

## 5 BIG LIGHT BOXES

### 1 **Ridvan Slivova** **White Paper Women's Protest for Peace,** **8 March 1998**

In swift response to Serbian forces' attack on the Jashari family compound in Prekaz village in Kosovo's central rural region of Drenica, in which the whole extended family, 58 people, mostly women and children, were killed, the women of urban Kosovo started organising protests. This first protest advocated peace, with white sheets of paper.

Altogether the women's network organised 8 of the 13 protests held that month against Milosevic's military violence in Drenica. Women were asking for a "peaceful divorce" from Serbia.

A series of interviews by Oral History Kosovo of participants tells the story of women's activism and their resistance. Women were particularly affected by the 1990s apartheid policies of the Milosevic regime.

When they were fired from the public sector jobs that had since the 1960s anchored female emancipation, educated women professionals were thrown back into the role of housewives. Many became socially restricted by the traditional values in which Kosovo Albanian society's resistance to the violent Serbian takeover consolidated.

<https://oralhistorykosovo.org/sq/march-1998-womens-protests/>

### 2 **Eliza Hoxha** **Student Protests,** **Dragodan/Arberi, 1997**

This is Albin Kurti, now Kosovo's prime minister, but then at the outset of his political career - as a student leader in 1997, organising protests against the closure of higher education and schools to the majority Albanian population under the apartheid system Milosevic instituted in Kosovo after 1989. He is photographed here by Eliza Hoxha, who is today a member of parliament, and then a student of architecture and a photographer for Zeri magazine. Kurti is seen in this photo using the back of Zenel Kelmendi, rector of Prishtina University from 1997 to 2004, as a support for writing.

From 1991-1999 Kosovo Albanians' schooling was self organised without state support and often subject to police harassment. It was situated in a mixture of private homes and residual buildings the Milosevic regime had no use for. Education was arguably the main pillar of the civil resistance movement to Milosevic's violent takeover and suppression of the institutions of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, developed in accordance with Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution. Formally, Milosevic imposed a Serbian curriculum unacceptable to the Albanian majority; in practice all the ethnic Albanian students, pupils and teachers were simply expelled from the state's places of learning.

Periodic student protests initiated in autumn 1997, often violently dispersed by the Serbian police, were a key turning point in awakening a more dynamic resistance to the imposed Serbian police state as the young lost patience with the inert, non-confrontational waiting game that characterised the peaceful resistance figure-headed by Ibrahim Rugova, the former literary professor sometimes styled as the Albanian Gandhi. The most detailed account of the Kosovo Albanian civil resistance movement is the late Howard Clark's book, "Civil Resistance in Kosovo" (2000).

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/civilresistance/limits-of-prudence-civil-resistance-in-kosovo-199098>

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### 3 **Ridvan Slivova** **Bread for Drenica,** **Prishtina, 16 March 1998**

The Bread For Drenica Women's March is the best known of those organised in March 1998 to show solidarity with the besieged people of the Drenica region, who were cut off from access to food and medical supplies by the continuing Serbian army presence following its bloody assault on the Jashari family compound in Drenica's Prekaz village.

The protest, in which women intended to march from Prishtina to Drenica, each symbolically carrying a loaf of bread, was stopped by the Serbian police at Fushë Kosovë (Kosovo Polje), a few kilometres west of Prishtina.

Being prevented from reaching their final destination did not mean that their political and humanitarian message did not get through. The protests organised by women activists throughout the month of March of 1998 had a major impact, bringing more international visibility to the violence taking place in Drenica.

See video of the protest <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAEjiONutCM&t=100s>

To hear the testimonies of women who participated in this protest go to

### 4 **Alan Chin** **Mother of Ali Paqarizi Weeps Over His Body in Kosovo,** **New York Times, 1998.**

This photograph was exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, in New York in 2001. It shows the mourning of Ali Paqarizi, a 19-year-old Albanian killed by a Serbian booby trap. A photograph that seems to echo the composition of a painting by one of the old masters.

"It was a very sad and tragic scene — the family, though, welcomed us journalists into the room because, I imagine — they wanted their loss to be recorded and remembered. The window light was diffused through a white curtain, creating the beautiful light" said Chin in a recent post.

Michael Kimmelman, then the chief art critic at The New York Times, wrote that the photo depicts "...not Paqarizi's formal military funeral, but what happened that day in his family's living room, where his mother, surrounded by grieving women, cried over her son's corpse. The picture captures not the public display of political defiance, but its root: the private despair that is the outcome of war."

## 5 BIG LIGHT BOXES

### **5** Hazir Reka **Miners' Meeting, Palace of Youth "Boro and Ramizi", big hall, February 1988.**

This is a rare photograph from one of a series of meetings which preceded the Kosovo miners' acts of protest. In November 1988 3000 Trepca miners marched 50 kilometres to Prishtina (the Trepca mine is near Mitrovica), inspiring up to 300,000 fellow Kosovars to form marches in solidarity, and in February 1989 circa 7000 miners shut themselves into their mines all over Kosovo for nearly a week, forming the leading edge of a Kosovo general strike.

The miners' displaying of Tito's portrait - which later the November 1988 marchers also did at the head of their column - epitomises their grievances: in defence of Yugoslavia and against the forceful dismantling of Kosovo's autonomy, which was established in Tito's 1974 constitution.

See the RTK archive video of this strike here in the Reporting House exhibition where miners state that they want Albanians to have the same rights in Yugoslavia as other nationalities (the 1974 constitution conferred upon Kosovo the same institutions as those of the Yugoslav republics and the status of a federal unit, but nominally kept it within the Serbian republic).

The miners' march protested the imminent dismissal of Kosovo's provincial leaders Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha Jashari and their replacement by Milosevic yes-men. The sit-in strikers were attempting to prevent the final moves against Kosovo's autonomy and demanded resignation of the yes-men.

The strike was broken after 180 miners were hospitalised due to the harsh conditions inside the mines and the yes-men were performatively dismissed, but were reinstated and a state of emergency declared 2 days after the miners emerged from underground, into the daylight of a very short-lived victory.

By 1992 94% of Kosovo's Albanian miners had been sacked. The development of an industrial working class had been for Kosovo Albanians a key marker of the modernity opened up to them under the province's autonomy in the late Tito period. Its sudden loss to mass dismissals was a double shock.

This song, "My father", by the band Minatori (Miner) and its accompanying video come across like a lament for this snatched away gritty modernity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZQ0VsSpy8o>

# REPORTING HOUSE

## 16 SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN I

- LIGHT BOX 1

### KIDS AT WAR 1999

- |                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Eliza Hoxha (Zeri):         | Boy greets soldier  |
| 2. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Small boy, big tank |
| 3. Eliza Hoxha (Zeri):         | Hi five             |

- LIGHT BOX 2

### SHOELESS 1986

4. Iljaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja) The school in Sllovi, Lipjan municipality.

The pupils were ordered to have an additional pair of indoor shoes since most were coming with muddy shoes, walking in from the surrounding villages that had no good roads. Most pupils had to remain barefoot as they had no means to buy a separate pair of indoor shoes.

5. Iljaz Bylykbashi, Village school of Sllovi, Lipjan  
6. Iljaz Bylykbashi, Village school of Sllovi, Lipjan

- LIGHT BOX 3

### KIDS AT WAR 1997-1999

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 7. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | Underground home schools in the Kosovo Albanian parallel education system   |
| 8. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | Underground schools for Kosovo Albanian children  |
| 9. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Vushtrri/Vucitrn, Kosovo, 24 June 1999. Kosovar Albanians burn and loot a Serb neighbourhood in Vushtrri/Vucitrn. French KFOR soldiers never arrived at the scene |

- LIGHT BOX 4

### CHILDREN IN WAR March - June 1999

10. Andrew Testa (New York Times): The little boy in this photo is Petrit Halilaj, waiting in line for humanitarian aid. He went on to become one of the most famous Kosovar modern artists and is exhibiting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MET, in New York.
11. Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): Woman with baby in a refugee camp
12. Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): Bread queue

# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN I

- LIGHT BOX 5

### GIRLS AT WAR 1997-1998

- 13. Alan Chin (New York Times): Girl and granddad
- 14. Alan Chin (New York Times): Girl in blanket
- 15. Alan Chin (New York Times): Villagers displaced in the woods taking a time out

- LIGHT BOX 6

### BOYS AT WAR 1999

- 16. Alan Chin (New York Times): Stern boys
- 17. Paul Lowe (New York Times): Displaced boy overwhelmed
- 18. Andrew Testa: An exhausted Albanian youth sleeps in the woods where he and members of his family are hiding after Serbian forces attacked his village

- LIGHT BOX 7

### TEENAGERS AT WAR 1998

- 19. Alan Chin (New York Times): Children on a tractor
- 20. Alan Chin (New York Times): Distraught women at the rail
- 21. Alan Chin (New York Times): Bored refugee leaning on a fence

- **LIGHT BOX 8**

### **ALLEGED SCHOOL POISONINGS**

In 1990, over several days starting on 20 March, several thousand Kosovo school children were struck down with a mysterious illness. The first cases were in a school in Podujeve/Podujevo, where pupils passed out and had breathing difficulties, amid varying reports of a strange odour or a white powder on desks.

Cases then snowballed, affecting almost exclusively Kosovo Albanian children, who were transported by scared, desperate parents in columns of cars streaming into the main provincial hospital in Prishtina from all over Kosovo.

Symptoms included nausea, inflamed eyes, heavy breathing, followed variously by dizziness, stomach cramps, convulsions, heart racing, hallucinations. Kosovo Albanian doctors preliminarily concluded poisoning to be the cause.

A wave of vigilante attacks upon Serbs and Montenegrins suspected of being poisoners was reported from around Kosovo. Serbian officials and observers dismissed the illnesses as a masquerade, outraged at the accusation levelled at Serbs of a monstrous crime against children.

Some Serbian doctors blamed Albanian doctors for inflicting medicines on healthy children and police intervened in at least one nun-run clinic, detaining nurses and discharging patients. Blood and urine samples were taken for analysis to Belgrade, where no traces of poisoning were reported to be found.

For Kosovo Albanians the phenomenon occurred amid Milosevic's destruction of Kosovo's autonomy and appeared to add an additional sinister prong to the all-out assault on their well-being. Some even saw it as a deliberate provocation to Kosovo Albanians to rise up in a suicidal rebellion, offering occasion for their complete ethnic cleansing from the territory.

Distrust in the conclusions of the Belgrade tests was heightened by the exclusion of any Kosovo Albanian or international participation in them. Later several foreign experts ran tests. While most were inconclusive, a controversial Belgian scientist reported in 1992 finding traces of nerve gas in the samples.

There were further smaller outbreaks of the illness later in 1990. No systematic long-term monitoring of the circa 7,400 cases seems to have been conducted. Anecdotally, they appear to have cleared up over time. In the immediate term the epidemic of inter-ethnic distrust prompted by the alleged poisonings served to cement Kosovo Albanians' separation from the state healthcare and education systems. Many Kosovo Albanians subsequently feared to take their children for immunisations, resulting in a spike of polio and other infectious diseases.

Although there is no clear-cut conclusion, the mass illness does bear resemblance to a number of other cases recorded throughout the world over time. These include thousands of schoolgirls falling ill across Iran with similar symptoms over several months, some reporting experiencing strange odours or seeing strange objects thrown into school yards before falling ill, starting in November 2022.

As with Kosovo in 1990, and similar epidemics affecting children and adolescents such as across girls' schools in Afghanistan in 2009 and up to a thousand teenage girls in the Occupied West Bank in 1983, scientific consensus has begun to group them into the classification of mass psychogenic illness: psychosomatic illness tending mostly to affect adolescent girls in situations of social stress. In no way fabricated, but without a direct physical cause - in the same vein as PTSD and shell shock.

A detailed exploration of the episode can be found in Julie Mertus's book "Kosovo: how myths and truths started a war", 1999. A good summary of what Kosovo Albanian doctors, Serbian doctors and foreign doctors had to say is collected on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo\\_student\\_poisoning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_student_poisoning).

# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN I

- LIGHT BOX 8

### ALLEGED SCHOOL POISONINGS

- 22. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Parents carrying children to hospital
- 23. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Poisoned children
- 24. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Hospital yard during the poisoning frenzy

- LIGHT BOX 9

### PHOTOGRAPHERS AT WAR

- 25. Besnik Mehmeti: Self portrait 1999
- 26. Ilaz Bylykbashi: Self portrait 1999
- 27. Ilaz Bylykbashi: Tarzan 1996

- LIGHT BOX 10

### BATHTUBS April 1999

- 28. Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): Girl with a comb
- 29. Alan Chin (New York Times): Hair salon
- 30. Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): Ready for pedicure

- LIGHT BOX 11

### MAD MAX 1999

- 31. Besnik Mehmeti: Cart wheel
- 32. Besnik Mehmeti: Soldier on a bike
- 33. Besnik Mehmeti: Car at war

- LIGHT BOX 12

### KOSOVO LIBERATION ARMY IN FROST 1998

- 34. Alan Chin (New York Times): Soldier in White
- 35. Alan Chin (New York Times): War in Winter
- 36. Alan Chin (New York Times): Soldier in White 2

- LIGHT BOX 13

### News Flash

- 37. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Following closure of Kosovo's Albanian language daily paper Rilindja, Albanians read their only remaining trusted news source, Croatia's Vjesnik.
- 38. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Editorial meeting of workers of Rilindja
- 39. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Police at the Printing House

# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN I

- LIGHT BOX 14

### KOSOVO SPORTS IN 1980s

- 40. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Fadil Vokrri, the most famous Kosovo footballer
- 41. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): “We love Prishtina” at the stadium
- 42. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): Traditional sports in Opoje, in the Dragash region

- LIGHT BOX 15

### ELDERLY AT WAR 1999

- 43. Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): When the feet give up
- 44. Alan Chin (New York Times): A grandmother
- 45. Alan Chin (New York Times): Weeping women

- LIGHT BOX 16

### SERBIA AT WAR 1998

- 46. Alan Chin (New York Times): A Serbian funeral
- 47. Andrew Testa (New York Times): A Serbian policeman killed in a Kosovo Liberation Army ambush 10 km west of Prishtina
- 48. Alan Chin (New York Times): Funeral



# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN II

- LIGHT BOX 1

### POLICE AND CHILDREN 1998 & 1999

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 49. Andrew Testa (New York Times): | A Serbian soldier guards displaced Albanian villagers in southern Kosovo |
| 50. Eliza Hoxha (Zeri):            | Boys watching the tanks  |
| 51. Andrew Testa (New York Times): | Kids outnumbered by bullets in Prishtina                                 |

- LIGHT BOX 2

### HUNGER GAMES March-June 1999

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 52. Besnik Mehmeti: | Summer slide             |
| 53. Besnik Mehmeti: | Feeding the family       |
| 54. Besnik Mehmeti: | Preparing for lunch time |

- LIGHT BOX 3

### WAR HAS ENDED

- |                        |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 55. Eliza Hoxha, 2000: | Blackboard        |
| 56. Eliza Hoxha, 2000: | Girls in the yard |
| 57. Eliza Hoxha, 2000: | Pensive boy       |

- LIGHT BOX 4

### FORCED CAMPING 1998

- |                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 58. Eliza Hoxha (Zeri):          | Home             |
| 59. Iliaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | School in tents  |
| 60. Iliaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | Outdoor learning |

- LIGHT BOX 5

### BOYS AT WAR 1998

- |                                 |                             |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 61. Alan Chin (New York Times): | All news, no music          |
| 62. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Crowded in the refugee camp |
| 63. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Bored at war                |

- LIGHT BOX 6

### YOUTH AT WAR 1999

- |                                 |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 64. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Lunch time    |
| 65. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Daily rations |
| 66. Alan Chin (New York Times): | Blanket hats  |

- LIGHT BOX 7

### ALLEGED SCHOOL POISONINGS 1990

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# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN II

- LIGHT BOX 7

### ALLEGED SCHOOL POISONINGS 1990

- |                      |                                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 67. Ilaz Bylykbashi: | Grown ups carrying children     |
| 68. Ilaz Bylykbashi: | Hospital panic during poisoning |
| 69. Ilaz Bylykbashi: | Police in front of hospital     |

- LIGHT BOX 8

### WRITERS AT WAR

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 70. Besnik Mehmeti:             | Rexhep Qosja, Kosovo Albanian writer disguised as a refugee 1999                          |
| 71. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | Ibrahim Rugova & Adem Demaci, Kosovo writers who became politicians 1995                  |
| 72. Ilaz Bylykbashi (Rilindja): | the Albanian Writers Association, which became the Information Center of Kosovo, QIK 1992 |

- LIGHT BOX 9

### MAD MAX 1999

- |                                      |                   |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 73. Besnik Mehmeti:                  | Getting back home |
| 74. Alan Chin (New York Times):      | Home at any cost  |
| 75. Besnik Mehmeti (New York Times): | Tour de Kosovo    |

- LIGHT BOX 10

### WAR PASSING THROUGH HOUSES 1999

- |                     |                              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 76. Besnik Mehmeti: | Ashes in Gjakova's old town  |
| 77. Besnik Mehmeti: | Qarshija burned, later build |
| 78. Besnik Mehmeti: | Homes                        |

# REPORTING HOUSE

## SMALL LIGHT BOXES COLUMN II

- LIGHT BOX 11

### SERBIA AT WAR

**79.** Andrew Testa. Sister Anjelica, Devic Serbian Orthodox Monastery. Deep in KLA territory, the monastery survived the war, only to be destroyed in anti-Serb rioting in 2004

**80.** Thomas Dworzak (Magnum). "Arkan", Željko Ražnatović, post-match. Serbian warlord cum manager of the Prishtina "Obilic" soccer club. March 1999

**81.** Andrew Testa. The funeral of Dobrivoje Savalic, a 42 year old Serb civilian kidnapped from the village of Velica Hoca and killed by the KLA.

- LIGHT BOX 12

### RETURN

**82.** Andrew Testa (New York Times): Serbian masked soldiers leaving Kosovo after Serbia capitulates, June 1999

**83.** Andrew Testa (New York Times): Refugees from Kosovo wait in buses to enter Radusa refugee camp, Macedonia, 16 April 99

**84.** Alan Chin (New York Times): Investigators finding bones from the killings in Kosovo

- LIGHT BOX 13

### THE ELDERLY AT WAR

**85.** Alan Chin (New York Times): The tractor home

**86.** Paul Lowe (Telegraph magazine & NYT): Carrying the old

**87.** Alan Chin (New York Times): Refugees under sheets