

# The Pain Is There for All to See

VO. From CI

friends and colleagues.

wasn't easy to gain access to the run hospital. While we waited in badly lit hallways, the American mat who brought us spoke persistently and firmly with the guards who deny entry. He asked to see and then stated with the hospital's director repeatedly phoned the Serbian administrator. "No," he told us, "is not an able answer."

ing again, outside this time, our ator, an Albanian philosophy graduate, pulled her coat around her. "A special kind of cleaning," she said, rearing us, as the chill reminded her, winter is coming. In just a few below-freezing temperatures at may kill many of those refugees still huddled outside Malisevo, "cleansing" of Albanians—who make up 90 percent of the population in Kosovo—as well as Serbian bullets could.

inside the hospital, upstairs, we saw a woman and a boy in intensive care they were not expected to survive. A man nearby, an old woman didn't move. She was still in traditional skirts, wrapped around her head. "Why didn't they have killed me instead of my son? He was only 11," she said, and wept. The young woman in the bed was as pale as the sheet we had pulled down to examine her. There were marks on her chest, above breasts swollen with milk: Her 8-month-old son had head blown off as she suckled. "Are we terrorists?" she asked, so our translator could barely hear

o days later, we drove up into the hills with a convoy of relief agencies trucks bringing food. At times it was like a cortege, moving through a valley in which every house had been burned, and, for good measure, burned, and cows unharvested. Cows roamed the fields, legs up and stiff. Dogs were everywhere. There were no people, except purple-uniformed Serbian police with automatic weapons whose muzzles pointed toward our faces.

turned onto a dirt road and for half an hour, past thick knots of men, men selling cigarettes to one another and an occasional Albanian cleaning his automatic rifle. We entered a tiny village in a high valley, and, as an empty barn, a few standing and, as far as we could see, camped across the valley. Thun people hid among the trees; hunched slowly toward us.

and of men and boys surrounded us, we were invited to come to the village, convinced we could not imagine the extent of the damage. Some had ventured back to their homes, allegedly encouraged by the police, only to be shelled again. A dark-haired man in his forties, in a cardigan sweater, took us in

hand. His face was long, handsome and pained. He showed us the modest farmhouse where 200 or more people spend each of the progressively colder nights. He took us past four newly dug graves—for three adults and a small child—down to the river where groups of women and children clustered around fires.

All these people had fled their homes, grabbing whatever they could in several panicked minutes. Some were in traditional peasant clothes; others, who lived in the country but worked in Pristina, were dressed in long fashionable skirts and platform heels. Many of them had traveled for weeks, just ahead of the shelling; others were newly evicted from villages like Senik, where fires still smoked.

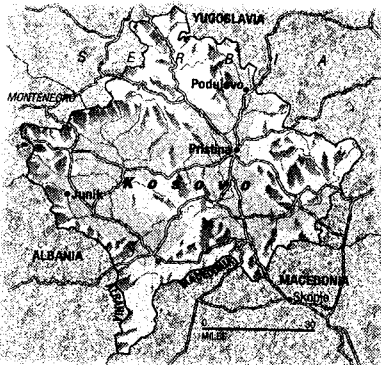
It is estimated by diplomatic observers and relief agencies that perhaps 300,000 people are now "displaced" in Kosovo.

In a makeshift clinic there were crowds, not lines, of people. We saw still-chubby babies with the diarrhea that had already killed some and, if inadequately treated, would kill many more; frail, elderly people; a teenager with an abscess as big as a fist in her jaw. The doctor, who had been displaced from his own village, told us that at least 300 patients had come to the clinic that day. He gestured hopelessly toward the few antibiotics he had, held up syringes for which he had no needles and put his head in his hands. In the next room, two babies with IVs were glassy-eyed and lethargic, and a pregnant woman was in premature labor.

The older children in this high valley had dark circles under their eyes and were, we were told by their mothers, at the slightest sound. When we asked them to draw pictures of themselves—a technique we use in groups of patients in Washington—they crayoned only houses, some neat and intact, others in flames. "Where are you in this picture?" we asked. "I'm not there," they said.

Some intellectuals in Pristina suspect the fact that they are Muslims is the roadblock to more definitive U.S. or NATO intervention. Serbian physicians whom we met in Belgrade insisted that America is neglecting their people's suffering. We listened as carefully as we could to all of their concerns, but our minds and hearts were outside Malisevo with the tens of thousands of the displaced. When Slobodan Milosevic, president of Yugoslavia, talks about establishing "humanitarian centers" while his troops systematically destroy humans, we can only be appalled.

The people of Kosovo need massive humanitarian intervention now: food, building materials and medicine and skilled people to provide education and health care. They need an end to the ongoing attacks that make a mockery of all humanitarian efforts. They need the United States and our NATO allies to help them return to their homes and, quite literally, to shield them with our bodies. The U.N. Security Council resolution of Sept. 23, calling for an immediate cease-fire and the resumption of peace talks, is a belated step in the right direction. The American diplomat's reminder should be our watchword. "No" is not an acceptable answer and, we would add, "later" is not an acceptable time.



THE WASHINGTON POST

## Message From Pristina

# 'The Indifference Wounds Us Deeply'

**R**exhep Ismajli, an ethnic Albanian, is professor of linguistics at the University of Pristina and a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo. What follows is excerpted from an e-mail sent by Ismajli to Victor Friedman, chairman of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Chicago, describing the situation in Kosovo. It was translated from the Albanian by Victor Friedman.

Friday, Sept. 18, 1998  
Dear Victor:

I received the books that you sent me. . . . Thank you very much. There were many interesting topics and various debates. There is a great lack of information here now.

But how can one think of scholarly information? Here we are struggling for mere survival. All week we have had staying with a family of seven that fled from Junik. Meanwhile, we ourselves do not know where we will be in a few days. They [the family] have no place to return to in Junik. Here they do not have anything to live on. In our neighborhood now there are many who have come from that area. But now we are afraid of an even bigger wave [of refugees] in Pristina because Podujevo and the region of Llap in the north are being attacked. The population there, however, has nowhere to go.

Life here is suffocating. We cannot go anywhere in the evening, because on every corner we encounter an armed, uniformed Serb patrol ready to abuse us. Nevertheless, we are trying to do something with the schools. Classes are held wherever possible, but the [space] capacity is insufficient, because the number of pupils has grown very much. These are stopgap measures to discourage people from leaving.

The stories of people from the war zones are terrible. The Serbs do not want to pursue only the units of the KLA [Kosovo Liberation Army]. They simply attack everything, even the unarmed populace and thus attempt to bring the KLA to its knees. They shoot at the columns of women, children, and old people who have fled in order to get away from the war. Their houses have been destroyed. Those that remain are first looted and then doused with gasoline and burned. We do not know what will happen tomorrow. Already deaths from cold in the mountains have begun to increase.

The indifference of the Great Powers wounds us deeply. Moreover, the West has given the impression that everything is proceeding according to the wishes of Russia, to whom they have given too much leeway. . . .

Thus faith is lost and desperation grows. Nonetheless, people believe that in the United States there will be a different stance, surely more just, independent of current affairs there. Now I keep thinking: What is happening here could not even be imagined in Africa. Many think that Serbia is simply attempting to exterminate a people. And this is being done before the very eyes of international observers who say that they have no authority. . . .

My book can finally be published this October, but here I take no pleasure in it.



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