



On the Record: Civil Society in Kosovo - the Crisis Years

Issue 4: Those Who Stayed, September 10, 1999

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From the AP Editorial Desk by Iain Guest

What happened to the Albanians who remained in Kosovo during the NATO bombing? Ever since the Serbian withdrawal, mass graves have been providing one grim answer. In this issue, activists recall how Serbian forces and paramilitaries launched their campaign of rape and murder. For the sake of privacy, names have often been changed throughout the excerpts.

From Peter's diary

Our friends' mother, Fejza, explained to me that they had thought that the bombing would end quickly. By the time they felt a need to get out of Prishtina [Pristina], there was no possibility to leave. Many Albanians in this part of Prishtina were killed or taken away, but the building that Fejza lives in was not touched. Fejza said that this was perhaps because there were Serbs living in the building. There is an older couple right next door, who are still living here. Fejza said, "God saved us."

Fejza told me: "In a few more days, they would have killed us all. The worst time was when the Russians came into Prishtina and the paramilitaries understood that their time was up. Then they were going around town one last time to steal and kill. Ibrahim's neighbor got killed. The Russians did nothing to control any of this."

Fejza's husband Adem told me that the Serbian police were always calling him up in the months prior to the bombing; telling him to keep his students from going to the demonstrations and harassing him.

He got tired of this after a while, and said to one of them, "We can't drive you Serbs out of here, or else we would. And you can't get rid of us, because there are too many of us. So why don't we make some kind of a deal, and calm this situation down?" He said that the policeman was shocked to hear an Albanian speak so openly.

"There were so many victims," Fejza said "Maybe it had to be that way."

"It didn't have to be that way," I said.

Fejza agreed. "It didn't have to. But when you were here last year, Peter, the Serbs said that there would be blood up to here (pointing to her knees) before there would be a free Kosovo." She was right.

...Back at the house Kasim [Fejza's brother-in-law] told me a story from Nasruddin Hodja, a Turkish Sufi whose spiritual teachings took the form of humorous parables. He said that once, Nasruddin Hodja was trying to teach his donkey to get along without food. He reduced the donkey's rations a little each day. The donkey was making progress. But just as it was getting good at not eating, it died.

Kasim said, "That's how we felt here during the bombing. Our children would get up at four in the morning to go wait in line for bread. After waiting for ten hours, they would be able to buy two loaves of bread." (July 8, 1999)

Living Under Occupation

"Everyone writes about the refugees who left the country, but what about the 700,000 who remained inside?" asked the director of the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, Sevdie Ahmeti. "They are forgotten."

There is a special story to be told about those who stayed in Kosovo while nearly a million others were driven out. It is not, for the most part, a story about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), because the possibilities for NGO work on a battlefield or in a torture cell are almost nil. In some cases, it is a story of heroism, in others of personal survival. The experience left a raw wound in people's hearts. Their recovery will, as with all atrocities, take a lifetime.

Those who stayed suffered a particularly intense trauma. To be a refugee in Macedonia or Albania was miserable, but at least people had escaped. The possibility of rape, torture, or sudden death was always around the corner for the people remaining in Kosovo.

Some stayed because they thought the NATO bombing would be over in a matter of days. Others simply had no way to escape.

Some made a conscious decision to remain and try to take care of their families or their constituencies. Father Nash of the Prishtina Catholic Church was one of those. He told me:

"During the NATO bombing, we had some good experiences and some bad ones. Some people came to the church to be evacuated. There were 400 of us here on the day before Easter. It was as if we were 'in the jaws of the wolves.' Arkan's and Seselj's men (paramilitary formations) were stationed in front of the church compound. We were surrounded by police, soldiers, and paramilitary units. Near the church there was a dental clinic and a bakery. They took women

there and raped them.

"We are alive because of the hand of God. If it weren't for a miracle, you would have found a big hole in the ground here where the church is. The military placed part of their surveillance network here. On Friday April 9th, at 4:00 p.m., they locked onto a NATO plane from here. NATO aimed a rocket at the trucks that were ten meters from where we are sitting. But the rocket landed in another part of Prishtina. It was like our second birth."

Free movement between cities, towns, and villages was nearly impossible for Albanians. This obstructed most relief work, and meant that aid deliveries from international organizations were generally turned back or confiscated.

The Mother Theresa Society (MTS) attempted to continue. As Marta Palokaj from MTS told me, "During the bombing, some of the people were dying of hunger, but we helped them. We became a special target. Approximately 90% of our clinics were destroyed.

"We had to close our offices in most of Kosovo. Only in Gjilan (Gjilane), one office kept working. This was because the authorities were not aware of our working there. There was less war damage in Gjilan.

"We were unable to help people much. No humanitarian organization could enter Kosovo except for some Greek doctors, and they were bringing food to the Serbs. There were people in the woods who were eating corn that had been stored."

During the NATO bombing the Center for the Rehabilitation of Women and Children did not work, but some of its staff and care recipients were stuck on the premises. Activist Nebih Balaj explained:

"I was here, with one other colleague. There were five women, including one disabled woman, and five children. Two of them were older women who were brought here by doctors. Two of the younger ones were women who had been operated on before the bombing started.

"One of our women colleagues was mistreated by the police several times during that period. The police came here every day. They wanted to force us to leave, but there was nowhere we could go and we had no way to move the disabled people. There were only three Albanian families that stayed in the neighborhood.

"We were not able to get medicines, but one woman brought some for us and handed them to us through a window. She was afraid to come into the center. She was an Albanian woman who worked in the hospital, even during the bombing."

While the prior intentions of the Serbian authorities are the subject of a polemical debate, it seems clear that Operation Horseshoe, albeit obviously pre-planned, was put into effect as a response to the NATO intervention. It is also clear from all-but-unanimous testimony that the bombing was supported by the Kosovar Albanians, and that it was not the source of their terror during the intervention period.

A human rights worker from the Humanitarian Law Center told me:

"During the bombings here, Albanians were not afraid. If you were not on the police force, and if there were no military installations near your home, then you were generally safe. The bombings were precise. Occasionally there were mistakes, but the Serbian police also changed evidence to make it look like there were more Albanian casualties from NATO bombings than there actually were. And they used displaced persons as human shields by placing them near military installations.

"The Serbian army put anti-aircraft guns on top of the Prishtina hospital. In Nis and Cacak they did the same thing, putting anti-aircraft weapons on the roofs of apartments.

"I began to feel optimistic in May, because the police did not know what to do. They were afraid. They were driving civilian cars by then, and they started sleeping in different houses every night."

Four Profiles

Fatban "Lucky" Bunjaku, Mihane "Miki" Salihu, Sevdie Ahmeti and Natasa Kendic are four activists who stayed in Kosovo throughout the NATO intervention. Here are their personal stories

Lucky's Long March

I first met Lucky last year when I visited the UPSUP (Independent Student Union) offices. In those days he worked with other students from the technical faculty to maintain email communication with their extended network of friends and supporters. We stayed in touch sporadically over the last year.

When the bombardment started, Lucky and his family decided to stay in their home in Mitrovica. He explained to me, "We didn't want to leave, because if all the Albanians left Kosovo, we would have done Milosevic's work for him." However, they were soon driven out of their house. The family stayed in an uncle's house in a suburb of the town for two weeks, and then that suburb was shelled. Lucky wasn't sure whether it was shelled by Serbs or Roma (Gypsies). He said that the Roma had been given automatic rifles and rocket launchers.

After the shelling the Serbian troops came to the suburb and formed a U-shaped cordon around the neighborhood, and forced most of the inhabitants (many of whom were already displaced) out of the house. They were then forced to march towards Gjakova (Djakovica), clear across the province in the west. This march took four days. There were approximately 75,000 citizens of Mitrovica on the march, forming a column 12 km long.

When the column of people neared Gjakova, they were stopped and ordered to turn back. Serbian security forces were accompanying them and telling them where to go. At night they slept near military installations, serving as a human shield against NATO bombs.

When the group was turned back, people slept in a field near Klina for around seven days. They were able to find a little food each day in abandoned houses. They found a field of onions and that was their meal for several days in a row.

Lucky was pushing his mother in a wheelchair most of this time. He told me, "Near Skenderaj (in Drenica) the police took away 200 men. I was not among them. Then when we were arriving back to Mitrovica they took away another 40. I managed to return to my house, which was robbed but not burned. I found some of my belongings in the house of a Serb neighbor who had since left.

"We hid in the house for three weeks. We watched through the windows and saw what the Serbs were doing to the Albanian houses. The women were stealing women's things – tablecloths and such, the men were stealing cars, and the children were stealing children's things, toys."

After a time the Serbian special police came to the neighborhood at 6:00 one morning and took away all the men between the ages of 17 and 50, including Lucky. They were told that they were going to the center of town to "get new identification." This was in mid-April. The men were taken to the jail in the center of Mitrovica, and the next day to Smrekovnica, a jail about 10 km from the town.

Lucky was beaten badly in Mitrovica, but not at the second jail. He was fortunate there, because there were two compounds at Smrekovnica. One was run by jail guards, the other by paramilitary. He was in the first one, but people in that one heard the screams of people being beaten in the other one.

Every day 200 people were sent into town for interrogation in Mitrovica. They were taken to improvised police stations at the elementary school and a technical college, because the police station had been bombed. For Lucky, this was the most terrible experience of the whole period. In a sports hall the 200 men were forced to kneel on a metal pipe with their hands behind their backs and their heads on the floor all day.

After five hours Lucky was called into an interrogation room alone. He was not beaten. He was fortunate that the police did not know that he had been studying in Prishtina and had been active in the student union.

"It seemed that they were confused," he said. "They could have called the secret police in Prishtina and found out about me. But they just asked questions like my father's name and profession, and where I was born, and my father, and his father before him.

"They just wanted to determine that we were not from a village in Drenica or other places where the KLA [Kosovo Liberation Army] was active, which would in their minds implicate us as being active with the KLA. Maybe they didn't care about who I was, as long as I didn't fight."

Lucky was then returned to the sports hall and had to wait on his knees for two more hours while the rest of the prisoners were questioned. He said that he could not walk normally for two weeks

after that. He and his group were taken back to jail, and the next day were driven to a spot six km from the border point with Albania between Prizren and Kukes. Lucky thought they were going to be executed there, but the Serbian police just ordered them to walk to Albania. They were beaten again, and then arrived at the border.

When Lucky entered Albania he wanted to let his parents know that he was alive. He told me, "Since I had no way to call my parents I tried to get filmed on television. I chose Reuters because as an independent news agency they have a wide distribution. I got in front of their camera and a neighbor of my parents saw me. My parents' television had been stolen, but the neighbors told them I was alive.

"Later my parents had to leave Mitrovica and went to Ulcinj in Montenegro. I got a job in Tirana with the provisional Kosovar government. I then came back to Kosovo and celebrated my birthday, July 1, in liberated Prizren. I first went to my house two days ago and everything had been taken or broken. The windows and doors were wrecked too.

"On the north side of Mitrovica the Serbs are in control. That is the bigger section, where all the large apartment buildings are. The Serbs were only 20 percent of the city, but they have most of it now. And most of the houses in the other section, where the Albanians are now, were wrecked."

I asked Lucky if he still goes by the nickname Lucky, and he said that he does. I asked, "Do you feel lucky?" He said, "I do. I was never pessimistic. While I was in jail I was damaged physically – I lost ten kilograms during this whole ordeal – but not mentally. I recovered from that. I spent my time thinking about how I could protect myself from wanting revenge, from becoming 'primitive.' "

I said, "It's not unusual to want revenge." He said, "Remember, my father, my mother, and my sister are all alive. If they had been hurt I might be thinking differently."

Miki – "You Will Give Birth to My Son!"

Miki is a young activist from Prishtina. In 1998 she was working with the UPSUP. She told me how she remained with her family in Kosovo throughout the NATO intervention, despite being displaced by the Serbian authorities.

"On March 27, a few days after the NATO bombardment started, the police set off a car bomb in our neighborhood. The electrical and water services were shut off. These were very tense days. Then on the 30th of March the police surrounded our neighborhood and started evicting people, street by street. There were 20 officers in black uniforms. They took our identification documents and destroyed them, and told us, 'Go to Albania!'

"We had heard that they were separating men from women at the train station, so we didn't go to there but in the other direction, towards the east. That night we slept in the street. We had prepared small packages of belongings and some blankets to carry, but the police did not allow us to carry the blankets. All we had was some bread.

"There were nine of us in the family, including my parents and my brother-in-law. On the 1st of April, we passed through some woods and came to a village. We passed through this village at 6:00 a.m. We were lucky because the Serbs did not do anything to us. But 20 minutes later we heard shooting and the village was emptied.

"We saw people leaving the village in two columns: one with cars and one on foot. There were only old people, women, and children – no men. We joined the column, and tried to stay away from the end of it. There were snipers on a hill above us, and we were followed by helicopters. I saw a young woman giving birth. It was awful, because I did not have a chance to help her. There was a truck accident too, and a baby was killed.

"My father was very sick. I persuaded my mother and brother to go on ahead. I stayed behind with my father and we walked very slowly. He was having heart problems. We arrived at a village where we had some relatives. There were already five displaced families, or around 80 people, in this house of four rooms. Most of us couldn't enter into the house.

"The younger people and some women slept in the house, and the rest of us slept in the woods. We didn't even have plastic sheeting to protect us. For two weeks we slept that way, hearing bombing in the distance. We got very little sleep. There was also very little food. Sometimes we went for 48 hours without bread. What food we had, we gave to the pregnant women and children.

"After two weeks, we decided to go back home. We started to head back on April 13. Near Prishtina we were coming down a hill, and we saw some Serbian deserters fighting with the army. This was a battle that went on for five hours. Then we were helped by some people from the KLA. They took us, just my family, and brought us to a village. We stayed there until April 18.

"On that day we started to go to Prishtina. There was a Serbian offensive taking place near Podujevo. Many people were leaving from that area. We walked with them all day and all night. We tried to leave the column of people, but the soldiers and police were controlling the march. They were trying to direct us to the east, towards Leskovac.

"We stayed in the middle of the column. In the front they were checking people's identification documents and taking money from people. They were asking for Deutschmarks and dollars. They were separating the men and women.

"We waited for three hours at a checkpoint to the northeast of Prishtina. A NATO airplane came by at a low altitude. At that time they started beating us with guns to make us go fast. They took several young people and put them in a garage, and we heard shooting. I didn't see what happened, but no one saw those people after that. They do not exist anymore.

"A soldier grabbed a young woman by the hair and said, 'You will give birth to my son.' She started to scream, and he put his hand on her mouth. I couldn't help her. We were ordered to look down.

"We approached a tunnel near Prishtina. I ordered my family to run away, across some railroad tracks. My sister and brother-in-law ran. We got across the tracks, and meanwhile I heard the police shooting. I don't know whether they were shooting in the air or not. We were able to get away, and we went back to our house.

"The police came back to our house on different occasions. Sometimes they would tell us to leave, and then others would tell us to stay. This kept happening until the middle of May. Then we were all given "green cards," special identification cards for Albanians who had stayed in Prishtina. They were written in Cyrillic only. If we went out to buy bread, we were asked if we had permission to walk on the streets. We felt like we were in a concentration camp, like the Jews during World War II.

"It was dangerous to speak Albanian on the streets. I saw a professor of mine, and he had the courage to talk to me. Prices for food were triple for Albanians. You could go outside between 10:00 and 12:00 – if you were out later, you were crazy, stupid. There were 10 checkpoints between our home and the market. The police checked our identification and asked us how much money we had, our profession.

"At one point the police came to my house to look for me. I answered the door, and pretended to be my sister. I said, 'She's not here.' Another time I was stopped on the street, and the police asked me to 'come make coffee' for them. I was with my sister, and she started shaking. I started to make jokes, to turn the situation in my favor. The policeman said that he would remember my address and come to my home. But he didn't come.

"The worst time of all was when the Russians came into Prishtina just before KFOR [NATO troops in Kosovo] got here. It was on a Thursday night. On that Friday and Saturday the paramilitary units were coming in and raping, burning, looting, and taking people's money. They came to my street on June 18 and started burning houses, but they didn't burn my house. They were stabbing people and beating old people. One of them was speaking Russian, not Serbian. On Sunday it was quieter. From June 20th it was more normal.

"This is a small part of the story. Thank God I was not raped or killed. Being killed is the end of everything, but I would choose that.

"Now I am waiting for myself to start forgiving. But I am afraid I will not be able to forget what happened. Sometimes I have nightmares. Now, when I wake up, I say to myself that I'm here in my bed, and that I need to go to work tomorrow.

"It is hard to continue life here. But it would be harder to start a new life somewhere else."

Sevdie Ahmetie – "The Dogs Barked All Day – They Were Like Our Radar"

Sevdie Ahmeti is a human rights worker and co-director of the Center for Protection of Women and Children. She stayed in Prishtina throughout the NATO intervention.

"It was hell. We were isolated and it was simply hard to live. There were 24 hours a day of fear and pressure, and you were never aware if you had another day to live. The NATO planes were high above us, but they couldn't see us.

"I was at home with my husband for five weeks. One day masked people broke in our door. Because of the noise it made, we thought it was a NATO bomb. They shouted, 'Police!' This was at 3:00 a.m. I was upstairs. My husband told me to stay upstairs. There were three men. One stayed at the door. They had machine guns and knives.

"Then my husband told me to come downstairs. The police hit me on the back. It was painful, and I didn't know how to keep going downstairs. They were hitting us, and demanding hard currency. They broke my brother-in-law's ribs. They tortured him, then my husband, and then me. It was two hours of torture - you can imagine what they did.

"They then ordered us to leave the country, and not to tell the police about this, or they would kill us. They told us which way to leave. We had no place to hide. We sent our children to another place, and I separated from my husband. I dyed my hair and covered my head like a villager. After 10 days of fear, some friends came to help me. They fed me and reunited me with my husband.

"My house was broken into nine times. They took our computer, our VCR, camera, and many valuable things. They also came to the office. They didn't steal equipment, but they took my papers, notebooks, and very valuable material. What was more shocking to me was that they put my picture here on the desk, together with material from Amnesty International and photographs of the protest marches.

"As you can see, it was very hard. At a certain point it seemed that bullets were the best thing for us, better than being tortured. I was told I had been put on a death list, but I didn't believe it, because I didn't do anything. I didn't shoot, I was opposed to weapons, and only advocated for human rights.

"You'll see a difference between the people who left and those who stayed. We have fear; we don't have such an enjoyment of the present. I'm very happy to see that people are coming back. But a small noise makes me tremble – it's not easy.

"I saw people being deported with my own eyes, and I wasn't able to do anything about it. And we queued for bread, and they wouldn't sell it to us, only to the Serbs and the Roma. Sometimes there was a little left over for us.

"We would watch from behind our curtain to see what was going on in the streets. Only old people and women went out. After 12:00 noon, there was no one in the streets, no one to be seen. Cars without license plates drove around. No one spoke loudly. The dogs barked all day. They were like our radar, a sign that the NATO planes were coming. There were many arrests. They were taking away young men and women, beating people, and detaining them for hours.

"It would have been incorrect for me, as a human rights worker, to leave Kosovo. But what we

experienced can't be described, only kind of understood. I've seen things like that in the movies.

"Now we have to take a humane approach to what we are doing. If someone has been raped, then we human rights workers are raping them again if all we want is their story, and nothing else.

"Everyone writes about the refugees who left the country, but what about the 700,000 who remained inside? They are forgotten."

Natasa Kandic- "We don't know you and we won't open the door."

Kandic is a Serbian human rights worker and the director of the Humanitarian Law Center's Belgrade office. She has maintained ongoing contact, as much as possible, with her Kosovar colleagues during and after the NATO intervention.

Following are excerpts from two letters sent to the JustWatch Internet discussion group, in which Kandic described what she saw upon visiting Prishtina during the intervention on 29 and 30 March 1999:

I reached Prishtina before nightfall. I could not get into the Humanitarian Law Center office. The building is opposite the Police Department and prison and the front entrance was locked. Someone inside said, "We don't know you and we won't open the door." By his accent, I knew the man was Serbian, and he must have known by mine that I was Serb too. I knew that the residents were Serbs and Albanians and I saw their determination to allow no strangers into the building as the good side of Prishtina.

I went around to the back and saw guards at the entrance of the neighboring building. Several men were standing behind neatly stacked sandbags. I spoke with them and learned that they were residents of the building and that they were guarding their homes. They had agreed that Serbs would defend Albanians from the police, the Albanians would defend Serbs from the KLA and all would defend themselves from paramilitaries and other bands. When air raid warnings are sounded, everyone goes down to the shelter except those standing guard.

When day broke, I went to see some friends. I made my way to Dragodan, Fehmi Agani's neighborhood. When we reached it, we were stopped by police. They asked to see our papers and when they saw that Ajten and Merita were Albanian, the one in charge ordered them out of the car. I got out too, saying we all worked for the same organization and were looking for a friend.

The officer replied that Albanians no longer worked in Serbia and should be on their way to Macedonia. I asked since when police had the authority to fire people and he yelled at me to get back in the car and shut up. I sat on the seat, leaving the door open and my legs outside the car. He slammed the door against my legs, saying Serbia was being ruined by such Serbs. The one in charge called someone over his radio. This lasted about 10 minutes and then he waved us on. We made our way back to the center, hardly believing that we had got off so lightly.

We drove through side streets to the Suncani Breg district. On the way, we saw wrecked and looted stores and kiosks. We found Pranvera but she was determined to stay with her family in

Prishtina. We were driven away by her Serb neighbor. "What kind of gathering is this? No loitering! Albanians, inside your homes!" he said.

The streets of downtown Prishtina were almost deserted. People were in their apartments or the stairways of their buildings. In one of these buildings, we spoke to residents and found Ferhat. He was just about to leave for the border. Everyone we spoke to was in a panic. With one exception, an Albanian, who calmly repeated he would not leave his home until he was thrown out. An elderly Serb woman came in and stopped for a moment to chat with her neighbors. She too appeared to be fearless.

12 May, 1999

Dear friends,

I am currently in Montenegro, consulting lawyer-refugees from Kosovo about ways to conduct research into events in Kosovo after 24 March. There are over 80,000 Albanian refugees in Montenegro. Approximately 60,000 of them are from Pec [Peja], Mitrovica and Istok. Interviewing refugees will help us obtain relevant material about the pattern of ethnic cleansing in the above places. This material will be useful to the ICTY's [International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia] Office of the Prosecutor for their decisions on conducting investigations and bringing indictments.

The office in Montenegro, in Ulcinj, is the third office of the Humanitarian Law Center. The office in Prishtina does not exist any more. Last time I was there on 3 April, was my second visit to Prishtina since 24 March. Through the open door, I saw books and paper scattered all over the place, desks with no computers, and the usual mess after a police search. Ferhat, one of my lawyers, lived in the neighborhood. I will never forget 29 March in Prishtina, and Ferhat on the staircase of his block, at his wit's end from terror and ready to flee Kosovo.

We had been in contact on daily basis in the previous days, so I had known he lived in fear that someone might come, knock on his door and kill him, but the terror I saw in his eyes made up my mind to depart immediately. I had already found my other staff, so we were ready to go. Pranvera stayed in Prishtina. Her father was adamant that she stay with her family and that they were not to lose contact. She phoned me from Albania several days later. All families from her part of town had been expelled, transported by train to Blace, a village close to Macedonian border. She spent a few days there, out in the open together with a group of 20,000 people. They were put on buses and taken to the Albanian border by night.

On that 29 March, we started from Prishtina towards the Macedonian border. Several hundred cars followed us. We returned after we received information that the border had been closed, and when we saw policemen wearing masks on their faces. We returned to Prishtina, dropped Merita off, as she decided to stay until my next visit, and turned Belgrade bound. I do not know how we managed to leave Kosovo, there must be a God somewhere. A car with three Albanians and two Serbs. We cleared all check points, each in fear that they will discover who we were, arrest and separate us. Ferhat's fear did not disappear in Belgrade. It was easier for him, but that was no freedom either. Several days later, we went to Montenegro; Ferhat then went to Albania and

subsequently to the US. Ajten stayed in Montenegro working with refugees for a while. She left for Budapest on 4 May. She, too, is US-bound. Merita was waiting for my arrival in Prishtina. She was looking after our Jeep. She left for Macedonia on 5 May. She is currently visiting camps and interviewing refugees. She plans to return to Kosovo as soon as it is safe to do so.

Whenever I show up in Prishtina, people can hardly believe it possible. It amazes me that I manage to do it. The first time I went back, on 27 March, I took a taxi to the bus station in an attempt to find a bus for Kosovo. Some ten meters away from the bus station, it occurred to me to ask the driver if he would take me to Bujanovac, a small place 100 kilometers from Prishtina, thinking that I would be able to catch a lift to Kosovo from there. He agreed to my proposal, and when we were near Bujanovac, he accepted, for a generous fee, to take me all the way to Prishtina. If it had not been for him, I could not have taken three Albanians out of Kosovo. He had a way of chatting with policemen, an air of nonchalance when clearing check points, asking about fuel and cigarettes, that left an impression he was one of their own kind. I went with him two more times. He would always ask, "who are we getting out this time" before each trip.

When I travel to Kosovo, on roads with no traffic, with police and military check points, I never think about the possibility of something bad happening to me. Riding through Serbia, my primary concern is fuel. I keep bothering the driver about how much fuel we have already spent. When I see the road sign for Kosovska Mitrovica, I start to look around. The villages were intact until 5 May. They were obviously empty, but there was no arson. I took a note that on 23 April, I met a large group of people on the same road, who were walking towards Vucitrn. These people were returning to their homes having spent two weeks in woods hiding, and were anxious whether the police would allow them to go back and whether their houses were still standing. They were looking at me in utter disbelief when I told them they should return home, that people were going back to Prishtina from the border. Unfortunately, these same people as well as others from Vucitrn, have been expelled from their homes.

On 5 May, I saw that the town was empty, and many houses were on fire. The same day, I passed through Mitrovica. There were neither police nor military in the town center. There wasn't a soul to be seen. Large sections of town had been destroyed. One could see that houses had been plundered first, and then set on fire. There were some people in the suburbs. Serb parts of town were intact. Afterwards, when I talked to Albanians from Mitrovica who came to Montenegro, I found out that approximately 30,000 Albanians were expelled from Mitrovica on 15 April, and that they had been ordered to leave for Montenegro. They traveled on foot, it took them three days to reach Dubovo, a village 80 kilometers away from Mitrovica, where the Yugoslav Army stopped them. The army kept them there for three days, when three officers announced there had been an "order for refugees to return home". They were put on buses and shipped back to burnt-down Mitrovica. Hunger and fear made many of them leave Mitrovica again and go to Montenegro.