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BALKAN JOURNAL

EDITOR IN EXILE

*Can a radical newspaper become the blueprint
for an independent Kosovo?*

BY ELIZABETH RUBIN

ON the afternoon of Wednesday, March 24th, Baton Haxhiu, the editor of the Albanian-language newspaper *Koha Ditore*, put the paper to bed early, with a banner headline that read "WE ARE WAITING FOR NATO'S BOMBS." Then he told his staff to go home. If NATO did strike Yugoslavia that night, the Serb paramilitary forces patrolling the streets of Pristina, Kosovo's capital, were likely to intensify their violent attacks against ethnic Albanians, and *Koha Ditore* (*Daily Times*) was an obvious target.

The newspaper had been founded in April of 1997, and its irreverent and activist coverage of the province's political life had at one time or another irritated all the major players in Kosovo: the pacifist Kosovar Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova; the Kosovo Liberation Army; the American Ambassador to Macedonia, Christopher Hill; and, of course, President Slobodan Milosevic. In rowdy tabloid style, *Koha's* editors had used gory photographs, dramatic headlines, and even pranks to make themselves heard. They had criticized Rugova's political naiveté and Hill's initial failure to negotiate with anyone outside Rugova's circle. They had repeatedly denounced Milosevic's brutal regime. And although they had contributed to an early wave of popular support for the K.L.A. by mythologizing it in print, they were often distressed by the guerrillas' ill-conceived tactics and had on numerous occasions angered them by drawing attention to their activities.

Milosevic had accused the newspaper of being an organ of Western propaganda, and his agents had sought many times to disrupt its operations by beating up its founding editor, Veton Surroi, and several young journalists, forcing others into hiding, and interrogating Baton Haxhiu. On March 22nd, a Serbian court had ordered *Koha Ditore*

to pay a forty-one-thousand-dollar fine for inciting racial and national hatred by publishing a statement from the K.L.A. leader Hashim Thaci that accused the Serb state of genocide. But the paper's militancy had won it immense popularity with its Kosovar Albanian readers, and Haxhiu, its outspoken and combative thirty-three-year-old editor, was referred to, even by those who had never met him, as Baton.

Now, as NATO prepared for the bombing, the members of *Koha Ditore's* staff said goodbye to each other and "See you in free Kosovo," and scattered through the city. Baton spent that night at the home of a friend, listening to the rumbling detonations of NATO's bombs. "It was the first time I was happy to hear bombing," he told me later. In the morning, he drove his car, a red Volkswagen Golf, to the *Koha* office, but he found Serbian militiamen guarding the door. "Last night, your office was destroyed and your security guard was killed," one of the men told him. Three armed Serbs then got into his car and made him drive around Pristina for twenty-five minutes. The streets were empty except for the Serb patrols, and his passengers kept waving their Kalashnikovs around. "I thought for sure they planned to kill me," Baton said. But, after shaking him down for three hundred Deutsche marks, the gunmen had him drop them off at a police station.

Baton drove to a nearby Albanian neighborhood, where two of his youngest reporters—Garentina Kraja and Nebi Qena, known as Tina and Beni—were staying, with Qena's family. The three journalists listened to a radio broadcast of a NATO briefing in Brussels and heard that *Koha Ditore's* lawyer, Bajram Kelmendi, a human-rights advocate who was widely revered in Kosovo, and his two sons had been executed by the

Serbs. According to other reports, Serb assassins were hunting down prominent ethnic Albanians and their families in the towns and villages outside Pristina and within the capital itself. "I thought, Now all of us can be killed—especially me, after two years of openly accusing Milosevic," Baton recalled.

All afternoon, Baton and his colleagues watched from the balcony as

only apples and tea as they watched a barrage of propaganda on Serbian state TV, and Dervishi passed the time imagining the horrors that Milosevic's men had in store for Baton. "The first Serb will fuck you," Dervishi said. "The second will beat you, and the third will kill you." All day, he sat wrapped in a blanket, smoking and moaning, and telling Baton what he didn't want to

me later. Dervishi and his neighbors had a different attitude. They were uncomfortable having such an important "dead" man in their midst.

The next morning, Baton shaved off the red beard and mustache that had covered his jowly face for twelve years, put on a cap and glasses, and left. After he knocked on several doors, a family let him into their basement, and he



Staff members of *Koba Ditore*: Garentina Kraja, Nebi Qena, Shkumbin Mustafa, and Baton Haxhiu. Photograph by Alex Majoli.

armed Serbs, many of them teen-agers, smashed and looted Albanian shops and set fire to buildings. "We were in denial," Beni told me later. "I saw people fleeing with nothing but bags in their hands and I felt sorry for them, but it still wasn't happening to me personally." The *Koba* journalists imagined that they might be rescued, and Baton even called the paper's Brussels correspondent to ask whether the British Special Air Services had a plan to evacuate intellectuals. The answer was no.

On Saturday, Baton moved again. Dodging militias, he drove down a side street and spotted an old acquaintance, Teki Dervishi, a writer in his mid-fifties, who had spent years as a political prisoner of the former Yugoslav President Josip Tito. Dervishi agreed to shelter him. For the next two days, the men ate

hear: the West didn't care about Muslims or Albanians; airstrikes were useless, and ground troops a fantasy; and they would all be deported, if they lived long enough.

On Monday, Dervishi's frightened neighbors knocked on his door, looking for company. They had satellite television, and that afternoon Baton watched a NATO press briefing in Brussels, at which a military spokesman reported the execution of five prominent Kosovars, including Baton Haxhiu. Baton watched his *Koba Ditore* correspondents crying for him at a press conference, and he listened to the eulogies of foreign journalists. He was stunned and afraid to come forward. "I said, 'NATO will lose credibility, and all newsmen will seem like liars. I am sorry for my family, but politics must go on,'" he told

stayed there, without news or contact, for three days. On the fourth day, Serbian forces moved into the neighborhood, expelling Albanians en masse. When Baton spotted a young woman with a baby passing his basement window, he rushed out of hiding to walk beside her, saying, "From now on, you are my wife and this is my child." The woman recognized him and agreed. With his new "family," he joined the column of deportees and followed what seemed to be his entire city, moving in cars and on foot toward the Macedonian border.

I met Baton a few days later, aboard the daily flight from Zurich to Skopje. I'd seen him at the Zurich airport, telling his story to journalists, and he seemed eager to keep on telling it. His beard was growing back, and he was still wearing

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the clothes he'd had on near the Macedonian border, where officials had plucked him from the masses and flown him to Western Europe to meet with government ministers and the press. In Bonn and in London, he and several of his friends were fêted as heroes of the Kosovar resistance, but as they sat in bars or hotel rooms and watched news footage of the systematic deportation of Kosovo's Albanian population, they were overwhelmed by the powerlessness of their people. Since the NATO airstrikes had begun, two weeks earlier, almost half a million Kosovar Albanians had been expelled from their country. Baton told me that he was now on his way back to Macedonia, determined to resurrect his newspaper there, with funds pledged by the British government.

As the leading voice for the cultural and political liberation of Kosovo's Albanians, *Koha Ditore* carried the burden of a great deal of anguished history. The lines of division between Serbs and Albanians were clearly drawn by the Balkan War of 1912. By the end of that war, some twenty-five thousand ethnic Albanians were estimated to have been slaughtered by Serb and Montenegrin soldiers, in what Leon Trotsky, who covered the war, called a "national endeavor to correct data in the ethnographical statistics that [were] not favorable to them."

Kosovar Albanians often refer to 1912 as the source of their current predicament. In the years that followed, the Kosovars rebelled several times, but repression followed swiftly, and the Serbs continued to devise plans to rid the land of Albanians. The balance shifted for a time during the occupation of Yugoslavia in the Second World War. The Italians and Germans made Albanian an official language and opened Albanian schools. In these years of "national awakening," the Albanians collaborated with the Fascists to attack Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, killing thousands.

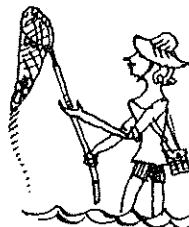
After the war, Tito's security service dealt harshly with Kosovar Albanians suspected of being supporters of Albania's dictator, Enver Hoxha. But in 1974

Tito expanded Kosovo's autonomy, ushering in an Albanian cultural and institutional renaissance that many Kosovars consider their proudest era. It was shortlived. Kosovo's autonomy was the first casualty of Milosevic's nationalist campaign, and in 1989 he reasserted Serb control: Albanian institutions and news media were shut down; tens of thousands of Albanians were fired from their jobs; a Serbian curriculum was imposed in schools; Albanians were denied entry to Pristina University; and the Serbs, who made up about ten per cent of the province's population, took control of the police, the courts, and the government.

The Albanians responded by starting a popular movement called the Democratic League of Kosovo, or L.D.K., which is often compared with Poland's Solidarity. In 1992, in a clandestine election, Ibrahim Rugova, a pacifist poet, was elected President of the new "Republic of Kosovo." Rugova sought international recognition for his state, but it was a purely rhetorical move. Arguing that an uprising would give the Serbs an excuse to wipe out Albanians, he chose instead the Gandhian model of peaceful resistance, boycotting Serb rule and establishing a parallel Albanian state system, financed by a three-per-cent tax collected from Albanian émigrés around the world. Rugova's peaceful "shadow government" suited Milosevic, because it posed no threat to Belgrade's control. It suited the containment policy of the West,

which was overwhelmed and paralyzed by indecision about how to deal with Yugoslavia's wars. And it suited Kosovo's Albanians, who watched Serb forces destroy Bosnia and were reassured by Rugova's claim that Clinton and the West supported his goals.

Few questioned Rugova's assertion that he was leading the province toward independence. But in 1993 Baton Haxhiu, who was working as a reporter for *Koha*—an Albanian weekly founded by Veton Surroi, which was modelled on *Time*—started interviewing Western diplomats and heard a different story. "They said to me, 'We do not support Kosovo's independence, and we never will. It would be dangerous for the re-



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gion," Baton recalled. "They said, 'We just support the peace of Mr. Rugova.'" Baton had little patience for diplomatic discourse, and he was incensed by the "political dualism" of Rugova and the West. "Outside Pristina, people were frustrated and poor, and under pressure from Serbian police, who were free to go into any house and rob and beat people," he told me. "Every family and village believed in this illusion that independence would come; every house had pictures of Mr. Rugova. It drove me crazy. He was like the Pope."

Haxhiu and Surroi began to publish articles with headlines such as "KOSOVO'S INDEPENDENCE IS THIRTY-FOUR SQUARE METRES"—an allusion to the size of the Writers' Building, where Rugova lived. People spat at Haxhiu on the street and called him a traitor. In the course of six months, *Koba*'s circulation plummeted from twenty-five thousand copies to fewer than four thousand. Instead of giving up, Haxhiu and Surroi decided to expand their campaign by transforming the magazine—whose readership consisted almost entirely of like-minded intellectuals—into a popular daily newspaper. They succeeded. *Koba* may have begun as "a rag of the K.L.A.," as one Westerner put it, but "it grew up over time." By its last printing in Pristina—its six-hundred-and-sixty-sixth issue—the paper's circulation had reached more than fifty thousand, in Kosovo and abroad.

Shortly after the air war began, Rugova appeared—reportedly under duress—with Milosevic at a televised Serb-run press conference. Portrayed as Milosevic's helpless stooge, he was discredited in the eyes of the Kosovar Albanians. The next day, the K.L.A., from its headquarters, in Tirana, Albania, proclaimed itself the new Kosovar government-in-exile. But, even with the K.L.A. recruiting and arming at a frantic rate, no one was able to halt the deportations, and the Kosovars now saw themselves as obstacles in the West's drive for some new world order. "We have an absurd situation now," Baton told me. "The world is speaking for the Albanians, not Albanians themselves." He tried to draw some hope from the attention that had been showered on him in Western Europe. He believed that if *Koba Ditore* could resume publication it could per-

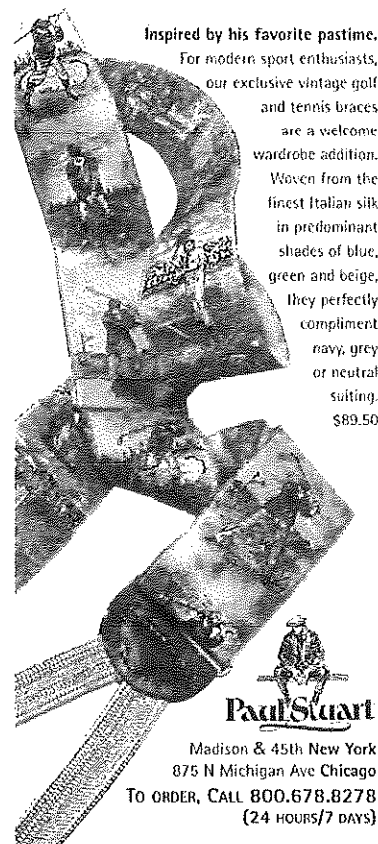
sue its readers not to lose faith in NATO as their ally in the struggle for Kosovo's liberation.

Publishing *Koba Ditore* was as much a way of keeping Baton and his staff sane as it was a potential vehicle for his political ambitions. "No, no, no," he'd say. "Veton Surroi is the politician. I am too, too"—he'd wave his hands, trying to find the words—"impatient and emotional." Yet every press conference he held to articulate his belief that Kosovo had to become a NATO protectorate suggested otherwise. When I asked Westerners and Albanians about Baton, they told me, "He's smart, he's politically shrewd," and then, "He's a lunatic and a self-promoter." Or, "He's brave and doesn't fear putting his neck on the table," and then, "He's stupidly, naively brave." Diplomats and journalists sought out Baton not least because he held nothing back.

A FEW days after the flight, I caught up with Baton in Tetovo, Macedonia, a small, predominantly ethnic-Albanian town, set in the foothills of the snow-covered Sar mountain range, which forms Macedonia's border with Kosovo. The town has an old Turkish bath, bazaars, red-tiled roofs, cafés blaring pop music, and ugly Socialist-era cement-block buildings. Much of Pristina's cultural élite was now living there. As many as fifty thousand Kosovars were out of the camps and were staying with friends, relatives, or strangers in the town and nearby villages—sometimes as many as eighty in a single house. The Macedonian Slavs in Tetovo were on edge, fearful that the traumatized and radicalized Kosovar refugees would stay, and would swing Macedonia's ethnic balance in their favor, stirring up the old separatist urges of western Macedonia's Albanians and destabilizing the already fragile state.

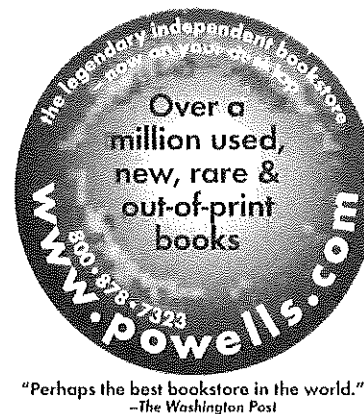
In Tetovo, the Macedonians frequented their cafés, and the Albanians frequented theirs. Café Arbi, at the center of town, had become the hub for Pristina's exiled intellectuals, and there had been several knife fights between Albanians and Macedonians in the surrounding alleyways. Arbi was a good place from which to follow the war. At night, NATO's planes could be heard, and on occasion so could the detonations

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behind the mountains. New deportees would appear, pale and high-strung, and circulate among the tables in a ritual of embraces and questions about who was still in Kosovo, who had got out, who had been killed.

Baton could usually be found amid the tumult at the café, using one of its tables as his temporary office. The story of his death and resurrection had transformed him from a newspaper editor in Yugoslavia's poorest province to an international celebrity from the battleground on which the West had staked its honor and its conception of a new world order. When Baton called his wife and son, who were in hiding in Kosovo, to tell them that he was alive, his wife asked him not to talk to the press. "We're still inside," she said. "Think about us, not just Kosovo." But Baton could think only of Kosovo and *Koha Ditore*, and the telephone at Arbi rang with calls from radio stations in Korea, Japan, England, America, and elsewhere in Europe. Tables were filled with television crews; print and radio reporters patiently waited to interview him. Baton accommodated them all. He was hooked up by satellite to hold a joint press conference with the British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, and he travelled to Skopje to meet with the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin. When he heard that his story was on the front page of ninety-five newspapers around the world, he told me, "This is absurd. I am just a journalist from the Balkans. Do they have nothing else to write about?" But he clearly liked it and was determined to exploit it.

If Kosovo were ever liberated, it would need a new political infrastructure, and to Baton this meant defining an alternative to the military force of the K.L.A. *Koha Ditore* had heavily promoted the Rambouillet peace accords, and Baton was still angry with the K.L.A. for its three-week delay in signing the agreement. In that time, he said, the Serbs had moved more than twenty thousand additional troops into Kosovo and along the border. They had stockpiled tanks and hard artillery and prepared their people for war. Ambivalence about the K.L.A. was widespread among the Pristina intellectuals in Tetovo; they respected the guerrillas as fighters but also regarded them as hard-

liners and political dilettantes, whose poor tactics had left the civilians they were trying to liberate to suffer the Serbs' brutality. To be sure, Baton told me, NATO now needed the K.L.A. "to do the dirty work in Kosovo." But he added, "We must have NATO ground troops. Otherwise, the K.L.A. will think it has won and will eliminate any opposition. They are idealists, and they want a regime with arms. I don't want political commissars—there would be no life for me in such a Kosovo." Such comments infuriated the K.L.A. and led Baton's critics to say that "he understands politics, but he acts before he thinks."

When I asked Baton if there was any genuine alternative to the K.L.A., he said, without any hesitation, "We have no alternative voice from Albanians now except me." It was a grandiose claim, but Baton was determined to live up to it by reviving *Koha Ditore*. So he worked the phones, rallying his dispersed staff (although many, like Surroi, were still in hiding), lobbying Western governments and private donors for funds, and trying to persuade Macedonia's Slav-dominated government that *Koha Ditore* would in fact help stabilize the country. Barely a week after he had established himself

at Café Arbi, Baton announced that *Koha Ditore's* first edition-in-exile was being prepared for distribution.

ONE day at Café Arbi, I met Tina Kraja and Beni Qena, the two *Koha* reporters whom Baton had stayed with in Pristina. They were in their early twenties and wore fleece jackets, jeans, khakis, and sneakers. Both of them—Tina, with short chestnut hair pulled back in a headband, and Beni, whose gangly bearing was reminiscent of Jimmy Stewart—looked like American college students. They were trilingual and worldly, and their mood alternated between optimistic energy and total gloom. Unlike Baton, they had not been rescued at the border. When I met them, they had just managed to escape from the Stenkovec refugee camp. (Beni had got out by carrying a camera and a mobile phone for a TV news crew he knew.) They had arrived in Tetovo with nowhere to stay—refugees like everyone else, or, rather, as many Kosovars described themselves, "deportees." Baton wanted them to get right to work, but the story of upheaval they were trying to absorb now was their own.

Nine days after the NATO bombing

CIRCLES

These are rocks he loved when he was alive
And how alive he was, like the sun this afternoon
Making mica gleam on the cold face of granite
And giving walls a long shadow across the grass
In the dead of winter, when he'd come from abroad
Like the sun emerging now from behind that cloud
To flood this dark lake water with golden light,
So that I still believe in him as in the sun,
And expect him to reappear as winter passes,
The telephone ringing some stormy night, his voice
Calmly announcing the day he's planning to cross
Back into our lives with so much news to tell
Of where he has been since he died, though I know
It's only a dream, so vivid it makes me cry
"Tony, it's you! What the hell made you play
This trick on us? Thank God you're alive and well!"
Which cannot be, though the sun breaks through
All the clouds on the lake where I cast his ashes
And a heron rose from these rocks like a ghost
In three wide circles ascending who knows where.

—RICHARD MURPHY

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began, Tina and Beni and various members of their families had left for Macedonia. In Pristina, they had seen footage of a nightmarish swamp of mud and rain and human waste at the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia. They'd figured that cameras always zoomed in on the worst images, but when they got off the train in Blace they realized that, if anything, the cameras had made things look better than they were. Family members were losing one another in the dark; Macedonian policemen, wearing masks and gloves, were beating back the surging Kosovars. NATO was totally unprepared. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was nowhere in evidence. Baton later called the horror at Blace "a media coup for NATO," because it won support for what the West was selling as a humanitarian war.

Tina and Beni spent days trudging from one hill to the next, waiting in line to enter Macedonia, while a few of the Macedonian police shouted, "Get down, you fuckers. You all need a bullet." "It was like 'The Twilight Zone,'" Beni said. "We thought we'd never get out. Tina kept crying and I wanted to pull her face off—I couldn't stand it. You had traumatized people, and these bastards kept calling them names." Then he corrected himself: "I mean *us*."

Tina and Beni still had trouble adjusting to being "part of the news." As Tina often told me, "We were the ones writing the news." In reality, Tina and Beni had always been part of the story they covered. They were in the first generation to come of age in Rugova's shadow world and had attended one of its first high schools, which were in houses donated by Kosovar Albanians. Both looked back at their adolescence in Rugova's system with scorn. As Beni put it, "First, we thought, Fuck the Serbs, they made us second-class citizens. Then it was, Fuck the Albanians, they didn't organize anything. The schools at home were a joke. We had no future, and we were just watching the years go by, achieving nothing."

Unlike Beni, who was the son of a theatre director and an actress, Tina came from an activist family. One uncle had been imprisoned for supporting Enver Hoxha's Albania, and her father was a founding member of the L.D.K.

He had gone to Albania in 1993, as a representative of the Kosovar "parallel" government, and the Serb authorities had not allowed him to return.

In 1997, Tina and Beni joined *Koha Ditore*. The paper's start-up staff was composed mostly of restless twenty-year-olds, some of whom, like Tina, were culled from a cultural group called the Post-Pessimists. Its members, in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, and Pristina, were seen as a kind of student élite, who travelled around Europe to "ethnic tolerance" conferences. That fall marked a turning point for *Koha Ditore* and radicalized the paper's staff. Pristina's students planned a march to demand the restoration of their university, and *Koha Ditore* rallied to the cause with headlines like "MEET YOU ALL AT 6:30." Some twenty thousand people had gathered for the march, when Serb police in riot gear attacked with tear gas and clubs and started beating the marchers. Tina, who, with Beni, was among the protesters, recalled the exhilaration of those around her. "It was the first time, after years of apathy, that Albanians took to the streets and said 'No,'" she said. "That's when all the trouble began, and from then on our life was *Koha*."

That October, Baton sent Tina and Beni to cover conditions in Kosovo's villages. In Drenica, a rugged region that has been the source of nearly every Kosovar Albanian uprising, they discovered members of the K.L.A., which was then still a secretive group primarily based abroad. They were taken into the family of a K.L.A. member called Adem Jashari, who had been convicted of terrorism in absentia, but they had to promise not to write about what they saw. In March of 1998, the Serbs attacked the Jashari family compound, killing at least fifty-one people, and triggering an unorganized uprising of new K.L.A. recruits across the province.

Koha Ditore's journalism was weakened, at times, by inexperience and fervor, but the paper nevertheless became a more essential element on the political scene than either of Kosovo's other daily papers. *Koha's* generally supportive coverage of the K.L.A. granted the movement a legitimacy that the West had denied it. Ambassador Chris Hill was infuriated by the newspaper, which, as

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one diplomat said, was "critical of Hill's negotiating scheme—which dealt only with Rugova, leaving out the voices of other important figures in Pristina." The disagreement between Baton and Chris Hill came to a head when Baton got hold of early drafts of Hill's peace proposals and published them under headlines such as "KOSOVO IS JUST A TERRITORY" and "NOTHING HAS CHANGED." Hill would have nothing to do with *Koba*. "This was a mistake," another Western diplomat said. "Baton was progressive. Instead of cultivating people like him, the U.S. made Rugova its man, because it could manipulate him."

Those arguments seemed irrelevant now to Tina and Beni. "We all thought that omnipotent NATO would force Milosevic to sign the agreement in two days," Tina told me. "When we said, 'See you in free Kosovo,' we never thought it would be in Tetovo."

ONE afternoon, I joined Beni on a visit to Stenkovec. He wanted to take food, towels, and slippers to his cousins there. The camp is just a twenty-minute drive from Skopje and

five miles from the border, and it looks like a nomadic desert city. The seemingly impassable Sar Mountains form an intimidating presence around the arid plain, now planted with rows of thousands of white and green tents. On a small hill overlooking the camp, smoke gushes from factory chimneys, blurring the skyline and creating, with the dust squalls, a permanent layer of soot that clings to clothes and hair.

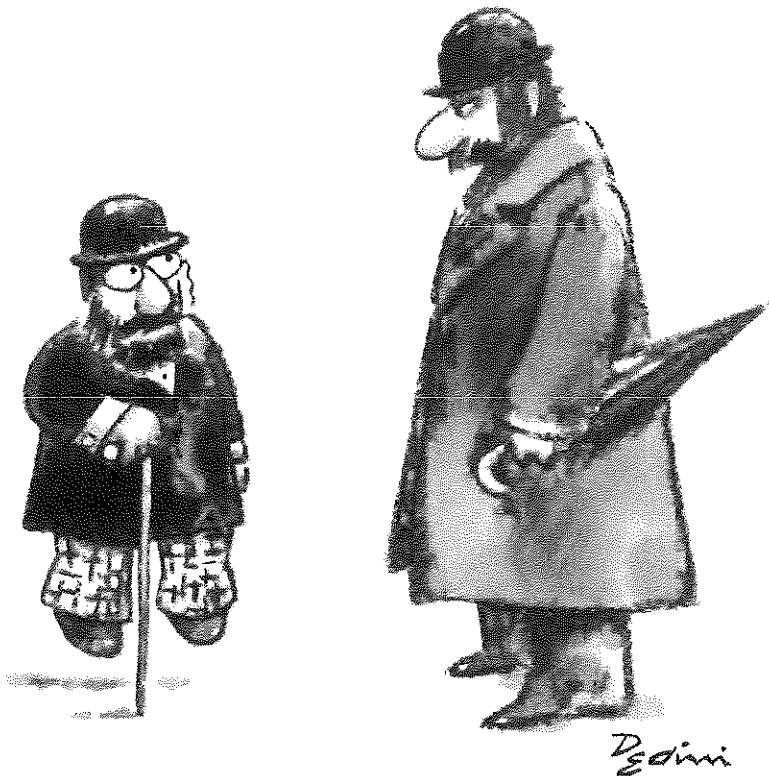
For the tens of thousands of Kosovars in the camp, life is defined by lists and lines: lists of who will make it to other Western countries, lists of the massacred, of families separated and children lost, and of war crimes; lines for water and food and toilets, and lines to get on the lists for transfer elsewhere. Everyone had heard rumors of people paying bribes to local volunteers working for the aid agencies.

The camp seemed to have doubled in size since I'd first been there, ten days earlier, and a sickening sense of permanence suffused the place. Macedonians had opened shops for snacks, produce, teakettles, and camping stoves. People hadn't washed in weeks.

Fights were breaking out. From an oversized Army tent we heard the out-of-tune voices of children singing a K.L.A. song, and I was reminded of the comment of an aid worker who had been in Gaza: "Nothing to do, lost their homes, nowhere to go, perfect recruiting ground for soldiers." Hovering throughout, near the bread lines, the Adidas basketball nets, the Israeli medical tents, and the mobile-phone queues, were the giant white satellite dishes transmitting the spectacle to the world.

Beni and I found his cousin Beti and her children in Tent No. 173. A box of fresh tomatoes, onions, and cucumbers, along with the refugee's essential item—a plastic jerry can for water—sat by the entrance. Beti was red-faced and exhausted. After the way she'd been treated at Blace, she said, she had no desire to live in Macedonia, and she had put her family on a list for France. When we left, Beni hugged them all, then turned away quickly and shifted his baseball cap back and forth on his head. As we walked up the hill to another encampment, I saw that he was struggling not to cry. He said that when he saw how fragile Beti was he couldn't bring himself to tell her that her brother had been killed in an artillery attack. The family had put him in a coffin to bury him, but the next day the shelling intensified, the family fled, and her brother remained behind.

On our way back to Tetovo, Beni spoke of his boyhood in a unified Yugoslavia. "I grew up as a Yugoslav. I didn't think of myself as having an Albanian homeland or ethnic identity. Now there are too many Balkan truths," he said, "Albanian, Macedonian, Serb," and after a moment, he added, "I pity the Serbs. They used to be a great nation with pride. They fought the Germans in World War I and World War II and now this guy Milosevic comes and fucks up everybody." Like virtually everyone else I met in Macedonia, he kept asking, "How come the mightiest military alliance in the history of the world cannot cream this maniac in Belgrade?" Then he said that it hardly mattered anymore. Even if NATO did destroy Milosevic, he could not imagine a future



"Obviously your cane is too long."

that would repair the damage done to the Albanians in the past few weeks.

BATON disagreed. The first edition-in-exile of *Koha Ditore* arrived at the camps on April 26th, a rainy Monday morning, with the headline "KOSOVO MUST BE THE WINNER IN THIS WAR." "People are ready to leave for the West," Baton told me. "They're frustrated, in the dark, without any information. I want the paper to tell them what can happen with Kosovo in two months and to encourage them to stay. Otherwise, we are going to have an empty Kosovo." The newspaper was written for the uprooted Kosovars, but its message—that there was an alternative to a K.L.A. state—seemed aimed equally at NATO, as a plea for ground troops and the establishment of a Western protectorate in Kosovo.

But even Baton's reporters, most of whom agreed that the only hope for a democratic Kosovo was a NATO protectorate, doubted whether the newspaper could have such an impact. Ardian Arifaj, the paper's twenty-five-year-old managing editor, told me that for him publishing *Koha Ditore* in Macedonia was not about politics but about survival—"the survival of Kosovo's Albanians as a people with their own identity." We were sitting in a television editing room as he played footage of himself and his girlfriend distributing the newspaper at Stenkovec. Men and children tugged at the bundles they carried, and stood in puddles to read over each other's shoulders. People were crowded behind a bulging fence, their hands waving and reaching, as if for their first food rations. A girl in a black-and-white checked flannel shirt wept as she turned the pages; her father and brothers were still in Kosovo, and she'd been without news of any kind for twenty days. The images made Baton's campaign to keep the refugees there seem cruel, somewhat akin to the ironic legend stencilled on the camp's tents, in large black letters, which Beni's cousin and thousands of other Kosovars had to look at all day: A GIFT FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

A few days later, I returned to Tetovo to see Baton before he left for Paris—as a special guest for "Kosovo Day." He had just closed the paper's fifth edition-in-exile, in a one-room of-

fice equipped with new, state-of-the-art computers. I found him at Arbi, with Rexhep Ismajli, a prominent linguist who, as an act of resistance, had refused to leave Pristina. But he had decided to take his wife and daughters out two days earlier, when Serb police abducted a prominent family next door to him. Pristina was now a giant prison, Ismajli said. When NATO bombed, the Serbs took cover, and he and the other remaining Albanians came out, like earthworms in the rain, to say "Hello, how are you?" and then disappear again.

The talk at Arbi was of the thousands of Albanians who remained in Pristina. Ismajli could not understand why NATO wouldn't give the Albanians arms to protect themselves. Even if NATO ground troops did finally go in, they wouldn't reach Pristina for days, and in the meantime the Serbs would probably do what they did when they abandoned the suburbs of Sarajevo after the Dayton agreement: burn everything down—only this time there were people still there.

I thought of something that Baton had said, in an uncharacteristically dark moment, away from the TV cameras: perhaps the best the Albanians could hope for was that NATO would destroy Serbia to the point where "it became a wreck of a state like Albania." Then, he added, "all the Balkans can start from zero in the twenty-first century." ♦

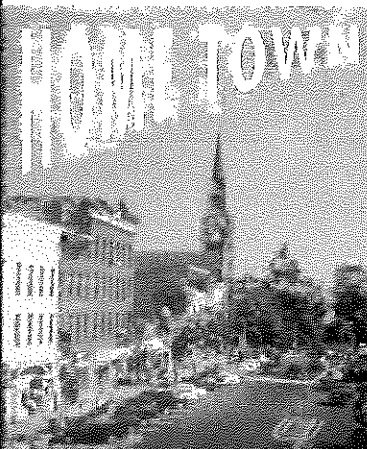
THERE'LL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND

[From the magazine *Royalty*]

A milkman who was awarded the MBE for services to the community has shown his dedication to his customers by turning down an invitation to Buckingham Palace to receive the honour. Trevor Jones, 69, who has been delivering milk in Tredegar, South Wales, since he was six, said travelling to London would disrupt his round and the lives of the people he calls on. "Jones the Milk", as he is known, was nominated for an honour by customers to whom he is a home help, matchmaker, odd job man and friend. Every day he delivers milk to a married couple whom he introduced to one another and a blind couple to whom he reads any important mail. He has rescued a woman who became stuck in her bath and last week raised the alarm after finding an elderly customer had fallen and broken a hip. "I am a very lucky man to be out in the fresh air all day," said Mr Jones, who first delivered milk from his father's horse and cart. "It is a great honour to get the MBE. The Queen is a very nice lady but she isn't worth rushing for. I am sure she will understand," he said.

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