

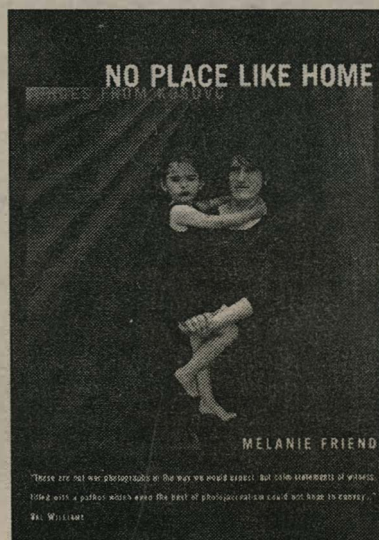
No Place Like Home: Echoes from Kosova

By Puja Vaswani

On Friday, April 5, the Albanian American Women's Organization "Motrat Qiriaz" hosted an evening with Melanie Friend, the author of a new book, "No Place Like Home: Echoes from Kosovo". The presentation, by the BBC photojournalist was the second among a series of workshops organized by "Motrat Qiriaz". The presentation was held in Pace University, with the help of Dr. David Abdul, and Bekim Tafilaj, the president of the University's Albanian American Student's Organization.

Melanie Friend is a unique photojournalist who has been taking pictures of Kosova since 1989. Her book encompasses 75 color portraits and 60 interviews of residents in the Kosova and Macedonia region. The story begins in the earlier stages of the conflict in the 1990s, when the torture was not so evident, and often hidden by the Serbs. Her pictures are far from stereotypical bloody war photographs. Instead, they are images of pristine houses, traditional Albanian living rooms, and lush gardens in remote Balkan hillsides, villages and refugee camps. The pictures of refugees are almost studio like—the subjects pose and look confident, as though they are ready to face anything that comes to them.

"It was really to shock the audience in England, to shock people out of a certain complacency that can come out of black



Front cover of "No Place Like Home"

and white photo journalism, so that's partly what this was about. It was to get an English audience to think 'oh, this could be my garden, my home, and to get people to empathize more to what happen,'" said humbly the British photo journalist, who has formed an allegiance to the Balkans, since her first visit 14 years ago.

Each photograph comes with compelling statements of the people who experienced hardships in the place shown. The statement is a complete paradox to Friend's peaceful, immaculate image, but enhances the personal, human factor in her work. Her photographs provide an extraordinary insight into Kosova's turbulent history through the eyes of ordinary people, the people who witnessed the worst cruelties inflicted upon



Melanie Friend

them. Kosova's ethnic communities come together to tell their stories of suffering, resistance, intolerance and comradeship against the backdrop of a hostile regime. It helps one understand how communal hatred and savagery can break out of the most peaceful field, the most lovely home, and what happens after it does.

"You cannot not see the violence as an outsider. I wanted to know the real story. By the end of the project, everyone had a personal relationship with me," said Friend sincerely in her soft voice.

According to GRANTA magazine, "The power of her book doesn't come from obviously shocking pictures; the shock and realization that these suddenly-changed and cancelled lives were once so like our own,"

Friend presents a paradoxical

picture, which includes the mystifying juxtaposition between the real and the remembered, the perceived and the actual. She puts photography under the microscope by stretching its role, from a witness to a historian.

Friend's reason for being so closely drawn to a region she had no previous relationship with is that she was compelled by the injustices that were taking place.

"As a journalist, I was in a privileged place because I had access to people I would normally never meet. As a photographer I had a role to inform and let the people of the world know what happened, but not without the accompanied testimonies of the people," said Friend.

"There's a big difference between hearing and seeing and there was a big contrast between what I was hearing and seeing—this really bothered me," said Melanie, while describing another slide to her attentive audience.

One of the audiences, Tirana-born Emon Maci said, "After seeing this, I recall a lot of things and it's emotional."

On her presentation, Valdete Zalli poignantly said, "It just reminded me of what I saw there, it's very hard, it's very true. It's describing our country. It reminds me of my real home." According to Friend, the reception to this distinctive book has been "fantastic." She said, "I'm amazed at it, particularly since it's been three years after the war—the response has been overwhelmingly."

UN Police Officer Indicted for Murder

PRISHTINA

A UN police officer has been indicted by a local court in Kosova on charges of murdering an Albanian woman and theft, a UN official said Monday.

Sherif Abd Elaziz, 32, from Egypt, was indicted after spending three months in police custody on suspicion he shot to death an Albanian woman in January, said Andrea Angeli of the UN mission in Kosova.

The murder is believed to have been motivated by a personal dispute, Angeli said.

The victim - identified as Vlora Berbati, 23 - worked as a translator for the UN police in the town of Peje, some 55 miles west of the capital Prishtina.

She was found in the officer's apartment with serious injuries and later died in a hospital. The 32-year-old Egyptian officer had bullet wounds in his arm and hand that authorities allege were self-inflicted.

Under an agreement between UN and Austrian authorities, the indicted officer was transported Monday to an Austrian hospital to undergo surgery and was expected to complete his recovery in an Austrian prison before returning to Kosova to stand trial, Angeli said.

Abd Elaziz is the first international police officer facing trial for a serious crime by the UN run local courts in Kosova. The United Nations waived his immunity when he was arrested in January. The UN police force in Kosova includes 4,450 international police officers.