

WORLD & REGIONAL ISSUES

TESTIMONY OF THE MOTHER OF TWELVE-YEAR OLD ALMIRA FROM FOCA, WHO WAS RAPED AND THEN SOLD



“THEY GRABBED MY CHILD FROM MY ARMS” SOLD TO UNKNOWN SOLDIERS FROM SERBIA?

Dzenana Karup-Drusko

“On June 9, 1992, they came to take my husband. I remember that Krsto Skakavac and Rade Draskovic were in police uniforms. On that day they took also other Bosniaks to the police station, some thirty of them, and nothing has been known about them since”, tells 47-year old Mejra from Foca. She continues: “When they took away the men, we women found ourselves in hell. They were searching the houses on a daily bases, saying that they were looking for arms. Nedjo Golubovic was coming to my house. One day in August 1992 three or four chetnicks came to take away my twelve-year old daughter Almira. They told me that Mica Orlovic ordered them to bring her to the police station. She never saw the police building, they took her to Karaman’s house, where girls and women were tortured and raped.”

After a few days Nedjo Samardzic brought Almira back to her mother. To see her. She remained in the house for two hours, he was there all the time, and then he took her back again to Karaman’s house. Samardzic was born in Bileca, and he was in Foca before the war started because he was doing time for murder. During the war he was member of the Serb units which were active in the region of Foca. Against Samardzic there is an ongoing trial for war crimes in front the Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

I was begging

When she was taken for the second time, Almira stayed in Karaman’s house a dozen of days. “One day she came. I asked her: ‘My child, how come you are here, how did you come, how did you manage to get out?’ She told me that Pero Elez drove her home. They did not take her away anymore”, remembers the mother of this girl.

In September 1992 they expelled the remaining Bosniaks from Miljevina (the town in which Mejra lived with her family), they put them on buses and drove to Foca. Mejra and her three daughters, together with the others, were taken to the sports house “Partizan” which was nearby the Police station, but also of the Foca Municipality. “I remember that Dragan Janjic, a pre-war police officer, was accompanying the bus”, remembers Mejra.

“On September 13th they stopped the buses on the bridge over Drina. They asked for Almira. She cried and asked them: “What do you want me for?” When I protested, one of them put a pistol to my head and said: ‘You shut up! You have nothing to do with her!’ They grabbed my child from my arms and took her away. She was weeping, and I could not help her. I begged them not to take her away... I have never seen her again”.

What she went through left permanent marks on Mejra. She was frequently hospitalized, and she is under constant neurological-psychiatrist control. She has increased sugar and pressure values, and must regularly take medication. She says that her nightmares over what she went through have never stopped. She continues to dream about her daughter, she imagines she is alive, and coming back to her. When Almira was taken from the bus, her two younger sisters were watching this. They remembered everything, They, too, have nightmares. They were crying for years and asking their mother when their sister and father will return.

She was crying and vomiting

Mejra admits that her only wish today is to find the remains of her daughter and her husband, and that “the war criminals be arrested and convicted for the war crimes they committed.” “I think that this would be a relief, because then, in a way, justice would be served. I fight for getting each criminal to stand trial for the crimes committed.”

What after been taken away from her mother’s arms the girl Almira went through told the girls who survived Karaman’s house and a few other notorious spots in the Foca region where the women were raped and molested during the war. Among those who were constantly visiting Karaman’s house were

Pero Elez, Radovan Stankovic, Zoran and Nedjo Samardzic, Dusko Przulj, Nikola Brcic... According to The Hague's Tribunal documentation Stankovic was in charge of this house and he managed it like a whorehouse.

"Nedjo Samardzic and Radovan Stankovic took Almira from the bus and brought her to Karaman's house", testified in The Hague Tribunal the girls who were prior to that already confined in this house and survived everything. Stankovic took part in distributing the girls to soldiers, and those who were not given to anyone, like Almira, could be raped by any soldier who was allowed to enter Karaman's house.

One of the surviving girls testified in The Hague Tribunal: "There were eight of us in Karaman's house. Little Almira was the youngest. Constantly present chetnicks for raping were Nedjo Samardzic and his brother Zoran, Radovan Stankovic and Nikola Brcic. They often used to bring some Montenegrins who were transporting to the town Niksic bear, and were loading coal from Miljevina. With Pero Elez came Misko Savic from Montenegro. They were coming every day, and we were forced to do everything, wash, cook... I know that Nedjo Samardzic was the first to rape Almira because he was boasting to have fooled Pero Elez who was looking to rape only girls who were virgins. I accidentally came upstairs where the rooms were, I did not know that Nedjo took Almira whom he forced prior to that to drink. I found her in the room, she was crying and vomiting. I took her on my lap and tried to comfort her. Afterwards she was raped also by Zoran Samardzic, Radovan Stankovic, Nikola Brcic, Dusko Przulj, Momir Skakavac... Even now I see Nedjo Samardzic laughing while saying how he had fooled Elez because he was the first to rape Almira."

They were sold

This witness said also that one day the sister of Momir Skakavac brought to Karaman's house a bus full with chetnicks from Montenegro. This sister of his is today calling and molesting women who are testifying against Skakavac in the court in Trebinje, where he is facing trial for war crimes he committed. To some of them she was even offering money, trying to persuade them to change their statements and that "they have nothing to testify against her brother".

On October 30, 1992 come Gojko Jankovic, Dragan Zelenovic, Janko Janjic, Pero Elez and some Cicmil, who baptized all the girls. It was ordered that four must go to Foca, and four must stay. Among those taken to Foca was also little Almira. The were given over to Radomir Kovac who held them in his apartment where also Jagos Kostic lived. Kovac was one of the deputy commanders of the military police and the commander of paramilitary units in Foca.

What was happening in this apartment was said by a surviving girl: "Soldiers were constantly coming and raping and humiliating us. One day Kovac forced the four of us to remove our clothes and to dance naked on the table. We were constantly raped by both Kostic and Kovac. We were locked and could not go anywhere. Almira was raped by Slavko Ivanovic, Zeljko and the others..." Almira remained in the apartment until October 20, and then Kovac together with Vojkan Jadzic took her and another girl to a house near the "Zelengora" hotel and sold them to unknown soldiers from Serbia. There they stayed about two weeks. Rapes and harassment were daily routine. "The boss in the house was Dragan Ginic, and there was the whole time also Vojkan Jadzic from Uzice. Brane Cosovic, commander of the unit "Vojvoda Dragan Nikolic" was also coming."

After some fifteen days Almira and that girl were taken to an apartment in the Podmusala settlement. Again they were raped on a daily basis. A few days later Almira was handed over to Janko Janjic, and two weeks later she was brought again to Kovac's apartment. And then on December 25, 1992, Kovac sold Almira to Dragan Stankovic for 200 marks?! One of the surviving girls saw Almira for the last time in January 1993. This is when Neso Blagojevic and Jasmin Gazdic took her away.

Justice

Radomir Kovac was arrested on August 2, 1999. The Hague Tribunal sentenced him to 20 years in prison. Radovan Stankovic is standing trial in Sarajevo, so are also Nedjo Samardzic and Gojko Jankovic. Dragan Zelenovic was arrested in Russia. In Trebinje Momir Skakavac is facing trial. Can justice be at least partly served?

"Momir Skakavac behaves in the court as if he were at home", says Mejra about the trial in Trebinje and adds that once the court police came to fetch her and the whole time during their journey they were listening to the music on chetnicks' commanders. The problem were also the costs: they have never paid her the 45 marks, and she had to give 100 marks to the driver. They told they would pay this to her account.

The trial in Trebinje is closed for the public, which means that Mejra's identity (we changed her name) nobody should know, and yet a few days before she was to go and testify an unknown man came to her

door, presenting himself as Omer. He tried to convince Mejra to change her statement, saying that to do so she need not even go to Trebinje, but that somebody will come to her and take the new statement. He offered in return information on the location where the remains of her husband and daughter can be found?!

Initiative group of the campaign "For the Dignity of the Survivors" - Sarajevo
FOR THE DIGNITY OF THOSE SURVIVED

For the first time in history has the raping of women, which was planned and organized during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, been declared war crime and crime against humanity. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, the war destiny of women who survived raping, even ten years after the war ended, did not instigate state institutions to adapt its legislature to their needs. There is now law dealing with the status of women who survived the crime of war rape to which they were many times exposed. There is nobody yet to know how many women survived war rape. It is certain only that there are thousands of them. It is also not known how many children were born after these horrible crimes.

Women who survived this severe trauma are, with few exceptions, financially are not secure. They are mainly unemployed, with essentially reduced work capabilities because of the traumas they went through. There is now additional education or re-qualification for them. Therefore, they are economically dependent on others. The majority of those who survived war rape have no adequate health care, nor access to psycho-social support. They have no regulated place to live. They have no support for the education of their children. They are living with traumas which they keep for themselves and which are often an obstacle for their return to the towns where they used to live before the war, so they do not file demands for the return of property. Only few among them found the strength to demand to be given the status of civil victims of war and thus secure a minimum financial repay which such a status implies.

They have no possibility also for any other type of compensation for the consequences of torture which they went through.

They are living quietly, on the margins of the society, surrounded with their painful memories. Most often they do not speak at all of their severe experience which they cannot forget, or they do so very, very rarely.

Their memories should be ours as well, because their sufferings are not only theirs, they belong to all of us. And not only to us in the region. Women who survived war rape must not be neglected, forgotten. This is a lesson that we all must learn. So that it would not be repeated.

Therefore, in this campaign we stand FOR:

- Passing amendments to the present law in the field of social security and security of civil victims of war, with the aim to secure rights of women who survived war rapes, as civil victims of war.
- Passing a law on the state level in order to have unified regulation of rights of persons who survived war torture, including women who survived war rape, as well as securing means for its implementation