Granada Television's series "Disappearing World" in Britain is celebrating its 21st year of the production of films about the lives of ordinary people in remote areas of the world with the aim of recording lives as they are lived for future generations. The latest of the 54 documentaries was shown in July 1991 when "Disappearing World" presented a film made in the villages of Rrogam and Thethi in the northern Albanian mountains; it was the result of many years of interest and research, taking six years even to get permission to film. The Norwegian anthropologist who worked on this film was Berit Backer. Backer spent a year in the all-Albanian village of Isniq just over the mountain range from the location of the film, in Kosova, Yugoslavia. It was here that she studied Albanian kinship systems and recorded her findings: "Behind Stone Walls" in *Culture Populaire Albanaise* (no. 3, 1983).

The film is set mostly in the relatively new village of Rrogam, thousands of feet up in the northern Albanian Alps. This is a Catholic village with about 45 houses inhabited year-round only since the Communist government came into power. Earlier this had been the summer pasture for the people of the village of Thethi (3-4 hours' walk over the mountain, westward). Thethi, whose inhabitants are of course close relatives of those of Rrogam, is an old village which had received foreign visitors early in this century and at the end of the last, for this is the heart of the land which lay under "the Laws of Lek" - ever since the 15th century when Lek Dukagin consolidated those traditional laws where honor was the highest attribute. Even under 500 years of Ottoman rule, little changed in this area where the *besa* (promise) kept everyone in line with Lek's Laws. Much has been written of this by many who have been fascinated with it in the past: Edith Durham (*High Albania, Some Tribal Origins. Laws and Customs of the Balkans*), Margaret Hasluck (*The Unwritten Law of Albania*), Bernard Newman (*Albanian Back Door, Balkan Background*) and many others. The anthropologist, Carleton Coon writing in 1950 (*The Mountain of the Giants*) from his notes made during visits in the late 1920s commented: "It is one of the most marginal and isolated regions of Europe ... a true refuge area comparable to the Caucuses and the Western Himalayan ranges".

Dialogue is subtitled, and there are nice touches as where the baker is told by a friend to look his part since they are being filmed. The use of face-to-face interviews helps to clarify the range of opinions. Usually those involved are unselfconscious, or often too emotionally involved to feel the awareness of the camera.

When the "Disappearing World" team finally managed to gain access to this very remote area it was fortuitously at a moment of great significance. They filmed during the transition from collectivism when, as everywhere in Albania, the area was experiencing the chaos of redistribution of land, stock and material resources. With the recent fall of Communism, each area of Albania reacted differently to the abandoning of the old systems. Each village, each district of every town had to make its own decision as to how to restructure its society, how to divide what had, for almost half a century, been government owned and collectively organized. Some of the questions raised are whether the division of land should be by ancestral ownership (leaving some landless) or by equal division (and if so, whether by family or by family size). Much of the film's focus is on this recent dilemma. With minimal intrusion from the anthropologist, film director and crew, viewers are shown how the villagers deal with the new problems. For some there is immense joy at having a small plot of land to enclose and call their own, a sheep or a cow. For others there is distrust, dissatisfaction - there are supporters of the Communist regime who felt very real benefits from the fact that there was always bread (produced in the state-owned bakery, run by the co-operative) a commodity whose price had never increased in 40 years. One staunch Communist supporter tells how she owes her life and that of her son to the Communist government; she had been taken to hospital by helicopter when undergoing a complicated labor. There were also those of previously wealthier families who now preferred to see land returned to those families, even if it might mean taking possession of land on which other families now lived in new homes. A case elsewhere in Albania was reported where the access to a relatively new school was closed by the claiming and ploughing of that piece of land by a previous owner.

The film is made over a period of six weeks, during which time very few solutions are found; it is clear that this disruption has come at a particularly difficult time since many are awaiting the outcome in order to know what and where to plant. However, after several inconclusive
village meetings some people decide to plant anyway, thus asserting ownership. In this instance the village representative seems to be a very serious, concerned and objective person, anxious to come to a fair decision which should disadvantage no-one. With no precedent nor authoritative advice, he is unsure how to reach this important choice. The film crew did manage to film the aftermath of the distribution of sheep (though they were not permitted to film the actual distribution). As viewers we are allowed to feel a part of the effort to find out information, though often we, as the filmmakers, are excluded - matters are too sensitive for outsiders to be allowed that part.

Traveling in Albania myself shortly afterwards, in July 1991, I also visited Thethi. The misused church was under renovation after the 27 years of state ban on religion. It still had no bell tower, though the old bell, hidden during those years in a private home, and at the risk of severe punishment, now hangs in a tree beside the church. The saving of this bell is no isolated event of clinging on to church property and religion itself. It now becomes evident that religion, far from being extinguished, was kept very much alive, but only privately and at enormous risk - for many were imprisoned, tortured, even killed for practicing worship. Only now, as people make rough crosses (in the North where the majority of the population was Catholic before the War) for every grave and an extraordinarily high proportion of young men wear crosses very visibly, is religion surfacing again.

In another remote village I also witnessed an instance of the dismantling of collectivism. This was in Pustec on Lake Prespa on the borders of Greece and Yugoslav Macedonia I arrived by chance on the day which had been allocated by the villagers to gather at the co-operative cattle barn for a distribution of the main asset of the building (the roof-tiles). Pustec is a village of Macedonian origin and many of the younger men (now free to travel, after the 50-year ban), had gone as migrant workers to neighboring, relatively prosperous, Macedonia. Thus the majority of the 200-300 people engaged in taking off the tiles from the cowshed were women, who carried them (a few with the help of donkeys), 20 per family, to their homes. My record of this moment is in the form of a few slides; but the video of the one-hour "Disappearing World" program is available for sale from: Public Media Incorporated, 5547 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60640-1199. It gives a unique overview of the effect of total release of government hold, without violence: we see a whole village disoriented by this change, more extensive than anything that previously occurred in this area.

For a full understanding of this film, it is helpful for viewers first to be given a brief geographical and historical background. Thus equipped, the film is both clear and fascinating in portraying a particular group of people struggling to make sense of an overturned world. It represents the difficulties being faced all over Albania as communities grapple with the problems of how to use the possibility of Democracy. Whilst the world saw only such events as the frantic mass exodus of young men, too impatient to work towards and wait for change, there are in each place different reactions being played out.