

## PEJA 1990-1997 ACCORDING TO ORAL AND DOCUMENTARY HISTORY



### History

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### Abstract

This study summarizes a research period of the important moments of the era of functioning of the city of Peja during the period 1990-1997, in the social, political, economic, cultural and educational fields. In an analytical and systematic way, the contribution of Pejans during this period of time is presented here. The main incentive for writing this text was the experience gained in the course Methodology of history and theories of the XIX-XX centuries, which was taught by prof. Jahja Drançolli whereupon we gained a modest experience in oral history as a new discipline in world historiography. For the contribution made in this discipline, young researchers such as Agon Rrezja should be mentioned with his master's thesis "Llapusha sipas historisë gojore dhe dokumentare" ("Llapusha according to oral and documentary history") defended in 2012 in the Department of History, using oral and documentary sources for the Llapusha region. Our main aim stems from the fact that oral history is a new discipline and not addressed in Albanian historiography. No researcher has dealt with Peja from the point of view of oral sources during this period of time and even earlier. Finally, we find that this study can modestly serve any history enthusiast to delve into this issue in other, more detailed ways.

## THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF PEJA

The territory of Peja lies in the south-western part of Kosova, respectively in the north-western part of the Dukagjin Plain, including Rugova. This municipality starts in the west in the heart of the mountains Bjeshkët e Namuna, including the valley and the rocky and picturesque canyon of Gryka e Rugoves and extends to the confluence of Drini i Bardhë and Lum-Bardhi. The climate of Peja and its surroundings has its own characteristics of the continental climate. Peja borders the Albanian villages left in Montenegro, Plava and Gucia, etc. In the north-west it borders with Rozhaja, the villages of Buxhov, Husaj, Dacaj and Baç. In the north it borders with Istog and in the east with the municipality of Klina.<sup>1</sup>

## POPULATION

Population is among the important geographical factors. It is the basic indicator with which socio-economic events in a place can be interpreted. According to official records made in 1981, Peja had 51,505 inhabitants, of which over 80% of the population were Albanian. At the end of the 1980s, the population of the city and its surroundings reached 70,000 inhabitants. It is estimated that today Peja has over 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Group of authors, *Kosova dikur e sot*, Belgrade, 1973, 814.

<sup>2</sup>Group of authors, *Kosova vështrim monografik*, Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo, Prishtina, 2011, 120-121.

## ORAL HISTORY AS A NEW DISCIPLINE IN WORLD HISTORIOGRAPHY

Oral history is documentation and analysis of some of the written memories told and includes the testimonies of eyewitnesses to a certain event.<sup>3</sup> Oral history is “*simply one of the tools that helps people communicate with each other and at the same time it is an instrument for data collection*”.<sup>4</sup> The inter-discipline called oral history is one of the newest schools in world historiography. There are traces from antiquity where different histories and chronicles were written according to the collective memory of the peoples.<sup>5</sup> The etymology of oral history as a terminology can be explained through the notion: story, event, and oral data from the personal experiences of individuals as well as from the collective wisdom that is interpreted in the simple form called “*narrative*”.

This word derives from the term “*narrare*”, i.e., a story or something told. With the development of empirical science research during the XIX century, things began to move better in the direction of the study of the interdisciplinary history that is called “*Theory of History or Historiography*”.<sup>6</sup> The first historian to put oral history into practice was Jules Michelet (1798-1874) professor at the Ecole Normale – Sorbonne University. Michelet conducted interviews with people outside Paris and enriched his work “*The French Revolution*” with oral sources. Great Britain established *Life Histories* collections which helped form the Oral History Society and were written by a large number of scholars in newsletters and journals such as History Workshops. In French historiography, the first pioneers of this science are Robert Folz and others. Oral history has not been convincingly supported by historiography for a long time when the memoirs or personal histories of individuals were rejected as unscientific for professional historians. Regarding the form of telling, narrating or reporting the event or history, the oral history researcher Allan Megill has made a categorization on three levels which he formulates from the micro-narrative of a particular event, the master-narrative that tries to explain a segment of history, and finally the meta-narrative as a rare narrative that counts in the historian's writing of history. Oral history is the science and art of the individual, which the interviewee interprets in his own artistic style based on the satirical, comic and tragic style of the event. Oral history, however, seeks to explain in the first place through their influence the individual lives as transmitted by conversations with individuals, with a personality that has remained in memory, especially the description of the personality, which is the strong basis that oral history requires. Fieldwork is important for humanism and for oral history it is indispensable. The meaning and ethics of person-to-person endeavor during fieldwork experience are crucial to the meaning and ethics of oral history practice.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the oral history student project in Rome, researcher Alesandro Portello's student collaborators asked him to teach them how to conduct interviews.

<sup>3</sup>Gjon Berisha, *Historia gojore dhe kujtesa e Kosovës*, in “Biblioetra”, year 5, no. 3, 2008, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup>Berisha, *Historia gojore*, 17.

<sup>5</sup>AgonRrezja, *Llapusha sipas historisë gojore në shekuj* (master's thesis defended in the Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina), 2012, 15.

<sup>6</sup>Rrezja, *Llapusha sipas historisë*, 18.

<sup>7</sup>Rrezja, *Llapusha sipas historisë*, 15-20.

Portelli managed to convince them that the main technique was to be careful about their behavior. According to Portelli, good behavior does not mean only speaking in a soft voice, saying please, thank you, but it also means accepting to do what they offer. In the examples he gives, Portelli elaborates that the essential art of the oral historian is the art of listening. In the perspective of the historian Jahja Drançolli,<sup>8</sup> oral history or narration in the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries became a competitive historical school after the Second World War in America and with its expansion in Europe, and thus deserves its place alongside the interdisciplinary sciences of world history and historiography in general.<sup>9</sup>

### POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PEJA 1981-1990

The period after 1981 is characterized by intense political activity in Kosova, especially in Peja. This can be seen from the fact that after the 1981 demonstrations, political developments are completely oriented towards the punishment of various illegal groups that aimed to make Kosova an equal unit with other subjects in the Yugoslav Federation. Hence, after the explosion of student demonstrations in Prishtina on March 11 and 26 and April 1 and 2, there were immediate attempts to organize them in the city of Peja, but the police quickly managed to discover the participants. Special meetings were held during this time in the Municipal Committee where the qualification of these demonstrations as hostile to Yugoslavia was imposed. In 1981, the District Court in Peja convicted many Peja people as part of the People's Red Front with its members Dukagjin Kelmendi, Ethem Çeku, Nysret Lipa, Mamujë Loshi, Skënder Hyseni, etc. The first group that was discovered after the 1981 demonstrations and arrested in 1982 was the "Independence" organization. In its essence, this organization did not differ from other illegal groups that came out with the slogan "Kosova Republic". The members of this group were: Halil Berisha, Sali Kelmendi, Ujkan Nikçi, Salih Lajçi, Naser Salihaj, Brahim Dreshaj, etc.

A group consisting of Bilall Kryeziu, Isa Hasanaj, Selim Lulaj, Agron Kryeziu, Gazmend Muhaxheri, and others, had included in their platform the achievement of the status for the Republic. This group was discovered and imprisoned on May 15, 1984. The patriotic organization "Ideali", known as the group of girls consisting of Robert Rasaj, Have Shala, Zoge Shala, Hidajete Kelmendi, was arrested in 1984. Meanwhile, the group "United Communist Youth" with members Gani Fetaj, Nezir Nikçi etc., was formed in April 1984 and imprisoned in 1985. The imprisonment of Albanians and its youth continued even after 1986 with the re-imprisonment of the activist Ramadan Shala.<sup>10</sup> The strikes of the miners of Trepça played a big role in the city of Peja and therefore the solidarity of the workers of the "Ramiz Sadiku" auto parts factory was immediate. In the Municipal Assembly of Peja, Ferid Gjikolli, as the mayor of the municipality, maintained a consistent attitude towards political developments. In the same way, the secretary of the socialist youth, Reshat Nurboja, who guided the organization in question, took a positive stance in the spirit

<sup>8</sup>Jahja Drançolli (1946- ). Historian, Doctor of historical sciences, scientific employer at the Institute of History of Kosovo (1980-1994), full professor at the University of Prishtina (1994-2015).

<sup>9</sup>Jahja Drançolli, *Metodologjia e historisë*, WUS-Austria, Prishtina, 2002, 98-110.

<sup>10</sup>*Monografia Peja*, (Editor: Gazmend Rizaj), Municipality of Peja, Peja, 2017, 173-174.

of Albanian demands. A weighty event for the time was the organization of 2500 pupils and students from Peja in the march on foot to Prishtina in defense of the Kosovar miners.

The protests of the citizens of Peja were strongly opposed by the Municipal Committee of Peja, which strongly condemns these popular revolts. From March 1989, when the constitutional amendments were changed in Kosova, there were also isolations of Pejan intellectuals. Thus, among the activists who were kept in isolation were: Afrim Mehmeti, Ahmet Zeka, Bashkim Ahma, Ekrem Belegu, Fetah Belegu, Nexhat Shala, etc.<sup>11</sup> Peja went through extremely difficult political circumstances in the years 1981-1989, like all settlements in Kosova. The Albanian illegality in the region of Peja and its surroundings was quite active as can be seen from the various groups that lined up against the daily politics of Yugoslavia. Although these groups were suppressed by the internal organs of the city, the national movement for the Republic did not die out among the people. Understanding the general trend well, the people of Peja strongly aligned themselves in defense of Kosova's autonomy from 1987 to March 1989. The illegal groups in Peja carried out an important mission for national emancipation and thus gave another direction to the developments since 1989, making the flow of events more organized and stronger, led by the *Democratic League of Kosova*, and other illegal groups mainly in the LPRK and LPK.<sup>12</sup>

## SOCIETY-POLITICS

The social circumstances in Peja were extremely complicated after March 1989. Thus, in order to better concentrate the reader's attention, we have combined events illustrated with oral interviews with direct participants for this general picture of all-round developments. Therefore, Reshat Nurboja<sup>13</sup> is one of those people participating in many events. Through communication with him, he recalls the important beginnings that changed the course of events, recalling that *"the massive movement of miners that lasted 8 days from February 20 to 28, 1989, unified the Albanian people in Kosova"*. According to Nurboja, *"from January 1990, when the LDK branch was formed in Pejë, this movement took the main role, playing a vital role. In addition, other entities such as the Peasant Party, Republican Party, Christian Democratic Party, Parliamentary Party, etc. were formed in this period. These parties carried out the social developments in Peja and thus begin a new stage in political awareness for the realization of centuries-old goals"*.<sup>14</sup>

During the years 1990-1997 in Peja, the serious political situation caused a large number of citizens to leave the country, thus creating an atmosphere of despair in the city. Thus *"an important role was played by the Albanian lobby in America, which helped in the economic aspect"*. The activist Nurboja recalls that *"with the initiative of the chairman of LDK for Pejë, prof. Ymer Muhaxheri the emergency headquarters was formed, which aimed to organize the protection of citizens in practical terms, it was called the aid fund, which meant that apart from*

<sup>11</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 176.

<sup>12</sup>Kosovar Basha, *Peja sipas histories gojore gjatë viteve 1989-1999* (master's thesis defended at the Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina), 2013, 27-30.

<sup>13</sup>Reshat Nurboja (1961- ). Lawyer, Secretary of the Socialist Youth of Peja, Chairman of the Republican Party, etc.

<sup>14</sup>Interview conducted with Reshat Nurboja on 01.08.2012.

*the citizens, the KLA should also be helped.* This authority provides us with interesting data, adding that *“the team composed of activists such as Rashit Gorani, Avdyt Lajçi, Angjelina Krasniqi, Isa Muçolli, Muhamet Dresha, Gjelosh Alija, etc., who were a group that made a valuable contribution by distributing aid in the villages and in the war zones in the Dukagjin region.”*<sup>15</sup> And one of the founders of LDK in the city of Peja, the lawyer Shkëlzen Hyseni,<sup>16</sup> presents an interesting narration about this period. He mentions that *“the founding meeting of LDK for Peja was held on January 11, 1990, where Ibrahim Rugova, Hajrullah Gorani, Binak Kastrati participated, and it was decided that Ymer Muahxheri was the head of the Peja branch. From that moment, the alignment of future activities through the LDK began. This is how the Council for self-financing was established, which played a big role in Pejan society, but also helped the villages of Kosova in different ways.* It is interesting that according to Hysen’s confession, he sees the LDK as *“the pivot of most national activities during these years”*. The social conditions in Peja were conditioned to pass through the LDK, as we learn from the two above-mentioned activists. Due to the lack of other legal activities in Peja by other groups or organizations, the LDK was the core of developments in this city. The final degradation of Kosova’s autonomy was sanctioned on January 1, 1990, when the presidency of the Yugoslav Federation stripped Kosova of its status as a constituent element of the federation. The Albanian delegates of the Kosova Provincial Assembly came out of the Assembly building and announced the “Constitutional Declaration” on July 2, 1990, which declared the independence of Kosova and its equality with other units of a possible Yugoslav federation or confederation. The Albanian deputies from Peja were: Besa Basha, Burim Muhaxheri, Feti Broqi, Gëzim Haklaj, Hilmi Muhaxheri, Qazim Kelmendi, and Refika Belegu. The Albanian delegates from Peja at the meeting organized on July 5, 1990, at the ‘8 Marsi’ elementary school in Peja supported The Constitutional Declaration.

After this meeting, the Serbian police gathered all the delegates and the chairman of the Assembly for informative talks, in which case many of them were mistreated, but Rustem Shala, Bajram H. Kelmendi, Isuf Bajraktari, Fran Krasniqi, etc. suffered the most.<sup>17</sup> In the wake of the complicated circumstances in 1990, the Central Council of the national movement for the Reconciliation was founded, headed by prof. Anton Çeta. The first core of this movement came from Peja from the group of students who had just been released from prison. Among the initiators of this humanitarian action were the activists: Adem Grabovci, Hava Shala, Myrvete Dreshaj, Ibish Neziri, Nurie Zekaj and others. In Peja, this humanitarian and political activity started with reconciliation in the village of Raushiq in Peja, where, in addition to Anton Çeta, Ramiz Kelmendi, Nimon Alimusaj, etc. also contributed. In February 1990 in Peja, on the initiative of a group of Peja activists such as Reshat Nurboja, Jahja Lluka, Myhedin Sylqa, Zejnullah Luta, Seit Luta, Hadi Doda, Mahir Muhaxheri, Ali Çeku, Gëzim Morina, Rexhe Krasniqi, Musë Nikçi, the Association for the Return of Albanians Displaced from their dwellings was established, its

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Shkëlzen Hyseni (1952- ). Lawyer, Member of the leadership of LDK in Peja 1990-1999.

<sup>17</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 178.

chairman being Reshat Nurboja and Secretary Zejnullah Luta.<sup>18</sup> During September 1990, the Forum of Intellectuals of Rugova was founded as well as the magazine “Gurra”. Meanwhile, during 1991, a non-partisan association named The Intellectual Forum - Branch in Pejë was founded. The chairman of this Forum was Xhavit Aliçkaj, while the secretary was Shkëlzen Hyseni, who at the same time was also a member of the central presidency of the intellectual Forum of Kosova, which was led by academician Mark Krasniqi. The new political circumstances after 1990 in Peja influenced the then mayor of Peja, Muhamet Çorkadiu, to be released from office as there was great dissatisfaction with him on the part of the Albanian population. This is how the new chairman, Aver Husaj, was elected. Next to him, Xhavit Sylqa, Shaban Shala, Metë Zeka, Bajram Kelmendi were appointed to the presidency of the Assembly. Ymer Neziri, who held this position from 1990 to 1992, was elected chairman of the executive council of the Municipality, followed by Ali Sylqa from 1992 to 1999.<sup>19</sup> The repressive measures against Albanians in the years 1990-1991 prompted the Council for the Protection of Human Rights in Prishtina and its president Adem Demaçi to establish a branch in Pejë. The composition of this branch included well-known activists of the city such as: Tahir Demaj, Rashit Gorani, Çelë Bardhaj, Ymer Lajçi, Mybijene Begolli, Drita Krasniqi, Binak Dinaj, Muhamet Asanaj, Sali Cacaj, Hysni Prelvukaj, Sherif Qosja, Zenel Mekaj, Ibrahim Rexhaj, Fitnete Kelmendi, Anduen Krasniqi, Haki Tigani, Neshad Asllani, Agim Nikçi, Mazllom Sahiti, etc. An important state-forming step was taken with the organization of the first multiparty parliamentary and presidential elections on May 24, 1992 in Kosova. The first MPs from Peja were Ymer Muhaxheri, Adem Bajri, Binak Kastrati, Shaqir Shaqiri, Niman Alimusaj, and Numan Baliq.

After the first elections, in defense of the polling boxes, Tahir Berisha was killed by the Serbian police, and Niman Alimusaj and Musa Rexhaj were brutally mistreated.<sup>20</sup> In Peja during the 90s, the illegal movement also operated, which had a branch of the People’s Movement of the Republic of Kosova. Names of the youth of Peja such as: Adrian Krasniqi, Qerim Kelmendi, Fisnik Cukaj and others took part here. In this period, the activities of Xhavit Haliti, who had immigrated to Switzerland and helped guerilla groups throughout Kosova, were also noted. From 1994 to 1997, the supply of weapons was done by Binak Dinaj and Rexhep Kelmendi. It should be noted that in the 90s, the personality of Adrian Krasniqi stood out for concrete actions against the Serbian police. In October 1997, he was killed as a martyr in an attack on the police station in Kličina, in which Mujë Krasniqi and Qerim Kelmendi had also participated. Hysen Dreshaj was also among the first activists from Peja who carried out actions against Serbian points during the years 1996-1997.<sup>21</sup>

In order to give an even more complete overview of the social circumstances in this period, we must also give some preliminary notices on the aspects of health during this time because this field played an irreplaceable role in the city of Peja. A weighty personality was Dr. Mahir

<sup>18</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 179.

<sup>19</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 180.

<sup>20</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 181-182.

<sup>21</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 184.

Morina<sup>22</sup>, who was also active during this period of time. He emphasizes, among other things, *“times start to change from 1989. At that time, the change of conditions in healthcare also began. The differentiation led to the removal of the heads of the Albanian guilds and their replacement by Serbs. The nurses were also removed and replaced with Serbo-Montenegrin ones.”* A very difficult period is presented to us from 1990 onwards when the Serbian authorities poisoned the Albanians in Kosova and Pejë. This is how Doctor Morina remembers these events: *“the ORL department was the first to open its doors to the sick and operated”*. For the first difficulties of the work, he even mentions *“after a few days, some doctors took us to the State Security, among them dr. Mahir Morina, Dr. Mustafa Ademaj and others to be informed in more detail about the help that the doctors were giving to the sick at that time”*. For the conditions and the beginnings of health development in the city of Peja, Dr. Mahir Morina gives us a clear picture. This doctor telegraphically shows that *“LDK had insisted on the mobilization of secret ambulances. It was at this time that the Mother Teresa association and the hospital with the same name was formed. We got the medicines from Mother Teresa in Prishtina, but we also bought them in the many pharmacies in the city, known as Lika. At this time, we mobilized as a group to be in charge of the healthcare system in Peja. The principals in office included dr. Mahir Morina, dr. Ibrahim Rexha, dr. Shyqyri Mema, dr. Shemsedin Muhaxheri etc.* This version narrated by dr. Morina is also supplemented with other data of interest by completing the table with important information, as follows *“the organization was made by dividing 5 points that provided emergency aid such as: 1) Dr. Mahir Morina’s practice; 2) Dr.Ymer Çavolli’s practice; other practices such as the one in the Kapeshnica neighborhood of Peja, in the village of Lugui Baranit, etc. These practices were well equipped with therapy and sanitary material.* In the end, expressing the determination of the doctors from Peja, he points out that *“there as great solidarity in aid and money from the Albanian population at that time. Peja’s healthcare system proved quite solid in many aspects. In Peja, we had a lot of sick people from the district of Mitrovica, Gjakova, Klina, Deçan, etc.”*<sup>23</sup> From the explanations of the two speakers above, we can emphasize that in the wake of a fascist government like that of Serbia, the mobilization of people lined up for the welfare of the people of the city made an undeniable contribution. In 1989, Serbia introduced violent administration by dismissing the directors, thus the Serbian workers’ council shaped the conditions to take control over the economy.<sup>24</sup>

## ECONOMY

As in other parts of Kosova, in Pejë, the economy underwent its biggest boom from the 70s to 1981, when after the demonstrations of 1981 there was a great economic decline. From 1981-1989, the degradation, intentional destruction and destruction of the Pejan economy began and continued without interruption, especially after the suppression of the autonomy of Kosova in

<sup>22</sup>Mahir Morina (1935-). Doctor and specialist in otorhinolaryngology, member of the leadership of LDK in Peja 1990-1999.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with Mahir Morina on 04.08.2012.

<sup>24</sup>*Ditari i një viti lufte*, (Editor Ymer Muhaxheri), Municipality of Peja, Peja, 2004, 270-271.

1989. The introduction of new directors by force and the expulsion of Albanian workers were the main signs of this massive destruction. The dismissal of workers causes a great social crisis among the population.<sup>25</sup> After 1990, the first business firms that operated in Peja began to emerge. *The Dukagjini Company*, founded in 1987, initially as a printing house, to be transformed into a sophisticated printing house, stood out. *The Unikat Company* was founded in 1990 with a focus on the production sector. *Bibita group* became one of the first companies in Peja. It was established in 1991 by the Gruda family. It was created as a mini juice factory. A company that was founded in the 90s was *Elkos* profited with domestic and foreign trade. And the last big company to operate in these years was *Devolli*, which was founded by a family with artisan traditions.<sup>26</sup>

By recapitulating a clear overview of this field<sup>27</sup>, the economist Nezhdet Nila elaborates that “after 1990, people were left jobless, and the population was forced to leave Peja and go to Europe. This is how the crisis of great unemployment in Peja emerged. A large part of the population is oriented towards trade even though it was not easy at all, because the Serbs imposed large fines on small businesses. The big companies that stood out were: *Devolli Group*, which were engaged in the production of sponges, as well as the trading company *Fruktusi*.”<sup>28</sup> A similar story is told by a personality who has been the head of Peja’s craftsmen in these years, Ismet Shala.<sup>29</sup> Speaking about the difficult political conditions and the reprisals of the government of Serbia, he even mentions “there was great solidarity, and many meetings were organized in the location called *Iiriana* in Peja, giving a lot of money to the people”. When it was a very difficult situation, it happened that within a day in Peja, up to 50,000 German marks were collected from the traders for the needed assistance.<sup>30</sup>

## CULTURE

This field was of great importance for the spiritual life of Peja. To give an overview of how the cultural life developed in this city, it is good to highlight some branches which were quite efficient with their activities. By including religion as part of culture, we must give a clearer overview of the development of religion, especially in the 90s. Hence, such an authority at the time was Nexhmedin Hoxha<sup>31</sup>, as an imam and member of the council of the Islamic community of Peja. According to Imam Hoxha, “during the years 1998-1999, all mosques played the role of a shrine, but also of a school and various gatherings, and thus we had difficulties in the *Kurshumli* mosque of the city, which was controlled by Serbian police patrols. Various activities took place in this Mosque, such as the meetings of the 3% Workers’ Union, as well as the exams of the Faculty of Business which were held in the Mosque and were checked by the police many times.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 265.

<sup>26</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 267-268.

<sup>27</sup>Nezhdet Nila (1952-). Economist, Member of the Economic Chamber in Peja 1990-1999.

<sup>28</sup>Interview with Nezhdet Nila on 05.08.2012.

<sup>29</sup>Ismet Shala (1951-). Mechanical engineer, Chairman of Peja Craftsmen 1990-1999.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Ismet Shala on 08.08.2012.

<sup>31</sup>Nexhmedin Hoxha (1949-). Hoxha and member of the Islamic Community in Peja 1990-1999.

<sup>32</sup>Interview with Nexhmedin Hoxha on 13.08.2012.



We can emphasize that mosques, according to Hoxha's confession, break prejudices about their contribution to the national aspect. I do not remember that in these years the Islamic religion in Kosova also played a vitally important role for a while, aligning itself nationally and not religiously. In order to keep the artistic spirit of the city during the years under review alive, the City Theater operated under unfavorable conditions. Founded in 1939 and with its first association in 1945 called "*Përparimi*" ("Progress"), this theater was the icon of the city of Peja and Kosova in general. The well-known intellectual and screenwriter in the city of Peja, Sejdi Berisha, evokes facts about this period, mentioning works that were part of the Theater's activities at the time. He emphasizes that "*In conditions of violent administration, in 1992, the light comedy of the author Atdhe Gashi entitled 'PS' was prepared, which was directed by the author himself, who is a director by profession. The premiere of this play was shown on May 10, 1992, and the roles were played by: Ruzhdi Spahiu, Drita Krasniqi, Mirlinda Haxhiu, Gëzim Kelmendi, Angjelina Krasniqi, Shqipe Sinani, Mane Krasniqi, and Gjylbehare Dauti. The assistant director was Ruzhdi Spahiu, while Afrim Gora was the costume designer, while the music was composed by Rauf Dhomi. After two years in the Peja Theatre, despite the application of repression and violence, efforts were being made to ensure that this institution did not stop operating. Shstringnergu's drama "Father" is prepared and presented, a psychological play with a very characteristic content which at that time could be embodied with other messages not only for the individual but also for the collective. In 1995, the comedy "I'm my mother-in-law's husband" was prepared, directed by Atdhe Gashi, who is also the author of the text. With this show, the City Theater stops working because the conditions were so tight that normal work were impossible. It should be noted that in this part the roles were performed by Hadi Shehu, Osman Kollçaku, Ruzhdi Spahiu, Hysen Binaku, Zija Bala, Shpresa Rama, etc.*"<sup>33</sup> Although in difficult conditions, these shows gave a good stamp to the time because the theater policy did not stop and served the Pejan spectators modest shows in very difficult circumstances.

The City Museum is also part of the rich heritage and cultural treasure. This is how we picked up segments from the museum life of the 90s in Peja by talking to dr. Baskim Lajçi,<sup>34</sup> a senior employee. According to him, "*during the years 1989-1997, the political situation clearly affected the field of museology for the worse. This was clearly visible especially in the employment of Serbs and Montenegrins who, without prior preparation, were employed in cultural institutions, for example in museums, and thus the working conditions were not good in this period. There was suffocation and insufficient space to work. There were pressures in various forms. As for the difficulties that had to do with the profession during these years, it must be said that they were many and different. The impossibility to develop in the field, to collect the ethnological material, especially the memorial one should be mentioned as a problem. Activities related to the culture and cultural heritage of Albanians were significantly reduced. A rare exhibition that was exhibited in the field of ethnology was presented in the Art Gallery and not in the Ethnological*

<sup>33</sup>Interview with Sejdi Berisha on 15.08.2012.

<sup>34</sup>Bashkim Lajçi (1955-). Ethnologist, Worker at the Ethnological Museum of Peja 1989-1999.

*Museum*".<sup>35</sup> An important institution for the city was the Intermunicipal Archive of Peja, founded in 1968. The director of this Archive for many years, Gëzim Basha,<sup>36</sup> evokes memories from 1990, stating that *"with the suppression of Kosova's autonomy, reprisals against the City Archive began and so on 13 September 1990, my dismissal as director was decided, and at the end of my term came a Serbian director and some other workers without any qualifications."*<sup>37</sup> Peja is known in the field of art because the only high school of art in Kosova operates in this city. Bringing out many artists with great success, they also gave importance to visual art as an integral part of the cultural circumstances in the city. One of the contemporary artists, Sokol Beqiri,<sup>38</sup> makes a brief summary of the art path of Peja during this time. He emphasizes that *"In this period, the quality of exhibitions began to decline, and the criterion was at a lower level due to the circumstances of the time. The artistic life in Peja was quite modest and therefore it was mainly oriented towards the city of Prishtina"*.<sup>39</sup> In the city of Peja, 1994-1997, the cafeteria "Evergreen" operated. For three consecutive years, over 40 exhibitions of Kosovar artists such as: Agim Çavdarbasha, Nexhat Krasniqi, as well as two exhibitions of the Salon of figurative and applied artists of Kosova were organized in this cafeteria/gallery. Two cultural weeks were also organized with various cultural manifestations of creators from the region of Peja, then evenings with rock music and fun music with distinguished names of the music scene at that time. There were also promotions of works of different authors, poetry evenings, comedy evenings and other activities of artistic expression. In addition, the art gallery "Europa" was founded in Peja in 1995 by prof. Isa Alimusaj. The activity of this gallery took place under conditions of occupation and was considered an illegal activity by the government.<sup>40</sup>

## EDUCATION

Educational activity in Peja dates back a long time ago. According to Murat Morina<sup>41</sup> *"as far back as the Ottoman Empire from the end of the 19th century, instruction was offered in secret schools"*. He even emphasizes that *"the supply of the texts was made by a person from Rugova named Rexhë"*.<sup>42</sup> The pressure and violence against Albanian education in the early 90s in Peja was greater than in other municipalities in Kosova. School facilities in some schools even in the year 1990/1991 taught in several shifts. In this school year, personnel changes were made in educational institutions in order to improve interpersonal and interethnic relations.<sup>43</sup>

At Xhemajl Kada elementary school, 6 teachers were taken into police custody after the protest rally. The director Isa Panxhaj and three other teachers were arrested from the Dardania

<sup>35</sup>Interview with Bashkim Lajçi on 15.08.2012.

<sup>36</sup>Gëzim Basha (1937-2020). Historian. Director of the Intermunicipal Archive of Peja 1969-1990/ 1999-2004.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Gëzim Basha on 16.08.2012.

<sup>38</sup>Sokol Beqiri (1964- ). Painter, freelance artist during the years 1991-1999.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with Sokol Beqirin on 20.08.2012.

<sup>40</sup>Rizaj, *Monografia Peja*, 314.

<sup>41</sup>Murat Morina (1927-2015). Teacher, Education veteran.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Murat Morin on 25.08.2012.

<sup>43</sup>Bajram Shatri, *Arsimi fillor në Kosovë gjatë shek XX*, Prishtina, 2006, 335-341.

School. In all primary schools such as: Miladin Popovic, Xhemajl Kada, Dushan Mugosha, Boro Vukmirovic, Ramiz Sadiku, Ivo Lllola Ribar, etc., violent measures were imposed. In the 1992/1993 school year, teaching in Albanian language was also banned in six schools in Peja. Lessons in the Albanian language were held only in the '8 Marsi' primary school. Schools organized protests where they took a large part of the population with the motto to protect Albanian education. In the school year 1993/1994 and 1994/1995, primary school students learned in the same school facilities. The education process started at 07:30 and classes finished in the last shift at 18:00. Lessons were reduced to only 30 minutes because of shift work.<sup>44</sup> Secondary education respected the statement of the Ministry of Education of Kosova. The vast majority of students started classes on January 20, 1992. Classes were organized in schools such as: Raushiq, Zahaq and Trebovic. The school year 1991/1992 ended on July 1<sup>st</sup>. This year was characterized by the perfidious methods of the Serbian military police power to chase the Albanian youth from education and the homeland at the same time. The number of students started to decrease significantly. In the Gymnasium, the Technical School, the Economic School, permanent premises were provided in home-schools, with the exception of some regions where it was not possible. From the school year 1992/1993 until the school year 1997/1998, teaching was organized at home-school points in school facilities. The shortest year in these years was 1991/1992. The 1993/1994 school year began on September 12. The other school years 1995/1996 and 1997/1998 started and ended according to the school calendar. The educational staff worked without any material income. The secondary schools of Peja in the year 1994/1995 had 3454 students. The Ministry of Education renamed the secondary schools. The high school was named Bedri Pejani; the School of Economics became Ali Hadri, the School of Art Odhise Paskali.<sup>45</sup> Education veteran and distinguished teacher prof. Xhavit Aliçkaj expresses himself in this way about education in the 90s: *"The Democratic League of Kosova at least helped us to organize and maintain the Albanian schools. The exam was passed because the education system was formed at all school levels from elementary to high schoolsto university"*<sup>46</sup>.

The Commercial High School founded in 1960 also operated in Peja.<sup>47</sup> The most difficult existential years for this school were those in the period 1991-1997 - which we can call the period of survival, in which continuity was maintained through the parallel organization of teaching in private homes. In this period, the solidarity of our people was expressed, when after the Albanian high school students and university students were expelled from the legitimate school facilities, the citizens of Peja opened the doors to the Albanian schools and education was organized in their private homes. This was a great period, which will remain marked on the pages of Kosova's history. The teachers made great sacrifice by holding lessons in private homes, in front of the enemy's guns, who had forbidden holding lessons even in this way. The teachers of the Faculty of Applied Business Sciences together with the other staff of the school had understood this as a sacred duty to the nation and the homeland and never hesitated to continue the education. In this

<sup>44</sup>Basha, *Peja sipas historisë*, 93.

<sup>45</sup>Demë Mulliqi, *Secondary schools of Peja under occupation 1990-1998*, Ulcinj, 1999, 150-170.

<sup>46</sup>Interview with Xhavit Alickaj, Peja, 14.11.2012.

<sup>47</sup>Group of authors, *University of Prishtina*, Prishtina, 2005, 13.

way, the continuity of the University of Prishtina was maintained, and also the migration of young people from Kosova was prevented – a plan for organized ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population. This fact represents the biggest contribution of the parallel organization of education.

During these years, the teachers and other staff of the school were mistreated and persecuted several times. We will mention some characteristic cases: The then director, prof. Mehdi Gjakova, was called in “informative conversations” several times and was threatened with imprisonment if the parallel education continued and if they signed any documents for studies. School secretary, Minush Hoxha was also involved several times in “informative conversations” and was threatened with imprisonment if the parallel education continued. Prof. Ali Sylqa was sentenced by the then regime to two years in prison, for his patriotic activity in school and outside it. Prof. Drita Shoshi was haunted from classes at the primary school ‘8 Marsi’ in Peja. Prof. Edmond Beqiri was taken in front of students from the common courtyard of the Technical High School and the Faculty of Applied Business Sciences in Peja and was mistreated and brutally beaten for 7 hours by the police, just because he was in school.<sup>48</sup>

This period can be divided into two phases: 1991-1994 - continuity with the laws that were current in higher education is maintained, 1994-1997 - teaching is organized in accordance with the Decree Law on higher education, approved by the Ministry of Education in 1994 and the new statute of the University of Teacher Training and the students of the Faculty of Applied Business Sciences, as the only university institution in the city of Peja, during this period were very persecuted by the regime. While some high schools were located for many years in the same houses and had created their headquarters in several spots in the city, the Faculty of Applied Business Sciences was always prevented from creating a permanent headquarters in the city. Immediately after realizing that in a particular house, there was no secondary school instruction being held, but rather university level instruction, the owner was invited to the police station and threatened for not continuing the education in his house. For this reason, it was often necessary to camouflage and mix with the high schools of the city in order to prolong the stay in the designated house.<sup>49</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the importance of oral and documentary history in the illumination of the issues we discussed is of great importance. Taking a critical look at these developments with these actors who contributed, we can come to the conclusion that the national movement in the city of Peja, mainly oriented until 1997 in the Democratic League of Kosova, had a great impact on the city of Peja and its surroundings. In all these areas that we touched on, we emphasize that in the conditions when these areas were developed, it was very difficult to obtain satisfactory results due to Serbian oppression. Social life and politics were at the basis of everything, making existential life primary. Although these were priorities, other fields such as economy and culture had a modest impact on social life in general in Peja during the years 1990-

<sup>48</sup>Edmond Beqiri, *Fakulteti i Shkencave të Aplikuaratë të Biznesit*, Pejë, 2010, 26-31.

<sup>49</sup>Beqiri, *Faculty of Applied Sciences*, 26-31.

1997. The culture managed to survive thanks to modest performances in the early 90s by the Pejan actors and thanks to the spirit of the café-galleries that opened in this city. Education was the main point where the most pronounced problems appeared because education remained one of the main priorities of Belgrade so that the Albanian population did not receive education because it presented an old danger to the Serbian authorities. In these years, primary, secondary and higher education experienced a great crisis, starting with the much oppression that were done against them in school facilities, on the streets, and also the interruption of material benefits for educators.

It can be said that the survival of the Albanian schools in this region was largely dedicated to the teachers' and parents' motivation, and daily politics, as well as to the businessmen who gave a lot from the material goods so that the education system did not die out. Taken as a whole, Peja in the years 1990-1997 experienced various social, political, economic, cultural and educational developments. The survival of its people was due to the insistence on freedom and patriotism. All the activists of these years were patriots because they proved themselves in moments of unprecedented oppression by the Serbian invaders.

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- Interview with Sejdi Berisha on 15.08.2012.
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