

**Josef Martinsen**

**KOSOVO: THE WELLS OF DEATH**  
**NINE WEEKS IN SPRING OF 1999**

**SYPRESSFORLAG**

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Cover picture: Ismail Kasumi bringing bodies out of a well in Kucica

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## PREFACE

This book was written in order to give an account of the discoveries that were made through an aid project led by UNHCR and the Norwegian Church Aid/ACT in Kosovo from July 1999 to February 2000. The aid project was initiated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Pristina. During the summer of 1999, after the Serbian military withdrawal, UNHCR received numerous reports of dead bodies being found in wells all over Kosovo. Seven months of aid work in Kosovo uncovered a series of criminal acts committed against innocent children, men and women, young and old.

I have, as far as possible, tried to clarify what happened to the well victims. I met relatives and neighbours. Many of them spoke frankly about their experiences and gave accounts which provided us with a picture of what must have happened. Others were emotionally unstable or too scared to present their observations concerning the well killings. In some cases, this complicated the work of uncovering what had actually happened. As far as possible, conversations with witnesses are presented in their original form. This has been done in order to make the book as true to the facts as possible. Some necessary considerations have been made in terms of language and presentation, but as few as possible. This way, the reader is able to form his or her own opinion of what took place, just as I did whilst conducting the interviews.

My “advantage” was that I had the process of excavation and verification at the back of my mind. The book provides some information about this, but does not go through the detailed physical discoveries “body for body”. This would probably make tedious reading and people who are particularly interested may refer to the project report. I have also limited the use of pictures of dead bodies, as I believe that an extensive use of such pictures, rather than promoting interest and empathy, activates defence mechanisms and creates distance.

This book will give most of the well victims an identity, a name and a face, that the reader can relate to – not only statistics that say nothing about the human tragedies behind the figures. The pictures have been collected from family and friends: family pictures, passport pictures, wedding pictures, or pictures from newspapers. In Kosovo, it is customary to honour the dead by placing a picture on their grave if possible, and people in Kosovo are interested in the kind of “memorial plaque” such a book represents.

Unfortunately, far too many of the victims in Kosovo will remain only a number in the statistics of the UN and the International Criminal Tribunal in Haag. The relatives of the victims of criminal acts in Kosovo strongly feel that what actually took place during those nine weeks in spring of 1999 needs to be documented and publicised. They would feel that a great injustice had been done if the sufferings and deaths that became the destiny of so many Kosovo Albanians, sufferings that were later exposed as criminal acts, remained unknown to the general public. As time goes by, it has become important for me not to turn my back on my experiences. After tragedies you will often hear people say: “So much happened, it is difficult to focus on specific cases”. But perhaps we have to – while acknowledging that we can neither document nor absorb all the evil in the world – focus on a few cases. If so, we should look to the cases that can be documented. The well killings themselves, and in many cases the rapes and mutilations that were committed along with them, deserve our attention because they represent such clear examples of violations of international law. In my opinion, these cases must be included in the process of reconciliation that must take place between the Kosovo Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians sooner or later.

This book also provides the reader with an understanding of the different types of projects that aid organisations take on. The Norwegian Church Aid felt an obligation and contributed towards carrying out this special project when the international community asked

for our help. UNHCR, which financed the project, pulled out after five and a half months for financial reasons. But the Norwegian Church Aid/ACT International continued financing the project for about three months, as there were still wells to clear.

A special thanks to the Rexhe Kukalaj family in Decani and the Mazllom Morina family in Gjakova. This project would not have been possible without their months of help and support.

Unless otherwise stated, pictures have been borrowed from the victims' families.

## **THE KOTLINE MASSACRE**

On the morning of Monday 30 August 1999, I was summoned to a meeting with UNHCR in Pristina. Reportedly, dead bodies had been discovered in two wells in Kotle, a village in the municipality of Kacanik in the south of Kosovo. Situated on the mountainside, at 1000 metres above sea level, Kotle was hard to reach. We were told that three or four other aid organisations had visited the area, among them an American engineering unit, but nothing had been done in order to help the villagers. The ICTY suggested that there were doubts regarding the authenticity of these discoveries, as the wells were supposedly destroyed during the war and were situated in what seemed an unlikely place. In other words: were we dealing with unfounded rumours? The next day my interpreter, Margita Kukalaj, and I travelled to Kotle for a closer inspection. Our trip to Kacanik started off well, but after leaving the main road we had trouble crossing a river, as the bridge had been destroyed during the war. We had to search for a while before finding a spot where our four-wheel drive could cross.

The road leading to Kotle was narrow, twisting and turning its way up the steep mountainside. After about half an hour's drive, we reached a hilltop which offered a magnificent view. The village lay below us, beautiful and serene, almost surrounded by mountains. As we came closer, the serenity of the scene was shattered; the village houses had been left in ruins.

The nightmare started at seven-thirty in the morning of Wednesday 24 March 1999. It came as a complete surprise. Those who remained in Kotle were shocked when the Serbian military approached their sleepy little mountain village in tanks and armoured vehicles.

Kotle mainly consists of old brick houses crumpling around a mosque in the southwest of Kosovo. The border areas Tetove in the west and Blace in the south are close by. Everything else however, is "far away": the marketing centre, the doctor and the dentist. Even the closest shop is situated between twenty and thirty kilometres away. Clinging to the green mountainside, Kotle is as scenic as a postcard – completely off the beaten track. The only access road for cars is a gravel road twisting and turning through several hairpin bends. From the west, there is another access road, but this is significantly longer. It is incredible that the Serbian military managed to find the village at all, but they did. Not once, but twice. The military had visited Kotle before.



The hill in the background is called Shollani. Two wells are situated here.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

Two weeks earlier, on 9 March 1999, Serbian military forces had been to Kotle. They had shot at the houses and some had been burnt to the ground. Two villagers – both adult men – were shot and killed. The villagers had however been warned off and most of them had managed to escape. So when the troublemakers left the village, people returned to their homes, feeling fairly confident that they were no longer in danger. As a result the villagers were unprepared for the next attack. The Serbian military and/or the police obviously knew that the villagers in Kotle had not gone to other areas of Kosovo, or to Macedonia or Albania, but had returned to their homes. Otherwise there would hardly be any reason to attack once again.

But the soldiers did attack. The Serbian military forces were accompanied by Serbian special police forces and a paramilitary unit.

They came from four sides. The largest contingent was loaded off the train that had stopped outside a station area in the valley. The three other units made their way from the neighbouring villages on foot and in tanks. Early in the morning, the Serbian forces left the railway track and made their way up the winding, narrow road to Kotle. As they arrived, they were joined by forces from the west, the east and the north; these forces had departed from the main road to Tetovo. The village was practically surrounded before its inhabitants had a chance to wake up. Many had barely started their daily chores when breakfast and errands were interrupted. The paramilitaries wore hoods that covered their heads, leaving only holes for their mouths and eyes. Several of them appeared to be drugged.

There was little to suggest that Kotle was about to become the scene of one of the most atrocious assaults against civilians during the Serbian offensive in spring of 1999. On this day however, the Serbian authorities declared a state of emergency in Serbia and in the former Yugoslavia. Later in the day, at about seven o' clock in the evening, NATO dropped their first bombs; the Milosevic regime must have been informed, as they replied by waging war. According to the Geneva Convention, the Serbian military was now fully responsible for what went on in Kosovo. The military in Kosovo cooperated with special police forces and paramilitary groups; Serbian forces used this type of organisation in the war in Bosnia, and General Nebojsa Pavkovic, commander-in-chief of the Kosovo area, used it as he took charge in Kosovo.

Some of the men, thirty-five in total, were gathered in the upper part of the village. They were kicked and beaten. After a while they were ordered half a kilometre up a wooded mountainside. "Run!" one of the soldiers said. "Run as fast as you can," – and those who could, did. The men - old as well as young - ran, walked and stumbled their way up the Shollani hillside until they reached two wells. These wells were empty as an attempt to drill for water had failed. During their march towards the two wells, Vebi Kuqi and twelve other men managed to escape. For the twelve fittest – or luckiest – it was possible to escape in the heavily wooded and steep mountainside. Vebi Kuqi reports:

*"Bullets were flying during our escape; machineguns were fired from armoured vehicles in the village. At the top of the hill, three other men and I lay down on the ground to catch our breaths as the running and crawling through the thicket had left us exhausted. We heard and soon managed to work out that the Serbs who were following us were approaching, and we were forced to take cover on the other side of the hill top. We were hiding inside a thicket in a natural depression in the terrain. They came close to finding us several times. They were constantly shooting at the area where we were hiding, and sometimes the bullets were so close to our heads that it felt as though our hair was getting burnt. As we were hiding behind the hill top, the Serbs did not appear to see us. Yet a bullet hit my right hand. We stayed there for several hours, listening. We were laying about 200-250 metres away from where the rest of the group was being held captive. After a while we heard terrible noises, screaming and shooting.*

*From ten-thirty in the morning till six o'clock in the evening, we laid there listening. What I was thinking? I thought it was my final hour, of course. That this was it, not only for the people we had heard screaming, but for all of us. In the end I was not even scared, I had accepted what I believed to be my destiny. We could not see much of what was going on, but we heard this awful screaming and yelling coming from the group being held captive by the Serbs. At about six o'clock we heard an explosion, then silence.*

*We heard nothing more from the well area where the Serbs had kept our family members and neighbours. After the Serbian forces had abandoned Kotine at about seven or eight o'clock in the evening, we made our way from the top of Shollani towards the wells. By the wells we found clear indications of violent activity. Pieces of clothing lay scattered around. On the ground we found bloody sticks with nails in one end; they had obviously been used for hitting people. These sticks were later removed by some Americans visiting the scene. Where the wells used to be, there were now only two small depressions in the ground. The wells had been destroyed by explosives. Not until eleven o'clock at night did we dare to approach the village."*





The school and public health centre in Kotle.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

Meanwhile, the Serbs were gathering the rest of the people in the village. They separated women, children and men into two groups. Women and children were loaded onto lorries. A fifteen-year-old boy escaped and ran to the top of the mosque and observed the harassment from there. Three men were killed in the village, and the few buildings that had not yet been destroyed, were now going up in flames. A total of twenty-five people were killed that day, twenty-two of them vanished “without a trace”. Although - without a trace? Pieces of clothing and small objects lay scattered around the wells and were hanging from the trees. Those who survived were taken to the city of Kacanik. The men were sent to Ferizaj where they were held as prisoners for two days and subjected to harsh interrogations. They were then released and told to go to Macedonia.

In Brussels, at about eight o’ clock in the evening the same day, Javier Solana, NATO Secretary General, was holding a press conference. General Clark had informed Mr Solana that NATO had started its air attacks against targets in the Federal Yugoslavian Republic. Mr Solana said that the international community had tried its best to achieve a peaceful solution for Kosovo, but without results. On this Wednesday evening, there was hectic activity in the SHAPE headquarters in Mons, where Wesley K. Clark, General Commander-in-Chief, and his staff were residing. The first bomb attacks against Kosovo and Serbia were implemented. The level of stress was probably well above normal. This was an historic day for NATO. For the very first time in the organisation’s history, NATO was attacking another European state, which was also a former communist state. One of the purposes of this attack was to strike the Serbian ground forces, which were terrorising the civilian population in Kosovo. According to NATO, the attack was supported by UN resolution 1199, which was passed on 23 September 1998.

However, the hunt for Serbian forces harassing civilians was stopped by the weather. Due to low clouds and rain, the NATO planes could not follow Milosevic's ground forces, and NATO did not have a plan B. Serbian intelligence was probably aware of this. The military and paramilitary units could continue terrorising the Kosovo Albanian population, without risking any interference on the ground. It is evident from their actions that the Serbian intelligence service did very well when acquiring information about NATO's plans.

In the spring and autumn of 2001, I returned to Kosovo to do research for book and a film. In November, I paid Kotleline another visit accompanied by my interpreter Benon Morina. Benon is the older brother of Albert Morina, who provided the well-clearing project with diving services. I managed to gather five of the people who experienced the nightmare in the morning of 24 March 1999. This is their story:

*"My name is Hava Kuqi (aged 84) and I live in Kotleline. On 24 March 1999, military forces surrounded the village. They sent the women and children to the town centre and held us there. Later the soldiers gathered some of our men and forced them up the mountainside. A number of soldiers surrounded the village. I told the women that this was the end for us. My son was one of the twenty-two men who were killed and thrown into the two wells on the mountainside. Three of them were my nephews. Military and paramilitary, as well as police forces participated in the attack. The youngest victim was a sixteen-year-old boy."*

*"My name is Qelik Loku (aged 15) and I live in Kotleline. On 24 March 1999, our village was surrounded by Serbian soldiers. I saw numerous soldiers coming from the old part of our village. I was at home with my family when the soldiers came to our house, I was hiding in the basement. The soldiers took the other members of my family to the centre of the village. I kept hiding in the basement until three o' clock in the afternoon. When I went outside, I could see some of my friends from a distance. I walked up to the mosque ruins. I went inside and up the tower; there is a flight of stairs inside. From the top of the minaret I could see the Serbs checking all the houses. I saw some people being beaten and the Serbs then took these people up to the mountainside near the village. I stayed hiding in the mosque ruins until the next morning. At six o' clock, I went outside and met some of the other villagers that were still in Kotleline."*

*"My name is Jeton Kuqi (aged 24) and I live in Kotleline. On 24 March, before NATO started bombing, Serbian military forces arrived. When the Serbs came to the village, I was up on the mountainside, not far from the two wells. The Serbs started shooting at me, so I was forced to keep climbing towards the top of the mountain to seek shelter. From there I could see two armoured vehicles and a tank. They shot at two women and a man. I could also see a number of soldiers from my hideout, among them eleven men wearing hoods that covered their faces. I stayed at my hideout until four o' clock in the afternoon. I then tried to make my way down towards the two wells, but the Serbs immediately started shooting at me. I remained in hiding until ten o' clock in the morning the next day. While I was hiding, I heard a powerful explosion. As I walked to the village the next day, I met Hasis and Nebib. We saw a large group of people from the village walking towards the two wells. As we approached the wells, we saw several signs of violent activity; bloody sticks and some clothes. I found my brother's watch."*

*They killed twenty-seven of the villagers, twenty-two of them were thrown into the wells on the mountainside near the village."*

*“My name is Hasibe Kuqi (aged 50) and I live in Kotle. The Serbs came and took my husband. He was badly beaten and our seven-year-old daughter witnessed the attack and became terrified. When I tried to reason with the soldiers they hit me as well.”*

*“My name is Ismet Loku (aged 53) and I live in Kotle. We were surrounded in our village, captured and beaten by the Serbs. They then forced us to walk towards Ferizaj. Just outside the village we were separated from the women and children and imprisoned in Ferizaj, where we were held for forty-eight hours. Some of the men wore hoods that covered their faces and they spoke Albanian. We were constantly being beaten in prison. When they released us we walked to Macedonia. One of my sons was killed in our village and thrown into one of the wells. He was only twenty-three- years- old.”*

We drove slowly down to a central part of the village. A crowd of curious adults and suspicious children had gathered there. Some of them smiled cautiously. After a quick chat between the children and the interpreter, we were escorted to a house. The house belonged to one of the local teachers. The atmosphere was tense and we noticed that people seemed nervous. No wonder. Five months earlier, about five per cent of the villagers were massacred in the course of a single afternoon.

Some of the villagers gathered at some distance from the teacher's house and people were rather standoffish at first. We told them that we had come to look at the two wells. Nexhat Loku, the teacher, lit up and gave us a short account of what had happened. He went on to tell us where to find the wells. Furthermore, he said that three other groups had been there to help them, but nothing had been done so far. Loku and the other men present seemed to fear that once again there would be much talk and little action. I discussed the issue with Margita and we soon agreed that we had no reason to doubt their stories. Through the interpreter I told them that their village would receive all the help necessary to bring out the bodies.

Accompanied by the temporary leaders of the village, we made our way to the place where the wells were situated. It took us about fifteen minutes to walk and partly climb to the particular spot on the mountainside. The villagers later told me that the wells were part of an unsuccessful water supply project. As we approached, we all sensed that something bad had happened in the area. There was something in the air. Maybe it was the thought of the twenty-two dead and abused people underneath us that made us feel so uncomfortable. The mountainside was quite steep. We observed two depressions where the destroyed wells had been. Pieces of clothing and shoes lay scattered around; there were footprints on the ground and rags in trees and bushes. There had obviously happened things here that we could not see evidence of anywhere else on the mountainside. The whole thing seemed eerie.

It took us half an hour to survey the well area before returning to the village.

Nexhat Loku invited us in. Traditional strong coffee was served and we discussed what the best way to dig the bodies out from the wells would be. This discussion concerning the practicalities of the project had already started up in the mountainside. The atmosphere appeared to have improved considerably. In collaboration with Nexhat Loku and Vehbi Kuqi representing the villagers, we made a plan to dig our way horizontally into the mountainside at approximately ten to twelve metres below the top of the wells. This meant we would enter at the bottom of the wells and would be able to bring out the dead bodies more easily. For the very first time since arriving in Kotle, we could see a hint of optimism in Nexhat and Vebhi. My problem however, was that our regular well-clearing team was occupied with a dozen wells in the Decani area. Moreover, this type of digging work was not really their job. We discussed the possibility of having people from the village do the work. Nexhat and Vebhi were more than willing to dig out their own dead. They had in fact been waiting for an

opportunity to do so since the UN took charge in Kosovo. However, UNMIK and ICTY had issued a standing order to prohibit local people from opening possible mass graves without their permission. This order was intended to protect any evidence of criminal acts and to make sure that Kosovo Albanians did not fabricate evidence against Serbs. The excavation of mass graves was to be done in an objective and judicially valid way, in order to avoid future accusations and formations of myths.

We were faced with yet another problem; Mostly all the tools and digging equipment in Kotleline had been destroyed during the Serb attacks. We made a list of the necessary tools: pickaxes, spades, crowbars, wheelbarrows, materials to build defences against landslides and hardy shoes, gloves and so on.



The excavation of a well in Kotleline.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)





The excavation of a well in Kotle 2.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

Moreover, I offered to pay the personnel in the work group 50 German marks a day and to provide them with food and drinks. UNHCR had granted money for our work in Kosovo, so it was only fair that those who did the work were paid for it. A salary of 50 German marks a day may seem small, but compared to the average monthly salary of 250 German marks, the pay was good. Furthermore, I was also responsible for ensuring that our activity did not make prices shoot up.

After four hours in Kotle we had made a plan for the excavation. My own experience as a former pioneer section leader in the Norwegian army some thirty-five years ago came in very handy doing this type of work. The next step would be to obtain ICTY's approval for the project. At nine o'clock the same evening, Tuesday 31 August, I met with Tom Parker, an ICTY investigator, to discuss our plan for Kotle. We both agreed that, under our supervision, villagers could do the digging work. They were to stop digging when they reached the bodies. An Austrian forensic team and Malvin Dagsland, a Norwegian police investigator, were to carry out the forensic investigations and be responsible for documenting finds on site. During the next couple of days, purchases were made and transportation to

Kotline was organised. Our real expenses when using local workers to do the job was about 60,000 Norwegian kroner (about 9,000 US dollars).

Prior to our arrival in Kotline, an American military unit had considered helping the villagers dig up the wells in Kotline. The unit made a plan for the work and an estimate of the expected costs, which they presented to the heads of the American military forces in Kosovo. The American military stopped the project, apparently due to high expenses. It was said to involve work in an inaccessible area and the American division had estimated the costs to be about 200,000 US dollars.

The villagers had to use a tractor to collect their equipment by the main road. The bridge to Kotline had been destroyed and the tractor had to find a suitable place to cross the river. The excavation started on 3 September. The following week, the workers were digging as fast as they could.



Austrian forensic team working near Kotline.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

In Kotline, the excitement rose as the work group dug deeper into the mountainside. The summer of 1999 was very hot and the temperature did not start falling until September, so we needed all the water we could bring from Kacanik. On Friday 10 September, we saw the first sign of bodies in one of the wells. The work was stopped immediately and the area closed off. We notified the ICTY who took charge of the excavation. The Austrian forensic team and Malvin Dagsland, the Norwegian investigator, were sent to Kotline.

The difficult job of organising the identification of bodies followed. The equipment necessary to document and register them was ready. Relatives stayed close so the identification could be made as quickly as possible. The bodies were brought out, one by one. All the dead bodies were remarkably well preserved, considering the fact that they had been buried for more than five and a half months. The explanation was probably that the explosion had created a vacuum in the wells, so that the normal process of decomposition was slowed down due to the lack of oxygen. This made it easier for relatives to identify the bodies, even though the bodies had been severely battered and some bodies had no head.

I especially remember the father who found his two sons.





One of the twenty-two bodies we found in the two wells. The body had been in the well for five and a half months. (Photo: Josef Martinsen)

It was as though a sad smile passed over his face – as strange as it may sound. He had been “given back” his sons. The uncertainty was gone. His sons could now be buried near their home. He could start grieving.

This was without a doubt the worst and most extensive case of well killings we had seen so far during our work in Kosovo.

In the middle of this process of digging out the bodies, other issues arose. A representative of the former KLA group in Kacanik had arrived in Kotle, claiming that in order to secure any evidence of criminal acts, a pathologist would have to be present when the bodies were taken out. It took some time to convince him that the ICTY had given this job to the Austrian forensic team and the Norwegian investigator and that the forensic team would secure the necessary evidence. The murders of these twenty-two men have been included in the ICTY’s indictment against former president Milosevic and four other high-ranking officials in Serbia. (One of the four, Vlatko Stojiljkovic, recently died of illness in Serbia.)

The following day, Saturday 11 September, I received a phone call from UNHCR requesting me to help a group called “United States Presidential Committee / Mental Health”. The group wanted to visit Kotle on account of the well killings and other mutilations that had taken place there.

At nine o’ clock in the morning on the Sunday, I left Pristina and went to Kotle as host of The Presidential Committee / Mental Health. The Committee surveyed the wells on the mountainside before speaking to some of the villagers. We returned to Pristina late in the afternoon and Margita and I could relax for the rest of the day. Another day searching for well victims would start Monday morning at eight o’ clock.

Anica Mikuskos, a psychologist from Bosnia, later returned to Kosovo and organised a seminar on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for all the primary school teachers in Kotle.



The US Presidential Committee/Mental Health accompanied by young and old people in Kotleline.

(Photo: Sadri Hadergjonaj)

Leader of the group: Executive Director/National Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder/Matthew J. Friedman.

Front row, from the left: Zenel Loku; Fatmire Loku; Nadire Loku; Mexhit Kuqi; Semie Kuqi; Habil Kuqi.

Back row, from the left: Nuhi Loku; the Committee's interpreter (name not known); a participant at the Committee (name not known); Vebhi Kuqi; Margita Kukalaj (my interpreter and deputy); Nexhat Loku; Rambiz Kuqi; Besar Kuqi.

**The following people were found in the two wells:**



Xhemal Nuridin Kuqi, born 3 November 1977 in Kotleline. He completed primary and secondary school in Kotleline with distinction. Xhemal could not afford to continue his education. He married Ajete Kuqi in the autumn of 1998, only six months before he was killed.





Ismet Zenel Loku, born 28 January 1978 in Kotle. He was orphaned at the age of seven. Ismet completed primary and secondary school with distinction, but money problems stopped him from continuing his education. Ismet took on odd jobs in the village and the nearby area. In the autumn of 1998 and spring of 1999, during the Serb offensive against the civilian population, he frequently volunteered to collect supplies for the village, which at that time was isolated by Serbian units.



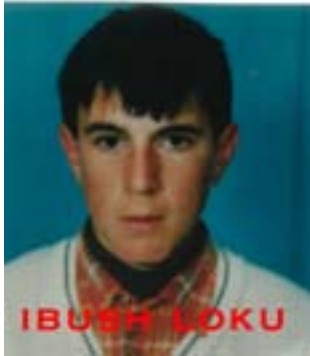
Ismail N. Loku, born in 1971 in Kotle. Ismail was the son of Nazmi and Qamile. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Ismail and his brother Agim were killed in Kotle.



Vesel R. Vlasi, born 14 January 1944 in Kotle. He completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. Difficult living conditions forced Vesel to start working at an early age. He worked in Germany for a period of time. Vesel returned to Kotle, got married and worked at the primary school in the village.



Neshat F. Rexha, born 19 January 1976 in Ivaje. Completed primary and secondary school in Ivaje and upper secondary school in Kacanik. He was a university student at the Faculty of Law and was visiting his uncle in Kotle when he was killed.



Ibush R. Loku, born 19 November 1979 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. Was unable to continue his education due to the family's economy and took on odd jobs. Ibush and Naser, his three years younger brother, were killed and thrown into the wells.



Naser F. Loku, born 15 December 1975 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. The family's economy did not allow Naser to continue his education.



Danush Idriz Kuqi, born 11 October 1982 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Danush was a skilled pupil, but due to unfortunate circumstances he could not complete his education. He was killed along with his father, Idriz, in Kotle.



Sabri Loku, born 20 May 1971 in Kotle. He completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. Sabri then went on to work as a farmer in the village.



Mahi Sh Loku, born 15 April 1971 in Kotle. He completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. He then worked as a teacher in “Naim Frashëri”, the primary school in Kotle.



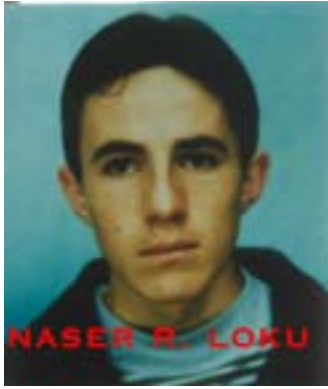
Sherif Sulejman Kuqi, born in 1971 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. No further education due to the family’s economy. Sherif got married and became the father of a child merely 14 days before he was killed.



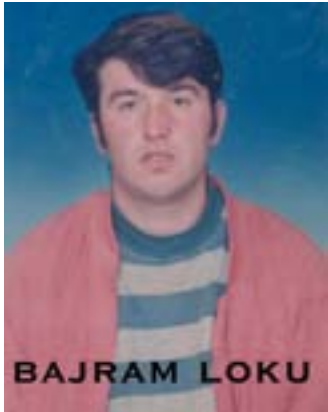
Nexhadi Ferid Kuqi, born 1968 in Kotle. He completed primary and secondary school in Kotle, but the family’s economy did not allow him to continue his education. He was married and the father of two sons, Nesim (aged 4) and Zelqifi (aged 2). His wife was pregnant when Nexhadi was killed; she later gave birth to a son and gave him her husband’s name, Nexhadi.



Izija Izmet Loku, born 22 February 1976 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle. Izija was unable to continue his education due to the family’s economy.



Naser R. Loku, born 3 March 1982 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Naser was killed along with his brother Ibush.



Bajram Loku, born 5 March 1971 in Kotle. He was the son of Qanija and Hakija. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Bajram started working on a farm in Kotle and could not afford to continue his studies. Bajram was married.



Agim N. Loku, born 1968 in Kotle. He was the son of Nazmi and Qamile. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Agim was unemployed because of the Serbian regime in Kosovo. Agim was killed along with his brother, Ismail, on 24 March 1999 in Kotle.



Cen Loku, born 15 October 1964 as the son of Ekrem and Sadija. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Studied biology for a year at the University of Pristina, then worked as a farmer for a year. Cen went on to study at the Teacher Training College in Gjakova. From 1990 to 1999, Cen worked as a teacher at the primary school in Kotle. He was married and the father of three children.



Sali Bajram Vlashi, born 30 March 1957 in Kotle. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Sali was married and the father of two children.



Minah Baki Kuqi, born 14 May 1982 in Kotle. He had completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and was attending upper secondary school at the time he was killed. He had three brothers and three sisters. Minah was considered to be an excellent student.



Adnan Refik Loku, born 1 June 1978. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Adnan lost his father at the age of nine. His mother's economy did not allow him to continue his studies.



Sabit Garip Loku, born 1 October 1979. He was the son of Hanifja and Garik. Completed primary and secondary school in Kotle and upper secondary school in Kacanik. Sabit was an intellectual man and went on to study at the Faculty of Law in Pristina, where he excelled. Sabit wrote poems throughout his young life, but most of his literary works were destroyed during the Serb attacks on Kotle. A small portion of his poems was saved, but has not been published. Sabit, his father Garip and two of Sabit's cousins, Adnan and Nexhat, were killed on 24 March 1999 in Kotle.





Garip Ilaz Loku, born 20 April 1952 in Kotle. He worked as a carpenter and had seven children. He was killed along with his son and two nephews. The family lost what little they had during the Serb attacks on Kotle.

In the course of the Serb attacks in Kotle on 24 March 1999, three other men were battered and shot to death in the village itself and one lost his life outside Kotle. These were:

Zymer Xh. Loku, born 1932  
Idriz Xh. Kuci, born 1944  
Sherif S. Loku, born 1957  
Ismail I. Kuci, born 1978

During the first Serb attacks in Kotle on 9 March 1999, two other men were battered and shot to death in the village itself. A third man was killed on 9 April in Koshare. These were:

Milaim (Gani) Loku, born 1965 in Kotle  
Emerllah (Mexhit) Kuqi, born 1976 in Kotle  
Abush (Liman) Loku, born 1978 in Kotle



The funeral in  
Kotline.  
(Photo: Margita  
Kukalaj)



The funeral in Kotline 2.

# KOSOVO - THE REASONS BEHIND THE CONFLICT

## THE COUNTRY

It might be useful to know Kosovo's geographical location in the Yugoslavia that existed before the wars in the 1990s. Kosovo, with a predominately Albanian population, and Vojvodina, with a large Hungarian population, were autonomous provinces within Serbia with great degrees of self-government.

Place names may cause confusion. On most maps of the Kosovo province, the names are in Serbian, as Serbo-Croatian has been the administrative language for the past century. Meanwhile, the majority of the population has Albanian as their mother tongue and prefers to use their Albanian place names. Throughout the centuries the population has had to relate to at least two languages and two alphabets being in use simultaneously, namely the Cyrillic and the Latin. In the years between 1500 and 1912, Turkish was the official administrative language, being replaced by Serbo-Croatian from 1912 to 1941. Educational institutions taught students these two languages and little or no teaching was conducted in Albanian. In 1946, the first Albanian textbook for adults was published and one for children was published the following year. Illiteracy was common among Kosovo Albanians long after The Second World War.

The Western part of Kosovo has diverse scenery with very fertile soil. In the west, in the municipality of Rahovec, large areas stretching down to Prizren are covered with vines. Kosovo has always produced excellent wine, some say from as far back as Roman times. In the Northern and Eastern parts of Kosovo, around the Mitrovica area, mining has existed for centuries. Especially the silver mines were profitable. Farming is poorly organized and has not developed much over the years. The government owns twelve per cent of the cultivatable land and eighty-eight per cent is privately owned. It is not run rationally and cannot compete with agricultural products from Macedonia and Serbia. The farms are small, ranging from about two and a half to five acres up to the largest of thirty-seven to forty-two acres, but few are that big. The government also own sixty per cent of the forest areas, whilst forty per cent is privately owned. The government has for the most part focused on heavy industries like mining, chemical and power production.

The most important cities are (estimate from Bureau of Statistics in Belgrade, 1991, since the Albanians boycotted the census):

<i>Albanian name</i>	<i>Serbian name</i>	
Prishtina	Priština	Population about 108,000
Prizren	Prizren	Population about 62,000
Peja	Peć	Population about 55,000
Mitrovica	Mitrovica	Population about 53,000
Gjakova	Đakovica	Population about 42,000
Ferizaj	Uroševac	
Fushë Kosovë	Kosovo Polje	
Skenderaj	Srbica	
Rahovec	Orahovac	
Vushtrri	Vučitrn	



The borders of today's Kosovo were determined when the autonomous province Kosovo was founded after The Second World War. In many ways the borders on the map naturally correspond to the physical conditions in the region. In the south and west, Kosovo is surrounded by hills and mountains, which resemble those of Northern Norway. Some are over 2500 metres high. A plateau is situated to the east and north of these mountains.

In order to get to the border station in Blace, we chose a country road leading there from the airport in Skopje. (Sometimes we had to go through the airport in Thessaloniki in Northern Greece, because the airport in Skopje had reached its capacity due to relief and military shipments.) Both Macedonia and Greece claim the right to use the name Macedonia and the Northern part of Greece is actually called Macedonia. On Greek traffic signs the name of the capital, Skopje, is consistently used instead of the Republic of Macedonia. Greeks looked perplexed or actually became angry if someone talked about Macedonia as something other than the Northern part of Greece – a reminder to outsiders that the threshold for conflict here in south-eastern Europe can be very low.

By the border station in Blace in July 1999, convoys carrying civilian and military (KFOR) equipment, people from relief –agencies and regular civilians, were queuing endlessly in both directions. From Blace the road is leading north to a large ravine towards the town of Kaccanic. The road runs parallel to a railway track passing Kaccanic towards Kosovo. Kaccanic is the most south-easterly municipality in Kosovo (out of thirty municipalities and 1409 villages) and consists of forty-four villages.



Map of Kosovo

One of these villages is Kotle, where the horrible killings were uncovered. The trip from the border and to Pristina, which is situated about 450 metres above sea level, usually took about two hours if there was little traffic. From Pristina, it was a one and a half hours drive to the northernmost frontier post towards Serbia. The trip from the easternmost frontier post, towards Serbia, in the municipality of Gjilan, and to the westernmost frontier post towards Montenegro in the municipality of Peja, is about the same as going from south to north. It makes the map of Kosovo look like a Christmas star with four points.

You get some idea of how high above sea level Kosovo is when you learn that rivers starting here flow into three oceans: the Aegean Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. From north to south Kosovo is divided by a range of hills. The eastern part is called Kósovo (Serbian form) and the western part is called Metohija (a Serbian name). For a long time the official name was both Kosovo and Metohija. Later, the name Metohija was removed after strong pressure from the Kosovo Albanians, who use the name Dukagjini on the western part of Kosovo and Kosóva, with an a, for the whole province.

## HISTORY

The name Dukagjini is also the name of a famous family with a long line of ancestors. Lek Dukagjini, who is closely connected to the law of *Kanun*, came from this family. Throughout the centuries, *Kanun* was passed on orally and was not written down until the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Catholic priest Shtjefën Gjecov. Lek Dukagjini lived around the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is maybe, next to Skanderbeg, the Kosovo Albanian's biggest hero. Skanderbeg (Skënderbeu in Albanian) was a Turkish name given to a prominent Albanian called Gjergj Kastriot. His family originated in Western Kosovo and owned large areas in Northern and Central Albania. His father was forced to support the Turks (the Ottoman Empire) and had to send his son as a hostage to the Ottoman leader, where he received his training. He later declared himself a Christian (Catholic) and fought in the Albanian forces against the Turks for around twenty-five years. Skanderbeg died in 1468 (Malcolm 1998:88).

The *Kanun* has always been very important to the Albanians and gives an understanding of early Albanian way of life and sense of justice. The basic rules can be summed up as follows: personal honour, equality for everyone, freedom to run your business within the law and without interference from anyone and finally, a word of honour, or "besë", which was thought to be inviolable. Breaching the "besë", or any other violation of a man's honour, could only be compensated for by bloodshed – or a magnanimous pardon from the offended party. Calling a man a liar in front of others, or offending a man's wife, was thought to be clear violations of someone's honour. The *Kanun* has been in use up until modern times, especially in the western part of today's Kosovo, in the highlands and the mountains, where blood vengeance has been a tradition.

A Serbian medieval state existed in the Balkans for about 200 years, from about 1185 to 1389, and had its main centre further to the east than today's Serbia. Stefan Nemanja founded and consolidated this state. In 1197 he left his throne to his son in order to become a monk and his sons later had him canonized. His son Sava received a special permission from the archbishop of Constantinople to found his own Orthodox church - the Serbian Orthodox Church - and a mix of secular and sacred power characterized the Nemanjan dynasty ever since. During this period, when Serbs were in majority in Kosovo, three large churches surrounded by monasteries were built, namely Gračanica, Peć and Dečani. This golden age has later achieved an almost mythical status in Serbian history and was often used in Serbian political propaganda. The golden age ended with the famous Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1398,

when Prince Lazar and his army (that supposedly included a contingent of Albanians), were defeated by the Turks. This battle has later inspired numerous stories, paintings, interpretations and myths.

From 1389 to 1804, the Turks controlled large areas of what was later to become Yugoslavia. A small version of Serbia that existed from 1815, expanded in 1878 and was internationally acknowledged, but did not include Kosovo. In 1912, during the first Balkan War, the Serbs and Montenegrins defeated the Turks and gained power over Kosovo. A year later, Serbia and Montenegro divided Kosovo as part of their agreement to establish the state of Albania. According to a census in 1910, there were 742,000 Albanians in Kosovo. This made up about sixty per cent of the population (Mønnesland 1999:149). The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which included Kosovo, was founded in 1918, with the Serbs as the leading power.

In 1937, Vasa Čubrilović, the famous Serbian academic and politician, compiled a memorandum, which turned out to be a detailed plan for the solution of the so-called “Albanian problem”. The plan was to push the Kosovo Albanians out of Kosovo by using deportation and terror (Mønnesland 1999:366). The plan was presented to the communists in 1944, who thought it was too Serbian-nationalistic, and not in accordance with the communist idea of equality and brotherhood between all ethnicities in Yugoslavia. In Serbia, it has been common to look at the Albanian population in Kosovo as a problem. The reason for this may be that Kosovo Albanians have not adapted as well as other minorities under Serbian influence.

There might be several reasons for the unsuccessful assimilation in Kosovo. First of all, the majority of the population in the area has been Albanian, a majority that has increased since 1945. Also, Serbian and Albanian belong to two different language branches. Another point to mention is that there has been a relatively close relationship with Albania, involving both trading and family relations (although Enver Hoxha’s communist rule made this difficult). The fact that the society was divided into clans, governed by their own rules and honour codes (*Kanun*) also plays in. The interdependence with the rest of the Albanian speaking population in the Balkans has been a strong identity factor, too.

However, the few people who went into higher education learned both Turkish and Serbian during the changing regimes. Today, most people over the age of thirty can communicate in Serbian, and many also know Turkish.

The first law to govern Kosovo Albanians’ citizenship was implemented in 1928 with the national Act of Yugoslavia, but people did not gain all their rights as Yugoslavian citizens until 1974. The most important right that they were denied was the freedom to use the Albanian language, even though Yugoslavia signed an international agreement to preserve the rights of minorities in 1919. These rights included, among other things, the right to receive basic schooling in one’s own language in areas of the country where a substantial part of the population had another language than the official one. It took a long time for the Kosovo Albanians to be allowed to use their mother tongue in Kosovo. Other places in Yugoslavia, Turks, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks and Russians were allowed to publish newspapers in their own language as early as in 1930.

## **KOSOVO UNDER PRESIDENT TITO**

After the war in 1945, the Communists took over the governing of Yugoslavia. Kosovo was named an autonomous province and eventually got a high degree of self-government, especially during 1974-89.

Along with the Party and the political institutions, there was a third power holding Yugoslavia together - the "Yugoslav People's Army" (JNA). In the post-war years, Yugoslavia was known for its weapon industry and strong army. This was necessary after the break from Stalin in 1948. But both the army and the weapon industry depended heavily on the Soviet Union. JNA originated from Tito's partisan army. "The first Proletarian Brigade", which became the model for the Yugoslavian army, was modelled after the Red Army in the Soviet Union. According to the constitution, the officer's core should be compiled in relation to the national structure of the country, but in the 1970s and 1980s, the Serbs and Montenegrins made up two thirds of the officer's core. More than any other profession, the officers were indoctrinated to be "Yugoslavians". Serbian was the official language of the military, the officers were constantly being moved around and their culture became "Yugoslavian". These officers often had a lot of privileges.

President Tito made it clear early on that in addition to defending the country's borders, the army should also defend the revolution from internal enemies. Tito trusted his army more than the Communist Party and used it to fight back nationalistic tendencies within the party organization. During the party rally in 1974, several high-ranking officers entered leading political positions for the first time. Besides the position of Minister of Defence, generals now held the positions as Minister of the Interior and Public Prosecutor. The constitution of 1974 gave the army a certain representation in the highest political institutions. When President Tito died, the army was already incorporated in the political system and in control. As well as the JNA, there was another military organization called Territorial Defence, TO (Teritorijalna Obramba), which Tito founded after the countries behind the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Unlike the army, this organization, which was lightly armed and built on local partisan warfare, was organized and paid for by the small republics and the local languages were used. Even though officers of the army usually held the positions of commanding officers, there were frictions between the army and the TO. After Tito's death, the army managed to take control of the TO. Some feared it would be used against the army in an internal conflict and these worries turned out not to be unfounded. The Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces was the state presidium and from there, the chain of command went straight to the Minister of Defence. In 1981, the army was sent in to deal with riots in Kosovo, and was thereby used to "solve" an internal political conflict. Gradually, the army's role became the protection of the country's political system. In 1983, The Minister of Defence, general Mamula, declared that the army was the backbone of the political system.

This army, as well as special police forces and paramilitary divisions like Arkan's Tigers and Franko Simatovic's "Red Berets", were the ones the population in Kosovo were to be unpleasantly acquainted with in 1998-99.

## **KOSOVO UNDER PRESIDENT MILOSEVIC**

In 1986, Slobodan Milosevic became party leader in Serbia, and in 1989 he won the presidency. He knew that people were dissatisfied with Serbia's unclear position within the Yugoslav Federation and started taking advantage of this to uphold nationalism, especially in

the relationship with Kosovo Albanians. In 1989, Milosevic took away Kosovo's and Vojvodina's status as autonomous provinces and made them part of Serbia. The fact that many of the intellectuals in Serbia supported this nationalistic trend would have a disastrous outcome. They elected the wrong leaders at the wrong time, which paved the way for four wars, a ruined economy, ruined infrastructure and to the destruction of priceless works of art in the former Yugoslavia.

It took another eight years of wars and living in a state of terror, a total of three wars within the former Yugoslavia, economic sanctions from the UN and finally a bombing raid on Serbia, Montenegro, Serbian military divisions and infrastructure in Kosovo, to put an end to the insanity and to allow new political powers to take control in Serbia.

When Milosevic's plans to conquer the "Serbian" areas of Croatia failed in 1991, he changed tactics and started advocating a state consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "the Third Yugoslavia", was signed in April 1992.



28 June 1989: Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia, addresses around a million Serbs gathered on the Kosovo Polje for the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Kosovo.

Both Kosovo and Vojvodina objected, since they had not been asked if they wanted to be part of this new state. In May 1992, the Kosovo Albanians held both a parliamentary and a presidential election in Kosovo without permission from the Serbian authorities. Ibrahim Rugova was elected and had no opponent. He promoted a passive resistance campaign that would last for eight years – and that has no precedent in modern European history. An alternative society system was established, especially within education and the health sector.

After the new constitution was signed, a politician called Azem Vllasi made a statement saying that Albanians now had to choose between occupation and war. Vllasi, who had previously held a high position in the Communist Party, was arrested for his resistance against Milosevic and his plan to remove Kosovo's status as an autonomous province as stated in the constitution of 1974. The discontent among the people of Kosovo grew. The Serbs lead a de facto apartheid policy in the province. Rugova's idea of passive resistance and a "parallel society" became very popular among Albanians. While the world was concerned with the war in Croatia and Bosnia, the Serbification of Kosovo continued and the oppression of everything Albanian increased. Milosevic carried out a large-scale clean-up of his army in May 1992. To everyone's surprise, the Minister of Defence and thirty-eight generals were removed, partly because Milosevic did not want to be held responsible for any crimes the army might have committed in Slovenia and Croatia. This was a last goodbye to the JNA and Tito's "Yugoslav" generals. Now, a new and younger generation of Serbian officers who were sceptical of the army's "cautious" conduct in Slovenia and Croatia took over and they were only loyal to Serbian interests. This would prove fatal for the Kosovo Albanian population.

The Serbification of Kosovo started with mass firings of Kosovo Albanians working in the public educational and health system, the police force and public administration. It then went on to appoint Serbs from the north. Serbs who accepted positions in Kosovo got a lot of advantages and Serbian became the only official language allowed. The Serbs must have planned from the start, implicitly or explicitly, that there would not be much use for Albanian labour in Kosovo in the future. The Kosovo Albanians responded by establishing their own unique parallel society, and they proved to be very inventive, especially in the educational and health sector. Education up to university level was taught in private homes.

In July 1991, the Serbian government decided to fire Sabit Jakupi, the manager of the publishing company "Enti e teksteve dhe mjeteve mësimore". In a short period of time, forty-three of the total sixty-two employees were fired - all of them Albanians. The printing of Albanian books was stopped and books in Albanian were collected and burned or destroyed. In July 1992, a secret publishing company was established. Sabit Jakupi, along with about twenty other people secretly continued to publish Albanian books, especially textbooks. These illegal books were printed in Switzerland and Italy and brought to Kosovo through Albania.

The Gandhi-like idea that Rugova had about fighting the Kosovo Albanian's cause with passive resistance seemed somewhat unsuitable in the Balkans. The fact that he was able to get the Kosovo Albanian society to stick to a non-violent strategy for eight years, when they were badly mistreated by the Serbian power, is proof of a determination to reach a peaceful solution to an infected ethnical conflict. It can be debated whether through these eight years of passive resistance, Ibrahim Rugova was the right man at the right place – at the right time. But an armed Kosovo Albanian riot in the early 1990s, when the wars between Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia were at their peak, would probably not have been neither understood nor accepted by Western Europe and the USA. An armed riot at that time would probably have resulted in an even larger tragedy for the Kosovo Albanians.

Ibrahim Rugova tried numerous times to attract attention to the situation of the Kosovo Albanians in meetings with western politicians, but was unsuccessful. In the 1990s,

international attention was directed at the neighbouring regions. The strain and humiliation the Kosovo Albanians experienced on a daily basis for eight years wore their patience. They were threatened by Serbian police and representatives for the paramilitary groups, which were operational in Kosovo during Milosevic's regime. And a classical example of the apartheid policy which was implemented in 1989 was the sign above the front door of the Grand Hotel in Pristina: "Dogs and Albanians are not allowed". Another thing that contributed to the humiliation and stigmatization of the Kosovo Albanians was the countless number of checkpoints set up by the police along the main roads. If they had been put up for traffic and safety purposes, people would not have minded them. But these checkpoints were used as a weapon of daily harassment. They held cars back for hours, constantly coming up with new things they had to check. At the same time, the Kosovo Albanians were told that if they had a little money to spare or merchandise they could leave behind, things would move considerably faster.

Many Kosovo Albanians had left Kosovo by 1990 because of the severe Serbian oppression. After the election in May 1992, the Kosovo Albanians elected a shadow government in Switzerland based on Ruganov's party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and with Bujar Bukoshi as prime minister. The basis for this government was Kosovo's constitution of 7 September 1990, also called the Kaccanic Constitution.

## **ALBANIANS LAUNCH GUERRILLA WARFARE**

In 1993, Albanian groups living in exile founded a political organization called Lidhja Popullore e Kosoves-LPK (National Movement of Kosovo). From this organization came the military organization KLA, Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK, Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosoves). In the beginning there was no joint leadership within the KLA, which divided Kosovo into zones, each with one leader. Some of these groups, represented by men like Ramush Haradinaj and Hashim Thaçi, who became important leaders within the KLA, started organizing a guerrilla movement in 1996-97. During 1998, the KLA became more and more active and attacked Serbian police and military and Albanians who cooperated with the Serbs. Albanian guerrilla soldiers killed many Serbian police officers.

The KLA opposed Rugova and his party, LDK. The Bukoshi government did not form a Ministry of Defence until after the Drenica massacre in early 1998. This department has later been called The Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo, or FARK, and was lead by the Minister of Defence, Ahmet Krasniqi, who was assassinated in Tirana on 21 September 1998. The funding of the exile government and its workings was made possible by Kosovo Albanian emigrants around the world paying about three per cent of their salary as a contribution to the fight for an independent Kosovo. Over the years, a large amount of money was collected and no official record of how the money was spent has ever been presented. This has contributed to poison the relationship between Kosovo Albanian politicians.

The relationship between the two military organizations was strained and Oslo was to play an important part as neutral ground where the parties could meet. In May 1998, a meeting was held between the KLA and representatives from the Ministry of Defence in the Bukoshi government at the Scandinavia Radisson SAS hotel in Oslo. Ahmet Krasniqi was representing the government and Adem Demaci was representing the KLA. It is said to have been Adem Demaci who wanted the meeting to be held in Oslo, but the reasons why are unknown.

The result from the meeting in Oslo was an agreement to coordinate the military forces, which were to keep their own individual names, KLA and FARK. However, the Oslo-agreement was never implemented and this led to an inefficient resistance when the war

started. The Serbian forces were more or less in full control until they left Kosovo and KFOR took over. On the other hand, it was of great political importance for the international society that there were Albanian resistance groups fighting in Kosovo.

Suspicion, old traditions and the old system of families and clans, as well as individuals' desire for personal power, were probably the causes that lead to the Kosovo Albanians being on the verge of internal war. The KLA felt that in the war against the Serbs, FARK tried to take over the military organization that the KLA had spent years to establish in Kosovo. The zone commanders in the KLA, who had lead guerrilla warfare for years, felt that they did not get the position they deserved in the new military. High-ranking people in the military seemed to have already started their political positioning to ensure their place in what was to become the new political system in Kosovo.

From a Serbian point of view, these were rebels and terrorists who had to be defeated. And the delegate from the USA, Robert Gelbard, stated in 1998 that the KLA was a terrorist organisation. If Milosevic had only played his cards right, this could have been the common perception.

## **MILOSEVIC'S TACTICS: EXPEL THE ALBANIANS**

The Serbs may have been right when they said that any country would try to defeat those who want severance from the state and are willing to resort to violent measures. But when the Serbs compare their situation to the way the Spanish government treated the Basque, the comparison is halting. The means that Milosevic was willing to use to overpower the growing guerrilla movement were not acceptable. We have yet not seen the Spanish government massacring civilians, women and children, even whole villages, in order to defeat Basque separatists.

During 1998, Milosevic decided that now was the time for the Serbs in Kosovo to win a war, after loosing the last three (Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia) in the former Yugoslavia. It had become a matter of life and death for Milosevic's political life in Serbia, because according to the nationalistic strategy he had chosen, he had to act tough in Kosovo. Maybe he needed a victory to take people's focus away from his problems back home.

Some commentators claim that the ethnic cleansing started when NATO bombed Serbia. This is incorrect. The attacks on Pastasel and Mleqan and the surrounding villages are proof of that. But the ethnic cleansing intensified in the winter and spring of 1999, shortly before the bombing started, because Milosevic knew then that he did not have much time to fulfil his goal: to remove most Albanians from Kosovo. He might also have been driven by a need to redeem his "honour" after loosing three wars in the northern part of the former Yugoslavia. The bombing of Serbia would probably lead to him restarting the talks for a solution in Kosovo sooner or later, but then there would hardly be any Albanians left.

It seems frightening that a leader of a European country could think that forcing millions of unwanted citizens out of the country would be accepted in the 21st century. Why did he think he could get away with that kind of policy in Kosovo? Was he simply crazy? Did no one around him have the courage to stop him?





People on the run in Kosovo, shortly before NATO intervened.  
(Photo: Arkivi Kombëtar in Kosovës Pristhine)



Under: Refugee camp in Macedonia.

## **THIS WAS WHERE THE WELL-KILLINGS STARTED - THE VILLAGE OF PASTASEL**

Pastasel is a small village in the municipality of Rahovec, which is situated at the foot of a northeast facing hill. To the west and south of Pastasel, towards Rahovec, are large areas where they grow grapes. Before 1990, quality wine was produced in Kosovo and exported to Western Europe and the USA. During the last decade, the vineyards have deteriorated.

It was in Pastasel that the well-killings started at the beginning of September 1998 and they continued in Mleqan later that same month. All the other well-killings happened within a period of nine weeks in the spring of 1999, when the Serbs mistreated the Kosovo Albanians the most and chased most of them from their villages and cities – and finally out of Kosovo.

The nightmare for the people of Pastasel started on 4 September 1998. Suddenly tanks came towards the village, fired at it and drove the population away, either up the mountainside or onto the roads to the south. Afterwards, Serbian military forces and special police units came and “cleaned up”, that is - killed anyone who had not escaped, set fire to houses and stole anything they found that could be of value.

Azemine Krasniqi (aged 58), the mother and wife of two of the victims, gives a simple account of what happened:

*“I live in Pastasel. On one of the first days in September the Serbs started throwing grenades at us. We were forced to hide in the forest on the mountainside. When we returned to the village later, we saw that our houses were burned down and that everything we owned had either been destroyed or stolen. Later, we found the body of my son, Ismet Krasniqi (aged 42), in the well. He had been murdered and thrown into the well along with my husband, Him Krasniqi (aged 62). We found our neighbour, Beq Beqa (aged 70), in another well. We managed to get the bodies out of the wells. The bodies were in bad condition, because a lot of stones, bricks and other things had been thrown on top of them.*

*This happened on 4 September 1998. We tried to return to the village later, but that was difficult because the Serbs were everywhere. We had to stay away from the village for a long period of time. During the Serbian offensive on 31 March 1999 the Serbs murdered forty people in Pastasel and about sixty-six people in the closest villages. Most of the victims were elderly people.”*

What happened in Pastasel was the beginning of the Serbian tactic that has been called a “Horse-shoe” operation. In short, this tactic involves chasing people from their villages, and was used again in the spring of 1999, also on a strategic level, to drive all Albanians out of Kosovo. The Serbian side has denied that there was ever such a thing as “Operation Horse-shoe”, but the outcome in Kosovo in the spring of 1999 showed that whatever the operation was called the result was the same. An “iron ring” with a narrow southward or westward opening that people could escape through was formed around the villages. Several villagers from all over Kosovo told me about this in the summer of 1999 and mentioned it again when we interviewed them in 2001.

The Serbian military and paramilitary operations and those directed by the police were primarily aimed at Albanian civilians. The KLA army used a guerrilla tactic with unexpected attacks and fast retreats. Front lines, like we have seen in previous wars, hardly existed. However, at times in the winter of 1999, the KLA controlled large areas in Kosovo (twenty-five to thirty per cent). But the Serbian military started an offensive that drove the KLA army out of Kosovo and into Albania and Montenegro. Shortly before Milosevic agreed to withdraw his troops from Kosovo, the Serbian military controlled most areas in Kosovo.

When the ethnic cleansing and murders of Kosovo Albanians first went on in the spring, summer and autumn of 1998, NATO's commander-in-chief, general Wesley K. Clark, who was also head of the American troops in Europe, ran hectic diplomatic and military preparations together with the Secretary General of NATO, the Spaniard Javier Solana. They tried to get the leading politicians in all NATO's countries to support a tougher attitude towards the Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic. General Clark and Secretary General Solana had information that revealed that at least 300,000 people had been chased out of Kosovo, and that an uncertain number of people were believed to have been murdered (1000 is by many thought to be a fairly accurate estimate). They realized they would soon be faced with a humanitarian catastrophe. The USA's Secretary of Defence, William S. Cohen, was in favour of NATO implementing a so-called ACTREQ (the second phase in a three-phase authorization procedure before NATO's military forces can intervene) that would bind the members to work against the Milosevic regime if Serbian attacks on civilians continued. Village after village would now be emptied unless something was done soon.

During a so-called informal NATO meeting with the countries' Ministers of Defence in Portugal on 23 September 1998, and in an attempt to pressure the participants, Javier Solana supposedly said that Milosevic's motto seemed to be "A village a day keeps NATO away" (Wesley Clark:135). General Clark and Secretary General Solana had previously had trouble getting the NATO countries to understand the severity of the situation for the Kosovo Albanians and the implications of Milosevic's possible intentions in Kosovo. It would seem that many of the political leaders in Europe now turned their back on what happened in Kosovo. A decade with war-like conditions in the former Yugoslavia and expensive NATO and UN operations and relief efforts had started wearing down the willingness to help. Was the humanitarian crisis evolving in Kosovo not something Western Europe should deal with on its own? If it had not been for the pressure the USA put on UN's Security Council at this time, the autumn and winter of 1998-99 would probably have been the end for the Albanians in Kosovo. They would either have been forced out of the country, or frozen to death in the forests and mountains of Kosovo. It would seem that Europe, and especially the EU, was unable to come together on important decisions when the pressure was high, even if the problem was right there in their own backyard.

On 23 September 1998, the same day as the NATO meeting was held in Portugal, the UN Security Council approved resolution 1199 based on Chapter VII in the UN Charter, after strong pressure from the USA. All hostile actions were to be stopped to avoid what seemed to be a humanitarian disaster in Kosovo and the countries were requested to send humanitarian aid. According to Resolution 1199, all UN countries could use all means to end the aggressive actions in Kosovo. Here, "all means" meant that military forces could be used if necessary.

The OSCE Mission (KVM) sent in civil observers in the autumn of 1998 to make sure that Milosevic carried out and followed Resolution 1199. The American diplomat Bill Walker was the head of the OSCE Mission. NATO also established an airplane-based verification scheme to observe the Serbians' military withdrawal from Kosovo.

The USA stated early on in the conflict that it did not want NATO's forces, and especially not their own forces, on the ground in Kosovo.

## **MLEQAN, 28 SEPTEMBER 1998**

On 28 September 1998 Serbian military, reservists in the army and paramilitary units, entered the village of Mleqan. They started torching houses, one after another. Here is Qamil's story, the brother of murdered well-victim Sherif Miftar Kryeziu:

"My brother was inside his house when Serbian units came to the village. He tried to escape but the Serbs stopped him. His wife and seven children were hiding in a forest area called Tërpush. The Serbs tied Sherif's hands and feet together and threw him into the well.

When Qamil returned to the village about a month later they found Sherif in the well. They sent a request for help to Ismail Kasumi in Pristina, who was a trained diver, because they did not dare to go down the well themselves because of possible poisonous gasses. Ismail Kasum, who today is head of the Youth and Sports section in the municipality of Pristina, came to help.

The body was taken up on 7 November and had clear signs of abuse. Reporters from the USA, England and Spain and Dr. Zekerije Cana, a representative from Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedom, were present."

## **BETWEEN TWO OFFENSIVES: OCTOBER 1998 - MARCH 1999**

In a meeting in NATO on 12 October, all the European NATO countries agreed to the plan on air strikes against military forces who were conducting ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and, if necessary, also against Serbia itself. As a result, Milosevic had only four days to prevent the air strikes from starting. According to Wesley Clark, these threats were crucial for NATO in order to secure any kind of progress in the negotiations with Milosevic.

On 15 October, Secretary General Solana and NATO generals Clark and Naumann went to Belgrade to make one last attempt to get Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo, in addition to numerous military troops, security police and special forces. Milosevic was also supposed to sign the agreement concerning NATO's over flights to verify the retreat of Serbian forces from Kosovo.

But it turned out to take much longer to close the deal than the four days NATO had planned and there was therefore a need for another approval from NATO's highest council. A ten-day extension was given to close the deal with Milosevic, and after many capers from him and his military leaders, the deal was signed on 25 October. This deal was supposed to stop all hostilities in Kosovo, and stated that OSCE could send 2000 observers to Kosovo to make sure the deal was followed, as well as allowing NATO to use airplanes to monitor the retreat of Serbian forces. The number of observers ended up being about 1400, as it turned out to be difficult to get 2000 situated. Only hours after the deal was signed, the first Serbian forces started moving out of Kosovo.

In the short term, Milosevic gained the most from the October Agreement, as he was able to prepare the attack on Kosovo in peace and quiet with his military leaders. Meanwhile, the Kosovo Albanians struggled through another winter without much food, water, clothes, or electricity. Many houses had been bombed and partly destroyed. The winters in Kosovo are real winters in the Nordic sense of the word: months of cold weather and snow. During the winter of 1999-00, the temperature in Pristina, where I lived during our stay, measured

twenty-nine degrees below zero. I can verify that stone or brick houses with no kind of isolation and heating are, to put it mildly, unpleasant to stay in during the winter.

After the first well-killings in Pastasel on 4 October and in Mleqan on 28 September, this kind of killing stopped for a while, only to continue in Polac on 20 March.

Wesley Clark says he feared what might happen in Kosovo when the winter ended and he would be proved right. He realized early on that stopping Serbian forces from terrorising civilians by using high-flying airplanes were very small, but at the same time, it was the best he could do. He started preparing a plan to send in ground forces who would act as a peacekeeping force after the Serbs had retreated, or, in the worst case scenario, be sent in as an attack force to chase Serbian forces out of the country in the autumn of 1999, before winter set in. This plan to send in ground forces as a last resort was not approved of by governing politicians in the USA, which is something Clark would later experience. He also talked to all kinds of different governmental bodies to get permission to use the about 140 Apache helicopters that the US Army had in Germany (Wesley Clark: 132). According to *Janes*, a reputable British military magazine, the Apache Helicopters are some of the most advanced weapon carriers ever made, equipped to operate both day and night and in all weather conditions. They also have their own defence system.

From the time the Serbian offensives ended in late October, early November, and until the beginning of March 1999, it would be a very unpleasant period for many Kosovo Albanians. Winter meant temperatures below zero for most people, and the hundreds of thousands of people who were running in the forests and mountains of Kosovo with hardly any food or clothes, often had nothing but a destroyed village to return to.

## RAČAK

It took some time for the OSCE observers to get settled so that they could start doing their job. The first observers were not in place until the end of December. As early as 15 January 1999, the OSCE discovered a massacre near the village of Račak. Bill Walker, a diplomat and the leader for OSCE in Kosovo quickly arrived and is to have said on the phone: "I know a massacre when I see one. I have seen it before in Central America and I am seeing one now" (Wesley Clark: 158). Forty-five civilian farmers, young and old, had been shot and dumped into a hole in the ground.

Soon, there were doubts of what had really happened in Račak. It was said to be KLA soldiers who had died in combat and therefore a clear scheme by the Albanians. French journalists claimed that the Račak massacre was merely propaganda and the Serbs happily joined in and supported this claim. Albanians had killed their own people to get sympathy, or they had dressed dead KLA soldiers in civilian clothes. These accusations have appeared in Western media from time to time.

So what do we really know about what happened? On 15 January 1999 there were clashes between Serbian forces and the KLA, who had to pull out of the village of Račak. According to the KLA, they lost seven soldiers, but the Serbs claimed to have killed "fifteen terrorists". The next day they found forty-five bodies, twenty of them in a dried up river and the remaining twenty-five spread around the village. According to the Human Rights Watch, testimonies show that Serbian police forces first separated the boys from the male prisoners and took them away. They feel that this is evidence that the police had orders to kill all the men in the village. Witnesses say that twenty-three men were taken away together and that they heard shooting around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. A few hours later, the KLA soldiers

arrived and around 4 am the villagers found the bodies. Some had obviously been shot when they had tried to escape.

OSCE, with missions-chief William Walker present, lead the first inspection the next day. Five of the victims were buried in Račak, while Serbian officials took the other forty to Pristina the next day, where medical experts from Serbia and Belarus performed the first examinations. They claimed that a test with kerosene showed that the victims had also used weapons. The report from the Finnish team of experts, which was presented on 17 March, rejected the first kerosene report and claimed it obsolete. Examinations with an electronic microscope showed no trace of gun powder on the victims' hands. Since the Finnish experts did not examine the bodies where they were found, they could not say for sure where they came from. The leader of the Finnish team, Helena Ranta, said that the victims did not have any ammunition on them. She wrote in her report: "There is no evidence that the victims were anything other than unarmed civilians." The bodies had as many as twenty bullet holes. When she was asked if this was a massacre, she answered that that was not a term she would use as a medical expert. Journalists interpreted this as if she denied that there had been a massacre. The Finnish medical experts later published an article about this in *Forensic Science International*. The Haag-tribunal's chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, also rejected the conspiracy theories: "We know civilians were killed in Račak and there are clear signs that there was an ambush."

## ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT

Milosevic used this period of truce to prepare the Armageddon, which came only a few months later. Could it be that he just wanted most of the Kosovo Albanians out of Kosovo, so that the Serbs would have the majority? If so, they were planning a simple and brutal solution. The destiny of one and a half million Kosovo Albanian citizens had little or no importance for the Serbian government's solutions to the "Kosovo problem". Or were these actions just a consequence of the cooperation between military, special police and paramilitary forces like in Bosnia, with general war tactics mixed in? Or was the situation out of control and pushed forward on its own lead by a criminal paramilitary, among which were criminals and prisoners who had just been released? These questions are still being debated in Haag.

But as soon as late December, an escalation of military and police units started in the Podujevo area. A clear breach of the agreement made with NATO shortly before. According to Skender Havolli (who's father's sister, eighty-two- year-old Hamide Havolli, would later become one of the well-victims), shots were fired on villages in the area. Podedjevo lies just northeast of Pristina and was, in a strategic military sense, an important area for the Serbs. They could quickly lead forces from this area to all central junctions in Kosovo.

On 20 December, General Clark was in Belgrade to address the breaches to the agreement that was signed on 25 October. But the trip was rather unsuccessful. General Wesley Clark and NATO's Secretary General Javier Solana demanded that the 221st Armoured Brigade, the 3rd Military Police Battalion and the 24th Police Battalion were removed (Wesley Clark:146). At this time, NATO probably had information about the activity of these groups in Kosovo, at the same time as the observers from the OSCE and other aid organizations reported cases of abuse against the civilian population. A total of more than 40,000 men under the command of the Serbian military, and equipment including armoured cars, heavy artillery and helicopters, were sent in to fight the Albanian civilian



population. NATO's reputation as caretaker for the safety of the Albanians was starting to wear thin. It seemed like Milosevic could do whatever he wanted.

Throughout January and February, Serbian forces continued to build up and spread out their military forces.

The agreement that ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke made with Milosevic regarding the OSCE observers' role as a recourse for verification and a defender of the rights of the civilian population was not followed through on either side. And the American diplomat and chief of the OSCE Mission (KVM), was declared as unwanted in Kosovo after his statements on Serbian attacks in Račak on 16 January.

The Serbian military was now sending more and more military forces to Kosovo and the attacks on Kosovo Albanians increased in February and March. The OSCE was silently planning the evacuation of its 1400 observers. Chairman of OSCE and the then Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Knut Vollebæk, had been told of the preparations for a NATO air strike on Serbia, and to avoid having the observers taken hostage, like what happened with UN forces in Bosnia four-five years earlier, it was decided that the observers had to leave. In the morning of 20 March 1999, OSCE started evacuating their observers south to Macedonia. The evacuation comes as a shock to the local civilians, especially for those Kosovo Albanians who worked as interpreters for the observers. According to Margita Kukalaj from Decani, who later became my interpreter and deputy in the well-clearing project, many of the interpreters were arrested by Serbian police and accused of cooperating with the enemy. At this time Margita worked as an interpreter for a Swedish OSCE observer. She was taken hostage in her village Decani during the Serbian offensive, which escalated after OSCE had pulled out. She and many other women were used as living shields against the NATO bombings inside a temporary military camp in the village.

But it was not only Milosevic who had spent the winter preparing; Clark and Solana had also done some thinking, both politically and militaristic. NATO had a long list of possible targets for bombing and had had them approved as legitimate targets of war if and when it would be necessary. A force of airplanes that were to take part in air strikes from, among other places, the Aviano and Gricignano base in Italy, and missiles that were to be fired from battle ships in the Adriatic Sea, started to come into place. Departments were set up in Macedonia. The issue of safety for the people of Kosovo arose and had to be dealt with straight away. If not, criminal groups, who were just waiting in Albania and other countries, would create lawlessness.

After a while, NATO could mobilize a force with an enormous air strike and bombing potential.

## **UNHCR SOUNDS THE ALARM**

On 9 June 1999, representatives from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Serbian Republic signed the Military Technical Agreement (MTA). The next day, 10 June, NATO called off its bombing raids against the Federal Republic of Serbia and Montenegro, and Serbian military forces started their retreat from Kosovo as part of the military technical agreement between Serbia's and Kosovo's international security force (KFOR). UN Resolution 1244, which was approved by the UN Security Council the same day as the NATO bombings ceased, authorised positioning of military forces (KFOR) and the establishing of the UNMIK, which was to take care of the civil administration in Kosovo. The UNHCR was responsible for coordinating all the humanitarian aid, the OSCE was responsible for

establishing democracy and for civil administration institutions, and the EU was responsible for monitoring the economic development.

The establishing of the KFOR forces had a dramatic start. The UN resolution which authorised positioning of this kind of forces also said, implicitly, that any member of the UN could take part with their own military forces. Despite NATO countries being the ones who had agreed to contribute with most of the forces in Kosovo, the Russians made a military and strategic move by sending Russian forces to Kosovo and occupy the airport in Pristina, right in front of the KFOR forces. The Russians had obviously decided to play the game their own way in Kosovo. Even though the situation cooled down due to the leadership of the British general Mike Jackson and widespread diplomatic activities, we were now very close to what NATO and the EU feared the most: a divided Kosovo, with one Serbian part, “protected” by Russia, and one part “protected” by KFOR.

Just when the refugees were returning, the first disturbing messages of dead bodies found in wells around Kosovo came. Especially the western part of Kosovo reported several findings and some places locals had taken the bodies out of the wells with help from KFOR forces. A few times international TV and media had been present. One of these cases was especially serious. In Studenica, in the municipality of Istok in the northwest of Kosovo, nine bodies were taken out of a well, eight women and one man. The youngest were just children – thirteen, fourteen and fifteen-year-old girls. As reports reached UNHCR in Pristina, it turned out that building materials, scrap, sand, dirt, rocks and dead people and animals had contaminated thousands of wells. It was difficult to make an exact estimate of the number of people who had died, because it was hard to tell the human remains from the ones of animals. The cases that had so far been uncovered by KFOR personnel and the locals were so terrifying that the UNHCR in Pristina realized they had a problem. For hundreds of thousands of people, the wells were the only water supply. Except in the larger centres in Kosovo, the wells are the primary source for drinking water. The UNMIK and the UNHCR did not only have to relate to the human tragedies, but also the destroyed infrastructure. They had to take action and they had to do it soon. What happened in Bosnia, with extensive criminal acts committed by military and paramilitary forces, was fresh in everyone’s mind. In addition to the reports on the well-killings, there were also reports of mass graves. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) would not run out of cases to investigate for a while. First of all, an enormous human tragedy was about to be uncovered. But soon another practical problem arose: How could they comply with the demands from the locals to identify the bodies as soon as possible?

Thousands of Kosovo Albanians were reported missing at this point. It became a priority for the governing authorities to organize aid programmes that were tailored for one specific task: *bringing dead bodies out of wells*. The work also included cleaning the wells so that they could be used again. In addition to getting the bodies out of the wells, the team was also given the job of identifying them, describing the injuries on the bodies as accurate as possible and then see to that they were handed over to the local authorities, who would conduct an organized funeral. Wherever they found dead bodies in wells, it should be taken care of as objectively as possible. Earlier, probably because of previous experiences in Bosnia, the UNMIK and the ICTY had ordered that all kinds of mass graves or similar findings had to be reported, so that official international organizations could conduct the necessary examinations and registrations for later war-crime investigations. Since Kosovo was a UN protectorate, this was the responsibility of UNMIK. ICTY was in this case responsible for coordination and investigation.

It was important both for the upcoming investigations of assaults during Serbian operations, and the danger of myths and accusations appearing between the opposing groups



concerning what really happened, that international personnel, under the supervision of ICTY, conducted the work of taking the bodies out of the wells.

## **NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID GETS THE ASSIGNMENT**

In the end of June 1999, the UNHCR office in Pristina sent out an urgent request for help with cleaning up the wells to a number of aid organizations. One of the organizations that responded fast and affirmatively to the request was the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). NCA had established itself in Kosovo and worked under the international umbrella organization Action by Churches Together (ACT). NCA had to pull out of Kosovo early in 1999 when the Serbian acts of war increased. But the organization continued its work in the area during the war – by arranging water supply and running refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia. UNHCR gave NCA/ACT the job of clearing wells in Kosovo. After a while, we also had to create a deposit of body bags for all of Kosovo.

The work in NCA's office in Norway started immediately after UNHCR had assigned NCA to the case. After one week, a team of seven people had been gathered. These people had experience from the army, the police, a medical profession, the fire brigade or a rescue squad and were used to extreme situations and conditions.

The NCA arranged a short pre-course, which included a visit to the Institute of Forensic Medicine, where professor Torleiv Ole Rognum dr. med. lectured about how bodies change after death. This knowledge was important for the members of the group, especially to prepare mentally for the task of bringing dead bodies out of wells. The group also had a meeting with the people at NCA headquarters, where different aspects of the mission were discussed. The most important precautions were:

- The safety of their own personnel.
- Treating the dead bodies with respect.
- Accurate registration and reporting of our findings.
- All decisions regarding the project to be made locally and in cooperation with the employer, UNHCR and ICTY, who had the main responsibility for registration and investigation of criminal acts committed during the war.
- The clearing and cleaning of the wells would be done in order for them to be used again.

## **COMING TO KOSOVO**

A week after I got the job, on 18 July 1999, I was on my way. The trip went by plane via Zurich to Thessaloniki in northern Greece. During my wait in Zurich, I noticed some briefcases labelled YH and YS. The Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS) is responsible for officers in the Norwegian Army. I already knew there was a Norwegian supply camp just outside Skopje in Macedonia – and this was my chance to ask for a ride to Skopje. If not, I would have to get there by taxi. I was in luck. The people I had found were military personnel, and they were going to the military camp outside Skopje.

From the airport in Thessaloniki we went straight to the Norwegian supply camp. I was invited to have dinner with the officers, and after dinner I was taken to the nearest taxi stand where I got hold of a car that could take me to the border station called Blace. It turned out the taxi driver was a good choice. I had to get another taxi after I had crossed the border

into Kosovo and it was getting dark. By using a combination of a bit of English and a bit of German, the taxi driver told me he had a relative just across the border and that this relative should be able to take me to Pristina. At the boarder station, taxi driver 1 managed to get hold of taxi driver 2 and that was the beginning of a breakneck ride along a pitch black road full of holes from the war. Suddenly, something that looked like a vehicle could appear, with no headlights, right in front of us on the road. And often the vehicle had a trailer with hay at the back. I later found out that something called an Enver-Hoxa tractor, with two wheels and a small engine, was a very common form of transportation in Kosovo.

On my ride to Pristina I often saw houses on fire. The taxi driver pointed at the burning houses and said: "Serb, Serb".

I often saw this kind of revenge carried out on Serbian property by Kosovo Albanians. During the first two months, while sitting outside on my balcony where I lived in Pristina, in a part of town called Dragodan, I would suddenly see flames appearing in the hills on the other side of town. Then, British helicopters with searchlights would appear and comb the area for the arsonists.

After two and a half hours I was dropped off outside the Grand Hotel in Pristina. The hotel, which used to be a five-star hotel (all the five stars are still up on the roof), is situated in the middle of the city, but ten years of neglect and almost a year of war-like conditions have left their mark on this wonderful city. I checked in and got a room on the fourth floor without water in the bathroom. There was no toilet paper and the mattress and linen were worn. I found water for sanitary purposes in a couple of bottles in a corner of the bathroom. The lift did not work so we had to use the stairs, and the candle on the nightstand would become useful since the power supply was somewhat unreliable. I was told that the hotel was run by British military that were stationed in the city, and I was happy to have a roof over my head for my first night in Kosovo. I fell asleep right away, after the exhausting taxi ride in the dark in a taxi that had seen better days.

At breakfast the next morning almost everyone I met were Russian officers, who were probably going to their units by the airport near Pristina, which they had occupied from under the nose of the Western KFOR forces.

The first trips around Kosovo were really discouraging. Except from in Bosnia there has never been such an extensive destruction of all kinds of settlements in Europe, especially buildings and infrastructure, since The Second World War. At first it was hard to relate to what we saw, especially considering all the hundreds of thousands of people who had lived in these ruins just months earlier. The destructions were not as extensive in Pristina, but this city was also marked by the war. NATO had bombed government buildings. In all the main streets, shop windows were shattered and damaged, and furniture and merchandise had been taken out or stolen. There was rubbish all over the place and some places people had started burning the rubbish in pure desperation to get rid of it. There was a stench of smoke and rubbish everywhere.

But it did not take long getting used to seeing all this misery. Humans have an amazing ability to adapt to new situations and conditions. Knowing that we were wanted there and that people wanted the excavations to be done as soon and as quickly as possible, helped us in our work. Many refugees, about 863,000, had been chased out of Kosovo and into the neighbouring countries, and about 590,000 were running inside Kosovo, a number close to a quarter of Norway's population. Many of the refugees in Kosovo were living on the mountainsides and in the forests under miserable conditions. The conditions for the ones that had been chased out of the country were not much better, which we could see from coverage in countless newspapers and TV reports all over the world.

## CLANGING COINS AND BLUE NOTES

Normally, UNHCR never initiates any aid programme before funds have been granted and a budget has been approved. In our case, the Norwegian Church Aid/Action by Churches Together received their funding *before* the budget had even been presented. This exception simply underlined the need for this programme to get started right away. Our cooperation with UNHCR would turn out to exceed all expectations. I would have thought that when collaborating with a relatively large and bureaucratic organisation such as UNHCR, our project would progress slowly, but that was not the case. Maybe it was the nature of the finds that caused everything to run like clockwork. Money was of course necessary from day one and the currency used was German mark. In a “country” literally destroyed, there was a glaring lack of everything. People were unwilling to sell their merchandise now and receive payment later. There was an enormous need for cash because banking as we know it did no longer exist.

That is the reason we paid cash. German 100 mark notes, blue and with a silver lining, got the vendors moving. Everyone depended on cash to start rebuilding and to get hold of merchandise. Merely a few weeks after the war ended, a varied selection of goods could be found in shops and markets. Private initiative supplied Kosovo with most types of goods within a surprisingly short period of time. The business community in Kosovo were the first to re-establish a normal relationship with the Serbs, probably because traditionally, most of their merchandise came from Serbia. This was also the case both internally and on a local level. When a milk producer in a rural district did not have enough milk, he could buy surplus milk from a neighbouring Serb village (Howard Clark).

NCA provided our well-clearing team with the cash we needed for the initial phase. I had completed the budget from a preliminary layout made by Tor Valla at the NCA. He worked on planning the new water supply system for the villages. The project was off to a good start thanks to our close contact with the decision-making authorities at UNHCR in Pristina and a well prepared NCA.

UNHCR would only pay the NCA after an interim account had been presented and approved halfway through the project period. This is standard procedure worked out in agreement between volunteer aid organisations and UNHCR.



The well-clearing team as they arrived at their permanent residence in Peja on Wednesday 28 July 1999. Front row, from the left: Roy Ringnes (from Årnes, deceased 2001), Bjørn Holt (from Årnes), Thore Hansen (from Porsgrunn), Margita Kukalaj (from Decani, interpreter and later also deputy project coordinator), Josef Martinsen (from Eidsvoll, project coordinator). Back row, from the left: Roar Henriksen (from Bryne, team leader), Egil Thøger-Andersen (from Årnes), Niels Magne Tykhelle (from Notodden), Driton “Toni” Kukalaj (from Decani, interpreter). The two men on the far right were some of our local neighbours. (Photo: Scanpix/Ken Opprann)

Decani, situated in the western part of Kosovo, was selected as a base for the well-clearing team’s operation, because the place, judging from the reports of dead people found in wells, was at the heart of our working area. Furthermore, the NCA/ACT had already established some of their administration and their project for rebuilding the water supply here. Decani is an old cultural city rooted far back in the middle ages. Like Peja and Djakova, this town is considerably older than for instance Pristina. There is a very old and beautiful road of paving stones leading from Peja to Decani and this road is still used as a thoroughfare for traffic. One of the Serbs’ greatest prides, an ancient orthodox monastery, a “subgroup” of the Patriarchy in Pec (Peja), lies on the outskirts of town. For both Serbians and Albanians, this town has great symbolic meaning. Traditionally, the relationship between Albanians and Serbians was reasonably good in Decani. The war changed everything.

The first week in Decani, Rexhë Kukalaj housed the well-clearing team while our permanent residence in Peja, twenty kilometres to the east, was being prepared for us. Nine

people, seven that were part of the project team and journalist Inger Anne Olsen and photographer Ken Opprann from the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, were sleeping on mattresses or thick blankets on the floor. The woman of the house, Deshira, prepared breakfast and dinner for all her tenants.

Decani was one of the hardest hit municipalities in Kosovo. Nearly eighty per cent of all buildings were left in ruins after heavy shelling and arson. We heard stories of Kosovo Albanians who used their savings to prevent their houses from being set fire to by paying off the local Serbian military chief. Later, the same Kosovo Albanians were forced to leave their homes and sent to Albania, Montenegro or Macedonia.

We had an agreement with the ICTY, stating that our well-clearing team could take care of all registration and documentation ourselves when dealing with wells containing two bodies or less. If there were more than two bodies in a well, the ICTY would send in their own forensic team to take care of the registration. The ICTY resources needed to be rationalised this way because of the huge number of mass graves that had been discovered, about 450, and the limited number of forensic teams available.

We had to recruit local labour for the project. It was important to find interpreters and manpower well acquainted with the local area. Good communication with the locals was absolutely necessary in order to get the correct information as quickly as possible. English was our working language, but it was hard to find good interpreters. All foreign aid organisations and military units searched for those best qualified. The Rexhë Kukalaj family in Decani was essential in the well-clearing project. Their daughter Margita, a twenty-two-year-old language student, and their son Driton, "Toni", an eighteen-year-old architecture student, were hired as interpreters. Margita was in her fourth year of English studies at university, or to be more precise, in the parallel education system which the Kosovo Albanians had established after 1989. In the decade before the war started, learning the English language had not been high on the Serbian school's list of priorities. Many organisations therefore turned to young students and people with higher education.

## **WE ROLLED UP OUR SLEEVES AND GOT TO WORK**

In my conversations with our employer (UNHCR), I had specifically asked to be issued with a brief authorisation document written in English, Albanian and Serbian. My experience from previous UN assignments abroad told me that we were likely to encounter situations where people would question our authority and our right to collect information and carry out our special assignment. As it turned out, my presumptions were correct, and our authority to carry out the project was questioned several times during our work. The handling of the people who were dead as a result of the war acts, and the procedures we followed, were highly sensitive issues for many people.

Due to the very special nature of our assignment - the handling of decomposing bodies - the NCA thought it might be necessary to change our crew after two or three weeks in the field. As it turned out, our crew did not need to be replaced that often.

The first team of well-clearers, with the exception of the project coordinator and team leader, was replaced after two or three weeks in the field. The replacement frequency was then changed, as the threat of landmines in the area and the lack of mine-clearing capacities slowed down our well-clearing project for the first two months. Locals were hired to support the well-clearing team and these were later replaced by Norwegian team members. This was part of the agreement we had made with UNHCR when the project was first established. In

addition, we tried to reduce the strain on each individual team member through practical procedures and the technical equipment we used during our work.

The roads in Kosovo, especially those covered in tarmac, were clearly marked by warfare; explosions and artillery fire had scarred the surface of numerous roads. The smaller roads were in extremely poor condition; they were mostly gravel roads consisting of more clay than gravel which made transportation time consuming. In many places, bridges had been destroyed. The road diversions, built straight into the terrain and with no ground work, further delayed transportation. Military transports were given priority and when military convoys came thundering by, all other traffic had to give way. Sometimes, when it was raining, road diversions and gravel roads became impossible to drive on because of the slippery, claylike surface. At times, driving on the roads in Kosovo was a true nightmare. With a large number of trucks and lorries on the road at all times, even travelling short distances could take hours, especially if it had been raining and you were driving on one of the road diversions. You were literally stuck in the mud. And you might remain stuck half the day waiting for someone (usually the military) to take action and release the trucks, lorries and jeeps that were facing all directions on the slopes. There was an enormous need for merchandise and building materials from across the borders, which of course caused even heavier traffic.

As refugees returned, private cars made use of the roads, most of them without number plates and insurance. Several young drivers did not have a driving licence and their driving caused a lot of fatal accidents. Kosovo Albanians did not enjoy queuing. They overtook cars on their left and risked ending up in a tailback where traffic was at a complete standstill. In the first months before the UNMIK police became operative, lawless conditions dominated the roads in Kosovo.

It must have been strange for the Kukalaj family to suddenly house so many aid workers. Less than a month earlier, their house had been occupied by the Serbian military. A local Serbian military chief found that the Kukalaj home would serve well as headquarters for his division. The family with six children (five girls and a boy) had been separated during the war. Some women were held hostage at a military unit and used as human shields against NATO's bombing; others were on the run to Montenegro or Macedonia. Two other people from Decani, who later became regular members of the well-clearing team, ought to be mentioned: Beqir Dukaj, a self-employed businessman in Decani, and Shefqet Kukalaj, a smallholder and former marathon champion. They were both exceptionally hard-working men, which came in handy when tons of rubble and rubbish had to be cleared from the wells before the dead bodies could be brought out.



Our baptism of fire – the first well. As it turned out, there were two dead bodies tangled up in each other in the well. This made it difficult for us as we tried lifting them out without causing further damage to the bodies. From the left: Roy Ringnes, Bjørn Holt, myself (Josef Martinsen), Egil Thøger Andresen and Driton (Toni) Kukalaj (interpreter). (Photo: Ken Opprann/Scanpix)

The well-clearing turned out to be an extensive and sometimes difficult task. Before we could even begin our job, we had to deal with the danger of mines and booby traps in the area. A large number of heavily contaminated wells containing bodies were discovered in rapid succession and it was impossible to know whether these wells contained humans or animals. We had to take certain factors into consideration, such as demands for a quick identification of the dead, and UNHCR's wish for a rapid end to the work for economic reasons.

There was a real danger of mines in the western part of Kosovo where most of the well-clearing took place. The mines could be everywhere; at the roadside, in courtyards, in houses, schools and farming areas. It seemed as though the Serbian military had scattered mines all over the place as they pulled out of Kosovo. For instance, an anti-personnel landmine was discovered by coincidence at the roadside in the residential area where the well-clearing team lived during their first week in Decani.





The well-clearing team working in the field.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)



A well-clearing team on a mission in Podujeve. All the members came from Decani. From the left: Xhevdet; Beqir Dukaj; Margita Kukalaj (interpreter and deputy coordinator); Fatmir Daci; Shefqet Kukalaj; Fatmir Dervishaj and Fadil Gashi sitting in front.

This area had been declared free of mines and children and adults had already made use of this spot for about a month when the mine was discovered. Mine-clearing the area in question was an important part of the well-clearing team's initial operational procedure, a precaution which, however, delayed our project for the first two months. UNHCR and UNMIK had set up a list of places and objects that were to be cleared of mines. Wells were not given priority by the mine clearing-teams. After a while, the problem with mine-clearing was satisfactorily solved through sporadic support from Norwegian People's Aid, which had mine-clearers in the area. (The mine-clearing teams were gathered in a pool centrally controlled by UNMIK.) Later, DCA (DanChurchAid) assigned our project with permanent mine-clearing support from locals who were trained as mine-clearers. Often, ex-KLA-soldiers were retrained for this task.

## **THE DIVING TEAM**

After working for two months, the authorities in Gjakova requested our support to search for bodies in the Radonjic water reservoir, which provides drinking water for about 200,000 people in the Gjakova area. At that time, there were no divers with the necessary equipment in Kosovo. Actually, the KFOR units had a couple of divers, but they were on stand-by for military operations and not there to take part in our type of work. The local authorities in Gjakova were anxious as rumours claimed the Radonjic water reservoir contained several dead bodies. We made an agreement with the local interim authorities to establish a fully equipped diving team consisting of two local divers. The municipal authorities lacked the necessary resources for this assignment and the equipment needed could not be bought in Kosovo. We cleared the agreement with our employer, UNHCR, and the investigative body ICTY.

Before 1989, there had been a diving school for frogmen in Gjakova, run by Albert Morina. The school had been closed down by Serbian police and all the equipment had been confiscated and brought to Belgrade. Whenever there was a need for diving services after 1989, divers had to be sent in from Belgrade. There had been a frequent need for divers at the Radonjic water reservoir, which was constructed in the 1960s. The divers were also often summoned to assist in drowning accidents all over Kosovo. In addition, Albert Morina had run a driving school in Gjakova. Serbian Police closed this down as well and told him that if he did not close the driving school, he would receive a house call he would never forget. After 1989, thousands of Kosovo Albanians working in public offices within education, health, police and administration were laid off without any explanation. And Albert Morina was not the only self-employed person threatened into quitting his business. This policy was probably aimed at rendering the Kosovo Albanians passive; make them struggle to make ends meet and thereby forcing them to leave Kosovo.

Sometimes, the work pressure was too much for the well-clearing team. In some villages, we cooperated with the locals and with KFOR to alleviate some of the stress when our team could not finish its assignment within the deadline stipulated in the agreement with UNHCR. The agreement made sure that reported assignments were started within two weeks of us receiving the initial report. Naturally, the locals were eager to know the identity of the victims in the wells. Thousands of families were desperately searching for family members and these families wanted the rubble cleared up and the identification to get started as soon as possible. Many of them were quite persistent. At times, tragicomic situations occurred, like the one time when our team informed the locals that there were no dead bodies in their well.

A woman searching for her husband was adamant that he had been thrown into the local well. When we informed her that this was not the case, she refused to accept it. She could not understand that the fairly deep well was empty; that it contained nothing but water. Finally, we had to let the woman see for herself. She watched a monitor that showed pictures transmitted from our underwater camera. It was still hard for her to accept that there were no dead bodies in the well.

Many Kosovo Albanians had developed psychological problems due to the strain they had been exposed to over such a long period. The nervous tension during the Serbian offensives of autumn 1998 and spring 1999, and the following uncertainty regarding their missing relatives, were more than many of them could handle.



The diving team at work in the Radonjic water reservoir in the municipality of Gjakova. From the left: Albert Morina (diving team leader) and Besnik Spahia.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

Merely two or three months earlier, most of the villagers had suffered shelling from artillery posts and tanks; houses were burned to the ground, neighbours were injured and killed, and most people had been forced to run and take cover in refugee camps. We were not surprised when some of them suddenly displayed post-war psychological problems.

When the military forces left, the entire former Serbian administration went with them. They brought all their equipment and archives, and what they left behind, was destroyed. UNMIK had an almost impossible job of setting up a civil administration from scratch. And the need for a civil administration was, to put it mildly, pressing. Both locally and “nationally”, there were tasks waiting to be solved by the new civil administration. UNHCR was responsible for establishing aid programmes for returning refugees. Most of them returned to ruined houses and winter was only three or four months away. Civil aid organisations (NGOs) from various countries took on aid projects following UNHCR guidelines. During the first month, 200 different aid organisations were registered in Kosovo.





British KFOR helps us dig in Podujevo. A piece of clothing has been found, the first sign indicating that the destroyed well contains more than water.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

But there was plenty for them all to do. Mine clearing and the rebuilding of houses, schools and health institutions were highly prioritised assignments; the aim was to provide housing for as many families as possible before the first snow fall. The winter of 1999-00 would turn out to be tough, with temperatures as low as twenty-nine degrees below zero.

## **100 TONS OF LENTILS**

We worked in Kosovo for more than seven months, focusing on dead and mutilated people in wells and water reservoirs. Every day we talked to distraught families desperately seeking their loved ones. This could have been a continuous detrimental experience, had it not been for some purely coincidental cases that gradually appeared. ACT International is an umbrella organisation representing over 200 different denominations from all over the world. Norwegian Church Aid is affiliated with the ACT. In Kosovo, the ACT had set up their head

office in Pristina and was leading a project in which five different Christian organisations took part. I got my own office at the ACT, reported to the ACT Director, and sat in with observer status in staff meetings every Friday. The issue of 100 tons of lentils appeared on their agenda almost every Friday.

The lentils were sitting in a warehouse in the Mitrovica-area. They were donated by the Mennonite Central Committee, a denomination in the USA and Canada. The warehouse was earmarked for materials and equipment needed for rebuilding houses. These materials were expected to arrive soon and the 2500 bags of lentils were occupying a large part of the storage facility. The lentils originally came from Albania, and were intended as part of the food supplies for the refugee camps, which the ACT and NCA, among others, were setting up during the NATO bombings.

In spring of 1999, hundreds of thousand of Kosovo Albanian refugees had fled into the northern part of Albania and the areas down towards the coast, and many of them were still there. The ACT and NCA started setting up refugee camps in Northern Albania near Kukes and in the vicinity of the towns Durres and Tirana. Albania would never have been able to take care of these refugees without outside help. At one point there was a real concern that the refugees would have to stay put in Albania for another winter, since NATO did not appear to succeed in driving the Serbian forces out of Kosovo in time. Aid organisations feared a humanitarian disaster; about one and a half million refugees were on the move. However, the NATO bombings in Serbia turned out to be so effective that after seventy-eight days, Milosevic gave in and withdrew his forces from Kosovo. The majority of refugees quickly returned to Kosovo. The construction of refugee camps was stopped and the lentils were transferred to ACT International, who in 1999 set up office in Pristina.

In my job, I was only supposed to focus on the wells functioning as mass graves. But when it dragged on finding a solution to the ACT's "lentil problem", and there were reports of rats and mice showing an interest in the stored lentils, I offered, in one of the Friday meetings, to solve the problem. Every day I travelled through Kosovo and talked to the interim municipal leaders. I could easily offer them the lentils, at least where they were most needed.

However, a practical problem occurred when we started planning for "operation lentils". Margita, our interpreter and deputy project coordinator, told me that lentils were not a common food product in Kosovo, and she did not think people would know how to use lentils in their cooking. After debating back and forth we decided that we had to produce a few recipes on how to prepare the lentils and use them in a daily diet. After consulting a few housewives and conducting some tests, we ended up with a suitable recipe for "lentil soup" and "lentil soup with something on the side", which we had printed in Albanian and Serbian. The recipes were handed out to people along with the lentils.

We were all excited the first time we met with municipal leaders and, after first presenting the well-clearing project, we offered them the lentils. Would the municipality like to receive a few tons of lentils as a dietary supplement for the local villagers in need of food? The response was entirely positive, as it would be almost wherever we made the offer. In seventeen out of thirty municipalities, we delivered between two and ten tons of lentils, depending on the size of the municipality. They also made agreements with the aid organisations working in the municipality who promised they would help distribute the lentils to each individual family, and in this respect, the Mother Theresa-organisation was of great help. In many places in Kosovo, families had recently returned to find their house in ruins and needed food and clothing. Within six weeks, 100 tons of lentils were distributed to the municipalities and thousands of Kosovo Albanians and Serbians got to taste what was to them an exotic dish. Both the ACT's head office in Pristina and the warehouse manager were happy the problem had been solved.

I kept twenty kilos of lentils and made lentil soup to serve at my farewell-party after seven and a half months in Kosovo. My colleagues at ACT International did not complain about the food. Perhaps they did not dare?

## **THE BOYS AND GIRLS IN THE STREETS**

Three months later, another case emerged. NCA had initiated a basketball school for children in Pristina. The previous organiser had given short notice of his return home and left the project without a coordinator. NCA's head office in Oslo asked me to take responsibility for the project until further notice and I accepted. The basketball school was run by two Kosovo Albanian basketball instructors who coached about 120 children. They held practices after school and at the weekends. The intension was that the children would be able to take their mind off their dire living conditions in Pristina and the horrible experiences they had been through in the last six months. The basketball school was a highly popular project and many children were eager to take part. Personally, this involvement gave me an opportunity to get away from my daily experiences of death and destruction that the Serbian forces had left in the wells in Kosovo. I also believe that, after being surrounded by military units, these children enjoyed meeting civilian foreigners.



The children give it their all at practice.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)





“The Street boys”.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

They really appreciated it if I dropped in at one of their practices. They experienced that someone from the outside world took an interest in them and what they were doing; someone was concerned with their wellbeing.

It could be worth mentioning a somewhat tragicomic episode from daily life that took place after KFOR had entered Pristina. Not long after the British units started patrolling the streets, the local military chief told families that the children should stop playing “cowboys and Indians” or “cops and robbers”- games played by children all over the world. The reason was that the children’s rifles and pistols looked like real weapons and the soldiers patrolling the streets did not enjoy having these “weapons” around them.

The young boys and girls in the street where I lived were probably wondering who this strange man was who disappeared early in the morning and returned late at night. As the days went by, I ran into many of the boys and girls on the street where I lived. In the beginning they would quickly disappear into a doorway, but with the help of a few smiles and a few “hello’s”, they started to smile back. They would still not completely trust me, so I decided to throw a “street party” for them so that we could really get to know each other. In front of my house there was a double garage where the roof functioned as a terrace and this was where we held our party. Margita sent out the invitations and on Friday 27 August, it was time for a big street party with food and beverages where about thirty children turned up. Unfortunately, I had to rush out to Skopje to pick up air supplies from Norway for the well-clearing team, but when I returned at 10 pm the party was still going strong. There was music and dancing and I received a warm welcome from all the guests. To help her host the party, Margita had recruited a couple of local ACT-employees and the Norwegian NCA employee Thorbjørn

Stray Pedersen (who was a former officer and trained frogman. He would later assist me in purchasing diving equipment in Greece). Children's parties are serious business and you should keep your promises. This was the first party these children had been to in a long time. A few months earlier they had been refugees, fleeing from Kosovo with soldiers, police and paramilitaries on their tails.

I never mentioned a word to UNHCR about my part-time jobs. It could quickly have turned into a discussion about my mandate to take on assignments in the area. But these small breaks from pulling dead bodies out of wells actually gave me new energy to do my job.

## **POLAC, 20 MARCH 1999**

In Kosovo in the spring of 1999, ethnic cleansings took place along three main axes running from north to south:

Axis 1: Mitrovica – Istok – Peja – Gjakova – Prizren – Montenegro/Albania (the northern axis)

Axis 2: Pristina – Malisheve – Rahovec – Prizren – Albania (the middle axis)

Axis 3: Pristina – Lipjan – Ferizaj – Kacanik – Macedonia (the eastern axis)

People were removed from their homes by force and transported by trains, buses, private cars and tractors. Many had to travel on foot for many days. As early as March 1998, Serbian military forces started a systematic shelling of villages in the northern part of the Skenderaj area. On 8 March and 15 March 1998, *Sunday Times* journalists Chris Stephen and Marie Colvin reported of assaults on the local population in Prekaz and of mass executions in the streets, all committed by Serbian soldiers. An old man claimed Serbian special police wanted people to witness these executions as it would scare the local villagers into leaving their homes.

In London, the so-called Contact Group for the former Yugoslavia held an urgent meeting with its members: Great Britain, the USA, Russia, Germany, France and Italy. The representatives discussed implementing tougher sanctions against Milosevic, but at the end of the day, the western countries merely threatened to call home their diplomats. Russia, traditionally a Serbian ally, threatened to veto any stronger sanctions. In a meeting between the British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and President Milosevic, Mr Cook was told that the situation in Kosovo was a domestic police matter and therefore of nobody else's concern. Two days earlier, on 18 March, Kosovo Albanian representatives had signed the Rambouillet-agreement, while the Serbians had refused. The Kosovo Albanians formed an interim government dominated by the KLA, the organisation led by Hashim Thaqi.

It was in Polac in the municipality of Skenderaj, on Saturday 20 March 1999, that well-killings again became a "hallmark"; one of the most outrageous war crimes committed by the Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces in Kosovo.

The same morning, other shocking things happened. All of the about 1200 OSCE-observers who were there to supervise the Milosevic-regime's conduct in Kosovo, were suddenly transported south to Macedonia. The Kosovo Albanians were shaken up by this development. All of a sudden, there were nobody left to give them even an illusion of security. No international organisations were left to report assaults to the outside world. Within nine weeks, an apocalypse descended on the people in Kosovo. Until the end of May, the ethnic cleansing continued, followed by destruction and the burning of houses and their contents, as well as a systematic destruction of the local water supply. The wells, which were vital for hundreds of thousand of people in the area, were destroyed and/or contaminated.

People and animals were thrown into the wells along with construction materials and other random rubbish. It would be very difficult for any of the Kosovo Albanians to return to the affected areas, if they ever dared to. This was systemised terror. Was the aim to scare all Kosovo Albanians away? Or part of a plan to gain total control? The effects were enormous, close to one and a half million people fled in just a few months. All they managed to bring with them was some food and clothes and soldiers methodically removed their money and valuables along the flight route.

That Saturday afternoon, international news broadcast the first disturbing images of fleeing Kosovo Albanians heading south towards Albania and Macedonia. Serbian military units, consisting of more than 40,000 soldiers, were deployed all over Kosovo at increasing speed. "Operation Horse-shoe" had been initiated on both a strategic and tactical level.

At the NATO headquarters in Mons on the evening of 20 March, people were relieved that OSCE's observers had been evacuated from Kosovo without anyone being killed or taken hostage, something the leaders of OSCE and NATO had feared. Hostage situations like the one in Bosnia had been avoided. In Bosnia, UN soldiers were taken hostage and chained to potential NATO bombing targets. The operations division in NATO's headquarters was now working hard to decide on the first bombing targets. It was important that the targets remained confidential until the bombings were executed; the pilots' safety and the element of surprise were crucial. NATO had had bad experiences of information leaking out during the planning stage of coming operations. Back in October, a French officer at the NATO headquarters had leaked information on planned operations to the Serbs (Wesley Clark 2001:177). In addition to the planning at the military headquarters, the bombing targets also needed political approval. Potential bombing targets have to be in line with the Geneva Convention and international law to get clearance. Naturally, there are greater risks of information leaking out when a lot of people have access to it.

Polac is situated a few kilometres south of the town of Skenderaj in the north-western part of Kosovo. In early March, the villages south of Skenderaj suffered heavy shelling. The villagers predicted the attack and had fled south and westwards along the main roads. Some took refuge in nearby woods and mountain areas. In the village of Polac there had been hectic activity. People had gathered all they could carry and brought it with them on the run. The Kabashi family decided to leave for the mountains, but the father and some of his nephews decided to stay and look after the house and what was left of their belongings. This would be a fatal decision for Mustafa Kabashi. His son Avdyl tells what happened:

*"My name is Avdyl Kabashi and I live in Polac. I am the son of Mustafa Kabashi (aged 52) and I can tell you about the horrible things the Serbian police and paramilitaries did in Polac. When the attack started, my father was in the village with three of his nephews. We tried to persuade him to come with us up in the mountains where the rest of our family was hiding, but he insisted on staying behind to look after the house. After three days, I returned home to force my father to come with me. The Serbians had set fire to some of the houses in the village, but my father still insisted on staying behind to protect our property. On 20 March 1999 at 4 pm, Serbian military forces attacked the area where we lived. My father had to run, at the same time as he was searching for his three nephews. Later, when I saw my cousins and asked for my father, all they could tell me was that he had been taken prisoner. We checked the prison; my father's name was on their lists, but they said he had left for Albania with his family. When I returned to the place where we lived, I went down to a plateau below our house where there is a well. I had a strange feeling my father could have been thrown into the well. I asked our neighbour, Sali, if he had noticed anything unusual about the well – but he*

*had not. I told Sali that I thought my father was in the well and we went down to take a closer look. I then found my father's coat. Shortly after, we discovered him in the well."*

*"My name is Bajram Kerolli, and I come from Polac. Serbian military forces had occupied our village. I met Mustafa down in the village and we went to his house with two of Mustafa's nephews. In total, there were four of us hiding in Mustafa's stable for two days. From the stable we could see military and paramilitary forces; there were two tanks in the courtyard. We could also see armed civilians speaking Albanian. On the third day, all four of us left for a grove in a hillside not far from where we had been hiding. Later, we saw some civilians in our courtyard and returned, only to discover that they were armed police wearing civilian clothes. Three of us managed to run back to the grove, but Mustafa, who was older and slower than us, was caught by the police and after that we did not see him again."*



Mustafa Kabashi, aged 52, from Polac in Skenderaj. (The photo, the only one found in the ruins of their home, was borrowed from the family.)

## **LLAPASHTICË, 24 MARCH**

The village of Llapashticë in the municipality of Podujevo is situated about forty minutes north-east of Pristina. The village is close to the Serbian border. This area was used as a transit point for Serbian military forces and they marched into position here before they were sent to Kosovo. In the winter of 1998-99, the Podujevo area became a recurring topic in meetings between NATO and Milosevic's regime. When the Serbians positioned military forces in that area without consent, they violated UN Security Council resolution 1199 and the grounds for OSCE's intervention. During this ceasefire, Serbian forces continued to shell villages in the area. In February and March 1999, as the Serbians really committed to their policy of ethnic cleansing, Serbian supply lines went through the Podujevo area. In the early afternoon of 24 March, Serbian military and paramilitary units, with the support of armoured vehicles, rolled up towards Llapashticë on the main road leading to Podujevo. Prior to this, the village had been under fire for several days. This was not the first time Llapashticë was shelled, the same had happened four months earlier. The second time around, the soldiers and paramilitaries brought special equipment to set fire to the buildings.

Hamide Havolli (aged 82) and her mentally challenged son Imer (aged 32) were standing outside their house, situated 150 metres from the dusty gravel road, watching the soldiers and paramilitaries coming towards them across the fields. Hamide had to sit down on the chair outside her house; her right leg had been amputated at the knee and she could not stand upright for long before her wooden prosthesis started hurting her leg. Imer was getting worried; he did not like the people approaching their house. Something told him this was a

dangerous situation, so he told his mother that he was going for a walk and disappeared behind the house just as the soldiers reached her. What took place had fatal consequences for Hamide. Skender Havolli, Hamide's nephew, reports:

*"The old woman who was found in the well, Hamide Havolli, was my aunt. The area where we live, Llapashticë, was occupied by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces for several months from 1998 to 1999. Podujevo was where the military forces marched into position in Kosovo as it is not far from the border to Serbia. Early on in 1999, the KLA notified people of a resistance against Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces. In the autumn of 1998, these forces had bombed villages and chased the Kosovo Albanians away from their homes. I was the only male member of our family, and I therefore had to join the forces the KLA tried to set up.*

*Before I joined the local KLA-force, Llapashticë had been heavily shelled by Serbian soldiers. It went on for several months and people were killed during these attacks. The first to be killed, in December 1998, was a man named Isak Havolli. Later, in the beginning of 1999 when the second Serbian attack was launched on the area, twenty-four people were killed in and around Llapashticë. The Serbians used special equipment to set fire to people's houses. Among the dead were children, women, disabled and old people. Again, people fled the area because of the relentless bombings. My aunt and her mentally challenged son Imer stayed behind in the village. Hamide had been physically impaired since 1941; she broke her leg during the Second World War. Apparently, the doctor did a poor job, her leg became gangrenous, and it had to be amputated. Since then, she used a wooden prosthesis. I believe my aunt was killed by the Serbians and thrown into the well on 24 March 1999, because on that day, her son came to where I was staying with eleven other KLA-soldiers. He said that Serbian soldiers had come to their house and that he had left because they scared him. This was the last time I saw Imer Havolli. In April, we returned to our village and found several people dead, both KLA-soldiers and civilians. We gave them a temporary grave about thirty centimetres deep. When the NATO units entered Kosovo and the Serbian forces returned to Serbia, the villagers started to come back. The Serbians had mined the area before they left, so we had to wait two or three weeks before we could return home. I went to my aunt's house to look for her and her son, but I could not find them anywhere. I asked all the neighbours if they had seen Hamide and Imer, but without results. After searching for ten days, I had a dream where Hamide told me she was not far away.*

*The next day I went to an old man I knew and asked him what the dream could mean. He advised me to go down to the ruined well when the sun set at night. "If you see lots of flies by the well, you can look for Hamide there." I went down to the well the next evening and saw flies circling the ruins. The next morning, I went to an international aid organisation to ask them to help me find my relatives. This organisation contacted NCA/ACT in Pristina, which came to Llapashticë. They dug up the well with an excavator, since the well was totally ruined and filled to the brink with rocks, dirt and building materials. Deep down in the well, under all the debris, we found Hamide. We could see the metal where her wooden leg used to be attached."*

It was seven o'clock in the evening on 24 March. Earlier that day, Hamile Havolli was killed and thrown into the well by her house. In the village of Kotle, a little further south, twenty-two people were mutilated, killed and thrown into two separate wells.



Hamide Havolli, born in 1917 in Llapashticë. Of her immediate family, her two daughters Hyra and Fahrie, are still alive.



Imer Havolli, (aged 32); Hamide's mentally challenged son.



A British KFOR unit lent us an excavator to dig through the ruined well where we found Hamide Havolli (aged 82). She lived in the house in the background.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)



At that moment, NATO launched the first four or five cruise missiles from battleships, heading towards Pristina. The targets were the Serbian command and communication centrals and the attack order came from NATO's headquarters in Mons. The bomber planes at Aviano Air Force Base had received their attacking orders forty-eight hours earlier. Battleships that would launch missiles at targets in Pristina were deployed to the Adriatic Sea. The targets were stationary installations such as command centres, radars and communication centres. These were installations with known coordinates and therefore easily accessible to the cruise missiles even in bad weather conditions. However, the list of targets did not include the military units continuously moving through the terrain. The weather did not permit high altitude surgical bombing of military units chasing civilians. From NATO's point of view, the first night of bombings in Kosovo and Serbia had been successful. All the bomber planes had returned safely to their base in Italy and the operation staff in Mons could breathe a sigh of relief after NATO's very first massive air attack on another European country.

At NATO's headquarters in Brussels, the first press briefings had been held on the NATO offensive. There was a strong interest in what was happening in Serbia and Kosovo and daily briefings were held in front of a number of journalists and TV stations.

## **DRENAS, 28 MARCH**

Drenas is situated at the heart of Kosovo, not far from the town of Glogovac and about an hour's drive from Pristina. On 28 March, the Serbian military, police and paramilitaries were very active in this area. A house-to-house search was carried out and the residents were forced to leave their homes and travel south and out of Kosovo. Houses were set on fire and furniture was removed or destroyed. Those who refused to leave the area were abused and shot. Only three days had passed since the massacres in the towns of Bela Crkva, Mala Krusa and Velika Krusa. In the first town, fifty-five people were killed, in the second, 101 people died (ICTY 2001:44-45, 46-48).

It seemed as though the apocalypse was near in Kosovo. In many villages, Kosovo Albanians were massacred and the number of refugees travelling on the roads had reached hundred thousand. The UN Security Council Resolution 1199 on protecting the people of Kosovo, with military force if necessary, had no effect.

The massive presence of the Serbian military frightened the Kosovo Albanians. Word was out about the NATO bombings, but this area had not been affected. How could it be that nobody stepped in to help them against the Serbian military and paramilitary divisions?

Mustaf Bajraktari speaks of what happened in Drenas when Hasan Bajraktari (aged 29) and Ekram Bajraktari (aged 40) were killed and thrown into a well:

*"At ten o'clock in the morning on Sunday 28 March 1999, the special police came to our house situated quite far from the main road between Glogovac and Skenderaj. The police ordered all the family members to leave the area. I had been hiding in the attic and heard seven or eight shots fired after my family had left the house. Because the police started using the house, I stayed in the attic. The police left after two days and a month later we found the bodies of Hasan and Ekrem in the well. We left them there, because the Serbs were still close by. On 28 June 1999, a Swiss team came and removed the bodies from the well. A third victim was Shaban Krasniqi (aged 30). He was Mustaf's brother-in-law and had a five-year-old daughter. He was found under a collapsed house wall.*



Ekrem Bajraktari (aged 26) to the left, Hasan Bajraktari (aged 29) to the right.

## **VOLLJAK, 2 APRIL**

Binak Berisha felt uneasy, he could not relax. Eleven families were living in his home; families who had fled from villages further north. Many of them lacked food and clothes and Binak felt obligated to help these people in need. The number of refugees on the run had only increased in size. The situation had been discussed by people in the village and they could not make themselves believe that the Serbs were mad enough to drive all Kosovo Albanians out of Kosovo. Not only was the threat of being chased out of the country imminent, the weather had been exceptionally bad lately. It had not rained this much in a long time and all the small side roads had turned into mud which stuck to shoes and clothes. Binak was worried about his family; wife, eight daughters and three sons. Would the military and special police come to Volljak and chase them south towards Albania too?

On that morning, the Serbians came to Volljak from the upper side of the village situated about a kilometre from the main road to Gjakova. The artillery fire forced most villagers away from the village. When the firing stopped, soldiers and police came, entered the houses and forced those who were still there to travel south to Gjakova.

It was the morning of Friday 2 April and NATO's bombing of Serbia and Kosovo was in its second week. The ethnic cleansing in Kosovo had by now been going on for several weeks and the tragedy was already a fact; hundreds of thousand of people were on the run.

The previous day, NATO's Secretary General Javier Solana and General Clark held a press conference in Brussels. Mr Solana opened by stressing that NATO's political goals remained the same:

- first and foremost, we must stop the killing in Kosovo and the brutal destruction of human lives and properties;
- secondly, we must put an end to the appalling humanitarian situation that is now unfolding in Kosovo and create conditions the refugees will be able to return to;
- thirdly, we must create the right conditions for a political solution to the crisis in Kosovo based on the Rambouillet agreement.

“After one week of air operations, I am confident that we are having a major impact on Belgrade's criminal war machine. We are degrading its ability to carry out the current acts of violence in Kosovo”, said General Clark, before doing his military briefing: “So as you can see, the net is closing in on the Yugoslav armed forces. The impact of our air campaign will be increasingly cumulative.”

But for the people of Volljak and hundreds of thousand of other Kosovo Albanians, NATO's air raids in Serbia were of no help. In Kosovo, Milosevic's war machine was practically given free rein to do as they pleased, and they did.

Ajshe Berisha, Binak's wife, tells her story:

*“We were surrounded by Serbian military units and they forced us out of our house and away from our property. We were housing many other families on our farm, families who had been forced to leave their homes in neighbouring villages. My husband told the soldiers that he could not leave his farm as so many other families were living with us temporarily and he felt responsible for them. Because of this, the soldiers started beating him with their weapons. They then ordered him to lie down on the ground and he was shot in front of the whole family. The soldiers ordered a local man, thirty-two- year- old Bashkim Berisha, to bring a tractor and load the dead body onto the flatbed. Berisha was then ordered to drive higher up in the village. Later we were told that my dead husband had been thrown into the well along with the bodies of three women from the village at around noon. The rest of us were forced to leave our farm and village immediately. I had to start walking with my eleven children; eight daughters and three sons; the youngest was eleven years old. We could not bring much with us. During our flight, I managed to keep the family together, but since we have returned, I have experienced physical and psychological reactions. I suffered a psychological blow. I have recurring headaches after what we went through and I am not able to be of much use.”*

*“My name is Miradije Berisha and I come from the village of Volljak. I was not present when the well murders took place, but two of the victims were my mother Aze Berisha (aged 48), and my sister Era Berisha (aged 18). The people in my village told me that on 2 April the Serbians attacked and forced the villagers to leave their homes. Some people were held back by the soldiers, among them my mother and sister. When we returned to the village two months later, we found that four dead people had been thrown into a well. It was my mother, Aze Berisha, and my sister, Era Berisha. The two others were our neighbours Gjere Berisha (aged 79) and Binak Berisha (aged 56). People in the village, led by Rrahman Berisha, brought the four bodies out of the well.”*

*“My name is Muj Berisha and I come from Volljak. I am a teacher. One of the dead women found in the well was my mother Gjere Berisha (aged 79). When these killings took place, I was in Germany visiting my daughter. We saw a news report from Kosovo on German television. As it turned out, the subject was Volljak, and I realised that my mother was one of the victims.”*



Binak Berisha (aged 56). Binak completed primary and secondary school. During his compulsory military service in the Yugoslav army he was trained as a cook and completed the army's cooking course. He later worked as a cook for miners. The family also ran a smallholding of two hectare.



Aze Berisha (aged 48).



Gjere Berisha (aged 79) is carried away.



Aze has just been pulled out of the well.

The day before, on 1 April, Javier Solana held a press briefing with Wesley Clark. This was an orientation on how the situation had developed after a week of bombing Kosovo and Serbia. Mr Solana stated among other things that: "After one week of our air operations, I am confident that we are having a major impact on Belgrade's criminal war machine. We are degrading its ability to carry out the current acts of violence in Kosovo." (NATO Press Release 1999-045)

The true situation in Kosovo was the exact opposite. The Serbian war machine was continually increasing its pressure on Kosovo Albanians; thousands of people were killed and hundreds of thousand were chased from their homes towards the Albanian and Macedonian borders. There were not enough NATO forces on the ground or in the air to prevent Milosevic's military, paramilitary and police forces from going berserk in Kosovo's villages.

## **GLLAREVA, 12 APRIL**

Kosovo was on fire. From the main road leading to Peja you could see countless houses go up in flames and heavy smoke fill the air under clouds laden with rain.

Gllareva is situated by the main road between Pristina and Peja and not far from the town of Kline. This is a flat, agricultural area. Since 24 March, the police and paramilitary divisions had carried out their "cleansing campaign", which consisted of forcing people to leave their homes and head south and out of Kosovo.

Nazim Morina (aged 26), son of Ramadan Morina (aged 65), describes what happened:

*“On 24 March the special police came to our house and took my father and his brother Bajram Morina (aged 57) and sent them to Kijeva, where the special police had one of their posts. After three hours they were both released, but only two hours later the police returned to take them away once again. This time they brought them to Gllareva where they were interrogated and beaten. The police then ordered them to start walking towards the village Doberdol, which lies far away from the road to Gjakova. My father refused to walk to Doberdol; he did not want to leave his home. The police shot him in the foot and brought him with them. My father was last seen alive on 12 April. On 13 June we returned to our village and after some time my father was found in Ajet Morina’s well and brought out by the Norwegian well-clearing team. Ramadan’s body was covered in knife wounds and his eyes had been removed. Ramadan was buried in the village of Rixhev.”*

It was 12 April. NATO was three weeks into its air raids and the weather was still bad. Undisturbed, Serbian troops carried on with their cleansing. It was difficult to find any other explanation why hundreds of thousand of refugees were now fleeing to Albania and Macedonia. NATO’s credibility was suffering; the organisation was unable to carry out operations to relieve some of the pressure on Kosovo Albanian shoulders. NATO found itself in a classic “catch twenty-two” situation.



Victim Ramadan Morina (aged 65) and his wife Kade Morina (aged 59) who is still alive. Ramadan had no schooling and worked as a farmer.

The way things were developing, it was impossible for NATO and the Supreme Allied Commander to take action against Serbian forces inside Kosovo to prevent the horrible atrocities that were to be uncovered after the war. NATO was about to lose the war in Kosovo, but on the other hand, chances were good of winning the war in Serbia where the bombings continued with unabated strength.



## VERMICE, 12 APRIL

In Serbia, the Milosevic regime exercised complete media censorship. War was declared on 24 March, which extended, among other things the authorities' power to control the media. But some were still critical of Milosevic's warlike approach. On 12 April, the oppositionist newspaper editor, Slavko Curuvija, was killed under suspicious circumstances in downtown Belgrade.

The police and paramilitaries came alone, now that most Kosovo Albanians had been driven away. They no longer needed military forces to help them do the heavy work. At this point, houses were set on fire. From a distance you could see innumerable houses burning and smoke filling the air. The inconceivable was about to happen; entire villages laid waste. The earth was scorched; they would not make it easy for Kosovo Albanians to return.

Vermice lies not far from Gllareva where Ramadan Morina was killed and thrown into a well on 12 April. The same thing was happening in Vermice. Sadije Gashi, who lives in Kline, tells what happened:

*"My mother Qamile (aged 72) was found in a well in Vermice. There were no witnesses. My mother lived alone in Vermice, and she stayed behind on 27 March when artillery and tanks started shelling the village and the Serbs forced all the other villagers to leave. My mother was last seen alive on 12 April, so we do not know exactly when she was killed and thrown into the well. On 16 June, my cousins Rrahim and Haxhi Kastrati came to my mother's house and found her in the well. They brought her out and buried her in the village that same day. My mother had been shot in the head and in the back."*

## DECANI, 13 APRIL

New dreadful well-killings were committed in the towns of Streoc, Lluca and Studenica in Western Kosovo on 13 April, in the area Kosovo Albanians call Rrafshi i Dukagjinit (the Dukagjinit plateau). The day before, Gllareva and Vermice had been the scenes of terrible crimes.

We established a base for our well-clearing project in the municipality of Decani in Western Kosovo. The ACT (NCA/NWF/DCA) was already conducting projects on water supply, mine clearing and projects to rebuild houses from here. Decani is perhaps one of the most severely hit areas in all of Kosovo; about eighty per cent of houses, schools and other buildings were more or less destroyed during the two Serbian offensives which lasted from autumn of 1998 to spring of 1999. The well-clearing team received a warm welcome from the locals and was introduced to some very skilful people. We included them in our project shortly after and initially they worked as assistants, but after a while they replaced the Norwegian team members. As I mentioned earlier, both our interpreters, Margita Kukalaj and her brother Driton (Toni) Kukalaj, came from Decani.



Qamile Kastrati, born in 1928. She was a housewife and worked with her husband on their smallholding. She was the mother of five.

It was pure coincidence that Margita Kukalaj became our interpreter and later also my deputy in the well-clearing project. Margita had been working as an interpreter for OSCE observers even before the start of the second Serbian offensive in Kosovo. This is her story:

*“The day before the OSCE left Kosovo on 20 March 1999, I was working as an interpreter for an OSCE verification team consisting of three people: a Swedish woman, Eva Janson, a Swiss man, Philip Sherrer, and a Russian man whose name I do not recall. We worked in a place called Junik, where several Serbian military units were based. The villagers were in a very difficult position as the military and paramilitary units surrounded them at all times. They had been hoping the Rambouillet negotiations would lead to a peaceful solution to the conflict and had therefore struggled through the harassment and poor living conditions since the summer of 1998. That was the year the Serbs started their first offensive against civilians. The villagers placed their confidence in the OSCE observers when they arrived at the turn of 1998. In fact, they felt so safe that they refused to be chased out of Kosovo. But as the Serbian pressure increased in 1999, a lot of the villagers experienced a great deal of uncertainty. What was going to happen, would OSCE leave Kosovo? We asked the OSCE observers what the best course of action would be, and they told us that things would get better and that we should remain in our houses. People felt reassured by the observers’ affirmations. The next day at noon, the OSCE office in Decani issued a statement demanding that all the OSCE teams in the field were to return to the office at once. It felt like everything was crumbling around us now that no OSCE personnel were left in the villages. People had trusted OSCE when they said everything would be alright. Suddenly, they were all gone and the fear of what the military and paramilitary units would do next, soon spread.*

*NATO started their bombing on the evening of 24 March. My mother, father, sister and I stayed indoors for the next three days. The rest of my family was in Pristina. The soldiers came and forced us to move to a nearby house where they had gathered civilians, old people, sick people and children. The military units seized all the houses in the area and gathered the civilians in a few houses among those the military now controlled. The same day, the police came and questioned me about my work for the OSCE. They left after a while, but said they would return to conduct further investigations. I was terrified, but luckily I did not see that policeman again. About two hours after the police had left we managed to get to another house where the police had gathered twenty-six civilians. For a couple of months, we were actually held hostage right in the middle of the military units in a residential area. It*

*was a horrible situation. We had limited food and lived in constant fear of being harassed by military and paramilitary units who stayed there when they were not out in the field fighting. All the civilian Kosovo Albanians who had remained in Decani and the nearby villages were now forced to leave Kosovo. About 100 families were still living in Decani and we were not allowed to move around freely. We were always afraid and I often thought we would be killed.*

*NATO dropped their bombs very close to where we were staying; two or three big metal plants in Decani were bombed. Many were the times I thought we would either be killed by NATO bombs or by the Serbs. I had a lot of difficult questions that needed answering; why would NATO bomb buildings and let military and paramilitary units continue to kill Kosovo Albanians or force them to leave Kosovo? I often heard people say “God help us”. I said it many times myself. The nights were the worst – like scenes from a horror film – when drunken soldiers returned from the front line and fired shots in the air and at houses. They came to the houses we stayed in and threatened to kill us if we refused to give them money or gold. The Serbian military and paramilitary units seemed to know exactly when NATO was going to bomb the Decani area. Just before every bomb raid, they would come to the houses where civilians were staying to mingle with them.*

*The only one who helped us with food and medicine was Father Sava from the Serbian monastery in Decani. Otherwise, there was not much food or security for anyone. It was impossible to keep in touch with the rest of our family in Pristina where it was rumoured that we had been killed and buried in a mass grave. I was in Decani from March until June and was present when KFOR units entered the town and took control. Before the NATO forces arrived, the families of Serbian military personnel were loaded onto trucks and sent to Serbia. There were also Russian soldiers among the Serbian military units in the Decani area. Even when KFOR arrived and assumed responsibility, Serbian military units continued setting fire to houses as they withdrew.*

*When the Serbian military led 270 Kosovo Albanians towards the Albanian border Father Sava, known for his humanitarian efforts among both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs in 1998, went to Decani and rescued 150 of them in a dramatic operation. In practice, Kosovo had enjoyed freedom of religion for decades; the Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims had lived peacefully side by side and all religious buildings had been shielded from attacks. This ended when the Milosevic regime started destroying Muslim mosques.”*

In November 2002, I visited Decani again as part of my research for this book and met some of the family members of the well-victims in Streoc. Hajrie Ferizaj (aged 48) tells her story:

*“I live in Decani and my husband Nijazi Ferizaj (aged 66) was found in a well along with his brother Shaq Ferizaj. I have five children; three sons and two daughters, and my son Valiant (aged 26) is still missing. The two dead bodies were covered in debris when they were found in the well and three fingers were missing on one of Nijazi’s hands. One of our other relatives, Sali Ferizaj, a twenty-year-old student, was found in another well in the same area (Streoc).*



Sali Ferizaj

*These murders were probably committed on 13 April 1999, as that was the day the Serbs came to our flat and completely destroyed it. We lived in a block of flats in Decani, but our flat was the only one destroyed on this occasion. Earlier, the Serbs had been to our flat and taken all of Nijazi's books. Nijazi was the headmaster and taught English at the gymnasium in Decani. He was the first to teach English there."*

Both Margita and her brother Toni, who worked as interpreters for our well-clearing team, told me that Nijazi had been a good teacher, respected and well liked by his students. His brother, Shaq Ferizaj, was a famous folk musician in Kosovo who would be sincerely missed. Shaq also wrote poems and set them to music. Hajrie said that it was "fortunate" that they had found Nijazi's and Shaq's bodies in the Decani area. Many claimed that Serbs often killed people in one place and then dumped their bodies somewhere else far away. They probably did this to make future identifications difficult. Nijazi Ferazaj and Shaq Ferasaj were brought out of the well and identified by Doctors without Borders (MSF). Sali Ferizaj was brought out of the well and identified by the Norwegian well-clearing team.

## LLUKA, 13 APRIL

Lluka is situated merely a few kilometres from Streoc in the Decani area, where on the same day, the Ferazaj family had become well-victims. At this point, Serbian military divisions were a heavy presence here, and along with the special police, they systematically shelled all villages from Peja to Decani. Those who remained there were forced to flee south towards Albania or west towards Montenegro. Their homes were plundered and burned.



Jetmir Mazrekaj (aged 20) from Drenoc was found in a well in Lluka, discovered by Curr Mazrekaj from Drenoc. At first he thought it was Arif, Jetmir's father, but experts later determined that the body found was that of Jetmir. By mistake, MSF, which brought the body out of the well and conducted the identification, wrote Arif's name instead of Jetmir's on the first official papers. This later led to

psychological problems for the family, who could not accept that it was Jetmir who had been found.

Jetmir had survived a massacre in Beleg on Tuesday 30 March. In all likelihood Arif, Jetmir's father, died while trying to protect his son. The following night, Jetmir managed to

escape from Beleg, even though he had been shot and wounded, and he was offered shelter by a family in Isnij. Two weeks later, on Tuesday 13 April 1999, the police came and arrested Jetmir, who was still weak from his injuries. He was the sole survivor of the massacre in Beleg and the Serbs probably wanted to get rid of this only living witness. After the offensive was over in June, he was found covered by animal carcasses in a twelve to thirteen metres deep well in Lluca.

## STUDENICA, 13 APRIL

NATO had by now carried out bombing raids for more than three weeks and their targets were mainly situated in Serbia. During the week from 12 to 18 April, Kosovo Albanians living along the northern axis were forced to head north towards Montenegro or south towards Albania. The weather was still bad and the Serbian divisions were able to carry out their operations against the civilian population quite freely; the same civilian population supposedly protected in accordance with UN resolution 1199. NATO was bombing Serbia and the Milosevic regime showed more stamina than anybody had anticipated.

*“My name is Enver Lipaj and I live in the village of Kamenice. Two of those killed in our town were my daughters Mirdonë Lipaj (aged 13) and Qëndresë Lipaj (aged 15). My mother, Sale Lipaj (aged 65) and my father-in-law, Sali Zeqiraj (aged 84) were also killed and thrown into the well in Studenica. Sali Zeqiraj was a so-called haxhi; an honorary title for Muslims who have made a pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, two of my uncle’s children, Lindihana Lipaj (aged 13) and Njomeza Lipaj (aged 14), and the wives of two of my uncles, Sabrije Lipaj (aged 45) and Hajrije Lipaj (aged 60) were thrown into the same well; they were all members of the Lipaj family. Hatmane Mehaj (aged 65), who was living with our family when these atrocities took place, was also killed and thrown into the well. On 13 April 1999, Commander Mihail Petrusic was seen near Sali Beqiraj’s house in the village of Studenica. All of the nine people I have mentioned were killed in that house and thrown into the well. The well was then destroyed by explosives and covered in quicklime.*

*My wife managed to flee to Montenegro with our other children and from there they went to Durres in Albania. I stayed on in the area and tried to find the rest of our family, but without any luck. Nezir Lipaj (aged 65) and Fatime Lipaj (aged 67) were also killed by the Serbs that day, but were not thrown into the well with the others. There were no witnesses to the murders, but it must have taken place inside Sali Beqiraj’s house, where the victims had been held captive. We know that the murders were committed at about nine o’ clock in the morning on 13 April 1999. The day before, the Serbians had started shelling the villages of Kamenice, Studenica and Vrella. When the shelling ended, military and paramilitary forces started to empty the villages of civilians. Many refugees who had come from other villages further east had ended up in Studenica. The civilians were forced to head north towards the mountains which form the border to Montenegro. The eldest in our family, Haxhi Sali Zeqiraj, was also forced to leave our village and he ended up in Studenica where the massacre took place. I think the reason why almost our entire family was killed, was the fact that I was a KLA soldier. The paramilitaries that operated along with the military forces were locals who knew about my connection with KLA. Two of them were Commander Mihail Petrusic and his close friend Raca Backovic, who took part in the military operations against the civilian population.*



*When I returned to my village on 26 June 1999, I discovered that a lot of people were missing. We heard about the well in Studenica that had been blown up and we immediately suspected that there might have been people in the well before the explosion. We started digging and straight away we could see that there were human bodies inside the well. Many families gathered in the area as we dug into the well and brought out the dead. Italian KFOR units, an American organisation and representatives from the ICTY were present.”*

*“My name is Rrahime Lipaj and I am married to Enver Lipaj. I first heard of this tragic atrocity committed by the Serbs when I returned from a refugee camp in Durres in Albania. After we discovered that our two daughters – and other family members – had been found in the well, I was shocked and in a terrible state. Of our immediate family, four had been killed and thrown into the well. It was impossible to comprehend. Two years on, I still have terrible physical and emotional reactions.*



Memorial plaque in the village of Kamenice. Everyone on the plaque, except Nezir (top) and Fatime (bottom) were found in the well in Studenica. The ninth person found in the well was Matmane Mehaj (aged 65).  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)

*After the murders had just been discovered, several people from the outside world came to comfort us, but since then, there has been no mention of what happened here and we have not received any help for our post-war reactions. Because I needed money for my son’s education at the university in Pristina, I had to start working as a teacher at the local school again, even*



*though my mental health was poor. The children I teach are the same age as my two daughters. At times, having to go to school and teach is almost unbearable.”*

## **GLLANASELLA, 16 APRIL**

At nine o'clock in the morning on 16 April, Serbian military units and police came to Tahir Topilla's house. The following account was given by his grandchild Dahbinof, who along with around 200 other villagers, had been gathered there by Serbian police:

*“Serbian police ordered Tahir out of his house. Because he could not see or hear very well, Tahir moved slowly. A policeman shoved him out of the house which made him fall over. I helped him up and all of a sudden, he hit the policeman who had pushed him. The policeman took his Kalashnikov and hit my grandfather several times in the chest. My grandfather fell again and this time he remained lying down. The police ordered everyone else to start walking to an area further away from where my grandfather was laying and the last thing I saw, several policemen were gathering around him. As we were walking away, we could hear them beating him while he was on the ground. Then we heard a shot. During this operation, almost every house was destroyed and people were forced to leave the village.”*

Enver Topilla (aged 46), one of Tahir's sons, had earlier joined the local KLA. They had an observation post on a wooded hill not far from the village. They observed what happened in the village through binoculars:

*“In addition to my father, many others were killed that day. The bodies were lying in the fields for several days and my father was thrown into a well in the end. The Serbs removed the bodies after a while and since then, nobody has seen them; they have simply vanished. Because there were no bodies to bury, many families now visit empty graves”*

Tahir was brought out of the well in July 1999, having been in there almost four months. A representative from the Red Cross, a French journalist and a representative from a local human rights organisation were present. Tahir Topilla was born in 1916 and he completed his upper secondary education in Macedonia. Mr Topilla had eight children; two sons and six daughters.



Tahir Topilla, born in 1916.

He was married to Shefkije, the daughter of Shaban Polluzha, a well-known military leader during the Second World War. Tahir Topilla worked as a station manager at the railway in Dritan in the municipality of Drenas. He was a member of the nationalist movement in Kosovo and the communist regime in Yugoslavia had earlier sentenced him to twenty years in prison. After he had served seven years in Kraljevo in Serbia – including a year in isolation – he was released, but had lost his civil rights. His children were denied the right to an education and according to Dahbinot, Tahir was detained every time foreigners visited the area in which he lived.

## KUCICA, 16 APRIL

During the week from 12 to 18 April, Kosovo Albanians living in Mitrovica and southwards had been forced to leave for Montenegro and Albania. People had been chased out of their homes and had to join long lines of refugees. The bombing raids on Serbia had intensified, but it did not affect the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo which had now assumed enormous proportions. By now, hundreds of thousands were on the run. Indescribable scenes were played out; men and women, young and old, many unsuitably dressed in the chilly spring weather, were driven like cattle along the northern axis of the Serb's "Operation horse-shoe". Sevdail Murati told us what happened to her family:

*"My name is Sevdail Murati. I was fifteen- years- old when my father Ukshin Murati (aged 46) and my brother Mentor Murati (aged 22) were killed by the Serbs. On 16 April 1999, military and paramilitary units forced us to leave our homes and join a group of people walking past our house. When we reached upper Kline, just south of Kucica, paramilitaries ordered us to stop. They approached my brother and I and asked us where our father was. They demanded money from us. We told them we did not know where he was and that we had no money. When the other people started walking again, we followed them. After a few minutes, two Serbian soldiers came running after us and said that my brother had to come with them to look for our father. The two soldiers suddenly started debating which one of us should go with them and in the end they decided we should both come.*

*As we approached another group of refugees, I saw my father among them and the soldiers forced me to point him out. They took my father and brother, but let me go so I could rejoin the line of refugees. A while later soldiers stopped the line again. They asked where we were going and I said that we were on our way to Albania. The soldiers laughed out loud and said: "Have a nice trip and enjoy Albania!"*

*At this point I was looking for my father and brother everywhere and I asked others in the group if they had seen them, but nobody could help me.”*



Ismail Kasumi is bringing bodies out of a well.



Ismail Kasumi is bringing bodies out of a well 2.



French KFOR was present when father and son Ushkim and Mentor Murati were brought out of the well.





From the left Ushkim Murati (aged 46) and Mentor Murati (aged 22).

*I followed the refugees all the way to Albania. I learned what had happened to my father and brother after I had left them in upper Kline when I returned to Kosovo on 21 July. They had been killed by the Serbs and thrown into a well in the village of Kucica. There had been no witnesses. My father was brought out of the well by Ismail Kasumi and French KFOR on 30 July 1999 and my brother was brought out the day before.*

*In July/August two years later, someone in my family read an article in the newspaper Koha Ditore about the ICTY and their investigation in Kline. In the article, a woman named Hyla Selimi and her son Sanju Selimi were said to have seen the Serbs shoot my father and brother and throw them into a well."*

## **OLD POKLEK, 17 APRIL**

Easter Week of 1999 had ended just two weeks ago. The Pope had encouraged peace and called for an end to the war in the former Yugoslavia. However, Milosevic's forces continued their destructive actions in Kosovo. Almost three weeks had passed since NATO started bombing Serbia and Kosovo, but few bombing raids had been directed at the Serbian aggressors in Kosovo. The destructive bombing was aimed at Serbia and Montenegro and the targets were military infrastructures. A few days earlier, Ambassador Sergio Balanzino, NATO Deputy Secretary General, had visited refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia. Hundreds of thousands of people had already been forced out of Kosovo. This caused problems for the neighbouring countries and to ease the pressure on Macedonia and Albania, the rest of Western Europe eventually had to accept refugees.

Javier Solana, NATO Secretary General, and Wesley Clark, commander of NATO's military forces, were concerned – and they had every reason to be. NATO was unable to stop

the atrocities carried out against civilians. In the press briefings in Brussels, it was repeated time and time again that NATO's primary task was to strike at the military, paramilitary and police forces. They were now carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing and plain murders of civilians in Kosovo. But NATO had failed to take bad weather into consideration. The bombers were unable to identify targets on the ground when flying at altitudes of 10,000 feet. Especially as heavy rain clouds were obstructing the view between them and their potential targets. The world's greatest military power, the USA, could not agree internally on whether to use their Apache helicopters stationed in Germany. Early on, the European NATO members had approved General Clark's plan to use these helicopters, but the USA refused to give their permission. The US Army Chief, Dennis Reimer, blocked any use of the helicopters.

The political and military sections of NATO were unable to agree on any new bombing targets in Serbia. General Clark had problems getting approval for yet more bombing and missile targets needed to maintain the pressure on Milosevic. The French President Jacques Chirac particularly opposed the bombing of civilian infrastructure. Serbian military leaders proved more than capable of avoiding being targeted by the NATO bombers. Divisions and heavy army material were spread all over Kosovo.

Old Poklek is a small town in central Kosovo, situated by the main road from Pristina to Peja. The Feronikal smelting plant is situated on the outskirts of town. A railway line is running from Glogovac to both Kline and Kosovo Polje. To the east of Old Poklek are some wooded hills that served as refuge for some hundred villagers from Old Poklek and nearby towns. Most of them had stayed there for nearly a month, it had been raining practically non-stop and the situation was critical, especially for families with small children.

It was late in the evening on Friday 16 April. In pouring rain, large Serbian military forces, along with special police and paramilitary groups, were in the woods, intensely searching for the villagers. In the end, people were surrounded and led down to Glogovac. The people came from the villages of Lower Zabel, Lower Korretic, Upper Korretic, Vasilev, Dobroshevc and Grabovc. Amongst those forced down from the woods, was Fadil Muqolli's entire immediate family, fourteen people in total. Ymer N. Elshani, a very popular author of children's books and his mother Naile Grecevc Elshani were with them. Serbian military forces and police had chased the Elshani family out of their village a few days prior to this attack.

In the early morning light, all the villagers were now forced to walk towards the railway station in Glogovac. Once there, they were ordered to stop and wait for further instructions from the Serbian police. An eyewitness gave us the following account:

*"My name is Hysen Kluna (aged 60) and I live in Old Poklek. Horrible crimes were indeed committed in Old Poklek in April 1999. At first we were surrounded by Serbian military, paramilitary and police forces and we were then forced to go to Glogovac. When we arrived at the train station, police forces stopped us and told us to go back to Old Poklek. Several families gathered in Sinan Muqolli's house where we tried to dry our clothes as it had been raining all day. We stayed at Sinan Muqolli's from nine o'clock in the morning till five o'clock in the afternoon, when some policemen came and forced us to leave the house. In the yard, they separated the men from the rest of the group. We were told to open our jackets and they searched us before they ordered everyone back in the house. All of a sudden, a policeman entered and forced Ymer Elshani and Sinan Muqolli to leave the house with their hands above their heads. We soon heard shooting; they had obviously both been killed.*

*The children started crying. A policeman came in and ordered us to shut the door behind him when he left. As Ramadan shut the door, the policeman immediately started*



*shooting through it. He then opened the door again and threw one or more hand grenades in among the women and children. I think it was only one; I am not sure as I was practically paralysed. After the explosion, the policeman opened the door once again and started shooting at the crowd with a machine gun. He emptied the magazine, reloaded the gun and started shooting at us again. I was hit by a bullet and wounded. I heard a voice shouting: "Stop! That's enough!", but the policeman replied that two or three people were still alive. He kept shooting until everyone had stopped moving, before leaving the house. A few of us who survived the shooting went upstairs. From the window on the first floor we could see that the police had set fire to some small houses next to the main house. Ramadan, Lumnije Muqolli and her two small children and I survived along with another woman called Emnie. Emnie later died from her injuries. The rest of us were able to get away. Lumnije Muqolli and her two children managed to get to another house, while Ramadan and I entered a stable close by where we hid up under the roof. After a while we saw two policemen approaching. We could not see exactly what was happening, but soon the big house with all the dead and wounded people in it was burning. Ramadan said to me: "The house we escaped from is burning!" The victims of this massacre were the Sinani family, the Halili family, the Ilmia family and the Ramoni family; they lost thirty-three of their family members. Ymer Elshani's entire family, except his daughter, was killed as well. Moreover, members from the Ramadan family, the Muqolli family, the Saraqo family and the Hocda family were also killed. I can testify that crimes against these families were committed using guns, hand grenades and fire. The Serbs later gathered what remained of the buildings and set fire to them again. I do not know the names of the offenders; I had never seen them before."*



Naile Grecevcu Elshani, born in 1925. The mother of Ymer N. Elshani. She had no education and was a housewife.



Sala Muqolli (aged 50). Sala was a housewife. In the period before she was killed, Sala suffered from psychological problems.



Halim Kluna (aged 60). Halim worked as a farmer.



Sinan Muqolli (aged 54). Sinan was a trained bricklayer.



Ymer N. Elshani (aged 51) – a famous author of children's literature. From 1967 to 1989 he had a number of books published; poetry, narratives, novels and drama. In 2003, the Department of Culture in Kosovo established a special award carrying Ymer's name. Each year, this award is given to the author of the best children's book. After completing upper secondary school, Ymer worked as a teacher and completed his university education in Pristina in 1972. He completed his military service in the Yugoslav Army in Novi Sad in 1975. He used to be the headmaster of the upper secondary school in Glogovac, but the Serbs removed him from this position. From 1981, the Serbs did not allow any of his books to be published. During the 1990s, he worked in the parallel educational system for Kosovo Albanians. He had four sons

and a daughter; his sons were among the fifty-two people shot and blown up as mentioned above. His daughter is living in USA.

Fadil Muqolli, who managed to escape during the march towards the railway station, tells his story:

*“On 17 April 1999, my father Sinan Muqolli (aged 54) and other members of my family were captured by Serbian military, paramilitary and police forces. They were first told to go to the railway station in Glogovac and then ordered back to my father’s house in Old Poklek. There were almost sixty people at my father’s house, all soaking wet and trying to dry their clothes. Late in the afternoon, at about five o’ clock, the police returned to my father’s house. My father and Ymer N. Elshani were taken away from the rest of the group in the house and shot, then thrown into Halis Muqolli’s well. The police went on to kill the remaining people in the main building, as Hysen Kluna told you. Among those killed were my mother, my wife and our four children. My four sisters, my brother’s wife and their two children were killed as well. My whole family was massacred during this Serb attack.*

*In addition to the well in which my father Sinan and Ymer N. Elshani were dumped, bodies were discovered in three other wells; one body in each well. These were: Sala Muqolli (aged 50), Halim Kluna (aged 60); who had a machine part tied to his body, and Naile Elshani (aged 75, the mother of Ymer N. Elshani). Naile had two large pieces of concrete attached to her body. Hisen Gorani, an old physically disabled man (aged 85), was killed in Old Poklek and later transported to Vasilev where they tried to bury his body inside a stable.”*

The Muqolli family was massacred by the Serbian police, whilst the others were massacred by Serbian military and paramilitary forces. Some Russians also participated, said Fadil. At the time of the massacres, the head of the police forces was a man who went by the nickname “Lutka”. A Serbian man from Kijevo called Pavle was the Chief Constable in the area. He returned to the area in 1990 and stayed until the Serbs withdrew.



The grave site of fifty-two of the victims in Old Poklek, who were shot, blown up and burnt.  
(Photo: Cheryl Johnson)

## QIRES, 17 APRIL

Kozhic is a small village situated far off the beaten track and high up in the hills in the middle of Kosovo. The main roads from Mitrovica to Pristina and Skenderaj to Glogovac are several kilometres away. Women in particular became the victims of war crimes in these far away places. From this village alone, twenty-four women were sexually abused and eight of these women became well victims:

*“My name is Qazim Dibrani and I live in Kozhic. Four members of my family were massacred; my mother Mirade Dibrani (aged 50) and three of my sisters, Antigona Dibrani (aged 20), Bukurije Dibrani (aged 22) and Mirishah Dibrani (aged 28). On 17 April 1999, Serbian military and paramilitary forces arrived in Kozhic and arrested twenty-four people from the village. They were taken to Qires and eight people from the group were later abused, killed and thrown into a well.”*

*“My name is Hajrije Xhema and I come from Kozhic. My daughter Zamide Xhema (aged 20) was one of the eight victims thrown into the well in Qirez. I was with her at the time of the attack and witnessed what happened. Serbian soldiers brought the group of twenty-four people, among them my daughter and I, to Qirez. When we got there, they locked us in a stable where paramilitary forces were waiting. They brought our daughters out one by one and kept them for about twenty-five to thirty minutes. When our daughters returned, they were terrified and anxious. They did not say anything as there were guards present in the stable, but we instinctively knew that they had been sexually assaulted and raped. The next time the paramilitaries entered the stable they took five of our daughters and three elderly women with them and locked the door with a wire. Terrified, we suddenly heard several gunshots. We thought it would be our turn next, that they would burn down the stable with us inside it.”*

*“My name is Sevdije Zymberi and I live in Kozhic. My daughter was taken to Qirez along with the twenty-four people from our village. My daughter and seven other women were later massacred and thrown into a well. From a total of 382 inhabitants, there are fourteen orphaned children in our village. In total, the Serbs killed twenty-four people; fourteen of the victims were women and nine were men. Another man simply disappeared. A woman named Mirdita collaborated with the Serbs. She was about twenty-four- years- old and spoke Albanian. The first time we saw her she was wearing a KLA uniform. On the day the atrocities against the eight women were committed, she was wearing civilian clothes.”*



Lumnje Zymberi (aged 20).

The well killings in Qirez have been included in ICTY's indictment against Milosevic, among others. Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) has rejected the UN Secretary-General's peace plan.

## **BELLOPOJE, 18 APRIL**

On Sunday 18 April, NATO entered its fourth week of bombings. In Europe, the possibility of stopping the air strikes in order to give Milosevic another chance to end the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was discussed. This scenario represented General Clark's and Secretary-General Solana's worst nightmare. If the bombing was stopped, this would ruin the progress and release the pressure on Milosevic's regime. However, NATO's ability to find a swift military solution appeared limited.

Further well murders were committed on Sunday 18 April in the village of Bellopoje. Hajdin Hajdini (aged 65) and Rexhep Hajdini (aged 80) were found in Hajdin's well on 18 June 1999, said Hajdin Hajdini's widow, Naile Hajdini:

*"Just before nine in the morning of 18 April 1999, paramilitary forces came to our house. They smashed our front door to pieces with their axes. Their faces were painted black and many of them were carrying knives. When they entered our house, they shot my husband and his brother Rexhep. As I tried to escape, they shot me twice; once in my shoulder and once in my back. I collapsed in the courtyard and thought I was going to die. Later my daughter Hasimja (aged 13) came and helped me escape to a neighbouring village (Halabak)."*

*Hazir Hajdini, the son of Rexhep Hajdini, said he found Hajdin Hajdini and his father in the well as he returned to the village two months later. A third man, Muharrem Hajdini, was also found murdered near the well. Hazir Hajdini said that the names of three local Serbs were written on a wall in their house. The three murdered men were buried near their house.*

## **SAVROVA, 18 APRIL**

Jakup Hysen Kurtishaj from Grejkoc, a village near Suhareke, would have turned sixty-four in June 1999. He was found by Sefedin Zogaj on 18 April in a well in Savrova. He was taken out of the well and buried in the area, because Serbian forces were still expelling people from their villages and from Kosovo. Jakup was probably killed just before 18 April; his identification papers, which were still legible, were found on his body. Jakup was unmarried and had spent many years working in Western Europe. He returned home to help his family because of the Serbian conduct in the area in 1998. Jakup was in a relationship with Milazim Gashi. They were living in Savrova temporarily when Jakup was shot in the chest by a sniper. Milazim managed to escape from the crime scene. There were no other eye witnesses.





Jakup Hysen Kurtishaj, born 21 June 1935 in Grejkoc. He was unmarried and had spent many years working in Western Europe.

## DRAGAQINA, 21 APRIL

Dragaqina is a small village in the municipality of Suhareke. It is situated about seven kilometres from the main road, close to some impressive hills divided by crossing gorges. The area is very fertile. Among other things, large areas are used for growing grapes, mainly for wine production. Average farms in the area are between two and a half and twelve and a half acres.

It was hard to make any of the men we met tell us exactly what happened on 21 April 1999. They appeared afraid of saying too much in front of the other villagers, but eventually told us their story:

*“There are about 300 people living in Dragaqina. The Serbian military units and police surrounded our village late in the afternoon on 5 April, and started searching for its inhabitants. However, earlier in the afternoon we had learned that the Serbs would probably attack us, so we had gathered the villagers and managed to hide in the terrain near the village. While we were gone, all the houses were searched – we later discovered that the Serbs had taken all our valuables. They then started setting fire to our houses. This continued until late afternoon the next day. Some of the youngest men returned to the village by a detour to see if the Serbs had left at eleven o’clock at night on 6 April. The rest of the villagers returned in the early hours of the morning to find their houses burnt to the ground. A lot of the villagers fled towards Macedonia and Albania, but some of the oldest men and some women and children stayed.”*



On 21 April there was a heavy rainfall. Shortly after noon, it was discovered that the Serbian police had surrounded the village, said Shefqet Trolli:

*“Eleven men and several women and children were down by the river or Reka as they call it. Earlier in the day, at about nine o’ clock, it had been rumoured that Serbian police and military units were operating nearby. To avoid being captured, the group of men, women and children had taken cover in an area by the river.”*



Shahin Trolli, born in 1917. He had no education, worked as a farmer and owned about twelve and a half acres of fertile land.



Ymer Trolli, born in 1908.



Nazif Trolli.



Nezir Hazir Kurteshi, born in 1950 in the village of Dühel. He completed primary and secondary school and from 1973 he worked in a factory called “Balkan”, which produced tyres and belts for tractors. He later worked as a farmer on his three and three quarter acres of fertile land. He was the father of six children; four sons and two daughters.



From the left: Ukë Trolli, born in 1928. He had no education and worked as a farmer on two and a half acres of land. Sejdi Trolli, Ukë’s brother, was born in 1927. He had no education and worked as a farmer on twelve and a half acres of land.

The group was discovered by some Serbs combing the area. The Serbs forced them back towards the village and to the only well in Dragaqina. The eleven male villagers were separated from the women and children and ordered into a courtyard near the well. After a while, the women heard loud screams and a lot of noise coming from the courtyard. It seemed as though the men were being badly beaten. "What happened next was awful," said Fetije Trolli (aged 70), who witnessed what took place on this rainy Wednesday evening. We met Fetije Trolli near the centre of Suhareke. She left Dragaqina after her husband was killed. Fetije went on to tell us that the men were brought back to the well. The policemen demanded money and jewellery from the women. The eleven men had obviously been severely beaten; Sherif, Fetije's husband, had a wound on one side of his face and his jaw appeared to have been dislocated. It became darker and a surreal and grotesque play started. It has not been easy to make people talk about what really happened when the eleven men ended up in the twenty-five metres deep well with a pump pipe across it. Reportedly, Serbian police said that if all eleven men were able to climb into the well and then climb back up, they would not be killed. The men started lowering themselves into the well, one after the other. As the last man had started to climb down the well, the Serbs started shooting into it and nearly buried the men alive by throwing sand, dirt and other things on top of them. The women and children were sent towards Albania or Macedonia.

After the Serbian forces withdrew and KFOR forces stepped in, people started returning to their village. German KFOR was contacted and was present when the villagers opened the well. It seemed like the Serbs had intended to blow up the well, as several grenades and a lot of explosives were found on top of the dead bodies. The explosives and the grenades were removed and the process of bringing out the eleven men started. To do so, the well had to be drained. In addition to those already mentioned, the following people were killed and found in the well:

Haki Trolli, born in 1943  
Azem Trolli, born in 1939  
Tahir Trolli, born in 1936  
Sherif Trolli, born in 1936  
Jusuf Trolli, born in 1934

## **LOWER NERODIME, 26 APRIL**

Lower Nerodime is situated a few kilometres west of the city of Ferizaj, by the main road from Pristina to Skopje. Biljaca, the border area to Macedonia, is only a forty-five minute drive away. Nerodime is a typical farming district. Ferizaj is completely surrounded by an agricultural area with rich soil suitable for cultivation. Compared to the rest of Kosovo, Ferizaj seems to be well-developed with a good infrastructure. The railway to Macedonia passes through the city.

The area is strategically placed between Pristina and Macedonia and is connected to central areas in both the east and the west by several roads. Serbian military, paramilitary and police units were scattered all over the terrain and were able to take action against the inhabitants at short notice. When I visited the village of Lower Nerodime, I met two boys aged fifteen or sixteen who spoke some Norwegian. They told me they had been forced to escape and had ended up in Macedonia in spring of 1999. Once in Macedonia, they were singled out and sent to stay in Norway for the duration of the war.

On 23 April, NATO celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Washington. At the same time, the annual summit for the leaders of the NATO-countries was held and it did not go unnoticed. Peace demonstrators were taking action. In USA, Europe and in the rest of the world, people opposing NATO's bombing of the Milosevic regime took to the streets. Few people were demonstrating against Milosevic and his ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Paradoxically, no demonstrations were held against Milosevic in Europe or in the rest of the world during his ten years of warfare.

The inhabitants of Lower Nerodime gave me the following account:

*"My name is Isak Sejdiu and I come from the village of Lower Nerodime. One of the victims in the well was my nephew Haki. He was twenty-eight- years- old. Our village was attacked by Serbian military forces on 26 April 1999. We had no other choice but to leave. They attacked with grenades and my house was hit numerous times. We did not dare to stay there any longer so Haki and I walked towards the mountains. We spent the night there out in the open. The next day, 27 April, we discussed whether it was safe to go down to the farm to check on the cattle and feed them. I stayed behind while Haki went down to the farm as I am unable to walk very fast. I waited on the mountainside all day, hoping that Haki would return to tell me that the Serbian military forces had withdrawn from the village. Since the beginning of the year, Kosovo Albanians in the village had been harassed by Serbs torching their houses at night in an attempt to make them leave the village. As the night approached and I had still not seen Haki, I started to worry. This was not like him; he would have contacted me during the day."*



Haki Sejdiu (aged 38).

*"The attack actually started three days earlier, on 23 April. The Serbs attacked in tanks and shot at Kosovo Albanian people's houses and properties. When Haki had still not returned to our agreed meeting place in the morning the following day, 28 April, I walked down towards the village to see what had happened. As I approached the farm, I did not see any Serbian soldiers. Haki was nowhere to be seen either and both my brother's house and my own had been stripped of furniture and other belongings. Some Serbian neighbours I met later that day told me that rumour had it Haki had been killed by Serbian soldiers at about eleven o' clock the previous day. I was unable to stay in my house due to the situation, so I went to stay with some relatives; the rest of my family was already there. As our living conditions had become unbearable, we went to Skopje the next day, 29 April. We returned to our farm on 28 June. A few days later I met Avdi Bega, a friend of Haki. He told me that Haki had been killed and thrown into a well near our house. KLA-soldiers came and brought Haki out of the well on 9 July. Ever since 1997, the relationship between the Albanians and the Serbs had been strained in our village. Ever since the Serbs had returned from a visit to Serbia, the atmosphere in the village was completely changed. From 1997, every Serb between the age of sixteen and sixty-five was armed and from then on, we were pressured and harassed. It is strange to think that all of a sudden we were no longer good friends and neighbours."*

## VERBOD, 30 APRIL

On 29 April, NATO launched an air attack against Feronikel, a factory near Glogovac. It was probably bombed because of the hundreds of soldiers stationed in and around the factory. However, all the soldiers vanished from the area the night before the bombing, as if they knew something was going to happen. Tanks and heavy military equipment were hidden in a nearby tunnel. When the bombing seized, the soldiers returned and immediately started another offensive against the entire district's local population. It started with artillery fire, before soldiers and special police forces moved in. The soldiers were divided into three groups; the first line of soldiers searched the villages and expelled the inhabitants. Any villagers trying to escape were caught by the second and third line of soldiers.

The village of Verbod is situated between Glogovac and Skenderaj and about 1400 people lived here before the war. In the course of the war, sixty people were killed. About 10,000 refugees came to the Verbod area during the war about 7000 of which were women. In most villages, people chose to leave their homes when Milosevic's military machinery and special police forces started attacking Kosovo with brutal force. But the villagers in Verbod refused to be scared off. The villagers would however pay the price for their resistance – out of the total of 1400 inhabitants, sixty people were killed, nine of which became well victims.

Gjemshir Kastrati quietly told us his story while we were sitting along the walls of a room in the house they were rebuilding. There were four brothers and five sisters in his family. His father Osman (aged 58) and his brother Ylber (aged 14) became well victims. During the artillery fire, they took cover in a dry well along with Beqir Kastrati (aged 47), Arsim Kastrati (aged 14), Afrim Kastrati (aged 16), Ahmet Dobra, Zeqir Gashi, Ramadan Aliqaj and Zenel Islami. The soldiers chasing people from their village discovered the dry well and the people hiding there. The soldiers or the special police shot into the well, killing all nine people in it. Gjemshir knows that this atrocity was committed by Serbs from Kosovo, because they were not wearing hoods and he recognized them as local policemen. Nearly all the houses were on fire after the Serbian attacks on the Verbod area.

The following people were found in a well in Verbod:

**Osman Kastrati** (aged 58). Completed primary and secondary school in Trstenik and worked as a farmer throughout his adult life.

**Ylber Kastrati** (aged 14, Osman's son). Ylber was the youngest of four brothers and was in the sixth grade at the primary school in Trstenik at the time he was killed.

**Afrim Kastrati** (aged 16). Afrim was in the first grade at upper secondary school.

**Arsim Kastrati** (aged 14). Arsim was in the seventh grade at primary school and was Zeqir Kastrati's only child.

**Beqir Kastrati** (aged 47). Beqir worked as a bricklayer. He completed primary and secondary school before becoming a bricklayer apprentice. He passed his exam and earned his certificate on completing his apprenticeship a few years later.

**Zeqir Gashi**, born in 1951, came from the village of Cikatova e Re.

**Ahmet Dobra** (?)

**Ramadan Aliqaj** (?)



## Zenel Islami (?)

The identities of these last three victims are uncertain; it was not possible to confirm their names during my research.

### UJMIRE, 14 MAY

The municipality of Kline is situated in the west of Kosovo, only half an hour's drive east of Peja which is situated west towards the Montenegrin border. Serbian special police, military and paramilitary divisions were scattered all over the terrain with large and heavily armed forces, tanks and artillery. I talked to Habib Morina in Kline about Serbs terrorising the civilian population in the area. In the municipal organisation in Kline, Habib Morina had a case load of relatives of victims or missing persons.

Only remains of documents were found in Kline after the Serbs left Kosovo. Before they left, they tried to destroy or burn all their documents. The same thing happened to all public archives that were not brought to Serbia. All types of office supplies also disappeared. They did not make it easy for their successors to build up a new public administration.

NATO's bombings of Serbian targets in Serbia were successful, but the Milosevic regime was persevering. Another few weeks passed before Milosevic appeared to be thinking of giving up his campaign in Kosovo. In Kosovo itself, more than 800,000 Kosovo Albanians were fleeing from their homes and NATO still had no adequate weapon to use against the Serbian forces murdering defenceless people and performing ethnic cleansing. Why did Milosevic continue to drive the Kosovo Albanians out of Kosovo, while Serbia had to bear great human and material losses? Especially Kosovo's infrastructure had been targeted and it would take decades to rebuild it. Did he want to become historically famous for clearing Kosovo of all Kosovo Albanians, thereby achieving some kind of heroic status in Serbian history?

In Ujmire, I talked to the family of the well victim near Cabic:

*"My name is Halime Shala. I am the mother of Faik Shala (aged 32) who was found in a well near Cabic. My husband Bajram Shala was killed by Serbian military and paramilitary forces during their first offensive in August 1998. I do not know exactly what happened to Faik. We were hiding in the mountains to escape Serbian military and paramilitary forces when we ran out of food. Faik said he would try to return to our home to get some; we had several small children with us. That was 14 May 1999, and after three months, we had still not heard from Faik. On 10 August 1999, I went to the village of Cabic to look for my son. My neighbour Halid Gjema told me that it was probably my son who had been found dead in a well. As it turned out, my neighbour was right. Military and paramilitary forces had been to the Cabic area, but I am not sure who actually carried out the crime.*

*All civilians were hiding in order to escape the Serbian forces. Women and children used to hide in tunnels outside our village. The male members of our family were hiding in the woods; they used to return to the houses in the village at night to collect food. Faik went to collect food in the evening of 13 May 1999. He was exhausted, but insisted on going. On his way home, he was captured by Serbian forces, shot and thrown into a well. As the village was heavily bombed, we spent a month and a half away from our homes under very difficult conditions. During the first offensive in 1998, we took cover in Pristina, but then when my husband was killed by the Serbs, we had to return home to bury him. During the second*



*offensive in 1999, we stayed at home in the village or in the tunnels and woods while the bombing went on.”*



Faik Shala (aged 32) completed upper secondary school in Kline and worked as a technician at a factory called “Obilic”. The Serbs later removed him from this position and he went to Germany as a refugee to find work. When his father was killed by the Serbs in 1998, he returned to Kosovo to help his family.

Life has been difficult for the Shala family after the offensives. All their belongings were either taken by the Serbs or burned and their houses were destroyed. They have not been offered any medical treatment and none of the family members are working.

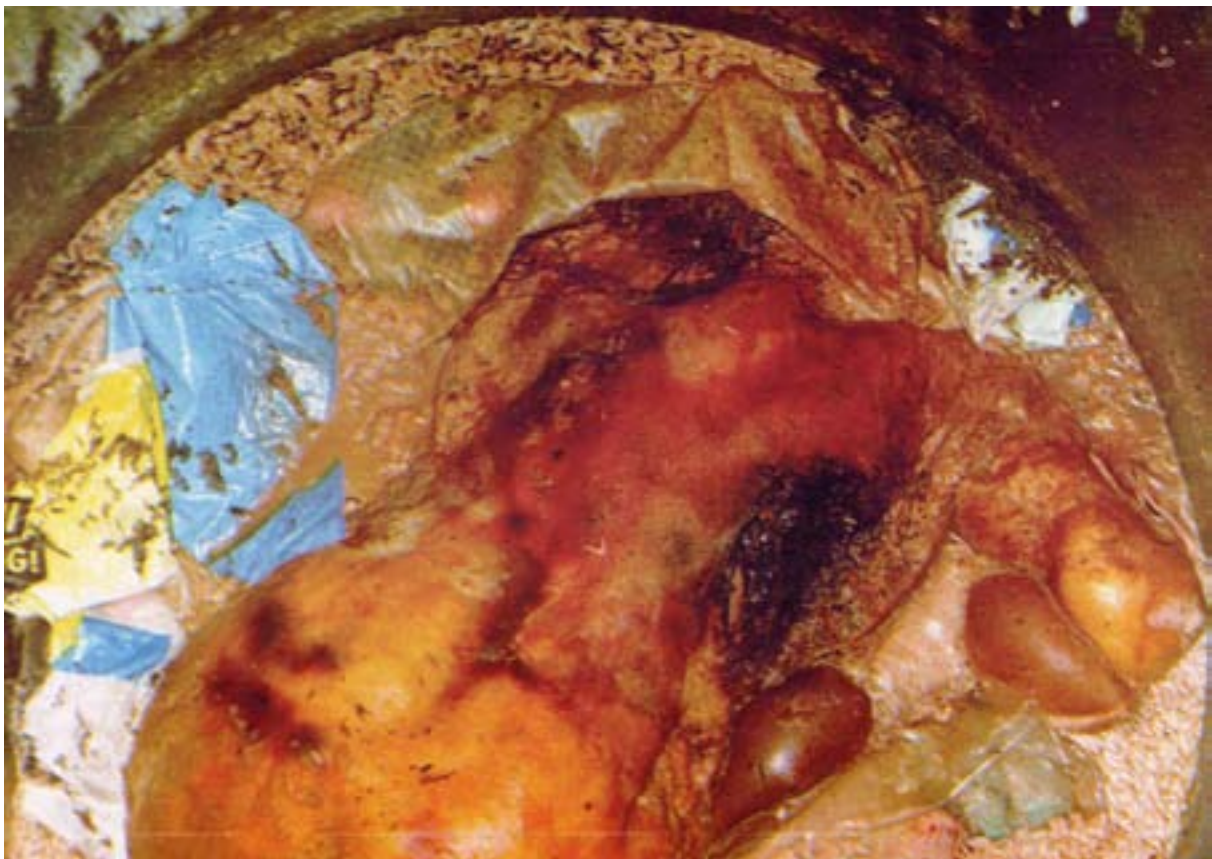
## **DAMIAN - IN THE HAS DISTRICT, 20 MAY**

The village of Damian in the Has district is situated just a few kilometres from the Albanian border. Serbian military forces were ravaging this area. Zymer Pnishi’s family did not consider leaving for Albania, despite the fact that a lot of people in the district had already left their homes and done so due to the constant threat from Serbian military and paramilitary units. During the last two months, hundreds of thousands of people had been walking along the main road between Gjakova and Prizren. Their destination was Kukes in Albania, a mere forty-five minute drive from Prizren. It is however a much longer trip if you are walking. If you are exhausted and starved, it might take you several days – especially if you have to depart from the roads. The flood of refugees came from all over the north- western part of Kosovo, which Kosovo Albanians call Rrafshi i Dukagjinit, and Kosovo Serbs call Metohija. Despite NATO’s bombing of Serbian units, these units were still able to move around relatively freely near the Albanian border two months after the bombing started. This would badly affect Zymer Pnishi and his family.

*“My name is Hava Pnishi (aged 72) and I live in Pnish. On 15 May 1999, I think it was a Monday, our village was surrounded by Serbian military forces. They ordered us to leave our village so the following day we headed for Albania. But my husband Zymer Pnishi (aged 72) refused to leave and stayed on in the woods above our farm. The rest of the family left for Albania, which is not far from our village. Zymer was supposed to stay in the hills above the farm and go down to feed the animals back at the farm when he could. We found Zymer in our well six weeks later. He had pieces of brick attached to his legs and a plastic bag over his head. He had probably been thrown into the well whilst still alive. A naked woman, Bahte Kajdomqaj (aged 40), was found dead on top of Zymer. We found Zymer’s brother, Zyber Pnishi (aged 66), in another well close to our home. We buried all the bodies.”*



Zymer Pnishi (aged 72). As so many other people in Kosovo, Zymer worked as a farmer.



Bathe Kajdomqaj (aged 40) and Zymer Pnishi were found in this well. The photo shows Bathe's naked body. Zymer was lying on the bottom of the well with pieces of brick tied to his legs.

(Photo: Arkivi Kombëtar in Kosoves Prishtine.)

## KOSURIQ, 27 MAY

On 27 May, NATO's bombings and the massive offensives targeting Kosovo's population had been going on for almost exactly nine weeks. NATO had been unable to do much in order to stop the well killings or to protect nearly a million Kosovo Albanians from being chased from their homes. Serbian militaries and paramilitaries were still making surprise visits to the villages, searching for any inhabitants who had managed to hide during previous attacks. Their methods resembled those of the Gestapo; as many Kosovo Albanians as possible were to be removed one way or another. This was the recurrent theme in all the Serbian actions. Another recurrent theme was the fact that the special police and paramilitaries rarely came alone. Military units would clear the way by shooting at the villages, chasing the inhabitants away. Most young people with families had already been forced to head south towards the borders of Albania and Macedonia. Many had taken cover in the wooded mountain areas or hills, which there are plenty of in Kosovo.

On this day, the ICTY in Hague charged Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia's President Milan Milutinovic, Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Nikola Sainivic, Chief of Defence Draoljub Ojdanic, and Serbia's Minister of the Interior Vlatko Stojilkovic with expelling 740,000 Kosovo Albanians and killing 340 identified people. These were tentative numbers and were included because the Criminal Tribunal wanted the indictment to represent this side of the tragedy in Kosovo. The rest of the indictment concerned atrocities committed in Bosnia and other places in the Balkans earlier in the 1990s. An essential name was however missing from ICTY's list of main characters in Kosovo – Colonel General Nebojsa Pavkovic, head of the Kosovo campaign.

On 24 March, a state of war was declared in Kosovo, among other places. This considerably extended General Pavkovic's authority and he gained full control over the operational area of Kosovo and somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 troops. According to the rules of war, extended authority is accompanied by extended responsibility for what goes on in the combat zone. As a logical consequence, General Pavkovic must be held responsible for the war crimes committed against civilians within his area.

In Kosuriq, situated in the west and about a forty minute drive east from Peja, I met the Maznikolli family in autumn of 2001. They were busy rebuilding their home after the Serbian destructions. Here is their account of what happened to their family:

*"My name is Zyner Maznikolli and I live in Kosuriq. On 27 May 1999, I told my son Isuf to take the family and walk to Glogjan and stay there. Serbian special police, military and paramilitary forces had been shelling other villages in the area for a long time. They then moved in, killing or chasing the villagers out on the roads and forcing them to walk towards Albania and Macedonia. Serbian military forces later came and surrounded our village and I was forced to hide down by a river not far from our house. After a little while, I crossed the fields to a forest and stayed there. After my son had arrived in Glogjan with our family, he waited two days before returning to our village to look for me. But since I was hiding in the forest, he did not find me. He went to our house and while he was there, the Serbs came and took him. I do not know what happened to my son after that until his body was taken out of a well near our house on 5 July 1999.*

*Zyner Thqi (aged 80) was also found in the well; he lived only 200-300 metres from our house. On 12 June we discovered a woman in our own well, Cyme Gashi (aged 75). She had two sons, Naim Gashi (aged 30) and Azem Gashi (aged 45), who live in Western Europe."*



Isuf Maznikolli (aged 45).

At that point, it became clear that NATO had lost the war in Kosovo. NATO had failed to defend people from Serbian attacks, which was the very foundation for NATO's intervention. People had been driven away to refugee camps outside Kosovo, or to the mountains and woods in Kosovo. There were close to a million and a half people on the run and they represented the most considerable flood of refugees in Europe since the Second World War.

The Serbian military machine was extremely good at avoiding the bombs that NATO had been aiming at their military units in Kosovo. The military had been the key element in the ethnic cleansing. Their ability to take advantage of the terrain and improvise had helped them avoid NATO's bombs. Moreover, the weather was on their side.

Meanwhile, the bombing continued in Serbia and in the south of Kosovo where KLA had gathered their forces in the Albanian border area, among other places. From there, KLA was attacking Serbian forces on the Albanian border. KLA did not play an important role in a military sense, but in a political sense it was significant for people to know that the KLA was involved in the battles. The presence of KLA forces in the border areas was of extreme moral importance to the Kosovo Albanian population and it strengthened their self-esteem. For the very first time in modern history, Kosovo Albanians had their own internationally acknowledged military force, partly because they were part of the Rambouillet Accords.

General Clark, NATO's Commander-in-Chief, was still working hard to gain access to the Apache helicopters. The goal was not to stop the ethnic cleansing and veritable killings of Kosovo Albanians, but to prepare for possible ground attacks on the Serbian forces which were controlling most of Kosovo at that time. They had been working on the plans for a few months and it would be their last attempt to drive Serbian forces out of Kosovo. For NATO and Western Europe, their credibility as an integral part of Europe's security was at stake. President Clinton had yet to give the go-ahead, but it appeared to be right around the corner. The European part of NATO had indicated that it did not "dare" carry out any ground operations in Kosovo without USA's participation (Wesley Clark: 330). In Macedonia and Albania, ground forces had been carefully built up over a period of time as part of the preparations for possible ground operations against Serbian forces.

Parts of these forces later became the KFOR force which entered Kosovo after the peace agreement was signed on 10 June, fortunately without having to fight any Serbian military units.

A new diplomatic attempt was made. The Foreign Ministers of the G8-countries met in Bonn on 6 May, where they agreed on the principles for a solution to the Kosovo conflict. On 2 June, former President of Finland, Marti Ahtisaari, representing the EU and NATO,

travelled to Belgrade along with the former Prime Minister of Russia, Victor Chernomyrdin, who served as a Russian delegate. They attempted to negotiate an agreement to stop the Serbian actions, make Serbian forces withdraw from Kosovo and end NATO's bombings of Serbia. This diplomatic attempt to stop the warfare in the Balkans was now of equal importance to both NATO and Serbia. The Serbs were suffering severely under the substantial bombings which destroyed more and more of Serbia's infrastructure every day. For NATO, ending the conflict would save them from implementing ground operations in Kosovo in order to drive Serbian militaries and police forces away. If Serbian forces were to remain in Kosovo after expelling the entire Kosovo Albanian population-about a million and a half people-to the mountains in Kosovo and refugee camps in neighbouring countries and in Western Europe, NATO would be completely defeated in a military sense. It would also lose its credibility as an important part of Europe's security. In NATO, this new diplomatic attempt was coined "diplomacy backed by force", meaning that a diplomatic solution to the conflict was sought but before an agreement had been reached and signed, the bombing of Serbia would carry on. During the nine weeks that Serbia was continuously bombed, so much damage was inflicted on the country that even President Milosevic was shaken and unable to ignore it. Milosevic gave in and accepted the peace plan. The Serbian Parliament accepted it the following day, 3 June.

A week later the parties signed the MTA. This agreement was signed after intense negotiations and after Milosevic and his generals had made various attempts to weaken NATO's position as leader of the KFOR forces which were to move in and fill the void in Kosovo as the Serbian forces withdrew.

Carla Del Ponte, Chief Prosecutor at the Criminal Tribunal in Hague, addressed the situation in a statement to the UN Security Council in November 2000: "In 1999, 195 mass graves containing 2108 bodies were discovered and in 2000, an additional 325 mass graves containing 1577 bodies were discovered."

On 3 February 2003, the UNMIK Office of Missing Persons and Forensics stated that so far, 4019 dead people had been found, 2212 of which had been identified. The latest updated list of missing persons contained 4233 names, 909 of which were not Albanians.

Noel Malcolm, the famous British historian, put it this way in his book about Kosovo: "A simple, but fundamental principle is at stake in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo-namely that the policy of terror against the civilian population must not pay off. This principle must be maintained, not only for the sake of 1.8 million Kosovo Albanians, but for the sake of the rest of the world and its future generations."

## **UNIDENTIFIED WELL VICTIMS AND OTHER VICTIMS FOUND IN WATER RESERVOIRS AND RIVERS**

Ever since spring of 1998, Kosovo Albanians had been forced to leave their homes and been made to walk along the country roads towards Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. The stream of refugees came from all over Kosovo, from Mitrovica and Vushtri in the north to Dragash and Kotle in the south. Some of them were killed by Serbian military and paramilitary units who were supposed to control the refugees along the roads until they reached the border of a neighbouring country. The refugees were frequently robbed of money and valuables at Serbian checkpoints along the road. In wells and water reservoirs we found a

total of twenty-two murdered people who could not be identified. This information might be useful in the future.

## THE MUNICIPALITY OF GJAKOVA

**Dedaj:** Two men were discovered in a well by locals who also arranged their funerals. Our contact in this case was Shpend Bajrami.

**Radoniq Water Reservoir:** Three dead people, two men and a woman, were found in Radoniq. The woman was found on the beach; she was dressed and a picture with the name “Albina” was found amongst her clothes. This is an Albanian name, but it was written in Cyrillic. All findings, objects and remains are kept in the chapel in Gjakova. Contact: Fatlik Lila.

**Hvite Drini:** Three men were found in the river at Kramovic, Dublibare and Dobidol. The river flows towards the south between Gjakova and Rahovec. One of those discovered was a young man, about twenty-five years old. He had been shot twice in the chest and his left foot and a finger on his right hand were missing. The two other bodies did not have any special characteristics. The bodies were buried in Gjakova. Contact: Arben Milici.

**Erinik (river):** The river passes between the municipalities of Gjakova and Decani. Two men were found in the river close to Gjakova. They had probably been in the river from May 1999 and were brought out by divers from NCA/ACT. The bodies were buried at the grave site in Gjakova. Contact: Albert Morina.

## THE MUNICIPALITY OF DECANI

**Irzniq:** A man was found in the canal; his body could not be identified. He was buried in Gjakova. Contact: Sadik Hoda at the Municipal Office.

**Maznik:** A man was found in a well; his body could not be identified. He was buried at the grave site in Maznik.

**Dashinoc:** Four bodies were discovered in two separate wells. One of these wells was the Norwegian well clearing team’s first project. When the well clearing team managed to bring out the body after much strenuous effort, they found another body underneath it. Both bodies appeared to have been shot, but could not be identified. They were buried near the well. A man and a woman were found in another well in the same village and were taken out by MSF. Both bodies appeared to have been shot, but could not be identified. They were buried in Peja. Contact: CDHRF in Peja.

**Streoc:** A man was found in a well by MSF; his body could not be identified. He was buried in Kodrali. Contact: CDHRF in Peja.



## **THE MUNICIPALITY OF KLINE**

**Doberdol:** An old woman was discovered in a well. She could not be identified and was buried at the grave site in the village. Contact: Mark Berisha.

## **THE MUNICIPALITY OF PEJA**

**Maja e Zeze-Peja:** A Serbian man was found in a well and was taken out by MSF. He could not be identified and was buried in Peja. Contact: CDHRF in Peja.

**Fusha e Pejes-Peja:** A man was found in a well and could not be identified. He was buried in Peja. Contact: Shefqet Shala.

## **THE MUNICIPALITY OF DRAGASH**

**Zagatar:** A man was found with his hands tied behind his back in a cave/well that was more than 100 metres deep. NCA/ACT gave his identification papers to ICTY, but his papers were subsequently lost. He could not be identified and was buried close to where he was found. Contact: Hajriz Meleqi.

## **THE MUNICIPALITY OF VUSHTRI**

**Studime e ulte:** A man was found in a well and could not be identified. He was buried in the village. Contact: Fadil Beqiri at the Municipal Office.



Building destroyed by NATO's bombings.  
(Photo: Josef Martinsen)



Ruined house.

## WHAT COMES NEXT - RECONCILIATION AND DEVELOPMENT OR CONTINUED CONFRONTATION?

The slogan of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is “Bringing peace to Kosovo”. I believe that NATO brought peace to Kosovo by bombing Serbia to its knees, thereby forcing Milosevic to withdraw the Serbian special police and military from Kosovo. Whether UNMIK will be able to sustain the peace in Kosovo and contribute to develop a modern democracy remains to be seen.

The essential question is whether Kosovo’s inhabitants- about ninety per cent Kosovo Albanians and ten per cent Kosovo Serbs- will be able to deal with their past. The rivalry between Kosovo Albanian groups, KLA sympathisers and FARK sympathisers that followed in the wake of the war is another disturbing element. Before and during the war, these groups were working towards the same goal – independence from Serbia. However, inherent suspicion, perhaps mixed with a desire for personal power, prevented them from coordinating their actions during the war and from presenting a united front in their contact with UNMIK afterwards. UNMIK could have tried harder to work closely with the leaders of KLA and FARK (which belonged to the Rugova wing). This became particularly evident in UNMIK’s attempts to control the strong hatred and the desire to retaliate against the Serbian population that arose immediately after the war. It was UNMIK’s and KFOR’s job to uphold law and order in the “new” Kosovo and their situation deteriorated dramatically because of persecution and killings of Kosovo Serbs.

The situation in Kosovo after the war may to a certain extent be compared to the situation in South Africa immediately after the abolishment of the laws on which the apartheid system was based, as Nelson Mandela describes it in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*. There are however several differences. South Africa had Nelson Mandela, a political resource with extraordinary diplomatic abilities. In Kosovo, a foreign institution was given the responsibility of making a uniting and practical political transition possible. At the same time, UNMIK was responsible for upholding law and order. The idea was that UNMIK would start rebuilding the “country” after devastating warfare and decades of misrule. However, UNMIK did not appear to take advantage of the fact that Kosovo Albanians trusted and respected Rugova. Moreover, the leaders of KLA who gained support from the population during the war, were not included in any discussions on how to limit the acts of revenge that resulted in thousands of Kosovo Serbs fleeing Kosovo.

Kosovo is at present a UN protectorate. UN personnel from various countries and with varied educations and backgrounds have the decisive word on all important issues. At the moment, the future status of the area is completely uncertain. Since the summer of 1999, UNMIK has been working hard in order to establish a civil administration at a local and “national” level.

If former President Milosevic, now on trial in Hague, is convicted, it would not be unreasonable to reassess the agreements that were made with his criminal regime. This could have consequences for the status of Kosovo in respect of international law<sup>1</sup>. It would be easier for the international community to follow the advice offered by the English historian Noel

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<sup>1</sup> Slobodan Milosevic was found dead in his cell in Hague on Saturday 11 March 2006. Straight away, rumours would have it that he had been poisoned, but the autopsy found no evidence of this. Indeed, Milosevic’s death was caused by his failure to take his medicine. In Kosovo, most people thought it was a shame that he died before the trial was over and wished he would have been held responsible for his actions. Many of those who are responsible for what happened in Kosovo are still alive today. They need to be arrested and brought before the Hague Tribunal.

Malcolm. According to Mr Malcolm, giving Kosovo independence would not create any undesirable new precedence for the creation of new states. Mr Malcolm bases his assertion on the fact that Kosovo was part of a federal system, had the same rights as the other republics and was represented in the federal system. When the federal unit was dissolved, Kosovo should have, as an autonomous area, been offered its right to independence, as was the case with the republics at the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

The UN is on a formidable and praiseworthy mission in Kosovo and one can only hope that the results will match its efforts. Security-wise, a democratic Kosovo would mean a great deal for the stability of this part of Europe, especially in the long run and if they want to be part of the EU. If this mission succeeds, Kosovo will quickly be transformed into a modern Western society, perhaps the first in the Balkans. It is the kind of future that young people in Kosovo want. They understand that a modern society can offer them opportunities in terms of education, work and contact and exchange with other European countries and the rest of the world.

Kosovans of all ethnic origins are now filling the positions of the new administration. However, UNMIK personnel have the final word on all levels. They also control KFOR and the police as well as all donations made by the international community for the reconstruction of Kosovo's new civil administration and infrastructure.

UNMIK's contribution to the reconstruction of the administration provides the Kosovans with technical insight on how to manage a modern civil administration. It does not however provide necessary insight into internal political and interpersonal relations. These areas will have to be developed if the people of Kosovo are to achieve what they wish for: a future of individual safety and development of the country's potential. Whilst working on enhancing the political and interpersonal relations in Kosovo, the inhabitants themselves and especially their democratically elected representatives, must develop an understanding of basic democratic principles and the rule of law. During the difficult transitional phase, this must apply to all ethnic groups.

For the people who have only experienced power as belonging to the physically superior, it will take time to adjust to the democratic ideals of the West. It was uncommon for rulers and political leaders to discuss their disagreements or make compromises. Kosovans are influenced by outdated social attitudes; partly remnants of the feudal system and partly prevailing attitudes during the Communist regime. These social attitudes do not fit in with today's Europe. The Kosovans did not take part in the developments taking place in Western Europe over the last hundred years in terms of social attitudes and the view on human life. This is bound to influence their view on society.

One example of the remnants of the old clan-based society that can still be found in this part of the Balkans, is the tradition of blood vengeance. From an early age, people in Western Europe are encouraged to practise critical thinking and are taught democratic rules. This was however not the case in the former Communist Eastern Europe, including Kosovo. The Milosevic regime may not be a Communist regime, but it inherited several of the unfortunate features associated with Communism in Eastern Europe, along with some unfortunate nationalistic features.

Many Kosovans thought that when the totalitarian and suppressive regime fell, the road was clear. This fact, combined with a legal system that was not constructed for dealing with the new situation or even being enforced due to the lack of police and other legal institutions, resulted in a kind of "Wild West" situation. This was the condition in Kosovo immediately after the Serbian forces left the province. Buildings were constructed without anyone informing the temporary municipal authorities. People who had acquired important positions used them to their own personal benefit. People without driving licences suddenly started driving. Perhaps they thought "no one can get us now", or "we are in charge". In my

experience, a lot of people had very little understanding of the individual's civil duties and the need for "rules".

There are however many sensible people in Kosovo who have not completely missed out on the development in Western Europe and in the rest of the world. But these people have little or no experience of being part of a modern society in terms of respecting the law, enforcing the law, accepting general human rights and equal rights for women, children's rights, the rights of minorities, personal property rights for both sexes or participating in democratic decision-making processes.

The elected political leaders are facing the great challenge of educating the people and their electors in the practices of democracy. This public education should also include the urgent work of uncovering the truth about what happened in Kosovo from 1989 to 1999. The process of reconciliation can then be established on a "national" basis and not only be ordered by a technically orientated UNMIK administration without much continuity in its leadership and to a certain extent, without adequate historical knowledge of Kosovo.

## **MOVING ON**

It is important to leave the past behind and focus on the future prospects for Kosovo Albanians, not only in terms of their relationships with Kosovo Serbs, Gypsies and other minorities, but also between different groups within the Kosovo Albanian community. The rivalry between these groups, KLA and FARK, may have had its peak just before, during and after the war. In the period between KFOR entering Kosovo along with UNMIK and OSCE and until the summer of 2003, between thirty and fifty political killings were committed. The majority of those killed were from the Rugova wing or the former FARK. Tahir Zemaj, a former Colonel in FARK, was the last known person to be murdered by unidentified killers on 4 January 2003. Before he was killed, Mr Zemaj was a security adviser for Rugova's party. The murder took place in Peja and Mr Zemaj's son and a close relative also died in the attack. Tahir Zemaj had previously testified against Ramush Haradinaj's brother in a trial on war crimes committed against the Serbs during the war. The murder of Tahir Zemaj has not yet been solved. The perpetrator may sympathise with KLA or Serbian intelligence agents, who are said to still be operating in order to infiltrate and strengthen the political differences in Kosovo. They may also belong to the mafia. If the Kosovo Albanians are unable to solve their differences and cooperate in order to create a new society that can provide future generations with the possibility of living in a democratic, safe and open society, their chances of living in peaceful coexistence with other ethnic groups in Kosovo are extremely small.

## **ON THE BRIGHT SIDE**

Participants on the practical and financial arena appear to be making a greater effort than politicians to solve problems and promote coexistence between the different groups of people. One of the most effective strategies for solving conflicts is by finding common needs. By focusing on practical issues, people may put aside their old disagreements.

Many Kosovo Albanians have attempted to start a dialogue in order to solve practical problems, only to be met with suspicion and hostility from their own people (Howard Clark: 23). The political parties have a tremendous responsibility in encouraging this type of activity so that dialogue is accepted, making life easier for the people involved. It must become



politically correct to encourage dialogues in the multiethnic society that Kosovo actually is. The political leaders have in fact publicly expressed their support for this multiethnic society. It must become socially and politically acceptable for Kosovo Albanians to make private attempts to start a dialogue with other ethnic groups. This type of activity must not be exclusive to international aid organisations and their relatively limited seminars. Even today, five years after the Serbian rule in Kosovo ended, it appears to be socially unacceptable to publicly say that you want to leave the past behind and put aside the intense feelings that it provokes.

Their relationship with the past seems to be inextricably linked to their view on Kosovo's status and their wish to be completely independence from Serbia. There are however some positive aspects. Both on a private and on a group level, people try to make it possible for Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs to agree on issues where cooperation seems more practical than continued conflict. This brings hope of a possible peaceful coexistence in the future.

It may seem as though the newly elected politicians in Kosovo have been focusing exclusively on Kosovo's forthcoming status – and their own positions. The important work of uncovering the truth and starting the process of reconciliation seems inferior. But this important work does not necessarily depend on Kosovo's status in international law. The political parties should cooperate and make a plan for this work to be presented locally in order for people to know what is expected of them. Only then can the work to achieve truth and reconciliation start.

When I returned to Kosovo in spring of 2001, I was met by the “imperative of reconciliation” and the term “affirmative action”, which UNMIK and OSCE had obviously established in order to gain the trust of Kosovo Serbs. Any activities that failed to meet this imperative as defined by UNMIK were frowned upon. Well-meaning people told me that my work on a book and a film about dead people in wells was not in line with the “imperative of reconciliation”. Cheryl Johnson, a freelance journalist and film producer from South Africa, told me that UNMIK had stopped a planned exhibition of documents and photos in Tirana, Albania. The purpose of the exhibition was to inform people of some of the consequences of the Serbian harassments. The reason UNMIK gave for stopping the exhibition was that it could harm the process of reconciliation.

In the three or four years since this policy was founded, little progress has been made in the process of reconciliation.

Starting the reconciliation process by covering up what happened during the Serbian destructions would probably be the worst strategy imaginable. Making sure the Kosovo Serbs are given the opportunity to present their versions and viewpoints does not have to limit the Kosovo Albanian collection and presentation of facts – they are both equally important elements in the upcoming process of reconciliation. Collecting information might be the most important part of preparing for reconciliation and forgiveness for both parties. Any information or claims that are not uncovered and carefully documented could easily form the basis for myths and accusations that may inflict considerable damage on the work of reconciliation and forgiveness.

UNMIK will probably be unable to “force” the Kosovo Albanians to reconcile with the Kosovo Serbs and the Gypsies if they do not realise themselves that this is the only way to secure a new Kosovo with the possibility of financial progress and legal protection for all. The Kosovo Albanians demonstrated their ability to solve problems in a non-violent manner when the Milosevic regime inflicted its brutal apartheid policy on them during eight long years in the nineties. Provided the political leaders of Kosovo understand how to benefit from the democratic qualities that the Kosovo Albanians have after all demonstrated, a successful

process of reconciliation and forgiveness should be possible. It is however essential that all political parties cooperate on a common basic initiative.

UNMIK, OSCE and the NGOs offer young people and women various courses in reconciliation and cooperation with the Serbs. These ad hoc-measures are commendable, but fail to reach all parts of the population, especially the elderly. The elderly still have their “old” opinions and will continue to influence young people at home. The older generation’s opinions are respected by young people in Kosovo and the political parties must therefore make sure their elderly electors receive information on reconciliation.

Ramush Haradinaj is the leader of the third largest party in Kosovo - the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo. He was a so-called zone commander in the KLA during the war. In his book *A Story of War and Freedom*, Mr Haradinaj said that he pictures Kosovo as a place where all Kosovans, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, have the same rights. This is an important signal coming from a man who is influential in political circles. Unfortunately, there have been few similar remarks coming from Kosovo Albanian political leaders after the latest election, and they have done very little in order to secure everyday life for all Kosovans. Reconciliation must become an integrated part of the programmes of various political parties in Kosovo over the next few years. The political parties themselves must also be a driving force and not just leave this work to the aid organisations and UNMIK. In order to do so, the political parties must put their differences aside and cooperate.

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the way in which it worked would serve as a good role model for the politicians in Kosovo: How do we solve an almost impossible problem? The white people of South Africa, like the Serbs in Kosovo, constituted a minority that had ruled over the majority of the population and committed crimes against them.

Some of the most important issues in the work of reconciliation and forgiveness for the Kosovans will most certainly be:

## THE TRUTH

The search for the truth must focus on what happened in Kosovo during the Milosevic regime. It must include legal investigations of named Serbs who participated in crimes and must hold military leaders on various levels responsible for their actions.

If the search for truth is to be credible, crimes committed by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs and Gypsies must similarly be subjected to judicial investigations. Fadil Muqolli from the village of Old Poklek gave me his view on the future of Kosovo (fourteen members of Muqolli’s closest family were killed; please see the chapter on Old Poklek):

*“I believe that a reconciliation between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs is possible, because they are our neighbours in all respects and because Kosovo’s future generations depend on it. But the first step in this process must involve complete openness about what the Serbs did in Kosovo after 1989. It will be especially important for me to uncover what happened to my family in spring of 1999. I have accepted that I will never get my family back, but the Serbian population and the rest of the world must be told what happened in Kosovo. Hiding the truth would be a betrayal of the close relatives that I lost. And the crimes that the Serbian units committed must be uncovered in detail to prevent the same thing from happening to future generations. The International Criminal Tribunal in Hague (ICTY) will probably do well at uncovering what happened on a higher strategic level. Even though the indictment against Milosevic and some of his closest companions include cases involving*

*individuals, there is still a lot of work to do in terms of uncovering the crimes that were committed against people. So much of what happened in Kosovo has to be investigated. It is important to give the family members that are still alive a sense of justice. The leaders on lower levels should also be held responsible in one way or another. People must at least acknowledge what happened in order to prevent future generations from fighting verbal battles and creating new myths. People in Western Europe have been living in peaceful coexistence for half a century and it is about time that we also manage to create habitable conditions for our future generations in the Balkans."*

Enver Lipaj and Rrahime Lipaj from Studenica express some of the same attitudes as Fadil Muqolli. They lost several family members, among them two daughters aged thirteen and fifteen. Even though they find it difficult to ever forgive the perpetrators, they are prepared for some sort of reconciliation to take place between the different groups of people. Life in Kosovo cannot go on as an eternal battle between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians:

*"We are neighbours and we have to find a solution to our conflicts. A future solution will have to include the truth about the crimes that were committed. We know the names of people who participated in crimes against Kosovo Albanians and these names must be made public. Unless our Serbian neighbours acknowledge the evil deeds that were committed, it will be difficult to build a new and prosperous future for our children."*

Isak Sejdiu from Lower Nerodime said that for him personally, reconciliation would be difficult. But he realises that it must be achieved sooner or later. In 1997, he was terribly disappointed by his Serbian neighbours in the village. All the Serbs went on a trip to Belgrade and when they returned, every man between the age of sixteen and sixty-five was armed.

*"They stopped talking to us and were very unpleasant at times. When Serbian military units started shooting at Albanian farms, our Serbian neighbours did not offer us any support. When we returned from a refugee camp in Macedonia, we discovered that all our furniture had been removed or burned and that our houses were more or less ruined. The previous decade was a horrible time for Kosovo Albanians. Never again must the Serbs rule Kosovo."*

## **JUSTICE FOR ALL**

During the initial phase of investigating and preparing trials for the Kosovo Serbs suspected of having committed crimes, something went terribly wrong for UNMIK. It is hard to say whether it was because of UNMIK's unwillingness to make use of what Kosovo Albanians knew, or an example of insufficient work on the part of UNMIK. The result was that hundreds of suspects avoided being arrested and investigated. It was not long before the Kosovo Albanians noticed this. The fact that UNMIK failed to use the police in order to quickly arrest suspects probably contributed to the persecutions and revenge killings of Kosovo Serbs. According to Andrew Rigby's analyses of Western Europe after the Second World War, the countries that quickly arrested thousands of suspected collaborators, largely avoided that their inhabitants took the law into their own hands. These countries included Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands and Belgium. France, on the other hand, arrested few suspected collaborators and experienced a wave of summary executions carried out by armed

members of former resistance groups. About 4,500 possible collaborators became the victims of “summary executions” in France (Howard Clark: 8).

In spring of 2001, two years after UNMIK took charge in Kosovo, only forty Serbian soldiers had been arrested for committing serious crimes during the war and most of them had managed to escape from confinement. Instead of breaking the spiral of violence in Kosovo by putting Serbs on trial, UNMIK’s failure to carry out trials resulted in an atmosphere of intolerance directed at the Serb minority. The simple fact that nothing or very little was done led to the formation of rumours and innocent Serbs paid the price.

The final goal for the process of reconciliation and forgiveness must be justice for all Kosovans. Justice does not only mean acknowledging every crime that was committed, it also means giving innocent Kosovo Albanians and Gypsies an opportunity to clear their names in public hearings.

The women who were sexually abused during the Serbian actions, especially in autumn of 1998 and spring of 1999, have a particular need for psychological and emotional support. The Kosovo Albanian society is dominated by men. Certain attempts have been made to improve the position of women, but they have not resulted in any significant improvements, a fact that is evident to anyone travelling through Kosovo. It should become a matter of honour for Kosovo Albanians to help the women who were sexually abused without turning them into patients. They are not sick, but in need of a social network to help them in their emotional healing process. For these women, the best solution might be programmes that help them get an education and a job.

Former KLA and FARK soldiers also need support to return to a civil life. There are thousands of them and not all of them have been fortunate enough to be integrated into the newly established TMK (Kosovo Protection Corps) or the police academy. Many of them will need support and treatment for a long time to process what they have been through. During the first period of time after Kosovo’s liberation, people needed homes for the winter and few resources were earmarked for the treatment of former soldiers with psychological war traumas. The new Kosovo should take pride in helping this group of people as well. Norway’s disgraceful treatment of its navy servicemen after the Second World War should absolutely not be imitated. Decades passed before those men were acknowledged and offered treatment and war pensions.

## **FORGIVENESS**

Every international guest, including President Clinton, has stressed the importance of forgiveness if the Kosovans are to interact with Europe and USA in the future. Most Kosovans understand, or will come to understand, the need for forgiveness, but on one important condition: the Serbs must acknowledge what happened, not only in the period from 1998 to 1999, but from 1989 onwards when the Serbs forced their apartheid rule – unique in Europe’s modern history – on the Kosovo Albanians. In order to obtain such an acknowledgment from the Serbs, the official authorities in Kosovo will have to set up a kind of “truth commission”, where anyone can present their accusations of committed crimes along with their evidence.

The fact that UNMIK did not immediately arrest Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians suspected of war crimes resulted in tensions. Consequently, Albanians took the law into their own hands and unfounded rumours and accusations remained undisputed and became “truths”. There are however people in the Albanian community who might lead the way in the search for truth. Adem Demaci, “Kosovo’s Mandela”, a political prisoner who

spent twenty-seven years in Serbian prisons; Flora Brovina, also a political prisoner; don Lush Gjerg, a catholic priest and one of the leading campaigners against the tradition of blood vengeance; and Jetemir Bala, a young non-violence activist, are all people who could lead the Kosovans through the inevitably painful process of seeking truth and forgiveness. There might also be suitable candidates among the Kosovo Serbs, like Sava, a monk in the monastery in Decani, as well as politically elected moderate Serbs. Such a process will undoubtedly be enhanced by searching for common needs and challenges. These common conditions might serve as a catalyst in the initial work of recording facts and problems.

Under the present financial conditions, any compensation from Serbia will be almost impossible. But in the long run it would not be unreasonable for the Serbian state to establish a foundation in order to remedy some of the damage that was inflicted on Kosovo, especially during the last ten to twelve years. In the long run, Serbia will certainly be able to offer at least some sort of compensation. After the Second World War, Germany was eventually able to pay war indemnity to Israel, among others. Kosovo was a living nightmare of death, violence and destruction during the actions of the Serbian military, paramilitary and police forces in the last year and a half before they were forced to withdraw. The international community contributes towards the reconstruction of Kosovo, but it is not nearly enough to compensate for all the damage and destruction.

## **THE FUTURE STATUS OF KOSOVO**

In the preface for the second edition of his book on Kosovo, Noel Malcolm said: “A simple, but fundamental principle is at stake here: a policy of terror against the civilian population must not pay off. This principle must be maintained, not only for the sake of the 1.8 million Kosovo Albanians, but for the sake of the rest of the world and its future generations.”

Conversations and interviews with Albanians from all parts of Kosovo make it clear that a future Serbian rule in Kosovo is considered to be impossible. This attitude is not only a result of Milosevic’s rule in Kosovo; it is rooted several decades back.

## **THE PRESENT SITUATION IN KOSOVO**

Today’s Kosovo is a disaster in every respect. Unemployment is soaring and it seems to be difficult to achieve short-term improvements. Industry and agriculture are poorly developed and to make the business sector profitable will take considerable investments over a long period of time. At present, there is no independent Kosovo Albanian municipal or state management. UNMIK represents a sort of shadow administration making the final decisions in each municipality, as is also the case on state level. UNMIK is in charge of all the resources donated to Kosovo by countries and international organisations. These resources still represent the bulk of public budgets. The collection of taxes has barely started. All public offices and archives must be constructed from scratch. The Serbs destroyed or brought with them practically all office equipment and archives when they withdrew (Howard Clark). In the municipality of Decani, where our project kept its main base, the Serbs literally just left a few chairs behind in the demolished municipality building. Archives and all types of equipment belonging to the municipal offices had either been destroyed or removed and this



was the situation all over Kosovo. As the expelled population started to return, they were met by empty municipal buildings.

Ibrahim Selmanaj, who was the interim mayor of Decani when we arrived in July 1999, was one of the KLA members who took charge in several municipalities as no other administration existed. People needed an authority to turn to for help when they returned from the refugee camps and the mountains. Former KLA members were harshly criticised for making themselves comfortable and taking up important positions in the municipalities, but the KLA leaders probably did the right thing when they appointed people for these administrative positions. The KLA leaders had no lasting powers or decision making authorities and controlled no resources, but their municipal offices were important to inhabitants who returned to ruined homes and little food and to the international organisations distributing emergency aid. Our team's cooperation with Ibrahim Selmanaj in Decani was excellent, and this was also the case in other municipalities that were temporarily managed by the KLA.

The KLA representatives gave up their positions after the first free local elections in Kosovo in autumn 2000, as these elections did not provide their parties with a majority. The KLA representatives went on to become representatives of two political parties called Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), which were established by Ramush Haradinaj (former KLA commander) and Hashim Thaci (former KLA leader).

If this process is to have any authority among the Kosovans, the political parties in Kosovo will have to take charge of the process of creating a democratic, pluralistic and modern society based on peaceful coexistence, conflict solution, compromises and respect for majority decisions. UNMIK would be incapable of carrying out such a task and should not attempt to do so.

## **JUNE 2003: MEETING WITH SOME CENTRAL POLITICIANS**

I returned to Pristina between May and June 2003 to get the last details on some of the well-killings. Some of the relatives and neighbours I talked to the previous year had been reluctant to speak of what had happened as they were quite simply afraid. Perhaps the Serbs would return? Male relatives would sometimes refuse to let women speak directly to me or my interpreter about what had happened.

While in Kosovo, I hoped to also be able to interview members of the largest political parties, including the party that represented the Kosovo Serbs.

## MEETING WITH PRESIDENT IBRAHIM RUGOVA

My first meeting was with President Ibrahim Rugova (Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK). Our meeting took place on Tuesday 3 June and I was accompanied by my interpreter, Benon Morina, and Kari Berge who served as a film photographer for the occasion. We received a warm welcome from Ibrahim Rugova at his residence up on the hillside overlooking the centre of Pristina. I told him about the book I was writing on my work with UNHCR and the NCA and how I had been involved in clearing wells all over Kosovo, bringing out dead bodies, animal carcasses, bricks, sand, dirt and scrap iron, ammunition, grenades and so forth.

I started by asking him his opinion on the work UNHCR and the national authorities had carried out since he was elected president in 2001. This was Mr Rugova's second term as president of Kosovo; his first term was as far back as 1992 when Kosovo Albanians held elections and declared Kosovo a free republic in response to Milosevic's suppressive regime.

*"In the last four years, we have made good progress in many areas. There is no longer an acute need for rebuilding. We are now working on financial issues, investments and privatisations. I am holding office for the second time and this time I am internationally recognised."*

Ibrahim Rugova probably looks back on the period between 1992 and 1998 with mixed feelings. During that time, he travelled around Europe and the rest of the world asking for support for the Kosovo Albanian cause. His requests never led to any real action, even though many western politicians expressed their sympathy. Mr Rugova continued:

*"We have made great progress when it comes to consolidating our institutions. The parliament functions well. The government is also functioning, although it is based on a coalition compromise. As president, I assist the institutions and at the moment we are discussing UNMIK's "handing over" of power to these institutions. We need more power when it comes to financial development and security, which is an important area that has to be treated carefully and cannot be rushed. The Kosovan police have been reinforced, but they need more specialised training."*

*In answer to your question, the future holds great things for Kosovo. NATO's intervention ended the confrontation. We have also seen progress in the integration of ethnic groups into society and a quick recognition of an independent Kosovo will bring even more peace to the whole region. One of Kosovo's future goals is to become a member of the EU and NATO and to maintain a good relationship with the USA and France who have helped us a great deal, and of course with countries like Norway. Based on the enterprising spirit among our people, Kosovo will have a great future as an independent country."*

"How has the work on reconciliation, cooperation and forgiveness between the ethnic groups progressed?"

*"I think we have made progress when it comes to integrating ethnic minorities. Minorities are represented in parliament. In government, two ministers are representing the minorities. Minority groups are also participating in other institutions, both locally and on a national level. In many areas there are positive signs of reconciliation, but as only four years have passed since the war ended, the wounds have still not healed. On the bright side, we are not putting any pressure on the other ethnic groups. They need time to adjust and to be integrated into society. There are some problems in Mitrovica, but in other municipalities people are able to move around freely, which is a good sign. People are still marked by what happened and they do not just recover overnight. The Bosnian and Turkish people have come a long way in their integration process, but the Serbs are a different matter. Some of them want to be integrated, but the extremists do not."*

“How is the coalition working out? This is the first time you have held an election with several party candidates. I have heard a lot of people in Kosovo say that the parties are fighting each other instead of cooperating in this crucial period before you take office?”

*“Since the national elections, the parties have been cooperating in parliament. The government does not want to go back to the previous system and wants to see cooperation in our institutions. There were numerous confrontations after the war had just ended, so we entered into a joint administrative management with UNMIK. In parliament, the parties cooperate in a democratic fashion and have compromised on the ministerial posts. The prime minister represents a different party from mine and the minorities are represented by two ministers.”*

“After travelling around the country for two weeks, my impression is that people are very frustrated. The high unemployment rate, I have been told eighty per cent, must be a major reason for this frustration.”

*“The correct figure is fifty-seven per cent. There are many different ways of calculating the unemployment rate. Some cling to the old communist way of thinking where only factory work or administration is considered work. Those working in agriculture are regarded as unemployed. The older generation has to retire and give younger people a chance to enter the job market. The current privatisation process will revitalise the economic structure. Many are of course frustrated by such a high unemployment rate and this is closely linked to the authority UNMIK has been given. As long as the government has no power, we will not attract any investments. UNMIK is here for our sake and we need to find a solution that gives us access to international funding and foundations. Political differences are part of any democracy, but on truly important issues we are working together. Three weeks ago, all parties agreed on a resolution on the “war value” of our struggle against the Serbs, and the fifteen year period was finally put to rest. I am sure people have different opinions on this process.*

*On important issues such as independence and economic policies, we have a joint political platform sanctioned by all parties. For three years nothing happened; the political levels were inactive. But things are improving now that we have held elections and have a parliament in place. However, some people are unwilling to work for our new institutions and wish to reinstate the old system. Three or four of the parties that were established after the war have more aggressive policies, but they are cautious still. We need more time to fully integrate them. Some of them use “elimination tactics” and say: “we cannot cooperate unless you or this other person steps down”. We are trying to consolidate the democratic spirit and in the last year, things have changed for the better. Since the last local election we have seen some progress.”*

“You mentioned that you had a joint programme for this vital period. Is reconciliation and forgiveness part of it?”

*“Well, yes. We have to be careful when dealing with those subjects. To be honest, the resolution was first and foremost aimed at an internal reconciliation on parliament level. It is hard to reconcile the different ethnic groups, but the resolution will probably have a positive effect on the rest of society as well. We need to make room for forgiveness, but only when the time is right. We have traditions for reconciliation, but it has to be introduced gradually. This resolution was meant to make reconciliation possible for those who said “You did not fight, we did” and so on – a sort of agreement to reconcile. Most people have accepted it. This is part of democracy. Some people will never accept it, even after we have reached an agreement, but that has to be our first step.”*

“In your opinion, how many years do you imagine it will take Kosovo to reach its final stage of independence?”

*“Our supporters understanding of the situation is growing, but we need to be patient. Some say soon, others later. In the USA, the subject of independence is frequently debated in Congress and other institutions. We are also met with understanding in Europe, but the countries there are hesitant. They understand that several things have to be in place first and that timing is crucial.”<sup>2</sup>*



President Ibrahim Rugova in conversation with the author in June 2003.  
(Photo: Kari Berge.)

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<sup>2</sup> Presiden Ibrahim Rugova died of cancer on 21 January 2006.

## MEETING WITH RAMUSH HARADINAJ, AAK PARTY LEADER

Immediately after my meeting with President Ibrahim Rugova, I went to AAK's (the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo) headquarters to meet with Ramush Haradinaj, and received another warm welcome. I had met Mr Haradinaj in connection with my work two years earlier. I presented Ramush Haradinaj with the same questions as President Rugova.

"Looking back on the period between the summer of 1999 and up until today, June 2003, what is your opinion on the current situation in Kosovo? What do you think of the country's development?"

*"In my opinion, all that has been done in Kosovo under UNMIK's control up until now forms an important foundation for our society, which is gradually developing into a functioning democracy. We want to further improve in the political field. Considering the short period of time that has passed, we have achieved a lot. But we are now becoming aware of the differences between UNMIK and the political parties. We want to continue to build on what has already been done to create an independent state and we will get there."*

"How is the political system working at the moment? There are five main parties in parliament. In your opinion, how is this structure working out?"

*"The political parties' work is based on an interim constitution implemented in May 2001. Considering the limitations of such a constitution, work is progressing well. Our situation is particular, with a large coalition where everyone participates and works together. Perhaps it would have been a different situation if some were in the position of power while others were in opposition. This might have provoked more reactions and resulted in a faster or different form of approach. When I look back at our starting point and our initial work, I feel we have spent our time well and learnt a lot since then. We are doing this for the first time and I think we have succeeded in doing our job so far."*

"UNMIK plays a major part in the process of transition to self-government. How well are you cooperating? Is UNMIK working against you, or are you facing the future together and transferring competence and authority to civil institutions?"

*"Now, after three years, we are not cooperating very well. UNMIK is not working against us intentionally, but it is a fact that a lot of things are not functioning properly. Some of the obstructions are political. At the same time, people in New York, Brussels and Washington are not ready to make the essential changes. International representatives stationed here do not have the courage or are not in a position to act. Everyone is talking about status and standards; that acceptable human rights standards have to come before the issue of Kosovo's status, but nothing is happening. The way I see it, it is about time we face reality and take action and not just hope and plan. UNMIK's mandate needs to be changed from an administrative mandate to one that monitors and assists. We believe there is a current need for transferring competence, but we would also like the institutions in Kosovo to work together with international experts, at the same time as they are given responsibility in all fields. These experts could assist Kosovo's new institutions for a while and monitor the process. However, the current parliament is governing at UNMIK's mercy and that is not the way of true democracy."*

"Do the parties have a joint programme on the development of Kosovo for the coming years and what about the work on reconciliation, forgiveness and cooperation with the Serbs? In what way is that part of the programme?"

*"The parties are working together. Kosovo Albanians are cooperating and we have a good working relationship with those representing the Serbs. They have representatives in*

parliament. There are differences between the parties, but in principle we agree on what belongs to the past and have a common understanding of the road ahead.”

“You write in your book that Kosovo belongs to all Kosovans, every inhabitant of Kosovo. Is that view stated in the programme? You are the party leader and meet voters from all over Kosovo. How do you inform them about the best way to achieve reconciliation and acceptance from minorities?”

*“The policies we carry out through our institutions show that we are working towards a common goal. In the government, all ministers are cooperating well, including those representing the minorities. This also applies to the Serbian minister, who I have met personally. Two minority representatives in our parliamentary group who represent the Egyptians (a group related to the Roma people) approached our group and wanted to join us. We also have close contact with other minority representatives and it is not just a symbolic contact – we plan tasks together which shows that we are making an effort in party politics. We have a meeting in September this year where minority rights will be an important issue on the agenda. That includes religious rights, cultural rights and the right to use your own language, but also other rights such as dual citizenship. This will for example apply to Serbs. We have yet to reach any decisions, but these are the issues we are working on.”*

“I asked Kosovan people about their opinion on the current situation. They said they were very frustrated and that the political parties are fighting each other instead of working for the people. What is your response to that?”

*“That is partly true, but it is untrue that we are wasting time and opportunities by fighting each other. We do not have the opportunity to give people what they want as high unemployment rates and an unstable financial situation make it difficult. Part of it is due to lack of efficiency, but a more important factor is Kosovo’s constitutional situation. We have not been given the all clear yet, but are ready to get started. People’s discontentment tells us there is a need for us to accept our new reality. We have to start relating to it and front the issue of Kosovo’s final status. We need to have UNMIK’s mandate changed into something else in order to develop into a normal society.”*

In the 2004 elections, one year after our conversation, Ramush Haradinaj was elected prime minister in a coalition government consisting of the AAK and LDK. In March 2005, he was accused of war crimes by the Hague Tribunal and chose to go to Hague of his own free will. There he was accused of, among other things, ordering the killings of Serbs and Albanians. Some of these bodies had ended up in wells and channels. These matters will be explored in more detail during the trial. It is vitally important that atrocities committed by Albanians are also investigated and penalized.

## **MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BAJRAM REXHEPI (PDK)**

Our meeting took place in the prime minister’s office at ten o’clock in the morning on Friday 6 June. We had been informed that the prime minister had a busy schedule that morning, so I started with a short outline of my work in Kosovo before focusing on my main concern: What now? Would there be reconciliation, hope and development, or would people still be confrontational? I went right to the heart of the matter and asked the prime minister: “What is your opinion on Kosovo’s development and UNMIK’s role in it?”

*“We have faced many challenges from the summer of 1999 and up until now, but with good support from the international community and the strong will of our people, we have*



*managed to rebuild a lot in three years, especially houses. Many Kosovans lead a strenuous life with current unemployment rates reaching sixty per cent. This is our main problem. We have a young population and they need hope and good future prospects.*

*A few months ago, UNMIK started to differ in opinion from us. We have ambitions of gaining more competence and responsibility for ourselves. This is normal; we need to develop our own institutions. We would have preferred a faster development; there are still many problems and we are not satisfied. UNMIK's assignment was a success at first, much progress was made, and they made it possible for us to hold local and national elections. We are elected by the people and they expect development and progress. UNMIK provides us with guidelines and directives regarding transfer of competence and responsibility to the institutions we are restoring. However, considering the fact that we are now a democratic state, we need to develop faster in respect of freedom for and acceptance of minorities, and also on the subject of integration into Europe and the EU."*

*"The period between the summer of 1999 and up until now has been decisive in many ways. Do you feel that the political parties are accepting their responsibility, or are they too busy fighting each other?"*

*"I think the parties are doing their best and they all want more responsibility. It is only natural that they are fighting for their share of the power and want to be the winning party. Everybody wants to win. However, we have several extra commitments and on some of the main issues there has to be a consensus, for instance on the issue of Kosovo's status. Sometimes we fail. Some parties are looking for power of their own which makes finding a common ground on the main issues difficult at times. But this is a long process and we are improving every day."*

*"As I understand it, the international community has introduced some goals, among them reconciliation and forgiveness. Have you achieved these goals in your opinion?"*

*"Luckily, it is in the human character to reconcile and forgive without forgetting the past. This is a long process and we are probably more ready for reconciliation and forgiveness now. If we always turn and look to the past, new conflicts will arise. Albanian history is exceptionally tragic and we are trying to compel people to reconcile, but in order to do so, both parties have to be ready. We do not see any signs of the Serbian side being ready, even though we were the victims of war, criminal acts and genocide and have more reason to be angry and refuse reconciliation. But we have to move on and try to give our younger generations a better future. As the majority, we are obligated to give all our inhabitants, including the Serbs, the same opportunities. However, they need to accept the new reality. I believe the first step towards true reconciliation is to find a good Serbian leader who will apologise on behalf of all Serbs, although they did of course not all take part in the criminal acts. They have to find a politician who is like Willy Brandt and who is willing to follow his example. This would increase the possibilities of a good relationship between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs."*

*"I recently travelled around Kosovo. Some very frustrated people I spoke to in the countryside said they watched politicians argue on TV and did not feel as though parliament members were representing the people."*

*"That might be true and they have a right to complain about politicians. To speak for myself, I try to create some form of balance and talk about people's real needs. I am a member of the PDK, but as prime minister I try to speak on behalf of the entire people. My agenda, my first priority, is not party issues, but trying to bring about development for Kosovo. I know that in parliament you will sometimes find parties that fight for their own issues instead of the common cause. We need to create better living conditions and opportunities so that we can give people, especially the younger generation, a better life."*

“I want to relate to you what a woman of about fifty years told me not long ago. I asked her opinion on what the political parties had done to solve people’s immediate problems. She said: ‘I think there is a lot of corruption’.”

*“Corruption is a problem found in every country, especially in countries going through a transition period with an inadequate body of rules. We have a body of rules, but it is UNMIK’s responsibility to uphold them. In our opinion, they are not doing a good enough job. But fighting corruption through the legal system and the police is only part of the job. We support UNMIK’s policy of zero tolerance on corruption and organised crime. I have tried to find ways to prevent corruption, but I have not been issued sufficient authority. Corruption is a complex matter that needs to be addressed through different forms of training starting at school level. I feel we would be better equipped than UNMIK to deal with corruption if only we had been given more authority. Many of UNMIK’s foreign employees are only here for a short period of time, while we live here and have to deal with these problems every day.”*

“One final question: How do you deal with the issues of Kosovo Albanian war criminals?”

*“I believe that the Hague Tribunal is entitled to investigate any country that has been through a war. From time to time we are frustrated by how Kosovo’s fight for freedom is on some international arenas equated with the war and with Milosevic, who is now on trial in an international court for criminal acts, genocide and occupational war. This makes us angry. I know we respected the codes of war one hundred per cent. Those who broke the rules must pay the price for what they did, but the accusations must be based on clear evidence.”*

## **MEETING WITH SERBIAN LEADER DRAGIŠA KRSTOVIC**

It was important for me to also get the Serbian leader’s opinion on the development after NATO and UNMIK took control. When I made an application to parliament, I got in touch with Dragiša Krstovic. He agreed to an interview on the development in Kosovo between the summer of 1999 and up until today, and this would include questions on reconciliation and forgiveness. I started by asking his opinion on the development after the UN took over in Kosovo.

*“I do have something to say about the period before the UN took control in Kosovo. There were political crises, ethnic crises and institutional crises, and tension was growing. Some wanted to try save Kosovo from a political crisis, but the ethnic crisis just kept growing. The intension was to establish an international commission led by former Spanish Prime Minister Philippe Gonzales, but unfortunately Serbia was against this idea and consequently nothing happened. Serbia should have accepted the initiative from the international community. I think the situation would have taken a different turn if this initiative had been implemented. Perhaps we could have avoided the bombings that started on 24 March. I believe we had an opportunity to change the outcome of this conflict and to avoid the war, bloodbath and destruction that occurred all over Yugoslavia and in Kosovo in particular.*

*After the war ended, the international community entered with their security forces. A new process to end the ethnic conflict started. As the UN arrived, Kosovo Albanian refugees returned to their homes. At the same time, large parts of the Serbian population left Kosovo and headed for Serbia and Montenegro. Much of the Serbian community in Kosovo was left in ruins. Houses were burned to the ground and churches were destroyed. What remained of valuables was looted and all of this was of course revenge for the mistreatment Kosovo Albanians had been victims of during all these years. What happened to both groups of people*

*is horrible and has widened the gap between the ethnic groups. According to the information we have gathered, 1300 Serbs have been kidnapped. Many of these cases remain unsolved and nobody knows what happened to them. Some have later been found in mass graves, but only a few have been identified. This took place at the same time as the UN security forces entered Kosovo. When Albanian refugees returned to Kosovo and gained power, large parts of the Serbian population left.*

*The situation has become reasonably stable as time has passed. Most political leaders have previously said that if the international community had not taken action, even more people would have been killed and more valuables stolen on both sides. The conflict could possibly have escalated and might still have been raging on. What more can I say. The Serbian community is not satisfied with the international commissions' work in Kosovo. Four years have passed and there are still more than 230,000 Serbian refugees living outside of Kosovo. They have not been able to return during these years and their flats, houses and homes have been set on fire.*

*There are very few Serbs living here now. More than 500 Serbian communities have been destroyed which is a big problem. The fact that Serbs in Kosovo are not allowed to move around freely is equally problematic. They have no security. A lot has happened lately, several young people were for instance killed a few days ago in the village of Verboc near Kamenice. On another recent occasion, an elderly man was beaten to death. What took place in Obilic three days ago is also very tragic. Three members of a family were shot. The funeral is being held today in a place called Sekundabodica.*

*In the four years that have passed, next to nothing has been done to provide the Serbs with security and the right to move around freely, or to facilitate their return to Kosovo. I can present facts. In Pristina there are very few Serbs left. Before 1999, 40,000 Serbs lived there. This is a great problem. There are no Serbs left in Peja, Prizren or Djakovica, or other areas where they are unable to return to their homes.*

*I now want to say something about what the UN has done regarding the constitution and about leadership. We have established an interim parliament and a state and have held both presidential and local elections, but unfortunately these institutions have not understood their function. They are supposed to work for all ethnic groups, but they are failing to do so. They are bringing about some form of justice for their own people. As a Serbian representative, I know that we experience a lot of conflicts regarding discriminatory decisions. Sometimes the other minorities are victims of this discrimination. Kosovo's government and parliament, as well as other institutions, are not working in the way they are supposed to. I believe it will be a long time before they function as they were intended to. They should work in the interest of all the people, give everyone the same opportunities and ensure there is equality before the law. The laws need to be held to a high standard and must be respected in the same way as in the rest of the world.*

*The Serbian side sent the wrong representatives to the Rambouillet negotiations. These delegates did not have a real mandate to reach an agreement with the Albanian side. The real mandate lay in the hands of those who governed in Belgrade. Powerful men in Belgrade were controlling everything from there and had instructed the Rambouillet delegation on what to agree to and what not to agree to. All I can say is that if the Rambouillet meeting had taken place today with the current Serbian government in charge, it would not have had the same outcome as it did in 1999. In such a situation, I think the Rambouillet meeting would have been a great success."*

*"UNMIK has set some conditions for the new development of Kosovo, where reconciliation and forgiveness are two main issues. In what way have you, as a Serbian representative, participated to improve this situation and move on to reconciliation and forgiveness?"*

*“Personally I have a positive attitude towards this. I truly believe we will achieve reconciliation and forgiveness and that we need to communicate with each other. About a month ago, the PDK headed by Mr Thaci, invited us to sit down and talk, and we accepted. We notified Mr Thaci that we wanted to document that these talks would serve both parties. A resolution on the fight for reconciliation and freedom in Kosovo was unfortunately passed soon after and led to disagreements. UNMIK and its leader Mr Steiner found this unfortunate too, and so did Washington. That is why we are not cooperating today. PDK’s initiative was stopped and no one is trying to arrange talks any more. I think this is very unfortunate. It would be in the interest of both parties and of vital interest to the people who are still living in the conflict areas. Especially after all the criminal acts I mentioned earlier which creates new and greater divides between the groups.*

*There is always something that keeps us apart. One moment you think you have become close, then something happens and the distance grows again. We then need more time to get closer to each other again. No one can profit from this and we are not happy with the situation.”*

*“UNMIK has been of the opinion that affirmative action in favour of Kosovo Serbs would help them get closer to the rest of the people. This means that they want to give the Serbs better opportunities in society. Do you think this has been positive for the development?”*

*“No, in regards to the Serbian society I cannot see it working. At present, the local Serbian communities are at risk.”*

*“But during my two weeks here, I have heard that the Serbs are not paying charges on their driving licence, they do not pay income tax or pay for electricity and other utilities. Is that correct?”*

*“Yes, that is correct. Some of it is correct, perhaps everything. At least a part of what you are saying is true. But this is not enough to make people stay, it is not enough motivation. More importantly, the Serbs need security to live a free life and be able to move around freely. If you do not have that freedom, it is not enough to use benefits as motivation for people to stay.”*

*“You are now a member of parliament, representing the minorities. Do you speak to the other members when you are working?”*

*“Unfortunately I do not, no. We talk in the sense that we communicate through speeches, work on projects concerning law and order together and work on the prime minister’s speeches. In June last year we passed a resolution which gives all refugees the right to return to Kosovo. We all “bought into” that resolution. If you think that we have direct contact regarding everyday matters, or on rights that should be passed on through the procedures in our meetings or conversations, you are mistaken. We do not.”*

*“One final question: There is a rumour here in Kosovo saying that all the political parties are officially fighting each other in parliament, but that Albanian and Serbian politicians socialise in restaurants, drinking and doing business in the evening.”*

*“No, that is not true. In parliament there are very hard talks between the Albanian parties on one side and the coalition on the other. In restaurants, the Albanians sit at one table and the Serbs at another. We very rarely sit together. I have never heard of any negotiations or business taking place between them. I really do not think that can be true. There are others who do business with each other, and business connections between the Albanians and the Serbs have improved, but not between members of parliament. I cannot be one hundred per cent sure, but I believe that this is not true for most politicians.”*

## ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS

<b>AAK</b>	The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (political party headed by Ramush Haradinaj)
<b>ACT</b>	Actions By Churches Together (International Christian umbrella organisation with headquarters in Geneva)
<b>ACTREQ</b>	Activation Request (the second phase in a three phased authorisation procedure before any NATO military operation can be initiated)
<b>CDHRF</b>	Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedom(s)
<b>CINC</b>	Commander-in-Chief
<b>DCA</b>	Danish Church Aid
<b>FARK</b>	LDK's military wing during the war
<b>FYROM</b>	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
<b>G8 Countries</b>	Organisation comprised of the USA, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada and Russia
<b>Hectare</b>	10,000 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>ICTY</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
<b>KFOR</b>	Kosovo Forces (headed by the European NATO members, but included forces from many UN member countries)
<b>Kosovan</b>	Inhabitant of Kosovo
<b>KLA</b>	Kosovo Liberation Army, UÇK
<b>KVM</b>	Kosovo Verification Mission
<b>LDK</b>	Democratic League of Kosovo (political party headed by Ibrahim Rugova)
<b>LWF</b>	Lutheran World Federation
<b>MSF</b>	Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders)
<b>MTA</b>	Military Technical Agreement
<b>NAK</b>	Kosovo's autonomous National Assembly (from 1974 to 1989)
<b>NCA</b>	Norwegian Church Aid
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation

<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Safety and Cooperation in Europe
<b>OMPF</b>	UNMIK's Office on Missing Persons and Forensics
<b>PDK</b>	Kosovo's Democratic Party (headed by Hashim Tachi)
<b>PISG</b>	Provincial Institutions of Self-Government (Kosovo's interim political institutions)
<b>PSDK</b>	The Social Democratic Party of Kosovo
<b>SHAPE</b>	Supreme Allied Headquarter Powers Europe (NATO's headquarters in Europe)
	Strategic level Comprises operations in all of Kosovo
	Tactical level Comprises a limited local area in Kosovo, for example a village
<b>UÇK</b>	Kosovo's Liberation Army, KLA – militant resistance not controlled by Mr Rugova during the war
<b>UNMIK</b>	United Nations Mission in Kosovo (the UN's civilian administration in Kosovo)
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UMCOR</b>	United Methodist Committee of Relief



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