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Kosovo's Hope: Stories of Renewal and Despair in an Independent Nation

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Kosovo’s Hope

STORIES OF RENEWAL AND DESPAIR IN AN INDEPENDENT NATION
Kosovo’s Hope

CONTRASTS AND CONFLICT: With independence comes struggle for survival

Energy and Pollution
Poverty and Happiness
Roma in the Republic
Young and Gone

Close to Death
Living and Leaving
Young and Jobless
Energy and Peril

Comfortable and Lonely
Health and Energy
Selling and Surviving
Conflict in Caglavica

VISUAL EDITOR: Bruce Thorson
EDITOR: Scott Winter
ART DIRECTOR: Joel Gehringer
The airport's wheels screeched as we touched down at the Lincoln airport after a long, interminable journey from a world away. It was Sunday, March 23, 2008, and we had been traveling for and off the plane for 21 hours, arriving eight days after independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. Kosovo is a land of contrasts and conflicts. A stunningly beautiful country, with its warm summers, cold winters, and high mountain landscapes, it has a per capita rate of less than 2,500 people per square mile, a unemployment rate that exceeds 40 percent and an economy that is the most under-developed in Europe. The people of Kosovo, comprised of about 90 percent Albanian and more than 5 percent Serbian, are scarred by a history filled with wars and bombing during the war. And Shannon Smith worked tirelessly, bouncing from photographer to photographer to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories. We brainstormed potential story ideas. We used all sources at our disposal to find and build contacts who would lead us to good subjects and even better stories.
PRISTINA became the capital after World War II and is home to the University of Pristina. Most of Kosovo’s population lives in rural villages outside of Pristina, relying mainly on subsistence farming, which is highly ineffective due to a lack of technical and mechanical expertise. A river, which once ran through the city, now is tunneled underground because people used to put their waste in it. Photo by Bruce Thomas
Contrasts and Conflict

AMID CELEBRATION OF NEWFOUND INDEPENDENCE, KOSOVO STRUGGLES TO SURVIVE

Story by Shannon Smith

The high-rise buildings of downtown Pristina gleam in the golden light of afternoon as the sun catches the steel frames and newly cleaned glass. Only an abandoned railroad separates the prom- inent metropolitan area from desolate shacks, rick with waste and unemployment. The tracks of the rail- road sink into the ground as the mud slowly envelops the ruins. The world has forgotten these tracks, as the same way it has forgotten the people who live beyond them.

Up until Kosovo declared independence, the interna- tional community had forgotten the people and the poverty in this region after the civil war and American intervention. On Feb. 17, 2008, Kosovo declared inde- pendence from Serbia, shifting status from province to country. The world paid attention. Within a few days, the United States, Great Britain and others had recog- nized Kosovo’s independence, the same countries that supported the United Nations bombing of Kosovo in 1999 to stop conflict between ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Most Western nations have recognized Kosovo comprehensively. The individual faces of Ko- sovo, those who survived the war and now battle to make everyday life difficult for many of those within the borders, are forgotten at the masses in Kosovo. The individual faces of Kosovo’s population are a mess of contradictions. Throughout Kosovo one can see people without money for food wearing professional clothing. There are broken buildings next to prosperity in the heart of Pristina.

As a welfare case, the Aliu family is provided 60 euros a month for electricity from the city. They cannot use more than 300 watts a month, which translates into a light bulb, a TV, and the use of a few appliances, but not heating. “Whenever it rains or snows we are afraid that the roof is going to fall,” Aliu said. “We are jobless and suffer from different diseases.”

Islam Aliu and his seven family members live in the only intact room within the shell of a bombed building in the shadow of the high-rise buildings of Pristina. Aliu, 40, and his wife, Shubrie, 36, have stayed in what’s left of the house and buildings that were destroyed by the bombs and fires nine years ago. The railroad between the shanty-like conditions and the shining new part of the city is the barrier between past and future, leaving the present an uncompromis- ing mess of contradictions. Throughout Kosovo one can see people without money for food wearing professional clothing. There are broken build- ings next to construction areas for new and mosques and fashionable clothing. There are broken build- ings next to prosperity in the heart of Pristina.

Institute of Journalism and Communication students Arianita Spahiu and Afrodita Margilaj. “I bathe them on the steps of the house outside or sometimes even inside the house,” Shubrie Aliu said (translated by Kosovo Institute of Journalism and Communication students Arianita Spahiu and Afrodita Margilaj). “I bathe them on the steps of the house outside or sometimes even inside the house.”

Islam Aliu works in the market when he can, but the work is inconsistent and never pays more than two euros a day, which is comparable to roughly two and a half U.S. dollars. Two euros is enough to buy a cheap tourist lighter celebrating independence off the street, but it’s a decision made for a family of eight. With the structural instability and economic conditions, Aliu fears for the security of his family. “Whenever it rains or snows we are afraid that the roof is going to fall,” Aliu said. “We are jobless and suffer from different diseases.”

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a month’s salary by the government. The family is not alone. Many families like the Aliax live in the same area, not far to the railroad in the broke neighborhood. These families are susceptible to these walking by day, passersby who are focused on shopping, picking up children from school, getting to work on time. They see the extreme hardship, family members mentioning hope and optimism for the future. 

The three main things we are hoping for better, neighbor Halit Rizkija, 54, said.

BLESSING VS. CURSE
Selvije Peqani watches the large black crows shirk, in her yard as a way to remind the people of their family’s wealth, everything that they are able to get up to pick up a morsel of a rotten vegetable within a paper bag before again rising. Students are always focused on the smal community of Fushë-Krujë, a small suburb of Pristina. The black birds find no use for the birds, too. Within the suburb, the birds flock upon the flocks of bread and fruit, or for her to invite visitors to trees. “If you go now to Obelic, as an example, and ask her, who are the poor people, before the war and after the war?”

ECONOMY VS. EDUCATION
As water drips down from the cracked roof of the schoolhouse in the village of Plementina, the bright faces of 18 students look to the front of the room and try to make out their classroom environment. The students, mostly children ages 6-7, don’t notice the cold or the dust, but they do notice the light bulb flickering with only one shoddy light bulb in the ceiling. The light bulb flashes on and off repeatedly before ultimately going out completely in one of the many power outages experienced regularly in the region. School supplies and clothing are only the beginning of problems for students like Sada Haliti, 7. Sada Haliti doesn’t have any books for school. The 75 students a month his family survives on doesn’t include money for education. Food and warm clothes come first and last. With two broken light bulbs, Sada Haliti struggles to make it to school. He also said the most important thing for the Roma, and Egyptian, “ is that the school has many obstacles in its path.

Selvije Peqani lives in a small house in Fushë-Krujë with her four children, 23 shop and her pregnant cow. Fushë-Krujë is home to many minority groups, such as Ashkali, Roma, and Egyptians.

Kosovo: At a Glance


CAPITAL: Pristina

POVERTY RATE: 37 percent

GDP: $4 billion

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 45 percent

POPULATION: 212,076

ETHNIC GROUPS: Albanian, 80 percent; Serb, 7 percent; ethnic others, 5 percent.

DOMINANT RELIGIONS: Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: Albanian, Serbian.

GDP: $4 billion

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 45 percent

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Kosovo’s Hope

MUSIC AND MOVIES, some local and some bootleg, are a few of the things that can be found in Pristina’s market area.

During the war, to the point of permanent black and blue marks. While socks tie, small legs struggle to support their green cardboard and heap them on the ground as they walk through the market area. Small children, sometimes made by two younger children, are working in the market area from a young age. The market is a place where these children can make some income and buy some food for their families.

Photo by Clay Lomneth

hospital for more serious care. The Obelic clinic has been the main source for the people of Obelic before they are sent to the Obelic, the medical center operating as a checkpoint to help provide income for their families in the midst of war. Their families and country nine years ago. The bombs that blasted nearby villages. The soldiers who forced them out of their homes. And the choking grip that poverty still has on their country.

Dardan Selimaj was old enough to remember when he was forcibly removed. He was 14 when the war reached his family; they held on and stayed in the country through the NATO bombings until the Serbian soldiers came and forced them from their home. Dardan’s family returned from Macedonia. When they came back, Dardan lived in a different Kosovo than he remembered.

"After the war, there wasn’t working a lot. No bakers. Nothing, nothing, nothing," Dardan said. "Everything was rebuilding. We were rebuilding our new lives." Amona said the villages outside the capital of Pristina were most affected by bombing and fire. She said the community banded together and helped rebuild nearby villages and now, since war ended, things are improving but aren’t perfect. She is able to go to school without working; she doesn’t feel threatened, Kosovo is independent.

But Amona said one wouldn’t have to look very deep to see the evidence of poverty in Kosovo. Poverty still has on their country.

During the war, Jashari volunteered to help soldiers in treating his neighbors and countrymen, one for less than 15 in the village in order to discourage any opposition. Sela counted her and the families’ survival as her proudest achievement. “The living must keep trying to most men older than 15 in the village in order to leased Muhamet three times. Sela says this happened during the war. Serbian solders abducted, beat and released Muhamet three times. Sela says this happened to most men older than 15 in the village in order to provide power to Kosovo.

A, one out of two Kosovo Energy Corporation plants declared independence, Jashari faced another challenge to help provide income for their families in the midst of war. Their families and country nine years ago. The bombs that blasted nearby villages. The soldiers who forced them out of their homes. And the choking grip that poverty still has on their country.

During the war, Jashari volunteered to help soldiers in treating his neighbors and countrymen. He makes conversation with Fatmir Shala, a young man who just got out of a consultation with Dr. Bedri Osmani. Shala is a student who lives in Mazgit near Obelic and came into the clinic because he has been experiencing chest pains and pressure for the past two months and has been losing weight. Shala is 20 years old.

ECONOMY, HEALTH

Haki Jashari’s hands are overly worn and withered for a middle-aged man. They are wrinkled like an old man’s face would be after years of laughing, only Jashari’s wrinkles come from the stress and pressure of his profession. Jashari is the chief of the Emergency Unit in Obelic, the medical center operating as a checkpoint for the people of Obelic. Before they saw just to the hospital for more serious care. The Obelic clinic has 30 percent more cases of cancer than the other local centers in Kosovo, something Jashari attributes to the high pollutants spread by the nearby power plant Kosovo A. Jashari sees the effects of the pollution every day as he struggles to diagnose severe conditions like heart problems, lung failure, high blood pressure and diabetes. Jashari is outraged at the plant and the way it is killing his town and his country.

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While Sela’s feeble, small legs struggle to support her aged body, her grandson Muhamet, 26, struggles to single-handedly support his family of seven by working at a mechanic’s in an auto shop in the nearby town of Skenderaj.

Muhamet’s father wasn’t the only one to be beaten during the war.出てくるsoldiers abducted, beat and released Muhamet three times. Sela says this happened to most men older than 15 in the village in order to provide power to Kosovo.

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Kosovo’s Hope

Kosovars are the poorest people in Europe, averaging about $1,800 per year. Pristina’s businesses are mostly small-scale retail shops. Unemployment is more than 40 percent.

Photo by Bruce Thorson

A young boy walks through rain on his family’s farm at the foot of Ciciavica Mountain. The family fled into the mountains as fighting drew near in 1998 and returned to a destroyed home. It took six months to rebuild.

Photo by Kate Veik

Kosovo’s Ethnic Population is about 90 percent Albanian, with Serbs comprising about 7 percent. The remaining are Bosnian, German, Roma, Turkish, Ashkali and Egyptian. Albanian and Serbian are the official languages. Bosnian, Turkish, and Arabic are also widely used.

Photo by Bruce Thorson

Children in Pristina play soccer wherever they can — an abandoned concrete parking lot in the middle of the city worked for these children.

Photo by Clay Lomneth

Young boy walks through rain on his family’s farm at the foot of Ciciavica Mountain. The family fled into the mountains as fighting drew near in 1998 and returned to a destroyed home. It took six months to rebuild.

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Children in Pristina play soccer wherever they can — an abandoned concrete parking lot in the middle of the city worked for these children.

Photo by Clay Lomneth
Meat is very hard to come by in Kosovo, and not many people can afford it. Photo by Lindsay DeMarco

A wall commemorating those who are missing or have been killed since the war in 1999 stands in the center of Pristina. Photo by Lindsay DeMarco
MANY KOSOVARS still feel indebted toward the Americans for their role in the war. Photo by Kevin Schmidt

A YOUNG CHILD sleeps in his family’s home in the Ciciavica mountain range. Photo by Kate Veik

A YOUNG MAN cheers during a pick-up soccer game in the valley of the mountains near Prizren, south of Pristina. Photo by Kate Veik

TWO WOMEN along the mall in Pristina, which is a street in Kosovo that used to be a street but now is open only to foot traffic. Women frequently greet each other with a simple hug and a kiss on each side of the cheek. Kosovars have little control over their life, due to a poor economy. They do, however, take pride and control in how they dress. Overall, their style of casual dress is more stylish than in the U.S. Photo by Bruce Thorson

Sights and Stories
WITH SPARKS FLYING, a worker for the Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) repairs a belt used to transport coal from the mines to the power plant.

WRENCH READY, a worker stands by while a broken conveyor belt is repaired.

KOSOVO A is Kosovo’s oldest power plant. It was built in the mid 1960s and only has one working smokestack. KEK workers repair a broken conveyor belt that takes the coal from the mines directly to a power plant.

WITH REPAIRS FINISHED, KEK workers head inside for a tea and coffee break.

In the village of Obiliq, population 30,000, have been living next to the worst polluting power plant in all of Europe for more than 40 years. Built in 1960, the power plant, called Kosovo A, now has only one working smokestack but has been half the responsibility for supplying power to Kosovo’s estimated 2 million residents. Many health problems have been associated with the power plant. At a health center in Obiliq, Dr. Haki Jashari, the chief of the emergency unit, sees patients every day with breathing problems and high blood pressure. Symptoms such as these, he said, are likely the result of living too close to the plant.

Another cause for concern is how the Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) handles waste from the power plants. KEK disposes of the ash in open pits, some of which are now close to houses. For the next three years, KEK will be working to clean up the land on which the ash pits are located, creating a cleaner and overall healthier environment for those living nearby.

Energy and Pollution
Photography by Clay Lomneth
A SUPERVISOR oversees the repair of a conveyor belt at a KEK mine.

IN PLEMINTINA, a Roma village, children play in the shadow of Kosovo-B, a newer and much more reliable coal power plant.
ASH from Kosovo A is likely why the young man felt short of breath, a doctor said. The young man is examined at a health clinic in Obiliq. The power plant is situated just outside of town.

Pollution from power plants is a major concern in some parts of Kosovo. In some areas, the ash in the air keeps people from leaving their homes.

THE FOCUS since independence has been more on a reliable source of energy than a safe one, a KEK spokesman said. As two coal power plants provide power to Kosovo, there is talk of building another one, called Kosovo C, which will displace some families from their homes.
Poverty and Happiness
Photography by Vanessa Skocz

Independence left Kosovo in high spirits — except in the community of Fushe Kosove, a suburb of Pristina. Here a community of ethnic minorities — Ashkali (478), Egyptians (14), Roma (100) and other internally displaced (78) — struggles to survive. These minority groups are not allowed to live within the thriving capital. Each ethnic group considers itself to have Albanian heritage, but the “true-born” Albanians consider these ethnic minorities to be of a Serbian heritage that doesn’t belong in Pristina.

With each family making an average of 52-62 euros ($72-87) per month, making ends meet is a struggle. In the Peqani family, an Ashkali family, Halit, 35, works various jobs until late in the night while his wife Selvije stays home. Her job is to take care of the house, children, and sheep and she often worries someone will steal her sheep. At times like these, Selvije prays she and her children will stay safe until her husband returns.

Halit, 35, and Selvije, 35, Peqani, live in Fushe Kosove with their four children. This house was built by Halit’s father two years ago in order for the family to successfully raise cattle and sheep.

Selvije bakes homemade bread at least twice a week because the cost of bread is so high. The Peqani family doesn’t have a consistent income so they try to save money as often as possible.

While Halit works, Selvije stays at home to take care of her four children. Most days her husband is gone all day while she cooks and cleans.

The only source of heat in the Peqani’s three-room house is a wood-burning stove. When guests are over, they are invited into the sitting room so they can stay warm.

Murat Peqani, 11, does his homework when she gets home from school. When she finishes, she helps her mom with chores.

HALIT, 35, AND SELVJE, 35, PEQANI live in Fushe Kosove with their four children. The house was built by Halit’s father two years ago in order for the family to successfully raise cattle and sheep. SELVJE bakes homemade bread at least twice a week because the cost of bread is so high. The Peqani family doesn’t have a consistent income so they try to save money as often as possible.

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MURAT PEQANI, 11, does his homework when she gets home from school. When she finishes, she helps her mom with chores.
RAMADAN PEQANI, 7, watches television while his mother does chores. He is the only child in the family who doesn’t attend school. He was kicked out for misbehaving.

MURAT, 11, Ramadan, 7, enjoy an afternoon snack with their cousins Mirtora, 5, and Metinida, 3. The Peqani children usually stay indoors when it is too cold to play outside.

COLD WEATHER outside usually means the children stay indoors. Instead, Ramadan plays with the ringtones on the family’s only cell phone.

WITH A MOTHER’S LOVE, Selvije Peqani embraces her youngest son, Ramadan. Selvije’s role in the Peqani family is to take care of the house and children, and she said she wouldn’t trade it for the world.
Selvije Peqani tries to fulfill her children’s wishes for fresh bread. Even though she is saving money by making bread instead of buying it, buying flour and eggs is still pricey.

When Selvije is alone with just her children, she often feels afraid that their sheep will be stolen. At times like these she prays for strength until her husband returns.

Outside of the house, in a shed where the Peqanis keep their livestock, they have sheep and a cow they raise to sell on the market. The family was given a loan from World Vision to buy more sheep to sell on the market. Before they received the loan they could afford only 10 sheep. Now they have more than 40.

Cola is served in the last remaining light from dusk. Due to power shortages there are many blackouts within the city leaving families with no power or water until further notice.
**Roma in the Republic**

Photography by **Kate Veik**

In Fushe Kosove, Tahir Alili’s family gets by. During the ethnic war between Serbians and Albanians, many Roma in Alili’s neighborhood fled the country to seek asylum abroad. Alili and his family did not have enough money to make the move, so instead of moving to a new country, they moved into the abandoned homes.

Alili has eight children and a father to provide for. Everyone lives under the same roof, but no one is employed. Alili wishes he could seek asylum in another country. He saw no hope for his children’s futures in Kosovo, but he has difficulty finding work elsewhere because he is Roma.

**THE FATHER OF** Tahir Alili sits in the main room of their home. He goes out everyday into Pristina to collect metal scraps to help support the family.

**ANITA ALILI**, 9, runs through the entrance of her family’s temporary home in Fushe Kosove.

**TAHIR ALILI** is the head of his Roma household in Fushe Kosove. Alili has eight children and his father living in his home with him. No one is employed.

**EIGHT SIBLINGS** live in the Alili household in Fushe Kosove, Kosovo. No one in the house is employed, but the older children still attend school. “We don’t even have shoes for all of the children,” their father said.

**DURING THE WAR** in 1999, many Roma in the community sought asylum in nearby countries, abandoning their homes. The Roma families who stayed moved into the abandoned homes.
“I want to seek asylum.”

Tahir Alili
THE ALILI FAMILY is living in dire circumstances. They cannot afford enough shoes for all of their children, so their children go barefoot even in winter.

TAHIR ALILI’S WIFE holds her 16-year old’s new born child. The daughter and her husband are getting divorced, and it is custom in their Roma tribe that the child goes to the husband.

TAHIR ALILI’S DAUGHTER warms her face as she leans against a wall in the main room of the family’s house.
Young and Gone
Photography by Vanessa Skocz

Rubble of burned and bombed homes greets visitors at the village of Krusha e Madhe, a bitter reminder of the price of Kosovo’s newfound independence. The civil war between Serbians and ethnic Albanians resulted in 80 destroyed homes and 207 deaths in Krusha, the most casualties among villages attacked from 1998 to 1999. A struggling economy has hamstrung rebuilding the homes destroyed after Krusha was attacked March 26 and 27, 1999. In addition, children have problems getting to school because of a lack of public transportation.

Nine years later, while walking to school through the developing village, Fjolla Gashi faced the unthinkable. A speeding car along the busy roads to school struck Gashi, 13, and three other girls. Fjolla went into a coma and died a week later.

FIDUSHE GASHI, 37, and her mother mourn over the body of Fjolla Gashi. Before the body is transported to the cemetery only the women of the community are allowed to mourn over the body in the home of the deceased.

FJOLLA’S FATHER, Afrim Gashi, 41, and distinguished males from the community of Nagavc transport Fjolla’s casket to the cemetery just outside the community. The men of the community carry the body to the cemetery while the women follow behind.

SCHOOL CHILDREN of the community attend Fjolla’s funeral because she died so young. Her schoolmates carried flower wreaths to place at Fjolla’s gravesite, expressing their love for her.

OUTSIDE THE MOSQUE, the men of the community wait to bless the casket. The have to wait for all of those in the procession to make it to the gravesite before they can say the final prayer.

FAMILY MEMBERS dig the last of the dirt out of the grave in order to place the casket inside.
FJOLLA GASHI was struck by a speeding car while walking to school with her classmates. She immediately fell into a coma and died three days later.

THE WOMEN of the community wait behind the procession until it reaches the cemetery where they will attend the burial and final prayers.
THE MEN of the community say a final prayer before the burial of Fjolla. The prayer is said outside the mosque and then the casket is transported to the gravesite.

FJOLLA’S FUNERAL drew a large crowd because she was young and because of the way in which she died.

AS IS CUSTOM, the men place wooden planks over the casket so that no dirt will come in contact with it.

FJOLLA’S FUNERAL drew a large crowd because she was young and because of the way in which she died.
COMMUNITY LEADER and school director Fadil Dilova aids the school children in placing flower wreaths around Fjolla’s grave. Many of the wreaths express their love for Fjolla and say how much people will miss her.

FJOLLA’S COUSIN says a final heartbreaking goodbye to her young relative, who died a tragic death. Car accidents involving school children are common in Krusha because of the lack of public transportation and the risk of walking on busy streets.
Close to Death
Photography by Clay Lomneth

Refka Ternava lives in the shadow of the power plant where her husband, Mustafa, worked until 2004, when he accidentally severed his leg at the knee and died from the wound. The Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK), the company that owns both power plants and the coal mines in Kosovo, employs many of those living in the small village of Dardhishta. Refka’s son, Basart, a husband and father, is one of them. He works in the same power plant where his father’s fatal accident occurred.

After Mustafa’s death, Basart said he was promised the same managerial position his father had, with the same pay. So far, KEK has not come through. Basart said he now worries about the stability of his job. His contract with KEK was to run until July, and he wasn’t sure if they would keep him on. Both Refka and Basart’s wife worry about him working at the plant; some days he comes home with burns on his hands.

Refka would like to move away from a place where she is reminded daily of her husband’s tragic death. In addition to seeing workers walk to KEK every morning, the house her husband started to build for Basart still stands unfinished in her backyard. With Basart earning 200 euro a month and reparations at 400 euro (half of Mustafa’s salary), there just isn’t enough money.
"He used to say all the time, ‘I’m scared for the workers because it’s unsafe... I know how to take care of myself.’ "

Refka Ternava
REFKA shows off a photograph of her husband, Mustafa.

MUSTAFA’s presence is still felt in the small property Refka owns. His photograph hangs in the living room, and a house he had begun to build for his son Basart’s family is unfinished in their backyard.

BASART with his son, Brahim, lives with Refka while Basart works at the Kosovo’s longest running power plant. After Mustafa’s death, Basart now has to provide for the family.

KOSOVO A is Kosovo’s longest running power plant, and time has not been good to it. With only one working smokestack, the coal power plant provides Kosovo with unreliable power. There are rolling blackouts every day.
ALEXSANDRA RAKIC waves away a stray dog while she and her 8-month-old son, Dmitri, walk outside of their home in Gracanica. The dog belonged to the previous owners of the house. They abandoned him when they moved, and the Rakics have been caring for him since.

GORAT RAKIC holds his 8-month old son, Dmitri.

THE RAKICS HOME in Gracanica, a suburb of Pristina, has been surrounded by Albanians. Serbians and Albanians have a long history of fighting in Kosovo so the Rakics, who are Serbian, feel uncomfortable in their own neighborhood. “I don’t have any friends,” Alexsandra Rakic said. “We have no playground here.”

ALEXSANDRA RAKIC pours coffee in her home in Gracanica, a suburb of Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

ALEXSANDRA RAKIC lives with her husband, Gorat, and 8-month-old son, Dmitri, in Gracanica, a suburb of Pristina. The Rakics are some of the few Serbians left in Kosovo after the ethnic war in 1999 and the recent declaration of independence. They are moving to Serbia soon — for their son Dmitri’s future.

“I don’t want my child to grow up in a place where he does not know what is a school, what is a park, what is a playground,” Alexsandra said. “We have no playground here.”

ALEXSANDRA RAKIC pours coffee in her home in Gracanica, a suburb of Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.
The Rakics are moving back to Serbia though Gorat's father's grave is nearby. And民族身份和家庭在塞尔维亚身份中是重要的部分。The Rakics are moving to Serbia for Dmitri's future. "We have no playground here," Dmitri's mother said.
MOST OF KOSOVO’S unemployed youth have no job experience. So the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP, started the Active Labour Market Youth Programme to enable youth integration into the labor market, serving as a link between young job seekers and employers. This program has given hope to 26-year-old Muhamet and his extended family.

MUHAMET, 26, stands outside the auto shop where he works as a mechanic. His job, arranged by the UNDP’s Active Labour Market Youth Programme, is his first.

A BUCKET hangs from a well in front of Muhamet’s home in Skenderaj, Kosovo. In this three-generation home of seven family members, Muhamet is the only one with a job.

MUHAMET looks underneath a car in an auto shop where he works as a mechanic. Six months ago, Muhamet had no job experience. Now he is gaining the necessary skills to continue working and supporting his family.

OUTSIDE THE AUTO SHOP, a red Albanian flag waves in a cold spring wind while a smaller blue flag, representing Kosovo, waves above. The six stars on Kosovo’s flag represent the nation’s six ethnic groups. Albanians, who make up more than 50 percent of the population, are by far the largest of the six.

SEAL ZEQINI, Muhamet’s grandmother, walks out of her home in Skenderaj. Zeqini’s son, who was kidnapped and beaten by Serbians in 1998, suffered permanent back and rib injuries and can no longer work. Muhamet was beaten as well, along with most men over the age of 15 in the village.

Most of Kosovo’s unemployed youth have no job experience. So the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP, started the Active Labour Market Youth Programme to enable youth integration into the labor market, serving as a link between young job seekers and employers. This program has given hope to 26-year-old Muhamet and his extended family.
Youth and Jobless

FELLOWSHIP MECHANICS teach Muhamet the basics of the job. Since the UNDP pays the salaries of young workers for the first few months, employers are willing to give time to training these young workers. Businesses then offer jobs to the employees they want to keep.

GREASE-LADEN TOOLS hang in the auto shop where Muhamet works.

SELA SITS in her living room, a simple and clean space, as she talks about the horror of watching soldiers take her son and grandson to be beaten. Though her son was left permanently injured and unable to work, she is proud of her family’s survival.

SELA WALKS out of her home and onto the front lawn, wet from the morning’s rain.

SELA’S BROOM, dust pan and shoes sit neatly outside her front door.
Energy and Peril
Photography by Clay Lomneth

Driving on the back roads of Zhilivoda, a small village about 20 minutes north-east of the capital city of Pristina, it would be hard to miss one of Kosovo’s best kept secrets. Illegal mines have sprung up around the area of the village. The Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK) has not yet touched the coal-rich land around the village. To earn an income, some of the villagers have begun digging for the coal themselves, sometimes right in their own backyards.

What makes the mines illegal is the depth. Anything found below two meters legally belongs to the government. The illegal mines are dug as far as a handful of men can dig with a pickaxe.

A spokesman for KEK, Nenad Sinani, said most of the talk about illegal mining in Kosovo is just rumors. He said some people dig a few meters down, but not much more than that.

A miner who would not give his name looks toward the surface to watch the coal being loaded into a tractor.

About 100 feet below the surface, illegal miners pock coal into a basket to be loaded up into a tractor and taken to a local market.

The land in Kosovo is rich with coal, leading the government to see it as a main source of energy and income for villages to mine for themselves.

A handmade pulley system is used to haul the coal from the bottom of the mine up to the surface.

A miner who refused to be identified looks up at his fellow workers.
(On) a larger scale, there’s no illegal mining here in Kosovo.

Nezir Sinani, KEK spokesman
ILLEGAL MINES stand abandoned in a small village north of Kosovo.

HEAVY RAINS earlier in the week have flooded an illegal mine.

WORKERS load coal into a basket to be taken to the surface.

LOADED UP, a tractor pulls away with the day’s coal, which will be sold at a local market for 60 euros, to be split at least four ways.
Resident walks toward the dining hall to join his friends in line. Seuchie Icomushefi walks the quiet halls of Kosovo’s House for the Aged Persons and Without Family Solicitude. “I used to work just for food, for nothing more,” Seuchie said of her job. But now her son works in the United States and sends money home. Seuchie continues to work because she enjoys talking with the residents. “Now I work just for myself because I don’t need the money,” she said.

Nazmi Jemiliu, right, spends his afternoon sitting with a friend on a bench within the compound. Many residents live in the home because their children will not care for them, but Jemiliu has no family alive. “I’m alone in this world,” he said. Jemiliu was married once, but his wife is dead.

One woman sits in a room full of couches, yarn and knitting needles. Many women in the home like to pass their time knitting, chatting and sitting in the sunlight, which shines in through the room’s large windows.

Kosovo’s House for the Aged Persons and Without Family Solicitude is an institution in Pristina for people who have no one to care for them. Some residents have no family alive. Others have no family who care they are alive. Neglecting family is a shameful act in Kosovo. Though residents enjoy warm beds and warm meals, they must fight the tides of loneliness and rejection.

Photography by Karen Schmidt
BIBA PROPS HERSELF next to the cosmetic table in her room. The 56-year-old woman was brought to the home after her parents left her at the hospital when she was born. She has lived there ever since. "I had no father, no mother, no friends my age. I was the only child here. I didn't have anybody," Biba said.

BIBA PROPS HERSELF next to the cosmetic table in her room. The 56-year-old woman was brought to the home after her parents left her at the hospital when she was born. She has lived there ever since. "I had no father, no mother, no friends my age. I was the only child here. I didn't have anybody," Biba said.
Most residents stand with their friends and chat while waiting for the dining hall to open, but others, like this resident, prefer to sit alone.
Health and Energy

Photography by Karen Schmidt

IN NEARLY EVERY HOME in Dardhishte, Kosovo, someone is dying of cancer. The village is located next to the Kosovo A power plant of the Kosovo Energy Corporation, or KEK. Kosovo A spews ash through poorly maintained filters, contaminating the village’s air and water. In a country facing an energy shortage, residents who can’t afford to move have no choice but to stay and suffer.

FERIDE MEXHONI, a woman suffering from cancer caused by the power plant near Dardhishte, Kosovo, holds up X-rays of her lungs. Every day, residents in Dardhishte breathe air that is filled with ash. “The cancer is very painful,” she says.

SHOES AND POTS stored outside become covered in ash. “Everything turns black from the ash, everything is full with ash,” one resident said.

VALSA MEXHONI plays dress-up on her front porch, sliding on a pair of dusty high heels. Residents in Dardhishte say they worry about the health of their children.

RESIDENTS in Dardhishte, Kosovo, live just across the road from this power plant. They breathe air filled with ash and drink water with a high level of phenol, causing cancer in the village to die from cancer.

FERIDE MEXHONI stands in her yard, staring at the sky her house. The village thanks the power plant for large income, residents say. Every day, residents are sickly feeling. Feride and her family can’t afford to move because they can’t sell their house.
Kosovo’s Hope

“I am sick from this environment.”
Feride Mexhoni

FERIDE AND SEMIN MXHONI sit in their home in Dardhishte, Kosovo, where they both suffer from cancer caused by the nearby power plants. Semin has already lost four brothers to cancer, and doctors in the village diagnose one new case of cancer each month.
Kosovo’s Hope

Health and Energy

EVEN BREATHING is painful, Feride Mexhoni said.

FERIDE MEXHONI wipes ash off her windows in Dardhishte, Kosovo. Residents say they are constantly cleaning ash off their homes. Even the red roofs of houses have turned black from the power plant’s emissions.

VALYA MEXHONI lets the sunlight warm her back while she sits on her front porch. Going outside is a treat for this young girl, who must spend most of her time indoors.

PHENOL, a highly toxic chemical from the power plant’s untreated waste, finds its way into streams, eventually contaminating the wells used for drinking water. “We cannot use this water,” Semin said.

THOUGH THE FAMILY has a nice yard and even a swing, they prefer to stay inside due to the amount of dust in the air. “We cannot go out from our houses, it’s a lot of dust,” Semin said.
Doctors in the village have instructed residents not to drink milk from their cows, who are fed with straw that is covered in ash.

Following doctors’ orders, Valsa Mexhoni drinks only store-bought milk. Feride says she worries about the dangers Valsa will face living in Dardhishte. “I am afraid about the youth. What about the children, the next generation?”

Kosovo. A power plant emits ash through its poorly maintained filters, polluting the air those in Dardhishte must breathe. “No one cares how we are living here,” one resident said. “They just care how to produce energy. And we still have energy reductions.”
A VENDOR prepares for a busy day by setting up his fruit and vegetable stand.

ABOUT 43 PERCENT of people in Kosovo are unemployed. Those who are lucky enough to sell in the market in Pristina only make about 200 euro a month, the equivalent of about $280.

A SCOOTER whizzes by a fruit stand as people shop in the market.

BESIM PLAKAJ works to support family and pay for his son to attend university.

YARN hangs outside a sewing shop in Pristina’s market.

EVERY MORNING around 7 a.m., almost 200 sellers begin to set up stands full of flags, fruit, and other various trinkets. Many people believe, and hope, that since Kosovo is independent, more money will come into the market.

Photography by Lindsay DeMarco
BESIM PLAKAJ, 38, sells cigarettes to make ends meet. He started his business immediately after the war in 1999 to support his wife, two sons and himself.

FLOUR is an important cooking ingredient in Kosovo. A VENDOR sweeps outside his store, hoping to bring in more business.

ONE VENDOR supports himself and his wife by selling honey. A DOZEN EGGS costs almost four U.S. dollars.

COFFEE SHOPS and small cafes line the streets in Pristina. A meal in the area near the market typically costs between three and 10 euro.
Conflict in Caglavica
Photography by Lindsay DeMarco

CAGLAVICA is a Serbian enclave that serves as a refuge for about 200 Serbian families living in Kosovo. Many people moved there from Serbia in search of a home. As more Albanians move into the community, the once Serbian majority is becoming a minority.

UERUT LECIC, 51, watches from the shadows as her husband, Dragan, fixes the generator outside.

FIL, a popular Kosovar food, is typically made of dough, cheese and either honey or vegetables.

AFTER A RIOT in Metrovica, Serbia, a UN security force member comes to ensure Caglavica is not experiencing riots.

UERUT LECIC does not feel threatened by her Albanian neighbors. “This neighborhood is safe,” she explains, “We do not worry about the neighbors.”

THE LECIC FAMILY, including Dragan and Uerut, Dragan’s parents, sister-in-law and sister-in-law’s daughter all live in a four-room house. They often experience power outages and depend on two wood stoves for heat.
Dragan (left) and Uerut live in Caglavica, a Serbian community where, as more Albanians move in, Serbians are becoming the minority.

After receiving threats from Albanian coworkers, Dragan, 50, who has worked as a guard in Pristina jail, felt it was best to retire early.

Uerut tells a story of a family whose house was burned by Albanians from Pristina. The fire from the house became so dangerous that many community members in Caglavica huddled together in the one-room schoolhouse in the center of the community.
THREE MEN return to their homes after visiting the only grocery store in the center of the community.

DRAGAN’S PARENTS, Marga, 81, (left), and Tomislav Lecic, 80, moved from Serbia to Kosovo in search of a home. Tomislav found a home after he built the house that the family now lives in.

A SCULPTURE made by Uerut’s daughter sits on top of the family’s television. “It reminds me to think of her while she is at university,” Uerut said.

DRAGAN RAISES chickens so that he does not have to spend money on eggs.
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