

THE EVENTS OF JUNE 1924 IN THE PUBLICISTICS OF FRIAR GJERGJ FISHTA

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Abstract: Gjergj Fishta, a prominent figure in Albanian literature, wrote epic, satirical, dramatic, lyrical, and publicistic works during the course of his career. He covered the journalistic side, which assessed aspects of Albania and its environment, in great detail. The majority of Fishta's prose works were released in periodicals and newspapers of the era, including *"Hylli i Dritës"* (1913) and *"Posta e Shqypnis"* (1916). The considerable work of Gjergj Fishta is a significant addition to Albanianology, theology, and cultural studies. Our inquiry will center on the newspaper article *"The Riots of June 1924."* This writing in the Fishtian pen takes the form of a historical testimony, bringing historical events, facts, and real individuals in addition to its vast lexicon. As he noted, Gjergj Fishta, the demagogues of political and social life were the target of this article. In particular, the authorities, particularly those in Albania, the Assembly, the Parliament, specifically the high officials, starting with the prime minister, witnessed an undress spiritual and national, ignorance to the point of regret, extreme impudence, and nonsense motivated by greed, with serious repercussions for the Albanian world and its people. With this study, Gjergj Fishta aimed to uphold Albanian identity, the call to serve the country, and the need to modify the law to better suit Albanian society. At the end of the day, Gjergj Fishta wanted the best for his people and the preservation of the Albanian identity based on the code of tradition, just like many other patriots, intellectuals, and albanologists.

Keywords: people, history, state, blood, Albania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Albania was marked by political instability and ferocious conflict during the years 1921 and 1924. This conflict wasn't just a straightforward power fight; it also occurred in and outside of parliament, in the press, and in the public eye. According to Albanian historiography, it was a confrontation of forces with opposing economic and social ideologies. The democratic forces emphasized the necessity of enacting anti-feudal reforms, particularly agrarian reform, to clear the way for the nation's capitalist development, relieving the working classes of their burdens and enhancing their quality of life. The conservative elements, on the other hand, wanted to maintain the feudal system that was left over from the Ottoman Empire. (Çami 2007, 337-38).

The conflict between these political factions resulted in a shift in the Albanian political landscape. The conservative government, led by Ahmet Zogu, was ousted in June 1924, and democratic forces led by Fan Noli ascended to power (Meta *et al* 2019, Volume II:311).

The intellectual elite of the day watched these events with particular interest. The appraisal and analysis of the factors that led to these events, as described by Friar Gjergj Fishta in the article *"The Riots of June 1924,"* published in the journal *"Hylli i Dritës,"* no. 5-6, in the year 1924, is of particular relevance to Albanian historiography. According to researcher Engjll Sedaj, the significance of the article, which was written in the Gege dialect, rests in the fact that *"Fishta was a contemporary of some historical events of great importance for the fate of the Albanian people"* (Sedaj 1996, 59).

Fishta significantly influenced how these events were described and interpreted in the world of journalism as both an actor and a witness to them. *"Fishta's contribution in the field of journalism continues to remain a challenging space..."* (Leka 2021, 49). Undoubtedly, the adjective *"defiant"* refers to a variety of aspects of Fishta's publicistic elements, including, in the case of the cited article, Fishta's courage and unwavering commitment to the truth in his writings and his lack of concern for the potential negative effects of his opinions being expressed. *"That's enough," he would reply, "since it appears that someone has exaggerated what I said; yet, I have no justification to do so: history is not being written with gloves. Therefore, I must refer to "white" as "white" and "black" as "black" because I have produced a historical text"* (Fishta 1924, 190).

Researcher Rovena Vata Mikeli makes a compelling case for Fishta's dedication to the truth, his contribution to journalism, and Albanian society today. Since every word Friar Gjergj Fishta wrote was employed in the correct context at the right time, *"we may categorically refer to him as the 'archaeologist' of the Albanian language. The Fishtian's concept is still applicable in the world we live in today. Maybe today his comments are even more relevant than when he penned them!"* (Mikeli, 2023, 183).

As he is also referred to in the academic community as *"the most prominent representative of the Franciscan clerical trend,"* Friar Fishta lived and acted in accordance with the binary: *"Faith and Fatherland"* in his life and social activities (Meta *et al* 2019, Volume II:312). Fishta was a constant observer of the Albanian people. When he

realized that the Albanian world was breaking apart into its constituent parts, he turned to his most potent tool: the artistic word, focusing it primarily on the factors and people who had contributed to the emergence of this political unrest and turbulence.

2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ALBANIA

Fishta rose to the position of spiritual leader for his country in an effort to maintain the mentality and spirit of the Albanian people. The phrase from scholars Çobani and Ballabani, who focused on Fishta's political views and personal characteristics, best captures this: *“Regardless of the Clergyman's attire he wore, it is known that Gjergj Fishta was actively involved in politics. This activity peaked during the June Revolution, possibly as a result of his service as a deputy, several-times chairman of parliamentary groupings, and vice-chairman of the National Assembly from 1921 to 1924. Gjergj Fishta reached the height of his literary and journalistic activity during this four-year span.”* (Çobani & Ballabani 2021, 204-5).

Based on the aforementioned characteristics, Friar Gjergj Fishta emphasized that a civil war would save Albania, albeit partially, from those who, in his opinion, were destroying it in the article *“Unrests of June 1924”*: *“Even the operation was done, they told me: the crisis, on June 1st, the civil war, which one would send it, no other, until somewhere-Albania was poisoned.”* (Fishta 1924, 187).

It is obvious that Fishta had targeted the powerful, blaming Ahmet Zogut and his ruling family. Fishta blamed the prime minister in office at the time for the situation Albania was in since he observed hopeless, unprotected Albanians stealing from their country's resources everywhere. Furthermore, Fishta breaks down a significant portion of the progression of historical developments in Albania between the years 1920 and 1924 in this article by including sufficient information, facts, situations, real people who, in Fishta's opinion, accurately represented their personal and family interests, places, or historical dates.

In this paper, Friar Gjergj Fishta stressed how these incidents, which he called riots, would go on forever and form a part of the story of a people with a strong sense of ethnopsychology, early historical memory, and indigenous Albanian traditions. The cleric emphasized that Fishta's intention was for this essay to serve as a historical record or testimonial of this national movement for future generations: *“... my Albanian grandchildren left me a historical document on this communal movement.”* (Fishta 1924, 187).

In *“The Riots of June 1924”*, Fishta provides an explanation, analysis, and harsh criticism of Albanian politics, primarily of Ahmet Zogut and the entire circle that represented this government. Wearing the role of critic, he hits right on the mark, without mercy, to put the tip of his criticism where it hurt the most, in the misuse of the Albanian people's income for the interests of the rulers, in the numerous and completely unnecessary expenses.

He *“revealed”* how the revenues of the Albanians were taken and went into the pockets of the rulers: *“But, in order to complete the organization of the administration exactly as it should have been, “like after the Turks”, it was begged that the producers of Albania should also be paid of wage earners and servants and their servants of friends and gamblers, this is also where the “representations”, “rewards”, “migrations”, “foretells”, “prapametunas”, “layers of service”, diets, “were founded the change of money” and how many other sources of money, expressed, yes, with barbaric and exotic words, which added to the style, but which, in practice, came out very classical; why, through them, the salary doubled and many times, even tripled”* (Fishta 1924, 189).

Since those who spent their entire days in coffee shops and taverns eventually found themselves sitting in the Albanian parliament and representing Albania and the Albanians, Fishta also refers to the legislators in this article as *“coffeehouses.”* He would ask, in a sarcastic manner, *“Who among the parliamentarians should write the job, to represent the interests of the people in the parliament?”* Anybody, but maybe 85% of them battle it out in *“cafés”* and *“taverns”* before entering the parliament. The parliament was transformed into a *“café”* as a result. (Fishta 1924, 191).

However, the insults and criticism of legislators did not stop there. He went on to describe them as a numerical unit, rather than formed individuals or genuine representatives of a state, who worked without conscience in the organization of the state administration, giving priority to personal interests over the benefit of the state or the people: *“It is true, therefore, that when the people of our State-government and parliamentarians-organized the political form of this State, they did not have the benefit of the people before their eyes.”* (Fishta 1924, 191-92).

Fishta goes farther in his critique of the administration, charging the officials with being opportunists, lacking in cultural or educational background, uninformed of the value of institutions, lacking in basic job skills, and abusing the state infrastructure. The individuals dressed in authority resembled him: *“... like a fly without a head,” Fishta highlighted, while the fortunate ones were: “... with u with carriages and automobiles down and upside down my wretched Albania.”* (Fishta 1924, 190).

Gjergj Fishta called the rulers “vagrants” in this article and other places, saying they “lived on the sweat and blood of others,” “weaved intrigues and lies,” “were violent,” “were unfaithful,” and that their “biramela” (aim) was “to crush the Albanians under the heel.” (Fishta 1924, 412).

The reasons of the catastrophic situation, where Albanians from all walks of life suffered in various ways without a present or future, were precisely such people, especially those in positions of authority. In this regard, Fishta also brought up the subject of nepotism and various connections, saying, *“This is why we have two types of vacant jobs: of the parliament, for charitable gamblers and bihude relatives, who had work to do; of the offices, for directors, secretaries, computers, furniture custodians, police officers, and so on.”* (Fishta 1924, 188).

Fishta referred to those who used this network as the bloodsuckers of Albania, saying that despite the state's overall organization, *“they had flaws without reforming the elders, the women, the chilimij (children), and the friends and relatives of that fortunate caste, who would feed on the blood of my poor Albania.”* Nepotism had become so pervasive that it, in his opinion, poisoned the well-being of the Albanian state. (Fishta 1924, 188).

It is a message that is specifically addressed to our man in a concrete historical course, but that still holds true today and will save tomorrow as long as there are Albanians and liven up the world and their country. This quote expresses harsh criticism through masterful irony, an unusual sarcasm, which is frequently scaled to the grotesque. *“With all this organization of the State, we are not completely satisfied: the elders, women, chilims (children) and friends and relatives of that fortunate caste, which would feed on the blood of my poor Albania, were flawed without being corrected”* (Fishta 1924, 188).

By comparing the location of the state administration to the movements of the crab, the rulers not only failed to change the situation but also made it worse. They said: *“After all, once everything is fixed, that were to be fixed, and the organization of the administration was completed, the State machine began to move... back and forth like a crab, and Ministers, parliamentarians and officials, friends, benefactors, and relatives began to work for “Alban.”* (Fishta 1924, 189–90).

The efforts of all those who misused official positions for personal gain reached such a degree that they fought against each other. Thus, in the continuation of the article, Fishta identifies them with the causes and triggers that led to such a state, thus making one of the harshest criticisms that our literature knows: *“... everyone wanted to go as far as possible, even that’s how they had a fight with each other and they started to put their “finger” in each other’s eyes. “Cliques” and “kamorra” are known to them; to build “groups” and “parties”; trenches and ridges were dug, and they stuck to each other, like those hairs of the rag. He calls them “Esadist,” “Zogollist,” “that Geg,” “that Tosk,” “Christian,” “Muhammadan,” “populous,” “progressive,” “oriental,” “occidental,” and “Albanian,” but he never questions why the salaries went to the government coffers. However, a pachariz, an alltipus, and a masquerade became recognized as official and semi-official in Albania, where they were afterwards assumed to be.* (Fishta 1924, 193).

As you can see from the description above, there are many labels and insults used against one another, but Fishta points out an interesting fact that shows how the desire for financial gain destroyed previous relationships: *“... everyone wanted to go as much as you can to see, even so you have to fight with each other and let them go by putting their “finger” in each other’s eyes.”* (Fishta 1924, 193).

According to Fishta, this resulted in the establishment of a political form that was not consistent with the nature, psychology, and true interests of the Albanian people: *“... these people gave the Albanian State a political form and a law that did not correspond to the nature, psychology, and true interests of the Albanian people.”* (Fishta 1924, 192).

These same people, as Fishta pointed out, sold whatever they could, pointing the finger at the kerosene concessions in which foreign powers were interested: *“... and even Albania was sold on the market, it is due with them: u start by talking about concessions, especially about the kerosene concession, from which big profits can be expected”* (Fishta 1924, 193).

Fishta claims that throughout all of these conflicts and pecuniary gains, patriotism and the promise of competence in a line of work were used as a ruse; nonetheless, nothing but theft, murder, deception, etc., were done in order to gain access to the state’s funds. He described the ruling class as *“...hamaj, bakaj, teneqexhi, tailor, gambler, vagabond, street and political, more or less illiterate - with ksula, who with cap, who with qylah and who wears a hat - and they fight you, you got a boy, clubs and parties, and they gave you programs and proclamations, even the ones who were built like biduhe, matufe, matrahule, don’t bother with them, where they stink with the smell of garlic, sacks, kerosene, fish and manure of the most abandoned streets of Europe.* (Fishta 1924, 196–97).

Fishta, who served as the Albanian people’s spiritual protector, insisted that those in positions of authority possess an education sufficient to qualify them for their posts. He wrote with annoyance and regret, *“...children without any culture, no civil education, and good family tradition.” This harsh criticism also applied to the issue of not*

educating them sufficiently, of their having civilized qualities or even a hierarchy of inherited values, through the traditional Albanian code." (Fishta 1924, 186).

In addition, Gjergj Fishta was quite familiar with the mindset, customs, psychology, and general state of the Albanian people. He frequently examined the governors' treatment of this population and concluded that "*Albanians had been bullied for years, once or twice, Albanians had been killed with Albanian blood.*" (Fishta 1924, 208).

This is how Mehdi Frashëri's words came true; he saw Ahmet Zog's death on April 23, 1923. He said: "*You took it with blood; with blood you kept it; without blood you didn't let me go.*" Fishta recalls the words he had heard from Mehdi Frashëri without any hesitation. (Fishta 1924, 209).

In this article, Gjergj Fishta explains the devastating degree of how the Albanian and his world have been destroyed on a national and spiritual level. Fishta presents a message that was specifically addressed to our man in a concrete historical flow, but that still holds true today through harsh criticism, masterful irony, and extraordinary sarcasm that frequently escalates to the grotesque, as masterful qualities that Fishta possessed in his writings.

3. CONCLUSION

The journalistic writing of Gjergj Fishta "*The Riots of June 1924*" is a protest against the government of the time, as he claims it did not work for the psyche, wants, and interests of the Albanian people, and we see Fishta angry, heated, and rebellious as a result. Fishta leveled his toughest criticism at the governors of the period and the country's highest leaders. As an individual, citizen and intellectual, Fishta did not feel represented, but Albania and the Albanians had been "abandoned", had been "looted", had been "stolen". The enrichment of the ruling class was always done at the expense of Albania, even Fishta in his writing does not hesitate to call the functioning of the state as a backward movement, but Fishta, known as the father of Albanian satire, understood that even in this writing would throw some of his satirical dust, where according to him the state machine moved backwards and forwards like a crab. Fishta intended for this statement to imply that the state played every stone, establishing rules, laws, forms, and ways to benefit as much as possible, whether through fat wages, per diems, bonuses, and so on. Gjergj Fishta, an expert on the Albanian government's non-functioning system, accused the authorities of gorging on the sweat and blood of Albanians. Fishta wrote about the white, I'll say white, and the black black with purpose, since this is how history should be recorded, without gloves, to leave a legacy for future generations. So it was Fishta who elevated Albanian ethno-cultural ideals and qualities to a pedestal, but he is still the one who calls to mind anti-Albanian behaviors and deeds; in these circumstances, Fishta sharpens the sword of his critique, which is harsh and direct. Gjergj Fishta's journalism writings are nothing more than his strategy to leave written data, facts, analyses, controversies, and reviews as historical testimony in the context of the protection of the Albanian nation's rights, the protection of the Albanian language, ethnographic and folklore values, and the protection of history and culture according to the psychology and mentality of the Albanian people.

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