

# Nostalgia and Privatization of Factories in Prizren, Kosovo

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## Abstract

In my paper I want to understand and explain the predicament, the socio-economic situation of Roma in Kosovo. Often their plight is explained with reference to poverty. But as Susser Ida (1996) pertinently argues "Poor people appear poor rather than unemployed or underemployed"(Susser (1996) in Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008:6). The focus of the paper is on nostalgia for a past where there was work. This cannot be understood without a general reflection on the privatization process in Prizren - Kosovo and its effects on the life of people caught in cycles of unemployment with special emphasis on minority groups such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. I look at how nostalgia of factory life helps people make sense of their present.

As a theoretical framework I rely on the concepts of "dispossession", "accumulation by dispossession" as presented by Kasmir & Carbonella (2008), Harvey (2003, 2005) to describe how loss (of jobs, land, means of livelihood) and destruction, which have left people poor, destitute and without hope, is part and parcel of capitalism, how growth, accumulation depends on destruction, that is "dispossession".

As Tanja Petrovic says nostalgia that characterizes these memories does not prevent, but rather, allows operators of socialist industrialization and modernization to re-experience themselves as social actors. Nostalgia has the capacity to intervene in the present by encouraging tensions and creating discomfort, preventing socialist industrial ruins, the ruins of a modernist utopia, to be pacified, affectively neutralized and be sent back to history, or simply be ignored and gradually forgotten as the remains of an inappropriate socialist past.

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I am also thankful to my classmates and friends from the RGPP, for creating a stimulative, supportive and understanding atmosphere throughout the entire academic year. Lastly, I wish to thank my grandmother for all her commitment by raising me in the best possible way by offering me all the best in life. This work and all my effort to have an academic career is completely dedicated to her, deeply thanking him for his commitment. I apologize for leaving her totally alone in the hardest part of her life. As everything that has an end even my stay came to an end, and I will return in the summer and drink our coffee my stronger grandmother. My friends for continuously believing in me, and for their compassion and support during this challenging year.

## Introduction

In my thesis I intend to ask questions about nostalgia, about its impact on the collective memory of people in Prizren. More specifically around the workers in the factory Perllonkes in Prizren during the earlier years in the socialist context. Interviews will include questions about their involvement as a former employee, their employment status, work experience, and the main part of where their nostalgia for their earlier work comes from. The results will help ensure the overall understanding of their situation and nostalgia as well as their current status. Interviews will gather a deeper understanding of the challenges today when it comes to access to the labor market. Roma members from different backgrounds will be selected for the interviews as educated and marginalized Roma members in Prizren. Data collection will be done through semi-structured interview. Information, impressions and narratives about nostalgia will be processed and analyzed, hence this research the plan implies the need for further research on narratives with higher civic representation around collective memory.

David Harvey (2003) claims that capitalism always creates its own 'other' and his focus on the 'inside/outside' dialectic of capitalism is particularly valuable. As Harvey shows (2003), this other is continually recreated by dispossession. He argues that there acontinuing dialectic between the expanded reproduction of capitalism and dispossession. At one moment, this dynamic puts people 'inside' the sphere of capitalist accumulation and, at another moment, " undercuts their forms of livelihood and social reproduction." (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008: 7). Harvey writes about a "twofold dispossession" first "stripping working people of the means of their social reproduction", that is people losing their jobs and second " commodifying resources and forms of labour that earlier were outside of capital's realm" (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008: 8), for example criminalizing the collection of forest wood, or fining Roma people who sell mushrooms.

As Harvey shows (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008: 9), dispossession takes various forms around the globe: in advanced industrial regions, workers lost pensions, welfare, national health care and jobs. Elsewhere, communal lands in indigenous and peasant communities were lost, environmental and genetic materials were patented, and water, communications and other public utilities were privatized. In Kosovo dispossession takes the form of privatization of hydropower plants, agricultural land and mostly factories.

## The privatization process in Prizren

For a long time, Albin Kurti, the current Prime Minister of Kosovo, had misled the electorate by becoming a protective figure for state assets through his debates in parliament. Even today, his videos on social networks are the most watched and viewed videos by his followers on social networks<sup>1</sup>. This is a form that is more common for him to communicate with the public because he rejects traditional media. On May 26, 2022, surprisingly in the vast majority of Kosovo, the call for the opening of a new wave to privatize 55 assets in Kosovo created a new social debate. In the perception of citizens made by various organizations in Kosovo (reference) the current Prime Minister was the most convincing figure for the citizens and the trust was extremely high since he has used these concerns and essential problems of citizens and today seem to be changing. In 2010, exactly with his resolution and that of another party in Kosovo, the entire work of the privatization agency in Kosovo was stopped. Today, after 22 years, again with his decision for the change of members and the functioning of the privatization agency in Kosovo, the call for the sale / privatization of 55 state assets in different cities of Kosovo has been opened.<sup>2</sup>

The privatization process in Prizren has been at the center of harsh criticism since its inception<sup>3</sup>. Prizren's unique position in Kosovo, Kosovo's status as a post-war country along with that of the post-communist transition, its international administration and ownership disputes with Serbia, have meant that the process is more complex and disputed compared to other post-communist countries in general, and with respect to other cities in Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> The whole process of selling Socially Owned Enterprises (SOEs) is known as "mass privatization" as it is characterized by rapid sales to private investors (so-called "strategic") through a tendering procedure. According to Tanja Petrović (2014:8) Overall deterioration and poverty inevitably create a physical environment that makes employees feel humiliated and trapped in an uncertain, grim reality that was not the case in the past. The past is always perceived as the best not only in material terms, but also in terms of the dignity and respect that workers enjoyed in socialism.

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<sup>1</sup> [\(20\) Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE! Privatizimi shpunësoi 76 mijë punëtorë të Kosovës 28.09.2012 - YouTube](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Kurti erdhi në pushtet duke premtuar ndaljen e privatizimit, sot ai e rifilloi atë me furi - Nacionale - Nacionale](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Privatizimi dhe post-privatizimi në Kosovë \(evropaelire.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Kundër Privatizimit të Egër të Pasurisë Publike \(kallxo.com\)](#)

The feeling of personal degradation and humiliation is emphasized by many employees when speaking of the post-socialist period. Many of them point out the situation they are facing now is so drastically different from it in the past that it is difficult that they can understand what happened to them.

### An overview of the economic situation in Kosovo and Prizren

The economic situation in Kosovo for twenty years after the war has continued to be one of the main factors that constitute the concerns and disappointments of Kosovar citizens. Low-income living and 40 percent of unemployed in Kosovo has made its citizens in many cases lose hope for a perspective and social prosperity. As a country emerging from the armed conflict and the damage caused by the recent war in the former Yugoslavia in Kosovo, its citizens have largely expressed these concerns in various forms of revolt.

In 2014, when Europe, specifically Germany, started accepting asylum seekers, Kosovars were listed as the 3rd group with the most citizens who had applied for asylum. Kosovars were listed as the 3rd group after Syria and Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Places that had turmoil and problems with essential security. In Kosovo, this figure and this fact began to be treated by civil society, the media and political opposition parties as indicators of the dire situation from the economic position and the loss of sense of perspective to see an economic development in Kosovo.

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<sup>5</sup> [Kosovarët, më së shumti rritje të kërkesave për azil, pas sirianëve - Albinfo](#)



## Nostalgia

In the 1960s to 1980s factories were built in different parts of Kosovo. Prizren was the second largest city in Kosovo and with its convenient geographical position both in terms of agriculture and its infrastructure in relation to the border city with other countries where it facilitated the circulation of goods. The factories were mainly monoliths of industrial power and employed a considerable number of its citizens. They were the backbone of the economy where the source of decent work was. In the war of 1999 where everything was destroyed by the aggression of the armed conflict in Kosovo, the properties and everything else, the only ones that survived without being damaged were the factories such as in my case the *Perdhonka*” Factory or as it is known today *“Progress”*. Factories belonged to everyone, to Serbs, to Albanians, to Kosovars etc., so they were spared from destruction. Factories were important and essential to survival to all parties involved in the conflict.

But these very same factories could not survive, or barely survived the post-war privatization. Two decades after the privatization process began in Kosovo, many of the factories that symbolize the country's industry are no longer operational, for example, the Progress Factory and Rami Sadiki, which are not functional today, either. Against the promises for investment and revitalization of these two factories, after the privatization process, the factories in general remain neglected and as they are losing value, they are at the same time creating easier opportunities for privatization. The past is remembered with nostalgia as it had employment and equal rights that made life meaningful in the past. During the interview with Naile Gashi, 56 years old, who has studies for word processing, she confesses that working in a factory has been the best part of her life, she says:

*“I had a job, I had my salary, I could have my salary and everything else I needed. We also had the 13th salary of the year. Today no one will know about you how you live or you have enough money for your family for a living.”*

For marginalized and excluded people nostalgia is one of the only ways that a large part of Kosovo society still lives today, 21 years after the war. This is because during existing socialism employment was a reality for most people as most people had jobs. It was obvious to all people that life meant equality for all and employment opportunities in different factories, hence nostalgia even today is a strong feeling and deep memory for the former Yugoslav citizen.

During the interview with Naile Gashi, 56 years old, who has studies for word processing, she confesses that working in a factory has been the best part of her life, she says:

*“The war caused us a lot of difficulties, we thought after the war that everything would be fixed because the factories were not damaged in Kosovo.”*

The new capitalist system has offered support with a dose of favourable policies for certain groups of businesses that in practice are groups made up of politicians and businesspeople. These groups through their activities have caused irritation and despair to a significant part of the citizens and deepened the feeling of nostalgia in a more pronounced way. General deterioration and poverty inevitably create a physical environment that makes workers feels down and trapped in an uncertain, gloomy reality that has nostalgia for the past.

During the second interview with Mehmet Galushi, 56 years old, who has studies for history and geography, he confesses that working in a factory offer him dignity and good economic condition.

*“I believed in that system that there was order, it offered me trust in the state and it offered me dignity as a factory worker. Every morning my face smiled because I knew that the end of the month awaited me with a salary that covered my expenses. Today the maximum salary is 250, what can do a family of 6 members like mine will do”.*

The past is always perceived as the best not only in material terms but also in terms of dignity and respect enjoyed by workers in socialism. The feeling of personal degradation and humiliation is emphasized by the employee when speaking of the post-socialist period.

In the interviews I did they point out the situations they are facing now is so drastically different from what it was in the past that it is difficult for them to understand what happened to them.

As Tanja Petrović says (2014: 8) “The nostalgia emanating from the workers preserves tension and anxiety, preventing the industrial socialist ruins of a modernist utopia from being peacefully naturalized and surrendered to history or simply ignored and forgotten as signs of an “inappropriate socialist past.” Affective, passionate and sensory memories of employees reveal them as socially engaged subjects and remind them of the agency they desire”.

Employment as one of the most important activities in the life of Kosovars was not a major problem for Kosovars since factories in the 70s and 80s were opened throughout Kosovo and

in the former Yugoslavia. After the armed conflict in Kosovo in Yugoslavia in 1999 and after the expropriation of factories. Privatization laid off 76,000 Kosovo workers.<sup>6</sup>

From that time even today, the nostalgia for that period was a very strong feeling for me and many other Kosovar families of that time. Such cases can be found in many histories and collective memory in Kosovo during the socialist period. This time period known and named as the time of Tito the communist leader in Yugoslavia for the older generations and for the younger generations was a period of economic equality.

Nostalgia is a merciful, compassionate part of our lives as something delicate and powerful in our lives, it is a strong desire emotionally and much stronger on the part of our memory of the past and leads us to a place or state where we want to go back. In this sense, in my understanding nostalgia is an emotion, and it is also a form of care for the people around us, for those we know, and it is also care in the sense that it keeps our social narratives about the past alive.

### Grandfather's rabbit bread

In his daily life when still working at the factory, my grandfather did not eat the whole piece of bread for the reason of bringing it home after work and sharing it with me and my brother. This was the most delicious bread for me and my brother when our grandfather brought it home for us. But it was the most unpleasant bread for him because the short break time was not enough to enjoy it. From this action of the grandfather for insufficient time for the meal the grandfather titled this meal as the bread of the rabbit. From that time even today, the nostalgia for that period was a very strong feeling for me and many other Kosovar families of that time. Such cases can be found in many histories and collective memory in Kosovo during the socialist period. This time period known and named as the time of Tito the communist leader in Yugoslavia for the older generations and for the younger generations was a period of economic equality.

My grandfather worked for construction company Ramik and Sadik. The factory was multi-functional construction in various fields of building construction, installation for electrical and water systems and its maintenance. At the time of its success employs up to 22,000 workers in this factory and consequently on the same day all the workers received their salaries, and this money was spent almost the city of Prizren when circulated a large amount of money. The

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<sup>6</sup> [\(20\) Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE! Privatizimi shpunësoi 76 mijë punëtorë të Kosovës 28.09.2012 - YouTube](#)

company was opened in the early 70s and was operational until 97-98. This company owned by him had many assets the worker where the workers worked, agricultural land, buildings that were built for rent and to donate to citizens through the criteria set at that time for Yugoslav citizens. Also, its canteen to feed the workers. The name of this company has had a special significance in Kosovo and throughout Yugoslavia. At that time the regime of the communist leader Tito decided to build a federation with different national communities and without favouring any nationality. Tito created the ideology of brotherhood for all Slavic peoples. A myth that existed some time ago about a story of two friends, an Albanian man "Sadiku" and another Serb "Ramis" where these two had lived together as an example, leaving aside national nationalism and aspiring to the ideals of a Yugoslavia equal for all. The company Rami Sadik fortunately survived the last war in Kosovo but unfortunately some parts of its assets did not survive the wild privatization and without a proper strategy. Like many other former companies, Ramiz Sadik had started the privatization process. At the beginning, in the process of preparing for its privatization, at the same time Kosovo's status as a state under the administration of the international community in 2000-2003 was beginning to change, Kosovo as a state is also going through the change of starting the independence process which took place during 2005-2008. The other part where the common dining hall used to be is now retrofitted into a modern cool dining place. Then when the new regulations came in from 2008 the company was left with a difficult position and only one ruin remained. For many a considerable group of people working in this company the despair was extremely unexpected and not liked for the workplace where they had worked. And they were left at the mercy of fate and without finding a solution to the 22,000 workers who work in the factory of Ramiz Sadik. Today many people expect this factory to be revitalized and a solution chosen for these workers. The protests and media engagement were also a phase when workers had begun to work for a solution for the factory but the only achievement that was for them was to enable the canteen to function which today serves as a meeting point for cultural and social activities. The nostalgia for the company is still very strong today, especially for the people who had worked in this factory. A large amount of money circulated in their city. This factory enabled a normal life for many people who were employed and on the other hand were ready to perform their services. In practice, life activities depend as a chain in the economy where through the expenses made by these employees in the basic things of life those for a shop or other craftsman in the city was in the maintenance of social welfare by developing the economic system in the cows.

In Prizren<sup>7</sup>, the most important factory in this city was the "Perllonkese/ Progress<sup>8</sup>factory. This factory was known throughout Yugoslavia. Its functions were to process synthetic yarns in textiles and to slaughter animals. This company owned numerous assets with hundreds of hectares of land and other assets. It counted many employees about 20.000 in this company which was special from other companies in Prizren in the past many employees came from other cities in Kosovo creating direct conditions for immigration. Many citizens who had an unusual surname, unlike many of the citizens of Prizren came from outside. They were asked if it was because they had migrated to work in the Perllonka or Pogres factory.

Mehmet says: *"we know when someone has not found our city and has come to live here because of the possibility of employment in our factory"*.

This factory privatized most of its assets and as the only company it planned to divide 20% of shares among former employees.

Naile says: *we have protested, and we have signed the petition of almost a total number of employees to benefit from the sale or privatization of the company, this process took a long time, and, in the end, they gave us only 500 euros. This right was made possible by the contract which included our right to profit from the sale of the factory.*

For 15 years in a row in the negotiations to gain this right that was initially held as a half secret, employees managed to earn this right. During the time of socialism in Kosovo many professions were regulated according to the needs of factories for a large part of Kosovar society. Prizren as a city with many factories where it offers a considerable number of working jobs had other features. this company numbered many professions in its various departments. Some of them are textile worker, driver, butcher, cleaner, item cleaner and many more. Another feature of Prizren that influenced the creation of a "new profession" were the narrow roads and unsuitable for cars and other means of transporting items. The handcart was a non-motor vehicle which was used for transporting food items in many places in the centre of the city in Prizren. This activity in them made him create a new profession and this profession in many cases was practiced by parts of the Roma community. In many cases in the collective memory this action is thought of as a very special service and today people remember with nostalgia such a service in the city of Prizren because this action was exercised by the same people, and you say that every day. For a small town like Prizren where each other knew each

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<sup>7</sup> [PRIZREN \(online-transparency.org\)](https://prizren.online-transparency.org)

<sup>8</sup> [PRIZREN \(online-transparency.org\)](https://prizren.online-transparency.org)

other, these people could also be people who conveyed messages to people serving in the ease of communication, as it is known that the means of communication did not exist to such a large extent. In the time of the Yugoslav federation military service was compulsory for all citizens living in Yugoslavia regardless of ethnicity.

### Initiation and Tattoos

Military service was compulsory for all Yugoslav men who were in good physical and mental condition and over the age of 18 years. This obligation of many Yugoslavs remains in their minds as a very important part of their life. From this military obligation in the Kosovar culture reached the age of maturity and could be considered ready for marriage and for a normal life as it was considered at that time. The parts that most arouse nostalgia for a considerable number of members of Kosovar society are two moments. The first is to organize a celebration the day before going to the place where they will conduct military training, and this had its own way of celebrating's in this story for everyone.

The second is a tattoo with the JVN initials of the Yugoslav National Army. Many military cadets drew tattoos on their hands as a reminder of their military service. Today there are different stories about different experiences in the collective memory of many Kosovar.

Ibrahim says:

*“I still remember the day I left for the army. All my friends gathered the night before and we had our party which did not end until the moment I left for the barracks I would stay. The live music was up to the train station. During our stay in the barracks, many of us got a tattoo on our hand. They were the initials JNA (the popular army of Yugoslavia) and the figure which in some cases a slope or a snake”.*

## Conclusion

In the daily struggle against unemployment and poverty, Roma and other communities face many challenges. Such as discrimination and segregation. The average life expectancy for Roma is 55 years compared to the majority Albanian and foreign population where it is about 74 years, 15 years less for Roma people. On the other hand, all this challenge has not stopped the willingness to look for work.

Even in cases when employment opportunities and their skills are not enough to find work in competition of the new system of creating a neoliberal global system. Roma again persistently looks for a job to have a normal life. Especially for the fact that from outside the Roma are considered and prejudiced as people who do not like work. Their nostalgia for the time and the early 80s and 90s when they were employed had a good welfare, health care and quality education even today this sympathy is present. The common feature of the interviewers is that many of them have the same nostalgia for the factories where they work. Also, as they said on the state trust and dignity that these factories offer. This leaves me wondering why there is not today after many developments in society and technology an empathy and perspective or hope for the future.

Nostalgia is a useful emotion to understand the past and and more importantly the present To have a job was very important. Factories meant dignity and pride for people, especially when "everything public belongs to the people". The second impression that the functioning of the law, health care, quality education was at a satisfactory level has ingrained in the mind that it was a system which has met their living expectations. Finally, in my view, it turns out that inequality and the lack of specific skills in employment efforts and poverty have had a direct impact on the loss of perspective and hope. The state has failed to present itself as a provide the conditions for hope and does not offer future perspective for society.

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- 2.Mehmet Ilazi
- 3.Ibrahim Kryeziu