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**HEARD**

**MEMORY BOOK WITH STORIES OF  
WOMEN SURVIVORS OF TORTURE  
DURING THE LAST WAR IN KOSOVO**

**PRISHTINA 2017**

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Integra  
Prishtina 2017

**Project leaders:**

Korab **Krasniqi**  
Kushtrim **Koliqi**

**Associates:**

Atifete **Jahjaga**  
Feride **Rushiti**  
Vjollca **Krasniqi**

**Coordinator:**

Sebahate **Pacolli**

**Interwiers:**

Vjosa **Devaja**  
Melita **Kallaba**  
Selvije **Izeti Carkaxhiu**  
Mimoza **Salihu**

**Transcript:**

Dren **Berishaj**  
Jeta **Rexha**

**Proofreading and editing:**

Arben **Ahmeti**

**Translation:**

Gazmend **Bërlajolli**

**Design:**

Milky Way Creative

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Prograf

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## I WANT TO BE HEARD

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



# I WANT TO BE HEARD

## Memory book with stories of women survivors of torture during the last war in Kosovo

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The concept of torture and sexual violence in war may not be limited to isolated acts committed by individuals, it rather encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy people but the sense of "self" and being "people" as well. Wartime sexual violence and torture is deliberately used as an instrument to terror, extortion, and forcing people to flee their homes. It is a broad and systematic 'military' tactic against vast numbers of women (and men) used to subdue entire populations.

Wartime sexual violence cannot be understood and dealt with only as a discrete trauma (psychological or physical) that can be systematically treated and that could heal as time goes by, but rather it has a life-long and intergenerational impact. Almost two decades after the formal end of the ground conflict in Kosovo, stories of torture and sexual abuse are kept silent (in many societal layers) and out of meta-narrative of war and the public discourse. Moreover, survivors of sexual violence and torture in war are subject to social stigma, exclusion, and inconsistent institutional policies. Families (to some extent) and the beloved are the circle of silence where the truth hides.

"... I have been wounded on my leg and chest. They did not spare me. There was no consideration... My chest was heavily bleeding. I don't remember much... When I got my conscience back, I remember I saw two men on top of me; one was forcefully holding me the other was... we were all devastated. Outside of the room were our children and other women. They all heard the screaming..." This is a fragment of a terrifying moment shared by A.G. There are countless stories of these degrading acts, which were made all the worse by being conducted in public and in front of loved ones, neighbors, and even sometimes, complete strangers.

Stories in this book deliver a broader set of implications for all women. It gives an example on how torture and sexual violence serve the goals of power and repression that forces society to reconsider how torture, sexual violence and other means of violence exercised on women are defined, as well as strategies that are employed to eradicate gender-based violence in armed conflicts.

Putting survivors of sexual violence and torture at the center of attention in this book, it pushes society to examine the role of the state structures, international community, civil society, academia, artists, researches etc. in dealing with and perpetrating gender-based violence in the last war in Kosovo. Reaching to this point, many ethical and methodological issues were brought into the perspective of the project cycle and the whole process of memory collection.

On May 14th, 2015 a roundtable with key thematic stakeholders, associates, academia, and national and international institution representatives was organized in Prishtina, to discuss, reflect on and gather recommendations about the initiative. The meeting brought insightful recommendations that contribute to a just and structured process that considers important aspects such as: contribution to social and transitional justice, intervention onto the dominant and hegemonic narratives of the war, silenced and misrecognized stories and experiences of women, do-no-harm and re-traumatization, strengthening institutional support offered to survivors, international recognition of the war crimes committed against women in Kosovo etc. This meeting produced a paper (analysis) with clear methodological guidance about the process and steps to follow. As a result, today we are now able to hold this book that unfolds 10 wartime memories of women subject/object of torture and sexual assault in war, and two men (husbands) in the supporting role. All memories collected and documented in this book are in full consent with all interviewees.

The methodology employed in memory collection from survivors of torture and sexual violence in war is Oral History. This method is to obtain diversified information that cannot be found in written and public sources. Collecting memories of women-in-war provide the basis for contemplating on the difficult past and gender aspects in new forms while reflecting on dynamics of the present. Collecting interviews from survivors of torture and sexual violence will help understand the cohesion of events in, before and after the conflict, the formation and contestation of the predominant narratives, and particular aspects such as gender identity.

The aim of this book is to document individual narrative and memories of women-in-war, which will, moreover, contribute to the process of dealing with the past, social and transitional justice, and simultaneously present a sustainable source for human rights activists, watchdog and advocacy groups, policymakers, researchers, academics and artists for further processing.

"I want to be heard" is a book of hope and truth. To re-live the moment and re-visit the place where someone has been harmed is difficult. Through the lives that survivors are living today, we are reminded of all that remains possible in the wake of the terrible.

Korab Krasniqi  
Kushtrim Koliqi

## Foreword

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It was a chilly morning in the fall of 2013. I took my car and drove for about an hour to meet a woman in a village of Drenica, a region in central Kosovo. I had spoken to her over the phone earlier that week, and we had agreed to a meeting determined by the condition of full privacy. She wanted to see me alone, and she wanted me to be the only one present in the room when unfolding her story. Going anywhere on my own had become very unusual to me, because it had been more than two years since I was elected president. As such, I was continuously accompanied by security officers. But, that morning I decided to get utterly disconnected from my personal reality in order to get a true, full picture of someone else's life.

We met in a cafeteria at the center of a small town not very distant to her village. We sat down in a quiet corner where we could talk. I had never met her before. Yet, I felt some kind of closeness to her for reasons I cannot understand even today. She was visibly anxious, her hands shaking, her voice trembling, her eyes wide open, looking at me with an expression I will never forget. In her eyes I saw fear, but I also saw hope, expectation, and relief. She was one of the first survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo that I spoke to face-to-face. But, as the future would show, she would unfortunately not be the only one. "Tell me whatever you feel you need to tell me. Don't feel pressured to say anything you're not comfortable with," I told her at the beginning of our conversation.

Her story was full of pain and suffering.

Her story touched me personally; it shook me; it shocked me. While listening to her, I went through a hurricane of mixed feelings: weakness, compassion, disappointment, and anger. I felt weak as I had not been able to help her at the time she was raped. I felt sorry and angry at the same time, for the fact that she had to experience this horrific crime. And, I was deeply disappointed and angry at our system, which had turned its back on her for almost fifteen years.

Readers will most likely experience the same wave of emotions when reading the stories of the survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo that are collected in this book. The women who tell their stories here reveal the deep-seated scars that the war of 1998-1999 left on an estimated 20.000 women and men in Kosovo. They show how survivors of sexual violence during the war have been haunted by prejudice, stigma, and discrimination in their daily struggle to find peace and receive justice. Furthermore, the stories collected in this book give us more details about the detrimental effects a patriarchal cultural mentality and the lack of willingness to deal with the past can have in

the process of healing and peacebuilding.

Over the last years, I have listened to numerous stories told by women like the one I met in Drenica three years ago. I cried with those who needed me to cry with them, and I remained stoic in front of those who needed me to be strong. I felt it was my moral duty as a woman to offer them an ear they can talk to, a hand they can reach out to, and a voice they can speak through.

In 2014, I initiated the establishment of the National Council on Survivors of Sexual Violence During the War, which brought together representatives of the government, the international community, and the civil society in Kosovo. Together we managed to push forward many issues related to the rights for war rape survivors in Kosovo by creating better conditions for access in healthcare services, education, and economic empowerment. The "Thinking of You" art installation erected under my patronage as president by artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa did a tremendous job in the process of collective healing by encouraging solidarity with victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. After thousands of skirts and dresses hung on Pristina's football pitch symbolizing our collective empathy and support for the victims, war rape is no longer kept under wraps.

A lot has been achieved, indeed, but more needs to be done. The process of verification of survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo is about to start soon, and I hope that this book will encourage more war rape victims to come forward with their stories and officially apply for their rights.

I wish there had been no need for me to write a foreword for a book on sexual violence during the war in my country. I wish there had never been a war in Kosovo at all. But, unfortunately, these crimes took place. And sadly, after more than seventeen years, we have still not come to terms with the war and what truly happened during that period.

I am strongly convinced that this book will support the peacebuilding process in Kosovo serving as an important tool in our efforts to deal with the past and break the culture of impunity for those who committed the crimes.

May this book also serve us as a reminder for what has happened to our people. And, may it serve the future generations of people in Serbia to learn from the horrible mistakes of their ancestors, so that these gruesome crimes will never be repeated again.

Atifete Jahjaga

President of the Republic of Kosovo  
(2011-2016)

## FIGHTING STIGMA AND PREJUDICES : STRUGGLING FOR SOCIAL AND LEGAL RECOGNITION OF WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

### The importance of discussions related to sexual violence as a war crime

Kosovo came alive from a war conflict which brought a lot of atrocities, massive killing, enforced disappearances, [extrajudicial] killings and conflict-related sexual violence and rape. For centuries, organized rape has been an integral aspect of warfare, aiming to inflict trauma and thus to destroy family ties and group solidarity within the enemy camp. Sexual violence committed in Kosovo, was part of the pattern of criminal acts committed in the context of mass aggression.

Second, rape was used by the Serb troops not only to abuse the women themselves, but also to inflict harm and enrage their husbands.<sup>1</sup> By sexually assaulting these women, the Serb troops sought to spread animosity among Kosovar families and push husbands away from their wives. Daughters were *"gang-raped in front of their fathers, wives in front of their husbands... just to dehumanize, just to degrade."*<sup>2</sup> While these rapes were conducted without these women's consent, their husbands still turned away from their spouses when these crimes occurred. The reason for this was dishonor: *"The 'touched' women. . . have now heaped shame on the houses of their husbands"* and brought dishonor upon the family because *"once you touch the woman, you touch the honour of the family and you provoke the man to react."*

There are countless stories of these degrading acts, which were made all the worse by being conducted in public and in front of loved ones, neighbors, and even sometimes, complete strangers.<sup>3</sup>

### Inherited cultural problems and mentality of neglect

While the after-war years marked the beginning of a higher awareness of and advocacy against rape, there are still many Kosovar victims that have not come forward with their claims and cases that have yet to be dealt with. Cases are still being decided now, over ten years later, mostly for plaintiffs who have applied abroad claiming asylum in foreign countries, with the only justification of "being afraid of remaining in Kosovo".

With a missing "crime inventory", trauma, prejudice and a lot of institutional and legal barriers, the struggle of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) during war was calling for attention and survival needs. The today's data estimate a number of 10,000 to 20,000 victims.

1 See e.g., Amra Zejnelli, How Long Can You Keep A Secret? For Kosovo's Wartime Rape Victims, The Answer Is: Maybe Forever, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Aug. 3, 2015), <http://www.rferl.org/content/kosovo-wartime-rape-victims-kept-secret/25403115.html>

2 Markus T. Funk, Victims' Rights and Advocacy at the International Criminal Court, (2010).

3 Donatella Lorch & Preston Mendenhall, A War's Hidden Tragedy: Newsweek and MSNBC Revisit Kosovar Albanian Women raped During the War 3 (Aug. 8, 2000) [http://www.donatellalorch.com/articles/scars\\_of\\_war.pdf](http://www.donatellalorch.com/articles/scars_of_war.pdf).

While there have not been disclosed numbers as to how many women suffered mental health problems or killed themselves in Kosovo, various reports and our field work say these sexual crimes caused a devastating effect. The fear of being rejected and isolated by their own families and the community was reflected in their psychosocial consequences impeding rehabilitation, access to justice, and socio-economic reintegration. For a long time, they considered themselves *"left alone"*. The psychological remainders and effects of rape are not as easy to deal with. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and even longings for suicide are just a few of the lasting effects of sexual violence that plague women.

All these social factors (existing gender disparities and stereotypes), the economic difficulties and lack of any gender perspective have created the prerequisites for an escalation in domestic violence and psychological torture. These factors have negatively impacted the conditions of the "survivors"; consequently, impacting the lives of direct relatives (especially own children) inheriting a second-generation trauma and related effects.

The question remains: how can total justice be achieved in post-conflict Kosovo when "prosecution" is still not enough? How can it be achieved when even in recent cases, victims are not granted relief despite providing evidence that they faced past sexual violence? Other results of war, such as damage to property, unemployment, and physical wounds, can be healed and remedied through time. While prosecution helps to keep the criminals of the devastating aftermath of rape away from the streets and in prisons, there are numerous other ways Kosovo is moving towards transitional justice to address other aspects of the issue.

### **Breaking taboos, silence and violence**

This section will be dedicated to my personal engagement, professional commitment for over 17 years of work dedicated to marginalized groups of war survivors and victims of torture.

During the war conflict, I was a young medical doctor completing specialization in the Tirana University of Medicine. My first contact with Kosovar refugees was during hours at the University Medical Hospital. I recall they were asking for treatment and psychological support. I decided immediately to voluntarily engage through a local NGO in Tirana, the Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for trauma and Torture which (at that time) was engaged with emergency program by helping war survivors and children refugees in Kukës, Tirana and Durrës. I started working in the emergency shelters by assisting Kosovar families forcibly and massively displaced from their cities, villages, houses. Human suffering gave me the tremendous strength to switch my life and professional orientation and become a *"human rights defender"* and a restless person towards social emancipation and sustainable change. The return influx of Kosovars into their own homes required a more larger



intervention and immediate support to cope with trauma. The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims was established as a response to the need for medical and psychosocial support for victims of torture and systematic violence among the civil population during the war. This commitment was done with huge ambitions to return the hope and life for those suffering from war' spiritual, mental and physical consequences. It immediately started offering counsel and assistance of doctors, psychologists, social workers and legal advisers to the rape victims.<sup>4</sup>

These were all reactive ways of dealing with such an atrocious conflict, however, the KRCT has consistently undertaken numerous proactive measures that offer hope to the female population of Kosovo. Women were the main group of people left after the war to help the nation recover and to bring awareness to these issues, after roughly 12,000 people, a great deal of which were men, were killed during the war.

### **The irreplaceable role of civil society actors in the recognition**

Whether in the initial phase of emergency relief or in the latter complex and length reconstruction of civil society in Kosovo, NGOs have taken over a number of key tasks that state or multilateral actors are either reluctant or unable to provide.

Enormous efforts from civil society actors and women leaders have consistently addressed the need for the legal recognition for such marginalized group and our voice was heard only after than a decade, throughout the recognition process of the status of "civil war veterans" by the SGBV survivors.

The process of legal recognition was strongly supported by the National Council for the Survivors of Sexual Violence, and the personal engagement of the President of the Republic, Mrs. Atifete Jahjaga for the support of the survivors through personal meetings with them and through hearing their needs. Prioritizing the needs for categories of survivors was a high priority issue for the President and directly it became the only opportunity for the *Civil Society* to articulate the needs for psychosocial and medical rehabilitation as well as economic empowerment. Various campaigns and media activities were organized to contribute directly on *changing the mentality* and *social perception* in order to create a momentum for recognition of victims suffering...but still there is so much work needed.

Parallel to those activities we contributed in the drafting of secondary legislation as well as the preparation and finalization of Application Formats for survivors, approaching the state commission for identification and documentation.

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<sup>4</sup> Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims,  
<http://krct.org/site/images/documents/reports/annual/en/ANNUAL%20REPORT%202005.pdf>

The urgent Call should be raised, *at this stage*, on the establishment of the State Commission for Documentation and Investigation, for addressing further support to survivors in need, continuous psychosocial and medical support. Special attention should immediately be paid to those victims willing to testify and have access to justice, those who want to break the silence and seek reparation and redress, as well as economic empowerment.

By all means, women should be guaranteed full access to education, women should be allowed to enter into any type of workforce they choose, and they *"confirm that conflict, post-conflict and transitional justice processes and institutions are gender sensitive. . . acknowledge the legal status of rape victims, publicly recognize the magnitude of their experiences, compensate them for their injuries and prosecute the perpetrators."* All of these actions demonstrate that not only are institutions as a whole committed to granting voice to women, but females themselves are also a driving force behind this crusade to seek social justice.

*Neglecting, abandoning and avoiding to deal with SGBV women and girls during the war is a "mistake" that inflicts the failure of rule of law, a barrier for consolidating a peaceful society with guaranteed well-being.*

Feride Rushiti,

Executive director at Kosova Rehabilitation  
Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT)  
Prishtina, 2016

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN WAR: EMPOWERMENT THROUGH NARRATION

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It is nothing new to say that sexual violence should be understood as a weapon of war. Sexual violence against women – especially rape, has been exercised in all wars for different political or military ends. Despite having recurred often in many histories, cultures and societies, wartime sexual violence was usually hidden or invisible. Thus, women's stories of rape in war usually went untold and unheard. Indeed, it was only in the last decade of the 20th century, during and after the Bosnian war, that sexual violence and rape received the attention of the so-called 'international community', academics and women's rights activists. Feminism played no small role in this process exposing the facile treatment of women in war and violence against women as part of war (Stetz 2001). Thus in the 1990s, for the first time, rape was codified as a recognizable and independent crime within the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The rape camps in Bosnia played an important role in achieving that goal. But the problem is, of course, universal: in Kosovo, Rwanda, East Timor, and Sierra Leone, women and girls are still suffering from wartime sexual violence.

Feminists have long argued that the nation, national identity, and nationalism are gendered. They have pointed out that women in nationalist discourse play such diverse roles as biological and social reproducers, cultural forms, signifiers, and embodied agents (Yuval-Davis 1996,1997; Peterson 1999); roles that may render women vulnerable to violence in war. And as Lene Hansen has argued, the raping of 'the nation's women' is part of war and not acts of violence against individual women. Moreover, sexual violence also served the purpose of installing a disempowered masculinity as constitutive of the identities of the nation's men. Through rape and physical torture against women and girls, the destruction of a specific group – ethnicity/nation, is aimed.

During the armed conflict of 1998-99, rape and the sexual assault of women was an instrument of war and part of the strategy of ethnic cleansing. Rape was an intentional tool of war. Gathering first-hand accounts of rape has proved very difficult for war crimes investigators. The scale of sexual assault in Kosovo may never be fully known. Rape is a deeply sensitive issue. Stigma attached to rape is strong and many women survivors of war time violence keep silent. Rape survivors think that speaking up may destroy their future, stigmatise their families, and it is a re-traumatising experience.

Having been suppressed in the post-war period, sexual violence in war, merits more attention. Wartime rape has affected not only women, but also men. Sexual violence has been part of political persecution. During the post-war period wartime sexual violence has, for a long time, been a silent category of civilian war victims. In recent years, as a result of enhanced women's activism, wartime sexual violence has become part of the discourse on justice and social policy. Some survivors of sexual violence in Kosovo have decided to break the silence. They have chosen to narrate the horror, pain and loss they endured.

In this book, several women, and two husbands of women who survived sexual violence, account their war experience. They narrate their personal histories of war, focusing on the violence they lived through. Their experiences are experiences of many other women in Kosovo and elsewhere. Their testimonies are stronger than stigma, silence and amnesia. The violence they described is more complex than that conceptualized in traditional justice. Their testimonies are individual, yet they point to methods of violence that were institutional and directed primarily against civilians. These stories enhance knowledge of women's survival and understanding how war violence is gendered. Women's narratives are about lived experience and transformations at the level of everyday life and subjectivities. Survivors of sexual violence express great pain and loss and are aware that to name evil is a step towards seeking justice.

Moreover, the survivors' narration of violence is a transformative memory. Testimonies break away from the representations of survivors of wartime sexual violence as fragmented subjectivities or isolated victims. By recounting the past, women redefine themselves as subjects. They speak and act to rebuild their lives, the lives of their families, and their communities. Through narration they move from trauma towards integration. Their narratives show that memory, like agency, is not static, but dynamic and plural.

Women's narratives and personal memory are important for reconstruction and interpretation of history. The narratives offered here have become an important source of war memory in Kosovo. Let us not forget that memory is fluid. Women's narratives, just as narration in general, are time bound and context specific, as the "stories travel through time" (Portelli 1991). The narration here shows the importance of women's voices in the construction of war narratives and memory. In this multidirectional fluidity, women speak not only about the past, but also about the present and the future. They narrate survival and agency, expressing the wish that their suffering is recognized. Yet, more important is that through narration, they constitute themselves as subjects with dignity. To narrate personal experience to the wider public at whom this book is aimed, is a move of an empowered subjectivity.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Sociologist and professor at the University of Prishtina  
Prishtinë, 2016

# NARRATIONS



# 01 - TEUTA:

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## I WANT TO BE HEARD

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo





## • **WRONG RETURN** • **FROM SWITZERLAND**

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It had never occurred to Teuta that she would one day experience what she'd only witnessed on TV during the mid 1990s. With her boss's wife, she would watch stories about the Bosnian war that was going on at the time. Teuta used to live in Switzerland then.

A few years later, her husband decided to return to Kosova to join the KLA. Teuta followed her husband's wish.

Yet, returning as a pregnant woman turns out to be the worst decision of her life. She experienced atrocities that came to be known as the two offensives of the Serbian army in the villages of Kosova.

She had to live in the open in mountains, dodge shooting, be wounded by a grenade, sexually abused and expelled from home, while being with her family and friends most of the times. Her five young children follow their mother in what could be assessed as months of facing inhuman atrocities.

Teuta was wounded on her leg and breast from two pieces of a grenade thrown on a row of civilians who were walking under a death threat: the one to stop moving would be killed.

A bit later she would see the horror by those she calls Seselj's paramilitaries, who rob her of her possessions. Others, she calls Arkan's paramilitaries, behead an infant to terrify the fleeing women.

"You knew whose paramilitaries they were from the name they'd shout; 'long live Seselj' or 'long live Arkan.' Arkan's men were masked, Seselj's had long coats," Teuta explains. Together with 50 other women Teuta is raped a few weeks before the war ends, in a factory where she was held for several hours.

“They had all the tools for massacre. They took a two-year-old boy from his mother and one of them placed his knife over his throat. “I have a soft touch, I have a soft touch, don't you worry!” he's shout. Children cried and screamed.”

First Person Narration:

• **I WAS WOUNDED BUT THEY DIDN'T SPARE ME**

Teuta

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I am a married mother of five. I have many brothers and sisters. I have good memories; many of them. My parents managed to school all of us girls, so we all finished school.

The best moments were those of Eid. We'd grab our music instruments, sing, go to houses and help brides dress up. Such a pleasure it was.

I got engaged and then married six months later. We had our wedding and then we had to move to Germany. So, I went there and lived with my husband. I worked together with him there.

For five years we stayed in Switzerland. I was pregnant when we returned to Kosova. I worked there looking after the five daughters of our boss, and my husband worked for him too.

We came back for holidays, I was pregnant that year. When we came back it was 1992-93, and the war was raging in Bosnia. I would watch the events from that war on TV with my boss's wife. I would get up from my seat, I remember, as I would get goosebumps in my entire body. The boss's wife and I would both cry while watching the events in Bosnia. I never even imagined I would experience the war in Kosova myself.

I never even thought of it. I could not watch the events on TV from crying, so with my boss's wife we'd go out often, taking the kids for a walk as we didn't even dare to watch the war on TV. So we decided one August and came back to Kosova, as nobody even told us what was going on there. As the time approached to leave, I noticed my husband coming back later from work in the evenings. I was pregnant and already had two children, my daughter and my

son. He would be late and I would wonder what he was doing. We would have the "Rilindja" newspaper at the time, and I was quite fond of reading. When I saw "Rilindja" announcing that the war in Kosova is on the verge it was 1997. That's when I started to fear. I would see that the men would assemble during the nights, and my husband had put on the KLA uniform.

I said to him that I would keep the children and move on, as my father-in-law had also instructed me to do so. My husband disagreed, saying we should all die for our homeland.

I gave birth. I gave birth under a candle light as there was no doctor. There were no movements allowed from the Serbian troops. That's when a massacre was done.

That's when the war started for me. It was the moment I gave birth and I was staying indoors for three weeks. Three weeks with the little children and the baby not knowing where my husband had gone as the army would not allow him to return home.

And then we'd move from one village to another. The nights belonged to us, the days to the Serbs. They would not dare move by night and they would assemble in their collection points. The daylight belonged to them.

It rained a lot, with hale even. We had nothing to eat. Our tractor had no more petrol; it got stuck. All our belongings were left on that tractor. We started to walk. It was only us women and children. We moved on foot, came and hid inside a stable. The military spotted us, observing our moves. They had seen that the infantry is moving downhill to enter the houses. So they waited until it was dark, they imagined that no movement would be going on during the night. We closed ourselves inside a stable and when we got out to pull out some water from a well, we heard many footsteps approaching. So we started to cry, as we knew that where they would find the weak few, they would slaughter everyone. We all started to cry and the young girls where screaming. Fortunately, it was our own army. They had come to help pull us out of there. We were helped that night, and managed to get away. We slept in another village. In the morning the soldiers brought us cooked wheat as we and the children had eaten nothing.

The children would not want to eat the cooked wheat without sweetening it up. The soldiers had cooked it as they had no flour. They said to us, "We are trying to get a tractor to load you on it and get you out of here." We were quite a few. We fit on two tractors and set off. On our way towards the border we heard the automatic rifles shooting above our heads. A bullet hit the tractor wheel and it went flat. We knew it was the Serbs shooting. The tractors stopped and the drivers ran away. We moved our children towards the woods and our army men totally withdrew, as the Serbs were approaching with tanks.

We stayed in the woods for three days and three nights. We would have to press on our children mouths hard as we saw below us many automatic guns and gulinovs. The infantry would then move and start shooting and shooting until it would get dark, they would try to clear the grounds. The tanks started to approach and the ground was trembling from them. The infantry soldiers climbed over those tanks and headed towards the village. We saw what way their offense was advancing, so we spent that night, and the other, and the other one after that, inside those woods.

We were dragging our children and headed towards another village. There we gave them something to eat and drink from what people who had abandoned the village had left behind. They had had some beans, and some bread loafs were still fresh, as they had run away upon hearing the automatic rifles. We had something to eat and then at 5 a.m. we moved on. They moved us on with another tractor from there. They sent us to stay with my family but there were many refugees who had sought shelter there already. They had finished their attacks on those sides and would not return this way anymore. But this was just another of their tactics, and they had burned our house destroying all of our possessions.

The fiercest attacks started after NATO had agreed to start bombing them. We were in a stable and could not even get our own children; you did not know what direction were the bullets coming from.

When they started with the attacks that day in March, they then assembled us all. They would even find us in the mountains hiding and assembled us in the village school. All of us women with our children were there for three days.

We went out to look for flour in the neighboring houses. We did manage to bake some three loafs of bread, but it was not baked properly, it was more like dough. I had to eat something in order to be able to breastfeed my baby. I had no milk in my breasts, and my baby was crying of hunger. When they came they even took away from us the bread we had managed to prepare and kicked us out of the school.

Seselj's paramilitaries came and then Arkan's. The first ones were Seselj's. We knew which ones were whose as they would shout out loud "Long live Seselj." Those that shouted "Long live Seselj" wore long coats. They were looking for golden jewelry. I had my golden jewelry with me as my husband had instructed me not to leave it home and that I should have it just in case.

Arkan's paramilitaries were utterly crazy. They all wore masks; their heads were all skin shaved and they all wore some scarfs over their heads.

They had all the tools for massacre. They took a two-year-old boy from his mother and one of them placed his knife over his throat. "I have a soft touch, I have a soft touch, don't you worry!" he's shout. Children cried and screamed.

My baby was sick and I had no mil to feed her, I had nothing to eat and I knew my baby was going to die. Then they came in-between women and girls and started to kick us all. Some of them they pushed into houses, to make sure if there were any KLA fighters inside them. That's when they separated about 20 of us, they dragged us all behind the school yard kicking us on our chests.

There they undressed us and collected our clothes so as to set them on fire.

When they sent us behind the school yard, there were young girls there, there was an elderly woman of at least 65, and even pregnant women. They undressed us all, had us lean against the wall naked facing it, and then they started to rape us. A girl was crying and screaming very loudly. My mother-in-law then spoke and asked them to release me. Some of them were a bit nicer, some were meaner. One of them asked "which one is your daughter-in-law?" My mother-in-law called me to approach her. Three women who were closer to her ran before me saying "It's me, it's me." But my mother-in-law said "it's neither of them." "I am her daughter-in-law," I said and then they hit those girls with the back of the riffle on their knees and they fell on the ground. I picked up

the clothes of another woman and quickly wrapped them around my body so as to face my mother-in-law. Then some other women gave me some clothes, and later we all joined the raw of some women moving. And I thought that was it, and I was saved. I was saved, I thought.

The women who were left there behind the school yard were never found and to this day nobody even knows where their bodies are buried. So we joined the raw, and were made to sit down with the face against the soil. They were firing on every side. That's where we were until late in the evening when more Serbs joined, and they started to sing. They all had long beards; they had assembled lambs, sheep, they were singing their Serbian songs and whistling. Many things they had stolen they had hanged on their tanks; the golden jewelry was hanging from their tanks. They made us keep our heads low, and they lead on their tanks while we walked behind them.

They would constantly hit us on our ribs with the back of their riffles. I was carrying my baby in my arms. One of my children was holding the hand of my sister-in-law and the other I was holding with my hand so as not to lose them in that raw of people. We started to move with my children, my mother in law and my sister in law. When we arrived at a village they separated all of the elderly men. They killed 13 old men in front of our eyes. One of them was saying "Look carefully and see which one is your father!" They would select the poor old men, make them kneel and shoot them against their head. Then they had the women who were pushing their mothers on a wheelchair, as they could not walk, move them to the nearby woods and then went to the woods and killed the old women. And then they would leave those dead women on wheelchairs inside the woods, or they'd kill them and then push the wheelchairs down the wood.

We started to move on and then a grenade fell and exploded in front of us. Many died; I saw beheaded women, women with no legs or arms. Then I noticed I had also been wounded by a part of that grenade, and saw that my daughter was also bleeding in her face. I was hit on my breast and my leg.

When I saw my girl bleeding I said to my mother-in-law, "My daughters been hit by the grenade". They would look at the people who were wounded and could not move anymore and they put them on the side in order to then kill them. My mother-in-law said, "Walk and don't even turn to see your daughter as they will kill you and your baby too." How could I walk though; my leg was bleeding. I asked my mother-in-law to hold on to my baby, "I'm shaking and cannot walk any longer, you hold the girl." Other women gave me some dippers to cover my baby and they tied up my leg so as I could move until we went to the city. On the way my mother-in-law said "You know... your baby is dead!" "What do I do now, where do I leave her?" I asked. I was wounded, and had a wounded leg. There were still some policemen and some soldiers, from the regular army, but the ones wearing masks were the ones who did the killings. I took my baby and put her down next to a mill. I never want to go to that mill again in my life. When I did, this Serbian uniformed soldier goes to me "Don't leave it there; a dog might eat it." He was himself yelling to me "Don't leave it!", barking like a dog, "Take it!" he'd say in Serbian, "Take it!" So I picked her up. When we approached the city they threw us into a valley and there they separated us and shoved us up into a factory. They had about 130 people inside that factory, and we did not dare see where they are taking the rest, as we were to stay

inside that factory. My mother-in-law took off her coat and laid it down for me. She kept it at it was cold. Women came to me and catered to my wound. They found some scissors and removed the part of the flesh that was infected. Then they put some flour on it so as to stop the bleeding and then tied up the wound. It got somewhat better. As for the breast, I could not do much; I just could not stop my bleeding, as I was breast-feeding my baby and she wanted to suck on it. I started to feel feverish, my temperature raised.

Some women found me some milk and I gave it to my baby trying to wet her lips. She started to open her eyes, she had been alive. And we stayed there for three nights, while I was very sick, yet my baby started to get better. There was a doctor there to whom I am grateful for as long I shall live.

All of the Serbs were assembled in front of the factory and they had captured a lot of young men. They would jump over their bellies with both feet, beating up our youngsters. The blood was screaming downwards. If they would hit someone with the back of their rifle, the victim would give away their watches, and even the gold those the young men had. They would kick them and load them on trucks. We the women started to cry and scream. A Serbian guy approached and he beat up an old man. He also attacked and beat up a young girl, just because she had short hair. "You KLA huh?" he said to her and beat her up in front of us all. Then they yelled at us for screaming and they put us all inside again.

They put us all inside and I thought they were going to take away all the young men as they were loading them on trucks. I thought they will take them and go away. When we got inside, two of the shorter men came in and said to us "Leave your children and come out!" But we all got out with our children as we did not want to lose sight of them. I did not want to accept parting with them, so I held them tight against me and thought to myself "Let them kill me together with my children as I will never leave them." You understand at that point that children are the core of your own soul.

We started to cry there and they said to us, "We have killed your husbands and burnt your houses. What else are you waiting for? Why are you not on your way to Albania yet?" "You killed our husbands and destroyed our homes but I will not let go of my children. Kill me with them." He took away his gun and then I saw some children coming out on their own, of mothers who let them out on their own. He was very upset that I came out with my children, that he slapped me so hard on my ear that I had hearing problems for a long time.

They beat me up and took away my children, and the children started to come out. We were 130 people, 50 of us they separated inside that place. They took the children out. We lost our minds, cried and screamed so hard, I will never forget those sounds (sobs). And then we saw so many soldiers and masked men with guns, knives and screwdrivers. They held their tools against us and then a big guy wearing a mask came in. He had a golden tooth. He yelled at us "In less than one minute I want you undressed. Take off all the clothes! I will not wait! Start undressing immediately!"

We were about 50 women inside, out of a total of 130 people. You cannot imagine all of the screaming and crying. We did not know which one to console. We did not dare approach any of the other women. They were beating them up. They undressed us forcefully, they would cut out bras with their knives to



take them off. They brought a knife against my chest (sobs). I was wounded on my leg and breast, but they did not spare me. My breast was bleeding. I lost my conscience. Later when I came to my senses I remember only that I had two of them on top of me. One was holding me and the other one was... doing his thing. All of us women lost our minds. They continued so for like two or three hours and never opened the doors. And outside there were our children and older men and women. They would hear our screams. The women there were all in one way or another known to one another. I had lost my conscience and remember almost nothing, I just recall that when those from outside came in, my mother-in-law threw a blanket at me. They took some of the women with them, 30 remained inside and another 20 were taken away. When those from outside came in, my mother-in-law came to cover me. My daughter was five at the time and she recalls "Mum, you were all screaming and crying inside."

Then women started to wash up with some warm water. It was difficult to find water at that time. We stayed there for another week and they were always nearby somewhere. We were constantly under their surveillance.

They returned the next day. The next round started the next day. I climbed the attic with another young girl, and we were saved in the attic. We did not go down until it was all finished and they were gone.

Then old women came in holding what they could find from the houses, and covered us. They were trying to make us some food, so as to feed us, but it was difficult to help the women. Then they brought in some doctors to try and help with our wounds.

We remained in that factory for another week as we had nowhere to go; we did not know if our sons were alive, and if anyone had died! We went out on the valley; we sat down and cried as we were so scared about our fate. During that week we buried a total of six children as they all died out of starvation. We would dig a grave deep enough as to fit the small bodies. Then we would go out and cry over those graves.

After one week I saw my brother and my husband coming down from the mountain towards us. I was so embarrassed to come in front on them. They had heard what had happened to us but they said not a single word about it. My brother came first, then some of my cousins who were now wearing a uniform, and then my husband. Then my mother-in-law said to me, "Say nothing, let them see with their eyes that you have been beaten up, as other women will also say they were beaten up". And that's what we decided to say to them, that we were just severely beaten up. But I thought to myself, he may learn it today or he may learn it later. Let him know here and now and let him decide while I am still here. Though we were both there, I had difficulties recognizing him, knowing if he was indeed my husband or not. When he approached he looked at me and the others afterwards. I wasn't the only one in that state, all of us were. Each one of us looked sick and exhausted. I approached and hugged my husband, my brother, all of my cousins who had managed to get alive from the war. My husband asked, "Are you safe?" "We're safe", I said. He embraced me again and asked "Where are the children?" We were all gathered there, but I pulled my husband to the side and told him exactly what had happened to us "So take me or leave me" I said to him, "this is what they did not just to me, but all of us." He said he knew it, and added "You will be my wife the way you have always been." He was very supportive.

KFOR forces then entered, but I did not see them as I had lost my conscience. I thought to myself "Here it goes again." My husband and mother-in-law suffered from my attitude later. I just could not love anyone anymore. I just could not adapt to life anymore; my life had been destroyed, it was not as it had been before the war. For a long time I even had problems sleeping. I would go to sleep, and then in the middle of the night I would wake up, get up, thinking I have to hide, they are coming, they are coming in, I would scream in my sleep and wake up crying.

Everyone saw I was going through hell. My father-in-law was also aware of it. We were trying to rebuild our lives, but I simply had no will, in spite of having my children. I went to the garage to hang myself; my father-in-law found me. He removed the rope from my neck, "What are you doing my daughter? What is it?" I was emotionally very disturbed.

I did suffer a lot after the war. I was psychologically imbalanced for at least three years. I was taking antidepressant pills.

And then from 2008 on I am very thankful to this NGO in which we are discussing. I must have been so closed down inside myself, but now I feel much better. That year was my first time narrating about my experience of the war. And there weren't just two or three other women there... there were many who told others about our experience of the war, as there was nobody to stop us talking about it. When I first spoke about those things I did not know I would be talking about it again. When I came to the association for the first time. My husband encouraged me, "Other women are going, why don't you go too?" he said. There were many of us, about two dozen women coming up together and speaking about the experiences of the war.

I started to notice the change after I spoke. I started to find people more accepting towards me. At times it seemed that I no longer felt anything about what had happened to me. And for the last two years now I am getting on much better with my husband. We are getting along fine. I sense that I feel closer to my husband because I never wanted to be intimate with him... and he was very understanding. He is a very reasonable person, a very quiet one. I am very upset myself, and whenever I get upset, he calms me down, he speaks softly to me "Let us go out for some fresh air, for a walk. Come! Why worry? There is nothing to get upset about, my love. Why worry? The war's over, finished, it is to be forgotten. We need to look towards the future, the children, the family." He is such a quiet type, and I am thankful to the Lord from the bottom of my heart for having such a husband.

Today, the best thing I expect to happen to me is to see that my children get schooled. I just want them to finish the school, find employment and pray that this thing does not repeat. God willing it never happens again. Oh dear God I beg of you!

And what I have hoped for I see is gradually coming to life. Surviving all of that suffering was worth it, I see now it was worth struggling and surviving so as to see my children grow up.

I am thankful you presented us with this opportunity to talk, I am really looking forward to see the book and read it. I really want to have the book in my hands. I want other mothers in Kosova to also be able to read it so that mothers can read about what other mothers have experienced.



## 02 - E.T. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • IT HAPPENED TO ME TWICE

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She has been sexually abused twice within a few weeks. She is still struggling to be accepted by her family. Her younger son, a former KLA fighter, has observed from the distance when women were put inside a building and raped. He has also seen his own mother enter that building. He is not supportive of her. He even condemns her for this tragedy. He tortures her asking, "Why did you accept to enter that building?"

“They would fear that NATO would see their movements and bomb the school. So they came in at night, did it quickly and got out. They'd say “Let us do this quickly before they bomb us.” They banged my head really hard.”

First Person Narration:

- **YOU COULDN'T DISTINGUISH**
  - **BETWEEN THOSE BASTARD**
- E.T

My mum raised three children, me and two brothers. I was the oldest. My brothers have died, only I still live. I grew up on my own until I was six. At the age of six my parents divorced. My father remarried. They divorced because my mum could not bear any more children. That was the only reason. So my father remarried and then a year later he had a son. One year after that he had another son. I lived with my father and my step mother, but I grew up with the feeling that she was not my mother. I never saw my mother again. She remarried and I never saw her again. Until I got married myself, we had no contact with one another at all.

I only finished my first year of elementary school. In fact I did about six months of it. My father interrupted my schooling as he wanted me to help with raising up my little bothers. My step mother could not manage on her own, plus she had two small children in a row.

If I were to go to the yard and play with other girls my age, my step mother would complain to my father when he'd return from work, saying “Your daughter would not help me.” I would always fear that my father would punish

me, asking "Why are you neglecting the boys?" I grew up a bit, and at the age of 12 he had me engaged. My father did it on his own, because I knew nothing. It was not like nowadays when girls chose the loved ones themselves... no, no, no, I had never seen my husband beforehand. My father had done the military service with him. He was my father's generation. Yeah, that's it. My husband the same generation as my father. He had been married for 25 years with his first wife. His wife was alive, but she had had problems bearing children and that's why he had decided to try marry a young girl. I was still a child. But he was happy to have a child like me. He said, "A child will bear you children, an old woman is hopeless." I never knew what it meant to engage and get married before. So when the day came, he came to ask for me and said, "We want to get a bride, she is suffering here. You have a lot of children and she cannot cope..." My husband came with his wife. So they came and made a deal with my father. They kept me "under the ring" as they'd call it, for about two weeks. They even brought some clothes as engagement present. Two wooden trunks they were. The deal was to come and take me after two weeks had passed. The wedding started and the girls started singing. When the women who were with the groom's wedding guests came, the girls would sing making up lyrics to mock them. My cousins were all doing that for example. I knew nothing about it at the time. They'd come up with lyrics. My friends would take care to see that the traditional wedding rituals were observed. But I felt no pleasure at all. When I came to my husband's place, they'd await us with musical instruments, singing... There were many invitees. But at the time it was the month of Ramadan. Some people were fasting some were not. The imam was also there. Than the tradition was for the brother in law to pick you up and send you to your bedroom. So he picked me up and it was easy for him, as I was still a child. He was about 40 at the time, I was only 12 and my husband was 42 years old. He had been married for 25 years to his first wife. Then he came to the bedroom, he started taking off my wedding dress and my gloves. And I was scared and started to cry. And he said to me, "Why are you crying, you will have a lot of fun and you will enjoy it." He also said "I will take you to your mother, and you will see her. So don't you worry about a thing. Your mother will come to you." So he would say things like that. Than he suggested that we lay down. He asked me to take off his shoes and socks and wash his feet. I had not done that before in my life. I found a pot and some water and managed to wash his feet. Then he asked me to undress him and prepare him for bed. I couldn't do it. "Come, don't be shy for from now on I am yours and you are mine. We will share everything from now on" (sighs). I remember that first night like it was yesterday. I undressed him and we lied down. He started to touch me, caress me. But I didn't feel comfortable. I cried, not silently but loudly, I cried and sobbed, and was very loud. He asked me to calm down and not cry. "How can I not cry? Where am I here?" "You will have fun and enjoy yourself." "No," I said, "I will never have fun!" Then we started the intercourse, but, you can imagine, having an intercourse between a grown-up middle-aged man and a child. So I lost my virginity. I saw my blood and got even more freaked out. He saw it too and said "Ah, that is good. That is very good." "What's good about it?" I asked. "You have ruined me." He said, "No, that is a good thing." I had no blood coming out of me for another three years. When I turned 15, I had my first period. And

they'd say "The young bride is going to have a belly" and I'd ask "What belly? I already have a belly!" I was a child and had no idea what they meant by it. But my husband was nice to me, I must admit that. His first wife too. I confess. They were both very nice. And then I got pregnant. I had mixed feelings about it. I was happy to become a mother, but scared I might abort the fetus. I was under a lot of stress somehow. Now I have two sons.

My husband said "I feel sorry about you. I should have taken you for a grown-up son of mine, but instead I took you for myself. I feel like I am with my own child but what can I do." I said "What can I do? It was my father's decision. I had to agree to be with you." I really went on really well with his other wife. She cooked for me, cleaned for me and took care of me as if she were my mother and not the other wife. She was really very nice to me and we did get on really well.

Then my husband died. Although he was much older, I was very pleased with him. He would take me places. We went to Brezovica. We went there and had fun. His other wife looked after my children at home, and I went there with my husband. We went to Matarushka Bath, with his friends and their wives for two years in a row.

Then my mother came to visit me. My mother had heard that I got married. My mother's sister was married to my father's brother, so mum would get all of the good news and the bad news. My aunt told her about my marriage and then five or six months later, my mother came.

When she first came, she went at my husband's, but I had been visiting my father back home, so we did not meet. Then my husband took me to where my mother was remarried. I started going to my mother's for visits. I had much fun. I'd go and spend a week there. She did not have any other children there. She had told the other husband that she was forced to leave a daughter behind and therefore wanted no more children. Her husband's children from his first marriage loved her dearly. They would also treat me like I was their sister.

My children loved me and supported me. But they loved my husband's other wife more. They loved her much more. Her brothers lived abroad and would send her some money, and then she would give some money to the children so they would love her. She would give them, in dinars at the time, sometimes 5, sometimes 10 or 20 dinars even.

My oldest son found his wife on his own. He was in school and a friend of his said he had a neighbor, and introduced them. They got married. We were relatively well off. They had a big wedding, we bought a lot of clothes for the bride.

When my mother's husband died, I took her to live with me. She had nowhere to go. The Serbs had burned her house in Vushtrri. My aunt's son took her to live with her brothers. But my oldest son said "Mom, go get granny, she is living with your brothers!" So we went and got her and now we live together in the same house. My sons live in another house with their wives and I live with my mother in another one.

Before the war I remember the Serbs came to get the weapons from my husband. They came to bust up our house. He had two lawfully owned weapons. So they came to ask for the weapons. My husband wouldn't give

them. He said he possessed them legally, why give them?

My husband died before the war started. He had a high blood pressure. The Serbs had beaten him up in the protests. He was spitting blood and then he died.

My youngest son joined the Kosova Liberation Army. When the war started they would not let us settle in one place for more than three days. They would drag us from one place to the other.

I was with my daughters-in-law, with the neighbor women, with my sisters-in-law. There were many of us. And we were on a tractor with our brother-in-law. They took our tractor and made us walk on foot. My daughter-in-law had a suitcase, I wanted to help her with it. The minute they removed us from the tractor, they set fire to it. We would walk amid soldiers on both sides. Tanks were moving behind us.

They took us to a village school. Once they took us there, they kicked out all of the old men and women, as well as the children, and kept us inside. They had long knives. What could have happened inside there? The worst thing possible. Sexual abuse. Of the worst possible kind.

They came at about 10 o'clock in the evening. We were alone inside. We had no lights, it was an utter darkness, just like a prison. We couldn't see a thing. And they would come in, it would last for one hour or two, and then they would leave. As soon as they separated us, we knew what was going to happen. They left all of the elderly and the children outside. They kept the young girls and women. I wasn't the youngest or the oldest. It lasted for an hour or an hour and a half.

They would fear that NATO would see their movements and bomb the school. So the came in at night, did it quickly and got out. They'd say "Let us do this quickly before they bomb us." They banged my head really hard. They banged my head so hard, they threw me on a toilet and it still aches.

We saw all of the other women being raped. We cried and scream. And the bastards, you couldn't even tell which one was which. They all wore masks.

So, they feared that NATO was going to bomb them and they were rushing to finish it and leave. We'd be in there until 9 or 10 o'clock next morning. Then they'd let us come out of there.

We cried all night long. "What happened to us?" "What they did to us!" We'd cry and tell each other things like that. My husband's other wife was outside. She said to me "I heard you scream, I heard you all scream." She knew what had happened to us and she had cried together with us.

I felt so terrible. They let us go one morning. Then we never saw them again. They let us walk away. We went to a village and stayed there for two nights. Someone suggested that we go home. As we went home, they'd observe us from the distance and shoot at us from a nearby hill. We entered a house, all together sheltering inside it. All of the houses had been burned down. It was terrible. After a while they come down and asked "Is someone inside? Come out as we will not let anybody come here anymore. We have burned down everything" I did not dare utter a word there. I was so scared; I never spoke a single word. We all went outside. We had baked some bread during our stay there. They were still in the oven so I went and took them out before we left. I put them inside a sack and carried them in my back. Some women said, "Don't

take that bread. They will see it and then kill us." I said "Let them kill me, and if they do, I want to be carrying my bread." They asked us if we had all gathered. There were men, my husband's relatives from the villages.

As we walked for a while they stopped the men and tied their hand behind their backs. And then they killed the men. Wherever they went, they would burn the houses they'd encounter. They had some arms and they would use them to burn the houses. I don't know what sort of an arm it was. It would surprise me to see that you can burn a house with an arm. The roof tiles would fall in front of us. They killed the men. Children would see their fathers being shot and they started to scream. We did not see the ones who shot the men any more. They took us to another village. They went away, disappeared. They left us in that village and policemen in uniforms came out, saying "Line up, the doctor will check you." Check what? There was nothing there. They just wanted to have us in that house and leave us there.

They left us in the yard until dusk. They wouldn't leave us go anywhere. In the evening they decided which ones from us should enter the house. They were selecting the young women and girls.

There were three or four rooms in that house. It was a two-store house. They would point the finger and order you to enter the house. They were policemen in uniforms, but they all wore masks so I could not recognize any of them. But I saw that there was a policeman who knew us all too well. He was from our village. When they got us in there, he goes to another one, "Get her!" But the other one did not respond. "What is it? Are you afraid of women? What can they possibly do to you? Why are you fearing them?" And then he said, excuse my language, "These Albanian women are good for sucking it." And then I said to him "So it is you? You are the one who came to our village and collected our arms?" And he said, "I came here just for the spite of your husband!" I know he was the first one to come for the arms. And then they tore my clothes, they ripped them lengthwise. I started to scream and cry; I cried and screamed. After them the paramilitaries came. Long greased hair, unwashed, dressed in black clothes. I just cannot describe what we went through. They would not let us in one place for over three days, moving us from one place to another. The sexual violence was horrible. I'd rather they killed us, slaughtered us to death, decapitated us, or mutilated us by cutting an arm or a leg, whatever, but not have us experience that. That was horrible.

They were shouting and screaming from the other rooms too. They took out some syringes in which they had some white liquid. They gave that to us so as to numb us down. I don't know what it was, but they'd give that to us, and then I lost my senses and don't remember anything until I woke up the next morning. When I got up in the morning, I noticed blood coming out of my stomach. They had cut my stomach with a knife, and I was bleeding. I don't know what they did.

I was totally naked. I couldn't stop my bleeding. I was covered in blood. A friend of mine gave me a garment. We left the house as they were not there in the morning. We walked and walked. We would stop from time to time to check on the others. So it happened to me twice. Yes, twice it happened to me.

When the war ended we all knew it because we saw the NATO troops enter. When they first came we thought they were Serbian forces. They also came



with tanks, trucks and flags. When we saw the flags we were so relieved. The men in the mountains were also aware of the end of war. "We're free! Free!" The Serbs were all trying to get away. They were singing while withdrawing. The bastards were finally withdrawing. They lifted their three fingers, yelled and swore.

That's how this life is. Joy and sadness. Sadness and joy. For example, my younger son had seen them ordering to enter that house and said to me, "Why did you accept to enter there? Why did you enter?" He was a KLA fighter. The KLA soldiers saw us from the hills. They were following us from the distance. And he says "Why did you accept to enter that house?" I say "I was expecting them to kill me or slaughter me altogether. I thought they would cut some limbs so as to leave me disabled my whole life. They didn't, they only wanted to please themselves, and do the improper things so us. They raped us; abused us."

I was having such a hard time with him. Such a hard time. With the younger son. He was not supportive of me at all. The other one, as he had his own wife, he would understand. His wife was also raped. He could do nothing about it. He was with the soldiers. He did not dare do anything. They were left in the mountain. They were saying, "We could kill them!" "Yeay, right you could. You could not, because they were so heavily armed and what arms did you have? A gun in your hands." They luckily ran to the mountains and were sheltered there.

After NATO entered, we continued our way towards home, to stay in our yards if necessary. There was nothing else to do. That's where we would stay, in poverty. We had nothing.

A charity organization came and gave us a tent. It was small but better than nothing. At least we could shelter our children. What else were we to do?

I was in a hospital with a woman from Gjakova. Her daughter was a member of the parliament. And the girl came to visit her mother and her mother told her I am from Drenica. The girl asked me how did we manage to cope during the war.

Tears started to pour out of my eyes. She asked me not to cry. "I know everything", she said. "Did you report it anywhere?" "Report what?" Then she explained to me and said that she could go and do it for me. Then I said, "I will tell you like you were my sister about what has happened. But I never dared report anywhere." She gave me the address of the organization. If it weren't for this organization, maybe I would not be here today.

I was very disturbed afterwards. I tried to hang myself. I tried to kill myself. My brother-in-law found me as I tried to hang myself. A friend of mine killed herself by drowning in the well. We had both suffered the same tortures. She decided to end it by throwing herself inside a well. We just could not live with ourselves and wanted to end our lives. We simply didn't want to live any more. But my brother-in-law found me. When he did I was holding the rope and had climbed an old chair. I wanted to put it over a branch and then push the chair with my leg and end it. But I had been destined to live. I would rather be dead than have to live like this.

After the war we had more problems than joy. My youngest son would not support me. I still have problems with him. He just won't support me. He is

married and has his own family.

The older son knows about it too, and he understands. Nobody wanted for this to happen. I was not the only one there. There were other women too. Women and girls. They would cut your fingers if you opposed them. There was a girl about 14 or 15-year-old, no more than that. They cut her fingers. She wanted to defend herself by grabbing their knife. And the Serb, he pulled the knife hard and he cut her fingers off. She now has four fingers missing. I haven't

## 03 – H.A. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • THE STORY OF • SEPARATING FROM THE CROWD

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H.A. does not find it easy to go out. It is not easy when she meets glances. It is not easy, especially when she sees men in uniform. She still suffers from the crime committed against her: a rape that lasted for hours by Serb soldiers and paramilitaries. Five of them she remembers.

The victim who comes from a village in Kosova tells how women were separated from other civilians who were forced from their homes, and were held the entire night, raped several times.

A mother of three repeated three times during an interview all the details of the most difficult night of her life, after which she says she does not understand why she continues to live.

Apart from being raped, the witness has also been physically assaulted. Most of the time she had been unconscious.

She tells how many times she gained her consciousness and was helped by no-one. She had been awaited by insults and successive kicks by soldiers, whenever she attempted to regain her conscience.

She was not alone. The victim says the entire house in which the crime happened, was filled with other women, who were then released together. She did not keep the events of that night a secret. Her husband, who during the war had been a KLA fighter, needed two weeks to abandon the idea of divorce.

“... they did send us there. I had lost my conscience. They took us and then came over us, and did whatever they pleased. When I regained my conscience, I could see that there were five of them.”

- First Person Narration:
- **THERE WERE FIVE OF THEM**
- H.A.

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I was born in a village back in 1960. Born into an average kind of family. I did the first five grades of schooling. My marriage was an arranged one. My husband was three years older than me. He went to Germany right after we married whereas I stayed here in Kosova. But he came back, he couldn't stay there. When he came back, the war broke out. My daughter was just a baby when it started.

The first day the war came to our village I was having breakfast. We simply found ourselves under their fire. We came out to see what was going on. The village was full of Serbs. And they expelled us from our home.

We went to another village. We moved for two nights in a row. Then we decided to try and return to our own village. Then it continued like that... with sufferings. I was holding my little daughter in my arms, and carried a backpack with some

clothes for her. The other children were holding to my garments. We moved from one village to the other. In the beginning of the war we would not go very far. Not in the first attack. When we went back home, it was burned down to the ground. But we stayed in our own houses like that until the second attack started.

When it did, we went to another village again. When we got there, their armed forces found us and assembled us all in one field. They were shooting in our direction. Then they had us all walk to another village and then brought us towards the city. As we came out of that village, the Serbian forces started to take us women and put us aside. They brought vehicles and made us enter them. First they would take us one by one, then in the next village they put two in each. They would return some, and come back and collect others. When they pulled me from the crowd, I had my baby in my arms. They threw her away on the ground. I tried to pull back from their grip, and then three or four other Serbs came on to me. One of them kicked me in my stomach, they got my arms, dragged me and put me inside the car. Then they took us to a place and distributed us in two different houses. They came back to take us in the evening and sent us to another house.

They took us and then abused us. I lost my conscience. To this day, even when I see our own army and their vehicles, I look at them and I tremble from fear. It looks to me as if they will grab me and put me inside their vehicles.

Yes, they did send us there. I had lost my conscience. They took us and then came over us, and did whatever they pleased. When I regained my conscience, I could see that there were five of them. I remembered two of them that had pulled me inside that house, but then there were five of them. Nobody came to our help. When I saw them, I started to scream. One of them grabbed my arm and said in Serbian, "Get up, nothing happened. It's not a big deal! Get up!" He pulled my arm and lifted me up. Then they started to hit me. I sat down and pulled my arms over my head, and they kicked my arms. They would not stop kicking me.

I was alone in that room but there were other women in other rooms. In the morning they left us on our own. The ones who released us were soldiers. And they would give away things like a liter of oil or shoes, or something like that.

I had a sweater, and a jacket. I put them and came out. The weather was all torn but I managed to tie it with a string and that's how I came out. They had torn our clothes to undress us, and all I could find was that sweater.

They released us as a group and we came back together. We found our family members crying, they had thought that we had been killed. We did not dare tell anyone what they had done to us. We said that they beat us up really badly, but nothing else. I was so shocked from the rape and the kicks, I did not even recognize my own children when we came to them. I just remembered how they threw away my baby. And we came together and stayed there together until the end of the war.

During the war my husband was in the mountains. He was with the KLA. We only saw him very rarely. He would come at times and bring food to us.

I was so exhausted physically. I couldn't stop thinking what had happened to me. I kept thinking how they threw away my baby. It would be so much better to have died than have to go through all of that.

## My husband would not accept it initially

I told my husband later, when the war ended. Nobody else knows. I thought to myself that he might learn it from others, so it is best that I tell him myself. So the war ended and we came back together, in our burnt down house, without anything to our name. So I had to tell him. We sat down and I told him what had happened. "People are talking about how they collected women and raped them."

I was so embraced to tell him. Ever since the war ended he would see me cry constantly and he would ask me, "What is it? What's wrong? Why are you crying?" He would try and console me saying "The children are OK, we are OK, we're all alive, why do you feel so sad?" he'd say. "Why?"

I'd say, "How can I not worry? Can't you see we have no house? What food can I cook for the children?" I was trying somehow to avoid telling him, and answer in a manner that won't make him suspect me. And then he spoke about some other case of rape, and I started thinking that he might have heard about my case too, that someone might have told him. So I sat down and told him what I had experienced. I said, "I really am sorry for being one of them raped women. You can do as you please, but that's what happened to me." They burned us with cigarette buds, they have kicked us and stepped over us with their feet. I had bruises until very late. I said, "I was myself a victim of rape."

"What?" he asked surprised.

"I was raped," I said.

He said, "Get your things right now and go back to your home. You've been in the hands of Serbs; they did as they pleased with you. You are no good for me, and I can no longer be with you!"

## People started to talk

So our life continued. Our little daughter grew up. But people started talking, and the circumstances in the village were such that we could not continue to live there anymore. So we left the village and moved to a city. But when we went there, we were tenants. It was not our own property. Then (sighs)...

Well they started to talk about things in general. My husband said to me that they say it to him too, "Your wife this, your wife that." So he thought it was best to leave the village altogether. And we went and started to rent in the city.

It has been very difficult ever since that day. I say to myself, "My God, I hope nobody sees how we are made to live here." I feel very bad. But nobody knows here apart from my husband. But when I go out on the street I feel as if everyone is looking at me.

To other women who experienced the same I'd say: find some strength to overcome it and live on. Don't use me as an example. They should not stress like I do. And the most important for me is to catch those who have done those wrongdoings. And give them the deserved punishment. But to this day none of them got what they deserve. I, for myself, feel terrible. I feel worthless, really awful. I go out, and when I walk, I think to myself, "My God, why am I living?" I see a vehicle of our own army, our own police, and I think it is them. I get goosebumps all over my body. Before I started to come here and open up to speak, I would not dare go out at all. It is really hard. (sighs)



## 04 – H.H. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • SEX SLAVE

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She has been separated from the crowd, just like many other women. The Serbian paramilitaries separated the most beautiful women and put them inside abandoned houses. For two and a half months she had been forced to live with a paramilitary. She does not know his name, but says she is still able to draw his face. While she was there, the paramilitary had kept her locked in the room. In other rooms there were other women being held like her. "At the beginning I resisted and then I gave up altogether," says the victim. She tells how the Serbian paramilitary would even compliment her, while drinking the milk out of her breasts.

“They selected all of the good healthy women, all of the young girls, and took them to another village. They took them and to this day we don't know where some of them are. Some ran away, some have died, some have been lost...”

- First Person Narration:
- **YOU ALBANIAN WOMEN ARE GOOD**
- H.H

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I come from a poor family. We were five children to our parents; two boys and three girls. I was the youngest. When I was three years old, my father died, and our mother raised us on her own. She would make handcrafts and sell them. It was very tough for her. I did my elementary school up to the eighth grade. I was a really good student, but mother could not really support us for any more schooling. I did finish and enrolled for the secondary school but could not go due to family circumstances. When I turned 18, they promised me to a man. I didn't want to marry him, because I was very young and he was about 40. I got on well with my brothers and my sisters. Me and my youngest brother really liked going to school. He was two years older than me. At the time they would support boys to get schooled, but not girls as much. They also

supported him by buying clothes for him, although I was more skillful and smarter. My grades were always As and Bs. I had no notebooks and would always ask my friends to give me some sheets from theirs. The friends were saying, "We'll give you sheets, just you be a good student and study with us." I didn't have a school bag, no books, and that's why I was always shy because we were poor. And I helped mother for all of her needs. We had some land, a cow, animals, chicken, but we had no money. No clothes and no money, but I never wanted to abandon school. I had nothing to wear to go there. I had no footwear either. I went to school in spite of all that, and I did pass the final exam but could not continue any further.

My mother was a very capable woman. To this day people speak highly of her when they mention her. My brothers were skilled, but they grew up shy, withdrawn, the way we all were. I was really talented, and I believe I could have reached even higher and even be part of the government, who knows. My mother lived for another two years after I got married. She died when I turned 20. I would work alongside my mother, helped her with housework and with her handicrafts. And then people would ask her to marry me off to them. She would receive offers. My mother could not really decide, as many people got interested. They'd say "We should have her, as she is hardworking and a good girl." Then mom went and found this 40-year-old man who had been married once, but his wife had died. I was not told about it at all. They came one evening, had a talk with my mom. She started to convince me, "It's better if you marry, he is rich, he will support you." I was young, and I got convinced. In the end this husband-to-be said, "I will find her a job, and will school her." Long story short, they engaged me to him. After three months we got married. He was 40, I was 18. I had prepared a lot of handicrafts for my life after marriage. Even to this day, I do all sorts of handicrafts.

The night before marriage we had the girls goodbye party. The girls came together. They would present me with a handkerchief to, like, cry. The next day they would come to congratulate. My husband brought the henna powder. Then my older sister held my arms... You had to put your hands against a rock. They did my fingers with red henna. You were not obliged to cry for parting from your family, but when relatives and friends came, I cried.

On Sunday morning a woman started preparing me for the wedding. There were no hairdressers at the time in the village, so an older woman would come and help you make up, dress up, put on the wedding dress.

After a year my daughter was born. Then I had a son and then another daughter. All three of them came one after another.

I got on very well with my husband. I was pleased that he advised me really well. My husband is a good man. He is a smart man. And he has been, thank God, very smart, noble, capable, skilled, although he was much older. I never had any problems with him.

We got on very well together. And his mother was very good to me. I loved her very much, his sister too. I got on very well with them. Even today, her children call me 'mom', because I helped her raise them as I did my own. A very pleasant family, loving and dear. We never had any issues among us. I also always made sure to meet the requests of my husband.

The births were all timely. I gave birth to my daughters at home, while my son I

delivered in hospital. My son was delivered in hospital for safety reasons, otherwise I would give birth at home. My daughters I delivered at home, in evenings.

I used to work all day, I even helped my husband mix the cement. When he would come home at 10 p.m. I would cook dinner. There were many people in the household. We would make four large pans because the sisters-in-law would come and the family would be bigger. When I'd have pains, I would hold on to the furniture. I would try to hold on to something. I'd remain like that until it went away. Then I would continue to make the pastry.

I was making dinner that night, a pumpkin pie, I remember to this day. I had turned on the fire of the wood oven to make it ready for the bake. I found it hardest to cut the wood, because I would cut the wood for the oven. I would use the axe. My husband would say, "You don't know how to use the saw." I'd say, "I've never used it", and I learned then how to cut wood using a wedge. I would make a wedge with an axe, then I would hit the wedge and the wood would cut. So I put the four pans to bake, and we had dinner. My mother-in-law came and said, "You ate so much, you ate half of that pan, you will not give birth tonight." "Oh well," I said, as I didn't want to oppose her. I was very quiet and obedient, and I am like that to this day. When the sister-in-law went to her room to sleep, my mother-in-law went to watch TV on the other room, which is at the end of the yard. My pains started, but I still cleaned up. I was quite hardworking. I prepared the raiser to cut the baby's cord when it gets delivered, and some red thread. The thread had to be red. I also put a blanket on the side next to me. I put a plastic bag under the blanket for safety, I set on both knees, I pressed my stomach with both my hands and it came out. I was totally on my own. Nobody else was there, even after 20 minutes had passed. So I came closer to the door, I opened it up, I was still on my knees over the baby. I called and called but nobody came. It was 11 p.m. My husband's niece was in the living room with my mother-in-law and then came and saw I had given birth. My mother-in-law could not believe, as she had said I would not give birth that night. My husband came, they tended to me, I then wrapped my baby and held her by my side and fell asleep. Before though, my mother-in-law asked, "What do we do now?" I knew what I was to do. I tied her cord with a red thread and then I cut it. And I took my sweater and put it on, I put on my underwear, and I stood up. I took my baby and washed it. I had a wood stove, I put a pot of water to heat on the stove and then had warm water to wash the baby with. I washed the baby, put her to sleep. Then went to the kitchen to fetch some milk. I washed my hands carefully. I boiled the milk, and drank a glass of it. I tried to breastfeed my baby but she would not suck any milk. I waited until the morning to try again. I worried that she might die, I didn't sleep well that night. I had cut the cord slightly long. I cut it again, and cleaned it up. My mother used to be very skilled and a good housewife. I learned things from her. I woke up in the morning, washed my eyes and hands, made some breakfast, I made the dough ready for the bread. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law were asleep in other rooms. They do not get up until 9 or 10 a.m. I gave birth to two children at home, but they took me to hospital for one birth. They took me in the evening due to my breast. I had a lot of milk.

I have been always very careful with the children. I would never let them wake

up before me. I prepared everything, their clothes, their food. Even if they found thrown clothes somewhere, I would make sure I washed them, fix what needed to be fixed on them. Other children would even envy them for those clothes. I would fix that garment and they would wear it. I even remember, a neighbor of my oldest daughter went and asked her to loan her a sweater and wore it. She had tried on that sweater once, so she came back for it.

My daughter would go and look after the cow when it was outside. She once saw the neighbor throw away old clothes. She recognized her sweater. It had been torn, a mouse had probably eaten some of it and made a hole. My daughter picked it up and brought it to me. I put it down on washing powder and washed it so many times, I made it brand new. I also made sure I closed the hole. On Monday my girl could wear it to school.

The neighbor girl then came to her and asked if she could borrow the sweater again. And my daughter has always been very withdrawn and... She goes to my daughter "I want to go to a wedding; will you lend me that sweater?"

My girl has worn that sweater for four years and she went to school and even finished school with that torn old sweater. You couldn't see it was torn as I had really fixed it well, I had patched it, made it look like it had a flower there. I took it off a jacket to put it on that sweater.

With my husband we raised three children together. It was hard, as we were poor, but we faced all of the challenges together. But the situation started to get worse in general just before the war. It was a really difficult time. We would just sit and listen to what is going on, what is being said. Before, when the Serbs where in Kosova, it was very difficult. We have lived close to them and suffered a hell from them. They would poison our students as they were in the classrooms. Then they started to go on the young boys, for a word they wrote on the black board they would take them, beat them up. We did not dare walk the streets, everything was limited. It got worse and worse during the 1990s, until it broke out.

They mistreated my husband on the day of Eid. They came before him as he was going to the mosque. They said to him, "If you want to go to the mosque, each must pay 10 DM." And they were several friends going on a tractor together, and they had to come off it, collect the money between them, so they collected about 200 DM. Our men went to the mosque to pray for the Eid and came back. On their way back they were stopped and robbed again.

The day the war broke out, you could hear the firearms and see the flames. They were shooting in my home village and we were all afraid. We would go to each other; we'd see what was going on. When it turned dark, they started to loot the houses, set them on fire, kill the livestock and people. You would hear people saying that so and so was killed, and we then thought it was best to leave house and run away. The entire village people assembled and we decided to go towards the mountains collectively.

Two attacks we witnessed. Twice did we leave our homes, and twice did we return. First time it was during the winter. When we left for the second time, it was spring 1999. We went through such hell. We ran away to our village but the police came and picked us up. We were about 1500 women or even more. We were only women, children and the elderly.

They selected all of the good healthy women, all of the young girls, and took

them to another village. They took them and to this day we don't know where some of them are. Some ran away, some have died, some have been lost...

We were in the crowd. They would take you, grab your arm and put you inside the house. One by one like that. They were around the houses with their police cars. I was among the women. I have been locked in a room for 22 days. 22 days inside a room. They separated me from my family and then I saw hell with my eyes. I was locked in a room without any windows. If I were to see those men again I would recognize them. But I don't know their names. They were careful and never used them in our presence. The man would come in the evening and stay inside with me until morning. He would leave in the morning and return in the evening. That went on for 22 days.

They had red ribbons tied on their shoulders, and wore black hats. They were dressed in black. They were armed, carried a short automatic rifle. To this day I remember the face. I can draw the man. It was always the same man. He would come in the evenings and leave in the morning. It was terrible. It would have been easier to die. Death does not compare to it. You could see death around you, but you could not die. And you couldn't kill yourself. I tried but I couldn't. I was totally naked, and he hit me and kicked me. My entire body was covered in bruises. Two years it took me to recover from the injuries and the bites. In the beginning I resisted a lot, then I was too weak to even try. He would give me injections; they would bring me food to eat. Him, the Serb himself brought it for me. In the evenings he would bring a man and he would give me the injection. They would not talk to me. They spoke to each other. In Serbian, but I understood it all.

It was a house. A guest room in a house. There were other women in other rooms. Many. You could hear them scream from the other rooms. There were older women, young girls. It was terrible. We were isolated in the middle of the forest. Nobody heard or saw us apart from God. We had surrendered totally until the day came for them to release us. But they never told us anything. They left us there and the tanks just moved away. We knew nothing. It just went completely silent. No more noises, vehicles or anything. I managed to open a window and jumped down from it. And then I ran away, walked and walked, until I was so tired that I had to lay down on the field to rest. Two guys approached. I know them, and I am very thankful to them. They asked, "What's wrong? Are you wounded?" I said, "Yes, I am wounded, I am sick." "Who brought you here?" they asked. I asked if they could give me some water. They went and found water somewhere in a nearby village. Then they told me about what was going on and how people are moving. They said the tanks moved away and they could approach. They found a carriage and a horse and they put me on that carriage that the horse was pulling. They took me home. There they helped me wash and dress up, and they gave me some food. Two women were there and asked me who I was and who my family was. Then one of the man notified my husband and he came with a tractor and picked me up.

An Italian organization came next morning to check on me. They said I was too ill to remain there and that I had to be taken to a proper medical facility. I had lost so much weight, I was all skin and bones. My husband had found the children and brought them home. My son was injured on his leg from a bomb shell. They had thought that I was killed. After I arrived the children came. I was



so weak that I couldn't even lift an arm. That organization helped me and took me to hospital, and I stayed there for four or five days. I received transfusions every single day there. I was in the Peja hospital. The hospitalization helped a lot. I started to gain strength. I could even get up and sit down, all on my own. They had put some medicine all over my body, because I had been covered in bruises. They would rub it on my arms and back and legs. Then I had an operation in my private parts due to the bad infection. Half of it is now removed. That's what made me experience all the trauma. I would never dare go out in the dark. I would not be able to bake bread. My children took care of me once I came back home. They made food for me. I could hardly do anything for about four years. Then I started to gradually gain strength. I tried to hang myself twice. Once I drank the Domestos bleach, but my children came nearby so I didn't have much. I couldn't when I saw them. I just wanted to die. I just didn't want to be alive any more. They rushed me to hospital. I spent a month and a bit more there. I have problems with my stomach to this very day.

Back in the house where I was held, there were other women. But we could not talk to each other. We were locked separately in different rooms. They would lock us and take the key. "You stay there," he would say. The same person every day.

Each one of them had his own slave woman. They would choose the one they liked, and then locked them in the rooms. There were quite a few of them. They would bring some food in the morning, they brought goulash, bread. I had troubles sleeping. I was too afraid to sleep. I could not sleep at all. I have problems with my sleep to this day. I would put some salt and then I would drink a glass of water trying to sleep. But I couldn't sleep. All that violence. He would come in the evening and assault me until morning. May God save you from experiencing what we have. He'd rape me forcefully until I was so tired that I couldn't get up on my feet. I can't even describe it. It would last maybe 20 to 30 minutes. And then again, and again and again. It would happen up two, three or four times before morning... In the morning he would go out, I have no idea where they went, then he would be back.

He was about 30 years old. He would always say good things. He would say, "You Albanian women are nice, you are sweet. Your breast milk is sweet." I was still breastfeeding my son. He would suck my milk. We have gone through terrible hell. I don't know how some people can sit comfortably in their posts, and not bother at all about our sufferings. How can they sit comfortably? How can they sit for just one day without thinking about providing some assistance for us? I might be suffering for a loaf of bread for example. And who can he sit in his office and get a 200-euro salary a month without caring about the horror I have been through?

After the war, life was very hard. I knocked on so many doors for help. I never found any help apart from here at KRCT. I begged everyone, every association, I asked for help everywhere, I told them all the truth. I even have witnesses, my husband is my witness, my friends who will tell you about this are my witnesses. Maybe I cannot really explain things the best way. I have a friend who will tell things in a clearer way and explain what we went through.

I told my husband later. My husband saw me when they took me. He was in the mountains, looking at us from there. He said, "You have my support. I could not

do anything to help you. I even saw when they took you and I did nothing to help you. I need to support you in every way possible." And he does.

I started to talk. I spoke to my friends, then spoke to the association. Before I started to speak I was much worse. I remained silent for about four years. I did not even tell my husband. He knew about it, but I simply could not tell him. I was reluctant, and did not speak to anyone. Everyone would say "She is sick!" And that bothered me, as I was not sick. That was really difficult to stomach. But what was I to do? Things had happened without me choosing them.

## 05 - H.K. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • **RAPING THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD**

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With their children and other family members they had left the village with the idea of searching for a safer place. For months they wandered from one village to another. It became harder and harder for a mother and her children as time was passing.

Under the orders of Serbian paramilitaries, she and six other families were placed in some abandoned houses in a city of Kosova. All were children and women. They were systematically raped for several months. Children were not spared. She is convinced that she has managed to abort using folk medicine seven weeks after the first rape.

“Three of them were staying by the door and one came in. They would wait for their turn. And this one grabbed me. I pushed him. He used his riffle to push me. He caught me behind the table. He did what he wanted and I had lost my senses. I lost my conscience.”

First Person Narration:

- **I ABORTED THE FETUS I HAD FROM THEM**
- H.K.

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I was born in 1969. My childhood was a difficult one. We were poor. Misery, hardship. We grew up under harsh circumstances. My father was unemployed; we were many children. We suffered a lot. We went through so much. Imagine, there were days my mother managed to bake a bread. She would not eat at all. She would start to cry. I was the biggest child. I would see our mother cry and I'd say, "I don't want to eat either." I swear to God. Life was so difficult. We were all good at school though. In spite of what we went through and the hardship, they are now all employed, some are doctors, and professors. I am talking about my brothers. We the girls could not continue our schooling.

I got married at 17. It was an arranged marriage.

My husband's family was rich. So, the time came. We used to make so many handcrafts, maybe you remember, to have all that for when we get married. It was Saturday morning, I clearly remember, and I started to cry, because I was getting married. Not cry; I bled from my eyes. I felt so sorry about leaving mamma. So Sunday came, and it was the day for me to get married. They came to get me with two sets of drums. They were that rich and they were throwing a big wedding party. But my father felt unpleasant as he was poor. The wedding lasted for a week.

I had never seen my husband before that Sunday when we got married. I never saw him that Sunday when I first went to their house, or during the wedding, until he came to sleep in the same room with me. My husband turned out to be quite a good man. He never yelled at me, he never ordered me around, neither did he see me as lower because I came from a poor family. Never in my life. We went on quite well. His people all liked me.

I gave birth to my first child only 10 years after we got married. First I had a daughter, then God gave me a son, and then another daughter. There, three children to my life.

Before the war, I mean until the war broke out, we had a happy life. God gave me children. My daughter was in her first grade. I was happy with my husband. Never did we have any problems or issues. He showed respect for me and I respected him too.

They came as they started to collect arms. They took the hunting rifle from my father and even slapped him in front of our eyes.

Every night at 7 p.m. the curfew started and we were not allowed outdoors until 7 a.m. the next morning. And then when the war broke out it was April.

I was preparing the dough for the bread, and a neighbor comes and asks my father-in-law, "Where are the boys, where are the women, the girls!?" He looked like he had lost it. My father-in-law said, "Well some are in the field working, and others are inside." "Assemble them quickly, the war has started. We're finished." "What are you saying?" "I swear to God. It's true. Tell the entire neighborhood." We all went crazy. The war?

"Run away, because we don't know what awaits us!"

"Where shall we go to?"

The Serbs started coming towards us. Military vehicles, cars, surrounded us.

What were we to do? The shooting started, the turmoil started, going up the mountain.

We grabbed our children, abandoned our houses and went to another village. It is a bit higher up on the other side. The war had no stopping from then on.

The police and the military were all stationed there. We spent that night without sleeping at all.

They started to shoot above the houses. Dear God, we were terrified.

There was this basement. The entire neighborhood assembled there, in our basement. And we spent a good three days there. Some would try to emerge and bring some food secretly, or something we could cook and eat, but then after three days they found us and kicked us out of there. The men had run away in the mountain earlier, so they were not there. It was only us women there. Men were afraid to remain with us. The day the shooting started they all left and there was no chance for them to return home any more. We would find

a way to send them some crumbs of food, secretly of course.

"Move it now, get out of here, go wherever you want."

We didn't know where to go. What way were we to go? We set off towards a nearby village. The night that we set off, my son, my only son, fell off a balcony. I had gone out to fetch some water from the well and take to the children inside. I had left my son on the balcony. But then a bomb exploded, and my son got scared. He jumped from the balcony and fell on concrete. He tore off his forehead and his eyebrow.

I thought that he had died. I took him inside; he was covered in blood. We put him on a tractor and sent him to a doctor in a nearby village. He put some stitches, closed his wound and I am very thankful to him, wherever he might be now. And we went back to the other village. Back there, everyone thought my son had died. But he gained his strength and soon got better. They then came to the house and caught us all there.

They assembled us in one field, all of us. We were out in the open for three days and nights. The first night I remember, it got very cold and started to rain. We had all gathered to feel warmer, without food or water. The children were crying. Some people had taken some flour and were trying to bake some bread there with some fire. They threw bombs on us. They killed a man, and then a woman. Cries, children terrified, it was horrible. It was so hard to have to suffer all that. Shells were flying over our heads. They came in among us and collected young men, choosing them at random. They would even take boys as young as 11. They took them away.

Three days later they released the men and so we got on our tractors again and headed towards the city.

We were moving across a field when many soldiers appeared before us. They were all dressed in black and masked. All were armed and were pointing the arms towards us. They started to swear at us, beat us up. They laughed and joked, swore a lot, while we were all crying and screaming.

They ordered us to go back, so we did for another two hours and went to a field full of people.

We stayed there for ten full days. Then then came, burned our tractors and ordered us to walk one after the other.

I had one of those concrete trolleys where I had put my daughter and pushed her. But the wheel would not move in the mud. It was raining heavily.

God wanted it to rain, and it was pouring. And it was muddy. My daughter was only seven weeks old. She had lost her conscience. My God, I thought, my girl is going to die. I did manage to push my daughter to the bridge. I left her on the bridge. Got her down. I said to myself, "Dear God. Forgive me." I could not do anything else. Had I stayed there, I would have been killed.

I parted from my little girl. I was exhausted, could not catch my breath, and it was so hard. There is nothing like parting once and for good from your own offspring. I asked Lord to forgive me, I closed my eyes and I put my girl down.

Nobody knew what was to happen to us. We were all traumatized, exhausted... and they were pushing us to our limits. The minute I moved on and made a few steps, my baby started to cry. My other daughter, who was 6 at the time, went to her and started to pull her. "Leave her," I said. "No mom, I won't," she said. I said, "Let me get you and your brother to the other side of the



bridge, and I am coming back for her.”

I took a blanket from one of the tractors, tore it apart and tied it around my waist, and tied my baby around my waist with it. Then we moved without stopping. Three days later they let us enter a village. We all went inside a school. It looked like a palace to us.

They told us that we had to move on, as we could not stay there. We decided to split and people were heading each their own way. About 60 of us took the same path. We went beyond the city and got to a village. And there we were stopped again; we were all ordered to remain there. “Come on now, either you'll give us all of the gold and money you have, or we will slaughter you all!” they were saying. They had gathered animals, and they were killing in front of our eyes horses and cows, dogs even, whatever animal they could. I made some steps backwards, with the baby around my waist and my son on the trolley. But this man with a scarf around his head grabbed my son, put him down his feet, pulled a knife from his wrist and put it against my boy's neck. And he says “Money, gold, or the child is gone.” I said, “Please, for the love of God, I have no other son but him.”

Another one saw me cry and hit me with the back of his rifle on my back. I begged, “O please, I beg of you, don't kill this boy. Kill me rather. Kill my daughters too. Kill me right away, but do not kill this boy.”

I had a chain, two rings on my fingers. I took them off quickly, and presented them to him. I took off my earrings too, and that's all I had. There, I said to him, that's all I have. Please, kill me but let this boy live. Please don't kill him.”

They searched us thoroughly. Our bags as well. They let my son go. But when he released him, he gave him such a hard push, that the boy fell on the asphalt, so his nose and mouth got filled with blood.

These ones were uniformed. It was a green color uniform. Mostly green and then around here it was a bit more mixed with yellow. Their scarfs were black.

But they would not let us go. They held us there. We'd be there all day long. They insulted us. All sorts of swearwords. “I will tear off your (private parts)”, they'd say, “I will do this and that.” They would laugh, drink alcohol, joke. They kept us there all day. Before it got dark they said we needed to go to the city. And they asked us to each find a house. We each had a young girl with us, 17-year-old. The one with me was ever so beautiful. They said “Should she run away, we will kill you!” She slept with us that night in a house we went to in the city. We didn't know what to expect, just chose a house and entered it. We had no idea what was going to happen. They came on to us that night, and they guarded us all night long. They would be outside or in the neighborhood. Inside the house, we screamed and yelled. The next day they said, “Remain in the same places and in the same numbers. If there's someone missing, we will kill you all. We did not dare move. What were we to do? We knew what was going to happen to the young girl. We decided to help her escape.

They came and had remembered her. They asked for her. That night the raping started.

It was the end of May. We spent three weeks here, and three there.

They all ran away, and I was left in that house with the children and the old woman.

When the paramilitaries came to me, they said, “Where are the others?” “They

ran away, what do I know?", I said. "How did they run away? We will slaughter the old woman now, and the children too. I said, "I did not come with anyone else here. Slaughter me. I will not get any worse. Us here are dead already." I could speak some Serbian, as I had an aunt married in Prizren. And in school we would have a class a week in Serbian, like they learn English now. I said "If you find nobody else, here I am. Kill me. There is no-one here. We're the only ones left, so do whatever you want, I have nowhere to go, nowhere to run to." And they started to come from that day on. They would refer to one of them as Boza, he was a bit older. He was a paramilitary and had his own group. He started to come, not just to me but he would go from one house to the other. He would come every day. He would enter the yard, and ask for coffee or tea. Or he would order me to make him pies and food, I would beg him, ask him not to assault me for the sake of God, and he would say, "Fuck your God. What God? There is no God here." Please, I would ask him. He brought some coffee with him one day and asked me to make him some. There was no electricity, no wood, no stove. I found some candles inside the house. I was forced to cook it with candle light. He would torture me so much. I was in the house with the old woman and the children only. He'd ask for a pie. Where was I to find the ingredients and make it for him? I was so afraid of them. A woman next door was very pleasant and she saw me one day from the yard. She asked if I had anything to eat, to feed those little children with. She brought 25 kilos of flour, 2 liters of oil, some pasta. She gave that all to me.

When they came on to me the first night, I will never forget. It was a guy called Boba, and I could read his badge, it said he was with the police. I would look at their badges. It was army and police. No paramilitaries. The regular army never touched anyone. None of them touched anyone. It was OK while they were the only ones around. But then three nights later they started to come. And there was this guy called Boba. He was a policeman. All day long he would circle the house where I was staying.

The old woman asked him, "Why are you always going round the house?" And he could understand Albanian. "I am observing the area. Stay calm," he said to her. He was a policeman. That night four of them came to the door. I had no key or anything. I would use some strings to keep the door closed. They cut them off and got inside. One of them grabbed me and started calling me his sweetheart. My God, what I suffered. The old woman screamed. The children, my little boy, too. We had only two rooms and a corridor. There was a dining table there. And he goes to me "sweetheart," and starts to chase me. Three of them were staying by the door and one came in. They would wait for their turn. And this one grabbed me, trying to kiss me. I pushed him. He used his riffle to push me. He caught me behind the table. He tried to grab me. He would bite my breasts with his teeth. I tried to protect myself, pushed him and cried. And my daughter cried, the old woman cried. I tried so hard but could not push him. That was the first time. He did what he wanted and I had lost my senses. I lost my conscience.

I don't know what else happened the first night. I was so dizzy and could not even say where I was. We had no clock to know that the time is, if they were still there or gone. We did not know. I just remember waking up. I was totally naked. My mouth, my face, my breasts, my entire body was bruised. I enter the room

where the old woman was, and she was screaming. My God, what is happening to us, she would say. There was no stopping ever since that day. Some of them would come every other night. The same guys. Then they would come again. They would come at night.

It was the time for my cycle. Then seven weeks past but I did not menstruate again. I started to throw up. I started to feel the smells more distinctly. I would get tired easily. Dear God, I screamed and cried, but they would not stop.

So I knew I was pregnant. I was calculating, as I already had had the experience with my previous pregnancies, and I could recognize the signs. And I knew that I had been impregnated by one of them.

I went to the neighboring house. The people had abandoned it; I find some food and eat it. And then I started to feel sick, something disturbed my stomach. My belly got swollen. I felt so sick. I could hardly move. I knew I was very ill. And I started to think that I would die. I tried to fight though, as I did not want my children see me die there. I thought I go elsewhere. I started to walk. It was such a hard thing to do. My stomach was swollen like a balloon. I went to a yard of a neighboring house. The old woman saw me. "What's the matter?" she asked. "Nothing," I said. "What did you do? Don't you go die on me and leave me, an old woman, to look after your children." I told her that I was pregnant. I almost died that night.

All night I was in pain. I had that food in the afternoon. I started to swell, and got sick. When the night came, I had nowhere to go. Then, at around 5 a.m., before sunlight, I remember my cycle starting again. I was bleeding.

Indeed, my cycle started again. And then, maybe some 20 minutes later, some large pieces were coming out of me.

The same people came every day. They have tortured us so much. They made us cook for them and used us.

We were subjected to sexual torture nonstop. I just could not stop them. I pushed the as much as I could but my strength was not enough. But they had us there under their control in those five or six houses in that neighborhood. In short, they made us their slaves.

It was that guy Bozo with his friends. He would use a stick to lift the skirt off a six-year-old girl and look at her panties. He would then push the girl to the ground. The old woman would cry, "It is only a child. Don't you fear God?" he would laugh, drink, like wild. He asked me that day to make him some pastry, and I said "I have no flour. Kill me, I just cannot do it!". So he pushed my daughter. He put the stick between her legs, and I still remember her cry to this day. And to this day my daughter is traumatized. She was covered in blood. How can I forgive that man? Is there a God? Is there any justice? Is there anyone on earth who can tell me? And EULEX calls me and asks me, "Do you want to withdraw your statement?" How can I withdraw my statement? I wish God granted me just one chance. Is there a God? If only for once in my life I could see them brought before justice, and sentenced. I will never forget this for as long as I live! Because they were sucking our blood. Is there justice in this world?

My girl remembers it to this very day. And she was six at the time.

Believe me. My girl then started to go to school, after the war ended. She was always frightened; she was never relaxed. Always tense, always traumatized.

My husband does not know the entire story. The old woman has died. My husband does not love me the way he used to any more. It is different now.

He did not know if we were alive until the end of war. I never told him. I was way too embarrassed. I found it so hard to do. Impossible. And I understand my husband.

He has always considered me a wife and a friend. He used to approach me and love me dearly. Very dearly. Even if I tried to mention it to him, he would lose it. Now our relations are very cold, extremely. And we don't approach each other as husband and wife again. He does not desire me, and I don't desire him. None of us approach each other. We are distant.

My older daughter always says, "My dear mom, do you remember what the war did to us. Do you remember?" I try to not let her think about those things any more. I try to avoid it, either by going out or by changing the topic. Because she often mentions it. She does not laugh, she started the school but never laughed.

## 06 - HANA:

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • I SAW NO LIGHT

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She did not have a good childhood. A failed love of youth and a marriage under extreme poverty, lack of love from her husband. He never even enjoyed the childbirth as she lost the baby soon after.

As if that was not enough, she has twice been the victim of sexual abuse. Once during the war and another time long before the war began.

“Four different persons embraced me that night in that house. One after the other. Then they beat us up, and pissed on us. Yes, they even pissed on us. It was strange. We could not find our own clothes. And I can tell you, I was surprised how strong people can be to defy suffering.”

• First Person Narration:

• **MY GOODNESS**

HANA

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We had a very difficult childhood. My father grew up as an orphan. I simply recall no good days from my childhood.

I loved going to school. But my grandfather would not allow it, he said we had to go and cater for the animals. I always liked to become a doctor. But we were so poor.

I don't remember much from my childhood, before I turned 18. That's when we used to do all the embroidery. We would come to the city, as our uncles were living in the city, and work there. We had our cousins there. I used to love them. We were very friendly. One of them said, "Will you take that young man?" he was very kind, pleasant indeed.

I liked him but I did not dare say it. He had lived in Austria. And I thought, I am a



peasant girl, who never lived abroad, I am not schooled, he will not even look at me. So I said to that girl "He would never choose me, so I better spare myself the embracement." I saw him from a distance but we did not speak. I still remember, he was ever so pleasant. And then we spoke. He wanted to meet and speak to me.

We agreed to get engaged. He said, "If your family won't give you, we will elope." It was autumn, before I turned 15. Then we came to the village, and he would see me at times. Years went by, we were very poor, but we would not let people know about it. I was worried or not continuing the school. I thought he would leave me because he will finally see there is nothing in me for him. And my grandmother used to say, "Careful, so as no-one says anything bad about you."

When I came to the village, I have no idea, but I hear people speak and they say "It is a splendid young man, we must find him a girl in the village." So without me knowing anything, they engage me to this other boy.

So because my father had agreed, my life went down the drain. My loved one disappeared. But it was different at the time: they would kill you if you opposed. If you did not agree, the grooms family would feel insulted and kill someone from the bride's family. My brothers were young. How could I jeopardize their lives. My older brother was in high school. I don't know why I did not elope at the time. Why did I worry, cry and suffer. Some of the suffering I have forgotten. Some I will never forget.

I was engaged like that for a year or so. And I kept wondering if I should marry him or not. I had never seen the man I was engaged to.

He was reputed to be very streetwise. His mother was sick, he had two brothers and no father. They only had two rooms, extremely poor, but my mom used to say, "It is enough that she is living with her own husband, that he has a job, and she won't beg for food."

When I went to my husband's house... I just cannot describe it. I took my pills and I braced myself. I cannot describe how poor they were. The mother in law was lying there, sick, poor. Mental illness. Two sons were both sane. But my husband was not totally sane. They had two rooms in total. One they left for us, there was a kitchen too. They were extremely poor and it was terrible.

When I would go back to visit my parents, I would cry there for hours. I was really disappointed. He was not a man, he would spend his day with other women, he was a loser, poor, had no food to feed himself. I was pushing my days in that house. Two years later I got pregnant with my first child. I had an accident in the yard while pregnant. My baby had suffered injuries. I went to Prishtina to the doctor. They said they had to clean me, so they did and then they said to make sure I don't remain pregnant within the first six months after the birth.

Then I gave birth to my daughter. We were extremely poor, and it was so hard. Nothing to eat or drink. I had to wash the clothes for the entire family, and they were dirty, poor, sick. And I had some pains while still pregnant, I had entered my ninth month. The fourth day or so, it was.

And a private doctor in Prishtina, she suggests to me to go to the gynecological ward in the hospital. She said there are Albanians and Serbs mixed as a team, but they have all the equipment. "I cannot treat you here," she says.

So we go to the hospital, and in the reception there were some Serbian nurses and there was a Serbian doctor. They all open their eyes widely when they see me. They put me on the table where they do the check up for patients and they started to tear off my blouse. I asked "Why don't you speak Albanian?" It was 1992.

They give me some nylon garment to wear, and they put me on a certain desk for the doctor to look at me. He presses my stomach and I feel terrible pain.

Then they put me inside a lift. They put me on a white bed with wheels and then put me inside a lift. Two nurses start to undress me, and they swear at me while taking me upstairs. They leave me with this man. He was big and had a white tie... yes, he raped me. He raped me inside that gynecological hospital there in Prishtina.

The Serbs had just taken over the entire hospital institutions. That's when it happened. Then another three guys came. They put me in a room. One of these other guys was a policeman, he had an automatic rifle on him. He goes "Get up! Why are you here?" But I was suffering in pain, could not even move. I tried to but it was very painful. They started to beat me up. I don't even know the reason. We were some women there trying to give birth. So one of them had already raped me. They inject me with something and they say "Get up and go where you were!" First it was that guy with a white tie and then following him came those other guys and they all came in one after another above me. There was a policeman, dressed in uniform, among them. With an automatic gun.

I lost my conscience and fell on the ground. And then they continued there. They raped me, they injected me, a needle in the gluteus. Then I had terrible pain. I gave birth. It was a girl. I remember when I heard her cry. I don't remember anything after that. I had lost my conscience; I had lost a lot of blood. And they kept me in there for another four days. They were giving me some blood transfusion. I got so scared then. A doctor came with a black beard. I asked him "What are you doing to me?" He said "Blood, blood." I spent there another four days. They would not give me any food. I was exhausted, hungry and terrified. I don't know how I survived it.

I gave birth. But I didn't see my daughter straight away. They brought her to me in the evening. They would bring them on a trolley. Not like today that they leave the baby next to the mother. Now they leave the baby next to the mother. My sister in law had two babies, and they were always there next to her. While putting the baby on the trolley, she drops my baby. She dropped her.

The baby could not suck any milk for two days in a row. She did drop my baby right in front of my eyes, but I dared say nothing. They were all Serbs at the time. Who could you complain to for anything? They were all Serbs; I did not see a single Albanian.

I took my girl, as she was crying from the fall. They released us after a while. The girl had a bruise on her shoulder. And her nose was a bit yellow. She would not suck any milk. "My daughter is sick", I told them. "She's OK. Go home."

I came home. It felt so totally different with a child in the house. Your life seems to get so busy. My mother and my younger brother came to visit me. I was lying on a bed, helpless and still exhausted. I was so depressed. I just wanted to die and not live any second longer. My daughter was so sick she would not suck

any milk. My mom was so happy I had a child. Everyone was. Let me wash your girl, mamma said. A woman from the neighborhood came too. She said, "I hope you get better soon. Your baby looks very sick." I was hoping her wound would heal, I did not know. My mom asked, "What is that bruise on her shoulder?" I told her that it was because she was dropped. My mom said it would probably heal too. I held her in my arms, and she was suffering. She died. My mother came back to see me. She lives a short life in this world. My mum was so sad too. That's when she got her diabetes. I remember it was Sunday when we buried her. I still remember her face.

How could those people work as doctors? I never forget that. There was no rule of law. That is something you just don't do to anyone. And they would also come to our houses and beat us up. And my husband, six days later, said "Come to the room!" he undressed me after we entered the room "What is this? Who did this to you?" he asked after he saw my bruises. So I told him what had happened. Parts of it. I did not dare tell him the entire story. "Who did you sleep with while there?" he asked. "What is this?" Then he started to beat me. He wouldn't stop. But I never dared tell him. I just could not tell him what exactly had happened. I said, "There were some women there. And while undressing us, they started to beat us up."

I could never tell him that we were raped while waiting to give birth to our children. Maybe it would have been better to tell him, but I just did not dare. He was a mean person, so I did not dare. But he would beat me up "Why did the baby die?" "They dropped her!" "Where were you? What were you doing?" "I was there, on the bed. They were bringing the girl to me in the room." Three years later I ran away from him. I left and said, "I cannot return back to him."

Five years of suffering. I just could not take it anymore. We were already poor and hungry, but he would also beat me up, and I could no longer take it.

The thing with my daughter happened back in 1992. Three years later I ran away from him.

Then my parents were trying to marry me off elsewhere. Then they found me this other husband, to whom I am married now.

When this man asked for me, I was told he had three children. When I came here, I found six children. I was still young. I was 27. And the man they married me for was about 50.

I was OK with this other man. He was not a crook, nor was he into trouble.

My teeth got darkened and he made sure I get them fixed. He also made sure I get dressed nicely. Some of the teeth were broken later during the war when they threw bombs on us. So I was better off here, but I was simply unlucky.

I had my mother in law and his children to look after. He had two sons. One grown up in Germany, the other one still there with him. They hated his father for looking after me.

Yes, this husband was much better. He would not beat me up, nor yell at me. I was warm, clothed and fed. So my health improved. People no longer recognized me. Then the war started.

And when it did, we had to leave house. And when NATO started to bomb them, on 24 March, or was it the 28, I get confused... It was all downhill from then; we had to run away from the house. We had just purchased a good car. It was a Fiat. And when the Serbs see him drive that car, they pull him out and

they beat him up and take his car. One of them would go "Take it!" and the other one would go "Drive me to the center!" they beat him up, but in the end they had given him his car back. He managed to get better after a short while.

We went to another village but they were throwing shells on us. WE went inside a house and sought shelter there.

Then we went to another nearby village. We would stay in the field. We would take turns to sleep inside the car, but it was very cold.

Then we all stayed outside. There was a small shack and someone would bring some wood. We suffered so much. We were so cold. We would all sleep in there.

We went to another village and slept in the barn on hay. The lady of the house said that they could give us some spongy mats. She also gave us some blankets. She also gave us some food to eat. At night they would start to shell the village. That's when we went out and went downhill, walking to get away.

They come to us with a tractor and offer us to join them. We were lucky and we climbed that tractor. The children and me. My husband walked. They were shooting from the distance. They killed a person there. He was a soldier, fighting for freedom. They shot him with a sniper from a distance. We continued on that tractor. At times we had to get down, as the tractor would not pull all that weight. In the morning we arrived in the city. They separated some of the people from the rest of us. Then we entered the city We saw an abandoned house, so we went inside it. We slept there that night and had something to eat. As it got darker some people dressed in black uniforms came to the street to patrol. They looked like paramilitaries. They asked how many we were and if we had come from elsewhere. Then they went somewhere. But about 20 minutes later they returned. They come and grab us. I was at the sink trying to wash a tray.

They separate my husband and some younger men, they lock them in some rooms. I thought they would kill my husband. They had beaten him up, taken the gold from him, and the money he had. And the children were crying and screaming. And then they grab us. They were jumping over the men, and they took us to another house. It was about one o'clock past midnight and they made us walk for another hour or so.

They took us to another house. In the room, there was a young girl. One of them kicked her in the stomach, and she fell on the ground. There was a lot of blood, pulled hair, many women, they were exhausted, like dead, they were on the floor facing it, and never moved. I saw women clothes torn and thrown everywhere, and bloody panties and bedsheets on beds. It was a three-story house. You just cannot imagine what we saw in that house. As the morning approached they undressed us and they started beating us up. They left us in the hall.

Four different persons embraced me that night in that house. One after the other. Then they beat us up, and pissed on us. Yes, they even pissed on us. It was strange. We could not find our own clothes. You just could not find your own clothes inside that mess. And I can tell you, I was surprised how strong people can be to defy suffering. We were exhausted but still managed to survive. They had beaten us so much that we could hardly move. There were a couple of them still in the house and I don't know how we managed to run

away. There were no Serbs in the streets at the time we got out. When I came to the other house, my husband was covered in blood.

We came back beaten up, swollen, my face still aches a bit today from that beating, and they broke a tooth, because when they'd beat us, they would kick us. And when one of them hit my arm, it got swollen. So back in the other house they tied it up for me. It hurt so much. I don't know how I am alive today. They insulted us, kicked us, embraced us and then pissed on us in the end. When I came to the other house, I was happy that despite everything, my husband was alive. We spent that night in Prishtina as well. My husband asked "Did you get out alive?" "Yes, I'm alive," I said. We were there with my husband's brother and his wife. We all slept there that night. The next morning they came and asked us to leave.

We went back to our own village. My husband was separated while in the city. He came on foot. We travelled all day, from midday, and in the evening we were home.

I had pain all over my body, I was sick, exhausted, beaten up, I could barely stand on my feet. I was worried, scared. On the way back the Serbs see us move. They stop us and beat up the driver. They take all of his money and his watch. Among them were some soldiers and some other guys dressed in black uniforms.

And they would say, "See how they have put the old women above." They made the old women get down on the ground, they would take them by hand to help them get down. And then they start beating us up, all of us that were there. They made us give them whatever valuables we had. I had a ring and gave it to them. I had a chain in my inner jacket pocket. But we did not mind giving it to them, all we cared about was to get out of there alive. Then they showed some mercy and asked us to get away. We remained there for some hours, beaten and exhausted. Another tractor approached. They went to them and started to harass the other people. They don't let us go to our own houses, and they collect us. They take us to another village. We all slept inside a school there. Then we go and find an abandoned house. The inhabitants had run away, so we went inside it.

We go there, put on a fire and make something to eat. We could not find much. Some flour, but no baking powder or anything else. Thank God the inhabitants of the house returned. That's where we were for the Eid, as well. There were about a thousand displaced persons. They cut a ram, at least to have some more and better food for the Eid.

I had no idea where my husband was. He was not with his older son, or with his daughter in law, and he wasn't with his brother either. They had separated. They had been held in some sort of a cave. So we stay there and the army would come asking how many were we and where from.

And God almighty wanted NATO to bomb them right there, and they destroyed some tanks. So we survived.

We went back to our homes. It was full of blood, women's clothes. They had cut, raped, slaughtered, God knows what they had done in there. After a month or so I went to the hospital, because my period had stopped. It was more like two months in fact. And then it was three months without a period.

When the bombing stopped, NATO forces came. We could go home. I was so

tired and sick. I went to a doctor in Prishtina. They stop me in the hospital. I was sick, and the doctors they say to me "You are not pregnant." I was happy to hear I wasn't. After all that raping I was not pregnant. I was given some drugs to help me calm down, but the pain would not stop. So much pain, I could not bear it.

I no longer feel any joy; I just can't feel joy any more.

I still have some pain. Just like during the war. It just feels like it was the other day. I now take the medicine regularly. I get a treatment. And I am not afraid because I take my pills.

My husband is helpful at times, and at times not. He dislikes me now. He swears and yells, saying "How can this happen to me? Why me? Why my wife? Why did we not go and live abroad when we had a chance?" When the OSCE withdrew we should have withdrawn." He has a lot of spite. He is angry. But it's my sister in law who is badmouthing me among people. And I had a quarrel with her, but in vain. I did bet her up, but it did not change a thing. That's how it has been. I have never been well ever since.

I am afraid that we will be forgotten. Nobody speaks about our suffering ever since Atifete Jahjaga left the presidency. And I am afraid because we did not tell, so will get nothing. So we just watch the news on TV, hopeful, but in silence. We fear we will be laughed at. Maybe something will come out of this all, but we did not speak. We were ridiculed. Things are moving very slowly.

I would like to ask them to respect the laws, rules, because we are not the only category to have suffered. Whoever has helped us, may they be rewarded by God. May God reward all of the doctors who have helped, workers, children, schools.

## 07 – LOLA:

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo





## • THE WAR DESTROYED IT ALL

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She was happy, happily married and loved. They had a daughter. Everything was perfect until the day they came.

They came and killed her husband and their small daughter. She was sexually assaulted, but that was not all.

“They killed my husband. And while shooting at my husband, they also killed my daughter. Me they grabbed by my hair and pulled me. They took me to a police station. And then they started to rage over me. Four hours later they let me go.”

First Person Narration:  
● **MY MOTHER, SISTER, SISTER-IN-LAW AND I...**  
LOLA

We were many kids. And we come from an educated family. We are all educated. The war made it impossible for us to progress any further, and we have lost some of the knowledge gained, but we are still OK. In our childhood we had enough, because our father was a hard worker. We lived well, went to school, had good parents, and they were understanding although we were many.

When I turned 18, a young man asked me to marry him. I knew him from the school days. We used to go to the same primary school and so, from one friend to the other, they had asked my brother to ask me if I want to get engaged to him. And as the traditional ways dictated, they had to send someone to ask for me. Then I got married.

We were engaged for six months and then got married. We had a good life. There were many wedding guests at our wedding as our houses were nearby. Three months after my marriage I got pregnant. Everyone was so happy. And then I gave birth to a beautiful girl. The husband's family were very excited. It was the first baby in their family. What a joy it was.

Imagine, the family came with musical instruments to pick me up from the hospital, that's how happy they were. Both families were happy. But then the war started, and it destroyed our life. It took away from me everything I held dear. They took the husband I loved, the girl I loved. Everything.

We were having dinner at home. I just remembered when they announced "The police have entered the neighbor's house. They are taking the educated people."

And after a short while they came to our house. They killed my husband. And while shooting at my husband, they also killed my daughter. Me they grabbed by my hair and pulled me. I used to have long hair then. They took me to a police station.

And then they started to rage over me. Four hours later they let me go. I went out, but where was I to go? So I decided to go to my parents' house. When I went there, all of my sisters had gathered in the house. My mum saw me disturbed. "Why are you so stressed out?" she asked. I was hesitating to tell her right away. But then she asked "What was the shooting we heard in your neighborhood?" "It was nothing." I said to her. Then I fainted. My brother took care of me and helped me get back to my senses. And then I started to tell them very slowly and carefully (sighs). And then they came to the house we were in. They came in and took us all. They beat up my mother. They did all that while my brother and we sisters were watching. To us women they would say "My sweetheart" and "This is what is awaiting you too." They put us on a truck and then they took us to... rather transported us, from one place to the other. Our sister-in-law, our aunts, my sisters, all of us there were loaded on that truck. And took us to some place.

There was a school there, but they had transformed it into the police station. It looked like a school, but it was the police station. They referred to it both ways. Then they took all of us in a row. I don't know how many of us there were, but there were many women. Then they raped us all. Those who opposed were threatened with a knife. My whole body is covered in knife cuts. I was too weak to resist. When I thought of what they did back in the house and when I saw what they were doing in the police station I was terrified. I would see my sisters, my sister-in-law, my aunt, my nieces... I thought they were going to kill us. I said to them, "Please kill us then do this to us." They would come one after another, one after another... Then they put us on a truck, tied our hand and legs. Our entire bodies were bleeding. One of them would come on to me and then he would call another one, and then another one. They all referred to each other as Jovan, using that same name.

When we came out of there they tied our legs and arms again and loaded us on those trucks. We could not move. We had lost so much weight. I heard them talk and learned they were taking us to Zvecan. I looked inside of the truck and saw a bottle. They will give us water and raki. And I saw some syringes. I did not know what they were.

One of them goes "We give it to you so you can be stronger." We had nothing to eat or drink, apart from some water that they would give us. And then when they were raping us, they would fill our mouth with water. We would faint from the abuse. And I hear one of them say "there are this many women in this truck, that many in that truck." I was in the truck with a sister of mine, my sister-in-law

and two cousins. I was wondering how I could break glass. My sister said "Don't, or they will do to us what they did before." I said "Once the truck starts moving again I will break this bottle. They will not know what happened. But I will break the bottle." I kicked it and kicked it. And then I hit it hard and broke the glass. I pulled it with my feet, picked it up carefully and then I cut the rope around my arms.

You can still see the scars around my arms. Ten I cut the rope for everyone else. Their arms, their legs. I forgot my own legs. I said "Jump women!" "No, we dare not, they will see us." I said, "Do you want me to go first? If they don't shoot me, then you should all jump after me." I jumped from the truck and then watched to see if the others were jumping. And then they started to jump. Every ten meters one would jump. And then I crawled looking for them. I tried to find where they are. I went for a long time looking for the others, trying to see if there are others.

Then we decided to withdraw to a nearby village. I don't remember the name of the village anymore but it was on the way to Zvecan. We came to a graveyard. A Roma man came with a carriage pulled by a horse. I ask him if he would take us. "What happened to you?" he asked. "We were hit by NATO airplanes," I said to him. He said "No, NATO hasn't started to bomb yet." I said, "NATO came, they brought us here and this is where they left us. He took us. "What ethnicity are you", he said. "I am Turkish," I said to him. Then I would speak to the women in Turkish, so that he thinks we are all Turkish. And when we came to our city, we decided to disperse each our own way, because there was a police station there, so we had to hide.

We went back home crawling. I did not know where I was. When you are exhausted, and then get a rest, that's when the trauma hits you. I just remember myself in the psychiatric ward.

I saw myself there and had no idea about my brother or sisters, or my husband and daughter.

We have suffered so much, but no-one is doing anything about us. Someone says this, another one promises that, But God willing, it will be better for us. I have said this way back during the UNMIK period, for mothers and wives. My life is over now, but at least for the others. I have no children or anything, but I spoke about their children, their sisters. I have said, "God willing and a good day dawns for us too." But nothing has been done so far.

The president Jahjaga helped us rehabilitate. It was enough to see her during the meetings for me to have this feeling that the soul of my daughter and husband would rest in peace. I'd say "Thank God someone is here to support us."

In the beginning I, on my own, came out and told several people about what had happened. They would point a finger at me and say "Look at her." Now everybody is supportive at least. And there are other things to tell, but I cannot tell everything because it will be hard to go back home. I am an epileptic, I have pain in my arms and legs, all over. But at least now it looks as if there is support for us. And we have managed to brace ourselves a bit, because you cannot cry your entire life.

My sister died of depression. She had suffered just like me. She died some years after the war. When the doctors operated her, they said "You will not

imagine what we found in her womb." And we did not dare say what the Serbs had done to her, because nobody spoke about it at that time. And they would say "We don't know what caused this." She left a daughter behind, who is now 12. Hopefully our government will finally do something about it and do something for these women, as we are tired of waiting.

About two or three years after the war, it was 2002, or 2003, I don't remember exactly, I started to feel terrible stomach pains. I had no idea what was causing it but it would not stop. My brother took me to see the doctor. The doctor examines me and says, "Your womb is in a terrible state. It is either from an undeveloped fetus or something terrible happened." But he did not know what had happened to me. I was operated, and it turned out that I had a tumor in my womb. And then 24 hours after the operation, as the doctor was talking to me to see how I was doing, he held a piece of paper and asks me "What did you do? What could have caused it?" how could I tell him what had happened.

"That was a terrible thing you had inside, you must have been subjected to some sort of abuse," he said. "Could it be that you were pregnant and then the fetus was injured and died inside you?" "Doctor, please. I cannot tell you what has happened. Because if I tell you, you will tell someone else, and then they will tell someone else, and so on." The doctor knew me, he had known my husband, and he said "I think I might have an idea of what has happened."

We are tired of his all. It has been 17 or 18 years. Someone would ask me of my birthday, and I could not remember the day or the month.

One more thing. After they killed my husband, and picked me up, they put me in some sort of an electric chair. That made me lose my memory. My school, reading and writing. Until recently I could not even sign a document. "How is it you can't read or write? Do you remember how good you were at school?" they'd ask me.

Four hours in the police station. A chair, and they tie my stomach. They say "Find where Adem Demaçi is!" "What do I have to do with Adem Demaçi..." They say, "Do you know of any KLA movements?" I say, "I don't know, I am learning about this group from you." And indeed I did not know. We were not dealing with any of that thing... And we did not dare speak of anything. My husband was an educated man. I was myself educated, we were not dealing with any of that. And they'd ask me about KLA, and this and that. And they say "Who is the Snake?" "What snake are you talking about?" And they would press my throat and say "Come now, tell us all you know about him." And I seriously did not know about any of those names. I do now, but then I did not know. So in other words, they would torture me for Thaçi, and Adem Demaçi.

My brothers were younger than me. They did not know what this or that was. Today they say to me "Poor you, what you have gone through." For at least five or six months I had no idea where I was. When I was asked at the psychiatric ward "Who are your parents?" and "Where do you come from?", I just did not know. This lasted for at least seven months. The doctors brought me back to my senses, with therapy. I had to undergo a strong therapy, as I was heavily drugged. And the doctors told me that I had been injected with syringes in my stomach with drugs while in hands of Serbs. I am also thankful to President

Jahjaga and Feride. Ever so grateful to them both. They found me a work place, so that at least I go out, and come in. I have a bit of an income and a life. My family feels very sad for me now. They all know what has happened. Not just them, but the neighbors too. They respect me and treat me nicely. They do not know all the details of what happened, but they all know my husband and daughter were killed, and that I have no other children, alone by myself. So they support me. But they do not know about what happened to me during the war. Now that they see me engage for our rights I hear some of them say, "You too must have some secret story." But before we came here we did not dare speak anywhere else. Here we were told everything will be kept confidential, they will not mention us by name. And we trusted them and started to talk. We have received a therapy. We have had meetings, and even managed to laugh, not just talk.

When I first came here, the trees over there seemed to me like soldiers. I would ask my sister-in-law, "Take me away, at least until those soldiers are gone." "What are you saying? What soldiers?" she would ask me.

While looking at them, it would seem to me that I was also seeing their hats, not just their uniforms. I was going out with my friends from this center. "I won't go out until they leave." "Why?" I would say, "Don't you see them?" I would think the trees are them. We came out and touched them. "Here. Are you now convinced that it is a tree?". Then the trauma hit me, the crisis, the sadness. I woke up at night and just walked around the room. When it is my daughter's birthday it gets worse (cries). I start to look for her in the room.

My family are trying to calm me down, saying I am neither the first nor the last to experience what I did. Remember, they say, the mother in Gjakova, who had five people in her family and now lives alone. You should be thinking about cases like hers. You have to go out and about, and be places and enjoy our company and us. We are still one family. For example, my brother will always bring his son when he comes to visit.

One day my brother says to my mother, "I want to divorce my wife!" "No!", she said to my brother. Why do you tell what they did to you in Sferkovnica prison to you? What did you tell us when you were released? Do you remember how your behind was? How your anus was swollen from Serbs raping you?"

"They were also raped without their will."

My brother said, "I cannot take it mother, when I think that the Serbs have had my wife I just cannot overcome it."

"My son, you have to. Look at your sister and your wife. And let me tell you one more thing." "Tell me what?", my brother asked her. "I cannot tell you for as long as I live." Then my brother understood that my mother was raped too. He started to cry. He got up, and embraced us all.

And my mum said "You cannot? How would you feel if your brother-in-law divorced your sister because she was raped?"

Then after a while another brother-in-law of ours divorced our sister. Four children, and she cannot cope to this day.

May God make sure to return to them what they did to us.

I took the bus the other day to go to another city.

And I see a Serbian woman, sitting there, dressed in Kosova Police uniform.

I said, "Grant me strength my God, to not make a scene here." I prayed and

prayed, and God helped me, and I calmed down. I was thinking while looking at her, "They have slaughtered and killed us. Our girls are schooled but find no jobs, and have no income. She would speak Serbian loudly. A woman saw I was feeling sick and she asked me how I was. She asked the driver to open the window so I could get some fresh air. I said "Ask the driver to stop this bus." I knew I might say something, so I chose to get down. The woman who saw I wasn't feeling well got down with me. "Let us take the next one and we go together as you're not feeling well. Did you undergo a surgery or what?" "Yes, I am feeling sick," I said. "Are you pregnant?" "Something like that," I said. She insisted to remain with me and wanted to know what had happened to me. I did not tell her. She said "I saw that the Serbian police woman was bothering you.

"I just cannot take it when I hear Serbian," I said to her. "Why?" she asked. "They have killed my husband and my daughter right in front of my eyes and I can never, for as long as I live, forgive them. And I will speak and ask of other women to speak and tell what they have done to us." And the greatest wonder is that none of them have been put to justice after so many years.

And immediately after the war, as early as while UNMIK was around, I started to speak and tell, explaining what had happened, so that people know, not just about myself but also other women. Until recently, because now I don't remember all the victims any more. Years have passed and faces have grown older and changed. Some of them sometimes send regards via other people.

We often discuss with other women who have suffered similar things. And when we do, we make sure that no children are around, as we don't want the children to know.

I have tried to kill myself about ten times. Do you know how God would let my mother know about it? She would come and ask "Are you there?" "Yes, I'm here" "You weren't earlier, where you by the well?" Ten times I tried to jump inside the well but God would inform my mother. "Were you by the well earlier on?" "No!". But I'd go to jump inside the well, thinking what good is life like this. Why live? When I'd hear my mum's voice I would go back. My brother finally decided to close the well. I would go to the well and cry at night. My tears would drop deep down inside. I would think, tonight I'm wetting it with tears, tomorrow I will jump inside. But my mother's voice would stop me.

Then they sent me to a shrink. I don't remember how many times they would tie me to the bed so I cannot get up at night. I would wake up and notice that I was tied to the bed.

I look at the children of my brothers and sisters. And I imagine what age my own daughter would have been, I look at her peers. She would be close to me, right next to me. But what can I do? A woman would say to me "It was God's will". I said, "It was not God's will, it was the Serb's will." Because God granted her so as to live with me, but the Serbs took her away... And still, you need to continue your life like this.

Everyone needs to speak up for themselves. We have been saying for the last 16 years, "Come out and speak, speak up, speak of your life, for what you suffered, for what they did".





## 08 – MERITA:

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • HE DID NOT TAKE ME TO GERMANY

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Her dream of education was interrupted. Once married she understood that the man she would spend her life with, was an alcoholic. Then he would go to Germany to leave her with five children in extreme poverty. This woman walked from one village to the other. From one house to another. She has experienced sexual violence and saw her children cry while asking for normality to be restored.

“... they put me inside the barn and then ordered me in Serbian “Take off your clothes!” I understand Serbian. I begged them as much as I could in Serbian and Albanian. I begged and begged. “Come on. Take it all off!” I will never forget that in my life. I so often recall that day.”

First Person Narration:

- **I KEPT THINKING OF THE BARN WITH**
  - **THE COW AND THE CALF**
- MERITA

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I don't really recall much from my childhood... My dream was interrupted before it even started.

I have two sisters, graduated, older than me. When I was supposed to go for higher education, the situation got very tense and we would have to go through private houses in an underground school, so I had to interrupt it, though it has always been my dream. To this day, if I get a paper or a book, I like to leaf through it and see what it is about.

I got married while very young, at 18. I had finished my secondary school. My

mother said "Don't wait my girl. You're not going to school, so it is better if you get married. Get on with your life." So I did marry. We met after someone suggested him. We did not get on that well. I did not choose him myself.

The marriage was a real hell for me. First day of marriage, my husband is drunk. He is an alcoholic. I would silently hope he would get better. He would always come home late, drunk, causing problems to me, his parents, his entire family. He could not befriend anyone; he would not have good relations with anyone. Initially I wanted to leave him. I thought I'd better go back to my parents, because I saw that there is no future with him. But my mom would say, "Maybe he will improve once there is a child. He has good parents. He is not a bad person." So I stayed. Our first child was born. After a year and a month. The first child was a boy. In the early days I saw he was quite happy, it looked like he was closer, but no.

In a household with two old people, unemployed, an unemployed sister-in-law, a brother-in-law who worked as a teacher. But why would he take care of us? He had his own family to care for. Not to mention the baby. He was engaging in those early days, and tried to be of help. But with him unemployed, we had nothing to eat. What was I to feed my baby with? My breast would produce no milk, as I was underfed. The boy would cry all night long. There was no food.

Three months after my son was born I went back home. I said I could not go back. I cannot live there. I had no future. I was simply blocked. I would just cry and cry. My life had changed so quickly and drastically. I was a quiet girl, in a good family, and had to go to a household full of noise, where I felt no love. I stayed at my parent's for three weeks.

My father came to get me. I was so happy when I saw him. I came out crying. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "Why have you come here," I asked. He said he had come to pick me up because he was about to go to a trip. My father would work and go on business trips in Belgrade. He said, "While I am away I want you to stay with your mother. She wants to see the boy too." They both really loved my son. And my mother-in-law, knowing I was sad, offered to wash the boy for me, so I don't take him unwashed. But I refused. I entered my father's car and we set off. I spoke to my father on the way home. I said, "I've had enough dad. I can't take it anymore. I have no other choice, there is no hope there. You saw it with your own eyes. My husband goes missing for a whole week. And I have no idea where he is. I don't know what to feed my son with." He said, "Well my girl, if there is nothing else you can do, leave him. Just leave him."

My husband's family sent me a message saying they would not leave my son to me. I would cry all night long thinking about it. I would feel sorrier for him than myself.

It felt like he was begging me each time he looked at me. I could not turn my back to him. I spent three weeks at my father's house (cries). Then the oldest brother-in-law came. He is dead now. He was a good man, educated, very soft spoken. I loved him as a parent. I still feel sorry when I think he no longer lives. He said, "I know he has pushed it beyond every possible limit, but don't abandon your son. We will try. You know I speak to him a lot. I feel so sorry about you but what can we do?" So I went back. The day I went back, he started his same old tune. Again, life was just a bit harder and that was it.

He would become more and more aggressive. He was constantly drunk. I was trying to talk sense into him. I would say, "Look at your boy!" "What is it you don't like about us?", he would ask. "Everything." I was there just as a servant to him. So that people know he is married, so that I fill in that wife position, and that's it.

Then after a year and a half I got pregnant again. I wanted to go and abort the child. I went to "Nanë Tereza" NGO who provided free of charge services. I went there and a woman asked, "Why are you aborting it? You already have a son. I am trying to get pregnant for years, but cannot. You are young, but later you will regret this." She convinced me so I went back.

He would not care at all about what was going on. He would come home late, drunk. He would vomit on the carpet in the room. I would have to get up and clean it. He would leave early in the morning; you would wonder why would he have to rush that way. Why can't he be home? I would spend my days with the children, the housework. And after my second child was born I decided that I would suffer just to raise them, and would not care about what he does. There was no going back. My third child was born, and then my fourth and my fifth. My life became more difficult than ever. He would become more and more aggressive. After my third child was born, we were put in one room. Me and the baby. They were hoping he would find a job and work. They would try to find ways to encourage him to work. His family are really good people. Educated people. But he is like a black sheep. So they tried to encourage him to work.

So they gave us separate rooms. I had no running water in the room, we would have to carry some to wash the baby.

We had no bathroom. We would often go to sleep without having any dinner at all. I would get up, and could not sleep all night. I would wonder what I could make for breakfast. If I would complain, he would say "If you like it here, stay. If you don't, leave the kids and go." But who would I leave my kids to? "Leave them, I'll look after them." I would say, "Why don't you look after them right now? How can I leave them to you?" He never wanted to cooperate and team up with me, not once. I have been married for 30 years now, and still have no marriage certificate.

He would say, "I will go to Germany, and get a marriage certificate there. Once I sort myself out there, I come to get you and the children." And being young, unexperienced, at times I even believed him. Nothing happened.

The children are raised like this, among noise, fights... We never had a quiet sleep. On those days when he'd be late, he would come at four or five a.m. We would know he was drinking. When he'd come, he would wake us up. The children would cry. He would kick us out. The neighbors would wake up and come...

I would hardly find any books for the children. But I have always spoken to them and told them that it was my dream and that I wanted to be there to educate them. And thank God my children did not disappoint me in life. They got schooled, they are good kids, they are soft spoken and people envy them.

On 24 March 1999. We were so happy. We thought it was for the better. NATO started to bomb and will stop the war. But the war got worse. A police check point was close to us. There were shootings there every night. We could not sleep from the shooting. We would go to bed in our clothes, and woke up

clothed. We were thinking they would kill us any day. My husband had gone to Germany and said he would take me there if I sorted out my papers. But how was I to sort my papers, we had no marriage certificate, I had not ID card, not even with my maiden name.

In April they came to clear the entire village and get us out of here. We saw others get away, so we came out too. I got on a neighbor's tractor. We got my mother-in-law too. We did not have much food. Everyone had taken a bit of food. I had packed some for the children. We took what we had. We set off and stopped in a village where some relatives lived.

It was April. They had burnt down a village and massacre the local people. They had killed many people. You could see the smoke from the distance. We knew where it was coming from. We did not know what exactly was going on. God alone knows what has happened there.

I ask my brother-in-law to take me to my father's. I said, set me on the right track. Maybe someone will offer if they are going that way. Because people were boarding the train it was full of people. He agreed to come with me. He had found someone with a carriage pulled by horses to take us there.

That man took us to the entrance of the city. He left us there because he was afraid to go any further. And we wanted to go walking thinking nobody would stop us. Then some soldiers stopped us. They were dressed in uniforms. We stopped on their order. They stopped us from a distance, about 200 meters and then started to run towards us. When they came they asked for our ID cards. They stopped us there for a while. The children were afraid. They were crying and screaming. It was very hot. We were thirsty for water. And they said, "Go!" they were swearing at us, saying, "Go to Albania, where you belong. This is Serbia."

So we walked and our children walked. We were alone in the street. There was no movement then at all. Only the Serbs forces were moving. There was no other movement.

On our way we see a bar in the street full of Serbs. I was afraid they might kill my brother-in-law and rape me and I said we better head off to the mountains because we were walking right into the dragon's lair.

There is a huge mountainous area there. It is full of oak trees. We walked through that mountain and came across a good Serbian man. He welcomed us. He got my daughter and I held my boy, and he said to me to ask the children not to be afraid. And I forgot to mention something I will not forget for as long as I shall live. On our way we passed by a school, and the children were so happy, they asked us to go inside. They were hoping to find other children there.

I felt so emotional. They were missing school, going to school and meeting other children. I never forget that. Each time I pass by that school, my eyes wet from tears.

And that Serbian man helped us a lot. He was a positive character. He spoke softly and made me lose my fear for a while. And he saw us through the village, carrying my daughter in his arms. In the village, the Serbs were chanting war songs. Even their children were wearing army vests. They behaved like mad. A man approached and attacked my brother-in-law. The children started to

scream. The man who was accompanying us, said to him, "Back off. These people are with me." And we entered their village. We saw an old Serbian woman. We asked us to give us some water.

So we went to my parent's village. I saw my mother, my brother. I was happy they were alive. They had food. We gave some to the children and ate the rest. We all ate and drank enough. A cousin of ours came and asked us to go and sleep over at his place because his house was more towards the center of the village.

But at that point I no longer cared what they would do. When I saw my parents and my brother, I thought the whole world was mine.

We went at our cousin's that night and slept there until Sunday. It was April 18th on Sunday. A Serbian commander came to the village. He said to our cousin that we could sleep in our own houses and that nobody would touch us.

And my father goes, "Let's go back home and do as they say." We were so happy; I can't describe it. I thought I would have more sleep in my father's house, because we were so many in there as guests. I felt intimidated, and thought I was bothering them with five children. We slept there for the last time... we always slept fully clothed, with our jackets and trousers. And it was March and April. It would get either too cold, and started to rain, or it would be too hot. Just before dawn we heard the shooting. The children were all asleep but I heard them because I could not sleep all night from fear. My mother entered the room and said, "Pick up your children for they are setting fire to the houses."

The entire village population assembled in the village center.

They came and started to separate the men.

They would just point their finger. They killed a cousin that day. He was holding his son. He got up once, but then sat down with his boy. The Serb yelled at him, "Did I not ask you to get up?" He stood up again and looked at his children. And when they asked my brother to move... dear God. And my father, him they had taken before he managed to get there. We did not see our father. At least I didn't. When they took our brother he would not stop looking at us. Dear God. I would look at my mother, and then my brother, terrified. He would look at us and then look at his children. I felt like he wanted to tell me something with his looks. I looked at my mother, felt terrible to see her like that. She did not shed a single tear. She stood there like frozen, looking on. They said, "You move!" "Where are you taking our men?" I asked. They said, "We will soon let them go. Be in your way!" They swore at us. The houses were burning, and noises of things burning and smashing were being heard. So we set off to go. As we were walking, someone said, "They have released the men!" And I felt so happy, so happy. I saw some of the men return, but those who were 40 or younger were kept. I could not see my father. And an hour later or so, they sent us back to the village. They said "You will have to return!" I was on a tractor with some neighbors when we returned. People were crying as they had learned what had happened. They took them to a yard in the village, and they had killed four of our men there. I saw my father. It was the first time I saw my father cry. I asked him if he knew where my brother was. "My girl, they killed your brother," he told me. "What on Earth are you saying dad? Is it true?" "Yes, my girl." My children would not stop crying. I was trying to calm them down. "No, they



haven't killed your uncle. He is alive." "Stay close to your mother, and don't go astray," I said. I was afraid I might lose them. If your children got lost, you would not find them anymore. They ordered us to go away, and I told my children to stay close to me. They have always been polite and understanding. They have always listened to me. When I washed them, they never cried.

I started to move towards the yard where they said the corpses were. A cousin of mine came and asked where I was going. I said I wanted to see the corpse of my brother. He told me he had wrapped those bodies in sheets with his own hands, and that my brother was not among them.

I went back to my children and then the Serbs returned. They were totally mad. What a nightmare. Dear God. And they surrounded us all.

They ordered us to leave. "None of you here. This is Serbial" and they would swear at us... So we set off, they take us to the market place. When we started to get on tractor they asked "Are there any men among you?" I said, "No" because I could speak some Serbian. "No, I only saw women." They took all of the valuable possessions we had. A neighbor woman's ear was bleeding. They had torn the earring off her.

Once we got there they asked us to return to our village. So we came back. It was burning in flames. Fire everywhere. They had assembled all the carriages and set them on fire. I separated from the rest of my family. My father left me with a Roma family, who were neighbors. They welcomed me and treated me with respect. I will never forget that. I have also instructed my children to make sure that family is duly rewarded.

A cousin came and asked me and the lady of the household if we could milk the cows and take the milk to the men in the mountain who had hid there and had nothing to eat.

I did not sleep all night. I started thinking about the cow and the calf, I knew it was the barn of our cousins. Even we would go and get milk from them at times. I was always attacked by that barn somehow. The entire night the calf and the cow were making loud noises. The calf had remained inside and the cow outside the barn. Or maybe it was the other way round. Maybe the calf was tied inside and the cow was released to eat grass outside. The whole night it seemed like I was opening the door of that barn and I let them be together so that they can calm down. That's what I was dreaming about. In the morning, the household lady gave me some of her garments to wear. I thought if I put on the scarf like her, the Serbs would not know I was Albanian, so I set off for the barn. The lady made some bread and said she would come with me.

"Let us milk the cows and bake the bread so we can send some fresh bread and milk to our men. At least let them eat something." So we set off for the barn. I had not milked cows before. I didn't know how.

"I will milk the cows and you go pick some eggs among the chicken," she said. I left the eggs, and crossed the street to make sure I unite the cow with the calf, as I was fixed to do that, as the cow would not stop. So I crossed the street. When I opened the door, there were two guys inside. They started to move towards me quickly. "My God, my God, what is going on?" They grabbed me, I had no idea who they were, I was stunned, couldn't move. They grabbed me and took me inside. One of them was wearing a uniform. They were both frightening and very scary. They were very dirty. One of them smelled horribly.

I had not come across such a filthy man before. He smelled of alcohol and sweat. He was dark and a bit on the fat side. Filthy. The other one I heard speaking Russian, and I am pretty sure he was Russian. He was blond, light skinned, quite big and had lost most of his hair. They put me inside the barn and then ordered me in Serbian "Take off your clothes!" I understand Serbian, I had learned it. I begged them as much as I could in Serbian and Albanian. I begged and begged. "Come on. Take it all off!" Dear God. It is turning 17, now 18 years ever since. I will never forget that in my life. I so often recall that day. Whatever I see, it makes me think of that filthy man.

One of them started to rape me and asked the other one to join in. And the other one then started to rape me from behind, you know? I was disgusted, I vomited and pushed them. They hit me and beat me up. I don't recall the rest. I had fainted. I don't know what happened. When I awoke, I saw those two men again. Luckily someone called them. They were using some walkie-talkies. Someone was talking to them and telling them something, I heard the voice go "quickly, quickly" to them. One of them says, "Get up!", to me. He hits me on my side, the left one here, and it aches to this very day. It is the weakest point in my body now. He hit me hard because he was wearing boots and they were hard. I said, "Are you letting me go?" He said, "No, no, no. Who is letting you go? You are coming with us!" Oh my God, oh my God, when he said "You will come with us", I thought "oh my God, You alone know why I chose to come here in the first place." I had come to make the cow and calf reunite. Oh dear God, please don't separate me from my children.

I thought, as I am not really alive anymore, let them at least kill me while I run away. That's much better than dying slowly. So I dressed up because they ordered me to. I put my scarf on my head and all.

I said, "I need to go. I have five children to take care of." They said "Oh you can have more children with us. Didn't you see? As many children as you want." And then I decided, there is a narrow passage, you might see it yourself, and I sometimes think, maybe God himself made sure that it be curved like that, it has this turn, and it is narrow. The barn is right there and then there are some pillars. So I took a deep breath, and I thought to myself, maybe they will kill me, but at least I will not be their slave again and experience what I did. He yelled "stop" but I ran away, and once turned back to see if they were chasing me. The Russian guy was pushing the arm away from the other guy's hand. He would call this other guy Ziko. I remember that name.

So I started to run as fast as I could. I ran and ran, maybe for an hour or so. It felt like a century.

I met the neighbor man and we went with his wife to milk the cows. "Did you pick up the eggs? What kept you?" His farm was huge, barns and livestock and houses all in one yard. "No, I don't know where to find any eggs." I know that the buckets with milk were in front of them I had run like crazy. Not walked. I had run. I felt so filthy. I wanted to clean myself. To get that thing out of my body. It felt like there was so much filth inside my body. When I went to my children, I did not feel like hugging them. I'd say to them, "Don't hug me. I'm dirty. I've milked the cows." I did not dare embrace my children with all that filth on me. With the smell and the... of that filthy man on me. They had no idea. I took a bath. After I did, I hugged my children. It felt like the world was mine.

And we were listening to the news. The Roma family was not listening to the news, but they would listen to them for my sake. And as I was listening to the news, I learned that my brother was alive." Oh God, I could see a light at the end of the tunnel. And we all screamed from joy, "Our uncle is alive!" From that day on I was restless. I thought I better go to the mountain and meet my parents. The neighbors had taken care of me long enough. I will never forget that family. I went once to visit them after the war. Once I met them in the market, my daughter was working so I went to the market for some groceries, and met the woman of the household and I bought some things for her. And we had coffee together, but I was afraid they might tell me "Why are you staying with the Roma?" you know, immediately after the war. My God, what a good family they were, how well behaved their children were. I envy that woman, how nice and kind their children were. Excellent. So from that moment on, I picked up my clothes, and went and found my family in the mountain and spend the days with them.

And the war ended, it was June 10.

My husband had been told that we were dead. Me and the children and my father and the whole family. They had confused my father's name with that of another man in our village. And true, the other man and his family were all dead. All killed. My husband had lost his mind. But I was crying on the phone and telling him that all of the children were alive.

So life went on. At the end of 1999, my husband returned from Germany. I would say to him, "Take us with you," as he had made some money there. I was begging him to take us all to Germany. And when he came here, the children were happy. He had brought them clothes from Germany, food. He brought some money too. I would wake up at night and observe him. He looked so much better. And I felt like the world was mine, I felt like my life was finally taking a turn for the better. My children managed to get out of the war alive, my family too, in spite of the poverty and all. But I felt a sort of joy in my house at last. We had a good couple of months. He would not go to drink till late, but then his friends started to come and pick him up.

He started to go back to his old habits, and spent the money he had made.

Then I started to work myself. I worked for a good year and a half. But every April I start feeling weak. I remember the rape. I felt so weak for not being able to talk about it, raise my voice and speak. At times I'd think that I will speak up, let my husband think what he wants of it. But then I'd think of my children, and how that might destroy their lives, how their friends would look differently at them. And maybe even my children would be shocked by the news. So I would close that door. I felt like I was powerless, and could not do anything for myself. Why not tell what has happened? Why try to hide away?

Now when I look at my children and see how well behaved they are, how clever they are, how nice.... I am reaching the peak of what I want to do, but no. Not yet. I have built this house and I know I am in debts for I have taken a loan. But when I think of it, I know it is my own work and that of my children.

But memories haunt me. It accumulated and felt like a volcano inside me that cannot erupt. I would write it down in a diary, like I write poetry, but I feared my husband or children would see it.

In my dream those two men appeared in masks and were saying to me, "You don't know us." And what bothers me most is that they say, "We've done nothing to you compared to what we did to your friend." I don't know who that friend is. I don't have a raped friend, and I know I haven't told anyone.

Maybe I will not live much longer, but other women were younger and had to go through all that. I would like to see that they get some sort of a support. If I could do something, I would do it for my friends, women who have suffered what I have. If I had some power and could do something, I would do something for those women.

## 09 - TH.M. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • I NEVER WANTED TO ENTER THAT PLACE

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She had accomplished one of the goals in her life. She could not get an education, but kept dreaming about it. She had married in the city, which had been a goal in itself.

She lived happily until the war broke out.

In an effort to find food, she had gone out on the streets of one of the cities of Kosova. She was kidnapped and held for hours in a cafe by Serbian paramilitaries.

“... they spoke to me in Serbian, I didn't understand them. I did not want to enter their café. They pushed me in. They pulled out a knife, they made a cut on my leg. I still have a scar. And they started to beat me up. I fainted. They had then undressed me. They were drunk and armed with automatic guns.”

First Person Narration:  
• **THANK GOD I CAME OUT ALIVE**  
TH.M.

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I am a joyful person, yet sometimes I am a bit upset, I know. When I get upset, I cannot get beyond it without taking my medication to calm me down. Other times I am calm, but I feel, I always feel that I could not do what I wanted to do. I wanted to become somebody, but now my time is gone. A person needs to do that, you know. So as not to rely on anyone. Not from your husband, or anyone else.

I never wanted to depend on anyone. I always wanted to be my own self. Even as a child. I was a clever child. I was special, and always did special things.



I always enjoyed reading, and enjoyed buying books more than clothes. When I'd receive books, I'd get very happy. Clothes would get old and tear, the book would remain. I used to like learning poems by heart.

I always dreamed of school. Even after I married, I used to dream that I have gone back to school and continued my education. But at that time we would only do the elementary education.

When they said I could not continue to further education, I felt horrible. But I still hoped, always kept a hope, thinking that maybe we'd move to the city and they would let me go to school.

Maybe there are people who quickly lose hope. I never lose hope. I always try to leave an open door so as to be able to do something even later on.

I'd go places with my father. I would always go places with my father. Wherever I went, it was with my father. I knew about men's interests more than about the women's ones. I have worked, carried, driven. Just like men do. And everyone would go, "Is that a guy or a girl?" They could not guess. I had so much will, and willfully helped my father. I did most of the men's jobs that are not the most tiring. Women's work, you do it all day, and afterwards you look back and see you need to redo everything, as you constantly need to wash and clean. It never ends. And men's work, you do it, and you know what you're doing and why.

When I was a fully grown up girl we came to the city. I would mostly stay indoors in the city. We'd go with my cousins and spend nights together. We'd play and dance and sing. We did not think much about life at the time. We only cared about having fun, getting together and enjoying life. And I will never forget that time of my life.

I always think that was a better time, because I was young then. I believe the youngsters still think the way we used to. Everyone knows their own generation, and they like it, and everyone thinks of the young days as being better.

When you look at the facts of life, it was not better then. How could it be? (smiles) There was no electricity in villages, it was terrible in fact. People were living like in prehistoric times.

They didn't care much about people then. They'd show more love and care to animals. They did not care about children. They would have many children, and not care about the individual fate of each one of them. They would get sick, and could even die, as they would not really take them to the doctor.

They'd say, "She will get better." They did not care much. Only when they'd see the child is not getting any better and could not even get up, then they would think of taking her to the doctor. Things were perhaps really more organic. And they had enough to eat.

Those who had milk, would make dairy products and produce cheese, and cream and... Because having cheese is good, but some didn't even have cheese. They would slaughter an animal, and have meat. The dairy they kept for the guests.

We were kids and we'd ask our grandfather, "How was it in your youth?" He would tell us that Albania had included Kosova at that time. But gradually, they took off lands and grails from them as Albania was made to withdraw. Like now when they ask you to pay property tax. The state took everything

then. He'd say, "You needed to milk the cows, and give it gradually. Albania had command over the whole territory." It looks to me like those times are going to return. They have entered gradually. They entered as leaders, as deputies, slowly. And I watch the TV and recall the words of my grandfather and feel those times are going to come back.

When I got engaged it was the time of many protests. At that time they would do such things, send you regards and... We had not met before. It was not a time when you'd meet beforehand.

Yes, you would see a photo, but not meet face to face. And then, a year later, we got married before the war. We had many cars come to take me, and they had the drums and the musical instruments and all. They could not play some prerecorded music, so they would bring some bands to play.

But it was a good time, a time for weddings, a time when you'd not think that your house would be damaged in any way. It is not like people had any good houses. Now you get good furniture and furnish it with expensive stuff and use the best room in your house, and the wedding guests in two hours make it look terrible.

I was never greedy. I have always liked to do good and I have taught my children to do that too. Because none of us can see God. None of us. We can put on the headscarves, cover our hair and respect God that way. We respect God best by being good, honest, sincere people. If you just put on a headscarf, but don't put your heart to it, God cannot do anything for you. God knows who is good deep in their souls, not those who only respect by putting on a headscarf. Instead of moving forwards, we're going backwards.

When I married, I was so pleased that I am marrying in the city and not to someone who lived in a village. I never wanted to go to a village. To tell you the truth, when they'd come and say to my father, "So and so is asking to marry your daughter," I would always say, "If they live in a village, I am not interested!" I was decided. I'd rather not marry at all then marry in a village. I'd say to my father "Tell them 'no!'"

When I married people were protesting against the system. My husband was a jealous guy and he was quite old-fashioned. Yet we got along well, with him and my in-laws. Before the war broke out, we lived with my in-laws. His parents, brothers. The in-laws lived even after the war. We lived with my in-laws for a long time, until we had our own children. And when the children grow up, they start fighting. If it weren't for the children, people would never split their properties. My husband worked but my in-laws didn't. His brothers worked too.

Then the war broke out. We remember when they kicked us out of the house. We got out, on the street. Then neighbors and relatives joined. The crowd became quite big. With neighbors all there. We all moved together and went to a nearby place. Some of the KLA fighters came and were moving around us. We would just look at them, we feared Serbs would kill us if we went with them. As we moved and others were joining the crowd, we saw uniformed men coming towards us. We thought it was the KLA, but they were Serbs; masked and all. We thought of going back home to take some more food and clothes, but they ordered, "You go back, and we kill you. Keep moving downwards" "Where shall we go?" "Go to Macedonia, or Albania, just get out of here. You

have no more business here. We went to the mountains. We thought we would return shortly. They would be watching us from slopes with snipers.

We slept one night in the mountains, but the next day, how were we to continue sleeping there? The children were small. I said, "Even if they kill me, I'll go back home." It was impossible to continue sleeping in the mountains. It was cold, my son was just a toddler. They were shooting us with snipers. They could see us from a slope. The bullets were coming very close. I feared they would kill my son. They saw us run away from there. So we started to run away from there, some on tractors, others on foot. We stopped in one place. They had been stationed somewhere and shooting us from a distance. They were stationed also just before entering the city. We were tired from walking and running away. We only had the food we had managed to get with us when we left our houses. The next day, they would make people get off the tractors, killed some, they beat up others. They shot some men, some they slaughtered. Some women they... terrible. And our men were so young. I felt so sorry about those men when they lined them up and killed them. And they killed so many. They shot them all with their automatic rifles. They would fall in the stream, all of the victims fell on that stream. They killed 150 people there. Then they had some others get inside a house, and beat them up there. My husband was among those people in that house, and he said later to me "I was lucky not to be killed. Inside the house, they would beat us all up. They had some metal bars, and hit us with them. We would shake and tremble." They would ask us to give them money. They made us get off the tractor. "Come on. Give us your money. You seem to love your father Clinton and mother Albright. Come on now." And we'd understand these parts although they spoke Serbian. We said, "No, no. We don't love them. We're not involved." "Oh yes, you love them. Come on now!" So they took them and made them enter that house. And they beat them up there. Some of them came out with wounds caused from knives. They would hardly walk. Some of them had died inside. If you were to come out of the row of people, you'd be shot dead. Then you had to join the remaining people and move in a row, because some of them they had shot dead by the stream. 150 people, that's a lot. When I saw the first dead person, I started to shake. My entire body was shaking. But I did not dare show it or say anything. I feared for my own life.

And they were shooting from above the road, as we were lower. A group of us was a bit behind, they were shooting to make us speed up and join the row. Some of us were moving with tractors, so we rushed and with our tractor got in-between some other tractors moving in a row. To us women they would say, "You have money, give it." They wanted to see where you are hiding your money. They wanted to undress us, "She has her money here." They used knives to tear off our clothes. They didn't care.

We returned home. But after we did, there was nothing to eat. There was nothing and I had to go out and buy something for my children. But there were no shops working, So I would go to my father's to get things there. I'd get groceries from them. They had some ham they had prepared a while ago. They had enough to eat and drink. But they too left their house, and it was left empty. And I would go there just to pick up things to eat. And as I was going there, to my father's, there was a café, with policemen assembling in it. And

they would see you from inside. There was no avoiding that place. And that is where it happened to me... that assault from them. If I am not mistaken, they were about 10 people inside. Or maybe that's how it seemed to me, but it looked like there were at least 10. There they were, they spoke to me in Serbian, I didn't understand them. I did not want to enter their café. They pushed me in. They pulled out a knife, they made a cut on my leg. I still have a scar. And they started to beat me up. I fainted. They had then undressed me. They were drunk and armed with automatic guns. Thank God a long time has passed since then, otherwise I would not be able to speak about it. Ever since then I have problems with my anus. Ever since that day. Because I had fainted I have no idea how long I was kept there. But I went at my father's just before it got dark. I went back home in the morning. I also got some clothes. They were not there the next morning. I only recall the beginning of my assault. I fainted and don't know what they did to me. When I got up I noticed my anus was bleeding. I picked up my clothes, and tried to fix myself up. I went to my father's house after I had managed to pull some strength. The house was abandoned. I went there, I cleaned myself up, and fixed myself. I was more relaxed to go there. I wanted not to be noticed, so that nobody could tell that I was raped, as I had managed to survive. I thank God for not dying, for the sake of my children. When I went back home, they asked me about the delay. I said that I did not dare move. When I returned I told my father-in-law. He said, "the important thing is that you are still alive." I told him what happened and where. He said that it was important that I was still alive. He said people have suffered worse things. That these are to be expected during the war. It is a good thing that they had not kidnaped me, taken me some place so that nobody knows of my whereabouts. Or kill me altogether. "Think of yourself as being reborn," my father-in-law said. He gave me the will to move on. He was a very pleasant man. He supported me a lot. I feared a lot from then on. He would know how to make some home remedies and helped me a lot. He was like a doctor, knew so much. I felt more comfortable from his remedies. He made me look at things more positively. To other people I'd say that I had been running away from the Serbs, their police, and that I had fallen several times and bruised myself. Thank God it did not turn any worse than that. Then after the war I would have constant nightmares. I would wake up terrified. My husband would ask, "What is it? You won't let me sleep at night with your screams. I dream that the Serbs are chasing me and I am running away," I'd say. I could not tell him. He was not one of those who could take it. My father-in-law was a different character altogether. He was peaceful and good. He used to explain things well, and he was an attentive listener. But his son was not like him at all. I loved my father-in-law as if he were my own father. He knew how to advise me. I have problems with my sleep. It was worse immediately after the war. I would suddenly wake up. Still do at times. Sometimes, if I hear some distressing news, all of the terrors of the war come back. It hurts when I hear bad news. The same goes with seeing scenes on films. I don't like watching movies. People ask have you seen this or that movie, but I don't watch movies. I try to find light things, humorous things.

The relation with my husband? I don't know. He is more rigid after the war. Sometimes he gets on my nerves. He makes me feel bad. I cannot open up to him. He is not very approachable.

I have my son. He is very helpful when he sees me upset. He has spent a lot of time with his grandfather, and I worried if he had told him anything. But he didn't. He didn't tell a soul. But my son tries to calm me down. He tries to make me feel good, not let me think about any negative things. He likes to take me out, things like that... Anything to make me not think about the events of the war. He doesn't like to upset me.

My son asks, "Had you been a writer, would you write?" And I say, "Song lyrics? Of those with three words in them? I would write about five hundred of those." You know, you describe it, try it in several ways then merge the parts you like. And things may occur to you anywhere. You may be travelling and things occur to you. You can describe the things you see and think of. Let the thing that bothers you get out of you. Because there is no describing it. You can put things you want out of your mind. But there is no describing it.

When my father-in-law died I felt very sad. I still cannot speak about it, and if people ever mention him, I start missing him.

While the in-laws were alive we were OK. After they died it became worse. It is harder now than it used to be. While they were alive, they were helping their children. Now there's no help from anyone. The sons are grown up and jobless. My sons are all grown up, but they are not working or anything. They have finished their schools but aren't working.

I'd plead that they deal with the youth more. I know a lot of young girls who don't dare do anything because of their parents' restrictions, so they do not enroll for higher education at all. And they do not dare come forward and say why they aren't. They don't dare speak.



## 10 – VIKI:

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo





- **MY SISTER, SISTER-IN-LAW,**
- **COUSINS AND I**

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About 17 women were assembled by a group of paramilitaries in a city in Kosova. The most beautiful women from the neighborhood were assembled, according to the witness. They were sent to a school in a nearby village. According to the testimony, there were tens of women held for days in a row. They were subjected to sexual, physical and psychological assault.

“They usually had very short nicknames. Nicknames like Fish, or Lion, the other was Wolf. My dear God, how much we suffered from that guy called Wolf. They tore us apart. They literally did. They raped us until we were torn.”

First Person Narration:

- **THEY PUT US IN A SCHOOL WHERE**
- **MANY WOMEN HAD BEEN ASSEMBLED**

VIKI

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We were ten members in our family, my father and mother, five sisters, and three brothers. I was the youngest. We had a normal life. Our father really took good care of us. He was wealthy enough, kept us well fed and dressed, we'd buy whatever we liked. I remember I had a pink bicycle, he had bought to me as a birthday gift. I might have been five or six. So there are good things I recall from my childhood.

I was a very good student all the way to the high school. But I could not continue my high school. The University was too far. So my father had me engage and marry. I got engaged but did not see my fiancée until six months later. We got married. The first months were OK, and then he started to be very jealous. He was extremely jealous and drank a lot. I gave birth to three

children. Then the war broke out. We were at home when we heard the noises. We were terrified, as we didn't know what was going on. My husband and children all got to the ground. I had no idea what was going on. I thought someone was getting married and celebrating in their wedding, but the shooting just would not stop and was heard really close. We went to a neighbor's and spent there some four days. They had a cellar where they could fit us too, the entire neighborhood went to their place. During those days I was left without any dippers. I had to go home and get some sheets or something. It was not far. I was dressed in training clothes, and they must have thought I was a man and they started to shoot at me from a hill. The snipers would shoot the minute they'd see someone move. But I went home and got the sheets. There were no movements. They said to us, "Go wherever you want. There is no place for you here anymore." They would knock on the doors and tell all the residents to get out. We were moving on a bus and the police would enter so often to see who is inside, if there are any suspicious faces. We traveled for four hours. My mom had come out to wait for me. Then we were trying to think where we could go from there. The phone lines were off; you could not call anyone.

So we set off. We calmed down a bit. At my sisters' house they had entered, they had killed her husband and daughter and they were coming our way. Then they came and took me, filled up their trucks, choosing the young and healthy women. We had no idea where they were taking us. They had taken 17 women in total in that truck. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. When we stopped, they had come to a large school. There we saw a lot of other women, they were all torn and beaten, and looked miserable. They made us enter. They were pushing us as much as they could. We entered inside, there was one woman only there. "Where are we? What will they do?" She told us. "Dear God, poor you women", she cried. She was asking "So they took you like they did us? Whoever gets on their hands, will not come out sane." They pulled our teeth with pliers, because we were refusing to do what they ordered. You see this scar here? They cut my leg, and the genitals too. They extinguished cigarette buds on our arms and cut us with knives. They kept us there for three days and three nights.

They would open our mouths forcefully and made us swallow their raki [local strong spirit, t.n.]. They tortured us, beat us up, they cut our belly, genitals, the front, the back (sighs). After three days they loaded us on trucks again, and they were saying "We are taking you to Serbia because Arkan is asking for you." When we had travelled for some time, my sister had managed to untie herself and helped us untie too. She broke a bottle she found inside, untied us, she helped us untie. Then we helped our sister-in-law untie. And then we helped the other women, and some were saying they were fearing. Then we jumped from the truck as we were there. We walked until we came to a man with a carriage pulled by horses. "What has happened to you like this?" he asked us. Half of us that were in the truck have jumped, I don't know whether the other half have jumped or not. The women there were indeed all beautiful, the ones they wanted to take to Arkan. So the man asked "What happened to you? Where are you trying to go?" My sister said, "We have been running through woods and got scratched on bushes." He asked where we wanted to

go. He was a Roma man. He offered us a ride. We got on his carriage and got on the way, but we were trying to cover and hide, fearing that the truck might come back.

When we went home at our mother's, my brother saw his wife and learned what had happened. He was furious "I will leave her; I will not keep her any longer." My husband came to and said "You're not my wife from this day on." My mother said, "What can we do? There is nothing I can do!" My mother and brother were discussing. My brother was troubled. She said, "Look at your own sisters my son. What happened to your wife is the same to what happened to your sisters. Will you forget your sisters? Abandon your sisters? And your wife? Where do you want to leave the kids?" He stopped. He didn't speak any more; he kept to himself. They raped my mother too the day they entered. And they took us with them. They also beat up our mother as she did not want to let them take us. They beat her and beat her. They cut her with a knife, she still has a scar on her leg. She was determined to not let them take us. She quarreled with them hard enough, but at some point they threw her on the ground (sighs). When we came back home, our mother awaited us happily. Then the other harassments came. They wanted us to leave the house and join a row of people leaving. It was April 9 when they made us get out of the house. The suffering we experienced is impossible to describe. We tried to mask our faces with dippers and keep our head low, but all in vain. Three times on our way we were raped by the policemen. I don't know if they were paramilitaries or what. They had drawings on their faces. You could not tell who they were or what they were. They used some nicknames, not their real names. They usually had very short nicknames. Nicknames like Fish, or Lion, the other was Wolf, namely the one who eats you like a sheep. My dear God, how much we suffered from that guy called Wolf, may God pay him all back. Together with his family. They tore us apart. They literally did. They raped us until we were torn. They raped us on the way. The whole world knows it. There was so much raping going on. We walked for five days one way, then walked to return, with little children, rapes, bloodshed... horrible it was. They would swear at us and yell at us. "How dare you oppose us?" they'd say. The girls had been lost. They had gone and sheltered at my mother's. When they kicked us out of there... "What is it?" "Mom, what happened to you?" "Nothing!", I said. She said, "No, we have seen it." They know it but never mention it to me. They have accepted that that is what has happened. Every April I recall what has happened, and get so upset, I need to go to hospital.

They would collect them from every neighborhood, assembled them at the mosque. There is that spot near the mosque. all those men, all those women, all those old people shot. When we returned, then they collected the men. They collected them and put them in prison. They were saying it was going to be very bad.

Someone gave us two loafs of bread. The regular army would give us some food.

The Serbian soldiers, they were not causing any trouble. They didn't want to sin by touching women and children. They gave us powder milk, they gave us bread, and gave us some sort of (sighs)... it was in a tube. The regular army I mean. Those that were in tents, they stopped us on the street and raped us. It

happened for three days. It was raining hard. My brother had a daughter in his arms. And a soldier goes to him "Stop!" He asked him to stop, but not us. He stopped, but my sister and his wife also stopped and I was more on the side with my mother. He pulls his knife and wants to slaughter my brother. But he had cut his star from the hat and used it to stitch it on a plastic sheet for my niece, so that she doesn't get wet from the rain. It was raining. God was crying from what was happening to us (sighs). The children would get tired and sleep. Some were walking with hands in their pockets. I couldn't let go of my daughter. I had to carry her.

We had injuries caused by cigarette buds and knives. These you could attend to as they were on the outside, but the wounds inside were worse.

After NATO started to bomb, an Albanian doctor was coming to treat us. That was after NATO started to bomb them properly.

They gave us the first aid, they stitched us, helped us with some creams to heal the anus. They gave us some pills for the traumas, because we told them what had happened. They took our names and details. That doctor came to check on us every week and he was putting his own life in a jeopardy, as he had to travel from another city. He was the only one to attend to victims of war. Someone else would not do it.

My sister was also in a terrible state. She did not want to separate from her husband and daughters. The doctor asked me, "Are you going?" He encouraged me to take my daughters and leave, promising I would get better. I took my daughters, he told me where to go and how, and later made sure I went to Belgium for a medical treatment. A Belgian woman married to an Albanian guy was the sponsor.

She would come to visit me in the hospital. She was my translator, such a nice woman. She will be my sister in this world and the next. They kept me for 28 days with transfusions. Non-stop. They would just change the bottle. And after I got better and was ready to leave the hospital, she said, "I will take you to the camp and register you as a refugee." We went there and reported, and she said, "I want to take you to the highest floor, and bring the food to you upstairs, so that others do not see you and you can only come down when and if you chose." I would agree to all of her suggestions. I was constantly thinking about my other brother, the second one. The police had taken him, and the papers were saying that he was dead. But he had not been killed. They had taken him to the prison, harassed him, beaten him up, even raped him. Then they had released him and made him go to Albania. I had no contact with him. The phone lines were not working. My mother always had a phone. I tried and tried, and after having spent six months in Belgium, I finally got to talk to her. "Mom, are you all alive and well?" I asked. "We're all alive, but your brother is sick, he may die." "Why?" I asked. She said that they had beaten him up badly and raped him. I said to her that I would go back. In Belgium I met a family, and they said that they wanted to make sure I get some sort of support from them as a compensation for all my suffering. They were very helpful. "You are left with three children and no roof over your head. Tell us where you want the new house and we will pay for it."

I wanted to go to my mother's. I don't like that city any more, not after the rape and all. I cannot love it any more. And when I went to my mother's, the trauma

was back, because of the terrible memories from there.

I went back.

My sisters, cousins from my mother's and father's side, we were all together. But let everyone speak of herself, because it is not my right to speak about the others. I can speak about myself, and my sisters. My sister was running after her husband, because he had been taken away. She had her two sons. Her husband is the only brother of six sisters. My sister was caught from the policemen, taken to a police station and then raped by them.

The policeman had asked her, "How does a woman run after her husband?" The Albanian women were always praised for their high morale. While raping us they were saying, "You Albanian women deserve worse because you try to protect your honor." They swore at us, threatened us. "We will do this and that to you, and then burn you alive." After what they have done to us, no Serb deserves to have their name even mentioned in Kosova.

I don't know how some people go to Montenegro for holidays. "Where are you going?" "To Montenegro!" "And what about the atrocities they committed against us?" There were more Montenegrins than Serbs.

I tried to kill myself several times after I returned to Kosova. Because we would speak and tell about the experiences of other people, and that would haunt me. I would look at my daughters and think, "Who will take care of them?" They don't have a father, and without a mother, where will they be? I would put the rope and make ready the chair and all, but they'd find me and prevent me. My oldest daughter caught me twice swallowing pills without counting them. She had reacted swiftly.

My husband came three years after I returned to Kosova. And he pushed me and threw me on the bed in front of our daughters. He raped me. "Is it good to be raped by the paramilitaries?"

That is also rape, because I had not seen him for three years. "Do you like it? Does it feel good?" Is it this, is it that, he yelled. The girls were screaming and crying. I was screaming and crying myself. I signed to them with my hand to go find help. They went and called the neighbor and he pulled him away, detaching him from me. It was a good thing I did not get pregnant, because I don't know what I'd do. I was traumatized. Went to the hospital. I spent there eight weeks. Neurosurgery. They did some analysis and said I was very sick. As if the traumas of the war were not enough, I had to experience this one too. Two months later they check me up and say, "You are pregnant". "Pregnant?" I said I wanted to abort the child. I went to abort. The doctor said, "I can't. You are anemic. Low in red blood cells." I still did abort.

My message would be for women to speak up, so that their voice can be heard. If we don't speak up, nobody is going to ask about us. Without us telling our stories, nobody will know what happened to us. Let the society in general help us out, let them not demean us, point fingers at us, call us names. Let them say some words of support. Let them support us the best way they can.

# Supporting narration 1 – AGIMI:

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## **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo





## • IDEALIST RETURN (SUPPORT)

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He had a good life in Switzerland, but had decided to contribute for Kosova's liberation.

His purpose was to build a place where his children's future would be possible. The war hit this fighter in his weakest spot: his wife and children.

Today he is proud, but sometimes saddened when he thinks that maybe he has offered his children a worse future than they would have, had he stayed in Switzerland.

“It is hard. Especially as we know what the Albanian tradition dictates. My wife told me immediately what they had...”

- First Person Narration:
- **SHE NEEDS SUPPORT**
- Agim

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I was in the war, a fighter. Then, after two months of fighting, I had no idea where my children were. After the war, asking where they were, had they been deported to Albania or Macedonia, I found them.

I was a fighter for the Kosova Liberation Army. I came back from Switzerland with my whole family here, but it was so destined that the war started. I had to contribute for our fatherland. That's why we had returned. And while I was there, anything, any contribution, anything I had, I gave for the liberating war. I didn't know where my family was for two months. Absolutely. And they had

thought that I had died. I had no idea if they had taken anyone, let alone that they had done something to them...

It is hard. Especially as we know what the Albanian tradition dictates. My wife told me immediately what they had... But regardless, if they had done something to my child, forcefully, I'd try to protect them. So I said to her "You have my support."

I knew about what had happened. I thought of our children. And I know what sort of a relationship we had before the war. It was a good marriage.

We lived in Switzerland. A very quiet life. We were both working, and we were helping the entire family, relatives, anyone we could. My salary was 4200 CHF a month, and my wife earned 2000, 1500-2000, can't remember exactly. But life was good. Life was good. But then the war started, we came here, remained here. And now the worst thing is, I am not a disappointed man, but... I don't know if you can understand me, I am proud for having been a fighter. Because my children know, and my relatives all know that I left Switzerland in order to come and fight. But my children do not know what type of future was I thinking to let them have. Or what type of future they would have had they remained there. Indeed, they could have had such a good life there, and here I could hardly erect this house with a lot of assistance. But then again we're all healthy, the children, my wife... you know already. What can you do? It was our destiny.

I told my wife, "Whatever you decide, I will back you. What way? Anyway. Do not spare me; we will be just the way we were. I will treat you the way I did before the war." I never even try to, you know, make her feel unwanted, or subdued. I never ever mention it to her, because I know what violence is. I was myself a participant in the war. We could have done the same things, but we didn't. It's because we Albanians have a different mentality to theirs.

To say the truth, I have stood by her side just as I have before the war. And that has had a good influence on her. It will help more if I approach more. I say to her, "You've raised your children. You have my full support. I will never neglect you or hold it against you." No, no, no. She will have my support for as long as I shall live.

If we could just turn back time. But that is not something you can do. So, what can you do in the end? Life goes on. You have to face every challenge.

There are cases when she dreams about it, she dreams and wakes up in cold sweat. Not just about it. Other atrocities of the war. She dreams that they have caught her children and want to kill them. Then she gets very emotional. It was not just the rape. They saw and suffered many other atrocities.

They did not chose to do it out of their own will. That's a different thing. To say the truth, she was a good spouse before the war, more like a friend... regardless, I need to support her. Rape is a whole weapon in its own right; it is difficult, almost impossible, to fight. Hopefully, nobody will have to go through such terrible events any more. I'd say everyone who knows what women have had to suffer during the war, should support them and extend a helping hand. Not try to oppress them, or silence them. It is rape we're talking about.



## Supporting narration 2 – M.P. :

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### **I WANT TO BE HEARD**

Memory book with stories of women survivors  
of torture during the last war in Kosovo



## • I HAVE DECIDED TO SUPPORT HER

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The former KLA soldier does not have an easy life. It has not been easy ever since he observed with his binoculars the rape of a group of women. His own wife was in that group. This man, who has now become a great supporter of his wife, witnessed the rape by standing on a slope about two kilometers away from the crime scene. He says no one dares mention what happened to his wife. "Good thing they don't dare."

“I was in the woods. I haven't seen my wife exactly, but I saw the other women of our neighborhood when they collected them. I saw them when they started to separate them from the group. They started to beat them up, and separate them. I saw the violence they used. I have seen the sexual abuse too.”

First Person Narration:

• **I ALWAYS ASK HER TO STOP THINKING ABOUT IT**  
M.P

---

I supported her with everything I could. Had I had more means, I'd support her even more. Yet, it was not easy for her or for me. Those moments are hard, they're hard.

I was in the woods. I haven't seen my wife exactly, but I saw the other women of our neighborhood when they collected them. I saw them when they started to separate them from the group.

They started to beat them up, and separate them. I saw the violence they used.

I have seen the sexual abuse too. They grabbed her, and she resisted, and screamed. We were on a mountain slope. We were in the mountains. The distance was about two kilometers.

Down the slope there were fields and graves on one side. They assembled



them all there. You could see everything from the slope. We were watching from there. We were there, between different Serb forces and we just observed, used the binoculars. I was there with three other men. Silent, all four of us. And we saw them, we tried to shoot, but a friend of ours stopped us saying, "They will just massacre more of them if we try to kill someone. It will be a bigger massacre!" It was so difficult to have to witness that. I saw a woman, they had grabbed both her arms, and she was putting on a fight. She would not surrender. I don't know who she was. Then one man stepped over one arm, the other over the other arm, and then another one... Horrible it was. I had never seen anything like that.

I felt like killing myself. I don't know. A murder is a different thing. Had they killed her, I would mourn her for some time and then time would start to heal the wounds. But this is lasting all life. I try to avoid talking about it, change the subject, but she... And I remember what I have witnessed from the distance. And then she feels as if she is surrounded by them again. And she also feels bad because now the news has spread that she too was among the women in that group. She suffers it to this day. She will not go places; she is terrified of people looking at her.

We were invited to a wedding, and we had to leave in the middle of it, she was thinking that people were giving her the looks. We came home and she would not calm down. I felt bad too, but what was I to do to help her?

Right after the war she stayed isolated for quite a long time.

Then she asked for professional medical help. She went to see a doctor. Some foreign doctors even checked her once. They did some analysis and said, "She has gone to the lowest point possible." She was really miserable. We sent her to a psychiatric ward. She stayed there for about two-three weeks, she was taking some drugs. The association helped her a lot, both with encouraging words and drugs. And we have come to this point in time. But it is not an easy thing. It is very difficult in fact.

It is so hard for me. For me and everyone who has learned the same truth. There are many who will keep silent. They just say nothing about it. And maybe that's better, they chose not to let anybody else but them know. But it is something that can happen. And it did happen. There's nothing you can do about it. It was never our choice.

I have never spoken to anyone about what has happened to my wife.

The children had no idea about it until very recently. Now they know.

They do not like it either, they are quite sad. Indeed, these are difficult issues. They're difficult. Whoever has been tested by God will know it in their heart and souls.

I have now started to feel a bit of satisfaction in life. Emotional life. In the beginning it was quite problematic. Now she is not so uneasy about it. In the beginning I'd think, "Why is she so reluctant? Why is she like that? What shall I do? Why? How?" No will for anything in her. Like a zombie. Better die than this, I felt. But I needed to change, show support, encourage her. I couldn't tell her how I was feeling. She was suffering. Crying non-stop. She would go out in the garden and cry. She would just sit outdoors and cry. She would not think of coming back. I helped her from the very early days. She would not know where to go on her own. I've said to her, "Take it out of your mind. Those were forceful

things. They are Serbs. They haven't... They did it to spite and destroy us all. And you were not the only one to suffer from them. These things happen in wars. They happen." They did not treat them as human beings. They saw them as if they were animals. Worse even. I try to calm her down, "Forget it, as if it never happened. Erase it from your mind." But she can't. She can't. The husband-wife approach was more difficult in the beginning. Then she could engage.

Now we are much better off. I'd rather die, lose my life, then lose my wife. I know her. I know how she used to be. But what can you do, it happens. You can cry as much as you like about it, but it's in vain. We had to take her to a doctor past midnight once. She vomits and faints. She has high blood pressure. And she just falls down on the floor. When she did fall like that the first time I thought to myself that she died. So we took her to the doctor. Once KFOR people came to check on us immediately after the war. She didn't know who they were. She just saw army uniforms, and then she fainted.

She saw the uniformed men enter the yard, and said, "The Serbs returned!" A guy was translating for the soldiers, and they ask "What's with her?" Foamy saliva was coming out of her mouth, she had lost her conscience. We took her to Klina. They looked at her, took care of her. Then she came to her senses. They asked "Why did you faint?" I told them, "She had no idea that you are with KFOR and come in peace". It took her a while to come to her senses.

They felt sorry for her. And it had a bad impact on her. She stayed in hospital for four hours, refusing to come out.

It still happens at times, but not as often. It is quite rare now. Now she uses some drugs to help her out. Sometimes she thinks she sees them on TV. And she always seems to find those sorts of scenes. Then her blood pressure rises. I've told her, "Don't watch those things. Watch other things."

One day she was in a terrible state. I feared that... you know... I wondered what I could do to help her get up. She had lost so much weight, she was but bones and skin. Then she started to feel better and gain some weight, and now finally she looks better. We're communicating better. We find her things to do in the garden so she has chores to do and thinks less about it. Sometimes I take her out places. She likes going out, not staying home the whole time.

I am aware about it. Nobody dares mention it to me and it is for the best that they can't.

The Imam had spoken during the Eid holiday. "Those of our sisters who have been raped should keep their head up high and be content with life. They should not be miserable, or feel guilty, for they have not done something out of their own choice." That helped a lot. "Don't call them names... support them... they are not..." those things.

I'd advise those who have been victims of rape to leave it to the past. To forget it and not fixate on it. That's how I would like to be and how it has to be. But now it is up to each one of them, how much they can work on it. She is in a good surrounding. We are there to understand and support her. This has happened without her wishing for it. It is hard, unpleasant, but... you need to move on.



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**PRISTINA 2017**