

A young man with short dark hair is sitting on a bed in a dimly lit room. He is shirtless, wearing blue jeans, and has a tattoo on his left chest. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The room has floral wallpaper and patterned curtains. Light from a window is visible on the left.

Young Miners of the Donbass

By Janos & Tali



The Donbass is a coal-mining district in the east of Ukraine, lying on the border with Russia and more than 700 km from the capital city of Kiev. Except from some heavy industry and a breathtaking countryside, the Donbass does not have much to offer to its inhabitants, especially in terms of life choices. In fact, for the vast majority there is only one job available, that of the miner. The region might be poor and underdeveloped, but its underground is rich in coal, forcing generation after generation of its young men to embark on a life largely spent in the darkness, digging for the black gold.

When asked, no miner will tell you that he likes his job, and in fact most seem to hate it. However, becoming a miner at least offers a measure of financial security, if such a word can be applied to a work that takes place hundreds of meters below the ground, in unsafe and aging mines that claim lives and limbs on a daily basis. Many, and especially the young, can only find work in illegal mines, which are more or less plain holes in the ground, taking even more risks and knowing that they will never get a pension or compensation in the case of injury or illness, two things that are almost taken for granted a job in which every day might be your last.

The young miners of the Donbass also face the uncertainties that cloud the future of the region. Dozens of mines have been closed in the last decade because of poor productivity, making thousands of miners unemployed. The prospect of economic integration with Europe to the detriment of Russia, and the adoption of stricter mining standards, alienated miners and played an important role in sparking the current pro-Russian uprising, which in turn places additional insecurity on the entire region, whose youth now don't even know in which country they will live in the future.

On their part, the young miners speak, think and sing in Russian, and have little attachment to Ukraine, a country that they feel never gave them anything. They often speak of how the more westernized people in Kiev and the rest of the country see them as ignorant menial workers and show no respect for the hardships and dangers that miners face every day. To them, Ukraine is a failed state, especially when compared to the Soviet Union that they have never experienced. Back then, they say, workers and miners in particular were the backbone of a strong country, and nobody would look down on them.

Often having grown up without parents, many of whom died because of mining themselves, the young miners still recall the happier times in which they dreamed of becoming archeologists, carpenters or of having their own business. Now that they are miners, they struggle to not let their work define them and to enjoy their lives made up of hard work, fishing by the lake, drinking and smoking with friends, followed by more hard work. This is the life of the miner, a life that nobody would choose if they had a choice, that choice that nobody ever offered to the young miners of the Donbass.



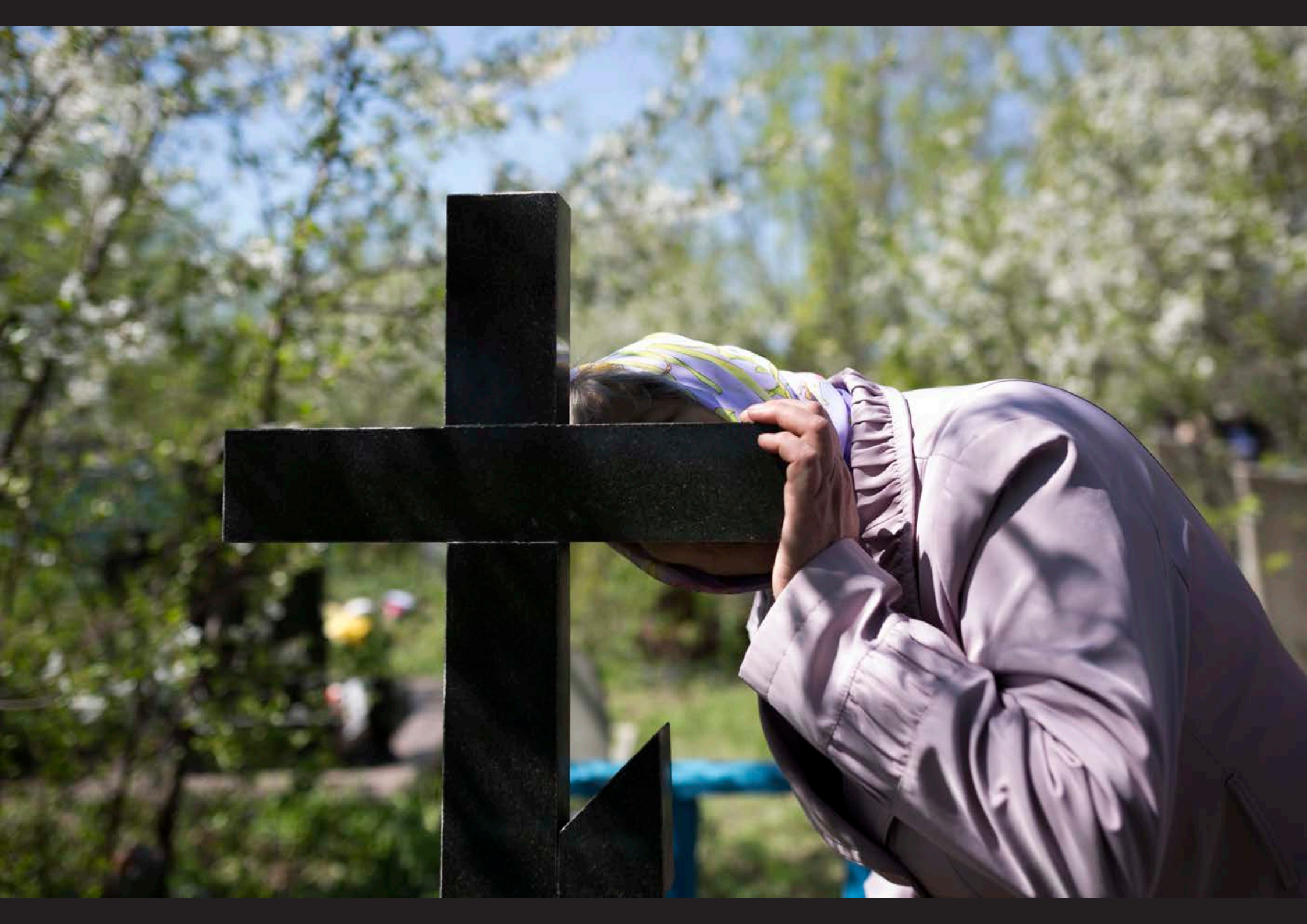
























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