

ICWA LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

TRUSTEES

Carole Beaulieu
Mary Lynne Bird
Steven Butler
William F. Foote
Pramila Jayapal
Peter Bird Martin
Ann Mische
Dorothy S. Patterson
Paul A. Rahe
Carol Rose
Chandler Rosenberger
John Spencer
Edmund Sutton
Dirk J. Vandewalle
Sally Wriggins

HONORARY TRUSTEES

David Elliot
David Haggood
Pat M. Holt
Edwin S. Munger
Richard H. Nolte
Albert Ravenholt
Phillips Talbot

Institute of Current World Affairs
The Crane-Rogers Foundation
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 U.S.A.

WM-12
EUROPE/RUSSIA

Whitney Mason is an Institute Fellow studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Part I

The Spotted Owls of the Kosovo: The Kosovo Turks

By Whitney Mason

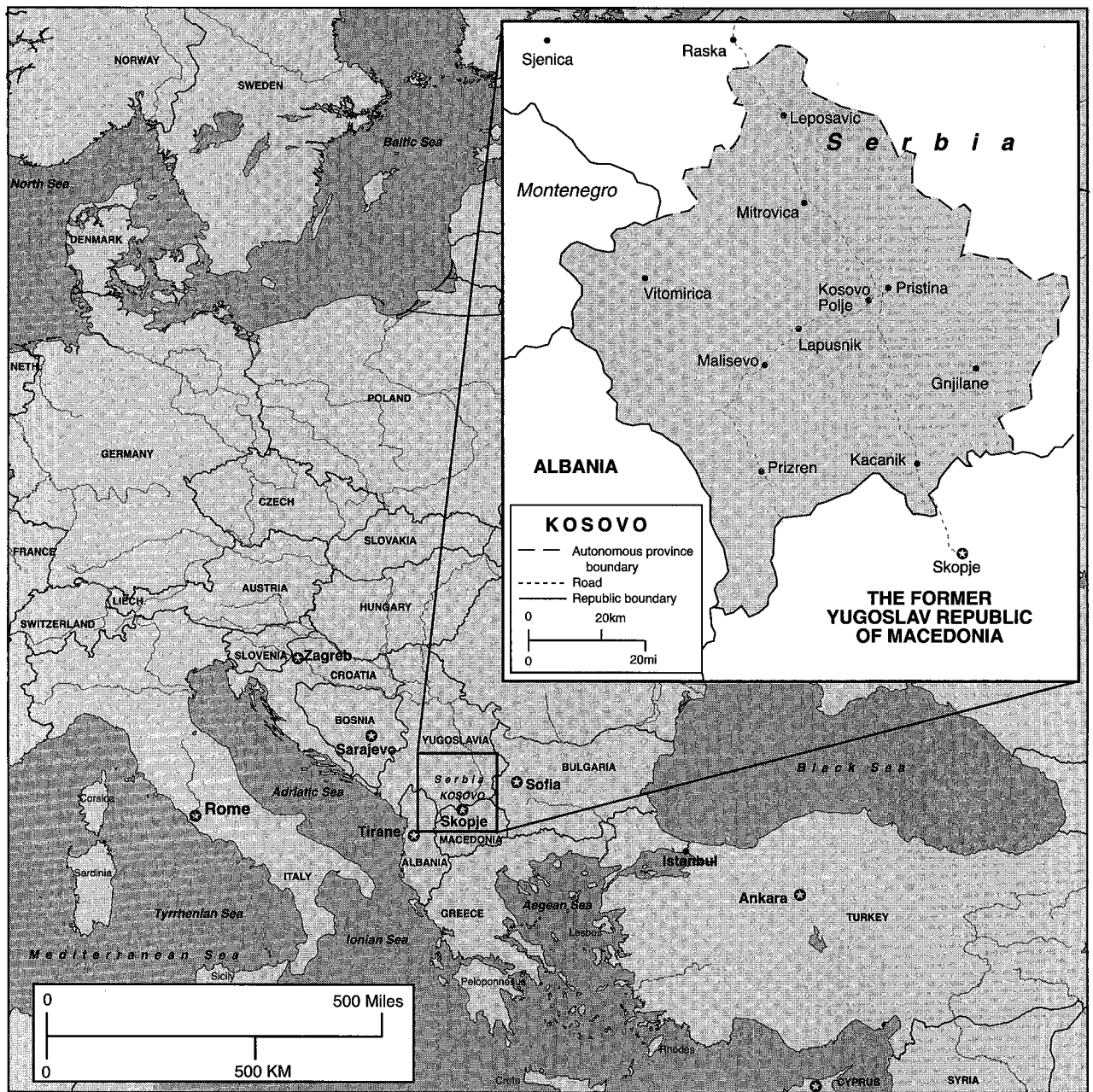
ISTANBUL, Turkey
June, 2000

My road to Kosovo began, like so many journalistic expeditions before, in a bar. It was a sunny late winter afternoon when my friend and former roommate from Sarajevo, Serif Turgut, and I stepped off the lift and into the familiar airiness of our favorite Istanbul watering hole, the Fifth Floor. Down the hill sunlight danced on the Bosphorous. A middle-aged man in a plaid shirt was standing at the entrance. "Erhan Abi!" ["Big Brother Erhan!"] Serif exclaimed in surprise. Erhan Abi and Serif exchanged kisses on the cheeks like long-lost relatives and the three of us sat down at a table overlooking the ribbon of sea connecting the tempestuous waters of the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Erhan Karaoglu, Serif explained, was the leader of a Turkish political party in Mitrovica, the city in northern Kosovo that French peacekeepers had just divided between Albanians in the south and Serbs in the north, where Erhan's house happened to be. While his wife looked after the family's single big asset and Mitrovica veered toward chaos, Erhan's son, a rock musician in Istanbul and the boyfriend of the Fifth Floor's owner, had found his dad the job.

As we chatted about the situation in Kosovo, it struck me that this was the sort of encounter that I'd hoped to experience in Istanbul but hadn't been sure I ever would. I'd read that in the early years of the twentieth century Turkish was a useful language among foreign correspondents working in the Balkans and the Middle East. Talking with a Turkish journalist and a Kosovar politician in a bar overlooking the Bosphorous, I wondered: Was our conversation an isolated incident, or might it be an early glimmer of Istanbul's reemergence as the center of a region stretching from the Adriatic to the Caspian seas that was defined by its common Ottoman roots?

The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 on the motto "Peace at home, peace in the world." In practice this has meant that, with the notable exception of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Turkey, unlike other empires shorn of most of their holdings, has never asserted itself as the former imperial center of the region. A question in my mind since leaving Sarajevo in 1996 was whether, now that the Cold War was past and alignments in the Balkans were shifting dramatically, Turkey would try to project its power in its Balkan "near abroad". If this were going to happen anywhere, it seemed to me, it would be in Kosovo, where Turkish soldiers on the ground as part of the NATO occupation force were actually guarding a beleaguered Turkish minority that had survived since Ottoman times.

Immediately after the end of the NATO bombing campaign last June, Turkish television aired reports featuring Turkish-speaking Albanians suggesting that with the Milosevic troops evicted from the province, halcyon days had dawned in Kosovo. As the months passed, there gradually emerged a darker story of Albanians persecuting minorities as the Serbs had before them. Members of the Turkish minority, whom it had always been expected would benefit from the Albanian victory, felt more under threat than before the air war. Turks had taken for granted that all Muslims in the Balkans were at least reliably friendly to Turks and Turkey; the prospect of



the Kosovar Turks being driven out of the province by Albanian Muslims amounted to a kind of heresy.

Every war reshuffles the deck of identities and loyalties and there was no telling, at least from Istanbul, what sort of hand the Turks of Kosovo had been dealt this time round. Would the volatility in Kosovo prompt Turkey to project its considerable power in the Balkans? And if not, was it possible that the Turkish community that had survived in Kosovo for over five centuries — including years under Orthodox monarchism, communism and fascism — would now be expelled by the new Albanian masters? Either way, post-Ottoman history seemed to be approaching a portentous turning point. When armed clashes flared up near Erhan Abi's hometown of Mitrovica in mid-February, my friend Serif announced that her employer, ATV, was sending her back to Kosovo for a couple of weeks.

Since Serif had spent the entire war in Kosovo and knew the area as well as anyone, I jumped at the opportunity to go with her.

I would look at the Kosovar Turks to measure the health of the multicultural society of Kosovo — much the way a forest ranger in the Pacific Northwest looks at a spotted owl to gauge the health of old growth forests. At the same time I'd look for signs of how Turkey was reacting to this latest invitation to flex its muscle on behalf of an embattled minority calling itself Turkish.

Serif, for her part, would become once again one of Turks' few sources of first-hand news about Kosovo, as she had been during the air war and the months of mayhem leading up to it. Turks and Albanians are both intimate and estranged. Over three million people who iden-

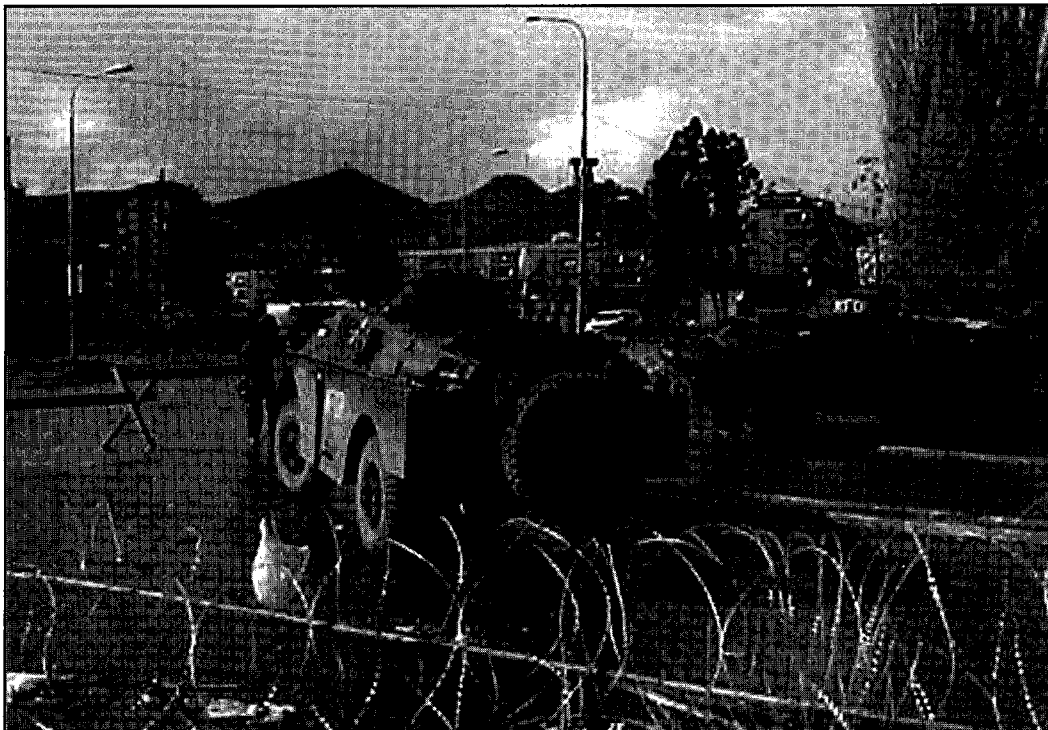
tify their ethnicity as Albanian live in Turkey — almost as many as in Kosovo and Albania combined. Among this number is General Cevik Bir, Chief of the Turkish army's General Staff during the war in Kosovo and a vocal critic of Turkey's support for maintaining the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. During the Ottoman period 38 Grand Viziers, the empire's top administrators, were Albanians. Most Albanians had adopted Islam and sided with the Ottomans against the Orthodox Serbs. And yet, the Albanians' greatest national hero, Skanderbeg, had made his fame by rebelling against the Ottomans. On the Turkish Airlines flight to Skopje, the stewardess reminded me that the former Ottoman provinces of Rum had become terra incognita for contemporary Turks. "Who lives in Uskup?" she asked, using the old Ottoman word for the provincial capital. "Albanians?" She was surprised to hear that most Skopje residents are not the mostly Muslim Albanians but Orthodox Christian Slavs closely related to Bulgarians and Serbs.

In my rush to the airport in Istanbul I hadn't had time to withdraw any hard currency and arrived in Macedonia with a wallet full of notes that no bank would touch. Neither would the Turkish Airlines office nor even the consulate. For some reason I couldn't get any money with my credit cards. Becoming a bit alarmed, I headed across the Vardar to the cobbled streets of the old Ottoman quarter, today dominated by Turkish-speaking Albanians, to search for people with some connection to the old empire. After an hour of going from shop to shop I'd only managed to find one Turkish bus driver willing to trade a hundred dollars. After another three hours wandering around I found myself drinking tea with a pregnant Macedonian Albanian travel agent and her jazz-musician husband who eventually introduced to me to a

slight man in a dark suit. By a bizarre coincidence that struck me like something out of a LeCarré novel, this man was the local manager of an Albanian construction firm called Mabetex that became famous for allegedly paying kickbacks to Russian President Boris Yeltsin in connection with renovating the Kremlin. The Mabetex man in turn introduced me to a currency trader who'd previously told me he had no interest in Turkish lira. This time he said he'd trade as much as I needed.

After a day and a half in Skopje I caught a UN High Commission for Refugees shuttle and crossed the congested border with Kosovo in the passenger seat of a white Toyota Land Cruiser, the stock vehicle of crisis areas. After entering province, I noticed a proliferation of reckless drivers. I confessed to the driver, himself an Albanian from Kosovo, that my single preconception about Albanians was that they were wild behind the wheel. He answered by asking rhetorically whether his driving was wild. The problem, he said, was that in the power vacuum following the flight of the Serbs there was almost no enforcement of traffic laws — or, for that matter, *any* laws. Anarchy ruled.

After driving for an hour through a startlingly pretty landscape of rolling hills surrounded by snow-capped mountains, as well as the expected pill boxes and armored vehicles of Kosovo's new NATO occupiers, we crested a ridge and looked down at the gaunt and humorless construction that is Kosovo's capital. Rolls of barbed wire lined the street between the UNHCR office and the amber-windowed hulk of Pristina's Grand Hotel, where I hoped to find Serif. A man at the reception said there were no rooms available. I asked him to tell Serif I was waiting for her if he saw her, and walked into the bar to wait.



When French troops divided the town of Mitrovica between Serbs in the north and Albanians in the south, they took no account of Kosovar Turks stuck on the wrong side.

Over a beer and a coffee — carefully combined to allow me to relax without falling asleep in my chair — I took in the bar's curious mix of tough-looking men, most sporting several days' growth of dark beard, and foreigners wearing purposeful expressions and the latest expeditionary fashions. After 40 minutes in this cross between a halfway house for hitmen and an apres-ski hour near Seattle a familiar face approached the table. "Hey there, Mother Fucker!" Serif said, extending her usual greeting with a weary smile. She introduced me to the cameraman working with her, Bashar. He immediately lived up to his billing as a gentleman by inviting me to take the second bed in his room.

That night Serif, Bashar and an older Kosovar Turk whom Serif called Ali Baba — and I — had a fine dinner in restaurant whose glass ceiling seemed to advertise its protected status as a feeding station for aid workers and foreign administrators. Back at the hotel Serif and I had a drink with a couple of guys she knew from the BBC. One of them, an Australian cameraman, condemned NATO's airstrikes against civilian targets, particularly against the Serbian National Television building where many Serb journalists were killed when an expensive piece of western ordinance had made direct hit. The other fellow, an Albanian fixer in horned-rim glasses and a bright-colored *anorak* who'd sat out the war in London, focused his ire on the Serbs who'd remained in Kosovo after the war. What he couldn't understand or forgive, he said over and over, was that the Serbs refused to declare publicly that what Milosevic's henchmen had done was wrong. Serif and the cameraman both pointed out that the Serbs were scared and confused and that they couldn't be sure that in the future they wouldn't again be living under totalitarian Serb rule. The defense fell on deaf ears. When I left the three of them there, he was still repeating that refusing to condemn the Serb atrocities amounted to endorsing them, and that people offering such a tacit endorsement had no place in Kosovo. It was the first but far from the last time I'd hear that the future of relations between Kosovo's ethnic groups depended on whether people were willing and able simply to declare publicly that they were sorry about the years of brutal persecution under the Serbs.

In the morning Bashar and I quickly showered and went down to the lobby to meet Serif and Ali Baba. After not more than five minutes downstairs I realized I'd forgotten to take a pen and returned to our room to get one. Inside the room I noticed that the 492-page book that had been on the nightstand, *A Short History of Kosovo* by Noel Malcolm, was no longer there. A fruitless five-minute search convinced me that a cleaning woman's curiosity had gotten the better of her. I returned to the lobby just as Bashar was going up for something himself. I told a man at the reception that my book was missing and though I had no hard feelings about it, I wanted it returned immediately. Wearing a poker face that neither admitted guilt nor protested innocence, the man picked up the phone and said several words in Albanian. To me

he said the matter was being looked into. A minute later the phone rang again. "The book is in your room," the man at the reception counter told me. When he came back downstairs, Bashar confirmed that a cleaning woman had returned the book. Later I heard from many Kosovars and internationals that Malcolm's book, which had been translated into Albanian and presents a version of events more favorable to Albanians than to the Serb nationalist line, was in great demand all over Kosovo. [A few days later an Albanian woman complained to me that Albanians had to rely on others for their own history — though in fact Malcolm himself refers to a good number of Albanian sources.]

Afternoon in Mitrovica

The next morning the four of us piled into Ali Baba's tiny red Renault, Serif and I in back and Bashar up front with his heavy beta cam in his lap. As we followed a decent two-lane highway north across the plateau, I mentioned that the fixer at the reception desk had struck me as rather dogmatic. Yes, Serif said, he'd lived up to Albanians' reputation. In Turkish, she said, "Albanian" is synonymous with being stubbornly opinionated: an "Albanian belief" is one that can't be shaken by contrary evidence. There's also a saying [which as it turns out is practically impossible to translate], Bashar said with a laugh: "A bumpkin had a son, grabbed his penis... and pulled it off." In other words, a parvenu, not realizing the value of unfamiliar new assets, is liable to destroy them.

With such edifying banter we filled the hour or so it took us to reach the unprepossessing industrial town of Mitrovica. After a quick lunch of *cevapcici*, the spicy little meat cylinders you find throughout the Balkans, we walked to the foot of a short, low bridge bracketed by the barbed wire, tank traps and armored personnel carriers that proclaimed it a fortified border. On a visit to Istanbul Peter Martin had told me that just a week earlier he had watched hair-raising television news footage of peacekeepers struggling to restrain a huge crowd of enraged Albanians determined to cross this bridge into the northern Serb-held side of town. Several soldiers and civilians were hurt in the confrontation. Now the bridge was just an empty little strip of concrete under glowering skies. Cars would drive casually toward the foot of the bridge then, instead of crossing, just as casually make a U-turn and head back away from the Serbs.

Serif and Bashar decided to try to enter the north by a less conspicuous bridge and since I didn't have the NATO press card required to pass the checkpoint we arranged to meet later in the afternoon. Fortunately, just before we parted, Serif introduced me to an old friend who happened to be among the crowd on the bridge gazing north. Before the war Erhan Kasap, now with the Turkish IHA news agency, had headed the Turkish section of the state radio in Prizren for 22 years. I told Kasap I knew Erhan from Istanbul and hoped to meet his younger brother, Adnan. As we set off to look for him Kasap gave me a

thumbnail sketch of the Turkish community in Kosovo.

The question of how many Turks live in Kosovo is deeply political and, like all questions of group affiliation in a region that's been religiously and linguistically mixed for centuries, ultimately irresolvable. [I don't say "ethnically" mixed because anthropologists have recently labeled the concept of ethnicity a figment and because in the Balkans, in any case, notions of ethnicity derive mostly from religion and language — and the manipulation thereof.] I'd read in Malcolm's *Kosovo: A Short History* that the origins of Kosovo's Turkish community can be dated to the years 1389-1455 "when officials, soldiers, traders and their families began to settle in some of Kosovo's towns." As Malcolm points out, "Turk" was not an ethnic designation during the centuries of Ottoman rule: originally the term referred to Ottoman soldiers who could be Arab, Kurd or Laz as easily as ethnic Turks. Later it referred to those who spoke Turkish, which would apply to virtually any city dweller since "a fully Ottomanized Albanian would be both Albanian and Turkish." Malcolm points out that Mehmet Akif, who wrote the Turkish national anthem, was the son of a Kosovar Albanian and though born in Istanbul, considered himself Albanian. Many Turkish Kosovars emigrated to Turkey between the wars and the Serbs classified "as many Albanians as possible as Turks to facilitate their removal. Still the number identifying themselves as Turkish was small: 27,920 in 1921 and 23,698 in 1931."

According to the last official census, in 1991, only about 12,000 Turks now live in Kosovo. Turks themselves claim the actual number is about 50,000. Presumably this means that if no biases against any group prevailed in Kosovo, 50,000 would call themselves Turks. Out of a total population of about two million, an estimated 300,000 Kosovars, the vast majority of whom consider themselves Albanian, can speak Turkish.¹

Kasap told me that in 1951 some Albanian extremists began saying there were no Turks in Kosovo. In 1974 Tito made Kosovo a "Socialist Autonomous province" under a constitution envisaging a sort of rainbow-coalition dictatorship. Among other politically progressive entitlements it guaranteed "the equality of the Albanian, Serbo-Croatian and Turkish languages and their alphabets shall be ensured."

But one people's liberation is another's manipulation: "The Albanians claim that Tito recognized a separate Turkish population only to reduce the power of Albanians," explained Kasap. "All of us — Serbs, gypsies, Bosniacs, Turks, Albanians — lived together without any

problem. But Albanian chauvinists couldn't bear this — 'This is Kosovo, this is Albanian!' they said." Kasap told me, expressing what seems to be the view of virtually all Turks in Kosovo, that many Turks were assimilated by the Albanian majority after the movement toward a Greater Albania began in Kosovo in 1981. "There were few jobs and few schools for Turks," explained Kasap. In 1981, he told me, about 10,000 Turkish Kosovars moved to Turkey. A bit contradictorily, he said that Turks — those few who continued to identify themselves as Turks, that is — didn't support the Albanians' separatist movement because Turks occupied a comfortable position in Yugoslavia, with their own schools, newspaper, radio and TV.

Relations among the various communities in Kosovo began to nose-dive in 1988 after Slobodan Milosevic became president of Serbia (then still one of five republics of Yugoslavia.) Milosevic tried — unsuccessfully according to Kasap — to pit Turks against Albanians. What Kasap next said startled me, especially considering that we were surrounded by well-armed, nationalistic Albanians: "Milosevic is a creation of Albanian nationalists. Without their extremism, Milosevic never would have emerged, never could have whipped up Serb nationalism as he did." Though I didn't know enough to assess this view myself, it's one I'd heard from many other apparently reasonable people in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. In 1987 a group of Serb nationalists in Kosovo asked the president of the Communist Party of Serbia, Ivan Stambolic, to address a rally in Kosovo Polje, site of a much-mythologized battle between the Serbs and the Ottomans. Instead, Stambolic sent his deputy, Slobodan Milosevic. When fighting between police and Serb protestors broke out, a television camera caught Milosevic declaring, "No one should dare to beat you." Frustrated Serbs and the young apparatchik had both found religion: from that day on Milosevic shot to power on the basis of a nationalism he had never before expressed and few observers believe he actually feels.

In 1989 a state of emergency was declared and hundreds of Albanians who protested against rising Serb nationalism were arrested. With security agents inside the hall and tanks and armored cars outside, the provincial assembly of Kosovo approved amendments that reduced Kosovo's autonomy to "a mere token." In 1991 the new constitution of the Republic of Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy altogether.

Albanians responded to state persecution by developing a separate and unofficial system of schools and hospitals. Turkish students, meanwhile, continued to attend public schools that taught in Turkish — the begin-

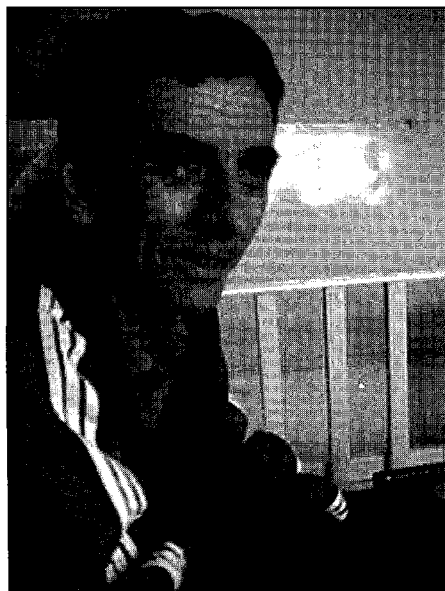
¹ A Turkish diplomat tells me the Turkish spoken by the Kosovar Turks, unlike the Turkish communities in other Balkan countries, is practically indistinguishable from that spoken in Turkey itself. There are, however, differences both of usage and pronunciation between the Turkish spoken in Turkey and that spoken in Kosovo, at least among those who identify themselves as Albanian. The word "*chush*," for instance, in standard Turkish is a word used to tell a horse to stop, as in "whoa boy"; in Kosovar Turkish it means "How's it going?" The word "*katir*" means "mule" in standard Turkish and "four" in Kosovar Turkish.

ning of a physical and psychological segregation of the two communities that endures today.

Milosevic's effort to turn Turks against Albanians may now be bearing bitter fruit in the form of Albanian resentment of Turks. Kasap recalls Albanians demanding, "Why are you cooperating with Serbs?!" Kasap insists that the Turks weren't "cooperating" with the Serbs; as a small, vulnerable minority they were just looking after themselves. Says Kasap: "We were caught between two fires." If the Serb fire has for all intents and purposes extinguished by ethnic cleansing, the Albanian one is raging. After ten years of ostracism and two years of indiscriminate attacks by Serb police and paramilitaries, some Albanians may have trouble appreciating the distinction between Turks "looking after themselves" within the Serb system and actively supporting it at the expense of their Albanian compatriots.

Today Turkish Kosovars are concentrated in five communities, where children attend Turkish-medium elementary schools before being integrated with Albanians and Bosniacs (Muslim Slavs) in high school: the provincial capital of Pristina with two schools for 500 kids; Gijlane in the southeast with one school for 50 kids; Mitrovica with one school for 30 kids. The unofficial capital of Turkish Kosovars is Prizren, a town of 120,000 in the narrow strip of territory in the far south squeezed between mountain ranges running along the borders of Albania and Macedonia, where Turks have seven elementary schools for 1,200 students. Mamusha, a unique, all-Turkish village near Prizren, has one big elementary school with about 700 students.

Politically, Kosovar Turks are divided among three parties: the pro-Albanian Turkish People's Party, whose leader Sezer Shaipi, has the Turks' seat on UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner's ruling council; the Turkish Democratic Union, based in Prizren and by far the Turks' most popular party; and the Turkish Democratic Union Party



Adnan Kasap hopes to return to Kosovo and wrest some power from the bigger community of Turks living in the south of the province.

— Erhan Abi's splinter group, which had tried to remain more strictly neutral as it navigated between the Milosevic regime and the Kosovo Liberation Army or KLA.

Kasap and I stepped through a gate in a rough stone wall and walked past a handsome old Ottoman house to a low, two-story concrete box next door where Erhan's brother lived. Adnan and his son Sancar, whom Uncle Erhan had named after the Turkish general who led the 1974 "Peace Operation" in Cyprus, met us at the door. Sancar, 20, wore his sandy blonde hair in a 1950s haircut. Adnan looked haggard, though no worse than I'd expect considering how he chain-smoked foul smelling cigarettes. We took our shoes off and stepped inside onto an undulating floor, ducking to avoid hitting the low ceiling, and were ushered upstairs to a sitting room. As often in poor homes, the TV, tuned to the Turkish state channel, continued to blare away as we talked.

Sancar asked us in English whether we'd like a coffee. I asked whether he'd studied English in university. Sancar explained that he'd studied in a medrese [school of Islamic theology] in Pristina for three years and had wanted to go on to a more advanced school for prayer leaders in Turkey, but hadn't been able to because he didn't have a Turkish passport. Instead he'd started to work as a barber in Mitrovica then, when the country was flooded by international organizations after the NATO bombing campaign, had landed a job with the World Food Program. The English he'd picked up along the way. Besides his amazingly good pickup English, Sancar was proud of speaking Serbian like a Serb and Albanian like an Albanian, in addition to his mother tongue, Turkish.

Adnan asked me to tell Serif to urge his brother to return to Kosovo to take charge of the party that had split with the Turkish Democratic Union (TDB). Originally the party said it wouldn't side with either Milosevic or the KLA, but would be on the side of democracy. The Serb regime managed to buy a couple members of the TDB in Prizren, which sullied the party's reputation. Still, since it had by far the largest Turkish population, Prizren Turks insisted that the leader of the party be from there. "We said this was wrong, but unfortunately the Prizren Turks didn't want to see that. A self-styled leader of the Turkish community — Zenel Abidid Kureysi and a woman whose name I couldn't find — attended the US-engineered peace talks in Rambouillet as a member of the Serb delegation. Kosovo Turks wanted to object, Adnan says, but didn't dare. Now he hoped the two factions would reunite with a leader chosen by a party congress and establish its headquarters in Pristina. Adnan said the location of the headquarters had to change because "every party is based in its respective capital"; the real reason, it seemed obvious to me, is that Pristina is about half way between Prizren and Mitrovica, giving Turks from the smaller communities a fighting chance for the leadership.

I asked how he'd respond to Albanian charges that Turks, by continuing to attend state schools and to work



Adnan Kasap (right), his son Sancar (left) and journalist Erhan Kasap (center), who used to direct the Turkish service of Kosovo state radio in Pristina.

in state institutions, had collaborated with the hated Milosevic regime. Sounding what would become a familiar tune, Adnan declared that if Turks had abandoned state schools along with Albanians in 1991, they would have been assimilated by the Albanian community and lost their distinct identity.

The future of the Turkish community in Kosovo, said Adnan, was now in the hands of the UN Mission in Kosovo, known by its acronym UNMIK. Like all Turks I met in Kosovo, Adnan asserted that until 1989 Turkish had been an official language in Kosovo. Though some UN officials deny that Turkish was ever fully "official," it seems to be agreed that Kosovar Turks had been allowed to use Turkish in these bits of bureaucratic currency. Since the end of hostilities last June, however, Kouchner's administration has designated Albanian, Serbian and English as working languages. The right to use Turkish in official forms, which in a still-étatist post-communist society are mother's milk, has emerged as most Kosovar Turks' number-one political issue. "It's European and American democracy we want here. We had rights, maybe not a lot, but we had them. Now we have no representative and Turkish is no longer an official language. We want to be able to fill our ID information in our own language. We're not asking for anything new — we just want what we had before," says Adnan. Seventy percent or more of Turks are unemployed. Turkish delegations have applied to meet with Kouchner but have been rejected. Adnan urged the OSCE to include Turkish on ID cards and census forms. "If [UNMIK Administrator] Bernard Kouchner wants to defend our rights, we'll survive."

In June UNMIK began trying to conduct a census in
Institute of Current World Affairs

preparation for elections it hopes to hold this autumn. The forms initially distributed allowed people to identify themselves only as Albanian, Serb or "Other." Under pressure from the Turkish community, with support from Ankara, UNMIK issued new forms allowing Kosovars to identify themselves specifically as Turks. The forms are still printed only in Albanian and Serbian, however, and the vast majority of Kosovar Turks have responded by boycotting the census altogether. UNMIK, meanwhile, has complained to Ankara that it didn't have the budget to print forms in Turkish.

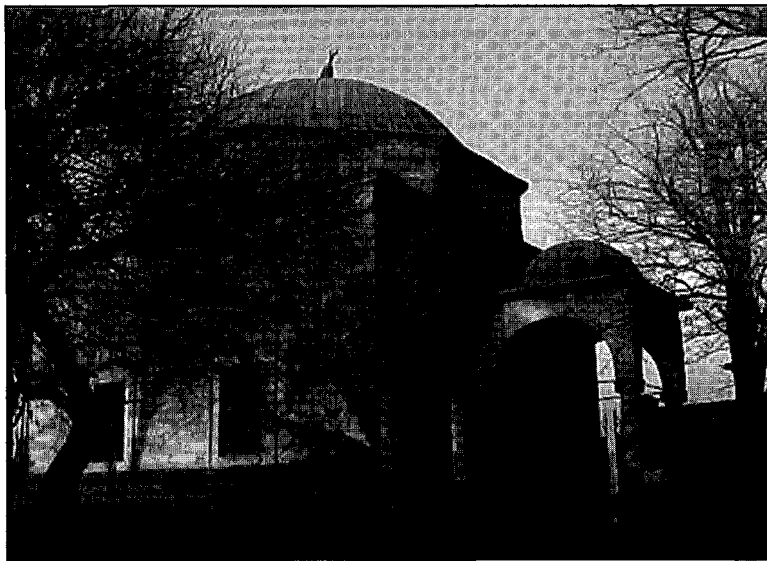
In light of my own growing skepticism of state structures, the Turkish Kosovars' emphasis on these forms in face of such so much greater chal-

lenges strikes me as pathetic and self-destructively petty — not unlike the importance many US women who consider themselves feminists attach to the use of the word "woman" over "girl" while blue-collar working women continue to earn 60 percent as much as their male counterparts. Serif argues, on the other hand, that the Turks reasonably view UNMIK's refusal to use Turkish on forms as an endorsement of Albanian nationalists' goal of creating a mono-cultural, monolingual state. She would say to the UN, in other words, begin as you mean to continue.

One Tomb, Three Myths

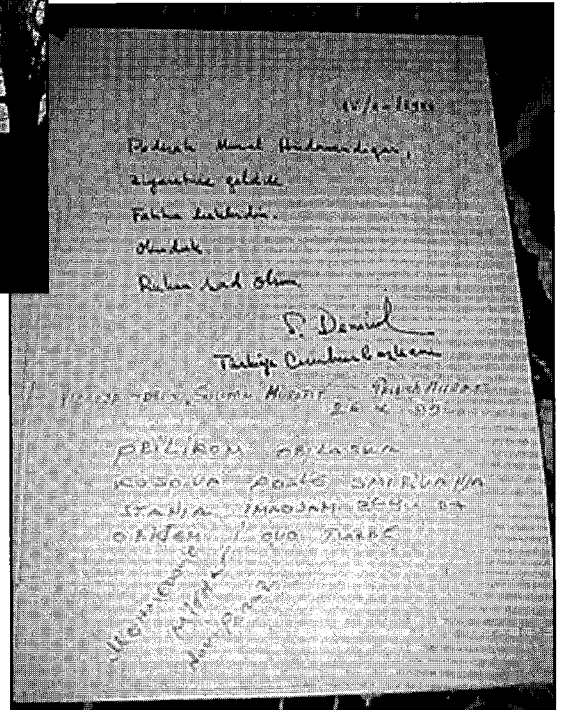
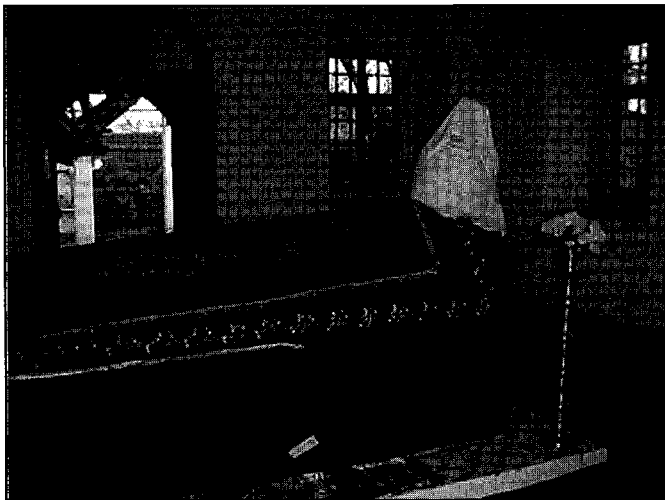
On the road back to Pristina Serif asked Ali Baba to turn off at the tomb of Sultan Murat who in 1389 had led the victorious Ottoman army in the Battle of Black Birds, a legend-enshrouded even that became the touchstone of Serbian nationalism in the 1990s. The tomb lies in a small domed building surrounded by an unruly yard enclosed by a six-foot-high wall. Responsibility for looking after the tomb belonged to Fahri Turbedar, the eldest living member of the family that has guarded the tomb since Murat was buried since dying in the battle. Graves of Murat's companions lay outside the building amid drooping trees.

"There are two popular assumptions about the great battle of Kosovo in 1389," writes Noel Malcom: "That it was this Turkish victory that destroyed the medieval Serbian empire and that the defeated Serbs were immediately placed under Ottoman rule. Both are false." The truth is, as Malcolm writes, that all we really know is that fighting was intense, with heavy losses on both sides,



(left) Here lies the conqueror: Amid the chaos of today's Kosovo, the tomb of the Ottoman Sultan Murat, who in 1389 was killed in the Battle of Kosovo Polje (the Field of Blackbirds) that led to the Ottoman conquest of Serbia, has a feel of Ozymandian irony.

(below) A martyr's tomb: For some believers Murat's sloped sarcophagus topped with a turban, like those of Muslim saints in Turkey, is a place for prayer.



(above) Odes to a world long past, (if it ever was): In the guest book next to Murat's tomb, Turkish dignitaries including former President Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, have paid homage to an idealized picture of the Ottomans' interethnic tolerance.

and both Lazar and Murat were killed. Among the many things we don't know are who fought on each side, how Lazar and Murat met their deaths, whether there were turning points in the battle and whether the result was really a Turkish victory or a draw. This lack of information has not prevented Serb nationalists from canonizing a version of events including the dramatic details required of an emotive epic.

The first verse of the Serb nationalist legend of the battle is that the Serb commander, Prince Lazar, was betrayed by his son-in-law, Vuk Brankovic, lord of most of Kosovo. Malcolm tells us that the first written source to accuse Brankovic of perfidy came from a monk from the Adriatic city-state of Ragusa, today's Dubrovnik. Malcolm suggests that it's more likely that Brankovic offered little support during the battle because he resented his father-in-law's domineering behavior.

The second element of the Serb myth holds that

Murat was slain by a daring Serb knight, Milos Kobilic, who was provoked to this suicidal act by aspersions cast on him by Brankovic and given credence by Lazar. The earliest Serb folk song about the battle says Milos reached Murat by pretending to defect before the battle:

Before the Sultan Milos bowed,
And he leaned o'er to kiss his knee,
His golden dagger he drew, and struck,
And underfoot he trampled him...

According to the earliest Ottoman account, from 1412, as quoted by Malcolm:

Much of the army went to pursue the enemy, and only the ruler and a few of his courtiers stayed in one place... But an unbeliever was lying there, covered in blood from head to foot. He was hidden among the corpses, but he could easily see the heroic Khan. As fate willed, he rose up from where he lay, jumping up with

his dagger and stabbing the ruler.

Perhaps the most important element of the legend, since it made the battle so influential in shaping the Serbs' sense of their own destiny, is the idea of the "Kosovo covenant." Lazar was supposedly offered a choice between an earthly kingdom and a heavenly one and, of course, chose the latter. Because of this decision, described as a covenant with God, the Serbs are often said to consider themselves a "heavenly people." In the folk epic "The Downfall of the Serbian Empire" by Vuk Karadzic, St. Elijah appears to Lazar and offers him the choice between his earthly kingdom and a heavenly one. Lazar replies something to the effect that "It is better to die in battle than to live in shame." Since the late nineteenth century, June 28th has been celebrated as the anniversary of the "Kosovo covenant – the choice," as one prominent Serb historian puts it, "between freedom in the celestial empire instead of humiliation and slavery in the temporal one". It was on this day 600 years after the mythologized battle that the Serb tyro Slobodan Milosevic stood on the platform at the edge of the battlefield and exhorted thousands of Serbs to crush the other peoples of Yugoslavia who kept the heavenly Serbian people from exercising their worldly prerogatives.

Murat's tomb itself is dominated by an oversized coffin draped in a tapestry of green, the color of Islam, and embroidered in gold with Murat's calligraphic imperial seal. Atop the head of the coffin sits a large turban. Next to the entrance hangs a framed note explaining the life of Murat. It is in French; Turbedar tells me that militants from the Kosovo Liberation Army took the one in Albanian. At first, he explains, the Albanians said they'd need it for only a couple of days. Three months later they announced they wouldn't be giving it back. "Turks and Turkish belong in Turkey," they told him. Turbedar eyes me from significantly from under his busy eyebrows. "Even the Serbs hadn't dared to damage the turbe," he says ominously.

During the war, Serif told me, Turbedar never took off his red fez, even in the bar of the Grand Hotel in Pristina, which was crawling with Serbs. Both Turbedar and Serif insist the Serbs never harassed him. "Slobo (Milosevic) curses the U.S., he curses the Albanians, but he doesn't dare curse the Turks," said Turbedar. "The Serbs," Turbedar tells me with a gleam of pride in his eye, "have always been afraid of the Turks."

In the guest book in a niche next to Murat's coffin I find comments from visitors around the world, including then Turkish President Suleyman Demirel and Foreign Minister Ismail Cem. Cem wrote: "While I remember, with God's mercy and grace, both Sultan Murat and our *sheyhids* [holy martyrs] buried here, I know we owe so many things to them. In the year 1389 they brought [a word I couldn't make out] of a new civilization and its tolerance and stayed here for hundreds of years as repre-

sentatives of justice and brotherhood. Today as a new era has started I wish the challenges, brotherhood and contemporaries of Sultan Murat would create friendship, unity and a period of peace within today's realities."

We step outside and wander among the graves toward a tree with little strips of cloth tied round its branches. Serif explains that people tie the scraps for good luck. Not being superstitious, ordinarily I feel no temptation to perform rituals good fortune — throwing coins in a fountain, for instance. With my wedding approaching though, any extra luck seems like a good idea. Before I even realize what I'm doing, I've pulled out my Swiss Army knife, untucked my shirt and started cutting a strip from the bottom of the tail. Wide-eyed with surprise, Serif tells Bashar to start filming. After cutting the strip I tie it to a branch and, at Serif's prompting, look into the camera and explain to viewers back home in Turkey that I'm getting married in a month and hope that my wife Amanda and I will be happy together. [Back in my Istanbul neighborhood the next week, neighbors and shopkeepers who'd seen the segment on the news treated me like a star.]

After I've finished asking for good fortune the Ottoman way, Turbedar complains about his own insurance dilemma. It seems the toilet in the guesthouse doesn't work. He pulls up the carpet and shows me where the floorboards are rotting. Turbedar is 63. "I may die soon," he explains, "and my son will come to take my place. But before then I want to make the necessary repairs. Otherwise, how will I explain myself in the next world?"

A couple of months later, I learn that Turbedar had died without having had a chance to repair the tomb. Serif attributes his early death to being harassed by Albanian nationalists. As soon as he died, the thugs showed up at the tomb and told his daughter that they would now take over the property. The next time the thugs arrived they were met by a platoon of Turkish soldiers who informed the Albanians that they would enter Murat's tomb only over their dead bodies. □



Turbedar, whose family has looked after Murat's tomb for 500 years, refused to take off his fez even in the darkest days of NATO bombing and Serb reprisals. Now that he's gone, will his children carry on the tradition of caring for the tomb — much less wear a type of hat that in Turkey died along with the Ottoman empire?

Institute of Current World Affairs

— Fellows and their Activities —

EUROPE/RUSSIA

Gregory Feifer—Russia

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Whitney Mason—Turkey

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

Jean Benoît Nadeau—France

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

SOUTH ASIA

Shelly Renae Browning—Australia

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

THE AMERICAS

Wendy Call—Mexico

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Peter Keller—Chile

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Susan Sterner—Brazil

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women.

Tyrone Turner—Brazil

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced photo-essays on youth violence in New Orleans, genocide in Rwanda and mining in Indonesia. As an Institute Fellow he is photographing and writing about Brazilian youth from São Paulo in the industrial South to Recife and Salvador in the Northeast.

Author: Mason, Whitney
 Title: ICWA Letters-Europe/Russia
 ISSN: 1083-4273
 Imprint: Institute of Current World
 Affairs, Hanover, NH

Material Type: Serial
 Language: English
 Frequency: Monthly
 Other Regions: Sub-Saharan Africa;
 East Asia; South Asia,
 Mideast/North, Africa;
 The Americas

ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4273) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

Phone: (603) 643-5548 E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net
 Fax: (603) 643-9599 Web Site: www.icwa.org

Executive Director: Peter Bird Martin
 Program Administrator: Gary L. Hansen
 Publications Manager: Ellen Kozak

©2000 Institute of Current World Affairs, The Crane-Rogers Foundation.
 The information contained in this publication may not be reproduced without the writer's permission.

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

Institute of Current World Affairs

THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION
 Four West Wheelock Street
 Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 USA