

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**

***Enver Hoxha***

**YEARS  
OF MY YOUTH**

*Reminiscences*

THE INSTITUTE OF MARXIST-LENINIST  
STUDIES AT THE CC OF THE PLA

***Publisher's Note***

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**ENVER HOXHA**

**“Korça is the city of my youth, and youth, as we know, is the phase of existence where one’s character is formed and the path we will follow in life is traced... there I began to see life, reality, people and events with more seriousness and attention, I began to feel that many things, if not all, were not working as they should. I became aware of the necessity for change.”**

**“I admired France and its people for their marvellous historical legacy. I appreciated and respected its men of letters, its authors and its scholars, for the pride that their ancestors inspired in them, for their scrupulous spirit and their perseverance in work, for their sensitivity to the destiny of their country.”**

**ENVER HOXHA**

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## PREFACE

*“Years of My Youth” follows Comrade Enver Hoxha’s book of reminiscences entitled “Years of My Childhood.” He began to write these notes in 1970, on my request and after many pleadings on my part, because he often talked at length about this phase of his life. On February 8, on my fiftieth birthday, he gave me a part of it, neatly written and accompanied by a letter in which he told me, among other things:*

*“...You asked me for some reminiscences of my youth. Of course, I couldn’t refuse your request so I started to scribble down these notes. They are unfinished, but when I have time I will finish them.<sup>1</sup> They are only intended for you and our children, ...these notes are poorly written, I let my quill run free, without going back to edit or correct...”*

*The original letter also included this note:*

*“All these things that I have written... are of little importance, but you asked for them, so I wrote these events as I remember them, with the impact they had on me then, and with the role they play in my life emphasized. I tried to retrace things as they were, without any exaggeration. It was a difficult task to do. Regardless, if I did exaggerate, these reminiscences would lose all meaning and would not be worthwhile to write down.”*

*We have chosen to give this second part of his reminiscences the title of “Years of My Youth” to follow his previous memoir “Years of My Childhood.” Perhaps Enver would not have wanted this to be published, for, as he says in the accompanying letter, these notes “are for you and our children only...”*

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<sup>1</sup> He completed these notes between 1971 and 1975.

*But I have decided to have it published all the same, remembering that he had also hesitated to publish the first part of his reminiscences of his childhood years, but as we now know, their publication gave pleasure to comrades and friends and all those who have read them.*

*I therefore gathered up the courage to have this published, with authorization from the Party as well, finding justification in the passage where he specifies “these are reminiscences meant for Nexhmije, my children, and above all, as they are and for what they’re worth, they ultimately belong to my beloved Party.”*

*Above all, I decided to publish these writings because this book is the last in the series of his reminiscences. On the commemoration of what would be his eightieth birthday, **Enver returns to us young again.***

*In these recollections, Enver appears to us with changes that unfold from year to year and grow with him. His life became completely different. Instead of the family home and the boarding school he was used to and instead of Gjirokastra, which he knew like the back of his hand, he arrived in Korça, a city beautiful in the summer with its flowers and harsh in its winters under blankets of snow. His pastimes are different, they are no longer children’s games with balls of rags and pebbles, but instead the games and jokes of a young man. No longer do we have the Enver with the patched shoes, with the coarse woollen clothes and trousers that his mother sewed for him, but the pupil Enver, as we called the students of the Lyceum<sup>1</sup> back home, with shoes and*

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<sup>1</sup> A type of school French and Albanian adolescent attended between the ages of 15 and 18. In our place and time, it is analogous to high school or secondary school.



*suits made with care by the most appreciated craftsmen of Korça. Now he wore a cap, a scarf, the coat that Korça demanded of him but above all Korça demanded his maturity.*

*Enver, one must say, cared about his appearance. The residents of Korça saw this at the time. Later, we were all aware of it. He cared for his belongings. Even when it became possible for him to have a bigger wardrobe, he stuck to the suit that he felt most at ease in and that was the most durable. We imagine his concern and care for his clothing at that time was because he was relatively poor. He himself recalls how difficult it was for him to get even a little money from his father for a coat or a pair of shoes because, as he said, “the poor old man couldn’t afford it.” I found it amusing, hearing him sometimes remark at the sight of a cute sweater worn by one of our sons, remarking, as if with nostalgia, that he would have liked so much to have such a sweater at his age, but that he never had enough money to buy one. In the notes he wrote: “...others would laugh and say: ‘Nobody cares about this! You even talk about buying new rubber-soled shoes!’ And that’s probably true, but today’s young people should know that, for us, buying a pair of new shoes or having a sweater made was an important event in life!”*

*During these youthful years, he took care of his own personal appearances which did not require expense to the best of his ability: he “ironed” his trousers by putting them under his mattress. In a photo we see that he placed a flower in his buttonhole after a button fell off; when he needed a bowtie he had to borrow one from a*

friend. "This outfit," he told me while showing a photo, "was loaned to me by Zihni (a cousin who studied in Vienna). This coat with a high collar which I wore when I was being painted by Vangjush Mio, was a loan from a friend..." He also said: "when we had a few pennies to spare, we always stopped at the 'Stamboll' pastry shop, where we bought slices of cream cake. We went there not because those cakes were good, the triangle pastries of Koçi Bako's bakery were much better, but because the walls on each side were covered with mirrors, in which we could take a look at our appearances and see if our hair needed to be combed before continuing to walk around..."

I left these memories as he wrote them, as he wanted to present himself. They are frank, as he was and remained all his life. They are written with transparent truthfulness. Those were the years of his first steps in his life as a revolutionary, when a young man aspires and dreams of a better future for his people and his Homeland, but also dreams and lives like any boy of his age: rejoicing in attending such a prestigious school; grieving at being held back from the path in which he believes he can best develop his abilities; laughing and joking with classmates, in class, at school, in the street. A few of his jokes were juvenile, but Enver too was young like everyone else. In his book "Years of my Childhood," he mentioned certain pranks he and his friends did in class and I managed with great difficulty to get him to delete them from the text, pointing out to him that they were not of any educational use, had no value from a pedagogical point of view. I also argued that the nation's children could imitate them by pretending that they were pranks that "Uncle Enver" was playing. He laughed so hard he was brought to the verge of tears when he remembered

*these pranks and told me that I was wrong to edit them out of the book, that the teacher could very well justify the jokes in the students eyes by telling them that at that time there was no Party and no pioneer organization to guide him.*

*In this book I have not deleted anything, because young people have always made and will make jokes, and we can all understand these jokes have no bad intentions. The duty of every parent and teacher is to advise their children and teach them what is right and what is wrong. The school, on the other hand, has the task of demanding compliance with established regulations. But every parent, every teacher, every principal remembers well the times they were not an "angel" in their youth. We, the older generations must understand the youth, and the better we understand them, the more we will be united with them in our march towards building socialism.*

*Since the time of the National Liberation War, since the founding of the communist youth, I have not known any party cadre who has had as much interest in the youth as Enver, who loved and understood them as much as he could. He was open-minded, patient and put great trust in them. During the war, when the youth organization was finding its footing, he advised us: "Watch out! The youth is delicate like glass, but if you know how to treat it, it becomes as strong as steel!" The youth proved the accuracy of this judgement in the heat of battle. Even after Liberation, in the battles for building the country. They deployed their physical, intellectual and spiritual capabilities. Conservatives, sectarians and enemies of progress have always dreaded their zeal and passion for socialism. One of them, Mehmet Shehu, in one of his bolder plots, sought to harm the party by*

*opposing the youth. Everyone knew that he went everywhere complaining about the “long haired rebels,” even though those “long haired rebels” and even rebellious spirits, he had among his own. Here I must recount an occasion where in my presence, he insisted that Enver “intervene” with a speech or a letter to put a stop to this situation where “our youth is corrupting itself with its taste for foreign fashions...” He ranted and ranted with surprising resentment against the youth, without giving any impression of the slightest attachment to them. Enver let him talk as much as he could, listened to him, then, calmly, told him:*

*“You are wrong, there is nothing to worry about here, we have a magnificent youth. Where would you find one like it? They do what the Party asks of them; the youth builds railroads, clears new land and lays out fields in fantastic terraces. The majority of our population is a rural population and itself is made up above all of young men and young women who cross mountains and torrents, in the literal and figurative sense, who sit on the benches of our schools, perform together on our stages, and flock to festivals and social events. The young people of the cities also, like the workers and the specialists, took in their hand the industrialization of the country, the rise of culture, arts and sciences, they honour us abroad. Such is our youth, pure and honest. I mean this with deep emphasis, you are wrong on every front. Our youth is remarkable, we have no reason to complain about it. Today young people dress more simply, with less pretensions, because the time of so-called conventional customs is over... But, of course, there are young people who wear their hair a little too long or who dress according to fashion! Well, fashion comes and goes; the important thing is their conception*

*of life, of work, of the moral and aesthetic rules of our society. Let's not forget that we too, when we were young, tried to follow the 'fashion' of the time, in our hairstyle, in our dress, we had no distractions. And did we have to suffer from it? The desire to be well dressed, to be elegant, was not the goal of our life. The purpose of our life was something much, much more important."*

*In Gjirokastra, at home and at school, the young Enver Hoxha had been regaled with stories of the struggles of his people, those led by the most valiant of Albanians, such as the heroic Skanderbeg, to the battles fought by the brave Çerçiz Topulli of Gjirokastra, which the people had immortalized in songs. Enver and his comrades recited with exaltation the poems of Naim Frashëri, Vaso Pasha and Çajupi, they sang the patriotic songs of Mihal Grameno and the songs of the people with passion, they took part in the celebration of Flag Day, sometimes under the heavy shadow of the bayonets of the Greek occupiers, sometimes under that of the Italian fascists, and they felt their love for their sorely tried country kindling in their hearts.*

*In Korça, the young Enver Hoxha had the opportunity to learn the glorious history of a revolutionary people like the French proletariat. The Korça National Lyceum, he said, was not only an important educational centre in Albania, but also a progressive, revolutionary centre. What the students learned and read there actually armed them against the feudal-bourgeois regime of the satrap King Ahmet Zogu. Under the contract with which the school held, the regime had no say in any of the educational material, whose direction came directly from Paris. They studied in detail the French Revolution, what were the intricacies of class and bourgeois*

democracy, and the history of other revolutions in France and of various other countries, especially the great October Revolution in Russia, from the perspective of the bourgeoisie. All of this opened up new horizons of thought for the young people of Korça. Outside of their school hours, the students read a lot of progressive and revolutionary literature.

**“Already in those years,”** writes Enver, **“the important thing for me was not only the way in which the events during revolution had precipitated, but moreover how the revolution itself was organized and initiated.”** When he was asked about this time, he recalled his intense attention he gave to reading the illustrious French encyclopedists, Diderot, Rousseau and others. He told us how, after reading the history of Mathiez and that of Jaurès on the revolution, he understood even better the role of the masses, the bourgeoisie, the revolutionaries and the contradictions of their goals and ideas. He points out that he was particularly drawn to the “fiery speeches” of Robespierre and Saint-Just.

Enver was also an avid reader of literary works. He recalls the enthusiasm with which he and his comrades read Ronsard, that great French poet, especially because he had devoted one of his sonnets to the exploits of Skanderbeg. “We were elated when we read that the great Voltaire had also mentioned Skanderbeg and his family, while Lamartine’s multi-volume work on the ‘History of Turkey’ filled us with pride for the long passages and the entire chapters where he wrote in enthusiastic terms and with forceful praise... They even wrote about scenes of tragedies that took place in Butrint, Albania.” He was deeply enthusiastic in French literature and he had deep admiration for many authors. Anatole France, he said, “pleased me very much”; he “de-

voured” the writings of Dumas; he said Hugo was “my favourite poet,” and he often recited passages from his works from memory.

“I had read many books and novels about this period,” he wrote, “which naturally enriched my culture and fuelled my hatred of the oppressors, but I learned from their actions, from the social evolution of the time, from the ideas development. All this prepared me politically to better discern the right choices among the difficult paths, those in which we had to advance in these very dark years for our country and for us, the young people.”

After going through the complex bureaucratic processes to obtain a scholarship, Enver, then twenty-three years old, left to undertake his university studies in France, in Montpellier. He describes his trip through Italy and France, a plywood box “suitcase” in hand, in his third class train car (though he described the conditions as being “as if it was fourth class”). He was travelling in lands he had only heard of in the pages of novels, he knew well that Montpellier was a centre of Provence, known by the stories of Alphonse Daudet, especially by the “Lettres de mon Moulin” (Letters from My Windmill), and its very old and famous university where he would find many of his schoolmates from Korça.

Enver had often spoken to me of Montpellier and his life in this city during the three years that he stayed there. He had described to me the streets, the houses, the general mildness of the climate despite the occasional inclement days, and he had spoken to me of its cheerful people full of temperament. I had always wanted to know this city where Enver had spent part of

*his life, but it was only in 1987 that I had the opportunity to visit it. More than 50 years had passed since he had lived there and, of course, a lot had changed. Enver describes the station he arrived at as “modest, quiet, dimly lit and intimate station” whereas now, Montpellier is served by the fastest train in France, built according to the most recent techniques of our time. I don’t know if the small hotel at the station, the “Terminus,” where Enver got off still exists, but today in the city attention is drawn to a large luxury hotel with many floors. I was afraid that I would not find even the traces of the streets, houses, faculties, parks and cafés that Enver had described to me, but the day after our arrival when we began our visit, we found many things as he had depicted. The square called “the Egg,” after its shape, with the cafés and shops that surround it and, on one side, the municipal theatre and, and on the other, the library that Enver often frequented, had not changed after all these years.*

*Naturally, the main purpose of our visit was to see the house where Enver had lived. It was not very far from the city centre. We parked our cars, because the street was so narrow that when a car passed ours we had to stick to the very side of the road; almost on the sidewalk. I took note of the seemingly endless number of winding alleys. Enver said: “From there, I slipped into a narrow, unpaved alleyway lined with small shops, without sidewalks, where a car rarely passed, and suddenly I had a feeling of surprise: it seemed to me that I was in the streets of my native Gjirokastra... I was suddenly overwhelmed with joy, but also with a strong sense of nostalgia. I walked lightly, for I was a son of my Gjirokastra of paths of stones and dirt, which had not yet known asphalt.”*



*We first sent an employee of the embassy the address of Enver's former home we had noted, to explain to the homeowners the reason for our coming and to ask them to receive us. The French are said to be cold. However, we were received with great warmth and kindness. Of course, we knew we wouldn't find the good old "chubby old lady," as Enver describes her, who was already in her seventies fifty years earlier, but we asked if she had any relatives who might have retained some memory of this time. The owners of the house, who had known neither the old woman nor the old man of the 1930s (the one who often came to visit her, but whose connection with her Enver does not specify), told us that both, lacking support, had suffered in their last years, that they had ended up in the hospice, where they died. The new mistress of the house was a pleasant old woman. His daughter, also very kind, gave us all the explanations we asked of her, showed us the room Enver had lived in, with two French windows opening onto a balcony, just as he describes it. Moved, I stood for a moment looking at the street, the rooftops, the horizon, as Enver must have done so many times from there while smoking and thinking nostalgically of his country, of Gjirokastra, of Korça, of his mother, his father, his sisters, his childhood and youth comrades. In the middle of the room was a work table, on which the young girl of the house had thoughtfully placed the pot of flowers we had sent to the owners. We apologized for disturbing them and asked to take our leave, but they insisted on offering us something first. Our hostess had even called a neighbour to help her, so as not to interrupt our interview. The warm welcome I received was not unlike the Albanian families back home, I would even say from Korça, because it is this city that these clean rooms reminded me*

*of, decorated with handwork, and even the hairstyle of the mistress. We were delighted with this visit. Having thanked our hosts, we finally took our leave.*

*We went for a walk on the Esplanade. As for the botanical gardens described by Enver, we only saw it from the outside, for it was closed. We knew well the love that Enver had for flowers. Even today, I still think about Enver's comment: "To attend class, it was necessary to go to three buildings: the facilities and the zoology and the zoology laboratory were located in the centre of the University, where the faculties of law, literature, history and the rectorate were also located. The fact that the rectorate was located in the very building where zoology courses were taught and laboratory work was done didn't interest me much. This was not the case for other rooms, the presence in the same building of the faculties of law, history, etc. was alluring. I often 'forgot' or 'made a mistake' and instead of entering the zoology amphitheatres, I slipped into those of history and especially law. I avidly listened to the lectures, which only increased my desire to take courses in these faculties and deepened my passion for them." He recalls with what zeal he followed the courses of literature and philosophy, neglecting those of botany, physics and chemistry, in other words all of the classes of the Faculty of Natural Sciences, which the Ministry of Public Instruction had arbitrarily mandated for him to be the focus of his study, much to Enver's chagrin. This negligence led to him losing his scholarship, which caused him great material difficulties, often leaving him without eating, but offered him the possibility of partaking in another school: that of the working class, of the revolutionary and communist political movement.*

*Love had its origin, in Gjirokastra, in the flowerpots*

*on the windowsills, or in the grand botanical gardens in Montpellier. Probably both at the same time. In Montpellier, Enver, just as he found the cobbled streets of Gjirokastra, also found its beautiful flowers, as well as those of the balconies and courtyards of Korça.*

*Of course, we couldn't leave Montpellier without visiting the amphitheatres that Enver had frequented. But we were left disappointed by the many changes that had been made as compared to the picture he painted for us in his memoirs. A new set had been built for the natural sciences. A manager received us very kindly, but told us that none of the teachers of those years were still alive. The old registers were preserved and Enver Hoxha appeared there with a date of birth October 3, 1908, the one written on his passport, according to the old Julian calendar, which corresponds, according to the Gregorian calendar, to October 16. We were delighted to learn that the Rectorate still had its premises in the same building. We went there to visit it, but we could not enter because the door was locked. From the outside it was just as Enver had described it, with an arched doorway opening onto a small courtyard surrounded by a portico. I told myself that during his three years of stay in this city, Enver must have often walked in this courtyard and under this portico when it was raining or windy, and you can understand why a wave of emotion fell upon me.*

*We also considered visiting Palavas beach, which Enver describes and where he sometimes went with friends. It was, he writes, some three-quarters of an hour by train, a trip made on an old train which rolled very slowly and the station was a sort of "sheet metal shed." The owner of the house where Enver had lived had also told us that until after the Second World War,*

*more than a beach, it had been a strip of marsh land, that there were no villas and hotels like now. Today, on the other hand, it was a very well-kept beach, with lots of buildings and ultra-modern hotels, but whose architecture I didn't really appreciate. We intended to stay in Montpellier another night to visit the library, the theatre, a café frequented by Enver and his comrades, but what I had already seen was enough for me. I was seized with sadness thinking about the things I couldn't find as Enver had described them to me. It created a void in me, in addition to seeing that those which remained were "worn out by the years." Above all, I was saddened thinking: "What's the point of seeing all this when I can't confide my impressions in Enver!" I remembered the nostalgia with which he questioned me when I returned from a service trip to Gjirokastra, Korça or other places he knew every corner of. Once, when I told him, speaking of Gjirokastra, that I found it sad (because I had visited it on a rainy day), he was angry! How he would protest if I spoke ill of Montpellier to him! He would talk to me with youthful enthusiasm about the people and the language of Provence, he would describe to me the lively dances of these regions, he would remind me of the tales of Alphonse Daudet, the poems of Mistral, he would describe to me the fairs and monomial students. "Let's get out of here!" I said to the comrades. And we left the same evening.*

*As we can see in these reminiscences, when Enver evokes Montpellier with love, it is above all because this city gave him precious gifts for the future of his life as a revolutionary. "I can say with certainty," he says, "I acquired vast and valuable knowledge about the evolution of universal culture, particularly French, and on the various periods of the history of France and of the*

*world. This knowledge, accumulated in these courses that I followed without being formally enrolled, but which absorbed the time that I should have devoted to the natural sciences assigned to me by our ministry, was of great help to me at the time already, but especially in my life as a revolutionary.” Especially in the years 1932-1933, when Hitler and the nazis in Germany were becoming ever more powerful, the activity of the FCP among the masses was quickening. The section of the FCP in Montpellier, says Enver, had a kiosk of its own, where books and pamphlets on Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were sold, inexpensive pamphlets accessible to workers, such as the work “Elementary Principles of Philosophy” by Politzer, a French communist philosopher. In Montpellier, Enver frequented the workers’ clubs run by the FCP. In these clubs and cafés conferences were held, meetings animated by discussions and debates, and communist orators took the floor to respond to opponents of Marxism. These kinds of debates and polemics, says Enver, were most interesting, because everyone could ask questions, intervene, applaud, whistle, drink beer or wine in the smoke of cigarettes which formed a thick fog. “Sometimes,” he said, “we also witnessed police raids, because these debates occasionally ended in a fist fight.”*

*In Montpellier, Enver met an FCP propagandist named Marcel who worked in a café and, like the Albanian communist Koçi Bako, provided him with books and pamphlets. When Enver did not understand something, he went to Marcel, who explained it to him with kindness and competence. Thus, day by day, Enver learned the science of socialism better, the mastery of which became for him a goal in life and which he placed above the other disciplines taught at the university he*

*attended. He had made up his mind to it: he would study more thoroughly the subjects for which he was most gifted. This, too, would allow him to serve his country even better. Albania at the time needed light and progress in all areas. But above all, he thought, Albania urgently needed to find the right way to resolve the essential questions of its political and social development. He therefore did not define reformist political action as the goal of his life. What was absolutely obvious to him was that his country was suffering under an abhorred regime and that this regime had to be overthrown. He knew well that the waters of Albania had begun to boil, that the new forces of progress and social development, the workers and the revolutionary communists, were preparing and organizing themselves. He recognized the importance to side with them, to campaign with them and to help them to the best of his abilities and his strengths.*

*When, in 1934, Enver saw his scholarship terminated, he was forced to return to Paris. However, this time he arrived with a different mindset; he was more mature, endowed with a broader horizon, but with empty pockets. He hoped that his comrades would help him find a job in a factory or elsewhere so that he could continue studying law or some other course in historical and social sciences at the Sorbonne. Enver says that when he returned for the holidays in Albania, seeing the suffering of the people and the inability of his family to make ends meet, he tried to find a job, but, having failed, he left for abroad.*

*For a time he stayed in Paris with friends. His sister was sending him a small remittance from Italy. He found a modest job as an address copier and rented a very small room, one and a half metres by two metres,*

*where there was just enough room for the bed, an attic, with a skylight from which one could only see the roofs of the surrounding buildings. "For ten months, in Paris," writes Enver, "I never had enough to eat..." This situation lasted until when, from recommendation to recommendation, he ended up finding a place to give Albanian lessons to the honorary consul of Albania in Brussels, a Frenchman of Hungarian origin, as well as his press officer. Apparently they liked his "presentable" looks and his mature attitude for a young man and they agreed to hire him as their private chancellor with a good salary which the consul paid out of his own pocket. This not only saved Enver from misery but revived in him the hope of continuing his studies. He applied himself to doing so as soon as he arrived in Brussels.*

*His job at the consulate was easy; he had to grant visas, read the press and collect clippings of articles relating to Albania. But now Enver was a militant communist, he had met the famous communist of the FCP Paul Vaillant-Couturier in Paris; he established links with the editorial staff of "l'Humanité" and began to collaborate with this newspaper. In his office at the consulate, newspapers, pamphlets and communist books had piled up to such an extent that when the press attaché arrived unexpectedly from Paris one day, he was scandalized. Enver was fired on the spot. The hope of continuing his law studies also faded. Despite all the love he had for the people of France, he could not return to live there because it would have been impossible for him to ensure his subsistence, and even less to send some help to his family from there. In a letter to his sister he said:*

*"Beloved Fahrije, in Bari, Italy," he wrote. "How happy I was to receive your letter... you have warmed*

*my heart... for almost four years I have only received letters full of reproaches, reproaches which are justified, but which sadden me and break my heart..."*

*Under these circumstances, he decided to return to Albania permanently.*

*At the end of the four years he spent in Montpellier and Paris, Enver wrote of France: "I keep the best impressions and memories of this country and its people... This country had a rich past of great fighters of the pen and of thought... Above all, the French people could boast of their bourgeois revolution, which had a great influence on the destiny of Europe."*

*The France that had decapitated the kings, the France of the Paris Commune, tempered Enver as a revolutionary and militant internationalist. He admired the rich secular history of the homeland of the enlightenment philosophers and studied their works on societal progress deeply. However, the brilliance of Paris never blinded his worldview, and he was still focussed on the struggle to liberate Albania. Indeed, he returned to Albania determined to fight for the liberation of the people from the oppression and obscurantism of King Zogu's regime. It was with this resolution that he did not hesitate to deliver ardent speeches on behalf of the youth, in Gjirokastra, in front of the grave of the democratic patriot Bajo Topulli, and in Shkodra, at the ceremony for the removal of the ashes of fearless fighters Çerçiz Topulli and Muço Qulli.*

*In 1936, he came to Tirana. For this young man who was returning from France, dismissed from his post because of the communist literature discovered at his home, it was not easy to find work. Once again, he and his family remained dependent on the generosity of strangers, friends and distant relatives.*



*“What was important to me now,” says Enver, “was to earn enough to live on by getting a decent job, to send some money to my father and my mother who lived in poverty, to know the economic and political situation of the country and to forge links with communist and patriotic elements.”*

*Eventually he was appointed a French teacher at the gymnasium in Tirana, where he worked for four or five months. Enver said that he started his job as a “proletarian” teacher, that he could not afford to get sick or take time off like everyone else because he was paid by the hour and his salary was proportional. The number of hours he worked was shocking! This arrangement in Tirana being very precarious, he did everything possible to be transferred to Korça. He knew the city and its inhabitants well, the school, and there were also many more comrades and friends. The bottom line, in his words, was that he knew, especially from prominent communist activist Ali Kelmendi, that the communist movement there was better organized and more assertive.*

*Around April 1937 he was transferred to the Lyceum of Korça, as a teacher of the French language. This position was also very useful for him to cover his activity in the ranks of the underground “Puna” Communist Group which operated in the city. Although unfortunately not mentioned greatly in this text, he spoke much of his activities in Korça, especially during the eve of the Italian fascist invasion, in his books “When the Party was Born” and “Laying the Foundations of the New Albania.” Nevertheless, in these reminiscences he does speak with love and gratitude of the communist comrades and the workers of Korça. “It is a source of satisfaction and pride,” writes Enver, “for me to have*

*had the chance to prepare myself as a faithful soldier of the Party in the ranks of the 'Puna' Group of Korça... Korça occupies a special, privileged place in my life."*

*"In Korça," he continues, "new, wider windows opened up to me on life, which helped me to acquire a deeper knowledge and understanding of it... But I will never forget that it is precisely to Korça that I owe my Lyceum graduation certificate, but also the understanding that there was another school, much more difficult and complex than any school, a school through which all the youth of the time had to pass. The first lessons of this 'school,' which was indispensable to Albania, was first presented to me by the inhabitants of Korça, workers and progressives, and above all by the Korça of the Puna, the Korça of the poor, and the Korça of workers and small craftsmen."*

*"I am not exaggerating in saying that the proletariat of Korça are the ones who showed my generation the right orientation in life, and I am not saying this to please them, I am emphasizing that they were our first masters of communism."*

*During the summer of 1984, when we went on vacation to Pogradec, I took his childhood reminiscences with me to read them to him and pass the time. In the past we had laughed to the point of tears reading many of the passages, whereas this time I saw him only moved and as if seized with a deep longing. One of those days, when we had finished this reading, he said to me: "Listen, I wrote something about Korça in my Diary, when we were there together..." While preparing the publication of this book, I remembered his words and having looked through his diary I found the notes he had thrown there in August 1975, when he visited the city of his youth and where he expresses so much love, nostal-*

*gia and gratitude for Korça and its inhabitants.*

*This is why I added these notes to his memories of youth, although they date from 1975.*

*“Through these memories,” Comrade Enver Hoxha said in conclusion, “I want my great Party, which raised me, educated me and instructed me, to know my life down to its details, with its good sides and its weaknesses. As for the value that these memories will have for this purpose, that is another matter, but now that my hair is turning white, I can say one thing with pride and complete conviction: it is a life that I have put to his end in the service of my beloved Party, my beloved people, communism and the proletarian revolution!”*

*My dear Enver! Why did you think you can only serve the Party and the people until you die? The Party and people do not let you die, they keep you alive in their hearts and minds, and you will forever continue to serve your beloved Party and people, communism and the proletarian revolution even after death.*

*On your eightieth birthday and after reading this book you would surely repeat with pleasure this saying of Victor Hugo which you held so dearly:*

*“For the man in his youth is handsome, but to him in his old age comes greatness.”*

**NEXHMIJE HOXHA**

**July 1988**

# I

## MY TIME AT THE KORÇA NATIONAL LYCEUM

Korça occupies a special, privileged place in my life. I was born in Gjirokastra, spent my childhood and earliest years there, learning how to walk in its endearing streets and alleys of stone. I opened my eyes there and received my first lessons about the Homeland, about mankind and on life. But Korça is the city of my youth, and youth, as we know, is the phase of existence where one's character is formed and the path we will follow in life is traced.

I was first person in Gjirokastra to complete the three years of intense study asked of us in the Lyceum. These years which were among the finest and most unforgettable of my life, and then, after six years abroad, I returned as a teacher in the same school I attended all those years ago.

Thirty to forty years have passed since then and it is difficult for me now to say what one thing had the deepest impact on me, it is also difficult to say what specific thing I learned at this time was this important, and it is impossible to say which teachers and comrades I respected the most.

The city's Lyceum, without question, was the most famous and respected secondary school in the country. As a former student of this school, I will never cease to evoke with veneration all that this school has given us, both me personally and my generation at large, in terms of education and culture.

But Korça wasn't just the grand Lyceum. The peculiarities of this city, from its idyllic streets, its alleys and the architecture of its buildings, from its ancient and recent history to its everyday life, to the quirks and mannerisms of the people, to their worries and their daily struggle, opened my comrades and I to new and broader perspectives on life. I consider myself very lucky to have studied and lived in Korça at the very time when, this city, more clearly than anywhere else in Albania, began to achieve a realization of class relations and take their first steps towards a new ideology and movement, the idea of revolutionary liberation; communism. Not only eager to study and extend our personal knowledge, but above all we were concerned to serve our country and our destitute people who were looking for a way of salvation, we, the young people of that time, had to be very supportive to the new ideological wind which had begun to blow from Korça and we had to strengthen it with all our power and with all our passion. I have been and will always remain grateful for this awakening to the Korçan workers, industrious, thirsty for civilization and progress, especially to their most advanced elements, the proletarians. I am not exaggerating in saying that the proletariat of Korça are the ones who showed my generation the right orientation in life, and I am not saying this to please them, I am emphasizing that they were our first masters of communism. I always remember with deep respect and particular nostalgia those honest proletarians, broken by toil and suffering, who soaked themselves like fighters in a new world, just as I remember with respect and nostalgia all that I

saw, knew and learned in Korça in the first years of my youth.

As I have already recounted in detail elsewhere, it was in the fall of 1927 that I went to this city for the first time to complete my last three years of secondary school at the Lyceum.

For many days and nights in Gjirokastra, everything at home was in chaos with preparations for my departure. As my day of leaving approached, my emotions increased, but the pride aroused in me by the idea that I was going to Korça dominated everything. Finally, early one morning, after kissing and hugging my mother, my father, my sister Sano, my other relatives and my comrades, my travelling companions and I got into an old truck and we drove off. We were on our way.

The journey from Gjirokastra to Korça is long and at the time it was done over two days, with a one-night stopover in Përmet. We were travelling in a truck in a total state of disrepair. It often broke down and the driver stopped at every service station to fill the radiator with water, which let its steam escape like a breathless old man. We were dying to get to our destination as soon as possible, but we also took pleasure in making a few stops along the way to contemplate the country, the towns and villages that were scattered along our route.

It was my first time travelling the Gjirokastra—Përmet—Leskovik—Erseke—Korça route. What beauty I was about to see! We left behind us the bridge over the river that I had crossed so many times with my childhood friends, we also passed

the hill of “Father Mane,” where we played with and sucked the yellow sage flowers like bees. Then came the Viro with its cold waters. Further on, surrounded by poplars, we saw the mill of the famous Dino Çiço. It was the limit to which we, the young people, pushed our walks. Dino Çiço’s mill was the “end of the world” for us.

Dino Çiço had a reputation of being a mysterious man, highly intelligent but he never attended school. It was said he locked himself in his room for days on end to create some sort of strange machine. Virtually uneducated, he struggled to invent a device that “would move without ever stopping.” This machine, he and his relatives called it the “Turkish machine that never stopped,” or more simply known as a perpetual motion machine. This famous machine made only of wood, which he fashioned himself using a shepherd’s pocket knife, operated without needing, according to him, air nor coal, nor oil! Dino Çiço lived in the Hazmurat district, we rarely saw him go out, but when he did he always wore his tight black pants and his distinctive white cap.

When we met him on the way, after having greeted him, we asked him when he was going to take out his perpetual motion machine.

He responded:

“Patience, my children, you will soon see it.”

But this perpetual motion machine we would never see, I don’t know why Dino Çiço visited Vienna to show off his invention. He went there, accompanied by the “famous” Xhevat Kallajxhi (“pig-snouted,” as he was called because of his large nose), but they returned quietly because the

“invention” turned out to be just a pile of scrap metal and wood.

We begged the driver, who was enjoying the songs we were singing in the back, the sound of which mingled with the sound of his jaw harp, to lift the tarp from the truck’s bed and for us to sit there. After we took our seats, we were “greeted” by the sun which beat harshly on our heads, made worse by dust which covered us as if we had been immersed in flour. But, young as we were, we hardly cared about it, it was enough for us to feast on the view of the mountains and the villages of Labëria, of the heroic city of Mashkullora, of the bridge of Kardhiq, of Picar of Çelo and, further away, the mountains of Lunxhëria and the villages which paraded one after the other before our eyes, just as we imagined them when our teacher, Mr. Arshi, spoke at length about them.

The truck swayed along the winding road above the old Drino river, which we knew well, but had no idea of its beauty. From our view, the river flowed its dark blue waters through shady plane trees. In this area were beautiful ponds always full of fish. It must have been here that Uncle Haxhi (nicknamed “the dull”) came to catch the fish he sold us.

After a long drive we finally reached the site of the “Cold Waters” of Tepelena. The truck allowed itself a moment’s rest; we, its passengers, rested as well, the truck’s water being replenished by the pristine springs while we humans took a drink from the same spring, but, in addition, we were shaking the dust off our clothes, we were washing our faces, whereas our vehicle was content to receive the few



buckets of water thrown on it by the driver.

“Don’t worry, guys,” the driver told us. “You will have plenty of time to get bored, we still have a long way to go.”

Shortly after, we entered the valley of Mezhgoran and Këlcyra. Wedged between high mountains, it seemed endless. The Viosa flowed quietly below the road as we continued our journey in the opposite direction to its course. We were eager to see the “city” of Këlcyra.

Finally our truck stopped, groaning loudly, in a dense cloud of dust, in front of an old shop.

“Whoever wants to can come down!” shouted the driver.

“Visit the city, guys!” he said jokingly, because in fact the “city” was merely a few old shops, a dirty inn and a handful of shacks. Only one house was of rather imposing dimensions, that of Ali Bey Këlcyra’s uncle, an odious tyrant hated by the peasants.

“You see those ruins up there,” the driver told us in a low voice, as if not to be heard by the Bey of Këlcyra himself. “This is where the *seraglios* of the beys stood. From there they threw the peasants into the Viosa river.”

“What do you mean?” objected a passenger, “how is that possible if Ali Këlcyra is a democrat, an opponent of Zogu and in exile?”

What the driver said next, I remember like yesterday. He wiped the sweat from his face with his cap and said to us:

“May the devil take Ali Bey! He is the son of a whore — never believe these dogs because they are all traitors and snakes in the grass.”

After having eaten a little, we climbed back on our truck and left for Përmet. The road, now in a straight line, crossed a plain. In the distance stood out the mountains of Dhëmbel and Nemerçke. We knew that beyond those mountains lay the village of Zagoria, the native land of Çajupi, a poet who was dear to us young people. Suddenly the truck stopped.

“What’s happening?” I exclaimed.

“A flat tire,” said Çomja, the driver’s assistant. He was a friend of mine, from my neighbourhood, who lived next to Choro, the butcher without a shop, as he was called in Gjirokastra, who sold meat on the street. Choro, “the unfortunate” as he was known, could never make ends meet. He sold my father tripe and intestines from time to time. I remember that my mother used to prepare them for us, the intestines stuffed with rice; this dish was called “bumbari.” But I digress, let’s come back to Çomja, who never went to school, instead focusing his time on his obsession with cars. Even as a young man he was obsessed with tinkering and repairing cars, which led him to be the best mechanic in Gjirokastra. He was constantly seen either lying under the trucks in the process of greasing them, filling their radiators with water, inflating the tires, etc. He was a resourceful, jovial little boy, but he was constantly filthy and smeared with grease, always wearing the same ragged jumpsuit without fail.

“Çomja, go fix it!” shouted the driver

Çomja proceeded to drop to the ground where he promptly slid under the truck

“How long will it take you to fix it, Çomja?”

“Ten minutes,” he shouted back, but the repair took an hour and a half. Just as he was about to shove the jack under the truck, he shouted:

“Hey you lazy bastards! Are you going to stay up there? Come down for a bit and give me a hand.”

We pretended to help him, but we were especially careful not to dirty our clothes. Eventually, the tire was finally repaired. Then Çomja seized the crank, thrust it into the bottom of the radiator and spun it vigorously several times until the engine started.

“Let’s get going Arshi!” he shouted to the driver. “Hit the pedal to metal, plenty of booze is waiting for us in Përmet!”

Çomja knew the tastes of his boss well, who, like all drivers at the time, had a weakness for raki, and loved beer accompanied by olives.

Finally, towards dusk, in the background and beyond the Viosa, stood out the city of Përmet. We crossed the bridge and entered the town, stopping at an old hotel. We would spend the night there and leave the next day for Korça. We quickly carried our suitcases to our rooms and went out for a little walk in the city while there was still daylight. The driver ordered raki, while Çomja was unloading the bags from the truck. Përmet was a small town which reminded me of a miniature Gjirokastra, with its narrow streets, its shops, its cobbled alleys, in places the town was well maintained and in others it was derelict, and the roads were dotted with potholes filled with water. We were curious, we wanted to see everything and we asked ourselves: “Will we see the source of the Viosa?”, “Do we pass through here to reach Zagoria?”, “What’s that

mountain over there?” But our walk did not last long, for night fell and we returned to the hotel. My companions and I gathered in a room, opened our little packets of food and swallowed what we had left. We couldn’t go to the restaurant because the dishes there were expensive, and we kept like the apple of our eyes the few leks we had budgeted to spend in Korça.

“So, students,” the innkeeper told us, “are you going to buy something here or are you totally broke?”

We were broke! The room where we were going to spend the night was absolutely filthy and infested with bugs. Who knows when the last time the sheets had been changed and how many travelers had slept there since the last time they were washed. Anyway, fatigue closed our eyes and the next day we woke up early. We washed our faces at the common fountain of the inn and went out into the street which had the town market. Çomja hadn’t gotten up yet, and he was sleeping in the truck. We shouted to him:

“Çomja, when are we leaving?”

“Leave me alone, let me sleep!”

“Çomja, we have to get going soon,” we exclaimed, “it will soon be noon!”

“Give me 15 more minutes,” he replied, but his quarter of an hour was closer to an hour and a half, if not two.

Finally, we got on our way and headed into the valley. The road meandered like the Viosa we were carefully following. We asked:

“Where is the Greek border? Are we going to get to the border checkpoint soon?”

As we said this, the Greek territory appeared before us almost immediately. We had reached the border at last. The truck stopped and we heard the driver shout:

“Hello Mr. Nuri, how are you feeling? Are you doing well?”

Mr. Nuri was the customs employee. On the bridge, on our side, we saw a border guard, a “red collar,” as they were called, and on the Greek side a police constable. In the middle, the bridge was demarcated by a post to show the exact place of the border.

We continued on our way and, around noon, after crossing hills and mountains, we crossed back into Albania until we reached the quaint village of Leskovik. We dismounted, bought plums, a few grapes, and sat down in the shade of a palm tree, while Arshi, our driver, finished his bottle of raki while Çomja socialized with a caravan of travellers also headed for Erseke and Korça. Above us rose Mount Melesina, and I remembered the one of the poems dedicated to it:

*“O Mount Melesina,  
Your peak pierces into the sky...”*

Very quickly, on our way to Korça, we passed by the villages of Barmash and Poda. Throughout our journey through these regions my mind was racing with the recollection of the play “Religion and Nation” by Kristo Floqi, which we had performed in Gjirokastra and where I had played the role of Zylyftar Poda. I recited passages from it to my comrades on the truck. Çomja opened his eyes, listened attentively, and from time to time cried

out:

“Despicable! What these Turks and Greeks have done to make us suffer!”

In reaction to another passage he exclaimed:

“They are brave, these people of Kolonja, O Enver!”

We halted, but very briefly, at Erseke; we cast a glance here and there, and saw only barracks, a few shops and some small houses. The plain seemed beautiful to us, but we were especially fascinated by the mountains which surrounded it, especially Gramoz, one of the most beautiful mountains I had ever seen.

We set off again for Korça, soon reaching Qarr pass, at the end of which we saw the great and beautiful plain of Korça. We were amazed. We were curious to know the beautiful Korça, which had inspired us with so many exhilarating dreams.

“There is Boboshtica! There is Drenova! There is Korça!” our driver exclaimed, pointing at villages in the distance

Once we finally entered Korça, we stopped at the travel agency, in front of which a small crowd was massed. The spirit and layout of Korça seemed very different from Gjirokastra. The streets were flat, people seemed to walk faster, there was more electric lighting. We slept the first night at an inn. The next day, some of us, as scholarship recipients, had to show up early to sign up for our dormitories.

Above all, we students had two things we wanted to find out as soon as possible: the quality of our dormitories and what the Lyceum looked like. Even before daybreak, we left the inn and, our suitcases in hand, we headed for the dormitory, our

future home, where we would spend three years of our lives. It was a multi-storey building with a very high ceiling, enclosed by equally tall walls. When we arrived the main door was locked shut. You had to knock to get in, and to get out you had to show your credentials and ask permission from the guards. We knocked on the door, with joyful hearts, but also with curiosity, because we did not know how we would be received, in what conditions we would live in, and with which new friends or strangers we would be grouped with.

The door was opened to us by a little old man with a sullen face. He had thick eyelids, bushy eyebrows and a large moustache. He asked us morosely:

“What do you want? Who are you?”

We replied that we were new students, and that we came from the Gjirokastran Lyceum. He then told us:

“Welcome!”

The man who greeted us was the janitor, his name was Guri. He seemed taciturn, but on the few occasions we talked he was always kind and friendly. During the three years that we spent at the dormitories, I never heard a negative word spoken of him. He showed us the stairs and said:

“Go straight, and take a right, you’ll be able to find the manager’s room. Be quick, you wouldn’t want to be late.”

We knocked on the dormitory manager’s door. We were both curious and extremely nervous, because we didn’t know what kind of man he was. We entered and greeted him. In front of us was a grey-haired man with a remarkably yellow face, who was

very thin, with a cigarette between his lips. We thought it was the manager.

“I am not the manager of the dormitory,” he told us, “I am the financial manager of the school, my name is Pero.”

We relaxed a bit. We thought: “Maybe we could ask him where we could get a bite to eat near here.” He wrote our names in a big black register, told us the rules of the dormitory, gave us advice on our conduct and after completing these formalities, which he knew by heart and which apparently he repeated to everyone, he ominously rang a bell. Immediately an assistant entered: tall, thin, with an equine face, blood-shot eyes, made uglier by a slightly rolled-up eyelid.

“Ilo,” Pero said to his assistant, “take these boys to their rooms and remind them of the code of conduct.”

I was placed in a room near the back of the building, situated opposite the manager’s room and adjoined to the supervisor’s office.

The room, lit by large windows, had ten to fifteen beds. The room seemed welcoming. Every two beds there was a two-tier wardrobe, which could be locked. I chose a bed near a window, and, having opened my suitcase, began to put away my belongings. Next to me sat my close friend Selami Xhaxhiu, with whom I was related. I was happy with my choice. Subsequently, our room filled up. I remember that there were people there from Lyceum in Gjirokastra, some from other nearby schools and some even from the philosophy school. Ismail Topçiu, Shaqir Gjebrea, Vehap Ciu, Lezo Çami, Nonda Bulka, Anton Mazreku, whose names,



among others, come to mind, occupied this same room. Later, we became better acquainted with each other as with all of the residents of the dormitory.

Then we went to visit the other rooms on the upper floor. They were very large, with two rows of beds and a hallway in the middle, like ours. In these rooms the youngest students slept. This floor, where the Lyceum students came to sleep, was a big mess and in constant disarray, while our rooms were more orderly. A smaller room adjoining ours was reserved for the oldest students. Later, we must have been attracted to this room, because it was the one of the most common topics of conversation during our free time, the place of literary and political debates, the room where the supervisors entered the least often, because there were comrades who smoked in secret. In the basement was Pero's room, the food store, the windowless dining room, with only a door at the entrance and lit by one electric light. The floor was cement, and its furniture was reduced to tables, benches and a stove in the middle. Another adjoining room had taps and sinks where we washed. The kitchen was located outside, backing onto the main building. Behind the dormitory, at the end of a small courtyard, stretched a row of latrines. On the other side of the courtyard was the large study room with rows of benches and, directly in the middle, there was a large furnace and facing the entrance of the courtyard, there was the elevated pulpit of the overseer.

In short, those were the conditions of the dormitory I was going to live in for three years, and of which I have good memories overall. I will mention

a few of my favourites.

Now the thing I was most excited for would be the day I would get to tour the Lyceum. The future students that we were, we all went there together to see the Lyceum. We were beaming, laughing and singing in the streets, which we watched with interest. We also observed with curiosity the people, the boys and the girls, the houses, the shops. We came to a small square. In front of us stood a cinema which in large letters said "The MAJESTIC Theatre," which was ironic given it was a sad cement building. Then we turned right and entered an alley lined with small houses which looked like the villas of Italy — they were very clean, with large windows accompanied by white curtains. Their gardens were also well maintained and full of flowers. We had been walking for quite a while when, to our left, the school appeared with its large door flanked by two columns on each side. It made a deep impression on me and I rejoiced in my heart of hearts at having the opportunity to study in this establishment, one of the most reputable and serious of all the secondary schools in our country.

We entered. Ahead of us was a long hallway with a staircase at the bottom. On both sides we saw the doors of the classrooms, and we looked carefully at the signs. I was curious to know which classes I would attend. Coincidentally, all of my classes were on the first floor. In fact, my class was the one you saw as soon as you emerged from the stairs. Next to it was the management office and, one door further, the secretariat. We opened the door and we asked to wait in line to speak to the secretary. While waiting for my turn, I visited the

class where I was going to study for a year. It was a beautiful room, with four large windows through which the light streamed in, the benches lined up in several rows, cut in the middle by a corridor. At one corner stood the blackboard and, facing the benches, the podium and the professor's chair.

On the first floor were all the advanced classes — the physics room, the chemistry room, which was also used by the choir and the brass band. The floor also included a kind of storage room only used by the general supervisor. My turn came to enter. I was immediately struck by the cabinets overflowing with student records. Everything was clean, orderly, although the room was cramped. Behind the table, with ledgers in front of him, sat a middle-aged man, tall, rather thin, with features that stuck in your mind, his face riddled with freckles and curly red hair. It was Poçi, the famous secretary of the school from the day it opened until the day the Italians closed it after their invasion of Albania. In his terse, characteristic voice, he said to me:

“Hand me your student identification!”

He took it from my hands, read it, opened a file with my name on it and gave some “advice” to me:

“Remember to study hard!”

“You can count on it,” I replied.

After filling out some paperwork, he gave me back my identification.

“Mr. Poçi,” I asked him, “when are we going to pick up our books?”

“For new students, it will be tomorrow afternoon.”

The distribution of new textbooks to study al-

ways gave me great joy.

Finally, everything had settled down. Homecoming day came. The streets, especially the “majestic” theatre, and the alley of the high school, were swarming with schoolchildren. The teachers from France had all arrived. As eight o’clock approached, we lined up in front of the front door and waited for the director of the school to address us. His name was Bailly Comte. He was an old man, white-haired, with a well-trimmed beard and a very pleasant countenance, but he limped and used a walking stick. He appeared at the top of the stairs with a few professors, Albanians and French — there were so many new faces for me to remember. Comte greeted the students in a loud voice, told us to work hard and advised us to study diligently. We applauded him, then, now impressed, I went into class. Thus began for me as for all my comrades the first courses at the National Lyceum of Korça.

The lessons, for us who came from the Lyceum of Gjirokastra, did not present any difficulty, we studied programs identical to those of any French lycée. Only the teachers were different, but we got to know them from day one and we soon became friends. I spared no effort to get good grades. I was very attentive in all respects, both in class as well as in study at the dormitory. In addition to the textbooks we were provided with in high school, we had a library in each class with many literary works, specially and carefully chosen by the French teachers. These books helped us a lot to develop our culture, to better understand French and universal literature and to perfect our mastery of the French language and culture.

I read with passion not only the books of my class, but also those of other classes, even books for classes I did not care much for. In addition, I borrowed books that my friends had brought from France or that they bought at the “Pepo” bookstore. During the three years that I spent at the Lyceum of Korça, I may have read hundreds of literary works, a host of novels and scientific works, which supplemented the lessons given in class. I read with great attention, took notes and memorized the phrases and verses that struck me. I looked up every word that I didn’t understand in my pocket dictionary (which I still keep like a relic in my library today) and repeated the term until it was firmly fixed in my memory. I also had a notebook in which I transcribed these words repeatedly. This very attentive way of studying the language was of great help to me not only to obtain excellent results in French, but also to better my abilities for the study of other subjects, even the more difficult ones.

In French class, I was one of the best students. In conversation, in reading, in the commentary of the texts and in recitation I was first in my class.

Our French teacher, in second period, was Mr. Deslion. He was a man of average height, rather chubby, round-faced, bearded and half-bald, and wore extremely thick glasses. Relatively old, he was kind and understanding. As students, we loved and respected him. Because of his corpulence and his beard, we students (influenced by Daudet’s novel) nicknamed him Tartarin, not because that he was exuberant like the Provençal character, but because, while taking his course, he had certain

small mannerisms and good-natured behaviours that we found funny.

I often asked him for explanations about the books I read. He was always ready to answer me, whether it was during class time or after the lesson. He stopped at my desk and explained to me whatever question I had asked of him, sometimes he even did it while going down the stairs, his briefcase full of books and with a pile of our notebooks under his arm. Poor Deslion died in Korça that same year. His loss saddened us, and we all went to his funeral. He was buried in the cemetery of the French soldiers of the First World War. His grave is still there. Apparently, no one was interested in coming to retrieve his ashes to bring them back to France.

The same year was also marked by the death of the director of the school, Bailly Comte. He too was a good man. He enjoyed our sympathy and our respect. He was replaced by Victor Coutant, until then director of the Gjirokastran Lyceum. We, his former students, rejoiced and went to welcome him. He did not conceal his satisfaction. Apparently, the regime was trying to impoverish the school by taking away its French teachers. But soon after our new director also died in France, where he had returned for the holidays, and in his place came a teacher named Léon Perret. He was accompanied by his wife and his son, Roger, whom I had as a classmate.

The school was a very important educational centre in Albania and especially for Korça, especially in this time of the feudal regime of the satrap Ahmet Zogu. The programs were identical to those

of all the secondary schools in France and the Zogite regime could not modify them or censor the subjects taught there. The Albanian government had no authority over the French teachers, because they were appointed by virtue of a contract and duly signed agreements, and Tirana could not possibly dismiss them without having to pay a large indemnity. The students in this establishment held a great variety of viewpoints, even if, naturally, a bourgeois culture was taught there and the teachers, also of bourgeois origin, belonged to various political tendencies, from monarchists to socialists, which differed like day and night from the feudal conceptions which were the basis of the Zogu regime to the revolutionary ideals of socialism. For us, at the time, the Korça National Lyceum was a progressive and revolutionary home. I say progressive because, on the one hand, what we learned and read there armed us against the feudal regime, and, on the other hand, through the school, sometimes in secret, sometimes in a semi-clandestine way, we managed to get our hands on really progressive, revolutionary and communist literature, which we secretly distributed to comrades we had confidence in and, to avoid being discovered, we always read outside, on the hills surrounding Korça, and never in the dormitories. This is how I read in French a few fragments of "State and Revolution" by Lenin, speeches by Stalin, short translations of Karl Marx and "Mother" by Gorki, then prohibited and still not translated into Albanian.

The in-depth lectures that were given on the French Revolution of 1789, of the other revolutions that followed in France and in other coun-

tries, up to the October Revolution, were also treated from a bourgeois point of view, but nevertheless opened up new horizons of thought for us.

The history of France was very rich in events, but also in literature having piles of novels of every subject imaginable. The school library, in addition to the official textbooks, received books of classical literature, but also works corresponding to the inclinations and political tendencies of the teachers. This is how, for example, when I was given the opportunity to study the French Revolution, in addition to official history, I was allowed to read numerous works written at various times, those of Lavisse, Michelet, Mathiez, Madelin, Malet and Isaac, the ardent speeches of Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just and so many other writings.

Naturally, for us, sons of the Albanian people, the alpha and omega of everything was the struggle against Zogu and the overthrow of his autocratic regime. One then imagines with what zeal we studied and how we interpreted in our minds and hearts all that we learned. I remember my joy at my first reading of Ronsard's poems, where I found a sonnet on the great deeds of Skanderbeg. Our hearts, mine and those of my comrades, swelled with joy when we recited in French, which we then translated by ourselves into Albanian, the verses dedicated to our prestigious hero:

*"O the honour of your age!*

*O heroic Albanian whose hand defeated the Turks  
twenty-two times!*

*Who struck terror into the Turkish barracks and*



*fear into their castles!”<sup>1</sup>*

The depth of the content of this sonnet, the art with which it was composed thrilled us and these feelings gained even more force when we learned that the author, Ronsard, was one of the greatest French poets of his time. Over time, our zeal in our studies and our research grew even more and we celebrated any new “discovery” that we made concerning Albania in the work of illustrious or lesser known French authors. We were elated when we read that the great Voltaire had also mentioned Skanderbeg and his family, while Lamartine’s multi-volume work on the “History of Turkey” filled us with pride for the long passages and the entire chapters where he wrote in enthusiastic terms and with forceful praise — the Albanians, Skanderbeg, the high virtues of our people, their fights and prowess in battle. Today, when I leafed through this book, regardless of its imperfections, its ideological limitations and other understandable flaws (Lamartine was above all a poet and not a political philosopher), I must say that his comments and considerations on the Albanians and their virtues are not only among the most laudatory that a foreign pen of the past century has ever written, but were also generally accurate. I was thus led

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<sup>1</sup> When we were in the Lyceum, each of us translated the verses of the great Ronsard according to their abilities and personal tastes. But it was a real pleasure to hear our comrade Nonda Bulka perform his sonnets, with forceful gestures and passion, in his powerful voice and his face flushed red. I quote here, in these memories, the original translation of Nonda Bulka.

to reading several other authors of the famous French Pléiade. Reading Montaigne, the travelling philosopher, gave me great satisfaction when, in the beginning of one of his essays, he mentions the virtues of our illustrious Skanderbeg. We were looking for everything that could have been written about Albania. Sadly, Albania was seldom mentioned. We asked our French teachers to tell us the works where we could find the history of Albania.

We made comments in class, and also read outside our class hours, reciting and analysing all the great French classics through the centuries, from Marot, Du Bellay, Corneille, Racine, Molière, Boileau, etc., which also strengthened our ability to write effectively. We jumped for joy when the teacher, who was explaining Racine's "Andromaque" to us, told us that the setting of this tragedy was Butrint, in Albania. This encouraged me to read with attention all the works of this author, although I had no particular liking for him. Madame de Sévigné's letters didn't excite me either, for, although beautifully written and composed with mastery, they were characteristic of a talkative, idle woman, who delights in gossip. Naturally, they are nonetheless of great value as a chronicle of that century.

I liked Molière's comedies much more because, superbly conceived and full of wit, they also encouraged reflection and drawing conclusions about the life, customs and ideas of his century. In Gjirokastra, I had acted in certain plays by Molière, which, after having been translated, we staged and performed ourselves.

La Fontaine's fables naturally occupied an im-

portant place in the hours devoted to French literature. We had learned many of them by heart. I attempted to read the maxims of La Rochefoucauld, but they required a great effort to be understood. Our literature professor who, it seemed, liked him very much, greatly frustrated me when he gave us one of these maxims as the subject of our monthly or quarterly composition. I also liked Boileau for his scathing, penetrating and incredibly sharp criticisms.

When we began to study the period of the French Revolution, the most important and interesting era in the history of France, I always diligently paid attention. I followed the course with intense passion not only through books, but also in listening very carefully to the explanations of our teacher and by reading the texts that he recommended to us apart from the textbooks. By this intense study I acquired vast knowledge of the movement of the various contending factions: Girondins, Montagnards, Feuillants and Jacobins. I knew far more than what was in our textbook. I knew about Mirabeau's true personality, about what he said and did behind the back of the revolution. Furthermore, I loved and greatly admired the eminent figure of Marat. Georges Danton's quote "Audacity, more audacity and always audacity" thrilled me. It was a motto that we, too, had to apply to overthrow the abhorred monarchy of Zogu, I said to one of my comrades, Enver Zazani, during our walks in the vineyards of Mount Shëndëlli.

I followed attentively in my mind the fall of heads both literally and figuratively, from that of

Louis XVI to that of the incorruptible revolutionary Robespierre, cut off by the guillotine and falling into the basket. I was impressed by the last words of Danton who asked the executioner to kiss his companion one last time. The executioner having prevented him from doing so, Danton told him, in a phrase that has remained famous, that, despite everything, he could not prevent them from embracing after death. But more than anyone else, I loved the Jacobins, Robespierre and Saint-Just, because they were upright, devoted to their country, intransigent against feudalism and the monarchy, rigorous against the reactionary factions of the rising bourgeoisie, masters in the art of setting up a revolutionary army and a revolutionary policy, both internally and against the coalition of monarchs that surrounded France.

Speaking of revolution, I remember a very moving episode for me. I had returned from Korça to Gjirokastra for the holidays and one day I asked what Vehip Qorri was up to, my poor blind friend. They told me he was seriously ill. I asked my father for some leks, and I bought a loaf of white bread, a piece of cheese and a bottle of milk and went to visit Vehip in his miserable shed. I didn't need to say my name, because he recognized me by my voice. I opened the door of the shelter where, in one corner, he was lying, huddled up on himself and wrapped in his blanket.

"Uncle Vehip, I'm glad to see you," I said to him. "I wish you a speedy recovery."

Vehip threw off his blanket, stood up with great difficulty, and began to speak in his sing-songy voice he was well known for. He told me as if he

was speaking in prose:

“I am very happy to know that you have returned. I wish I could regain my sight.” Vehip took a long pause and started to sing again: “Unhappy that I am, unable to look at you again, but I still know it’s you Enver, my young friend, I will never forget you.”

I sat down next to him, he kissed me on the cheek, I heated his milk after pouring it into an old metal container that he had there, and I prepared some porridge for him and we began to chat. He asked me about my school, about the courses and he said to me:

“I am very unhappy to have never been able to attend school.”

I tried to cheer him up by saying:

“Others before you, including great men, have suffered from physical impairments,” and I told him “there was once an illustrious composer named Beethoven, who played the piano and sang of the French Revolution, and ended up going deaf.”

“You may be blind, but you play the flute admirably,” I added, “and you sing to the people who will rise up one day in the revolution.”

Vehip raised his eyes and asked me:

“What is a ‘revolution’?”

I began to explain it him, talking at length about Robespierre and finally concluding:

“The day will come when the people will arm themselves and rise up to chop off the heads of the king and his aristocracy.”

Vehip, his spoon in his hand, his face inflamed with fever said to me:

“Do you want to repeat the name of this Frenchman?”

“Robespierre,” I replied, and Vehip immediately composed a poem for him:

*“O famous Robespierre, I did not know you  
But today Enver told me so much about you  
Bold, and never backing down, you inspire me!”*

When I began to leave, he asked me:

“Will I manage to live long enough to see it, this revolution?”

“You will, and you will enjoy its many fruits, because then it is the people who will wield all the power.”

After Liberation, when I went to Gjirokastra, I saw Vehip appear in front of me. The villagers had taken care of him. He kissed me and said:

“Enver, you kept your word, now I can die.”

“No, Father Vehip,” I said to him, “now you must live, because to the sound of your flute you inspire the masses, the Party and the partisans.”

He regained his strength and lived a serene life, until the day he passed away, in the city’s old age home.

But since those years of my youth, when I myself in Korça was engaged, full of zeal, in reading and debating to learn more about revolution and the revolutionaries, many months and years passed, but he never gave up hope. Vehip Qorri witnessed, in Gjirokastra, the triumph of our revolution.

During those years, I endeavoured to follow not only the course of the events during the revolution, but also its lead-up. So I eagerly read the encyclo-

pedists, the works of Diderot, from the novel “Rameau’s Nephew” to “La Religieuse” and the “Letter to M. D’Alembert.” I read Rousseau’s “Social Contract” and “Emile,” works by Voltaire, his “Philosophical Dictionary,” “Candide,” the “History of Callas” and even the “Carnival of Venice.”

I remember one incident I had with a student from the Gjirokastran Lyceum. His name was Vehap Ciu. He was a year above me and very good at math. The solutions he found to problems were so original that our teachers had them published in the *Annales de Mathématiques en France*, alongside those of other French students. Vehap slept in my room, and was so dedicated to his studies he even forgot to eat, and let the cheese sent to him from Gjirokastra rot in his cupboard and stink up the room. Here is one episode:

One evening, once back in our room, when we had begun our philosophical discussions as we did regularly, I said to Vehap:

“Could you, Vehap, solve this problem which seems incomprehensible to me? In *Candide*, there is a table where all of the deposed kings are gathered in the Venice Carnival, but there is an empty chair (I made that part up). I don’t understand why Voltaire left this seat empty.”

Vehap to answered me:

“If it was a question about a theorem in geometry, I could answer you, but I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about, I don’t get it.”

A friend intervned and asked me:

“What do you think, why did he leave it empty, Enver?”

“He reserved it for King Zogu,” I replied, “be-

cause the day will come when he too, as dethroned king, will go to visit this grand table...”

When one of my teachers lent me Mathiez’s “History of the Revolution” and works by Jaurès, I understood the events even better, the role of the masses, the bourgeoisie, the revolutionaries and the conflict of their ideas.

A series of novels by Dumas, Hugo and Anatole France completed my knowledge. I “devoured” the writings of Dumas, I greatly appreciated Anatole France and Victor Hugo was my favourite poet. I eagerly read all his works and especially his plays and poetic work. I knew thousands of his verses by heart. I loved Hugo and I defended him against his detractors.

One of my professors, Maraval, who didn’t like him too much, said to me one day:

“You are just like the long haired and flamboyant Théophile, to defend Hugo this much.”

In the French essays for the first part of the baccalaureate entrance exams, I came across a section on Hugo. The questions arrived from Paris in a sealed envelope and were of the same difficulty as those sent to all of the lycées in France. Naturally, I passed the French test very well. Victor Hugo came to my aid.

I also found Napoleon’s period, the First Empire, very interesting. We studied it in detail. We knew the name of each marshal, the forces he commanded and the military tactics and positions in each battle, which was accompanied by maps. We had learned how the Thermidorian terror stifled the revolution, how the rising bourgeoisie had established its fierce dictatorship and brought to



power a dictator, a despot, who transformed the republic into an empire. We admired Napoleon for his military genius, for his mastery in the battles where he fell like lightning on his enemies, putting their coalitions to rout. But if Napoleon was a reformer, a great organizer and a remarkable administrator, and if his troops, in their conquests, overthrew thrones and carried wherever they penetrated in Europe the spirit of the revolution, he was also a despot, a tyrant, an enslaver of the French people and many others. I had read many books and novels about this period, which naturally enriched my culture and fuelled my hatred of the oppressors, but I learned from their actions, from the social evolution of the time, from the ideas development. All this prepared me politically to better discern the right choices among the difficult paths, those in which we had to advance in these very dark years for our country and for us, the young people.

The later period of the history of France and world history, which was the focus of my philosophy classes, opened up to us new ideologies and new perspectives. One day, the professor who was talking to us about Napoleon III, Versailles, Adolphe Thiers and Bismarck mentioned the Paris Commune and the Communards. We were prepared to learn, and we listened intently. For the first time he said the name of Karl Marx and the "Communist Manifesto." In secret I had obtained, from France, the "The Class Struggles in France," but I had not yet read the "Manifesto." I raised my finger and asked the teacher:

"But who was Karl Marx and what did he want to do?"

The teacher replied:

“I am absolutely not a Marxist and we are forbidden to speak of him here, but in spite of my contract, I will tell you a few things about him.”

Indeed, that is what he did, but he said little and denigrated Marx thoroughly.

As for the “Manifesto,” it ended up secretly falling into my hands. I had been in Korça for a year, I had quite a few comrades in the town, and among them many industrial workers. One Sunday, while we were walking near the main chapel of the Metropolitan Church, a worker from Korça, younger than me, but whose name I no longer remember well, it was perhaps Foni Thanoja, said to me:

“Hey, why don’t you come and have a cake at Koçi Bako’s bakery!”

We entered a pastry shop and each ordered a slice of cake. Koçi asked Foni:

“Who is this student?”

“He’s a comrade, don’t worry,” Foni replied.

“Can’t you come to my business sometimes too, students?” Koçi told me. “I don’t think the ‘Stamboll’ pastry shop makes cakes any better than mine. Or is it because over there there are mirrors on all the walls?”

Koçi’s words saddened me. The third time I went to his bakery, there was no one there. He approached me, brought me my usual cake and said:

“The cake costs a lek, but what I’m going to give to you is much more important and costs nothing; hide it, read it, translate it and give it back to me.”

It was the “Manifesto” I heard so much about.

I held it tight to my chest, squeezed Koçi's hand tightly and walked out. On the way to the dormitory, I felt like people were looking at me and wondering: "What the hell is on his chest?"

Albanian literature was the only important subject taught in the Lyceum in our mother tongue, and our teacher was Kostaq Cipo. He was one of the most capable teachers, if not the best in Albania at that time. In the school he enjoyed great authority, as we liked and respected him a lot. He knew Albanian literature, as they say, like the back of his hand. He was also very well educated in the minutiae of grammar and syntax. Endowed with a vast culture, he possessed skills in Latin, Italian, German, French, Greek and even some other languages that I have now forgotten. With us, his students, he was incredibly kind and supportive, he loved us as we loved him, and never missed an opportunity to support us. I followed his lessons with great interest. He spoke to us with great grace about our literature, about the promoters of our National Renaissance, about the Albanians of Italy. He seldom mentioned the lackeys of the regime, which he truly despised, as the progressive democrat that he was. We guessed that deep down he was an anti-Zogite, but he was careful not to express himself openly. He confined himself to a few ironic allusions. We had only a few literary texts in Albanian, and the books of our Renaissance poets, Naim Frashëri, Çajupi, etc., which were published, were difficult to find let alone to buy; Zogu's rotten regime didn't even publish these national treasures.

Cipo explained many things to us, mostly

orally; he dictated them to us and gave us notes to copy at home. When he spoke, whether in class or outside of it, he raised his head in the air and stared at the ceiling without ever looking you in the eye. In class, I was among the best students; Cipo appreciated my compositions and I was very happy to enjoy his esteem. If I'm not mistaken, he had studied in Italy and he had also lived among the Albanians who had long settled in that country, which explained his passion for Arberësh literature. The Arbëreshë authors were naturally a big part of the course, as when their turn came, he shone. He communicated to us his love for De Rada and his "Milosao" which he knew almost by heart and which he recited fragments to us in Arbëresh. We hardly understood what he was saying, but, with his help, we set to work and gradually began to learn both De Rada and Zef Sérembé, as well as Gavril Dara and Zef Schirò. At each lesson, Cipo moved from one subject to another, also indulging in jokes that aroused our laughter. He was often sarcastic and always made ironic jokes towards us, but never maliciously. He explained to us many other Albanian authors, including religious ones, like Fishta, Konica and Noli, although he was anti-religious. When Fishta came up he told us:

"Let us try to focus on his patriotism and his good aspects, as for the rest let us just ignore it."

He praised Faik Konica as a scholarly and skilled polemicist writer; he also praised Fan Noli, especially his translations of foreign literature in Albanian. We rarely heard Noli's poems from Cipo, but we learned them on our own, especially those that were aimed at Zogu. Naturally, I had

learned the elegies on Bajram Curri, Luigj Gurakuqi and so many other people which I liked very much, because Noli was also an eminent man, a democrat, an anti-Zogite. Among the students, it was rumoured that “regardless of the fact that he is a priest, Fan Noli is a communist, as he has been in Russia.”

With his love of Albanian literature, Cipo naturally could not neglect the rich folklore of our country. We often asked him for explanations when we read the treasures of our people’s creations, some fragments written in difficult Albanian, characteristic of certain mountainous regions.

Cipo had admiration for Albanologists, especially Germans and Austrians, but he did not push this feeling to the point of idolatry, as some others did. He liked the great German authors in general, he also had a thorough knowledge of German literature, a subject he touched on because it was in the program of the philosophy class, if I’m not mistaken. Be that as it may, by that time I had already read Goethe and the dramas of Schiller avidly. Cipo recited to us the Nibelungen, Eulenspiegel and many other works by German authors, especially romantic ones. Perhaps he knew them mainly because they were on the syllabus of his course, but I had the impression that, while not being a “Germanophile,” he had a particular sympathy for German literature. He also liked Italian literature, but didn’t talk about it much. It was the time when, in Italy, fascism had firmly established itself in power, the time when Zogu put himself increasingly under the rule of Rome and sold off Albania. It is obvious that for these reasons, apart from old

memories from long ago, the people, the youth and the people of progress did not want to hear about the Italians. When we spoke of the pepinos,<sup>1</sup> we fully agreed with Cipo.

As a fan of folklore that he was, Cipo gave us homework to study the local folklore from where the students were originally from. For me, he asked me to prepare a project for him when I returned from vacation to Gjirokastra — a very detailed description of a “Gjirokastran wedding.” I remember having done this duty with care, noting the customs and the large number of songs sung on the occasion of weddings. I filled three notebooks with my notes and took them to him at the start of the school year. He was satisfied with my work, and congratulated me on my passion for folklore. I had already noted his benevolence towards me in the recommendations he gave me each time I went on vacation to Gjirokastra. He always came up to me and said to me in his thin, drawling voice, raising his eyes to the ceiling and blinking:

“Let’s see, Hoxha, what else you will bring us from Gjirokastra! Collect me anything of any interest.”

I never failed to keep my promises. I respected and loved this teacher very much, who instilled in me a love of my mother tongue, of the treasures of our country, who always steered us straight in the right direction of patriotism and democracy.

Later, when I became a professor at the Korça Lyceum, we became close colleagues. After Liberation, when the former Minister of Education,

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<sup>1</sup> Italian fascists — *NEPH*.

Gjergj Kokoshi, was condemned for his hostile activity, I summoned my old professor and offered him the post of Minister. He accepted, worked very conscientiously as a minister and a man of letters, until the day he died of cancer. His death affected me deeply because I had so many great memories from the time I was in school. I remembered my anxieties and my joys when I presented myself for the first part of the baccalaureate, which was as difficult here as it was France, and Cipo, saying to me when I passed him in the corridor:

“Hoxha, you wrote a very good essay!”

But let's get back to the dormitories, because that is where I spent a good part of my school life. I have very good memories of it, but also less good ones. These concern the bureaucracy that reigned there, while the life that I led there left the best impressions on me. I have always been optimistic, frank, cordial and generally open with people and with my comrades. I bonded, communicated very easily with others. With the beginning of my studies in the Lyceum, “family” life also began in the dormitory. It was indeed a large family, including elements from all regions of the country, apart from the local students from Korça. I had comrades from Shkodra, Mirdita, Mat, Peshkopi, Kosova, Vlora, Tirana, Elbasan and Gjirokastra. There were about 150 of us, every year newcomers arrived, and even relatively old boys were close with the first and second year students. At the dormitory there were cases of students without scholarships, whose families paid the exuberant registration fees themselves.

Despite some little things that were bad, life in

our dormitory was regular, normal, it was subject to internal rules, which then seemed rigid to us, but many of which, now looking back at it, were essential. In the morning, we got up early, to the sound of a bell that Ilo jingled as he passed from one dormitory to another. It was rather annoying but essential. Guri and Ilo deafened us with their bell, and we, every now and then, threatened to send them to hell and back without a second thought, but when we said this they did not hold back from making similar threats in their thick Korçan accents. Every action at the dormitories was announced by a bell and we got used to it. No matter what, even in winter when it was very cold and snowing, barely out of our beds at the ringing of the bell, we went out into the courtyard in front of the latrines to wait our turn, then quickly returned with our own bars of soap and our towels around our necks (at that time we cared little for brushing our teeth so we brought no toothbrush). Then we went to wash our clothes in the washroom, did our hair in our rooms and immediately went to the study where we had to spend an hour and a half. You had to be punctual if you didn't want to incur punishment, and the most severe penalty was to be confined to the dorm on Sundays, which we feared like death!

After the morning study, we went to have our breakfast. We were usually served a small amount of cheese with a cup of tea or a glass of milk and sometimes we were served a small amount of marmalade. For breakfast we never had a proper meal, we only ate well at lunch and dinner.

After breakfast, we picked up our books, lined



up and made our way to the school, always accompanied by the supervisor; we very rarely deviated from the route to the school. Five or ten minutes before the start of class, we would either enter the small courtyard of the school, or sometimes in the alley next to the school, where we paced until the bell rang, this time not rung by Guri but by the Lyceum's janitor, the famous Nisi. The first period of lessons generally ended at mid-day, but sometimes we were let out early in the morning when a teacher was absent. When dismissed we returned in long rows in the courtyard to depart. On the way back, some did try, with or without permission, to get away from the group. In these cases we sometimes resorted to making some little lies to deceive the supervisor, or sometimes we would fabricate small fights and tricks to deceive the dormitory caretaker Nisi.<sup>1</sup> It was the manifestation of a natural instinct for freedom, for independence and for challenging bureaucratic discipline. I remember this period of my life today with a smile, but the fact is that at the time, when we were young, neither I nor my comrades could bear this harsh rule, it aroused in us a feeling of annoyance that went as far as pure anger. Despite everything, the rules were the rules and they had to be respected. Otherwise, we were kicked out of the school

After lunch, we walked around the dormitory's yard until it was time to go back to school because we had classes every afternoon. The only place where we were allowed to enter when we wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with the aforementioned Nisi, a janitor — *NEPH*.

was the study, we were forbidden to go into the bedrooms to lie down or rest at mid-day. They were locked and only opened before we went to bed for the night. In the afternoon, on our return from the Lyceum we wandered around the yard again, playing, singing and talking until it came time to go into study for an hour and a half, which was mandatory, before going to dinner. Then, after a short break, we had two hours of study to ourselves before bedtime. Whoever wanted to could stay in the study even later. Such was the general schedule of a day spent at the dormitory.

The study schedule was well organized and almost all of us adhered to it. It was a great help for our lessons. At the ringing of the bell, we entered the study and plunged into our homework or our lessons in complete silence. Everyone had gotten into the good habit where, if a student arrived late, we all noticed the quiet opening of the door gently and their tiptoeing to their place. During the study time, our conversations were done in low voices. If anyone needed to go out, he had to ask permission from the master of studies, who was always present and, if sometimes he was absent, had one of the older students replace him. Especially in winter, when it was freezing outside, the study was well warmed by the stove but above all by our breath, because at playtime, having nowhere to go, we stayed inside, chatted and sang songs from our regions of origin.

I don't remember a single real fight between students in the dormitory. On the contrary, we were all very close. There was no narrow parochialism there. We never saw, for example, the boys

of Gjirokastra, Shkodra, Malesia, Delvina or elsewhere, group separately according to their region of origin. This solidarity in the dormitories was also manifested outside, sometimes violently, against rivals of the school, especially at football matches. At the dormitory we had our team. I did not play, but comrades of mine, especially those from the North, were part of it. We had among us excellent players, passionate about this sport, like Anton Mazreku, Rifat Jolldashi, Zef Mirdita, etc.

One day, our team faced the local team of "Skanderbeg." This too counted among its ranks of skilled players, like Pilo Peristeri, Teli Samsuri and others. I seem to remember that we won, but at the end of the game, for some reason, tensions rose and the fans of both teams began to brawl. We, the supporters of our dormitory, burst onto the pitch, but so did the Korça supporters. There ensued between us a bloody fight with fists and kicks, which only the fall of night put an end to. We returned to the dormitory, some with black eyes, some limping, some with their shirts torn or the buttons of their jackets torn off. Of course, at the dormitory, we were given a stern talking to by the faculty, in the Lyceum too we were reprimanded, but no one was expelled. The rivalry soon subsided and afterwards we jokingly remembered this fight as "preparation for future battles."

At the dormitory, no one ever had to complain about the disappearance of a personal object from their closet. We all held an unspoken agreement that theft was morally one of the lowest things you could do. Similarly, none of the dormitory residents, if he received some food from his family, re-

fused to offer some of it to a friend who seemed to want it.

The comrades from my region, that of Gjirokastra, formed a fairly large percent of the dormitory residents. At times of rest I, who liked to sing songs from Gjirokastra, would join some of them and we would sing together.

The dormitory brought together the most diverse group of people I had ever seen, and their paths in life must have been very different as well. For example, Nonda Bulka had a gift for poetry and literature. We called him “the Florence Nightingale of Përmet.” He was kind, loyal, courteous, optimistic and a democrat at heart. He remained so all his life. I already loved him very much, and this sympathy I felt in general for the natives of Përmet, like Sotir Angjeli and others, whose names I have forgotten. As to the Greek students from Delvina, they were a bit boastful and ambitious, but on the whole they were good students. Eqrem had excellent results, Feim was strong in math, Myslim was very simple and also good at the natural sciences. Among their Greek comrades, there were some who later showed sympathy for the treacherous organization of the “Balli Kombëtar,” but never took up arms against us. On the other hand, Abdulla Rami ended up becoming a prison guard. I remember him quite well for his stubborn and grumpy demeanour.

The students from Shkodra were good friends — they did not shine in their studies, but they were affable and loved sports and jokes. This was the case of Anton Mazreku, a keen speaker and the most fervent supporter of the cult of the round ball.

Tef Jakova was a quiet guy. He spent most of his time in bed, rather than going to school. Whenever someone entered his room, which was close to the central stove, they would see Tef and Nazmi Uruçi (who later became an officer for the Zogite regime where things ended badly for him<sup>1</sup>), lying in their beds, pretending to be ill to skip school. This room was the famous “veterans’ room” of the dormitory, the door of which was locked from the inside and which one entered only if one knew the password. It was the chamber of philosophical, political and literary debates. The room counted among its residents Rasim Bako of Kosova, at that time a philosophy student, who was an excellent friend, constantly smiling, while at the same time he could be profound (I don’t know what has become of him). Alongside him was Shefqet Shkupi, also in philosophy and with whom we would reconnect in France later; originally from Kosova, he was a very good friend, honest and patriotic, and he eventually became a judge in Vlora. In this room, some time later, Nonda Bulka was housed, and then eventually me. I have kept so many memories from this time. We also received visits from comrades from outside the room, such as Aqif Selfo, Sinan Imami, etc. Inside, we debated and we smoked to our heart’s content. One day, the supervisor of the dormitory, Hasan Rami, came to chat with us. Tef Jakova was smoking a pipe and, when a supervisor

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<sup>1</sup> Nazmi Uruçi was shot in October 1944 on the orders of the General Staff of the Albanian National Liberation Army, guilty of collaboration with fascist Italy — *NEPH*.

sent by the director arrived to do his check, Tef, out of respect, hid his lit pipe under his bedsheets, but the supervisor said to him, without concealing his smile:

“Tef! Your blankets reek of smoke.”

“Yes, I do not deny that, God I am f\*\*\*ed!” exclaimed Tef. “This tobacco is killing me, I’m going to quit smoking right now!”

Later when a doctor came to make his visit, he would go to Tef and ask him:

“Do you have any issues, Tef?”

He responded:

“I swear to you, doctor, my head hurts so much!”

In fact, Tef had nothing wrong with him and it became a familiar “phrase” for Dr. Haki Mborja, an elderly, patriotic man, who when he asked us: “Do you have any issues?” we answered “my head hurts so much” without fail. After we went through this routine he would always walk away without asking any more questions.

But on one warm summer day, while I was in my room or when I was in class, I don’t recall anymore, I began to feel very bad. I had a very high fever and almost lost my senses.

When the doctor came, he uncovered my head on which I had pulled up my covers and said to me in passing:

“Oh let me guess, your head hurts.”

In fact, I was very ill and I called him back, but he didn’t want to hear from me. I then grabbed the glass bottle of water from the window sill and threw it on the ground to get his attention. The poor doctor became scared, retraced his steps and, after ex-

aming me, declared that I had to be treated urgently. At the dormitories, there was no actual infirmary, so my godfather, Ramiz Shehu, a friend of my father, took me to his home, where I stayed for a few weeks until I recovered. When I got up, I went to apologize to Dr. Haki and thanked him.

Rasim Bako was the main organizer of our discussions in this room. One afternoon, "Capsule" (that was the nickname of Nazmi Uruçi) took everyone who occupied the room aside, and announced to us that late in the evening, at ten o'clock, there would be debates and that Rasim would tell us the rules and who would attend. We got together. Rasim as usual was in bed. Tef too. The debates began; Rasim was the first to speak and for a quarter of an hour he began to make pessimistic remarks about life, about the vanity of existence and he expressed other ideas of this kind, which did not agree with the convictions that we knew him to have. We were surprised to hear him say these things. What transformation had taken place in him? During the debate, to illustrate his idea, he evoked the enslavement of Kosova by the Serbs, spoke of the sufferings and the distress of the Kosovars. Tef Jakova would puff his pipe and occasionally say, "I agree with Rasim."

When Rasim was finished, we took turns speaking.

"I agree with you on some points you raised about Kosova," I told Rasim, "but I don't agree with your philosophical views on life. Have you studied the poet Ovid by any chance? I am surprised to hear you consider things even darker than what Schopenhauer believed. The situation of the

Albanian people, of course, is serious, life is difficult, but it is worth living. Man, by nature, is a joyful, optimistic creature.”

After I spoke, other comrades intervened, eventually it was Bulka’s turn to speak. He agreed with us and said:

“I don’t agree with your ideas at all, Rasim. You want to paint the world around us as hell. Listening to you, at first I thought you were quoting Leopardi with all of your pessimism and vanity. Have you gone insane or are you just dumb? Life is beautiful and we must enjoy it. Don’t look at things in such a sad light. Since you stay lying in your bed all the time, naturally, you don’t enjoy life. I understand that you are longing for your Kosova, where the Serbs persecute our brothers, but neither the pain suffered by them, nor the sorrow for the distress that surrounds us, should lead you to despair. I, myself, enjoy life,” continued Bulka, and he began one of his romantic tirades. He began to speak of the beauty of Përmet in in the spring, of the bucolic village he was from, Leusa, full of flowers and covered with cherry trees, and he did not forget to also mention a young blond girl, anonymous, but whom in fact we knew, because he was burning with love for her.

“Nonda ruined everything for me,” he said to me, putting his foot in his mouth by mixing up the names of the girls

“That’s enough about Nonda,” shouted Tef. “The others also want to talk.”

“Don’t you interrupt me,” he protested. “You puff on your pipe, you look like a slovenly philosopher who hasn’t washed.”



As Bulka spoke, Tef had taken off his pillowcase, covered his head with it and wrapped his body in a white sheet. Tef began to say:

“I am a bird from Shkodra, although my name is ‘Tef Jakova,’ but I have nothing to do with Rasim ‘the little Socrates’ who spoke before us.”

We burst out laughing when we heard Rasim nicknamed “the little Socrates,” but Rasim retorted, blow for blow:

“Capsule, prepare the hemlock for me, I’ll drink it as soon as Tef finishes this homily!”

Laughter broke out once again and Tef responded:

“Rasim is Muslim, Allah be praised but I am Catholic, with the Pope’s blessing, and being Catholic, I know priests and deacons to their deepest levels. I know how their molars are when they chew away at all those good things in churches, convents and cells. I know their teeth that gnaw at the people and eat away at people’s riches when they die. As a godson of the Vatican, I approve of Rasim’s pessimistic thoughts. I will now speak of,” continued Tef, “how monsignor Gjergj Fishta was blessed by the holy father and the Duce. From now on, no longer call me Tef Jakova but rather Tef Lazarus, since Fishta resurrected me, took me out of my tomb to pay respects to one of his renowned poet colleagues.”

Tef then proclaimed:

*“You, disgusting worms  
Who nibble on humanity,  
You who in the darkness hold  
Me hostage...”*

Bulka was shocked, he jumped on his feet, and, with a burst of laughter, as he often did, yelled:

“Ah, you played me a good trick, Rasim! But you, Tef, you’re a bastard, you opened my closet and stole my poetry notebook.”

We couldn’t hold back our laughter. We understood now why Rasim had brought up this debate; he wanted to confuse Bulka, by bringing out the contrast between his optimistic and pessimistic moments when he was stood up by his girlfriend.

These were the kind of debates that we had in the room of the “veterans,” sometimes on a problem which concerned opinions, sometimes by picking on a “weakness” held by one of our comrades. There was no lack of humour and jokes, but the fact is that when we wanted to push someone against the wall for some misstep, as in the case I just mentioned. Through jokes and humour, we also touched on problems of a political, philosophical, moral and artistic character.

One evening I commented on the need to extend the freedoms granted to students. But I developed this theme by broadening its framework and basing it on the principles of the free development of individuals and ideas. All the comrades chimed in and Rasim drew conclusions from what we had been going over in one form or another.

“I approve of your ideas,” Rasim said, “but what should we do with Vaso and the other guards, ‘our guards,’ or rather ‘yours,’ because, as far as I am concerned, I do not leave my room and, when I do, no one dares to say anything to me, because, according to them, I am ‘crazy.’” He continued, “Even if they want to punish me, they have no-

where to send me, I have no family or a single lek in my pocket. These debates,” concludes Rasim, “are very good, we agree in our ideas, but they will remain fruitless if we do not convince one of our superiors to advocate for them. I have the perfect target, by far the most suitable supervisor for getting on our side is Hasan Rami.”

He was a young teacher, from a small school in Elbasan. Smiling, cordial, he behaved well with us students. He always supported our demands and when we asked permission, he never refused. He was the best of our supervisors, not to mention Koço, a friend of ours from Korça, who was appointed to the post of supervisor when we were doing our last year of study at the Lyceum.

The other supervisors were vile and wicked. For the most part, if they weren't agents of the police, they had made themselves the most servile instruments of the director of the school and that of the dormitory. This was the case with Vasili, a bad guy, grumpy, an infamous spy; and Rali, a fat greek, who was as tall as a small dog on its hind legs, who didn't even speak Albanian, a two-face with a heart of stone, who reported everything to the director; and especially with Xheladin Nushi, a cretin, a dumbass Zogite who was, according to rumour, later to go to Tirana to serve as “male entertainment” for the princesses, sisters of Zogu. I don't even know why we gave him the nickname “the truck.” But the biggest scoundrel, the baddest and most evil of them was Ahmet, an old Turkish type, police spy, heartless, who had a pocked face and snake eyes. He was to later become an Italian soldier where he eventually ended up in prison.

The other directors of the dormitory, with the exception of Hasan and Koço, were on the whole penny-pinching hypocrites and scoundrels, who would do anything to make our lives hell. They even paid off certain students to surveil our every move, where they were rewarded handsomely by the administration. One supervisor (whose name I have forgotten) was a tall man, over fifty, and dressed all in black, with a long coat and a soft black hat. He walked like he had a spine made out of steel, talked without turning his head one way or the other, but when he spoke to you, even if he was so angry he would kill you if he could, he without fail called you "my boy." He rarely left the office where he "cooked the books" and fabricated financial statements. He seldom talked with the financial manager of the school, Pero, whom he often butted heads with over his unscrupulous dealings. It was Pero whose job was on the line if this came out. In all these operations he stole skillfully and without drawing the ire of anyone. Shrewdly concealing his embezzlement, he posed as a parsimonious, frugal saver and, to be well seen by the Ministry of Public Instruction and in good standing with the administration, he sent there a bribe of about one twentieth of what he stole. He had thus acquired the reputation of a civil servant "integrated" and devoted to the regime. He had also established the rule that every day at the dormitory there had to be a supervisor chosen from among the students, naturally from the older students, responsible for supervising all acts of the interior life, taking delivery of the chef's food deliveries, seeing if the deliveries were in good condition, checking the

kitchen, checking the cleanliness of the rooms, taking an interest in sick students and organizing the groups of students who needed go to the bathhouse in the town. Often the student in charge of these tasks stayed in bed and feigned illness to skip these tasks.

Very often, we were irritated by being served inedible food. Sometimes the food was not of good quality, sometimes it arrived in insufficient quantity. Exasperated, we formed a delegation, of which I was a member, who would ask to speak to the director of the dormitory to complain to him about the situation. As usual, we are told: "You are wrong to complain, you are very well fed, you have never eaten so well at home; you are scholarship holders, the king is making sacrifices for you," with heaps of other nonsense and threats spewn at us. We demanded twice, then, after being ignored repeatedly we organized a one-day rebellion. I was the supervisor for the day. I went to take delivery of the food and noticed that the meat and the cheese smelled bad and that the quantity of butter was insufficient. I shouted to Pero:

"I will not take this delivery!"

"Have you gone mad, you will take the delivery right now!"

"I do not care, you have no authority over me and I will not take the delivery!" I replied angrily.

"I may not but the director certainly does!" he screamed. "I guess I will have to show you to him"

"You can go to hell, I won't take the delivery!" I concluded.

The director called me into his office and said: "My child, you are wrong, the meat is good.

You must be disciplined and the food must go to the kitchen as soon as possible, because the boys will arrive from the school and they will not eat and you will be responsible for it. We will be obliged to take severe disciplinary actions.”

I replied immediately:

“Please, sir, don’t use threats! I only take deliveries of undamaged food, only the best for the students.”

“Pero,” said the director, interrupting the discussion. “Take the delivery yourself and prepare the kitchen. As for you,” he addressed me, “get out of my office now!”

I stormed out, went to class and discussed the incident with other residents of the dormitory. We decided to boycott the meals that were served to us at lunch. I returned before the rest of the students and waited for them. When everyone had entered the courtyard, I climbed two steps up to the podium and spoke to the students about the situation. The comrades began to shout:

“We won’t eat rotten food!”

The supervisors, who were watching the scene from the principal’s office window and listening to the shouting, were frightened and locked the door for fear that we would break into their room. Apparently, one had informed the head of the local police force by telephone, because ten minutes had hardly passed and the constable arrived, escorted by several armed guards. The constable left the lackeys and went straight to the manager. In the courtyard, we began to shout even louder. Shortly after, the constable came out with, in his hand, a sheet of paper at the top of which was written my

name, followed by those of three other comrades. He called us. The comrades were shouting, the unrest in the yard increased, the guards entered and, amidst a great uproar, lined us up and led us to the police station. There they began to interrogate us, but we protested forcefully.

“Tell me, boys, why are you being such trouble-makers?”

“We are well within our rights, but you, by what right do you detain us?” I replied. “Shouldn’t we defend ourselves against the rogues who rob us of the opportunities allocated to us by the state? We will not eat rotten meat. By doing so, you make yourself the accomplices of these scoundrels.”

“Hey, you’re gonna regret it if you keep running your mouth!” cried the officer.

“I have no reason to be silent,” I replied, “you can do what you please!”

The case caused a stir in the town, the Lyceum’s teachers were alarmed, the telephone began to ring nonstop, we were stuck being interrogated by the officer but after four gruelling hours we were released. Then we returned to the dormitory, where the students received us warmly. Three days after this incident, we saw the Secretary General of the Ministry of Public Instruction, Luigj Shala, arrive from Tirana. He questioned us, naturally remonstrated with us, but pronounced no punishment against us. Measures were taken against Pero, who was the “culprit” that was blamed for the crime. Be that as it may, since that affair, the cronies of the management took their precautions with us. We had won that battle, they had lost it.

The most tedious work at the dormitory was

mending our clothes or sewing back a torn button. We did it ourselves, because there was no one else who could do it. The two or three women on duty confined themselves to washing our clothes, but they did not sew or iron them. The first annoying task was to sew our number on each piece of clothing to prevent it from getting lost among the others and to find it easily when we gave it to wash; the second was to mend our socks, which often tore, especially at the heels. We watched with envy as Shaqir Gjebreja did this work. We called him “the arbiter of elegance.” Shaqir knew how to mend socks like a girl from a good family, with the help of a wooden ball. His clothes were always ironed impeccably, because he had them ironed in town at an acquaintance’s dry cleaning business. The other students and I resorted to a more practical method and used “means at hand”: we placed our pants under the sheet or under the mattress. In both cases, the next day the result was pitiful: firstly, the pants were creased and came out not with one, but with two or three folds; secondly, on the pants were the imprints of the metal springs of the bed base. We practised this way of “ironing” especially on Saturday evenings, in order to be ready for the usual Sunday walk on the boulevard. Shaqir was also the master choreographer of the dormitory. He taught us the “Charleston”! We all stood at the foot of our beds and danced this modern dance, while Shaqir, at the entrance to the room, while dancing, he, without struggle, sang “...that’s my baby.”

Our bedroom had seen many things: Akil Sakiqi’s arguments (who would become an officer under Zogu and continued this career under the fas-



cist occupation), with Ismail Topciu and Lezo Cami's daily blackjack games. They played that game every single night from the day that they arrived to the day they graduated.

As for my old comrade Selami Xhaxhiu, next to whom I slept, he suffered from insomnia. I wonder how that boy kept himself alive! He only slept an hour, at most an hour and a half a night! I could wake up at any time, and I always found him with his eyes wide open.

Despite everything, Selami was very calm. On the very few times he could get a good night's sleep he always gnashed his teeth all night long, and the unfortunate man also had bad teeth!

Every time I woke up I would ask him: "Selami, what time is it?" He would take his fancy watch out of his pocket and tell me the time. Sometimes, for fun, when, very early in the morning, I asked him the time, he replied:

"Why do you care about the time, just listen to Selman Riza chanting downstairs in the yard, you'll guess what time it is."

Selman Riza was a friend of ours from Kosova and, I must say, one of the best students in our class. He had excellent results in every subject and he studied hard. He got up at night no matter if it was snowy or sweltering and paced below our windows while going over and studying the materials, reading aloud. He had a loud and high pitched voice that would tear your ears apart and cause such grimaces as he spoke that we burst out laughing.

One of our most beloved pastimes was the cinema. When Saturday came, we would get dressed

and get going. The youngest students came to our rooms to ask us to convince the overseer to take them. The supervisors, Abedin Shkëmbi and Hasan, also always wanted to go to the cinema, but they made a fuss to be asked. In our dormitory there were film enthusiasts who collected photos of artists. This was the case, among others, of a bey's downgraded son, Hilmi Frashëri, who was always seen with artists' postcards in hand, haggling: "Two Gary Coopers for a Greta Garbo." He informed us in advance of the films that would be screened at the "Majestic" or the "Luxe" because he was in contact with Peti, the son of Koçi Çalo, the owner of the cinemas.

We went to the cinema in rows, but, for my part, I also had another job: I had to explain the film, when it was in French, to Abedin Shkëmbi. For films in other languages, this chore fell to others. In the "Majestic" cinema the youngest students always heckled and yelled, especially during the "westerns." Hooting and hollering drowned out every film. On the other hand, at the "Luxe" cinema, where silent films were shown most often, it was a different story: the films were accompanied on the piano. The pianist, a man bewildered by love and cocaine, only knew how to play a few pieces which he repeated constantly. We learned them by heart. Sometimes he would fall asleep, so we would start shouting:

"Play, Metaxa, play!"

Other times, when he was about to give in to drowsiness, he would hit keys at random on his piano and we would then shout to him:

"You're playing out of tune, Metaxa!"

Another distraction we had was Xhavit Leskoviku's shop, very close to the dormitories. We often went there to buy pears, cherries, nuts, needles, notebooks, pencils, etc. Although the product's quality was not the best, Xhavit was an excellent man, very balanced, always gave us a reasonable price, and he even gave us students a discount even if it meant he did not make a profit. We liked him, never stole from him and never tried to haggle. When we had no money to pay, he would tell us:

“Just remember it, I don't keep records like the grocer. When your money arrives, you will pay me.”

As soon as we had some money, the first debt we paid was the one we had in Xhavit. Next to his shop was the cobbler's shop who repaired our shoes, sewed them or drove in nails.

I must admit that I was concerned about my clothes and appearances. I often went to the bathhouse; my clothes weren't new, but I took care of them. However, they eventually wore out because I only had one suit. Once I asked my father for some money to buy me a winter sweater and a pair of shoes. Under his conditions, it was a big expense, but he went out of his way and picked up a small sum for me to have a suit made too. It was a great joy for me. I went to choose the material of the suit, a piece of light beige fabric, and I remember I took it to the tailor at the “Pallas” clothiers, who was nicknamed Kallatso.

“Kallatso,” I begged, “put all your artistic talent into it!”

“Don't worry, I'll make you such a beautiful

suit that when you walk down the boulevard, all the girls will instantly fall in love with you.”

By the time my suit was done, I ordered a sweater nearby, from Garo, as they called him. Garo had a workshop where he made sweaters himself by hand. I chose a checkered one, brown and dark red. I also went to order myself a pair of shoes.

“What colour do you want?” asked the cobbler.

“Yellow,” I told him.

“Would you like them to tango?”

“No, Charleston,” I replied jokingly.

“Do you want leather or rubber soles?”

“Rubber.”

Those rubber soles were fashionable then. Three fingers thick, they made you look taller, and besides, with them you didn’t need galoshes in winter. I killed two birds with one stone — in a fortnight I dressed myself from head to toe. Immaculately dressed, I looked at myself in Kallatso’s mirror. “Let’s hit the boulevard!” Looking at myself today in old albums with these new clothes, I remember that I went with Elmas Konjari and another comrade from Korça to a shop which had the sign “In Venice,” near Shëngjergj, to take a group photo that I sent to my parents so that they could see their son in his new suit...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the original, Comrade Enver Hoxha, while putting down these reminiscences on paper, added this: “All these things that I have written... are of little importance, but you asked for them, so I wrote these events as I remember them, with the impact they had on me then, and with the role they play in my life empha-

Many other stories came from the three years that I spent at the dormitory. Some come to mind clearly, others more vaguely. Although life there is generally, according to some, monotonous, as far as I am concerned it was happy, because I liked human contact, collective life and I have the best memories of my comrades of the time, from Selami, Rasim and even Dhimitër Shuteriqi, who was much younger than us and attended the lower grades of the Lyceum.

Life at our dormitory was also interesting from the point of view of the social composition of the dormitory residents. There were no affluent boys who separated themselves from the poor, for almost all of us were scholars. But there were still some whose parents' economic situation was not to be pitied, the sons of civil servants rubbed shoulders with the sons of poor farmers, there were boys from families of average or poor urban origin, but also the sons of workers, craftsmen and peasants. We had needy emigrant Kosovars among us, and even comrades who had come from the orphanage.

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sized. I tried to retrace things as they were, without any exaggeration. It was a difficult task to do. Regardless, if I did exaggerate, these reminiscences would lose all meaning and would not be worthwhile to write down. But since what I am writing here is only for you and our children, there is no danger of others laughing at it and saying: 'Nobody cares about this! You even talk about buying new rubber-soled shoes!' And that is probably true, but today's young people should know that, for us, buying a pair of new shoes or having a sweater made was an important event in life!"

Despite these differences in the social composition of the students, we made no distinction in our collective life; between the residents of the dormitory a sincere affection was created, the reciprocal and collective relations were of great simplicity. Rarely did you hear a pupil boasting of his bourgeois origin, or of the well-to-do economic status of his family. Sometimes the parents of the dormitory residents would send them high quality foods and we always looked forward to those days. My family never sent me anything. When one of the students received a few candies from home, he always shared them with all his friends.

I remember one evening at the study a boy named Hysen Janina proudly exclaimed, "I can eat glass!" I seem to remember that we had actually seen him crush glass between his teeth. As he loudly chewed a friend from Fier intervened and said to him:

"Come on, Hysen, please, no need to eat glass, you're going to get hurt. Here, eat this slice of cake that mom sent me instead!"

No one received a lot of money from their parents and with the pocket change they had spent it frugally. If you asked a comrade for a small sum and he had it, he would not hesitate to lend it to you. When this was the case, we would lightly tease, but without any malice or resentment.

In our dormitories there were boys from families of all the country's religions, Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox (I don't remember if we had any Jews among us), but what was striking was that even then not one of us believed, not one of us regularly prayed, no one went to church or mosque, no one

observed Lent or Ramadan. In short, the presence of religion in our dormitories was not felt at all. Undoubtedly, the secular and bourgeois character of the French school had a lot to do with this state of affairs.

The progressive spirit of the Lyceum also spread to the town, for, although Korça was one of the towns with the most advanced population in Albania, the religious spirit, whether Orthodox or Muslim, was far from having disappeared there. The Metropolitan Church, with its many places of worship in the city and in the villages, helped to preserve and develop religious rites and customs, especially among the elderly. This did not mean that the young people had all escaped the clutches of the cults. It was seen clearly at Easter, Christmas, the celebration of personal saints and the Day of the Dead. Easter especially was the most successful cult recruiting event in the city. In the Lyceum, the choir, led by a certain Sotir Kozmo, who wore a wide-brimmed black hat and tied a black tie around his neck, the end of which reached his stomach, almost exclusively sang religious songs.

We, the dormitory residents, when the great Christian feast of Easter came, had free time until midnight because it was the hour when, according to the Gospel, "Christ was risen," a ceremony in which all the priesthood appeared in ceremonial clothes and the believers who carried on their shoulders a board with an epitaph in golden characters, which represented Christ. This procession went through the city starting at the Metropolitan Church and ended at the Church of Saint George. The same was true on the day of holy water, a reli-

gious holiday that fell on the first days of January. On that day, a large crowd gathered, and in the freezing cold, at the small bridge of the Panda creek, the priest, "blessing" the fetid water of the "river," threw a cross into the water and five to six boys plunged into the cold water to fish out the cross and receive a portion of the offerings collected by the church as a reward. The same was done on other religious holidays. Unfortunately, these days were very numerous for the Orthodox.

Muslim holidays were less numerous: Ramadan, Bairam and some others. But on those days, in the Muslim quarter too, there was a large celebration.

The Christians accused the Muslims of being fanatical, and the Muslims said the same. The two parties did not back down from their pretensions, causing a certain resentment between them, not always declared but very obvious. Even the quarters inhabited by the Orthodox and the Muslims were segregated from each other by the river. We students who lived in the dormitory, were, so to speak, both literally and figuratively, somewhere in the middle, at the border of the two groups, on the bridge which connected them. Our favourite neighbourhoods, for us students, were those of the Christians, not because of their churches and monasteries, which in fact we did not care about, but because this area was the heart of the city, it was there where the schools and the shops were, where the commerce was, where the streets were lined with stalls, where the workers and craftsmen were gathered in greater numbers. In this district life was livelier, freer and more advanced.



The Korça of that time was one of the most evolved cities of Albania, it was a great patriotic centre, an illustrious centre of culture and education. These great traditions were preserved, developed and constantly cemented. Above all, Korça possessed a large population of the working class and tradesmen not only the most developed in Albania in its number and diversity, but also of the most revolutionary at that time. This force of progress was later to play an important role, but already at that time its weight and its influence were considerable.

During those years, the new bourgeoisie of Korça, with relatively advanced traditions, was in full growth. It had spread in Greece and elsewhere, it was experienced in commercial matters and in usury, and it had even begun to invest in factories and workshops. Although it posed as a progressive force, it was fundamentally a traditional bourgeoisie — arrogant, corrupt, very petty and conservative in its customs, in its daily and in social life.

On the other hand, Korça had one of the most advanced agricultural sectors in the country. The peasants, Orthodox and Muslim, were very hard-working, but oppressed by the feudal lords, especially by the Muslim beys, like Maliq bey Frashëri, the beys of Mborja and others. In the countryside, the influence of these lords was quite prevalent, while in the city, the Orthodox bourgeoisie was dominant.

Many of the native inhabitants of Korça were conservative and it must be recognized that they were parochial. The Lyceum brought a lot of freshness to the city and it rekindled the revolutionary

spirit there. Not only did it make its influence felt in the field of education, culture, economics and commercial development, but it also attracted a considerable number of young people from all regions of Albania. Teachers and professors came there from different parts of the country, French professors also arrived and all these people spread to Korça, rented rooms, penetrated into the close minded families of the city and mingled their spirit, the mentality, customs and ideas from other regions. Thus Korça experienced a new impetus in its economic growth as well as in its cultural and educational development, in its social evolution.

By this judgement that I make, I do not intend to embark on the history of the social evolution of Korça, because when I was a teenager I did not understand these things as clearly as I understand them now, and, if I speak with the political maturity that I have acquired today of the problems of that time, the presentation that I would make would not be helpful. I would have to step out of the relatively restricted framework of my student perspective and, moreover, it would be neither honest nor fair on my part to claim that at the time I understood all the problems as I do today. As for analysing the Korça of today, it wouldn't be fair as I've never properly experienced the "adaptations" of the modern day. The reason I explain this is to briefly describe the framework in which we the students were experiencing.

Like my other classmates, I felt a real love for Korça. Although we students did not go out into the city every day, I quickly learned all the streets and alleys, the large neighbourhoods, so well laid

out and characteristic that it is difficult to find a city as elegant, so beautiful and so human, in their free and harmonious disposition, with their organic links from one house to another, with their red roofs, which, complemented with the surrounding hills in spring and autumn, was occasionally scented by the air of poppy fields, with their multitude of chimneys from which rose columns of smoke, and which, when autumn came, but especially during the snowy winter, conferred on the city a magical aspect, covering the city with a bluish veil, like in a fairy tale.

We had “free time” every Sunday afternoon, on legal holidays, on Easter and on certain Muslim holidays (these too were also legal holidays) as well as when, for one reason or another, we got special permissions. The last two years of our studies, these exit authorizations were granted to us much more easily. We were no longer controlled like the new students, we were relatively free. From now on, we were considered to have reached maturity. During the period of preparation for the baccalaureate exams, we enjoyed complete freedom of movement, at most we had to take formal permission to go and study outdoors.

During our first year in Korça, it must be said that when we students went out into the city, we felt like we had escaped chains! We walked the streets in all directions, and not only the boulevards, but also the alleys. On Sunday mornings we washed and sewed our clothes, combed our hair as best we could, we also put on a little pomade, ironed our trousers as I have already described, shined our shoes until they were perfectly shiny

and got out. When it was cold, snowing or when a heatwave started we went to visit the dormitories of the students from Gjirokastra, who attended the Lyceum at their own expense and were very well off. For my part, I mainly frequented my friend Aqif Selfo, who was the oldest and most mature of our comrades. I liked him a lot because he was very frank and generous and also because he was my cousin. He had rented a room from an old woman, on the hill to the east of the city, somewhere near the Church of Saint Athanase. He had also bought, I remember, a small “automatic” stove which ran on petrol and which he prepared coffee for each of us, which gave us a pretext for joking. He only had one cup, which we rewashed each time for each of us and, when there were several of us, you can imagine the time this operation required. As he was very orderly and thrifty, when we remained penniless, I asked him for a small loan which he did not refuse. When we received some money from home, we left it in the custody of Aqif, who was like the bank for us students.

Other comrades too, like Skënder Topulli, whom I liked very much, Selaudin Kokona, Nedin Kokona (with whom we shared classes) and Hamit Kokalari, were in the city, either in rented rooms or with relatives. Nedin Kokona was a real sex icon. When we walked with him on the boulevards and in the alleys, the girls exclusively looked at him, and we were enraged. Each of us cast our interest on a girl we thought was attractive, but this “choice” usually ended in a fiasco. We went in a group in the alley of a “chosen one,” she stayed in front of her door, looked at us and, after having be-

come accustomed to our flirting, she ended up smiling at us. But to whom? We couldn't understand it, because there were several of us. It was necessary to specify the target of this smile and for that, each of us had to return to his door, but alone, many times. There were some among us who did not hesitate to do so. Sometimes the girl went out and sometimes not, sometimes she smiled and sometimes not. Such that we never knew for sure which of us was her favourite. In three or four hours, while chatting, we walked through a multitude of streets and alleys and wherever attractive girls appeared at their doorsteps, we shouted at them:

“How's it going good-looking?”

In any case, if sometimes they smiled, sometimes they answered us curtly with a “leave me alone, asshole” or “have you ever looked at yourself in a mirror?” etc. Thus a shower extinguished our inner “fire.” But rarely was one of us upset or downcast by an episode like this. It was more like the jokes of teenage kids, who just as they were getting tired of studying, they also needed to hang out, laugh, crack a joke or prank. It was a common practice for all students during their walks in the city to crack jokes about two main topics: beautiful girls and priests!

We felt a strong antipathy for the latter, especially for one of them, who was called Kandjer. He was a “fashionable” priest, as the townspeople called him — handsome, young, with a jet-black beard. It was customary amongst the students, at the time, at the sight of a Christian or Muslim priest, to “pass it,” as they said, by touching the

priest with one's hand. It was offensive to the priests. When they noticed it, they got angry, insulted us, but we couldn't help it. I remember that one of my friends had a room with two windows which overlooked the street. Opposite his house lived two or three young girls and, on Sundays, with their friends, they chatted on their doorstep. One day we saw Kandjer come down from the Metropolitan Church and enter this alley. The girls, who hadn't seen us at the windows, began to gesture at the priest for him to talk to them. Kandjer approached and, when he was close to them, he stopped and said to them:

“What are you girls doing?”

We, who were following the scene, began to shout:

“F\*\*\* you bastard priest!”

Kandjer raised his head and exclaimed too:

“F\*\*\* you, students like you are spawn of the devil!”

These walks ended by tiring us and, when we had a few pennies to spare, we always stopped at the “Stamboll” pastry shop, where we bought slices of cream cake. We went there not because those cakes were good, the triangle pastries of Koçi Bako's bakery were much better, but because the walls on each side were covered with mirrors, in which we could take a look at our appearances and see if our hair needed to be combed before continuing to walk around. In the evening, back at the dormitories, our legs were cramped, our stomachs grumbled and our shoes began to fall apart, but we were satisfied with these long walks.

We went to the cinema not only on Saturdays,

where there were reduced prices, but also when there was a good film on Sunday afternoons. Sometimes the film was not good, and then the cries rang out:

“Nasi, give us our money back!”

Nasi, the manager of the cinema, shouted to us from a box:

“I will not! Why is it my fault if the film is like that?”

Once I decided to learn to ride a bicycle. The shop that rented bikes was close to the Lyceum and the “Majestic” cinema. I drove to Deboje not without falling and bumping into many obstacles. But to come back, I had to carry the bike on my back because I had caused a wheel to fall off. I was obliged to pay fifteen leks (a very large sum for me) as the price for the damage caused and since then I have not touched a bicycle out of principle.

The Korça market was famous at the time. It was teeming with small artisan shops, from hatters to blacksmiths. They were in alleys sometimes paved, sometimes dirt. In winter, all the garbage was covered in snow, but when it melted it created a big quagmire, so much so that it almost took a bridge to cross it. But, among these small shops of grocers, cobblers, butchers, dumpling merchants or saddlers there were also shops of big merchants like the Turtulli, the Ballauri, the Lako, the Rako, etc. These were the big bosses of the place.

We went there sometimes when we had to buy something that we couldn't find at Xhavit's shop, which was near the school. So we went to the shops owned by Merdan or Rako. Both were wholesale suppliers to small shops like Xhavit's, but they also

sold retail products, such as razor blades. It was in Korça that I used a razor for the first time. Once I remember going to buy a pocket watch, the first in my life. It was at Rako's store.

"What do you want?" asked Rako

"A pocket watch," I told him.

He led me into his back room. What a sight to see! On the floor was a large pile of pocket watches haphazardly stacked as if they were worth nothing. I thought watches were delicate, precious, intelligent mechanisms. I asked what brand the watches were and Rako replied:

"These are the best, they are Japanese!"

He bought them by the kilo and gave them to us individually.

"Choose one and, I assure you," said Rako "that this will last for a very long time and I believe it will still work by the time you reach 50, but if you are unlucky and it breaks, I can't fix it, no refunds. I'm not forcing you to take it."

"How much do they cost?" I said.

"25 leks," he replied. "But for students I have a special discount so I will take 2 leks off, so 23."

After a short haggle I snatched it from him for 20 leks but, in fact, out of those 20 he made 15 in profit. I also bought a thin chain and for a few weeks stuffed the watch into my pocket and took it out with satisfaction. I mostly watched it in class to kill time. This "satisfaction" did not last long however.

One day I said to my comrade Selami:

"My watch does not work anymore!"

"Put in some grease for the gears," he replied. "You should've expected this to happen."



To repair this watch I paid half a lek every day on grease. After 40 days, my watch finally kicked the bucket and I threw it in the trash. That was the story of my first watch.

When we needed to buy a good shirt, a pair of socks or a tie, we went to the “Kaino” store. Or when we wanted a little cheese like Gruyère or some good olives, we had to go to “Rota.” There, near his shop, was a filthy little café, where a few comrades took their meals. It was Karamanka’s famous restaurant, a man we were amazed was still alive with his advanced age, not mean, generous, but who drank all day and after closing his restaurant, went out completely drunk to go home and shouted at the top of his voice in the street:

“It’s me, Karamanka, there is no one else like me!” “Down with Turtulli, down with Ballauri!” and he hurled other insults at various other politicians.

I often went to the shop of Ymer’s brother and Xhavit Dishnica, who were my classmates. They had a shop at the horse market where we also got to know villagers, apprentices and other boys our age. We asked them a host of questions, because we were curious; we wanted to know what was true in what we were learning in the Lyceum about the life of proletarians and peasants.

I thus knew several masons, I remember well Mihal Dhima, who was a friend of our family in Gjirokastra. I often visited him and we became friends. He was poor like his cousin Leko, but he was generous, simple and full of hatred for the aristocrats and the wealthy. Masons did not always find work and, many times, when I passed by the

market, I found them on the sidewalk talking to each other, with their trowel in the big pocket of their apron.

“My boy,” one of them, an old man from Orgočka, told me, “this life we lead is a dog’s life, while others are born with a silver spoon in their mouth.”

I had a lot of sympathy for these masons, perhaps because I was friends with Mihal, but they too were very human, very warm to you, even without really knowing who you were. In contrast to this generosity and this simplicity, I remember the behaviour of some of my classmates from Korça (mostly city dwellers), sons of wealth, but also of petty bourgeois, who not only never invited anyone to their home, but rarely even walked around in our company. The workers of Korça were cut from a different cloth, and the love I had for them only grew in me. I felt close to them during my time in Korça, in 1927, when I went for the first time to this city, which was to leave indelible impressions in my spiritual life. A few years later, when I was to return to Korça as a teacher, all these impressions, these feelings, these ideas, were to become even clearer and better organized in my mind.

We weren’t just walking along the boulevards, we were also going around the city. We often climbed to Saint-Athanase, a hill dotted with trees and crowned with a church, near which there was a fountain. From there, we had an admirable view of the city and the plain. We sat up there on the grass or on the walls of the church and we recognized all the streets of Korça, which extended in front of us. From there, we usually went down to go up to-

wards Shëndelli, another hill which stood at the end of the city. It was a very large hill, planted with acacias, and like Saint-Athanase, crowned with an old church. All the summits had been monopolized by the priesthood.

We would generally go up to Schendelli from the boulevard. Once there, we would lay down on the grass in the shade contemplating the plains, villages, trees and streets. We would bring something to read, such as textbooks or novels. Sometimes, we would go on from there to Barc village. The hills of Saint Athanase and Schendelli brought up Lyceum students, schoolchildren and other city dwellers, but also, on holidays, women carrying unleavened bread and beautiful girls. A sort of fair was organized on those occasions.

Other places we went for a walk were Drenova and Boboshtica, where there were springs of pure and cold water, beautiful shades and red mulberry trees, which we liked very much, but we had to set off from the very break of dawn so as not to collapse from the heat.

When we went to Bazdovec and Dardha (I only visited these places once during my time in the Lyceum), we got up even earlier. We travelled to Dardha on an old truck. We organized picnics there, and took food and drinks with us.

All these walks in these places are beautiful memories I keep dearly and, when I go to Korça, I will not fail to go see them again. My nostalgia for those youthful years is further heightened by the fact that these sites are now beautified, richly wooded and, moreover, they can be crossed or traversed by car.

Among the places that I frequented with the most pleasure and of which I keep a host of memories from my life as a student, I remember the cafés “Panda,” “Shetro,” “Bilbili” and another, which, I believe, no longer exists, because the site was demolished to build the regional hospital. These places, even if they were called cafés, were not in fact mere coffeehouses like the others, but a kind of summer garden. You could order a coffee, a Turkish delight or a small plate of jam and crackers which usually cost a “calf,” i.e. a quarter of a lek. In Korça, this coin was called this because of the lion it had on one side and which some (who had never seen a lion) mistook for a cow. But, generally, Lyceum school students did not go there just to have a coffee. They usually went there to study during the week, especially in the spring and summer, when they were preparing for their first part of the baccalaureate and philosophy exams.

We preferred the “Panda” café because there were a lot more roses which formed green hedges that formed like little green boxes. There were a lot of trees there, and in the shade we refreshed and rested, especially in the heat of the day. We lay down on the grass, or looked for a bench and opened our books. Near the café “Shetro,” on the other hand, grass was not very abundant, there were only shady trees and it was quieter there. When we went there, we climbed onto the terrace, where, in the shade of a large walnut tree which towered above us with its foliage, we studied. The waiter was a certain Llazoja, Llazoja the “general” as he was called. He was a man in his forties, who didn’t care to wash his face when he woke up, wore

old clothes he didn't care about and did not lift his feet while walking. Perhaps he got into this habit because of his shoes, which he had worn to shreds during the winter and summer. Apart from this habit, he used to let out vulgar exclamations at all times.

"So Llazoja, what's up?" we asked.

"What's up? Uhh... Yesterday I lost ten leks! It was Vasil, Thina's son who stole them from me!" (Vasil was the French newsagent on the boulevard). Then he would ask us: "Are you all thieves?"

We would order a candied fruit from him, and Llazoja, still dragging his legs, would come downstairs and bring us a single cherry in a spoon on a large coffee tray.

"With a meal like this we are gonna be stuffed in no time!" we said to him laughing.

"I wouldn't want to spoil your appetite," he replied.

The fruit cost a "calf." When we gave him a lek, for the candied fruit and three others as a tip, Llazoja did not thank us, but said:

"Jesus Christ, you students are very generous. It is wrong to say that in Gjirokastra you are all miserly!"

But later when we didn't even have a "calf" to give him, we said to him:

"Remember, Llazoja, we'll pay you another time."

He answered us:

"I wouldn't remember it, I should write out on the slate with my" without finishing the sentence he slapped his rear end. "Say, you students, if you're broke, why are you asking me for candied

fruits! Go drink a bit of water from the Shetro fountains instead.”

Sometimes, as a joke, we would say to him:

“Lazoja, we liked the cherries but we need more, bring us a *çaçanik*” (candied fruits with pistachio, the most expensive thing on the menu, something we could not afford).

He replied:

“I don’t trust you to pay me. If you feel like *çaçanik*, go to ‘Nano,’ where these little rich darlings like Thimo Çali and Petraç Katro go.”

Opposite this café-garden was the hospital, donated by “philanthropist” Thoma Turtulli. He was the richest man in Korça, a big trader and stockbroker. He had donated a library to the city which was like a rat’s nest, and the Zogite regime, in return, authorized him to bring in goods from abroad without paying customs duties, which gave him profits equivalent to the price of a good fifteen libraries. He had done the same for the hospital.

One day when Llazoja brought us some candied cherries, we asked him:

“Who built that hospital, Llazoja?”

Llazoja frowned and replied:

“Turtulli, the piece of shit!”

“Come on Llazoja the ‘general,’ you’re being mean to Thoma because you are too poor to meet him,” I said to tease him, convinced that after I said this he would tell for the hundredth time the story of this nickname that everyone in Korça knew. Llazoja responded:

“What, you don’t know the face I’m making? I told him that to his face! Before becoming a café waiter, I was a porter at Thoma’s. All day long, I

loaded and unloaded bags. One day, I was exhausted, dripping sweat from the tip of my nose, and I sat down to roll a cigarette.

“Thoma had seen me and said:

“‘Hey, get moving!’ in a threatening tone. ‘Why are you standing there smoking for no reason?’

“‘Give me a second,’ I replied. ‘I’m exhausted!’

“‘Stop daydreaming and shut up lousy, get up and get to work!’ Thoma shouted at me. I had become intensely embarrassed and angry so I said, ‘I’ll sit here as long as I want, you piece of shit!’ Sure, he kicked me out, but what did he gain? He may well rot in his gold, now no one calls him Thoma anymore, but only ‘the piece of shit!’”

Sometimes we would give Llazoja, or his comrade who replaced him a bit of propaganda, but Llazoja would say:

“I don’t have time to deal with that stuff! Talk-ing about a good insult or starting a shouting match, now that I am interested in, but unfortunately I cannot talk about that stuff. Beware of the police, they will lock you up if they catch you.”

Sotir Papakristo, the Albanian supervisor of the school, was sometimes harsh with us, and sometimes we took revenge by going on strike. I remember that once we were not allowed to go and celebrate the memory of the martyrs of Orman Çifligut because, according to our superiors, it was a study day. The schoolyard was seething with protests. The students sent a delegation to the supervisors. My class appointed me to represent it. Our delegation, led by two or three older comrades, in philosophy and elementary mathematics, was headed by

Xhelal Rusi. We asked permission from the two directors who were sitting opposite each other. A supervisor from France was uncertain, stammered, while Papakristo refused to give us his authorization. So we went down into the yard, pushed past the doorman, forced the lock open (because the door to the yard was still locked by Nisi), went out and, singing, went down the “Themistokli Gërmenji” boulevard to make our way to honour Orman Çifligut. The director could do nothing against us, he limited himself to a reprimand, because we were too numerous, and, if he expelled us class representatives, the students planned a general strike of the school, which he wanted to avoid.

When we protested, Xhelal Rusi always said “we must learn to storm the barricades, there will be a revolution soon!” Us students always joked that he must be “Bolshevik,” which in Korçan slang meant someone who was a rebel for the sake of rebelling.

With Xhelal we also organized “meetings” in support of Doctor Zographos. He was a man between 55 and 60, small in stature, thin in face and body. He had a pointed beard, wore a frock coat, striped trousers and a bowler hat which he traded on holidays for a top hat. A little ridiculous and rather light, he was the laughingstock of the bourgeoisie of Korça. No one sought his care. But the doctor had a mania: he wanted to be elected as a deputy and not even a deputy like the others, but an opposition deputy. He posed as a liberal democrat, and indeed he was; moreover, he did not fail to manifest these sentiments openly. He had a love for speeches. However, in his harangues he did not



directly attack Zogu, but instead focussed on all the zealots of Korça. The authorities and the bourgeoisie had put the doctor in some sort of house arrest. We students wanted Zographos to win both because it was funny and also because we wanted it. We visited the doctor and smuggled speeches out of his house. When Flag Day came, the authorities made sure that the doctor did not leave his house to prevent him from acting up. For his part, the doctor was waiting for just such a moment. He dressed to the nines in his coat, with his top hat, his cane and a medal which I no longer remember from whom he had received it, he snuck out and went directly to the place where celebrations were held and tried to reach the balcony of mayor's house, facing the church of Saint-Georges. The guards blocked his way and he clashed with them at the door. At that moment, in the tumult, we intervened, carried off the doctor and made him go up in secret somewhere, even higher, on the balcony of a café, where we awaited the end of the official ceremony. As soon as it was over, we took our doctor out onto the balcony and he began his speech. The trouble was that no one let him speak, some whistled, others shouted, "Give the doctor a drink!"

He retaliated by shouting and insulting in turn. The whole situation had turned into a massive frenzy. But soon after, I remember it as if it were yesterday, we got into a big embarrassment because the doctor was almost killed. When we went down to the café with him, the crowd surrounded us, shouting:

"Give us a speech, doctor!"

But the unfortunate man, drenched in sweat, was out of breath from having screamed so much from the top of the balcony. We held him up, me on one side, Xhelal on the other, so that he didn't collapse. But the crowd continued to shout:

“Give us a speech, doctor!”

Eventually we managed to shove him into Lakçe's pharmacy, and had him surrounded by students until the crowd had moved away.

Later the doctor was the victim of a serious accident: he almost drowned in the lake of Pogradec!

The brother of doctor Zographos, also a doctor, organized a big party and, the same night, drunk as they were, a group of guests took with them doctor Zographos and went to Pogradec to continue the party. They all got into a boat for a walk on the lake. The boat capsized and they drowned; only Doctor Zographos miraculously survived.

The next day, of course, we, his friends, went to his house to congratulate him on having escaped this misfortune. But to see him we could only burst out laughing. He had become extremely pale and, skeletal as he was, he appeared to us in his underpants, with an old blanket over his shoulders.

“We are so happy you survived, Doctor!” we told him.

“You'd better say that Albania was lucky not to lose me! But unfortunately,” he continued, “even if I am saved my medal is lost. It fell into the lake and I am very saddened, especially since I have no copy to replace it!”

The incident rattled the doctor and he soon became deeply pessimistic.

“Don't worry,” Xhelal told him, “when we take

power we'll decorate you!"

"I know, I know," he replied, "but when you take power, the grass will have long since grown on my grave."

Korça and its surroundings were not only effected by warm summers, but also by frigid winters. At the time, on November 28, the National Day (Flag Day), Korça was covered with snow. In the winter, the population had a lot of problems keeping warm. Firewood was expensive; in the dormitory and the Lyceum, it was distributed very sparingly. Especially in the school, there were days when we shivered.

Sometimes we said to Aleko Turtulli, a classmate:

"Bring a little wood from home, oh 'Golden Pig,' because you will catch the cold and sadden your mother who has only you."

The "Golden Pig" was a fitting nickname for this plump boy, heir presumptive to the fortune of Vangjo, of Thoma and, later, when he married, of that also of Lako! But he never inherited it. Our National Liberation War prevented it. He does not declare himself openly against us, but, when the extraordinary tax on large merchants was instituted, he was taxed out of millions of leks. He paid for part of it, then squirmed for the rest, swearing he had nothing left, but no one believed him. With the approach of tax day, in the event of non-payment, it would have driven him directly to prison. I remember that he then came to Tirana and asked to see me, to confide in me as the fellow students that we had been. I told him:

“Aleko, pay what you owe to the people and the state, otherwise you will not escape prison.”

Korça, under the snow, had its beauty, especially for us, the young people, who held a deep sense of wonder. The first snowy days were full of excitement in the city. The snowball fights started from the dormitory yard, continued through the streets as we lined up, and ended in the Lyceum's yard. The winter was particularly harsh especially when the Morava wind blew, because it could get bitterly cold and freeze you to the marrow. Among so many episodes of our games and our distractions during those days, I remember one time when, in a square near the school, we began to build three or four snowmen. We started this game as a usual distraction, then little by little we dressed these fellows, someone found a policeman's *kepi*,<sup>1</sup> others brought old soft hats and mouldy waistcoats, we made kinds of epaulets and wooden weapons; big suspenders, rosaries and other ornaments were found, they wrapped their feet with pieces of rubber and tin, and the result was a few chubby “officials” and police officers, made of snow. They were the perfect recreation of the average grotesque senior civil servants and the typical police officers of the regime.

We laughed and we winked at each other and as soon the leader of this group of snowmen was also “dressed up,” a recreation of Zogu, his head crowned with a crown of rags, to make the allusion to the king even clearer. The joke took on great

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<sup>1</sup> A type of officer's cap known for its distinctive visor — *NEPH*.

proportions, the young people of the school and the surrounding neighbourhoods began to gather around this group, each one went there with another piece of old clothing or a quip but we all spoke in hushed tones so as not to give the secret police the opportunity to suddenly burst in, bringing our prank to an end, but we were almost caught by a patrolling officer so we launched ourselves at the snowmen and tore off their heads and arms and knocked off their hats.

Word of this story was heard, investigations were carried out to find out who had participated in it and if it had really been done to weaken state power and insult the honour of the king, but nothing was discovered. We justified some “exaggeration” in the reports of the costumes and “ornaments” of our snowmen by comparing it to the tradition of the carnival, which, in Korça, was very widespread and was organized every year. The whole town took part in it, the snowmen alluded to good and bad elements of these people, but of course the popular humour targeted the pretentious and stingy rich people of the city. It targeted the mayor, the venal officials, the degenerate elements and all their lackeys. During the carnival, the common people had fun, of course, but above all found the opportunity to express their hatred and revulsion against those who exploited them and sucked their blood.

It was precisely this custom and these popular games that we invoked to defend ourselves when the supervisors called to ask us about this story of snowmen, and, as they did not manage to get anything out of us, the question was closed with a rep-

rimand and the “advice” not to “celebrate the carnival in this way any more, if you do not want to be expelled.” This was the only “incident” of the unforgettable winters of Korça, not to mention of course the cases where some had to withdraw from the course because of a cold or the flu, which nailed them to the bed for 10 to 15 days.

The women of Korça always managed well with the snow, and were truly worthy of praise. I specifically mean their cleanliness. Winter and summer, at home everything was clean, their house, the spaces around it (the yard and the doorstep), themselves and their family. When we entered their houses, we discovered them very clean, the rooms where their families met in winter were warm, the corridors covered with homemade carpets that they had woven themselves on the loom, the curtains were never missing from the windows. On Saturdays, no matter what, each Korçan proceeded to do a deep cleaning of their house, their courtyard and their property line. Afterwards the men always went to the market. Then, on Sundays, everyone went out on the town, there was men and women, going out with their hair done; the old men and women went to church, friends visited each other, while the young girls in the afternoon posted themselves on their doorsteps, or strolled on the boulevard in groups of four or five, dressed in their best dresses locked together arm in arm.

Korça was at the time the only town in Albania that had a brass band. Korça also had several orchestras, which played on Sundays in the parks, especially at the “Bilbili” café at the end of the boulevard and at the “Panda” café. But there were also

groups of young people, who, with nothing but their guitar, gave serenades in the street, under the windows of some lover. The Korçans were good people, mostly tradesmen with a passion for art. They sang patriotic and love songs and the best of them were part of the artistic group "La Lyre," very famous in those years in Korça and even outside the city. A good part of the boys of those years, such as Jorganxhi, Mosko, etc., have preserved and continued this tradition even today and they even have formed their own orchestra, which, as its amateur singers are mostly old, is now called "The Choir of the Elders."

They and I look forward to seeing each other again when I go to Korça again. The last time I visited I learned they organize parties in which I participated in, and after the concert, we started talking about times past, while the young men and young women danced in front of us, happy and joyful from the days full of labour and full jubilation created for them by the Party.

I successfully completed my first year of secondary school. My school report was good, I had honours. The note I had received from the director reflected the general appreciation that the French director made of the student according to his marks and nothing else. I was very satisfied. After taking our certificate, we stayed in Korça for a few more days before leaving to return home. In summer, the residents of the dormitory were no longer fed, and only the "emigrants" or those who had no relatives remained at the dormitory. They were generally comrades from Kosova, certain northern regions

and those who came from orphanages. We, the natives of the South, almost all returned home for the holidays, which continued until the fall, at the start of the school year. We left by truck for Gjirokastra, again taking the road to Përmet. I was impatient to arrive in Gjirokastra because I was longing for my father, my mother, my sister Sano and my hometown.

When I returned, my family was overjoyed because they were seeing their only son again. Mom didn't know what better to prepare to satisfy me. Dad also went out of his way, went to the market two or three times, bought meat, vegetables, sugar, etc., because Mom had to bake us a cake or serve cheese burek, which was my favourite food. Nor did my father fail to give me, as pocket money, a few leks from the small amount he kept in a satchel with several pockets, which closed with a snapping spring. He separated the currencies according to their value, those of five leks, one lek, half a lek and the quarter lek. The first days of vacation, still touched by my return, he gave me money without me asking him. A few weeks later, I had to ask him and he gave some leks, saying only "Don't spend a lot!" I spent at most one lek a day, but when a month passed and I asked for the usual lek, he gave it to me with difficulty, but gave it to me anyway, adding "You are ruining us!" The second month, it took Mom's intervention to get him to pull a lek out of his bag. He was not at all miserly, but in fact he had no money, and we lived in very cramped conditions.

During the holidays in Gjirokastra, we organized walks with comrades. Every morning, I went



out and visited friends and cousins in their homes, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, almost everywhere. I really liked showing them my interest in them, and, for their part, the families of my cousins and friends appreciated my gesture. In the afternoon, I usually didn't take a nap; but I stayed with Mama on the couch, downstairs in the hall, because it was cool there and, when we were too hot, we drew a bucket of water from the cistern, we cooled ourselves by throwing its contents on our heads or chests. My mother told me:

“Enver, don't use too much water, you can see that the cistern is almost empty...”

We made it a habit each time we threw the empty bucket into the cistern to first measure how high the water still came. Gjirokastrans suffered from a lack of drinking water. I don't know if I told you that our cistern, like most of the others in the city, also contained red worms, so we filtered the water through a white veil and only then used it.

When, towards the end of the afternoon, the temperature cooled down, I went out to the window of the guest room and observed the main road when my comrades came out. I was looking at them with an old navy spyglass. This spyglass clicked like a revolver when you closed it, a gift from my great-aunt.

During the holidays in Gjirokastra, we also carried out cultural activities, reorganized the orchestra, staged plays, comedies by Molière, organized Laberie choirs and held collective readings. I did not give up reading. I mostly devoured novels in French. The month before the start of the school year, I also opened the textbooks and familiarized

myself with the second year courses that I had to follow. Usually, I borrowed these textbooks from my classmates who were a year above mine.

In the fall, as we were getting ready to leave for Korça, I asked mama to make me some sweets for my roommates who had no parents. Mom graciously consented by preparing a large tray full of Turkish delights. My father, cautious as always, had a tin box made for me at Mr. Malo's, brought it to me, and, after Mama had carefully lined up the delights in it, took it back and had it closed at Malo's. Rasim, Kel Gashi and other comrades were very happy when I gave it to them.

"You're lucky to have such a good mother who thinks of us who don't have mothers," Rasim told me.

"When you write to her, thank her for this and tell her that we embrace her as her sons." I did not fail to convey to Mama the thanks of my comrades. When I left to spend my holidays in Gjirokastra, I suggested that Rasim also come to my place. He had thanked me, but had refused, perhaps not to be at our expense, because he was completely broke. He was very unfortunate. wore old clothes, had only one shirt and when he washed it, waiting for it to dry, he wore his jacket with nothing underneath. In the winter, he had an old coat whose collar he turned up to protect himself from the cold. Rasim's cap was disgusting — its bottom glistened with sweat and grime from his hair. The dormitory provided these students without a family with only a shirt and, for the winter, a light black cloak which reached their knees.

We began our second year of studies in Korça, spent mostly trying to prepare for the first part of the baccalaureate exams, the most difficult and decisive examinations in the Lyceum. The baccalaureate resembled today's graduation exam, but currently one takes this exam only at the end of the last year, whereas in the French lycées it was spread over two years. It was, so to speak, two successive examinations of academic achievement, both difficult, both life changing. When you had passed both, only then were you considered to have completed your secondary education and had access to any university in France and other European countries. This equivalence of our Lyceum with the other French lycées was achieved after much effort by the French teachers, especially by the director at the time Bailly Comte. It was a great success for the Korça National Lyceum.

I was very happy to see my dormitories and classmates again. We shared with each other our impressions of the holidays, told each other which novels we had read and which ones we liked the most. It was a relatively united class, but with noticeable differences in the level of preparation of the students. There were some excellent ones among us, like Hamit Kokalari and Selman Riza, others also who passed with difficulty, and others who failed. We also had a young girl in our class, the first and only one in the Lyceum at that time. Later, after I finished my studies, more came. Korça, although it landed in an advanced town, was, in regard to the schooling of women, behind in relation to Gjirokastra. In Gjirokastra's Lyceum there were already some. She was originally from

Gjirokastra, from Libohova, the daughter of a doctor if I recall correctly. She also had a brother in philosophy class. She was rather pretty, intelligent, but did not shine in her studies. Very mischievous, she caused pandemonium amongst the students, drove one of our comrades from Gjirokastra and an elegant young bey crazy in love with her. In fact, she had a system with many of the boys. At first she pretended to pay attention to them, made them flirt and give her gifts, then she ceased all communications. It must be said that she had a little flirtation with our physics and chemistry teacher Saint-Genez, which I will have the opportunity to talk about later. The aforementioned elegant young bey and Aleko Turtulli were aristocrats, and we did not enjoy seeing them. The first spoke French very fluently (his father was Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time); as for the second, he was among the weakest in the class. Kristo Fundo and a few other Korçans were rather cold as friends, but they were good students, especially Fundo, who was among the first in mathematics.

Apart from the other professors I have mentioned, we had in our class a new professor of French literature, whose name was Maraval. He was well educated, but very distant, always paranoid of getting ill. I remember in winter as in summer, he wore a neckerchief, in winter of wool and in summer of silk.

Maraval laughed and smiled very rarely. Apparently, he had adopted this attitude as a pose to impress us, as a mark of authority. We advised the girl in our class to do something joking with him, just to make him crack, but he didn't falter in his stern-

ness.

“I can’t do anything more,” she told us. “The only way to make him laugh is to dress up as a clown.”

Maraval, when he commented on the texts to us, always kept his briefcase full in front of him, and always took out a “mysterious” book and began to talk about it being the best he ever read. His analyses were profound, we took advantage of them, but we were curious to know what this book was. We searched and searched but it was in vain. Finally, we succeeded in finding out. Our girl friend became friends with the landlord of the house where the professor lived. The landlord let her in where she promptly entered Maraval’s room, noted the title of the book, the address of the bookstore, and also the names of a few other works, which were strewn out on the desk.

A classmate ordered these books for us from his father in France, and we ended up reading them. One day, Maraval asked a student to comment on a text and as he had learned the commentary by heart in one of these books, he began to recite it to him. Maraval listened to him, wide-eyed, he blushed and broke into a cold sweat as he watched him attentively. When he finished and answered brilliantly, Maraval gave him a 9. The grades in the Lyceum ranged from 0 to 20, in other words 20 corresponded to a 100%. Our comrade had therefore not even deserved a passable mark. Obviously, Maraval had understood that his mysterious book had now had its day. He removed it from his briefcase and never brought it to class again. We still bought more of these books, because they were ex-

cellent, they were of great help to us, and, finally, reluctantly, Maraval was forced to recommend these books to us.

We studied French literature and there was a focus on three authors, Emile Faguet, Lanson and Brunetière. I preferred Lanson as he was more concise in his definitions and his work included quotations from other works, as well as numerous illustrations.

Anyway, Maraval helped us a lot to enrich our knowledge of French literature, and especially in the literature of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

I continued to read Balzac avidly, whom I loved very much, because in his novels, at that time, I found so powerfully described types of characters, of men who had many points in common with those we knew in our daily life, especially of usurers, hypocrites, rich people and simple poor people. With Balzac I liked the richness of his language and the control in the composition of the subjects. Subsequently, I was to understand the great scope of the "Human Comedy," its stinging criticisms of the bourgeoisie, and to comment on Balzac, despite his monarchist views, he had managed to achieve a colossal and profound denunciation of the French bourgeoisie.

I also carefully read Chateaubriand as well as Vigny and Lamartine. We learned a good number of poems by Lamartine by heart, notably "Le Lac." I didn't really like the Symbolists, like Mallarmé, whom I didn't understand. On the other hand, I read Verlaine and Rimbaud with pleasure. We read Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* with particular cu-

riosity, but they seemed rather strange to us for the time. There were a lot of things we didn't understand. We could not understand Baudelaire's feelings, but when we had read his biography, we managed to form an idea of the daydreams of a sick poet. We were especially curious because some of his poems were marked "forbidden" by the Zogite regime. It also surprised us, because we got to read books like "La Garçonne" by Victor Marguerite, which were much more outrageous. We read these novels in secret and we borrowed them from comrades outside.

Leconte de Lisle's "Ancient and Barbarian Poems" also left a deep impression on me. I was very fond of Heredia's sonnets, many of which I learned by heart at the time and some of which have remained in my memory even today.

"Le Feu" by Barbusse was one of the novels that had attracted me the most because I had found in it a very real description of the war, of the distress and suffering of soldiers and men, in general, a bitter criticism of the war and the capitalists who provoked it. I couldn't understand how such a serious writer as Barbusse could have written novels like "L'Enfer."

It's hard for me to remember all the books I read at the time. Besides, there is no need to expand. I simply want to say that all these readings helped me not only to broaden my cultural horizon on the life and thoughts of the French people, but also helped me learn French better and helped me understand and reflect more deeply on the situation of our people. In my mind, at the time already, I made many parallels and drew many conclusions.

I read in French works not only written by French authors, but also works by Russian writers, such as “War and Peace,” “Resurrection” and “Anna Karenina” by Tolstoy, which I really liked. I had also read works by Dostoyevsky, such as “The Brothers Karamazov,” “Crime and Punishment,” “The House of the Dead,” etc. They seemed strange to me because in French literature I had never come across such “heavy” books.

As for English authors, I read in French works by Shakespeare, Dickens, Defoe, Lord Byron and Keats.

In “Werther” by Goethe, I was very touched by the story of Lotte and Werther and their end moved me. Of Schiller I had read several tragedies, in particular “Wallenstein” and “Piccolomini.”

My readings of Spanish literature were limited to the works of Cervantes and the “Cursed Lands” of Blasco Ibanez, and, as far as Italian was concerned, I only read “My Prisons” by Pellico. In short, at that time, I had an idea, admittedly not very broad, of the literary movement in the various countries of Europe.

In mathematics I was not brilliant. We had as a professor in this subject a certain De Laur. He was a short, blond, taciturn man who kept his mouth shut most of the time for the good reason that he had buck teeth. I, like many others, had seen my teeth begin to deteriorate since I arrived in Korça, they began to hurt me and, since we had no money to go to the dentist, nor the time, nor the concern to do so, over time they seriously deteriorated. The water of Korça, it was said, was very harmful to the teeth. But Professor De Laur hadn’t had his teeth



spoiled by this water. De Laur was very strong in mathematics. Despite all my attention during his lessons, there were a lot of things I didn't understand. In the compositions, I did quite well the part devoted to the course, to the demonstration of the theorems, but I was much less good at the abstract problems, which I had difficulty solving. So I had passable marks, which constantly hovered over failing, that is to say ten (out of twenty of course). We had in our class very skilled comrades in this matter, Kristo Fundo in particular, whom I have already mentioned (and who took a cold shower every day, winter and summer), Hamit Kokalari and Kiço Karajani who boasted that when he went to Gjirokastra, his mother fed him twenty eggs for breakfast every morning. "Eating so many eggs, we teased, made your face fat," and we called him "fat face."

In geometry, I had less difficulty than in pure math, and my overall mark was improved, but when we began to study geometry in space, I had more difficulty than simple plane geometry.

In physics and chemistry our teacher was called Saint-Genéz. His name began with Saint, but there was nothing holy about him. He was an atheistic man, ironically he received the newspaper "La Croix" from France. He was an excellent man, very capable, smiling and very open with us. He constantly joked with us and we never stopped showing him our love and respect. He had a long, thin face, an eagle's nose, large white teeth and long legs. He was from Gascony. We had read Rostand and his "Cyrano," and recited at Saint-Genéz when he was in a good mood:

*“Eagle’s eyes, graceful as cats,  
Fierce moustaches and wolf-like grin,  
Behold the Cadets of Gascony,  
De Carbonne, de Casteljaloux.”*

He smiled sympathetically and said to us:

“You forgot a line” (which we omitted on purpose):

*“Shameless swashbucklers and liars.”*

Saint-Genез made us laugh, for example, when he called us to the blackboard. Sometimes he remained seated, sometimes he stood up and, to correct our errors, when he was seated, from his seat he took a piece of chalk and threw it on the board. It meant that we had made a mistake, we picked up the chalk, brought it back to him, then returned to the board, and this game repeated itself when he corrected us. When he was standing, as he had very long legs, he raised his foot instead of his hand and the toe of his shoe showed us on the board where the error was.

Physics attracted me and in this subject I was an average student, while chemistry seemed abstract to me. I didn’t easily handle formulas and their combinations, and so I limped a bit in this discipline as in math. But just like geometry for mathematics, physics came to my rescue to raise my common grade in the sciences.

We also laughed when one of our classmates, whose name was Kel Gashi, was interrogated. Kel was originally from Mirdita, if I’m not mistaken; regardless he came from the mountainous regions of the North. He spoke French with difficulty and

could not understand the lessons. He was a smiling and friendly comrade, and I don't know what has become of him. The teacher called him to the blackboard and asked him:

“Explain to me Archimedes' law!”

Kel hesitated and started:

“*An object immersed in water, an object...*” and he repeated this beginning of the law five or six times. He did not remember the rest and repeated like a damaged record at the beginning. We laughed and Saint-Genез laughed with us. Then Kel, to change the subject, started to explain Lavoisier's laws and thus caused a great confusion. Finally, Saint-Genез said to him:

“*Hey, what a waste. Sit down!*”<sup>1</sup>

The peals of laughter started again at this pun, and, strangely, that description fitted Kel like a glove, because he was distracted and disorderly, not only in his studies, but also in daily life.

As far as the state of physics and, even worse, chemistry laboratories were concerned, they were extremely poor. All in all, the Lyceum had only a small cupboard of supplies in the large room on the first floor, the key to which Saint-Genез himself kept in his pocket, so as not to lose what little we had. We studied with the help of illustrations from the books. It was fine for physics, but for chemistry? It was difficult for us to conceive his reactions in practice.

I liked the natural sciences and, although they were not my passion, I studied them with relish. It

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<sup>1</sup> In French, this remark is a pun between Kel's name and the word “quel,” meaning “what” — *NEPH*.

was Brégeault who gave us these lessons, until the arrival of the Albanian professor Ligor Serafini, who replaced him for this subject. Brégeault also taught us history and geography, subjects that I preferred and in which I had excellent marks, even being one of the very first in my class. In geography class he gave us a lot of details and, as I had already had him as a teacher at the Gjirokastran Lyceum, we were on very good terms, I took the liberty of saying to him one day:

“Mr. Brégeault, you even tell us where all the chicken coops are in France!” He found my remark amusing and laughed.

English, as a second language, was taught to us by “Father Loni,” or Loni Kristo. He had lived in the United States for many years before returning to his homeland, Albania. He published a newspaper in Korça called the “Albanian-American News,” but his newspaper was not successful and closed down so “Father Loni” became an English teacher in the Lyceum. He was quiet, rather harsh, neither knew nor applied the slightest shadow of pedagogy and didactics in his curriculum. He came to class, opened the textbook, read the text in English, translated it to Albanian and that was it. At the next lesson, he opened this same textbook, questioned one of us, made the student read the text that was assigned, then made him translate it, gave him a grade and... that’s it! That’s what his English lessons boiled down to. Naturally, we learned almost nothing and when someone, out of boredom, looked out the window a little, “Father Loni” would say to him:

“You in the back, keep your focus on the board,

otherwise I'll pick you up and throw you out that window.”

Later, however, when I was appointed teacher at the Lyceum and we became colleagues, I saw that he was not a bad man, that he was honest, upright, communicative, but devoid of culture and attached to his conservative ideas. During the National Liberation War, he did not support us, but neither did he declare himself hostile to it, as did his friends, Fazli Frashëri and Stavri Skëndi.

The approach of the baccalaureate examinations was an important event. For those who, like us, had to take these exams, it was a great concern, one that was constant. The last month before the exam was especially the busiest, because in addition to the teachers having to finish their courses, not knowing what questions could come from France for exams, we ourselves studied constantly in the hopes of receiving a good grade.

To top it off, the examinations occurred when in Korça, the heat waves began. For the last 15 to 20 days preceding the exams, we first-year students were allowed to go out and study in the countryside, provided that we returned regularly at lunch and dinner times. We were often seen early in the morning, with books under our arms, climbing towards the Panda café, towards Saint-Thomas or sitting in the shade of the poplars of the Muslim cemetery.

The baccalaureate exams were difficult. When I remember them today, I believe they were much tougher than the graduation exams of other lycées at the time and also much more difficult than our modern-day secondary school exams. In the Ly-

ceum, the subjects were extensive and very complex, the teachers very demanding and the grades set with severity, especially for the last exams. Almost all the tests were taken in French, which naturally increased the difficulty for us. Also, in our time, Lyceum students did not have the study facilities that they have today. Our method was rather empirical, and not directed by the professors. These did not lend any help to the students. No kind of discussion was practised. None of us learned how to properly study.

At first, for the main subjects we had two types of textbooks, the complete text of the subject, with notes taken throughout the year, and a summary, a small summary of the book. These summaries were very useful and very well written by competent authors. These memory aids were of great help to us, and especially useful to those who studied systematically during the year to put order in the mass of knowledge that they had accumulated. As the exams approached, some comrades went over the material only from the summaries, and even learned them word for word.

The questions asked in the written exams were naturally secret not only for us students, which went without saying, but also for the teachers. During the course of the year, they did not guide us by asking us questions formulated in a manner more or less similar to those which we would have to answer at the end of the year. They did ask us questions, but their questions were routine, incidental, incomplete and often irrelevant to the text. All this added to the panicked atmosphere which was created when the examinations began worked well to

increase our anxiety.

We had to pass the written tests, and obtain at least 10 out of 20 marks to be eligible for the oral examination. The written subjects were Albanian, French, mathematics (algebra and geometry), physics and chemistry.

On exam days our legs wobbled, we felt like we had forgotten everything, and we felt a big pit in our stomachs. The exams were held in the rooms on the first floor of the school. At each bench were seated two students, the row behind remained empty to avoid copiers. In the room all our exams were stamped with the seal of the management. No textbook, no summaries and no notes without prior approval from the administration were permitted. If one was caught copying or sneaking in any literature not approved, one was excluded from the examination and immediately expelled.

The beginning of the exam was marked by the entry into the room of the school director and the teacher, who solemnly opened the envelope containing the questions. Generally there were two questions, between which one could choose. I remember that at this moment we were all petrified and we only heard the sound of the director tearing the envelopes. When he began to dictate the questions, our pens would spring into action. After reading them, we lifted our heads and looked at each other. Some looked content, some worried, some looked distracted, some looked down on their benches, some looked out the window as if for inspiration, some rubbed their hands in satisfaction, and others watched jealously at those who were smiling. A few moments later, we communi-

cated with a nod of the head and with our fingers: "Which question did you choose? The first or the second?" or "Do you know how to solve it? Do you know what to do?" The answers also came in the silence, with a nod that expressed satisfaction or, on the contrary, with a face that expressed disappointment. In the mathematics exam, we sought with cunning to agree at least on the approximate result of the problem. We did it using our fingers, especially when it came to numbers. After handing in our copies, once outside, we shared our solutions and the ways in which we had solved the problem. Our classmates who completed the second part of the baccalaureate exams, those in philosophy, with whom we asked for their opinions on our answers, cheered us up: "Yes, that's good, but perhaps you would have done well to add that as well" and "In my opinion, you will get a good mark." The older students lavished their encouragement and consolation on us, as we would do ourselves the following year, when we were in philosophy, towards our classmates in the first year.

With exams over came the anguished wait for our final grade. On those days we found it hard to even touch a book, we wandered down the halls in the hopes of meeting a teacher. When one came out, we greeted him and scrutinized his face; if he smiled at us, it warmed our hearts a little. Professor Cipo was a kind of barometer for us, through his face we could tell if the exams he was grading were good or bad.

Finally, the director communicated the results to us. I got good grades in all subjects. In mathematics, the object of many of my fears, I obtained



a passable result, in the other subjects my marks were good or very good. When I say very good, there was a caveat, because in the Lyceum we rarely received 20 out of 20 or even an 18 or 17. Most students were ecstatic to get a 16.

What unbridled joy we felt when we learned we passed! We jumped in the air, we were over the moon and we felt as if we were on top of the world. We kissed each other and returned singing to the dormitory. There our comrades were waiting for us, congratulated us, kissed us and gave us hugs. Guri, the janitor, no longer prevented us from leaving the dormitory without permission. We had acquired a privilege in this respect. The post office was close, so I went there to telegraph my father that I had passed my exams in writing, that I only had the oral examinations left, and that it was easier than the written. I told him that, in fact, I passed it with an amazing mark and so I became a “bachelor student.” I felt on top of the world, relieved of a heavy burden, as I had fulfilled an important duty towards my country and my family.

The issue of people’s suffering and the causes of the economic situation of my family were of great concern to me. From that age on on, I was mature and I understood the worries that overwhelmed me. Zogu’s regime crushed young people’s spirits like a weight upon our shoulders. We saw in the street the destitute people, starving, in rags, and we also saw the civil servants, merchants and speculators who lived in ease. The people were out of work. Some struggled to find work breaking stones at a lek a day. A lek was the price of 2 loaves of bread. One can imagine the misery that afflicted

the families of the unemployed. Between us students, we talked about all this in the Lyceum, and again in Gjirokastra when we went back there for the holidays.

In Gjirokastra, we had very good friends, even if some of them, like Salahudin Kokona, a boy of excellent character, was bourgeois. We discussed the concerns of the people, blamed Zogu and his collaborators, and hated the police and their spies. Often talking about undercover agents, we pointed them out and we were suspicious of them. There was no censorship, no holding back in these discussions. The dirty lackey of Zogu, Qazim Bodinaku, tried hard to have us thrown into prison and he was very close to succeeding in 1932, when the trial of the “conspirators of Vlora”<sup>1</sup> took place, of those who harshly condemned Zogu.

When that happened I had returned from France for the summer holidays. We learned of the arrest of this secret group which was preparing to overthrow Ahmet Zogu. In Gjirokastra we wrote on the walls: “If they are shot, the people will rise up and then the revolution will break out.” On this occasion, Enver Zazani, Salahudin Kokona, Selami Xhaxhiu, other comrades and myself, who were

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<sup>1</sup> Known as the Vlora Movement, it was a secret anti-Zogite movement, part of a conspiracy to subvert the government. Poorly organized and alienated from the masses, heterogeneous and limited in composition, manipulated and subsidized by Italian and Yugoslav reaction, devoid of a clear program, this movement failed completely. The Zogite secret police arrested more than 60 of its members in August 1932.

suspects in the eyes of the regime, were arrested and locked up in prison. At our interrogation, we rejected all the accusations, telling them that they were only slanders. They took samples of our writings to compare them with that of this inscription and, having failed to establish any proof, released us. We got out of prison and our hatred against the regime only increased.

My last year of school in Korça was that of humanities class. Lyceum students who had passed the first part of the bachelor's exam could choose, according to their abilities, between elementary mathematics and humanities. It goes without saying that I chose humanities, because the political and historical human sciences were my passion.

In humanities class, the main subjects were philosophy, psychology, logic, ethics, etc., whereas in mathematics most branches of mathematics were very minimally taught, and, if I am not mistaken, only logic laws were taught.

These subjects were taught to us by Professor Mayer. He was a short, plump man with a round face, who smoked like a freight train, as I do today,<sup>1</sup> but when I was in secondary school I didn't smoke. I started to smoke when I went to France as a way to calm my nerves while studying for zoology tests. Mayer was originally from Alsace and he spoke French with an accent quite distinct from the others. He stuck faithfully to the official philos-

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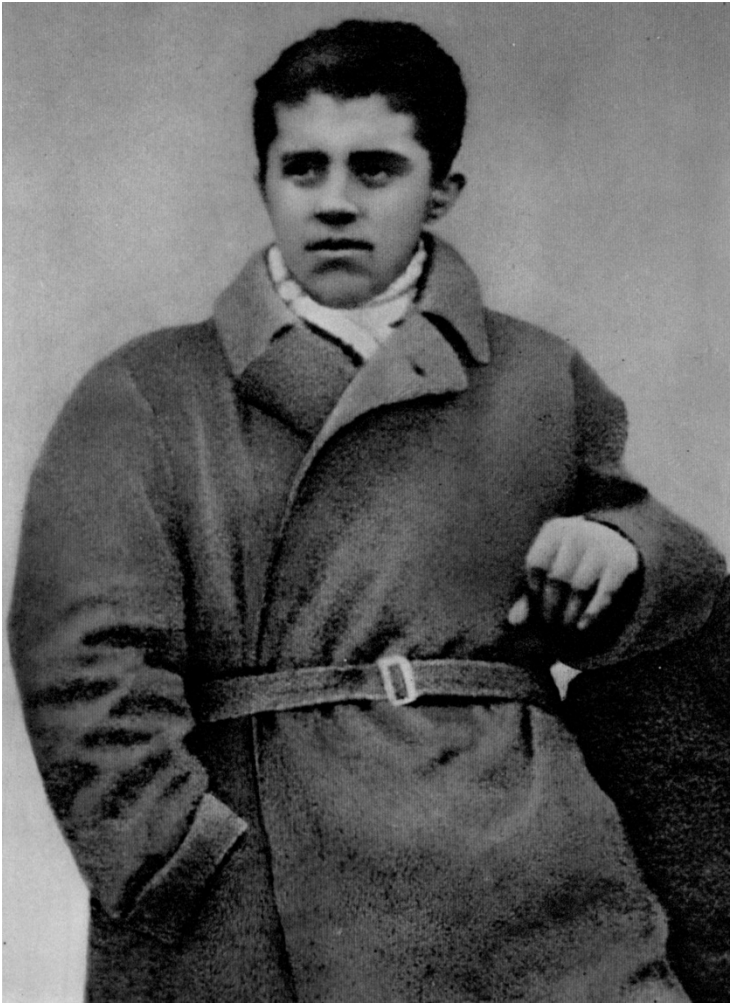
<sup>1</sup> These reminiscences were written before 1973, when Comrade Enver Hoxha quit smoking for good after doing so for about forty years.

ophy textbooks we had in hand and to the syllabus, and very rarely, as far as I remember, were there any lively debates in our class. Our professor explained to us in turn the schools and the philosophical doctrines, but when it came to Marx's doctrine, he was dismissive, and always laconic as he answered our questions. Apparently he had a stern order from the Department of Public Instruction not to talk about him.

We did very little math in humanities class. It was naturally focussed on other subjects, such as French, Albanian or foreign literature, contemporary history, geography, natural sciences and some other secondary disciplines. Albanian and foreign literature (except French, which was done separately and in a very extensive way) was taught to us with great competence by Professor Cipo. That year, I learned more thoroughly English, Spanish, Russian and Italian literature, and a little Arabic literature, especially that of the countries which were French colonies. It was a year where I had no difficulty in my studies. I took a liking to these subjects and studied them all diligently because I was now relieved of mathematics.

As students of humanities and mathematics classes, we now had a little more freedom in our daily regimen, whether at the dormitory or in high school. We were in the last year of our time at the Lyceum, so a bit of a blind eye was turned to our decisions by the staff, even though the monitors and supervisors couldn't stop themselves from making their presence felt every once in a while.

Here, for example, is what happened to me one day. Like every morning, we went in rows to the



*"I studied and lived in Korça just when, in this city, the communist ideology and movement were taking their first steps."*



*“Korça... is the city of my youth.”* Aerial view of Korça in the 1930s.



The former Korça National Lyceum.

The Korça National Lyceum's dormitory building.

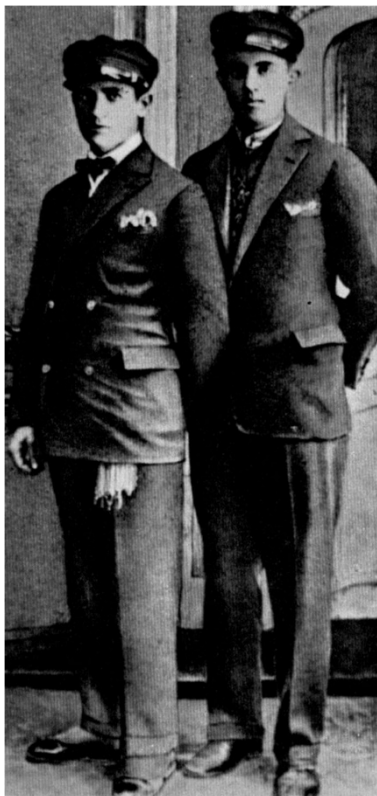




With a group of comrades on the steps of the city library (in the second row, third from left to right).



Enver Hoxha (right)  
with Elmaz Konjari,  
Korça, 1928.



*“...our caps, the only piece of our clothing that was well maintained.”*

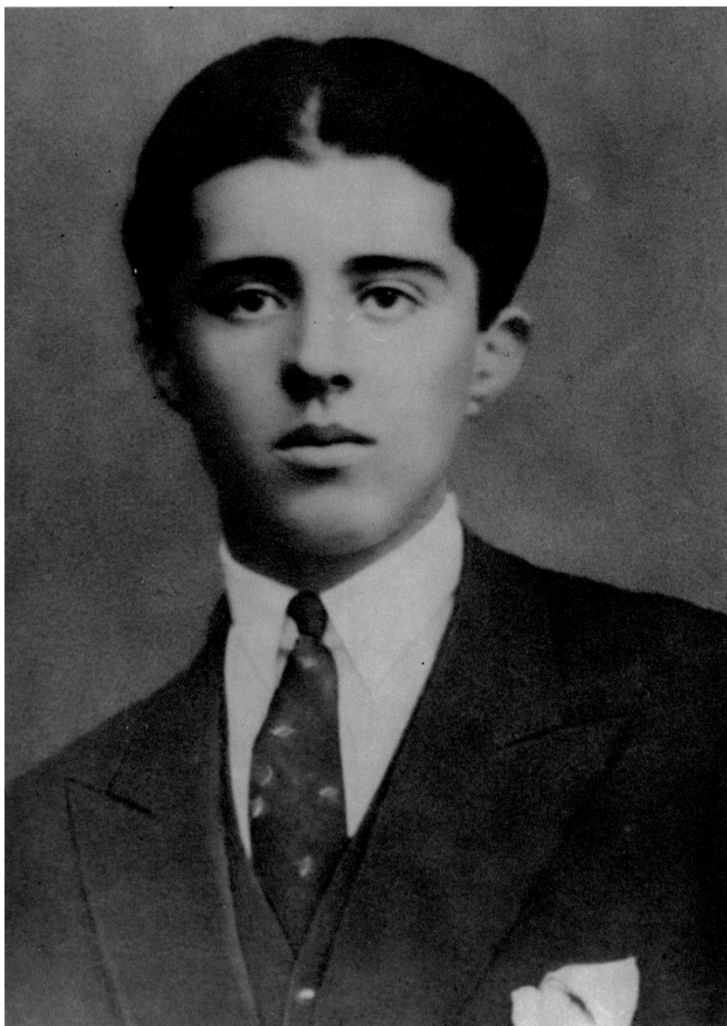


*“I looked up every word that I didn’t understand in my pocket dictionary (which I still keep like a relic in my library today)...”*

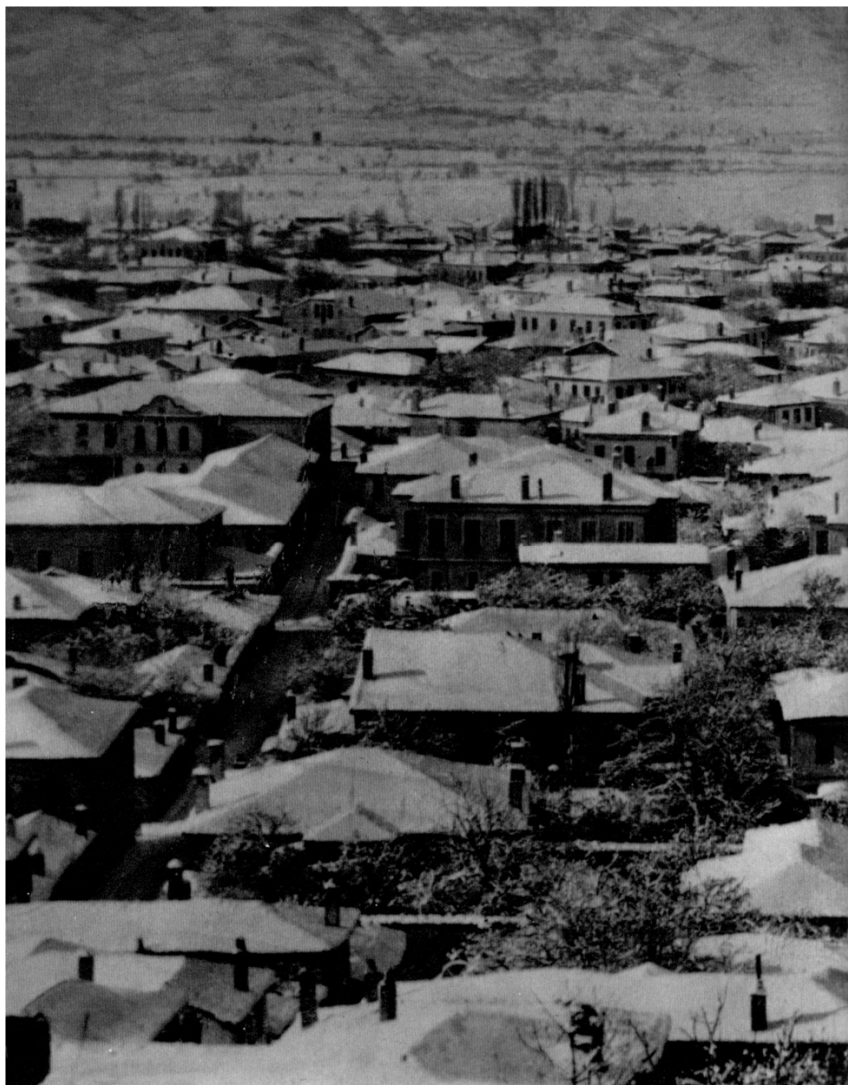


*“...we celebrated any new ‘discovery’ that we made concerning Albania in the work of illustrious or lesser known French authors...”*

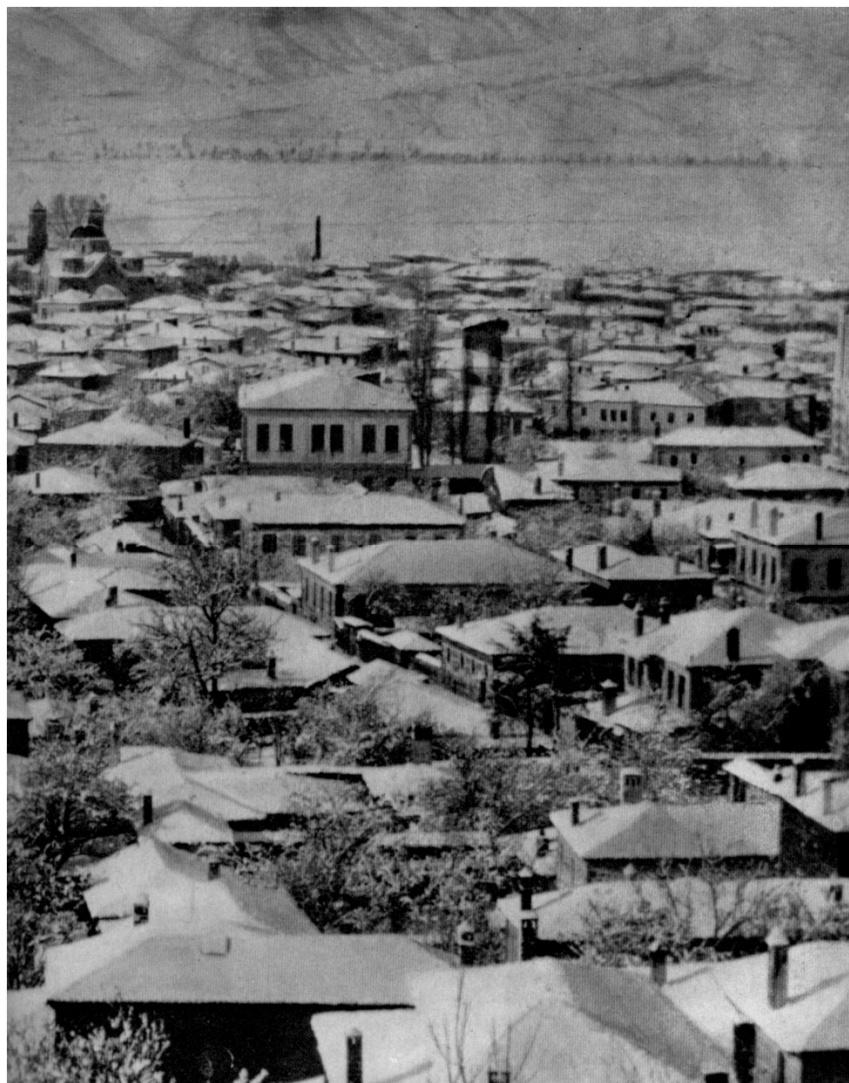




Enver Hoxha, Lyceum student (1928).



*“Korça, under the snow, had its beauty, especially for us, the young people, who held a deep sense of wonder. The first snowy days were full of excitement in the city.”*





With a group of students (fifth from left to right).



*“One of my favourite places filled with memories of my student life was the Panda café... We usually went to this place to study during the week, especially in spring and summer...”*

*“...I went to my old  
base, Koçi Bako’s  
pastry shop, to  
meet my old  
friend.”*







The old market of Korça in the 1930s.



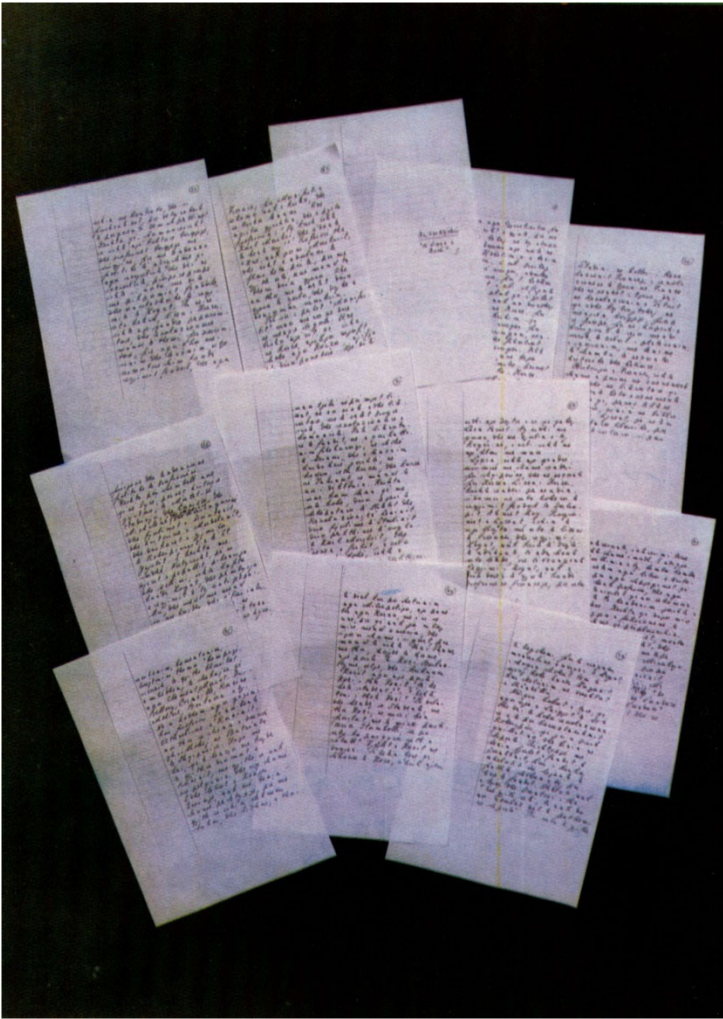
In the courtyard of the dormitory in the last year of studies (fourth from left to right).

On the steps of the city library (top, middle).





Student of humanities at the Korça National Lyceum (1930).



Handwritten pages of Comrade Enver Hoxha's memories of his years of study at the Korça National Lyceum.

school and did an hour of lessons. As for the next three hours, they were cancelled, our teacher being ill. Generally, in these cases, we, the students, had to stay in the classroom waiting for everyone to finish, to go back together in rows to the dormitory. But since we were now in our final year, we acted in a much bolder manner. That day I planned to sneak out and spend some time in the city. Now at the main gate the famous Nisi was constantly on guard, always faithful to his role as a guard dog. He asked me for the permission of the director. We began to argue and it eventually devolved into a fight and I ended up opening the door and running away. The next day I was called to the director Papa-kristo. With a suspicious look, he said to me:

“What did you do? Why did you force your way out by shoving Nisi?”

I told him that I had politely asked to leave, but that it was Nisi who had pushed me and that I simply returned the favour, that I had gone to the dormitory and that I had not walked in the streets, etc., etc. The case was closed with a reprimand, a “don’t do it again or we’ll have to suspend you!”

We, students of humanities and math who passed the baccalaureate examinations, had badges on our caps, the only piece of our clothing that was well maintained. On the hat we had a white ribbon embroidered in white silk. It was one of the first things we bought as soon as we started the year and, of course, we were proud of it. In fact, we felt that this ribbon inspired respect and envy amongst others.

“You are all lucky to have passed!” our supervisors told us.

“Hey wait, why do we not have our diplomas yet!” we asked

“That doesn’t matter! As long as you have your badges on your hat, it’s all the same,” they insisted.

To graduate you had to study. And that’s what I did. The teachers were happy with me.

That year, a new geography teacher, Petraq Pepo,<sup>1</sup> came to school. In our humanities class, if I’m not mistaken, he taught us geography, because Brégeault wanted to focus on the teaching of history. Pepo was, as we knew him then, similar to the Pepo we know today, nice but sometimes impulsive, and at that time he naturally wanted to assert himself as a skilled and authoritative educator to his French and Albanian colleagues, and also to us, his students.

Such a desire of young Albanian teachers to prove their worth to colleagues, especially French, was inspired by good intentions, but nothing good ever came of it. And things got even worse when someone, instead of imposing himself by the knowledge of his culture, his passion for learning and his tact, sought to assert himself by loud declarations and imposing his authority on the students arbitrarily. During those years at our school, such a type of teacher was indeed appointed and, to tell the truth, he was so full of himself and so eager to appear authoritative that things often turned into a comedy. This young professor maintained that he had graduated from the “Ecole Nor-

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<sup>1</sup> After the National Liberation War, Petraq Pepo became one of Albania’s most renowned historians until his death in 1989 — NEPH.

male Supérieure,” that great school of the most prestigious in France, from which not even our French professors had graduated. He therefore boasted so much and at all times that he ended up irritating the others, who began to make fun of him and even began to doubt that he had actually gone to school at all. In any case, they couldn’t help insinuating to him that he had been admitted there as a foreigner to fill a quota and not following the normal entrance examination. He was unintelligent but claimed to know everything. He had a strange, rather raspy voice, which he tried to force, to the point of becoming ridiculous and we couldn’t help laughing.

He spoke French worse than us, although he had lived in France. He had to teach his course in French, and that was where the comedy began. He tried to speak quickly to show that he handled French with ease, like a true former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure. But he only provoked laughter because in the middle of sentences he said French, not finding the term he was looking for, he introduced Albanian words or expressions. For example, when he happened to talk about cattle breeders in France, he would say:

“They slept on the rogoz and wrapped themselves in their bruc”<sup>1</sup>

Or, when a student did not answer him satisfactorily, he would say “You gave it to the river!” a literal translation of a popular Albanian expression which meant “you messed up” and which, natu-

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<sup>1</sup> They slept on the rug and wrapped themselves in their sheet.

rally, translated like this, made no sense. Or even, instead of saying “listen!” in French he used the literal translation from Albanian of “hold your ears!” We cleared our throats and grabbed our earlobes between our fingers. We all heckled him, this poor fellow, but it was above all Enver Zazani, Avdullah Rami and the only young girl in our class who harassed him the most.

I remember one winter day when it snowed, a few less-than-studious comrades had brought pieces of calcium carbide and two of them, sitting at the back of the class, put them at a corner of the wall on the floor. During the teacher’s lesson where he blabbered on about the “Ecole Normale Supérieure” they showered the calcium carbide with spit. The carbide began to exhale acetylene and emit the most pungent odour I have ever experienced. As he spoke, the professor huffed his nose, wiggling it around like a hunting dog. Finally he couldn’t stand it any longer and exclaimed:

“Open the dritare, it smells like mut in here!”<sup>1</sup>

We laughed out loud. As the bad smell dissipated, we proposed to him:

“Let’s close the windows, sir, we’re going to catch a cold!”

As soon as the windows were closed, the comrades in the back silently resumed spitting on the carbide, and the stench began again. This time the teacher said in a mixture of French and Albanian:

*“I don’t know what to do, in the future when you enter school, check your soles carefully to see if you have not stepped on a... treasure.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Open the window, it smells like shit in here!



But the most serious incident, the one that unexpectedly pitted him against my history teacher Brégeault, happened precisely while I was taking my history oral examination. Both had been appointed members of the grading committee and each was trying to argue who was more educated. It was the end of my studies, I had passed all the written exams for the second part of the baccalauréate and I was presenting myself for the oral exams. Naturally, the rivalry between Brégeault and the new professor had reached a fever pitch, as both were historians and both claimed to be very strong in their subject. But it must be recognized that the more capable of the two was Brégeault, who had more experience and had a better memory. But both had a slightly “odd” brain, as we said. Brégeault considered me a good student, not only because he had known me since Gjirokastra, but because in history and geography I always had good marks. Brégeault and the new teacher as teachers of the humanities were therefore the ones who were going to appreciate our knowledge of history. They were seated at the table side by side, without looking at each other or talking to each other. The students who would take the oral exam went through the same process — they entered, sat down in front of the professors and the student pulled out a piece of paper with the questions from a stack. That is what happened to me as well. I knew the subject thoroughly, and without emotion, I drew my question and handed the piece of paper to Brégeault. It was about Napoleon III. Brégeault read the question aloud and, without even glancing at his colleague, tossed him the paper. I began to

talk at length about the coup d'état, the Second Empire, the Franco-Prussian war, the internal and external policies of Napoleon III and finally his capitulation at Sedan. When I had finished, Brégeault said to me:

“Very good, Hoxha!” and I saw out of the corner of my eye that he had given me an 18 out of 20.

Then he added: “You are done with your exam, you can go to the dormitories.” I got up. Now the other professor, perhaps to contradict Brégeault, or to show himself superior, said to me:

“Don’t you get up yet, I have one more question for you!”

I sat down again. I remember he asked me:

“Who was Napoleon III’s Minister of Foreign Affairs when the battle of Sedan occurred?”

I ran through a number of ministers in my mind, but the one from the Sedan period escaped me and I said nothing. Brégeault, without turning his head towards his colleague, said:

“A minister of no importance, the question is superfluous!”

The other, who was clearly irritated, rebuffed:

“That’s a very important and not at all superfluous question,” and, since I still didn’t answer, he himself said the minister’s name. No sooner had Brégeault heard him than, laughing mockingly, he called out to his colleague:

“How do you ask a question you don’t know the answer to yourself?” and he mentioned another name. His rival flew into a rage, stammered, contradicted him, claiming that the man he had just named had not been a minister. Then Brégeault also got irritated, got up and said to him:

“You are just an ignorant buffoon!”

The quarrel heated up, it almost turned into a fist-fight. I intervened to prevent them from fighting. While trying to separate them, I said to the professor:

“Professor, give me a mark, you might forget, then you decide on the name of the Minister of Foreign Affairs!”

Finally, furious, they both went to the director. Brégeault was right about the name of the minister, who, with Napoleon III, had undermined the empire, but also almost undermined my history test as well!

The year of humanities passed for me easily and pleasantly. My readings had helped me understand the world a lot better and the subjects in general were of great interest to my young mind. At the dormitories, we were freer, we could see our classmates outside more often, we organized our studies together at the city library or in the open air of cafés, on the surrounding hills. Sometimes the director Perret’s son, Roger, who was very friendly and sociable, accompanied us.

Those years the eldest son of my godfather Ramiz Shehu had arrived from the United States. His name was Telat, but he told us: “Call me Charlie,” because when young Albanian men went to America they usually changed their names.

“We will call you Telat and not Charlie,” we told him. “You were born in Gjirokastra and not in Boston!”

Telat was several years older than us. One day, he gathered all of us, the students of the Lyceum from Gjirokastra and offered us an excellent lunch

among the mulberry trees of Boboshtica with roasted meat and baklava. We had a great day, we ate, drank, sang and danced through the night.

Another Sunday, “Charlie” brought us together again, but this time to have us take a photo together by the best photographer in Korça, Sotir, at the “Sotir Studio.” I still have this photo today. Sotir was a master of his trade, a true artist, a friend and comrade of our art teacher, Vangjush Mio. I was on very good terms with the latter already when I was in school, and I remained so later when we became colleagues. Often, when we were his students, he would take us with him and we would go out into nature, where, after setting up his easel, he would begin to paint, while we would stay behind him, contemplating his painting, asking him questions, and when he was done we studied in the shade of a tree.

My joy, when I had finished passing all my exams, was indescribable. I had good results, finished my time at the Lyceum and considered it a great success. When I received my diploma, I had the impression that I had something precious in my hands. Life now opened up differently before me. But worries and sorrows would reappear even after that happy day that my comrades and I had celebrated together. We were sorry for those who had failed. One afternoon, the director Perret, who was staying in a suite in the new “Pallas” hotel, invited us, those who had succeeded, to have tea with him. With his wife and his son, he offered us cakes, tea and fruit. Perret congratulated us and inquired about our plans, spoke to us about life in France and recommended certain universities and certain

cities to us in case we were to pursue higher education there.

Thus ended my years of study in Korça. The moment came for me to separate myself from this city which had become so dear to me, because I had acquired more knowledge there, I had known life better there, frequented many people, and essentially changed who I was as a young man. I had come to Korça to go deeper into education, to ask myself a lot of questions about the events, the phenomena, the facts and the problems that filled daily life, in school as well as in town. I cannot say that I had correct and complete answers to this host of questions that came to mind. No, these answers were to come to me later. The main thing was that there I began to see life, reality, people and events with more seriousness and attention, I began to feel that many things, if not all, were not working as they should. I became aware of the necessity for change, I became aware of upheavals; and that a revolution was needed. But I will never forget that it is precisely to Korça that I owe my Lyceum graduation certificate, but also the understanding that there was another school, much more difficult and complex than any school, a school through which all the youth of the time had to pass. The first lessons of this "school," which was indispensable to Albania, was first presented to me by the inhabitants of Korça, workers and progressives, and above all by the Korça of the Puna,<sup>1</sup> the Korça of the poor, and the Korça of workers and small crafts-

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<sup>1</sup> The "Puna" Group, an early underground organization of revolutionary workers in Korça.

men.

Along with Lyceum and the beautiful neighbourhoods of the city, one of my favourite places in those years was the old market of Korça, its streets with its small shops, with wooden shutters. I passed close to the apprentices, always bent over, needle or awl in hand, who were sewing, patching or repairing old or torn objects. They worked under the supervision of their master, who sometimes was surly and demanding, sometimes seemed a good man, but did not let his apprentices have a break. They got up before dawn, opened and cleaned the shop, then inevitably came the boss. Sometimes he said “hello” to them and sometimes he didn’t speak to them, and confined himself to giving them orders. In these dark and damp shops they worked from morning till night. They took their lunch from the stall, which consisted of a piece of bread, a little cheese and a dry sausage. But these workers had the eyes of an eagle. They scrutinized you carefully from head to toe. I remember quite a few of them, as I used to go to them when I was in the Lyceum to get my shoes fixed, my cap mended or my pants made. I got to know them, enjoyed chatting with them, and afterwards I had the opportunity to get to know them even better. Over time they began to share their worries, their convictions and their ideals. I had respect and admiration for them, for their work, for the fact that, despite their lack of education, they were intelligent, spirited, indomitable even in misery. In the workshops and shops, I met many of them, and in particular Koçi Bako, Sotir Gura, Gaqo Nasto, Teni Konomi, Llambi Dishnica, Petro Papi, Pilo Per-

isteri and Ilo Dardha, whom I mention because they stood out in the labour movement, and made friends with the Party. They were truly to be admired. I sometimes went to their house to have a shoe repaired or to buy a trinket, and they knew how to talk to you, as they were experts in sounding you out. Then these same workmen and apprentice repairers communicated a want to understand Marx's "Manifesto," and asked you questions that even Brégeault or another professor would have had trouble answering: "Tell us, student, what you know about the Paris Commune?", "What do you know about Soviet Russia?", etc., etc. I have already evoked in writings, and I will do so again, these unforgettable workers, who were among the first to commit me to the path of communist ideas and its movement. I have expressed my gratitude to them so many times and I will re-express it to them each time they are mentioned. At first I took their insistence on asking questions and their eagerness to learn "dangerous things" as a chance occurrence, prompted by a word or piece of news they had occasionally heard. Later, I learned that nothing was due to chance in the questions they asked and in the discussions they tried to prolong and make more frequent. They had begun to organize themselves, and began to embrace communist ideas.

When I was in the Lyceum, the Communist Workers' Group of Korça had just been formed. Its influence and its size were limited, it was in its first steps, but, in any case, "the water began to bubble" and one day it would boil over. The communists that I associated with at the time were casual ac-

quaintances to me, and I did not even know that some of those who I had philosophical debate with, such as Koçi Bako, Llambi Dishnica and others, were communists. Six years later, when I returned to Korça, our ties would be established on solid foundations and I was to become a member of the “Puna” Communist Group alongside the communist workers of Korça, an experience I held and will always hold in honour. But, as I said, that wouldn’t happen until later. Let’s go back to the days when, with my diploma in my pocket, I was so excited I felt on top of the world!

I returned to Gjirokastra for the holidays overjoyed. My family was also happy, my father and my mother went out of their way to make me feel accomplished. Their son had finished secondary school. They said:

“We will face great hardship funding you for college, but we will come to the end of our troubles once you have a good job. It is absolutely necessary that you obtain a scholarship for higher studies as we cannot fund you entirely anymore.”

My dream, you can imagine, was to go to France, to university, to study literature or history and geography. I was gifted for these subjects and convinced that I could succeed in them and become a well-respected teacher. But everything depended on obtaining a scholarship because my father was destitute and therefore unable to cover my expenses, not for three years, but not even for two months abroad. I was therefore happy to have finished my secondary studies, but at the same time very concerned about the future that awaited me. I



had no one in Tirana who could support me at the Ministry of Public Instruction. Only my notes, listed in my school report, could speak in my favour. It also depended on the number of scholarships that would be granted for France and the subjects chosen.

Finally, an advertisement appeared in the newspapers. All those who had graduated from a lycée or a preparatory school could send their applications to the Ministry of Public Instruction and accompany it with their school certificate and other papers to attain a scholarship. I prepared everything and specified in my application that I wanted to study history and geography or literature. I was extremely impatient and anxious. Some of my comrades would continue their studies at their own expense. They did not ask for a scholarship. We envied them because they didn't have to worry, as they could choose the branch of study and the city they preferred.

Eventually, I persuaded my father that I should go to Tirana myself to follow up closely on my scholarship. I came there for the first time. The only impression it made on me was bad. In our discussions at the dormitory study we called the capital "den of the brigands of Zogu, the den of corruption," and when I saw it and got to know it closely, I told myself that we had hardly been mistaken. I didn't know anyone and took a room or rather a bed in one of the rooms of an old and dirty hotel called "Hotel Durrës." The room where I slept had four beds and every night I had three strangers there as companions. In the morning, we barely said hello to each other and asked indifferently:

“Where are you from? Why did you come to Tirana?” That was all.

I went every day to the Ministry of Public Instruction. It looked like a circus. The stairs and hallways were filled with strangers and students like me, who had applied for scholarships. We tried to arrange meetings with one of the secretaries of the ministry, but without success.

“You have to wait,” we were told, “they are busy.”

Several days in a row we heard the same words. We asked, “Will lists of scholarship recipients be posted today?” and they said, “No, they will be posted tomorrow!” This situation lasted for weeks and I went every day to the ministry where I spent all my time in the stairs and the corridors. Finally the lists of scholarship recipients were posted. My joy was at its height. I got a history and geography scholarship and the city where I would study was Montpellier! I jumped for joy. The list of the names of the lucky beneficiaries was also published in the newspaper.

A few days later, I went to the ministry to do the required paperwork, but there was news that left me petrified:

“Your scholarship has been taken away from you and given to another!” You can imagine my despondency. But I was determined not to surrender without a fight. I started to shout: “It is my scholarship and given to a student who had worse marks than me but had connections. I will not leave the ministry until this injustice is resolved and the scholarship I was rightfully given is returned and officially re-published in the newspaper!” In short,

I made a big racket because I had no one who could help me. Finally, after a lot of yelling they caved. The general secretary of the ministry called me and said:

“My boy, there has been a mistake, your geography scholarship has been awarded to another student, but we will grant you a scholarship for natural sciences! We don’t know if you will accept this scholarship as it appears to not be the course of study you planned on taking, but I advise you to take it, otherwise you won’t get a scholarship at all.”

I already felt then and I still feel a great respect and a great interest for the natural sciences. I knew their beauty, their strength and their importance, I knew in general the progress they had brought and still bring to humanity. But independently of this respect that I felt for these sciences, my passion and my aptitudes went rather to human sciences, to history, to literature, to law. So I hesitated to speak.

“Accept this scholarship for the natural sciences,” he told me, “otherwise go back to Gjirokastra.”

I saw that they were steadfast, and unwilling to budge on their choice for me. I asked:

“You assure me that the same misfortune will not happen to me twice?”

They gave me this assurance and told me:

“Go to that room and just sign and you will be off to Montpellier!”

I went, and so it all ended. The battle was won — I got a scholarship to France.

Satisfied, I returned to Gjirokastra to prepare

myself. My father had a new suit made for me at the best tailor in town, new shoes, several shirts, and in the autumn, with other comrades, I left for Durrës, and, through Italy, towards France. It was the first time in my life that I left my native land. A new page was opening in my life, some memories of which I will try to retrace.

## II

### TRAVELS THROUGH ITALY

I left for France with the other comrades who were to continue their studies there in various branches of higher education. Most of those who graduated from Korça's Lyceum were sent to France, most as scholarship holders who received a monthly stipend. The amount we received from this stipend was small, and we had to live very modestly, as poor students. But of course, and this was the main thing, we were happy to have obtained these scholarships, because we were thirsty for education.

I recounted above the adventures of the granting of my stipend, at the end I was finally forced to accept the branch of natural sciences. As soon as I left, therefore, I was not particularly enthusiastic about the studies I was going to undertake, but I said to myself: "Let's go ahead, what's the worst that could happen."

Some of us, including myself, were to study in Montpellier, an old town of great renown for its university, which dated from the 15th century, well known for its faculty of medicine. I was delighted to have been sent there, because, in secondary school, where we were told a lot about France, its culture and its universally renowned science, we were told a lot about its university centres, among others, Montpellier. In the Lyceum I had learned that the climate there was mild, that it did not snow there in winter, that it was not cold there, whereas in summer it was more temperate there as at home,

a more bearable heat, due to the influence of the Mediterranean.

My father and my mother, in spite of their poverty, and not without getting into debt, made me buy a new winter coat, a new suit, a pair of shoes, two shirts, patches and a few pairs of socks. I was also prepared, according to custom, some characteristic Gjirokastran biscuits for the trip, I was also given a tin box filled with two kilos of dry Turkish delights for my elder sister Fahrije, who was at the time, with her husband and son Luan, a political refugee in Bari, Italy. With this baggage, and the sadness of leaving my mother, my father and my sister Sano and leaving them alone at home, without support, because, according to the mentality of the time, it was in me that they saw their only support, I left for Tirana, from where I was to reach Durrës, to take the boat there and disembark at Bari.

I was leaving my beloved homeland for the first time. I left her under the odious oppression of the satrap king and the bandits of his entourage. The people suffered from hunger, they were burdened with taxes and lived under the whip of the police and in the fear of spies. We, the sons of the common people, even after facing hundreds of hurdles, managed to finish some school but we could not easily find a job as a civil servant. To be appointed secretary or a local civil servant, it was necessary to have relations with those in the government, and support from a wealthy patron, which we lacked. Many of our comrades couldn't even finish their time at the Lyceum, but when it came to finding work that would provide them with a living, they

were “privileged” because they were apprenticed to a shoemaker or a tailor and earned a few leks, enough to ensure their subsistence and help their families. As far as I was concerned, I could not yet support my family and that was a great torment for me, because instead of being of some help to them, it was on the contrary they who continued to support me. But I still rejoiced at the idea that I was going to educate myself and that I would compensate them for these financial woes.

From my childhood, I had conceived the question of education, studies, as a great duty towards the Homeland and the people, and as a food just as nourishing as the bread that I ate. This necessity had been instilled in my mind and heart from my first years of primary school, by my beloved and patriotic teachers, by Naim and the other promoters of our National Renaissance, with their poems that we learned by heart with so much passion. I was encouraged in this way by my uncle Çeni, who was an educated man, but also by my mother, who despite her lack of education, but thanks to her great maternal love, knew the value of education. With her own intelligence and insight, she understood that I had to study and that I had to go to school regularly. At the cost of much effort, she saved a little money and never left me without pencils, notebooks, pen holders, nor failed to buy me all the books that our teachers recommended.

My beloved mother, today I evoke your memory with the greatest tenderness. You lived long enough to see my children grow up, go to kindergarten, go to primary school. You haven't lived long enough to see them finish college and enjoy

all the benefits. Nor did you get to see their children, who are growing up strong and happy. I remember, like it was today, when you said to my children:

“Study, for now you have all the opportunities. It is the Party that brought them to you, and you must love it with all your heart. Love the people as the apple of your eye. Your father fought for the Party and for the people. How can I even express my sufferings and my anguish? In the evenings, I ate mouldy pieces of bread and said to myself: “Who knows where my son is? Is he alive? What if he was killed?” Well there you go, he emerged victorious from that battle and look at all the good things his struggle brought to the people. You have all the schools you need, whereas in the days of Enver’s childhood and youth, schools were something very few attended. I will never forget the day my son left for France. I was happy he was going to study, and at the same time saddened, because I felt like I was left alone on the pavement. This is why, my children, you must study and become useful to the people, to the country, to your father and to yourselves!”

Zogu had stuffed the country with Italian “advisors,” who were scattered in the offices, in the army, who held monopolies in oil and copper, who invaded the lands of Sukth and brought in other settlers of Italy. The country was teeming with Italian spies who had organized their networks and were preparing to occupy the country. Zogu and his clique shared the “rewards” that Mussolini supposedly extended to Albania, but in fact, through these dealings, loans and debts, Zogu and Musso-



lini together were digging the country's grave. The local usurers had become veritable bloodsuckers who sucked the blood of the poor. The merchant bourgeoisie was getting on its feet, the Italian market was open to it; and through that, the Zogite regime imported the little bread that the people ate, and even eggs, oil and olives, luxury fabrics, shoes, porcelain, glassware and everything the rising bourgeoisie needed and whose appetite, like that of a high official who received great salaries, was constantly increasing. In fact, a workman, who broke stones all day in the sun, to paving and asphaltting the roads which Italy needed for the war which it would later declare, received an insignificant pay, some twenty times less than the salaries of the regime officials. Such was the difference in wages. But this was only one aspect of the infinite multitude of means and manners employed to exploit the people. Poverty and misery appeared at every step. It was therefore, with a heart heavy with this grief, that I left my country.

We embarked on an Italian merchant ship which was going from Durrës to Bari. I saved the little money I had, because I had calculated everything until my arrival in Montpellier. Comrades who had already been to France had informed me about everything, from the price of train tickets to that of a box of matches and had given me advice in all respects. I therefore took a ticket and crossed the bridge onto the boat. I was planning on shoving myself into a corner under a staircase, resting my head on a suitcase and covering myself with my coat. If I managed to fall asleep, so much the better, if not, I would stroll on the bridge and the top

deck. It was my first time on a voyage by sea. I was young, in good health and naturally a bit romantic: the stars, the moon, the sea, with its light waves and the white foam that the ship left behind, I liked all that. And then, in the end, it would be a one-night affair and it would pass. In the morning I would be on the quay at Bari, where my sister Fahrije, her husband Bahri and some other friend would surely be waiting for me! So I spent the night like this, on the deck of a merchant ship, under the stars, more awake than asleep, tossing and turning in my head all sorts of thoughts, asking myself a host of questions, making a multitude of hypotheses about what awaited me on the great road of life that stretched out before me. The nostalgia for my country and the people I left there, the sadness of separation, the mist that shrouded my future, the swaying of the boat, the stars and the moon, the dreams and the sorrows, all this tangled up this night in my head and in my heart until the moment when we approached the port of Bari. Immediately, my worries of the night disappeared and the only thing that interested me now was to know if someone had come to receive me or not! In fact, my dear sister Fahrije, with her husband and her son were waiting for me.

When I landed I greeted them effusively. I hugged little Luan who hugged me and called me “uncle Enver!” I found another family of mine in a foreign country. We got into horse-drawn carriages. Indeed, I seem to remember that there were two of them, and we set off towards the house where Fahrije was living at the time. It was located in a street called “Via Piccinni.” We crossed a ra-

ther dirty district, with small streets, full of people in the alleys, on the steps of the doors and at the windows, who were talking, shouting, singing. I was surprised and asked Bahri:

“What is this this place? Why are we here?”

“It’s old Bari, as they call it, it’s inhabited by poor people!”

We left this district and turned onto another street, and emerged on the edge of the sea which we began to walk along.

“This is the *Lungomare*,”<sup>1</sup> Bahri told me.

It was a beautiful promenade, wide, paved, bordered by railings made of marble, and facing the sea stretched green tile in front of tall buildings. We drove and drove, but I noticed a detail that seemed curious to me: at the windows of many of these buildings there were neither curtains nor people like in old Bari. There were only signs bearing a few words, of which I asked what they meant. They explained to me that they meant “For Rent.” I thus understood that these dwellings were empty and that they were waiting for tenants who did not show up. Later I was to learn that these buildings were the fruit of investments by capitalists, as our merchants and our aristocrats had also begun to do in Albania, who bought land, considering them safe real estate investments. Just as our lords exploited the peasants on these lands, so did Italian capitalists exploited the workers of their country to build these concrete buildings and squeeze the tenants. But they couldn’t find customers, or found very few of them, because the rents were too high.

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<sup>1</sup> The seafront esplanade of a city — *NEPH*.

Finally, we turned onto the street where they lived and we entered the apartment my sister resided in. Bahri's apartment was on the ground floor. She took the key from her bag, opened the door and we entered. We were at home, as a family! The accommodation consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. The bedroom overlooked the street; the other room, the living room, was so dark that the light bulbs had to be turned on day and night. The kitchen was also small, lit from a single window. The apartment was dark and cold, for the sun hardly visited it and the floor was paved with tiles. How far we were from our pretty, well lit houses in Gjirokastra, with their little gardens in front, and a Judas tree or a mulberry tree in the middle of the paved courtyard! Here, in Bari, or at least in this part of the city, there was only asphalt, cement, the sun was absent and there was little greenery.

The road leading to Fahrije's house was long and its end was about an hour's walk from the main arteries of the city. This street, too, was cold and sunless, as it was lined with tall buildings with mostly empty apartments. But, in spite of everything, it was swarming with petty criminals and prostitutes.

In any case, I was happy to be with my relatives. My sister was very kind. Bahri Omari, too, at the time, loved us, he took great care of us, did everything possible to satisfy us. There is no need to dwell here on the activity and the political views of Bahri during his period of exile and until his return to Albania in 1939 now as an occupier. During his long stay in Italy, when I had the opportunity, going to France or returning from it, and that on sev-

eral occasions, to meet him, to discuss with him and his friends, at that time therefore, we believed Bahri was an anti-Zogite a member of Opinga,<sup>1</sup> and a true believer of democracy and progress, although naturally of a bourgeois character. From the first days when I set foot in Bari, I met many of his friends too, who, in the 1930s, posed as anti-Zogites. They were a small part of a whole group of “political refugees” who were formerly affiliated with the Fan Noli government and, after some pleasantries, I had discussions with them, not only precisely political ones, but also friendly conversations, because, in general, we got on well with each other, I often visited and did not quarrel, as is often the case with “political refugees.” But I will have the opportunity to write at greater length about their history, either during their exile in Italy or France, or when they returned to Albania.<sup>2</sup> Here I only wanted to recall briefly that in 1930, when I went for the first time to Bari, and in every subsequent visit, Bahri did not strike me as a bad man, on the contrary, and he was also very considerate of me. He and my sister went out of their way to satisfy me not only with food, but also by buying me, for example, a suit, a pair of shoes or a shirt. When my scholarship in France was taken away from me and I was in Paris, I asked my sister for two hundred French francs. She and Bahri immedi-

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<sup>1</sup> A progressive and democratic association in Albania during the 1930s.

<sup>2</sup> See Enver Hoxha, *Laying the Foundations of the New Albania*, Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin Institute, Toronto 1985, Eng. ed, pp. 222-236.

ately sent them to me. Bahri was an avid chess player. During the day, he went to play at the “Stopani” café with Italian lawyers, accountants and skilled technicians who called him Honourable Omari. But he mostly played in the evening, because whenever I was at their house, as soon as we finished dinner, while Fahrije and I stayed at home with little Luan, Bahri would go out.

“Where is he going?” I asked my sister.

“At the club,” she told me, “to play chess, and since he plays well, he almost always wins.”

As for the other people Bahri was friends with in the apartment, I didn’t know what they were doing at night. I only knew that Karbunara did not gamble and that Muharrem Vllamasi practised poker, because I often heard his friends ask him:

“Did you win anything?”

Muharrem Vllamasi was a member of the political group of Bahri, Sheh, etc., and he was very inclined to joke, with which he used to hide his true political leanings. He did not declare himself a fascist, but made his criticisms jokingly, pretending to be both with the nationalists of Bahri Omari, Ali Këlcyra, Sejfi Vllamasi and Kol Tromara, but also a comrade and friend of Qamil Çela and myself. He was a liberal element, he was with everyone.

Doctor Beqir Velo, one of those refugees I got to know at the time, was a good and simple man. He lived modestly, he was always on the move, he lent his services to the sick who came from Albania to be treated, he knew the doctors, their offices, and how to use the system. He took his compatriots there, helped them with their purchases, and they in turn helped him. He earned his bread by the

sweat of his brow. He was one of the few emigrants in Bari who, on their return, joined the National Liberation War and adopted a patriotic attitude.

Qamil Çela, the “red-faced,” was the best, the simplest, the most honest and the most respectable of all. As far as I know, he received no subsidy from anyone but he was close comrades with Halim Xhelo<sup>1</sup> and the Albanian communists of Saint-Etienne, Gogo and Kozma Nushi, with Ymer Dishnica, and eventually he also befriended me. Qamil was a communist only by conviction, but without theoretical training or as an authentic militant. He loved the Soviet Union and Stalin, but as far as I know, especially in Italy, his actual activity was reduced to nothing. He had no connection with anyone in the country, except perhaps with Demir Godelli or Selim Shpuza. In any case, he was an honest man. He communicated with the Albanians of America, none of whom, as we know, were communists, even in name. Even after the occupation of the country, he did not return like the others, but remained in France where he displayed no kind of activity during the years of the war. He returned, as I know, immediately after Liberation, and we respected him. He was even admitted to the Party as an “old communist,” but he neither knew nor understood the Party. He thought that, since in exile he had been in contact with us, he should, on his return, be assigned a position in charge of affairs and be treated like Ali Kelmendi, where we, the other party members would be his “pupils.” Later,

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<sup>1</sup> Halim Xhelo was a prominent Albanian revolutionary and patriot.

he began to show some discontent and quarrel with the comrades of the Elbasan Party organization. We advised them to be more tolerant of this patriotic old man and to treat him like an old communist, because he had indeed been one.

This was broadly the status of the anti-Zogite emigrant nationalists in Bari. They went to bed as they had woken up, without having done anything, without any anti-Zogite activity or any other organized action. They only read the headlines of the "Gazetta del Mezzogiorno" and spread the gossip of the Albanians who frequently came to Bari before the occupation of our country by Italy.

Bari consumed all the products of the Albanian people and delivered to us rags and other trinkets that Italy sold by the ton. People of all kinds came to Bari from Albania, spies of high calibre, who naturally wanted to get connections with Roman high finance, but also small spies sent by the regime to see what their adversaries were doing. Spies of this kind, often the "cousin of so-and-so's cousin," therefore a "trustworthy" person to the regime, brought information of the anti-Zogites abroad to Zogu himself.

One time, when I had just arrived to Bari from Albania, the Sheh, Bahri Omari and others rushed towards me, looking elated, enthusiastic, and asked me:

"So what's new in Albania?"

"Nothing, apart from poverty and misery," I replied. "Tirana is swarming with spies and the bloodsuckers of the people live in opulence!"

The Sheh jumped, looked at me with the eyes of a rabid dog and said mysteriously:



“They don’t have much longer, their time is up.”

“Why”, I asked, “what happened?”

“You don’t know?” he said, surprised. He continued: “you students, you are never informed, but it is natural, nothing is said to young people.”

I looked at the Sheh, I was both surprised and irritated. He continued: “Zogu is done for!”

“What has happened to him?” I asked him.

“Let me finish, he has cancer! Two or three famous Viennese doctors went to treat him, but it is not curable.”

“An ignorant scoundrel like him can go to hell,” Bahri said.

“Who gave you this good news?” I asked.

“Ah no,” replied the Sheh, “we don’t reveal our sources and our secrets to reds!”

“So”, I said to them, “the happy news you gave me is certainly cause for celebration, but what I can tell you is that Zogu, like cats, has nine lives. He needs to be shot!”

In fact, the story of Zogu’s cancer had run its course in Albania. Zogu came back from Vienna in perfect health and over there, not only free from “cancer” but also free of two gunshots from two Albanian adventurers, who were foreign agents and had not succeeded in killing him when they shot at him coming out of the opera. Immediately after these events, the famous “Vlora Movement” had been exposed, which was nothing other than a plot mounted by foreigners, but doomed to failure from its embryo because the “anti-Zogite” political refugees, just like any other group of foreign agents set up this anti-Zogite movement, where it was not

based on the hatred of the people for the tyrant, but instead they had in view their petty calculations of possible profits, changes of political influence and new ways to subjugate the Albanian people. So things took their course. Zogu prepared the occupation, plundered the gold of the people, went to Egypt to meet with Farouk, smuggled all his stolen wealth out, and went to die in Paris, while the famous “anti-Zogite patriots” of Bari returned to Albania, became “Ballists,” collaborated with the Italians and the Germans against us, but ended up failing and in our hands, where they were brought to justice and condemned for the crime of high treason against the Homeland and the people. Thus ended their story. But let us return to the times when I knew a certain number of them, to the time when, for the first time, I visited Italy on the way to France.

The Italy we were travelling through, and where we sometimes stopped for a few days in Bari, seemed to us, as it really was, a hell, the prison of the Italian people, the enemy of our people. Italy had firmly bound to Albania its executioner, Ahmet Zogu, whom Italy kept in power and, by means of loans, credits, concessions and various other methods, was preparing, on the one hand, to plunder our people, on the other hand to occupy our land at short notice. The Italian people themselves lived in misery, the streets of Bari were filled with beggars. If even a cigarette butt was left on a table in the “Stopani” café, it would disappear immediately, for there was always a poor fellow snooping around, passing by ready to seize it. Cigarettes in tobacco shops were bought by the piece, and in the

streets you saw people willing to trade their meagre amounts of food for one, even though with most of them their hair shone with pomade. We also observed many very nicely dressed officers, who looked like toy soldiers, their chests covered with ribbons of decorations which they had obtained without seeing any combat, and, almost everywhere, fascist thugs, in their uniforms of black cloth and with well-polished boots, usually chubby and ruddy. The sidewalks were swarming with them.

Whenever we travelled by train, we did it in groups of two or three students, because we risked having our suitcases stolen. When we went to the station to get our tickets for Ventimiglia, the closest town to the border between France and Italy, the counters asked us where we wanted to go and what class we wanted our tickets for, we replied in our gibberish Italian:

*“We want ticket of a third a class please, to the Ventimiglia!”*

The third class train ride was hell. We sat on the floors for dozens of hours due to there only being a handful of seats. In addition, you had to constantly check your suitcases, because they were constantly stolen. The police also asked you for your papers seemingly every half hour. The third-class cars were not only crowded but they stank; in winter and especially in summer they were disgustingly filthy.

Everything changed as soon as you entered France. We had the impression of coming out of prison, because, after we passed the French border, despite us still travelling in third class, the seats of

the French cars were made of leather, stuffed with horsehair, relatively soft, and we always arrived at the correct destination on time. In Italy, on the other hand, we were forced to take disgusting trains and buses which were chronically late and often skipped certain towns.

In Italian stations, day or night, there was perpetual shouting and especially from the sellers of pillows, those at stalls who sold mortadella and cheese sandwiches and the porters. For us students, we never used the services of the porters, as we could not afford this additional expense. Dealing with our suitcases was a herculean struggle as they were extremely heavy and we sometimes had to change trains several times, cross rail tracks and run to different platforms. Apart from that, the trains were old and often broke down. Once we were travelling in Northern Italy. It was at the beginning of winter, it was cold, it was snowing, but in the car it was warm, because, in addition to the radiators, the breaths of the many travellers warmed the atmosphere. At one point, a leak occurred in the radiator tubes and soon we were drowned in steam. Inside it was scorching hot, while outside it was freezing to the bone. With the windows open we were dying of cold and when we closed them we were bursting with heat. Two good hours thus passed with alternations of unbearable heat and Siberian cold.

Usually we didn't stray far from the train stations, but once, when I was travelling with Enver Zazani, who was studying in Lyon, we decided to go out and visit Rome for a bit. After getting down in the capital, we left our suitcases at the locker and

went out. We started our walk, but, not really knowing where to go, we wandered at random. We came out on a long street, at the end of which stood a large white monument that blocked the view. We entered this street which seemed endless to us. We ended up arriving at a square, which we crossed, and approached the monument. The gates were closed. We stopped in front of it to contemplate this enormous mass of stone devoid of all grace. But, as we were looking at the monument, we saw ourselves surrounded by six or seven men in civilian clothes. One of them asked us:

“What are you doing here?”

“We are looking at the monument,” we replied.

“Who are you?”

“And why are you one to question us, who are you?”

“We’re from the police!” said one, sternly.

“Oh, I understand. We are Albanian students!”

“Hand over your papers,” they said roughly, and we handed them our passports, which they examined from every angle and, on returning them to us, they added:

“Do you see that street over there?”

“Yes of course.”

“So get moving and don’t even think about coming back here if you don’t want to spend the night in jail.”

“Fine!” we said and promptly walked away.

We wondered: “Who the hell should live there?” Later we learned that it was not a monument and instead it was “Piazza Venezia,” where Mussolini’s palace was located. Without knowing it, we had entered the area populated by spies and

we were gazing upon a monument which was the headquarters of those that were oppressing the Albanian people!

Another year we stopped for a few hours in Florence, a magnificent, historic city, the birthplace of great men of the Italian Renaissance. We crossed the Arno on the "Ponte Vecchio," visited the "Piazza della Signoria" and its famous statues, then went up to the Boboli gardens. In this city we were able to visit all these places without hassle, we were not stopped by the police or the spies of fascism, which we believed would be constantly on our heels. Perhaps it was an impression caused by the bad reputation that the fascist regime in force gave to Italy, by the history of Italian-Albanian relations and above all by the anti-popular and anti-national policy that the Zogu regime pursued in its relations with Mussolini's Italy. For all these reasons, wherever we went in this country we felt surrounded by enemies. Naturally, this feeling of enmity concerned the regime and not its people. Because, in general, the Italian people are kind-hearted and are hardworking. I had the opportunity, among other things, to better observe this spirit when I visited a small spa called Salsomaggiore. When I became a teacher in Korça under the Italian occupation, I had a serious swelling of the knee and the doctors recommended that I go to this spa to bathe there in a special mud. Fahrije and Bahri had not yet returned to Albania. I borrowed some money and with Fahrije we spent a fortnight in Salsomaggiore. I must say that the baths were excellent as well as the service in general, so much so that the condition of my knee improved to such

an extent that my pain never returned, not even during the hard years of the Resistance. The boarding house where we stayed was simple, cheap and the owners very cordial and affable. Not once did we speak of fascism. It was only in the streets that I saw thugs in black uniforms and *bersaglieri*<sup>1</sup> with their rooster feathers in their hats.

The chapter of my travels through Italy, when I was on my way to France, ended in Ventimiglia where we had submitted to a check both for the customs and passport service. The customs check was not about the few shirts or shoes we had with us, but was about the books we might have hidden in our suitcases. The customs officer had a list of banned titles, which he glanced at in turn after looking at the books of a few of them, then he leafed through each book to see if he could find a chapter on a banned topic and after I passed the check he then threw it in my suitcase. On the other hand, when one went to the counter for visas and passports, at the entrance as well as at the exit, there was a constant presence of heavily armed border guards. They checked your passport from every angle, using magnifying glasses to scrutinize the stamps and, having completed this laborious operation, took out two photo albums out of their drawer, in my case one of the letter E and the other of the letter H to see if my photo was there to see if I was banned from entry. He searched carefully in the album once more, looked again at the pass-

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<sup>1</sup> A group of the most skilled marksmen in the Italian infantry, often tasked to patrol the streets of Italian cities and recognizable for their feathered hats — *NEPH*.

port, then at my face and, since he discovered nothing suspicious, he took his stamp, applied it twice, once on the stamp and once on the passport, while I, on the other side of the counter, flanked by men armed to the teeth, breathed a long overdue sigh of relief!

Such was the fascist Italy of Mussolini, the sworn enemy of our country and our people, enemy of the Soviet Union, and of all socialists and communists.



### III

## MONTPELLIER

A few minutes after the train left Ventimiglia, the locomotive's siren announced that we had entered another country. It was France, the country of the Gauls, the cradle of European civilization, the country of freedom, work, culture and revolution. Our emotion at that moment was at its peak, we looked with curiosity and joy at the landscape around us, everything seemed different, more vivid, more beautiful, more brilliant and at the same time closer to us.

From Ventimiglia to Montpellier our journeys have always been smooth and uneventful. When we drove by day, we gazed with greed and sympathy at this country of the bourgeois democratic revolution, this country which had given the world philosophers, scholars, doctors, writers, poets, playwrights and illustrious actors. We had studied the life, the ideas, and the works of many of them already when we were at the Lyceums of Gjirokastra as well as Korça. Our heads were full of the historical and social events of which France had witnessed, we knew its language and now that we were entering the land of the Gauls for the first time, we had the impression of also knowing its stations, cities or towns. We happily read the advertising posters, we asked in French "Where is the fountain?", "Where is the newsstand?", "Where is the train stop?", etc., and we were surprised to know how to express ourselves so well and so fluently in French. The French understood us and we saw no surprise

in their features caused by our accent.

From the train windows, we contemplated the vast Provence and felt as though we were conversing with Alphonse Daudet, who had so well evoked this region, and with Mistral, the other renowned Provençal. Many people in the train stations seemed to resemble the heroes of the books we had read, such as Tartarin and Costecalde; the boys and girls made us think of Calendan or Mireille. As the train rolled on, we felt as though we were crossing the famous Camargue, which extended on both sides of the Rhone, with its famous horses and bulls running in the vast plains and meadows; we expected to see, perched on a hill, like in Daudet's beautiful stories, the windmill, its immobile wings, where the old miller waited and waited for grain to grind. But our hopes were in vain, as the modern flour mills had converted the windmill into a dilapidated museum.

Our young imagination imagined all this, among so many other things especially when we passed on the bridge of Avignon where "they all dance in circles" as the song goes.

The train was moving and, lulled by its monotonous noise, we remembered the history of the Popes of Avignon, the journey of Richelieu, arriving sick from the siege of La Rochelle and stopping on the way to see Cinq-Mars and all of the closest political allies and friends Louis XIII, to have them beheaded in Lyon.

I was also thinking of the Albigensian Crusade, this sect of heretical Cathars, mass-murdered by the Inquisition, and whose Grand Inquisitor said: "Kill all those you can, for in heaven God will sep-

arate the good from the bad.”

Amidst the noise of the train taking me to Montpellier, the atrocities of Simon de Montfort and the ultimate resistance of the Cathars in the castle of Montségur captivated my mind.

With optimism, I told myself that I was going to an old city where, several centuries before, Rabelais had taught, where Bataillon and many other illustrious professors gave lessons. Some things I had learned in the Lyceum were now coming back to me in abundance and in detail, and deep down, I felt that I was not in a foreign country, but in a friendly country that had never harmed our people.

We entered the Montpellier station once night had fallen. Compared to those in Italy, it was a modest, quiet, dimly lit and intimate station. There were very few people around, and it was we, the newly arrived travellers, who gave the small square and nearby streets some life instead of those looking to make money. Here, no one bothered you; there were no porters rushing for your suitcases, no news or food vendors, and even less pillow salesmen. This simplicity and calm surprised me, because in the Lyceum, we had heard about the exuberance and arrogance of the inhabitants of Provence, Hérault, Nîmes, among others. But they were friendly, smiling and helpful. We set foot in this city for the first time, but at first, we did not ask anyone for directions because we were happy to find our way ourselves, as if we already knew the place.

Exiting the station, we came out onto a square from which several well-lit streets led off. Nearby, we saw the sign of a hotel “Terminus.” I headed

towards its door, pushed it open, and addressed the hotel manager, who was standing, waiting for customers, and asked him for a single-bed room.

“Will it be for one night or several?” he asked me.

I told him I planned to stay for two or three days. As he asked for my passport, I told him I was a student. He chose a room for me, rang a bell, and when the night security guard came, he asked him, “Take the gentleman to the third floor, and give him an empty room!”

The guard grabbed my suitcase, and we climbed the stairs because hotels of this era were without elevators. I entered a modest room, but with clean sheets and a sink; as for the toilet, the guard pointed me to the door at the end of the hallway with his hand.

It was the first night I spent in Montpellier, where I would stay for three years. I came to know and love this beautiful, ancient and peaceful city, full of greenery. It was a provincial city, the Parisians said of it, but for me, it was full of life because there were crowds of students from almost all regions of the world. They chose it for the reputation of its university, for the mildness of its climate, the cheerfulness and the vitality of its people.

In the morning, I got up, went out to the train station square, and looked with surprise, curiosity and satisfaction at a small park planted with tall trees that separated two wide streets lined with sidewalks and tall buildings, but not uniform ones. To the right of the station, I saw the sign of a café called “De la Gare,” and an advertising sign featured a woman holding a tray on which were placed

cups of café au lait and steaming croissants. I knew what croissants were, I had also seen them in illustrated books, but I could not imagine that this small pastry, served with café au lait, was a kind of small bun in the shape of a crescent was, so flaky, so well-cooked, and with an almost spongy texture. I entered this café and ordered a café au lait with croissants. It was my breakfast. The young waitress brought me what I had asked for. I drank my cup by dipping my curved pastry, like a sickle, into the light brown coffee. I paid the price to the young girl and asked her:

“Where is the university located?”

“Which faculty?”

“The Faculty of Sciences.”

“Take the main street over there and, you’ll arrive at ‘actor’s square,’ at ‘the egg,’” and, speaking quickly as the French usually do, while I was trying to imagine what this “egg” was that I had to end up at, she continued to explain the rest of the itinerary: “You’ll go straight, take that street, arrive in front of the post office, go past the square, and on the right, you’ll find another post office surrounded by bookstores. From there, go straight ahead, and you’ll surely find the street and the Faculty you’re looking for, because you’ll see a crowd of young people like you, swarming like bees in a hive.”

I thanked her but thought I remarked “it’s quite complicated instructions.” In any case, as they said in Gjirokastra “by asking around you can reach the ends of the earth.” So I walked up the street, which I believe was called “Rue Maguelone.”

When the Municipal Theatre appeared before my eyes, I found myself in front of a large and

beautiful square, the middle of which was occupied by a space raised above the surrounding road. This platform was the famous historic "Egg" of the city. At the time, we considered it the heart of the city. To get a better view of "actor's square," I crossed the sidewalk and arrived at the "Egg." There, we were not afraid of being hit by a car. The "Egg" had the shape of the object it was named after, it was paved with grey slabs and, in the middle, on a beautiful pedestal of white stone, stood a statue, called "The Three Graces." I stayed there for a moment and admired the first work of this kind that I saw in France. Later, I was to see many more, but this monument seemed magnificent to me. From the "Egg," I looked at the Theatre, which also seemed very beautiful to me, very "grandiose," because I had never seen anything like it. Later, comparing it to others, it no longer produced the same impression on me, but in the main square of Montpellier, it dominated the view of this centre, from which many streets started. I was not only going to learn their names soon, but also to become familiar with their appearance by going to the Faculty every day, going back and forth from the house where I lived, and in my walks. Around the square, attention was mainly drawn to cafés with terraces filled with tables and chairs, large cafés at the bottom of important old-style buildings, baroque and modern, and I started reading the signs: "Café du Commerce," "Café de France," opposite, the "Café Riche," further on, two or three blocks, another café identical to the "Café de France" which was also named "Café de France."

To the right of the Municipal Theatre, beyond

the “Egg,” there was a large park called the “Esplanade,” which I will often mention later on. On the square, there were benches on which one could sit; on the street that bordered it on one side stood the “Galeries Lafayette,” a large department store with several floors, where we would go to buy everything we needed, from shaving cream to razor blades, but we also strolled through each of its four floors filled with various items. We looked longingly at the windows, the displays, the new products launched on the market, as we were not able to buy anything expensive. We went there mainly to look at the book section. I must say that in Montpellier, this renowned university town, the spirit of the population at the time was rather conservative, and not as libertine as one might expect. At the “Egg,” there were no other shops or stores other than the one I just mentioned, except for a newsstand that also sold books on the street that led to the cinema. But I will have the opportunity to talk about these places again.

Leaving the “Egg,” I walked along the sidewalk attached to “Café Riche” and, following the sidewalk of a street called the “Rue de la Loge,” I walked and walked, and, having asked for directions, reached a small square surrounded by bookstores, where mainly academic books were sold. One of them, which I frequented most often, was the “Vidal” bookstore. From there, I slipped into a narrow, unpaved alleyway lined with small shops, without sidewalks, where a car rarely passed, and suddenly I had a feeling of surprise: it seemed to me that I was in the streets of my native Gjirokastra. Narrow and steep, paved with cobble-

stones, with rows of tall houses that stretched one after the other, with the windows of their shops on either side, and women and children leaning out of their windows or standing in front of their doors, I was tempted to ask myself, “Has this all been a dream, am I still in Albania? Is this Varosh or Palorto<sup>1</sup>?” I was suddenly overwhelmed with joy, but also with a strong sense of nostalgia. I walked lightly, for I was a son of my Gjirokastra of paths of stones and dirt, which had not yet known asphalt. Indeed, almost all the streets I walked for the next few years were paved.

Descending this street, I reached a large building with a curved door (strangely similar in shape to the doors of Gjirokastra) in front of which was a café full of young men and women. I thought to myself: “This building must be the University!” I entered through the large door and emerged into a square courtyard with a gravel-covered ground with rose bushes scattered across it. The courtyard was surrounded by a portico. I walked around it as if it were a familiar place, and as I passed, I read the signs attached to the doors that opened onto the courtyard: “Secretary’s Office,” “Law Amphitheatre,” “Faculty of Zoology,” “Library,” “Faculty of the Arts,” “Faculty of History,” “Faculty of Geography.” To the right, on the ground floor, was a terrace bordered by a balcony, which, as I was to learn later, allowed you to view amphitheatres of history and geography. Still facing the main entrance, through a passage on the ground floor, one emerged onto another courtyard, like the first, also

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<sup>1</sup> Two neighbourhoods in Gjirokastra.



covered in fine gravel and planted with roses, on which the amphitheatres were located..

For me, it was a day of joy, an unforgettable day, because I was discovering things that were unknown to me, which aroused my curiosity, but I also needed to find out about the procedures to follow to figure out what classes I have been assigned and where my dormitory was located. I went to the secretary's office where I found a line of students waiting their turn to register. I lined up like everyone else. In front of me was a tall, friendly-looking blond boy. He greeted me, I responded to his greeting, we shook hands and introduced ourselves.

"Hoxha," I said.

"Roncant," he said and he asked me: "What nationality are you?"

"I am Albanian!"

"I have sympathy for Albania. I am enrolled in the Faculty of History and I have read the exploits of your famous Skanderbeg. Would you help me learn more about him?"

"Why of course, I would even like us to become friends!"

"I think we will," he said to me and he continued: "what are you studying?"

"Natural sciences."

"Very good."

"I have just arrived from my country and I would like to know what I have to do to get my schedule."

"This is very simple. Have you graduated from a lycée?"

"Yes, the French Lyceum of Korça."

"Math or humanities?"

“Humanities.”

“Alright, go ahead of me in line!”

“Of course not, you were here before me!”

“Come on I am a year older than you, you’re just a rookie.”

We approached the secretary, to whom I asked many questions.

“For a foreigner,” the secretary told me, “you don’t speak French badly.”

Roncant, who knew him well, said to him, laughing:

“But you, can you speak Albanian like Hoxha speaks French?”

The secretary, a thin, friendly man in his fifties, laughs and says:

*“Hey, Roncant, so is this your little protégé.”*

Roncant replied:

“Yes, he is a descendant of Gjergj Kastrioti.”

“I don’t recognize that name,” continued the secretary, “did this Kastrioti study at our university?”

We both burst out laughing.

“No,” I told him, “he was an illustrious man who lived in the 15th century, but Montaigne, Ronsard, Voltaire and many others have spoken of his exploits”

“Then what use will the sciences be to you?” replied the secretary, laughing, “enrol yourself in history, in law!” His remark, although joking, really annoyed me. “That’s what I wanted,” I replied, “but I can’t, because I have a state scholarship and that’s what I was assigned. Could you change it for me?”

“Impossible!” replied the secretary, now seri-

ous again. “Here, for foreigners, we rigorously apply the decisions of their countries.”

The secretary provided me with all the required information and asked me to bring him my completed paperwork the next day. I got out of the line and waited for Roncant.

“Let’s go get a black coffee at the café,” my new French friend said to me. “Let’s also get some pastries.”

“No,” I said, “I’ve already had my breakfast.”

Regardless, I went, and as I put my hand in my pocket to pay for my coffee, he stopped me.

“No, it’s out of the question, you’re my new friend” and he paid for my coffee.

From that day on we were close friends.

Now I had to find my Albanian comrades, whose dormitory I did not know, but the oldest among them, Eqrem Hado, Niko Stralla and Selim Damani, had told me that after lunch they were going to have coffee at the “Café Riche” or “Café de France.”

I had lunch in a little restaurant near the University that Roncant recommended to me. It was a place full of happy, “rowdy students,” as the manager said, a nice old woman. I sat down at a table where three boys were already seated.

“You should dig in to some blood sausage, bro!” one of them said to me. I didn’t understand what “dig in” meant, but I guessed it meant eat, as for the blood sausage I didn’t know the name of many foods. I said to the waitress:

“Okay, I will have a blood sausage”

“Okay I think I understand what a blood sausage is,” I thought to myself, “but why did he call

me ‘bro’? I’m not his brother.” Later on, I learned that young people informally referred to each other that way. We struck up a conversation and they asked me which university I was attending. I told them what I was going to study.

“You’ll start with the PCN,” one of them said to me, “we’ll study together. You will study the frogs of d’Hérouville and visit the botanical garden constantly!” I remember the name of this student, his name was René.

My meal was served to me. It was a big sausage filled with congealed blood, served on a plate with a layer of rice which looked like the rice from the pilaf that my mother prepared for us, but more sticky. I looked at him and René looked at me too:

“Dig in, it’s awesome!”

“What dialect of French is he speaking?” I wondered a little worried, because those were words I didn’t recognize in the slightest. I grabbed my knife and fork and began to cut the sausage that I mixed with the rice. It was very tasty. The comrades asked me:

“Did you like it?”

“It’s awesome,” I answered without knowing what that word meant. They had a rule that whoever finishes first paid for the table, and when they were all done they would all get up, say “see you soon” and leave. Cordial and simple boys.

When lunch was over, I went to the “café Riche,” a large café, with walls covered with mirrors, with a stage reserved for a band and bordered on both sides by benches covered in red velvet. When I entered, I was dazed, because I had never seen such a café, so big, with such a large menu,

with a massive display of seemingly dozens of ice cream flavours. There weren't many customers at that time. I looked here and there to look for my comrades, when I heard, coming from a corner of the café, a voice:

“Hey Enver, over here.”

I turned my head and almost jumped for joy. They were my classmates from the Lyceum, who had arrived in Montpellier before me, and also other friends who had been in this city for two or three years, but whom I knew from Korça, because we had lived together in the dormitories. I rushed towards them. There was a whole colony of Albanians there. Later on, I met others. We hugged each other, questions flew back and forth, and I told them about my first day's adventures.

“Very nice,” Sotir Angjeli told me, “We have the same class, sign up, and tomorrow we'll go together to listen to the lesson in the zoology amphitheatre.”

Eqrem Hado asked me in which hotel I had stayed. I told him that I had settled temporarily in the hotel near the train station.

“Take your coffee,” he said to me, “then we'll go to my house, we'll stay there for a little bit and in the afternoon we'll go see a local guy I know, who takes care of finding rooms to rent.” That's exactly what we did.

Eqrem Hado was from Delvina, the son of a lawyer. He had been a good student at the Korça National Lyceum and had come to Montpellier a year before me. He was in his second year of law school. He was a very nice boy, an excellent student. Cheerful, a little boastful, he had a reputation

to be a little hot-headed, but he never held a grudge. I liked him, teased him, joked with him, but he never got angry with me. As long as I knew him we had no quarrels between us.

“I am for a republic, but one that is authoritarian,” he said.

Naturally, I was not a big fan of his views, I was against the monarchy and against Zogu, especially since I was attracted to communism. Later, when we were discussing these subjects, he told me in confidence:

“Be careful, don’t open yourself up to everyone, because there are informants among us, who no doubt send reports to Tirana! Beware of Selim Damani and Foto Bala, because they are the ones who seem always friendly, but are really snakes ready to strike, one misstep around them and they can get your scholarship revoked.”

I knew Foto Bala, he was in my class, and he was a conservative man who held no principles. As for Selim Damani, I didn’t know of him at the time. In Montpellier, I got to know him well and learned he was a man of weak character, more than willing to bow down to Zogu. The passing of time, especially during the National Liberation War, made his weak character and total lack of backbone more evident. He allied themselves with reaction and things ended up “badly” for him. Eqrem had not been mistaken in his judgement.

We went to the local guy he previously mentioned, and asked him to find me a cheap room with electricity and if possible with a stove and not in the suburbs. He said:

“I have what you need. Just yesterday someone

told me about a room he heard of, very close to the 'Egg,' on the second floor of an apartment on Bruyas street."

"How much is rent?" we asked him.

"Three hundred francs a month," he replied.

Eqrem and I looked at each other. It was too expensive for me and Eqrem told him so, adding that he himself was staying in a room with a bathroom and that he only paid 250 francs.

"Follow me," he said, "let's still go see the place, because I myself haven't visited it yet, we'll haggle on the spot with the landlady. I'm telling you before we arrive that you will be looked on with suspicion, you won't be able to bring whoever you want to the apartment; the family that owns it is strict."

"Alright!"

So we went to Bruyas Street; it was a narrow street, with low sidewalks and lined on both sides with old houses three or four stories high. It was located very close to the "Egg," about 40 to 50 meters from the main square. We went up to the second floor, and rang the bell. A plump old woman, who seemed to be in her seventies, opened the door. She spoke half French, half Provençal, the language of the locals. She moved with difficulty, but she was comely. The intermediary says to her:

"I brought you a client, he is a foreign student. Can he see the bedroom?"

"Come in!" said the old woman and she ushered us into a small living room. She asked us, looking up and down at me several times:

"Where are you from?"

"From Albania," I tell her.

Albania, Albania... the old woman repeated to herself, then, with a little bit of embarrassment in her voice, she asked: "Which country is Albania near? I do not know."

"Near Italy," I replied and added, "bordering Greece and Yugoslavia."

Ah, in the Balkans! she exclaimed. "That is where my grandson went to war and died. He was under the command of General Sarrail."

"Sarrail's troops were also in our country," I explained, "and precisely in the city where I attended school."

"You look like a good boy to me," she said, "come and see the room."

It was a very clean room, with two balconies, as it was located on the corner of the street, the bed-sheets were as white as snow, there was a hand-made quilt, an armchair, a washbasin and a small table with a large pitcher completed the furnishings.

I liked it and expressed my satisfaction to the landlady.

"I accept the rules of the house and the conditions are good — the issue is that I cannot pay more than 200 francs a month!"

"It does not matter!" said the old woman. "In the memory of my grandson, who may have been to your country, I accept. Here is the key."

I took it and paid the old woman two months' rent.

She was an excellent woman. She told me:

"Don't pay two months at once, you're a student and you may need that money."

"No I insist," I replied, "I come from a poor



country, where people are thrifty!”

“I like people like that,” she replied with satisfaction and added: “Anyway, if you can’t make ends meet at the end of the month, you can ask me for part of the rent you gave me until you can make up for the rest.”

I spent three years in the room of this good-hearted, simple, affable and extremely clean old woman. I never had to complain about her and I don’t think she did about me either. I always found everything in order, sometimes I brought her a cake or some bananas, because she had no more teeth, and she herself often offered me a glass of wine to drink.

“Only pour me a little, good mother, very little, because I don’t drink.”

“What a little baby not being able to drink a glass of wine!” she exclaimed, and she left the glass in my hand.

When I came back from Albania, I brought her a small hand carved statuette as a gift. It gave her great pleasure. She had no real friends and was a very lonely woman. From time to time, a man, older than her, who walked with the help of a cane, came to visit her. I met him many times in the small living room of the house. He too spoke in Provençal.

“We cannot let this language die out,” he said to me, “we find it very beautiful, it reminds us of the songs of the cicadas in the Camargue countryside, it evokes the half-wild white horses, the beautiful dances and the customs of our peasants and our families.”

“You speak like a poet seized with nostalgia,” I

said to him, “you are quite right to preserve the dialect and the good customs of your forefathers. I, too, respect those of my people.”

“Tell me something about your country, Mr. Hoxha,” he said to me and I, conscious of his poetic soul, told him, among other things, that our people sing their joys and their sorrows not only in poetry, but also in song. One day he took an old map of the Balkans from his pocket, put on his glasses and asked me:

“I know you are Albanian, but where in Albania were you born?”

I put my hand on his shoulder: “Here, it is there. Can you read it? I am from Argyrocastro.”

I showed him Korça on the map and told him about what had been called the “Republic of Korça,” which had been formed by the French. I told him that in Korça the French cemetery is separate from the locals, that it is well maintained, that the tombs are made of marble and that people go to lay flowers there every year.

The landlady’s head shot up and she put her arm around my neck and said:

“Mr. Hoxha, my child, you wouldn’t be interested to know if my grandson’s grave is there too, would you?”

“I will do it, I promise,” I said, “I will visit the cemetery and inform you upon my return.”

The old woman took me even more in affection and she said to me:

“You can use all the hot water to wash yourself and to shave, you don’t have to spare me a drop, you are like a son to me.”

She was truly an excellent woman and I remem-

ber her with gratitude.

The street where I lived was very quiet and the sun shone through the window in the morning for several hours. Afterwards, I bought a small crystal radio, the first one I had ever owned! It only picked up broadcasts from Radio Montpellier, but during the hours I spent in my room, it was a great distraction for me. It had cost me 25 francs, which was a lot for me.

The next day, I went to the front office of the university to be officially registered and, following an unspoken tradition that my classmates revealed to me, I left the secretary a 25 franc gratuity. He thanked me, as he did with everyone. From then on, I was a student at the University of Montpellier.

I enrolled in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, or PCN, as it was briefly called at the time, based on the three initials for physics, chemistry and natural sciences. I had to learn my way around campus to find the lecture halls, the laboratories, and so on. Here things became a bit more difficult. To attend class, it was necessary to go to three buildings: the facilities and the zoology and the zoology laboratory were located in the centre of the University, where the faculties of law, literature, history and the rectorate were also located. In those years, if I am not mistaken, the rector was a man named Morin. He was a great jurist. The fact that the rectorate was located in the very building where zoology courses were taught and laboratory work was done didn't interest me much. This was not the case for other rooms, the presence in the same building of the faculties of law, history, etc. was alluring. I

often “forgot” or “made a mistake” and instead of entering the zoology amphitheatres, I slipped into those of history and especially law. I avidly listened to the lectures, which only increased my desire to take courses in these faculties and deepened my passion for them. I had said to myself many times, “this is the last time I set foot in the Faculty of Law,” “I must come to terms with the fact that I am a student of zoology and chemistry,” but four or five days later, I forgot my resolution. In reality, it was never a “mistake” that caused me to enter the amphitheatre, but a new weakness, a deep temptation to learn more about these disciplines I cherished. Naturally, I wanted to rectify the injustice that had been done to me in Albania when, by the authorities, I had been assigned to the natural sciences branch instead of political and social sciences. I went to these courses so often that many students in the faculties of law or history believed I was enrolled in their faculty, while from time to time, I couldn’t understand even the most basic formulas of chemistry and physics! The day would even come when class would get revenge for the “forgetfulness” I had shown them; but I will talk about that later.

The Faculty of Physics and Chemistry was located in a different building than the one that held the Faculty of Zoology. To go from the Faculty of Zoology to that of Chemistry, it was necessary to climb some narrow and picturesque streets and alleys which sometimes gave me the impression of being in the districts of Manalat or upper Dunavat in Gjirokastra. But here, in Montpellier, in these beautiful districts, very often you could receive a

bucket of dirty water thrown at you from a window. You could shout as much as you wanted, and even hurl some student insults, but no one would answer you. All you had to do was swallow your pride, walk up the alley and act as if nothing happened, even if you were drenched as if it had rained.

We did our botany course in one of the most beautiful places in the city, the Garden of Plants (an establishment that dates back several centuries and which continues to grow to this day). This garden was not large, but it was surrounded on all sides by walls, streets and boulevards. It started gently sloping and ended in a flat expanse. The large door opened at the bottom of the "Promenade du Peyrou" which I will discuss later. At the entrance, on the right, stretched another boulevard and, in front of the Garden of Plants stood an old tower, covered with ivy and other climbing plants. There began the famous Faculty, one of the oldest and most famous in Europe, that of medicine, where famous Frenchmen had studied and taught, from Rabelais to Claude Bernard and many others. On the other side of the main entrance of this Faculty, with its statues of scholars in front of the door, stood, a little smaller, one of the oldest churches in Montpellier.

The Faculty of Medicine was surrounded by old houses, low, with chipping paint, bordering narrow streets with iron handrails, the houses were not very clean and the sun rarely shined. The rooms there were cheap, but they were all rented by the students of the Faculty of Medicine. At the end of the boulevard which separated the Garden of the Plants and the "School of Medicine" was an impos-

ingly large hospital; at least that was the impression its façade produced. This is where the medical students did their training.

On the side facing the hospital, the Garden of Plants had another large entrance. It was open to the public every day at set times. In its alleys one met students, schoolchildren, young girls with their suitors, mothers pushing baby carriages. Time limits were set for visitors' walks through the garden. The garden was embellished with beautiful flowers, tall exotic bushes, shady and rare, trees with thick foliage and there was also a plant nursery. Each tree, each shoot, and each group of flowers, had its sign with a name in Latin and French. It was forbidden to touch trees or flowers and no one dared to do so. We were only allowed to study the flower, write down its name and draw it. As for us, students of this Faculty, we were provided with special authorization and also had access to places forbidden to the public. In this space, which was flat, of fine appearance, and planted, as I have said, with the most varied trees, evergreens and other deciduous plants, there were also greenhouses heated in winter. There were places where other plants and flowers grew, grown directly on plots of soil or in the nursery. Not only did we walk there freely, but we also had lessons there with our teacher, who explained to us the vegetation, the grass, the flowers, the wild and decorative trees, the shrubs, the fruit trees, the insects, the effect of frost, species, families and classifications according to Linnaeus, Buffon or other eminent scholars and botanists, French and foreign.

All these things so beautiful and full of interest

that we saw in the Garden of the Plants increased the respect that we held for the famous botanists and other illustrious scholars of the plant kingdom. In the garden there were busts of various illustrious botanists from the 16th and 17th century and a few busts of great botanists of the modern day. These busts were located in groves, in flowerbeds, along paths, near the greenhouse, and at the entrance of the faculty. Below each bust, on a pedestal, a slab of marble bore the skilfully engraved name of each of them, as well as the years of their birth and their death. While admiring the vegetation, the trees and the flowers, one was naturally led to feel respect for those who had devoted their lives to this field of life and science. Apart from us, of course, who were students of this branch, the simple visitors who came there to walk or relax, even the lovers, while looking at the flowers and the trees, stopped in front of the statues, became curious, read in silence or aloud the names of botanists who had died hundreds of years ago, and precisely this reading of their names was a great honour done to them, one of the forms that their immortality assumed. This veneration of past scientists was near universal, I noticed it then in almost all the other faculties of the University of Montpellier, and I also observed it in other universities and schools of Paris. Everywhere the figures and names of the great scholars who had studied or had taught in such and such lycée or in such and such faculty appeared in the courtyards, in front of the doors, in the rooms or on the walls, some (the most famous) were honoured by statues, others by commemorative plaques.

At the Garden of Plants, I enriched my knowledge of seeds, learned their different species, the nature of the growth of cotyledons, of monocotyledons, and the theories of Mendel who hybridized varieties of peas. I increased my knowledge of flowers and their names, which I still know today in greater numbers in French than in Albanian. I learned to know many kinds of trees which grow in various regions of France and other countries, particularly those which grow in the former French colonies, from Algeria to Senegal, to the Sahara and the Hoggar mountains. For my part, I told our teacher which trees, plants or flowers were grown in our country. He usually took note of them, but he asked for details of the dimensions of the stem and the exact shapes of the flower, which I was unable to give him because I was a son of a townsman and not of a countryman, and then, as I said, I had never wanted to become a botanist, consequently, what I did not know in botany, I had to learn quickly.

In the middle of the garden were the buildings of the Faculty of Botany, the amphitheatre, whose windows overlooked the garden, the study rooms, the library room filled with books, herbariums of flowers, leaves, and also rooms full of various trunks cut into slices like books. A special place was reserved for the laboratories where each student had their microscope. It was the nicest, most pleasant and best equipped place in the whole university.

One of the professors of this Faculty was the illustrious Bataillon, a quiet, affable, elderly man. He was famous throughout France. Often in the



amphitheatre where he gave his course, we saw strangers, not only students of our age, but also older people in the audience. They were qualified botanists, secondary school or university teachers, who came from various places in France to hear such and such a lesson from Professor Bataillon. We also saw them after class, locking themselves away for hours in his office presumably to talk to the man himself, after a while they left, each returning to their day to day life.

In class we were to locate the individual sections of the plants, such as the stem, the leaves, the flowers, the seeds, the pistil, the ovaries, and the smaller parts. After having poured over them, using a pipette, a special chemical solution that we had to prepare ourselves, we placed them with the greatest care on the stage of our microscopes. Then began the study of cells. We discovered their divisions, which nature had designed with so much art, their contents, the chromosomes, the protozoa and a fascinating, enlarged, colourful world appeared before our eyes. Near our microscopes, each of us always held a sheet of drawing paper, on which we had previously made a sketch of the plant, the flower or a part of the aforementioned organs, the cells of which he would study under the microscope. We had to draw them accurately with a steady hand, and write on them the name of each of its components. Then we would transcribe on this same sheet the composition and the exact contours of the cells that we were studying under the microscope and would write in a beautiful handwriting in small but easily legible characters, not only the composition of the cell, but the names of

each of its parts, the number of elements that we saw, the shapes of the organelles and patterns invisible to the naked eye, but also the functions of each of them, the composition of the walls of the cells, how osmosis occurred, the transformations undergone by the pollen which stuck to the pistil, the way in which it passed through the ovary, and the metamorphoses which this grain underwent until it reached the cotyledon, etc. It was a fascinating world that I came to love more than the other branches I studied. These seemed to me more daunting, so I had no success there, especially in chemistry.

The amphitheatre of chemistry and physics was, as I have said, on top of a hill of old houses, to which one ascended by alleys similar to those of Manalat, a district of Gjirokastra. In the amphitheatre we listened to the chemistry professor's lectures and watched him write formulas on the blackboard which sometimes seemed incomprehensible to me, and sometimes took on geometric shapes according to their combinations and the results of their reactions. I must confess, I understood nothing of these Latin formulas, with Arabic numerals sprinkled about. It was a shortcoming on my part, but I couldn't help it, this subject was tough. I was aware of the importance of chemistry, of the interest it presented. I knew that, directly or indirectly, it related to the other subjects of the natural sciences, but instead of being captivated by the composition or decomposition of bodies, by the laws of these processes, despite being so interesting, I felt attracted like a magnet to other subjects, by other fields.

When it came time for practical work in the chemistry lab, things changed a bit, because that was the theory put into practice. In practice, I understood things a little better; the theory, on the other hand, was nonsense to me. The laboratory of the Faculty of Chemistry was very poorly maintained, and let's not mention the creepy atmosphere of the large room, provided with only a few sinks, surmounted by taps rusted by time and from which flowed cold water. But the sinks themselves were cracked, blackened by acids, and seemed to have been there since the days of the French revolution. In this laboratory, an assistant, who stood near the benches with test tubes in front of him, gave you two or three of them, according to the practical work of the day, and poured into each of them several kinds of acids, gave you a sheet of paper and left you to your fate. We stood in front of a washbasin, we looked at the problem with the formulas written on the blackboard and we mixed the acids with the various substances in the test tube, observed the colours which appeared and concluded on the nature of the matter. To tell the truth, things were easier when Mom dyed wool for the socks she knitted for us for the winter, or when she coloured eggs for us. That I can assure you, but I need not assure you that this work seemed very arduous to me. I did make an effort, but not a great one, and that is why the results I obtained were mediocre.

It was different with zoology, with its academic courses and laboratory dissections. Zoology teachers accompanied their lessons with colour photos of animals, their limbs, their organs. They showed

us comparisons with human organs, they showed us the differences and the process of ageing that had taken place in them and showed the various organs of their bodies, and explained their functions.

The zoology laboratory was also interesting, there were always animals alive, or dead, preserved in phenol. I remember that at the time our teacher was an old, imbecilic, rich man who walked with the help of a cane which he always kept close to him. One day he also had at his side a container full of small and large frogs. Under the supervision of Professor d'Hérouville, the students plunged their hand in and fished out a frog which was then to be brought back to him carefully dissected, not as the butchers of the bridge over the Gjirokastra river did, who slaughtered the rams for a country party; it had to be presented to him on a tin tray with an open explanatory note. He would look at the dissection, the drawings, ask you a few questions and, if he was satisfied with your answer, raise his cane and give you a hit on the legs if you were tall, on the hips if you were short, adding: "you did a good job!" Otherwise, he wouldn't hit you. If he hit you, it was a good sign, if he didn't hit you, it was a bad sign. It was his quirk. We tossed the leftover frog shreds into a big tin box that reeked of phenol. I asked a friend:

"Do you know what happens to the frog remains?"

"We'll eat them in the form of carrots or cauliflowers, because we make fertilizer out of them, my friend," he told me. "You don't know much about agriculture it seems, whereas my father is a wine-grower."

When we dissected a dead dog or cat, the female students all ran out in disgust.

“I guess we are going to face this without them,” the professor would joke, “looks like the nurses have deserted from this battle!”

As if we boys enjoyed handling the dead cats that the guards picked up in the streets. Sometimes also the laboratory was empty, because, apparently, the animal kingdom showed itself to be cautious, guarded and hid to avoid the scalpels of the students.

So I followed, sometimes with zeal, sometimes without enthusiasm, these classes of the natural sciences, for which I had obtained my scholarship, but my passion for law, history and geography remained unchanged. Also, from time to time, I followed the courses of these subjects as a spectator and above all I continued to read to extend my culture as much as possible. Naturally, this took my time and prevented me from concentrating as I should have in the branch that had been assigned to me, so much so that my success in all my exams was compromised. I passed them with some hiccups, because when I succeeded in writing, I was sometimes flunked during the oral examination. In some subjects, botany for example, I had good results, in zoology I was passable, in physics and chemistry rather weak.

In France, lessons in the amphitheatres of the Faculties could be viewed by any student who wanted to, even if he was not a student of the class. Anyone could attend as a listener who had interest in that subject.

From time to time I used that privilege, I

mainly went to the law amphitheatre to listen to lectures on Roman law, civil law, on the problems of property and a series of other lessons recommended to me by my Albanian comrades enrolled in this Faculty. In these amphitheatres we also sometimes witnessed pranks. There was no register, nobody asked you who you were or where you came from. People entered, took their places, when the professor arrived, some got up, others didn't, some applauded, some others whistled or banged their fists on their benches. The professor was not disconcerted, he began to speak and did not stop, even in the event of a racket. In the amphitheatre you could sometimes hear people coughing rhythmically, but the professor remained indifferent and continued his lesson. Some who were bored left, alone or in the company of friends, boys or girls, in the middle of class. Even in such cases, the professor did not lose his calm, he continued to speak, waved to those who were leaving and the only thing he said to them was not to slam the door. He remained unfazed until the end of his lesson. When he heard the ringing of the bell, he put on his toque which accompanied his outfit and left. Whether we applauded or not, it didn't matter to him. The course had no questions and no answers, that is, no "practical work," as we call it today; there remained only what you learned yourselves in the lecture of the professor or the books written by others on the topic in the library.

At the Faculty of Letters and that of History and Geography things were different. In their courses, as in those of the Faculty of Law, students from other faculties could also attend, but they

were asked for their identification cards. Generally these courses, especially those of geography, were not frequented by many outside observers. A popular French saying goes that “we French don’t know the first thing about geography.”

I attended courses and conferences of literature, philosophy and history with interest. Although I had no exams to pass in these subjects, I listened attentively to these lessons, I understood them and I can say with conviction that, without aiming for a diploma, I acquired vast and valuable knowledge about the evolution of universal culture, particularly French, and on the various periods of the history of France and of the world. This knowledge, accumulated in these courses that I followed without being formally enrolled, but which absorbed the time that I should have devoted to the natural sciences assigned to me by our ministry, was of great help to me at the time already, but especially in my life as a revolutionary.

The analyses which were made of the various eras, of the events, of the authors, of the insurrections, of the ideas, of the political programs and, as a whole, of their philosophy, both at the Faculty of Philosophy and that of History, certainly had a bourgeois character, but often these analyses were carried out in a progressive perspective. The commentaries had an authentic background and the character was not distorted — neither of classical literature, nor of the era of the Enlightenment and the revolution, nor of the romantic, Parnassian era, nor of the various artistic trends, such as those of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Gide, etc.

In philosophy, whether it was French, English

or German philosophy, metaphysical and idealistic conceptions dominated. Marx and Marxism were ignored before Fichte, Klopstock, Durkheim, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, etc., or were analysed only summarily and just so that they could be refuted. But in groups of students, the question of Marxism was posed differently. In organized debates, conferences, meetings, and in cafés and workers' clubs, we went to listen to speakers, communists and workers, in their discussions with opponents of Marxism. These kinds of debates and polemics were most interesting, because everyone could ask questions, intervene, applaud, whistle, while drinking beer or wine in the smoke of cigarettes which formed a thick fog. Sometimes, we also witnessed police raids, because these debates occasionally ended in a fist fight. The police asked you for your papers, loaded those who had fought into their vans and drove them to the police station. Each time we went to meetings of this kind outside the University, we took care to take our passport and our student card with us.

The police intervened in various premises but not at the University, this being prohibited by law. Only in the case of serious offences, with the authorization of the rector, the authorities of justice could enter there to carry out their investigation, whereas in the case of demonstrations, minor spats and conferences which took place inside the University, the police were never authorized to intervene. There were occasional clashes in the street between the police and the students; after a good fight, the students locked themselves in the courtyard of the University, while the police could only



watch them from outside. They could do nothing against them, they were forbidden to enter.

We were forced to buy textbooks with our own money, which depleted our already very precarious budget. I frequented two libraries and I remember that there were no others in the whole city. One was the library of the University itself. As for the other, the municipal library, quite far from campus, it was located opposite the Esplanade. To get there, you had to follow a long street, like a kind of artery, which ran along the Hospital, went up the avenue separating the Garden of the Plants from the School of Medicine, came out on the "Promenade du Peyrou" and the Arch de Triomphe of Montpellier, built in honour of Louis XIV, which went down the Foch street onto Lodging street and ended at the "Egg." It was built in the 19th century style, with a large gate, a large staircase, with iron railings beautifully wrought by local craftsmen. Having passed through the main door, one entered a vestibule, with walls covered with books locked in glass cabinets, from which one entered the reading room, itself full of occupied tables and where complete silence reigned. In the middle, as in the Faculties, stood a pulpit, behind which sat a scholar. At the back of the room are were the librarians. Having been given his book, the student settled down in silence in the room and began to read. If anyone needed an explanation, he got up and went to ask the scholar. When he was able to answer the question, he did it immediately, if not, he wrote down the name of a professor and showed you a door on one side of the room and he said "go there!" We entered a salon, where we found this

gentleman, who gave you all the explanations required. I will remember this library for its order, its tranquillity and its very kind, knowledgeable and helpful teachers.

We went there very often with Sotir Angjeli, an excellent comrade of mine, placid, honest and studious. He had a particular taste for the natural sciences, and was interested in almost nothing else. It was even I who read the news to him from the newspaper and explained it to him. A real “man of observational sciences,” as we thought then. If someone who devotes himself to social sciences needs a knowledge, even a basic one, of the natural sciences, it makes sense a man of the sciences of observation must be endowed with a culture sufficient in the humanities, politics, etc. Sotir and I had been in the same class in the Lyceum, we had finished it together, we had gone together to Montpellier where our friendship only grew stronger. We returned to our country at different times and took, more or less, different directions in life. He became a teacher, and one of the best, at the preparatory school in Tirana. I was first appointed as a teacher in Tirana, then in Korça. Then the Resistance started and I joined the struggle. Sotir did not join the armed struggle, but nevertheless remained on the side of the people, always honest, simple and a devoted anti-fascist. After Liberation, he became a professor, and one of the best in the country at his post at the University of Tirana. He was so modest and shy that he never asked for a favour from me, or even asked to visit. I asked him to come over two or three times and eventually he came to see me, and we kissed on the cheek. I questioned him,

asked his opinion on the subsequent development of our University. I took a great interest in him when I learned that he was suffering from a serious illness, and was dismayed to learn of his untimely death. But let us get back to the years we were students in Montpellier. He was then staying in a room near the municipal library. Usually, I picked him up at his house and we went to the library together.

We frequented each other a lot, we lent each other money until our last franc, we studied together and even attended dance lessons together! He was small in stature and we laughed when he happened to dance with a “lady” taller than him.

One incident we discussed when we reunited, the beginning of which made us laugh, but the end of which made us bitter.

Sotir and I decided one evening to go to the Municipal Theatre to see “Les Cloches de Corneville.” It was the first time in our life that we went to the opera. We entered the building and gazed with curiosity at the grand horseshoe staircase, the walls hung with mirrors, the floor covered with red carpet, the purple velvet armchairs, etc., all in the style of 19th century theatres. The first act finished, we got up and went to the foyer. We each lit a cigarette and walked around looking at the paintings and ornaments on the walls, but were struck by the fact that many people seemed to be staring at us.

“Oh I see why they are staring at us, they are simply fascinated, they have never seen a man as short as you are!” I said to Sotir, half-jokingly, but half-concerned about all the attention we seemed to be getting.

“Don’t worry about them,” Sotir replied, “if they want to look at us, it’s not like we can stop them!”

He hadn’t finished speaking when a police officer appeared in front of us and said:

“Put out your cigarettes, don’t you know it’s forbidden to smoke in the foyer?”

I threw away my cigarette and put it out. Sotir was a little slow in making the same gesture and said to the agent:

“*Okay, okay*” but he had a certain frustration in his voice. The other, offended, came up to us and said:

“Give us your documents!”

He took out his notebook and took note of Sotir’s name, address and place of study. He was ticketed. I intervened and said to the officer:

“Mr. Officer, you have to excuse us, it’s the first time we’ve been to this theatre and we didn’t know the rules!

“We don’t speak with that tone to the authorities here in France like this individual just did,” he replied, staring at me harshly.

Sotir protested:

“I didn’t say anything to insult you.”

“Speak to me one more time without the due respect owed to an officer of the law and things will end badly,” replied the officer, and shortly after he left.

“*Death to the pigs!*” I said laughing to Sotir to cheer him up, remembering Crainquebille’s cry in Anatole France’s famous short story.

We had completely forgotten this incident, when, ten days later, Sotir received a summons for

contempt of public force. We both set to work preparing his defence, three typewritten pages. On the appointed day, Sotir with his “plea” in his pocket and me as a witness, if I was accepted, went to court. The antechamber preceding the room was full, surely of defendants like Sotir. From the room we heard the names being called. When his name got called, we both got up to enter. One of the judges asked:

“Who is Sotir Angjeli?”

“I am” replied Sotir

“And you?” he said turning to me. “You have to wait until your name is called.”

“I am his witness!” I explained to him.

“Get out! We don’t need a witness!” he said, looking at me and pointing to the door.

After barely five minutes after I left Sotir reappeared. What a quick trial. I questioned him:

“What just happened?”

The judge asked me my identity. He told me that I had insulted a law enforcement officer. I took the sheets we had prepared out of my pocket, and as soon as I started to read the first few words, he asked me:

“What are you holding?”

“My defence,” I replied.

“Put it back in your pocket, we don’t have time to hear your sob story. You have been fined five francs!” and the judge shouted, “next!” “That was the whole trial!” Sotir exclaimed, concluding his story, then, apparently offended that no one had listened to his argument, he said to me:

“A five francs fine! They made us come all the way here for so little! I’m going to go back to the

theatre, I will light a cigarette again and I'll do the same thing to this officer!"

The situation soon came back for him. A few days later, a policeman knocked on Sotir's door and handed him the bill for the costs of the trial: one hundred francs! The fine, it was true, had only been 5 francs, but to this sum were added 95 francs for the legal costs which he absolutely had to pay if he did not want to be sent to prison! The unfortunate Sotir was forced to pay this sum. For what? Simply because he had said to an agent "Okay, okay" in a rude tone.

We were regular visitors to a restaurant located in the street that led to the station, Maguelone street, if I remember correctly, and we ate our meals there, at noon and in the evening. It was a small restaurant with an oblong room, simple and with some eight tables for four customers each, separated in the middle by a narrow corridor. A single boy did all the jobs a waiter did. The boss was a very good man, placid and honest. He sought to satisfy us and we paid him regularly as soon as we received our scholarship. We were four or five Albanians eating meals there. Apart from us, it was frequented by Turkish, Iraqi and Saudi Arabian students. I remember the names of some of them, Nesim, Kamel, Ahmet, Teufik. There were also some from Lebanon and Palestine, and even some Syrians, like Fuad, Namik and others whose names I have forgotten. We were like family there, very close comrades, at university and in extra-curricular life. Apart from us, students, some travellers came there from time to time who wanted to eat

cheaply. We often went with the foreign students to play belote in a café and, if we didn't have any money, they were the ones who offered us the coffee; when they were the ones who were stiff, which was less frequent (because they received a much larger sum, almost double ours), we were the ones who paid. They were all very kind, honest and straightforward, though they might have been sons of merchants or landowners. They arrived from Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, boxes full of oranges, figs and packaged dates. They never failed to offer us a bag of dates, figs or big oranges from Palestine or Lebanon. We also knew students from Egypt, Algeria and other Arab nations, but did not communicate as well with them and associated with them less. Who knows what became of all these boys, what path they took and what ideology they embraced!

The French generally don't drink water at the table, but wine, "pinard," as some people said, whereas we, Albanians, mainly drank water. Only when we received our scholarship payments did we take a bottle of wine and we always invited the boss and the waiter to join. The French in general eat very little bread inside restaurants, whereas we Albanians ate a lot. The owner of the restaurant had got to know our habits and he adjusted our portions accordingly.

Always, at noon, we laughed with the waiter who had become like our brother. Before we arrived for lunch, he would set the cutlery, place a basket full of white bread in the middle of the tables. As soon as we were seated, François, the waiter, arrived, asking us what we were going to

have, and by the time he had to go to the kitchen to get the dishes, the bread had disappeared from the basket. When he placed the plates in front of us, we tugged on his white jacket and said to him:

“François, you are young, how did you lose your memory? You forgot to bring us bread!”

Laughing, he replied:

“There, in that basket, what was there? Chestnut candies?” yet he still always brought us a new basket of bread.

During all the time I spent in Montpellier, I ate almost all my meals in this little restaurant; I couldn't leave him, and there was a reason for that: we didn't eat badly and the boss gave us credit, because sometimes our scholarship payments took two or three months to arrive. It was the time when, in Albania, civil servants sometimes went up to eight months without receiving their salary. We cashed our cheques in a small bank which took a 10-15 franc fee on every 1,000 francs we received.

I only went to the theatre two or three times, but many other comrades didn't go there ever because the tickets were expensive. On the other hand, we went to see each new film that came out. There were only three movie theatres in town, at least to my knowledge, and they were all centrally located. One of them was bigger and the tickets cost a bit more there. There, of course, we took tickets for the very first rows being the worst seats, whereas in the two other cinemas, which were in the same street, the prices of seats were more affordable. For the latter two, the comrades sometimes also found us a special discount card sold by the shops, thanks to which we paid only half the



price, but only on the second or fifth day after the film's release and in the early hours of the afternoon, when there weren't many spectators. The cinemas in Montpellier were always full, but the most popular showings were those at eight o'clock in the evening. Leaving the cinema, those who had money went to have supper in restaurants which served choice dishes; as for us, poor students, we took a walk before going home to bed.

I also followed football games, but not very regularly. When I attended a match, it was a Hungarian footballer, a centre forward from the Montpellier football club, who always gifted me a ticket. He was one of the best players in the team, his name was Pishta. Pishta lived in the same building as me. We got to know each other, we soon became friends and, for each match, he always made sure to slip an envelope with a ticket inside my post box at the foot of our building's staircase. Not once did he forget to do it. I was never a football fanatic, but I wholeheartedly supported Montpellier and when Pishta scored a goal, as he did often, I applauded my heart out.

When the weather warmed up in June, before returning to Albania for the holidays, on Sundays, when there was good weather, we went with comrades to Palavas beach. It was quite close to Montpellier, less than three-quarters of an hour, and connected to the city by a train which did not go more than 20 to 25 kilometres an hour. It started off slow as a tortoise, emerged on a plain, crossed a few small villages and finally arrived at Palavas, whose station looked like a tin shed, where you could take shelter when it started to rain. The sand

was not bad there, but without comparison with the golden sand of our beaches, which I had never seen with my eyes at that time. I had been to Vlora and Durrës when I was at school, but not to the beach. That of Palavas was surrounded by a few huts, like the little houses which the merchants of Tirana had built on the beach of Durres. Only in Palavas, there was a casino and, below the building, a dance hall, where we went, after taking a bath, to drink an orangeade and dance until the train came back, because there was no hotel to spend the night. Palavas included, all and all, two streets. Between the two stretched a channel about five feet wide which filled with water from the sea and into which entered the fishing boats and a few boats which needed to be repaired. This is where I entered the water for the first time, of course, kicking and gasping for air with my comrades, because we didn't know how to swim. We therefore did not stray from the edge, we advanced as far as we could on foot and quickly retraced our steps for fear of drowning. The second year we learned to float on the water. I remember that one day when, unfortunately, the sea was rough, I went a little over the edge and, despite my efforts to get back to shore, the water dragged me down. I called for help from a French comrade who was on the beach and he came to rescue me from this situation.

The station in Montpellier that connected to Palavas was a small building, but a charming one, at the entrance of an avenue leading to the Esplanade. This was crisscrossed by paths lined with trees, with benches. From each side started adjacent paths. There were students, common people,

lovers, women walking their babies in strollers. The Esplanade and the Promenade du Peyrou were the only beautiful parks in the city, but without many flowers, with small box trees and especially large trees. Anyway, they were the favourite places of the townspeople. The students, after having made two or three turns at the "Egg," went to the Esplanade which was not very far away. There, in spring and early summer, a fair was held. Set up on one side of the broad alley were wooden booths adorned with neon signs, and where candy, toys and small handicrafts were sold. There was also a shooting range where you could win a ball, a bottle of liquor, or some other object if you hit a bullseye. We Albanian students often went shooting, and it must be said that we were among the best, we never left without a bottle of wine, a packet of cookies or sweets. Each stand had its music, its radio or its gramophone, and all these songs played at the same time. At the time, we simply didn't care about it but it was a deafening cacophony. Despite everything, we walked with pleasure among the lights, we looked at the stands with their ornaments, we heard the songs of films reproduced on discs, we laughed and made some jokes. This fair, if I'm not mistaken, lasted a fortnight and, for the entire city as for us, the students, it was an event.

At one end of the Esplanade stood a wall which marked the end of the Esplanade and from which one could descend, if one wished, by taking a stone staircase and coming out on another street along a river which was called the "Verdanson." This detail stuck in my memory because we were passing through there to reach an alley where an old friend

of mine from the Lyceum, Shkupi from Kosova, lived in a furnished room. He was an excellent friend, quiet, honest, older than me. I really liked his company. Whatever he did, dozens of times a day he lifted his glasses which came down to the tip of his nose.

“Pick up your glasses, Shefqet,” I told him, “because they’re going to fall on the floor and you don’t have enough money to buy more!”

Everything at the time, especially for us students, was expensive, but luckily we were young and didn’t have to spend a penny on a doctor. When we had a headache, French comrades like Roncant or the Greek Thano, both studying medicine, came to see us. As for Shefqet, he was studying law and, on his return to Albania, he was appointed judge. He did not participate in the National Liberation War, but sided with the people and, until his retirement, worked in the court of Vlora. He sends me his wishes for my birthday every year.

From the stone steps of the Esplanade we would walk across a flat expanse, towards a small river connected to a small pond. At the water’s edge stood a café with a phonograph; there were also rowboats for rent. Two or three of us would take one and row a few laps.

Such were our “amusements and distractions” at Montpellier. The Promenade du Peyrou, built in the 17th century, played an important role in the city. It really was a splendid promenade, tastefully designed, with white walls made of beautiful stones, and a large gate with artfully chiselled iron grilles. In the middle of the central aisle, on a large

pedestal, stands the statue of Louis XIV. According to what the students told me, the sculptor of the statue had committed suicide after the inauguration because he had forgotten to equip the horse with stirrups so that the king's legs hung down like those of Sancho Panca.

At the entrance to the Promenade stood, like a guard tower, a very beautiful monument, full of grace, which was accessed by a staircase in white and monumental stones. It was a water tower. The water was provided by an imposing aqueduct, 800 to 900 metres long, also built of white stone, with two floors of arcades superimposed over it in the style typical of the period that can be seen all across France. In this promenade filled with large centuries-old plane trees, the water tower and the aqueduct formed a superb ensemble. Similar plane trees were planted not only on the main promenade, but also on both sides of the street leading to it.

We frequented the Promenade du Peyrou, not only to walk there, but also to study in the shade of the trees and at the edge of the gardens surrounded by artfully forged railings.

At the Faculty of Medicine, each year at the beginning of the course, the famous march of the students was organized, which made us cross "Pins street," the great gate of Peyrou and traverse the streets which led to the Arc de Triomphe. It was a joyful demonstration, made up of songs, dances, instruments, whistles, old traditional songs, songs from the bourgeois revolution, full of wit and flavour, interspersed with insults addressed to the police and the authorities. The joyous hubbub which filled Foch street descended into Loge street and

the procession stopped there, at the house of Roudelet, where Rabelais once lived, an illustrious figure in the town's medical school. From Loge street, the students marched on to the main theatre where the students would dance, do the farandole and act in a rowdy way. The especially rebellious climbed the monument of the Three Graces and they would kiss the lips of the statue, caress their breasts and make other more scandalous gestures. This continued until late at night. The police never intervened, this demonstration being a centuries-old sacred tradition of the students. The authorities claimed that they organized the march in order to initiate them into the tradition and to encourage them to have school pride.

This old university town was the hometown of the philosopher Auguste Comte, founder of positivism, Cambacérès, legislator of Napoleon, one of the main writers of the French Civil Code, the poet Valéry, who was born in Sète, where he had first met André Gide and other famous writers.

I was very fond of painting, and I often went to visit the art museum which included the works of the greatest names of the Montpellierian art world of the past century and the most illustrious was François Xavier Fabre. Many famous paintings I had only heard of were presented there. I had a special love for Corot and the brilliance of his colouring, the simplicity of his style, pure and rich in sentiment both in landscapes and in portraits. I also liked Gustave Courbet's warm paintings, for his plains with their mills in the distance and their shadows from which the scent of the meadow grass exhaled, with their hard-working peasant women

nearby. I was very fond of his realistic paintings of himself and his many patrons. I admired the works of this realist painter, first of all, naturally, because they were of great beauty, but also because Courbet had been a revolutionary, and had even been prosecuted and interned by the reactionary government of Thiers for having participated in the Paris Commune. I contemplate with delight his beautiful works which I especially loved at the time, *Baigneuses* and *Baudelaire*.

This museum also contained many famous paintings and sculptures, notably the *Women of Algiers* by Delacroix. There were Dutch paintings from the Flemish school, busts made by Houdon, the sculptor of the famous bust of Voltaire.

Each time that exhibitions of paintings and sculptures opened in Montpellier, I went to visit them and learned how to observe them. They broadened my horizons, developed my feelings and helped me better understand and enjoy the social and cultural life of a people with such a rich and varied civilization.

Once, I visited the remains of Maguelone, destroyed by the Franks of Charles Martel. I stayed there on the ruins, by the sea, south of Montpellier, an important city of the Middle Ages, built on the ruins of an old cathedral, and at those times I tried to imagine the wars of Charles Martel, of Pépin and Bref, the repression of the Saracens and, in turn, other episodes of the French Middle Ages. I saw Aigues-Mortes, the largest port-city of the French High Middle Ages, entirely surrounded by ramparts. It was there, if I am not mistaken, that Saint-Louis embarked for Egypt and Tunis, where he was

taken prisoner by the Arabs during one of his expeditions.

I also visited in barely twenty-four hours Nîmes, birthplace of Alphonse Daudet, the “Maison Carrée” and the arenas, two structures built by the Romans when they occupied Gaul. They are very well preserved monuments. At the bullring, I witnessed a bullfight with death. It was the first time that I had seen such a fight with my own eyes and I had been encouraged to do so by reading a recent novel “Blood and Sand.”<sup>1</sup>

But I was very interested in literature and I spent part of my scholarship on buying books. I tried to read novels that critics called progressive, but I also read and reread the classics in the university library. There was also recent literature. I bought “L’Humanité” every day, and “Le Canard enchaîné” every week. I read the other newspapers at the café, notably the “Dépêche de Toulouse,” “le Temps,” etc. I bought papers from the press organs of organizations of all kinds, of all different currents, from each province and for each branch of the economy, which was a vast field in France. I cast a glance at the headlines, events of foreign policy or on some sensational fact in the life of the country. I sometimes bought “Les Nouvelles littéraires,” a weekly literature review, but it was expensive.

There was a bookstore in Montpellier which rented books at very low prices on condition that they were not damaged. I had the trust of the shopkeeper and I always returned books spotless. To-

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<sup>1</sup> A book by Blasco Ibanez.



day I have in my library old books and new ones, which I pass through my hands so many times. Despite everything, they are in perfect condition, like new, except that the pages of some of them are yellowed by time.

So I benefited a lot from my readings. I judged, with advanced maturity for my age, the important international events: I became aware of the ferocity of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat and of the oppression imposed on it. I was in France when Hitler seized power in Germany. These were serious moments that we students judged as such. We followed the press and saw clearly that fascism and nazism were arming themselves, that they were preparing for war, that they were indulging in provocations. The French fascist leagues raised their banners, the governments of the time financed them, supported them, pushed them against the French Communist Party and the progressive elements. In the press, the hypocrisies and designs of the pseudo-democratic French, British and American governments were revealed. The statements by then French Prime Minister Albert Sarraut that France would not allow Strasbourg to be exposed to the threat of German forces when Hitler occupied the Rhineland without firing a shot, thus tearing up the Treaty of Versailles, were nothing more than a joke.

The Western “democracies” and the United States of America had financed revanchist Germany, invested heavily into Krupp, helping establish Hitler’s fascist dictatorship to launch him into a war against the Soviet Union.

In France, and especially in Montpellier, the

field was freely and widely open to me to initiate myself to Marxism-Leninism, to better understand the struggle and life in the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin. The section of the French Communist Party in Montpellier had a special kiosk where books and pamphlets on Marx, Engels, Lenin, speeches by Stalin, etc. were sold. It contained, in pamphlets, commentaries that the Party itself wrote in a very comprehensible way, because it prepared them for the workers and the simple communists, and, necessarily, they were just as useful, even indispensable, for me, a young student with a communist heart. I generally bought these publications, because the party sold them cheaply, and, moreover, when I managed to frequent the workers' clubs run by the FCP, many other relatively short works were given to me free of charge and I then studied diligently. When I came across problems that I did not understand, I went to the kiosk to ask for explanations. The newsagent didn't have time to give them to me, but he gave me the address of a hidden café in the suburbs and said:

“Go over there, ask to see Comrade Marcel and ask him to explain to you, he is a Party propagandist!”

I ended up reading these kind of publications regularly, frequenting the workers' clubs, the debates that took place there and, thanks to all this, day by day I was getting better acquainted with this science which was to become for me a goal in life and to which I placed above the other sciences of the University. I thus began to grasp the edged weapon of the revolutionary struggle. I made contact, as a reader, with many members of the French

Communist Party. One day, Marcel said to me:

“Tomorrow the book of Politzer will be distributed for sale, the famous philosophy professor at the Workers’ University opened by the Party in Paris.”

I asked him, “what branch of the Party are you a member of?”

“No,” he replied.

Perhaps he didn’t come forward, because he didn’t know me well, but he still recommended that I get Politzer’s “Elementary Principles of Philosophy,” adding: “You tell me what you think” by which he meant, “you will see how rich, simple and comprehensible it is.”

He also gave me another piece of advice:

“At the end of each chapter, Politzer poses questions that the reader must answer themselves. If the book asks you to write down your answer, it is very beneficial to do so.”

The next day I went to buy the works of this “Poltizer” at the Communist Party kiosk. I began to read and reread each chapter. What a wonderful book! I had acquired quite a bit of knowledge in Marxist philosophy, but I can say that Politzer’s systematic, clear and comprehensible presentation of Marxist laws and theory as a whole opened my eyes even wider, made me understand more deeply the struggle of Marx against the Owenites, the theories of Ricardo and the other idealist philosophers and economists, of whom I heard glowing praise during the lectures held in the amphitheatres of the University. I understood more clearly the lies, the distortions, the falsifications indulged in by the bourgeoisie and its lackeys to deceive the working

class and defend the current order of oppression and exploitation.

I studied Marx's "Manifesto" and "The Civil War in France" more seriously and in more detail. I learned even more about the ferocities of the bourgeoisie, about the horrors of Thiers and Marshal Galliffet, the assassins of the Communards, I understood better what the Paris Commune and the Communards stood for, who launched themselves into making revolution. Everything I learned I attached to my Homeland, to my unhappy but never subjugated people. For me, who loved history so much, reading about Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin's speeches and the French Communist Party's pamphlets made my interpretation and study of it more serious and clarified it in my mind. Now not only was the hostility we must have felt for the monarchy and Zogu more clearly apparent to me, but my eyes and my mind were clear of certain severe illusions which had clouded my view of what we should do, of which way we should fight and what must be acted upon when we win.

Particularly in 1932 and 1933 my passion for the human sciences became a permanent necessity and duty. During this phase, the public activity of the FCP itself became ever more animated and, at the same time as I followed this action, I constantly enriched my mind with the works of various authors which would help me to fully understand and comprehend the theories of Marx.

These studies further diverted my attention from those formally assigned to me. I don't mean that I did not care about them; I continued my efforts and passed a few exams well, but failed some

others. In the end, in my heart of hearts, I had made a decision: I would study more thoroughly the subjects for which I had the most aptitude. Thus I would serve my country, and perhaps I would even help lead it one day. The Albania of that time needed light, progress and a clear vision of its future in all fields, in all branches of science and all other activities. But above all, I thought, she had an urgent and indispensable need to find the right way forward to settle the essential questions of her political and social development. I cannot say that, therefore, I defined political action as the main goal of my life, nor did I see very clearly what I would do and how I would do it in the future. What, on the other hand, seemed more than obvious to me was the fact that my Homeland was languishing under a hated regime and that this regime had to be abolished. I knew very well that the winds of change had begun to blow towards Albania, that new forces of progress and social development, the workers and the revolutionary communists, were preparing, organizing themselves. With the knowledge I had acquired, I thought, I would know how to side with them, campaign with them and help them with all my ability and with all my might. I came to this conclusion especially when, at the beginning of 1934, my scholarship was finally suspended. It was a heavy blow, because I had no means of subsistence. But even after that, I was determined to continue my efforts to find some way to complete my higher education. However, there was one point on which I already knew: if I wanted to graduate and get my diploma, I would no longer try to obtain it in the natural sciences which had

been assigned to me against my will.

During these three years of study in Montpellier, I learned a lot of things both inside the University and outside of it, and I considered that knowledge I gained as a degree in the real world. Unbeknownst to my comrades, but not to Sotir Angjeli, I went two or three times a week to Marcel's bar, where I became a regular customer. There were always construction workers and other branches of industry, and the discussion was going well and without reluctance to criticize their employers. Marcel commented on the editorial of "l'Humanité," and answered the questions put to him. I learned at the bar when and where debates took place with delegates from the French Communist Party and other parties. I followed these debates which generally took place in workers' clubs. They were filled with listeners from both sides and the room was shrouded with a fog of tobacco smoke, the love of which disregarded all ideological lines. They were very interesting conferences and debates. I was introduced there to the manner of posing problems, I saw how the oratorical jousting of the speakers unfolded and how their speeches were accompanied, according to the approval or the disapproval which they aroused, by applause, whistles, pounding of fists on the benches and the occasional punch thrown. A ruckus and a cacophony that I had never heard before. Sometimes, as I said before, the meeting degenerated into a real brawl. I partook in some of them. But I learned and was at the same time surprised by the eloquence of these speakers who had no paper in front of them, by their ease of elocu-

tion. One of them spoke, another interrupted him, yet another asked a question and the first, with astonishing presence of mind, answered without hesitation and picked up the thread of his speech just at the point where we cut him off.

“They are so sharp with their words!” I thought to myself and admired them for everything they knew and said, but sometimes I wondered, “Don’t they talk too much? Should all this time be dedicated to speeches and debates? Where is the action?”

“The day of action will come,” said a mason to me one day, who was close to me during one of these debates. “The issue for us is to know Marxism, its dialectic, then when the time for action occurs, we will know precisely what to do.”

On two or three occasions a group of Bulgarian students took the initiative to organize some meetings with all of us Balkan students. I asked a few Albanian comrades:

“Do you want to go?”

“Have you lost your mind!” they replied. “The Ministry of Public Instruction will be accuse of being communists.”

“Well,” I tell them, “so I guess we’re not going.”

In secret I decided to attend. The meetings went very well, they all discussed the problems of their respective countries. I also spoke. The speeches were imbued with a spirit of progress, but were not of a particularly communist nature. Despite everything, these meetings ceased because it was necessary to obtain the authorization of the police, and we refused.

There I met, among others, two Greek students, who were studying medicine. One of them, whose name was Thano (or Thanas), was in his fifth year and an intern at the hospital in the psychiatry ward. I bonded with him. Fair-haired, of short stature, he was kind and frank. I liked him and a good friendship bloomed.

“Thano,” I told him, “if you weren’t blonde, but black-haired and if you were a little bit taller, I would say you are an Albanian from Suli. You are a son of Foto Xhavella, Kollokotron and Bubulina, who heroically participated in the Greek revolution of Ypsilanti’s era.”

Thano laughed and answered me with the verses:

*“You, Albanians, always so proud,  
With your sabres and scimitars,  
You, Albanians, of ancient stock,  
What have you done to break the chains of Ali Pa-  
sha of Tepelena?”*

He had invited me two or three times to dinner at the psychiatric hospital. When he came to the café, Thano also brought with him a “cured” mental patient, but who was not allowed to partake in wine, because the alcohol would make them relapse to their old ways. After having his coffee, once a patient said to Thano:

“May I go out and get some fresh air, I would like to see what they have at the newsstand.”

Thano allowed him to do so, but nearby there was a bar, and the patient almost immediately entered and proceeded to drink two large glasses of beer which intoxicated him. A commotion ensued:



“Maurice!” Thano yelled. “Come on, Enver, we have to bring him back to the hospital, he’s been drinking!” We rushed, explained what happened to the bartender, paid for the drinks and apologized to him, explaining that Maurice was mentally ill.

Between us Albanian students, there were never quarrels nor any animosity; in spite of everything, we formed friend groups according to our political sympathies. Eqrem Hado, two comrades from Shkodër and I, made up one of these friend groups and we enjoyed each other’s company. Then there was the Korçan clan, made up of aristocrats and the wealthy, like Aleko Turtulli, Thimaq Ballauri and others, who looked down on us and spent their days playing poker. Niko Gliozheni was simpler and more democratic. Sometimes he stayed with the Korçans, sometimes with us. We called Thimaq Ballauri the duke and that flattered him, because the French men and women heard us and turned to look at him. He was tall and stocky with a horse-like face and a hooked nose, he dressed well and looked handsome. When the notorious informant Foto Bala came to where we were meeting, we were silent, we stopped talking about politics.

The third year that I spent in Montpellier, in May or June 1933, if I am not mistaken, an Albanian inspector from our Ministry of Public Instruction arrived. His name was Kromiqi (not to be confused with his brother, Professor Kurrizo). He told us that he had been to the University, had learned about Albanian students and that what he had been told about us was on the whole satisfactory.

It had been three months since we had received our scholarship payments and we were eating and

drinking on credit. We were in severe debt. One afternoon, this education inspector, with his wife, invited us Albanian students to the “Café Riche” claiming to want to know us and talk to us. We rejoiced, because we were convinced that he had brought with him the cheques we were owed. We greeted him, shook his hand and sat down around him to listen to what he was going to say to us. He in fact repeated to us the few words which I reported above. After he was done with this subject, he proceeded to give us propaganda for Zogu: “You must be faithful to him, because he is our leader, no matter where you are, you must hate and fight communism, otherwise you risk not only seeing your scholarship cancelled, but even ending up in prison.” Zogu’s inspector was even threatening us with jail, but his words went in one ear and out the other. Shortly after we were seated, the waiter came to ask us what we would have. We looked at the inspector and his wife who had ordered ice creams and, after hesitating for a moment at the thought that they were too expensive, but telling ourselves that really it was he who had invited us and that he was therefore going to be the one footing the bill, we all ordered some.

Once the inspector had finished his little speech, Eqrem Hado stood up and said:

“Mr. Kromiqi, it’s been three months since you sent us our scholarship payments and we don’t have anything to eat, most of us are on the verge of eviction, so we hope that if you came here from the ministry, you might have a solution to the issue of payments.”

The inspector, without any emotion in his

voice, answered him:

“I didn’t bring you your payments because that’s not my job. The reason I am here is to go to Paris, Toulouse, Lyon and elsewhere, where there are Albanian students and do my inspection work.”

My blood boiled, as they say, and I spoke up:

“Mister Inspector, then, according to you, our economic situation in a foreign country is a subject that does not interest the travelling inspection of a man of your position? Who else more competent than you, Inspector of the Ministry of Public Instruction, can we address?”

“The best thing you can do is go directly to the head of the department. My only mission is to report on the situation that I mentioned to you,” replied the inspector without the slightest embarrassment.

Another comrade, who was an excellent student and was to graduate that year, so nothing could be done to discipline him, intervened:

“Ministers and their deputies regularly receive their copious salaries, while they leave us without eating.”

The inspector, whom we had pushed to his limits and whom we watched angrily, replied:

“My boy, think before you speak when you talk about our ministers and deputies, you run the risk of seeing your scholarship revoked.”

“You only have to send us the funds right away!” one interrupted. “These students would have a much better opinion of these gentlemen if we were given what is owed to us.”

The atmosphere was tense, and the inspector, to get out of this situation, resorted to threats:

“I will immediately send a report to Tirana for your spirit of indiscipline.”

“For what?” I interjected. “You consider the fact that we want what we were promised indiscipline on our part?”

“Waiter!” called out the inspector. “How much for two ice creams?” (in other words, his and his wife’s) and he held out to the waiter a 100 franc bill.

Eqrem Hado stepped in and said to the waiter:

“He must be mistaken, the gentleman will pay for all of our orders.”

This despicable man, knowing that we were penniless, came from Albania and, not content with not bringing us our needed payments, invited us to coffee and did not even pay for our ice cream. We knew the waiter well and he only returned five francs out of the hundred he had received. Kromiqi widened his eyes and asked:

“What do you mean? Our two ice creams cost ninety-five francs?”

“It’s the price of all the orders at the table,” replied the waiter.

“I will only pay for two ice creams, mine and my wife’s.”

“For the other orders, who will pay for them?” asked the waiter.

“Those who consumed them,” replied the king’s representative.

The boy replied “I know these students, they are honest young people, but they have no money. You will pay,” and he walked away.

The furious inspector’s face turned bright red and he said to his wife:

“Come on, let’s get out of here!”

He didn't even extend his hand to us, just gave us a nod and left the café. We never saw him again. We went to shake hands with the waiter, who said to us:

*"I immediately knew that guy was giving you a hard time, what a bastard."*

Eventually the payments were sent. As far as I am concerned, my scholarship was cancelled because I had not passed certain natural science exams and, contrary to the order of the ministry, I had followed the courses of the Faculty of Law that year and not the one to which I had been assigned. The payments began to arrive towards the end of 1933, and after I was told that mine was cancelled, I began to think of ways to save money. I ate less, I no longer went to the café, very rarely to the cinema and, as for the newspapers, it was my comrades who lent them to me. In the meantime, I thought about looking for a job to be able to continue my studies and I used my soles to run left and right, but without success. So, with the small savings I held and after I had received my scholarship payment for the last month, I decided to leave for Paris. There, I had Albanian comrades and I thought they would help me find a job, just to be able to live and continue my studies, this time at the Sorbonne.

I withdrew the certificates of certain exams in which I had passed, an attestation that I had regularly attended the first year courses of the Faculty of Law and thus left Montpellier for Paris with 1,500 francs in my pocket. I was going to Paris in the hope of finding some kind of work there and continuing to study and broaden my horizons. So I

left Montpellier, which I loved very much and which I still remember fondly today; I left with a heavy heart, disappointed and concerned about my immediate future, but also with some faint hope of finding a job and completing my studies. If I returned to Albania without a diploma, I would not get a job and would go hungry. I decided to make one last attempt.

## IV

### PARIS

I had already visited Paris the first year of my arrival in France, I was invited for a few days by friends who were studying there. On that occasion, I visited the Colonial Exhibition with them and also some famous places, such as Versailles, the Louvre, the Invalides and the Panthéon, some famous roads and neighbourhoods like the Champs-Élysées and the boulevard Saint-Michel, the Concorde, the Latin Quarter and Montparnasse. During those days I stayed in the apartment of Abaz Omari, the son of my first cousin, who was then studying in Paris. Later, when the Liberation War began, we called upon him to join us in the fight against the occupier, but he joined the “Balli,” fought against the people and ended up being captured by our strength and got the punishment that he deserved.

This time I was going to Paris under different conditions, I was no longer a student invited by friends for a visit, but a young Albanian forced by circumstances to go to the French capital in search of opportunities to live and study. Now I was more mature, endowed with a broader horizon, but with empty pockets! I hoped that my comrades would help me find a job in a factory or anywhere else so that I could continue my law studies and take a course in historical and social sciences at the Sorbonne. I got off very early at the Gare de Lyon, left my suitcase at the left-luggage office and took the metro to get to Boulevard Saint-Michel, in the

Latin Quarter. There I had to find comrades, especially Qemal Karagjozi and Remzi Fico. I had Qemal's address, he lived at the Hôtel Monsieur le Prince.

As it was early, I sat down at a small café named "Dupont" on Boulevard Saint-Michel and ordered a café crème and a few croissants, thinking to myself:

"Take it easy on your spending, because you'll be left penniless." But I was hungry. From Montpellier to Paris I had only eaten half a pound of bread and a piece of camembert which I had bought when I left.

The boulevard was starting to come alive, the students were coming out, so I got up and headed for the Hôtel Monsieur le Prince. A beautiful hotel, indeed! It acquired its imposing name from the street where it was located, but its appearance inside was miserable.

I approached the front desk where the landlady was standing, a fat old woman with a puffy face and greying hair.

"Who do you want to see?" she demanded of me.

"A student who lives here, his name is Qemal Karagjozi."

She glanced at the board where the keys were hung and replied:

"Go up to the fourth floor, to this number, he'll be in there." I climbed the stairs two steps at a time, very happy I knocked on Qemal's door and immediately heard his voice, which I knew well. He shouted in French:

"What do you want, who are you?"



I replied in Albanian:

“Open, Qemal, it’s me, Enver.”

I heard his voice from inside.

“Hey! I am glad to see you, it has been a while,” then he opened the door and we kissed.

I sat on his bed and told him my story.

“Don’t worry,” he told me, “we’ll work something out one way or another.”

Qemal was the son of Halim Karagjozi. His father and uncle were wealthy ranchers. Younger than me, he had been to the Lyceum in Gjirokastra, then to Korça National Lyceum, where we had become friends. Qemal was not only a good comrade, very modest, but also animated by progressive ideas, and even ones that were communist.

“Have you had anything for breakfast?”

“Yes,” I told him, “we’ll have to discuss how I’m going to manage with only the 1,500 francs I have in my pocket. When I spend all the francs I will have nothing!”

“Ah, my poor guy!” Qemal exclaimed. “It’s lucky that you have 1,500 francs on hand, because I’m dying for a smoke. For now we are rich. Next week I get my paycheque and we will seriously deal with this issue.”

“I’m not lucky,” I told him, “because I have no other source of money until I find a job, but get dressed, we’re going to buy a packet of ‘yellows’ (these were the cheapest cigarettes) and have a coffee and some croissants, because I see you look like you just woke up.”

“I was all out of cigarettes,” he interrupted me, and, since I was handing him 100 francs, he exclaimed: “Now my wallet is a hundred francs

thicker. That's something, old pal," he concluded.

"First of all, we must settle the question of my lodging and my food," I told him. "Do you have an idea of my budget?"

"Go to hell, you've become stingy like your father Halil."

"I don't want to be destitute!" I defended myself.

You will sleep here in my room, until the old lady of the hotel says to me: "Why are you two sleeping there?" and he continued to imitate the old woman: "You only rented the room for one client, your friend or cousin must pay." But since I know she's a good woman, she won't raise this question for another twenty days. So we'll tell her we're ready to give her an increased rent, until that room up there is free, an attic two metres by one and a half. You will have to bend down to enter it, you will only have a bed and the skylight, from which you will have a view of the roofs of the houses of all the surroundings.

I remembered Murger's novel "Scenes of Bohemian Life," but Qemal's proposal was the best possible solution to my situation.

"Schnoz," I told him (we called him that because of his huge, crooked nose), "you've really learned to hustle in this city."

"Here in Paris it's cut-throat and you are forced to learn to think on your feet. As for the food," says Qemal, "we'll go eat where my friends and I hang out, at Lazare's restaurant."

"Who is this 'Lazare?'" I asked, although I was more thinking about the difficult days that could come.



When Enver Hoxha was doing his higher education in France.



*“The chapter of the journey through Italy... ended at Vintimille.”*  
Ventimiglia train station.



*“We entered the Montpellier station once night had fallen. Compared to those in Italy, it was a modest, quiet, poorly lit and intimate station.”*



*“I had to stay in Montpellier for three years, I had to know and love this old town, endearing, full of greenery and quiet..., famous for its university.”* Partial view of Montpellier.



CONSULAT GÉNÉRAL  
DU ROYAUME D'ALBANIE  
N° 2983

### CERTIFICAT DE NAISSANCE

Le Consulat Général du Royaume d'Albanie à Paris, certifie que M<sup>r</sup> *Enver Hoxha*, ressortissant albanais de condition *libre* et de M<sup>me</sup> *Gjules* fils légitime de M<sup>r</sup> *Habit* et de M<sup>me</sup> *Gjurovate (Albanie)* né le *3 Octobre 1908*.  
En foi de quoi il lui a été délivré le présent certificat pour en justifier à qui de droit.  
Paris, le *10 Novembre 1930*



UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTPELLIER  
FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES  
NOTICE INDIVIDUELLE  
de M<sup>r</sup> *Hoxha* étudiant

Nom *Hoxha* Prénoms *Enver*  
Date de naissance *3 octobre 1908*  
Lieu de naissance *Gjirokastra*  
Nationalité *Albanaise*  
Statut de l'Étudiant *Libre*  
Nom de l'Étudiant *Enver Hoxha*  
Domicile des parents *Gjirokastra Albanie*  
Montpellier, le *17 Décembre 1931*  
Signature de l'Étudiant *Enver Hoxha*

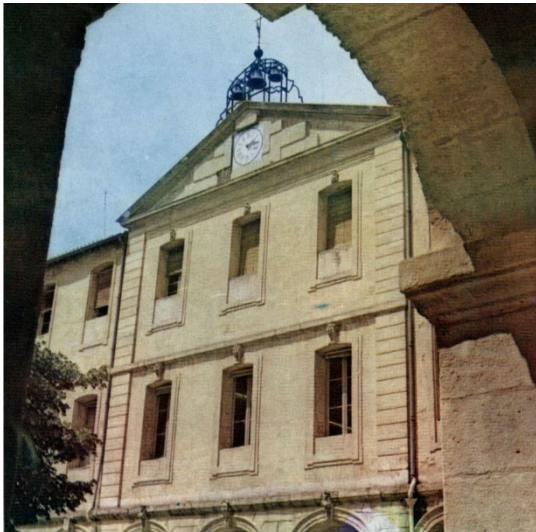
1931-1932 | *Hoxha*  
Études poursuivies dans les sciences  
1932-33 | *Botanique*  
1933-34 | *Botanique*  
1934-35 | *Botanique*  
1935-36 | *Botanique*  
1936-37 | *Botanique*

Documents that the student Enver Hoxha presented for his registration at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Montpellier.



The entrance of the University of Montpellier.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences where Enver Hoxha studied.





The house on Bruyas street in Montpellier, where  
Enver Hoxha lived.

His room.







Enver Hoxha in the first year of study in Montpellier, with Abaz Xhomo.

With fellow foreign and Albanian students in their third year of study (first from left).





Montpellier, the square in front of the Municipal Theatre.

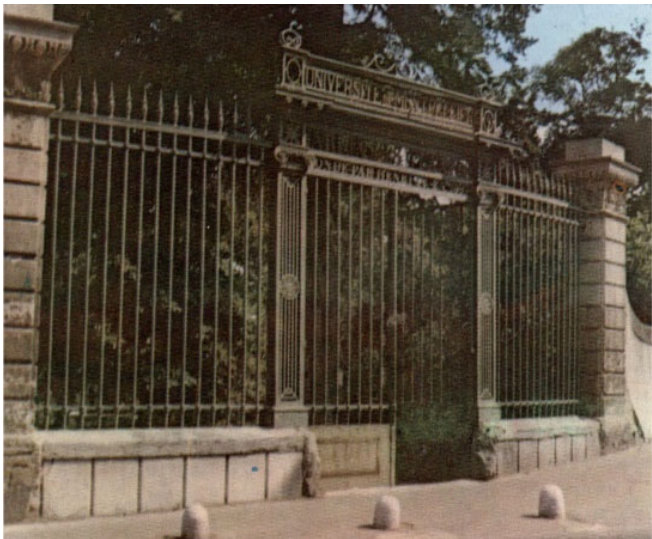
View of the statue of Louis XIV in Montpellier.





Montpellier, the Promenade du Peyrou.

Main gate to the Garden of Plants.





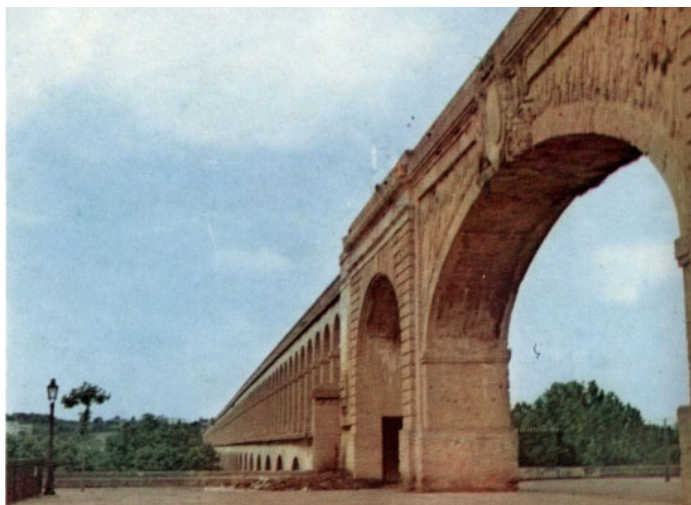
*“During these three years of study in Montpellier, I learned a lot of things both inside the University and outside of it, and I considered that knowledge I gained as a degree in the real world.”* Enver in Montpellier, 1933.



*“I acquired vast and valuable knowledge about the evolution of universal culture, particularly French, and on the various periods of the history of France and of the world.*

Reading room at the Montpellier library.





The aqueduct of Montpellier, an historic place  
Enver Hoxha often visited.

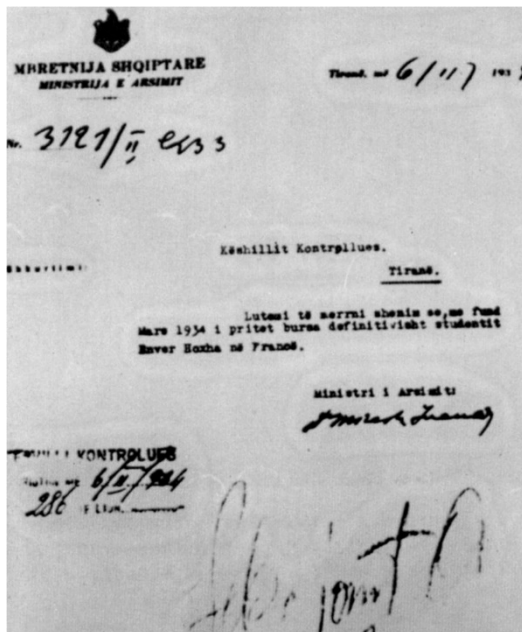
Montpellier. View of the workers' club, an  
important centre of political debate frequented by  
Enver Hoxha.





Meeting of revolutionary workers in the 1930s in France.

Facsimile of the decision to cancel Enver Hoxha's scholarship.





*“...In those days of 1934 and 1935, I wandered around Paris looking for a job to ensure the bare minimum of my subsistence... Life taught me, sufferings tempered me.”* Partial view of Paris.





The house of the Albanian Nushi family in Décines (Lyon), where the Albanian communists working in France gathered.

The “Monsieur le Prince” hotel in Paris, where Enver Hoxha lived.





*“One of the places I often went to and looked at with particular admiration was the rue de Rivoli, where the hotel ‘Continental’ was located, where... Avni Rustemi killed the arrogant traitor Essad Pasha Toptani.”*

Lazare’s restaurant in the Latin Quarter in Paris.





*“I went to the “Père Lachaise” cemetery, where I collected myself in front of the wall of the heroic Fédérés.”*

*“I often passed on the quays of the Seine, I visited the booksellers, because I truly loved to read.”*





The Palais du Luxembourg in Paris where the Peace Conference was held in August-September 1946.

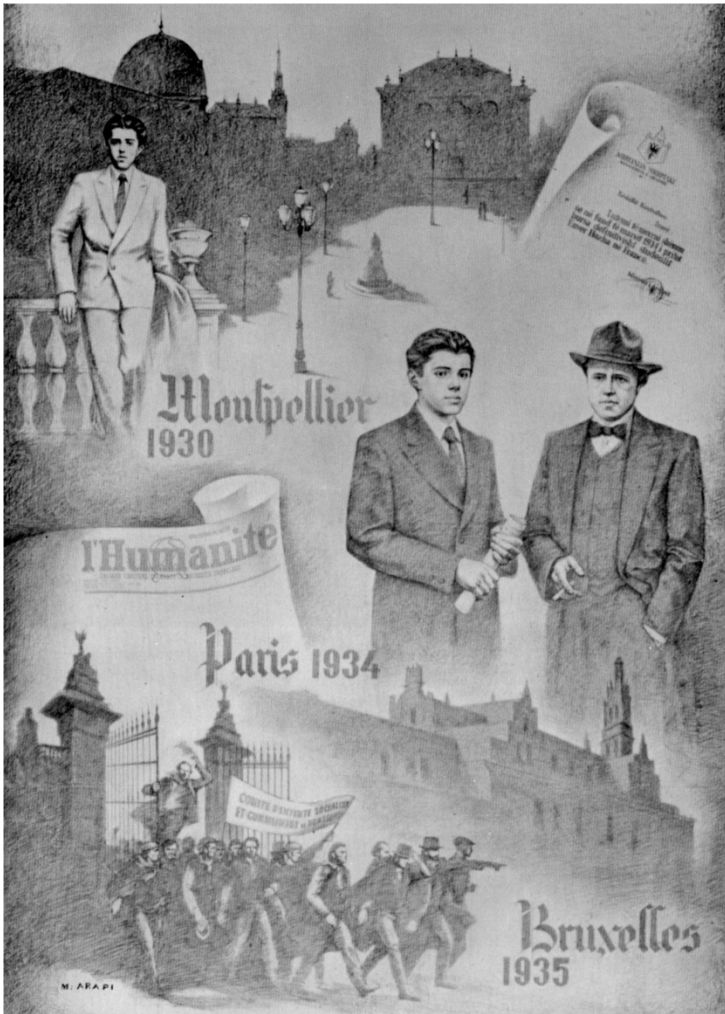
*“...the people and the Party had instructed me to go to Paris to visit the Peace Conference to support and affirm the legitimate rights of Albania in the international arena.”*



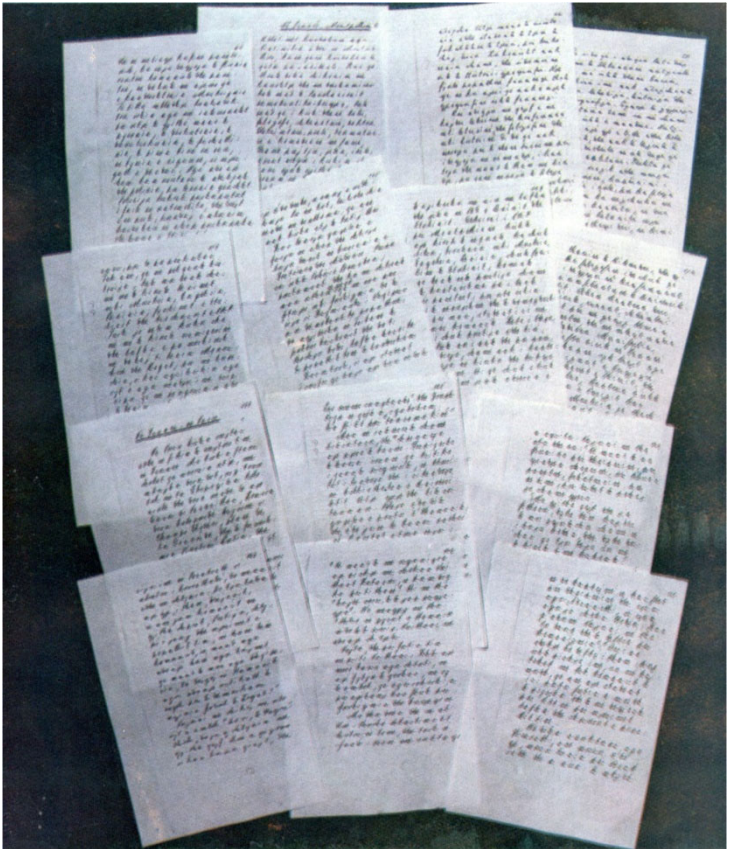


*“...after our victory against fascism, I would come to this same place, this time as Prime Minister of the new, democratic and people’s Albania, that I would ascend the rostrum and speak of the heroic struggle of our glorious people!”*

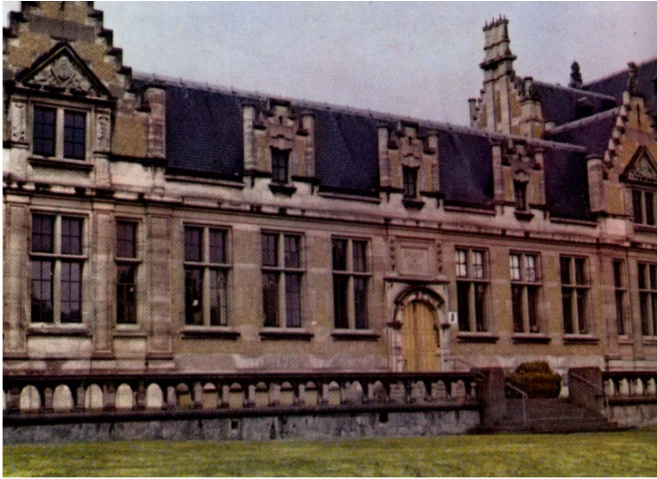




The years of studying abroad (Drawings by M. Arapi).



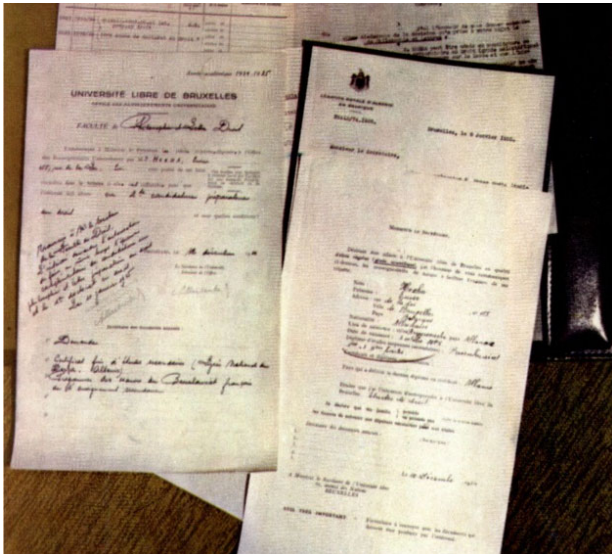
Handwritten sheets of comrade Enver Hoxha's reminiscences of his stay in Montpellier, Paris and Brussels.



The Faculty of Law in Brussels where Enver Hoxha studied.







Documents relating to the registration of Enver Hoxha at the Faculty of Law of the “Free University of Brussels.”

With a compatriot in Antwerp (in Belgium).





Brussels (1936)

He's an Albanian from Përmet, he can barely speak any French but he doesn't have a bad heart. If we are late to pay him, he does not force you to pay immediately; if you go over a month or a month and a half without paying, he only serves you a soup and a piece of bread, if you wait two months, he says to you: "Put yourself into the kitchen a bit and do the dishes, then you can eat."

"That sounds generous," I tell him, "he must be a good guy."

We soon went to have lunch at "Lazare's" and I was introduced to the other Albanians such as Doctor Remzi Fico, Sinan, Imami, etc. We shook hands with Lazare, who asked me:

"Have you just arrived in Paris? Where are you from?"

"From Gjirokastra, I am a student!" I replied.

"We are all from the countryside it seems. There are a lot of boys from Gjirokastra here!"

Coincidentally Lazare was friends with Remzi Fico, to whom I was related through his mother, and who I had embraced warmly, my trust with Lazare was immediately increased.

"Laz," Remzi called, "you'll put Enver's lunch on my account."

"Understood!" nodded Lazare, and just as we were leaving he found an opportunity to ask me:

"What relationship do you have with Doctor Remzi?"

"I am a nephew to him through his mother."

"Very well, come and have your meals here, don't go patronize that ruffian Mulleti!"

"Why should I avoid him?" I replied, and I didn't even know who that "ruffian" Mulleti was;

later, I learned that it was Qazim Mulleti, a notorious politician, but the restaurant was run by his brother. "Laz," I went on, "here is a deposit of 400 francs, sometimes I may be late in paying you, sometimes you'll give me a little credit."

"You are neither the first nor the last," he replied and, laughing, he added: "Old Lazare has seen plenty of poor students." So this problem, too, had been settled.

I quickly got used to the atmosphere of the neighbourhood and from those days I attended a few conferences in the lecture halls of the Sorbonne. I spent a good part of my time in the Luxembourg gardens, I sat on a bench in the sun and read "l'Humanité" or the classifieds in some other newspaper to find a job. I went through them one by one, every day at noon, because I told myself that perhaps my destiny lay there. But I waited in vain, because usually they asked for qualified people, which was not my case, or they demanded other conditions that I could not fulfil. After reading the newspaper, I stuffed it in my pocket and went to wash my hands in the basin of the "Fountain of Medici." Opposite stood the Palais du Luxembourg, the great building of the Senate. Everything in and around this building was majestic, imposing and of great beauty. In my situation of idleness, animated by few hopes, these impressions only increased my despondency and my concern. How could I have imagined then that one day, some ten or eleven years later, after our victory against fascism, I would come to this same place, this time as Prime Minister of the new, democratic and people's Albania, that I would ascend the ros-

trum and speak of the heroic struggle of our glorious people!

I will never forget those days of August and September 1946 filled with work, meetings, press conferences and debates. The reactionary and chauvinistic circles, in particular Anglo-American reaction, did everything possible to ensure that the new Albania, which had nevertheless emerged victorious from a bloody war, was deprived of its rightful place among the nations and countries which had made a great contribution to the war against nazi-fascism; they spared no effort to dismember our country even more than it had been at the beginning of the century. But now the people were in power; they had created, in the very course of the struggle, their own power, they had their own democratic government resulting from the struggle, and the people and the Party had instructed me to go to Paris to visit the Peace Conference to support and affirm the legitimate rights of Albania in the international arena. As soon as I entered the resplendent great hall, which for weeks had been seething with speeches, debates, quarrels, demands, appeals, declarations and counter-declarations by delegations from various countries, I felt even more clearly that henceforth Albania, with or without the good will of international reaction, had become a powerful factor which had to be taken into account. This truth, I had heard from the mouth of Hysni Kapo and other comrades of our delegation who had taken part in the Conference for several days; I had read in the French press and in other writings the appreciations and the comments which were then made on Albania by Vy-

shinsky and Moša Pijade, Maurice Thorez and others who spoke to me about the Albanian question. I was more convinced of our position on the days when I participated directly in the work of the Conference. I spoke there in the name of a just cause, in the name of our country and our valiant and fighting people; my voice was that of the new Albania, which had conquered the rights which were due to it at the cost of its all the blood it shed and its great sacrifices, which possessed these rights de facto and which now demanded not only that they not be undermined by external forces, but also that they be recognized and affirmed in the international arena.

During the days that I spent in Paris in 1946, during a few free moments, I found the opportunity to go and see these places, the squares and the streets where I had walked ten or twelve years earlier. I saw before my eyes those Albanian emigrants who surrounded us with their love and concern as soon as we set foot on French soil. They were happy and proud to see that representatives of their people were now coming to defend with strength and dignity the legitimate rights of their country.

But all of that was to happen much later. Let's go back to those days of 1934 and 1935, when I wandered around Paris looking for a job to ensure at the bare minimum subsistence, those difficult days when I spent whole hours on the benches of the Luxembourg Gardens. In my destitution as a poor student, who only ate one meal a day, only lunch, a lunch that cost no more than five francs, and as I ate I read the advertisements every day to

find a job, I remembered these sentences from the biography of Anatole France: "...Little fellow, cap on head, hands in pockets and bag on back, I was walking through the cold air of Luxembourg and looking at the yellowed leaves fall one by one on the white shoulders of the statues..."

I may not be quoting the terms of France exactly, but as to substance and even as to form, I must not be much mistaken. France was one of my favourite authors. I had read many of his powerful and captivating social and political novels; I also had great admiration for him because, being a great writer of world renown, he had joined the French Communist Party and remained a member until his death.

Months passed, and I was in a very difficult place financially. I walked long hours and, when exhausted, I sat down in some café to read the newspapers that were there, the waiter would pass by three or four times and, with his napkin, pretended to clean the table, by which he meant to tell me that I had to order something again, or else I would be forced to get up. Qemal helped me, Remzi lent me a little money, sometimes they paid me for my cinema ticket. In any case, I was exhausting myself looking for work. I also went to a few printers to see if they were hiring, and there I was asked what studies I had done and I told my story.

Without fail they asked: "Are unionized? Do you have your card?"

"No, I am a student," I would reply.

Then questions about my experience and time at school came, but this rigmarole was seemingly

out of simple politeness or pity, because, in the end, I received the same answer everywhere:

“Here there is no work for the French, so we don’t hire foreigners!”

Once, in an ad in a newspaper, I read that they were looking for someone to copy addresses. I introduced myself — it was a store of a wine house. The person who received me gave me a sheet of paper to see my handwriting. Apparently he liked my penmanship and said to me:

“Jot down twenty thousand addresses for 30 francs. Is that pay okay for you?”

“Of course, I accept!” I said to him, without really realizing the condition that was imposed on me. Later, I felt immense fatigue, because it took two or three days to write 20,000 addresses on envelopes and write them in beautiful handwriting, without errors. But I had no choice, it was 30 francs!

I spoke to my friends about the work I had found. They didn’t approve of it.

“It’s not a job for you!” Remzi said. Do it for the moment, but I advise you to go to our embassy, as Noçka will surely receive you. I know him, ask, insist, so that you can get your scholarship payments.

“Well, I’ll go, but nothing will come of it,” I replied.

I went to the embassy, and I was received there by this Noçka, who was the first secretary of our embassy in Paris. He was a middle-aged man; he received me with a certain courtesy, made me sit down and offered me a cigarette. I told him about my business, told him that I had come to Paris on



purpose to claim my rights, etc. I tried to speak to him very calmly.

“And who is helping you here?” he asked me.

I replied that I was copying addresses and that I was helped a little by Remzi Fico.

“Are you related?”

That was where I told him we were cousins.

“Well,” Noçka promised me, “I’ll report your case to Tirana and as soon as I have any news, I’ll have you called. Where do you live?”

I gave him my address and asked him to notify me through Remzi.

I waited a few weeks and finally Remzi let me know that Tirana had responded to my request by refusing to accept.

“I pointed out to the secretary a lot of good things on your transcript,” Remzi explained, and he then said to me: “Let’s go back to the embassy, perhaps we will find you a temporary job.”

I went to the embassy, where Noçka notified me of the reply from Tirana, adding that it was also specified there that I was the brother-in-law of Bahri Omari, that is to say, of a political émigré. What could I say to him? Anyway, I saw that he was waiting for an answer and I said to him:

“Nothing binds me to him, except my sister. The ministry knew about it when it gave me my scholarship in the first place.”

“Don’t worry about it anymore,” Noçka told me, “nothing will come of it. But I have another offer for you: we will soon create a new consulate in Brussels. The consul will be a certain Maroth, a count. Besides, he’s rich. He will pay the rent for the embassy building itself, the salary of the secre-

tary, and we in return will send him the seals, consular stamps, etc. I can recommend you to go there as secretary or chancellor.”

Without going any further, I thanked Noçka, telling him that he was doing me a great favour.

He told me not to rush.

A few days later he came to me and explained:

“Before the opening of the consulate,” he told me, “the press attaché and the consul want to learn a little Albanian. For this, they plan to take two hours of lessons per week and they are prepared to pay 20 francs for an hour.”

“Alright,” I said, “I’m ready to work tomorrow!”

I went away satisfied, with my forty francs from these Albanian lessons, added to the sixty francs I received a week for the envelopes, combined would give me a hundred francs. For me it was a fortune, even if, practically, it was just enough to not starve. I settled my working hours at the envelope office and left for the consul’s residence.

The consul was a courteous man, he seemed well off and, as I was to learn later, he was a successful industrialist. He also had some influence, connections in Belgium and Holland, but, as they say, the rich aim high. Mr. Maroth, a renowned businessman, wanted to be given an honorary title! He wanted to assert his presence not only in the banks and on the Stock Exchange, but also in diplomatic circles to be invited to receptions and organize some himself on occasion. Whether he wanted it just for decorum or out of snobbery, or if was he aiming, through diplomacy, to create new possibilities for expanding his business activity,

that I never knew, because I was not not curious to know it and did not have the opportunity to be enlightened on it. The only thing I was convinced of was that his desire to enter diplomatic circles was an aspiration hardly difficult to achieve for the wealthy. These people contacted small states or governments without support, such as the Zogite regime and requested them to open consulates on their behalf, to be accredited as consuls, in countries where the state concerned was unable to create and maintain one themselves. This is what Maroth did with the Zogite regime. He requested the authorization to open an Albanian consulate in Brussels, of which he would himself be consul. All the expenses, from the rent of the seat, the staff and the activity of the consulate were covered by him. Zogu, as I was to learn, gave his approval, and subsequently even issued a special decree appointing Maroth Marothi, a French citizen of Hungarian origin, Consul of Albania in Brussels. A veritable salad of states and titles from which I never explained to myself the purpose of. But from all this, I, a poor student, drew a not insignificant profit: I found a job, which, as I will specify later, really did not represent anything from the diplomatic point of view, but was nonetheless real help in other ways.

At the beginning of my work I was paid by the hour for the lessons that I gave to the consul and to the person in charge of the press (also French). I was using a manual that was lent to me at the embassy. During the first few days, I took my work seriously and tried to explain the lessons well to my students, but for them these lessons were nothing

but annoyances by the government to make them believe that they really cared about Albania, a country they could not care less about! Very quickly I persuaded myself that not only would they never learn our language, but not even the history of Albania, its life and its problems. They asked me what our national holidays were, on what dates they fell, took note of them in notebooks so as not to tire themselves of remembering them, and in the meantime they went on with their business. They did not interrupt the formal aspect of their Albanian lessons, for, apparently, they were awaiting the announcement of their appointment and didn't want to take their chances skipping lessons.

Several months came and went, I gave my lessons, fatigued and tired, and apart from the 40 francs a week, I also had other perks for working in Paris. I got to know a host of streets, squares and monuments in the city, looked at everything very carefully, remembered the names of places, the statues I had heard of at school or seen the reproduction of in books. I now saw alive, but partly also altered, fragments of the stories and novels I had read. As I read the street names, I remembered the illustrious men of French history and literature, the wars fought by generals and marshals whose names had either remained written in history or on a commemorative plaque, or had disappeared without a trace. I often passed by the quays of the Seine, visited the booksellers, because I had a passion for reading, and from time to time I bought used ones very cheaply. When reading "The Civil War in France," I tried to find the streets and boulevards where the fighting had taken place and where the

barricades had been erected; I found some of them, others had changed. I went to Père Lachaise where I saw the wall of heroic Federates shot. Another time I visited Notre Dame. During this time I was constantly contemplating the statues, the stained-glass windows, the spires, I remembered Hugo's novel, the stories of Quasimodo, Esmeralda and her goat, the passions, the revolt and the Gibbet of Montfaucon.

Among the places that I often frequented and with a particular admiration I had a weakness for the rue de Rivoli, where the Hotel Continental was located, in the heart of Paris, where fifteen years earlier, a brave boy from Albania, the eminent patriot and democrat Avni Rustemi, shot down the arrogant traitor Esasd Pasha Toptani. I tried to imagine as accurately as possible the path Avni had taken to find the best position to shoot this traitorous and rogue general, I also imagined the moment when Esad Pasha had left the hotel, the disarray and the confusion that gripped passers-by when they heard the shots and saw the Turk, the man who sold out our country to dozens of countries, stretched out full length on the ground, and everyone's surprise when the perpetrator of the attack, a young man, small, pale and with a calm and resolute look, without hesitation, with a revolver in his hand, the barrel still smoking, surrendering himself to the French police. Avni Rustemi's shots had not only had the effect of putting down a traitor. Their impact raised in French opinion and in that of other countries the renown of small and valiant Albania, the determination of its sons to defend the rights and interests of the Homeland even

at the cost of their lives. In Paris, although it is difficult to find a historical figure or event that is not commemorated or honoured by a plaque, a bust or a monument, it goes without saying that there was nothing like it, nor no sign, to recall the noble act of Avni Rustemi. But for any Albanian who sets foot in Paris, the place where Avni Rustemi performed this act is and must be a place of sacred pilgrimage, a place where everyone must go and bow with respect, a place where patriotism and the revolutionary courage not to bow before any oppressor, to put above all the superior interests of the Homeland. It is, animated by such feelings and emotions, that I myself went to these places, in the difficult days of my student life.

In Paris, I also knew political refugees, like Kol Tromara, Qazim Koculi, Sejfi Vllamasi, Ali Këlcyra, Beqir Valteri, etc. All of them, with the exception of Sejfi Vllamasi and Rexhep Mitrovica, played poker and shopped frivolously. It was Remzi, Qemal or someone else who introduced me to them. I was introduced to them as Bahri Omari's brother-in-law and as such they always held out their hand and greeted me. They didn't concern themselves with politics at all, didn't care much about the fate of Albania, because they were far from the country, and news and people didn't arrive in Paris as they did in Bari. This kind of politicians did not have, even between them, a certain agreement in their social relations, they only played cards and tried to out drink each other. They received plenty of money — nobody knew who was funding them — because not only did they live in apartments with expensive rents, but all fre-

quented the great cafés, notably “La Coupole” in Montparnasse. They were rarely seen in chain cafés, such as “Dupont,” which were on every street corner.

All these individuals, so-called anti-Zogites, were brought back by Italy during its occupation of Albania. It organized them in the struggle against the people and the national liberation movement. We did everything we could to ensure that, even if they did not join the people and the liberation movement, at the very least these émigrés did not rise up against it. Alas they had deliberately chosen the path of treason, they took the lead of the “Balli Kombëtar” and attacked us openly with arms. So we could only condemn them as war criminals. Let’s just say they got what they deserved; we sent others to prison, while still others managed to escape on English boats and died all the same like traitors execrated in exile, as nothing more than agents and spies of the imperialist enemies of Albania.

The French Communist Party had set up a number of reading centres in working-class neighbourhoods where I went to read its press. I read there Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, passages and commentaries on *Capital*, I listened to lectures on Lenin and Stalin. This helped me considerably in the formation of my Marxist-Leninist conception of the world. The ideas of scientific communism were instilled deeply in my mind, I thought of my unhappy country, of my schoolmates in Korça, of the workers, I witnessed the misery of the French proletariat, I also looked at my personal misery and yet in spite of all of this I felt like I had never been stronger. I

took part in the open meetings that the FCP organized in the squares and in the stadiums and I saw there the strength of the proletarians and the strength of the immortal ideas of Marx.

“We will win,” I said to myself, “but we will win by fighting.”

Life taught me, suffering tempered me, for as long as I stayed in Paris, ten months or a little more, I was never satisfied with bread, and even less with scraps of leftover food. In the evening, I often ate brioche for lunch, and for dinner I would often eat fried brains with a few slices of potatoes and a bit of bread. Sometimes I went twenty-four hours without eating, before I received the few francs for the work I was doing.

My shoes had torn, and I asked my sister Fahrije to send me two hundred francs. She promptly did so. I bought myself a pair of shoes, socks and a blue shirt, because the white ones had to be washed every day and were torn. I reserved the only good white shirt I had for my visits to Maroth, when I gave him Albanian lessons

Finally one day he said to me:

“Everything is ready in Brussels! At the end of the week come and receive two monthly payments in advance and a bonus to cover the price of the second class train journey. We have notified the Belgian embassy in Paris so that you can go and get your entry visa there. Your salary will be 600 Belgian francs and you will sleep at the consulate, so that you will not have to pay rent.”

I was very satisfied and ran to Qemal and Remzi to tell them the good news.

Then I went to the reading centre of the French



Communist Party and asked the person in charge if he could arrange an interview for me with Comrade Paul Vaillant-Couturier, because I had a communication to make to him. He told me to come back the next day to receive the answer. When I returned he urged me to go to the offices of "l'Humanité," where I was going to be received by Vaillant or another comrade. I went there and was lucky enough to be received by Vaillant himself. He was a man of average height, with a smiling face, a serene gaze, who suddenly hardened when he spoke of fascism and the bourgeoisie. He held out his hand and invited me to sit down. I briefly told him my story.

"Now, finally," I told him, "I have been offered the opportunity to work in Brussels as private secretary at the consulate that the Albanian kingdom will open and with a foreigner being hired as the consul. I will also take care of the press. I have a request for you. I am a communist with all my soul, your press and the sufferings of my people have combined to inculcate these convictions in me. Could I sometimes, basing myself on the news that I would receive from Albania, send to 'l'Humanité' some short article to unmask the feudal regime of Zogu?"

Vaillant looked at me again with those same serene eyes and said:

"Of course, comrade, you can send us some, we will publish them gladly."

I was delighted, moreover, I was over the moon and immediately got up from my seat. Vaillant-Couturier suggested that I stay a while longer and asked me:

"Can you tell us a bit about Albania, the social

situation, the working class, the peasantry, as we are aware of aspects about your country but, we must admit, we know rather little overall.”

“Very willingly,” I agreed and began to describe the situation to him, taking care not to blather on too much, because I was taking up his time and so I focussed on what interested him. I stayed there for an hour and a half, and had the impression that I had aroused his interest because he was taking notes and, when he extended his hand to me, I shook it and he said:

“You speak French well, and you must also learn how to write it well. For each article you send us, put in your pseudonym. We will understand that the articles which come to us from Brussels and deal with Albania are written by you, Comrade Hoxha.”

As I stood up to leave, Vaillant gave me one last piece of advice:

“Love communism and no matter what, fight for it!”

“I will fight to the death for it,” I told him.

Such was more or less in substance my meeting with this great communist with whom, although being only a young student, I had the great fortune to converse for an hour and a half, and who listened to me describe to him the sufferings, the struggle and the hopes of my people.

On the day appointed by the consul, I took the little luggage I had, some clothes and my collection of books, boarded the train for Brussels and left. Thus closed a page of my life in France, in Montpellier and in Paris, where I had lived for nearly four years. I keep the best impressions and memo-

ries of this country and its people. I had known them and had already loved them through my studies and the books I had read, but also through direct contact with them during those four years. This country had a rich past of great fighters of the pen and of thought, of incessant struggles for freedom and progress. Above all, the French people could boast of their bourgeois revolution, which had a great influence on the destiny of Europe and of the world. Like thousands of others who had the opportunity to know it closely, I admired France and its people for their marvellous historical legacy. I appreciated and respected its men of letters, its authors and its scholars, for the pride that their predecessors inspired in them, for their scrupulous spirit and their perseverance in work, for their sensitivity to the destiny of their country. Of course, there were also many things in France that were not ideal. There was a rich bourgeoisie, consolidated, ambitious and repressive against the masses, there was a powerful state apparatus which was ready to stifle any possible criticism or act that would subvert their power in order to ensure tranquillity and total obedience to the law, and above all, in those painful years full of political and social upheavals, politicians who, for a thousand and one reasons were to, a few years later, lead France to defeat and a shameful capitulation. In those years, I neither had nor wanted to deal with these "aspects" of France. I had gone there to study, and there was and still is a lot to learn in this country. However, even in intellectual activity, in literature, culture and science, one observed, alongside the marvels of the thought and the creative spirit of men, a lot

of excess, false stars which twinkled for a time and were dying out, but all of this in a country like France is inevitable. The important thing was to stay away from these negative aspects, to learn from France what was good and edifying.

I left this country with the best judgements and impressions of it, its people, simple, hardworking and dignified, with whom I do not remember having ever had the slightest conflict or quarrel. I was leaving in the years when the breadth and dimensions of the class struggle grew like never before, when the French proletariat rose up in powerful demonstrations and in meetings in defence of its rights, in defence of the homeland and the world, against the threatening peril of the fascist plague. Again and again I had the opportunity to line myself up, a proletarian student, alongside the proletarians of the factories and the mines in the meetings organized by the trade unions or the French Communist Party. I was leaving this country more mature, more educated and better tempered, even if I had not obtained any diplomas. I felt stronger because what I had read, heard and witnessed there, as well as the spiritually and economically challenging moments I had experienced, served as a diploma for me, which served me much more than a piece of parchment with a university's seal. Though I did learn a great amount from my time in University, the true lessons in life that I learned were found outside of campus and were ones I learned on my own.

## V

### BRUSSELS

The train journey from Paris to Brussels was much shorter than that from Montpellier to Paris and, in addition, my morale was much higher. Now I was assured, at least for a time, a salary I could subsist on. I had a job, which, in fact, I did not know what it would consist of or how well I could do my tasks, but I did not worry too much about it. In the end, even if everything went well for me at the consulate, I did not intend to become a diplomat. I was very happy to learn that there was a good university in Brussels which was well respected; I had also received from the consul the promise that he would help me to enrol in the Faculty of Law of the Free University of Brussels. Things, therefore, seemed to be going rather well, and that, of course, made the hours of travel more pleasant for me. From my seat, I could see the landscape unfolding, endless fields and meadows, a prosperous land, cultivated and maintained with care, herds of sheep and horses in the pastures which bordered the roads and the canals, farms and nice-looking, orderly little towns with their characteristic red-tiled roofs. After crossing the border, in Belgium I found a landscape almost identical to that which I had left in France.

Finally, I arrived in Brussels. It was a big city, but, of course, without the majesty or the magnificence of Paris. I exited the train, left the station and hailed down a taxi. I gave him the address: "155, Rue de la Loi." We walked up a few streets, passed

a cathedral and came out on a main street, which seemed to go on forever. The first thing that struck me were the trams. In this city there were a multitude of them, crisscrossing the neighbourhoods in all directions. You didn't see many cars there, nor as many buses as in Paris. This long, interminable main street I had arrived at was the Rue de la Loi.

We entered through a large metal gate, itself opening into a large enclosure, also gated, which surrounded a site containing several large buildings of ten to eleven stories. On the address given to me was also noted the number of the building and the floor, I believe it was the fourth.

I took my suitcase, paid the fare to the driver and headed for the elevator. Before entering, I was stopped by the concierge, who asked me who I was and where I was going.

I handed him my passport and introduced myself as the secretary of the consulate.

He looked at my document and replied:

"I have been notified of your arrival, take the elevator and you will find yourself on the floor of the consulate, it is the door opposite."

I went upstairs and, when I reached the landing, I rang the bell. A moment later, the door was opened to me by an elderly woman with grey hair, who looked at me, glanced at my suitcase and asked me:

"Are you mister Hoxha?"

"Yes"

"Come in," she told me and wanted to carry my luggage.

"No," I objected. "I'll do it myself."

"Well at least follow me," she said. "I'll take

you to your room.”

“Here,” I said to myself, “looking at the corridors and the rooms with open doors, full of sofas, armchairs and chandeliers, I even have a room for myself.” My room was very large, with an armchair, a table and a chair. In one of the walls was a door that led to a small bathroom.

“You will live here,” the woman told me. “Rest for now and this afternoon at six o’clock you are expected by the press officer in his office which is there, further down the hall.”

Later, I learned that this lady was the maid of the press agent’s wife, she was an old Hungarian, and that her husband was younger than her. He must have been in his sixties, she in her seventies.

As I said, both the consul and the press attaché were rich and the reason they worked here was to get titles in order to be able to enter the diplomatic corps and adorn themselves with some decoration. As long as I was in Belgium, I did not see the consul more than three or four times, and scarcely more often the press attaché who had a separate apartment, in the building of the consulate itself. When they came to Belgium, it was not at all for ordinary consular business, in fact the least of their worries, but, on important days, for the ceremonies and banquets offered for the diplomatic corps, on the occasion of the Belgian national holiday, those of the king, of the queen or for the New Year they would pay a visit. This is what these so-called cosmopolitan foreign personalities were like, men who represented the odious monarchy of our country. As I said, they hardly knew Albania. They had some idea of the biography of Zogu and certain

personalities of the regime, but they never wanted to learn anything else. I tried to teach them some basics, but I saw that what I told them about the history of my country entered one ear and left out the other. It was the same with my attempts to teach them the Albanian language, after every lesson they went on with their day with their knowledge of the Albanian language unchanged.

At six o'clock I visited the old woman, who also acted as a maid for the press agent's wife, whom during my time at the embassy, I saw only three or four times. She told me that I was expected at the office.

I was dressed and introduced myself. I held out my hand to the consul and the press secretary, and sat down near the work table. They were seated in armchairs. Apparently this room was to be my office. It was lit by large windows from which the sun streamed in and one could contemplate Brussels and the parks surrounding the building. Only one thing displeased me: above their heads, in front of me on the wall hung the portrait of Zogu, and when I raised my head, I was forced to see the executioner of our people. Their shared office was more similar to a living room, with large armchairs, a beautiful carpet, chandeliers and large lampshades; it was opposite of my office. From what I thought I understood, they had no intention of working in the consulate at all; I knew I had to do both of their jobs, that it was I who would do all the work and they would only come to Brussels occasionally to schmooze with the Belgian aristocracy where they would shortly leave a few days later. I did not care much, because for the most part I was just excited



to be gainfully employed.

The consul was the first to speak and told me my duties:

“You must report to the Foreign Office and apply to be listed as Chancellor of the Consulate. I will give you a letter signed by myself and, when you present it, you will be listed in the Diplomatic and Consular Directory. You must watch your behaviour, because you will represent your country,” etc., etc., continued this Hungarian-Franco-Belgian who lectured me for five minutes on my duties towards my Homeland. (“Keep rambling on,” I said to myself. “You’re the one who’s going to give me lessons about my Homeland!”) And he continued:

“You will always grant visas to those who ask to go to Albania, with the exception of the communists, who are our enemies!” (“Keep blabbering,” I said to myself. “The enemy you are so afraid of is right in front of you”) “Those applying for a visa must complete a form, separate from those prescribed by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There is a different visa process for traders and businessmen who request to visit Albania. You will give the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs the correct documentation that is required for their purchase or sale operations and to do this you will need to consult the embassy in Paris, which will provide you with the required paperwork which you will fill out and report to Tirana.”

After this lesson in “diplomacy,” he got up, opened two drawers of my work table and continued:

“Here are the seals, stamps, forms and regis-

ters. You must keep them in order and clean. You will enter what you spend on the forms as well as the revenue you will collect in whatever way. Do you understand?"

"Yes, very well, Mr. Consul."

"You will have to report everything you do to me."

"Yes sir, Mr. Consul!"

"That's all I had to tell you, now you're in charge."

"Sounds good," I replied.

Then I spoke to the press officer of our embassy in Paris, who was visiting Brussels. He told me more or less:

"As far as the press is concerned, a press agency will send you at the consulate clippings from any newspaper which publishes even a small piece of news on Albania. You will be subscribed to this press agency. You will have a special fund for this. As soon as the clippings are received, you will buy five issues of the newspaper which mentions Albania and cut the article and you will stick it on a white sheet of paper; you will write at the top of the sheet the title of the newspaper and the date it was issued. All of this, of course, must be done very neatly; you will send two copies to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana, two to the embassy in Paris and one in the press office. If the article appeared in an illustrated magazine, you must send any drawings related to the clippings to the aforementioned locations. Is this clear?"

"Very clear," I answered (as if it were complicated, a child could do this!).

"So we're done!" he told me. "In the morning

you will have to be present at the office until 1:00 p.m., then you are free.”

I thanked them, but they asked me to go to the manager of the building, whose offices were a little further on in the courtyard, and to ask him to give me the address of a workshop or an engraver to order a bronze plaque for the consulate. I took on that task later on.

They stayed in Brussels another three or four days. On the day they were set to leave they had scheduled one last ten minute meeting with me and afterwards they would return to their homes in Paris. The meeting was uneventful until I found the opportunity to remind the Consul of his promise to recommend me for admission to the Faculty of Law of the Free University of Brussels.

“Ah yes, I will,” he said to me. “I’ll take care of it. You will compose a letter pretending to be my letter of recommendation to the University, write what you think is appropriate, bring it to me for me to sign, and then I will put the seal of the consulate on it.”

“Thank you,” I told him. “I’ll talk to you...”

But he interrupted me:

“Write your letter and do it fast, because we have to leave for Paris.”

I went into the other room, wrote the letter, took it to the consul and, in two or three seconds, the Albanian Consulate in Brussels sealed its first ever document; a letter of recommendation addressed to the Rectorate of the Free University of Brussels.

After which, the consul and the press officer left, and I was left alone. They locked their apart-

ment and left, their suitcases in hand. I was left with the keys to our consulate, which included my office, the waiting room, my bedroom and a small kitchen.

I put the drawers in order then, turning to the portrait of Zogu which hung on the wall: "O son of a dog," I cried to him, "come down from this wall, for I cannot bare to see you, go away!" and I grabbed him and shoved him behind the cupboard in the kitchen. If someone told me of his visit, I would naturally put him back in the living room, and if the consul or someone else should come unexpectedly, I would hasten to put him back, finding a pretext for his removal. But the consul and the attaché, even the rare times they had come, had announced their arrival two or three days in advance, so I had no worries. I was convinced that they would always warn me before coming, but, as we will see later, this conviction was to cost me dearly.

The next day and the day after, I met the building manager, a man in his fifties, wearing glasses, who received me courteously, asked me if I had settled in and gave me his telephone number, so that I could call him if I needed anything. Then he said to me:

"We also have maids available to clean the offices and bedrooms at no charge for you, everything is included in the rent."

I thanked him and asked to have the consular plaque made for me, and I gave him the drawing I had made with the coat arms of the Kingdom in the middle.

"I'll be sure to do it, I know a guy who can take care of this," he told me.

So I no longer had to worry about the plaque.

At the apartment, I had a sense of comfort I had never experienced before. Now I had new worries about what life was like, most notably the cost of restaurant food, because I had blown through the 600 francs a month I had been promised. I did this because I had a hard time in France, and especially in Paris, where I stayed and even had to go to bed without eating. "So, Enver," I said to myself when I woke up, "be careful, save money, regulate expenditures in your life so as not to suffer." In the meantime, my clothes being in rather bad shape, I had to save a little money to buy myself a black suit to look like a civil servant, and I also had to register at the Free University of Brussels.

I then decided to get to know the city starting from the centre. To do so, I had to go down the Rue de la Loi, which seemed to me endlessly long. I walked it the first time on foot, in places it was flat, in places downhill. I was drenched in sweat, but I was curious to see the houses and shops on both sides. The buildings there weren't very tall, as it was a residential neighbourhood in a 19th century style. In places, there were shops, many groceries and a few department stores. It was in this street that the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Administrative Centre of Belgium and, if I am not mistaken, the Theatre de la Monnaie were located. After this reconnaissance outing, I made it a rule to go down the Rue de la Loi on foot and go up it by tram, because the climb was very tiring.

The job I had at the consulate was a breeze, nothing tiring or complicated, because the Belgian

press didn't often write about Albania. In fact, it was almost entirely unaware of it. The press agency to which we were subscribed very rarely referred me to long articles and, in those cases, I carried out what was asked of me. Short news on an event that occurred in Albania was more frequent — they were transmitted by the agencies of Rome, and by "Reuters," then taken up by the Belgian news wire and published in the newspapers. What was this news? They usually concerned the visit of some Italian minister to Albania or of an Albanian government figure in Rome, the reception of a personage by Zogu, the granting of a credit or a loan by Italy to Albania, etc. News of this type was published in a corner of the paper and did not occupy more than three or four lines.

At one point, around the second half of August 1935, came news of an "insurrection in Albania against Zogu." Immediately I rejoiced, got dressed, went to the kitchen and, addressing myself to the photo of Zogu, which I had stuffed in a corner, I said to him: "Ah, scoundrel, your end has come, you will find your end and pay for your crimes against the people." Unfortunately the report said nothing about where the "insurrection" had broken out or who had taken the lead.

I went downstairs, bought a pack of newspapers, glanced at them at once and saw that they all gave the news according to the same formula. Some explained Zogu's life, his connections to Italy, etc. There were some who posted a photo of him with the princesses, where they had been fixed strutting around on the occasion of who knows what visit or ceremony, but the headlines and news about the

“insurrection” above the photos made their haughty attitude even more ridiculous. As usual, I cut out the clippings, glued them to sheets of paper and bundled them. The next day, early in the morning, I went out and, at the nearest kiosk, bought “Le Soir,” “L’Indépendance Belge” and two or three other newspapers. I read them with keen curiosity to learn what was happening in my country. On the second day, the newspapers reported that the “insurrection” had broken out in southern Albania, in Fier, and that it was spreading to other regions as well. In the days that followed, the reports intensified. It was announced that “the uprising is organized by the opposition forces,” that “the army and the police have lined up against Zogu,” etc., but precisely this news, which produced a positive impression on the Western reader, discouraged me. I knew that the “opposing forces” displayed included the relatives and friends of Ali bey Këlcyra and the Vrioni family, who might have had a lot of subjects of discontent and quarrels with Zogu, but who remained, deep down, men of the regime and the king himself, people who were not animated by any principle or spirit of consistency in their “anti-Zogite” actions. I also knew that, if the “insurrection” of which the newspapers spoke were only their work, either this news was falsified, or this movement would quickly be suppressed. The people could not rise up with the Ali beys and the Vrionis in an insurrection, not to mention that these gentlemen themselves, even if they really wanted to act, would not and could not rely on the people.

The news of the second day dimmed my hopes

somewhat, but the fact that all the press was paying attention to the events in Albania and lending them the spotlight led me to think that perhaps the truth was not quite yet revealed. I hoped that the movement was as broad as possible and was based on the people. I tried to evoke the patriotic or democratic elements that could have some role in the organization of such a movement, but however much I racked my brain, I couldn't think of any possible leader for this rebellion. True patriots and democrats, who had proven themselves in the 1920s, particularly in the movement which led to the June Revolution of 1924, such as Bajram Curri, Luigj Gurakuqi and others, were either murdered or in exile and scattered in different countries. I had some information about their history in emigration, and I knew that they were divided into at least two large groups. One was known as CONARE, with more democratic positions and practically more or less aligned with the Comintern, the other was the "National Union," which included all the types I had known in Bari and Paris, such as Ali Këlcyra and Sejfi Vllamasi, Bahri, the Sheh of Karbunara and others. Did these groups take part in the organization of this "insurrection" of which the newspapers spoke? It seemed unlikely to me, despite my strong hope that CONARE had played some role in this affair. Some newspapers, without supplying any sources, wrote that the "communists" and the "Bolsheviks" were involved in the events in Albania, which naturally made me happy. It had been five years since I had last resided in Albania and it seemed to me unlikely that in that space of time the communist movement had



progressed there to the point of sparking an armed uprising against the regime in place. "Unlikely," I said to myself, "very unlikely. The day will come when the communists will do what needs to be done, but, for the moment, it is impossible to expect that from them." Despite everything I tried to give myself courage, I said to myself that sometimes the course of events deviates from anyone's forecast. I continued to collect the clippings and pile them up every day. Later the newspapers wrote that the royal military forces were commanded by a colonel, about whom in Albania I had heard all sorts of ridicule. "Ah," I thought, "what a handsome officer Zogu has placed at the head of his forces, a clown, a human scum, who never knew what war was, and whom he called to his palace only to be distracted by his antics."

Three or four days later, the news about the "Revolution of Fier" took on an interesting twist. The newspapers wrote that Fier had really fallen into the hands of the "insurgents." that a general of Ahmet Zogu had been killed there, but that the movement had been almost entirely crushed in two or three days. The "insurgent" forces, few in number, had been decimated by the Zogite army, which had dealt them severe blows; a few small groups of combatants had taken refuge in the mountains where they were being chased step by step by formations of the Zogite army and, after only three days, order had been restored in Albania and the insurrection put down. This news saddened me but in spite of everything I clipped out the relevant stories, pasted them on sheets of paper like the others and, when this story was closed, I sent the big

packet of newspapers to the fixed destinations. During my entire stay in Brussels, it was the only time that I sent such a large package of newspaper clippings to Paris and Tirana.

During these events, I was summoned twice to the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs where I was asked for details on this subject. I pretended to know more than what their press was saying and I told them about our people who can't stand oppression for long, about Fier, about Skrapar, and so on. In those days, I also received a visit from a correspondent of the newspaper "Le Soir," who asked me for details on these events. I repeated to him what I had already said to the ministry.

In the months that followed, the usual routine continued, in other words very few articles on Albania were published, which I cut and sent as always to the fixed destinations.

Consular affairs didn't require much work either. During my whole stay there, I barely had to grant 20 to 25 visas. They were traders or tourists. In fact, Albania and Belgium did not even have commercial relations. Belgian traders came to be interested in what they could buy or sell in Albania. I knew full well how miserable our country was at the time; everything was taken from us by fascist Italy and we bought everything from Italy! But I urged them to go there, told them that there were minerals, oil, bitumen, chromium in our area. They were interested, and I encouraged them, in the hope, if possible, that the commercial ties of Albania and Italy would loosen up a little.

"If you want to talk about needs," I told them, "our country needs everything, even things as sim-

ple as buttons.”

They asked me for the addresses of traders and I gave them the addresses of the few traders I knew, Selfo, Ali Hasho, Xhelo Dibra, Turkeshi, etc. What they got from these addresses I had no idea, for, as I said, the consul had no jurisdiction over trade; our embassy in Paris considered the Belgian consulate to be outside its regulatory jurisdiction, while our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the authorities in Tirana conceived of the country's foreign trade solely within the framework of its relations with Italy, and no one ever asked me anything. Surprisingly, on two occasions, I was visited by the Belgian merchants to whom I had given addresses who thanked me because they had succeeded in selling dyes, textiles, shoes, etc.

I was proud that I had done my job well and said to them: “Very good. I will help you if you would ever like to return.”

That was all the excitement I had at work! As I said, I had no contact with Tirana, I confined myself to sending the clippings there and, moreover, I never heard back from them when I sent the clippings. For Tirana I did not exist, I was the chancellor of a consulate they didn't care about, the expenses of which were covered by the consul and the press officer.

To be fair to them, they sent me my salary as well as the cost of buying newspapers, very regularly on the first of the month. As for the consulate's rent, I didn't care much about it, it was paid directly by the consul to the property manager.

Almost a year after the opening of the consulate in Brussels, I received news from the embassy in

Paris, informing me that another consulate of Albania would be opened in Antwerp, and that the consul would be the Dutchman Gottfried Parser. I was asked to act as secretary there. They had sent me his address and asked me to help him.

I went to Antwerp which was an hour by train from Brussels. I presented myself to the new consul, who just like Maroth Marothi, and even more so, was a man of several nationalities and multiple professions: a Dutchman from Amsterdam, of Belgian and Dutch nationality, a well-known businessman and industrialist, possessing securities and capital in hotels and banks, honorary member of multiple yachting and automobile clubs, holder of numerous honorary decorations from various country, in addition to all that, the title of consul! Ahmet Zogu appointed him consul in Antwerp and, a little later, after my return to Albania, promoted him to consul general, and naturally also awarded him by royal decree, a decoration.

But as for what Zogu was doing with these "consuls" of Albania, who had no idea what Albania was, with some of them being unable to point it out on a map, was of no interest for me. I will only recall that when I met Parser he received me courteously and told me that he needed my assistance.

"You will have work in Antwerp," he told me, "but no more than two days a week. You will take care of visas for Albania if there are any requests, you will translate business information for me from Albanian into French. Eventually," he continued, "you will have to write some letters to commercial firms in Tirana, because," concludes this honorary consul, "I have also been appointed to Denmark."

“I’m ready to come and help you two days a week,” I said. “I can’t travel more often because, in addition to working at the consulate in Brussels, I also take courses at the Free University.”

“What salary do you want for this work?” he asked me.

What could I tell him? In a moment of panic I said a random number:

“Three hundred francs for me, in addition to the cost of the outward and return journey by train!”

“All right!” he nodded and he paid me two months in advance as well as the cost of travel by train, in second class, whereas to save a little more, I took third class.

I thus went twice a week to this consulate, where I worked half a day, sometimes only an hour or two, then I would go out for a walk, to visit the city, the famous museums of Antwerp and its colossal port.

One day a boy older than myself presented himself at this consulate. He entered the room and, to my astonishment, spoke to me in Albanian.

“Who are you and what are you doing in Antwerp?” I asked him.

He told me his name. He was studying agronomy or business, I don’t remember well, but he was from Kolonja, from the village of Vllamas.

“Oh?” I said to him. “Do you have any connection with Sejfi and Muharrem?” His face lit up and he asked me:

“Why, do you know them?”

“Yes, very well, they are friends of mine.”

“They are my cousins!”

We hugged and started a chat, went out to-

gether, for a walk, to lunch in a restaurant, and it was even me who offered to pay, although perhaps I was the one who was worse off economically. We talked about Albania, and because he was completely isolated there, he asked me for information on the famous “insurrection of Fier,” etc. He and I were delighted with this contact, because it was the first time that I met an Albanian in Belgium and I was the first time he had either. I had the impression of having found a brother in a foreign country and when, after our first conversation, I discovered that he was an anti-Zogite, we began to speak frankly. I told him the days and times when I would be at the consulate so that he could come and see me. We even had a picture taken together in the street, while walking, by one of those photographers who suddenly snap a picture of you without telling you and then gives you the address of their shop.

After pocketing the two months salary of the consul in Antwerp, I went straight to a department store to buy myself a ready-made suit. The salesman looked at my size, asked me which shade I preferred and I said:

“I want a very dark and rather thick suit.”

With one movement, he drew from a cupboard two black suits, one in combed cashmere, which cost eight hundred francs, and the other in wool, at five hundred francs. I told him I was taking the latter. I put it on and was amazed to see that it fit me perfectly, that there weren't even any alterations to be made. I was really surprised because when I was young and had ordered a suit from Aqif Gabeci, in Gjirokastra, or from a tailor at the “Pallas” hotel

in Korça, not only did I have to wait a week, but the tailor continued to unstitch on one side and cut on the other, to the point that I lost all taste for the new suit. This one, on the other hand, which I bought in Antwerp, was ready in ten minutes. I looked at myself in the mirror from every angle, I paid and kept it on me. The salesman packed the other, which I took to my apartment. I left happy because I had satisfied a requirement, to not to make a bad impression in the diplomatic world.

I stayed in the big apartment in the Rue de la Loi for about a year, until early 1936, then we moved because, it seemed, the rent for the first apartment was too expensive and it was too large for the work being done. The consul, when he came to Brussels for a matter of protocol, had more interest in sleeping at the hotel, so the consulate would exclusively be a place of work. We found a small apartment with a living room, which also served as the consulate's office, a bedroom for me and a bathroom. The owner and his wife lived on the upper floor and the consulate had the ground floor to themselves. The building was located in an ordinary street, parallel to other similar streets which led to the square and to the large park known as the "Cinquantenaire," surely laid out for the fiftieth anniversary of the constitution of Belgium as a separate state.

At the time of my stay in Belgium I returned once on leave to Albania. I met my parents, rejoiced to be with them again, but I also saw their deprivations and those of the people. Discreetly, I was interested in finding a job in Albania because my family was in a dire financial situation, but my

search was in vain. So, my vacation over, I left for Brussels.

My application for admission to the Free University of Brussels had, of course, been accompanied by an official recommendation, not to mention my zeal, but the application process was complicated. A dense correspondence was exchanged with the secretariat of the University: I was asked where I had done my previous studies, how many exams I had taken, which optional exams I intended to take; by passing the time by filling out forms, months passed. Finally it was decided that I would be registered in the second year of the Faculty of Law, so I took my registrations and began to attend the classes and the lectures.

I studied diligently for several months. My conditions, I must admit, were now good. Just as I was preparing for the first examination of the year, the Paris press officer suddenly appeared. He entered the waiting room without warning and found me immersed in books, newspapers and magazines. As I was preparing for my exams, I had not taken care to clean up the piles of newspapers of the French and Belgian communist parties nor took the time to hide the shelf filled with the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

I saw him blush and frown at the same time.

“What’s all this?” he asked me.

I could not find a justification to extricate myself from this embarrassment, but he continued:

“What, are you a communist, Mr. Hoxha? We didn’t know that.”

At first I thought of telling him that these were newspapers and books which were given away for



free, but such an argument, for an anti-communist like him, would have had no effect. So, regaining my composure, I justified myself:

“These books are not mine, they must belong to the son of the property manager, who has surely forgotten them here, because he comes around sometimes!”

But he did not buy this explanation:

“It’s not a journal or a book forgotten by chance by a stranger,” he said with a smile. “That whole shelf is filled with communist literature.”

I didn’t continue on my plan of throwing the blame on the “guilty son of the property owner,” because, in addition, the two owners in Brussels had no sons at all! The Antwerp consul, yes, had a son called Donald, more or less the same age as me or younger, whom I saw sometimes, and with whom we took a brief walk and spoke against fascism. But, from what I understood, Donald had nothing to do with communism or the communist party either.

So I fell silent, picked up my bags and our meeting ended. I was afraid that my time in Brussels was coming to an end. A month or two after the departure of the press officer to Paris, I received notice of my dismissal. This put an end to my stay abroad. I was very upset at this turn of events, especially at having lost the opportunity to pursue and complete my higher education, now in a branch of my liking and which it was relatively easy for me to complete successfully. What hurt more was that the year that I spent in Belgium made me see, learn and acquire something I had never experienced, that being a good standard of living. The very favourable con-

ditions of housing, the fact of being alone at the consulate without being disturbed by anyone, enabled me to read and study with more zeal than I could have done anywhere else. During that time I read many works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and other theoreticians, not to mention the communist press that I read daily. I had not subscribed to communist newspapers so as not to attract the attention and prosecution of the police or the fascist organizations that were everywhere in Brussels, and every day I went out to buy them at different kiosks, covering them with a bundle of other newspapers. I was extremely careful in this matter but I underestimated the possibility of an unforeseen visit from my superiors at the consulate, and, from all the harm I suffered, I drew a good lesson: the most dangerous enemy is the one we forget or underestimate.

However, apart from the knowledge that I had drawn from the study of communist literature, I had to take with me from Belgium all the mental baggage that, to a greater or lesser extent, one acquires during a stay in a foreign country. So I left with a wealth of impressions, knowledge and fond memories of this country, of Brussels, of Antwerp and the other places I had visited there.

Belgium, as we learned in school, was a small country with a very dense population. It had many factories and workers, in addition to this they held an immense colony that was called the Congo. It was a kingdom, and all of the Belgian Congo was personal property of the king for the past century and it continued to be an inexhaustible source of copious profits for the metropolis. In Belgium too,

as in all capitalist countries, the workers were oppressed, and very harsh strikes often broke out there. I myself attended one of them and saw the police on horseback, batons in hand, violently intervening against the crowd of marching workers, who were proclaiming their demands by marching from the Place de Brouckère to the Stock Exchange.

In those years, the Belgian Communist Party was numerically small but very active; the Socialist Party, which had at its head the social Democratic president of the Second International, Emile Vandervelde, was more powerful, and enjoyed a strong position in Parliament.

In Brussels, the workers lived in miserable dwellings in the suburbs, but I read in communist and socialist newspapers and reviews that in the coal mining areas people lived even worse. The plight of the workers in Belgium, the Congo and the United States made me think of the sad situation of the workers in my country. I remembered the poems of Verhaeren who had broken with symbolist idealism to embrace realism and link poetry to reality. I had read "The Multiple Splendour" and "The Sprawling Cities" by him. From this last collection I still remember these verses:

*Looking at each other with broken eyes from their  
windows*

*And mirroring themselves in the water of pitch and  
saltpetre*

*Along a narrow canal, pulling one's bar to infinity.*

*Face to face along the quays to infinity,*

*Through the heavy suburbs*

*And the weeping misery of these suburbs,  
Factory and factories hum terribly.*

When I was in Belgium, the country was still a kingdom and its king was Leopold III, son of Albert I who fought alongside the Entente during the First World War against Germany. The name of Belgium and King Albert emerged with honour from this conflict, while later, during the Second World War, Albert's son Leopold surrendered without serious resistance to Hitler, where he was promptly sent into exile where he lived a charmed life.

Brussels was a beautiful city, much older than modern. We could only see very few recent buildings, no skyscrapers had been built. Curiosities swarmed everywhere. The streets, long and narrow, alternated with broad arteries and boulevards. There were parks, shops and stores with large, richly furnished windows, but there were also little streets with low houses and alleys that climbed or descended in a labyrinth. Brussels had magnificent and miraculously preserved old neighbourhoods which included such sights as the Grand Place and the square of City Hall. All the buildings bordering this square dated from past centuries; walls, doors and windows, towers, keeps and belfries were chiseled in stone like lace. I had never had the opportunity, neither in France nor in Italy, to see such a set, where stone, wood and iron had been worked with such mastery to constitute the constructions which surrounded this space on all sides. The buildings were very tall for the relatively small square they bordered, but the architecture was so

beautiful and endearing, the walls, the columns and the colonnades, the window jambs and lintels drawn and sculpted with such elegance that, in the middle of the square we felt no rush to leave and get on with our day. On the contrary, we were seized with the desire to stay there as long as possible to admire the genius of the craftsman, the soul and the artist's hand of the builders of this ensemble. It must be said that constantly, in winter as in summer, during the day as well as late at night, we saw groups of people there, foreigners or Belgians, who lingered there for hours. The Belgians themselves were proud of this monumental complex and, on learning that you were a foreigner, they did not fail to inquire about your impression of these constructions surrounding the Town Hall. If you told them you hadn't been there yet, they immediately showed you the direction or accompanied you to the centre of the square themselves.

There the flower market took place every day, where men, women, young girls and even specialized firms sold flowers of all kinds. The heart of Brussels was therefore the Grand Place, where, according to the history books, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, in the 15th century, Charles V had abdicated. On the ground floors of the buildings that surrounded the square, as well as in the streets and alleys that radiated from it, a bit like tunnels, in the various directions of the city, there were shops, craft workshops, selling trinkets of gold, silver and ivory. The houses of the old guilds of smoked fish, bakers, etc., revealed the important role that these had played in their time. On the square one was struck by old signs hung there since ancient times.

My time there reminded me of the Victor Hugo quote “I would like to paint every single one of these old houses.” He often went to Belgium, and had lived in one of these houses in the Grand Place. Here is what he said about it:

*“I lived in the midst of tall Flemish gables.  
Everything that could tempt an ambitious heart  
Was there in front of me: the stark and gigantic  
square  
And the four supports of Egmond’s scaffold.”<sup>1</sup>*

I also climbed the stairs of the house where Hugo had lived. Opposite of his house was the little café where Paul Verlaine had shot Arthur Rimbaud. Baudelaire had also lived close by. On this square, Voltaire, Byron, Metternich, have all walked on its cobblestones, the same stones tourists walk upon who visit to this day.

Belgium, even before the First World War, was a relatively freer country than its neighbours, and many politicians, poets, writers driven out of France or pursued by the French police and reaction found refuge in Brussels, as was the case of Hugo, Dumas and many others. They staged forbidden plays there, they also published books there, the censorship of which, in France and elsewhere, did not allow publication domestically. I must say that this “freedom” in Belgium had its limits set by the local bourgeoisie and international reaction. Pursued and persecuted by the Prussian

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to Lamoral, Count of Egmond’s execution in Brussels in the 16th century, triggering the Dutch uprising against the Spaniards — *NEPH*.

reaction, Marx, too, towards the middle of the last century, had gone to Brussels to live and work there. In his case, as in others, Belgium showed that, when it came to people who, through their ideas and their convictions, sought the transformation of society in favour of the proletarians and the people, its alleged "freedom" revealed its conservative and reactionary background. The Belgian police, far from allowing the great Marx to reside in Brussels, arrested him and expelled him from the country. I had read this in Marxist literature and, telling myself that there were plaques in Brussels evoking the stay of Verlaine and Rimbaud, I thought for a moment that I should also find the place where Marx had resided. Alas it was in vain that I looked for even the slightest trace of the passage of this great guide of revolutionary theory and practice of the proletariat. The Belgian government, which had expelled Marx during his lifetime, did not treat him anymore favourably after death.

Life in Belgium was also cheaper than in France, Italy and elsewhere. This was perhaps due to the fact that its population was smaller, its industry highly developed and its colony of great wealth. Brussels was considered by the bourgeois a place par excellence, because one ate well there, drank there and dressed well there, naturally for what concerns the wealthy and not the workers.

Brussels had an art museum very rich in paintings by the great Dutch and Flemish painters, works by Rembrandt, Van Dyck and many more recent ones. I visited there two or three times. Likewise, I visited the old church of Sainte-Gudule and the Palais de Justice.

Belgians, as we know, speak two languages, Flemish and Walloon. Walloon is French pronounced with a certain accent, while Flemish resembles Dutch. In Brussels Walloon predominated, and in Antwerp the Flemish speakers prevailed as the majority.

In any case, everywhere in Belgium, in the street, in the squares, in the cafés or at the university, we heard the two languages, French and Flemish, and, from what I saw, the question of language, that the pre-eminence of one over the other, etc., constituted an acute problem there which was discussed among men of letters and in the universities, but also in political and governmental circles. This problem, which was considered to be of national importance, was at the origin of lively debates, movements and schools of thought which quarrelled not only on the issue language, but also debated on the topic of what is Belgian literature.

There were a faction of authors at the time which identified written Belgian literature with French literature and maintained that all Belgian literature “in the French language” should be considered as French literature. In fact, it was, of course, the same language, but the literature I read, according to my impression, had uniquely Belgian particularities, specific to the way of life and the social life of the country. The Dutch reacted against the pro-French faction centred in Lower Belgium, while the Dutch faction were centred in Antwerp, Antwerpen for the Flemings. Flemish, of course, was spoken, but Dutch, especially in its new standardized form, according to what I read in the newspapers published in French, was taking



over as the dominant language. French in those years progressed, certainly under the strong influence of French literature and contacts, commercial relations and political alliances (especially the Franco-Belgian alliance of the First World War against Germany). I didn't understand a word of Flemish and made no effort to learn it even slightly. It was a language that seemed very heavy to me, rather off-putting, like German. As far as music and people's behaviour were concerned, there was a noticeable difference between the two peoples that made up Belgium.

While the French faction was larger and influential, at the Royal Museum in Brussels, one of the grandest in Europe, the finest works of the Flemish and Dutch schools predominated, gems of the fine arts, especially painting.

In Brussels I did not have the opportunity to see or hear folk art performances. I also did not see people dressed in national costumes. I did attend a practice there which made a great impression on me; every day we changed the costume of one of the most beloved monuments, the best known and the most visited in Brussels, the famous Manneken Pis, one of the curiosities of the capital. All the countries of the world at one had each sent him their national costume.

But that was the case only in Brussels, because from what I had seen in newspapers and magazines, in the three regions of Belgium (lower, middle and northern), especially in the villages, they still wore national costumes, multicoloured, with white headscarves and wooden clogs. In these regions were also preserved the traditions of popular

unwritten folklore, in the villages of Flanders and Wallonia.

The Belgians hadn't made a bad impression on me, but at least those I knew seemed to me lacking in the liveliness, quick-wittedness and humour so characteristic of the French. They drank a lot, the streets were teeming with breweries where you were served all kinds of beer. In France there were breweries, but not as many.

The Belgians I had the opportunity to meet seemed to me rather cold, unsociable, slightly distant, but that may very well have been only a fortuitous impression, since I did not talk casually nor created a level of intimacy with any of them. On the whole, however, they were level-headed people who didn't bother you and didn't want to be bothered either.

Daily life in Brussels was very cheap, compared not only to that of Paris but even to that of Montpellier. Food items cost less. In an average restaurant, of course not on a main street, you could get your fill for ten Belgian francs. The price of tickets in the cinemas I went to were generally cheaper than in France, as were the prices of consumer goods and it was even said that the French came to do their shopping in Belgium. Cigarettes were also cheaper than in France and, in addition, when you bought a packet, the retailer offered you the matches for free.

One day, as I was walking along the main street of shops and cinemas, named Rue Neuve (a surprisingly narrow street, at most eight or nine metres wide), and looking at the windows, in a small creamery I saw among other things a bowl of yo-

ghurt with the label “Albanian yoghurt.” What a surprise! I walked in, sat down on a seat and ordered an ‘Albanian yogurt.’ The boss brought me a bowl and I asked him:

“Why do you call it ‘Albanian yogurt?’”

“I inherited the secret recipe from my grandfather, who was Albanian,” he replied.

“Do you know where Albania is?”

“Yes, of course, it’s in the Balkans!”

“Do you know where exactly your grandfather was from?”

“I don’t want to lie to you, I don’t know,” he said to me, and he added: “Why are you asking me?”

“Because I myself am Albanian” and immediately after I said that we hugged. He went into the back room to fetch his wife, and he said to her:

“Come on, we have a fellow Albanian!”

I started talking to them about Albania and they listened with interest. Afterwards I reached into my pocket to pay.

“No way!” he stopped me, “and not only today but when you have the time and you want a bowl of Albanian yogurt, come here and you won’t have to pay, you will make me happy!”

I went to their shop several times, and he and his wife also visited me at the consulate.

I got used to walking around Brussels and very quickly got my bearings in its streets. I went to bookstores where you could read books standing up, even without buying them. I procured some leading newspapers; as for the others, I read them in bookstores or libraries, not only because my work required it and I was drawn to politics, but

also because I followed with interest the evolution of culture and economic problems.

Whenever I had the opportunity, I attended the meetings of the Belgian Communist Party, but I did not find there a broad understanding of the problems of their country, unlike the French Communist Party.

At the time, in Belgium, “rexism” had appeared on the political scene, a self-declared fascist movement led by Léon Degrelle. His supporters were highway robbers of the blackshirt type. They raided en masse, smashed everything and publicly beat their political opponents, while the police just watched. Later, they joined the nazis.

I often went by tram to the distant neighbourhoods of the suburbs, to working-class areas and estates. There, things looked different, the town’s architecture seemed older, the people exhausted, the atmosphere gloomy. I remembered Verlaine’s verses:

*“The sky is copper  
Without any light  
It would seem as if one could see  
The moon live and die.”*

I had thus visited the agglomerations of the small cities surrounding Brussels, such as Ixelles, Saint-Gilles, etc. After walking for hours to see people’s lives up close, I would walk into a café or sit outside on the terrace with half a beer in front of me (I couldn’t escape the temptation) which I followed by black coffee, usually served with white whipped cream on the side, which one threw, if desired, into the coffee or which one could eat with a

spoon. Each country has its own custom. In France you were served coffee in what looked like water glasses, while here in cups a little larger than ours in Albania. I spent an hour or two at the café before returning to Brussels.

If there is one historical place that I visited with particular interest, it was Waterloo, the famous battlefield. I went there by coach and I remember the emotion I felt there. Throughout the journey I looked at the plains, the trees, I read the signs with the names of the roads, “Chaussée de Waterloo,” “Chaussée d’Ixelles” until the moment when I arrived at Waterloo, which was not far, about half an hour or three quarters of an hour from Brussels.

I was well acquainted with the history of the First Empire, Napoleon’s many campaigns and battles, which we had learned in the Lyceum by following them on the maps. I suddenly remembered everything I learned at that school, the novels and poems of Hugo, the “special” historical books that I had read on the battles of Austerlitz, Eylau and Wagram, on the campaign of Russia, on the battle of France and finally on Waterloo. I had read many books, but I had especially kept in my memory “Les Adieux de Fontainebleau” and the “Mémoire de Sainte-Hélène” by Las Cases. I had visited the Château de Fontainebleau, near Paris, before going to Belgium and later returned there when I went to the French capital for the Peace Conference in 1946. With Hysni Kapo and Kahreman Ylli, members of our delegation, we visited the castle and the surrounding area, and we also took pictures.

French literature and school exalted Napoleon

and his time as revolutionary, as the continuation of the revolution but when we investigated deeper into these texts, we saw that the great strategist and undisputed politician was also a tyrant and a counter-revolutionary. He was a dictator, a bourgeois potentate, who wanted to dominate not only his country, but all of Europe, to establish everywhere across the continent the power of his family and the French bourgeoisie.

Driving in a coach on the Chaussée d'Ixelles, this episode of history reappeared and took shape in my mind. In Brussels, Wellington and his staff had organized a party. The alarm is given. The "ogre of Corsica" was marching on Brussels with his army. It was precisely this path that Wellington travelled in haste to take up his battle positions at Waterloo at "Mont Saint-Jean." It is this same journey that Napoleon and his troops also made to emerge in the plain of Waterloo, where the decisive battle was to be fought which saw his definitive defeat after the hundred days of power which followed his return from the island of Elba. Waterloo single handedly put an end to the Empire.

When the coach had reached the top of the pass, the conductor said:

"Here is Waterloo, we will descend to the foot of Lion's Mound which was erected on the spot where the Prince of Orange was wounded." The bus stopped, we dismounted and saw in front of us a high artificial mound in the shape of a pyramid. The view was both grandiose and moving. This mound, built of earth and stone, dominated the surrounding plains and hills. Our tour guide told us that we would go up, climbing some two hundred

steps if I am not mistaken, to the top of the pyramid, to the platform surmounted by a large bronze lion which looks towards "Mont Saint-Jean" where the English army and Wellington's general staff were once located.

"The base of the lion, that is to say the upper platform of the pyramid, represents the place from where the Prince of Orange directed the battle," the guide tells us, "while the lion is the symbol of the British empire and not of the Prince of Orange."

Without being particularly curious about what the lion symbolized, we waited impatiently to reach the top of the mound.

The ascent of this multitude of steps was rather tiring, but faced with the emotion and the exaltation that this visit inspired in us, no one hesitated. We therefore climbed to the top, on the platform, at the feet of the great lion, from where one could contemplate the plain of Waterloo as if in the palm of one's hand. I suddenly remembered these verses of Hugo devoted to Waterloo. In school we learned the whole poem by heart. I still have the entire poem memorized even to this day. I remembered a number of verses, of which I will jot down a few. As the tour guide explained to us the unfolding of the battle, I linked his explanations to this poem from which the guide himself quoted passages from. Such was the force of the pen, the force of the ideas of the great Hugo.

*"Waterloo! Waterloo! Waterloo! dreary plain.  
Like an ocean boiling in an overflowing vessel.  
In your woods, vales, and hills,  
Pale death blended with the dark battalions.*

*O Waterloo, I weep and I stop, alas!"*

We saw the "living" topography of the place and, after explaining to us the unfolding of the battle, indicating to us the positions of the armies as well as the directions of their attacks, the places where installed flew their battle flag, etc., the guide tells us:

"Now we will descend and watch the panorama of the famous Battle of Waterloo!"

We descended and entered a room, lit on all sides, in which, by illustrative means carried out with great art and truthfulness, we witnessed a panorama of the principal scenes of the battle of Waterloo, the positions of the armies and their staffs, the directions of the attacks, which we had imagined from the top of Lion's hill. In life size and in colour, we were presented with the uniforms of the time, the French armies, English, Prussian, all the forces which took part in the battle. You could clearly see Napoleon and his staff with Marshal Ney, the brave, and his guard in the fray of battle. In the background were Wellington and his troops, and on the horizon, in a cloud of dust, the forces of the Prussian Blücher, entering the field of battle. I watched all this with emotion and Hugo's verses came back to me with all their life and force.

*"The evening was falling, the battle was fierce and dark*

*He was on the offensive and almost won victory*

*He had Wellington cornered in the woods*

*With his telescope in hand, he occasionally observed*

*The centre of the fight, a dark point where*

*The melee, frightful and alive in the tall grass,*



*Suddenly, he shouted out, 'its Grouchy!' little did he know it was Blücher."*

Hugo, while being a great romantic, describes, in my opinion, the last battle of the Emperor with a realism of exceptional power. The painters who had reproduced the panorama must, I think, have been inspired not only by the reality of the battles themselves, but also by this famous description.

We visited by coach all the historical points of the battlefield: "La Haie Sainte," "La Belle Alliance" and "Le Mont Saint-Jean." We went to the historic well of the Hougoumont farm, where, we were told, three hundred corpses had been thrown. We also went to see on the spot the positions from which Marshal Ney was desperately attacking Wellington's English. All the belligerent states in this battle erected memorials at the strategic points of their attacks or on the positions of the bulk of their forces. The "Hotel des Colonnes" also, on "Mont Saint-Jean," where Hugo stayed and wrote his famous poem, has remained a monument.

Near the battlefield was a museum that we visited, a shop that sold handicrafts inspired by battle motifs, soldiers' uniforms, miniature busts of Bonaparte, trinkets with the characters from "Les Miserables" of Hugo, and even busts of Cambronne. Further on, in a restaurant where we had lunch, everything, from the signs to the plates, bore names evoking the names of battles, the names of the generals, the names of the marshals and above all the emperor.

With this passage I close these condensed memories of Belgium, where, apart from a brief holiday

spent in Albania, I stayed for almost a year and a half.

My impressions of this country and people were and have remained good, just as my memories of Montpellier, Paris and the French people as a whole have remained excellent and unforgettable. In mid-June 1936, permanently dismissed from my post, I picked up my clothes and returned to my country. I did not want to make any attempt to find any other work or study opportunity in France or Belgium. My future would be decided in Albania, in the midst of my people, and I would live with them for better or worse. I had left my Homeland nearly six years ago and during that time, in the countries where I had lived, studied and worked, I had learned a lot, as Montaigne says in his famous "Essays." The contacts, the visits, the study of the life of the people, of the social and political situation, of the artistic and cultural life of the various countries and of the workers' centres that I had experienced had broadened my knowledge and my culture. All this had educated, strengthened and cemented in me ideologically in my progressive and communist views, because everywhere I saw typical pictures of societies with antagonistic classes: the development of the blood-sucking bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the misery of the workers, on the other; I saw how the proletarians were crushed in their strikes and their demonstrations, but, at the same time, how the fortunes of the colonialist bourgeoisie grew shamelessly. The funeral of Queen Astrid, wife of Leopold III, who died in an accident, remains etched in my memory. In the procession one saw the hard faces of the men of the

monarchical regime, their chests covered with decorations and, on the other hand, the metalworkers and those in the coal mines, who dug hundreds of kilometres of galleries, but did not have an inch of their own land in which to be buried.

I felt my hatred of the oppressive and exploiting classes growing stronger and it gave me a strength that I had to put at the service of my Homeland and my people, who were suffering under the tyrannical regime of the feudal satrap Ahmet Zogu, and would eventually suffer under the boot of fascist Italy and nazi Germany. I would eventually fight against them steeped in communist ideology as a faithful soldier of the Communist Party of Albania. It was to these ideas and these sentiments which I had made my own and which I defended wholeheartedly, that I owed my dismissal, but I regretted nothing and was in no way disheartened. I would return to my country and unite with my comrades sharing my convictions and with our brave people to find the path towards the future. Also, from the point of view with the ultimate goal of the liberation of the people of Albania, the loss of my job in Brussels was hardly a loss, on the contrary, it affected me less than my dismissal from my post as a teacher at the Korça National Lyceum affected me.

## VI

### MY FINAL RETURN

Towards the end of June or the beginning of July 1936 I returned from abroad to my country for good, with the company of my friends and relatives. I wouldn't starve, I would find a way to survive. Abroad, I was a little lost, without support and in permanent uncertainty, as it turned out with the cancellation of my scholarship and my dismissal from the consulate. I lived there in total insecurity because, on one hand, my political positions were anti-Zogite and, on the other, the ideology that inspired me was Marxism-Leninism. During my stay abroad I had done my best not to point out the "questionable" personal traits of mine, that being my attachment to communism, to the Soviet Union and to Stalin, my interest in the press of the French Communist Party, and in general for the communist pamphlets and newspapers that I read. This simply could not remain a secret. In Bari, the emigrants called me the "redhead," as Ali Këlcyra and Sejfi Vllamasi also did in France. Qemal Karagjozi, too, knew my convictions well, because we used to see each other and he helped me when I didn't have enough to eat or even get a café crème. Although he belonged, as I said, to a rich family, he spoke to me with admiration of communism and even did so aloud, for he was not afraid of having his stipend taken away, since he was doing his studies with his father's money.

I didn't know if the explanation of the reasons for my dismissal had arrived in Tirana, but I de-

cided to not express my convictions openly.

What was important to me now was to earn enough to live on by getting a decent job, to send some money to my father and my mother who lived in poverty, to know the economic and political situation of the country and to forge links with communist and patriotic elements. In this last respect, I thought I would act with great precaution and vigilance, until the secret police were less interested in me, as they likely knew why I had been expelled. At the beginning, I went to Gjirokastra to satisfy the nostalgia I had for my parents and relatives. For the first few days, I played the role of the “good boy” when I came to my political positions and views but that did not last long. It was precisely at the same time that I arrived that our great revolutionary Ali Kelmendi had been brought to Gjirokastra. I didn’t know much about him. But as soon as Skënder Topulli told me who the “Mountaineer” was, as he was called, and why he had been brought to Gjirokastra, I gave up on my decision to stay “in the shadows” for a while. It would have been unacceptable and unforgivable for me, not only as a son of Gjirokastra, but as a devoted communist, not to try to contact him, not to see him, not to listen to this man, who, according to the information that Skënder had received from Korça and which he shared with me, was one of the main figures, if not the leader, of the communist movement of the time in Albania. We therefore set out in search of the “Mountaineer” and, as I have already recounted in detail elsewhere, we found him, spent long hours with him, learned from him and did everything we could to put things right so that

he could escape the country.

One of those days I was called by the old teacher of my childhood, the patriot and democrat Thoma Papapano, who told me about the preparations that a group of patriots from Gjirokastra were making for a significant act: the transfer of the ashes of Bajo Topulli from Saranda to Gjirokastra so that Bajo “rests where his head fell,” as he told me, paraphrasing our great poet Andon Zako Çajupi.

“I thought, and suggested it to the others,” he continued, “that you should give the main speech at the ceremony of the arrival of the ashes...”

I was touched and moved beyond measure by the great honour bestowed on me, but I objected that perhaps this honour belonged to someone else, better known, older, and that I was still young.

“Precisely because you are young, it is you who must speak,” insisted the unforgettable Thoma Papapano. “We elders have done what we had to do, now it’s your turn, the youth, to act.”

He stared at me with misty eyes, then, after a short silence, raised a finger and said, laughing:

“As for the content of the speech, I am sure of you, because I remember your childhood writings. But watch the spelling! Don’t break the rules of the language!”

I knew well the concern of this expert of spoken and written Albanian, but, wanting to tease him, I said to him laughing:

“I’ll try to stick to the spelling rules, but maybe I’ll break the rules as to what is permissible to say.”

He took my hint and replied in a half-joking, half-serious tone:

“I am ready to read your speech in advance to correct any mistakes of the language; as for offenses of the content of your speech, you will have to deal with Xhevat Kallajxhi, the director of the newspaper ‘Democracy.’”

I lived those days with great anticipation for this long-awaited event. Preparing for the speech I would deliver, the issue that concerned me above all was to what extent I could openly express the progressive ideas that were boiling in my mind as a revolutionary youth. The ceremony would be public, the people would take part in it, but the local authorities would also come, from the police and the mayor to the regional heads of the secret police.

It was therefore a question of finding a language and a mode of expression such that the discourse on this illustrious patriot resonated both as a testimony of deep respect and gratitude towards the other patriots who had sacrificed their lives for the country, and as an oath of the youth and people to support and carry forward the sacred cause of Albania, its progress and transformation. That is what I did. The ceremony of the bringing and the burial of the ashes of Bajo Topulli was grandiose, moving. By honouring and commemorating a patriot of the past, whom the Zogite regime had left in oblivion, the people of Gjirokastra, by their large participation in the ceremony, by their discussions and public comments, found the occasion to express their resentment against the abhorred regime, by evoking the past to imply the clashes and battles to come. The speech I made was well received. Certain passages irritated the representatives of the regime, but I had chosen my words

carefully and everything was justified by the fact that we were gathered to pay homage to a patriot who had given his life to Albania and not to sing hymns in honour of the king.

A few days had hardly passed when, still under the impression of the ceremony in honour of Bajo, it was decided to form a group of patriots and other progressive elements to go to Shkodra to find the burial place, somewhere in Shtoj, of the patriots Çerçiz Topulli and Muço Qulli, and bring their ashes to rest in Gjirokastra, on the same hill, at the entrance to the city, where the remains of Bajo now lay. I was also part of the initiating group. We got ready, went to Shkodra and I cannot forget the warm welcome and the ardent patriotic spirit we found among the inhabitants of this city, valiant and patriotic. There, too, at the ceremony organized by the people of Shkodra to accompany the ashes of Çerçiz Topulli and Muço Qulli, I had the great honour of speaking on behalf of the Gjirokastran delegation.

All these activities that I participated in mere weeks after I returned from abroad, especially because I was expelled for being a communist, certainly gave me satisfaction and accentuated my determination to pursue my political goals further, but my open displays of my tendencies and convictions did not go unnoticed by the regime. Despite everything, by being careful not to step out of my persona in public, as a progressive democrat, by only participating and expressing myself in the events and on the occasions that the Zogite regime was forced to tolerate, I thought I did everything right and I believed the regime had no grounds to



arrest me. Through this legal activity, within the possibilities offered by the government, not only would I understand events that unfolded much better, but also the concerns of the people and the lives of the people themselves. I would see myself creating opportunities and possibilities of connecting with the communist elements and groups that operated in Albania. The meetings and interviews I had had with Ali Kelmendi had given me a clearer view of the situation in this regard.

The main and most urgent thing for me at this point was to find a job. Towards the beginning of autumn I went to Tirana, made contact with friends and comrades. Syrja Selfo and some other friend lent me a little money and I ate my meals sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. Tirana was full of people from Gjirokastra, but most of them were traders and I neither had nor wanted to have any connection with them. Sometimes I also went to lunch at Hivzi Kokalari, to whose family we were related by marriage, on my sister Fahrije's side. Hivzi, who worked at the bank, was self-righteous but had the intellect of a donkey, just like his father Sami, who was already dead, if I'm not mistaken. His brother Isa, another "donkey," became an officer. Both worked in offices, and my presence seemed to annoy them. In fact, I visited them as little as I could. Their only topics of conversation were money and Zogu, whom they valued equally. During the War, they declared themselves in favour of the Italians, and later became "Ballists." At the Liberation of Albania, both of them were arrested for their misdeeds.

In this time of misery and idleness in Tirana, I

was especially helped by Syrja Selfo and Nexhat Peshkëpia. Syrja gave me thirty or fifty Albanian leks from time to time, and he also invited me to lunch, not at his house but in a restaurant. He didn't like having me in his family and I myself was hesitant to eat with him because his brothers, with the exception of Halit, were reactionaries, anti-communists, pretentious and arrogant.

Nexhat often invited me to lunch and dinner at his house. He was a teacher and his brother, Manush, a bank clerk. Nexhat's wife was from our family and this relationship allowed me to go to his house without ceremony. Manush himself, at the time, was progressive.

Nexhat, I don't know if I've already written it down somewhere, was an outspoken anti-Zogite and anti-Italian, a man who was never afraid to voice his opinion. When Italy invaded and the National Liberation War began, both he and Manush joined the "Balli Kombëtar," the traitors to the people and the quislings. They fought our Party, the National Liberation Front and myself. Subsequently, Manush was to receive the punishment he deserved, and Nexhat on the other hand fled with the English on the eve of Liberation, eventually immigrating to the United States, where he continued to fight us by participating in organizations of agents of subversion and by spreading propaganda. A few years ago he, too, died in New York as a traitor and an enemy of socialist Albania and communism.

Looking for a job became a real odyssey for me. I had no interest in the trades to be able to be taken on as an apprentice in some workshop, and there

was no work to be found with any tradesman, not even with the Selfos, who were, like me, from Gjirokastra. I sent a request to the Ministry of Public Instruction to obtain an appointment somewhere as a teacher of Albanian or French, but, as with my other requests, it was answered by a letter of inadmissibility. I reminded them that I could also teach biology (botany or zoology), even if I had not graduated, because I had studied these branches, but the ministry also swiftly rejected these applications. At the same time, I applied to jobs at the Ministry of Justice, thinking that, given the knowledge I had acquired in the courses I had taken in France and Belgium, my request might be taken into consideration. At the time, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice was a certain Emin Toro, from Gjirokastra, whom I knew and to whom I submitted my case. I asked him if he could appoint me secretary of any court, pointing out to him that many of the civil servants in office had no diploma and had not even finished their primary studies.

“They don’t have a diploma and haven’t studied, but they have the right to administer justice,” Emin told me in a condescending voice.

“And I am excluded from this right?” I said ironically. “Or does the law only protect those who violate it and who do not know what justice is?!”

Emin responded to my words by lightly frowning and he answered me dryly:

“We have no open positions!”

I wore out the soles of my shoes by going from one department to another, but I was always answered with the same refrain: “We have no work.”

“Insist with the Ministry of Public Instruction!” the professors at the preparatory school in Tirana advised me, and that was what I did, but still without any result. Often, people invoked my lack of a diploma as a pretext, but there were young people in Albania who had graduated and still couldn’t find a job. The regime feared educated people; ignorance and illiteracy reigned supreme, while Fejzi Alizoti, minister and deputy of Zogu, and servant of the Italians, proclaimed: “We don’t need all these graduates.”

When, faced with this worrying and hopeless situation, I was going through a moment of dejection, Nexhat and Syrja came to tell me:

“We learned that the Albanian Red Cross is providing two scholarships for abroad. Try your luck again!”

“It’s useless,” I told them. “I don’t want to go abroad. I learned and saw as many things as I could. But now I want to work in my country and earn a piece of bread for me and my family!”

“Don’t you see that no one is giving you a job?” insisted Syrja. “Always submit a request, you won’t lose anything if you apply.”

“Well,” I nodded, “I’ll do it so as not to upset you.”

I wrote a request, we sent it, but nothing came of it. Apparently the scholarship was chosen at random. I was certain that things would turn out this way, and that is why I urged Nexhat and Syrja to continue to beg some of their high-ranking friends in the Ministry of Public Instruction to get me an interview.

Eventually, after much effort, pain and suffer-

ing on my part, the ministry allowed me to be a part-time teacher who stepped in when the main teacher was absent at the preparatory school in Tirana. I was very happy about it, because from then on I would work with young people, I would teach them openly and with all my heart what I knew about the subject I would teach and, indirectly, instil in them hatred of the regime. So I started my work as a “proletarian” teacher: I could not afford to get sick or take leave like everyone else, because I was paid by the hour. In other words my salary was proportional to the number of hours I instructed! This was my situation during the four or five months that I worked at the preparatory school in Tirana.

The beginning of my duties in the preparatory school, regardless of the small amount of my remuneration, was for me a kind of achievement. Now I was more or less covered economically and would no longer have to resort to the generosity of others. This had hitherto affected me painfully. You have to have known hunger to understand what it costs to be reduced to asking for help from others, even if it is, as in my case at the time, friends and comrades. I felt like I was begging, I considered it a mutilation of my personality. But, whether in poverty and misery, I never lowered my head even in front of my friends and comrades. Admittedly, close people, like Syrja and Nexhat, helped me and were generous with me, but, even in the most difficult moments, I would have refused any help if we had not agreed, at least as patriotic Albanians, in our ideas and in our convictions. The truth is that with these two friends I spoke openly about politics

against the Zogu regime, because both of them were anti-Zogites at the time.

Now that I had been assigned to the preparatory school, I had to begin my clandestine action and struggle, first of all making contact with comrades and communist elements. But in Tirana for me at those times, it was not easy, above all because I had never stayed long in the capital, I had little knowledge of the democratic and revolutionary elements and no sort of connection or reliable information as to the elements that I could contact to penetrate into the “structures” of the communist movement of that time. I made great efforts in this direction, but I could not manage to find any traces of a communist organization. Moreover, I did not even know if there even existed such a group organized in Tirana. There was indeed someone, Tahir Kadare, who had graduated from the reserve officers’ school in Tirana in those years, who spoke to me from time to time about the “communists” and the underground communist movement, but it was hard to seriously believe to his speeches and his stories. I had known him in Gjirokastra since my childhood and when I arrived in Tirana I sometimes slept in the shed of his backyard. You could talk freely with him about anything you wanted, you could speak ill of Zogu, of fascist Italy, talk of communism, etc., but I tried to convince myself that none of these were hallmarks of a progressive. Regardless of the advanced ideas and views he was expressing, I once asked him whether these opinions were solely his and two or three others’, or whether there was something more organized, more serious, in that aspect.



*“...Around the month of March 1937, I was informed that I was appointed teacher at the Lyceum in Korça! It was a great success for me, an event that was to have a great influence on my future.”*



*“The great honour fell to me to speak, on behalf of the delegation of Gjirokastra and of all the people of the region, at the ceremony organized by the people of Shkodra for the transfer of the ashes of Çerçiz Topulli and Muço Qulli.”*

In front of the monument of Çerçiz Topulli (Gjirokastra, 1936).







Tribute to fallen patriots (Shkodra, 1936).



Facsimile of the newspaper “Demokratia” (August 1, 1936), which published the speech that Enver Hoxha gave at the ceremony of the burial of the ashes of Bajo Topulli.



*“...The house of André, the son of Thulla and Polikseni, in Korça, became for me like my own house; they treated me and loved me as if I had been their son...”*





*“During these three years of work in Korça, the fact that I was a teacher ended up becoming for me a strong cover for the activities I did in the ranks of the ‘Puna’ Communist Group.”*



*“...I was already on very good terms with Vangjush Mio when I was a student, but I was to later become friends with him when we became colleagues... He would take us out into nature, where he would start to paint, while we were surrounded by nature while contemplating his paintings.”*





With students  
and teachers  
from the Korça  
National  
Lyceum.



*“I worked there  
for three years as  
a teacher and I  
still have very  
fond memories  
from those years.”*



Views of the villages of Boboshtica (top) and Drenova (bottom) where Enver Hoxha often visited during his stay in Korça.





In Korça in 1939.



*“On the recommendation of the leadership of the ‘Puna’ Group, I also became a member of the society of the ‘Out-of-school Youth of Korça’...”*

With teachers from the Korça National Lyceum.



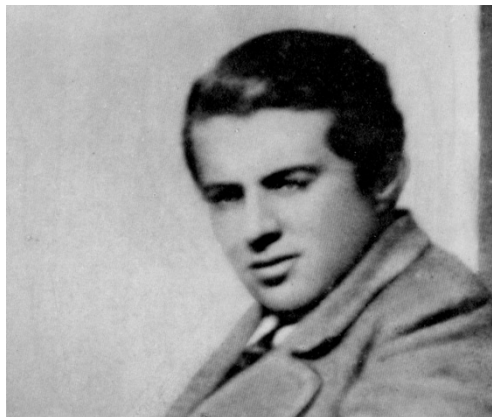




*“In the two subjects that I taught, French and morals, I tried to conduct my lessons as freely as possible, outside the rules of traditional pedagogy, trying to make the hour of class a kind of conversation with my students.”*



View of the anti-fascist demonstration of November 28, 1939 in Korça, of which Comrade Enver Hoxha was a leader.





At the Kristal café in Korça in 1939.



*“As well as the Lyceum and the many beautiful districts, one of the places in the city that I liked to visit in those years was the old market of Korça, its narrow streets with their small shops...”*



*Handwritten note in Albanian script, dated 1948, mentioning 'K. Hoxha' and 'Ministria e Arsimit'.*

*Handwritten list of names and signatures, including 'K. Hoxha', 'Enver Hoxha', and 'Ministria e Arsimit'.*

**MORETNIJA SHQIPTARE**  
**MINISTRIA E ARSIMIT**

Tirane, më 12.05.1948

*Handwritten signature*

OJtimit

Shkurtimi

Ju njoftohet se Z. Enver Hoxha shkarkohet me detyrë speciale të transferuesit shtetëror prej Liceut të Korgës shkarkohet nga detyra dhe ceket jashtë vendit dhe nuk shihet nevojë e shpërblyer tij në shërbim shtetëror.

Detyruesi:  
 Ministri i P. të Shërbimeve

-----  
 Drejtoris së Liceut Korgë  
 "Arsimit të Rehtë" shtetëror  
 Kryes së Biografisë shtetërore  
 Llogaritë +

K. H. H.

Por njoftohet dhe për të marrë shkëmbim të nevojshme.

Detyruesi:  
 Ministri i P. të Shërbimeve

*Handwritten signature and stamp*

*Handwritten note: "A.A. Shkarkim 17/05/48"*

Documents relating to the anti-fascist activity of Enver Hoxha as well as the document declaring his dismissal from his position as teacher.



1947. The first visit to Korça after liberation.  
With the mothers and relatives of fallen  
comrades.

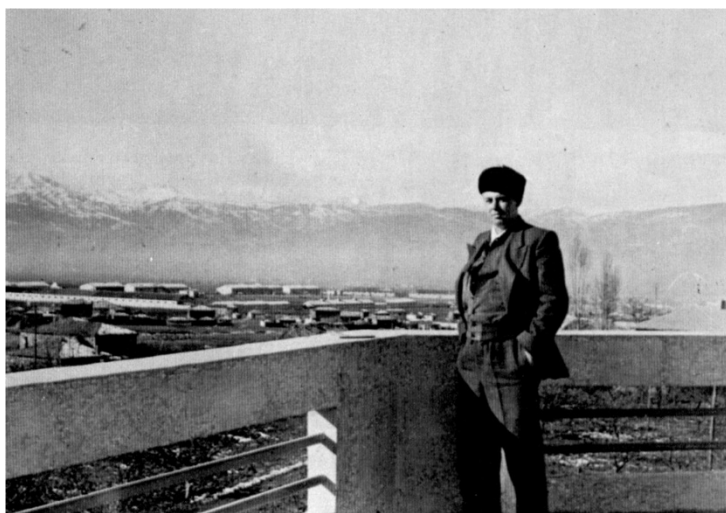
1947. Visit to the Korça brewery.





Korça, 1952. During military training.

Korça, 1952.







With his son Ilir, in Korça, covered in snow.

With Comrade Nexhmije Hoxha.





Korça, 1954. *“I went to... the heights of Mount Shëndëlli. From its position on the mountain top it looks over Korça proudly.”*



Korça,  
1954. In the  
beautiful  
nature of  
the  
mountains  
of Korça.





Among the inhabitants of Korça. Episode of the unforgettable visits of June 1965.





Korça, 1965. *“When I came to Korça, I met old comrades but also younger ones, workers and communists. It breathes life into me and gives me great joy.”*



Korça, 1967. Among the people of Dardha.





Korça, 1967. With older comrades from the years of his youth.



Korça, 1967. *“I am happy to see you, my dear friends of Korça...”*







With the workers of Korça, 1967.

*“I have been and will always remain grateful to the inhabitants of Korça, thirsty for civilization and progress, especially to their most advanced elements, the workers.”*



At the “Raqi Qirinxi” secondary school, in the class where he once attended (Korça, 1967).





“Your homework is excellent. You deserve a ten out of ten...” (Korça, 1967).



Korça, 1980. “When I go to Korça, I walk in the streets and everyone comes out to see and meet me.”





Korça, 1980.

With mother Polikseni, in the house where he lived from 1936 to 1939.





Among the two generations, the oldest and the youngest, singers of Korça.

“We had a great group!” he told me. “We were going towards the establishment of a party, but Zogu killed most of our comrades mere days before we were going to establish it!”

“Really? What happened?”

“Didn’t you hear about what happened last year here in the summer?” he said surprised. “We almost took over. We had prepared everything down to the smallest detail, and two or three days later, just when we were about to start the insurrection, someone betrayed us and we got picked off.”

“What are you telling me!” I replied with a kind of disappointment mixed with mockery. “You’re saying you could have won!? Were you involved in the Fier affair?”

“Yes!” he exclaimed. “That’s right! We had won over the main army formations in Tirana. The secret police were also with us. They had even laid the cannons which were to fire on the king’s palace. Alas, we were thwarted.”

He spoke to me in detail, mixing exaggerations with reality to make things more tragic and disturbing, but everything he told me convinced me even more that not only had the “Fier movement” was not organized by a solid centre, but that even in its preparation and in its “execution,” as I was to learn later, the communist elements and groups had not been at the head of the action. Tahir spoke to me a little too openly; he hid nothing from me, but from all these conversations I got the impression that he was very little informed about the exact situation, the organization and the extension of the communist movement at the time in Tirana, and was seemingly unaware that the communist movement

in Tirana was rather small. As for the “communist officers,” of whom Tahir spoke to me with great passion, after the “Fier movement” they had been purged and dealt with: some sent to remote posts in the countryside, some shot, others sent back to civilian life, and some still on the run. This “communist group of officers” could hardly be called a group even before it was disbanded, because it was too underground and reduced to a limited number of young officers, it also had no clear political platform, no form of definite organization, nor did it display any activity which showed its connections to the people. I asked Tahir if he knew what was being done in the different prefectures and regions with regard to the communist movement, he vaguely answered me something about Korça, but I saw that he was not aware of anything. I did not agree to meet certain elements of Tirana, because, as he told me himself, they knew nothing more than what Tahir told them. He remained “in contact” with them but they were more interesting in chatting and playing a game of cards rather than actually doing any clandestine activity. So several months passed and I still couldn’t find the means or the possibility of linking up with authentic communist elements.

My job in Tirana was more or less a last resort, so I started looking for work as a teacher in Korça, if possible in the Lyceum. I knew the city and its people well, I knew the school and I had classmates and friends there. The main thing was that I knew, especially from the mouth of Ali Kelmendi, that the communist movement was better organized and more assertive there. The workers of Korça,



the communists of the city, I thought, will discover themselves, independently of the efforts that I myself would make in this direction. I sometimes complained to the director of the preparatory school and to the Ministry of Education about my state of being half-employed, half-unemployed, I begged them incessantly, and, at the same time, I asked my colleagues of the preparatory school to help me find a new teaching job, preferably outside Tirana.

Finally, around March 1937, I was told rather unexpectedly by the Ministry of Education that I had been appointed teacher at the Korça National Lyceum. It was a great success for me, an event that was to have a great influence on my future. I didn't wait long — I picked up the few bags I had and left in the first days of April for Korça. Here everything was known and dear to me: the streets and the alleys, the houses and the courtyards surrounded by railings; the industrious women who were so clean, cultivated, intelligent and who held their heads high in front of life, the men and young people who were hardworking and serious, courageous and fond of progress. I had the impression that people known and unknown greeted me and welcomed me, and this feeling was undoubtedly caused by the crowd of memories which I had of this city and its residents.

The deal for teaching in the Lyceum was relatively simple: I was told that I would be in charge of a French course and a moral course, then I was told that, just as in Tirana, I would not be able to complete the number of course hours provided to get a full salary, meaning that I would be paid for

the hours I worked!

“But why?” I asked. “At the ministry I was told that I was appointed definitively.”

“We don’t have enough class hours to fill,” I was told. “If there are more, we’ll assign them to you.”

I was mildly frustrated but I knew this was something I could not refuse. I accepted, asked for a few days off for the time to find a room and settle in. Thus began the second phase of my life in Korça, now as a teacher at the Lyceum. I worked there for three years and I still have fond memories of those years. The didactic process did not present any difficulties for me, not only because I had three or four months’ experience of working in the preparatory school in Tirana, but, and this was the main thing, in the two subjects I gave, the French and morals, I tried to do my lessons as freely as possible, outside the rules of traditional pedagogy, trying to convert my time into a kind of conversation with my students. This way of proceeding seemed appropriate to me, both for a better understanding of the material by young people, and for the multiple possibilities it created to move from one subject, theme or problem to another. Over time, these didactic talks deepened. The pupils themselves got used to this method, they gave examples during our chat in French, they explained their own points during the moral course and they expressed ideas and views and asked questions at a very advanced level. For the time, students had to speak their mind and truly explore these topics. Naturally, I tried not to go overboard, because in no way did I wish or allow myself, for a moment’s

“satisfaction” or “audacity,” to arouse suspicion and reveal what was going on outside of class time. Because, practically, during my three years of work in Korça, the fact of being a teacher and giving lessons ended up becoming a perfect alibi, a cover for the activity that I began to participate in the “Puna” Communist Group.

Renewing my ties with the communists of Korça was not difficult for me. A few days after my arrival, I went to my old base, Koçi Bako’s pastry shop, to meet my old friend there, and satisfy my craving for pastries from when I was a student. Koçi threw himself on me for a tight hug as I crossed the threshold of his door and I was surprised to learn that he knew that I had been transferred to the Lyceum.

“When they told me that you had been appointed teacher at the high school here,” he told me, “I rejoiced, but at the same time I thought that you had possibly changed and I was afraid you wouldn’t come here.”

“How could you think that!” I replied. “Is that what you think of me?”

“Well, what do you want! When you were a poor student, my cakes were a great luxury! Now that you are a teacher, I thought that you would do like the others, that you would get your pastries from the Kristal café.”

“So you think I would be angry because you fattened me with those cakes,” I teasingly winked at him. “Is that what you think of me?”

“No, my old Enver, but things change and personalities change especially fast. I thought, ‘He’s been to Europe, to Paris, how can he still taste my

cakes!' But I was wrong. You came! What do you want from your Koçi?"

"During those days those cakes were some of my favourite things in the world!" I said, looking around at two or three customers who were sitting on a bench and watching us with a look of a little astonishment.

"Hold on, professor!" said Koçi, and he looked at me with a smile full of insinuations. He also sat down for a moment, we chatted casually, he asked me for news about my family and my affairs, I asked him about his, we talked about what happened to the friends I haven't talked to recently. We didn't say anything "suspicious," neither me nor him, but we understood each other.

A few days after this meeting, one evening in the house where I was staying, a rather special episode occurred. Immediately after my arrival in Korça, I moved into a house where I stayed for a few months before settling with André, Thulla's son, where I remained until the end of 1939. This second house, which was called "house of Polikseni," named after the name of the hostess, an intelligent and active woman, one of those great hostesses of Korça; affable and generous, is well known as the place where I lived during those years in Korça. The truth is that with André and his wife Polikseni I felt at home, they treated and loved me like their child, I must say that from the first house where I only stayed a few months I have many wonderful memories I hold dearly.

I had moved into this house and after a few days after my visit to the pastry shop owned by Koçi, one afternoon, while I was getting ready for my les-

son the next day, the owner of the house came into my room and told me:

“Listen, Enver, why didn’t you tell us your chimney isn’t drafting well? We would have found a chimney sweep, my boy, why don’t you tell me these things?”

I did not understand what it was about, and as I told him that I had no idea of this business, at the door I saw the head of a stranger pointing, who said to me:

“Professor, my boss has sent me to clean your chimney according to your order!...”

I quickly pulled myself together by guessing that this unexpected “service” probably had ulterior motives or had a message he wanted to communicate to me. I was forced to justify myself to the owner of the house by claiming that indeed I had complained to some comrades about the smoke from my stove.

The “chimney sweep” came in, put a bag on the floor with a rope, hammers and tea towels and began to work around the stove pipes. I could see that he understood nothing about this profession, and that he even hit the chimney with hammers so hard that he was denting the pipes which could cause them to fail completely.

“Who is your boss?” asked the homeowner.

“The best of Korça!” replied the “chimney sweep.”

“But what is his name?”

“How about I finish my work and I’ll tell you,” angrily responded the “chimney sweep” while he continued to bang on the pipe, at the edge of the wall, where it entered the chimney. “Why do you

keep bothering me?” He then told the owner of the house: “Go tell your wife to make us coffee and some raki. I will go with the professor downstairs, to the living room.”

The other came down and, while I was trying to figure out the secret of this story, the “chimney sweep” began to tell me:

“Koçi Bako came to my ‘boss’ and he praised you, he talked about you at length. Koçi said ‘He’s a teacher at the Lyceum, but his heart beats for the proletariat.’”

“‘Perhaps he loves you for your cakes,’ Mr. Pilo told him, but Koçi swears by you. ‘But no, no, no.’ replied Koçi, ‘you will know him and you will see that he he has a deep love of the proletariat.’” Because, you may know, professor, we are workers and rather poor, we work, some in a small shop, some in a workshop, but we get along and we like each other. As for reading, we read a little, and we like smart people. As for educated people, Korça is full of them, but there is education and true education. Well, you made Koçi happy, you impressed him. Master Pilo told me himself: “Raqi, because my name is Raqi Themeli, go to the teacher and ask about his chimney.” “What smoke are you talking about?” I replied, “I’m a tinsmith, I don’t know anything about chimneys.” “It does not matter, get info on him and try to get him on our side,” answered Mr. Pilo. That’s why I came, professor, I messed up a bit and made a mess, but I gained something: I’m going to have a raki and a coffee with the mistress of the house.”

I couldn’t help laughing as he told me this story, but I got the message, and at the end, to tease him,

I told him:

“Thank you for everything, but tell me, do you think my chimney will work now?”

“I think it’s all fixed up, professor, in my opinion at least!”

The next day or the day after I went to the forge of Pilo Peristeri, we quickly got to know each other and now my activity was organized, within the “Puna” Communist Group of Korça. I was happy and made it a point of honour to serve during those years as much as I could and without expecting anything in return, working alongside the communist proletarians Miha Lako, Pilo Peristeri, Koçi Bako, Sotir Gurra, Petro Papi, Nesti Titani, Petraq Titani, Raqi Themeli, Foni Thano, Llambi Dishnica, Stefo Grabocka and dozens more.

I have always esteemed and respected them for having been able, in such difficult times, to be the first to rise above misery and stagnation, to look ahead, to organize themselves and to lay the foundations of the communist movement in Albania. The activity and the organizational forms of the communist movement during this phase also contained errors and gaps, weaknesses and imperfections, of greater or lesser importance, conscious or unconscious, but the main thing was that the communist ideas and movement in Albania went forward, spreading and sinking their roots in Korça and Shkodra, in Tirana and Elbasan, in Vlora and Gjirokastra, gradually preparing, through struggle and fighting, the basis on which the glorious Communist Party of Albania would be founded upon later. In all the subsequent revolutionary processes which the Party led us, the place and the role of the

communist workers of Korça were most important and decisive. It is a source of satisfaction and pride for me to have had the chance to prepare myself as a faithful soldier of the Party in the ranks of the “Puna” Group of Korça. In talks and meetings, open or clandestine, the workers of Korça showed themselves eager and excited to ask questions, to learn how to develop a plan and organize to solve problems. But I must say that they themselves, even if they for the most part lacked schooling, were characterized by a developed political and ideological sense, they were mature and serious, and of course I learned a lot from these proletarians.

The “job” assigned to me was the propagation of communist ideas and the achievement of the goals set by the group in the Lyceum, in the ranks of progressive intellectuals and out-of-school youth of Korça. To this end, on the recommendation of the group’s management, I also became a member of the “Out-of-school Youth of Korça” society and regularly participated in all its activities, which, it must be said, were, in those years, of the most numerous and of a marked political character.

When I began my action in the “Puna” Group, we had just received the new Comintern directives relating to the communist movement in Albania, although we did not attend the directives were inspired by the meetings in Moscow between December 1935 and January 1936, in the spirit of the directives of the 7th Congress of the Comintern. As we know, the Korça Group became aware of these directives in the summer of 1936 and was one of the



few groups in Albania to subscribe to them, and we followed the orders to dissolve the “sectarian” cells and we deepened our penetration of the communists into the masses of workers, peasants, intellectuals and young people, etc. It is true that I did not directly participate in any cell in “Puna,” but I had still had permanent contacts with communist comrades of the school, and even more with communist workers and artisans. Stefo Grabocka, Sotir Gurra, Llambi Dishnica and Nesti Titani were among those whom I met most often and regularly, not to mention here Miha, Pilo, Koçi Xoxe, Sotir Vullkani, etc., with whom my contacts were regular.

I bonded with Sotir Gurra who I had a particularly deep friendship and camaraderie with. I often went to his house and even slept there sometimes when our conversations went on very late.

“I see you rallied the professor to your cause!” his brother Milto once said to Sotir.

“What’s wrong with that?”

“There is nothing wrong, but be careful because, if they catch you and fire you, you’ll have no other job. You will lose everything!”

“No, we are very careful!”

“Good, good, we’ll see,” said Milto, who, having taken a notebook under his arm, excused himself into an adjoining room. He was an educated man, an intellectual, patriot, democrat and progressive. He was not won over by communist ideas, but never did anything against his brother or against us. On the contrary he supported and helped us.

During this period, I met, among others, Koço

Tashko. The fact that he had come from Moscow, from the Comintern, was an important positive element which added to the good reputation he had inherited, as a scion of the honoured and famous family of the Tashkos and as an ex-student of the famous Harvard University. In particular, among the progressive intellectuals of the time, he enjoyed a special reputation, which he endeavoured to further strengthen through his behaviour as a “revolutionary intellectual”! This was how he was introduced to me at first, and although his pretentiousness and arrogance were obvious, I listened to him and respected him. I saw that worker communists like Miha, Pilo and others judged him differently, with more realism. Over time, when my collaboration with Koço became closer, I began to understand why he was so beloved amongst the workers.

Right at that moment, primarily due to her precious qualities and virtues, but also thanks to Koço’s work, one of the most deserving and renowned intellectuals of Albania, the talented and virtuoso artist Tefta Tashko, approached the Korça Group and became involved in the legal activities it led. I formed a strong friendship with her, which grew stronger and was tested during the difficult years of the War, especially during my clandestine period in Tirana.<sup>1</sup> Tefta Tashko was not a member of the Korça Group, and she did not become a member of our Communist Party either, but throughout that entire time, she was and remained a true comrade of work and ideals for us. She ded-

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<sup>1</sup> See Enver Hoxha, *Among Simple People (Excerpts from the Memoirs)*, NEPH, Ottawa 2023, pp. 58-73.

icated her marvellous voice to the cause of the people and, after Liberation, devoted her talent and life to the people and the cause of the Party.

Among the intellectuals I collaborated with during those years, under the guidance of the communist group, were Raqi Qirinxhi and Manol Konomi, who were members. We also maintained connections with others, such as my friends Vangjush Mio and Kristo Kono, who, it is true, did not become communists but wholeheartedly supported our line and directives. Not to mention others whom we sought to win over to our cause, but who, when the time came, opposed the National Liberation War, the Party and the people.

These elements, however, were few and I erased them from my memory, far outweighed by the revolutionaries that constituted the best sons and daughters of Korça, whose names and qualities I keep indelibly engraved in my mind and in my heart.

These are the main memories of the period before and after my return to the country in the summer of 1936. Of course, life is full of events, big and small, and not all of them remain or deserve to remain in one's memory. I have tried very hard to be as exact as possible in everything I have written, but it is possible that on certain points I have not been very precise, because for the whole period which preceded my affair with the comrades of the Korça Group I took no notes and had no diary. Even during the War I did not keep a regular diary, for reasons of secrecy and because of the incessant clashes with the enemy occupiers and their instruments. On the other hand, as for the extremely im-

portant and official wartime documents, I have kept them as the apple of my eye and today the Party and the people have them. This is why I have tried to write down these notes on the years of my youth, basing myself almost entirely on my memory. These are keepsakes for Nexhmije, to my children and above all, as they are and for what they are worth, they belong to my beloved Party. Through these memories I want my great Party, which raised me, educated me and instructed me, to know my life down to its details, with its good sides and its weaknesses. As for the value that these memories will have for this purpose, that is another matter, but now that my hair is turning white, I can say one thing with pride and complete conviction: it is a life that I have put to his end in the service of my beloved Party, my beloved people, communism and the proletarian revolution!

## VII

### BACK TO KORÇA

August 1975

On August 18, we left with Nexhmije for Korça. The trip was a real pleasure. The beautiful plain of Starova was bountiful with rows of green corn and beets, with the occasional expanse of tall grass and hops. Further on, we discovered Zervaska with its beautiful houses, dominated by its forest of chestnut trees and bordered by vast plantations of fruit trees, apple trees, pear trees, plum trees, etc. Our agriculture has advanced so much! We passed Pllloça, in the region of Çërrava, and everywhere the view was of greenery, the wooded slopes, the houses and the smiling villages, bristling with trees. I have visited and known these villages since the time of the war, and they are getting better every year. I said to Nexhmije:

“Oh! If only we could become young again, we would come to live and work in one of these villages. What a marvel!”

The landscape retains this beauty all the way to Korça.

When I went there, I rediscovered the memories of my youth, of my struggle for communism in the ranks of the Korça Group, I feel a particular satisfaction because, among other things, I have kept vivid, almost indelible memories from when I was a teacher, from the close friendships I had with my dear students, who stood up in demonstrations, engaged in the fight against the occupier and

fought bravely. When I came to Korça, I met old comrades but also younger ones, workers and communists. It breathes life into me, gives me great joy, revives me. I remember my chats with Miha Lako, in his shop, who stamped his feet against the floor with all his might so that we wouldn't be heard when we were talking about how to organize the denunciation of Trotskyites and archeio-Marxists like Niko Xoxi, Aristidh Qendro and Zef Mala. I remember Pilo's forge opposite the "Afrika" café, where we used to meet and educate ourselves for revolutionary action. I keep the memory of Koçi Bako, of his little shop where we went to have a cake and listen to the "Internationale" on Radio Moscow, thinking of the successes of the Soviet Union and Stalin. I remember my friend Sotir Gurra, our meetings at Kori's house, in the little café behind the "Mercur," and at the home of the bourgeois Hamit Baçi, whom Ali Kelmendi had once frequented when he was interned in Korça. I also have memories of my teacher, Vangjush Mio, who later became my colleague. When I was still a student, he called me "the chubby baby," but even when we became colleagues, he didn't take that nickname away from me. We went together around Korça, at the foot of the Morava, to Boboshtica, to Drenova; he set up his easel and began to paint. I watched him and sometimes spent the time reading.

"When I've finished," he said to me, "you'll give me your honest opinion."

"What can I tell you," I replied. "As a painter you have no equal, there is no one else who can paint the beauty of the landscape more faithfully

than you!”

“Don’t flatter me!”

“I’m not the type to flatter!” I replied, admiring his work.

Sometimes we went together to the studio of Sotir the photographer, an artist of the people and full of talent. We would start discussing. Often I said to them both:

“These dogs that govern us have smothered everything in us, even art. But the people appreciate your works. You are both remarkable artists.”

“Zogu and his minions,” said Vangjush, “are nothing but garbage and everyone knows it!”

“What do you want,” sighed Sotir, “it’s not like we can chop off their heads!”

“One day we’ll chop off their heads, we’ll do it ourselves!” I said.

“But how,” asked Sotir, “are we going to overthrow them with my photos and the paintings of Vangjush?”

“Yes, indeed! With true proletarian art, and your works certainly are, art turns into a weapon in the struggle for progress and justice.”

“You know, Sotir,” Mio would tell him, “the ‘chubby baby’ is a communist.”

“Good for him, and are we not communists as well? Aren’t we, Vangjush?” said Sotir. “It is not as if we love Selim and Tefik Mborja, the Turtulli, the Lako and all their brood! Not only do we hate them, but, with all due respect, you can shove them up here!” and Sotir lifted his leg and slapped himself on the buttocks. We started laughing.

“These ruffians deserve to be treated like how Karamanka deals with thugs, by yelling at them in

the middle of the street.”

When I come to Korça, I remember all this and so many other things. By making contact with the workers, the metallurgists, I feel young again. I have a deep nostalgia for their workshops of yesteryear, very small, from which we organized ourselves for the demonstrations against the occupiers. I think with emotion of their villages and their houses, of the comrades and partisans of Vithkuq, from Gjanç, from Voskopoje, from Panarit, from Shipska, to the barracks of Zvarisht, Progr, Dushar and so many other places where I fought as a soldier of our great Party and our marvellous people.

I think fondly of the old streets and houses of Korça.

“Please preserve them,” I said to the comrades. “Restore them, keep them in good condition, because they are the works of our great people!”

I was driving through the streets of Korça in all directions. I have grown old, but when I was young I walked them. I am happy to see the streets that inspired in my younger self a deep appreciation and feeling of the beautiful soul, the material and spiritual culture of my people. Now, both my taste and my judgement are more mature than when I was young, and I appreciate the fine works, the jewels of the genius of our people much more.

I went to visit the old market of Korça, the former home of the workers. I wanted it to be preserved, restored and to remain as it had been, a monument, for two reasons — as a monument of culture and as a political and ideological monument, the cradle of the workers of Korça. The Party granted my wish.



I visited the alleys, the ulica, as they are called in Korça, winding and serpentine, and the old houses that are being restored with so much taste. Everywhere I found the streets full of people in whom I saw affection and enthusiasm on their faces. They know my habit. When I come to Korça, I walk the streets I did in my youth, and everyone comes out to see me and meet me. How I would love to walk among all these people, to kiss them, to give them a hug, to enter their rooms, which are so well heated by a large stove in winter! But I can't do it now because I want to see all of Korça and the time I have doesn't allow it. I drove slowly in the car, greeted them, but neither they nor I were satisfied with so little interaction.

I went to the workers' recreation centre, a new building built on the heights of Mount Shëndëlli. What a beautiful building! From its position on the mountain top it looks over Korça proudly. Young and old from all over Albania had come there to relax, and they were happy like me. I met old acquaintances there, teachers, workers, artists who immediately improvised an original and attached concert. On a grandiose landscape appeared, with Korça as a backdrop, the little singers with pure, soft and crystalline voices, who sang tunes that rejuvenate you, that seem to give you wings. We sat on benches with my old friends, the singers of the "Choir of the Elders," Jorganxhi (bass), Toli (tenor), Xlierah, the mandolin player alongside Duro and others.

"I like to call you the 'Choir of the Elders,'" I told them, "but you are young again. I give you this name because the songs you sing are inspired by

the songs of us elders and are ones our youth love very much, the patriotic songs, the songs that sang of the beauty of nature, the purity of feelings, youthful and romantic love. Your art is renewed, rejuvenated, and both the old songs and the new songs of the youth we once experienced long ago revive and invigorate us.

“Oh, Comrade Enver,” they replied, “what a miracle our Party has accomplished! We are young again, the Party and the people love us and respect us.”

“I haven’t forgotten your shop, Jorganxhi,” I told him, “over there, in the street with the metropolitan church. I used to watch you from behind the glass when you were working and I said to my fellow students, pointing to you: ‘Look at that one, over there, he sings wonderfully.’ I heard you again tonight at the workers’ recreation centre. After the little singers, it was your turn, with your host and your leader watching. This time you were numerous, you had enriched your choir with young elements. You have done very well. Our life is precisely about renewal. Old Mosko is dead, but fifteen others have come to replace him. You sang in my honour patriotic songs of our Renaissance and demonstrations against fascism. Thank you, I will never forget what you have done for me.”

“What song do you want us to sing to you, Comrade Enver?” they asked me next.

“You know very well which song I would like to be performed and I myself know it is one of your favourites,” I said to them and I exclaimed: “The Ballad of the Mill!”

Then sounded the bass voice of Jorganxhi, to

which, a moment later, joined that of the tenor, Toli, then the whole choir sang this beautiful song, the ballad of the mill, in the sweet freshness of the evening.

My dear old friends of Korça, you called me back and made me see again, long since the end of my youth, the beauties of my country, recalled the sufferings of our heroic people, who fought and worked, and who, in their fight and their misery, has always had the songs of our Homeland on their lips! Now these people hold power. The Party has brought us joy and happiness, the days we sang of long ago are no longer farfetched dreams, but now our daily existence.

I remained so enthusiastic about this meeting that when we returned home, with the leaders of the Party and the people's power, we began to discuss the models of the city. The architects gave me an account of their work. I noticed that they were passionately attached to their city. Nexhmije and I were very satisfied with their ideas and their taste. I myself made only a few suggestions to them, for they had foreseen everything very well, and even Nexhmije, who has a passion for architecture, hardly made any criticisms or observations. Our judgements solidified my belief that everything there had been planned in the ideal way.

Nexhmije, the comrades and I did not fail to go and see Ruzhdi Pulaha's comedy "The Lady of the City" at the "Çajupi" theatre. A successful play, with excellent political and social content, a realistic and current comedy, which avoided turning into vapid sketches, but reflected and stigmatized the vestiges of the petty bourgeois in an educational

way. The subject is very topical, a transfer following an appointment from the city to the countryside. I laugh, I rejoice, because the piece is imbued with a very fine humour and, if you know Korça, you enjoy the piece even more. The whole troupe was excellent, especially Dhora Orgocka, who kept the spectators captivated for more than two hours. What a wonderful talent! I must also mention the excellent performance of the remarkable actor Pandi Raidhi. At the end I congratulated the artists and, after I exited, I saw quite a surprise at the town square! The good people of Korça were waiting for me. I had to show them my deep respect, so I walked around the square in the light of the fluorescent streetlights.

Once I returned to Tirana, I told Nexhmije about my impressions. She listened to me intently, and gave me, it seems to me, a good suggestion: that this comedy could be adapted with slight modifications, to some other big cities, like Tirana, Shkodra, etc., and be performed everywhere, because it is very educational.

My meetings and work talks with executives, workers, cooperativists and the intelligentsia of the city gave me great satisfaction. I felt revived, enriched with new and great strengths. There is nothing more instructive, more educational, than contacts with the base. Therein lies life, the intense revolutionary struggle, the efforts, the creative ideas, the best suggestions, therein lies the experience of the most advanced. Whoever knows how to profit from all this wealth of the working class and the people faithfully serves the Party and socialism.

It is in this that lies the strength of communism,

of our ideology, it is this flame which must animate our active life, it is this fire which must vivify the contacts with the base, the reports, the conferences, the speeches. Far be it from formalism, stereotypes, routine, work conceived as drudgery, just to blindly follow a leader! Only the working class, the people, active life, labour and the revolutionary struggle can teach you, give you new ideas, open up perspectives for you. When they are listened to and the Party elaborates their ideas and sends them back to them as it should, the working class and the masses absorb them, assimilate them, apply them in a revolutionary way, which, in turn, leads to new ideas, to new actions, to new treasures. Our theory is revolutionary, it is not static, it is not lethargic; it constitutes a colossal force which creates, which delves into the depths of matter, and for this it studies the laws of development and knows how to implement them in the most adequate conditions, erasing the remnants of the idealistic and reactionary elements of the old.

What enthusiasm the workers and students instill in me! When you as a party member go to them, you sometimes wonder what you will say because they already know a lot of things. Yes, it is better to start by listening to them, creating an atmosphere that convinces them that you are there among them as a simple comrade, that you did not come to give them a speech, but above all to learn from them. Then you will find that original ideas arise within you, new forms of expression, and a multitude of things drawn from the great experience of the Party will come back to your mind. You will combine all of this yourself, you will illustrate

it with facts, new examples or your own experience. This way, you will make your talk more interesting, and do not forget that this situation has been created by the workers, the cooperativists, the writers and the artists themselves with whom you have spoken, whom you have listened to, and who have listened to you. Thus, an astonishing osmosis is achieved between the teachings from the grassroots and the generalizations of the Party. This osmosis is fruitful, it is the method that I strive to apply, but it is a method that needs to be perfected every day. Always speak openly to the working class, to the masses, always tell them the truth, hide nothing from them. There will certainly also be things which, in the name of the general interest, one must have the patience to delay mentioning, but find the way to do it. The working class, the masses, will understand you, because they understand and apply revolutionary tactics and strategy.

I learned a lot from my contacts with the inhabitants of Korça. They gave me many suggestions and many of them will help me in my work. We chatted together, but above all they communicated to me their great enthusiasm, their conviction that they will move forward, that they will beat the established records. Above all their enthusiasm is based on the great deeds our Party has done and the uniquely close links between our marvellous people and Party. This is our greatest victory. This steel-like unity of the working class and the people with the Party is, like Mount Tomor, strong and unshakeable for centuries. This unity will never die, we only need to keep the Marxist-Leninist ideology pure, to keep it the blood, flesh and bone of

masses, and make it the foundation and guidance in every action.

I am putting all these impressions and ideas down on paper here in Korça, and I feel my respect, admiration, and love for this city and its hardworking, progressive and revolutionary people growing even stronger. In everything we accomplished during the years of the Party, in all the historical transformations and conquests achieved in Albania, Korça has held a special role and place as the first cradle of the communist and workers' movement, as the land where communist ideology, Marxism-Leninism, took root for the first time and became the dominant ideology in our country. I am delighted and proud to have had the honour and opportunity to be by the side of the old guard of communist workers in Korça, among those who were nursed and raised in this cradle of the revolution from the very beginning. I consider it a special opportunity and honour that Korça offered me the possibility and created the conditions for me to know and travel the great process of development of the revolution in Albania from its earliest steps, from the moments when Marx's "spectre of communism" began to appear here, until today, when it has become the dominant ideology, a guide for the future. I am and will always be grateful for as long as I live to Korça, its people and its proletarians, my first teachers and comrades of communism.



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