



THE RAPES IN BOSNIA: A MUSLIM SCHOOLGIRL'S ACCOUNT

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ZENICA, BOSNIA — Before the local Serb warlord took Jasna away from her apartment to rape her on June 9, he told her not to cry. , Jasna a Muslim schoolgirl, would be safe with him.

Then, Jasna, 17, said in a lengthy interview here, the Serb ordered her, her 15-year-old sister and an 18-year-old friend into a car and drove them to a motel in their home town of Visegrad. The notorious Bosnian Serb White Eagle militia had just seized Visegrad, and Jasna sensed in a terrifying instant that the victors were going to treat women as spoils of war.

The girls were taken to the Vilina Vlas motel, which has been described by the Slavic Muslim-led Bosnian government as one of the Serbs' alleged "rape motels." Jasna was locked in one room and her friend was locked in another. Jasna's younger sister, Emina, was put in a room across the hall. A few hours later, Jasna heard her sister moaning and sobbing. She never saw her again.

The warlord, Milan Lukic, who has been well-known locally for years, came into Jasna's room, put a table in front of the door and told her to undress.

"He said that if I didn't do what he wanted, I would never go home," Jasna recalled, speaking in a nervous but steady voice. "Then he ordered me to take off my clothes. I didn't want to do that. He said I must, that it would be better to take my clothes off myself, or else he would do it and he would be violent."

Jasna paused in her narration. She tightened her hold on the hand of her older sister, who is a student in Zenica and sat next to her throughout the interview, which was conducted in this government-held city in an empty pizzeria decorated with a few paltry Christmas ornaments. Jasna stared hard at a spot on the tablecloth and resumed speaking.

"I started to cry. He said I was lucky to be with him. He said I could have been thrown into the river with rocks tied around my ankles. But I didn't want to do it. He got angry and cursed and said, 'I'm going to bring in 10 soldiers.' "

And so Jasna, who said she had never had a boyfriend, tried to stop crying as she was raped.

According to the Bosnian government, more than 30,000 women have been raped in this former Yugoslav republic's nine-month-old war, with some of the victims as young as 12.

The government, partly supported by testimony from Muslim victims and captured Bosnian Serb soldiers, has accused the Serbs of employing rape as a tactic to "boost morale" among the victorious fighters and humiliate Bosnian women and their families. A captured Serb soldier in Sarajevo, the capital, has told journalists that men in his unit were ordered to rape. The soldier, Borislav Herak, admitted violating two Muslim women at a "rape motel" outside Sarajevo and then killing them.

The practice of mass rape has been condemned by the United Nations and the European Community. Each organization is sending investigative teams to the former Yugoslavia to interview rape victims and determine the extent of sexual crimes here. EC leaders described these practices earlier this month as "acts of unspeakable brutality," but the number of such incidents has not been confirmed.

Most Muslim rape victims who have survived their ordeals are unwilling to talk to anyone — spouses, siblings and especially journalists — about what they have been through. Their code of silence may make it difficult for investigators to collect firsthand testimony.

One hindrance to disclosure is the resentment that many Muslims feel toward Western reporters trying to investigate reports about this latest atrocity in the Bosnian war. The Bosnian government is publicizing the rape issue in an effort to galvanize support for its fight against the Serbs. But many lower-level officials and ordinary people view the Western interest in mass rape as an example of how the West loves to be entertained with lurid tales of Bosnia's misery — and then do nothing about it.

Jasna, who escaped Visegrad a month after being raped, agreed to talk on the condition that her last name not be divulged because her younger sister is, if not dead, still in Serb captivity. Jasna said there was one reason why she decided to talk: "I want people to know the truth." After a moment, she added, "I was lucky. I survived."

As in virtually all other rape cases, there was no way to independently corroborate Jasna's story, since there were no witnesses and the warlord who she said raped her could not be reached.

The trouble in Visegrad reached a climax in early June when the White Eagle militia, which has been linked to some of the worst war crimes in Bosnia, took control of the Muslim city, once a lovely tourist draw on the Drina River near the Serbian border. The White Eagles began rounding up and killing fighting-age Muslim men, so most of them fled to the surrounding forests to wage a guerrilla war. The women and children were left behind.

Lukic, who is described as a tall, handsome and athletic Serb and is said by the Bosnian government to have led the "ethnic cleansing" operation in Visegrad, came to

Mersiha's building on June 9 to inspect its vacant apartments. About 11:30 p.m., he entered the apartment where Jasna, her younger sister and mother were staying with friends. According to Jasna, Lukic asked how old they were and, seeing the girls tremble, told them not to worry.

Lukic ordered the three girls to come with him so that they could help identify some Muslim youths being held at the city police station. When Jasna's mother pleaded with Lukic not to take the girls, he became enraged and started overturning furniture. "I am the law," he screamed.

The three girls went downstairs and got into Lukic's car. They did not go to the police station. They were taken to the Vilina Vlas motel, which has 20 to 30 rooms. They did not see any other women there except for middle-aged Serb receptionists, who were joking with soldiers milling around the lobby.

The girls initially were locked in one room together. But after about 10 minutes, Lukic came to the room with a soldier and told Jasna's 18-year-old friend to go with him for "questioning." Mersiha overheard Lukic tell the soldier in the corridor to "question her, but not too much." Other soldiers in the hallway began laughing.

The same scenario unfolded with Jasna's sister, Emina. Lukic entered with a soldier and told 15-year-old Emina to leave with the soldier. He gave the same order — question her, but "not too much." There was more laughter in the corridor.

Lukic left Jasna alone in the room for about 10 minutes. Then he came back, put the table in front of the door and gave the order to undress, followed by the threat of rape by 10 soldiers if she did not comply.

After the rape was over, Jasna began crying again. She said in the interview that she was crying for her younger sister, not for herself. It did not matter. Lukic taunted her, she said. "What do you want to do to me?" he sneered. "Stuff me into a big artillery gun and shoot me to Turkey?"

Jasna said Lukic fell asleep. Some soldiers knocked on the door and one of them shouted to Lukic, "We know what you've got in there and we want it too." Lukic told them to go away.

Then Jasna heard the voice.

"At about 3 o'clock, I heard a loud cry when the door across the hall was opened. The girl inside that room started to cry. I recognized the voice. It was my sister."

Jasna has not seen or heard from her sister since that moment.

At about 5 a.m., Lukic ordered Jasna to get dressed, and then, much to her surprise, he drove her home. Jasna's terrified mother was waiting for her in the apartment building's entryway.

"I decided to not tell her that I was raped," Jasna explained. "She was crying and asked me, 'Where is your sister and your friend?' I told her they were okay, they were just staying overnight. I didn't want to hurt my mother."

Jasna and her mother stayed in Visegrad for a month more, hoping that Emina would be freed and sent home. Even though the town's Muslim population was under virtual house arrest, Jasna's mother went to the police station almost every day. One time, a Serb policeman simply aimed his loaded gun at her and said, "Leave." Another time, she saw Lukic there.

"Lukic said to her, 'What do you want? At least I returned one of your daughters,' "

according to Jasna.

With few Muslims left in Visegrad, Jasna and her mother had little choice but to leave in a bus convoy in the middle of July. Their best hope is that Emina is still in Serb captivity. Their worst fear is that she is dead.

Jasna now lives in a student hostel in Zenica with her older sister, Meliha, who was in this central Bosnian town when the rapes allegedly occurred. Instead of remaining silent and withdrawing, she said she has repeatedly talked about her ordeal. Even so, Jasna said she has nightmares every night and must sleep in the same room with her sister. She gets frightened whenever Meliha goes out. Jasna told her story reluctantly. She avoided talking about the rape for the first 45 minutes of the interview, but then it came tumbling out, almost nonstop.

"I want to tell the Westerners the real truth," she said. "I want them to stop these crimes. There are plenty of girls in a worse position than me."