

**CHARACTERS IN THE OPTICS OF  
THE ACTORS IN “ERA DHE LISI”**  
According to Sinan Hasani’s Omnipotent Novel



**Creative and Performing Arts**

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**Abstract**

The film belongs to the beginnings of cinematography in Kosovo. It was the first cinematographic work that came and competed at the XXVI Festival of Pula and was nominated for its three great awards, among the 15 selected films. According to the critically acclaimed time, the film besides bringing a social and human epoch to post-World War II Kosovo until in the mid-60s, over a period of over 20 years, has also become a part of the “life poetry and prose expression, blended with the documentary that passes the targets of the recording factography”.<sup>1</sup> According to director Besim Sahatçiu, the film is the first work of Kosovars for Kosovars. According to him, it was a laborious and inspired work, with 120 people playing and who embody roles from the most diverse ones, leading roles, middle roles, and in short, an epic film with massive scenes and fading environments which bring a post-World War II Kosovo. And as a first and massive film, rightly the director states that “I’m not afraid that the defeat of such a great commitment (I worked 16 months uninterruptedly, on average 15 hours a day) would go bad.”<sup>2</sup>

The title of the film and the sixth parts series one hour each, “*Era dhe Lisi*”, is a literary metaphor, a versatile poetic allegory. It is expressed, perhaps, in the semantics that the hard oak tree has received in the consciousness of the people as the unseen tree, the wind and the swarms. *Era dhe Lisi* (English: The wind and the oak), albeit in nature are opposite to their companion, in the poetic conception of the main character they are together, in a war, survival and transformation. The film has a tabloid nature that includes many phenomena and episodes.

Time is shortly after the Second World War and in the core of the film's message stands the commendation generally made to communist power, its connection with the people who understand and support it, and as a structure it is mostly twofold, the relationship between the two generations. According to the Yugoslav newspaper “Borba”, this film comes as a “social chronicle of Kosovo that began immediately after the war in 1945 and continues until the mid-sixties, this film brings two main characters, representatives of the two generations who hold the drama, which is closely related to the social and political conditions in Kosovo. It is a serious attempt to end the truth for a time that exactly as a document should have been accomplished for many reasons.”<sup>3</sup>

**Abdurrahman Shala's *LISI* — the political myth of the hero, symbolism, life-style —**

“To the question, after all, which is the older one, the oak under which people talk or he, the wise elder of the village (whom an elderly Oak knows it so since it was small), it answers: *Lisi*. What we have experienced together! How many storms and strong winds we have faced!??”

<sup>1</sup> Mehmetaj, Gani. *Revyja e filmave “Pula 79”*. Rilindja, 17 gusht 1979, f. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Le të flasë vetë vepra*, Sineastët kosovarë në festivalin e Pulës, Intervistë me regjisorin e filmit e teleserisë “Era dhe Lisi”, Besim Sahatçiu, Rilindja, 21 korrik, 1979, f. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Gazeta “Vjesnik”, 31 korrik 1979, nxjerrë nga gazeta “Rilindja”, artikulli *Kinematografi e re që premtton*, 5 gusht 1979.

If *Lisi* (whose name is of the main partisan, the protagonist of the film) is all that Kosovar was yesterday, *Burimi*, the boy who from the courier arrives to become a doctor and politician is the Kosovar today."<sup>4</sup> This assertion is equally related to the film structure itself as an open structure with the presence of many events.

*Ramë Ahishta*, interpreted by well-known actor Abdurrahman Shala, otherwise nicknamed *Lisi*, becomes the linking link of many film events spread over 20 years, until the 1960s. The actor has brought life full of human-hero viciousness of war involved in transforming the country and social relations. The character in the actor's optic is a jumble between the two times, the wartime that comes as a memory and confession to and after the war that comes as concrete and direct action. As we look at the creation of the epic and dynamic figure of *Lisi*, by the many assertions of film makers and critics of the time, as well as by actor Abdurrahim Shala, the figure of *Ramë Ahishta* comes as a difficult drive between tides and alleys, not only dramatic but also heroic, strong, stoic, devoted and implacable man. Such qualities become present by the actor thanks to the cinematic narrative that brings heroes from war memories, to the great postwar events, the communist power, the fight against saboteurs and opponents of the new state, the creation of cooperatives; furthermore, the hero moves into situations and other events, from the period of Stalinism and to the collection of weapons, "the stages that left a deep impression on our human psyche, especially when it is known for the ups and downs of this period, - emphasized the press, and the various obstacles and obstacles which at any moment did not hinder the dialectical development of society, and in these steep curves, storms and winds, all faced stoicism and hope for a better life".<sup>5</sup>

As seen from today's perspective, the film and series "Era and *Lisi*", is beyond the assessment of the first Albanian film in Kosovo, beyond the historical importance, nostalgia and respect for the creative work of the Albanian cinematic cinematographers, must be affirmed that the treatment of the subject, the characters, its content structure, the ideas quoted, etc., are of the typology of socialist realism. In this respect, the overarching assessment of criticism does not stand. It is part of the ideological optics of the time with clichés and praise for the achievements of communist power during the National Liberation War and especially in the heavy years filled with terror behind it, where the light of clear historical reasoning has already been made everywhere present in our studies.

From the point of view of the typology of characters, especially of Rama and *Burimi* as an organizing and conceptual couple, whereby the whole subject of the film directly or indirectly is connected with them seems to be balanced with the evaluation given in the same article of the newspaper "Rilindja" as it is said, "*Lisi*, the main character of the film, is the implacable warrior, who had much merits for the expulsion of his occupator and his servants, but despite his ironic

<sup>4</sup> *Le të flasë vetë vepra*, Sineastët kosovarë në festivalin e Pulës, Intervistë me regjisorin e filmit e teleserisë "Era dhe *Lisi*", Besim Sahatçiu, Rilindja, 21 korrik, 1979, f. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Prezantim i denjë i kinematografisë kosovare*, Festivali i XXVII i Filmit Artistik në Pulë, Rilindja 30. 07. 1979, f. 13.

will and unmatched enthusiasm, winds that blow continuously throw him down and up, not bowing him even for a single moment."<sup>6</sup>

This critics' rating implies the image that actor Abdurrahim Shala has created for the character called Lisi. In fact, the distribution of the subject with many episodes weakens the film, and consequently the character, as it loses its ability to concentrate on an active link and there to raise the whole structure and meaning. However, when we consider it as an opportunity and power to present its time and social movement, the film "Era and Lisi", in this context also the actorial creation of Abdurrahim Shala, creates undeniable values, avoiding spectacular performances and insisting on the interior transformation of the characters.<sup>7</sup>

Most authors bring the life of a former Albanian warrior, Ramë Ahishtës, who has the nickname of the war Lisi, transforming it into a circle of summaries and stating everything related to, alongside or against it. "The character was played by the well-known actor Abdurrahman Shala, was written in the newspaper "Rilindja" on July 3, 1979. - Shala's actorial accomplishment was impressive for the time when it was recorded and it was critically acclaimed. At the XXVI festival of artistic film in the city of Pula in Yugoslavia, he won the "silver arena"<sup>8</sup>

What does this man represent and what does the actor Shala bring?

What is his acting optima?

The first question is easy to be answered. Ramë Ahishta or Lisi of Abdurrahman Shala is the figure of the militant, of "man of people" who is affiliated with humans, courageous and careless as well as nice with people, who has authority and his word is well-heard. So he is a bearer of new time and change that was brought. He is present everywhere and in a sense, is turned into a composite and compositional yarn of multiple cross-sectional objects in a shape of mosaic.

As a bailiff and representative of the new communist power in the province after World War II, Ramë Ahishta of A. Shala became part of the "enthusiasm" of people liberated from "captivity" and full of hope in the new era, which would begin with the establishment of a cooperative in the village of Ahishte, presented as the "liberation" of peasants from poverty, a

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> In the evaluation case of Zagreb's newspaper "Vjesnik" about the film, it is written: "The film is a Kosovo social chronicle that began immediately after the war in 1945 and continues until the mid-sixties, this film brings two main characters, representatives of two generations, who hold the drama, which is closely linked to the social and political conditions in Kosovo. It is a serious attempt to end the truth for a time exactly as a document should have been realized for many reasons ... "Era and Lisi" by Besim Sahatçiu (Kosovo-Film) was created based on the omnipotent television serial according to Sinan Hasani's novel. Petrit Nimani consistently transmits Sinan Hasani's pro-life motives for Kosovo's development (the film explains the period between 1945-1966), which makes it possible for the director to use powerful narrative elements to reflect social events between the reports of the main characters, otherwise carriers of their development to the premises to which they belong. Sahatçiu avoids spectacular steps, focuses mainly on the faithful transformation of the motifs mentioned, which sometimes acts in a very discrete way, slowed down in the narrative of the tale, and pointed out the classical action of the director when it comes to the transposition of literary matter. But the film is highly committed, even more important than the political courage to tackle distortion issues in Kosovo openly to all events that characterize Kosovo's development during these two decades. "The newspaper "Vjesnik", July 31, 1966, issued by the newspaper "Rilindja", the article entitled The New Promising Cinematography, August 5, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> From the newspaper "Rilindja" of August 3rd, 1979, p. 13, in the announcement "the Jury for awarding official awards decided – THE GOLDEN ARENA OF THE FILM 'THE TROPHY': The silver medal for male role and 6.000 dinars for Abdurrahman Shala for the role in "Era and Lisi", directed by Besim Sahatçiu, production of Prishtina Television and Prishtina's "Kosovo-Film".

daunting and propagandistic power scheme. The actor could not avoid it because he embodies what the word and literary discourse in the script is given as an opportunity. It is the actor who retains the enthusiasm and the energy to embody the figure of the communist and popular leader who merges with the measure and seeks to become their representative. But the actor did not allow the character of Ramë Ahishta to be touched and affected by attitudes, gestures and declarative forms, panenergetic, trying to make it as human, as reliable and beyond the mastery of the times. It is understood that this could be achieved through the application of the principle of artistic truth, thus enabling a more realistic and credible presentation.

But this movie-backhand character, given by the actor as a "hero" manageable by the people and the new powers themselves, with bravery and greatness during the war, is equally present in the collection of weapons, excesses, when because of their holding power exercises violence against the villagers, beats and humiliates them; furthermore, Rama becomes present in the fate of so-called "nationalists and irredentists". The game of Abdurrahman Shala is calm, preserving the good, balanced human format that people love because of its merits, fame, and honesty. The actor outlined the gangrene phenomenon of immigration, migration of Albanians to Turkey; he also described the difficult state of the population, their poverty, their lack of life. In a sense, by the form of the actorial incarnation, A. Shala's *Lisi* is not the man coming from the "above" of the hierarchy of power. Rather, it is the man who came directly from the people, therefore, and trustworthy. This approach the actor Shala has made it so visible, even more sensible. But, on the other hand, being part of the schematic conceptualization of the time regarding the ideological and political format of the hero, the actor fails to avoid until the end a sort of external combatant that originates from the very form of literary discourse in scenario, for this reason in his game has also appeared a somewhat positive attitude of uncompromised man, determined, etc., namely this literary typology. However, in its entirety, his acting is trustworthy, warm, outspoken in the scales of the natural and the truthfulness. While still in the game it is not made of its full value of the interpretation of the camera, the redemption and the openness when there is no feeling nor gesture. From this point of view, his game has sometimes elements of acting in theater, where gesture, movement, speech discourse in times of open conflict and the situation of honor, sight are more conventional, more controlled.

The character of Ramë Ahishta through Abdurrahman Shala's revelation comes as the man standing with two feet equally here and there. The actor sometimes blames when war, social values, and new times are accused of excessiveness or feebleness, but while still silent, hearing and enduring when he sees the anger of his fellows, their dissatisfaction goes where there is no longer existent. Therefore, actor Abdurrahman Shala as *Lisi*, in dialogues with others, seeks the rationale for the man and the peasant first of all than the political representatives of power when it comes to counteracting the realistic logic of the villagers as they tell the truth in the eye on co-operatives as a reform for allegedly social equality, in fact for the abduction of the land and the cause of expected poverty: "The mall of the whole village to mix and live together, someone to work and someone to order ... - waving one of the highlanders. - Once we will all eat in a couldron." The love for the village, the people, the home, with the respite and the accompaniment

that accompanies it from time to time, the actor mentions well and in depth thanks to a mild, self-contained experience, without "declaring it" as such. And this emotional layer becomes even more fluid, even takes a dramatic psychological vascular as he hopes to recapture once-destroyed life. In these film sequences, the actor reaches to touch upon objects of commendable spiritual caricature reflecting the vibrations of his soul, soft human nature, in spite of the courageous and manly form of the subject space, insisting on the psychological injuries and sorrows that create an emotional background to the viewer.

One of the episodes where actor A. Shala's game gains warm emotional and comforting tones is that of Hatixhes' homecoming (plays actress Shirine Morina), *Lisi's* wife. It is a difficult moment for him, where there is an amplitude of sensitivity moving in touching intonations. The words, gestures, the behavior of actor Shala in this sequence are humanized and create a whole uniqueness, unitedness, interactiveness. We look and feel the person who needs the hearth, the wife, the family. The man who returns to his Itaka after so many vicissitudes, in wars and life threats, in work, and in fierce matches. From the psychophysics of the actor and the few words the text gives it, it is not difficult to understand that the brave, authoritarian, and proud man named Ramë Ahishta will recall his interrupted life, give full repentance and nobility to the relationship with the outcast woman, to blossom again into a human love of respect and mutual comfort. This approach is well understood by the actor and he has been able to show off in all its mildness and humanity. Inspired by the whole character and interpretation of Abdurrahman Shala who has done to Lisi-Ramë Ahishta, the image is impressive, imposing, where the actor "miraculously embodied the parable of the warrior, in war and in peace"<sup>9</sup> and where he "as remembrance has the memory and not the vengeance, which Abdurrahman Shala with the role of *Lisi* came to the top to accomplish it majestically".<sup>10</sup> The rating was so high by the criticisms and impressions so deep that the newspaper "Rilindja" in its editorial writing "A worthy presentation of Kosovar cinematography" writes: "The protagonists of the film "Era dhe Lisi" were well identified by our actors, like Abdurrahman Shala in the role of Lisi, who proved to be a top-ranking actor."<sup>11</sup> Another rating for the actor comes from the TANJUG news agency, which was said that "Abdurrahman Shala was the impressive interpreter of the protagonist, the man who faced the difficulties in life."<sup>12</sup>

### **Burim Ahishta of Faruk Begolli**

The second figure, which in the scenarios is set to create a double-breasted, complementary structure, is that of Ramë Ahishta's nephew, Burim Ahishta, played by Faruk Begolli with a positive and energetic boy that impresses the broad spectator.

<sup>9</sup> Gazeta "Borba", 31 korrik 1966, nxjerrë nga gazeta "Rilindja", artikulli *Kinematografi e re që premtion*, 5 gusht 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Gazeta "Politika", 30 korrik 1966, nxjerrë nga gazeta "Rilindja", artikulli *Kinematografi e re që premtion*, 5 gusht 1979.

<sup>11</sup> *Prezantim i denjë i kinematografisë kosovare*, Festivali i XXVII i Filmit Artistik në Pulë, Rilindja 30. 07. 1979, f. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Cituar sipas gazetës "Rilindja", dt. 30. 07. 1979, në shkrimin *Pasqyrë e rritjes së Kosovës dhe e njerëzve të saj*, f. 14.

For the time this has been an appreciated and pleasing role. According to Jeton Neziraj, "In the politically engaged film, like most of the films of that time, "Era dhe Lisi", according to the novel by Sinan Hasani, the former high communist leader in the former Yugoslavia, with a scenario by Petrit Imam directed by Besim Sahatçiu, Faruk Begolli plays one of two main roles Burimi, a young communist fighter who fights for the ideals of the Party after the end of World War II. The film speaks of the consolidation of popular power after the end of the war and confrontation with the "garbage" of fascism."<sup>13</sup>

"Burim, his grandson (of Ramë Ahishta - HH), is the incarnation of a young man who persistently seeks not only the transformation and penetration of the progressive but also the abolition of violence and reprisals made by people who abuse their position when they are in power".<sup>14</sup>

Faruk Begolli brought the character of Burim as part of the enthusiastic youth of the first years after the war, filled with energy and hope, with joy of age and dreams of bright future. It is and is a well-known, highly consumed, heroic-shaped roll that produced the socialist rivalry. This courageous and lyrical young man has also valuable human qualities, such as the deep love of his uncle, the respect and humility of honor and sensitivity that the actor has brought through a visible sincerity. The grandchild is two generations of fighters, complementary to one another. But if Abdurrahman Shala suffers somehow this forerunner of the hero, Faruk Begolli seems to overcome it easily because of the redemptive and optimistic nature that he has as an actor, which he intercepts himself in the whole dungeon of his character. This makes it charming to the viewer. Although amused by nature and optimistic, the actor has not neglected even a key feature of the character: courage. He dares to risk, even dares and strikes with career-caretakers of the new caste of power, which for purposes only have privileges, extortions, abusive authority, and the rampant ego.

Faruk Begolli's *Burim Ahishta*, though young communist, he becomes acceptable to the spectator by bringing through the game mostly human qualities, a dependable human format rather than a schemed ideological format.

"Faruk Begolli in the role of progressive and energetic Burimi, - underlined the criticism of the time, - once again proved his qualities well received before."<sup>15</sup>

Aktori në film doemos kryen edhe funksionet "social-politike" si bartës i ideologjisë së kohës dhe optimizmit shoqëror brenda prototipit të heroit pozitiv, të cilat vijnë drejtpërdrejt nga ligjërimi letrar në skenar. Kësodore ai shpërfaqet edhe brenda tipologjisë së preferuar të metodës së socrealizmit, pra si i riu i mbushur me energji dhe shpresë për të sotmen e re dhe të ardhmen e "ndritur".

<sup>13</sup> Neziraj, Jeton. *Faruk Begolli*, Autori & Integra, Koha, 2007, f. 55.

<sup>14</sup> *Prezantim i denjë i kinematografisë kosovare*, Festivali i XXVII i Filmit Artistik në Pulë, Rilindja 30. 07. 1979, f. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Prezantim i denjë i kinematografisë kosovare*, Festivali i XXVII i Filmit Artistik në Pulë, Rilindja 30. 07. 1966.

In this sense of intimacy that comes from the subject where the character is involved in some of the political clashes of the conflict, there is no such thing as an actor to shake it off. This could not be asked. For this reason, in these links where he is "victimized" by the text and the discourse of the character of Burimi, amongst other things are his "braveness" and "accusations" of those who deform the political line but on the other hand the actor during his game becomes more credible precisely in the criticism and demotion that makes people dressed in power, who have now become militants and idealists of the past, traders of ideals, interests, and careers. Likewise, Faruk Begolli's character experiences and denounces the investigative process against Albanians, his fellow citizens, as on the other hand suffers the cliches of socialist realism with "class differentials" and "incompatibility with the class enemy", coping with the Soviet pressure with the demise of the relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the Stalin period.

It must be stated that the actor's play does not come up against what the character gives in his text. In this case, the two actors, Abdurrahman Shala and Faruk Begolli, in two main roles of the film "Era dhe Lisi", carry and reflect in their interpretation the limitations that come from the way of conceiving these characters, schemas and political pathetism, human views that this way of conception brings inevitably. What can be appreciated in Faruk Begolli's acting is the effort to fill the role with the most natural sense and action so that he sounds trustworthy, not so representative, and is forced to announce through dialogue but how it looks, how it behaves, gestures, talks, how it feels and reacts. The actor is not responsible for the ideas that his character announces with his own mouth. He is responsible for giving life and spirit to this character in a more credible way, within his feelings as an actor, his ideas and his way of seeing and conceiving the role, Burim Ahishta. The estimates that come for the actor in the film are generally positive and enthusiastic about the state and the experience that Albanian cinematography in Kosovo had at one time, as it was thought that the film "Era dhe Lisi" was the first feature in its history.

In an interview of the time, Faruk Begolli would declare: "I think this year for the first time I introduce myself to this festival with two valuable roles, (Era dhe Lisi and "Heavy Years" movies -HH). Also after 14 years of my career as an actor, for the first time, I have had the pleasure to work in these two roles, which enabled me to engage myself in maximum as an actor. I am very pleased with the cooperation with directors Besim Sahatçiu and Zhika Ristiq".<sup>16</sup>

"Other actors of Prishtina's Popular Theater such as Shani Pallaska, Istref Begolli, Hazir Myftari and the entire team of actors in this film company, re-evaluates the newspaper "Rilindja" after appearing for the two protagonists view, Abdurrahman Shala and Faruk Begolli , - acted as a compact orchestra under the direction of director Besim Sahatçiu".<sup>17</sup>

From a film's perspective today there are many shortcomings. He could not escape the schemes of the time, the overwhelming presence of ideological and political strata, though trying to create a social picture of a comprehensive nature for the time period after World War II.

<sup>16</sup> Neziraj, Jeton. *Faruk Begolli, Autori&Integra*, Koha, 2007, f. 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Prezantim i denjë i kinematografisë kosovare*, Festivali i XXVII i Filmit Artistik në Pulë, Rilindja 30. 07. 1966.



"All this lofty, multifarious and unexplored subject," writes the famous scholar, Josif Papagjoni, "has everywhere a stinging and spiking propaganda, with frequent lectures filled with rhetoric and political slogans, when it could be piped and focused much on the path for the lives of two protagonists, Rama and Burim, their reports, despair, disappointments and dramas. The film has a flood of words, the most parasitic, where the elements of propaganda are active, as well as the introduction of "revolutionary" songs as a communist background. It can be said that the vast majority of the subject is unfinished and untrained artistically, as evidenced by the weaknesses and shortages of the initial stage of cinematic development in Kosovo in the 1970s, as well as the return of film subjects to the function of ideology and propaganda."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Papagjoni, Josif. *Filmi artistik shqiptar – imazhi, historia, qenësia*. Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Tiranë 2017, f. 450-451.