

Women's Experiences with Fracking in Zharrez, Albania

A COLLECTION OF
NARRATIVES

DOCUMENTED BY:

SAMUEL DARER, SARA FRUNZI, ALEXANDRIA SHEEHAN



FIQERETE GREMI

SOFIE SENKO

LEFTERI KOTHERE

NEXHMIE ASLLANI

DONIKA ASLLANI

Figere Gre

Figere Gre is 60 years old and has lived in Zharrez for 38 years. She and her husband raised 2 daughters and 1 son in Zharrez. Her children have all moved out now.

Figere takes many expensive medications every day for heart, lung, and intestinal illnesses. Her father loaned the couple money to pay for her medicine, and in return her husband helps her father with farming, which means he is sometimes gone for long periods of time, leaving Gre on her own.

When she was younger, Figere grew fruit to sell. Now, she is sick and the pollution in her backyard makes her illnesses worse.

"I CANNOT DO IT ANYMORE, I DON'T HAVE THE POWER."





There is an abandoned, uncovered oil deposit pit in Figerete's backyard. The oozing pit is right next to her persimmon trees and the bad smell from the pit means Figerete can no longer work in her field. The smell of the oil is so bad, she had to go to the hospital last summer because she couldn't breathe.



**FIGERETE STUFFS
THE CRACKS WITH
NEWSPAPERS AND
RAGS TO KEEP THE
RATS AND FROGS
OUT.**

Between 2012-2017, tremors shook the Zharrez community day and night as a result of fracking by Bankers Petroleum. The Gremi house was hit particularly hard and still has wide cracks in the walls and ceiling.

Figerete has to keep buckets around the house because water leaks in when it rains. During heavy rain, she has to constantly empty the buckets, which is difficult for her because she has breathing problems and bone pain.

Figerete received compensation from the government for damages from the tremors. Because she hired a lawyer, she was able to collect a payment that was 600% higher than what the government initially offered.

It still wasn't enough money to repair her home, and she needed to use the money for her medicines, because they were not covered by insurance.

***"What is reimbursed is not good for me.
The medicine that works is more
expensive."***

**"I WISH FOR A GOOD HOUSE, A
PLACE TO STAY AND NOT
BE RAINED ON."**



Sofie Senko



Sofie Senko is an 80-year old widow who has lived in Zharrez her entire life. She has 5 adult children. 2 daughters live in Berat, 1 daughter is in university, another lives in Greece, and her son lives in Italy. Sofie now lives alone, but spends a lot of time with her neighbor and good friend, Fiqerete Gremi.

Like Fiqerete, Sofie also has several health problems, including diabetes and hypertension, which require daily medication. Zj Gremi brings her food, but Sofie is often too sick to eat.

Sofie believes that her health problems are directly related directly to living in Zharrez.

When her son moved to Italy, she moved to live with him for 3 years and felt much better. Unfortunately, she did not qualify for an Italian pension or monetary assistance, so she returned home in Zharrez. Now, she says she cannot leave, because she wants her children to have somewhere to come back to when she is gone.



**"I JUST HOPE MY KIDS
HAVE A LONG LIFE.
I KNOW MY TIME
IS COMING."**



Sofie's home was also severely damaged in the 2012-2017 tremors. She would often run outside until the tremors were over, afraid that her house would fall on her.

Her roof collapsed, destroying 3 rooms. Because her home had extensive damage, she received 200,000 Lek (\$2,000) in compensation, but it was not enough to fix her home.

Two rooms have been renovated, so she now has somewhere to sleep and her children have somewhere to stay when they visit. Her roof is still being re-built and one room remains unusable.

During the reconstruction, Sofie spent extra money to obtain permits and ensure that construction is done legally, to protect her children. **The home is in her son's name, and she doesn't want him to be arrested.**

Sofie says she doesn't care much about her health anymore because she is old, but she wants a nice home filled with things for her children.

"I just want a bed, a wardrobe, and four chairs."

"IT LOOKS LIKE I MADE A PALACE, BUT IT DOESN'T COUNT WHEN I NEEDED A LOAN."



**"I DON'T FEEL GOOD IN
THE CONDITIONS I
HAVE. I FEEL SELF PITY."**

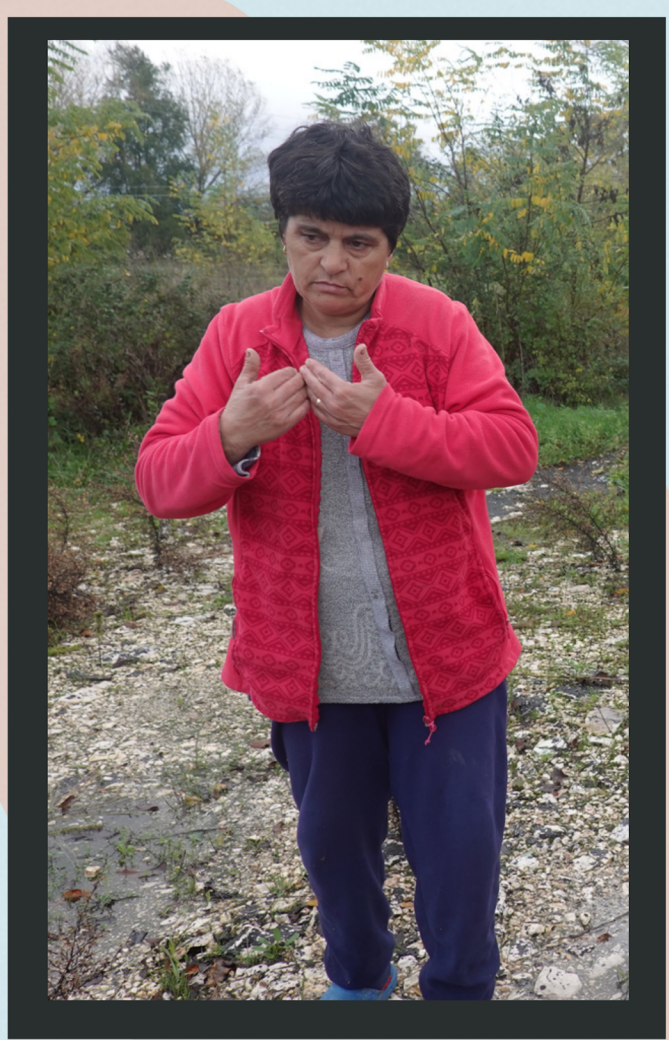


Leteri Kothere

Leteri Kothere is 48 year-old woman who has lived in Zharrez for 20 years. She lives with 6 family members, her husband, their 2 sons and 1 daughter, and her mother-in-law whose pension they live off of.

Leteri's house is located directly across from a collection of oil tanks. The smell of oil is always prominent, but in the summers it is so overwhelming that she has to shut the windows and stay at a hotel or a neighbors' home. She says she feels suffocated in the summers.

Her mother-in-law is blind, and more sensitive to the bad smells.



Leteri's home was damaged by the 2012-2017 tremors for which she never received compensation. Her roof caved in and her family had to repair it themselves. To do so, they took out 300,000 Lek loan

Leteri says she would like to leave Zharrez, but she and her family cannot afford move.



**"WHO WOULD BUY A
HOUSE IN THIS AREA IN
THESE CONDITIONS?"**





Lefteri's family owns a field and grows olives, corn, grain, beans, and grass to feed the cows. All of their crops are for their own use.

An abandoned oil deposit well is located next to the fields. The well overflows when it rains, contaminating Lefteri's crops and making the land infertile.

According to Lefteri, the oil well was originally the result of a deal between her cousin and AlbPetrol, made without her consent. Her cousin allowed the company to use a road behind her land to transport oil, in exchange for splitting profits from the site with him. *Lefteri never received any of the profits.*

Lefteri said the extraction operation started in 2013, using a road on her property to access the site instead of the access road that they were supposed to use. This continued for 2 years. The operation started again in 2019. To prevent the company from using her road Lefteri blocked it off with a low stone wall in 2022, and they haven't used the site since.



Nexhmie Asllani

Nexhmie is a 40 year-old woman who has been living in Zharrez for 22 years. She is separated from her husband and has three sons. Her oldest two are adults and live in Italy. She lives with her youngest who is currently in second grade.

Nexhmie's youngest son has had a cyst on his liver since he was born, which you can see on his ultrasound photos. Nexhmie believes his sickness was caused by the pollution when she was pregnant. The doctor in Tirana said she should leave Zharrez, however she cannot afford both to leave Zharrez and the operation to remove the cyst. Nexhmie used to bring her son to her mother's house in the summer. She cannot anymore because her mother cannot provide the specialized care her son needs.



"I cry for my son. His sickness is getting worse."



"WHEN I SAY WE LIVE IN ZHARREZ, THE DOCTOR UNDERSTANDS"

"HOW CAN I AFFORD ALL OF THIS WITH NO JOB, TAKING CARE OF MY SON, AND LOANS?"

Nexhmie is unemployed, raising chickens and growing olives to support her family. For a time, she received financial assistance for living in poverty, but now that her eldest two sons are adults she no longer does. Her eldest sons do not make enough money to send any back home, even for the youngest's medical expenses. She said it is assumed her sons will support her, but they need to use the money for their own lives.



The field where Nexhmie grows olives is right next to an open petrol well. She believes the Greek olives she grows have been impacted by the petrol, as she only harvested 20 kilos of olives this year.

***"I AM AFRAID MY SON WILL FALL IN
THE PIT AND DIE."***



Donika Asllani

Donika is a 45 year-old widow who works as sanitation worker for the administrative and social protection unit in Zharrez. Her husband died in a tragic work-related accident in Greece fifteen years ago. Together they had two sons. The eldest is 23 and lives in Germany working as a cook. The youngest still lives with her and is 14 years old.



When her husband died, she received no life insurance payment. Donika had to take out a 800,000 lek loan to have his body returned to Albania. She uses half of her monthly salary to pay that loan.

Ever since her husband passed, her eldest son has worked to help support the family. He traveled to Germany 7 years ago to find a better paying job. Since he moved, Donika has only seen him twice, both times within the last year and only for a few days.



Donika uses the money her eldest sends back to help pay for her youngest son's education. She hopes her youngest will be able to attend university. Once he graduates, she would like for him to leave the country and to look for better opportunities.



After her husband's death, Donika remained close to her in-laws. Much of her husband's side of the family lives together, including Hamite Asllani, Donika's mother-in-law who lives with her husband, son, and nephew.

Donika is close with many of the local women and hears their opinions about the oil industry. She says other women blame the municipality and are misinformed. Many people, according to her, don't know much about the oil technology. Donika says she has tried to explain that the municipality doesn't have control over Bankers, ***"but it is up to them what they understand."***



"WATER IS EXPENSIVE FOR ME"

Donika explained to us about the water situation in Zharrez. Contamination from oil deposit wells makes tap water unusable for cooking and drinking. As a result, everyone in Zharrez buys bottled water. Donika says and that she spends approximately \$30 USD on water every month, the same amount she receives in government aid.



Donika believes that families in need don't receive enough aid, from either the government or Bankers Petroleum. Bankers provides some rations once per year, such as one kilogram of sugar, but it is not what people need. Donika suggests Bankers Petroleum invest more resources in employing community members, giving to families in need, and providing school buses if they want to truly invest in the community.

**"I KNOW HOW IMPORTANT
IT IS TO HAVE HELP"**

THANK YOU TO
THE WOMEN OF
ZHARREZ FOR
SHARING YOUR
STORIES WITH US.