

Oral History Kosovo

Sevdije Ahmeti in her own words, from a December 27, 2014 interview with Anna Di Lellio

When Milosevic took to the streets in the late '80s he used women, he talked how Albanian women had to be blamed because of the high birth rate, and we became a tool of war, and during the war rape was a tool of war. I said early on, "This is going to be a war against women."

On September 3, 1993 Vjosa [Dobruna] started the first center, the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, which worked publicly, though we had no permission, we used many ways to be active and present ourselves as very untouchable to create a safe space for women. [...] Vjosa dealt with health care issues, and I worked on human rights reporting [...]

It was a psychological war from 1990 to November 1997, but from February 1998 the real war began [...] From Feb 1998 until March 1999, mid-March, I went to the war areas on a daily basis.

After the massacre at the Jashari compound at the beginning of March 1998, Sevdije began to keep a diary in the form of messages sent to world outside Kosovo through the Network of East-West Women. She continued the diary for sometime after the war. This is her entry on July 7, 1999 from Çirez:

Of the 572 inhabitants (57 families) of Kozhiça [one of the six villages in Çirez], 20 are dead (among them an infant, a woman killed in front of her children, and six young women whose fate is detailed below); three disappeared; and eight are wounded. Three houses were left untouched, out of 77. Serbian troops, which raided the village on April 17 1999, kidnapped six women and a seventh who was displaced from Dubovc. According to the surviving eyewitness, they were raped by Serbs, before being executed and thrown into the wells of the village – but according to some rumors they were still alive when they were thrown into the wells. The age of the victims indicates that the crime was deliberate and planned. In one of the wells, we found the remains of Lumnije Zymeri and Bukurije Dibrani (both 20 years old), Mirishahe Dibrani (27) and Antigona Dibrani (16); in another well, Miradije Dibrani (50), Fahrije Ademi (53) and Tahire Shalaku (60, from Dubovc); and in a third well, Zahide Xhema (21).

The bodies of the victims of this collective rape were recovered last July 2 by delegates of the Tribunal of the Hague, when the villagers were not there; even the relatives of the victims could not be present. Finally, the little Besarta Seferi (12) died instantly when the village was attacked and the women raped: because she was afraid of being also kidnapped, her heart stopped.