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THE OTHER ALBANIA: KOSOVO 1979

Part II: The Village, the Factory, and the Kosovars

The aggregate problems of nationalism and irredentism, population, education, the economy, and politics that were surveyed in Part I of this *Report* about the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo do not occur in an abstract vacuum. They happen in, to, and because of peasants and villages, workers and managers and factories, students and politicians. By the same token a resident observer's return to a corner of "his" beat after nearly a decade's absence does not consist entirely of conversations and interviews with "senior Party officials" and their ilk. Kosovo is too beautiful, especially in autumn, and its people are too hospitable and interesting for that, even if it were, by itself, a legitimate way of touching base again.

Part II of this *Report* therefore returns to the village and family where Part I began, and from there to a thoroughly atypical factory and some of the Province's towns, for a glimpse of the ways the Albanians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Turks, and other Kosovars live and form the habits of work, life, and political attitudes that shape the aggregate reality of the least developed and least visited of Yugoslavia's eight republics and provinces.

Return to Skivjani

The wider world and its problems intruded into an evening in the Hadri household in Skivjani only momentarily, and without direct reference to Kosovo, from the television screen. It had been turned on so that the (male) children could watch "Sesame Street"—in American English with Serbo-Croatian subtitles for an Albanian-speaking audience!—and all of us (males) could cheer the 3 - 2 victory of a Yugoslav (Belgrade) team over an East German one in a EUFA Cup soccer game played in Dresden. Then, via satellite and somehow incongruous in this setting, we watched the latest scenes in and around the occupied American Embassy in Tehran and Senator Edward Kennedy's official announcement that he is a candidate for the Presidency of the United States.

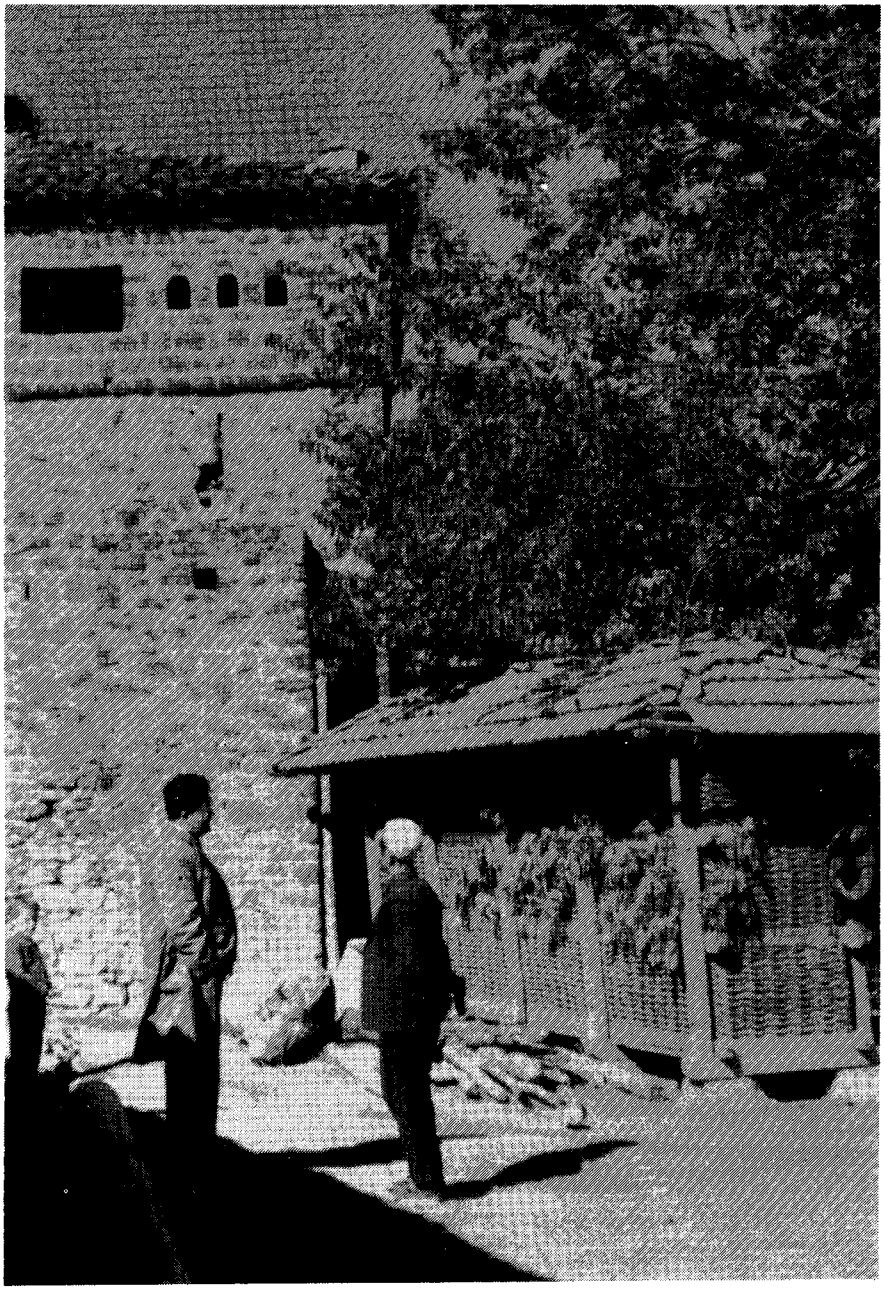
The setting, on the third story of the old tower house, was the large room that had been reserved for ceremonial occasions, as Turkish and Balkan peasant traditions dictate, when I had first seen it in 1965. The room and its uses, like most other things connected with the Hadris and Kosovo in general, had undergone extraordinary but partial transformations since that time.

The approach was still the same: up two flights of rickety wooden steps in near darkness, past an odoriferous floor-level slit in the outside wall that serves as a *pissoir*, and through a smaller chamber where shoes are removed. The room itself was also basically unaltered: a slightly raised wooden floor covered with overlapping carpets, a low bench around three of the walls, similarly covered for sitting or sleeping, and almost no other furniture. Then, however, all the carpets had been homemade, some woven and some tufted, in bright, multicolored Muslim patterns. Now the central carpet, filling most of the room, was a commercial synthetic fiber one of poor quality and atrocious off-orange color. The charming narrow open Turkish fireplace of decorated white plaster built into the wall opposite the door was also gone, its function taken over by a small, peasant-made Franklin stove that squatted well out from another wall, which had a new hole in it for the long zinc stovepipe. Missing from the walls were the sheepskin, the old pendulum clock, and the traditional musical instruments (a five-stringed *čargija* and a two-stringed *čiftelija*) that Demush Hadri, then a teen-ager enrolled at a pedagogical college, had played for us with a piece of broken razor blade. Also missing was the framed photograph of President Tito that had hung to the left of the Turkish fireplace, although the hook was still in place. Had it been put there, like the photograph of a rich aunt who has announced that she is coming to call, because our 1965 visit was prearranged and we were accompanied by a government official in Priština? It seemed less likely, although possible, that Hadri political views had changed in the meantime. A Hadri elder told me, privately and with every evidence of sincerity, "We love Tito, because he gave us our freedom."

The room was still sparsely furnished, with additions limited to

the Franklin stove, a double electric hotplate for making Turkish coffee, a typically Central and East European *regal* (combining closed cupboards for drinks, open ones to display glassware or books, and a stepped-down top to accommodate the television), and the television itself, a large black-and-white set with a 24-inch screen. One suspects that the introduction of this last item began the transformation of the room's function, from traditional ceremonial to what is best described, in its American meaning, as a family room.

This new use only emerged as evening approached and younger Hadris came home. Meanwhile, sitting Turkish style on the low bench, the honored returning visitor from America and his companion from the Provincial Secretariat for Information in Priština sipped Turkish coffee and homemade *rakija* distilled from plums or wine, received gifts of cigarettes and golden-leafed local tobacco for rolling your own, and listened to the two eldest Hadris talk about the evolution of a Kosovar Albanian family.



The three new houses in the compound (described in Part I) were not being built merely or primarily because the family had grown from 26 to 60 members since 1965, although this by itself would have required some measures. The main reason was that younger adult Hadris, with cash incomes from jobs in Djakovica, the family trucking business, or other sources, had become increasingly reluctant to turn over their earnings to the extended family's common pool, where decisions about its use had traditionally been made by the senior Hadri or his deputy. Instead, younger Hadris now wished to control their own earnings and thus the welfare of their own nuclear families themselves. Rather than have endless squabbles, it had seemed better to break up the common household by building the additional houses and subdividing even these.

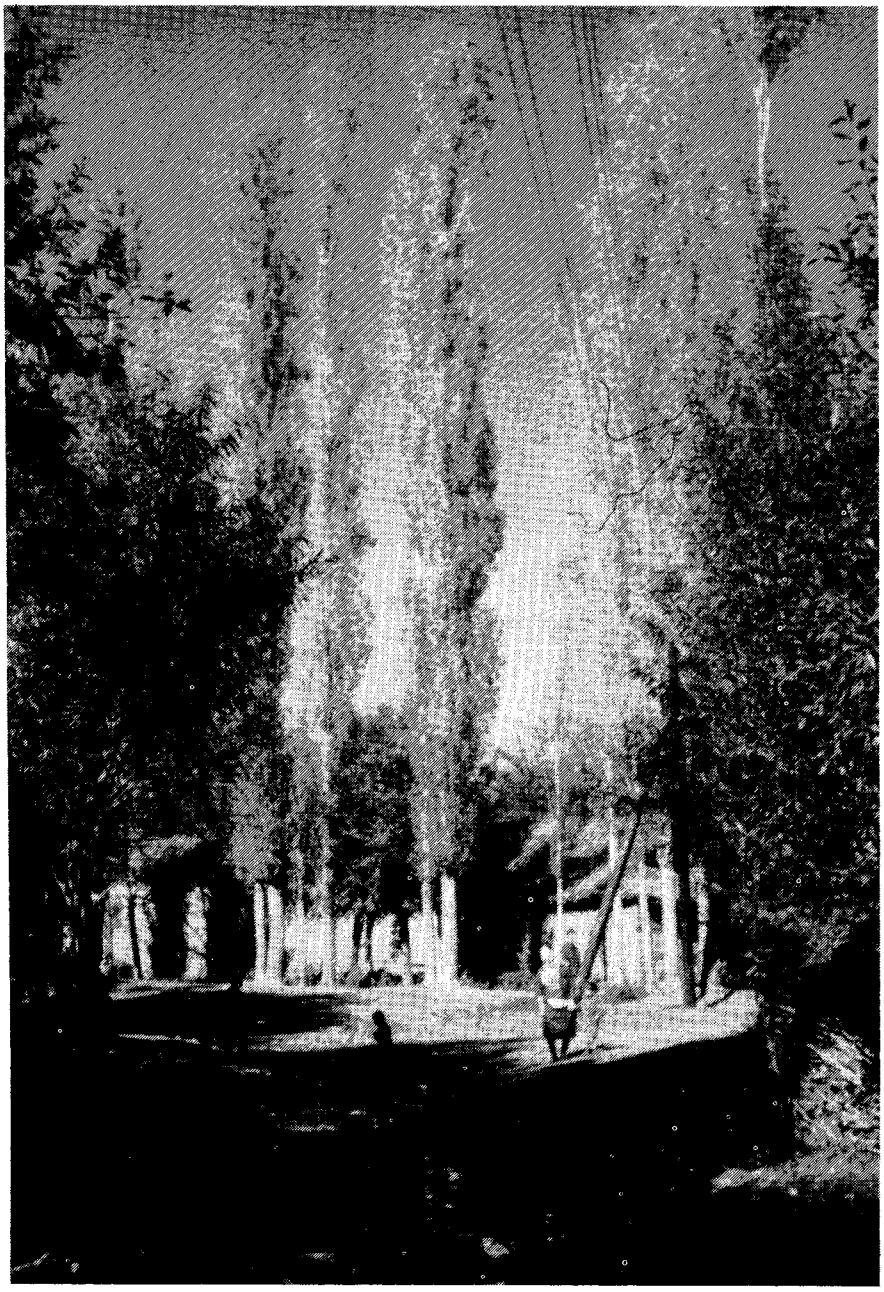
Thus even the Albanians of Kosovo, with some Montenegrin clans virtually the last people in the Balkans to cling to the extended family whose Serb form, the *zadruga*, is so beloved and studied by anthropologists, are abandoning it in the face of inroads by a cash economy and "modern" values. One suspects, however, that a residual allegiance to traditional values as well as obvious economic considerations are responsible for the new houses being built within the old family compound. They could, after all, have been built on Hadri agricultural land, now no longer of pre-eminent economic importance, if that were not contrary to traditional rural settlement patterns as well as too radical a break with traditional family ones.

Skivjani: The tower house of the Hadri family in 1965. Photo credit, Mary Rusinow.

In 1965 the Hadris were still primarily subsistence farmers, living off their 10 hectares of land (wheat, corn, vegetables, and fruit) and their livestock (20 cows and calves). Cash income was then provided by apples and melons—the only farm products to reach the market—and by the family mill just outside the compound and the four Hadris working as artisans in the village. This, too, has changed. Only the two old men who supervised the traditional ritual of our reception are still engaged full time in agriculture. Even their engagement is largely indirect, they said, primarily a matter of overseeing hired labor (!) and leasing arrangements. The mill, once an important source of wealth, stands idle for lack of peasant customers, who now find it more economical to sell their grain to the cooperative and buy milled flour. In place of these sources, most family members are earning more, even in this land of staggering unemployment rates, from employment or self-employment in enterprises in Djakovica, as village middlemen, or by services performed by the Hadri trucks and limousines, resources bought by earlier family thrift.

As the afternoon progressed, children and younger adults joined the group, driven by curiosity or drawn by television. Among them was Demush, who had told us in 1965 that his life's ambition was to finish pedagogical college and return to the village as a school-teacher. He had done this and had stuck to it for three years, until interrupted to do his obligatory military service. Now, instead of teaching in the village school, he is in his final year at the Faculty of Law of the new University of Priština and is looking forward to a legal career in government or industry, in Priština or in the wider world. The financial and promotion prospects and living conditions of a rural primary school-teacher were too limited, he explained, especially since the qualifications do not even entitle one to teach in a secondary school. Meanwhile, he has also acquired a wife, three daughters, and a son named Bekim, an extraordinarily attractive and bright lad of 10 summers who stretched out on the off-orange carpet after the soccer match to do his arithmetic homework from a fifth-grade textbook that would have taxed the abilities of an American eighth-grader. Demush, reminded of his eager and talented playing of traditional musical instruments in 1965, smiled deprecatingly and changed the subject to ask who would win the American presidential race, how I thought the drama of the hostages in the American Embassy in Tehran would end, and whether the European members of NATO would agree to upgrade their nuclear arsenal to match that of the Soviet bloc.

By the time the Yugoslav team scored its first goal against the East Germans, the one-time ceremonial



Skivjani: Main street. Photo credit, Mary Rusinow.

room's population had grown to 13 children, 6 teen-agers, 5 members of the middle generation, the 2 old men, the guests from America and Priština, and the guests' Albanian driver, who had finally been summoned to join the party when it was clear that it would last well into the evening. He arrived grumbling that he had been on the point of abandoning us and driving back to Priština alone, but was mollified when he was given the Montenegrin Assistant Secretary for Information's second-most-honored place next to our hosts.

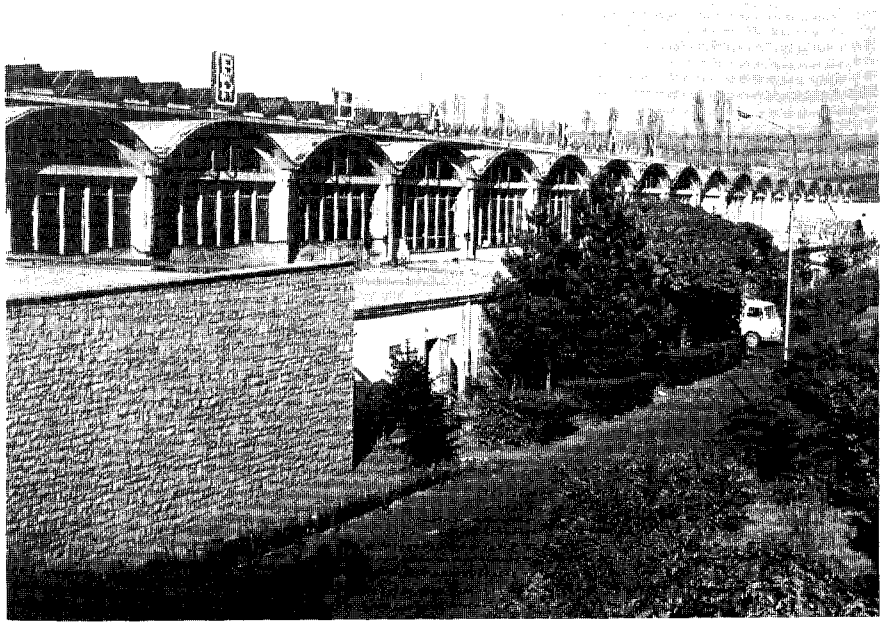
All in the room were males, although a probably female child (in jeans and with hair almost as short as the male children's, so it was hard to be sure) had sneaked in long enough to watch the final minutes of Sesame Street. A woman fleetingly glimpsed tending a laundry-line in a back courtyard when we arrived was the only other member of her sex we ever saw or heard. However, some of them had apparently been alerted that we would not leave as soon as we had said we must, since a peasant feast appeared in due course, carried in and later cleared away by younger males and placed on a low, round table of plain, unfinished wood that had materialized from another room. There were pickled wet green peppers and tomatoes and great slabs of fresh soft *feta* cheese, a roast chicken (legs ceremoniously presented to the guest from America and the Albanian driver), thick yogurt, and *burek*, a kind of cheese strudel made with heavy pastry, served piping hot in bakepans a foot in diameter. All hacked with the pocketknives everyone seemed to carry and eaten with fingers from common dishes. A younger Hadri, apparently feeling he should apologize to the foreign guest for this custom, recalled with some bitterness an occasion during his army service when someone had failed to supply the mess hall with plates and eating utensils: "A, well," the Serbian officer in charge had said cheerfully, "I suppose we can all manage to eat Albanian-style if we must!"

The Factory that Works

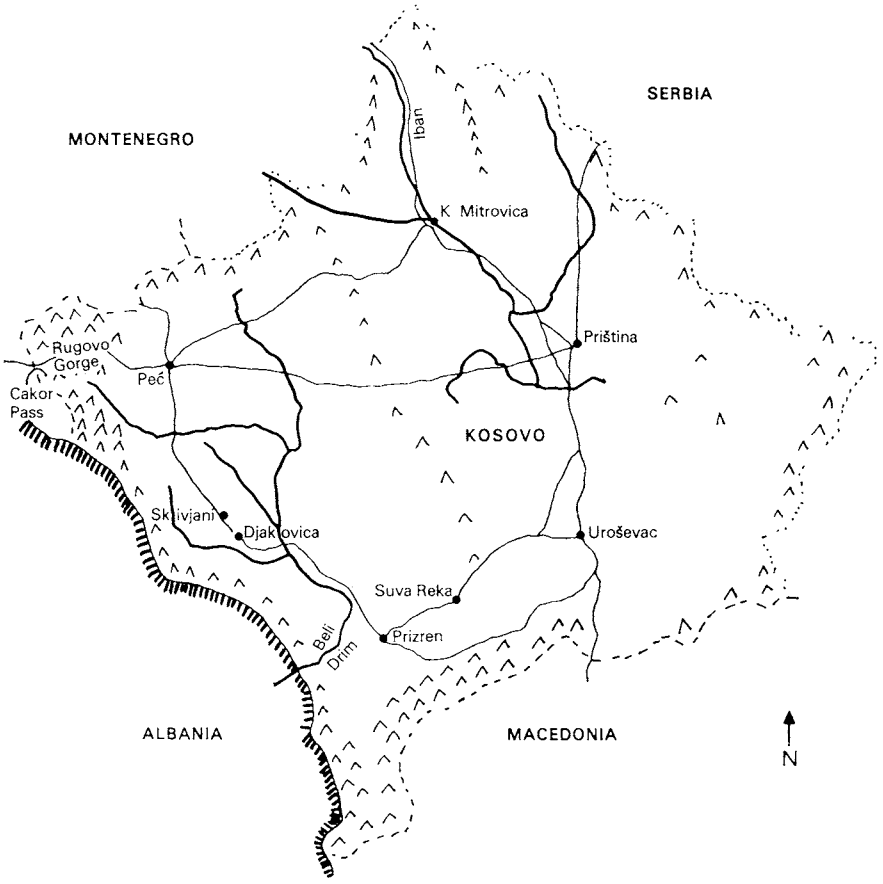
Before and after I was taken to Suva Reka to visit Balkan, the only factory producing rubber conveyor belts in Yugoslavia, several officials told me quite frankly that many visitors to Kosovo, including Tito himself in 1975, are taken there because it is a model factory. "It is one of the few," I was told, "and probably the best of those few, that are really profitable and efficient, producing goods that are well up to Yugoslav and even European standards. Management, community relations, and community developments are also models. But we think it is fair to show it off because it *is* proof that industrialization and modernization *can* be made to work in Kosovo after all and despite what is so often said in the rest of the country and world!"

Such statements are typical of the combination of calculatedly disarming candor and less calculated defensiveness that one frequently encounters in Kosovo these days. These reveal much about the self-image of the Kosovars who make them, and who are usually Albanians. They are also, however, indicative of the strategy, described in Part I, that Kosovo officials are now employing to counter the charge that more developmental aid for Kosovo will simply disappear, as past help allegedly has, down an eternal sinkhole of incompetence, misconceived megalomaniac projects, and people culturally (or genetically?) unfit to do any better.

The approach to Suva Reka from Priština is spectacular, particularly on a clear autumn day. The town and its minarets came into view suddenly, tucked below the western edge of the low north-south range that divides Kosovo's almost circular intermontane tectonic basic into two nearly equal parts. In the distance, some 20 miles away, rose the great snowcapped wall of far higher mountains, in places nearly reaching 3,000 meters, that separate Kosovo from Albania to the west and from Montenegro and Macedonia to the north and south. Straight ahead a single, narrow gap in this barrier marked the canyon through which the Beli Drim river and the ancient Roman road from Constantinople make their way from Kosovo to Albania and the Adriatic, while mild Mediterranean air flows the other direction, bringing western Kosovo a gentler climate than the eastern half of the province. Between Suva Reka and the high mountains, stretching away to the



Suva Reka Balkan's main factory.



north in patterns of autumnal green, gold, and red, lay the fertile, well-watered high plain of western Kosovo that used to be called Metohija. (This name is officially out of fashion since 1966 because it is a Serb appellation for what is now an almost exclusively Albanian-inhabited district—as I was reminded by a stern rebuke from my host at Balkan, chief engineer Xhafer Gashi, when I used the name Metohija because I did not know the seldom-used Albanian equivalent.) For this observer possibly the most beautiful corner of many-splendored Yugoslavia, it is a naturally rich land whose history has imposed a half-millennium of poverty on its early Slav and later Albanian inhabitants.

Balkan of Suva Reka represents a singularly successful if woefully exceptional attack on that poverty. The factory was founded in 1961 to make rubber soles and to provide a modest alternative to agriculture—here primarily vineyards—as an employer of the district's rapidly growing population. The following year it occurred to its director that rubber conveyor belts would be a better idea. No one in Yugoslavia was making them and placement of output, without marketing or transport problems for a young, small, and inexperienced enterprise, was assured by the proximity and needs of Kosovo's then only significant industrial branches, the lead and zinc mines and smelters at Kosovska Mitrovica and the open-pit lignite mines around Priština. By 1964 Balkan had 80 workers and 3 shifts (at that date already an unusually high utilization of capacity by Yugoslav standards), 400 tons of output, and a level of profitability high enough so that the director could persuade his workers' council to approve 80 scholarships, one for each worker, to send Suva Reka youths to secondary and postsecondary studies outside the commune.

In 1966 the plant and its output assortment were expanded and modernized for the first time, using Czechoslovak equipment and technology. That same year the Yugoslav economic reform of 1965, a giant step toward a genuine market economy, began to have a countrywide impact, driving uneconomic and badly managed firms to the wall but providing new opportunities for those who knew how. Kosovo had and has more than its share of the former type and almost none of the latter. Balkan continued to prove the exception. Further expansions, modernizations, and diversifications of output took place in 1970, 1972, and 1976. These were now based on West German, British, and French rather than Czechoslovak equipment and technology. Output growth rates averaged 30 percent per annum and profitability was maintained, thanks in part to low-interest credits from the Federal Fund for Development of Underdeveloped Regions.

Today Balkan's Suva Reka complex of 4 plants employs 1,300 workers, consumes 30,000 tons of rubber, exports over 30 percent of their output (chiefly to Morocco, Algeria, Bulgaria, Romania, and the U.S.S.R.), and have an annual turnover of 80 billion dinars (18.50 dinars = US$1). Many departments work in four shifts, the fourth being weekend overtime. Of the workers, 200 have university or other postsecondary degrees and 400 have other forms of postsecondary specialist training. More than 60 are females, all of whom have completed Yugoslavia's required 8 years of primary education (a detail cited with pride in a community whose school had only 5 female pupils when Balkan was founded in 1961). The average monthly personal income per worker is 7,500 dinars—cf. Kosovo and all-Yugoslav averages of 4,084 and 5,075—with 20,000 dinars as the top of the scale. The enterprise funds over 200 scholarships for postsecondary studies in engineering, medicine, law, architecture, liberal arts, and other fields.

Future plans are ambitious but judged by past performance

probably realistic. By 1983 Balkan expects to be employing 3,000 workers and to have 3 branch factories elsewhere in Kosovo, 2 of them in Priština. Central to the expansion plans are two joint ventures that are currently being negotiated with Western firms. One is with the Gates Company of Denver, which will supply complete know-how, supervision, and marketing assistance for the production of more than 10 million special use belts and will purchase $1.8 million worth of the output. The other is for the production of dumper tires in collaboration with Dunlop of Great Britain, which will buy and market 25 percent of Balkan's output over a 15-year contract period. Total investments here are valued at $220 million.

How is one to explain this happy anomaly? All who were asked this question, in Suva Reka and in Priština, suggested that the chief source of Balkan's success has been Balkan's chief, its General Director. Here, it seems, is a Kosovo version of other socialist self-management success stories in which most of the credit is usually given to the top manager. The adjectives used to describe him were the same that have been applied to better-known counterparts like Erik Blum of Energoinvest in Sarajevo and the late Norbert Veber of the Sisak steelworks in Croatia: energetic, authoritative (or authoritarian?!), competent, willing to take risks, and outstandingly able to manipulate people and the peculiarities of the Yugoslav economic and political systems. "The workers," Gashi said, "although formally they hire and can fire him [in the Yugoslav self-management system], touch their caps to him and say 'yes, sir,' when he speaks. Discipline and respect, on which discipline is based, are equally high."

It was also the General Director who had the idea of transmission belts as an ideal product, not only because there would be immediate, assured, and growing demand and no competing domestic producer, but also because it is a processing industry and employs relatively large numbers of people with skill levels that could usually be achieved quickly, even in an educationally backward environment like Suva Reka. Even more importantly, I was told, it was he who insisted from the beginning on the principle that "the most important capital is cadres" (as engineer Gashi quoted his absent boss)—meaning that the development of appropriate skills, attitudes, and values, both in the factory and in the community, is in the long run more important to continuing success than the more traditional form of "capital" that has tended to obsess Yugoslav planners and managers. The result of this recognition has been a commitment to social development in Suva Reka and Kosovo in general that has so far paid off for Balkan in political as well as economic dividends.

Its earliest and most consistent symbol has been Balkan's large number of postsecondary scholarships for local youth, with subjects of study only sometimes directly related to Balkan's own needs. The enterprise has also participated, with funds, equipment, and labor, in the paving of Suva Reka streets, new housing, and public services. The town's secondary vocational school is in effect a company school, and Balkan's clinic is the district's leading health service center. Balkan has also built and runs Suva Reka's stylish and by Kosovo standards unusually efficient hotel and restaurant (the plumbing works, which is more than can be said for the Kosovski Bužur in Priština, for long sadly reputed to be the province's leading hotel).

The social commitment encompasses the entire province: Balkan scholarships are not limited to Seva Reka youths, although they are given priority. It is also a matter of special pride, Gashi said, that Balkan's younger university-educated specialists are now primarily graduates of the new University of Priština, whereas older ones had to be drawn from other universities (he himself, although a Kosovar Albanian, did undergraduate work at the University of Belgrade and graduate work at the University of Zagreb). The work force at Balkan is young, too, corresponding to the youth of Kosovo's population: the average age, including the Director and senior engineers in the calculation, is 23 years.

The obvious question posed by the Balkan story is how to replicate it.

Modern Priština: Marshal Tito Street. Photo credit, *Review*, Yugoslav monthly magazine.

The answer offered by Ismet Gusija, Director of the Provincial Institute for Social Planning in Priština, was perhaps gloomier than he meant it to sound: "It is difficult to transfer this success story. We use Balkan as an example of what we *can* do, but to reproduce it all of the environmental factors must be reproduced, including the personality of the enterprise's director." Was this not a counsel of despair? Not quite, he said hastily, since there are now several examples of enterprises that have finally become profitable and competitive, after years of serious problems and near or de facto bankruptcy. But such turnarounds are not easy. "An accumulation of errors and misplaced investments, which never happened at Balkan, takes time and effort to correct. There is so much to do so that, for examples, batteries made in Kosovo can compete successfully in Germany, when even batteries made in France, which did not have five hundred years under the Turks, cannot compete there. And just look at conditions in British industry, and then imagine the magnitude of the problem here!"

The Urban Scene

Every Yugoslav city and town has its *korso*, the traditional evening promenade that remarkably survives all "social modernization" and modern forms of entertainment and for which main streets almost everywhere are usually closed to vehicle traffic from 6:30 to 8:00 P.M every day of the week. Up one-half of the street and back down the other, individually, by couples, or arm in arm in groups of one or mixed sexes, Yugoslavs of all nations and classes participate in this ancient civic ritual of the Mediterranean world. It is an occasion for greeting friends, indulging in solemn or frivolous conversations, making or observing the making of dates, window-shopping, girl-watching, boy-watching, each according to individual taste.

In Priština, the capital of Kosovo, the *korso* exceeds all others in its intensity and vivacity. The city claims a population of 197,000 plus 37,000 university students, with the latter (one is repeatedly told) equalling Priština's total population 30 years ago. On any evening, even a cold, rainy one in November, one has the feeling that all of the 37,000 and a third of the rest are out on the downtown thoroughfare that is inevitably named for Marshal Tito, promenading up and down in a shoulder-to-shoulder, sidewalk-to-sidewalk mass of humanity. It is not for lack of alternatives: a large, modern auditorium at one end of the same street is or soon will be packed for the play, the ballet, the folk music, the opera, or whatever is on that evening; there is an oversize, active youth center with all sorts of indoor sports, dancing, and lectures; plenty of cafés and cinemas; and the skyline of the city bristles with television antennaes. But the *korso* lives, with a vengeance unknown elsewhere, and it can take minutes to cross the boulevard on an inescapably oblique course that ends well downstream of the intended goal, as in swimming a river in flood.

The voices, like the neon or painted signs on the shops and offices, are largely Albanian but with a stratum of Serbo-Croatian. In dress most of the strollers are indistinguishable, except for the white felt skullcaps still worn even by many urbanized male Albanians, from any similar crowd anywhere in Central or Southern Europe. For young people of both sexes and all nationalities this usually means jeans, with a surprisingly large number of them genuine American brands like Wranglers and Levis, which are hot black market items in other Communist-ruled countries. There is always, however, a good scattering of older men in white turbans and the Albanian highlander's jodhpur-cut (baggy-seated, tapered leg) trousers of white homespun cloth dramatically decorated with thick black braiding in intricate patterns. As a female counterpart, some older women in chador-like peasant dress are all but veiled—meaning a headscarf drawn over most of the face, since the veil as such has been banned by the Communist regime for over 30 years. Occasionally and incongruously such a woman will be walking hand in hand with a daughter wearing a blouse with a startling cleavage, skintight pants, and high heels; but never when father is also present.

The students who sometimes seem to dominate the *korso* gradually filter away into cafés and

Scene from Old Prizren. Photo credit, Mary Rusinow.

restaurants, which at this season are warmer, in summer moved outdoors and cooler, and in all seasons more congenial than the grubby, smelly student hostels or rented rooms where they live. The café-restaurant Beograd is close and popular—contemporary in design and decor and doubling as an exhibit hall for some remarkably original and delightful multimedia abstract renderings of Kosovo folk-art motifs by a local artist. Almost all at the tables are Serbo-Croatian speakers. Beer and wine flow steadily, but few are also eating, whether out of choice or penury. The food is in any case better at a privately owned restaurant, down beyond the Provincial Government building, that is almost the only place in town to get good pork...and where two waiters are the only Albanians present. As good and much cheaper are the little hole-in-the-wall and also privately owned traditional short-order eateries in the old bazaar or up by the Technical Faculty. Each is identifiable by its open grill with tin hood and chimney-pipe projecting out into the street and tended from inside by an old man and a boy who sometimes speak only Albanian. They serve *cevabčići* and beef or lamb sausages, *burek*, yogurt, fruit juices, and sometimes beer but no spirits. Here a Serbo-Croatian-speaking client tends to attract curious and sometimes suspicious stares from the regulars. For elegance there is the Rugovo in one of the new apartment-and-shop complexes a little further out. There the decor and the cuisine, both excellent, are from the wild country of the Albanian clans north of Peć; the clientele is mixed and usually seems to include several tables of senior government and Party officials.

The talk of Priština—and of Yugoslavia when Priština is the subject—often focuses on the many new buildings that have transformed the town's skyline. These include the Grand Hotel Pristina, opened in 1978 with 664 beds and Hilton-like lobbies, shops, and reception rooms; the great tower of the Bank of Kosovo and the equally grand one of the Albanian-language Rilindja publishing house; the sprawling ultramodern shopping mall with its chic boutiques, rivaling any in the United States and grander than its Ljubljana equivalent; an enormous multipurpose sports center, still under construction, for which several square blocks of old Priština have been razed; and others. Even local authorities, while not hiding their pride in all this, admit ruefully that the display is not the best advertisement for a Kosovo that is widely accused of spending other people's money on "megalomaniac monuments" rather than sound economic development. Meanwhile, the towering modern façade of the new bank building already shows some gaps where tiles have fallen off, and the plumbing at the Grand Hotel—although an infinite improvement on that of the old Kosovski Božur—is eccentrically designed and functions accordingly.

At least it would be difficult to regret the passing of the old Priština that such megalomania has razed. The old town, which still exists in unpaved streets and sagging houses of sun-baked brick or half-timbered wattle and daub between the new center and the new outskirts, had little by way of history or style when it was chosen as a regional capital, after the Second World War, because of its central location within the province and at the junction of north-south and east-west railroads and highways. Better yet, putting the capital where attendant expansion and modernization could not destroy much of value has also helped to spare other towns, where the transformation of historic urban and residential centers would really have mattered.

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One of these last is Prizren, population 50,000, the traditional administrative center of the region and for a time the capital of Tsar Dušan's fourteenth-century Serbian Empire. In the apt description of travel writer J.A. Cuddon (who makes one of his rare mistakes by also liking old Priština *and* the Kosovski Božur), "Prizren is a town of brown roofs, white walls, and green gardens. Brown, black, and white are the colors of the costumes, with the occasional streak or blob of deep mulberry red or burnt orange. It is among the most beautiful of the Balkan towns and in the old *konaks* behind the high walls set with stout, studded doors and ornamental knockers, a

Scene from Old Prizren. Photo credit, Mary Rusinow.

traditional patriarchal way of life is still strong."[1] The peasant market, one of the largest in Yugoslavia, is also possibly the most colorful, especially on a Wednesday, the chief market day. Folk costumes, now rare in most Yugoslav regions, are still common and distinguish the peasant sellers and shoppers by clan or valley as well as nationality. More color is added by the unusually rich assortment of vegetables, fruits, and herbs and of clay and ceramic pots and utensils that mirror the wealth of soil, climate, and culture in the valley of the Beli Drim that used to be called Metohija.

As a relic of its importance in Ottoman times, Prizren contains the largest single concentration of Kosovo's Turkish minority of 12,000. They still dominate much of its commercial life, and despite an Albanian majority, a considerable Serbo-Montenegrin minority, and great importance in both Albanian and Serbian history, the ambiance is more Turkish than elsewhere in the province. This is not only a matter of historical buildings like *hans*, mosques, and *konaks*, and of domestic architecture. It is clear—as it is in Peć, Kosovo's other most beautiful town—in the way the river, small streams, and fountains are used to water and to add light, shadow, and music to the urban environment, and in the way charming old Turkish houses with their enclosed balconies have been sited on the hills and along the streams so that no one's privacy and "ancient lights" are interrupted. The streets away from the river are narrow, dark, crowded, dirty, and noisy; private precincts are the opposite for each of these characteristics.

Like a symbol of Kosovo's national question, Prizren is sacred to all three of the province's principal nationalities. It was a capital of the Namanjić dynasty of medieval Serbia and site of one of their finest monuments, the church of Bogordica Ljeviška, just by the peasant market. Begun in 1307 by King Milutin on the foundations of an earlier basilica, Bogorodica Ljeviška contains some of the finest fourteenth-century frescoes to be found anywhere in Europe, hideously damaged by the Turks when they converted it into a mosque, but now painstakingly and lovingly restored and equally venerated for its historical and aesthetic importance by Christian Slavs, Muslim Albanians, and Communist atheists of both nations. The town was also an important Turkish commercial and administrative center, as noted. And by the river is the house, now a museum surrounded by a memorial park, where the League of Prizren, the first modern Albanian nationalist movement of liberation, was founded in 1878.

As in Palestine, the Turks are long hence discounted as a temporary (if long-lasting!) military imposition never backed by demographic or cultural reinforcements of moment, but what of the other two? The Serbs and Montenegrins whose Kosovo cradle of civilization and national consciousness is still visible and alive in Prizren, at Visoki Dečani and the Peć Patriarchate to the north, and on the battlefield of Kosovo Polje or at Gračanica Monastery, both by Priština? The Albanians who have lived on and cultivated the land for three centuries and whose dream of individual freedom through national independence was born here one hundred years ago?

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The church of Gračanica Monastery, another foundation of King Milutin's south of Priština, is an even greater monument of medieval Serbian history and culture, different but for many art historians the peer of High Dečani. It, too, was much damaged during the Ottoman centuries, and throughout the 1960s the full glory of its architecture and magnificant frescoes was obscured by the restorers' scaffolding. Now it stands free again, inside and out, and is wonderful to behold. Inside, however, there is an odd feeling of emptiness and of some new form of sacrilege that is explained when one realizes that the great iconostasis, so important to the *Gestalt* of an Orthodox church, is missing.

No one wanted to explain, but inquiries in various places produced the story, or at least a credible if prejudiced version of one. The iconostasis was removed for restoration by the Provincial Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments during the general restoration of the church. Left until last, work on it had not been completed (or begun?) when changes in official personnel in Kosovo, reflecting the kind of ethnic "affirmative action" policy in vogue in the 1970s, brought a new director to the Institute, an Albanian. The new director had new priorities, it is said, and these were concerned with Albanian and Muslim monuments, not Serb and Christian ones. Abandoned, with the public excuse that there is no money for its restoration, the iconostasis is believed to exist in a warehouse somewhere. Some say it is not as much a matter of priorities as of spite. Revenge, for 50 years of Serb cultural arrogance and worse, might be a more apt if scarcely less represensible word. Who can say?

A similar mystery surrounds the curious fact that the Orthodox monasteries of Kosovo, unlike those of Serbia (or even benighted Bulgaria, the Soviet Union's loyalist ally), are not permitted to let foreign guests stay in their *konaks*, contrary to Balkan tradition, the monks' or nuns' economic interests, and their concern for the souls and comfort of weary and sometimes impecunious travelers. Or the reasons why the Serbian Orthodox holiest of holies, the Peć Patriarchate with its unique triple church, must still be reached by a formidably potholed dirt access road, quite impassable in bad weather. After all, even historically and artistically insignificant and isolated Bulgarian monasteries (not to mention Serbian or Macedonian ones) have been connected to the outside world by excellent asphalt roads, clearly built more for the sake of national pride than in the

1. J.A. Cuddon, *The Companion Guide to Yugoslavia* (London, 1968), p. 190.

expectation of tourist Deutschmarks or francs.

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The potholes of Peč Patriarchate were smaller in 1965. Or perhaps they only seemed so because we had arrived over Čakor Pass from Montenegro, pursued up and down a narrow road of loose and poorly maintained macadam and hair-raising hairpin bends by trailer trucks loaded with lead from the mines and refinery at Kosovska Mitrovica... and by warnings from Serb friends in Belgrade (with clear ethnic prejudices!) that the pass was rife with armed Albanian brigands. But it was also then, and in the refectory of Peč Patriarchate, that we met our first such brigand, although he was unarmed and wearing a grey flannel business suit. As narrated at the time,[2] in 1965 Ramë K. Nikçi was School Administrator of the Peč Agricultural Secondary School, a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia since 1948, and since 1941 the latest (and last?) of generations of Muslim Albanian *vojvode*—"chieftains" or guardians—of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate at Peč. All of them, according to a tradition confirmed by a decree of the Ottoman Vizir of Sköder about 1880, have been chosen from the senior family in the senior of the 12 villages of the Kelmendi clan of Rugovo; none, until now, has ever died of natural causes. Ramë Nikçi, who had succeeded to the title and obligation at age 14 after his father was killed early in the confused Yugoslav civil war of 1941-1945, and who took an oath to the Communist Partisans in March 1942, was determined that he should be the exception. He should also be the last of the *vojvode* of Peč, since the protection of the monastery and Patriarchate had been assumed by the Institute for the Protection of Historical Monuments in the new Communist state, eliminating his responsibilities.

2. Again see D.I. Rusinow, *The Other Albanians* [DIR-2-'65], *AUFS Reports*, Southeast Europe Series, Vol. XII, No. 2, 1965.

Gračanica Monastery.

But at the same time he was proud of the tradition, his title, and his image as a protagonist and preserver of the wild sword dance for which the Rugovo clans are internationally famous. And also of his then seven-year-old son, Valdet, who wanted to become a doctor.

In 1979 it seemed appropriate to look for Ramë Nikçi again and to discover what had become of him and of his traditions and ambitions.

We found him in a new profession, chief of the general and legal department of the Intercommunal Self-managing Community of Interest (SIZ in the Serbo-Croatian acronym) for Employment in Peč. In simpler terms this is the employment office for northwestern Kosovo, with almost infinite opportunities for patronage and corruption—which his enemies say he is not averse to using—in a society where getting a job is a matter of utmost importance. His son Valdet, he told us, did not become a doctor; his secondary school grades, although good, were not good enough to get him into the medical faculty at the University of Priština, so he went to the faculty of engineering (some confirmation, incidentally, for statements heard elsewhere about comparative strictness of entrance requirements). But a 17-year-old daughter, never mentioned as existing in 1965, was the youngest delegate to attend the XIth Congress of the League of

Communists of Yugoslavia in Belgrade in 1978.

Ramë Nikçi is still ceremonial *vojvoda* of the Patriarchate—having, he admitted, finally agreed with my 1965 remark to him that the office should be continued, like that of the Beefeaters who still "guard" the Tower of London, for its symbolic importance, here doubly important as a symbol of historic cooperation between Muslim Albanians and Orthodox Serbs. His old hobby as a protagonist and teacher of the traditional Rugovo sword dance has borne even more important fruit as Yugoslav folk-dancing has gained in importance and international popularity with a worldwide and particularly Western fashion for such folk-arts. The Rugovo folk-dance group of which he is secretary but no longer an active participant since a recent heart operation by a leading Yugoslav heart specialist, Professor Isidor Papo of the Belgrade Military Clinic, has traveled widely throughout Europe and is planning a tour of the United States. They would do even better, he explained, if he did not continue to insist on traditional purity of dance and costuming at a time when most such ensembles have "dolled up" their performances with ballet routines and modern choreography to make themselves more versatile and popular.

On the day we visited Nikçi at the Intercommunal SIZ for Employment in Peć, Patriarch German of the Serbian Orthodox Church was about to arrive from Belgrade to pay a rare official visit to his Patriarchal church. With President Tito also expected during his Kosovo tour the same week, the town was full of rumors that the two might meet at the Patriarchate. Ramë Nikçi, *vojvoda* since 1941, a Partisan of sorts since 1942, and a full member of the Communist Party since 1948, hoped he might be invited to stand ceremonial duties at such an encounter, in Rugovo costume and arms, as historic guardian of the Patriarchate. After all, his history is famous, as is proved by a fat album of clippings from the Yugoslav press that he produced from his desk, just as he had done in 1965.

As for his sworn duty to protect the Patriarchate, an article about him in the Belgrade weekly *Ilustrovana Politika* (August 9, 1978) that he proudly produced noted that the principal threat today comes from those lead trucks that still thunder over the still unpaved road over Čakor Pass, "which set the frescoes dancing against the walls. And that is something that Vojvoda Ramo Nikči [sic] cannot help."

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Whatever one may say about the potholes on the access road to the Patriarchate—whose condition was a sign that Tito would not be coming there, as he did not—those of Peć itself were being filled and patched at a frenetic pace. Tito was arriving in four days, as several young Albanian boys attracted by the unseasonable presence of foreigners and eager to practice their formidably good school English promptly explained. The pungent smell of hot asphalt, poured from handcarts and pressed down by singularly maneuverably self-propelled rollers especially adapted for narrow streets, nearly smothered the smell of *čevabčići* and grilled sausages from the grills in the old bazaar.

In a conversation after the Presidential visit, Kosovo Party President Mahmut Bakalli—who will, I trust, forgive one breach of the rule that our talk was for "background" and not direct quotation—began our meeting, after noting apologetically that we might speak in Serbo-Croatian for convenience despite protocol requirements that he should speak in Albanian and I in English, with a translator, by saying: "We cleaned up our streets for Comrade Tito's visit, as you will have seen, but it could not be hidden that our infrastructure still stands on glass legs."

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In this unhappy age of airplane hijackings and international terrorism, most Yugoslav as well as other European airports display signs bearing stern warnings, similar in wording to those in American airports, about the penalties for attempting to carry hidden weapons or explosives beyond the ticket barrier. Visitors to Kosovo leaving by airplane from Priština Airport (normal daily traffic: one or two flights to and from Belgrade) are offered what may strike them as a significantly and perhaps even ominously different version.

Over the Priština Airport ticket counter is a sign that pictures a revolver, crossed out (like the cigarette on a no-smoking sign) with a red "X." Under the revolver the following polite request, in Serbo-Croatian and Albanian, conjures up images of a saloon in the legendary Wild West:

"Please register your weapons."

(January 1980)

This *Report* concludes the series, "The Other Albania: Kosovo 1979."