‘Freedom!’: Albanian society and the quest for independence from statehood in Kosovo and Macedonia

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THE POLITICAL STORY of the Albanian conflicts has been widely discussed and documented in numerous publications (see, for example, the Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000). But to understand the Kosovo and Macedonian wars, one needs to travel up into the mountains south of Vitina, keep on driving even when there is no more asphalt on the road and enter one of the large compounds in the hills. In S, for example, one would be received by AR, a friendly man of sixty years with no incisors, and his wife, dressed in colourful baggy trousers, shyly waving from behind. Politics is not an issue for these hard-working people, life has made them wise and they feel no hatred towards any other nation. Their oldest son is a physics teacher at Vitina grammar school, the second and third sons are electricians, and a further, younger son is a student in Austria. Dad formally collects all the money that the sons earn and M, the oldest, decides on what to spend it. They hate being interrogated by the police, the corrupt municipality officials and the visa problems they face when they want to travel to Ljubljana, which is vital for them as they hold an exclusive licence for the import of electric counters from Slovenia. The Rs want to live freely and in peace, and they are ready to fight for it.

Focusing on the shortcomings within the Albanian societies of former Yugoslavia might lead to a serious misunderstanding of the situation. These societies are indeed always at risk of conflict; however, at least the Kosovo war in 1998 and 1999 was caused to a much greater extent by outside factors. The Kosovo Albanian society may be blamed only for its failure to avoid conflict and its poor capacity to manage problems that were generated elsewhere. Once it had begun, the conflict was extremely difficult to stop, and instead of dying out or continuing on a small scale, it tended to spill over into neighbouring areas inhabited by Albanians. The explanation for this phenomenon is one which can actually be found within these societies.

From 1986 onwards, when a wave of nationalist feelings accompanied the rise of Slobodan Milosevic, Kosovo Albanians became its mainly innocent and

almost accidental victims. After the Pristina rallies in 1981, nothing had happened in Kosovo to stir up nationalist feelings among Serbs. In fact, the percentage of Serbs in the Kosovo population was declining, owing both to the much higher birth rate among Albanians and the emigration of Serbs. The 'exodus', as Belgrade media liked to call the steady Serb emigration, was above all a consequence of the high unemployment and the poor economic status of the southern province. As opposed to Albanians, Serbs in Kosovo found it easy to leave the impoverished area and to settle somewhere in Serbia proper or in other, more prosperous parts of what was then Yugoslavia. Back in 1974 when there was a change in Yugoslavia's constitution, a feeling of alienation spread among Kosovo Serbs who from then on were no longer privileged; they started to feel like foreigners in what they considered their own country. To be fair, it was certainly hard for Serbs to live in a rapidly changing society with different values, a different religion and a different language; and the notorious priority Albanians give to family life certainly contributed to the isolation of the minority, which in 1991 was about 10 per cent of the Kosovo population. Nevertheless, there was never a perceivable political strategy to expel Serbs from Kosovo or even to create an 'ethnically pure' province. The incidents of the years to come – e.g. the killing of soldiers by an Albanian in Prokuplje or the smear story of the Serb who had a bottle forced into his anus by an Albanian – were all invented or at least exaggerated and misused. Outside interested political circles, there are not even reports of any particular hostility of Albanians towards their Serb neighbours. The alleged rape of Serb women by Albanian men simply did not take place, as the Croatian academic Branko Horvat has shown in detail (Horvat 1989: 148–167). In fact, the conflict started in Belgrade. Kosovo was the first and easiest means of feeding the aspirations of the new Serb nationalists and this was the most important factor. 'Srbija cela, a ne u tri dela' (Serbia is one, not separated into three), was the slogan. Serbia and its position in Yugoslavia was the target, not Kosovo.

The second most important factor was the policy of the international community. The Badinter Commission, inaugurated by the then European Community to regulate the succession of the dissolved Yugoslav Federation, decided to recognise – and thus grant the status of sovereign states to – the six former republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), if they applied. Although ethnically mixed and, in the east European sense of the word, 'nationally' divided, Bosnia was recognised. Kosovo was not, although it had been, as a former 'Autonomous province', a constitutive part of the federation and thus equal to the republics. After the Dayton Peace Accord in late 1995, the blockade of economic sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRJ) was not lifted. Albanians, undoubtedly the first victims of Serb nationalism, suffered most from the sanctions as their province belonged to the SRJ as its poorest part. Seen from a different point of view, Belgrade was deprived of all means of calming the conflict with the Albanians. Even if Milosevic had wanted

to, he had nothing to offer them. Albanian representatives were told by western diplomats they should make do with their status, while at the same time the SRJ was gradually redefined as a 'rogue state'. This approach sought to seal a lid on the steam-pot rather than to diminish the heat: a recipe for an explosion. No strategy, not even a positive option existed for the Kosovo Albanians. For them gaining independence was the only plausible aim.

The small political elite of Kosovo was badly prepared to meet these serious challenges. The Albanian communist establishment in Pristina opposed the loss of autonomy in 1989–90, but was unable to retaliate. Using familiar party structures, Belgrade replaced uncomfortable leaders such as Azem Vllasi with faithful lapdogs such as Rahman Morina. Before they were dismissed, most of the Albanian communist leaders had been forced to crack down on 'nationalists' and movements of unrest among their fellow citizens. As a result, they were all unpopular. The Yugoslav federation was already weak, and Kosovo had no true allies among the other nations gaining independence. Once autonomy was lost, Kosovo Albanian leaders – with very few exceptions – found themselves ousted. Their immediate and natural reaction was not to accept the unilateral constitutional changes. Nobody really expected them to accept the changes; Belgrade did not even try to convince anybody in Kosovo of their worth. From now on, the Albanians were simply the enemy and had to be kept down. The declaration of independence from the dissolving Yugoslavia was a logical and uncontested consequence. The loss of autonomy came with a wave of strong anti-Albanian propaganda, and not even the most loyal Albanians could feel invited to cooperate in the new structures. Thus, even unification came from outside. The only non-communist party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), founded in December 1989, became the natural backup system for the Albanian communist elite, who were the only ones with at least a little political experience. The 'Autonomous province' deserved its name only from 1974, when the constitution was changed, and historically it was the only political body Kosovars had ever run themselves. There were no dissidents, there was no old bourgeoisie, and there was no political emigration. The thin layer of politically educated people came from rural families and they were brought up during communism. University teaching in Albanian started only in 1970. In 1945, Kosovo had had an illiteracy rate of 74 per cent.

The ousted Kosovo Albanian leaders were so desperate that they could not even find a leader. Those who had been in office were compromised, and those who had not were incapable. Mahmut Bakalli, head of the Kosovo Central Committee in 1974, has told how Ibrahim Rugova, president of the Kosovo Albanian Writers' Association, became the leader of LDK. When they had to leave the Party premises, a building was needed. They found the small pavilion of the Writers' Association close to the Pristina stadium. 'Rugova was elected for practical reasons. The seat of the newly founded Democratic League was the

building of the Writers' Association. He is a serious and quiet man, so he was elected' (Petrovic 1996: 26). Whatever was needed to form an independent state was now provided. A constitutive assembly was formed and a referendum was organised, spontaneously supported by all political and civil authorities in every town and village.¹ When the first unofficial elections had taken place, the job was done. The shy and friendly Rugova lacked any political sense, let alone experience. In his whole political 'career', he has stubbornly kept repeating his political mantra that Kosovo was an independent state. During the first years, it was the policy to act as if the goal of independence had already been achieved. Like ousted monarchs, Kosovo Albanian leaders acted as 'legitimists' and simply ignored the new authorities, claiming they were the only legitimate authority. This kind of behaviour may be typical of emigrants who have nothing in hand but an abstract legal position. But the LDK leadership acted inside the country, and everybody could see their weakness. Two attempts to gather the newly elected parliament were inhibited by the police. Its authority was transformed into an unofficial 'council of parties'. Instead of forming a state, Kosovo Albanian leaders pretended to have one.

From the outside, the 'Independent State of Kosovo' was frequently viewed as something comparable to Mahatma Gandhi's movement of civil disobedience. Indeed, Rugova is a deeply peaceful person who detests violence and war. Born into a rural family in the village of Istok, he was awarded a scholarship and studied literature in Paris, where he heard Roland Barthes, a famous existentialist (Carlen, Duchene and Ehrhart 1999: 51). Pacifism was and still is a rare phenomenon in Kosovo. Albanians are a Balkan people with a long tradition of war and heroism. Virtues and values are deeply patriarchal, as is typical in formerly cattle-breeding societies, and to be a man, one has to carry a gun. Islam, the predominant religion among Kosovo Albanians, has no specific sympathy to ideas of non-violence – unlike Hinduism in India. Even communist Yugoslavia was not at all pacifistic, on the contrary: war was intensely glorified in hundreds of films about the partisans. Rugova's so-called 'Gandhi strategy' had no roots in Kosovo Albanian society. Rugova, once a member of the communist party himself (Carlen, Duchene and Ehrhart 1999: 70), has no charisma and is not persuasive. His pacifist approach was accepted only because there was no alternative. Serbia, aware of the mood in Kosovo, concentrated large numbers of police and army in the province. Nobody could even think of open resistance. Public rallies were impossible. Whenever more than three people gathered in the centre of Pristina, armed policemen would appear and disperse them. Whoever tried to speak out against the regime in public risked being terribly beaten.

As opposed to Gandhi, Rugova and the Kosovo Albanian leadership never had a plan, except that by calling their weakness pacifism, they tried to benefit from western countries' sympathy. 'Passive resistance' in India was an active strategy, including demonstrations and sabotage, aimed at destabilising the colo-

nial regime and influencing the British public. Kosovo Albanian leaders, by contrast, never took action.² They chose to build a 'parallel system', as analysts put it. But even the setting up of this parallel system was hardly planned and required little organisational performance. In less than a year, most 'socially owned' firms changed into Serb hands and their managers were dismissed.³ The Albanian party and state authority ceased to exist. In the Albanian community, nobody accepted the changes, and mere non-acceptance was the founding act of the 'Independent State of Kosovo'. In practice, Albanians in public jobs lost their money, their weapons, their offices, but kept their titles. The new, Serb-dominated authorities tended to ignore the Albanian majority of the province. The Albanian-dominated communist society of the 1980s was changed to into a virtual system of meaningless claims and pretensions.

In July 1990, most of the Albanians in public service had been asked by the new Serb authorities to sign a declaration of loyalty. Many of them refused and were immediately dismissed, and many of those who signed were fired later.⁴ Unemployment was high even before this. The pressure was greatest on school and university teachers. The province's authorities, now installed by Belgrade, decided to introduce Serbian curricula and had Serbian textbooks translated into Albanian. Very few Albanian teachers remained, and Serbs were unable to teach Albanian children in their mother tongue. So school teaching simply went on as it had been before, but with two changes: ousted teachers no longer got a salary and, in many cases, the authorities kept the school buildings closed. The organisation of a 'parallel system' thus meant providing money and sometimes alternative school rooms. Transition to a modern system of education did not and could not take place. Teachers formally stayed in office for ten years, not controlled by anybody. University teachers in particular look back on this period when they taught students in their private homes as a time of heroism, and they think they deserve gratitude and at least permanent employment (Koliqi 1997).

The 'government' of the 'Republic of Kosovo', headed by the Germany-based physician Bujar Bukoshi, organised a system of tax collection to finance the few state-like authorities. In practice, taxes were collected by the LDK, as Noel Malcolm put it (1998: 349). Precise data are missing, but most of the money was almost certainly collected among young Albanians in western Europe who had left the country fleeing unemployment. The only state-like apparatus in Kosovo besides education was the health system, organised by a humanitarian foundation called 'Mother Teresa'. The organisation played an important role in keeping up some social welfare and medical treatment, although on a very low scale (Malcolm 1998: 351). In fact, many Albanian health workers kept their jobs even after 1990. In principle, there was always free access to hospitals and outpatient clinics.

Official tax collection more or less stopped, as the Serb financial authorities were unable to replace their Albanian colleagues. Not even electricity bills were

paid. The infrastructure suffered from the lack of any repair and there was no longer any public construction. Of course, the Serbian state continued to pay pensions, but in fact, Albanian pensioners avoided the state bureaux in order to avoid being humiliated or shouted at. Although the official Serbian state institutions never openly refused to cooperate with Albanians, most of the citizens were reluctant to come into contact with 'the Serbs'. The atmosphere in public buildings was rude. Going into a public office, younger men risked being handed over to the police for anything suspicious, checked for weapons or beaten up. What remained of the Serbian state served the needs of the Serb and Roma minority in Kosovo. For the rest of the population, there was nothing but the police.

Both communism and the pre-modern structure of Kosovo society prevented the existence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Besides the state and the family, there was no third sector. While the Orthodox Church in Serbia fuelled nationalism, the Muslim community in Kosovo was completely useless for political purposes. Although more than 90 per cent of Kosovo Albanians come from a Muslim tradition, religion never had deep roots (Malcolm 1998: 134–138). Albanian nationalism has always been anti-Muslim. Its most important mythical hero is Skanderbeg, who in the fifteenth century organised the Christian resistance against conquest by the Ottomans. According to nationalists, Islam is something that has been imposed on Albanians by foreign conquerors; it is not looked upon as their 'essential religion'. Referring to the famous Kosovo battle of 1389, when a Christian army led by the Serbian Tsar Lazar was beaten by the Ottoman forces under the sultan Murat, Albanian nationalists claim their forefathers had instead fought on the Christian side. In their mythology, Lazar was an Illyrian, i.e. pre-Albanian, and 'had nothing to do with Serbs' (Rizaj 1992: 122).

After 1990, most of the state functions were taken over by the family, which had always played a very important role in Albanian societies. Even today, a considerable part of the population live in so-called 'complex households' with up to several dozen people, linked by kinship in the male line. In the countryside, family compounds form entire village quarters, each of them surrounded by walls. Villages frequently lack public places like pubs, mosques, or assembly halls as all social life remains in the family. Neighbourhood is unimportant compared with family links. When an enemy came, villagers in western Europe would gather in the market place; in Albanian villages, there is no such thing. Everybody would seek shelter within their own family walls. It is still amazing how little people know about each other, and this fosters an atmosphere in which suspicions and conspiracy theories flourish. But on the other hand, the family provides for all an individual's basic needs and gives solidarity to all members.

In rural and conservative areas, especially in western Macedonia, the state has never really replaced the authority of the family. There was opposition to female employment among religious Muslims which excluded Macedonian

Albanians from industrialisation in the 1950s. Everything else the state demanded was even more unpopular, above all taxes and military service. An Austrian scholar has defined the south-western Balkans societies as 'acephal' rather than pyramidal (Kaser 1992). At the time of the Ottoman Empire, the Sublime Porte was interested only in the regular payment of tributes and had no interest in self-organisation at a higher level (Kaser 1992: 164). Everything else was left to the families. When, after the Balkan wars, Serbia occupied Kosovo, people for the first time came into contact with the challenges of a modern state. The famous upheavals of the 'Kacaks' in the 1920s were primarily resistance to the modern state as such, and not a national struggle (Banac 1995: 238–250). Even now, one can feel a spirit of 'freedom' in all Albanian lands. 'Freedom' is the most important slogan in all movements, against the Serbian or the Macedonian state as well as those against the government in Tirana. In all of these movements, freedom means the absence of the state, be it Serbian, Macedonian, or even Albanian. The remains of 'Kanun', the ancient legal system still known to many people in the countryside, regulates the relations between families; part-time judges play a minor role, no police and no correctional system is needed. Even in the most developed areas, contempt for the public space is visible to any visitor. There are large private houses with some luxury, carefully cleaned and abundantly decorated with brass and false marble, but schools look like ruins, and nobody cares about rubbish collection. Sometimes families and neighbourhoods replace the absent state by self-organisation. In villages even road construction is done privately. Many people prefer it this way. Interference by the state means control, corruption and sometimes violence. Even in Albania proper with its ninety years of state tradition, state authorities are often looked upon as adhering to 'another gang'. The notion of the state as a power neutral to personal interests simply does not exist.

Everywhere in the Balkans, but especially in Albanian areas, families are the most important institution. After the collapse of the Yugoslav state authorities in Kosovo in 1990, the families functioned as the natural backup system. They had to care for the ill, the elderly and the disabled, give shelter to persecuted family members and, during the war, form important defence units. Following an old tradition, women were kept at home and the young men sent abroad to make money, while the parents, the father's unmarried brothers and the young wives were engaged in household maintenance and agriculture. Many urban families in Pristina, Peja/Pec or Skopje/Shkup keep close ties with their family houses somewhere in the countryside. Even today, a big household is a sign of wealth rather than a sign of backwardness.

Families like the Rs, in the hills above Vitina, were and still are the place where the transition to market economy has happened. While many Serbs or Macedonians were sitting in their tower blocks waiting for jobs to come, Albanian families rapidly turned into modern profit centres. From 1991 to 1992,

the number of private enterprises in Kosovo increased 2.9 times (Lidhja 1996: 16). Many families can boast about ten or even more trained workers and professionals, all of them being supported by the women, wives and sisters, aunts or nieces. Inside the family everybody can rely on each other and strict obedience to the father or even the oldest brother (addressed by the title '*bac*') is common. In some parts it is the custom that all the money every family member earns is collected and guarded by the head of the family. Some families engaged in international trade and soon became wealthy. Emigration helped to find partners abroad. It is certainly true that quite a few families were involved in illegal businesses such as the drugs and arms trade and the trafficking of women; moral standards beyond the borders of the wider family are certainly low. But it can also be said that the pre-modern structure of Albanian families turned out to be more modern in its flexibility than any other structure in the area.

Family spirit is also the explanation for what is erroneously called 'Albanian nationalism'. Everywhere else in Europe, nationalism is an ideology that came about along with the bourgeoisie and industrialisation, replacing traditional bindings by a spirit of belonging to a spiritual community. Nationalism among Slav peoples in the Balkans started in the nineteenth century, often copying the ideas and myths in western nations, with Serbs producing the richest mythology and the highest aspirations of all. Like German nationalism, national ideas in the Balkans were not at all confined by state borders; most people lived in multi-ethnic empires, the Ottoman or the Austrian-Hungarian Empires, and some, like the Serbs, lived in small and emerging states. According to the German poet and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, publisher of Slav fairy tales and an influential thinker for East Europeans, a nation is a community based on common language, common culture and common descent (Herder 1965: 224). The State is not even mentioned. Nationalism is at first a purely spiritual, ideological phenomenon which might become political once the period of 'liberation' has begun.

Common descent, replacing the common state in western European nationalism, in German and Slav nationalism is a myth to give people the feeling of belonging together, with little respect for real relations people might have. The feeling of national solidarity, for example, led Croats in central Bosnia into a fatal trap when they took sides with Croats in Herzegovina rather than with their Muslim neighbours. In Bosnia, nationalism even split families. In Kosovo or Macedonia it did not. For Albanians, the 'national' feeling of belonging together is not a myth, but a part of their reality. Many people are able to recite the names of their forefathers for more than ten generations back, and there is an amazing awareness of to whom one is related. People feel closest to those to whom they are the closest kin. An individual sees the social world in concentric circles, the inner circle formed by his or her parents, children, brothers and sisters, outer ones by cousins, some would even feel they belong to a 'tribe' ('*fis*'), and all feel they belong to the Albanian nation, a large family united by real descent. Being

itself the outer circle of a kind of family relation, national adherence can never destroy family links. There are no reports that the very few mixed Albanian–Serb families were divided by the conflict. Even the popular ‘godfather’ relations that imitate kinship survived the war.

But the crisis of the 1990s not only empowered families, it also significantly challenged them. Obvious police oppression was humiliating and harmed the traditional authorities. Everybody could see that even the supposedly almighty father, as head of the family, was afraid of the police. Adolescent sons sending money from Switzerland objectively became much more important for the survival of the family than their fathers. And finally, families could not compensate for everything that the state had once provided. Kosovo Albanian society is the youngest in Europe, with more than half of the population being aged under twenty-five.⁵ The parallel educational system failed to provide everybody with the necessary schooling, and generation after generation was sent into unemployment and no prospects. Everybody who graduated from Pristina University was solemnly handed their diploma, but few ever got a job, either in Kosovo, or in Macedonia, let alone in western Europe. The old, mainly former communist dignitaries of the Kosovo Albanian societies got their salaries, paid by young emigrants in Switzerland or Germany, but the ‘parallel system’ had nothing to offer the Kosovar youth. Although most young Kosovo Albanians remained loyal to their families, a spirit of anger and of independence grew, especially among the temporary emigrants in Zurich or Munich.

In Kosovo, Rugova’s attentism and passivity led to more and more divisions within the national movement (Troebst 1998: 9). Adem Demaci, a very popular former political prisoner labelled ‘the Albanian Mandela’, was the first to openly criticise the official policy, urging action instead. There was particular unrest among students who repeatedly ignored the LDK recommendations and demonstrated in public. The faction of ‘former political prisoners’, forming the so-called ‘left wing’ of the Kosovo political scene, gradually distanced itself from the leaders. In 1996, the ‘Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves’ (Kosovo Liberation Army/UCK) started to kill Serb policemen. A conspiratorial organisation based above all in Switzerland and Germany and directed mainly by students, it gained more and more sympathy among the young in Kosovo. When, in 1997, people in Albania proper stood up against the semi-dictatorship of Sali Berisha, arms deposits were looted on a massive scale, and much of the booty was sold into Kosovo. The Kosovo Albanian establishment, unable to react, simply ignored the new force. Yet in 1998, when Kosovo was already at war, Rugova claimed the UCK was only an invention by the Serbian secret service. When in late February 1998 army and police units cracked down on the rebel clan of the Jashari in a village in the Drenica Mountains, the conspiratorial circle of the UCK suddenly became the synonym for overall upheaval (Halimi and Shala 2000). However, neither before nor after the Jashari massacre could the UCK be called a real army.

After the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO forces in spring 1999, the UCK was transformed into a paramilitary 'civil protection corps' in order to keep the soldiers and officers under control and prevent them from terrorising the province. But according to regional military traditions, leaders kept their independence and did not subject themselves to political orders. For Albanians in former Yugoslavia, and not only for them, the borders of the successor states have little meaning. It was normal for everybody to continue to fight for 'freedom' in Serbian Presevo or Macedonian Tetovo. The Albanians in the neighbouring states and territories shared the desire for 'freedom'. In Macedonia, there was a fierce debate on whether the Macedonian UCK was made up of Kosovars or Macedonian Albanians. Among the Albanians nobody considered the question important. In Yugoslav times, Pristina was the cultural centre and also the only university for Macedonian Albanians, many of whom spent most of their lives in Pristina which is only 70 km from Skopje. Borders are considered artificial and unnatural, places of birth are more or less accidental, and it was the fixing of the border between Macedonia and Kosovo near the village of Tanusevci that incited the war in Macedonia.

The situation in Macedonia lifted the political veil from the events in Kosovo and showed its social nature. In Macedonia there had never been any autonomy for Albanians. Consequently there were no 'parallel institutions'. Yet the societies were and are strictly separated. The number of mixed Albanian–Macedonian marriages amounted to just sixteen in 1999 (Brunnbauer 2001: 160). Macedonians run the post-socialist state institutions, and Albanians have built up a private sector. The latter have coped much better with the transition from self-administrative socialism to capitalism. Although it is not easy to find a meaningful indicator, areas populated by Albanians are visibly wealthier than others.⁶ The peace agreement of 16 August 2001, brokered by the European Union, invited Albanians to engage in state institutions, which is anything but tempting to them. Average salaries in ministries are as low as 100 Euro per month, and the private sector offers much better opportunities. A special quota allows ethnic Albanian students to enrol at Skopje University with worse marks than Macedonians, but few Albanians make use of the opportunity. With the peace agreement, Albanians achieved something they had never sought.

As opposed to Kosovo, the situation in Macedonia was not unbearable for Albanians when the violent conflict broke out. Arben Xhaferi, the 'moderate' leader of the Macedonian Albanians, was not as passive as Rugova in Kosovo. Yet the radicals soon became more popular than the elected leaders. There are two main reasons for this, first, any conflict with the slightest national connotations gathers all Albanians under one flag – right or wrong, my family. There is hardly a forum among Albanians to discuss different opinions; the press is poor and obedient to varying leaders. Second, the UCK insurgents met the spirit of 'freedom' as they promised to 'liberate' Albanians from the state rather than offering to

integrate them into it. Xhaferi's party had joined the government only in late 1998, sharing power and sinecures with the national party of Macedonians, the VMRO. From the perspective of professional western observers, Xhaferi's party had achieved a lot, important positions in Albanian-dominated municipalities were for the first time given to Albanians. But those who benefited were all members of Xhaferi's party. Ordinary people in Tetovo or Gostivar did not feel proud that the head of the county hospital or the culture hall was now a compatriot. They wanted 'freedom' and felt betrayed by Xhaferi. This is not a distinction between 'moderates' and 'radicals', it is a rift between ordinary people, on the one hand, who do not want to be bothered by any state authority and, on the other, politicians who see a chance to exploit the institutions.

It is an old and sad story. Misled by the 'national' aspirations in the Balkans, western diplomats force people into new states with nobody having a clear picture of what they should look like or what they are good for. Albanians, at least, want freedom of movement all over Europe rather than a national state, and they are not interested in the heritage of corrupt and ruined socialist republics with which they never identified. But they get what others think is good for them. Since the infamous London conference on New Year's Eve 1912–13, when a handful of ambassadors generously gave birth to the independent state of Albania, little has been learned.

NOTES

- 1 The referendum took place on 26–30 September 1991. According to the official result, 87 per cent participated, of whom 99 per cent voted in favour (see Zajimi 1994: 145).
- 2 Rugova himself, typically, sees it exactly the other way round: 'C'est pourquoi, meme si cela m'honore, je n'aime pas trop que l'on parle de résistance passive, gandhienne. Je dis qu'il s'agit d'une résistance politique, non passive, donc non gandhienne' (Rugova 1994: 126).
- 3 Stavileci (1995: 550) mentions 250 managers.
- 4 According to Stavileci (1995: 551), 135,000 were fired, among them 20,000 teachers.
- 5 In Yugoslavia, Kosovo had by far the highest birth rate at 3.00.
- 6 Natalja Nikolovska, a Macedonian professor of economics, has compared house construction in Macedonian and Albanian areas and found it several times higher in the latter (Nikolovska 2001).

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