

**Shkëlzen Gashi, *Adem Demaçi Biography: a Century of Kosova's History through One Man's Life*. Translated by Elizabeth Gowing. Prishtina: Rrokulia Publishing House, 2010. 240pp. ISBN 9 789951 519045. Reviewed by Antonia Young.**

Shkëlzen Gashi has followed every possible lead to portray his hero as fairly and objectively as he feels right (which accounts for the word “unauthorised” in the title, since he decided to include certain points which Demaçi did not agree to—even listing specifically which those points were [p.iii] and noting that by doing this, he was following Demaçi’s virtue of not backing off from pressure, however persistent [p.iv]. Together with Elizabeth Gowing’s flowing translation, the whole text can only elicit lively enthusiasm from the reader. In his eagerness to reproduce an exact truth, Gashi provides, often long, lists of full names of the many people involved in the many (mostly illegal in terms of the oppressive regimes under which they were working) activities. There is also an extensive bibliography.

The book is very finely produced, and enhanced by a multitude of visual images: not least two clear maps. There are photographs of related events, that illustrate the historical roots of Demaçi’s firm opinions and unwavering stand; and there are also photos of Demaçi at various stages in his life, at various events, and at demonstrations. A range of documents relating to his (usually controversial) activities give further context. The book’s ten chapters are arranged chronologically, starting with the situation at the time of Demaçi’s birth (usually thought to be 1936 [also the birth year of the writers Ismail Kadare and Rexhep Qosja]. Actually Demaçi’s was the year earlier—and proper records had not been kept). The first chapter takes the reader through to Demaçi’s year of first imprisonment when 22. Three chapters are devoted to his 28 years in prison (in three separate terms), which gave him the title of “Kosovo’s Mandela”. Four other chapters relate to Demaçi’s evolving political career, at first in the Revolutionary Movement for Albanian Unity; later with the Kosova Parliamentary Party, and the Kosova Liberation Army; and the penultimate chapter covers his activity concerning the Rambouillet Accord in 1999. The final chapter takes the reader up to 2009 when he was once again elected Head of the Kosova Writers’ League.

At age 11, Demaçi was chosen as one of three Kosovar children to join the Yugoslav Pioneers along with hundreds of Albanian children in Durrës (Albania), where each morning they sang the praises of Tito, with no mention of Enver Hoxha.

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This was 1946, when Yugoslavia was planning to make Albania its 7<sup>th</sup> Republic. Demaçi's mother is presented as a tremendous inspiration in his life, supporting him throughout on his political stands. She had suffered witnessing the execution of four of her uncles by Serb forces in 1912. Adem Demaçi was amongst the first Kosovar Albanians to be educated in their own language.

Demaçi's concern for the mistreatment of Albanians in Yugoslavia resulted in his writing material that was considered to be anti-government; his full length book, *The Serpents of Blood* was the final straw and it led to his arrest in 1958. Surprisingly, during all the 28 years of imprisonment, he was always treated without physical violence, although he was in solitary confinement, sometimes for up to a year at a time. On release from his first 3-year term, Demaçi became actively involved in the Revolutionary Movement for Albanian Unity. In 1969, Demaçi was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. He believes that the Revolutionary Movement led to the fall of the Serbian Interior Minister, Aleksandar Ranković, in 1966, which in turn helped to bring about, after further demonstrations in 1968, the 1974 amendments to the Yugoslav Constitution, and from that time giving the Albanian language legal status and other reforms to the advantage of the Albanian population in Kosova.

Demaçi's children were named Abetare (a word referring to the Albanian alphabet primer) and Shqiptar (Albanian), both to demonstrate pride and love of his country. However, he was to see very little of them during their childhoods. Even when he wasn't in prison, he didn't want to cause them extra suffering by being associated with his illegal "revolutionary" career, and insists that it was his love for them that kept him away from them. Moreover, his reputation caused his wife to lose her teaching job, she was forced thereafter to take menial jobs. Demaçi resolved this situation by asking her to file for divorce. Only this allowed her back into a reasonable job, enabling her to support their children. During his time in prison, Demaçi read widely, and was also able to listen to the radio. In particular he came to realize that Hoxha would not work effectively for Albanian unity. He also realized that his hopes in Russia and in China were ill-founded.

The Yugoslav regime's political distrust of Demaçi was so intense that, on his release from prison in 1974, a friend greeting him was ordered to report to the police daily. By 1975, Demaçi was back in prison for the crime (which he has denied) of drafting the Statute and Plan of the Illegal Revolutionary Group of Kosova. In 1981

generally nonviolent student protests were broken up with violence and prisons were filled with arrested demonstrators. Once Milošević came to power, in 1987, oppression of Kosovar Albanians increased. Pressure was exerted even on Albanian representatives within the Kosova Assembly, such that few opposed the unification of Serbia with its two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosova, which thus each lost their autonomy. Demaçi commented that with such actions, Milošević unified the Kosovar Albanians, as he never could have done himself.

On completing his prison sentence in 1990, Demaçi was welcomed to a home built by friends and admirers. Gashi provides pictures to illustrate the rapturous welcome he received. On being asked how he felt to be free, Demaçi replied that he was now in the largest prison in the world (Kosova). In the same year, working to unite Kosovars under increasing oppression, the folklorist, Anton Çetta (a member of the Board of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms) worked to reconcile a large number of ongoing bloodfeuds. At the same time Serbian was pronounced to be the only official language (in spite of the population consisting of almost 90% Albanians). Throughout the 1990s, young men were drafted to fight Serbian wars in the former Yugoslav republics, and 90% of Albanians were dismissed from their jobs. Despite all this Demaçi always spoke in defence of the Serbian people (as distinct from the Yugoslav authorities).

Demaçi was very much in favour of a nonviolent solution to Kosova gaining independence. He differed in opinion from Ibrahim Rugova concerning the mode of achievement, in particular he did not feel that the US or any other country could negotiate on its behalf. In this he has been proved right in hindsight. All the resources and negotiations still have not gained Kosova a worldwide acceptance of its independence, where even the UN as a body does not accept it. Moving his political affiliation in 1996, to the Kosova Parliamentary Party (PPK), Demaçi hoped to radicalize the new generation of disaffected youth into more active, but still nonviolent, resistance. Within a year PPK created over 200 new branches. At this time he also toured Western Europe, alerting its people to the dire situation of Kosova under extreme Serbian martial law. He also tried to promote the idea of creating a Balkan federation, giving equality to Kosova, Serbia and to Montenegro: as Balkania.

Following atrocities by the Serbian forces, the emergence of the KLA (Kosova Liberation Army) became inevitable. The PPK was the only political party which publicly supported the KLA. Demaçi met with the American mediator, Richard

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Holbrooke. The latter suggested that Demaçi try to persuade the KLA to withdraw from blocking roads. Demaçi believed this would only be acceptable if Serb forces also withdrew; but he did ask concessions of the KLA: that they would modify their aggressive fist salute, and that they should support his Balkania idea.

Demaçi could not agree with the KLA demands that were to be presented at the Rambouillet meetings, (set up in 1999, to bring an acceptable solution to Kosova's demand for independence); he argued that if agreed, the demands would still not bring independence, but rather a break-up of the country along ethnic lines. After the war, when some Albanians made reprisals by attacking Serbs, Demaçi expressed his concern for the latter. At the time he headed UNMIK, Bernard Kouchner invited Demaçi to head a Committee for Reconciliation. Demaçi agreed on condition that Serbia should first recognise Kosova's independence and apologise, officially, for the crimes committed against Kosovar Albanians. As these conditions were not met, the organisation was not formed. Demaçi could find little evidence of moves towards independence under UNMIK, and was scathing about his political compatriots who worked under the rule of UNMIK. He pointed out that the Ahtisaari plan brought into operation in 2007, which claimed to protect the rights of all ethnic communities, actually allows the sovereignty of the Serbian minority over the Albanian majority. This he contends is because two thirds of Serbian representatives could block any law, and that it allows Serbia to meddle in Kosova under the pretext of supporting local Serbs (p.204).

As Alex Channer notes in her review of this book ([Balkans@yahoo.com](mailto:Balkans@yahoo.com), 1st August, 2010), Demaçi "makes some puzzling leaps between methods of resistance, covering the entire spectrum from pacifism to guerrilla warfare". Separated from his third wife, Demaçi now lives in Saranda, choosing to live until he is 111 years old.

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