

Kosovo's Women Square Their Shoulders

STILL MISSING:

Tinka Mazoku, 13, sobs with her sister and mother outside the ruins of her home after her father failed to turn up among a group of men who had been freed from a Serb jail.



In the midst of mourning the loss of their men, mothers, widows and sisters grapple with the changes to their age-old way of life

By *Theresa Agovino*
CHRONICLE FOREIGN SERVICE

HADHAQ, Yugoslavia
head down, the 13-year-old faces the ground, and his bushy blond hair and slight shoulders bob up and down as tears drop on to his knees.

Ilir Dobraj not only mourns the loss of his father and his two uncles; he sobs over his fear of the future.

According to rural custom in Kosovo, he is now the "man of the family," responsible for his mother, three siblings, two aunts and

five cousins. All three of the family homes were burned. Now they live with a neighbor and have nothing but the clothes on their back, a cow and some food provided by aid organizations.

"It is going to be hard," says Ilir. "I'm not going to be able to play anymore."

His mother Shihide cries, too. "My son is too young for such responsibility. I wish we were all shot and killed. Who will support the children? To be a woman, a widow in Kosovo is to be nothing," says the 36-year-

► **WOMEN:** Page 5 Col. 1

MEMORIAL:

Bude Jaziri, center, is joined by relatives as she mourns for her sons Besnik and Bujar in the town of Junik.

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SAMIRE HYSENI, 28, a mother of two who lost her husband in the Zahaq murders



Associated Press

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COLETTE VERCELLI, a psychologist for Doctors Without Borders

From Housekeeper to Breadwinner — a Painful Role Shift

► **WOMEN**
From Page 1

old, whose husband and two brothers-in-law were killed in a massacre that left 19 men in their village dead.

In part of the world where men still bear most of the burden as providers, women are now finding that war has left them the head of the house. Ethnic Albanian men were more likely to be killed during the ethnic cleansing committed by Serb forces because Albanians were believed to be members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the rebel group fighting for the independence of the Yugoslav province.

Now these widows are not only struggling with their grief, but with how they will support families and continue to live in a society where men made most of the major decisions. Tradition dictates that a dead man's father or brother support his widow and children. That practice is moot in many families because all of the adult males have been killed.

"These widows have such wide-ranging problems," says Colette Vercelli, a psychologist for Doctors Without Borders. "There is an urgency to begin treating now, before all the symptoms of the trauma they suffer set in and become permanent."

Many widows say they suffer from nightmares, sleeplessness, anxiety, and forgetfulness caused by the atrocities they witnessed and experienced during the conflict.

Vercelli points out that women often have an easier time coping with post-traumatic stress because it is more socially acceptable for them

to cry and discuss their feelings, but even if they overcome the trauma associated with the war, many say they are overwhelmed by the new life they face now.

Women in rural Kosovo were untouched by changing social standards that sent many of their city counterparts into universities and the workforce. In the villages, women often consider themselves helpless without a man, even though they work hard around the house and the farm.

"Being a women, I am not strong enough to cope," says Samire Hyse, 28, a mother of two who lost her husband in the Zahaq murders. "My only hope is to go to my husband's brother in Norway."

Numerous aid organizations are planning special help for the widows, who are among the most vulnerable Kosovars. Peace Winds Japan plans to set aside a large number of the 500 prefabricated homes it is sending to Kosovo for widows. Concern, an Irish charity, plans to provide widows without any other family support with clothing, food and blankets. Such help is desperately needed, and will be for a very long time.

Many of the women worry their young sons will have to drop out of school to support the family. "I wanted my son to go to school, to have more opportunities," says Mrs. Dobraj. "Now that doesn't seem possible." She says she just doesn't feel able to cope without the help of a male — even if he is only 13.

But as time wears on, she may come to feel differently.

"War often masses the strong ca-

pabilities of women," says Lynne Jones, a psychologist with Child Advocacy International, a London-based group working in Kosovo. "Women take on tasks and find themselves in social roles they didn't think themselves capable of before. War is often a step in the advancement of women."

The changes are already visible — and causing incredible anguish. The Hoti family lost its only breadwinner when 33-year-old Adem was killed by a grenade as they hid in the mountains from the Serbian forces burning their village of Bradash in central Kosovo. His 5-year-old son, Armend, also died in the attack.

The extended family of 14 fears for their survival, especially since they lost their animals and their tractor in the Serbian offensive. They live in a half-finished house with no doors, windows or furniture, and so far, aid rations have been meager.

Adem's 24-year-old sister, Ganimete, who still walks with a limp from the injuries she suffered in the grenade attack, took the unprecedented step of going to the provincial capital of Pristina to look for a job. What's more, she promised her dying brother that she would not marry so she could help look after his children, a supreme sacrifice in a traditional family where all the women wear head scarves and the father sports a white skull cap.

"It is difficult for me (that Ganimete is looking for a job). She is also injured and has to do this only to feed us," says Sheskije Hoti, the 60-year-old matriarch of the family.

Adem's widow Bedrije also feels



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guilty. "I don't want her to throw her life away. She has to have a husband and her own children," she says.

Yet Bedrije admits she has no idea how she would support her two surviving sons. Unlike her sister-in-law, she never finished high school and has no skills. Employment opportunities are practically out of the question, because most of the factories have also been burned. And going to Pristina is not an option for a woman with two young children to raise.

Adem's brother is a refugee in Germany and has been unable to

find a job. So as hard a decision as it was to make, Ganimete's father conceded that his daughter should try to find work.

"We need a door, we need windows, we have nothing for the children," says Shahim Hoti, the 72-year-old family patriarch, who is too feeble to work. As his daughter prepares to leave for the city, he tries to be optimistic.

"She was always here with me," he said. "She is young. Now she is going to have some perspective about the world."

WAITING: Qame Gashi, left, weeps as she sits outside a makeshift morgue in the town of Bela Crkva to see if one of the 64 bodies unearthed nearby by the international war crimes tribunal is that of her husband.

ON GUARD:

Trying to stop more fires from being set,

British paratroopers stand in front of a private home in flames in Pristina. The houses are said to belong to local Gypsies, whom ethnic Albanians accuse of helping the Serbs.