

Gjergj Rrapi: *Die albanische Grossfamilie in Kosovo*. Vom Original übersetzt von Kristë Shtufi. Redigiert von Helmut Eberhart und Karl Kaser. Zur Kunde Südosteuropas. Albanologische Studien, 4. ISBN 3-205-77047-1. Vienna & Cologne: Böhlau, 2003. 145 pp.

One of the more fascinating features of traditional Albanian society is its large “extended family” structure, which was formerly prevalent in northern Albania and is still to be encountered in Kosova. The extended family, headed by an elderly male patriarch, usually comprises all of his sons and their wives and children. It can count up to forty or more members living under one roof. In some cases, this extended family may inhabit several adjoining houses in a walled family compound, but household tasks and labour are performed jointly. The extended family constitutes one economic unit and all assets are shared. Ownership and property thus remains indivisible.

Much has been written about the extended family as a social structure which was once encountered throughout the Balkans. In *Die albanische Großfamilie in Kosovo* (“Albanian Extended Family in Kosova”), Gjergj Rrapi offers a lucid study of the phenomenon in his native Kosova. The original Serbian-language version of the book was completed in the early 1990s and appeared in Belgrade in 1995 under the title *Savremene albanske zadružne porodice na Kosovu*, published by the Institute of Social Research of the University of Belgrade (Faculty of Philosophy). The present German-language translation, carried out by Kristë Shtufi and edited by Helmut Eberhart and Karl Kaser of the University of Graz in Austria, has now appeared as volume four of the new Albanological Studies publication series.

Following the editors’ preface and a short introduction, the book is divided into four sections. Under “theoretical overview,” the author introduces the Albanian extended family in Kosova, and discusses the theoretical aspects and the objectives of his investigation. He defines basic terms involved, elucidates methods and aspects of data collection, and sets forth the questions he hopes to answer. This thesis-type approach is, alas, of not devoid of the standard, pious references to Marx and Engels, rather unusual for a work of sociology published in the mid-1990s.

The second section, “demographic characteristics,” present the results of the data collection, including chapters on: the structure of extended family households, socio-economic characteristics, property ownership, technical equipment, herds, household apparatus, food, hygiene, clothing, houses and equipment, school education, and outside employment. The data are elucidated by over 40 tables.

The third section on “family life and relationships” investigates the human relationships in the extended family, with chapters on: division of labour, internal order, advisors to the male head of the household, the male head of the household, the female head of the household, marriage, the rights and duties of family members, family planning, parent-child relations, religion, and family and society.

The essence of the book appears in the fourth section, entitled “the system of values.” Here we are informed about: factors of change, property relationships, discipline, solidarity and pressure to conform, factors of tradition, economic aspects, security and defence, demographic aspects, psychological aspects, and the role of women.

In his conclusions, Gjergj Rrapi demonstrates that the extended family in Kosova, as opposed to other regions of the Balkans, was by no means moribund at the time of investigation. He stresses that the phenomenon had undergone very little change and still constituted a stable institution which was widely admired and respected by the Albanian population, in particular as a means of protection and defence. He rightly notes that this family structure has had a major influence on the thinking and mentality of the Kosova Albanians, and that only radical economic change in Kosova Albanian society could lead to

its disintegration. The author, who died before the book was to see the light of day, could not, of course, foresee the cataclysm which was to befall Kosova in 1999 when Serb forces and paramilitaries endeavoured to “cleanse” the whole Albanian population of the country, causing half a million people to flee for their lives.

The “Albanian Extended Family in Kosova” is a useful and interesting contribution to the study of a quite unique society. The interested reader may, in addition, wish to consult another recent publication on the subject: Berit Backer: *Behind Stone Walls: Changing Household Organization among the Albanians of Kosova* (Peja 2003), based on research carried out much earlier, in 1974-1975, in the village of Isniq. These will certainly not be the last publications on the subject, although the traditional extended family structure is now disintegrating rapidly in Kosova, too.

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