



# Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence

Prishtina, 2024















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## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

Interviews with:

**Agim**

**Agron**

**Arben**

**Bujar**

**Driton**

**Flamur**

**Qendrim**

**Shpëtim**

**Labinot**

**Lum**

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(Note: For the protection and safety of the interviewees, the names of narrators, other characters, locations and details potentially leading to the disclosure of identities have been changed and anonymized by replacing them with other names or codes)



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Men's narratives

# Unheard

of overcoming the trauma

# Voices

of wartime sexual violence







## Gender stereotypes and their impact on stories of sexual violence experienced during the war in Kosovo

The third book in a row, "Unheard voices", includes deeply moving narrations that reveal the untold stories of men and boys who survived wartime sexual violence. In the fashion of memoirs, the book spotlights the narratives of survivors of wartime sexual violence who lived through unimaginable horrors, as a way of challenging dominant narratives of the time and shedding light on a silent aspect of human tragedy.

In the dark margins of war, where violence and suffering leave indelible scars, some voices often remain silent, buried under the weight of social taboos and deeply-rooted stereotypes.

Sexual violence as a weapon of war has been directed at a wide range of people and has not been homogeneous. "Traditionally" only women and girls have been perceived as targets of rape, but reports from war terrains and conflict zones show that sexual violence has spared neither men nor children.

"I have a certain shadow, a certain ice in my soul. I can't take it away, because what they have done to me doesn't hurt anymore, the pain has passed, but my soul is ice cold" – a child survivor.

The sentence above is excerpted from a painful confession of a survivor who was only 14 years old when he faced the terrible crime. The book you hold in your hands tries to shed light, moreover, on these narratives which reflect the chilling reality of innocent voices, the voices of children, thus leaving an indelible mark on our collective consciousness.

Civilian men and boys who have been raped under war circumstances, live highly stigmatized in society, equally if not more than the women and girls who experienced this war crime. In the case of raped men, it is the gender stereotypes of "power" and "masculinity" that have influenced the stigmatization. The traditional concept of the man as a strong figure who deals with difficult challenges, is contradictory to experiencing the suffering of sexual violence during war, since sexual violence as a weapon of war shows that men, like women, are exposed to the risk of violence and that the reality is far more complex and challenging than the socially constructed image of masculine physical strength. Such social perceptions, which link the figure of the man with the image of "masculinity", makes the survivors live with the heavy burden of shame that they were not able to protect themselves (and in many cases also the women) from the humiliating act of rape. They feel broken and guilty, negatively affecting their

self-esteem and emotional health. The consequences of this feeling of weakness and shame have made men more difficult than women to access the necessary rehabilitation services and become reluctant in seeking professional treatment and recognition of status.

Male and female survivors have different needs and challenges due to the interaction of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors. Therefore, the approach and provision of rehabilitation services differs to some extent between them. For men, the essential aspect is dealing with feelings of shame and guilt by challenging and redefining social norms. Whereas for women, the therapy focuses on restoring a sense of freedom and empowerment, challenging any internal feelings of powerlessness.

In the previous book “Beyond pain, towards courage”, published by the Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT) in cooperation with the forumZFD program in Kosovo, the narrations of partners and family members of female survivors of wartime sexual violence were revealed, and for the first time in the context of the research work, the narrations of two men who survived sexual violence during the war in Kosovo were brought into the public discourse. These contextualized narratives revealed the dynamics of how sexual violence experienced in war impacts on the family and wider circle, perpetuating the cycle of trauma and shame as a result of social stigma and prejudice.

This time, we bring the book “Unheard voices” which is an exclusive compilation of the narrative of men and boys who were not spared from the brutality of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo, with the aim of documenting war crimes, and informing the wide public on the painful truth and dealing with the past.

“Unheard voices” brings to the fore the haunting narratives, shedding light on the experiences of men who have faced the trauma of sexual violence and emerged as beacons of resilience, courage and strength. This book aims to amplify the voices of survivors and challenge the social stigma surrounding men and boy survivors, encouraging other silenced voices to be heard.

In the coming pages, you will come across a variety of narratives that share a common thread: the triumph of the human spirit over invisible pain. These stories are living testimony of surviving men who refused to surrender to their traumatic experiences. Instead, they found the strength to face their past, slowly walk their healing journey, and rebuild their lives with unwavering purpose and determination.

Thanks to the courage of the survivors, the long-term professional work by the



psycho-social team of the KRCT, as well as the relationship of trust built over the years, the protagonists of this book managed to overcome the feeling of guilt and shame that overtook them. With the aim of contributing to the documentation of the truth, they decided to speak, overcoming the pain and finding the strength to share the experiences of horror suppressed for years, with the general public.

The Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT) has needed great and continuous efforts to change the situation, both in the personal sphere through psychological work directly with the survivors and their families, as well as in the social sphere through anti-stigma awareness campaigns, as well as tireless institutional advocacy. All this work of over two decades, has enabled a paradigm shift where many survivors today feel encouraged to talk about their traumatic experiences of rape, creating space for boys and men where self-blame is deeply embedded in their souls.

This book is not just a collection of personal narratives, with a special emphasis on men and boys; it is a call to action that challenges society to deal with its assumptions and prejudices, where men is perceived as invincible and unaffected by this crime, to acknowledge the unique struggles faced by male survivors, and to advocate for a more inclusive, sensitive and supportive environment for all those who have experienced sexual violence.

Together, we have the power to break the silence, empower survivors and create a path to a future where courage prevails over silence.

**Dr. Feride Rushiti,**

The Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT)  
Executive Director





# UNHEARD VOICES

## Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence

Wartime sexual violence should not be limited to its understanding as 'forced use of the body for sexual fulfillment'. It is also important to understand the ways in which the victim, whether male or female, submits to the aggressor. Rape affirms the power of the assailant and thus the powerlessness of a woman or man experiencing the violence, while the effects of the act of rape extend beyond the individual, targeting wider communities.<sup>1</sup>

Through the exercise of the power of rape, the aim is not only to demonstrate the power of one ethnic group over another, but also to demonstrate the powerlessness and inability of men to protect women, children, the elderly, and themselves. Sexual violence in war, in other words, produces unequal relations between men: those who display their physical and political power through violence; and men for whom the act of rape symbolically represents castration as a punishment for their powerlessness and vulnerability. So, rape becomes synonymous with the dominance of one social group over another, where the feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability extends to the whole society.

Aspects of gender-based violence and rape in times of war have received attention through the reactions triggered by the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The importance and need to address the crimes committed in these wars prompted great international interest, given that they were taking place within the geostrategic region of Europe. In dealing with the cases filed for serious violations of human rights during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, for the first time, classified sexual abuse and rape of women, men, and children as a war crime. This court has claimed and made decisions for the rape of thousands of women, men, and boys, as well as numerous cases of births as a result of rape.<sup>2</sup> Gender-based violence and rape in war constitute one of the defining characteristics of the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the par excellence weapon of ethnic cleansing.

In the former Yugoslavia, and especially in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, violent policies during '90s were spread on many fronts, including bodies and sex – as a means to incite terror, to destroy the family structure, to implement the cleansing plan, humiliation, loss of agency, and de-legitimization of the body and subjectivity. The crime of rape generally targeted women but did not disregard men, the elderly, and children.

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<sup>1</sup> Branche, Raphawlle; Delpla, Isabelle; Horne, John; Lagrou, Pieter; Palmieri, Daniel; Virgili, Fabrice: *Writing the History of Rape in Wartime, Rape in Wartime* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Djelilovic, Zinaida, *Male victims of rape, last taboo of the war in Bosnia*, Balkan Transitional Justice (Balkan Insight, 24 April 2020)

In the war in Kosovo, rape of men was a widespread practice and strategy implemented by Serbian police and paramilitary forces, and by the Yugoslav army. The number of raped men has not been comprehensively investigated, but data suggested by organizations that provide rehabilitation and empowerment services claim that men, including children and juveniles, were direct targets of rape.

For more than two decades, male rape survivors were silent/ced as a result of shame, stigma, prejudice and prevailing traditional norms on gender roles. Silence and 'forgetfulness' became parameters of resilience and routines of existence. Crimes of rape against men remain unknown, unexamined and outside the margins of the collective narrative and the contemporary historical context. Society has stigmatized survivors, depriving them of the right to access emotional, social, economic and political support. In addition, the survivors also faced what is known in theory as 'social death' (Patterson, Orlando, 1985) which is manifested through the loss or invalidation of identity, relationships and social vitality. This model of behavior disregarded the presence and existence of these entities and categories of war within the broader social group, manifesting itself with exclusionary, stigmatizing and discriminatory (verbal and non-verbal) public communication.

The stigmatization of survivors of wartime sexual violence is driven by gendered understandings of identity, norms, traditions, beliefs, and prejudices. Stigmatization in the context of wartime sexual violence can also be understood as a form of social punishment for inadequate manifestation of gender roles and actions. In this way, gendered power hierarchies are put to the test while shaping social understanding of how gender structures play a key role in the production of stigmatization.

The book "Unheard voices: Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence" aims to break the cycle of stigma and shame by presenting the narratives of 10 male survivors of sexual violence from the last war in Kosovo. In the book, brave narrations are revealed which appeal to the human conscience.

The interviews included in this volume were conducted by the therapeutic experts engaged in the Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, through the oral history research method, and were audio recorded, with the written consent of the interviewees. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours, and within this time a wide range of personal experiences were examined including; family history and structure, childhood, education, professional achievement, war and trauma, resilience, personal life, life after war, etc. Audio material from the interviews has been transcribed and edited, and each narrative is preceded by a title and a short introductory or descriptive text. The structuring of the interviews



was done in the format of life stories, eliminating questions, sub-questions, complementation, assertions and out-of-context conversations. The substance of narratives in this volume is authentic and unfolds systematically in a coherent structure, with authenticity and dialectal nature of the narrative language.

This approach helps to create spaces for silent and largely unknown narratives to the public, to find a place in public discussions about the war. Also, oral history, in the context of working with survivors of wartime sexual violence, offers the possibility that difficult narratives of violence and rape are heard with a subtle nuance.

From what can be understood when the survivors narrate, it can be seen that the priorities that are highlighted in relation to what has happened to them are focused on documenting the past and non-repetition, recognition as justice and justice as recognition, recognition by institutions and society, and reparations as a form of recognition and empowerment. These aspects present the potential of how Kosovar society can respond to the 'social death' and misrecognition of the experiences of male survivors of wartime rape to 'heal' the harms of rape with a reparative and gender sensitive capacity.

The central premise of this book is in the construction and dissemination of narratives about the experiences of men raped in wartime, as a way of expanding the narrative of war and countering the dominant narratives, which, to a large extent, place glorifying military stories at the center, underestimating civilian experiences. The book also pays attention to elements related to the agency of the body and narrative, and justice on gender crimes.

Although recent institutional initiatives (through verification and compensation) have contributed to the recognition of men and boys as 'victims' of sexual violence, the dynamics surrounding gender-based crimes and the lived realities of survivors remain largely unknown. Thus, the book highlights the heterogeneity and complexity of lived experiences, centering the diverse lived realities of male survivors and providing a perspective beyond the margins of rehabilitation communities.

Through the experiences of 10 male survivors of wartime sexual violence, the book attempts to include unheard voices and perspectives in the public discourse about the war and the past, as a way of facilitating a sense of social justice and inclusive gender understandings, and to help expand and deepen understandings of gender dynamics in war.

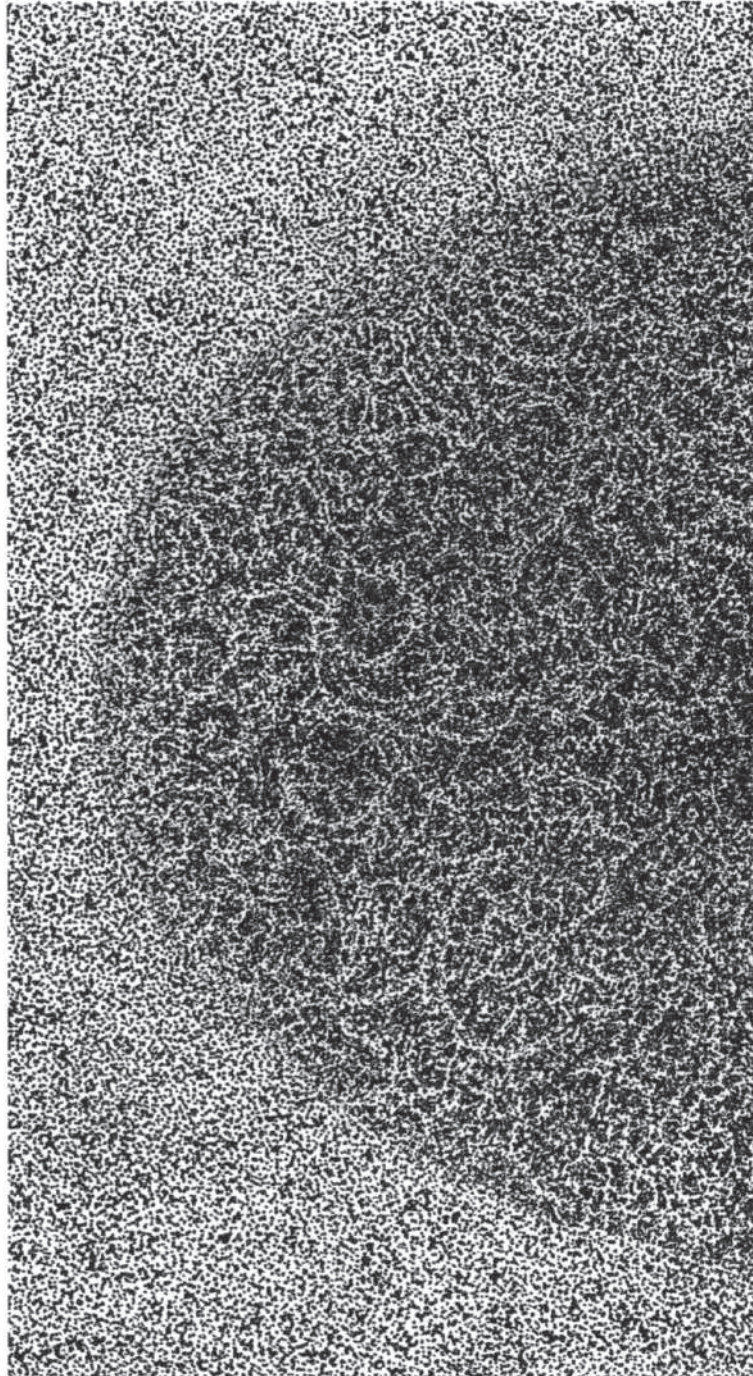
**Korab Krasniqi,**  
forumZFD Program in Kosovo

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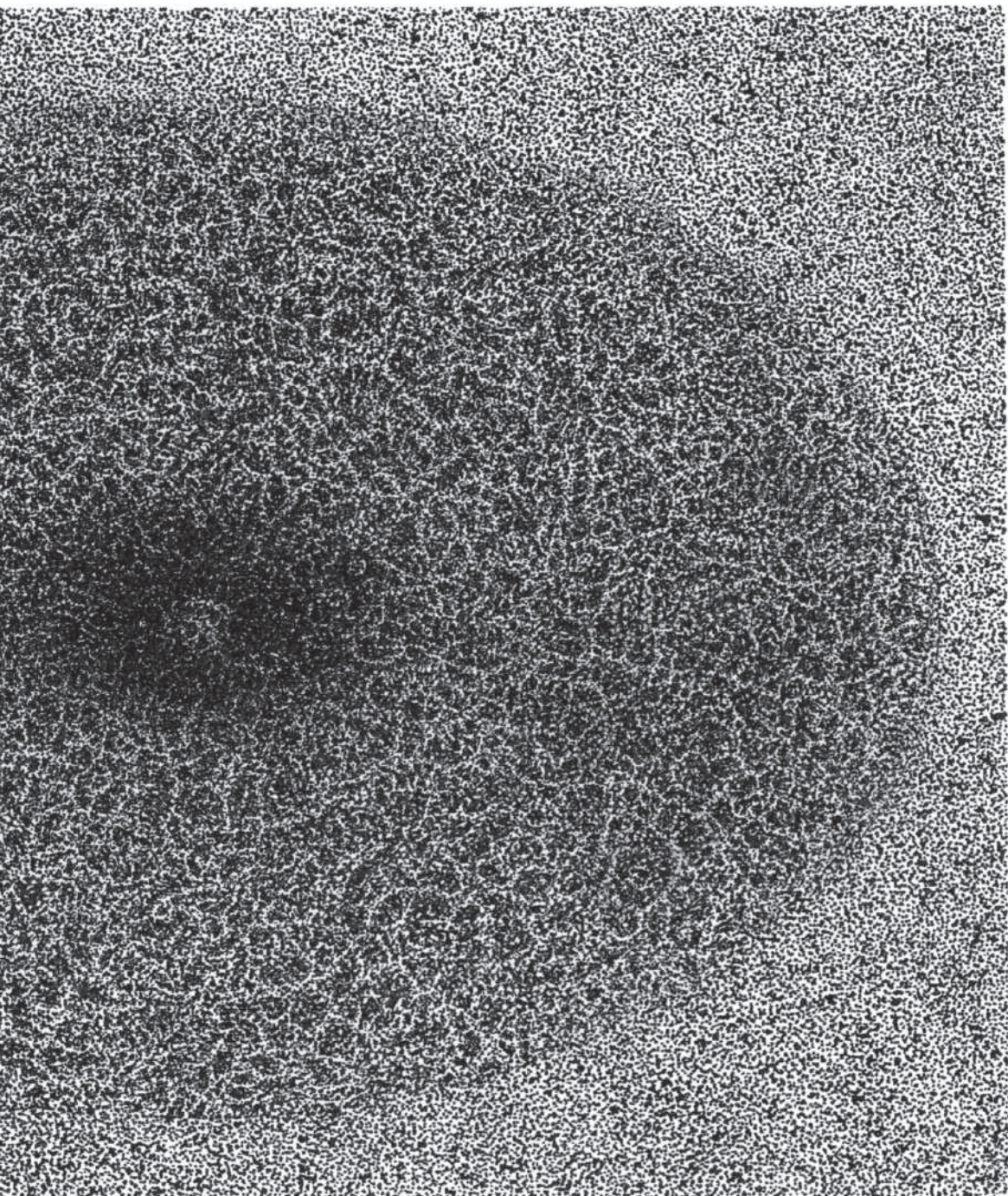
Warning: This book contains detailed and graphic descriptions of persecution, fleeing from the war, violence, rape, murder, torture, suffering, starvation, etc., caused by the war, which may be disturbing for readers or re-traumatizing for those who have experienced similar suffering.

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The language used and the views presented in this publication are those of the male survivors of wartime sexual violence interviewed for this project, and do not reflect those of the organizers and partners, associates or supporters of this project.









When he said to me

Men's narratives

"they raped me too", that's

of overcoming the trauma

where I lost my mind, I wanted

of wartime sexual violence

to leave them altogether

## When he said to me "they raped me too", that's where I lost my mind, I wanted to leave them altogether

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While studying at the Technical School in Prishtina, Agim falls in love. When his father tells him that he has found another girl for him to marry, Agim promises him that he will fulfill his wish, and after a difficult breakup with the girl from Prishtina, he returns to the village of his birth, to marry and serve his family.

During a major offensive by the forces in Drenica region, thousands of people, children, women and old people from all over gathered in Agim's village. He tries to escape by joining the convoy of women and elderly people, but they catch him, and together with several hundred others, take him to another village. There, Agim is separated from the others and raped until he bled. After they force him to do hard work, they take him to the police station, where they rape him three more times.

After the war, he continues to work as a figurative arts teacher, but in the classroom, he often seems to be haunted and numbed by fresh memories of the war, and when the school principal enquires about his condition, Agim opens up and tells him. Agim leaves the teaching, and because of the words that spread in town, he is forced to leave his place of birth.

Agim will also understand another hard truth from his wife, which he cannot bear.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Agim

I was born in a mountainous village. It was not a big village, but it had many children. Before the war, there were only 29 houses.

Before, we did not have a television, a radio, or anything in the village. Now the internet and television are there. Now the parents are already left aside. We were a closed place, we didn't have a television, or anything, we were completely isolated. I remember when a guy from a village bought a television set, all the children went there on Sundays. Only on Sundays would they let us spend some more time, they would say to us "go home now".

Our life has been very good back then. We had an average life. I don't have a brother, only a sister two years younger than me. They didn't want to have more children. Our relations were very good. We never had any quarrel, we never had any fight, we were only two children. Compared to how other neighborhood children, brothers and sisters were having fights between them, we never did. Our mother has spoken to us a lot. She brought us up and we didn't swear like other

children used to, if you could only hear them. I didn't know how to swear until the eighth grade.

My parents were working in agriculture only. We used to raise and sell cows, we used to plant our land, that's how we survived. We had a normal life. My father used to do the farm work every day. We also had our uncle's land who lived with us, so we had a little more than usual. We were also dealing with wood, we used to sell some small quantities.

Me and my sister watched our cows. At five o'clock in the morning we used to take them for pasturing, and returned them before going to school at one o'clock in the afternoon. When I came home, my mother used to wash me in the plastic tub, because we didn't have a bathroom back then. So, she always washed me, because we used to get dirty every time we came back with cows.

We used to go to school every day with my sister. Girls back then were only engaged in housework. My sister helped my mother and I helped my father in the fields. There was no difference, neither towards me nor my sister, nor towards my father, nor my mother. Wherever was a need, we went.

Back then love towards parents was greater than it is today. My sister and I were loved a lot, perhaps because we were only two children. They didn't even let me do much work as a child, but I always engaged myself, I went with my father and my mother; wherever there was a need, I always helped them.

Our mother didn't let us go out very much like other children did. Our mother or our father always used to come with us, they never left us alone. Never, ever. Yes, we used to go and swim during the heat, because there was a river in the village, and there, either our mother or our father would stay with us, they never left us stay alone with other children.

I feel sorry for my mother today, she suffered a lot, she suffered way too much. Poor woman always used to wake up at five o'clock in the morning to milk the cows, to prepare meals for us. She did all the work, both in the field and at home. What a time! I often say to my wife "compared to the times it was back then, today we shouldn't say even that we are working".

I didn't have any uncle, only grandparents, brothers, first cousins... because my father didn't have brothers either. I had four aunts. They were all married. My cousin had only two daughters. When I grew up, his daughters have already married.

My father was only seven years old when his father died, and his mother died when he was only two. He was raised by one of his uncles. My relations with my



father's uncle were as with a grandfather. I used to call him 'father'. He had two daughters, he didn't have any boys, So I used to sleep with him always. We lived together, but he had his house close to us, within the same yard. My uncle never worked, he only spent time in the guest house. He never spent time with women. He did have a wife, but she together with my mother used to stay at home, and he used to always stay in the guest house. He never ever spent time with her. I love them very much, and he also loved me too beyond words. I also considered him as my grandfather. He always used to call me "my son", you know. Moreover, in the beginning I didn't know whether he was my father, because that's how the times were before, up until the 2nd grade I was thinking that he was my grandfather. But then my mother said "no, this is our father's uncle". And then my mother told me about the biography of my father: how his father and his mother left him when he was very small, how he grew up, and ...

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I remember like today when I got in the first grade as a 7-year-old. I wanted to go to school, but I didn't spend time at school. I was telling them "I also want to spend time with my mother here". But here in the village, women used to be more isolated, they weren't really allowed to go out much, you know, as they go out today. So, my father used to come and spend time in the schoolyard until the classes were over. I always used to raise my head and watch whether he is there. Two other parents were inside as well, but only the first day because the students got used to it, but for me my parent used to come for two weeks, he regularly stayed there. But then I got used to it, I adapted to it as well.

Until 4th grade I finished my school in in my place of birth. We were 30 students in the classroom. We used to sit three students per bench in four rows. The first grade and fourth grade were in two rows. We were first checked our homework, we were taught the alphabet, we were then told to read, and then he used to go to the other classroom.

From grade 5 to grade 8 we used to go to a school in another village. The distance was about 10 kilometers on foot. When the first and the second year were finished, the choice was then yours to choose a profession, the profession you would like to pursue. We were 16 children that went from our village, I will never forget it. We used to leave at six in the morning in darkness during the winter. Our way was uphill and all mountainous, but coming back was downhill. It was a pedestrian path, when it snowed there, you couldn't drive through, because it was very slippery, so if you slipped and fell down, it was a 300-meter-deep cliff, we would have fallen down on the ground dead. There were also wolves, but our father and our mother used to tell us at home "the wolf will not eat you because there are cows", because they used to take the cows pasturing during the winter as well, so

when there are cows in the mountain, the wolves are not dangerous.

When we went to the other village, we used to have a very good time. They received us very well in the beginning, I will never forget it, with teachers and everybody, we always had more respect than the other students from our village. We used to walk for one and half hours, because it was quite far. It was a mountainous muddy road. It was very difficult. We used to get wet, and when we got there, we were all soaked. We always used to warm up and dry in the first class. We used to go with patched pants, so that sometimes you didn't know what pants you are mending; our mother used to kind of put aside the ones for the school, but there wasn't much to put aside. But we all used to be the same, there weren't any differences, we were all poor.

Our first teacher was a very good teacher, but also very difficult. He used to beat us a lot. For those who didn't learn, he used to have very bad behavior. He was very tough. The discipline back then was at a very high level. When he used to tell you "Be quiet", nobody dared to speak anymore at all. There was a great deal of respect for the teacher before the war. I was even saying, "does this guy even eat, you know", I would be asking myself.

I will never forget the impressions from the teachers before the war. They were very good; I have a great respect for them. They are almost all dead, because I used to know them after the war as well, I used to also keep contacts when I finished my higher education. I also used to work for six months in the village as well, I substituted for a teacher. He was even telling me "Look you were my student, and now you are telling me "Go to the class"", he was making fun, because when I was a class mentor for the day, I used to say to him, "come, because the bell rang to enter the classroom".

I always liked the technical education basis class, because I used to draw well. We used to have this class twice a week back-to-back. I was always the most distinguished both in the arts and in technology. We used to have arts class once a week, he always used to say to us, draw, I will never forget it, for example when he was saying to us, "draw a cow", you used to draw a neighborhood from the village, different kinds of things. The arts and the music were taught by anybody who could teach. The Albanian language classes were from grade five, and together with the mathematics, were always the most important, because they used to make us learn a lot. I even know the multiplication table, because I used to learn it from grade 3, because students didn't dare not to know the multiplication table, because they used to beat us. As soon as they started beating you with a stick, five hits on this side and five hits on that side. Those who didn't know it, he used to make them stay the whole class, for the 45 minutes on foot. They were very severe tortures. I feel sorry today and I used to

be scared when he beat them, but he was never beating me, because there was no reason to beat me, as I was a very good student, and I was a very well-behaved boy. As soon as I went home, I used to go and do my homework even before having a meal. There was a great deal of order. But sometimes I go back and say "they were right, but not that way". You cannot beat the student just because he doesn't learn, there are other methods. In one aspect I never liked the violence in the school.

Back then the teacher used to shout a lot, so much so that we were saying "you could hear it down from the river". Imagine, the schoolyard was full of apples, apples used to ripen in the autumn, but we didn't dare to pick even one apple. Even when the apple fell down, we were supposed to pick it up and take it to the principal. There were only two teachers in our school. Both of them were very tough, they used to beat us a lot. What's even worse, we didn't dare to tell, they used to beat my father's cousin so much, because he didn't learn at all. I was saying to him "why don't you tell at home", because they were beating him so much, he was saying "I don't dare". I was feeling sorry for him, so sometimes I would cry. Imagine we were so scared; we didn't dare to tell at home even.

During the day, we usually played with the ball, but back then we didn't have any ball, so we used to take some clothes and played 'petak' with sticks, we used to play 'hide and seek', and we used to play 'stol'. Girls always used to play with stones, we call them 'pebbles players'. As boys we were separated, we did not play together with girls. There was no discussion in our village about the girls, whether they liked to go to school or not. It was a clear-cut decision, "only the 4th grade". There were girls in the other village, because it was a big village, now it is about 500 or 600 households. There were even more girls than boys in our classroom. There were only two girls in our parallel classroom in the 5th grade. At that time, we didn't know, we used to think that girls should only know how to write and read, and nothing more. And boys used to finish only grade 8, very few of them continued further education. We married our sister through an arranged marriage, because until the night girls would become brides, they will have never seen their husband before.

The first and the second year of the high school I finished in the closest town. The third and the fourth year I finished in Prishtina. My major was in construction. At that time the secondary school was finished by eight students only. We only had two girls in the classroom in the first and the second year. We were about eight students who went together to \_\_\_\_\_. We were 16 altogether, but the eight of us were kind of close to each other from the same neighborhood, as one family with them, because our grandfathers were brothers. Unfortunately, none of them finished the school, but they were still better off, because they are all out in the western countries now.



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There was an aunt of mine, my mother's sister in Pristina, so whenever she came to visit us, as far as I can remember, we used to give her everything, beans and meat and everything for every winter. As soon as we slaughtered a cow, and dried the meat, my mother used to fill a bag full of dried meat for her. So, the aunt had told me, "When you finish your high school, you should come to Pristina and continue your education for two years". Because I used to learn, I was always an excellent student. My father didn't want me to go far away, but my mother did, she used to say to me "go and finish your school, because we will get old and you will remain like your father always working in agriculture, you will exhaust yourself". When I used to go there, my sister used to cry, she used to hug me, and say to me "you will not go anymore".

My aunt's husband used to have a good job, they had money, so she was buying clothes for me, she supported me. Until I came to Prishtina, I never had any sneakers or shoes to wear. In the village we used to wear only peasant's shoes. So, my aunt bought me clothes, sneakers, and everything. I will never forget it, she bought me a white pair of sneakers so when I walked back then even if a bit of a mud would fall on my sneakers, I would immediately clean them with a handkerchief, because back then we used to keep handkerchiefs in our pockets, because we never used to wear sneakers, always peasant's shoes only. So, when I used to go back to the village in good clothes and shoes, everybody used to run to me and talk to me and ask me "how is life in Prishtina?". So, I was telling them. Some were saying "wow I want to come for once and see Prishtina", because there were children among us who until they finished grade eight didn't go to a town; even the nearby town was like a little village, I remember two shops and a bakery, there wasn't much more.

I was 15-year-old when I took the documents from there and went with my aunt's husband to the school and got enrolled, I chose a construction profession, at that time it was called Technical School. I always liked the Technical Education Basis subject, but on the other hand, I also knew that there is a lot of drawing in the construction branch.

So, when I came to Prishtina, I used to spend a month without going back at all. My aunt had six children, with one of her girls we had only two months difference between. They used to have a big house in the outskirts of the city, where it is even today. They looked after me as a family member, I used to have my room for studying and sleeping.

When I came to Pristina, the life was a bit more different, for example, in the primary school we didn't dare to say a single bad word to girls, because teachers

would kill us by beating us. So, I remained alone, when they talked to me, I felt ashamed. I blushed so much when I felt ashamed, because we weren't used to being asked by a girl for something. If you consider our villagers from our village, we were like in a jungle.

My parents remained alone, I used to then go and visit them every second week. Every time my father went to a market, he went to the post office and called me. He didn't know the numbers, so somebody else had to dial it for him, I waited to talk to him, I even cried, because I felt pity for them remaining alone, but what can one do.

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I got introduced to my wife through a friend of my father, because during the summer he used to work in the state fields, where they used to harvest and plough the land. He used to work in agriculture from spring to autumn. So, a friend of his says to my father "I have a daughter and I want her to marry your son". He says actually "my son is in school, and I cannot decide for him".

Speaking the truth, I had a girl here in Pristina, we were together for two years. My father didn't feel like asking me, so he told my mother to ask me "whether I have any girl"? My mother knew it, because I always told her every detail, but not to my father, because back then we didn't dare, because we used to have respect. My mother knew it, but she didn't dare tell him "that I have a girl", but instead she told him "When he is home, we will ask him". Every time I went there on Saturdays, my father always used to come out and wait for me, because one had to walk for a long distance. There was a bus twice a day only, which was a state-owned bus, because there were no private companies. So, my father always went out during the winter and waited for me, and never left me alone, and so on the way he asked me indirectly "whether I have any girl"? I told him "Actually I have one, but without getting a job I cannot marry her". He said "all right, I hope she is a good girl, but she is not fit for us, because she is a schooled girl, we have remained alone, you will find a job somewhere, and she will take you to Prishtina, and you will leave us alone like two worms", so I started crying. I said to him "hear me out my father, you have my oath that I will not take her". "I have been with her for two years but I will not marry her. You can find me one wherever you want, for your sake, find me wherever you want". The day after, it was Sunday, my father told the other guy "My son accepted". I told him "I can't accept her really, without seeing her". Back then you couldn't just see her openly, you had to do it secretly; but with him it was easy, since the girl's father was a friend. So, my father told him "My son accepted her but not without seeing her". He said "Easy. I will ask my wife to prepare a chicken on Sunday because a friend is coming over with his son". So, we went on Sunday and I saw her. Now I have this wife for the sake of

my parents. Yes. I have her for the sake of my father, but she is now above everybody for me.

I was almost 19-year-old. I don't remember whether it was 1987 or 1988, 'because I forgot a little bit, a little bit now after the war – but I have everything written down, since I have the diary. I have written everything from grade one, what time I had, what I have done, who have I been in school with, who was sitting with me at my bench, what kind of marks I had, and those kinds of things. I often look at them now since I left teachingn, I often go through them.

We got engaged in the fall, and then I returned to the village, I got married and I got employed. We then sold several cows and I built a new house. I got married in 1987 and have five children: daughter was the first, followed by three sons and another daughter. It was a great joy for my mother; for my father as well, but more for my mother. Imagine my children used to sleep with my mother all the time because she loved them so much.

But I will never forget the girl from Pristina, because I loved her, and she loved me. Even five years after I got married, I had relations with her. She is employed in a school in Pristina as a class teacher. It was very difficult for me when I decided to tell her. First, I told her on a telephone. I said to her "they want to engage me, my father found a girl for me, so because of my parents I have to get engaged", then I stopped the phone call because she was screaming too much. She knew my whole story, so then I called her to my aunt's house and in the presence of my aunt I told her everything. She received it very hard, but then she had a very good luck in life. Now we have no relations whatsoever, but for about 10 years I went and was interested about her, because I know where she was married, I just wanted to know whether she is in a good place. Thank God she has children and has got good living conditions.

We experienced the war severely, so big of a horror so that it is indescribable. I remember we didn't know what was happening, and so we heard several tractors approaching. "What happened?" they said "police moved all of Mitrovica, they took people out of their houses". So, they found a place there in our village, a safe place, mountainous place, "they said they won't come here, police will not come here". They came there and stayed for some time, and then went back to their houses again, because the OSCE came. First, they closed all schools, and then they opened them again. When the war started, I personally didn't expect to happen what happened.

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The day when Serbian forces entered, I decided not to flee. We stayed in the

mountain the whole day, and went back in the evenings. The police and the army were stationed about 3 kilometers away from us, and were continuously shelling. We were guarding, but they prepared the terrain so well so that we didn't notice them at all. Only when they suddenly entered with infantry and, and a neighbor of mine was saying to me "they entered, flee Agim", and I told him "By God, I will never flee, I want to stay with my children until it happens what happens, I want to stay with my children, my mother and my father". My father also told me "Run, run", I said to him "by God, I will not run away". He said "I am going to flee". So, my father left, I stayed, and suddenly they started collecting men. As soon as I got to the door, they got me, took me beyond the school, in a field they collected us together and started taking out women and children, and everybody, and went towards another village. They first burned down the school. There were refugees there, there was also a journalist, because we were about 20,000 people, you know, you couldn't move around because of people. They burnt the school, and started burning the houses as well.

They gathered us all in a field, there were people there from everywhere, we didn't know where they were from, they were only coming with tractors and horse carts and were being stationed in the meadow. I saw them being brought from the meadows, so I said let me get up and get in the convoy as well, in the convoy of women. I saw a woman with an old man, and they were saying to me "oh brother, will you help us?", they didn't know that they caught us and we were surrounded. So, I said to the policeman in Albanian "can I help that woman and that old man?", so he said to me "get out". So, I got that old man, held his shoulder, and he put his hands in his pockets. When we went to the school, there was a bridge that we had to cross over, there were four policemen, two on one side, and two on the other, checking everybody. If you went the other side, you could save yourself. A guy was saying to me, "what about you"? but I didn't know Serbian at all, I said to him "I have this old man with me, he is my father", so he returned me back.

Almost all the women, children and old people were taken away, the village remained completely empty. The tractors were being burnt, the house carts were being burnt, it was full of smoke, smoke, you saw nothing but smoke. I saw the army and the police coming down from the mountains, they came and they were gathered in that field, because that was where they had their base.

They were only working with a map, and one guy said "the offensive was carried out successfully". No soldier or policemen got killed". Because we were asking a policeman who was guarding us, his wife worked in the bookstore in the city before. We used to know that woman and that policeman, so I asked him "what's going to happen with us?" he said "the massacre of Izbica awaits you". We will not forget the Izbica massacre because it was Eid day, on March 28. On the 29th,



they entered in our neighborhood, because they knew there were many people stationed there.

And he said "everybody", I said "what is he saying?", "he said take everybody to Serbica". Some started crying, I got completely numb. One can get numb without drinking anything! He said "everybody in line by two", one tank was leading us ahead and the rest were coming from behind. Just before we got to the asphalted road, they said "everything you have in your pockets, besides the identification card that you keep in your pocket, other things like money, cigarettes and everything else throw here. Whoever is caught to have anything in his pocket...". They were throwing money, deutsche marks. Moreover, a cousin of mine had a lot of money and I said to him, "could you give me 1000 deutsche marks", because they said "you could save yourself with money", "don't you have any?" Not really, I said. "Here they are" he said, so I hid them slowly. He threw about 5 to 6 thousand deutsche marks, and put the rest in the pocket, he hid them. I had a good watch that my sister brought to me from America, and I said to myself "whether I should throw it or not?" Because when I started to work, she wanted to honor me, she said I bought this watch for 5 thousand pounds and I brought it to you. So, I threw it. But I threw it in a thorn bush. I knew that place, so I said if I live, I will come back and get it.

So, we left, they did not search us anymore. "Did you throw everything?", "Yes", "All in line by two". The army was coming with tanks, plus the ones on foot. When we got there at the village checkpoint, we were in line by two, they hit hard a cousin of mine who was walking. When we got to the asphalted road, the army took him on the truck, so they started hitting us as well. They hit me on my back, but not much, because I don't want to lie, it's forbidden.

When we went to the other village checkpoint, to the house of a person I knew well, where they built kind of a room, all with sand. Close by was a big truck with sand, parked. There they stopped the convoy and told us all to sit down. We were 290 people, by counting, I will never forget. As soon as I sat down, one guy was saying to me "come over", and the neighbor was saying "here Agim, they will kill you now", so I got completely numb. They removed me from the convoy, and asked me to put all the sand in bags. For an hour we emptied completely the sand because there were many of us.

Then came one guy who dragged me and put me inside the house. I thought I will be killed right there, but when they put me inside, there were several soldiers sitting in two rooms, drinking, so he grabbed me by my hand and threw me to the ground and told me "Get your clothes off", so he made a gesture with hand to remove my coat. First, I resisted, but he had an automatic rifle in his hand, so I thought he is going to kill me. So, I got my clothes off and he raped me there. I

fainted, so I didn't know what was happening with me anymore. When I opened my eyes, he was staying before me, urinating on me. Thinking that he was throwing water on me, for God's sake, he was urinating on me instead. After he dressed, he called me, he made a red sign on my jacket. When I went to the convoy, the sign was still stuck on the jacket.

It seemed to me as if I went home when I saw the people. A cousin of mine asked me: "Agim? What happened to you, did they beat you hard?" I said "yes, look at my leg with blood", because he hit me there with the automatic rifle, I said "I think my leg is broken", he said "not really if it had been broken, you wouldn't be able to walk". When I took my pants up, the blood was coming out as much as it could. "Get your clothes off and give me a T-shirt so I can tie it, and stop the bleeding, because you will lose a lot of blood and die. So, I got my jacket off, I had two sweaters, or three, because we used to put heavy clothes on – "not with a T-shirt no, but with a sweater", he tied it and we left.

We went to the city, behind the police station, where there used to be a farmer's shop. When we entered, the place was almost flooded with mud up to the knees, because it was flooded, inside was full of sand and mud, and all the windows were broken. The police and the army walked around it, because there were still people in the buildings in the city. Those people had been taken as hostages.

They forced us to sit down there, I had severe leg pain, and was feeling cold, I was all shivering from cold. He says sit down facing him, those with identification cards on one side, and those without should remain seated. He asked to verify us, because he said there were six KLA soldiers among us. I had my ID, and he came over with a big bag and collected them all. "Now you are free, you will stay here until tomorrow at three o'clock, while we find those six soldiers."

As soon as we kind of relaxed a little bit, when suddenly four people entered, not with rifles but with bats, which they held in their hands. "You, come here," they told me. "They want to kill you," my cousin says to me. When I stood up, my foot wouldn't hold me, so I showed him the blood. "Don't be afraid, we won't do anything to you; we have killed them there, we will load them onto a truck. We just need to load some dogs and take them to another place; we will throw them in a bad river". We started getting those dogs in pairs of two, some by the feet, and some by the head, until we loaded the truck. Along with three others, they took us in a Niva, and they followed the truck. There, they made us throw them in the bad river. When it was done, thinking that they are taking me home, they got me in the truck, where there were two other Albanians and a Serbian driver.

When we returned, in front of the police station, a soldier in camouflage came out, grabbed me and the other two guys, and took us inside the station. I will

never forget it; he took me to the basement and raped me there as well. He then took me to the corridor, and B.H. came, so I was telling him. He recognized me because he was a Serb that worked at the municipality, but we knew each other because he was a neighbor, and I had received a certificate from him to postpone my military service because I was married. I told him that they were doing everything to me, and he said that as it is enough that you are alive, but if he knew he wouldn't let them do that.

They took us there two more times. I have never experienced greater horror in my life. Even now, when I recall it, it sickens me. I forget about myself for three to four hours completely, I lose all concentration, but again, thank God, I return to normal life, because one has to keep on living.

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Only two weeks after the war I hesitantly told my wife. When she told me "They raped me too", I got shocked completely, and I wanted to leave everything. It felt like the whole house was overthrown, I lost myself when she told me, I got furious. I wanted to leave her, if it weren't for my children's sake, I would have left her immediately. I can't blame her, but that's how I felt.

I live with her, but I no longer have any peace or love. I know it was not her fault, but still, I said everything to her, with great resentment, resentment against the army and police. When I see them in a parade or on the streets here, all my thoughts go to my wife, not to myself so much, but my wife comes to mind with worst thoughts. Sometimes I think, "Why did I beat her?", because I left my job and everything. [At this point, Agim can't hold back his tears and begins to cry].

When I saw how it is to expect money from somebody, and they ask you "what did you do with it, where did you spend it?" [Agim bursts in tears].

Now, children are taking care of me, giving me ten euros, the third one mostly, he always buys me cigarettes, and the others don't. "Where did you leave them"?! Well, one meets somebody, I don't drink alcohol, but I buy them a soda or coffee. That's how it is with somebody else's money.

After the war, I worked for eight years at the same school, but I started to forget a lot. As I was teaching, I would lose my concentration, and sometimes I would freeze. Back then, I was even worse. The principal would come to the classes, about 20-30 times, and would seat in the last row and would take notes. At one point, while giving lessons, my mind went 'crazy,' I got into bad thoughts, and I froze, I stopped completely and went and set. The principal didn't say anything initially, but when he came after a month, and told me, "You haven't been like this

before, Agim. What's going on"? Students have told me that he is not the same teacher anymore. I lost all interest because I used to be precise, well-prepared, with curriculum, and he couldn't find anything wrong.

I told the principal everything that had happened to me. The principal was senior and very kind, both before the war and after the war he continued working there. "I tell you as a father," he said, "as if you are my son, if you'd listen to me, you would quit this job because you are no longer fit for teaching." His words made me give up on education, I quit the job, and left the village, which I would have never done otherwise. In the village, they started saying to me, "look at the gay, look at him." I couldn't tell if it was the principal who had spoken or if it was someone else. I left the place because I was afraid it would lead to a conflict. I didn't mind for myself, but for the children, they were growing up, and while holding the hand of your children someone could say, "look at the gay with his children", a child would intervene and would get in trouble. I completely erased that place from my mind.

I have good relations with my children, but not with my wife. Since the war, I hardly speak to her, even though we live in the same house. Children know about the case, for both of us, but they don't mention it to me. My wife has told my daughters, and then they told to my sons. In fact, my son often says to me, "You have quit the job needlessly, too bad for you, you are out in the streets now". To be told by your children that you have quit the job and have remained on the streets ... [Agim bursts into crying again].

My children give me some money because they respect me and try to help, but they always ask, "where did you spend them, what did you do?" The third one cares for me the most, but I don't engage in such conversations with him. Sometimes he turns and says, "Oh, Gim, I remember when you used to come in the suit", but it seems to me like he is saying it out of spite, to mock me, and I tell him that times change. One daughter looks after me a lot. She takes care of everything, of my clothes, my room, and everything else. She hardly speaks. [He starts crying again.]

I come here \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes to meet some friends of my generation with whom I worked in education. They are still working, almost every two to three weeks I go to spend time with them. Sometimes I do private work, taking care of the gardens, but while working I get overwhelmed by pain.

It was more difficult that it happened to me than to my wife, it is harder, it would have been better if they had killed me ... [Agim bursts into tears], only faith in God keeps me, and if I killed myself, they would say "he is a liar", otherwise I would kill myself. Sometimes when it gets really hard, I think about jumping from



the second floor, because alive and in misery, nobody is looking at me. But the thing is, for the sake of children only because they were still young, and I said to myself they would get in a very bad situation, otherwise I have no will to live, none at all. Death is better for me.

But since I came to you, I feel lighter, as if I got relieved a bit. It seems to me that I feel, I got the burden off since I started telling you, because I was always blocked. I have one unfulfilled wish though: telling the journalists about what happened, this is my unfulfilled wish.

I think that the majority of the population will read this book, because it shows the crimes that Serbia has committed. The thing is that it's better to be killed, because if you are killed you are a hero, here you are neither a hero nor anything. You are disappointed, and you can't even demand your right or anything.

Now I've started taking a few sedatives, and I take them when my head starts pounding, even when I see our police, just seeing their uniform, I block completely, my thoughts go always to this case, and I change the path.

Once again, I'm saying it's better to have been killed than having this happening to me. I could sign my killing today.

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# Shame belongs to Men's narratives the criminals, of overcoming the trauma we are innocent of wartime sexual violence

## Shame belongs to the criminals, we are innocent

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Agron remembers his childhood with a lot of nostalgia. He talks about beautiful times in the family, with friends at school and in the neighborhood. His father is a teacher at the school where Agron attended elementary classes. They go to and come back from school together. The walks and frequent conversations create a special bond between Agron and his father.

As he grows up and enrolls in the Technical High School, the political situation worsens. Police control and violence increase. At a time when Agron and his friends feel mature and start to like girls, they become witnesses of extreme violence. They see aggressive police patrols at every corner. Fear of violence causes Agron to interrupt his education and start working in the construction.

Violence escalates. Agron and his family feel threatened and are forced to retreat and stay in the mountains. There, he becomes a witness to the gruesome murder of two boys, brothers, one shot with a gun and the other with a wooden stake.

On March 30, 1990, while trying to supply his family with food and flour, in their abandoned home, Agron is apprehended by two police officers, and from that moment, his life changes forever.

Today, Agron's status is as a survivor of wartime sexual violence. He lives in his home with his wife, two sons, and two daughters. He is eternally grateful to his wife, family, and everyone else who has known him and supported him toward rehabilitation.

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## Agron

We were many families living together. We were five sisters and five brothers. I am the fifth in a row. My father worked in education, meaning he could make some money and managed to take care of us all. My mother did not work, she was a housewife. One person worked for all of us. We never lacked anything. Those have been very good times. I was born on \_\_\_\_\_. I spent my childhood in \_\_\_\_\_, together with my family. We were happy, we used to keep cattle. We took care of the cattle in turns, ... with brothers and sisters. I remember times when we happily ate with brothers and sisters together in the garden. I have a photo, and we cherish it greatly when we look at it with one my sisters. We ate potatoes, vegetables, and fruits from the garden. I remember the clothes we wore, some clothes, some short T-shirts. Today, when we look at the photos, it seems interesting to us.

I come from a religious family, and we have respected the religion. More than half of the family prays. As children, we also used to wake up before the dawn to have our meals before fasting. We enjoyed it. We as children, would be waking up and eating what our mother had prepared. We used to wake up, they started the fire for us, prepared the food, made the meal ready for us. We stayed with the family until the time came for finishing the meal.

Later, I started going to school. I completed my elementary school in \_\_\_\_\_ where my father worked... exactly at the same school. In school, I had friends from



the neighborhood. We couldn't wait to go to school, and we would go together. We used to play marbles. We went to each other's house, and our mothers would give us pastries with jam, delicious treats. Friends were coming for me, those that were my neighbors who were my classmates, and my mother prepared the same food for all of us. She made pastries with jam, gave us a quince. We had our fruits in our yard; we picked fruits and enjoyed all the good things. Now, it has changed; we buy food outside on the street. After school, we played various games, with sticks, with marbles that I mentioned earlier, with... We enjoyed playing all day long. When we went home, my mother used to laugh, our hands all muddy. We would dig some holes in the ground... who hits the marbles. We also played with sticks. We cut some shorter sticks and divided ourselves into four people. We opened two holes, and whoever hit the stick in the hole won. It required skill to hit the small stick, and the other had to catch it. We were running to both of them in turns, counting as we did. We played until 30, until 20. Whoever made the most sticks, won the game. It was very interesting.

I also played a lot with the ball. Near us, in the yard, we had a field, a state field. We had our soccer field there, and we made it ourselves. After school and on weekends, we would go out there to play. I always stood out as a good player. I always played in the attacking position. I was fast, they would say, "... We can beat them. You score the goals; you have to always stay in the attack."

During the summer, for vacations, we used to go to a nearby river, where we would swim during the summer, like in the sea. The water was clean; there was sand at the bottom... the water was flowing. Very beautiful. We spent our time here. In winter, we went skiing. The river near us would freeze completely, and we would skate freely because we knew that even if the ice broke, the water wouldn't cover us. Skiing, we created various games, for example, playing cops and robbers. We made our own sleds, using wood and plastic tubes. We would cut the tubes and attach them to the bottom of our wood sled, making it easier to slide in the snow with plastic. We curved the plastic edge a bit to avoid hitting holes. We would go downhill, enjoying it, three and four children at the same time. It was a very good time, to me that seems to have passed very quickly. It feels like it happened just yesterday.

From my parents, I have been closer to my father. I have shared many things with him. Because he worked in education, at the school I attended. Often, I went to school by holding my father's hand. On our way to school we would stop by the store, and buy something. When I finished classes, sometimes I would wait for my father, and other times, we would return home together with friends. So, I have been closer and freer with my father. I discussed everything with my father, even though I had older brothers and sisters. I had good relations with my sisters and brothers. When I didn't know my homework, I would ask my sisters, "Can you help

me a bit". All the children in the house have learned, but it seems to me that I was a bit better. I learned from my brothers and sisters. I enjoyed studying... I liked biology, I was interested in seeing animals, I loved creatures that live in the sea.

We were a big family, very close and loving between ourselves, well bonded. The sisters often gave us gifts. The eldest sister, for example, once bought me a bicycle. I will not forget this memory, it is special.

My father worked in education until the repressive measures were imposed. He worked for 10 years without pay. After the repressive measures were imposed, everything was ruined at the end of the '90s. My father was never involved in the politics. An uncle of mine told us that he had participated in the demonstrations in 1981. He said they had gone to Pristina on foot from \_\_\_\_\_. Kaqusha Jashari was also there. These demonstrations were for Kosovo.

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When I went to high school, Technical School, I was very afraid of the police. We grew up a bit, moved to the Technical School. We would use shortcuts, but they would appear on the street blocking our way. We were afraid of the equipment they had; we were scared that they would beat us and kill us. The high school was not so close to us, it was closer to the downtown. One and half kilometer away from the primary school. There, both the high school and the technical school were located. When we went to the center, because we lived kind of in the outskirts, to go to school, we had to pass through the center. I remember being afraid when we saw Serbian police stopping people at intersections. Later, the police would come to school, they would come with equipment in their hands and would enter inside; they would provoke us, shouting to us in Serbian.

I still have a friendship with my classmates, but most of them have moved to developed countries in Europe. However, those who are still in Kosovo, we stay in touch, have coffee together, contact each other through the phone, "where are you? what are you doing? are you free? can we go for coffee? I miss meeting up with you?", and so meeting them and reminiscing about the school days. Many friends I had in the primary school continued into high school, we continued together. Some live close to my house even today. With those living abroad, we maintain contact through phone calls. When they come to Kosovo, they visit our homes, and we spend time together. We go out, spend time, have coffee, eat lunch, because we have houses close to each other and have grown up together. I also have special friends whom I haven't met or talked to, and with some that are in Europe, I didn't even have the chance to meet them again, I don't know where they are.

I have many good memories from high school. We used to go on excursions. We would get up early in the morning, and would wake up early before the dawn. Maybe due to the excitement of going on the excursion, we would get up, get dressed, put shoes on, and meet our friends. My mother would prepare and serve us with a pie. My father would give us money, saying, "You are going on an excursion. Don't save on this day, buy whatever you want." We would visit different cities, Prizren, going to different restaurants, spending the whole day together with friends, teachers, together with.... These are the best memories I have, the excursions. They seemed interesting to us. We would smoke cigarettes. We never smoked before, but on that special day, we would say, "Let's have a cigarette with friends".

High school, in general, was good. We would always go before the classes started. We would go earlier because we enjoyed playing. During the winter, we would go to light up the stoves. We liked going near the stove, especially when the caretaker lit the stoves. Until the classes started, we stayed together with friends. We went sometimes even 40 minutes earlier, saying, "Let's go earlier, sit, chat, have a good time." We did homework in the classroom. I remember when we had papers to write, we would tell each other, not being noticed by the teacher.

I had to then interrupt my high school because I started working in the construction. The pay was good. I would go around working with whomever I could. I would only say "Do you need any worker, do you want me to work?" In the beginning, I worked and went to school. What made me interrupt my education was the police checkpoint where people were being stopped. I was 16. I only completed one year of high school. I didn't even finish it completely, because I started working, and I had a lot of fear from the Serbian police. I saw them calling people that were bigger than me; they asked for their IDs and exercised violence against them. I witnessed with my own eyes when they called them and beat them. One day, I said, "they can call me too". I saw in groups of five or six people, beating one guy as much as they could. I wasn't the only one who dropped out of school. Due to the situation, my friends also dropped out of school because things were getting worse. Some finished it, some didn't. Then I learned to work as a painter, and I would go to other cities and work. I worked in the construction as well. In other cities when I would go, I was afraid that the police would stop us on the way. They would get on the bus, check us, they were asking for our IDs. When I worked in other cities, I stayed away from home for a week or ten days without coming home at all. I feel bad that I dropped out of school, because it wasn't a good solution. I was a good, excellent student from the beginning, engaged in learning. I still have my school diploma; I haven't lost it. It would have been better for me to continue my education, to get some good job. Unfortunately, I couldn't continue further because I feared Serbian police.

While I was in the Technical School, we didn't consider ourselves children anymore. We considered ourselves grown-ups. We had the desire to dress better, to appear more special. We talked more with friends, liked girls; "that girl is so pretty." Puberty. We started having crushes on girls. I had a crush in school, she was one year older than me. I was in the first year, she was in the second. I liked her. We sometimes had coffee, sometimes went out, walked a bit in the city center. Everything was fine until the situation started to deteriorate. I didn't have any worries; I was very happy. But then, this situation caught us in our best time, right when we were starting to live our lives.

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I will never forget that terror when we heard a noise. They said war started in \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. And that day, I heard my father say, "they say," he said, "there was a war in \_\_\_\_\_," even though we ourselves could hear the explosions. We heard some noises, about two helicopters flying above us. We went outside in the yard, looked, and I heard my father say – because my father had completed military service in Yugoslavia – "oh," he said, "look, it will be difficult", he said, "because who is," he said, "Serbia, how much weapons they have and how much...". Speaking with some neighbors in the yard, he said, "only those who completed military service in Yugoslavia know it." We were unarmed, we had nothing on us. That's when the worries started.

I thought about the war, saying now they will start flying airplanes and helicopters, and they will kill us. We heard that they killed people in Likoshan, and they killed people in Prekaz. The war was only spreading further. Serbian forces organized offensives. They would surround a village and start shooting with various weapons; they shelled houses with tanks, killed people. The terror began, the doomsday began. We faced worries, we faced trauma. We lost trust; we were afraid to stay even in our own homes because Serbian police would come in and enter our houses. At some point, we started to leave, abandoning our homes, going somewhere where we felt safer. The war struck us all, we only stayed in the mountains. It was the beginning of spring in 1998. We stayed in the mountains all the time, moving from one place to another. We were a complete family, a complete neighborhood. From mountain to mountain. The attacks began at some point. Before dawn, the offensive started; they entered houses, killed without making any age difference – whether children, elderly, or women, whomever they met. They killed several people in front of my eyes. The noise started, one had to wake up early to escape, but as we fled, we heard explosions. They would gather the men early in the morning, would board them onto trucks, mark them, and take them to stations or wherever, I don't know. Somewhere near us, they had dug graves to bury the people they killed.



One early morning, the offensive began. They caught many people while sleeping at home. They took men and loaded them into vehicles. One of our neighbors tried to escape from one of those vehicles, and they killed him on the spot. We saw it while we were running away. The offensive continued, and this person trying to escape was killed; we saw him lying on the asphalt. We had family ties with him. These events I am narrating started before the NATO bombings.

They said that around 20,000 people were hidden in the mountains. At some point they surrounded us. They knew we were there, and they came and called us. They said, "Come and form a line one by one, gather in this place." I remember it as today, we were hiding in the mountains when a Serbian policeman said, "We see where you are, it's better if you came and form a line and surrender voluntarily." They surrounded us, and made us surrender. They gathered us in line by one in a certain place there. It was the first offensive; it included all the villages. They surrounded us with tanks. We surrendered, and I remember it vividly. I almost lost consciousness when we surrendered there. They began grabbing us from the crowds of people, arranging us in rows, putting towels in front of us. Parents were shouting, "Please don't kill them." They were asking for gold, money. Now, in that chaos, they were also bringing others that they caught. They dragged two brothers from the mountains. They spoke in their language, laughing, with towels, knives in their hands. One was killed right in front of us with a gun, and the other was being beaten as much as they could. They killed him by beating him with the wood. In front of us they took out a knife and hit him to his head. It was a horror that I experienced myself, and all those who were there. First, they caught one of our brothers. They prepared him for execution. The other brothers were in different areas; we didn't even know where they were. We had no information about each other at all.

Nine, nine persons were taken there... they were selecting young men. One of them was my brother. They put a certain belt in front of him and the policeman took an automatic rifle, loaded it and aimed it at him. Our mother went there shouting and screaming, "please don't kill my son, don't kill him," she went crazy.

They collected gold from the women. Some were giving money; the women were giving gold. At some point, a couple more vehicles arrived... I don't know what they discussed with them; they just left us there like that. From those nine individuals they took, they killed the two brothers, one with a rifle and the other with wood stake. Seven others were not harassed. Among them was also one of my cousins. Today, he lives in \_\_\_\_\_.

It was a horror! I still remember when they were begging them, "By God don't kill us, because we have small children." Today, my cousin tells in the Serbian language how he pleaded them, "I am wearing boots, just look at my boots full of

mud, I have small children, don't kill us because we didn't do anything”.

When the offensives were completed, we would return home, but the Serbs would come early in the morning and caught us in sleep. When we would wake up, we would see them, noise and a lot of policemen; we knew they would be killing. They were mixed... There were police in dark uniforms, in blue, in sky blue. With Serbian flags, towels around their necks, guns in their hands, cold weapons, knives... they would terrorize us. It often happened, they would beat our father in front of our eyes, beating him without mercy. Early in the morning, they would catch us before waking up. We didn't know anything when we got up, we would hear terror, cries, and shouting. We were just waiting for them to kill us at any moment.

After the NATO bombings, we continued to stay in the mountains. While KFOR infantry was doing the intervention, we stayed in the mountains. There were even more severe offensives when NATO intervened. Those were moments of even more severe suffering. We would see houses burning. You could see your own house burning, and you knew someone that had been killed. You would see a neighbor, someone you knew, killed. They would catch us on the road fleeing, and we would meet them in the mountains while fleeing, very difficult and terrifying moments.

Let them kill us. It's better if they kill us now because we were exhausted completely. We endured days without food, sustained only by the fruits from the mountains, by redberry. At some point our stomachs were spoiled. We couldn't take even bread or anything. We endured. I spent six days at a time without eating. Only terrible things, people were killed where we were staying in the mountains, children, old people. I've seen children killed. When I remained alone and didn't know where my family was, which mountain they were on, I started climbing the mountain to find them. When I went to a village, I saw more children killed in the mountains, I don't know how I survived the bullets, the grenades, non-stop attacks. I could hear bullets that flying by my ear. There were cases where I had torn clothes, and I knew they were bullets, I knew they were trying to hit me, kill me, with a continuous rain of bullets, grenades, oh God.

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March 30, 1999, was a very bad day. That day, for me, was a bad luck. We had abandoned our home and were staying somewhere else, at a close relative's place. We didn't dare to stay here, in our house, because our house was located at a crossroads where the Serbian police positioned themselves. We were surrounded, scared, devastated, and hungry there. At any moment waiting for them to come and kill us. We stayed without food for several days. The whole family was there: my sister, mother, myself, aunt, aunt's husband, grandmother, and so on. The other

part of our family was in the mountains, and we didn't know in which mountain. My father was also in the mountains. After some time of staying without food, I remembered that my mother occasionally ground wheat for a piece of bread, she ground it with a coffee hand grinder. I also remember that a cousin of mine had brought two trailers of wheat to our house to avoid them being burned in his village, as there they had started burning more houses. In the meantime, that day, I decided to go and get a bag of wheat to cook. My mother used to cook the wheat and we would eat it. One morning I got up early, I said to myself let me go and get a back of wheat and bring it here, so that our mother could cook it for us.

I left straight towards our house, even though I knew it in my heart that something bad was going to happen. We felt surrounded, scared, exhausted, and hungry. I had taken a kind of wheelbarrow with me. I left my aunt's house, going through fields trying to hide. I didn't go to the main road because I was afraid. I managed to get to the house where our cousin had brought the wheat in our house. When I was entering the house, there was a family there, but they had been scattered, they had all left. When I arrived, there was only an old man. As I let go off the wheelbarrow and entered the house, the wheat was in the corridor. The house was a single story and shaped like an L. There was another room, a corridor, and a bathroom. Our cousin had left the wheat in the hall. When I entered, I saw only the old man. The others had gone. The old man had been living with his own family there, but the others had left for the mountains, and the old man couldn't join them. He had continued to stay there. So, I said to him, "Uncle, how are you, how are you holding up, are the Serbs coming?" he started looking at me and said, "Yes, by God, they are coming" he said, "everyday", "they come, enter and exit." I said, "Aren't you afraid?" He said, "No, by God, I don't have what to do." Poor man. Talking to him, I heard some noise from the vehicles. I knew there were no civilian vehicles traveling, I only knew... I was telling the old man, "By God, I hear some noise." I went out and looked. When I looked, they came. They surrounded the house. What to do? I stayed. With two thoughts in my head, I should either run away or stay. Initially, I wanted to run away. But then I saw there was nowhere to go. I said, "as soon as they catch me running, they will kill me."

I was forced to stay there with the old man." I enter inside and say to him "Serbs came". "All right" he says, don't be scared they come and go every day. We are used to them. You just sit here around me and be quiet. Don't say a word. I was overtaken by fear. My God! A very ... fear... I was sweating. I knew as soon as they entered in, I said God knows what they would do. I feared they would kill us and massacre us, because we heard they were massacring people alive. At that moment a noise was heard calling out. As soon as they entered the yard, in their own Serbian language they asked "Gazda, gazda". When I saw them in the window, I was shocked. I was terrified out of fear. I was sweating all over and started feeling drowsy. They entered, knocked out the door, bam, and spoke something

like in Serbian. I didn't understand them at all, but I know that they called, "Gazda, gazda". They talked something with that old man, and started laughing, talking, with knives in their hands, with towels, boy did I get scared, did I get dead scared. There have been many of them, but only two entered. They entered the house, they took that old man, got him out. I said they will kill him, and they will kill me after him as well. The same two guys grabbed me as well, took me to the corridor and they forcefully threw me against the wheat bag. They pressed my head down. In my mind, I said they are going to kill me, I became numb scared. I was only sweating. I didn't even know what they wanted to do with me. Even today, I never would have thought that they are going to do the worst possible thing to me. They started taking my clothes off. I know that had stripped me, yes, I said, they stripped me to massacre me. Because I heard they were killing people by massacring them. Yes, even there, I know that they stripped me down, stripped my pants off, and started doing the worst possible thing to me. I felt a strong pain, I thought they stabbed me with a knife. I am being massacred; I don't know what happened. I was staying over the bags; I don't know if I fell asleep or lost consciousness. I do not know! After some time, one of our neighbors who had been hiding by the river came over, he came and entered inside when he saw that the forces had left. They have walked away. He came and entered the first house; the first house was us. I hear he is calling me by name. He helped my put my clothes on and wash my eyes. "Don't worry, don't worry, they're gone, they're gone" he was telling me. "Do you know where the others are, where they are" he was asking me. After he helped me get dressed and after he washed my eyes, I stayed with him a little longer, until I pulled myself together and departed. I went and joined my family. I did not see the old man. This cousin come into our house accidentally, running away and trying to find shelter for himself. I fell asleep out of fear. Did I faint, or what happened to me I don't know. But I know that my cousin called me by my name, "Get up, you know what happened, Serbs are gone, they went".

When I went to my family, I didn't tell anyone anything about what happened to me. I waited until evening. In the evening, when it got dark, our army was on the move. I joined them, and asked them whether I can go to the mountains with them, because I thought my father was there. There I joined them, and went to the mountains. We stayed there until NATO intervened. Until the war ended. My mother told me to "go" because they were "entering the houses" she said. On that day, some people near my uncle's house had been killed, if I am not mistaken. They mentioned that they killed about eight people. Out of fear, my mother told me to "leave".

My mother had spoken to some soldiers and asked them "if it was possible to take her son to his father". That's how I went to the mountains and met my father. My brothers were somewhere else. Some had gone to Macedonia. They had taken



the train and went out. My father and I were in the mountains, staying in tents. My uncles were also there.

There were attempts by Serbian forces to approach our location, but we had some members of the KLA nearby. There were also many women and children. NATO quickly intervened and halted the Serbian offensives, and thus we were saved.

At some point I told my father. I was very close to my father throughout my life. I started telling him, explaining that "we stayed without food, we had nothing, not even a single bite. I went to get..." I told him the whole story. "I went to get a bag of wheat. When I went there, I met only an old man in our house... while I was talking to the old man, suddenly they entered and caught me ... so and so it happened." I told my father the story. He asked, "What did they do to you, how?" I said, "two Serbian policemen caught me, hit me against the bag of wheat, yelling at me in their language, I didn't know what they were saying, sometimes they were laughing, sometimes... they undressed me, and they did the worst possible thing to me, they raped me." It was something I hadn't even thought of.

My father began to cry, hugged me, and said, "It's good that you survived," he said, "oh father, so many things they have done, they have killed, many bad things." My father cried. He was very said, very, very said.

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After the country was liberated, NATO infantry forces entered, and we returned. We returned to our home, started cleaning the yard, and rebegan our lives. Our house was damaged. People who had stayed there also damaged it, those who baked bread there, they had burned the ceiling, and had taken the flooring away? Typically, houses were insulated with wood, they took them to burn and bake the bread or for heating.

I told only to my father regarding my story. Gradually, my father told my mother. However, my mother never said anything to me. She knew it, and when I would go to the doctor after the war, they used to give me some medicines, I would use them without my mother knowing it, thinking that she shouldn't know because she would get worried. My mother anyhow complained about high blood pressure, she was sick. I thought, when she sees my medications, she would worry and ask me why am I taking them. I always took them secretly from her, for example, I would go to the river and take them. But now, everyone at home knows it, because I enjoy the status now. My wife also knows, everybody. Now I receive this income.

At one point I told them myself. It was difficult, but eventually, I had to do it. Initially, I was afraid to tell them because I thought, "what will they say? what will

happen?". Even when I went to the doctor, when he prescribed me medications, I quickly tore up the prescriptions, as soon as I would get out of there. I tore up the prescription in many pieces that nothing could be legible. I always told the doctors – because I needed a document from the doctor for the association (KRCT) – I told all the doctors that it seemed like it appears in a dream to me, that they were treating me like this, and now I am stressed, anxious. I didn't tell the doctor what happened to me, but I told them that it appears to me in my dreams. I am seeing it. "Doctor, I dreamt that the Serbian police were chasing me, catching me, treating me in a worst possible way." Then, the doctor has prescribed me medications for anxiety, stress, trauma, and ...

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The woman I am with now, we met for the first time on the street while I was walking in the city. I had gone to the city for work and met her on the way. I asked her to have coffee together. We introduced ourselves without the help of anybody. I saw her by chance while passing by, liked her, approached her, and started a conversation. Later, we had coffee together. First, we had a conversation, I asked her for her number, it's not that we went straight for a coffee. We stayed in touch through the phone and met again. For a long time, I didn't tell her about what had happened to me. We started getting closer, talking more often. It caused me a bit of stress, but I was happy because I thought I could be with her, and then I have the opportunity to get married, to feel closer. We used to go out for a year before deciding to get married. It took a while. I found it difficult, I was scared, I felt shy. I hesitated, thinking, "What if I tell her or if she finds out?" Maybe I will take her, we get married, but as soon as she finds out, she would say, "Why didn't you tell me?" I was afraid she would ask to break up. So, at first, I didn't tell her.

When we got married, we went to the sea first of all, and after coming back from the sea, we celebrated with a wedding at home. I was very happy; I had someone close to me, and I felt more connected. However, I always had a fear because I thought she may hear from somebody. The fear of my wife finding out was greater than the fear for my family. Thank God, I had an understanding family. I am grateful to God that my wife also supported me. She took great care of me, spoke kind words, and reassured me, saying, "this didn't happen to you alone; the blame lies with the criminals who exercised the violence." I want to thank everyone, my family and my wife; I am very grateful for their support.

Before my status became recognized, I needed to tell my wife. After eight years, I finally told her. I didn't tell her for a long time. I couldn't keep it a secret any longer once the status was about to be revealed. Obtaining the status had been a strong reason to gather the courage to tell her. I couldn't hide it anymore, because I had

to justify the pension income. Where is the money coming from?

I have stress, significant trauma, I wake up at night, needing to get up, but my wife is used to it. She sees me moving a bit, she knows I am awake. She gets up, makes me a coffee, maybe she needs to stay awake for one hour. I cannot sleep later on. I experience anxiety at night, it frequently replays in my dreams. I often see my case in a dream with a different war content. I all repeats to me as it happened. It is interesting now, even when I see it in a dream, I know it is a dream. I don't have the big fear as if it is happening for real. When I wake up my heart is beating out of fear. I would express it by tears as well, I would cry. Although I know that dreams are not a reality, when I see them, I feel bad.

I would like to express my gratitude once again to my wife for her support. She didn't find it strange. She didn't judge me or say to me, "What are you telling me? Why?" Why didn't you tell me at the beginning?" She didn't seek explanations. Eventually, I felt relieved. Both my wife and my family told me that they understand and support me. They said, "The Serbs spared nothing; they left nothing untouched, they killed everyone and..." They accepted it as something that happens during the war, as something that didn't just happen to me but to others as well. They reminded me that others have even been killed, people are no longer alive today.

I felt a lot of shame and pain when I had to tell it to my wife and my family; I have no words to describe it. It's much worse that I was a man, and this happened to me. I was very worried. For a man, it's a bit more difficult. My manhood shattered; my morale shattered. Even today and every day since, I don't feel completely like a male, like a man. In this regard, I am broken, my self-esteem is shattered. They broke me; I no longer feel like a strong man, like we men usually do. I used to think about when I create a family, when my daughter, my son, or my children find out about this, how will they take it?

When my wife became pregnant and I found out that I was going to be a father, it was a feeling of immense joy. I am becoming a parent. I thought that maybe it would help me forget the incident, strengthen me, and fulfill my life. I would overcome everything; there is something new, I forget the difficult moments. It was a moment of happiness, a moment of hope. The desire to live became greater, more positive. The sun shone for me as well.

Now I have four children, two boys and two girls. I experience the successes of my children very well. They are a motivation that cannot be exhausted. They are a form of support that continues my life further. When I see my children, everything is okay for me. The support of the state is also important. That they recognized

our status, that they have acknowledged our pain. Someone recognizes us, and the state supports us, our association, KRCT. Psychologists support us. They help us forget the bad things, to continue life because now we have children. My wife is very supportive. Then there's the extended family, the children. Everyone

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I try not to stress, not to remember the things that happened to me... I make every effort to overcome them, but unfortunately, my mind has registered them. I keep remembering it. Seeing a uniform, for example, of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) or any military vehicle or if I hear a noise from an airplane, I immediately say, "the mind goes to what happened, it wasn't easy, these things are not forgotten ever." For me, this is a heavy burden to carry throughout my life, a black hole that sometimes swallows my hopes for life. But above all, God is the greatest. Inshallah, He helps us all. Because what has happened to us is too much, too much. I wish I was rather killed, than left like this. It's not easy for me, as a man, to even come here. Even when I am with my family, I say they all know.

However, what has pushed me the most, because I could have kept everything hidden, even the recognition of my status didn't push me to come here, what has primarily motivated me to come here is our presence as witnesses who have experienced sexual violence. We have come here to be heard, to seek justice, so that the courts might know it. Justice, to know who the criminal is, to make them appear before justice, so that our state can make it easier for us afterward. So that our state can make it easier to reveal the stories that have happened to us. To document the stories that have happened to us. The psychological violence, the physical violence, the sexual violence.

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Today, I live with my wife. I am separated from the extended family, meaning I live with my children and my wife. From the immediate family, I have my mother, father, and brothers. My mother lives with my younger brother, but she spends more time with me as well... due to the incident that I have experienced. We are constantly close to her. She only sleeps at my brother's house, otherwise I count her to be with me. They make me happy.

I have good relations with my wife. I am a tolerant person. I don't remember having any major issues. We go out to the city with the kids, dine in restaurants with them, sometimes have lunch, go to the square, as the city is close by. In the evenings, at noon, whenever we have time. We enjoy ourselves a lot, we are free, we are happy. Although I know I carry a heavy burden, I manage somehow, not to make my wife and my children worry. I try to replace the bad things with good



things. Our economic conditions are not good because I don't work. I do some private work occasionally, seasonal jobs. Due to stress and health conditions, I couldn't work. I lost my strength, and I couldn't work regularly. We have our own house, but it's not very well regulated. It's a house built from before; my sister paid for building it. However, we more often have than we don't.

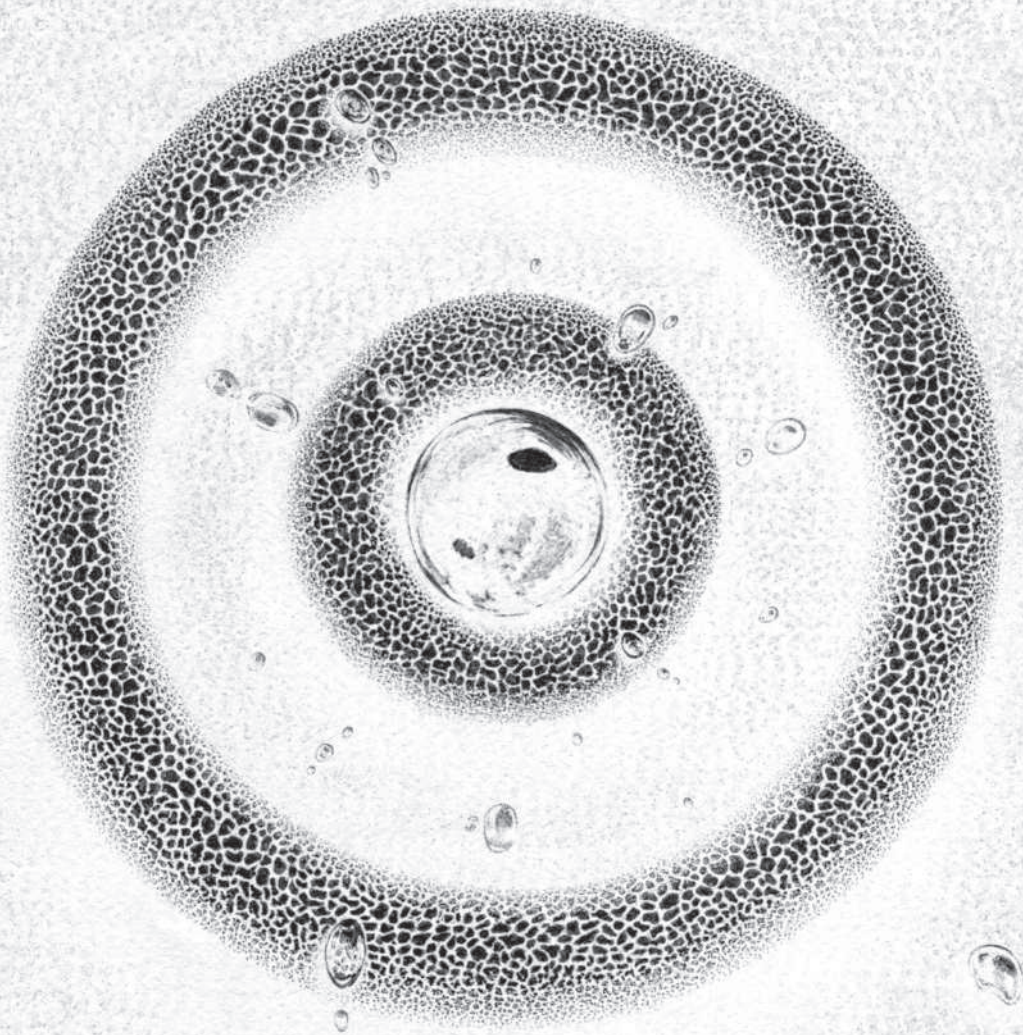
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Perhaps there are people who have experienced something like me, and today they remain silent. They don't have the courage to speak, they don't have the courage to get exposed – those people, regardless of whether they are our sisters or brothers, I feel great pain for them not finding the courage. Now I compare it to myself... When I didn't have the courage to come here (to KRCT), it was very difficult for me, much more difficult. This was a difficulty for me. There were times I decided to come, I came to the door asking people where this association is, because I didn't know, I found the place, and even then, I didn't have the courage to enter. I turned back home. Then again, until I finally decided.

Until the moment came, meaning until the moment came, then I met with psychologists. Here, I gathered even greater courage. I started to feel much better because I realized I have wider support. Associations support us, the state supports us, and it has become much easier for me. I want to say, hopefully, our sisters or brothers will gather the courage to speak, because it will be much easier for them once they report it. Keeping it secret felt like being trapped in solitude, isolated, stressed, and anxious. We never went anywhere; we never went out. In the association I have met other people, other men. Today, we have become friends. We stay in touch. This has eased our burden a lot. People who have experienced this need support; the blame lies with the criminals, we are innocent. Completely innocent. Criminals did not choose age or gender. We need support from families, society, and the state. We did not want to happen what happened to us.

I am still afraid. The thoughts of something bad happening to my children, similar to what happened to me roam in my mind, considering the situation and events in Mitrovica. My children are not aware of what happened to me. They see me as the most loving person, I do not burden them with my worries and concerns. They are still young.

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The pain has eased away,

Unheard

yet my soul remains ice cold

voices

## **The pain has eased away, yet my soul remains ice cold**

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Arben, being only 14-year-old, is the youngest survivor among the men commemorated in this collection, making his story exceptionally shocking.

After their home and all their possessions were set on fire, Arben's family moved to some abandoned house, surrounded by Serbian forces. One day, Arben gets on his bicycle and goes to buy bread for his family. He is caught and sent to a house 400 meters away, where he is raped throughout the night and day.

Except for his mother, who will try to cleanse him of the unimaginable horrors he has experienced, Arben hesitates to tell other relatives, including his wife, out of fear of losing them forever.

Now, Arben is highly sensitive to any form of violence and has a strong message for the society on how victims of violence are treated.



## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Arben

I was born in the summer of 1985, and grew up in a small town in Kosovo. We are eight boys and four girls. I am the youngest of the boys and have a younger sister. My father worked in a factory, and my mother took care of the children.

I have a close bond with my younger sister and a brother before me. Life hasn't been too bad for us, because my father worked, and then my brothers have also left the country for work. Like all the children around the world, we were happy. We had a good family, got along well, and never had any problems. We have utmost understanding between each other.

We played together non-stop, stayed together, and went to school together with my older brother. I always went to school with him, and returned with him. He is a

year older than me, and we played, did homework together, and always helped each other.

During that time, we played games like 'petlla' and 'pitpitat' – a game that was mentioned once by a mayor on television. The game is played with two sticks; one stick is used to throw, and the other is used to hit it away or catch it. The person who catches the stick has a difficult task because we would throw the sticks far away, and that person had to gather and return them to us. In other words, whoever lost the game had to collect the sticks and bring them back to us.

We used to play with the ball, both football and basketball. In school, we played boys against boys, girls against girls, or boys against girls, but in the family, we used to be mixed boys with girls, because we are a big family.

I remember the first teacher, but the first day at school not very much. Very few memories remain in my mind, but I know that we had a good time; we were very obedient pupils, because back then it was a different time, when the teacher shouted at you, you wouldn't dare tell at home, because they might scold you too for not listening to a teacher. In short, we had a very good time; from the first grade to the fifth, I had the same teacher.

Our father wanted us to learn, as he had worked hard and provided us with very good conditions. He made our lives good because before the war, there were no luxuries (in general, there was poverty), but he worked hard and organized all the children going to school. Now that they have finished school, he put older boys into various jobs. Before the war, they went to work in Slovenia and Croatia.

The sisters completed both primary and secondary school, but they couldn't afford to complete higher education, because we were a big family, a lot of people, and some would marry at that age. Except for me, they all found girls and boys through arranged marriages. Later, they met, agreed, liked each other, and now they are engaged and married.

My father worked a lot as a factory driver, and decisions were made together with my mother. He also worked in metallurgy and also exported goods abroad. My mother never attended a single school day in her life. My mother was left by her father who passed away when she was very young, and she lived with her uncle. When we learned her story, that she grew up without a family and had only her mother, and when her brother died back then, they gave her as a bride to the other brother. So, we never angered our mother, and always treated her very well.

They have been through a lot of things there. People on that side still mention our mother so well because they have had such a good time. My father, as I mentioned, worked a lot and had everything, even a car and a motorbike. He took



my mother on a motorbike to visit her parents.

My father died after the war, and my mother passed away several years ago. My father was wounded in the war, when he died after the war, I was very attached to my mother, so to say, we were bonded like a padlock. So, when my father died, we experienced it very hard, when my little sister came from school, I met her halfway, told her everything, and felt very lonely from that moment on. Because my father was in a hospital for some time, about seven months, and I didn't feel much pain when he died, because when one's mother is alive, one's sorrow is lesser. When my mother died, I became cold, and now there is no warmth in my soul.

My mother always protected me, always. When I caused a problem or something, broke a glass or something, she took the blame, saying, "I did it." With me, it was a bit different, because when I needed to buy something, my father would ask, "What's missing my son, socks, sneakers?" At that time, we didn't have as much as now, we now have ten pairs of sneakers, socks. At that time one pair of socks, you would wash them in the evening, and would wear the same in the morning. I would say that I don't need anything because I couldn't dare to say that I had torn my socks two days earlier, and as soon as turned away, I would say to my mother, 'tell him to buy them for me'.

My sisters took very good care of me. We have always gotten along well with each other. My sisters would knit sweaters, they would cover for me, because we have a river nearby, and usually in the summer we liked to go and swim there. My father wanted us to stay at home and learn, or to look after the livestock, or look after the garden. When we went there for a swim, my sisters would always cover for us, they would find a way for our father not to notice that we were gone. Sometimes, we would sneak out during the winter to ski on the river ice, we would freeze ourselves out there, damaging our clothes and sneakers.

When we had the opportunity to leave the house, we would go and visit our aunt and uncle, and worked in the fields, helping with taking cows for pasture.

Oh, if I had time to sit and talk, it never crossed my mind to stop and think like this, it's the first time!

My father had a garage, and he had all sorts of tools there. I was about six years old at that time, if I am not mistaken. I would pretend to work on something, and would put the tools in place and leave them in place as they were, so he wouldn't notice and say "who was in the garage and mingled with my tools"? I also had a task of fetching water for the cow, cleaning the snow with a shovel, and so on. I feared my father the most, never feared anybody else. My father was tough

because he wanted us to progress. When he saw us, for example, going to tend to the cows, he had one reaction, and another when he saw us going to the creek. "Where are you going?" "I am taking some wood." or "I am preparing some wood," or something else. But when I would tell him I was going to play soccer after school, he didn't like it.

We never dared to cause any problems, not at all. I had one problem at school, and I came home to tell them that they have taken me to the principal and hit my hand with a stick saying, "He is causing problems, when going to a long brake he is completely out of control." And then when I told my father that the principal has beaten me, instead of giving me the support, they started slapping me whoever could. I then became calm, because I knew that the principal would beat me, and I would also get beaten at home.

As for the school, I didn't like it much; since I was little, I was more interested in working. Doing work only, irrespective of what kind of work. I got involved with my father's garage, worked in the garden, took care of the cows, cut wood, and fixed anything in the house that was broken.

High school was two or three kilometers away. I went there for a year and then dropped out. My mother supported me a lot, and my father was eager for us to go to school. He worked hard to provide everything for us to attend school; there were times when he gave me money to buy books, and I would buy sneakers, and again when he would come home would give me money for books, because he loved seeing me be in school. However, after the war, I couldn't continue; I couldn't find myself well there, and I went to school for a year and dropped out.

I was under pressure, and they always told me, but I don't know what got into my head not to go to school, even though I registered for mechanics there, but I had to interrupt, I couldn't, it was far away and ...

We had many cousins; we didn't have problems with anyone. We stayed together, and no one bothered us, and no one was bothered by us. If we met a friend from a generation on the street, we would sit down and have coffee.

I remember my grandmother, but not my grandfather, as he passed away a long time ago. My grandmother lived with my younger uncle, but my mother would take care of him. In fact, once a day, my mother would bring them freshly baked bread, and this obligation, interestingly enough, was conveyed onto me to fulfill. I would take them the bread, she would smoke cigarettes, I started to smoke as a very young person, around the age of 11.

At that time, only my grandmother knew about it, because when I would go there,

my mother would prepare a meal in special plate, and when she added a piece of cheese or a pickled pepper, I would tell my grandmother, "I put these two behind my mother's back", and she would give me a cigarette. I had daily contact with her. Everybody would make sure my grandmother had cigarettes, so I would take one from her every day, but I didn't smoke regularly. After the war, I started smoking.

We are six boys and six girls. I remember when my mother had the youngest sister, the rest of us were all like grown-ups. They all started making fun because my father wasn't very tall, and my mother was taller. So, with the youngest sister, we made jokes a bit, we would cut her hair, dyed it, we almost raised her. Now she is married in Switzerland, and I spoke to her just two days ago because I went to the graves of my father and my mother, and relatives, took some photos, and then my sister called me to ask me how I was doing. I said to her, "Have you received your salary?" She said, "No, why?" I told her that it would take away my sadness.

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When they started the offensive, it was terrifying. Catastrophe! Everything we had, our homes, our livestock, they set them on fire. In our village, they burnt down two houses, ours and another belonging to a neighbor. They burnt our house because my father was a patriot. He was involved with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), advocating for democracy and participating in protests.

After forcing us out and setting our house on fire, we wandered to a village in the mountains, where they began killing people. Until the war, everything was phenomenal, but when the war started, everything fell apart. We had nowhere to go; we sought refuge once in the house of a relative, but we were forced to leave. We then went downtown to one of my father's friends, stayed for some time, but then their family member came, so we had to leave. We then moved to some abandoned houses.

We were then surrounded by Serbian forces, and they did not let us leave. The older brothers were not there, only me, my father, my younger sister, and my sister-in-law. But then relatives would come, aunts, when they had nowhere to go, they would come there and find a solution of staying there.

We were isolated there, because they had surrounded us, and wouldn't let us move around. Meanwhile after a month or so, we decided to move out into the village and spend time with them. We went out, spent time together, because we needed to get the food. There was a barn which we improvised quickly, using metal sheets as a roof. All the soldiers descending from the mountains considered that place as their base. They would enter and exit as if it were their own family,

checking on their mothers and sisters.

Things were getting tighter... [Arben takes a deep breath, eyes filled with tears].

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When we were surrounded in those houses, I moved to secure the food, because I was a bit older boy there, but not so old as to be at risk of being killed or thrown into a prison.

Every morning, I would take food to them, and one day there was some kind of offensive or action, but I didn't know. I was traveling with a bicycle, and when I came out, I saw that there was a base there, and I noticed something was not right. However, even if I knew that something was wrong, I had to take the food to the people there. When I went, the action had already started; I went inside and called those guys, but couldn't find them there, so I started having a meal, when the door was suddenly kicked open and hit my head.

Attached to the yard door was the barn, they had fastened some kind of rubber bands to the big door where cars entered to make it wider, whilst the small door was free, so they hit it hard, screaming and shouting. I went and entered the cowshed; there were mattresses and sponges, when a Serbian entered shouting and screaming. He caught me and brought me forward, and another one came out there; they spoke something among themselves, hit me with something behind my head, and I lost consciousness.

In the meantime, I saw myself in a kind of van with a tarpaulin. When I tried to get up, he charged approaching me with the automatic rifle's barrel so that I stay and don't move... [Arben finds it difficult to continue, and his heart is beating rapidly].

They took me to a house 400 meters away from my home, and I thought they wanted to kill me because I couldn't think of any other reason. They brought me inside that house where they were positioned and took me down to the basement through an iron door. "Wait here, and don't make a sound" he said and went upstairs talking and laughing. That house is still there, and I hope it collapses or something happens to it.

Initially, a very evil guy come. When I asked for water, he forced me to drink, and afterward, he also drank. They fetched water with a bucket from a well in front of that door and gave me water. When he entered there, my youth go destroyed, and that's where my life turned black. I had suffered so much abuse that even now, it feels like I am still there.

It was a horror! I understood that the pain is not to injure your hand, because you

can injure your hand and they cut it off completely, or they can stitch it and you get used to having a cut hand. But what they did to me, this will never be removed from my head. Never! Ever! I have said it, and will always say it: even if they killed all my family members, a man who has experienced the violence that I have experienced, I am in a position to sit down with him and speak with him; I am able to sit in front of him and talk to him.

Even today, we have many cases, "he raped her, he did her, but no big deal, she will not spend it, she will spend it, it doesn't hurt her..." Everything that is done without someone's desire is a great pain. They cannot even touch this glass without your presence, without your knowledge, without your consent, and let alone me that I was in the best possible age, at the best age of my life.

Once there was a loud noise, in my mind I thought they would now all come to abuse me and rape me, I had blood on my body, I didn't even know what happened to me, because I was at a very young age to even know. Now I know, because now my daughter is 14-year-old, the others are younger; I make my wife talk to them, what can happen, what is sex, when should one have a relationship, how should one find someone, etc. And at that time, I didn't know anything, because back then we were shy to even wear in the house short pants up to the knee, and let alone something else. Now I am not even a half-man, I tried to talk to my wife, but I am very afraid to tell her.

After all that big noise there, they made it their own way playing with me all night and all day until noon, then there was some calm. I pushed that door open a little, I was all naked, but I thought that if I walked out there was the exit of that house, they were there and they would shoot and kill me. So, I walked around the creek, I fell into the river full of thorns, and walked there out of fear, full in mud and exhausted.

I had passed by my house, and when I walked a couple more houses from there, I saw a person laying on the ground. I went and saw a man still moving, an old man came out and said, "hey boy, what are you doing naked like that?" I said, "they killed him"? he said, "who is he?" I said, "the one that is bringing us wood." He was a man in black, wearing a black hood on his head. He yelled at me to go home and get dressed. I didn't say a word, went to the base where the men were, then I wore a big shirt of my older brother, and just before it got dark, I went there, and they didn't know where I was or what happened to me.

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I know that at that time was my birthday, I turned 14. Until the moment I came to talk to KRCT, I didn't know the benefits of this therapy, because I simply saw one



program on TV. I went online and looked for it, and I was fortunate enough to meet you. All the staff here knows how to treat me well, somehow, I feel myself as if I am talking to my mother, because my mother knew about it.

I met my mother in the hall, she asked "why are you all dirtied up" I told her I needed her to wash me, because there was no electricity at the time. Waiting for the water to warm up, I started crying, my mother would wash me with her hands. I told my mother, and I have talked to her about everything until her last moment.

I had the support of my mother not to be teased by anybody, perhaps she told my father, as he was there, but I haven't noticed anything. I told her that I had gone to take food to the boys, and it ended with that much. When I spoke to my mother, I was very calm, very comfortable.

Later, when my mother died, I used to get more anxious. I would go out, walk, cry, but it wouldn't go away. A kind of shadow, a kind of coldness is in my soul. I can't get rid of it; but what they have done to me it doesn't hurt anymore. The pain has softened, but my soul is ice cold, I cannot sleep, I see dreams, I get sad when I see bad things on the television, "she got raped, this and that".

I never watch Big Brother, when suddenly appeared in front of my eyes one of them telling her story of being raped at the age of 5, you know, I was all well, when suddenly everything was falling apart, I couldn't leave her or walk away. The situation went bad. She was telling her story, whereas my wife and my children asked me why was I crying, I told them I felt sorry for her. I knew well in what condition she was, because they were writing in the comments that she was lying, it was not true. Those "aliens" didn't know how old she was or what she went through, so it could have happened to her.

My mother supported me and stood by me in every way. I had her by my side, and perhaps even when I did wrong, she protected me. When I would get very overwhelmed, she would say, "come, take me to that sister of mine, to that daughter of mine", and my wife would say, "I will come too," and my mother would say, "I want to go with my son only"; and then she would say to me "don't worry my son, things will get better". Look what is happening to people even after the war; not that she gave me any injection, but when speaking, one eases, the burden feels lighter.

I then dropped out of school and started working as a baker. After a year and a half of work, I felt the need to go abroad, because I couldn't adapt here. There wasn't the energy I needed for the school; I couldn't balance it. Deep inside, I didn't want to harm anyone, but there are environments that treat me badly, and I just

avoid them. I left my job and went abroad, moved from one place to another... Perhaps life has to be lived this way, spending life in several places... but, life must go on!

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In 2009, I met my wife. We spent a year dating together, whilst I was with her, I tried to find a way to discuss my issue with her, but I didn't have the courage, because I felt I would lose her. I married her, but I still couldn't burden her with my problem, perhaps it would have been easier for me, but again I can't, because I could lose her. She make me live, my mother, her and my children.

Perhaps she would have supported me, because she is my wife and my friend. We have never had any problems between us. If I were to face separation after this issue, I would not live for a minute, or if they understood anything, I would again not live for a minute. I have it on my shoulders, a year may go by without having any problem, and then I have them, the situation is the same, it doesn't change. It seems to have adapted to my world. I fear talking to her, because if I ruin my relation with her over this problem that I have, I don't know what I would do with my life.

We have three daughters. The oldest is more like her mother, the second is more like me, and the youngest is unique. One day, I gave them 5 Euros to buy something from the store, 40 cents were spent by the two elder ones, and the rest was spent by the younger one. They bought things like notebooks, glue, pens, unlike a child would go and buy a chocolate. One day, she said, "father, I need to buy a pair of sneakers." I asked, "why?" she said, "they are completely ruined, look at them?" I said, "Okay," "when your father makes money it will not be a problem", she said "you don't have the money"? I said "no"! She said "I have the money", so she went and brought me 60 cents, and said, "I can get you the money, don't worry".

God always does good deeds. First, I had the support of my mother; then, my wife also provided support, and then with the passing of time, my children also became a support. Today, I exist due to you as well [the therapist from KRCT], because you also play a very important role in this situation of mine. You didn't make me happy, nor did you give me any money, but the hand you extended to me, I felt a great relief. I pray that every minute you spend on my problem will result in the well-being of your children.

Now, I work as an unregistered taxi driver. As soon as things start going well, a car defect occurs or the registration expires. I am active and enjoy working, but I don't know, I have never met anyone in my life to ask me how I feel. So that they

are the same as me, do you know what kind of communication I would have with them, it would be all different. But now, we are in contrast. I never heard any confession, so that girl I saw on Big Brother made an impression on me. I never watched that program because those people are isolated and get bored, I don't want to see boredom; I don't want to see when they fight each other. But I don't know how I met her, my soul was torn; maybe all of the Albanians saw and listened to her case, and when I saw those comments about the 5-year-old girl, I put myself into her position, and I said, "if I go and speak, what would people say?" What would they say?! "He is lying"! I saw it in her soul because I know the pain she has. I know exactly how her soul hurts. It does not hurt her because she had an intercourse, but the soul gets cold, it is never warm again, she may seem all fine, but she is a broken person, a broken glass. I was upset, and I couldn't sleep that night.

Maybe you have thousands of cases like these since this is your job. But if once in your life you are given the opportunity to have contact with someone like me, you are sent by Allah to heal that person; you heal them with a word, with a hug, don't underestimate it. Because it cannot get any worse, even if you took me in front of the car there and shot me right in the forehead, it wouldn't get any worse. But for me personally, Allah sent you to help me with this conversation.

I have never had such conversations, except with my mother, never in my life. It's the first time I met here with you, and we are discussing things about my life. In my mind I want to reveal them, but the words are not coming out. You are the luckiest person in the world because you work with people like this, and you may not know what a great deed you are doing. Perhaps you do know, because you are educated for this, but do you know the burden that your presence lifts from my body.

I believe in God, and I know that it will be as God wills, nothing else; and through experience, all the sins in this world are washed away. I believe that if I do a good deed to you, I will receive 100% of that good deed. I love people while they are alive, and I like to love and honor and respect you as long as you are alive. Because some people do not love or hug other people while they are alive, and when they are dead, they go hugging them.

There is much left unsaid, but I can't, the words are not coming out all at once. In my youth, I thought I will grow up, get educated, and work hard to support my family, so that the family wouldn't be left longing for anything. But because of what happened to me, my dreams disappeared, not because of education, because I could work and finds a decent job, but I can't do it. I have a lot more to say, but I don't know where to start. I hope Allah will reward us.

If someone has a problem and doesn't have anyone to talk to, like I have you, that I come here and share the burden of my problems, let them go and search for him day and night until they find him; one can tell their own problem that can be explained, only by telling it, they would feel very easier, only sharing the pain with someone makes one feel lighter.

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# Man

Men's narratives

## being raped is a

of overcoming the trauma

## different thing

of wartime sexual violence

## Man being raped is a different thing

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When the war broke out in Drenica region in the first half of 1998, Bujar's village was set on fire and turned into ashes. He fled to the mountains and sent his family to his wife's family. Only three years later, Bujar would learn from her own mouth the grim truth of what had happened there. Bujar gets caught in the mountain along with other fifteen people, and gets subjected to cruel sadism by paramilitary forces. One night, they took him in a tank and sent him to another village, where Bujar became an eyewitness to the rape against at least two girls, which he vividly describes. There, Bujar endured brutal abuse.

However, amid this universe of cruelty, Bujar found glimpses of humanity in a reserivist from Krushevac, who helped him and took care of him. Bujar has not forgotten and will never forget that person.



## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Bujar

I come from a poor family. I remember as a child, the conditions were of extreme poverty; with my mother, father, and three brothers, we used to sleep in a space together with livestock. I was the fourth of the children, with two sisters and a brother older than me, and a younger sister after me.

We had no income whatsoever. I remember when we used to slaughter cows, my mother would take their skin and would make peasant's shoes for us. She would stay up all night by the wick lamp to sew them, but they wouldn't last even for a week, so she would sew new ones, because rubber peasant's shoes appeared

later on.

My father used to be a farmer at that time, but then he started working as a house builder, which became our livelihood. He couldn't stay at home much, as he would leave in the morning and would return when it got dark. So, I spent most of my time with my mother. She loved me a lot, and we had good relations until she died.

I was a twin with one of my sisters. At that time, boys were favored, so my mother used to take my side, having special attention towards me, giving me more breast milk than my sister. I was a bit thin as a boy, while my sister had a bit more weight, she was more capable, so, my mother took care of me more than my sister, both regarding clothing and food. This continued until late.

Regarding household chores, there was no work I didn't do as a child, as there was a shortage of labor, and there was a need. That is why the older generations gave birth to many children as they were needed to help their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, everybody. As soon as we would come home from school, our mother would give us a piece of bread, and we would take care of the livestock and oxen. As soon as you grew up a bit and could help your family, you had to work in the field, and do the work around the house. I worked whatever I was capable of and whatever there was a need for, and I never said no.

I completed primary school in the village, which was about 15–20 minutes away, but due to the floods during that time, we couldn't cross the bridge, so someone from the neighborhood or family would take care of us, picking us up all pupils from the neighborhood, and taking us to and back from the school.

I was a good student; I have always been an excellent one. I always completed my homework alone; moreover, when the math teacher was on a break, we challenged us to see who could complete the multiplication table faster, I always managed to finish first. My only shortcoming was that I lacked capital, otherwise I would have completed my college education by now, but budget constraints have left me with only high school diploma. I attended high school in the city. We commuted 13 kilometers from home to school, on a road full of stones and mud. I would leave school at 7 in the evening and wouldn't arrive home until 10 at night. The next day, I had to start the journey back to school again. At that time, having a piece of bread to eat was something we were longing for, and the aroma of the bread from the bakery would be felt 100 meters away, we were so hungry, and so valuable was the bread. Today, bread tastes differently, you put it on the table and it doesn't smell as bread.

Since high school, I started working as a motorcycle mechanic, and I still do that

profession today. Back then, there were some Russian motorcycles, so when we opened the crankcases to see what was inside, and what was broken, I started learning how to fix them myself. I found a lot of use in learning that. When the technical high school opened, due to great interest, I learned everything there. I remember we got a big horse with which we planted corn in the villages. In one of the villages, I saw someone had bought a new bicycle. When I saw it, it was shining, I really wanted to have it. At that time, buying a bicycle was like buying a car today. When I asked how much it cost, he said he bought it for fun, but after a week, the same guy called me to go and mow the grass together with my father. My father was telling him that I wanted to have the bicycle, and he said, "Let him take it, free of charge!" "Not free of charge, but instead I will find you ten men to do a one-day work for this bicycle." "Don't get me ten, get me five men instead". When I went to get the bicycle, I felt like I was in heaven, and I have been riding it ever since.

Later, we bought a motorcycle. My brother got a job at KosovaTrans as a ticket agent, and we bought a motorcycle from a Serb in Zvecan. We then travelled with it until I finished high school, and it felt like having an airplane. We both rode it, and we even managed to carry three people on it. We never stopped, even when it snowed. We would deflate the tires to avoid slipping, place a newspaper on our chest, a bag, because it was the only transportation. At some time later on we bought a 'Figa', and I never remained without a car since then.

We were very close to each other as friends back then, and we didn't allow interest to interfere in our friendship. We even shared a cent, what I bought, my friend bought as well. We ate and traveled together, and we got along well with each other. We were good students.

The main thing is that we had a lot of difficult times. These young people nowadays shouldn't just sleep but learn on their computers, because, as long as I am alive and until covered by my casket, I won't forget the hardships I went through, there is a saying "I lived 200 for years," given all the challenges I faced. I remember going to sleep and waking up with livestock, I walked 15 kilometers soaked through the mud, but today is a different time, my son doesn't even go to the city center without a car. I tell him, "Come on my son, it's a pity, go and walk."

I completed the fourth year in Mitrovica. The school was good, and the teachers were knowledgeable; they took care of us and taught us well. At that time, classrooms in school were mixed with both Serbs and Albanians. All Serbs spoke Albanian, and you couldn't tell they were Serbs. We traveled by bus once a week, and later we got a flat there with three or four friends. We cooked ourselves, we prepared our meals, and we did the laundry ourselves. We didn't have money, but we would take things from home. We were poor back then, but whoever had

money lived well, and those who didn't, had to make it through with what they had.

We had hardships, but in the end, I managed to achieve everything. Today, with the blessings of God, I have two houses and a complete family, children and a wife. I worked and never wanted to ask for help from anyone, because I never wanted to become friends with those who didn't work, and make friends with those who wouldn't listen.

After finishing high school, I couldn't find a job for a few years. Later, I got a job at the Water Supply Company as a machinery technician. I have done all sorts of jobs, except for collecting garbage, because it was a small organization, and only my field of study didn't have much work to do. I didn't have driver's license, but I drove all vehicles of the organization. That is why they all loved me, because I was hardworking, I never said no.

In 1985, I got a job, my older brother immediately left us because we were all living together in one house. Another brother completed school, but he couldn't find a job, so he took care of our livestock. He went to work abroad, and along with me who was working, we started becoming better financially, and we also refurbished our house.

I got married in 1986 through an arranged marriage. I didn't personally know my wife until the wedding night, only through friends and acquaintances. I swear I saw her for the first time on the road after we got engaged, and we didn't stop to talk, because the mentality and times were different.

At that time, one person made decisions and was to be asked for everything. He would arrange marriages for brides, complete all tasks, and we would just wait. After I got married, we had a modest wedding. Now I have a wife for me, whom I thank wherever she is, because she gave birth to my children, I have progressed and built two houses with her.

Children were then born. As a single person you had only one obligation, now that the children were born, the responsibilities increased, and I had to take care of my parents because they got old. My salary in the organization was small, but I always worked in the private sector. I worked there until three in the afternoon, and then I took the pliers and was installing water pipes in the villages. This routine continued until two in the morning at times, and would wake up at seven tomorrow morning and went back to work. I never stopped, except for sleep that stopped me. Work never ruins anyone; only stress and those things ruin a person. I thank God that I am well and healthy. I have some problems in my head, but those are manageable.

In 1992, the situation went bad. The director changed, everything changed, and I lost my job. I continued working in the private sector, because it brought in more income that way, because the salaries were low.

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During the time of the war, we were dealing with agriculture, we worked the fields, and had our own bread. We had cows, had our own meat; we had chickens and eggs. It means we didn't need to go to the market except for tea, sugar, and a few other things. We didn't even need oil because we also had buffalos, and my mother would fill all the containers with homemade butter, so much so that even after the war, I didn't buy oil for three years, because I had hidden it with flour, beans, and whatever else we had. We built a bunker, so everything we had was saved.

A few years earlier, when I was working in a village, I met someone who had survived the war in Bosnia. He told me, "God willing, you won't see the same here in Kosovo, because you wouldn't need neither land nor potatoes." He told me how he survived for six months in a basement, saying, "If it weren't for the potatoes", he said "I wouldn't be alive today, I would have died out of hunger". When the war started in our village in Kosovo, I thought about how not to let the children and the family go without food. We assumed the war might last for several years. I started to open a garage, blocked it, built walls, and covered it completely. I stored around 500 kilograms of flour, beans, and potatoes, I covered them with plastic sheet, I put some planks above them, and covered it with sand, that is how they were saved.

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As soon as the war started in our village in 1998, it created a dire situation for us. Initially, Serbian forces were moving around every day, though they didn't fire on us, there was no calm. Serbian forces would move around, although they didn't shoot at us, but they were coming to the village every day. Later on, they decided to get stationed in the ammunition factory in Skenderaj, leading to violence against the population, where they started setting villages on fire one by one.

When they attacked us, we fled with tractors to another village where there were people from everywhere. Around 100 people crowded into one house, sleeping on top of each other, until they came there and set everything on fire, we then went back for several months to our houses. Police started coming, so we fled again. We took with us whatever we could like sugar, flour, mattresses, blankets and loaded them on tractors We never dared to take them off the tractor anymore.



I remember as today when I was present at the funeral of teacher Halit Geci, when the KLA became public for the first time. They appeared with masks for about five minutes, and then withdrew. We, who had no rifles, who were civilians, went to the mountains, and we returned to our families in the evenings.

In that village where family members were, after an offensive, they burned down the village and killed several people. They wanted to take them to Albania, and there they took my 11-year-old boy thinking he was a grown-up. My wife recounts that even the bread they had; they threw it away. Along the way, they stopped at another village, and the majority were not allowed to go to Albania. They stayed there for several nights, and when the situation calmed down a bit, they returned home.

When the war broke out again, my wife took the children and went to the village at of her brothers' house, hoping it was a safer and more distant place. I took them with a tractor, and stayed there for a night, and then I went to \_\_\_\_\_. The next day they came and set that village on fire. Men fled in the morning to the mountains, leaving the women behind to be caught by them. They were raped from the first to the last. Only after three years my wife told me this. When I heard that something happened, I said to her "Either tell me, or go and get your clothes ready and go to your brothers. Tell me the whole story from A to Z", I said to her "I give you my oath, I will forgive you everything, because it was done against your desire".

They told me how they entered in the yard – my mother-in-law, mother, sister-in-law were all there – and they were raped in front of the eyes of the others, plus they called other guys on the radio. They took their belongings, gold, money, and everything they had. Then they threw them there and played with them until the evening.

They remained in the village, and only after four nights, we somehow managed to take them and went to \_\_\_\_\_, where we stayed for about three or four months.

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When they entered in \_\_\_\_\_, they caught us again. I was caught in the mountains. I had a problem with veins in my leg, and I knew that if I got injured, I would have a lot of bloodshed, and would die, that is why I had plenty of bandages with me because a doctor had told me that if I got injured, I should make them a bundle and tie it.

When they saw the bag with bandages, they assumed I was a KLA doctor, and

one of them hit me with his boots. To this day, I still have a scar. He was getting ready to kill me, but the other one didn't let him do it and intervened. They started quarreling and fighting between themselves. I rolled up my pants at the feet and said to him "look"! Zašto se žuriš?" he said, I understood Serbian but didn't speak it. Both of them were reservists, and the one who intervened to stop him abuse me, I wish he becomes my brother in the afterlife.

Among the 15 people they captured, about 13 were elderly, and I was the youngest. The elderly were treated even more brutally than me. They separated us there, they took the women somewhere, and took us to the basement. To tell you the whole story would take more than a week, so I will keep it short.

When we approached a water spring, one of them shouted in Serbian to throw us into the water and get rid of us. The elderly started crying, and one who was near me, was 84 years old, kept saying, "we are done, my neighbor, we are done". I told him, "How are you not ashamed to cry, I am 40-year-old, and if it's written for me to die, it will happen and that is it". We started entering into the river one by one, only when they shouted to stop. They only wanted to scare us.

Walking down the hill, we kept meeting other groups, expelling them, so the brother-in-law of my boss that I worked with, M.P., with a mask, and rolled up sleeves calls me: "dodji ovamo", and he asks me why am I here, and told him, he shrugs his shoulders and told me that he can't do anything, and he can't help me anything.

Just before we got to the village \_\_\_\_\_, at around 3 in the afternoon, they took us to a house. One of them killed a cow with a shot to the forehead. The cow was still twitching, and they forced us to go to the well to fill police canisters with water. I was with four police officers.

One of them had seen me with the police and, thinking I was part of the KLA, started approaching me. He shouted, "Evo teroristi!" and shot at us for about twenty minutes, but luckily, the bullets hit the water. Bullets were going all over the mountain, but luckily, they didn't hit anyone.

We slept there that night, the next day, we were taken to another village. They had called a big belly Serb there. He was sharpening a knife shush-shush-shush and asked "How many are there?" "15", "Oh, you told me there were 50! If I had known, I wouldn't have come for just 15."

I can't lie: my feet couldn't hold me anymore, I thought he was going to cut our heads off. The bullet is a clean job, but the knife is a different thing. They threw us into the river to eliminate us, but that was just a game, and we didn't see that

person again.

They took us hostage and brought us to a hill, because they were preparing to shell the village with tanks from another village. In case any Serb is killed, they wanted to eliminate all of us. The man from Krushevac told me, "God willing, they won't kill anyone, because..." shaking his head.

We stayed there the whole day, and after they burned that village, the 15 of us returned to that house. I slept on a straw for three nights.

The reservist, I wish he becomes my brother in the afterlife, went and brought me meat, oven pan, water, and gave me a match to lit fire for the elderly. He showed me where the flour was, and told me to make bread for the elderly.

During the evenings I wouldn't see him anymore. The others would come later and would take me to the room upstairs. I will not get into telling you what they did to us, meaning to me, not to the elderly.

One night, they put me in a tank and took me to a village. There I saw two women, one of them had been placed above the door; they had tied both her hands and were raping her. They told me, "Look, it's your wife. We brought her here; do you want to see her". When I went in, I couldn't recognize if she was my wife, but later, when I came out, I saw that she wasn't. Another girl there had blood all over her, whether she had her menstruation, I couldn't tell, my stomach went upset and I lowered my head.

They put me in another room, kept me there for about three hours. What they did to me, my God, I won't go into the details, as it's not an easy matter, and I am getting choked up. I only know that I couldn't recognize anyone, except for the one from Krushevac who stayed with us for three days and three nights.

From there, we got in a tank and left, I learned about this later in the village of \_\_\_\_\_. It was dark when we entered a room where they had drawn different female genitals on the wall. They had drawn them so well that they looked real. After the war, I learned that certain houses had these drawings, and I immediately recognized which house it was.

When we returned at four o'clock in the morning, they took me to the men who were in the tractors garage sleeping on sponge mattresses. I want to emphasize that they abused me in that way, but not with words. The elderly were abused during the day, asking them how many sons they have, where are they, but they didn't say anything. I remember one of them at one point saying, "why are you lying, you bastard, someone must have been fucking those brides we sent to

Albania”.

One day while fetching water at the well, the reservist from Krushevac gave me a pair of boots and said that the war was over, and that very soon we would be leaving from there. He told me, "By God I hope that those who are fighting there won't get killed, so you can be saved, because I pity you, because I cannot save you, as it doesn't depend on me." You wash up, as you are looking sick, and I can't let you die because it doesn't depend on me." I asked about his name, and if I am alive, I promised him that I would send a gift to him in Serbia. He said "don't force me", "because I can't provide my name or anything." "I will bring you food and beverages whatever you need."

That's how it went, what I experienced I wish no one experiences it! I lost myself, and my face became a yellowish color. I could never sleep; I could only sleep for about five minutes a day, and would wake up immediately, because I was in a state of fear and anxiety.

It's true that those who were there took care of us and treated us well, but they kept us captives. They had a tactic to deceive us who were inside, talking to us all day, so they could withdraw the tanks, because we didn't even hear when they started them and departed with all the arsenal they had. The last one came one with a scarf and a knife, threatening to remove our heads if we dared to leave the room. He locked our door, and we had no idea what was happening outside. After a while, the KLA came and took us out of there.

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I reunited with my family after four nights, once they released us. I had been separated from my family for almost seven nights. When I returned to the tractor, where I had left it and where I had stored my belongings, I saw that everything had been scattered, all over. They hadn't touched the food, but they had checked for money or gold. Later, a son of one of my relatives, who was with the KLA, went with some of his friends and took our families.

They had told my wife that I had been killed. Nobody knew I was alive, because when they took us to the mountains, they were shooting as much as they could, so that even if somebody would have been behind, would get killed. Later, a cousin of mine went to them and told them that I was alive. [Bujar starts crying]. Yes, indeed, it was written for me to live. At that night we only had eaten and went back home.

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They had demolished our house to the ground, killed my buffalo, killed the dog in the yard, and the cow was in another village. That night we slept in a trailer.

The next day, I went to the town. The police were still there. The checkpoint in the village was removed, and people were getting into Serbs' houses. My daughter went sick. I took her to a doctor, and went to check out a house belonging to a Serb. It was free. The next day, I took my family, and we stayed there for three years. Later, I bought land and built a house in the town, where I am still living today. A new life began.

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When my wife told me what had happened to her, I, too, told her everything. I am not saying it's right to rape women, but it's a little different than raping men. A man being raped is a different thing. I have never abused my wife, because I knew she wouldn't willingly do such a thing. They had also raped her sister in front of her mother's eyes.

I have always had good relations with my wife, and I have always told her, "I want you to tell me everything as it was, I forgive you everything". That's why she told the truth, but she told it after three years, after I had heard. She said, "I was afraid you would leave me." I told her that I would have left her if she had done it willingly, that these things didn't only happen to her, but to thousands of women. It's a different thing that they didn't report it. I reassured her that I had seen them with my own eyes, and that I wouldn't like to see even the wife of the enemy that way. Because they were capable of anything; oh Allah, they were doing everything.

Now, the situation is good. I had two twin daughters, one of them passed away, and the other one is married. I have three sons, all of them are married, all of them have children. Our economic situation is good, and we all work. I am still working today. I never stop. In fact, this is what keeps me going. I can't stay in one place; even when I don't have work, I go out and walk because I can't sit still.

We lack nothing, except that our heads are feeling heavy. Sometimes I wake up at night, and as soon as I see the police with their black clothes, I turn my head to the other side, because I feel like I am seeing them again. Now I have adapted, but I will never get those things away from my mind. Even the headache I have is from the war. My daughter also remained sick from the war, and takes pills today; she was nine years old and out of fear she became ill. Even the youngest son remembers everything, because one remembers more as a child than as an adult.

All those things that I remember, I will never forget them as long as I am



breathing. I have a lot to tell, but these are the main things. What we experienced during those three days and three nights, and what they did are impossible to describe.

I told KRCT, "any woman that comes here, help her, because only I know what they did to them, for God's sake, may I never see such things again in my life".

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If you can't heal  
Unheard  
yourself, nobody  
voices  
can!

## If you can't heal yourself, nobody can!

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Flamur is a devout Muslim, who has a passion for basketball, and he remembers the good interethnic relations with the Serbs in the neighborhood. He is cheerful and recalls beautiful childhood memories. He is a gentle, well-mannered person and has excellent relations with his work colleagues.

Trapped in Peja, together with his elderly father, in May 1999, Flamur is forced to go out in search of food. On his way, he encounters a person, and a bit further another person, and they get captured by the paramilitary forces near a coffee shop.

Together with one of them, he is imprisoned and subjected to severe torture for seven consecutive days. Flamur expresses himself with an unimaginable strength for someone who has experienced what he has.

Flamur will bear the consequences for a long time, but when, after the war, he accidentally meets his future wife, his life takes on a different meaning, and he finally finds his life partner with whom he will share the deepest secrets of his life.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Flamur

I grew up in Peja, in the neighborhood near the market. We are five children, three brothers, and two sisters, and I am the third in a row. My mother was a housewife, and she had Turkish origins. Initially, my father worked in a factory, and then he worked in a tobacco plant.

Life has been good for us, and we had fantastic relations. We were a good family, never had any problems. We were in that neighborhood forever, and we never had any issues with our neighbors. We minded our business. If we could help them, we helped them, if not, we never did any harm to anybody.

My father used to pray five times a day, and he observed Ramadan. I started fasting at a very young age, and I continue to do so to this day. This tradition is passed down to my children and my wife, respecting the religion, fasting, and religious rites.

Our family was not involved in politics, except for my grandfather, who fought in World War II and was recognized as a brave fighter. Later, he was employed in the Peja Municipality, and at some point, they found out he was related to the League of Prizren, leading to his imprisonment, eventually killing him in the Nis prison in 1947.

When they imprisoned our grandfather, my father's grandfather was alive, and from Podujevo they decided to settle in a village near Fushe Kosova, and from there, they took their children and our grandfather, my father, and my uncle and hid them; they hid my father in Peja, while my uncle went to a place near Lipjan to his uncle. Today, we are in Peja, and my uncle has stayed there at his uncle's place.

I feared my father the most. He was a hardworking man, and in terms of education he was also very strict. He taught us to be strong, to live and survive, not to do wrong, not to steal, and especially to avoid gambling, which he hated the most. He would say "I can tolerate everything, but I will not tolerate that." He also didn't like to see us much in coffee shops.

I remember a particular case when I was playing basketball against the first neighbor adjacent to us. And while throwing the ball to hit the basket, the ball hit the vehicle. He stopped and asked me why did you throw it, I told him it was unintentional. He said, "do you want me to take you to your father, or do you want me to take you to the police?" I replied, "I'd rather go to the police than face my father," as I was more afraid of him.

My father never allowed us to take the wrong path, and he resented any wrongdoing. If we happened not to greet our neighbors, he would go mad. If any of the neighbors would tell him that some of us children didn't greet him, he would scold us at home, "you are embarrassing me, not yourself. People say that the son of \_\_\_\_\_"

He himself was very strong and worked twice as hard as us. When we went to the mountains to gather firewood, when he would hit an axe into a tree with one hand, we couldn't remove it even with two hands and two feet, he was that powerful. He was an orphan, as his mother died during childbirth, and his father left him young. However, God gave him strength. We felt ashamed to say "no" to him, we were never lazy and we always worked for a better life.

Until I turned fifteen, my family had not asked from me anything, only encouraging me to learn. At my early age I was thinking about how to support my family, help my father, as we were living on a single income. I would ask my mother, God rest her soul, to make me some ice, and then I would buy small

syrups— I can't remember their names—for making lemonades, so I would sell lemonades in the market, which was about 100 meters away. I didn't even reach the age of 13 or 14, but I wanted to help them.

When my brothers grew up and started trading, I wanted to help them, to sell fruits and vegetables. We managed to get good income, but unfortunately, the war ruined it all. They even took our goods together with trucks.

Back then we used to play with our neighbors, with boys and girls from the neighborhood. A game was called "klička mačka," a game where we knocked down a glass with a ball. We then had concerts on the streets, competitions between neighborhoods. I used to sing with my sisters, three other girls from the neighborhood, and another one from a different family, and so on, and then the other ones from the neighborhood would call us to watch their concert.

I really like basketball. As a 16-year-old, in 1982, I registered in the city team, but I saw that something wasn't right there, so I left.

We had also Serbian neighbors, and we played football with them, and never had any problems. We would never believe that that would happen to us from Serbs, because they were neighbors to us. They came to visit us for Eid, and we would go to them for Orthodox Christmas.

We had good relations; we grew up together and never had any problems with each other. However, after 1981, things went bad, as they started distancing themselves from us. They have always played the politics. They were sneaky, cunning, they were thinking only for themselves, pretending to get along with us, so that they can harm us in the end.

I know that good things don't happen in war, and fortunately, no one from our close family was lost, thanks to Allah, they all had life. But what happened to me, I initially found it difficult to accept it, but one has to accept the life as it is.

As my mother told me, I was a very well-behaved child, I never cried during the time up to the elementary school. Our teacher was the best in the whole of Peja. She was calm and wise; if you made a mistake, she would correct you without informing your parents. She was so gentle that you would even feel embarrassed to make mistakes. My mother took me to school the first day, as she had also finished her school there. Her family came to Peja from Prizren even longer ago, about 200 years ago.

I remember when we went to Kopaonik for winter holidays. I will never forget it as long as I live, it left such an impression on me because it was so beautiful.



Throwing ourselves everywhere, with skis, and throwing to each other with snow.

Our eldest brother was an exceptional student. Until he finished the eighth grade, he was the best in school. The other brothers as well, the elder sister graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics, and the second sister in literature. Both brothers left high school and chose to work in crafts.

When I registered in high school, the circle of friends changed entirely, the friends I had continued in a different field of study. Since the second year, I had been in a vocational branch for a mining technician. Then, we were three inseparable friends, and at the end of the third grade we talked about going to the seaside. We decided, if the families would allow us, to go to the seaside. We just got our IDs, we were 16-17-year-old, and after talking to my mother and father, they eventually agreed and let us go. We enjoyed 14 days in Montenegro. When we returned home, they didn't recognize us because we spent the whole day outside in the sun. We didn't know how to protect ourselves from the sun at that time; we just wanted to enjoy.

With those friends, we stayed together for another two or three years after school, and then we went our separate ways. One went abroad to western countries, and the other stayed here, and we meet occasionally.

I have a funny memory with one of them. One day, we met three guys from Prizren in a cafe. We welcomed them, and now it was their turn to return the favor to us, so they invited us to go to Prizren. We decided to go one day, but we couldn't meet them. We went to a supermarket to get something to eat, and one friend, without looking at the label, grabbed a can of minced meat and when he went outside, he said: "this is delicious, do you want to try a bit?" When I looked at it, I saw a cat drawn on the can! I will never forget this one as long as I live.

During our studies, we became a bit more serious. There were students from various regions, including Peja, its surroundings and other cities. We were a group of 40 people, and our goal was to get employed right after our studies.

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For me, the war started before they killed Adem Jashari. Since then, I have known that things will be bad for us. I was at home when they fired a rocket, or mortar, in the market, where dozens of people were killed. A neighborhood of mine got his hand injured from that incident. When we went there, it was chaotic, noisy, full of blood. We saw every kind of thing! Bad, very bad! I was traumatized, and I couldn't sleep for a week; I would jump asleep from traumas.

My mother passed away before the war, so I remained with my father only. I

never wanted to leave my father alone because he was elderly. My brothers and sisters had their families. We were in a same yard, but they had their own families. It was very dangerous. We had to work, but cautiously, in hiding, not engaging in conversations with just everyone. In late '98 things got much worse, and we started securing reserves. One of my brothers was trading goods, he had a small truck, he would go to the villages and would supply us with the essentials.

My father had blocked the door with wood, and we only went out through a window, and into the neighbor's yard, to be able to supply ourselves, since it was necessary to buy something. My father once told me that some Montenegrins came with beards, 'chetniks', and were knocking at the door. When a neighbor, a woman married to a policeman, asked them what they were doing there, even if the person was there, they wouldn't dare touch him because she would report them. She was a good person, and we always got along well with her.

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It was May of 1999, on the day I told my father, "Father, I am going to get some eggs, cheese, or something...". We remained without food, so I decided to go out. I started going to allays and reached the place where the market used to be. When I crossed the road, I met someone I knew as a familiar face from Peja. He asked me where I was going, and I told him that I was looking around that area of the city to see if I could find something. He was also going that way because he had small children and they were left with nothing. We set off together and encountered another person on the way, a bit older and unknown to us. "Where are you going, guys?" We told him, and he joined us. We wouldn't dare going on the main road because there were patrols there. There was a kind of a barrier which we crossed and got to the other side. We got wet a bit, but it was a risk we had to take.

When we approached a building, about 10 or 12 or 15 people came out at once – at that moment one almost faints – shouting and yelling at us. They had black uniforms, some with masks, some without. They ordered us to lie down on the ground the three of us, and they asked us where we were going. We told them that we were checking to buy some milk, egg or cheese. "You are terrorists, you are KLA," and started beating us as much as they could. Then they grabbed us and took us to a place, about 20-30 meters away, pushing us inside. The oldest among us was taken somewhere else, I wouldn't know exactly where, and I did not hear about him anymore. To be honest, I suspected that he may have set us up. I never saw that person again, I always doubted whether he was a spy, simply put.

The place they took the two of us to, had been adapted as a site for abusing

people. Previously it used to be a kind of a lobby with sofas, chairs, and tables. They put us into a room like a warehouse, completely dark. There was a sponge mattress, where they threw us in, a toilet and a tap. There was no window, and we slept on a single sponge mattress, we were freezing, because we didn't have anything to cover ourselves with.

Two or three of them remained, and three others were there in a cafe. They then entered our room and asked us questions, and then they forced us to take off our clothes. Both of us were kept there for a week. I know it was May 14th, but I don't know if it was the first or last day. I started to forget some details since I had this surgery, and I can't recall it exactly. [Flamur takes a deep breath].

On the first day, after approximately three or four hours, it may have been even shorter, but it seemed to me a very long time, they forced us to undress, and threw our clothes in the lobby. Our room was kept closed with an iron door, and they could be heard talking outside. When they returned, there were three people, one always in a position with a weapon pointed towards us, and the other two started yelling at us and subjecting us to a worst procedure.

Systematically, for a week, every day, they abused us. Seven days, the same procedure by those two individuals. It was dark, but we recognized them by their voice. Sometimes during the day, sometimes at night; we would notice when the door would open, as we couldn't notice otherwise. After they were done with us, they would throw dry bread at us in a bag. We survived the week with that [Flamur takes a deep breath]. Luckily, we had enough water.

These were people with very weak morals, indescribable. They were smelling alcohol, and they were probably drugged. There is nothing they didn't say to us in Serbian, "gipsy", "filthy race", "I am not doing anything to you, what I would do to your mother." Fortunately, my mother had passed away, and I would say to myself: "By God, you can't do anything to my mother, you can do anything to me, but not to her."

On the day we escaped, it was a very bad day for us, they had cut me with a knife in the belly, but luckily, they cut the skin more than the flesh, and the knife did not go inside. I bear the scar even today.

We heard a very loud noise outside, so that even the bricks were shaken. They were inside the cafe, they opened the door, cursed us and showered us with water, as they usually did. At the moment the bang was heard, we heard them shout as much as they could, "bezhi, bezhi, bezhi!" and they left.

I noticed they hadn't locked the door with a key. I waited to see if they would come back, but they didn't, so I told my friend, "Let's open the door and see if

they are still here?" When I opened the door, there was no one. I said, "Let's run from here," "no, they will kill us," "we are dead anyhow, I don't believe they will let us go alive". They are just using us as much as they can, and in the end, they will kill us!"

When we got out, we saw our clothes. For a week, we hadn't had any clothes on our bodies. We got dressed, and my wound was hurting. We approached the door and, luckily, it was unlocked. We checked if anyone was there, but found no one. Great God, to Him we praise who made that noise so that we can be saved.

We went in the direction of the Roma neighborhood, because we knew there was a barrier there. But it had been destroyed by the bombing, so we continued walking through the water. It was cold, but we didn't care, so we went to the Roma neighborhood. We had to be cautious with them as well, because some of them had collaborated with the Serbs.

We first left towards his house. I told him, "You go to your house, and I will go to mine, because my father is worried." I walked through alleys, jumping by a couple of house walls; I had no other way out, because I couldn't go through the main road.

It was a complete darkness when I approached the window, and knocked on the window to my father. "Where have you been?" "I swear I have been to a friend's house and stayed there." I didn't want to tell my father what happened to me. I never told him because I did not want to make him worry. As for the wound, I told him it happened to me while jumping the wall. He then called our Serbian neighbor, who cleaned my wound with alcohol. And when the paramilitary forces left, I went to a doctor to check up on my wound. He said I was lucky not to have had internal bleeding.

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For a long time, even after the Serbs left and after liberation, I didn't leave the house until my brothers came from Albania. That's when I started going out a bit in the neighborhood.

No one in the family knows about my case. Except for a female and male friend, I didn't tell anyone.

For two months I was in isolation, suffering from headaches, abdominal pain, and colon. I had pain all over. I couldn't sleep during the night, so I slept during the day mostly. My father would ask, "What's wrong? Why can't you sleep?" "I can't, because I sleep during the day, so then I can't sleep during the night," I would

blame on daytime sleeping.

Later on, I wanted to see a doctor because I had pain in the colon, but there was no health service available, and there were no schools or anything. A sister-in-law suggested going to an imam to write a talisman, but I dismissed the idea. My father would say to me, "You are the best imam for yourself. If you can't heal yourself, no one else can. You need to get up, become alive, and overcome the trauma, because life goes on." He thought that I only had the traumas of war. It was difficult, very difficult.

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I met my wife accidentally downtown. I had gone out one day, climbed uphill, towards the walking paths; not down there where I was running away, because I hadn't been going there for quite some time. She was with her sister, and they had gone out for a walk. I greeted them politely, without any ill thoughts, and they greeted me back. I continued on my way, and after about 50 meters, I thought, let me turn back and take another look. I noticed that they were also turning back.

For a long time, I couldn't think of anything positive, because I would immediately recall what happened to me, and when we were looking to talk to one another, at that moment my head would become heavy. From that moment, I started to let go a bit, to become alive again. Until then, I felt like a dead person, like a stone; I had no feelings, and I didn't talk to any family members. Sometimes, my nephews would take me by force for a walk, saying, "Uncle, shall we go there? Shall we do this?", but I would tell them that I couldn't because it seemed to me that everyone in Peja and the whole world knew it. That was the impression I had.

After two or three weeks, I went to that road again. In the same place, I saw two people a bit further away. I was trying to approach them, but I couldn't. I wanted to talk to them because my heart was racing for some reason.

I had a fast pace because when the trauma hit me, I walked like being in a hurry. So that when I would meet someone sometimes, they would say, "Slow down, what's wrong with you hurrying so much!?" speaking to myself, you don't know what happened to me, you are not in my shoes, otherwise who knows what you would do.

After a few months, we accidentally met again, just the two of us. I took a deep breath and approached her, "Hello", she responded "Hello." "Where are you going?" I asked. She said "I went out because I have some business down there, and I am heading back home." "Can I accompany you?" "Yes."

So, gradually, we started seeing each other more often. We didn't have too many

conversations, because we both had the same problem. She told me that she was not married, some of her family members were abroad, and she told me more about them.

We started to open up to each other, and she was the first to tell me what had happened to her. After some time, I also told her what had happened to me, in a same way it happened to her. Then she told me that her brother had also experienced the same thing. [Flamur takes a deep breath]. After a few years, he had committed a suicide.

After we got married in 2005, my brother-in-law stayed with us all the time because her mother died, and he had no one to stay with in his house. Initially, he would come as a guest, he would stay for two nights, and then would go home. We had a spare room, and I told my wife to invite him to live with us. I knew very well what kind of pain he had, but I couldn't tell him that I knew. I knew that one can't endure being alone, that he is scared to sleep alone. I understood very well when my crises hit me. Later on, he started staying with us longer.

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Our first son was born after ten months. It was a great joy. I couldn't let go of him. For one and half years I used to wash my son with my own hands. Later, after two years, we had another son, and after him, a daughter.

After the birth of our son, at times my brother-in-law spent a month with us. My wife still has some trauma, because she found her brother who committed a suicide at home. When she called him and he didn't answer, she went home together with her niece, and what did she see?! He didn't tell anyone how he was, and he had hung himself.

I used to say before, and I will always say: Thank God that He created the family for us, as who knows what people would have done. Children remove the bad things from you and make you think positively. They give us the will. God willed so, they are good students, well-behaved. They don't leave the house without asking us.

I am investing in them to have a happier life, so that they learn, because if they don't learn, the investment is worthless. They have talents and learn well. Daughter plays the violin, and she is quite talented. The three of them are attending foreign language courses.

My wife has always supported me. We didn't mention the incident to each other



anymore, and we tried to treat each other more gently. When I saw that she was upset, I asked her to go for a walk with our youngest son. Sometimes I took the children alone, and she was left to calm down at home alone. And vice versa, she tried to calm me down when she saw me upset, because the way we read each other, no one else does. We know each other's pains.

It has not been easy for us at the beginning of our marriage. We also had problems in our sexual relationship for a while. We went to a very good psychologist together and told him the issue, and he said that we should sleep together, but not trying to have an intercourse for a while.

We were born into this world to be together. Perhaps God made us together with the same experiences, for us to have each other, and understand each other in every aspect.

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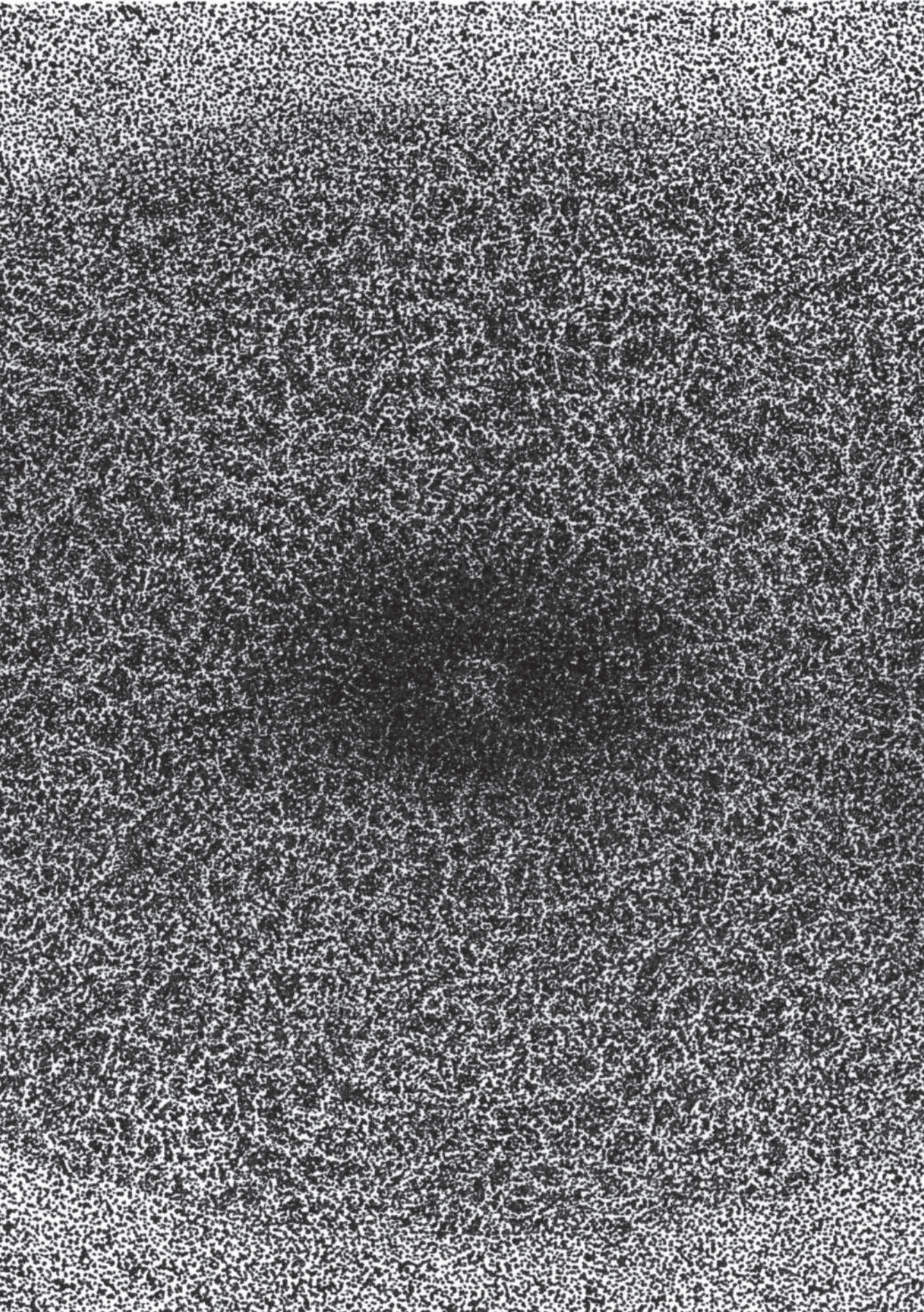
I used to do other jobs, whatever I could find, some here, and some there. I maintained houses, gardens, and other work, just to survive. And now, I am very well accommodated at the supermarket where I work. I don't mind working, I treat customers well, and I have fantastic relations with my colleagues. Everyone addresses me as uncle Flamur. Whoever needs help, I call in first. I try to have good time with everybody, with good words, because a wrong word can ruin the whole day.

I don't spoil the fun of my children. I always treat them with understanding. I have three children, but my daughter is special, she adds joy to my life. She never spoils it, and she never says no. When they were younger, I was always ready for them, took them for walks, to playgrounds. They encourage me to see life better and better.

I would like to say to everyone who is affected by the war to give themselves courage, to continue life, not to take their lives. We have one life, and it is valuable. We should look to live, to forget the past as much as we can, because it's difficult to forget everything, but as much as we can, engage ourselves in something. Those who are not married, look into getting married and create a family, like me, and move forward. Leave those experiences behind, as much as you can. God willing, there will never be war in the world.

War brings damage, no benefit, only tragedy. God willing, we will never experience war again, neither us, nor our children, nor our grandchildren. This war in Ukraine has brought back wounds. I saw a case on TV, and it seemed the case as mine. We know it is not easy for them, because we have been in their shoes. May God help them too.







# "ZATVORI Unheard OČI" voices

## "ZATVORI OČI"

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Driton has an artistic talent, he has written poetry, and played music. This is clearly evident in his extraordinary storytelling affinity, making his narrative captivating and gripping from the beginning to the end.

In terms of the volume of horrors and torture, Driton's story is unparalleled. It is difficult to read these lines without being amazed by the unseen strength this person possesses.

When Driton is taken onto a truck with some of his relatives, he notices that his legs are covered in a thick blood of his massacred uncle. Thinking he is a KLA soldier, they capture him, imprison him, and torture him. And when he refuses to provide information, the torture worsens and multiplies. However, they cannot break Driton's spirit, even when, at the peak of the absurdity of violence, they forcibly try to convert him into Jovan.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Driton

I was a well-behaved, non-problematic child, never aggressive, and always averagely reserved. Some people express their aggression, their worries, but for me, no one noticed it, neither when I was being upset nor when I was being happy. Even when expressing my emotions, my nature is such that it cannot be assessed; perhaps I could be upset, but I keep that anger inside. I was always like this, within the family and among friends, whenever there was something to react to, I always kept it to myself, even though I might have been upset.

I was born in 1965 and spent my childhood in a village in Kosovo. I completed my primary education partly in my village and partly in another village, two kilometers away. At that time, we didn't have transportation; we would walk to school and back. I was good at math, but two other friends were still better than

me. There were instances, for example, where they helped me in assignments because I only got mark four, and they would get a five plus, you couldn't get any better mark. They were capable, filling the entire blackboard with formulas, while I reached halfway, and then I struggled, so the teacher would help me.

I always liked the Albanian language. Back then, I even wrote about 20-30 poems in a notebook, which I lost during the war. I once met the village writer on the bus, showed him my poems, he read them, and said, "Driton, continue to write because you are gifted, you have a talent."

Until I turned ten, we had a difficult economic life, but things changed afterward because my grandfather was a merchant. He was hospitable, having a guest house which was open twenty-four hours a day. At that time, there were horse travelers, so every traveler would take a break at my grandfather's guest house. Guests back then didn't come to spend some time only as they do now, arriving by car, staying for an hour or two. At that time, they stayed for a week.

My mother had her own problems; she worked hard, as we had a tough life. She always had hardships, either when we returned from school or with guests, to prepare what she could, how to welcome people, because it was a serious matter to receive a guest, but she was always hospitable. My father worked in a Cooperative back then. He was hardworking, he worked in a Cooperative for several years, and supported our family during that time.

I loved my grandmother from my father's side a lot. To tell you the truth, more than my parents. My grandmother also always loved me. When I was twelve or thirteen, sometimes I would go out to chop wood, and my grandmother would call out, "what are you doing my son, come in, it's cold outside." She would then talk to my father and mother, "How can you let your son go out, he is still young." I remember, along with some cousins, we were about seven years old, we entered a barn full of straw and hay for baking the corn. I told them, "Don't do it guys, you can burn down the barn," because I had a bad feeling. "Don't worry, it won't burn," until it suddenly started. At that moment, out of fear, I tried to put some soil, and the fire begins to spread, the barn was on fire, we started to run away and hide; I headed straight to my grandmother's lap. When an elder villager arrived, a tough man, and started shouting, "Where is that devil, I will beat him, I will kill him..." my grandmother would protect me, telling him that I was asleep, and so on. It became a big deal; the police came, they took us to the guest house, made me sit cross-legged, and told us to confess everything. They had figured out that three of us had participated in this "action." The others were hiding: one in the barrel, the other in the creek, or who knows where. I described it as it happened, entirely unintentional. I don't know why, but I didn't forget this story.

I am the oldest of four children, with two sisters and a brother. I have always had

normal relations because I was the eldest and also the quietest. My relations with my sisters were all good. Both, when we were young and now, the sisters were more distinguished. Even if they have gone to the city, I have never scolded them, they had freedom. As for my brother, well, he was a bit spoiled; even though he is younger, he scolded the sisters and yelled at them and raised his voice, and sometimes he hit them. I would tell him "Hold on, let them do their thing."

I have always had the best relations with my younger sister. She is now in the western countries, and the second one is there, too, whereas the eldest one is here. Usually, the younger one calls me more often, asking about my situation and if I need anything. The others and my brother call me too, but not as much as she does. Whenever she comes, she enquires about me, she always helps me or prepares something for me that I can take home.

I have always spent my summer holidays at my uncle in a mountainous place, and I enjoyed it a lot. I wish a million times to go back to that time, but the problem is that it doesn't come back. There were fields where we played football, and the youth gathered with livestock, taking them for pasturing. My uncle had a lot of livestock, milk, cheese, and yogurt. All organic. My uncle loved and still loves me the most, then and now. I was the eldest nephew and have always visited them, and behaved well with them. Although they are now in Switzerland, whenever they come, they respect me.

As a family, we used to play music, we all played 'çifteli' (traditional musical instrument). The two sisters sang very well, moreover in 1993 they even won an award at the Music Chords competition. Later, Qamili i Vogël came, and he asked to take the sisters, but for some reason we didn't let him. He had seen that the girls had talent, could make it in music, and offered to find them accommodation in Prishtina, pay for their education, and involve them in an ensemble, but I don't know how the circumstances unfolded.

We had an artistic group in the village, together with several nephews who sang and played 'çifteli' and 'sharki' (traditional musical instruments), a cousin who played the flute very well, along with a teacher who played 'def' (drum-like traditional musical instrument). However, there were some fanatic villagers there; where the youth gathered, neighborhood against neighborhood, both men and women, jealousy would arise. We are an interesting people; we try to hinder others.

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In the '80s, we had a cattle farm, they brought us 12 cows from the Netherlands



to Prishtina via an airplane, and later with trucks we brought them to the village. The villagers spread some village gossip, saying that allegedly they took my father to a prison, claiming he had taken a loan from the state. In Yugoslavia, there was some kind of a twenty-year credit for farmers, but you could replay that credit after twelve years. The state made almost all the investments, with work tools, water, and modern food processing machinery. The state cooperative used to collect 700 liters of milk every day. For four to five years, I woke up early in the morning, took care of them, cleaned them, provided water and then my parents would milk them. In other words, I handled fifty percent of the work, and then I would go to school.

Later, I worked for two years as a salesman in a company outside Kosovo, where my father and I had a depot with construction materials. After I grew up, we opened a business. At that time, privatization became applicable in the former Yugoslavia in 1991. If you had the opportunity, you could invest in anything at that time. If you wanted to open a factory even, the state was obligated to support you, and you would then return it slowly. I had two textile stores in the city, a good beverage shop, and a warehouse in the village. We had a furniture salon and a grocery store in the village. I was the leader of the company until before the war, and when the war broke out, everything ended, we lost our goods, whether they were burned or stolen, I don't know!

We provided great help to people. We provided materials to people for building their houses even when they couldn't pay, but even when they paid, back then they used dinars, if you waited to be paid, it lost its value after a year; for example, you sold it for ten thousand euros, but they would pay you with a thousand euros. However, the situation changes, people will get close to you if they have any benefit from you, the moment the benefit goes away, they gradually start distancing themselves. People can be different, but the good deed should not be forgotten. I don't worry about it, but it's a bit disappointing when you expect something in return from people. The good deeds you did for them, you expect them to return them to you, but such people are few.

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We didn't involve ourselves much in politics, but before the war, during the critical phase when relationships deteriorated, I was the head of the village's Youth Council. That was the time when Ibrahim Rugova formed the Democratic League of Kosovo, the time when many people were expelled from their jobs, and most teachers were left unemployed. At that time, I had to dissolve the organization because people weren't interested in attending the meetings, the situation deteriorated, and I had to announce that the organization was permanently closed.

Even in the years when the arms action was taking place, where people were beaten in 1995, I was taken with my grandfather to the village for weapons, and they held us for four hours and abused us. We had a restaurant in the village, and my father would always keep a gun for safety, but now they spied that this person has a weapon. Espionage worked very well at that time.

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When the war broke out in Drenica, it was understood that the war was going wider. It had been a very difficult time, not only for me but for all people, because no one knew what would happen. We were the oppressed people, unprepared even financially; we had no weapons, no ammunition. We relied on the mercy of God. At that time, there were only those individual organizations that were formed by the KLA headquarters, otherwise, it was a difficult time.

When on March 27th, the army started firing illuminating rockets, we collectively left the village, women, children, men, and everything we had, we have taken them to another village. From there, we retreated, out of fear that they would attack us at night, and we returned the next morning. During those days, a large battalion of the army went to Karadak, but the army was spread out. Logically, they followed us and suspected that we were preparing for some action.

There, in the village, at a relative's house, we kept watch until the moment when they surrounded us and attacked. Initially, there were many young people, but they spread out, and in the end, only me and my cousin remained. We didn't believe we could escape the bullets, so we had to surrender. We had a bag with some weapons, that someone had exchanged, and I didn't want to take it, but I had to, because the soldier told me to, insulted me, and we had to take it. When I took the bag, I realized it wasn't the bag with bullets and bombs that we had secured for ourselves.

From there, they took us into a corner of a wall, where I saw they had taken another cousin of mine there, and when we entered the yard, he asked me for a jacket because he said he was shivering, but he was actually trembling with fear. "Cousin, how am I supposed to give it to you?" I asked. "Give me so I can warm up a bit," he insisted, so I had to give it to him. At that moment, they shot and killed three fellow villagers, they threw them into a pit, whereby three or four bullets went above my head. Along with a cousin and two soldiers, we leaned behind a wall, and one of the soldiers next to me started shaking out of fear, and the other soldier looked at me in the pupils of the eye. To be honest, I didn't think I would survive; I thought that even if I die, at least I should kill someone, one for one; thinking of grabbing him, he was looking at me how was I going to act. At that moment, he received a news over the radio that "we have killed this many, we

have shot them,” and I saw that his situation changed. We went ten more meters to an iron door which was locked, and the soldier ordered me to take it down, so I hit it with my feet until it fell. They caught one of my fellow villagers and started questioning him, telling me to go to the barn and check if anyone is there and come back. Two soldiers and three of us.

To tell you the truth, I thought of escaping, but when it is written for you to live, miracles happen. I went to the barn to check; they were talking to a fellow villager, and I saw that they were not looking at me. I started opening the door, but someone had closed it, and it squeaked because it was an iron door, so the soldier shouted at me, insulting me, swearing at me, said go back. When I turned to the right, I saw soldier's boots. If the door would open, he would have cut me through with bullets, because he was waiting for the movement. From there, they took us to a village, passing through the yards of two or three houses, we reached the mosque where there were many soldiers, officers, various types of military personnel, with beards and black faces, where they had caught and gathered a few other fellow villagers. They had killed my uncle at the entrance of the village, injured a cousin of mine, and killed another one with his sister. My uncle was in another village, where we had taken our family to, but he returned because he said, “There are twenty people stuck in the village; if something happens to them, I have no place there anymore.”

After a while, a soldier came, “You,” he said, “look and think well.” I said, “What should I think about (“šta da se razmislim”) – in Serbian, as I learned in school a few words I told him I don't have anything to think about. He said, “You will think well, and you will come with us.” At that moment I understood that they intended to take me. It didn't take half an hour, just when I saw the truck and they took me with them.

Before they arrested me, before the war broke out in the Eid day, at that morning and at that evening I saw a dream:

A little puppy was barking loudly behind the house, and I went to see what it was barking, what was happening. I came out behind the house, and when I saw it, oh my God, its back legs were left hanging thin like a matchstick, and its ribs were completely out. We had a cow back then, and I took the cow to the field to milk it, trying to put its head in the milk, I couldn't. I went and got a teaspoon, slowly trying to feed it, and after about ten minutes, it started licking its lips, and then it began to wag its tail. It would get up but it would fall immediately. The next day, it started walking again...

At the moment when the army caught me, there where they took me, the dog was by my side, and at that moment when the soldiers took me to the truck, it accompanied me to the truck.

When I got on the truck, there was a lot of blood; my uncle had been killed, and my cousin was wounded with his two daughters. My cousin was screaming, his daughters were crying. I couldn't look at my uncle, as he was massacred, his brains were out. My feet were sticking to the blood because it had started to clot there. They took us to \_\_\_\_\_, where they unloaded my cousin, and they left me in a village. Just before getting off, two or three soldiers came, checked some lists, and found my uncle's name there. They asked me about my relation to him, so I told them, so they ordered us to get off the truck. I took with me the bag, girls, my uncle and the other relative. They took the two girls back; how much they kept them for, and where they have taken them, I don't know. They say they left them in the village in the afternoon.

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They put me inside a certain office and started questioning me: "Where is the weaponry, where is the army, we will give you as much money as you want", But I kept saying that I don't know what to tell you. Some would question me with good words, some with bad words, trying to force information out of me. I told them, "You can kill me, but I don't know what to tell you." "We will give you money, anything you want, just tell us and we will spare you." Then two other entered, insulting me badly, one soldier shouted at me "you have to tell us or we will burn you, we will kill you" and all the worst things. After that, two other soldiers came who raped me. They undressed me, questioned me; one of them closed the door, the other pushed me and slammed me onto a table. I don't know what happened, but I had significant body pain from the beatings. They were under the influence of alcohol or drugs, I don't know, but they were beating me and raping me.

Then some chaos happened outside, and they quickly dressed me, and seated me in a chair, and told me not to make a sound. The door opened, and someone asked what was happening and why they had locked the door. They said they were interrogating me, and since I wasn't disclosing anything, they left immediately and others entered. One of them came and said, "Are you talking, or your eyes will not see the ground again?" "I don't know what to tell you; we don't have an army," I replied. "Oh yes, you have things to tell us," and he took a rubber stick and hit me on my head. At that moment, to tell you the truth, I closed my eyes because I thought was going to kill me. He then hit me on the back four times, and there I lost my consciousness, I fell on the ground from the chair, and they continued beating me. They changed, sat me down, asked questions again, "we will give you as much money as you want", they opened the bag - although I wasn't concerned about the bag because when I grabbed it, it was very light, and I thought someone had replaced it and so it turned out - towels, soap, comb, T-shirt, a mirror... "you have prepared yourself, you are a KLA," they said. I told them

it's not my bag; when the soldiers took in to the yard, they forced me to take it. Why are you lying, you prepared yourself for war.

Then some others came there, took me, undressed me again in another room, and left me in the underwear only. They tied me to a radiator, and I started to tremble because they left me in that position on the tiles. Another person came in and said, "Who ordered to undress you?" Afterward, they put clothes on me again. Again, they sat me down; another soldier came, whose face I often remember, I forgot his figure, but he was fat because he couldn't fit through the door, so he entered kind of sideways and started talking to me in a thick voice. He approached me and asked, "Do you want food?" I said no, because I didn't dare eat without knowing what was in the food. They forced a spoon or two into my mouth, and I immediately started vomiting; the bowl was spilled. He began swearing at me, saying all sorts of things to me. They left, removed the bowl, and tied me up again.

Different soldiers were coming inside, they would turn the lights off, and would put the flashlight in my eyes so that I couldn't recognize who they are or what was happening. As soon as I would open my eyes, they would start hitting me by foot: "ZATVORI OČI". Even when they would turn off the lights, they would surround me, started singing and drinking, my eyes were tearing due to smoke. I started getting wet, when they resumed with the flashlights, I realized they had been urinating on me. A soldier approached me by the head and told me not to dare cry or he would cut my head off.

Two soldiers were watching over me. On the right side, where I was tied to a radiator, there were broken windows, and a soldier was watching me. I don't know if it was morning, as I was psychologically exhausted. Then there was some chaos in the corridor, they started shouting at me and ordered me to remain silent for ten minutes. At that moment, I had almost fallen asleep due to fatigue, and my eyes had closed. Within seconds, they began a loud quarrel, and from their swearing and shouting, I understood they were talking about slaying me. The two soldiers guarding the door tried to protect me, but when the others arrived at the door, they were trying to keep the door closed, but they slammed the door open, so a soldier was running towards me, pointed his machine gun at me, and at the moment of firing, another soldier intervened, pushing the gun upwards. Out of frustration, he kicked me with force in the belly. Tied to a radiator, when they kicked me caused my head to collide against it, and I lost consciousness.

They then returned my conscious by splashing water on me. There was a silence for about an hour, and then a soldier came near my head, just before the dawn, he said, "Sad čes da pevaš srpski", "Ja ne znam da pevam" "Nema veze, ja ću da te

ućim". I was singing until daylight. Now, whether it was an hour or two, I didn't know because I was exhausted, and as soon as I would get tired, he would charge with a knife. I was in a corner by the wall, and he came and hit the wall. I was afraid, I couldn't tell if he was hitting the wall or me. When daylight came, many soldiers gathered, and they brought me some bread and a pastry. My hands were tied tightly; I couldn't eat. One of them loosened my hands, but they were so swollen that I couldn't grab the bread, because whenever you would move, they would tighten further. Then, a soldier came and handed me two pieces of bread, but I couldn't even swallow.

From the moment they took me there, it had been around forty hours, roughly thirty hours of abuse – ten hours since they took me from the village, somewhere around twenty-four hours. The next day, a Russian mercenary arrived and sat beside me. Seeing that I wasn't eating, he started speaking in Russian and punched my face every five minutes for about an hour or so. When a younger soldier arrived, apparently feeling compassion about me, he approached and asked if he could help. He asked me if I spoke Serbian, and I replied a bit. "Do you know why he keeps punching you?" "How do I know what am I doing here", "He is telling you that he fought, killed, and cut people, he wants you to look into his eyes, and you are not doing it." I don't understand Russian, I said, "just look at him". He stopped talking in Russian, talking and talking, and I wouldn't take my eyes off of him. When he saw that I wasn't reacting, as soon as I would turn my head, he would start punching me. He asked me whether I was a Muslim, I told him I was, "would you change your religion", "I don't know", "how come you don't know", "I wouldn't change it", "get up! undress!" I was tied up, I couldn't do it, so the young soldier undressed me. When he saw that I was a Muslim, he kicked me forcefully making me hit the ground. I lost consciousness again, and they waked me up with water.

After some time, a higher-ranking soldier arrived, saying, "I am Captain Petriq (or Periq), this is my army, is someone harassing you?" because they had told him that the Russian guy was punching me. To tell you the truth, if I tried to defend myself and say that I was being abused, perhaps I would do more harm to me, so I said no. "Do you see what army I have?" "Yes, I see it". As he was leaving, he said I will see you again, who for the sake of an Albanian from a village in Serbia, he had decided to set me free. But I could never know, maybe he did millions of good deeds to him that's why he decided to let me go. Going outside he looked at the mercenary with disdain; some time went by, I couldn't tell how long, until evening, no one else came there.

Later, three soldiers came, took me, and said, "Now we are going to change your religion." They took me to a church, they tried twice to open the church door but they couldn't, and one of them managed to grab a cross. "Your name is Jovan!"



My stomach went upset and I pushed him with tied hands, not much though; they all started hitting me with the machine gun barrels, hitting me with their feet, punching me and left me there, as though I was dead. I only know that a civilian arrived later on, opened my eyes, and said, "neighbor, are you okay? Get up and get in the car."

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Dragan got me into the car, untied my hands, and took me to the village. Captain Periqi (or Petriqi) was also in the car, who, looking at me in the rearview mirror, said, "Thank this man, because else you would never see light with your own eyes again!" "Hvala ti, i hvala mu!". "Thank God, I was begging him all night to release you, because he is innocent." They let me go and told me to leave immediately because there were snipers around. My mind was on a cow I had in the field, which I had forgotten to untie.

I started walking through the fields, avoiding the neighborhood, and my brother yelled at me, I began crying, I cried like a child, and walked as if in a dream. Instead of crossing the wooden bridge, I went into the water. When I reached the creek, my killed cousin was still there, her head in the well. I just looked at her, and started walking uphill, it was almost dark when I suddenly lost control, they took me from the hill by dragging me, up to \_\_\_\_\_. They gave me some soup, water, but my hands didn't work. As soon as I regained consciousness, I immediately would fall asleep; how long I slept, three or four hours, I don't know. From there, my wife and my grandmother took me to the bathroom, cleaned me with a little lukewarm water, and my body was completely bruised, they laid me down. My uncle slaughtered a sheep, and they put salt and onion on my body for a week.

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I was then visited by a doctor in the village, who gave me injections and a therapy for a few days. We stayed there for two months until NATO intervened, and we returned to the villages. However, that phase after the war, for about six months to a year, I couldn't feel my body; I had pain, and was taking painkillers. After a year and a half, I was getting worse; I started losing weight and couldn't eat anything. I lost eight kilograms, and terrified my family. Signs of trauma started to appear, nightmares haunted me, it can't get any worse. I started going to various doctors: for heart, lungs, and had full-body scans. "Driton, there is nothing wrong with you," they said. "But my chest tightens, I am feeling dizzy, and losing my breath." When the doctor found out what had happened to me, he suggested I see a psychiatrist immediately. I immediately went to a private clinic, started a therapy, and after four or five days, the situation changed immediately.

I started moving differently, changed my behavior. I took medication for eight months, but then I stopped, even though the doctor told me not to stop them because I still needed them, but I got better.

With those medical reports, I applied to the Commission for my right to be recognized. They initially denied my request, and upon appeal, after submitting additional documents they requested, they granted me the status of a victim of violence. The income I am receiving now is not substantial, but perhaps things will change. Health comes first.

Later on, I started some activities, businesses, but I abandoned everything halfway. This has always kept me, but I feel a lack of something. Before the war, I had significant businesses, and now when I see people who have moved forward, it seems to me that I have fallen behind a bit. Despite having a decent life, it has always remained a concern for me that I could have been successful in business, I could have gone far, but now I have to accept my fate.

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We get along relatively well with my wife. We occasionally have disagreements, as is common in any social circle and family. Now all three of our children have grown up. The eldest son is 31, the second one is 23, and our daughter is 20. Our daughter got married, and our sons went abroad, one with regular permit, the other in asylum. My wife tends to take their side mostly; some requests don't get fulfilled, which gives rise to small conflicts, but we don't have any big ones.

Now, I live with my wife and my mother. My wife knew 90% of the things from the beginning, those that I have narrated, but some rape secrets, I revealed them later, to both my mother and my wife. She said she knew it had happened to me, but I kept it secret and didn't tell them about it. After I came here to the association, I provided reports, interviews, and the case almost became public. I was supposed to appear in media, but the only thing that stopped me was my married daughter; she stopped me, otherwise I was going to go public. What happened not only to me, but to thousands of women and men, cannot be undone.

Now, the treatment I started at the KRCT is helping me. Those complaints have faded, and I am more relaxed. Now, I have also started working, and work is helping me. There hasn't been a day that I didn't go into town because when I stay silent, everything comes to my mind. When I go out, walk, act, or work, my mind goes elsewhere, and it always feels like relaxation. The therapy has also helped me a lot.

There are many things to tell, if we had another conversation after six months,

perhaps something will change, some things may be forgotten, and some new things may be told. The meaning remains the same, but changes can happen. Lately, I have started to forget people's names. Sometimes I call my daughter by my sister's name, and there are cases when they tell me the name, and I immediately forget it; I cannot remember at that very moment.

I have an obligation to the country to narrate the incidents, but the only reason that is holding me back is my daughter. I would make it public without any problem, as it would have a different echo, both the media and the international public would know what had happened to these people, even though they made confessions, including Vasfije and many women. The more, the better. These rapes have happened, and we hope that perhaps justice will be served.

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I suffered  
Unheard  
so much!  
voices

## I suffered so much!

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Like the majority of our protagonists, Qëndrim also recalls growing up in a severe state of poverty, under extreme conditions, where participation in the family struggle for survival was paramount and indisputable.

Being the eldest in the family, Qëndrim is forced to perform various hard jobs: selling diesel, working in construction abroad, and loading sand with a tractor. During his return from Prishtina, where he goes to secure a part for the tractor, he gets stopped at a checkpoint where a group of degenerate paramilitary forces unleash their sadism upon him.

Although he asks them to kill him, Qëndrim will be left alive, illustrating the perpetrators' perfidious purpose: the absolute defamation and spiritual denigration of the victims. However, the perpetrators will fail in their efforts, as Qëndrim defeated them, where the courage and the narrative are a testament to this victory, this resistance, this Qëndrim.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Qëndrim

I come from a small and a very poor family. We were three brothers, a father, and a mother. I also had a sister, but she died when she was four years old. I remember my sister very well. My parents had children even before me. My mother was gentle, soft, and my father was quite aggressive. My mother suffered from him a lot. But when there is poverty, as they say, a person becomes aggressive and angry, and so on. My father was also a lazy man.

I am the second eldest, but now I am the eldest since my older brother passed away three years ago. He used to take care of the village cows: without much clothes, barefoot and without food. He would go to work in the vineyards in Shtip in Macedonia, and later he went to Zagreb, at some point later he was allowed to work in 'Përparim,' a kind of agricultural cooperative, to drive a tractor. In short,



poverty and hardships, all of it.

I completed my elementary school in the village of \_\_\_\_\_. I was a good student, and I remember the principal, teachers, and everyone. It was difficult for them too, because they traveled on foot to teach us. I also remember my classmates, but I don't communicate with them today because they have moved away. The first teacher in our village is said to have been a certain S.E. from \_\_\_\_\_ who taught children for the first time in the guest house. Today, even the street holds his name.

It was tough, carrying food with us ... almost everybody did the same. Sometimes I wouldn't go to school when we would be tested for marks at the end of the year, because the family would stop me at home either for pulling the oxen, or for going to the mountains to get the firewood. When my father would say, "Don't go!" I didn't dare going. I was a good student, even the neighbor wouldn't go to school because I would help him. But he didn't stop at all. He finished school, became a teacher, and now he has a teacher's pension. Not me, even though I learned more than him.

Back then, we played games with a net, by serving a ball. There weren't many games like today, no television to watch; until 1972, we didn't even have electricity.

When I grew up, I started working as a day laborer. Cutting bricks, harvesting corn, and performing various services at different houses. We earned 20 'qese' a day, and slept in a shed, under the rooftiles. It was tough! They would wake up earlier, and I, being young, 16 years old, would still be sleeping, and then I saw that they had already left. I worked for two seasons and then went to do the army service.

May 25th was Tito's birthday when I went to do the army service for 18 months. When I went, I didn't know a single word. They would ask me for my pants size. "What's your pant size?!" I never bought pants by size. We would buy them from the gypsies in the market; we just checked if they would fit, shortened them, narrowed them, and that's it, sizing them up just by looking at them. What size was saying this fool, but I wasn't a fool...

Six months prior to finishing the army, we had two food rations; they also gave us shoes which they would call 'plitko,' because with boots we would go downtown. I learned the language quite well, I was going to courses, and I was also a 'desetar,' like a corporal. One time they let me go home for about 7 days as a kind of reward because I was a good marksman, and there were others who didn't know, from Serbia, Macedonia, and Slovenia.

I used to go to the city by bicycle; the road was without asphalt. The money I received for seven days was 140 'qese' back then, here it was different if you converted them into dinars. I haven't spent a single cent, and I gave it to my father. I took the peasant's shoes and kept mending them; I didn't buy them. I saved the money for my father: 140 'qese', I gave it to him.

My father and my eldest brother got in a small quarrel. Later he went to live into a small town, and he also became a bit aggressive. When he moved to an apartment in the town near our village, he started quarrelling with us a bit too. Specifically, he became a bit of a troublemaker, and he didn't get along well with our neighbors. That started creating some cracks between us.

At that time, they used to harvest wheat fields with sickle, and he would sleep because it was getting too hot, so who was going to carry the wheat rolls? Those oxen were hungry, and the neighbors would wake up at 3:00 in the morning in the middle of July and brought three cars of wheat rolls, but when we would go there, they would say it was eaten by locust; or they would say "the oxen", or they would say "bad house", or "holes". One time I was pulling the oxen and my cart went upside down and my wheat rolls fell over, he would be killing me. Then I would have to go back and ride the cart again, beaten on both sides.

I remember it well because you never forget those things, good things are forgotten, but bad things are not. But eventually, when we grew up, enough was enough. Now, he abused our mother, and she became sick psychologically, remaining with consequences, from all the words and from...

When our mother and father died, we split up because the place was too small, and wouldn't fit us. Most of them would split up after the war, but we did it two years before the war. Some bred livestock, some worked on land, but the land wasn't so good, and some went abroad. Later, I went to Zagreb.

In 1972, I went to Zagreb, because I finished the military service in 1971, and then I fled. There, I did almost the same work as in Kosovo: carrying coal and wood, ploughing gardens. I then got in the construction with an employer where I worked all summer. I left a mark there for the future; I never did anything bad in that place. I could, for example, take watches and rings on the table, but I have never touched them. They had so much trust in me that even if I went there today, they would still trust me. I worked in the summer, winter, at home, here and there until 1985, somewhere around ten seasons I worked. Sometimes with one employer, and when they wouldn't work, I would go out and work on my own; and finally, I work for a company named \_\_\_\_ for about 6 months.

My uncles were in Switzerland, so they sent me a letter of guarantee for a visa. I

didn't even know where to apply for a three-month visa. I didn't even know where to get a visa in Belgrade, at the embassy, and talking to one guy, he said, "You need to get a visa," and we joined each other. We went to the embassy, there was a long line outside; we got the visa in hand, paid for it, and I still had some dinars, now equivalent to 2 Euros, just enough for two traditional pies. We took the Belgrade-Zurich train with two traditional pies! My uncle picked me up there.

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The next morning, my uncle took me to a meat factory, 5-6 story high, where they preserved meat and made all kinds of sausages. When I entered, there were about 500 workers. I thought to myself, "What am I going to do here?". I walked in and out, butchers on every side with a knife in hand, I said, "Good Lord, I won't make it alive out of here!" I didn't know a single word, and they gave me some overalls, apron, gloves, and boots.

I was in Switzerland from 1986 to 1991, three months each year. I would receive 1000 marks for three months. Every year I would go, I had a visa guarantee. At one point, I didn't even need to get a visa, the municipality there in Switzerland would issue it for me. I worked well, but I couldn't get the paperwork done, because at that time you couldn't spend time with people in asylum. Later on, it became a trend to marry an old woman, but even those old women were kind of taken up!

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I got married at the age of 24. I married through an arranged marriage, an aunt of mine had arranged it for us. We made a little wedding in some bad houses, because we didn't have good conditions, but over time, things started to improve a bit, although even now, the conditions are not great.

I have four daughters and two sons. Our first daughter passed away 8 years ago. She became sick in Germany and had returned home. The eldest son lives in Belgium, he has his own house there, and the second one is here in the village, while I live in a small house nearby. Sometimes they come, sometimes not. Only the second son completed his education and works as a teacher, while the others only finished the eighth grade and didn't continue further.

I haven't told my children about our relationship with our father, to avoid causing any issues or them saying later something like, "Hey, you are like your father!" or, if I say something, they might say, "Hey, but you are just like him!"

Now I can't work. I had a tractor, but I sold it long time ago. I sometimes sell some

hay, but no one is buying it, because there are no cows or anything, so who would you sell it to? I have some left, but no one is taking it.

Now I live with my wife in a foreign house, but we make it feel like our own home because it became hard to live in the village, not even the ambulance was coming to get my wife for the hemodialysis.

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In the '80s, it wasn't known much what Albanians wanted, because they were telling us that it is a lie that Kosovo wants a Republic, only the Serbs say so. Those of us in the diaspora didn't really understand their essence and purpose, we would even say "What do these people want, we are fine," you went wherever you wanted, and worked wherever you wanted! But they had it actually figured!

In 1992, I had a cart. There was a fuel crisis, and I started getting fuel from Tetovo. Once I was stopped by the Serbs in Shterpce, and they wanted to kill me. When I saw them approaching, I left the cart and ran away. When I noticed they were getting close, I returned and raised my hands, they told me, "Stay here, don't leave; we need to check because you have either weapons or drugs," they said, "at the end of the day we will take your fuel, no big deal" I had to give them 20 deutsche marks to let me go. At that time, it was like that; later in time they would kill you right away, without any hesitation.

We had to survive because we had nothing. We became about 15 family members, and we all smoked. My mother smoked, my father and my brother also smoked. We had to make money to survive. I was the oldest, and they depended on me.

We paid the custom fee 10 denars, and they would let us cross the border. But then we had to cross the checkpoint in Komoran?! The cart wouldn't go through the mountains and fields. I had so many hardships!

At one point in time things got stuck, so I said to myself I am going to Slovenia. They gave me visa, and I worked with Albanians as if we were war prisoners, I am telling you, they would suck your blood. I worked there for two summers, and I went home for three months in the winter. On the highway, on the road, in the ditches. Oh my God, Oh my God!

I worked for three years at an Albanian in Slovenia. He made us work in a company with fixed hourly rate, he would get the money that the company would pay, and we wouldn't see him for three months anymore. He would employ us in a company, whereas he would drive around in a nice car, and would say to us that he didn't receive the money yet. "When I get it, I will give it to you," he would say.

Oh my God, oh my God, Millosh went to The Hague, but it would be much better off if they sent him there instead of The Hague. He wouldn't give any money; at times we didn't receive our salary for five months. Our shoes would get damaged, our clothes would be torn, and he would say "I haven't received the money." In short, he said, "Go wherever you want." But where could we go?!

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When the war started in 1998, I was at home. I had bought a tractor with the money from Switzerland and worked the land. I also had two cows. With that tractor, I used to transport stones, soil, and then sand which I used to take it to the villages where it was needed, to earn some money. I would load as much as an excavator with a shovel in my hand for 10 euros. During the war, my tractor served me to get supplies, while some people didn't even have any transportation to carry a sack.

Raids, beatings, and the abuse began. They would go to the surrounding villages and loot belongings; we knew that something was not right here. In the markets, they would get out from the vehicles and would take the peppers that the poor man had brought to sell. There was a checkpoint in the village of \_\_\_\_\_ in two places, at the entrance and exit, and another one on the main road. There were checkpoints everywhere, they were looking for weapons. The checkpoints existed from 1992 until the war started. There were checkpoints in Ferizaj, Gernica, Komoran, Drenas, Rahovec and Klina.

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It was February 1998, when Radio Zagreb reported that people were killed in Likoshan, Qirez, and now in Prekaz. At that time, Radio Zagreb used to broadcast news at 6:30, because otherwise there were no news broadcasts, they had blocked everything. As the Serbian forces continued and expanded, they reached \_\_\_\_\_. We stayed at home, thinking they wouldn't attack us without a reason. One day, we went out, and four tanks went towards the village. Like everybody else, we also fled, and jammed ourselves at the crossroad and couldn't get out. Dust, crying, barefoot women.

It was July 1998 when they occupied the school and the clinic, and then they stationed in some kind of a warehouse on the main road. There, the Serbs placed a sniper, a night sniper who wouldn't miss a shot. We had to sneak out at night to get some things, we were scared. We had to crawl, as if trying to steal from our own house, with fear.

We stayed there for about a month, and when things calmed down a bit, we

would return for a week. We would make our bags ready, so we could grab them and move uphill. Back then, the roads were without asphalt, full of potholes, it was also raining. They were stationed across, two kilometers away, so we couldn't turn on our lights, and would only light the fire during the night. There were no lights anyhow, even if you had lit a lighter, they would see you. We had to take our livestock with us so we could milk them.

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People from Drenica region had sent their family members to Albania, and these guys had remained outside with some blankets, asking for food. We gave them food as much bread as we could, and as much as we had. There was a young boy there, around the age of 15 or 16, when he saw my wife baking bread, said, "Could you give me some bread, I am starving", we sat him down, gave him some pickled peppers. He said, "just bread, empty bread." Oh my God, he was 15-year-old and separated from his family, or who knows what, holding a blanket in his hand. Terrible, terrible. War doesn't bring anything good, only terror and misery!

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The checkpoints had become more seldom; they were removed from Komoran, but remained on the main road at our place. The city bus started operating twice a day. We couldn't wait for the bus where we were supposed to, but elsewhere, at a certain road in some fields, because the forces were patrolling with trucks, with black hoods and guns in hand. The bus would take us to Prishtina to get things done. Somebody had stolen my tractor's compressor pipe, I wanted to buy some filters, so I thought of going to Prishtina. When I arrived here, it was deserted, with very few people. It was November 1998, you couldn't see anything on the roads, except for burnt houses. In Komoran, the checkpoint's location was known, the terror of those rooms. In Prishtina, my uncle had sent me some money from Stuttgart, around 200 deutsche marks, but up in the mountains, by word of mouth, they said that one shouldn't walk around with money, or they would take you and beat you. I received the news that there was a person who would bring them to me at the 'small post office' near the Pension Trust building. Once I got the money, I went to 'Xhamia e Llapit', where there was a car parts store – it's still there today – and bought two tractor filters, two cans of oil, and a compressor pipe. When I got to the buses, there were only four of them in total, and our bus hadn't come. It was autumn, November, and I didn't know what to do because it was quite late. I got on the bus to Peja, heading towards \_\_\_\_\_, it was almost dark.

When I got off the bus there, there were no lights, some were in the mountains, and some at home. I took a piece of wood for safety, as there were dogs in the mountains. I started walking and walking towards home at night, by myself, until I



reached a certain place, the neighborhood of \_\_\_\_of the village, where Serbs had been stationed. During the day, they had attacked the mountain of \_\_\_\_, and now they had come further down, to the asphalt, to a narrow road, thorns on both sides, where they had stationed some forces. I was passing by, and only when I heard STANI!!! "Evo, terorista!!!" I almost died out of fear! "Baci oružje"! had a piece of wood and a cap in my hand, so they had thought this guy is a KLA, far from it ...KLA on the asphalt!!!

Two guys came out and called me in, asking me who I was. To the side was a meadow, uphill. On the other side were some trucks, armored vehicles parked there. Climbing the steps, suddenly, one of them started hitting me with the water pipe.

Over the steps onto the truck, there were two wooden chairs on the side, a table in the middle, two small flashlights, and bottles of: Cezar, Stock, Brandy. I had no way out but drinking several glasses "Živeo Milošević." Long live! Long live! "Down with Rugova, down with the KLA," I said. They asked me if there was any KLA in the mountains, I told them there was. I said I wasn't part of the KLA, and they insisted I drink, and then they started, "Do you have a wife? Why didn't you come with your wife? What kind of wife do you have?"

Then they took the pipe ... and sometime later on ... they hit me. There were about five people in two types of uniforms with various stripes, but it wasn't the moment to look at them what they were, or who they were, as I was just waiting for them to kill me. If they had killed me, it would have been better, I have said it many times because if I were to be asked, I would have told them to kill me, death comes only once.

One would come in and the other would go out, when they would go out, they would call them by names: Milan Radetić, Milan Knježević. They didn't wear masks, with black hoodies, weapons in their hands, and would come around me. Oh my God, of my God! Some would come in, some would go out, some would drink, some would sing. After they released my belt, took off my pants, one of them said, "if you would have been here with your wife, you would be watching and drinking, and we would be having sex with her."

I wanted them to kill me, and I told them not to leave me alive. "Ubijte me!" "Aaa, nećemo da te ubijemo. Ovako ćemo". Then happened what happened, they threw me to the ground "GUBI SE!". Then I somehow managed to put on my pants. They had cut them with a knife but somehow, I managed to put them on.

I couldn't see them anymore, just hearing them. When I got to the main road, I walked a bit, and a car with dimmed lights came. I didn't have a watch, but it was

somewhere around seven and a half in the evening. The car stopped and took me, he told me he was going to a certain village. He asked where they were, I showed him, he had his family somewhere, and he had come through the fields, not through the asphalted road but through the walking path. We parted ways somewhere, I warned him not to turn back there, because they did so and so to me. I am not entirely sure, but I think I told him because he saw me beaten with bruises and signs.

I rested a little bit and went home. Only my wife was at home, because we had taken our kids to their uncle, so when she saw me, she said "they have finished you"! She saw my clothes with blood, because my bowel had ruptured, that is how strong I had tightened myself. I told her what they have done to me ... with pipes... because the beating seemed like nothing to me. She received it very hard; I told her if she had come, she would have saved me, and we leave it here and never, never, never...! Now she forgot it a bit, because her memory got mixed a bit.

I returned to the mountains and told the guys in the kitchen that my back was hurting, and I couldn't help them anymore. I had worked initially for about four months in the KLA kitchen, but I was in civilian clothes. I was a volunteer, because while we were sheltered at a guy's house, he brought some soldiers, and then I told him that I was going to stay and help them. It went so until the end of December, and then we took our children and went to the mountains altogether. In-and-out, in-and-out!

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For three months, until June, we stayed in the mountains with tents, with stoves and cows with us. We saw our house from up there being burnt. When we returned, they had given us some materials and rooftiles to fix it up a bit. We started working on the land, and my son and uncle were sending us some money. My daughter went to primary school, and my son in the secondary school. We started to revive a bit, with different works. I worked, and I had to appear calm.

I didn't seek medical help because there was nowhere to go to. The medical assistance was meant for soldiers, I had to tell them what had happened to me. I always felt like they were still there in the truck, to the point that I would get scared in my dreams. Even to this day, sometimes they haunt me. I thought about asking for help, but I managed to endure and keep it to myself.

I knew they wouldn't understand because I was alone. When you don't talk, they don't know how to understand you; even speaking to a single person, it spreads around. They started talking later about what they have been doing, and I knew that that's true, as they had also raped men. I wouldn't believe it, if I didn't

experience it myself.

24 years after the war, I say we have one bad habit: we put it in our memories, while Serbs put it in writing. Wherever they go, they write: the water spring starts here, the road starts there, the mountain; they knew our terrain better than us in the mountain, because they had sketches and maps, and they knew all the properties, all the lists and valleys. We didn't know where to go in our own mountains. We don't write our history, but keep it through 'sharkia' (traditional musical instrument); with 'sharkias' we will kill them, there are tales from the time of my grandfather! This is a joke; Serbia isn't afraid of 'sharkias'!

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If it weren't for my children,  
Men's narratives  
I wouldn't know how I would  
of overcoming the trauma  
be able to live  
of wartime sexual violence

## **If it weren't for my children, I wouldn't know how I would be able to live**

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In July 1998, Shpëtim's village comes under heavy shelling, and he takes his family and seeks refuge in the mountains. After two weeks of enduring harsh conditions, two of his children get sick – one, 8-month-old, and the other, 2-year-old – and lacking medicine, Shpëtim is forced to take them to Prishtina for treatment. On the way, he is captured together with a group of women and an old man, and is taken to a house where he is raped for several consecutive days. Shpëtim testifies that perhaps he could have escaped, but since one of the criminals threatened to kill his children, escaping went away as an option, and the love for his children gives him strength and courage to endure.

When they get freed after two days, the family finally reaches Prishtina, and Shpëtim's saved children receive medical care, whilst many years later, Shpëtim still suffers the consequences of torture of those two harrowing days. The fate of Shpëtim is inseparably linked to his children, who may perhaps never find out the sacrifice he made for them.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Shpëtim

I grew up in a large village in Kosovo. We were primarily engaged in agriculture and livestock farming. We were five children, two boys and three girls; I am the eldest, and after me, three sisters and the youngest brother. We lived as a family community, about 20-30 family members. The family consisted of our father and his three brothers. One uncle was a farmer, another was a teacher (among the first after World War II), and the third uncle moved to Germany along with our father. We were raised by our mother, as our father spent most of his time working abroad. He would come twice a year and would stay for two to three weeks, and during that time, we had to rely on the support from our mother and uncles who took care of us.

In the '70s, our father was forced to move to Germany for work. I remember he was sent there through an agreement between Kosovo and Germany, facilitated



by Mahmut Bakalli. He worked there for over 40 years, and then returned, and he now lives in Kosovo. Our father came back in 2010, and now he enjoys a pension from Germany.

When I was around 12-13 years old, our father split from his brothers. From that point, we lived on our own with our mother, brother, and sisters. Me being the eldest child, I felt the responsibility to take care of the family, including our mother, sisters, and brother. I had to ensure everything we needed, from personal necessities to food, clothing, and education. It was my duty at that time to take care of them, because our father was in Germany, so he wasn't around. Our father stayed in Germany until he retired after more than 40 years.

Our uncles have always taken care of us, but it was a bit hard for me, still being a child, and having to take care of my family, meaning being responsible for wood, flour, which at that time in order to have it for consumption you had to make sure you obtained it before the winter season. During that time, I had to manage planting and working the land, attending school, and so on.

As a child, along with my generation, we went to the fields, taking our livestock for pasturing. The nieces and nephews were older than me, and we got along very well. Together, we tended to the livestock, played football, played with sticks, swam in the river, went to school together, and so on.

I completed my elementary school in the village in the '80s. I was one of the best students in the class and even among my generation in the entire school. I was very well-behaved, gentle, and not arrogant. Perhaps I matured earlier than my age, as one of the family caretakers.

We were about 15 students in the same classroom. I made friends with them, we went to school together, returned home together, had a little meal, and played various games: football, played with stones, played with sticks, 'peta', and other games that I don't remember now.

Our mother provided for us with what she had at that time. We sometimes would go to watch our livestock, we then played together with friends from other neighborhoods during the time we were tending our livestock. A good period was when the school year ended, and we would go on excursions. The entire school would visit historical monuments. During that time, it was a great sense of excitement, and we eagerly anticipated the coming year end to revisit those places, such as the Gadime Cave, Brezovica, historical monuments, the League of Prizren, the Prizren Castle, the Istog fish factory, and so on.

My family is a family of faith. My mother observes Ramadan, but I wouldn't know

if my father does. Perhaps he also observed it in Germany, but I cannot be sure, because he never came neither for Eid nor for Ramadan. I started observing Ramadan at the age of 18, and later, my sisters and brother followed suit, all after the age of 18.

During those times, life was very difficult, marked by extreme poverty and misery. My father in Germany was more interested in buying land than taking care of us and raising our well-being. We didn't lack clothing, as he would be bringing them to us from Germany. However, it was common back then to think about buying land and living in the village, rather than securing food from the land.

We were involved in politics. I was around 13 years old when the communist regime of that time took my cousin, supposedly for having some books by Enver Hoxha, which were prohibited back then. They came to our house, arrested him, and kept him in prison for about three to four years before releasing him. During that time, around 1984-1985, it was very challenging because encountering a police officer or communist soldier meant constant fear of being arrested. From my mother's side as well, we had relatives who were victims of the previous regime after the World War II, Rankoviq, UDB – State Security Administration. Meaning, there are many in our family that have been persecuted all the time.

I remember that I attended school for three years in the municipality, and in the fourth year, we were forced to return to the village, because Milosevic had closed down secondary and elementary schools. For me, that time was very challenging. We had to get up at 5:00 in the morning and walk for about 20 kilometers on foot to attend classes, and adding to that taking care of the family.

When they poisoned us in the school around the third year, I was one of the poisoned ones. We were in the classroom, when me and one of my classmates started experiencing some poisoning, so I asked the teacher if I could go out because I wasn't feeling well, so he took me and we went outside. After 10-15 minutes, the whole class and the entire school started going outside, running around people were fainting. I had to go to the ambulance to receive treatment. At that moment, we didn't know what was going on; people were collapsing out of a sudden, it was a very unpleasant experience.

We attended the 4th year in the village, but only for half a year, because they had closed schools in the first half of the year. Afterward, I came to Prishtina and enrolled in the faculty. I was admitted in the Pedagogy Faculty in 1993, and attended on semester. I had to stop my studies, because at that time they were looking for my generation to go and serve in the army, so I was not feeling safe to travel from my village to Prishtina.

After that, I had to stay in the village, not go out, not move much. Because I had already been recruited in Nish in 1992. There, we underwent all the army checks,

but we didn't receive any official call-up. However, wherever they found us, wherever they encountered us on the road, they would take us. There were peers of mine who were forcefully taken into the army and sent to fight in Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia, so I had to run, hide, and so on.

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I got married at the age of 23. Back then, marriages were arranged. We went to ask for the bride, and a year later, I got married. During that time, it wasn't allowed for the groom to go to the bride's house, so I never met my wife before getting married.

The wedding was time befitting, traditional wedding. The girls would sing with 'defa' (drum-like traditional musical instrument), and when we went to take the bride, we used tractors because we couldn't go with cars as there were no roads in that area suitable for traveling. That's how the atmosphere was back then, it wasn't that good, because we were under the occupation of Serbia, always fearing that someone might come and disrupt the wedding or arrest someone.

But both of us were happy. We have three children who have grown up. We live well with our children, with everyone. We still live in the village.

After getting married, I started doing some craft work. I worked with tiles, water, electricity, I cut firewood, and in the winter, I also worked as a butcher. Later on, I had to open a stall where we worked together with my brothers for about ten years. However, milk collecting enterprises were not behaving the best, so we were forced to close it down. If they would be coming to collect the milk from us in the village, we wouldn't stop it, so instead we had to deliver the milk ourselves to the milk collection points, and the distance was quite long, around five to six kilometers, that's why we were forced to stop the business.

It was late in 1997 and early in 1998, when our father was leaving for Germany. After about a week, they blocked the roads, set up checkpoints along the roads, and demanded to know who was part of the KLA, and who collaborated with KLA. They would harass and beat you only because you were from the village, as the first cells of the Kosovo Liberation Army began forming in the villages.

Three of my cousins are in Germany. They went there in the early '90s due to the difficult economic conditions. I couldn't go because there was no one to take care of the family.

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During that time, in July '98, the bombardments began in our village. Tanks came, and they shelled us with tanks, so we climbed onto a tractor of one of my cousins and went to the mountains. We realized that there was no life left in here, because the village is a bit lower, while the surrounding areas were higher, so they observed us from higher up, and had seen us. We spent about two weeks there on tractors covered with plastic sheets. We were together with the entire neighborhood; we left together, and we stayed together. Some could go, perhaps even to some friend's house, but it was riskier there, so most of us were in the mountains. There wasn't enough food, only as much as we could get with us when we fled: flour and essential items for life.

At that time, I had two children, one was 8 months old, and the other was 2 years old. During our time in the mountains, due to very harsh conditions, they became ill. They had diarrhea, fever, so I had to take them to the hospital for treatment. However, they didn't have the medicines to treat them, so they advised me to take them to Pristina.

We departed for Pristina in the morning and encountered a police patrol on the way. They took us there and separated us into two groups, women separately and men separately. We were around 18 people, mostly women, myself and an old man, whom we met on the way travelling with his family.

They kept us there and abused us for two days. It was evening when they took us to split us. They took women to one house, and me and the old man to another. We walked a bit on foot, but it wasn't too far, I cannot recall now how far, but not very far. The house was one-story house, there was a corridor inside, one room to one side, and the other room to the other side.

Around midnight, they separated me from the old man. A policeman or soldier, I don't know exactly, took me to another small room where there were blankets, cushions, and a mattress. His uniform was with different color stripes – whether it was gray or blue, I can't remember now due to stress and trauma.

When they took me, I experienced severe abuse. Insulting, screaming, "I will kill your children, I will kill you all." Afterward, he undressed me, took my shirt off, took my pants off, and threw me to the ground, on the mattress, grabbed me upwards with his hands and started raping me. After he exercised the violence, he forced me to dress up, by insulting me with a heavy Albanian language, and then took me back to the old man.

So, the same procedure continued the next day as well. At that time, approximately, he took me and put me in another room. [Shpëtim's breathing becomes difficult]. There was no light, it was all dark, and they played with

handheld flashlights. As far as we could tell, it was the same person, with a beard and slightly longer hair.

I felt so miserable there, if it weren't for my children, I don't know how I could go on living afterward. It was a severe trauma, a terror that I can't even describe. It seemed to me that it lasted for a year.

After two days, they released us and ordered us to climb the mountain on foot, and we headed towards Prishtina. While I was there, I could have escaped, but I didn't dare because of my children, I was afraid they would kill them. I had an opportunity to escape, but out of fear for my children, I had to stay and endure it.

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When we climbed the mountain, we came across a tractor. We got on and continued to a nearby village, and from there we went to \_\_\_\_\_. Afterwards, we got on another tractor and continued until the asphalted road, where we got onto a bus to Prishtina.

There, we went to one of my relatives, a private residence. We took our children to a private doctor since we didn't dare go to the hospital, where most of the doctors were Serbs. Children received medical care, and became better.

When we arrived in Prishtina, I did not want to tell anybody. However, when I went to clean up, and when I took off my underwear, I forgot to clean them and hide them. My wife noticed it and asked me later on. She noticed I wasn't well; I wasn't in a good mood that I used to be. Asking me slowly, so I had to tell her.

My wife supported me, gave me the courage and strength as much as she could. In other words, if it weren't for her and my children, I might not be alive today. At that time, I thought that what happened to me didn't happen to anyone. But then seeing that they had killed my neighbors, and the population throughout Kosovo, seeing the killings, the war in Prekaz, the massacre of the Jashari family, my severe emotional state seemed somewhat less severe.

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After our children became better, we were forced to leave, so we went to Germany. We had spoken with our father on the phone; he invited us to go. Our home had been burned, and we had no roof over our heads. We took illegal routes; we crossed borders on foot, and from there, we continued with cars, buses, and taxis. This journey lasted almost a month.

We stayed at our father's apartment for about a week, and we immediately declared as war refugees. They took us to a camp, a shelter for asylum seekers, where we stayed for a month. From there, they relocated us to another city, where we received social aid from the German state.

They didn't allow us to work because we were refugees, and we didn't dare to go and work unregistered. Anyway, we had our children to take care of, as they were very attached to me, and they wouldn't even let me leave the apartment, so that even if I wanted to work, I wouldn't be able to.

After a year in Germany, we officially requested to return to our homeland. I couldn't sleep; I had anxiety, stress, and frequent headaches. There were doctors there, but we didn't know the language, and I couldn't bring myself an interpreter because I didn't want anyone to know about my personal life. We are among the first refugees to have returned to Kosovo.

Here, we continued to raise our children and work in agriculture and livestock. All three of my sons are doing well; they are exemplary and have completed their university studies. But the children don't know about my past; only my wife knows.

I have problems; I have severe headaches, my hands tremble, and I sleep very little. Often at night, it feels like something is suffocating me, and everything rushes through my mind, incidents, experiences. My wife usually tells me, "Don't let your mind go there, don't worry, it's in the past." But now I see that I am feeling worse than at that time.

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*"If the village were to hear about it,*

**Zëra**

*I would have to leave this place"*

të pa dëgjuar

## **"If the village were to hear about it, I would have to leave this place"**

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In October 1998, a few months after graduating from secondary medical school, Labinot is asked to visit his elderly grandfather in the city. The bus stops at a checkpoint, and two police officers get him off the bus and take him along with other two boys and two girls. They take them to a house – a house of horror – several kilometers away from the checkpoint, where they abuse them and rape them in the presence of others.

Later, he is taken to the police station for another four nights, where he is also harassed, abused, and subjected to violence. Labinot will suffer severe physical and psychological consequences.

After revealing the true reasons for his health problems to his first wife, she is horrified, unable to cope, and separates from him.

Despite the severe misfortunes and poor emotional state, Labinot must also reconcile with the words of stigma. But he will overcome them as well, and encouraged by his sister, he has the courage to provide a number of testimonies to UNMIK and EULEX. Although disappointed with the process, Labinot still has a thread of hope that, someday, the criminals will be brought to justice.

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Labinot

I am Labinot, and I come from a village in Kosovo. We are five brothers and a sister. I am the fourth in a row. My mother is a housewife and my father is a farmer. We lived in a large family community with our older uncle for 15 years, and then we separated.

Our uncle was the head of the family, giving us orders and assigning tasks based on who should do what. For example, I was told to herd cattle, another to herd sheep, and someone else to plant corn. When we were around 5-6 years old, they would immediately assign us tasks and engaged us, at least in taking care of the livestock. My sister had the responsibility of our mother. She stayed at home and took care of housework, cleaning, washing, and looking after the yard and the garden.

We would spend the whole day in the fields and mountains. If there was a problem or if someone would get into a fight, we would first have to inform our uncle who was the head of the household. He was the boss. Our father spent the

whole day in the fields, either planting corn or in the mountains.

In the winter when we sat in the guest house, we had to follow a turn: uncle, father, cousins, and us. One dining table would be filled with adults, and the other one with children. The women would bring us the plastic basin for washing our hands, and we would eat with two dining tables in the guest house. After we finished, the women would eat in the living room whatever remained. I was closer to my father. He loved me more since childhood, and I could express myself more with him. From the beginning, he got me closer, and when I was very little, I used to go with him to the fields. He would trick me and return me back home, as he had to go to work. I wanted him to take me and get me on a tractor, I was interested to see how it worked. In short, I had a kind of love for him. To put it shortly, I loved him more than my mother.

I completed my primary school in the village. I was calm, had good relations with friends, I was never troublesome or problematic. I finished high school in a town, 70 kilometers away. I wanted to study medicine, but the nearest town only had a high school. So, I enrolled into general medicine program, completing four years of study in 1998.

It wasn't easy for me to adapt to school because I hadn't experienced being away from home before. I had to take care of food for me in a not very good condition. Initially, I felt lonely and longed to return to the village. It was a new life for me, with different mentalities and strengths. It seemed interesting in the beginning when I was hearing different dialects.

Overall, I did well in school until the end, which coincided with the beginning of the war, changing my life for the worse. I completed secondary medical school in May 1998, and the incident happened to me on October 15th.

I had dreams and ambitions of becoming an educator, a teacher. This was something I held close to my heart. But later I couldn't, and when happened what happened to me, I lost my will and desire.

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One day, my father told me to go check on my grandfather in the city, just to make sure he had enough food, and hadn't passed away, God forbid. He was very old, and his wife had passed away earlier. During the time of Ranković, my grandfather was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He spent 15 years in Goli Otok. My cousin, the son of my uncle, was also involved in student demonstrations. So, as a family, we were distinguished in this aspect, and those who had political connections avoided any movement because they had started getting them off the bus – as it happened to me – arresting them and killing them.

At that time, I was interested in registering for the Higher Education in the city. When my father told me to go, I said I am going, and I will see whether I can get enrolled.

I walked to the city on foot, wearing a cap on my head. It took me about three hours to reach the city, passing through villages and mountains. There were very few people in town, almost none. I waited at the station, and eventually, a Kosova Trans bus arrived. It was almost full, except for a couple of free seats. I sat next to an elderly man who was going to Pristina to visit his sick daughter-in-law and children. He asked me where I was going and warned me about the danger near the checkpoint, where they wouldn't let me pass without checking, and that it would be tough.

When we stopped at a checkpoint, two police officers entered the bus—one through the front door and the other through the back asking for identification cards. The old man said, "Ah, this idiot is from Mushtisht," "This is Zoran – Zoki." As soon as he saw me, shouted at me "Izadji ovamo!" when I got off the bus, I saw that they had also taken two Albanian women. They accused me of being part of the KLA, and started abusing me, and insulting me. From that moment, my life changed forever.

They took us to a house, like a warehouse, about 2-3 kilometers away from the checkpoint. We were three men and two women. When we arrived, the house was a horror. Inside was a corridor and two rooms—one for men and the other for women. In the middle was a table, where some guys with a kerchief on their head were drinking beers and brandy, with berets; those were the police who stopped me. There were three or four women, screaming and cursing. They constantly shot with guns and automatic rifles in order to intimidate and terrorize us.

There, they stripped us, raped us, and abused us in the presence of others. I experienced it so painfully that I felt a strong desire to die, because I was feeling ashamed of the women who were watching what they were doing to us. They made sure they could see us being raped. I thought it would be better to be killed than to endure such shame. They kept us there, abusing us until four in the morning.

Later, they took us to a detention facility at the police station and held us for another four days, from Thursday to Monday. It was a catastrophe there as well. There were many other Albanians. There was even a guy who seemed even younger than me.

The police and paramilitary forces rotated in shifts, and among them were also Albanian spies, including someone named Buzhala from the Suhareka area, along with another. They insulted and shouted at us, sometimes in Albanian and sometimes in Serbian. They would see us in what state we were, but when Serbs

would come from an operation or when someone was killed in fighting with the KLA, they would beat us as much as they could and insulting us, not sparing any words. An Albanian flag was on the ground at the entrance of the station, so we would step on it every time we entered.

I was injured, I was bleeding from my colon, and my head was wounded. A doctor came and bandaged my head. When they released me on Monday, they took my identification card and said I needed to report twice a week.

After being released, I went to my grandfather's house and told him everything. I told him they had taken my ID and that I wanted to leave. He said "don't, because they will catch you and kill you." I insisted that I wanted to leave, because I knew what awaited me there if I went back.

Later, I got onto a bus with Turks and went to the village of \_\_\_\_\_, where I roamed through the mountains and villages until I reached my own village. They stopped the bus in two places, but thank God, I was saved.

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When I arrived, my family had moved to another village, about 4-5 kilometers away. I asked around to find them, and they told me they had climbed up the mountain. We didn't stay there for long since we didn't have proper conditions, so we went downhill again.

My sister was a nurse, and she took care of me a lot during those days. I told her, and she started giving me injections. Finding medication was a problem, because there was nowhere to buy them, but she was taking care of me with what was available at the time. She would put onions on my head, tying it with a bandage to alleviate the pain. Then I had to tell my father as well, I couldn't hide it anymore because my colon had come out almost with the size of a hand palm. I had severe pain, I had to tell him. When I told my father, he said, "Don't make a mistake of telling somebody; because if anybody would hear about it, I won't live anymore, or I have to leave from here." "You will heal soon". "Don't speak to anybody, otherwise the whole neighborhood will laugh at us, and if the village hears about it, I will have to leave the place". "Just say to them they have beaten me."

It was very difficult for my mother. She had told my father not to let me go to my grandfather. My brothers were saying the same thing to me "didn't we tell you not to go?!" They thought that I have only been beaten. Nobody knew except for my father and my sister.

My mother still doesn't know it, I didn't open up with her. She had a heart attack,

so I tried to stay away from her so she wouldn't see me, because she would get sick and would get a high blood pressure. We were in a difficult financial situation. My mother was receiving 40 euros a pension, and I had to take her 10 euros to go to a doctor, or buy medicines. A disaster! I didn't have the money, I didn't have a job, my mother needed the money for herself. My brothers would help me when they could, more during the summer, because they didn't have any work or money during the winter. What do I do?!

I did not want to have contacts with people after the war, because they would either say something to you, or they would get into a conversation about the war. That was bothering me a lot, when they were talking about massacres and rapes. I would leave because I wasn't able to take it anymore. I couldn't watch even a television when they would show this kind of news. It felt like throwing salt on my wound.

Initially, before going to the hospital, I often thought about ending my life, and jumping from somewhere.

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I got married in 2006 to a certain woman unfortunately. It was arranged by my mother, through some women and through some relatives. I didn't know her, nor did she know me. At first, she seemed fine, but later, during my crises and struggles, I wasn't in a mood for sex. She would ask, "What's wrong? Tell me, what's wrong?".

Seeing that she was getting frustrated, I decided to tell her. I told her what Serbs had done to me, and she took it very, very hard. Eventually, she started complaining and requesting to go back to her parents. When she went there, she called me on a telephone and said, "I don't want this anymore, it is over". You can't keep anyone by force.

I was taken by a sadness, because I thought to myself that she would tell others there which was something I didn't need. I was very bad. In depression. I was cursing myself for telling her. I would remember what the beasts have done to me, and would go completely mad.

Many things are bothering me – the village mentality, buildings, things are bothering me, I couldn't express myself to anyone, I feel embarrassed. Words wouldn't come out of my mouth. After we broke up, I shut myself off, feeling terrible. I didn't feel like going out; in fact, things were getting worse one after another. My sister got engaged and moved to Germany, and then my father passed away.



Later on, my sister met with someone who had been married before, and she approached her to help her. Things happened, and we got together. I got married for the second time, and God blessed us with a daughter. Now we are living together here. I say thank God I am taking these medications because I still have some tightness, as if someone is hitting me on my head. I lose the will and hope for life, I get completely cold. When this crisis hits me, it feels like I can't hear anything, I get detached completely both physically and mentally. I get exhausted, I get all tired.

When I remember the incident, I feel a tightening and voices speak to me, and my ears ring. I am very distressed; it feels like I want to fall from a tree or a height. At night, I sleep on the ground because if I sleep on a bed, it feels like I want to fall into a pit. Now, I avoid talking to my wife; I don't say anything. I told the previous one, and things became a mess. Now I am also careful for my daughter, because I wouldn't like her to get hurt.

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Now, my family doesn't force me into anything, nor do they pressure me. Whatever I can, I help them with. I enjoy going out walking into the mountains. In the summer, when I go out, it feels like I am relaxing, and it goes away somehow. I will never forget the good things my sister did for me, until I die. She helped me in every way; with medication, with doctors, and even supported me financially. She was helping me emotionally, telling me not to focus on what people say. I felt very sad when she went abroad. It was like becoming an orphan. I experienced it so hard. I still can't believe that she left. I see her in dreams, as if she is coming back from work. Sometimes I can't believe that my father also died. It happens that I go home joyfully and happily, and later, when reality hits, I realize that he is no longer here, he died. At that time, I feel very bad, and I haven't seen him when he died. My mind always wonders if he is still alive.

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I have reported the case to the police, but I am very disappointed. I have given statements five times to UNMIK, twice to EULEX, and they have never dealt with my case, only harassing me. Especially in UNMIK, they were making fun of me and laughing at me.

My sister encouraged me to go to EULEX. She worked as a nurse in a clinic and convinced me to report the case, expose the criminals, catch them and punish them, because otherwise, as she said, you will keep it inside yourself, I keep it to myself, and our father did the same. She took me secretly, allegedly she was taking me to a doctor, she gave them the phone number, and later they called.

I had strong faith that these internationals would do something. Now it seems they couldn't find the evidence of UNMIK even. Whether they have thrown them away, or what they have done, I wouldn't know. My sister would say perhaps they find them and punish them. I have given interviews to EULEX a couple of more times. I told the translator how come you cannot catch any criminal, don't abuse me. Because then my situation worsens. Later, our special police also took me for an interview. Now lately they have called me again, saying there has been a change in the unit or section. I was at home, and I couldn't speak because my wife and my brothers were there, and he thought they I wanted to skip the conversation. Like I came here today for example. I have to tell them that I am going to a doctor.

Not long ago, an investigator called me and said that prosecutors have changed, and I need to give an interview again. I said to him, do I have to repeat the incident every time you change?! It's hard for me because I have problems with my wife, my daughter, with everybody. The story is being repeated, repeating all the bad things to me.

I don't know if they think I am lying, because sometimes they make me repeat the same words two to three times within hours. I have told them that those events are etched in my mind, and I can't forget them until I die. It's been over 20 years since I gave the interview to UNMIK, and in that file, there were evidences with names.

Here at the organization [KRCT], I understood that there are others like me. We have met a few times. We didn't go into details, we haven't spoken. But I understood that it hasn't only happened to me, but also to others. The police told me about the organization. My sister had told them that we don't have the money for medication, and they recommended this organization and they had mentioned another one in Gjakova. Two police officers escorted me here, and Selvia registered me. They told me that their doors are always open for me, and whenever I needed pills and medications, they have always provided them. I am forever grateful to the psychologists as well.

Once the law was published, the organization called me and told me that I have the right to receive assistance from the state. I used that right and applied. Eleven months passed until my status was approved. Afterward, they asked for a proof, and my sister came from Germany just to testify.

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For the conclusion, I would have liked for this organization to have more resources, to do more for us, to shelter those in need, and remove us from the

scene. I hope the government takes action and brings about a change. We still have to pay for doctors, while all other categories receive services for free. It's a disaster! If it weren't for you there would be nobody to give us medications. Perhaps, at times, they could take us out for a trip somewhere, for a day, two, or a week.

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Even if I would have  
Unheard  
to die, I wouldn't tell my  
voices  
story to my mother

## Even if I would have to die, I wouldn't tell my story to my mother

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Despite the bad feelings from his mother, 17-year-old Lumi decides to join the nationwide protests against the crimes occurring in Drenica region. After the protesters are dispersed and persecuted, Lumi finds himself in the yard of a house near the city factory. When the homeowners refuse to shelter him, he climbs over the wall and ends up at the feet of the two sadistic paramilitary forces.

Drunk and drugged, referring to each other as "kolega", they beat and brutally assault Lumi for several consecutive hours, until he fainted, then another one and then again, another one.

Fortunately, a compassionate woman from the neighborhood had seen Lumi, she would provide him with medical care. Together with her friend, they escort him in a wheelchair to his home. Lumi's experiences will be documented by an Albanian journalist, who would later publish it in the newspaper "R."

Extremely satisfied with the services he has received at the KRCT and the support that was provided to him in alleviating the heavy burden of trauma, Lumi has a message to all those who feel lonely and isolated, emphasizing that "it is never too late to speak the truth!".

## Unheard Voices

Men's narratives of overcoming the  
trauma of wartime sexual violence

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### Lumi

I am Lumi, and I am 43 years old. My father left us when I was three, so I was raised by my mother, younger brother, and older sister. My father was hit by a Serb with a car, and my mother raised the three of us as orphans, in extreme poverty. Our house was near the bus station. Now, all three of us children are married and have our own families.

As a child, I was loving, cheerful, and calm. I used to be happy about everything. I was very active, I wanted to do everything, but most of all, I enjoyed planting flowers in the garden. I started gardening from a young age. I always laughed; I was very joyful, happy with the life I had. We also had our grandmother, but she passed away 15 years ago. She raised us with the income from hand weaving. She would make a thread weave and would go and sell rugs in bags in the marketplace, in order to buy the necessities for home.

My father had started working in a factory, but he was laid off after about four or five years. In the factory of... because father had worked in a factory before...

I don't remember my grandfather. They say he was killed by a friend of his, throwing him off the bridge. I don't know the reasons, because I didn't get into the



details, but that is what I heard. I have never asked the reasons for that murder. I was thinking to myself perhaps my grandmother wouldn't tell me the full story so as not to burden my heart, so that we can continue living our life.

In school, I enjoyed playing football. I loved it a lot and played very well. I had a weak spot in my heart for becoming a football player, because I had a lot of talent. Unfortunately, the incident happened, and I withdrew from life, lost all motivation, and didn't have the willpower anymore.

I had friends at my uncle's house from my mother's side, with whom I used to have good time. We would go out and play football, and would be making plans for everything in our life, and were thinking and dreaming of our future.

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We had happiness in life. We lived in a house near the bus station. My father left us a two-story house. We lived in poverty ... We lived with our mother and our grandmother. But my grandmother passed away later on. She suffered from an illness.

We had many friends and relatives. They used to visit us. L. and V. were young at the time. We had close and far relatives. One of them was massacred, and his fate is unknown. Another acquaintance of ours was kidnapped. His fate is also unknown. This happened during the time of the massacre in the village. They took people and burned them. As far as I know, this relative of ours was there. But it is not known where his corpse is. His wife is now left with two children. He left them on their own. She has been through a tragedy herself and had to undergo surgeries.

My aunt is in Germany; they left before the war. She started a family there. The family of my grandmother from my mother's side is in \_\_\_\_\_. They have a common surname. They live in \_\_\_\_\_. This grandmother, mother of my mother, also passed away. Now there are two sisters, both of them there; one of them cleans and caters at the city hospital.

I have fond memories of my grandmother. Grandmother on my mother's side. She raised us, instilled in us the will to live, and provided us with everything because they had better conditions. They had a grocery store... Then the war started. They closed their business, and they went bankrupt. They ended up in a bad situation.

As a child, I would often go to my uncle... I would sleepover, I would stay for a week and sometimes two weeks. I enjoyed it a lot there... I had the desire to go. Our grandmother loved us and supported us a lot. I had also friends at my uncle. I

had a great time. We would go out and play football. We did everything a child needs to do – play, learn, make plans for the future. We thought about becoming famous football players. I had the talent for football. But then, the incident happened to me, and I lost the willingness.

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The greatest tragedy in my life occurred on March 18, 1998, when I was only 17 years old. On that day, a protest was held in the city center. I remember that my mother begged me not to go out because she had a bad feeling that something bad might happen to me. I told her that whatever happens to others, can happen to me too.

During the protest, we were shouting in support of Drenica. When the paramilitary forces started attacking us, we headed towards the train station with thousands of people. There, they began shooting at us with firearms, and they killed Q. M.

Trying to escape, I entered a Roma house. There were man and woman. I pleaded for help, and the man grabbed an axe and chased me through the yard. I told him they were chasing me, but I had no other solution, so I climbed a wall and fell into the factory yard. When I looked up, I saw two paramilitary forces with masks in front of me. That's where my life began to come to an end.

They took me into a room and started beating me so much that I lost consciousness. They then started taking my pants off, and raping me both of them for several hours. They had alcohol with them, and when I became unconscious, they would through it to me to wake me up. D.A. was calling the other guy "kolega" in Serbian. They kept me there for several hours, unconscious.

A woman, B.D., who lived near the factory, had seen the paramilitary forces who had taken me there. I don't know how she dragged me out, only when I found myself in her house. There, she provided me with her resources and kept me until the evening.

From there, she took me in a wheelbarrow, and covered me with a blanket, because she was fearing there may be paramilitary forces in the streets, and she took me to her friend R.D. These two ladies were house cleaners. From there they then took me to my house.

When my grandmother saw me in that condition, she immediately fainted. They wanted to take me to the hospital, but my mother feared they might kill me. Later, journalist A.S. from the R. newspaper interviewed my mother, B.D. and R.D. My back was completely bruised from the beatings, so they were soothing it with wet

towels. When the journalist saw it, he asked if they had done anything more to me. I didn't admit to being raped, my mother was close to me, and I didn't have the heart to tell her.

Journalist A.S. visited our house three more times and recorded my statements in a notebook, which he later published in the R. newspaper. However, he lost his life, and they burned his house, and along with it, the history of the Serbian genocide. He had gathered a lot of evidence.

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When the war started throughout Kosovo, we went to our neighbors and stayed there up all night. We wanted to go to \_\_\_\_\_, but the paramilitary forces turned us back, and we decided to return to the city center. There, they loaded us onto trucks, a very large population with the intention of taking us to Albania. We were afraid that they wanted to take us to a barracks and wipe us out.

Later, we continued towards \_\_\_\_\_, where we saw people in apartments observing. When we passed by \_\_\_\_\_, I saw a horrifying scene: they had separated the men from the women. On the side, there was a tractor that the Serbs had shot at. I saw four corpses with my own eyes, one of them was a six-year-old boy who had been killed alongside his father and mother.

From there, we continued to Kukës. On the way, paramilitary forces stopped us, took our identification cards, and spoke threateningly: "Idite Albanci, ne dodjite više na Kosovu!"

In Kukës, we stayed for two or three days until a family from Laçi took us in. We stayed there for almost two and a half months. I wasn't feeling well with my health; I had problems with stress and anxiety. I remembered what they had done to me, and I remembered the murdered child, together with his parents.

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I had friends from the neighborhood. I still stay in touch with them. We were inseparable. I have very good circle of friends. From those days until now, we still hang out because our homes are close. We get along very well. I say to them I don't want to talk about negative things. They notice that I am a bit reserved, and they say, "You have some problem in life, something is worrying you!" They don't know my story. I haven't told them. Revealing it to them might lead to prejudices, and it could lead to the worst... Many times, I considered committing a suicide. I thought, "Well, this is it Lum". This was before getting married. When I thought about it, I thought, "My mother struggled to raise us as orphans, and now I want to end my own life. It's not right! I need to give myself strength." I would go out,

walk... I would feel stressed. Like in a depression. Should I go and kill myself, put an end to myself. But I realized that's not the solution. I thought, "will the truth ever come out in my life to reveal the case, what happened to me?!"

Later on, I got married, created a family. Thank God, I now have three children. I lead an average life, I have enough for food, not more than that. I intent to educate these children, to provide them with schooling, good advice, to think positively, not negatively.

I met my wife when I used to go to discotheques. Like young people who go out. I gave myself the will to live; I said, what can I do, either go through the worst, or continue with life. That's how I met my wife. My wife is an orphan. Her mother died during childbirth. She contracted a jaundice. Her aunt raised her. We have been together for 3-4 years. She would ask me, "Why are you so relentless?" "Did you quit alcohol?" I had started drinking alcohol at that time. I started because scenes were coming back to me... all the scenes were coming back to my mind. My wife took away the alcohol. We decided to get married. We got married with the escort of two cars, we went and got married after 4-5 years. God gave me my first son.

I had good relations with my wife at first, very, very good relations. But after we married, she could see that something was not right. For example, during the intercourse I had no feelings, I didn't have ... I had a lot of obsessions, negative ones. Scenes kept coming back to me, exactly those scenes. I was seeing nightmares. I had to drink alcohol to get into intercourse, so much so that it became an obsession. My wife saw that something was not right. She would say, "Lum, you either have debts, or something is bothering you in life." I would say to her, "Honestly, I don't have anything, it's just like that. But I have psychological problems; I am not well."

Our son was born, and meanwhile, my wife remained pregnant with our second son. Again, with fixations. She noticed that I used to go to Pristina... I really wanted to go there; I didn't know where to go to tell my story. I wanted to go to the Kosovo Police after 24 - 25 years, but I thought if I went to report to the Kosovo Police or KFOR, they could take it as a joke, or take it as a matter of prejudice. I had a lot of dilemmas.

"If I go to any organization, someone familiar might be there, and they could start with prejudices, "it happened to him." People there know everything. What will happen then with my case? They will start with prejudices, saying, "Serbs have done this and that to him", thinking, "they did him well, it was wrong what they did." There are all kinds of people. Without experiencing it, one cannot rationalize what those Serbian barbarians have done. Raping of both women and men. They

didn't care about age, 17, 18, 15, 16. Just to destroy your life. Vashije Krasniqi Goodman was on television telling her story. She was on 'Zëri im.' She revealed her story, from the beginning to the end. Watching her on television, I started crying. I started crying, thinking, "will the truth come out in my life ever?" I thought about where to look, what to do. I had no contacts. I went on the Internet and wrote 'victims of sexual violence during the war of 1998 and 1999.' I found the KRCT number and called them on a telephone. A male voice answered, he said, "do you want to be transferred to Selvi Izeti, she is a very good psychologist and will help you a lot with rehabilitation." Then, I came to the organization. I thank the organization for doing a lot, a lot for me. I thank Selvi Izeti for doing everything for me to come and tell my story, to narrate the story of my life.

I waited for two years when I applied, and I went to the Kosovo commission. I had the interview with the commission that day. The response came back immediately, and it came back positive. Now, I receive a pension of 230 euros. I am very grateful to the state for making it possible for me to receive this pension. I have three children, a wife, and a mother. My mother receives a pension of 100 euros. That's how we manage. We have to pay for electricity, pay for this and that... most of the money goes to doctors. I was at the doctor three or four days ago. I received infusions because I am not feeling well. I have psychological problems, and problems with back discs. My back is too curved from the beatings I received there at the factory. They beat me up to the extreme until I became unconscious.

My wife would ask me, "Why are you going to Prishtina, what is the problem?" I didn't tell her anything. I went to the association. I didn't tell her my story. But then I was very sick, I had to go to the hospital. There, they gave me sedatives, diazepam. I took it very close to my heart when I disclosed the case in Prishtina, at the association. I was afraid it would become public all over Kosovo. I was very worried. On that day, I cried a lot during the interview. Saying, "Why did you come to talk, Lum?" My wife takes me to the hospital and back. There, I receive infusions, diazepam, diclofenac, sedatives... Doctors would ask me, what's bothering you to get yourself in this state? I would say to them, "Nothing, I am just not well, I have a psychological burden, and have a headache." The doctors were interested if there was any domestic violence.

I took the injections and medications and went home. My wife came into the room on the second floor, sitting there asked me, "Lum, you have something, you need to tell me what's bothering you." I said, "Look, my wife... we have been married for two years. Thank God, we have three children. I cannot tell you whether the door is open or closed. I have been raped by Serbs when I was 17. They have raped me, they did everything to me, they destroyed my body." My wife started crying loudly, crying and hugging me. Both of us were crying. "Lum, you are not alone,

Lum, take it easy, you are neither the first nor the last," she said, "Lum, hear me out, I give you my oath..." she took the Quran, and said, "put your hand on the Quran," so I put my hand on the Quran... that day we both put our hands on the Quran and said, "we swear both to raise these children together." But the burden is not lifting. It will never be lifted.

I grew up without a father, and my wife grew up without a mother, at least our children should have a normal life. Let us educate them, try and provide them good conditions for schooling and work. Now, we get along very well with my wife. She respects me a lot, and I thank her with all my heart. I have support... I tell her, "I am going to Prishtina," and she says, "okay, Lum. Shall I come with you?"

Our daughter is three and a half years old. My mother has diabetes, undergoing a therapy. She got diabetes because of me; from the day she saw me in that condition. Plus, the story of her life... my father left her at the age of 24 with three orphans. She suffered a lot. But regarding my mother, even after her death, I wouldn't reveal my story to her. Serious Crimes Police had come over, I pleaded them not to tell my mother what happened to me in life. I don't want to upset her.

When I first told my wife, I felt very, very bad. I had a lot of emotions, everything. I thought, "Lum, what should you do now with the solution to your life, should you choose the bad path or the good path?". When I confessed, "What have you done, Lum?" I was afraid that our relationship would be ruined, or that she would leave the house, and leave our children. What would happen to my life? I asked myself, "Is this the end, or is it the beginning of my life?" But when I hear these kind words and advice, they give me the will to live. Sometimes, when I talk to my wife, I go into more detail just to see her reaction, whether things are changing or not. As soon as we wake up in the morning she hugs me, makes me coffee, saying, "I love you, you are my sweetheart," as should be a relationship between a husband and wife. I have great support.

I have lifted a heavy burden from my life. The other burden is how to heal myself. How to raise these children? I don't think about the bad thing anymore. Why go to the bad thing now when I have three children to raise, two brave boys, and one 'Shota Galica'.

Children are not studying much. So, I am advising them, "you need to learn, you need to do this, you need to do that." I take them to school, pick them up from school. The eldest son sometimes says to me, "What's wrong, father, why are you alone?" You stay alone in the room. I like being alone. I like the peace of being alone. Even my wife says, "Why, Lum, come down and spend some time with us." I like the tranquility of life; I like being alone.



I cannot tell my story to the children, it's a big problem. But I want to tell them what the Serbian genocide did to the Albanian population, for example, how they killed, how they committed rapes, did this and did that. To keep history alive. Not to ignore the history of terror in Kosovo. To document it.

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I appeal to the Republic of Kosovo – to bring the justice to the surface. I want to confront those people who were there. I haven't seen them well because they were wearing masks, but I know one was taller, and the other shorter.

In the neighborhood, there were those people on the first floor, the second, the third, the fourth... there was another one called 'baxhanak'. He committed massacres... They were called 'Tigers.' They had their own army, the 'Tigers.' One guy has facts, now whether he was sentenced in Serbia for the massacre in the village, I don't know. He was my neighbor. I would see him; his eyes were as red as blood, so much drugged he was. He would look at me and turn his head. After the war, when I checked him on the phone (social media), I saw that he had posted some Serbian paramilitary forces who were there, who had committed a massacre in the village. Now, he is in Serbia, they say, in Novi Sad. Some say he is in prison; some say he is free. I am convinced he committed massacres.

When the incident happened to me, there were two people who pushed me inside. They closed the door... they grabbed me, one of them was taking my pants off, one in front, the other behind. I would faint. They would take alcohol and poured it on my head to wake me up. With rifle butt, with those ... so I would faint and they would commit the sexual violence. They were so drugged; I can't even tell. But they had masks on their heads. I cannot say things I don't know. They then left from there and took me away. Seeing myself in that catastrophic condition... completely torn. My teeth were all broken from the rifle butt. Now, I have these porcelain teeth. I had a rupture here (he shows with his hand), my back was a disaster. My entire spine was broken. My whole chest was open. Everything is swollen. It is from the rifle butt as they were beating me. My body is deformed. They wanted later to take me to the hospital, but there was a big mess. My intestine was torn a bit on the side. If they had taken me to the hospital, they would have made me disappear, they would say who brought him in this state. They do it themselves, and they say who brought him in this state.

My mother also decided to stay at home. I would ask her for chamomile tea to clean the wound. I couldn't tell my mother. She would put wet towels on my back non-stop. She had seen my pants with blood, and I am convinced that my mother knows the whole story, but maybe she doesn't want to tell me. My mother saddens me in life, because she comes to check on me, "Lum, are you okay, did

you sleep, did you rest..." She knows a little, but she doesn't want to doubt. I told my sister, as I had no other solution. I told my brother-in-law as well.

When I told him the story, I cried so much, I was in a car with him and he said he was a member of the Kosovo Liberation Army. He was a quite high-ranking officer, and he said, "What happened to you, why didn't you report it earlier?". I told him I couldn't tell him. How could I tell you the story of my life. He said I would see you were suffering, that you had resentment.

My sister and her husband have never let me lack anything. They understand, give me clothes, help me. When they see me upset, they immediately inquire, talk. My sister has taken it very close to her heart. She has been crying, and she is on the therapy since the day she found out about it. She got it from me. She was very sad; she is on a therapy. I didn't have any other solution; I needed support.

I thank my family that supported me because I wouldn't have another solution. I could only go and lose myself. Now I have children, I live for the family, I think of living for the family. These things in life I have.

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We stayed in Laç for about two and half months. From there I went to school. I went to school, thinking perhaps the resentment would go away a bit. I went to school for about a month, but I could see myself that I wasn't feeling well, I have psychological problems. I would remember the scenes, and the scene of that child would come to mind... the picture would be coming back. It would come back the whole thing as it happened; grabbing me, doing the thing to me and me fainting... I felt so bad... so I left the school. My schoolmates would come and would take me. The sports center was nearby, near the school, so they would come and take me out, for a walk. I would go for a walk, but again I would see that something is not right.

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As a refugee, I went to my grandmother since they were in another place. I stayed with them for about a week or two. They were in tents. All were from Kosovo. There was a Polish organization, and there worked an interpreter. She was from Prizren. I went because I didn't feel well, and so I went to tell them my story. I explained how it happened; they gave me medication, gave me some therapy. I don't know what pills they were; they examined my colon, but my biggest mistake was not getting any documents from there. There were two men and a woman, doctors. I stayed under observation there for a week.

After the war ended, thanks to the Kosovo Liberation Army and NATO forces, they relocated us home. They brought us home with their van. When we entered the house, you couldn't see anything but a mess. They had taken the bathroom tub, they had slaughtered a chicken there, it was all covered in blood. Crosses in the rooms. But thanks to God, our house was spared. Near there, many houses were burned. The city was all burnt.

We started living our lives in poverty, with my mother, brother, sister and grandmother. But my grandmother passed away two years after the war. Later on, I started working in a cafe. I worked there for almost a month to support my family. We had no income; we had nothing. We received some aid from organizations.

I had to leave my job because I wasn't feeling well. I had anxiety and stress. I would see members of the Kosovo Liberation Army in uniforms. Until the uniforms were taken away. Even with KFOR members I would see myself. It seemed to me that they were coming. They would do it again to me, to the point I was scared when I saw uniforms. I would hide, and run away whenever I saw military uniforms. I would remember the scene, and from that day when I see military uniforms, it affects me strongly as a psychological burden.

Several years went by, I decided to work in the factory, the plant of \_\_\_\_\_. I worked there for almost 12 years. I had no other solution; either work or face the worst. I needed to take care of my family. I had to leave the job again because I couldn't handle it. The place where I worked reminded me of those places where they had done worst things to me.

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I thank the KRCT organization very much. It would have been better if I had come here earlier. Since I came and I shared the story of my life, I feel much better. Today, after I did the interview, I felt very comfortable, exceedingly well. Before, I would cry... male, men don't cry, but I couldn't, I had to get rid of the resentment from inside.

I must live for the sake of my family, for the sake of life. Because Allah has created us, and Allah knows when He will take our souls. Children go to school; two boys go to school, they study well. They are a bit temperamental. But usually, I say, thank God, they don't have my traumas.

For all these years I tried not to even slap them. I would see myself when I didn't feel well, I would go to my room, would close myself in. Not locking the door, but watching TV, something funny, or something to come to my senses.

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I make an appeal to survivors of sexual violence not to remain silent. Raise your voices for justice, because it's never too late to speak the truth. Only the truth about the Serbs; the crimes they committed against the innocent population. Tell the history and don't keep it hidden. Regardless of whether one is male or female, nobody did it to them out of their desire.

The goal was to destroy our lives, to bury us alive, to make us suffer. I used to wonder how they didn't take my soul that day, I would at least be killed, but they left me, and their intention was to make us suffer in life. Not to get married, not to create a family, to commit suicide.

You could go to OSCE, KFOR, and tell your story. Our cases have been ignored, have been removed, it's unclear whether it happened, it's unclear what happened there. You couldn't even go to the hospital and say you have been raped. Who are you raped by?

We need to make a movie, to tell the world what the Serbs have done. To reveal it to the world, to Europe. Everyone knows what they have done to us; they committed genocide. Everything needs to be exposed. I am ready to confess for a film, for a documentary.

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I applied for a visa to visit a cousin of mine in Europe, but they didn't grant me the visa. Embassies did not take into consideration the story of my life. I need to go somewhere, to go out, to take a walk, to remove the resentment, to change the country. I would like to be allowed to travel, to visit places, to be a bit more open to other countries.

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