gjysma, thjesht për dëshmi, jo për art. U uroj shtegtim...,*" 138.

acrimony, animosity, and that ever-so-Albanian characteristic—the inexorable call for revenge.”⁶⁴ It is important to emphasize that Albanian prison literature is generally not preoccupied with any social phenomenon such as vengeance, known in the Balkan area as a dominant feature, especially in epics, but exclusively is preoccupied with communism and its outcomes.

Dorëshkrimet e fshehta të burgut (608 pp.) reflects the sensation of a young man (then 27 years old) who show us how the state’s propagandistic machinery worked and how the writer was the main target of the propaganda. In a note of the *fourth Notebook*, Zhiti mentions that the notebook collects 27 poems “*the same age when he was arrested*” (227). Meantime the theme of his sentence and arrest is the major part of the book. In a poem written in 1980, in solitary confinement, Zhiti contrasts his fate with that of nightingale (symbol of freedom)—a *locus communis* in many verses of romantic poets:

At the bars of my cell

*How sweetly the nightingale sang
Through the iron bars of my window,
Transforming the very iron
 into the verdant branches of a cherry tree.
The floor was covered in warbles
And I, on my knees,
Picked them up one by one
Like crumbs of bread,
 like crumbs of life.*⁶⁵

⁶⁴ In Robert Elsie, “*Kujtesa e ajrit* by Visar Zhiti,” *World Literature Today*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Focus on Maryse Condé (Autumn, 1993), 867.

⁶⁵ The English version of this poem and the following are taken from R. Elsie’s translation: Visar Zhiti, *The Condemned Apple* (A Bilingual Edition), GREEN INTEGER 134, København & Los Angeles, 2005, 75.

Another common theme in all prison literature is the theme of forced labor, and Zhiti also offers such scenes of forced labor camps in Qafë-Bari (1983) in the poem *Vdekja. E para.* (*Death. The first.*) which in the English version of Elsie appears with a different title. This poem describes a prisoner's death in a mine and demonstrates the price of the sentenced persons in Albania. The last verses clarify that according to communist mindset, the prisoners are just numbers, not human beings.

Death impresses no one here

*The tunnel caved in
And a prisoner was killed.
(but the chains he was wearing have not yet been killed)*

*And so, the chain gang returned to camp
With one man less,
With one corpse more,
Undelivered to its family for burial.
(You are neither among the living
Nor among the dead.
You have no life,
Not even a grave!)*

*The jacket worn by the dead prisoner
Is held in the hands of one of his friends.
Throw it at the feet
Of the officer at the gate,
In charge of the watchmen,
And say: "Count it, are we all here?"*

*Take the jacket
And shield Albania's trembling shoulders. (155.7)*

Similar to this poem is the other poem *Banjoja e të burgosurve* (*The prison shower room*), written in Qafë-Bari in July 1983 (cf. Alb text, 267-8). Here Zhiti incorporates episodes from the hard work in the mine while also giving a scene from the only moment he considers as satisfaction (the water), which he associates with erotic elements, “*Fall in love with the water / As it glides over and envelops your body / Like a woman*” (163). Although the leitmotiv of love is present in Zhiti’s poems it does not embrace a significant dominance.

Visar Zhiti seems to be (up to now) the only poet in prison who uses calligrams as poetic expressionism, such as *Litari i grackës* (*The Trap Rope*). Thirteen words represent an image of a rope (see Appendix). A similar experience is manifested in *Fitorja në qiell* (*Victory in Sky*), where the verse “*Kështu fluturojnë pata e egra*” (331) [*This Is How Wild Geese Fly*-my translation] is given in the form of the letter **V**, an association with the way of how birds fly in groups (here wild geese). But this letter also personifies Victory’s initial letter and coincides—as the poet mentions—with his name *Visar*. The translation of Zhiti’s works in several languages has been the only tie connecting the international reader with the theme of Albanian communist repression.⁶⁶

The last author treated in this chapter is Fr. Zef Pllumi with his fundamental work, *Rrno vetëm për me tregue* (a literal translation into English: *Live only to tell*). This trilogy of memoirs was published in Albania between the mid-to-late 90s and, after that, republished several times.

⁶⁶ Critical thoughts on Zhiti’s poems are published in different languages, including Italian. Cf. Albana Alia, “*Poeti albanesi*,” who claims, “*Visar Zhiti è uno dei maggiori poeti albanesi contemporanei, nonché testimone delle persecuzioni politiche e ideologiche ai danni della libertà artistica e intellettuale.*” [*Visar Zhiti is one of the greatest contemporary Albanian poets and a witness to the political and ideological persecutions against artistic and intellectual freedom,*] LEA - Lingue e letterature d’Oriente e d’Occidente, n. 6 (2017), 105.

Pllumi's work has also been translated into English in two volumes (2008, 2016) under the title *Live to tell*,⁶⁷ including some excerpts from the first volume by Robert Elsie.⁶⁸

Zef Pllumi, then a deacon, was one of the youngest Albanian Franciscans, located in Shkoder-Albania, the center of resistance against the regime, who was arrested firstly in 1946 at the age of 22. He was released three years later and worked as a numismatist in the Museum of Shkodra. On March 25, 1956, he ordained a Franciscan priest, in totally secrecy due to the political atmosphere,⁶⁹ and served in Dukagjin (Up North Albania) for 12 years, but in 1967 was arrested for the second time and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Fr. Zef Pllumi was finally released three years earlier, his sentence expiration,⁷⁰ on the verge of the European political transformations. However, the persecution and trial file on Pllumi, is not declassified yet, which, according to institutional law in Albania, it is not an accessible source. Regarding the archival sources on this author, Albanian and foreign researchers long-ago have claimed access barriers.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Fr. Zef. Pllumi, *Live to Tell: A True Story of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania* (trans. by Kate Schank), New York-Bloomington-Shanghai: iUniverse, Inc, 2008. The second volume is available on compatible NOOK Devices.

⁶⁸ See Zef Pllumi: “*The Church in the Garden of Gethsemane*.” http://www.albanianhistory.net/1944_Pllumi/index.html

⁶⁹ Cf. Át Zef Pllumi, *Rrno vetëm për me tregue*, Shkodër: Botimet Françeskane, 2015, v. 2, 71.

⁷⁰ See the last chapter, “*Liria erdh vetë*” (*Freedom arrives itself*), in Át Zef Pllumi, *Rrno vetëm për me tregue*, Shkodër: Botimet Françeskane, 2015, v. 3, 317.

⁷¹ Lori E. Amy, “*Re-membering in Transition: The Trans-national Stakes of Violence and Denial in Post-Communist Albania*,” *History of Communism in Europe: Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Europe*, (V. 1/2010), Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010, 218, “*in the first place, communist-era archives have never been opened to the public, in the second, anecdotal evidence suggests that, were the archives opened, researchers would find a host of problems, from large gaps in the record following the destruction of archives to problems with how information was recorded and reported.*”

Nevertheless, Fr. Pllumi, after the 90s, tried to revitalize the Franciscan Convent in Shkoder, which was destroyed and remained with a few members who survived the communist crimes. Also, he reorganized the Convent and invigorated the cultural life of Franciscans, reactivating the typography and the Franciscan Editions together with the famous magazine *Hylli i Dritës (The Daystar)*. This magazine was founded by the notable Albanian Franciscan, Fr. Gjergj Fishta, in 1913, and it continued to be published until the communists' arrival 1944 and was the main literary magazine at that time. The most well-known work of Fr. Zef Pllumi is the autobiographical trilogy *Rrno vetëm për me tregue*, besides others less known as *Françeskanët e Mdhaj (The Great Franciscans)*, *Ut heri dicebamus, Histori kurr e shkrueme (History never written)*, etc.

Rrno vetëm për me tregue, as I said above, is a work divided into three volumes. The first volume covers the years 1944-51 and has as the subtitle *Libri i kujtimeve (The Book of Memories)*; the second 1951-67, subtitled *Liria mes dy burgimeve (The Freedom Between two Imprisonments)*, and the third refers to 1967-89, *Robnia e gjatë (Long Confinement)*. The book's composition is almost like other memoirs in Albanian tradition, but in contrast with them, Pllumi's work is an expanded narrative organized in 89 chapters of 900 pages. Due to his lengthy prison experience, this author recollects not only episodes from Hoxha's inferno, but he gives alternative data of the Albanian manipulated history. Several times in his trilogy, Pllumi claims that the true history of Albania (especially during communist power) is not published. The passage on Zef Mala, the co-founder and leader of the Albanian Communist Group in Shkoder since the early 40s, is of particular interest. Mala, who was in the same prison with Pllumi, told him that he left a "*History of Albanian Communism*" over 800 pages in manuscript. The former communist exponent requested the Friar since he was younger and could survive the prison to find his house and take care of the manuscript. Pllumi replied that it was paradoxical such a request. How could ever a persecuted Catholic cleric take care and

publish a history of communism? But Mala insisted since his health was getting worse every day. In the end, Pllumi promised him that if he would be alive after prison, he would find his house and wife in Himara, a city in South Albania. Unfortunately, shortly Mala died in jail due to a tumoral throat disease. After 1989, Pllumi finds Mala's house and asks his wife for the manuscript, explaining the will of his husband in prison but she says that when Mala has arrested, the materials were transferred in confidence to a neighbor named Spiro Gjoka. The family Gjoka moved to France in the early 90s. Fr. Pllumi, through a French Albanologist, found the address of that family, and he wrote a letter regarding the manuscript. Mr. Eduard Gjoka replied by saying, "*kur agjentët e Sigurimit të Shtetit e kishin arrestue atë vetë e dergue në kamp të Spaçit, familja e tij e frigsueme i kishte djegë të gjitha ato dorëshkrime që mund i shkaktoshin shumë vujtje në hetues?*" [when State Security agents arrested him and sent him to Spaçi camp, his frightened family had burned all the manuscripts that could cause him much trouble to interrogators] (v. 3, 198 – my translation).

In conclusion, Albanian historiography might have loose an important future edition. This example and others in the trilogy do not prove the Latin maxim used by Fr. Pllumi himself in his book, *Sanguis martyrum semen cristianorum* (the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity),⁷² but make evidence for the suppression and terror of a nation. So I don't think that the subtitle in English (*A True Story of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania*) fits adequately. I suggest that this autobiographical work be considered a stylized literary facticity of communist Albania rather than a true story of religious persecution.

The style of the original edition, *Rrno vetëm...*, is often based on periodic sentences (Ciceronian style), mostly with a slight usage of (self)humorism, and expressed according to

⁷² Fr. Zef. Pllumi, *Live to Tell: A True Story of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania* (trans. by Kate Schank), *ibid.*, 250.

Albanian Franciscan didacticism: a language for all readers, a kind of secular humanism.⁷³ Some Albanian critics classify this work as a *documentary-literary* memoir, e.g., K. Rrahmani, who argues, “*Live to Tell is a moral and physical witness to a life under communist dictatorship for half a century. Pllumi has coalesced his dolorous memories into documentary-literary form. Even though the expression documentary-literary sounds like an oxymoron, in this case there is a semantic equilibrium between two words and domains.*”⁷⁴ Indeed the author himself denies being a writer or writing a fiction work; in his preface, Pllumi says, “*The events I describe herein are not fictional, nor are they lies crafted as political propaganda. They are simply pale descriptions of a bitter historical reality which unfolded and lasted in Albania for almost half a century... I confess I’m not a writer by trade, so please forgive me.*” (English version, XV).

This corpus of memoirs is not only his itinerary through different prisons or forced labor camps but also a narrative of surviving cruelty, dictatorial government strategy to isolate the country, a sketch-profiles (prisoners and persecutors), the destroying of the Church, show trials,

⁷³ Since the beginning, St. Francis founded the tertial order (secular Franciscanism), making it a significant part of this religious order. In Albania, the tertials have a long cultural history of publishing the monthly religious-cultural periodical *Zani i Shna Ndout* (*The Voice of St. Anthony*) from 1913-44.

⁷⁴ Kujtim Rrahmani, “*In the Shadow of Mnemosyne: The Poetics of Debt in Fiction and Testimony.*” *INTERLITTERARIA* 2019, 24/2, 531. Cf. also the next addition, 532, “*Pllumi’s intention is to find within the genre of autobiography the true language of testimony. He declines to tell some of the most extreme incidents of his life under tyranny because nobody would believe that, as he used to reaffirm. Instead, he achieves an unusual balance between documentary and fictional writing, retaining some distance to real events in order to remain plausible. Thus, the author’s intention not to be fictional – in the sense of historical untruthfulness – provides, paradoxically, a fictional aura. He has simply written an autobiography, a memory, a kind of chronicle that spontaneously transcended into literature.*”

abuse, absurdity and so on. An example of absurd Albanian communist bureaucracy is the passage below, described by Fr. Pllumi in the closure of his trilogy:

A prisoner wrote to his family that he had ended his sentence. His son came to pick him up, but he was so ill he could not go out to a meeting. The doctor gave him the bad news that his father was dying. The following day he came from Saranda with a coffin because his father had died that night. He waited three hours at the camp door to get his body to bury somewhere in the villages of Lushnja, where the family was interned. But the camp clerk did not allow the corpse to get out of prison before 2 pm because he completed his sentence only then! The boy waiting there on the street, distraught, said: "I came to get my father to enjoy only one free day, but you do not even give me a corpse! *A free corpse!*..." (v. 3, my trans.)⁷⁵

Many other illustrations may reflect the unimaginable events in a very isolated country, which attempted to be a Stalinist satellite, performing inhuman methods against the victims.

The autobiographical trilogy *Rrno vetëm për me tregue* can be placed among the most fundamental works in Eastern Europe that confirm the cruelty of dictatorship. In a way, these are manuals that show the difficult path to democratic processes, which continue to be slow and dysfunctional in Albania.

⁷⁵ Cf. Alb. text, "Nji i burgosun i kishte shkruar familjes se e kishte plotësuar dënimin. Erdhi djali i tij për ta marrë por ai ishte aq i smundur sa nuk mund doli në takim. Doktor i dha lajmin e zë se babai ishte tjetër vdekë. Në nesër në mëngjes ai erdhi nga Saranda me një arkivol sepse babai vdiq po atë natë. Priti tri orë te dera e kampit për me e marrë trupin e tij me varrosë dikund në katundet e Lushnjës, ku familja ishte e internueme. Por kartelisti i kampit nuk lejonte që kufoma të delte nga burgu para orës 14, sepse vetëm atëherë plotësonte dënimin! Djali që priste aty në rrugë, e shumë i mërzitun kishte thanë: "Erdha me marrë babën që të shijojë vetëm një ditë liri, por ju as kufomë nuk ma jepni! Kufomë të lirë!..." 301.

Conclusions

Albanian literature compared to other literatures in the Balkans, unfortunately, has been left quite unstudied and untranslated, an issue claimed years ago by researchers like R. Elsie.⁷⁶ Besides 3-4 authors (Lubonja, Zhitit, Jubani, Pllumi), Albanian prison literature it is not translated; therefore, it is quite difficult to properly introduce this literature to an international reader when there are no translated texts for study purposes. Furthermore, any academic endeavor would be incomplete without the respective translations that would offer a more comprehensive understanding of this literature. Thus, in this context, this modest work can probably serve as the first attempt to introduce the Albanian prison literature integrally to the English reader. In addition, the lack of research and the lack of a complete study on Albanian prison literature (in Albanian or a foreign language) has been a great obstacle to this thesis, but I believe that some of these obstacles have been overcome by partially translated texts and quotes when necessary for the understanding of the context, and with an in-depth analysis of Albania's literary and historiographical questions about the communist period.

The first chapter (*A Survey of Albanian Prison Literature Scholarship*) analyzes the academic and non-academic studies of the Albanian prison literature and, at the same time, argues and criticizes these sources. Some of the detailed arguments brought in that chapter or the one that follows are given to best contextualize the role of literature in the Albanian dictatorship. Any possible thematic digression is presented not without cause; often, the approach is critical to communism during Hoxha's regime and that after it—a post-communist

⁷⁶ See Robert Elsie, *Introduction to Albanian literature*, "The scarcity of translations of Albanian literature has, thus, nothing to do with a lack of quality in the original (although there are admittedly many works of dubious merit which would be better left untranslated), but simply rather with a lack of literary translators from Albanian into English. It is to be hoped that the situation will improve in the future." <http://www.albanianliterature.net/>

period that explicitly affected literature and criticism since the former regime influenced many biased studies. I consider it very important to clearly understand that some Albanian authors after the 90s, who have been described as dissidents or contributors to the Albanian decommunization, in some cases by foreign scholars, have actually had a previous devoted career in communist propaganda (for instance Besnik Mustafaj) and there is not much literary product to show the opposite. Their work before the 90s belongs to socialist realism, which tended to produce an ideological art, but even after these authors did not fully detach their writings from socialist realism. Occasionally, I have tentatively tried to compare and characteristics of prison literature with that of socialist realism, which is quite contradictory and in opposition to each other. The first is written under freedom deprivation but is free of propaganda, and the second is written in freedom but is deprived by it. I aim to clarify that the prison literature in Albania should be appraised as circumventing and antagonistic to an ideological method that has its origins in the Soviet Union. Along with prison literature, the Albanian literature of exile and the literature that remained unpublished until after the fall of communism are also listed against the regime. Of scholarly interest, I would say, is also the subchapter dedicated to the authors in the Diaspora who managed to escape the draconian laws of communist Albania. Memoirs of Nika Stajka, Gene X. Kortsha, and the Italian Jesuit priest Giacomo Gardin, S.J., remain peripheral to this day for the Albanian reader, despite their significant contribution.

In the second chapter (*Typology and Classification of Albanian Prison Literature*), I have tried to present a typology of Albanian prison literature, dividing it into literature (poetry, drama, novels) and memoirs. However, some editorial aspects are clarified related to Albania's historical context regarding publishings after the 90s. One part of prison literature is written inside the prison cells (mainly in poetry, drama, diary), and the other outside the cells, as a memoiristic expression of writing. The only book composed in Hoxha's prisons and published

during the communist rule is that of Arshi Pipa, which was published in Rome while the author was living in the United States. *The Prison Book* (1959) coined the first tamizdat of Albanian literature. In examining the typological issues, the relevant chapter is preoccupied with aesthetic elements and arguments about the nature of this literature. However, a comparative study with Eastern European literature would complement Albanian prison literature's academic framework better. Yet this thesis mainly focuses on the general context of Albanian literature, leaving out the Albanian literature developed in Kosovo. Prison literature recognizes some scientific works produced in Kosovo, but it is generally of a different written nature and context from Albania. The communist forms of arrests, prisons, and punishments between the Albanian side and that of the former Yugoslavia are fundamentally different. Despite some juxtapositions, it would still not be fully accurate to compare Enver Hoxha's prisons and the repression of convicts with Josip Broz Tito's, a fact that has been claimed implicitly by B. Kosumi; however, he places these two kinds of literatures together.

The last chapter (*Representative authors: Arshi Pipa, Havzi Nela, Fr. Zef Pllumi, and Visar Zhiti*) focuses on four authors, whom I consider the most representative in the Albanian prison literature but also important authors in the Albanian literature tradition. Firstly I have examined three poets (Pipa, Nela and Zhiti) who composed their works in the prison, and then the autobiographical trilogy of Fr. Pllumi, which was written after the 90s. In my arguments, I have mainly used stylistic analyzes of verses, as well as rhetorical findings related to poetry. Pipa and Nela present a classical poem in composition, and formally their verses are organized in (hetero)syllables and stanzas. Mainly A. Pipa uses the Petrarchan sonnet as a compositional form of writing, and H. Nela, the octosyllables, considered the Albanian folk verse. Nela's poems are dominantly influenced by Albanian folk poetry and simultaneously express political dissidence. Probably an isolated case in the Albanian literature of that time. Moreover, a sort of aesthetical dissidence is manifested in Visar Zhiti, Nela's contemporary inmate, who rescued

eleven notebooks—printed recently as anastatic in over 600 pages book—from prison. His poetic themes are related to prison, and the nature of the verse is outside the clichés of poetry published at that time in Communist Albania. Zhiti also marks cases of mannerism in his poetry, or calligrams, under the influence of French poets, such as Apollinaire.

Meanwhile, Pllumi's autobiographical trilogy is an important event for Albanian and Eastern Europe culture. Its publication is not merely a chronology of episodes, personal experiences, resistance, or persecution of clergy (as the English edition of *Live to tell* presents in the subtitle, not rightly, in my opinion). Pllumi's work is literary history and a source of information from which the reader understands the Albanian dictatorship and totalitarianism.

The corpus of Albanian prison literature works is a confession and testimony to the tragedy of a nation and culture, which seeks to be promoted for three decades now in the international arena. These writings are an open invitation to conscientiousness and mark the unified history of Europe, which experienced communism and persecution.

The thesis is supplied with an appendix that helps the reader better comprehend the Albanian totalitarian system's absurdity. In accomplishing this appendix, archival sources have been used, issued by The Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents 1944-1991 (Albanian acronym AIDSSH), and made public for the first time (Files of Arshi Pipa and Ernest Çoba). To respect the length of the thesis, only a few facsimiles are presented here because only one file is over 1800 pages long, which would require another more comprehensive study in the future. At the same time, private sources of archives have been used, such as that of Mr. Visar Zhiti, who, for the purpose of this thesis, with courtesy has handled me some facsimiles from his case file regarding the poetic expert opinion which sentenced him to imprisonment. Secondary-archival resources are provided here through online access.

Appendix

Fatos Lubonja

Kartella Model 1

Nr. regj. 3204 Nr. 19835 Kategoria P.R.2A
 Mbiemri LUBONJA R. U. ku u stërvit
 Emri FATOS P Origjina sociale Student
 Atësia TODI Arësimi te' Cauti te' pa mbuar
 Nëna LIRIJE Profesioni Studente
 Datë-lindja 1971 Kombësia Shqiptarshitetësia Shqiptar
 Vënd-lindja Çirani Partiniteti A.B.R.
 Vënd Banimi TIRANE Lagj Nr.9 Pr. "M.Gjoksha" Pall.42 dka.3 Ap.23.
 Vëndi Punës U.J.H.T. Data e vënies në përpunim
 Tendencja Agjitacion e propagandë

P. operativ Iliriani Kote Gj. 10042+10490 "A"
 Nr arshivës 15465
 Në Çirani më 07/1975
 Titullari i organit
Shefi Secerant te' vete
(Refik Naxhi)

Data e ndryshimit	Ndryshime mbas regjistrimit	P. operativ
21-1-74	Kupit nga P.P. me UA per agj. Prop. njiftor Çirani me bll. N. 04715 d. 21-1-74	
30-7-74	Arrestuar njiftor Çirani me bll. 146 dhe u detyruar 7 vjet burg.	
20-2-76	Dozja vrshtuohet me vlerë historike, njift. Tirane me 001292 dt 18-2-76	
23-7-76	b.F. rishet me degën e IV	
1-12-77	d. gj. arshivuar me degën e IV	
6-3-78	Revizimet në 2/A per agjitacion e propagandë: Miridita me 04821 dt 27-2-78, u ruanetua -	
25-12-78	7P rrethim me 16 gjatë burje. Miridita me 000945 15-12-78	
12.6.80	Emoni Fleri dozjen per ruanjet. 004704 dt 29.5.80	

Facsimile of Fatos Lubonja's File

(<http://perpjekja.blogspot.com/2016/11/sigurimi-i-vertete-ismail-kadare.html>)



© AIDSSH-Albania

'Top Secret'

[2432]

FORMULAR FILE

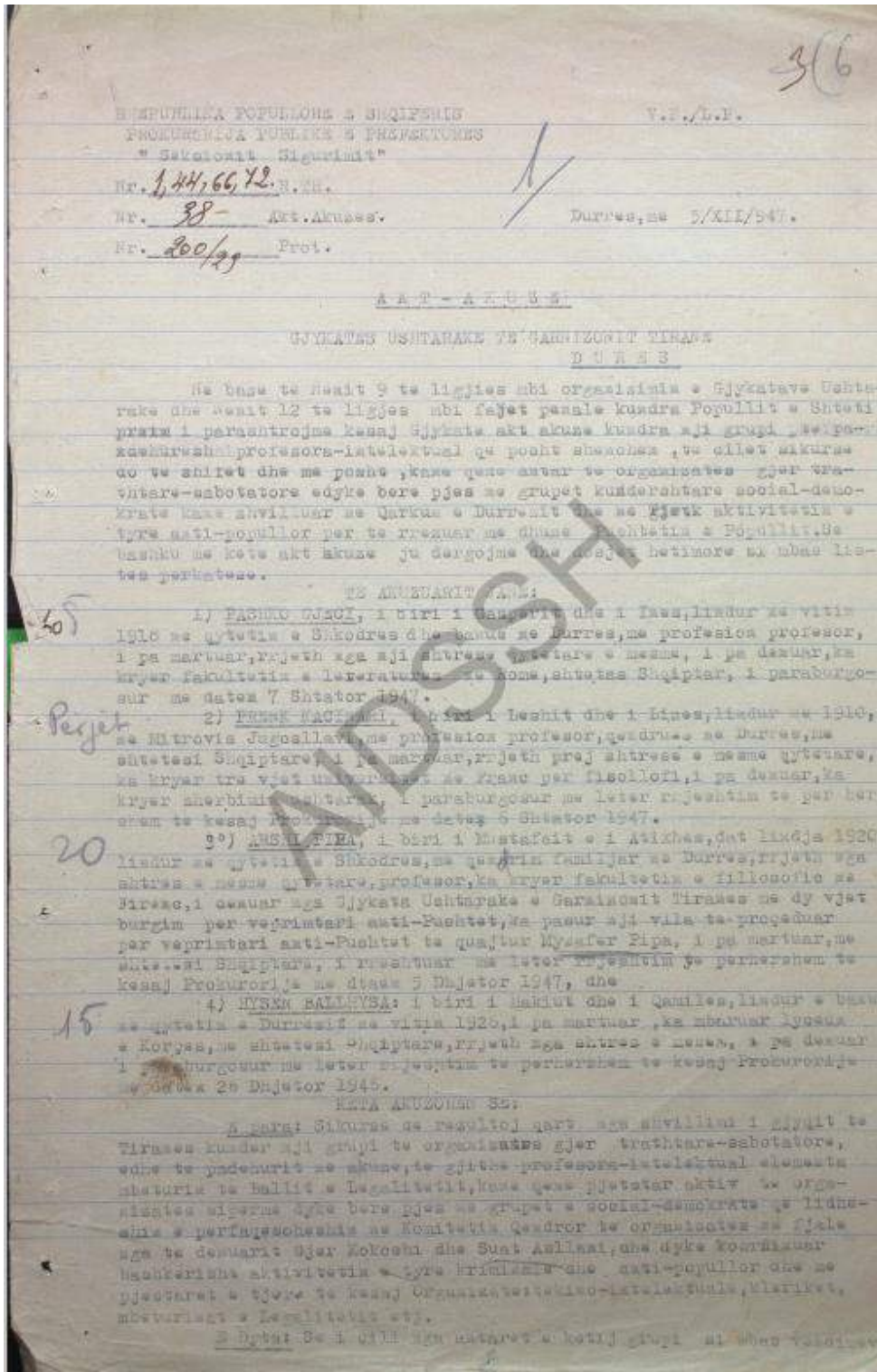
2A CATEGORY, NO. 370 IN CHARGE OF ERNEST ÇOBA

[HAS 687 PAGES]

STARTED 25.8.1954

CLOSED 13.V.1977

The indictment of Pashko Gjeçi, Prek Kaçinari, Arshi Pipa and Hysen Ballhyza (Durrës, 5/XII/[1]947)



3/1 PASDËHURI ARSHI PIPA: Me vendimin nr. 629 datë 23/11/46 të Gjy-
kës Qendrore të Qeverisë Tiranë, është detyrë me 2 vjet prapë la-
rija, si detyrë i saktë _____, për vepërishtori nëtështetë.

Me kënaqësi është shprehur Gjyqimi Qendror të pasdështur sipërme,
që vetëm që në donjes hatamore nuk lëshon paralledhur të gjithë faktet dhe
qëvrit vepërishtorë tij anti-kombetare për të cilin në atë kohë gradë e
marrësimet dhe fajetia që tij, porse shpesh kuadër tij atëvë, kanë
qënë të pjetësime për shkak se nuk ishte shprehur thellësisht organizatë
e gjere trashëgates-antebotatore e deputetëve dhe teknikë-intelektuale,
Komitete në prefektura e krahina sidhe grupet e shpërndimë që kanë të
likuidime në këto organizatë, që keshivu ai urjeunim sidhe dëfinit që ka
shpërë i pasdështur ka qënë cilimul në krahina me gradë e fajetisë dhe të
trëpikësimeve që ay paraqet.

Përse sipër, Prokuroria Publike e mbështetur dhe në fletë-akuzës e
seksionit shpërndimë, ka riprobuar të pasdështur për shkak që në përgjë
thësi u lëshuam në objektin e kënaq akte-akuzës, dhe që mendimtimt për
të pasdështur i parbledhin si në pozitë:

I pasdështur ka kryer studimet e fakultetit shpërndimë në Tiranë.
Kryetari prej shpërndimë hejleresh dhe gjatë vllaj i tradhetarit dhe armikut
popullit Mysafir Pipë, është përfjetur gjithëkohë që të fund në rrethet
shkollorë aftë kulturore burjeve në frymë reaktive dhe të shpërndimë influ-
encës kulturore e politike të imperialistëve amerikanë, me vendim
t'ua në. Sënte menduar të shpërndimë cilimë shpërndimë të jeta politike e
vendim, për t'ua demobilizuar atë.

Gjatë okupimit fashist ka qënë drejtues dhe predikues në riviste
i ideologjive fashiste dhe i programeve shpërndimë të ballit.

Ndhe mone gjatimë, qëndron kompleksisht armik i pushtetit popullor,
dhe dyke qënë profesor në liceu e burjeve, shpërndimë në grupin e social-
demokratëve dhe shpërndimë aktivitetit e tij kundërshtar për shpërndimë e
radëve të organizatës së shpërndimë rrethimë që forca të pushtetit popu-
llor. Në vendimë qënë vepërishtorë në rrethet shpërndimë dhe shpërndimë të pre-
kur e të shpërndimë, sidhe në kënaq që paraqeset, ayke u menduar gjithë-
mone të shpërndimë demokracitë të cilin dhe shpërndimë të parëditimë, që të
shpërndimë rrethet influencë të imperialistëve amerikanë, me vendim t'ua.

Me lidhje me të sipër të shpërndimë para hetuesisë dhe para gjyqit
i dështim Sulic në rrethet shpërndimë Pipë ka bërë pjetës në grupin e social-
demokratëve dhe ka qënë shpërndimë në aktivitetin e kënaq grupit në Iona Poturicës,
Mysafir Ballhyes dhe Shpërndimë Çelës."

Të shpërndimë depozitë dhe politimë bajat edhe drejtuesit e komitetit
qarkor të Durrësit, të dështim Sella Kokolari dhe Ramana Isaku.

I pasdështur e urrës thellë pushtetit popullor dhe udhëheqësit e tij,
dhe këta ay nuk mungon t'ua shpërndimë edhe gjatë procedimit që i bëhet para
prokurorisë. Ky mendim që vetëm të mone akuzat e fajetisë tij, por edhe
të shpërndimë gjithë akuzat e popullit që u bënë gjatë rrjedimit dhe shpë-
ndimë të gjyqit Tiranë kundër grupit deputetëve dhe teknikë-intelektu-
alëve.

Ja si shpërndimë ay në procesin e vet, para rrokorisë:
"Une monegj gjithëshpërndimë pënimt që kanë bërë para hetuesisë sidhe për
gjyqit në Tiranë, të dështim shpërndimë të komitetit qarkor të Durrësit,
Sella Kokolari, Sulic Kojari e Ramana Isaku, për që unë të kënaq qënë dështim
i Tiranë, organizatës në shpërndimë të grupin e social-demokratëve. Une mendim
me kënaq kënaq bërë këto politimë duke ditur se unë kënaq qënë një person që unë
e shpërndimë pushtetit popullor shpërndimë e van politimë dhe para gjyqit
përse, dhe kënaq qënë menduar, t'ua kënaq kënaq kënaq akuzat shpërndimë që
kënaq kënaq dhe të shpërndimë."

Këto del sidhe në tjetër qënë e rrethëshpërndimë dhe personalitetit
të kënaq të pasdështur që kënaq i vendimë kënaqshpërndimë në rrethet e vet
anti-kombetare dhe tradhetare.

Kënaq qënë në rrethet shpërndimë e Tiranë të pasdështur dhe në shpërndimë

Appeal Letter of Arshi Pipa to Supreme Military Court [of Albania]
(Durrës, December 27, 1947)

Vdekje Fashizmit
Liri Popullit

Me anën e Drejtoris Buregut A. P. Durrësit

Gjykatës së Lartë Ushtarake

Tiranë

I nënshkruemi Arshi Pipa kam nderim t'i panages asaj së
Naltë Gjykati kërkuesim time apelimore, si vijon:

I arrestuem që me 27 Prill 1946, jam dënuar prej Gjykatës Gjerrizor-
nit Tiranës me 2 (dy) vjet përvojë liri për vepimet e kundër pushtetit. Me 20 Dhe-
tuer 1947 jam dënuar rishitas nga Gjykata me 20 (njizet) vjetë përvojë liri, i ak-
zuar për përmarrje në grupin social-demokrat në lidhje me organizatën e depu-
tëve. Përsa i përket kësaj akuzë marr lejonte bëj vetëm një vërejtje: personat që
më akuzojnë dita i njëj vetëm për fjetje e dita nuk i njëj fare. Prej akteve
që e Naltë Gjykati do të marrë në shqyrtim, kam shpresë, do të dalë e qartë se
unë nuk jam një njeri i politikës por një njeri i librave, i studimeve; nuk kam
marrë pjesë në jetën politike para Gëzimut, nuk kam qenë as me Ballin as me
Legatitetin. Me ndjenja kam qenë kundërshtar i fashizmit, gjë kjo që provohet
ndërmjet tjerash, nga një dokument që ndodhet në aktet e mijë të gjykimit
të parë. Rrezedhi nga një shprehje e mesme qytetare, Nuk jam i frikës nga
Reformat, mbasi as unë as prindët e mijë nuk kemi të paktën asnjë shtëpi
banimi tonën.

Përveç të mënjërmëve lutem të merren para sysh edhe këto dy gjana:

a) gjendja ime familjare: tue qenë unë i vetmi mashkull - veç
babës që është tërësisht vjësor e paralizik - në familjen time të përballuar nga marra,
katerë motra - prej të cilave njëra e sëmure tuberkuloze - dhe dy jetimë.

b) gjendja ime shkëndetërore : tue qenë unë qe prej shumë kohe me një infiltracion të mushkërive.

Tue shpresue se apelimi im do të gjëjë konsideratë pranë asaj së kalte gjykatë, kërkoi lehtësimin e dënimit dhe shpreh bindja time në vendiktimin e saj të drejtë.

Arshi Pipa

i burgosur në Prizren A.P. të Durrësit

Livari, 27 Dhjetor 1947

1981

1981

Hijshim

ANNOUNCEMENT

A graduate course, Albanian Language and Culture, has been instituted at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

The course, to be taught by Professor Arshi Pipa, will center on distinctive aspects of Albanian culture such as language, folklore, ethnology and literature. It can be language-oriented, or culture-oriented, or both, depending on the interests of the students.

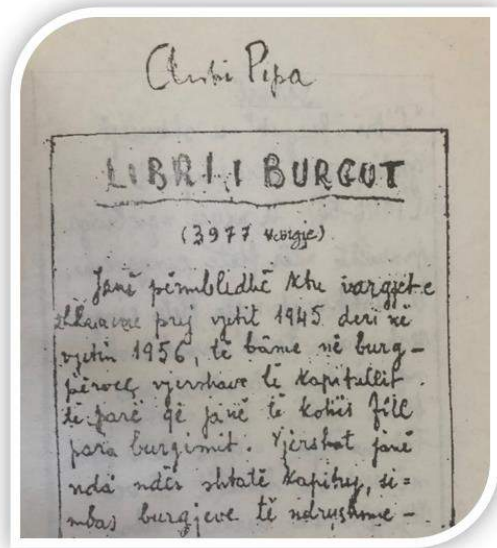
Albanian Language and Culture will be offered in the Fall Quarter 1981. Interested persons should write to:

Professor Arshi Pipa
Department of French and Italian
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Mn 55455

Përkthim

Ne universitetin e Minesotës, Minneapolis,
është hapur një kurs i gjuhës dhe kulturës
shqipëtare për të vjetër.

Kursi, i cili do të jap mësim profesor Arshi Pipa,
do të përqendrohet më së shumti bazuar
te kulturës shqiptare siç janë: gjuhë,
folklori, etnologjia dhe literatura. Kursi
do të ofrohet në vitin akademik 1981-82.
Interesuar të mësojnë ose të ofrojnë shërbime,
të kontaktuar me profesor Pipa në adresën e mësipërme
1981.

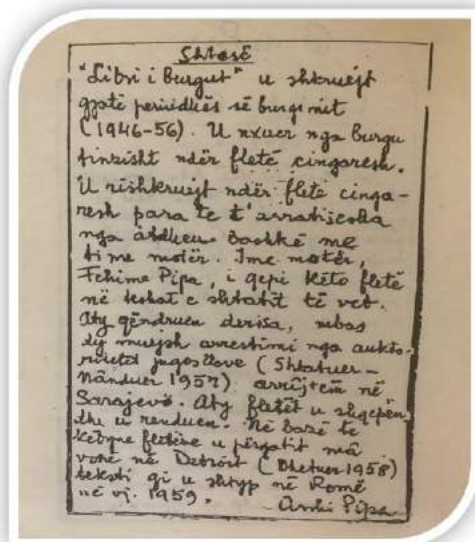


Arshi Pipa

THE PRISON BOOK

(3977 verses)

Here are collected the verses written from the year 1945 until the year 1956, composed in prison besides the poems of the first chapter, which are before prison time. The poems are divided into seven chapters according to different prisons.



Appendix

"The Prison Book" was written during the imprisonment time (1945-1956). It was taken out in secrecy in tobacco leaves. It was re-written in tobacco leaves before I escaped from my fatherland. My sister, Fehime Pipa, stitched them in her clothes. [Those leaves] stayed there until we arrived in Sarajevo after two months of arrest from Yugoslav authorities (September-November 1957). The [tobacco] leaves were unstitched and composed. Later in Detroit (December 1958), based on these [tobacco] leaves, was prepared the text that was printed in Rome in 1959.

Arshi Pipa

PRISON AND LABOR CAMPS

Arshi Pipa, *The Prison Book*, notes [1959]

*

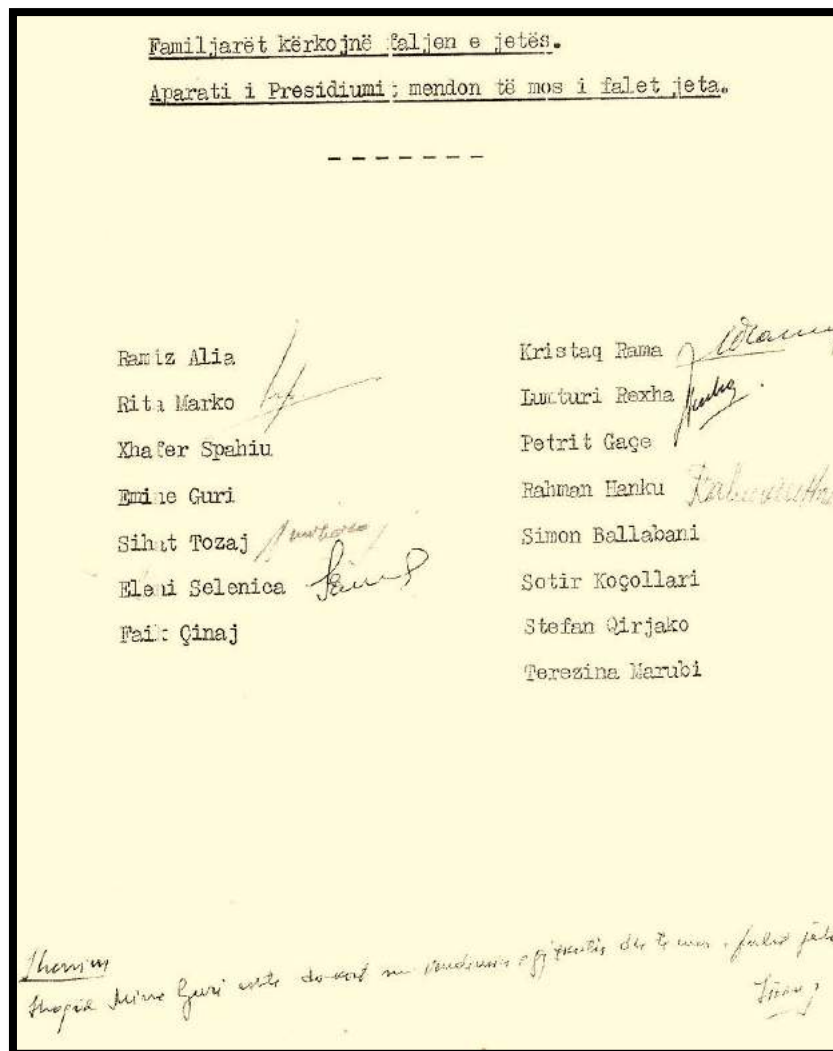
“Burrel Prison where died a lot of Albanian prisoners by tortures, illness, famine, is the worst prison of communist Albania: since the beginning, there were put together the political opponents of communism classified as the most dangerous,” 207.

“I was in Korça’s Hospital when a peasant from Elbasan prison was brought in. He was suffering from starvation. But when a bowl of spaghetti was given to him, he opened his eyes and made a sign that he wanted to eat. He was able to take a couple of mouthfuls. During the third one, he closed his eyes and died. I always have him in my mind, with wisps of spaghetti in his mouth hanging over his chin,” 203.

**

“During the period of four years that I have spent in Burrel Prison, I had the chance to see more than one time how arbitrarily, people were taken and sent to solitary confinement, only with a blanket and nothing else, sometimes without it... Solitary confinement meant food limitations... The water was not clean. I have seen with my eyes many times worms swimming on it... Burrel Prison has been the dirtiest I have ever experienced; there were no toilets at all. During the winter, the people could not wash,” 207-8.

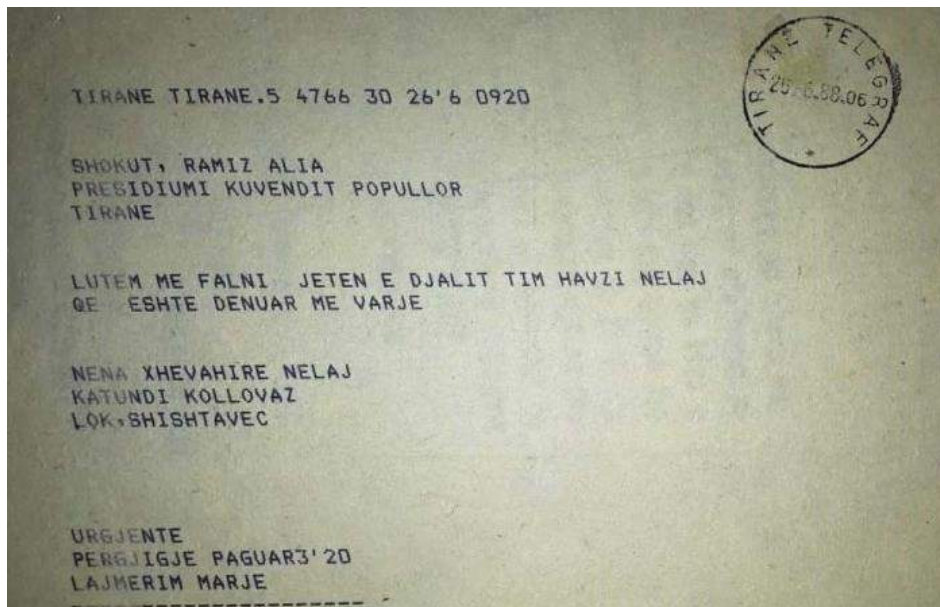
“The daily meal in camp consists of 800-850 grams of bread, two ladles of “dish” (usually unpeeled potatoes with oil) and a smaller ladle of tea” 201.



Refusal document of life forgiveness by Presidium for Havzi Nela

Gazeta *Dielli*, a copy of the document can be found

<https://gazetadielli.com/33-vite-nga-ekzekutimi-i-poetit-havzi-nela/>



Seal [Tirana, telegraph. 25.06.88]

To Comrade Ramiz Alia
The Presidium of Popular Assembly
Tirana

I beg you to forgive the life of my son Havzi Nelaj condemned with hanging.

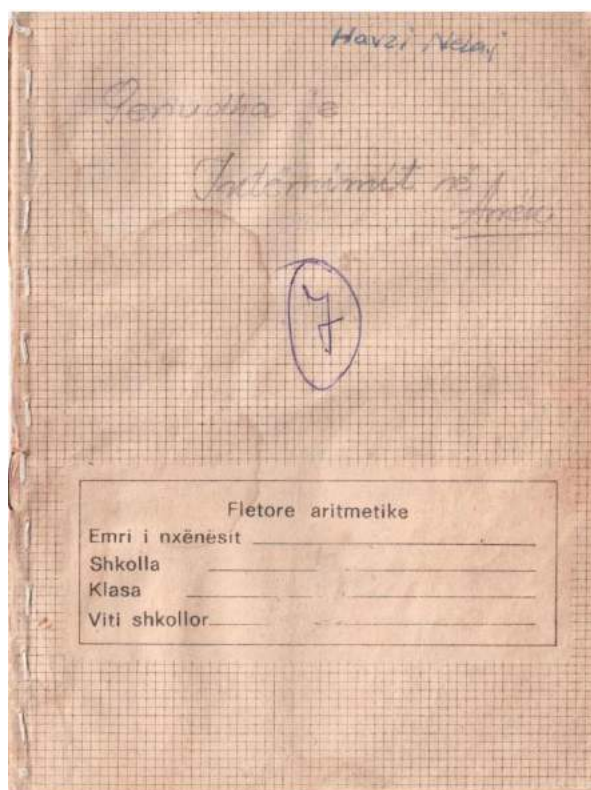
The mother, Xhevahire Nelaj
Kollovaz Village
Lok, Shishtavec

Urgent
Paid answer 3' 20
Receipt notice

<https://www.observatorikujteses.al/1988-telegrami-i-nenes-se-havzi-neles-drejtuar-presidiumit-te-kuvendit-popullor/>



Fletorja nr. 3 / Notebook No. 3



Fletorja nr. 7 / Notebook No. 7

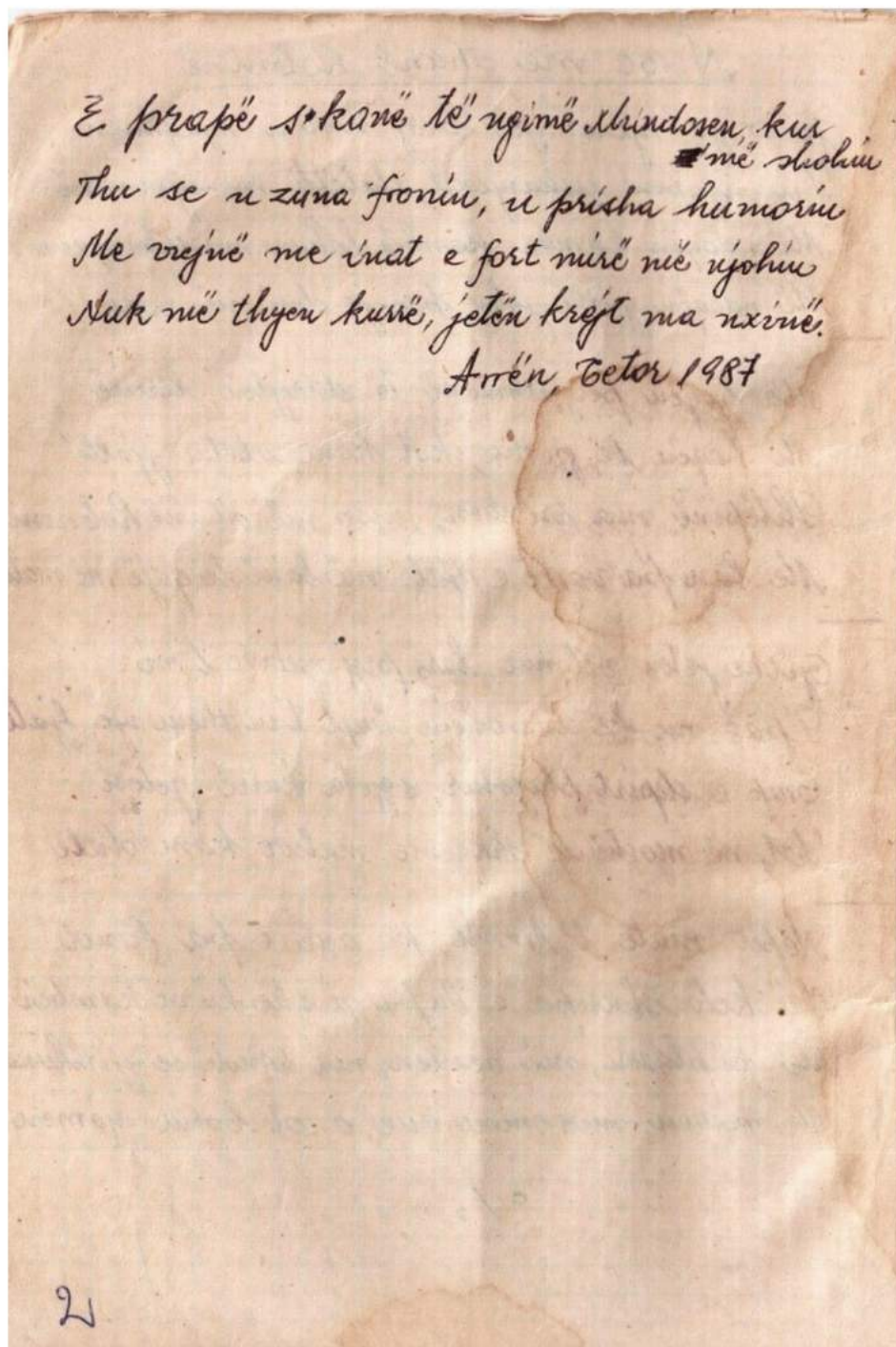
Nuse më dhanë Robninë

Jo or jo, njëzet jet burg nuk u myafituen
G'u ngopën ushunjëzat, xhelatët mendjëmarrë
Më ndoqën kamba-kambës, lakun ma shtërnguen
Më ndoqën gjithë jetën, pse jo deri në varr!

Ma hogën përgjithmonë, të shtrejtoën, liriuë
Më hogën të gjitha, kot kanë ubetur gjallë
Ghtëpinë ma rrënuen, nuse më dhanë Robninë
Më lanë pa vajzë e djalë, më lanë të qajë me mallë

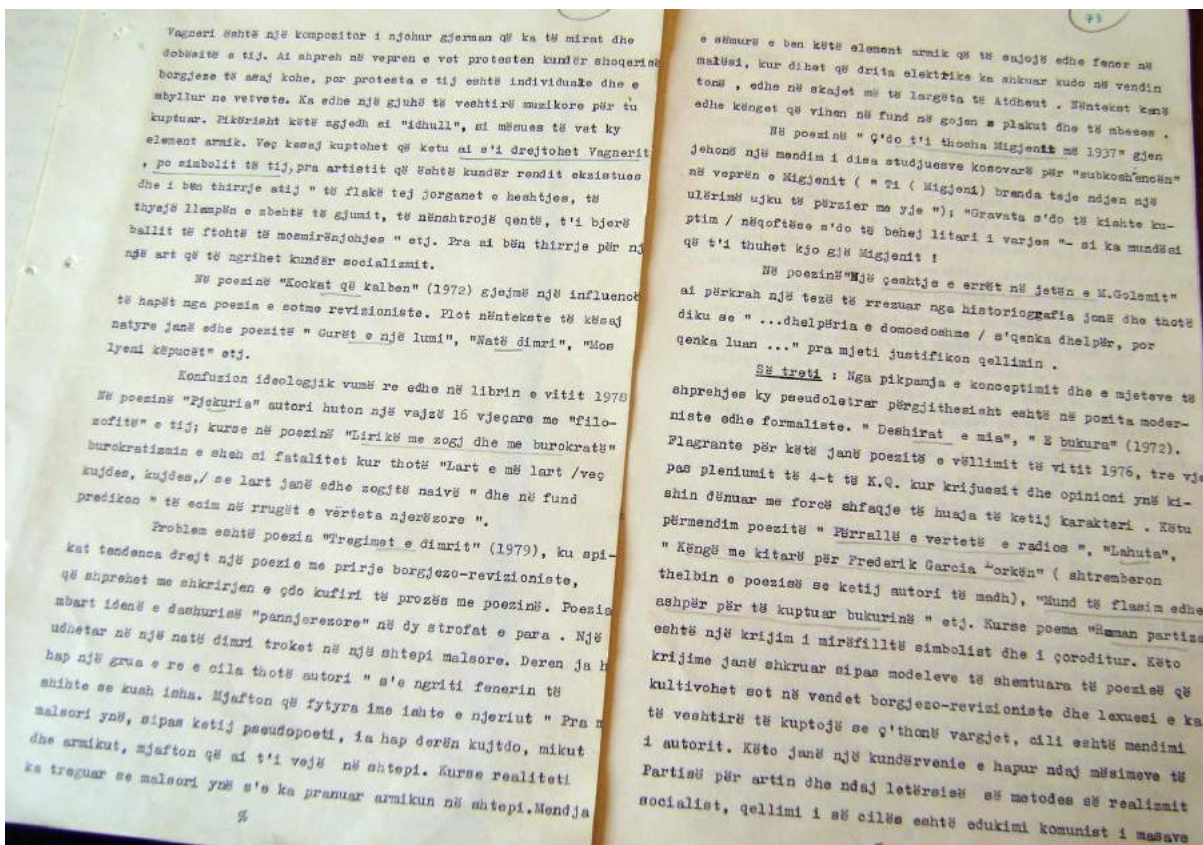
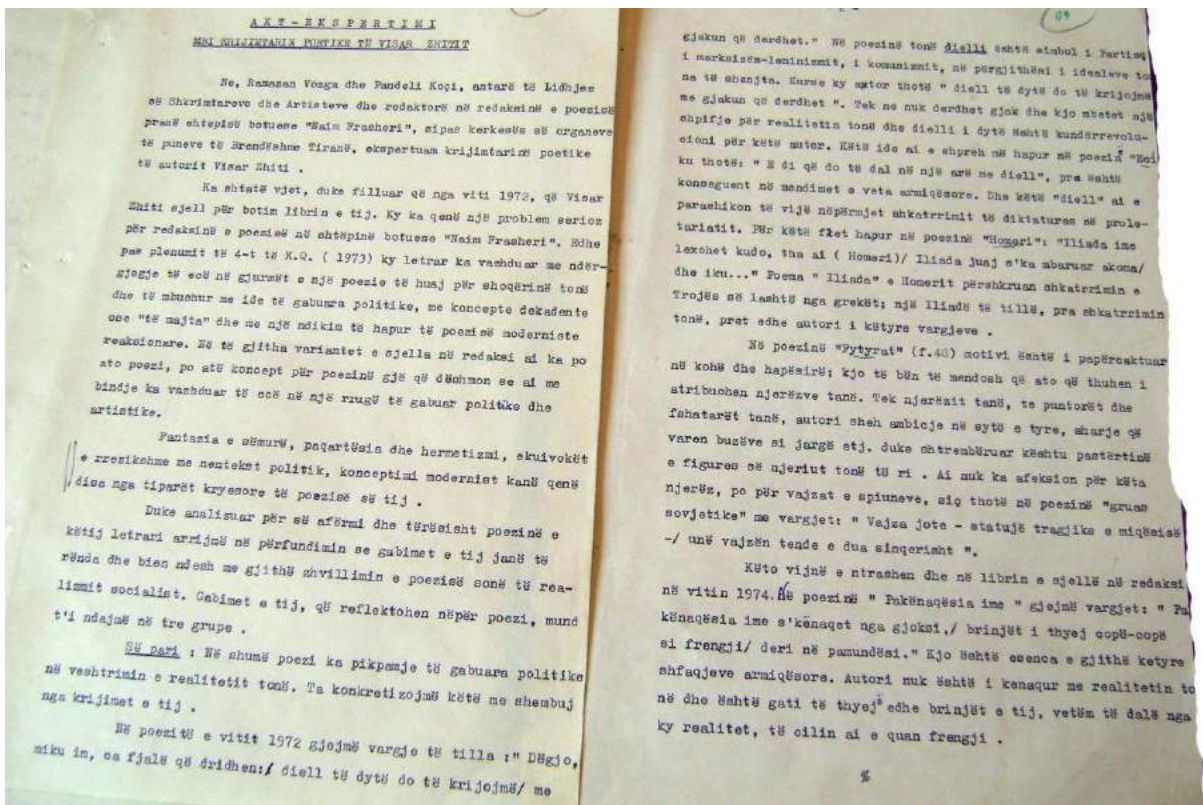
Gjithë jetën veltmue, larg prej njerzve t'mi
G'pas me kë larrohem, kujt t'ia them një fjalë
Grup e shpirt plazour, s'qeta kurë qetësi
Gjot në mothë të shkrueme, malce kam djalë

Nëpër male t'Armit, pa auë e pa fund
Në këto shkrope e thepa që s'ke ku ve kambën
Më përphasën, më rezuen, ma randë se gjithkundi
Më rezuen mos me u qe, o zot banu gjamëu.



Fascimile of H. Nela's poem, *Nuse më dhanë robninë* (They Gave Me Captivity as A Bride)
Havzi Nela, *Shtatë fletore: vepra e plotë poetike* [Seven Notebooks: The Complete Poetical Work],
Tiranë, Klubi i Poezisë, 2018.

Expert Opinion On The Poetical Product Of Visar Zhiti



Vashdajtë këto edhe në librin e vitit 1976. Në poezinë "Natyrikt, nuk jem gjithmonë femijë" lexojmë "Unë nuk çava përpara në art sepse paskam dashur qëndrueshmëri/ por nuk më gëshehën/ (dhe a'më ndihmuan)/ sepse unë duke u bërë burrë/ do të isha talent/ i tmerrshëm... Dhe më për dapo e lamë zemren timë si një mi/ që brën vetën e vet...". Ai e ndjeh vetën të përcaktuar padrejtësisht dhe e parandjen se fundi i tij do të ishte i turpshëm. Akoma që ai bën kundër shoqërisë së ashpër të talentit të tmerrshëm, siç e quan ai vetën, (kuptohet i tmerrshëm për shoqërinë tonë) është shpifje sepse ky pushtet i ka dhënë shkollën dhe punën, pra nuk e ka lënë "si një mi që ha vetveten" në depo, por i ka dhënë të gjitha mundësitë që të ecë në jetë si njeri i ndershëm, duke e bërë edukator të brezit të ri.

Në tej vjen poezia "Dritarët" me këto tri vargje: "Dritarët/ janë britma ime që të braktiset me forcë/ dhoma e errët e vetmisë." Ja si e karakterizon ky element armik vendin tonë "një dhomë të errët vetmisë" dhe për këtë ai kërkon "braktisje me forcë" duke aluduar kështu në një veprim kundërrevolucionar. Por këtu ka edhe një farë singulariteti. Si element armik ai e ndjen veten të vetmuar dhe të braktisur në ambjentin tonë revolucionar.

Problemi të kësaj natyre gjejmë edhe në poezitë "Pusha e betejës", "Lagja ime e vogël", "Drejt", "Macja dhe macja e pasqyrës", "Tromba dhe burokratët", "Studentët e Shkodrës (strofa e III)", "Fëmijet e detit" (strofa e IV, V), "Mermeri i ditëve dhe i statujave", "Revolucioni", "Balladë moderne për një skllavë", "Vrulli i munguar". Në hapur shprehjet ky element armik në poezitë "Mikut tim që punon", "Fëmija me këpucë të mëdha", "Djali i Rozafës", "Xhuliasë", ku pozicioni i tij armiqësor është i përcaktuar mirë.

Kjo për faktin se shpreh "shqetësimin" e tij për një femijë malësor që shret në pari në qytet dhe ngaqë s'ka ç'të veshë ka mbathur këpucët e mëdha të të atit (në poezinë "Fëmija me këpucë të

mëdha"), kurse në poezinë "Xhulia" një malësor shkon në universitet e veshur me xhaketa e vjetër ushtarake që ia dhënë të vëllezit kur ai mbaroi shtetësinë ushtarake. Këtu duket që të qellimi i tij, me këto vargje kerkon të njohet jetën tonë dhe shpif për mirëqenien ekonomike që u ka sjellë socializmi, sahtu si gjithë popullit, edhe malësorëve tanë.

Në librin e vitit 1977 gjejmë poezinë "Do të dal kundër roborizimit", megjithatë i është thënë gjithmonë që është me nëntekst, por ai njaftohet vetëm me ndërrimin e titullit.

Edhe në librin e vitit 1978 gjejmë të tilla gjëra. Në poezinë "Bisedë me një puntor për Partinë" autori ka një koncept të "vetin" për Partinë në strofën I (f.100); kurse poezia "Gjirksi" me karakterin e saj të papërcaktuar dhe në lidhje me një poezi të tjera të gabuara, fshih një mendim të poshtër. Paralele të fshihura ka edhe në poezinë "Në amfiteatrin e madh" ku lexojmë vargjet "ndoshta një djalë të gurimadha / (si paska fytyrën time)/ e burgosën në sallën me tigr/ se dash të bente kryengritje". Në pa adresuar është edhe poezia "Poeteve që mbyllën në kullën e fildishtë" që mund të interpretohet edhe si reagim kundër poezisë së shtetasve me vargjet "vallë q'ndehet burë për të shpëtuar poezinë nga mati i drunjtë i dobësive?".

Në librin e vitit 1979 është poezia "Ne 20 vjeçarët që shkuan në fshatin e ri socialist". Poezitë titullit të saj është vend një citat i shokut Enver. Por famë i poezisë nuk përkon me të, bile e kundërshton. "Vallë burrosh me Mio Sokolin në krye" nuk ka asnjë detaj nga koha e Mio Sokolit; kështu edhe kjo fshih mendimin e autorit. "Njerëzit e punës" - fillimi dhe fundi i kësaj poezie janë shprehje e një anarkie të thënë troq.

Së dyti : Në një poezi ky pseudoletrar shpreh hapur edhe botkuptimin e tij ideologjik të huaj për shoqërinë tonë, sidomos lidhur me rolin e artit. Kjo del në poezinë "Vagnerit"

punonjëse.

Duket thënë se këto qëndrime armiqësore të këtij elementi armik, që theksojnë si në aspektin politik, ideologjik sahtu edhe në atë të konceptimit e njetëve të shprehjes, (të cilat shprehin fund e krye në krijimtarinë e tij) nuk janë të ndara me thikë, përkundrazi ato thuren me njeri tjetrin dhe i shprehin njeri tjetrit në qellimin e këtij pseudopoeti.

Pas kësaj analize arrijmë në shtatë përfundime. Ky element armik është i bindur në mendimet e tij të gabuara dhe armiqësore. Vargjet e të redaksisë, keshillave që edhe ai ta veshë talentin në shërbim të popullit, v. Zhiti s'ua ka vendë veshin fare; përkundrazi për vite me radhë ka vazhduar të ngulë kembë që këto krijime armiqësore të botohen. Me këto krijime ai ka dashur të çorodisë lexuesit, të derdhë helm në mendjet dhe ndjenjat e tyre. Siç u vu re në sipër në një poezi ai shpreh hapur apo në mënyrë të terthortë pikpamje të gabuara politike në pasqyrimin e shtrembëruar të realitetit të tonë socialist duke u kundërvënë kështu gjithë letërsisë dhe arteve toza që militojnë në ndihmë të Partisë për edukimin e popullit. I ndikuar rëndë nga ideologjia borgjezo-revizioni ai ka rënë në preherin e një poezie të huaj dhe armiqësore për ne, që dëmton vijën e Partisë.

Në përfundim një gjuhë të errët dhe plotë nëntekste ai ka synuar të mbjellë idetë e tij kundërrevolucionare. Në rast të tjera ai është krejt i mbyllur dhe përdor figura që nuk zberthehen dot. Këto poezi hermetike e të pakuptueshme janë në kundërshtim me orjentimet e Partisë për një letërsi të qartë e të kuptueshme. Ky pseudopoet me imitimet e shentuara të artit reaksionar është përpjekur të mbjellë barëra

helmuese në kopëstin tonë të pastër letrar dhe të përlindur kështu atmosferën tonë letrare.

Ramazan Vozga
Tirane më 24.10.1979

Pasqeli Koçi

THE ACT OF DENUNCIATION,
AN "EXPERT OPINION" ON THE
POETIC WORKS OF VISAR ZHITI
(1979)

No country of eastern Europe suffered from such a high degree of censorship and political control as Albania. From the Second World War right up to 1990, the Albanians were hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world and forced to live a parallel existence, as if on another planet. They knew very little of the outside world, and they were too afraid to ask.

It is estimated that, under the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, at least one third of the total population was in the active service of the Sigurimi, the notorious and omnipotent state security office. The Sigurimi waged a sustained and implacable campaign against would-be spies and saboteurs, against sworn enemies of the people's power, whether they existed or not, and enabled Hoxha thus to maintain absolute rule over the country. Class struggle, as the campaign was officially

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division of the Naim Frashëri State Publishing Company, have prepared the following expert opinion on the poetic works of the writer Visar Zhiti, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior in Tirana.

It has been seven years now, beginning in 1972, that Visar Zhiti has been trying to have his manuscript published. This endeavour has constituted a serious problem for the poetry division of the Naim Frashëri State Publishing Company. Ever since the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central Committee (1973), this writer has been persevering consciously in support of a type of poetry foreign to our society, of a type of poetry charged with erroneous political concepts, decadent, so-called 'left-wing' ideas and overt influence from modernistic reactionary verse. In all the alternatives he has submitted to the board, he has always presented the same type of verse, the same concept of poetry, which proves that he has consciously taken the wrong political and artistic course.

Among the primary characteristics of his verse are a sick fantasy, obscurity and hermeticism, dan-

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known, was carried on even in the smallest unit of society, the family. Children spied upon their parents and grandparents, husbands upon their wives, sisters upon their brothers. If other eastern Europeans could give vent to their frustrations in the privacy of their homes, the Albanians were forced to maintain silence, for years, indeed decades on end.

One of the very first documents to have seeped out of the Sigurimi files is an 'expert opinion,' an official act of denunciation, against the poet Visar Zhiti, recipient in 1997 of the prestigious Ada Negri Prize for poetry (Italy). As a direct result of this 'opinion,' the poet was arrested on 10 November 1979 and spent the next seven years of his life in prisons and concentration camps, including a long struggle for survival in the infamous copper mines of Spaç.

"We, R. V. and P. K.⁵, members of the League of Writers and Artists and editors at the poetry

⁵ Names abbreviated at the request of the poet.

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gerous allusions with political undertones and modernistic ideas.

In our detailed and comprehensive analysis of the poetry of this writer, we arrive at the conclusion that his errors are grave and in contradiction with all aspects of our poetry of Socialist Realism.

The errors which are evident in his poetry can be divided into three groups:

Firstly: In many of his poems, he holds erroneous political views in his description of our reality. Let us offer a few concrete examples from his works. In his verse from the year 1972 we find the following lines: "Listen, my friend, / to these trembling words / a second sun will be born / of our blood." In our poetry, the sun is a symbol of the Party, of Marxism-Leninism, of Communism and of our sacred ideals in general. The writer nonetheless states: "A second sun will be born / of our blood." No blood is shed in our country. This is a defamation of our reality. By the second sun the author means counter-revolution. He repeats this idea overtly in the poem 'Set off', where he states, "I know I will find a field of sun." This is

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the logical consequence of his hostile thinking. He thinks that this 'sun' will rise by the destruction of the dictatorship of the proletariat, something he expresses openly in his poem 'Homer': *"My Iliad is read everywhere, he said (Homer) / your Iliad is not finished yet and he departed..."* Homer's Iliad describes the destruction of Ancient Troy at the hands of the Greeks. With such an Iliad, the author of these lines is seeking our destruction.

In the poem 'The faces' (p. 48), the motif is left unspecified as to time and place, which makes one think that the subject of the poem may be our people. The writer sees ambition in the eyes of our workers and farmers. His distortion of the faces of our new generation is an insult oozing like saliva from his lips. He dislikes these people and prefers the daughters of spies, as he states in his poem 'To the Soviet woman': *"Your daughter - tragic statue of friendship / I love your daughter sincerely."*

Such elements are even more apparent in the manuscript he submitted to the board in 1974. In his poem 'My dissatisfaction' we encounter the lines: *"My dissatisfaction cannot be stilled by*

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the breast / I'll shatter my ribs for a loophole / to impossibility." Here we find the essence of all these hostile manifestations. The writer is indeed dissatisfied with our reality and is ready to break his own ribs to escape from this reality, an escape he equates with the loophole. The same things come up in his manuscript of 1976. In his poem 'Of course we don't always have children,' we read: *"I did not get far in art because of my love of ruins, / nor would they let me (nor would they help me) / knowing that, when I grew up, I'd be a tremendous talent... and in the files they abandoned my heart like a mouse with nothing to gnaw at but itself."* He wrongly regards himself as persecuted and has a premonition that he will not end well. The accusation he makes that our society is oppressing him and his 'tremendous talent,' as he says, is a defamation because it is our system which gave him schooling and a job and certainly did not abandon him 'like a mouse left to eat itself' in some warehouse. On the contrary, it gave him everything he needed to become a good citizen and educator for the coming generation.

Following this is the poem 'The windows'

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with these three lines: *"The windows / are my calls to tear myself away with force / from a sombre room of solitude."* This is how this hostile writer characterizes our country - "a sombre room of solitude", from which he wants to "tear himself away with force", an allusion to counter-revolutionary activity. There is, nonetheless, a certain degree of sincerity to this. As a hostile element, he does feel isolated and abandoned in our revolutionary midst.

Problems of this kind we also find in the poems 'The battlefield', 'My little neighbourhood', 'The deer', 'The cat and the cat in the mirror', 'The trumpet and the bureaucrats', 'The students from Shkodra' (third stanza), 'The children of the sea' (fourth and fifth stanzas), 'Marble of days and statues', 'The revolution', 'Modern ballad for a slave' and 'The wise passion'. This hostile writer reveals his ideas most candidly in the poems 'For my working friend', 'The child with big shoes', 'Rozafa's son' and 'For Julia' where his aggressive attitude is more than evident. In the poem 'The child with big shoes', for instance, he expresses his preoccupation for a child from

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the mountains who visits the city for the first time and, having no footwear, puts on his father's big shoes. In the poem 'For Julia', a mountain lass attends university wearing an old army jacket her brother gave her when he finished his military service. The writer's intentions are obvious here. In such poems he is endeavouring to blacken our life and make little of the economic well-being which socialism has brought to all of us, including the inhabitants of the mountains.

In his manuscript of 1977, we encounter the poem 'I shall speak out against slavery'. Although he was told on several occasions that the poem had undertones, he did no more than change the title.

Such things can be found in his manuscript of 1978, too. In the first stanza of the poem 'Talking to a worker about the Party', the writer states he has his 'own' attitude towards the Party (p. 100). The poem 'The sphinx', which has undefinable imagery but is obviously linked to many other erroneous poems, betrays an evil thought. There are also hidden allusions in the poem 'In

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the great amphitheatre' in which we read the lines: "perhaps some courageous lad / (with my face) / imprisoned in the tigers' cage for having risen to arms." The poem 'For poets hiding in an ivory tower' is also vague and could be interpreted as a reaction to our poetry, especially the lines: "what can we do to save poetry from the yardstick of imperfection?!"

In his 1979 manuscript, we find the poem 'We twenty-year-olds who set off for the new socialist village'. Under the title is a quotation from Comrade Enver Hoxha, but the conclusion of the poem is not in line with the quotation. In fact it contradicts it. 'Oh, ye men led by Mic Sokoli' provides no details describing the era of Mic Sokoli, a fact which betrays the true intentions of the writer. The beginning and the end of the poem 'Working folk' contain expressions of anarchy, pure and simple.

Secondly: In quite a number of his poems, this pseudo-writer openly embraces foreign ideological views about our society, in particular concerning the role of the arts. This is apparent in the poem 'For Wagner'. Wagner is a famous German

composer with positive and negative aspects. In his works, the composer raised his voice against the bourgeois society of his age, but his protest remained individual and isolated. He also has a musical language which is difficult to comprehend. And it is precisely this composer whom the hostile writer chooses as his idol and master. On top of this, it is obvious that he is not addressing Wagner himself, but Wagner as a symbol, the symbol of an artist who is at odds with the existing social order and who calls upon the poet to: "throw off the covers of silence, quench the pale flame of slumber, subdue the bounds, and confront the chilly brow of ingratitude" etc. He is thus calling for the arts to rise against socialism.

In the poem 'Rotting bones' (1972), we are confronted with overt influence from modern revisionist poetry. Poems such as 'The stones of a river', 'A winter night' and 'The shoeshine boy' are full of allusions of this kind.

We also observe ideological confusion in his manuscript of 1978. In the poem 'Maturity', the writer confounds a sixteen-year-old girl with his 'philosophy', and in the poem 'Lyrics with birds

and bureaucrats', he regards bureaucracy as inevitable by saying, "Higher and higher, but do take care, for naive birds fly high," and recommending in the end, "let us take the path of genuine humanity."

Problematic is the poem 'Winter tales' (1979) which evinces a tendency towards bourgeois-revisionist verse, expressed in an attempt to break down every barrier between prose and poetry. The poem presents an ideal of 'pan-human' love in the first two stanzas. A traveller knocks on the door of a mountain house one winter's night. The door is opened by a young woman, of whom the writer says, "She did not raise her lantern to see who I was. It was enough for her to see that my face was that of a human being." The pseudo-poet is trying to allude here that our mountain people open their doors to anyone who comes by, be he friend or foe. Reality demonstrates quite the contrary, that our mountain people have never let foes into their homes. It is the sick fantasy of this hostile writer which causes him to use a lantern as an image for light in the mountains, whereas everyone knows that all corners of our country

have been electrified, even the most remote mountain valleys. There are also allusions in the songs sung at the end by the old woman and her granddaughter.

In the poem 'What I would have said to Migjeni in 1937', we find reflections of what a number of Kosova scholars have asserted about the 'subconscious' in the works of Migjeni: "Within, you feel the howl of the wolf among the stars." "A tie would have no sense / why would you choose the hangman's noose" Could such things ever have been said to Migjeni?

In the poem 'A sombre aspect from the life of Mojsi Golemi,' he supports a theory already disproven by our historians and states somewhere, "sly dealings of necessity / but it was not the fox, it was the lion..." The means justify the end for this writer.

Thirdly: In his beliefs, his ideas and his forms of expression, this pseudo-writer has proven himself to be a modernist and a formalist, cf. 'My wishes' and 'The beauty' (1972). Quite flagrant are the poems in the 1976 volume, three years after the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central

Committee, when writers and public opinion vigorously condemned foreign manifestations of this kind. Mention may be made here of the poems: 'A true tale on the radio', 'The mountain lyre', 'Song for Garcia Lorca accompanied by guitar' (here he distorts the essence of the poetry of that great writer), 'They can also speak harshly to understand beauty', etc. The poem 'Partisan novel' is a wholly symbolist and degenerate work. Such works were composed in line with unflattering models of verse cultivated nowadays in bourgeois revisionist countries, and readers have difficulty understanding what such poetry means, i. e. what the author is trying to say. They are in open contradiction to the teachings of the Party on the arts and to the literature of Socialist Realism, the aim of which is to educate the working masses in the spirit of Communism.

It must be stressed that the aggressive positions taken up by this hostile individual, evident both at the political and ideological level and at the level of means of expressions (permeating his verse from beginning to end), cannot be divided into clear-cut elements. On the contrary, they in-

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tertwine and serve to reinforce one another, which is the very aim of this pseudo-poet.

On the basis of this analysis, we can arrive at a number of conclusions. This hostile writer is convinced of the rightfulness of his erroneous and aggressive views. Visar Zhiti has paid no attention whatsoever to the warnings of the editors and to advice that he, too, should put his talents at the service of the people. On the contrary, for years on end, he has insisted on publishing his hostile writings as they are. With such works, he is endeavouring to corrupt the readers and to poison their minds and feelings. As demonstrated above, he has expressed erroneous political views in many of his poems, both openly and indirectly, distorting our socialist reality and thus contravening all of our literature and arts which, under the direction of the Party, are struggling fiercely to educate the people.

Strongly influenced by bourgeois revisionist ideology, he has fallen victim to a type of poetry which is foreign and hostile to us and which contravenes the course of the Party.

With obscure language full of allusions, he

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has endeavoured to sow the seeds of counter-revolution. On other occasions, he is quite hermetic and utilizes figures of speech which cannot be interpreted at all. Such hermetic and unintelligible poetry is in contradiction to the teachings of the Party for a clear and intelligible literature.

This pseudo-poet with his unfavourable imitations of reactionary art has endeavoured to plant poisonous weeds in the pristine garden of our literature and to destroy our literary culture."

R. V.
(signature)

P. K.
(signature)

TIRANA, 24 OCTOBER 1979

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Visar Zhiti, *The Condemned Apple: A Bilingual Edition*, [Robert Elsie [translation], GREEN INTEGER 134, København & Los Angeles, 2005.

LITARI I GRACKES

Vij
vërdallë
i vetmuar
Gjurmët bëhen
litari në këtë
çfarë
kë.

Nentor 83

Litari i grackës (The Trap Rope)
Dorëshkrimet e fshehta të burgut (The Secret Manuscripts of Prison), Tirana: Onufri, 2021.

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