



# KOSOVO

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November 25, 2008

## House of War

By William Langewiesche, Vanity Fair

<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/12/kosovo200812>

*After Ramush Haradinaj led Kosovo's bloody fight for independence from Serbia, becoming provisional prime minister, he was tried for war crimes by the U.N. tribunal in The Hague. In a clash of 21st-century justice and 15th-century laws, Haradinaj came out the winner.*

*The head of the household has the right to occupy the chief place in the house, to possess his own weapons, to control the earnings of those who live in the house, to buy, sell, and alter the land, to give and take loans and enter into guarantees, to construct houses, to assign those in the house to work for free, to possess wine or raki, to punish those who live in the house when they do not behave in the interest of the household. —From the laws of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjin (Kosovo, 15th century).*

In the category of life's little curiosities, consider the experience of the Austrian engineer who took the aisle seat directly in front of mine in the economy section of Austrian Airlines Flight 372—a small airliner that was loading before takeoff last spring for the morning's run from Amsterdam to Vienna. The engineer had a thin, moralistic face, and short, gelled hair. He sat very straight with his head bent slightly forward, reading some industry paper and exuding rigidity even from behind. He wore an immaculate white shirt, cuffed around the wrists. The window seat beside him was empty, and surely he hoped to keep it that way. But after a while, among all the inbound passengers of the ordinary sort who fly in the mornings between European capitals, an exception advanced up the aisle and stopped with an apologetic smile to indicate the empty seat. He had the body of a wrestler, and a long thick face, with a mouth slightly open and a protruding lower lip. He wore a blue suit with an open-necked shirt. It was Ramush Haradinaj, an ethnic Albanian and guerrilla commander in the Kosovo war, who the previous day, after three years of process, had been acquitted of war crimes at the United Nations tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, in The Hague.

I knew something of him already—and indeed had booked this flight on the chance that he would be on it. He grew up a country boy in the traditionally rebellious West



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of Kosovo, as the oldest son of an important Albanian family. Like most Albanian families, his was nominally Muslim, but secular in fact. Haradinaj did well in school, but was viewed as a potential troublemaker by the dominant Serbs, and was barred from attending university. After a one-year stint in the Yugoslav Army, he joined the diaspora in Switzerland and France, where he worked as a manual laborer and nightclub bouncer. During that time he trained for war, competing in marathons, developing contacts, and learning martial arts. He claims to have swum once for 27 hours in the open sea just to prove that he could. Upon his return to the Balkans, around 1995, he began systematically to run guns across the mountains from Albania into Kosovo. After the war started in earnest, he earned the name Rambo for his stubbornness in battle against the Serbs. Picture a blood-drenched fighter holding his ground with a machine gun in each hand. He was wounded many times. He killed a lot of people. Perhaps more than anyone else, he was responsible for provoking Serbia into the campaign of ethnic cleansing which led to the NATO intervention of 1999 and the separation of Kosovo from Serbia's grasp. Later he started a political party and briefly served as the protectorate's provisional prime minister before being forced to resign because of the war-crimes indictment. To my surprise now, he was unaccompanied in the airplane. He had no handlers, no family, no guards. He slid a small suitcase into the overhead bin.

In the name Haradinaj, the *j* functions as an *i*. In Ramush the *u* functions as a double *o*. When crowds in Kosovo get excited, they chant "Ra-moosh! Ra-moosh! Ra-moosh!" with equal emphasis on the two syllables. They fire shots into the sky. Single shots. Multiple shots. Ripples from Czech machine pistols. Bursts from Albanian Kalashnikovs. Gunfire is a Balkan language used to express all manner of moods. When love is the emotion conveyed, it can deafen you if you get too close. When vengeance is the message, it can tear you apart. I do not mean to be judgmental, and easily acknowledge that civilized Austria by contrast is a record-holder in genocide. But Austrian airliners at least are quiet. From my seat I said, "Congratulations, Mr. Haradinaj." We shook hands. He did not know me. The engineer did not know him. He stood to allow Haradinaj to slip into the window seat, then buckled himself in again and resumed his stiff-necked reading. Haradinaj removed his jacket with surprising grace for a man of his build, and began to poke text messages into a mobile phone. He kept at it after the flight attendant ordered the passengers to switch off their electronic devices. Why this restriction? Not for safety, as is claimed, but for lack of official approval. No dogs off leash, no campfires on the beach. I watched the



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engineer grow upset with Haradinaj's appalling noncompliance. He refrained from comment, but kept glancing over, as if he could no longer concentrate on his reading.

The takeoff eased the pressure on his soul. Haradinaj stowed his phone for the flight, and gazed out the window as the airplane climbed eastward over Holland. Soon clouds obscured the view. The engineer had gone back to his reading when Haradinaj turned to him and struck up a conversation in fluent English. He was disarmingly open. He said, "I've been in United Nations detention in The Hague for a war-crimes trial, but I was acquitted, and now I'm going home to Kosovo. It's a good day. Yesterday was a good day. I have to change airplanes in Vienna. What about you?" The engineer eyed him doubtfully. Kosovo? He had heard of it. The conversation might have ended there, but Haradinaj opened the in-flight magazine to the route map of Europe and pointed to Kosovo—a country so small that its name could not be contained within the boundaries shown. We have more than two million people, Haradinaj said. Ninety percent are Albanian like me. Ten percent are Serbs. Some are Roma. The groups don't mix—a problem from the war—and this must change. We have a parliament. Our capital is Priština. It has good cafés. I was the prime minister once. Our government offices have been supervised by the United Nations, but just recently we declared sovereignty. Some countries have recognized us, and the European Union is stepping in now to help. We do not have an army. We are protected by NATO troops. There is a lot of building to be done. Unemployment is 50 percent. We need to improve education. The market is so-so. We have agriculture. We need investments.

"Are there tourists?" the engineer figured to ask.

"Not yet," Haradinaj said. He seemed to think the engineer might pioneer the trade. He said, "We have good wine." He seemed to be speaking the truth as he perceived it. He did not mention the fact that despite a huge influx of foreign funds and advisers Kosovo is a place mostly untouched by the mechanisms of formal government, and controlled beneath the surface by a system of patronage and understandings outside of the law. In that sense it is like many other countries in the world—societies where, for all the vaunted globalization of our age, traditional ways continue to function and are woven into the fabric of progress. What does "modernity" even mean? Kosovo's economy is largely underground. Fifty percent unemployment? More like 50 percent black marketeering, smuggling, and tax evasion. But there was perhaps no contradiction in Haradinaj's mind. Kosovo has hardly any street crime. It has

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affordable restaurants and bucolic valleys. It has a ski resort in the mountains where a visitor would never have to wait in line. There are plenty of beautiful women there, but the country is so calm that the engineer might even bring his wife.

It's complicated. Kosovo is calm but tense. In dispatches from the international officials in Priština, that is the language most often used. However self-justifying the description may be, it is not entirely wrong. Haradinaj is the embodiment. United Nations prosecutors in The Hague accused him of having organized the slaughter of civilians during the war. Innocent Serbs and suspected Albanian collaborators. Mothers, children, simple farmers. Christ, like pigs in a ditch. He has always denied it. After the war his power was sectarian and based on the fighting he had done, but he shifted with the times to oppose further Albanian-on-Serb violence. In March 2005, when the legacy of war returned to claim him, he became the only sitting prime minister in history to surrender to international justice. Paradoxically, on the eve of his departure, high-ranking international officials attended his farewell dinner. By all accounts it was a fond and teary-eyed affair. The head of the U.N. mission expressed faith in Haradinaj's future, and called him "a close partner and friend." If the official went too far, as critics said, it was because Kosovo was tense. Haradinaj was going to be missed not merely because he spoke the language of good government (everyone does), or even because he was an extraordinarily effective executive (though this is the reason given), but because outside of the ordinary channels he was able to handle his own people, however that is done.

To the engineer on the airplane he said, "May I ask you something? How old are you?"

"Thirty-six."

"We are the same age! I am 39!"

What a coincidence. Again, it's complicated. His mouth hangs open, but no one should doubt that Haradinaj is smart. Experience has shown that he can be brutal, but the mere potential now serves him in peace. He is unassuming, but as the supremely self-confident can be. Toward the end of the flight, having engaged his seatmate without much trying, he jotted down his coordinates and invited him to visit his

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house, in Priština. He clearly meant it, too. Welcome to this side of Ramush Haradinaj. There are several others.

On the tarmac in Vienna the Austrian police whisked him away, as much to protect him on Austrian soil as to ensure his quick departure on the next flight for Kosovo. I took the same flight, two hours south from Vienna, with a detour around Serbia to avoid interception. Haradinaj sat in the front of the airplane, now wearing a tie. We swept over the ragged farmland southwest of Priština—a plain littered with unfinished brick houses built with money sent home from abroad—and landed at the capital’s airport, where a crowd of about 2,000 waited to welcome Haradinaj under the black-eagle banners of the former Kosovo Liberation Army. NATO soldiers watched from the side. One of Haradinaj’s staff spotted me, and hustled me into a small office building for a formal introduction. As we shook hands, Haradinaj said, “You were on the airplane this morning in Amsterdam.”

“And at the trial yesterday in The Hague.”

He said, “I’m sorry, I didn’t recognize you.”

Accompanied by a crush of guards and hangers-on, we emerged into the sunlight of Kosovo. The crowd chanted “Ra-moosh!” Haradinaj raised a hand in greeting. I found a place in the back of a Mercedes in his 10-car convoy, which went careening down the airport road toward the city center, aggressively pushing other traffic out of the way in a manner dear to American security types—who indeed had given this team its training. The driving struck a discordant note in an otherwise reasonable return, and it hinted at bullying by Haradinaj’s entourage, whether uncontrolled or by design. Priština is a city of a half-million that functions like a smaller place. Later I learned that the style of Haradinaj’s arrival did not sit well with many residents there, and that some observed it with dread. The same can be said of his house. It is a large, round-roofed structure that stands on a hill facetiously known as Mount Olympus, and can be seen from much of the city, where its opulence speaks to the spoils of war.

The convoy delivered us there directly. Haradinaj sat in a spacious salon receiving a line of sycophants and friends. Television crews came in and did what television crews do. Eventually the scene quieted. Haradinaj is married to a woman from an elite Priština family, a news anchor on national television, who has borne him two children. The young family had been in The Hague for the verdict, but had missed a



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flight and was delayed for a day in Vienna. Haradinaj stripped off his tie, pushed his sleeves back, and sat into the night with a couple of advisers, discussing the next day's events over cigarettes and raki. He planned a pilgrimage to the war—a ceremonial return to the scenes of Albanian sacrifice, and to his seat of power in the rural West, where he would end the day at the family's compound, paying respects to his father. For the moment it did not matter to him that Kosovar Serbs were hunkered down in their enclaves in fear and anger. He realized that for the Albanians in the majority—even his rivals and those nervous about his return—the verdict in The Hague was seen as a vindication of their conduct in the war. Of course, it was not intended as such. Seen from The Hague the verdict was precisely as narrow as the prosecution's charges, which were weakened by a lack of forthright witnesses, and pertained only to one man. Haradinaj understood this full well. But he also understood that identity for his people is collective—that the insult to one becomes the shame of many—and that having salvaged his honor in The Hague he had no choice but to share the honor upon his return home.

### **Blood for Blood**

Home for Haradinaj is a plateau called Dukagjin, in extreme western Kosovo, along the mountains of northern Albania, to which culturally it is very similar. It contains perhaps a hundred villages and a few large towns, along with a few—now very few—communities of Serbs. The Albanians are divided into clans and closely knit farming families, among whom the Haradinajs have long stood out. These rural families have never fully submitted to the powers that have claimed the region over time—most recently the Communists, the nationalist Serbs, and the technocrats of the United Nations. Instead, they have largely governed themselves by homegrown rules—a code known as the Kanun, which emphasizes the sanctity of land, blood, and honor. The Kanun serves as a constructive guide to village life, spelling out public and private responsibilities, and, for most infractions, specifying sanctions that are mild. In the case of violent crimes, however, it contains a curious twist: dishonor is believed to lie not with the perpetrator of the crime but with the victim—and indeed with the victim's entire family. It is said that the family's blood has been stolen. The family must then reclaim its blood by committing an equal act of violence against any male member of the original perpetrator's family. This is known in the Kanun as the principle of blood for blood. Given the asymmetries and misinterpretations that inevitably occur, it has led to multi-generational feuds, and vendettas that blossom out of control.

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According to the British historian Noel Malcolm, an argument in 19th-century Albania over four rounds of ammunition brought about the destruction of 1,218 houses and the deaths of 132 men. The Kanun does provide for voluntary reconciliation, but by the fall of the Ottoman Empire, in the early 20th century, nearly one-fifth of adult-male deaths in the Albanian highlands resulted from blood-feud murders. Nearby, in a single area of western Kosovo where 50,000 people lived, the toll amounted to 600 men a year. These were extremes which later subsided, but the feuds endured even under the imposed solidarity of Communist rule—to the extent that during the 1990s an Albanian nationalist using the mechanisms of the Kanun organized mass ceremonies in which tens of thousands of Kosovars were able to renounce their blood claims against others. A large percentage of the rural population was involved. The harmony that resulted was a short-lived affair, and now even under the enlightened rule of Europe and the United Nations, and in a society that is rapidly modernizing, blood feuds again are on the rise. Such is the reality of Kosovo. In perpetuity its Albanian peasants have lived under the threat of violent death. The need for protection led to a unique architecture still much in evidence on the plateau today: tall fortified farmhouses known as *kulas* (meaning towers), which are built of heavy stone, largely without windows, and with gun slits on the upper floors. It's obvious that too much could be made of this. The Kanun reflects the lives of a hard people as much as it forms them. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the Kosovo war was sparked and fought not by the urban sophisticates of Priština but by the tough country boys of places like Dukagjin. They had been insulted by Slobodan Milošević, Serbia's president, and assaulted by his police. As much as a modern struggle for liberation, this war was their blood feud with the Serbs, and required by honor. The intervention on the Albanian side by American F-16s did not relieve them of the obligation.

Haradinaj's father knew that the fight was coming and would not spare his sons. He is the hereditary patriarch of a region—a stoic, hooknosed farmer named Hilmi, who is white-haired at 65 now, and has long been sought out for his generosity and advice. His village is called Gillogjan. It is a cluster of stone and brick houses, 20 minutes off a main road, on a rolling plain of fields and forests. About 2,000 people live there. The Haradinaj compound stands apart from the village proper but within the village bounds. Ramush grew up there with special responsibilities as the oldest of the boys. When he was 13, in 1981, he witnessed violent demonstrations during which Albanians were beaten by the police, and after which one of his cousins was sentenced to prison for 15 years. Blood for insult. In his teenage mind Ramush



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declared war on the Yugoslav state. To people unfamiliar with the backcountry of Kosovo, the idea would have seemed ludicrous at the time. Even in the early 1990s, more than 10 years later, it would have been easy to dismiss the man. By appearance he was a migrant laborer with a Rambo fantasy, practicing kung fu in Swiss gyms and indulging in ineffectual surveillance missions through the Balkan mountains.

Only in hindsight is it obvious that he wasn't fooling around. By the early 1990s the elites of Priština were in full separatist rebellion, but using the tactics of peaceful resistance. They were led by an erudite professor of literature named Ibrahim Rugova, who saw himself as a Balkan Mandela. History has since demonstrated that peaceful resistance would never have succeeded. At the time, though, it was a strategy that appealed widely in the capital. Merely a few crude peasants wanted actually to use weapons, and they were scattered and disorganized. Haradinaj set out to fix that. He still lived in Switzerland, but increasingly spent time in the Balkans. In 1994 he and a small group of men took to calling themselves the Kosovo Liberation Army—a name initially so presumptuous that it seemed to Priština's elites to have been invented by Serb provocateurs. The army on the Dukagjin plateau consisted at first of hardly more than Hilmi's boys—Ramush and some of his younger brothers, who kept slipping back and forth across the Albanian border. By 1995, however, Haradinaj was building a network of fighters on the ground and supplying them with weaponry that he scraped up in Albania and smuggled across the mountains, often on his own back. In Kosovo I've heard it said that the K.L.A. wanted to provoke Milošević into a grotesque over-reaction, in order to trigger the intervention of NATO and achieve independence at last—because this is indeed what happened—but Haradinaj, for all his capacities, was not so clairvoyant as that. More modestly he hoped to excite the Serbs into retaliatory measures that would grow the ranks of his forces. In this he wildly succeeded. Morally the strategy was dangerous, because it relied on placing civilians at risk, but in an era when the armies of established governments routinely inflict collateral casualties in battle, the distinction of intent seems legalistic and artificial.

In any case, the K.L.A. initially restricted its targets to the uniformed agents of the repressive Yugoslav state. The first attack on the Dukagjin plateau was carried out by one of Haradinaj's brothers, a granite-jawed man named Luan. In 1996 he sneaked up on a police post, broke a window with a rock, and tossed in two grenades. Four Serb

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policemen were killed, and three were wounded. Luan heard their cries as he withdrew. The police responded that night by raiding the household of an important family—a grave violation of the Kanun. Right from the start, the escalation was under way. K.L.A. attacks continued sporadically, sometimes against individual policemen known to be abusive. But progress was slow and dangerous for the K.L.A. fighters. Above all they lacked adequate weaponry. Haradinaj concentrated on establishing Albanian lines of supply, and in this Luan helped him greatly. They brought in explosives that were used to destroy an ammunition depot. Haradinaj continued to return to Switzerland, where he worked as a roofer. Such is the world in which we live. The Serb authorities fought back, killing some K.L.A. fighters and arresting others. In 1997 they clamped down on the border, sending army patrols high into the mountain passes to stem the flow of weapons coming in from Albania. In practice that meant stopping Haradinaj.

In early May, he and Luan led a supply column of 10 volunteers up a mountain trail toward the border from the Albanian side. Their ordeal has become a nationalist legend, and subject to the distortions of propaganda, but a reasonably dispassionate account of it is contained within a book-length interview of Haradinaj, conducted by an admiring reporter named Bardh Hamzaj, and published in Albanian in 2000. The supply column was heavily burdened with weapons, including the first rocket grenades acquired by the K.L.A., and because some of the men were not physically fit, they had to rest for a day just short of the border crossing. The pause was dangerous because of the risk of being spotted. Haradinaj thought they should turn back, but allowed himself to be swayed by Luan.

At dusk the following day, the column moved out. The trail led through a pass at the border line. Concerned about a possible ambush, Haradinaj insisted that they cross above the pass, on a stony mountainside. He advanced in a flank position, about 50 yards below the group. Luan took the lead. Carrying their heavy loads, the fighters crossed the border spaced 20 yards apart. The last of them had moved about 200 yards inside of Kosovo, and Luan had signaled an all clear, when a concealed army patrol opened fire. It was just as Haradinaj had feared. The soldiers, of course, were Serbs. Because they had expected the K.L.A. to stick to the trail, their two-sided ambush became a one-sided affair, with Serb rounds spraying upslope from positions closest to Haradinaj. He shouted to his men to lie flat, then zigzagged through the fire to check their positions. Lying flat himself now and returning fire, he staged his fighters' retreats. Luan, who had been farthest in front, was the first to arrive back at the

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border, where he, too, returned fire. The other fighters followed except for one man, who had been shot in the leg and disabled. As Haradinaj ran to him, the man took a second round through the leg. Haradinaj eased the heavy pack from his back, then lay nearby, squeezing off single shots to preserve ammunition, and waiting for the fast-approaching night.

Seeing that Haradinaj was immobilized, Luan ran forward from the border and assumed a new position on the mountainside. The position offered clear fields of fire, but itself was badly exposed. Haradinaj tried to turn his brother back, but his shouts were drowned in battle. He swiveled to rejoin the fight. The Serbs had the disadvantage of being downslope and forced to shoot in an unexpected direction from positions without adequate cover. Haradinaj apparently killed two in succession, and saw others go down. During a lull, someone cried out that Luan had been hit. Haradinaj scrambled back to Luan, who was sprawled on his chest among stones. Assuming that he was merely wounded, Haradinaj shouted, “Get up, man. Don’t let the family down—we’re not finished yet!” Luan did not respond. He had been shot through the mouth and was dead. Haradinaj tried to carry him as if he were alive, hoisting him by his belt and clothes, but he lacked an adequate grip. He laid the body down, grabbed a leg and an arm, and dragged Luan away through the brambles. Later, Haradinaj said that he had felt “a bit lost” emotionally. That’s the thing about war. The firing increased, and he ignored it. He deposited Luan near the border, then ran back to retrieve the weapons. By the time he returned, other fighters had gathered nearby and were obviously demoralized. Luan had seemed invulnerable, but had been killed by a single bullet.

The night fell, and the firing decreased. Haradinaj asked for others to retrieve the wounded man, who was somewhere out there in the darkness. But the man then arrived on his own, using his rifle as a crutch, and utterly exhausted. Luan had a combat knife on his body. Haradinaj used it to cut two oak branches, with which he fashioned a stretcher for the wounded man. He lifted Luan’s body onto his back, and shouldered Luan’s weapons along with his own. Would history show that this was the only real purpose of all his fitness training? The dispirited fighters retreated down the trail toward the nearest Albanian village, four hours away. They arrived in the middle of the night. The villagers cared for the wounded man and helped Haradinaj bury his brother. Badly shaken, Haradinaj flew to Switzerland and resumed his work as a laborer. He took time out to assess his life. Within months, though, he returned to the war. Today, Luan has a street named after him in central Priština.

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In November 1997 the K.L.A. displayed itself overtly for the first time when three gunmen made an appearance at the public funeral of a schoolteacher slain by Serb forces. The gunmen were masked, until one of them showed his face: it was Haradinaj's 19-year-old brother, a tough kid named Daut, who with this display served public notice of the family's defiance. Not far from the funeral another prominent Albanian family, named Jashari, had also declared its defiance. The head of the family was a heavily bearded man named Adem Jashari, who wore long hair in the fashion of 19th-century Albanian highlanders, and for several years had been attacking Serb police patrols foolish enough to wander into the vicinity of his village. To Albanians today Adem Jashari is known as "the Legendary Commander." In the summer of 1997 he was convicted *in absentia* of terrorist acts by a Priština court that, according to Human Rights Watch, failed to comply with international standards. Had the court complied with international standards, he probably would have been convicted anyway. The Serb police tried to arrest him in January 1998, but were repelled with the help of gunmen later described as "friends from the woods." On March 5, 1998, the government went after him again, this time with artillery and hundreds of soldiers and police who surrounded the Jashari compound. Adem Jashari knew of the attack days in advance, and he decided that the whole family should go down fighting. This is surely what they did, during a shoot-out that killed two Serbs and left more than 40 Jasharis dead, including 28 women and children. Only an 11-year-old girl survived. Seven unrelated Albanians also died. For independent Kosovo, Adem Jashari became the founding martyr. Now his image adorns calendars for sale by the family graveyard.

### **The Battle of Glllogjan**

Next up for the treatment was Haradinaj. He had returned to stay in Glllogjan, and was strengthening the K.L.A. network, building bases, and importing weapons and supplies. He moved by night, and during the day worked from home with radios and couriers. There was fighting all around, with daily attacks by the K.L.A. across the Dukagjin plateau. The Serbs knew very well where the center lay, but they had lost control of the backcountry and could not move against Haradinaj without mounting a large operation. Large operations take time to plan, especially for forces that are afraid. Sensing nonetheless that action was imminent, Haradinaj hired workers to begin surrounding his house with heavy compound walls. He knew, however, that the walls would at best allow for delay. Unlike Jashari, he believed in maneuver, and intended for his family to survive. In late March he walked through the village in

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daylight for the first time in eight years, familiarizing himself with the changes that had occurred, and planning escape routes and defensive positions. He had allies there. Some weapons and ammunition were already cached.

In the pre-dawn of March 24, 1998, and unbeknownst to Haradinaj, an armed Serb force probably several hundred strong began rolling through villages to the northwest. The Serbs formed concentric rings around the village of Glllogjan at the closest distance of about two miles, and well beyond view. Daut recently told me that they fell behind schedule because one of their armored cars broke down. That sounds about right. Other details are subject to the confusions of memory and mythmaking, but by plausible account the morning came peacefully to Glllogjan, with no sign yet of the aggressors. Haradinaj and his extended family were in the house. The group included his mother and father, his brothers, a sister, a sister-in-law and her children, and a few closely allied fighters. They had automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and a 7.9-mm. machine gun up on the second floor. Workmen arrived to keep building the walls. Daut walked across a meadow and into the village to run an errand never specified. Hours later the attack began. Daut was returning across the meadow when a police sedan nosed out of the village and came at him from behind. Daut started to run. Two policemen jumped out of the car and from 20 yards away opened fire. Daut turned, crouched, and fired back with a pistol that Haradinaj had given him. It is said that he killed one policeman (“the notorious Otovic”) and wounded the other. This may be, because apparently he emptied the pistol on them, and at fairly close range. Daut is a relaxed fellow, but dangerous to provoke. Haradinaj heard the shots, shouldered past his father’s “What’s happened?,” and rushed outside with a Kalashnikov. Daut had fallen to the ground, and Haradinaj thought that he had been hit, though Daut was actually just taking cover and swapping clips. Other Serb forces came swelling into view driving Nivas, Pinzgauers, and armored vehicles. Haradinaj fired on them, joined by a friend and two brothers. Their shooting was probably ineffectual, but it gave Daut time to run to the house. I presume that the Serbs continued to advance—though their performance that day was hesitant and confused. At some point here the workmen disappeared. Haradinaj went upstairs, grabbed the machine gun, and fired off more than a hundred rounds. He pissed on the bastards. The battle paused. The timing is unclear. The Serbs remained in view, but must not have been shooting much. At some point Haradinaj went out to the road and found his father, Hilmi, lugging a sack of a thousand bullets that he had hoarded. His sons had teased him about it before, and Hilmi had not forgotten. He said, “I don’t know how



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this will turn out. I hope it will be for the best, but in any case I think you'll need these!" This passed for lightheartedness in the family.

Haradinaj decided to take advantage of the lull to send the family out. Daut would remain with him in the house to help mask the evacuation. The other brothers and their friends would accompany the women and children by a roundabout way to safe houses in the village, then pass word to the fighters there to wait for further developments. Old Hilmi's job was to lie in an irrigation ditch and harass the Serbs with steady shots, then find his own way out. This indeed is what seems to have occurred, and under a barrage of gunfire from the house, during which Haradinaj and Daut kept shifting positions to give the impression of being many. Eventually a special Serb unit reached the courtyard. Daut tossed a grenade to Haradinaj, who lobbed it over a wall. When the grenade went off, it blinded the family dog. The Serbs shouted and pulled back. Helicopters clattered overhead, but did not yet attack. Haradinaj and Daut put down their rifles and picked up rocket launchers. They fired at a house where the Serbs had concentrated, and according to Haradinaj they hit it twice. Other shots missed but suppressed the incoming fire. In the confusion Haradinaj and Daut fled directly across the meadow and somehow got to the village unscathed. They entered an abandoned stone house, where they met up with their father, brothers, and other fighters, and with the sister, who had not hidden with the women, and who now joined the battle. It was afternoon. For an hour they fought from that single house, scattered between the floors and shooting from the windows. They held the Serbs off. But it was obviously a mistake to present such a consolidated target. Haradinaj scattered his fighters, sending Daut and others to a nearby *kula*, and dividing the remainder among three neighboring houses. They carried radios for communication. There was a lull while the Serbs readied themselves for another try. The K.L.A. fighters rested and ate whatever they could forage. When the Serbs advanced again, Haradinaj hit them with grenades and sustained rifle fire.

Some of the Serbs took villagers hostage. Using them as human shields—and forcing them to walk with their hands on their heads—they moved up behind them along a road. From the *kula* Daut radioed for instructions. Haradinaj told him to hold his fire unless the Serbs managed to push the hostages through the *kula*'s door, in which case, if he couldn't withdraw, he was to shoot through even his neighbors. Later he explained that a fighter cannot die without firing his gun—whether as a matter of honor or a necessity against overwhelming odds. Either way the attitude is related to a kind of fighting that subsequently triggered prosecutions in The Hague. The

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prosecutions reflected a global divide. Compared with the antiseptic killing done by the best modern armies—often by machines and from a distance—killing is dreadfully dirty when done by peasants like those of the K.L.A.

Luckily, however, that afternoon the hostages were never pushed through the *kula*'s door. A helicopter fired two explosive rounds that detonated in the dirt. In the village there was smoke and confusion. It was hard to know what was happening. Serb police broke into the ground floor of a house without realizing that Haradinaj's father and sister were fighting from upstairs. The house stood across an alley from Haradinaj's position. He did not know that the Serbs were there. He saw a figure in a window, and assumed it was his father, who was foolishly exposed. He gestured to the figure, and shouted for him to take cover. But the figure was a Serb. He fired at Haradinaj with a soft-nosed bullet that shattered Haradinaj's right hand. Haradinaj shouted, "Don't shoot, it's me!" The Serb fired again. The second bullet struck Haradinaj low in the stomach and fragmented into his right leg, leaving shrapnel that remains today. Haradinaj finally got the message. He fell to the floor, picked up a grenade launcher, raised himself to stand openly again in the window, and fired back at close range, hitting the Serb who had shot him, and causing carnage in the room beyond. The Serb survivors wanted to withdraw, but didn't dare. They called out for reinforcements, which never came. Whenever they shouted, the K.L.A. visited them with rocket grenades. They visited other Serbs with heavy gunfire, and the Serbs visited them plenty hard in return. This was the nature of the battle for the remainder of the day. Haradinaj slapped cheese against his wounds to stem the bleeding, and kept fighting with his one good hand. It is said that his sister killed a man. In another part of the village three fighters who were cut off from communication escaped in the late afternoon, but were shot by outlying forces. Two of the escapees died on the spot, and the third—a Haradinaj cousin—dragged himself down a road until he bled out and expired. Despite the ferociousness of the fight, they were the only Kosovar Albanians who died.

The Serbs apparently lost more men, though probably not the 40 that Haradinaj has claimed. Given the emotions at play in the Balkans, the real numbers cannot be known. But there is no question about who won the battle at Glllogjan that day. The Serbs fell so completely apart that after nightfall, with the village in flames and K.L.A. ammunition running low, Haradinaj was able to evacuate his family and fighters into a forest and move through wide-open holes in the Serb lines. The Serbs then withdrew entirely, and Glllogjan became an important K.L.A. base, overrun twice

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in later times, but never subdued. Haradinaj was evacuated across the border to recover from his wounds, but he soon returned, and as a symbol of Albanian resistance. Ra-moosh! Jashari was the Legendary Commander, but he was dead from the start. Haradinaj was Rambo, a survivor, and soon a K.L.A. general giving the Serbs hell from *kula* to *kula* across the Dukagjin plateau.

### **A Different Kind of Justice**

The Hague stands for the other extreme. It is an emasculated place, the most lawyerly on earth, and the Silicon Valley of social correctives. They call it the international city of peace and justice. It is the seat of agencies such as the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the U.N. tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the I.C.T.Y. The I.C.T.Y. was founded in 1993 by a vote in New York before the war in Kosovo erupted, and it now has a staff of more than 1,100, and an ample annual budget. It occupies the former headquarters of an insurance company, about 15 minutes by carbon-neutral walk from the ultra-safe center of town, just past the Peace Palace and next door to a placid hotel.

Last April, on the afternoon of the verdict in Haradinaj's trial, a crowd of former K.L.A. fighters negotiated the metal detector and identity checks, and milled around in the tribunal's lobby. They tended toward middle age and leather jackets with death's-head T-shirts half-hidden underneath. They had buzz-cut hair and slip-on shoes stained with Balkan dirt. Many were stiff with the strain of behaving. A few were less self-conscious. One man wanted to display a K.L.A. flag, but was forbidden by security guards insisting on judicial decorum. The man was unembarrassed. He raised his shirt and exposed his fat naked belly to prove that he contained no further surprises. Daut was there, too, now just shy of 30, and urbane in a well-fitted suit. He stood with Anita, Haradinaj's young wife, who looked anxious and haggard. A display case offered emblazoned souvenirs for sale. They included an I.C.T.Y. baseball cap, a fleece cap, a polo shirt, three different coffee mugs (U.N., I.C.T.Y., and Office of the Prosecutor), a desktop flag holder with two small flags, a shoulder patch, a glass paperweight, an I.C.T.Y. penknife with corkscrew, a wall plaque, a lapel pin, a tie clip, two teddy bears (medium and small) in miniature U.N. T-shirts, a pen-and-pencil set, and a U.N. shot glass, a near necessity for toasts to international justice.



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Slowly the crowd filed through another metal detector and into a gallery fronted by soundproof glass that gave directly onto the courtroom, where the defense and prosecution teams had taken their places in opposing ranks overlooked by an elevated bench. I was struck by the trim appearance of three young women who sat in the front row on the prosecution side. They had immaculate suits, perfect hair, and taut, unblemished skin. Across the chamber, Haradinaj was escorted in, followed by two lesser defendants. He wore a suit and red tie, and shook hands with his lawyers, who clustered around him in friendship. They sat. Three judges in red robes entered and assumed their positions on the bench. There is no jury in I.C.T.Y. proceedings. The chief judge was a rotund, silver-haired Netherlander named Alphons Orië, who had served on the Dutch Supreme Court. In English he began to read a summary of the decision. This took about an hour. Sometimes I watched the faces of the K.L.A. men in the gallery. They wore headphones for translation, and seemed completely absorbed.

The context for the decision was the indisputable fact that K.L.A. fighters committed crimes against Kosovar civilians during the war—and specifically in this case for six months after the showdown at Glllogjan, during a period of K.L.A. consolidation in the surrounding villages and elsewhere on the Dukagjin plateau. The victims were innocent Serbs and Roma, and Albanians suspected of collaboration with government forces. They were variously driven from their homes, beaten, robbed, imprisoned, starved, raped, tortured, and murdered. Cumulatively the abuses never crossed the threshold of definable genocide (in contrast to the Serb government’s policy of ethnic cleansing), but they were war crimes nonetheless. It is illegal to harm noncombatants, unless as the unintended consequence of fights between combatants. The prosecutors in The Hague were sensitive to legal distinctions. When they went after Haradinaj, in 2005, they did not accuse him of committing the crimes directly, but of being responsible for them by leading a “joint criminal enterprise” whose purpose was to rule the region by whatever brutal means. Emphasizing that the perpetrators were K.L.A. members under his “command and control,” they indicted Haradinaj on 37 counts of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws of war. They asked for a sentence of 25 years.

It is now known that attorneys within the Office of the Prosecutor, after years of investigation, strongly advised against proceeding, arguing that the case as constructed was flimsy, that it was based largely on hearsay, that the witnesses at hand were unreliable, and that in the context of Kosovo’s war the alleged intent would

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be difficult to prove. They were overruled by the chief prosecutor, a Swiss woman named Carla Del Ponte, but what her staff had feared is what indeed occurred at the trial. Haradinaj's defense team was led by a renowned London lawyer named Ben Emmerson, who called no witnesses of his own, and relied entirely on shredding the evidence presented by the other side. The prosecutors called 81 witnesses. Because many of them feared for their safety, presenting their testimony was a huge effort carried out at enormous expense. The defense in turn was not exactly a romp. It cost about \$12 million—a sum which had to be raised from sympathetic contributors, and included infusions from the lawyers themselves. Nonetheless, as Judge Orić proceeded now with the summation, and even as he regretted an atmosphere of witness intimidation in Kosovo, it began to seem that Emmerson's strategy had succeeded.

In the end Orić said, "Mr. Haradinaj, will you please stand?" Haradinaj stood straight, with his fingertips resting lightly on the table in front of him. His expression was serious and concentrated. In shortened form Orić said, "For the reasons summarized above, this chamber finds you not guilty, and therefore acquits you of all counts against you in the indictment." The gallery rose as one and erupted in cheers and whistles. Anita Haradinaj leapt into Daut's arms, and for hours afterward could not stop from beaming. Haradinaj remained serious. Orić called the gallery to order. Not guilty does not mean innocent, after all. Who knew what Haradinaj really did—perhaps not Haradinaj himself. Privately, Orić may have had doubts. But he was an instrument of the law, a disciplined judge, and the prosecution had failed to meet the standards for a conviction.

Actually, the prosecution's performance was abysmal. The root of the failure was a misreading of the Dukagjin plateau—a place where "command" has never led to "control," where the K.L.A. was never actually an army, and, most fundamentally, where the Kanun's traditions of blood for blood and collective honor meant that fighting in the villages would inevitably spread beyond the bounds of international law. Not every crime could be assigned to the Kanun. The rapes that occurred, for instance, belong to more universal behavior in war. But essentially the prosecution proposed that Kosovo could have been, and should have been, as immaculate as The Hague. As the prosecution's own witnesses made clear under cross-examination, the reality was something else. In the courtroom the case inevitably collapsed. Carla Del Ponte escaped the wreckage before the end to become an ambassador to Argentina and write a book of self-praise, but Orić endured the entire wasteful event. Now his

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expression was neutral. Addressing Haradinaj he said, “The chamber orders that you be immediately released from the United Nations Detention Unit, after the necessary practical arrangements are made.”

### **The Head of the Household**

Those arrangements rushed Haradinaj onto the morning’s flight to Vienna, into an economy seat beside an Austrian engineer, and then on to Priština, the greetings on Mount Olympus, and the next day’s pilgrimage to the West. I went along for the pilgrimage among Haradinaj’s guards and staff. The trip started modestly. For hours the convoy wandered through the rolling farmland of central Kosovo, stopping at rural graveyards of the K.L.A. dead, where villagers stood in line to greet Haradinaj. At each cemetery he spoke briefly about the sacrifices that had been made. Systematically he called the dead “heroes.” One of the graveyards he visited was that of the Jasharis. Afterward he walked up the road past the shattered Jashari compound and into an adjoining house, where he sat over a ceremonial coffee with the senior surviving family member—a bald man in a business suit. We moved on. By the time we came to western Kosovo the crowds had grown large. In the city of Peć, at the top end of the Dukagjin plateau, thousands of people filled the center and chanted “Rammoosh!” Speaking of the trial in The Hague a man said to me, “People here would never have accepted a conviction.” He said they would have turned to violence. I asked him how they could be so sure of Haradinaj’s actions during the war. My question was irrelevant. He said, “These people have ferocious loyalty.” Welcome to the West. A banner read, WELCOME TO THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD. Haradinaj mounted a stage and spoke briefly into a microphone. People cheered. A band played. We drove south along the base of the high Albanian mountains, down the main road of the plateau. An Albanian rap song came over the radio, dedicated to Haradinaj. “You still are,” the refrain went. “And who you are, we know. It’s obvious what you have done.” R-A-M-U-S-H. You earthshaker, you state-maker, you speaker of the truth.

Or, you criminal, say the Serbs. They would kill him if they could. They would shoot him in the head and throw his body into a ditch. They would wrap him in barbed wire and drag him to death behind a car. This is what they say he did to their people. Carla Del Ponte added to the vitriol by suggesting in her book that the K.L.A. killed prisoners in order to harvest their organs. No doubt some Serbs believe it. So what if none of the allegations could be proved in court—it just shows that the proceedings



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were biased. Such is the nature of Balkan politics. I asked Haradinaj why he had run for office. He said, “It was an environmental decision, something spontaneous, I guess. The fighting was over. I was living in a country with no institutions or laws. There was a confusion of authority. People were looking to me for answers. Somehow I was already like a mayor.”

Somehow? He was Rambo, and the head of the household for the entire Dukagjin plateau. We arrived in the town of Decan, which was the scene of fierce fighting in 1998 and is the hub for more than 30 villages, of which Glllogjan is one. Decan has a reputation for toughness. I had gone there the week before—having been warned in Priština (naturally) that a visit might be dangerous—and had found it to be a quiet if sullen town. Today, however, it was wild with cheering crowds who surged forward toward Haradinaj, overwhelming the police and guards. Haradinaj laid flowers at a statue of his dead brother Luan, and pushed through the crowds to the elevated veranda of a municipal building. I pushed with him, and looked out across a sea of his friends and relatives. He made a short speech about fallen heroes. The town erupted in celebratory gunfire. We headed for Glllogjan. I was struck that in a country whose progress depends on the re-integration of the embattled Serb minority, Haradinaj’s references had all been to the war. Later, when I mentioned this to him, he said, “You can’t ask people to deny their identity. I don’t give up my role in the war, because it is my life. I do look forward. But I have a right to my pride, to my dignity, to my honor.”

Few in Kosovo would disagree. But the elites in Priština often expressed concern to me about the effects of such attitudes. To them Haradinaj is the most admirable of a nonetheless troubling kind—the country boys who fought the war (or said they did), then rolled into town with their weapons and pride, and stood on their heroic record to seize political power even while some were engaging in organized crime. Albanian groups have long been involved in the European heroin and sex trades, and it has often been reported that the K.L.A. participated. Haradinaj himself is another question. His wealth requires explanations—which he politely refuses to provide. Suspicions abound, but they have to be judged in the context of Serb propaganda, and of a rumor mill in Priština that runs in overdrive. It may be that Haradinaj established wartime connections that later proved useful for profitable smuggling—particularly of guns and cigarettes. It may also be that members of his entourage wield his name to criminal advantage, and indulge in strong-arm tactics, with or without his knowledge. I myself do not know. One likely explanation for at least part of his wealth—and one

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that he briefly acknowledged to me—is that he has admirers who provide for his needs. The contributions are not kickbacks for public contracts, of the sort that enrich other politicians in Kosovo. Nor are they payoffs to a protection racket—a proto-taxation system that some say accompanies Haradinaj’s dominance in western Kosovo. Rather, they seem to be genuine gifts—of materials and labor as well as cash—offered by people who recognize his deeds, and also are sensitive to his power. The Priština elites are sensitive, too, and wish that he would now retire. Speaking of all the former K.L.A. fighters, an educated friend of mine whose uncle was killed by the Serbs said, “I don’t want them to rule our country based on injustices that happened 10 years ago. I’m really sorry my uncle was executed. But I don’t want it to overshadow my children’s lives. I cried when I heard the news of the acquittal, I was so glad. But war is for dogs, not for heroes. So thank you, Ramush. Now, go back to your village and do something nice.”

But Haradinaj is not so easy to categorize. He will continue to live in Priština with his elite Priština wife, and will party in the restaurants and bars with Daut by his side. Politically he will probably thrive, and may even someday become prime minister again. And will he go back to the village? Of course, yes, for visits with which to recognize that other full side of his life. On a rise overlooking Glllogjan he is building a monument to collective identity—two magnificent stone *kulas* in a stone-walled compound that will include a swimming pool and outbuildings for the staff. Construction was interrupted for lack of funds—which were sucked away for the defense in The Hague—but the project is nearly completed. When we arrived in Glllogjan he mentioned it briefly as we drove by. As if perhaps I didn’t know, he said, “We have survived like this for centuries. We have built our lives. Our traditions have survived. And there was a kind of government.” He did not say “the Kanun.” He said, “The *kula* is more than a house. It is a school, a court, the base for the army.”

We drove on to the old family compound, rebuilt since the damage it sustained in the war, but permanently violated in Haradinaj’s mind. His father, Hilmi, was there, and led us upstairs to a feast in a long room warmed by a hearth. The room was lined by cushions along the walls, and crowded with village men. The feast went on into the night, with raki and traditional song. I sat next to Hilmi, who said, “I don’t want to brag about my son.” He was a man of few words. He watched his son from afar. Later, for no apparent reason he said, “As for Serbia, to be honest, I never cared. But we had to do it this way. We don’t know of any other.” I supposed he was thinking out loud. At this late stage he seemed satisfied with life. At one point he drew a pistol

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from his pocket and fired a round into the cushion beside us. For an instant the cushion smoldered. The celebrants understood the comment. Eventually others pulled pistols out and shot through the open windows. Half of the windows were closed. As the feast continued, men began to shoot directly through those windows as well. Glass showered onto the food and drink, and the good times went on as before. Later, when I mentioned the indoor shooting to a friend in Priština, he said that the tradition had been discarded years ago, and he deplored it as primitive and archaic. But I thought, No, progress as the elites would define it is to some extent a charade, and indoor shooting, like Haradinaj himself, is equally a part of modern times.

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