

Angelina Jolie's Kosovo Journal

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I've started to read about the Balkans. I leave for Kosovo in two days. In March 1998, fighting erupts in Kosovo, Serbia's southern province, between the majority ethnic Albanians and the Serb minority. Within few months, 350,000 people have been displaced or fled abroad. On March 24, 1999, after the failure of peace talks in Rambouillet (France) and repeated warnings to the Serbian government, NATO launches a 78-day air-war. Within three days, ethnic Albanians begin to flee or are forced out of the region by Serb forces. Eventually nearly 444,600 civilians fled to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro. More than 90,000 people are subsequently airlifted to 29 countries for temporary safety to ease regional political pressures. On June 12, 1999, NATO and Russian forces enter Kosovo after Yugoslavia accepts a peace plan requiring withdrawal of all forces from Kosovo. The next day, UNHCR and other agencies, also forced to leave the region when the air attacks started, return. Refugees flood back and in one of the fastest returns in history with 600,000 people going back home within three weeks. In a reverse exodus, an estimated 230,000 Serbs and minority Roma, fearing revenge attacks, seek safety in Serbia and Montenegro. During 2000 till the end on 2002 only a few returns took place with the figure of 6,024.

Since then, it has been registered an overall decrease in the incidents against minorities, but even with improvement of the security situation the area remains tense. An alarm position faces all minority ethnic groups, Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians (RAE) and especially Kosovo Serbs. While RAE, Bosniaks and Goranis have a limited access to general services, the Kosovo Serbs fear for physical security. Despite improvement toward human rights the minorities in Kosovo challenge in regard with a freedom of movement and a property rights.

The United Nations Interim Administration (UNMIK) was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of June 10, 1999, while the powers based on Regulation of May 15, 2001 are divided between the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), the Reserved Powers, and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), the Transferred Powers. Kosovo's first post-war general elections were held on November 17, 2001. On December 10, 2001, the Assembly of Kosovo was convened for its inaugural session and the new government was sworn in on March 4, 2002. The structure of PISG comprises the Kosovo Assembly, President, Government with ten ministries, and Court Structure of Kosovo.

I am waiting for a fax to see if I can still travel. A bomb went off in the Prishtina. The news casters seem less worried now that it has been confirmed it was not another terrorist attack, it was internal. How is that better? The story seems to

quickly fade. It is not connected to most of the big headlines. It was simply internal so seems not for the to be concerned with. I am learning more new things all the time, but this struck me. Since the end of World War II, there have been over 150 wars, almost all in the developing world, with casualties totaling more than 30 million. Currently there are about 30 civil wars and local conflicts taking place in various parts of the world. In the brutal conflict between the Russians military and Chechen separatists, many human rights abuses have occurred, including systematic clearance and intimidation of Chechen villages. According of Amnesty International, there were up to 160,000 people in 'refugee' camps in and around Chechnya in late 2001. Many ethnic Chechens are refused IDP status and get no help from authorities.

It was reported, know no one was killed but 30 were injured. I worry about Mimi. (Marie-Noëlle, a friend I first met when she was working for UNHCR in Cambodia and Thailand.) She was posted in Kosovo six months ago. I finally get her on the phone. We talk about the days we will spend and what we will be doing. I don't mention the bombing.

I can't help but notice as I write how luxurious this room I am in is. How pampered I am here. I am staying in a hotel for the weekend. They even put up a little Christmas tree and near it a little bear for my son. Room service comes under a silver dome, with a red rose and white linen. How can we live so drastically different in this world? Here there is *no* lack of electricity or water. In fact, I realize as I write that every light is on in this room is on and of course, I feel stupid.

December 28, 2002

I dropped Maddox off at our home with a nanny early this morning. I can't stand to hear him cry but I know he will be alright. Safe and warm at home. I'm sure when he's older he will understand. Still I found it very hard to finish packing hearing him in the other room.

Inside the airport. As I walk up to my gate I don't know what I am expecting to see, but as I sit here I am surrounded by some men and women in business suits. They are very healthy and good looking people. Europeans. Something stylish and cool about them. Not the pictures I have seen in the news or in the papers where they seem so different and far away.

Upon arrival, out of the windows of the plane I see military bases and large UN tents. Mimi and I realize that it has been a year and half since the last time we saw each other, although it feels like yesterday. These places do that to friendships.

I am received also by Anki, UNHCR Deputy Chief of Mission, Misko and Keli from Field Office Prishtina. Getting into a car I am asked to sit not on the left side but the right side back of the UN vehicle. Not behind the driver.

We go directly to the village of Dobrajae Vogal/Mala Dobraja. This area is mostly Albanians, some Ashkaelia. In 1991 Serbs expelled Albanians from their jobs, some Ashkaelia took the jobs. It is one of the reasons for the anger between Albanians and Ashkaelia. We are going to visit with the first Ashkaelia to return. This group did not take jobs they are peasants but still they are Ashkaelia. Expelled in 1999. These four families returned only 2 days ago. UNHCR has to speak with local politicians and community to let minorities come back. Possibility of violence is anticipated. This family cleaned out a well for water, and the next morning they found a dead dog in it.

We drive past a Russians military base. We are inside a mountain range (mostly dirt). There are chunks of icy snow from the night before that the sun has not yet melted. Today is a very hazy sunny day out the window. Brick buildings half bombed out. Plastic sheeting for windows as we 're driving into flat farmland.

Misko says "Sometimes it seems hopeless. A lot of work sees little results but if one family is integrated then it will move more quickly. This situation is very frustrating. You have to believe that small steps lead somewhere. We have to think hard to make sure *those who remained* in the village benefit from projects as well. If we rebuild houses for returnees, we also have to rebuild houses for the local people, to keep the peace. Everyone is poor and everyone is in need.

We stop to get out and meet a very sweet man. It is very muddy farmland so we take off our shoes. There are four more men inside. I realize that I am meeting with Albanians to speak of the Ashkaelia that have returned. Everything is translated. Their language sounds beautiful and ancient. "During the war we were unable to leave." "Would you have gone if you had the chance," I ask. "No destination - just to leave because there were so many murders. Just a safe place until the war is over. He continues and before it is translated I don't know what he is saying but his voice, his tone is getting very passionate and I hear "Slobodan Milosevic". It is translated "The minorities did join Milosevic's Serbs. Not all, but we know which ones. There is hate. The international community has to understand that we know we must learn to live together but it is hard not to feel anger". The Albanian man refers to the return project as "our" return project. A UNHCR staff thanks him. It is important that they see it this way. Everyone is working together to help rebuild the country.

(Jeans with many patches) I notice a mother of a girl come around the corner to take her. Moments later a man that must be her grandfather walks by. They all live together... I ask what their trade was. "We worked in the mine. Many people were fired before the war. Now it is closed". They all worked in magnesium mines. They were all fired when the mine was closed and it will not be re-opened.

Suddenly there is a discussion and a light that is suddenly turned on. A small rejoice, "Power is back on." Another man begins to speak. He has beautiful blue eyes. Rubbing his hands together. They are the hands of a farmer. "We stayed- we had to witness to many massacres now war is over and we try. We don't have proper roads. We don't have schools in the villages. As for the minorities, we feel that all the families that were not involved in the murders may return now".

I wonder how UNHCR and other agencies will be able to prove the innocence of individual families. "We are aware that without return of minorities, Kosovo can not progress. We know it is important. The problem here is almost everybody is unemployed. We are very poor. That is the problem we are facing. We cannot rely on aid forever."

I see more people walk by. How many people are in this house? "18." Some are abroad, which is good. One has a job in Germany and he sends money to help support. I am told they also have a handicap son who is in the other room. It is not translated so he can not hear. So I assume it is not something to discuss.

As we walk out, I see him standing by the door. Hands twisted together. Big curious eyes. What it must have been like for him during all the bombing and fighting, or for his parents to calm him trying to explain.

The air is so clear it is very cold. You realized it after a while, and wonder how they live in it. There is no real source of heat. Most windows are broken and many of the houses have no roofs.

We visit returnees, the Ashkaelia. We walk over bits of tile and rubble mixed in with mud. Two brothers and seven children... I shake a man's hand. He is very muddy from work, so he offers a wrist. He is very cold from working outside. We walk into the house not much of it is finished but they seem VERY happy to have it. "What was it like for you in the camp?" I ask. "It would have better to have been dead" he said. I ask the little girl if she was happy to be back, "Yes Very!" I keep hearing planes as we talk, not normal plane sounds. Later I see out the window it is a big military aircraft flying low.

UNHCR has to make sure now the children will be accepted and that the walk to school is safe. As we talk there is a little wood burning stove and the younger woman and the pregnant wife take turns spinning the pan around. I notice how quiet the children are. They seem to know that there is very little they can ask their parents for. And certainly very little to do or play with. So they sit and they listen... And occasionally they do smile. They don't seem to know how much they are missing. The man starts to ask the UNHCR officers I am with, for a truck filled with gravel. "I have has an old vehicle", he says, "and my wife is going to go into labor any day now. I'm afraid. Our car will not move in the mud."

Another man walks in. The life on his faces is so deep. "Before the war we had cows, now we have no milk." They have a well but they found out the water is undrinkable. They put chlorine but tested again it is still not drinkable. "We have a small baby and no formula. We need a cow." The UNHCR staff say that they will see what they can do.

These people have seen everything and they are still holding on. They are hungry. Their eyes are so expressive so clear. "We have to find seeds and tools, but still, even then it will be a year before we can feed ourselves. Now outside there is deep mud so what can we do?" They are so desperate. The old man takes off his black cap and a gestures begging. As we walk out I can hear the frustration in the UNHCR staff. "We are trying to get them as much as we can, there is so much they need. Only so much money is in the budget, there are so many families." Nothing is simple. For example, it is explained to me if they get them a cow, they would have to get the cow for others with different ethnic backgrounds as well, or there would be a fight.

Anki points out the window to a mountain range "In 1998 we heard that villages were attacked, and we came looking for uprooted families." I look at this sweet little woman and try to imagine her in the middle of war. I am beginning to understand how much more human beings are capable of. I wonder what I am capable of. I read somewhere once "very few people are strong enough for what they really know."

I finally asked about the bomb the one, I heard about on the news before I came. It seems it was mafia, a car bomb. As we drive I see WFP signs in little brick buildings surrounded by a spiral barbed wire. There is something very comforting about it. Here is a place where people are trying to overcome tremendous hardships and with them groups from around the world gathered together to try and help.

Prishtina

Inside UNHCR office: a meeting with female de-miners. I had heard about this group before I came. They became one of the best de-mining teams. The only all female platoon (30 people) in the world. They were working with Norwegian Peoples Aid, these four women. I ask how they got involved?

"After the war we came back, no jobs, everything destroyed. At first there were very few women. We did well. Now there are a lot of women. Between Albania and Kosovo on the border there are lots of mines. There are no maps.

One girl is working now with Handicap International. "We are happy when we find a mine, because you didn't step on it, you found it". One of the girls was wounded in the field. "On May 25, 2000." She remembers the date clearly. She now wears a prosthetic leg. I would have never guessed she hides it so well

under her jeans and boots. What were you doing before the war, I ask? She answers "I went to the University, and I was a shop keeper."

One girl starting de-mining at 15 because her father was shot during the war and no one in her family was working. She lied and said she was 18. I ask another woman if she has any children. "No" she says. "But we did have mothers in the de-mining team, even one grandmother. Mothers especially want to de-mine. They need a job even more because they have mouths to feed, and they don't want their children to step on a mine." She tells me she also had to deal with cluster bombs. Suddenly I am writing in the dark. Someone says, "Welcome to Kosovo."

Anki's Home

UNHCR staff dinner. We are 45 minutes early so I have some time to wash up and rest. First thing I notice is the generators. I am shown to my room and then the bathroom. Anki checks the large boiler and the meter. "Good, we have some warm water and should have water pressure if you want a quick shower." I say no, not because I'm being polite and don't want to waste water, (which I don't) but really I'm too cold. I unpack stickers, finger-paints, hair-bands and stuffed animals. I wish I had remembered I had this earlier, I could have given some to the kids. I think, maybe I will drop them by on the way back to the airport, but the families asked for milk. They need a cow. I can't come back with toys with stupid stickers. Maybe I can bring food, something. I will ask Mimi.

Dinner

All the lights are out, so we set out candles. I meet a few of the local and international staff from different offices in Kosovo. UNHCR staff. Naturally we start to speak about the generators. The electricity problem. How there was money stolen. How even during the bombing they had better electricity. There is something very special about a group of friends gathering together to talk. No television, no radio no distractions.

"The first days of the air raids was the scariest. We didn't know how they were going to attack." Sunnah, another UNHCR staff arrives, and brings in flowers. Four large yellow orange and pink flowers that look like daisies. This leads to a long discussion as most people in the room haven't seen flowers for a very long time. "Where did you get them?" "Were they flown in?" "No there is a small glass house behind a building and they are starting to grow them there." "How do they keep them warm enough?" "Maybe woodburning heater." The conversation goes on for a while, and I realize I have never taken so much notice of a few flowers. What it means for things to be growing. How flowers can bloom in a frozen, bombed out country. And how much that can mean?

Anki who cooked the dinner is Finnish, and because of the diversity of UNHCR staff it is common for a person to cook something traditional from their country. "This is tomato, this is pickled peppers from a neighbor who heard I was having guests and this is reindeer." Maybe it's because it's close to Christmas time but I suddenly saw images from my childhood of Rudolph and Blitzen and the rest of Santa's sleigh team. But I was hungry, and so they were dinner, and they were very good.

During the night they talked about how when the operations just started after the war some 300 non-government organizations came in. Now there are less and less NGO's. Now maybe soon, too few. It seems it isn't a popular hotspot anymore. But also less and less funds. The reintegration process is very slow. Over 200,000 people were out of Kosovo in 2000, since then only 6,024 have successfully reintegrated. That is only 3%. It must feel like they are accomplishing nothing and yet when you think of places like Northern Ireland, you realize that maintaining the peace and starting families actually successfully living as neighbors again, is a huge success. The first few minorities back into a village are the most difficult. In the future the others will follow should have an easier time. So that is the hope for the future.

December 29, 2002

Up for 8am leave. Put on layers of clothes and grab a little coffee. Decide not to bother to take the mud of my shoes, it will only get dirty again. We drive out of Prishtina into Mitrovica. I see signs for Save the Children. Actually they are stickers on the window of a small house. That must be their base.



We stop at Mimi's home. She has a street puppy she rescued. The dog is out of control and lovely. She has never had a dog before.

We get a breakdown from Geneva. Milosevic wouldn't allow UNHCR to open a base in Pristina until 1993. UNHCR Office in Mitrovica was opened in 1998. Mitrovica is a very different part of Kosovo. A river divides the Serbs and Albanians. UNHCR local staff includes several Albanian, two Serbs and one Bosniak. The French KFOR stopped conflict from crossing.

French troops controlled the bridge. We cross into the North where it is Serbian. It instantly feels different. One UNHCR staff is Serb his name is Mirko. Before the

conflict he lived in the south now he has to live in the north.



UNHCR/ M.-N. Little

The Roma quarter. The Roma people were accused of siding with the Serbs. So after the war, Albanian people burnt down their houses. Roma people are in camps in the North. UNHCR wants to try to return them home, but are not sure it is safe. The Roma people have no property documents.

UNHCR has “Go See” visits. For people to see where they used to live. I ask how many are in the

camp we are about to see. They say about 200, in comparison, that seems very few, but not if you think, as you should, of the individuals, the families.

It was explained to me here in Kosovo that there are different languages and different religions. Sometimes you have the right religion to be safe in one area, but the wrong language and vice versa. It is an extremely complicated situation here.

Three towers are next to the bridge and they are mainly Albanian. They have to use footbridge to cross into the south area to get groceries etc. Military French protects the towers if Serbs try to attack. What happens if something happens elsewhere and the Serbs are attacked? I am reminded there are many Serb, Albanian and minority groups who are working together. “Some Serb families tried to protect Albanians during the war and got in trouble, same with Albanians in other areas protecting Serbs.” I can only imagine what “in trouble” must mean. This reminds me of all the stories the people hiding Jewish families during WWII.

We pass a Muslim gravesite. I am told Serb orthodox is on the other side. Where people are now they are often in the opposite place where their loved ones were buried. So they have to be escorted to these different grave sites to visit loved ones. I hear something that sounds like gun shots. The army men move to look over to a cliff, no one seems to be too worried, and after a few minutes we move on.

I meet Neno and Zeqo, the Serb and Albanian community leaders. We meet in a small room they call their café. It is a structure with, wooden boards, plastic windows, some cement and Styrofoam. I later find out it is the best meeting

place. Apparently they are “Goodwill Leaders”, they are now working together. I ask how they became community leaders. As I speak to them, I look at their faces. They are good looking, weathered older men with a deep wisdom showing in their eyes. They are built, as men are, when they have done physical labor most of their lives. “Before the war there was no need for leaders, then after it was scary. We wanted to stand up, and say we have to live together. We believe there is no future if we don’t. We try hard to keep the peace in this area. They are used to us now, but the first few months we had a lot of threats because we were not willing to act against each other. We don’t hate. We have families, so we have courage for them.”

From the international community we have had some help. We could use more, we have project proposal like a playground. Our children are still playing on mud. It would be good to have an organized place. We have formed a small football team. All the boys are about 12 years old. “We went to practice on the south side and no one could tell who was Serb – or Albanian. The boys played together”. He paused “It was good.”

Sometimes when he speaks he looks up or at me or the other UNHCR staff, but most of the time he looks at his hands. Both men seem to want to look out the window or down at the table. They are very gracious and polite men. They thank me for coming and listening. I thank them. What they are doing is the most important thing. Men like these make peace possible.

UNHCR brought firewood. They made sure everything was distributed equally, not just most vulnerable but something for all groups. A gesture that there is a wish to help everyone. “We need to have assistance to reconstruct more homes so people can return. We have over 1600 burned down houses. We know it is important.”

I ask what is a specific thing that would help if I were to fund through UNHCR. “We have started a youth center. But we could use much help. We don’t have much.” ACTED, A French agency was here and did a lot of good, but the director became sick and had to leave. UNHCR is now trying to pick up on the programs to help find ways to continue them. The men didn’t know the program stopped because Thierry (the director) was sick. They are told this. The men say they are sorry, to please send their regards and to tell him they will never forget the he gave them.

I want to learn “thank you”, but as I think that, I realize I will have to learn it in all languages and God forbid I sat the wrong thing to the wrong person. “There was a time not long ago you would be shot for that.” I think I’ll stick to smiling and bowing my head, so not to disrespect anyone.

Zeqo, the Albanian leader says "A humanitarian agency came in to offer help but to only Albanians. So I said no. It is not right we cannot accept unless they help us all. That is the only way."

"Employment is the biggest problem here but there are no jobs. We have freedom of movement in this area. But it doesn't mean much when you don't have a place to work." The leaders smile and speak about something together, and then explain they have a big dream to again have a Serb/Albanian wedding. "Many people used to be married couples but they were divided during the war. Now many are still living apart on either side of the bridge. It is safer that way."

The Albanian man has to work in the south tomorrow but there is no escort bus available so the Serb is going to drive him to the border of the bridge. They still have many problems outside their small area. Even with their own people. The Albanian man has had trouble with Albanian extremists because he lives with Serbs, and the Serb man has had the same problems. You have to be careful with license plates because if you drive with the wrong one in the wrong area, you could be killed. Before we I leave, I buy groceries from them. The Albanian man gives me traditional cognac. The Serb man says "Now you must have Serb brandy if you had Albanian cognac." They both laugh about it. Amazing.

We then proceed to Branko School Temporary Community Shelter (TCS) where there are Serb IDP's, a few Roma families and refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. Like a camp same thing as a camp but they are occupying a building that used to be a school. The first person I see is a skinny man with a sad face. An older lady comes out with a big smile she recognizes the UNHCR staff member that helped her find safety here.

The first couple we meet with are originally from Croatia have been here for 8 years. There is a strange smell, like very old mildew. We go into the room where they live. The man's health has been bad. I ask the woman how she came to be here? "Since 1995 in Mitrovica. Since 2000 we are in this building." They used to be in an occupied kindergarten but it was happily returned to the kids. "We came with our son in 1995. Our journey from Croatia was very difficult; many people were leaving. Around 700,000 Serbs left Croatia at the same time. A lot of bad things happened during the trip. A lot of people died and were left along the road. There was no time to bury them. Women had babies. They could only stop to have them, and then they had to get up and keep walking." She was looking down and says "some died." What are your hopes now, I ask? After last year, their family was pushing to be sent to a country abroad but they were denied. "So then we try to have local integration but what will that be like? We don't know when they will rebuild Serb homes. We don't know if we have to be on a list to maybe get one. So maybe we stay here."

I ask what is the situation in Croatia now? "Very difficult life conditions. No jobs for most people especially Serbs. No jobs for Serbs. This is one thing that makes

a refugee. If you take away their ability to make a living, they will die. It is persecution. Here, for money, the women go to the very poor market and buys cheap goods. She then gets on a bus and goes to a better market and tries to sell the goods for a little more money. Many people try to make money the very same way it is very competitive. The man has lung problems. He had been working in a mine his whole life. This building they are in now is very cold. The lady is coughing a lot during the meeting. They have only a little heater but they have set it near me, the guest. It is true what people say about people who have the least – they give the most.

Before we leave, we meet two more men. They are elderly men who have lost their families during the war. They share a small room and it is full of piles of wood. They can't leave it outside they have to save it as currency. One man says, "In 1998 after the war he was brought back to his old house, but it was occupied and so then he was put in prison for trespassing. It was confusion. It was only 2 days. A strange welcome back. So now I live in a camp. How can you return when you have no home and no family?" I look around the room. There are two old cots, the piles of wood and a few old green army blankets. It's quiet and cold.

As we leave the community center, many of the old women have come out to shake hands and say hello to visitors. I see a group of Roma children; they look so sweet and so poor. Their faces dirty and their clothes full of holes. They smile and wave goodbye.

We drive to the UNHCR office shared with the UNICEF office and the Kosovo Women's Initiative. We are also with UNHCR's KFOR Liaison officer. He has been with us during the day. A very nice man named Fabian. We have lunch in what is usually the conference room. We talk of schools and food. I ask the man from UNICEF if many schools have been rebuilt. He says over 200. But there are still security concerns. Many schools are separated into Serb and Albanian. And even in the schools where they are mixed, they are still separate times for different ethnic groups. Even if they are learning exactly the same thing. "It has to change. It is not the way they should grow up, they are divided It is the wrong message to give them".

I have had many lunches and dinners in different countries with UNHCR and other agencies and NGO's. Here is Kosovo, maybe it's because it's cold, or the situation is so frustrating. But every time we sit down the conversation becomes very heavy. We often sit in moments of silence. After talking about the schools and the kids no one seems to be saying anything for a very long time.

Radica, one of the UNHCR staff has a 21 month old baby. Her husband is Momcilo, from UNICEF here. He is Croatian they met when he was a refugee in a camp. She is Serb. When she was 7 months pregnant she went to check on a group of Serbs in an enclave inside Albanian territory. One the way out, the

UNHCR vehicle was stopped at a road block. Albanians looking for Serbs. The other staff in the car, an Albanian, was trying to protect her, saying she was from Pakistan. They ask for her I.D. She said she lost it. "We were in the car over an hour. Sometimes they rocked and pushed the cars. The crowd was getting angry. They had heard Serbs were in one of the cars. After an hour the Albanians dragged some of the men out of cars behind them. They were Serbs they started to beat them on the street. Some how by the grace of God, in the sudden chaos we broke away from the barricade and survived." A baby could have never survived a beating like that.

They show me a newspaper clipping of a UNHCR bus when it was hit by a grenade. Many people died.

At the end of lunch we get a call from a special team of security that to say that something has happened we can't now go through one area- we need to go another way to get to the next place on our schedule.

On our way out I said goodbye to a few people who are traveling on with us. With a big smile he shook my hand "have a nice life". Realizing I would never see him again, what a nice thing to say to someone. Mirko only recently started driving again in the Albanian area. That is where we are going through now.

Looking out the window, so much barren land. It has started to rain. In some areas, I can see where homes have been rebuilt. But most are left bombed or burned, and a shell of a home only now stands. No real jobs, no infrastructure. There is so much suffering, so much loss. It's a sad place. Hard to see how it can ever return to normal. No real joy, but there is the ability to survive. To move on, to try to rebuild. To try to make neighbors of old enemies. But that's what it is, this place, it's sadness. Like a dark blanket has been thrown over everything.

Months ago, before briefings, before this visit, if you would have asked me what I thought Kosovo was like. I would have said, war is over and they have been given aid and attention from the international community. So the people there must feel free and are busy starting their lives a new. I would have expected energy in the place, a sense of hope. But it doesn't feel that way. Being here now, it feels so still and gray.

Next we visit a shelter for displaced Roma families; we enter a warehouse. The Leposavic Roma Warehouse. These are the Roma people from the area bombed out by the river that I saw earlier. There are boards inside cardboard boxes and banana boxes. There is very little light and it's very hard to write. Mimi says, "When you are UNHCR and you have nothing better to give and no place to take them, it's embarrassing."

Kids have started to gather and walk with us, whispering and giggling. One of the kids pops a balloon the other jump as if they thought it was a gun shot. Outside

the kids want to take a picture. I feel stupid writing that I'm sad for these people, of course I am.

We walk down to the local store. I buy fruits, vegetables, cigarettes and soap. When we return to the warehouse, we have to explain it is not a UNHCR donation but from a guest so that they don't expect it every time they have a visit. We leave the bags in a room for their leader to distribute when they come back. He was called away for an emergency. I wanted to give the kids the balloons and lollipops here, but it was a bad idea on my part. One of the men tried to distribute them but they mobbed him- desperate to get something. I am told they are going to put them by the kids when they are sleeping.

In the car Mimi tells me about when she first was posted here. She met with a lot of Croatian refugees, they were almost forgotten- lost in the shuffle from the more recent conflict. She tells me of one woman a grandmother who is raising her grand daughter 12 year old girl. The girl said she wanted to be a doctor "but look at my life- I am a refugee. I may not be able to go to school past a certain age because this is not my country." Mimi said Mirko spoke up and said "don't worry Einstein was a refugee" then Mimi said the girl smiled so big.

5pm we visit a French KFOR Base in Mitrovica. I am nervous to meet him at first, but I find the General Bidart a very nice man. The way he talks of his men and women it is obvious he cares for them. He says, "It is nice to have a visitor during the holidays. They are all so far away from home. And everyone works so hard."

We visit communications operations and AZUR FM a radio station. A small tent in a caravan where 5000 French people listen and families can email and send a message like Happy Birthday. I am asked if I will say Happy Holidays to the troops, in French. I give it my best shot. Mimi assures me it made sense.

We stop next at the hospital. It was bombed out when they first came three years ago. They have fixed it very nicely. They are not in the middle of a crisis so at the moment they are treating civilians for free.

When we head back to Mimi's home the street is black. There's no electricity. By flashlight we enter the house and turn on the generators. I am handed a candle. Dinner with all the local UNHCR Mitrovica staff. They tell of amazing stories of human triumph and the will to survive. The lights go out again. A few people hold lighters up in the air. "Like a rock concert" someone says. We light candles and resume talking.

December 30, 2002

Early morning coffee with a French KFOR Commander and his men. They work close with UNHCR they have information on who was where before and during the conflict. "It is important for military to eventually phase out so the people can

begin to take their own destiny in their own hands". They show me the mural of the bridge. "It is our hope that one day this bridge will unite not divide."



UNHCR/ M. Cemerikic

We visit a family of Ashkalia returned to Kosovo from Serbia. 133 Ashkalia returned in different groups this last spring. The man leads us into a room, He sits us on a couch, he sits on the floor. As we talk, three little children come in and sit next to him. He has become a community leader. The meeting is mainly listening to all his concerns.

As we step out we put our shoes back. We take them off every time we come inside a house.

Not for religious reasons, but for all the mud. To keep the homes clean. As poor as they are, they take a lot of pride in what little they have.

We meet another man. This man has a kind face. A humble manner, nice smile. His wife greets us as we stand outside and talk to him. Different NGO's are helping with the reconstruction of the houses. UNHCR is helping to coordinate and follow up on these returnee families. It is wonderful to realize how many people / organizations from so many different counties have come together to help in this particular area.

Down the road, near where we are talking a horse drawn carriage with two older people sitting on what looks like a pile of straw. Then KFOR military vehicles, then a Red Cross truck, then police. I think how much that says about this area.

Serb/Roma Enclave: we pass a checkpoint with Moroccan KFOR soldiers. There is a lot of barbed wire, sandbags, camo net, tanks and guns. "How are we going through if we are Albanian?" Referring to some of UNHCR staff. "It's ok, if no one gets out of the car. We'll just drive through to see what a real enclave is like." Still, a few in our group stay back behind the wall as we enter. Inside there is a bus that is escorted by KFOR whenever it leaves this area. On occasion a train also runs through with KFOR inside for protection. When the Serb villagers go out to buy groceries they have limited freedom of movement. We pass through the Roma section. They have less land, and it is the poorer area.

Roma and Serb share this area. Enclaves are difficult to live in because there is no freedom of movement for the people outside of the enclave. It means that everyone is still divided. We have to try not just to bring people back, but to

reintegrate people and rebuild society. We have to set up returns in a way that is part of rebuilding to future and peace.

We travel back to Prishtina meet with the British KFOR, the Staffordshire Regiment. It strikes me how young so many of these soldiers are. Like the French they discuss the importance of phasing out, but they are not leaving they will be in a camp outside of the city in case of emergency and to over see the larger area.

An officer brings me to the top of the building where they watch over the city. I see a few of their officers stepping out. "Notice guns slung low so not to intimidate. Their patrol is to see if anything is happening but also spend time talking to the locals. The best way to get to know a place is to know the people. They are the pulse of the city. "He points to a fire truck down below." That is a sign we will be able to, start to phase out. Three years ago the military was the police and the fire brigade. Now there is a red, not army green fire truck and a very good police force. Amazing for only existing a few years." English will stay on for a while longer to oversee the local forces. Until they are ready.

Before I leave I visit the Prishtina UNHCR and KWI (Kosovo Women's Initiative) office and meet the staff I had not met earlier. The KWI was established in 1999 to facilitate innovative approaches in programs for returning refugees, internally displaced persons, and other war-affected women. Funded by the United States Government, and working through UNHCR and NGOs, the KWI is designed to mobilize women throughout Kosovo, assist them and their families in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods shattered by war and inequality, and empower them to become agents of change and solidarity in their communities. The KWI helps by financing projects for women. While recognizing the immediate survival needs of war-affected women, the KWI also works to identify gender inequalities and support programs that redress gender discrimination in a sustainable manner.

Back to the airport. It's hard to say good-bye to Mimi. We talk of Cambodia the first place. That was a country after a war but it felt very different than Kosovo. Maybe it is because more years had passed after the war and occupation in Cambodia. But I think it's more than that and more than the sunshine in that country and grey weather in this country. There is hopelessness and sadness here. I'm not sure what kind of future it will have.

Mimi has another year and a half here before she is sent elsewhere. For now she and others share this post and it is not an easy one. It is very depressing here, but the people are very strong. There are many brave, hard working men and women determined to have peace and rebuild their country. And their will to do so, is inspiring.

We're close, terrible war they turned on their neighbors. Concentration camps. One day friends, neighbors and school mates. The next day killing each other.

Like a German during WWII helping Jews Serbs helping Croats or Muslims. No one wants to be a minority the feel is not safe. People ran together to separate corners, people came back when peace keepers arrived.

Guys with guns dividing the city. UNHCR would personally walk people to old homes started by a bus service. People fired rockets at bus drivers and shot at civilians. Mitrovica the river divides Albanians and Serbs STILL. 12 staff killed in the burning of the Balkans. UNHCR was seen as a target, all felt they were favoring the others.

Presented here are the unedited thoughts and impressions of Ms. Jolie during and immediately following her trip. They are entirely her ideas, and do not represent the official position of UNHCR. The text and the images accompanying it may not be reproduced without Ms. Jolie's permission.
