Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS IN STATEBUILDING

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MAKING THE STATE IN KOSOVO

Edited by

Vjosa Musliu and Itziar Mujika Chao

‘This volume bears the keen sight of its editors and the exertion of scholars from and of Kosovo to impact the uneven space of knowledge production about this social and political space. It is both a collection and a proposal for the contours of ongoing inter-generational and inter-disciplinary conversations giving shape to future critical, feminist and gendered analyses of state-building.’

Prof. Dr. Nita Luci, *Ambassador of Kosovo to Norway*

‘*Feminist Encounters in Statebuilding*, as its editors rightly argue, does much more than fill an obvious gap in the literature on statebuilding, which has thus far paid little attention to gender, even less so to feminist perspectives. The edited volume goes much further: thanks to the feminist lens, this collection of essays opens new research agendas and novel ways to think of statebuilding, far beyond the usual foci on institution-building and the rule of law. Memory, activism, justice, care – these are the themes that highlight both women’s contributions to the statebuilding process and the silences that make them invisible. This is a book that should be a must read for all those interested in liberal interventionism as the defining political project of our times.’

Prof. Dr. Aida Hozić, *University of Florida, USA*

‘This book takes an innovative approach to women, gender, and state-building, drawing on an intensive interrogation of oral sources, discursive practices, everyday encounters, and mental maps. Its theoretical and methodological contribution to the field is genuinely original.’

Prof. Dr. Anna Di Lellio, *New York University, USA*

‘Written by a new generation of theoretically highly alert and critically engaged young Albanian scholars in and from Kosovo, this book offers fresh and illuminating insights of Kosovo women’s pertinent, yet mostly ignored, experiences and agency before, during, and after the 1999-conflict. The assembled case studies explore the subjective experiences of (mostly) ethnic Albanian women as fighters, victims, students, care givers, human rights activists, memory entrepreneurs, and politicians. The analyses historicise, situate, and trace these both ordinary and extraordinary women’s struggles to claim and negotiate voice and space against a backdrop of systemic omission or oppression. They show how Kosovar women challenged and counteracted (unless they resigned to, or even reproduced), both entrenched and shifting, heteronormative and patriarchal gender conventions at all levels of societal interactions – from family, local, and national, to international. Overall, the studies expand the paradigmatic character of the Kosovo case in international relations studies by demonstrating the benefits of exploring statebuilding processes through a critical-analytical gender lense.’

Prof. Dr. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, *Bournemouth University, UK*

‘This must-read book, focusing on feminist activism and feminist thinking in Kosovo, provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted aspects of the Kosovo state-building process across its various stages. Each chapter serves as a piece of the mosaic, contributing to an aggregate feminist understanding of the topic in the context of Kosovo. An insightful and thought-provoking work of feminist contemporary academic literature from Kosovo about Kosovo.’

Dr. Elife (Eli) Krasniqi

Feminist Encounters in Statebuilding

This volume provides one of the first comprehensive feminist readings of international statebuilding, with a specific focus on the case of Kosovo.

Rather than simply showing how the state in Kosovo is being built by and through women and feminist encounters, this volume is interested to problematise women and feminist subjectivities vis-à-vis the state and statebuilding. The book challenges three main arguments related to the processes and subjects of statebuilding in Kosovo. First, the academic literature on Kosovo has a tendency to take the international intervention of 1999 as the originary point of statebuilding processes in Kosovo. Second, and relatedly, given Kosovo's unprecedented exposure to Western intervention and statebuilding, the majority of works start from the presumption that liberal interventionism in Kosovo (and elsewhere) is normatively more progressive than the previous system, and that the liberal interventionism and statebuilding are naturally gender progressive and gender-equal. The third argument has to do with the existing legal architecture on gender and women's rights in contemporary Kosovo. The aim of the volume is to, on the one hand, problematise the evidence against the backdrop of everyday manifestations and/or performances of statebuilding and on the other hand interrogate the co-constitutive gender aspect. In terms of methodology, the volume brings together contributions that rely on traditional and multi-sited ethnography, and narrative research rooted in projects and initiatives in Kosovo. This allows the contributors to unearth new and silenced actors, entry points, subjects and subjectivities in processes of and related to statebuilding in Kosovo; feminist frictions and challenges to statebuilding in Kosovo; as well as encounters of heteronormative statebuilding.

This book will be of much interest to students of statebuilding, Balkan politics, feminisms, and international relations, in general.

Vjosa Musliu is Assistant Professor of international relations at the Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). She is also a co-series editor of the Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding series.

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Feminist Encounters in Statebuilding

The Role of Women in Making the State in Kosovo

Edited by Vjosa Musliu and Itziar Mujika Chao

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Vjosa dedicates this book to Evrim and Nora Tan

Itziar dedicates this book to Paule, Zuhara, Izei, Oier.

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1 Introduction

Feminist encounters of statebuilding in Kosovo

Vjosa Musliu and Itziar Mujika Chao

The 8th of March has historically symbolised the embodiment of feminist contention and interrogations, and it has not been different in Kosovo. In 1998, in the middle of the war, thousands of women walked from the capital city Prishtina to Drenica, each of them holding a loaf of bread high in their hands as a protest against the siege of the Drenica by the Serb armed forces. Seven years later – and five and a half since the end of the war – in 2005, women's rights and feminist activists hung a banner in the fence of the government building in the city centre of Prishtina, bringing attention to a clear message: *Resolution 1325 guarantees us participation in Negotiations* (*Rezoluta 1325 na garanton pjesëmarrjen në Negociata*) (Kosova Women's Network [KWN], 2005). The UN-mediated negotiations between Prishtina and Belgrade between 2006 and 2008 barely included any women and did not acknowledge women's claims for gender equality, nor did they take into account the defence of women's rights and claims through the process, despite the increasing international measures such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, which advocates for the equal participation of women in all decision-making spaces in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (2000). On the same day in 2012, women's organisations and feminist activists organised the annual march foregrounding a key message that had been silenced since the end of the war in 1999: *We don't want flowers. We want justice for sexual violence survivors during the war* (*Nuk duam lule. Ne duam drejtësi për të mbijetuarat e dhunës seksuale gjatë luftës*). After 12 years of an almost impermeable silence, the focus of the domestic public was brought to the lack of justice and reparation measures the survivors demanded (KWN, 2013). On 12 June 2015, 5,000 dresses were displayed on clotheslines in the football stadium Fadil Vokrri in Pristina. Organised as a grassroots action, this art installation of Alketa Xhafa Mripa – a Kosovan artist based in London – foregrounded the issue of wartime rape as a national conversation in post-war Kosovo (Di Lellio et al., 2019; Hirch, 2017).

In 2018, the names of Diana Kastrati and Zejnepe Bytyqi, two Kosovo Albanian women killed by their respective partners, and three billboards with the question *How many more missed calls?* (*Edhe sa thirrje te humbura?*) covered the city centre of the capital city in red and black. This was the intervention of the feminist art collective Haveit to the response of the state (KWN, 2019; Haveit, 2018).

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Kastrati and Bytyqi were both killed by their partners even though they had repeatedly reported previous attacks of domestic violence to the police. On the 29th of August 2022, hundreds of citizens flooded the streets of the city centre of Prishtina to condemn the rape of an 11-year-old girl by five men in a city park in the middle of the day. This protest was largely articulated as a note of protest against the public and security institutions. Two main slogans were articulated: *Shteti fajtor* (*The state is to blame*), as well as, *Nëse tutesh prej territ, ja qesim flakën qytetit* (*If you are scared of darkness, we will set the city on fire*).

These events are just a handful of feminist encounters – disruptive and contentious acts – foregrounding the failures of the liberal statebuilding practices and the lack of local institutional response. It is the aim of this book to focus on, identify, analyse and centre such feminist encounters – interrogations, disruptions and contributions – carried out by women within the broader critique of statebuilding. As will be shown below, this volume in its entirety, as well as the main argument of each chapter individually, challenges the seemingly gender neutrality of states and of (international) statebuilding, through the case study of Kosovo.

The book contests three main arguments that have featured in international relations (IR) scholarship on international statebuilding in Kosovo. First, IR literature on Kosovo has the tendency to take the international intervention in 1999 as the original departure point of statebuilding processes in Kosovo. This periodisation renders invisible a vast number of initiatives, developments and actors that have carried out processes of statebuilding during the so-called non-violent civil resistance period (throughout the 1980s and 1990s) that aimed at constructing a functioning parallel state that would enable acquiring independence from Serbia. Since 1989, Kosovo Albanians self-organised to build institutions that were both functioning in and of themselves, resisting the repressive measures taken by the government in Belgrade against them, as well as offering the means for survival to most of the population. Scholarship in statebuilding in IR has remained disinterested to that period. Furthermore, most of the literature (in IR and social sciences more broadly) that focuses on the non-violent civil resistance movement and the statebuilding initiatives prior to the NATO intervention in 1999 has not focused on the patriarchal reproductions of those efforts. Such viewpoints have overlooked women's resistance before and during the war outside the official historical narratives (E. Krasniqi, 2011 and 2021; Luci & Gusia, 2014; Demiri, 2018; Mujika Chao, 2020) and have rendered women's and feminist activism in statebuilding as a post-war product (Luci & Gusia, 2014).

As this edited volume will show at length, Kosovo has a history of feminist mobilisation that began when the country was still part of Yugoslavia, whether within the underground movement Ilegalja (E. Krasniqi, 2011) or within the subsequent non-violent civil resistance movement (V. Krasniqi, 2011; Schwandner-Sievers, 2013; Luci & Gusia, 2014; Mujika Chao, 2020). Such studies have demonstrated that liberation and state formation were the main driving forces behind the movement and the defence of women's rights was secondary, even if women's activism continued throughout the years. Many women activists persisted in their activism, often standing in opposition to the organisational structures of

the national movement (Di Lellio, 2016). Studies looking at the women's collective movements in the post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding period have focused on how both local political elites and the international peacebuilding and statebuilding architecture have ignored and sidelined such contributions and consequently have not included women or their needs and claims within their infrastructure, goals and programs (Corrin, 2000; Abdela, 2004; Alice, 2009). Women activists have framed their rights as the essential precondition for a progressive society (Vardari-Kesler, 2014), constructing women's role as the key figure in the democratisation processes in pre-independent Kosovo.

Second, given Kosovo's unprecedented exposure to Western interventionism and statebuilding (Tahiri, 2010), the overwhelming majority of works in IR start their analysis from the presumption that liberal interventionism in Kosovo – and elsewhere – is normatively more progressive than a previous system (Musliu, 2019); and second, that liberal interventionism and statebuilding are naturally gender-progressive and gender-equal (Rexhepi, 2016; Musliu, 2021). On the contrary, sporadic works have shown that international statebuilding is not necessarily neither gender-equal (Tahiri, 2021; E. Krasniqi, 2012; Ante, 2010; Mujika Chao, 2021) nor sexually progressive (Musliu, 2021; Rexhepi, 2022). For example, for more than 20 years since the emergence of the international peacebuilding and statebuilding architecture in Kosovo, there has been an omission of wartime sexual violence from internationally led transitional justice processes and mechanisms (Di Lellio, 2016; Krasniqi et al., 2020). In this sense, the main approach for liberal peace organisations has been that of mainstreaming gender equality in their inner and outer architectures, planning and programs (Agency for Gender Equality, 2014). Despite women's organisations and feminist activists' pledges for gender mainstreaming and feminist contributions in policymaking, both international and local structures have failed in implementing such processes, reinforcing patriarchal power relations (E. Krasniqi, 2012).

The third argument has to do with the existing architecture – legal and administrative – on gender equity and women's rights in contemporary Kosovo. A series of – official – events have developed such architecture in terms of gender in politics and decision-making in the post-war scenario: first, the use of gender quotas for the first time in the 2001 National Assembly elections and its subsequent implementation; second, the approval of the Gender Equality Law (2004); and third, the adoption of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the monitoring of the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 (2014). In the consolidated political institutions in post-war and post-independence Kosovo, there has been a gradual increase of women in key decision-making positions. However, the inclusion and implementation of functioning gender-mainstreaming measures in political institutions have had a more problematic trajectory. It is also the aim of this volume to problematise this evidence against the backdrop of everyday manifestations and/or performances of statebuilding dynamics towards gender equality; and to unravel the frictions and encounters between political elites and movements, statebuilding mechanisms and performances and feminist claims for gender equality.

This edited volume recognises the contributions of critical feminists and builds upon their work to foreground the debate on women and dissident gender identities in statebuilding within IR literature proper. Rather than simply *showing* how the state is being built by and through women and feminist encounters, we are interested in problematising women, gender and feminist subjectivities vis-à-vis the state and statebuilding. To that end, we interrogate *what kind of* a state is being built, contested and (re)negotiated through feminist encounters. Derived from anthropology (see the work of Faier & Rofel, 2014), encounter refers to everyday engagements across differences. In this edited volume, we conceptualise and look at feminist encounters as spaces where state-making and statebuilding occur through asymmetrical, unequal and violent interplays between different groups.

Etymologically, encounter can both mean a meeting, especially one that is unplanned, unexpected or brief; as well as, a hostile or adversarial confrontation. In our usage of feminist encounters, we are also drawn to both conceptualisations of *encounter*. First, by using feminist encounters we want to both provoke and problematise the seemingly unexpected processes, knowledges and histories of feminist and women-led movements in processes of statebuilding in Kosovo. As indicated earlier, IR literature and literature of (international) statebuilding in Kosovo (see Capussela, 2015; Ker-Lindsay, 2011; Hehir, 2010; Visoka, 2018) have been oblivious to processes of statebuilding outside of hegemonic masculine subjectivities. At best, they have merely stirred in "the gender" element (see Visoka & Musliu, 2019) without disrupting the orthodox knowledge of statebuilding. Second and relatedly, these seemingly unexpected and uncalled for feminist encounters disrupt the canon of knowledge by showing yet another viewpoint to statebuilding and intervention in Kosovo. The consecutive chapters will reveal how these silenced knowledges of feminist and women-led statebuilding processes in Kosovo will make an adversarial confrontation to the orthodox canons of knowledge in statebuilding as they inherently dismantle the co-constitutive links between patriarchy, masculinity and state(-building). In her seminal work, *Imperial Encounters*, Roxanne Lynn Doty (1996) argues that the term encounter implies the presence of two entities with similar powers (p. 4). In her problematisation of power in colonial histories of the West, she then introduces the concept of imperial encounters to point out the power disparities between the Global North and the Global South. In the same vein, feminist encounters in our book will be used to explain that the adversarial confrontations are a result of power disparities between imaginaries of a feminist state and a masculine state – commonly referred to as simply, *a state.*

Building peace, building states, reproducing patriarchy

What today is identified as liberal peacebuilding gained academic attention in the 1990s, spurred by Boutros-Ghali's "An agenda for peace" (1992), which identified peacebuilding as a set of coordinated actions to "strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict". Conflicts such as that of Rwanda or Bosnia Herzegovina, Timor Leste or Kosovo constituted spaces in which liberal

peacebuilding was "tested". Through continuously interconnected and layered top-down operations, a plethora of international actors within the UN, international financial institutions and peacekeeping forces as well as international NGOs, liberal peace aimed at not only building peace and avoiding a backslide to conflict, but also the development of functional states through the implementation of liberal democracy, governance and market liberalisation.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, statebuilding established itself among international organisations and donor states of the Global North as the primary paradigm for intervention in conflict-affected countries (see for instance World Bank 1997, p. 3). Among these agencies, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) acted as a "primary coordination body" (Paducel & Salahub, 2011, p. 2), which understood statebuilding as the process of "building the relationship between state and society" through international engagement aimed at increasing the accountability and legitimacy of the state, and its capacity to fulfil "core functions", primarily understood as the provision of security (OECD, 2007). In the UN as elsewhere, statebuilding became tightly tied to the notion of "good governance" and increasingly became synonymous with peacebuilding.

Considering this history, critical scholars within peace and conflict studies correctly observe that statebuilding is the latest iteration of "various and sometimes cross-cutting projects of disciplinary, regulatory and liberal rule and values beyond 'the West'" (Gabay & Death, 2014 in Reeves, 2021; Sabaratnam, 2017; Visoka, 2018; Hehir, 2019; Visoka & Richmond, 2017; Bargués-Pedreny, 2018). Statebuilding has been said to rely on "the centrality of security through military force". Along these lines, a big part of the scholarly literature on statebuilding similarly centres on military, police and judiciary institutions as sectors that international actors should target "if they are intent on strengthening a targeted country's state" (McMahon & Western, 2017, p. 6). In contrast, critical scholars have also shown how such centrality in security decentres attention from the role of civil society and informal spaces (Mac Ginty, 2021) in peacebuilding, or how it also contributes to the reproduction of violence and violent values (Jackson, 2018). Such scholarship focuses on the various and diverse resistances and contentious positionalities that arise in post-conflict contexts, which mostly acquire a position of opposition to liberal peace. However, though identified as neutral, the interrelationships that are built in such contexts and practices are not gender-neutral, as they are based on and built upon specific gender norms, and therefore, also have specific gendered effects.

Feminist encounters with the state

Although the last decades have seen a burgeoning of politics and policies aiming at the defence of women's rights, equality between sexes and genders, or gender mainstreaming within different administrations and organisations, everyday life demonstrates that such measures and practices have not detached states and statebuilding processes from its heteropatriarchal nexus and androcentric and masculine identities and ways of functioning. There is no question that states, as well

as any kind of inter-state power relations and politics, are based on, conformed and shaped by gender as an unequal, subordinating and violent power-based structure and system. Always interconnected with other power structures and dynamics such as class, religion, race, ableism, ethnicity or age, among others, gender is one of the central power and control devices that rules all aspects of everyday life: from the intimate to the personal, from the local to the international level, including states. For example, Doty explains how the (re)making of the United States in the 1900s was also concomitant to the identity construction that took place focused on "American manhood", where a man can stand up by virtue of his manhood and say he is a man (Doty, 1996, p. 30). Talking about the building of a democratic state in the United States in the wake of the occupation of the Philippines, she notes:

> The business of democracy was not to make government good but to make men strong: "The glory of the American Republic is that it is the embodiment of American manhood" (Jordan 1901: 31)…The republic was both the manifestation of American manhood and the vehicle for the construction of a new kind of Anglo-Saxon man.
>
> (Doty, 1996, p. 31)

The late 1990s and early 2000s opened the space for feminist debates and contributions linked with the state, in two main areas that are of interest for this edited volume: on the one hand, the contributions that came from feminist studies on politics, policy-making and administration which focused on the inner functioning of states, their features and gendered dynamics and reproductions (Chappell, 2000; Mazur, 2002); and, on the other hand, the contributions that came from feminists focusing on international relations, conflicts and conflict-management, international intervention, statebuilding and peacebuilding. The latter focused more on the relations between states on the one hand and the nexus between liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding in post-conflict contexts on the other, relying on gender and feminist lenses, and more recently on masculinities and queer perspectives (Tripp, 2012; Rexhepi, 2016; Deiana, 2018; Stavrevska, 2020; O'Reilly, 2018; Smith, 2019; Martín de Almagro, 2017; Castillejo, 2010; Duriesmith, 2017). Although both sets of contributions do a similar exercise in practice, it is true that a conversation between each set of authors has been scarce: the former does not take into account the linkages between peacebuilding and statebuilding in post-conflict contexts, and the latter does not take into account the contributions of the former in terms of the gendered aspects of states, their administration and citizenship.

This volume draws from both strands of literature, but is visibly located within the feminist literature within IR and peace and conflict studies. Feminists focusing on state dynamics, politics, institutions and policy-making have long identified that gender is a central aspect of the functioning of states and how the functioning of states and their institutions and administrations have also a direct influence on women (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Smith & Stavrevksa, 2022) and other dissident gender identities. Several authors have demonstrated how states

have – apparently – incorporated feminist claims regarding gender equality and the defence of women's rights through the institutionalisation of specific measures as a response to feminist contention (Krook & Mackay, 2011). In this regard, concepts such as *state-feminism* or *femocrats*, among others, started to gain visibility in the context of the strengthening of "feminist institutionalism". However, critical voices have questioned how such institutionalisation of feminist claims visibly distances itself from its critical origins, responding to the needs of states and their administrations and hence co-opting the voices of women – not necessarily for good. In doing so, they have also pointed out that a focus on women, rather than on gender, does not necessarily imply an application of a gender perspective, or further, feminist viewpoints. Although the participation of women has visibly increased in state institutions and organisations, their participation continues to respond to patriarchal imaginaries, entangled with liberal understandings of the role and functioning of states, and therefore the place of women within those states. More recently, thanks to extensive research and activism, a handful of states have taken gender mainstreaming and feminism in their foreign policy, even though what feminist foreign policy exactly means is not clearly stated yet (Thomson, 2020). Since the turn of Sweden's foreign policy towards feminist perspectives and positionalities, some states such as Canada, Germany, Chile, Mexico, Spain and France, among others, are increasingly taking steps towards advancing global gender equality through foreign policy tools and the adoption of a feminist perspective. Such a move has generated interest as a possible alternative approach for the advancement of gender equality. However, several central questions remain open, ranging from how feminist perspectives are defined, understood and implemented, to whether such opportunities are co-opted by liberal states.

Feminist scholars within critical peace and conflict studies have continuously interrogated the co-constitutive nature of international intervention and international peace- and statebuilding. For them, there is a mutual feeding between liberalism and patriarchy and at the same time, the international system articulated through and via liberal states is marked by gender imbalance and patriarchy. International statebuilding imagines the construction of liberal states organised around security – usually rendered to borders, army and police – electoral processes, and law enforcement, all of which are coded as masculine and androcentric. Here, the emphasis on statebuilding as primarily security sector reform locates statebuilding within the most masculinised domains of state power (Shepherd, 2017, p. 49 in Reeves, 2021). Statebuilding consolidates and entrenches itself in a masculinised state. This in turn enables for investments in security institutions to be presented as an effective approach to managing undisciplined states in the global periphery – because the myth of the social contract posits that this is how "functioning" states emerged in Europe. By rendering statebuilding in border demarcations, security capacities building or institution building, it (re)creates the state as a masculinised structure and renders invisible a wide array of societal, intersubjective and everyday encounters that are quintessential to making that state.

As has been continuously demonstrated by feminists (Confortini, 2006 & 2010; Wibben et al. 2018; McLeod & O'Reilly, 2019; Mujika Chao, 2021), processes

of statebuilding do not escape from the masculine and androcentric realm that they emanate from (Cohn, 2008), reproducing the gender-based power structures, relations and dynamics, violence and discrimination, that they create – and ignoring feminist claims that activists and researchers have brought to ongoing debates regarding the nature of external interventionism and statebuilding. They identify four strands of critique: (1) the participation of women in peacebuilding and statebuilding; (2) the masculine and violent identity of states, as well as the linkages between peacebuilding and statebuilding; (3) the critique to the concept and practice of gender mainstreaming; and (4) the role of feminist social movements, organisations and groups of women and other dissident identities in the agenda of states.

The participation of women in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes and organisations has definitely increased in the last decades, as a result of the different international measures that have been adopted in this regard. One of the most important and influencing sets of measures directly related to post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuiding is the international agenda on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the implementation of different international measures for gender equality and the defence of women's rights. Although the WPS agenda focuses on several key issues related to the defence of women's rights in these contexts, it mainly focuses on acknowledging the diverse experiences that women have in conflicts and refers to their participation in all decision-making spaces in peacebuilding. Such an agenda is now present – with more or less presence and intensity – in different post-conflict and statebuilding contexts, and an increase of women in such spaces is visible, but the implementation of the agenda overall is still pending. The presence of women in decision-making positions is understood to be key in the advancement of their rights. However, their mere participation does not necessarily mean that their rights are defended, their claims taken into account or that they will automatically have a gender and/or feminist perspective. This is very much in line with what Klein identifies as a "gendered contextual landscape" (Klein, 2004, p. 279), but does not necessarily respond to the needs of women and non-binary gender identities in different locations and spaces. Such a frame, also co-created with international organisations, can be a problem in itself (Cockburn, 2004, p. 41), as it also transmits specific values related to the rights of women and their roles in the political, social and economic spheres (Duncanson, 2016), that do not necessarily coincide with the needs of women and gender dissidents.

The abovemnetioned centre on the features and effects of the participation of women in different statebuilding spaces and dynamics that are inherently violent. In doing so, feminist researchers have long demonstrated that states are not gender-neutral. In fact, when conceptualising violence and peace, the masculine subject remains central and as such it is taken as the norm. As a consequence, not only are states continuously (re)producing violence – direct, structural, symbolic – but also limiting their understanding of peace and therefore erasing women and dissident gender identities.

Feminist encounters with statebuilding

The idea of gender mainstreaming is perhaps the one that has most permeated in state institutions, as well as in the processes of peacebuilding and statebuilding. While enabling important feminist victories, including the aforementioned WPS agenda, the establishment of gender mainstreaming mechanisms has mostly focused on women – rather than on gender understood as a relational device, a set of relationships and a system. Statebuilding initiatives targeting conflict-affected states in the Global South in the years 2000–2010 are an example of the use of gender mainstreaming. From the 1990s onwards, statebuilding initiatives have been launched ostensibly to bring peace, development and gender equality to conflict-affected countries where state institutions were perceived to be deficient. In devising statebuilding, policymakers integrated forms of gender mainstreaming, which expect the adoption of specific measures for gender equality – from the increase of the participation of women to the identification of mechanisms to end women's discrimination in formal spheres, for example. Here, gender expertise, defined narrowly as expertise on individual women's rights, is key, although its impact is limited without the consideration of feminist critiques of the liberal state. The latter reveals that, in its very structure and values, statebuilding promotes the globalisation of an unequal gender order (Shepherd, 2017, pp. 37–65 in Reeves, 2021). Further, without feminist critique, expertise on women – and other gender dissident identities – often risks reducing gender mainstreaming to what feminists have identified as adding women and stirring (Krystalli and Enloe, 2020; Warren and Cady, 1994): the belief that including women in most public and central decision-making spaces will secure taking into account feminist claims; and, attempts to make individual women fit into projects designed by and for men. Such projects reproduce, consciously or not, inequalities between hegemonic femininity and masculinity, with material and practical implications for men and women (Reeves, 2021) as well as non-binary gender identities.

Feminist contributions coming from civil society and grassroots organisations have also pointed to the impossibility of states to respond to feminist claims, as states themselves are the guarantors of inequality. Here, feminist civil society organisations are key in the defence of women's rights and feminist claims (Mujika Chao, 2021), but they tend to be continuously marginalised from statebuilding spaces and initiatives. Feminist and women's movements have been key when making it clear that despite the more feminist-friendly postures specific states and statebuilding processes might take, traditional or Westphalian states will never have a feminist identity as gender imbalance is entrenched in their fabric. Taking stock of this, scholars have differentiated between women's activism and feminist activism (Cárdenas & Hëdström, 2021). Whereas the former is usually understood as "organised social movements to challenge gender inequality" (Basu, 2018, p. 5), the latter would be closer to "struggles that have the same goals but need not to be organised as women's movements" (Basu, 2018, p. 5). Thus, not all women's movements are necessarily feminist nor have explicitly feminist goals in

mind. It is, however, important to clarify that such a separation does not do justice to the positioning of women and/or other non-binary gender identities in relation to feminisms, as there are many cases of women-led activism and militancy that is not "overtly feminist in its objectives" or is not overtly self-identified as feminist in public as it may "have unintended feminist effects by mobilising women in public political spaces" (Cárdenas & Hedström, 2021, p. 149).

Still, we are interested in these feminist interventions within critical peace and statebuilding studies because feminist scholarship has been able to capture the complex, contested and ambiguous dynamics of shifting gender relations in conflict and post-conflict settings and the everyday domain. One of the initial feminist critiques directed at the linkages between peacebuilding and statebuilding referred to how their functioning responded to patriarchal values and discourses was that while the "nation" is typically seen as female (Yuval Davis, 1996; Cockburn, 1998), the "state" is seen as male (Duriesmith, 2017; Hooper, 2001). Despite an increasing understanding of women's agency and its limits, the entrenchment of dominant hierarchical norms at the intersection of gender and the nation remains puzzling. Everyday nationalism directs attention to mundane aspects of nationhood. It also offers a bottom-up perspective on top-down processes of "formal nationalism" and their interplay with everyday constructions of nationhood. The alignment between these bottom-up and top-down processes reveals how national ideologies are legitimised and hierarchical gender relations are as a result entrenched. This in turn produces and reproduces gendered discourses and imaginaries of conflicts and war metanarratives (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015, p. 172) and with it, unequal gender relations (Krasniqi, Sokolic & Kostovicova, 2020).

Kosovo: Contested statebuilding

Kosovo was the most underdeveloped region in the former Yugoslavia. At the end of World War II, over 80% of Kosovo's population was illiterate (Ukaj, 2006) and this percentage was even higher amongst women and girls. Inhabited largely by Albanians, as a former province, Kosovo was at the end of the food chain in the post-World War II Yugoslavia. The installation of a post-war regime in Belgrade in 1949 was followed by an organised expulsion of Albanians to Turkey owing to a migration deal the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the new Turkish Republic had signed. Until the early 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians left mostly in the direction of Turkey. The 1974 changes introduced in the Yugoslav Constitution, gave Kosovo substantially increased autonomy – similar to that of the other republics, including de facto veto power in the Serbian parliament. A year after that, in 1975, the University of Prishtina was opened, offering for the first time programs and lectures in Albanian, in addition to Serbian. The period between the early-mid 1970s to the late 1980s was characterised with a cultural and educational revival in Kosovo (Kelmendi, 2019). This period was cut short with the coming to power of the nationalists in Serbia in the late 1980s when Slobodan Milošević effectively revoked Kosovo's extended autonomy in 1989 and renewed repressive

measures were reinforced against Kosovo Albanians curtailing political and individual freedoms.

The decade of the 1990s is largely characterised by the so-called parallel system in Kosovo. Ousted from all public institutions – medical, educational, cultural and economic – Albanians who comprised over 80% of the population in Kosovo at that time self-organised in parallel structures organising and maintaining the bureaucratic, legal, social and economic layers of a state within a state. A series of women's organisations emerged and developed in Kosovo during this period tackling widespread illiteracy among women and girls in rural areas (Rogova, 2020); feminist student movements (Hetemi, 2020); as well as queer movements (Musliu, 2021). These feminist activists were both fighting for the emancipation of women and girls within the Albanian society as well as for the emancipation of the Albanian subject (women and men) in response to Belgrade's repressive measures. The continued curtailing of freedoms for Albanians in the 1990s led to a full-blown escalation in 1998 when the Serbian military waged a warfare against the Albanian population in Kosovo and its guerrilla movement Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* [UÇK]). After a series of failed discussions mediated by the UN and the European Union (EU) between Milošević, Kosovo's Government and KLA leaders, NATO intervened with air strikes against Serbia's military sites in 1999 without the approval of the Security Council. After 78 days, representatives of Kosovo, Serbia and NATO signed the Kumanovo Agreement in June 1999 effectively putting an end to the war. The adoption of Resolution 1244 (1999) established a provisional international administration system, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) supported by an international military force, the NATO-supported Kosovo Force (KFOR).

Since then, Kosovo and its multi-layered transitions in a span of 30 years have become the poster child of the political and epistemic communities of (international) statebuilding. The pending political status of Kosovo between 1999 and 2008; its struggles with the finalisation of its independence from 2008 onwards; the deployment of a comprehensive UN administering mission (1999–2008), followed by a deployment of an EU rule of law mission (2008–current); and its diplomatic and recognition conundrums to enter in the society of independent states, have made the latter an ideal "case study" for IR and its subdisciplines. Scholars working on peace studies, conflict resolution and transitional justice, to name a few have interrogated the multi-layered processes of and related to international statebuilding in Kosovo focusing on structures and institutions (Hehir and Robinson, 2009); post-war reconstruction and reconciliation (McKinna, 2012); Europeanisation and EU integration (Musliu, 2021); diplomacy and international representation (Visoka, 2018); education and governance (Selenica, 2018); state recognition (Berg & Kursani, 2022; Visoka et al., 2019), transitional justice (Hehir & Sheremeti, 2021), among others. Despite the audible contribution of these works, what has not received as much attention in the statebuilding literature on Kosovo is the role of women and non-binary gender identities in shaping and challenging processes of statebuilding and state formation. This edited volume recognises the efforts of critical feminist

contributions and builds upon them to foreground the debate on women and feminist movements in statebuilding. It is our aim to challenge the apparent neutrality of states and of statebuilding dynamics, focusing on gender and feminist analysis of everyday manifestations and performances of statebuilding, as well as the encounters with women's and feminists' claims for gender equality.

Outlining the volume

The aim of this edited volume is to gather dissident voices within the statebuilding paradigm in Kosovo. Such voices do not only distance themselves from a masculine and masculinist ideal of a state and statebuilding but are also part of a broader debate of what a feminist deconstsruction and reconstruction (Peterson, 1992, p. 17) of statebuilding would look like. We bring together contributions that rely on traditional and multi-sited ethnography, and narrative research that is rooted in projects and initiatives in Kosovo. This allows our contributors to unearth new and silenced actors, entry points, subjects and subjectivities in processes of and related to statebuilding in Kosovo; feminist frictions and challenges to statebuilding in Kosovo; as well as encounters of heteronormative statebuilding.

The contentions around Kosovo's sovereignty and subjectivity do not have political implications only. Such contentions – about what Kosovo is and how it should be talked about – spill over in the academic sphere and knowledge production as well. Scholarly contributions from non-Albanian scholars, Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks from or working on Kosovo, are as a result missing in the edited volume. Their absence is even more pertinent if we consider that the project of (international) statebuilding in Kosovo has been taking place by foregrounding the Albanian majority subject. Elsewhere, Sakibe Jashari rightly argues that the international statebuilding in Kosovo has systematically taken place at the expense of the Roma, Ashali and Egyptian women (2019, p. 149). Despite our aim and willingness to opt for a wider ethnic and cultural representation of authors, we had great difficulty in bringing non-Albanian scholars from Kosovo. This is certainly not a conundrum original to this edited volume (see Visoka & Musliu, 2019). We argue that the silence or the boycott of non-Albanian scholars from Kosovo – in particular to Serbian scholars – to partake in such academic works is largely contingent on ethno-politics.

The authors of this edited volume are young scholars from Kosovo working in and outside Kosovo. Chapter 1 – the introduction – lays out the main debates around Kosovo, feminist activism as well as processes of (international) statebuilding in Kosovo. The subsequent chapters walk the reader through encounters of feminist contestations and contributions in processes of statebuilding in Kosovo. The first three chapters map out and problematise what Svetlana Alexievich would call *the (un)womanly face of the war* (Section I) in Kosovo and how we can understand women's contribution in the surge for liberation. Concretely, in Chapter 2, Lirika Demiri focuses on oral histories of women, recovering traces of the diverse manifestations of women's agency through the 1980s and 1990s. She contests dominant narratives on Kosovo through the study of women's agency and participation

in campaigns for women's literacy, national liberation underground groups, civic resistance initiatives against the regime of Milošević and grassroots women's rights organisations. Through such a feminist intervention, she demonstrates how the post-war political memory and politics of remembrance are male-centred and male-dominated.

Adem Ferizaj looks at women combatants who were part of the KLA in Chapter 3. Analysing the diversity of roles that women in the army acquired throughout the war, using decolonial lenses, Ferizaj argues that though patriarchal value systems were omnipresent, women fighters temporarily challenged such values within the KLA. For him, the post-war silence of women fighters is a result of the re-patriarchalisation of post-war Kosovo. Ferizaj engages in debates about multiple feminisms and problematises whether KLA women combatants in Kosovo can be seen as a case that challenges the premises of Western liberal feminism.

Focusing on one of the central preoccupations of feminist theories and perspectives, Erjona Gashi explores in Chapter 4 the various and different care-related roles that women acquired through the war in Kosovo in 1998–1999. Literature focusing on conflicts has usually looked into the most visible roles women acquire in contexts of turmoil, namely as fighters in different realms, as peacebuilders within civil society organisations or as victims of gender-based violence. Gashi focuses on the overlooked everyday roles within the broader labour of care performed by women through the lived experiences of five Kosovar women. She specifies the ways in which Kosovar women's development of care activities through the war was vital to not only the well-being and survival of their families, communities, and larger networks but also to the resistance against systematic cultural erasure at the hands of the Serbian regime.

In Section II, "Places and spaces of women in war and peace", two chapters focus on the cultural (re)production and heritage by problematising spaces and places of women and their labour in war, liberation and statebuilding. In Chapter 5, Andi Haxhiu questions the narratives created in and by the National Museum of Kosovo (NMK) and argues that NMK narrates the national history foregrounding the legacy of the KLA. Within this male-dominated and masculinised narrative, perhaps paradoxically, the "Goddess on the Throne" is the museum's centrepiece and the official logo of the museum. Engaging with ethnographic fieldwork with museum curators, Haxhiu argues that curatorial practices in the National Museum of Kosovo have continuously shifted Kosovo's narrative from civil to guerrilla resistance telling this way *the story* of Kosovo through a male barrel of a gun. Ardiana Shala and Blerina Këllezi discuss gender-based violence and the responsibility of the state and public institutions in post-war Kosovo in Chapter 6. Relying on semi-structured interviews with survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo war, Shala and Këllezi analyse the 2014 Law Amendment in Kosovo's legislation which enabled wartime rape survivors to apply for formal recognition as civilian war victims. In doing so, they problematise concepts of responsibility, victimhood, recognition and violence as venues through which states are built and contested.

In the last section, "(Re)making Kosovo. (re)making gender.", three substantive chapters interrogate how gender, women's rights and representation were

problematised in post-independence Kosovo. In Chapter 7, Rozafa Berisha argues that practices and discourses in post-independence Kosovo promote an ideal female national subject that bears the premises and promises of neoliberalism. Building on debates of neoliberal statebuilding and ethnographic work with young Kosovar women, Berisha finds out that the new model of nationalist womanhood in Kosovo is built on multiple axes of Europeanisation, neoliberalism and national identification. In Chapter 8, Enduena Klajiqi turns the gaze to the Serbian women MPs in Kosovo's National Parliament. Situated between contesting Kosovo's sovereignty, all the while partaking in institutions of an independent Kosovo, Serbian women MPs in Kosovo's National Parliament offer an interesting entry point to understand intersectional representation. Drawing on speech acts of Serbian women MPs, Klajiqi interrogates the interplay between nationalism and feminism.

In the Conclusion – Chapter 9 – the edited volume editors summarise and bring together the main arguments crosscutting the individual chapters. They identify the main temporal and spatial threads evidenced in the chapters and cast a forward-looking research agenda for feminist statebuilding in Kosovo and elsewhere.

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Section I

Kosovo

The unwomanly face of the war

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2 Subversive stories of women activists as counter-memory

"I was considered a stubborn"

Lirika Demiri

Introduction

More than two decades after the end of the war in Kosova, women's subjectivities and narratives about their political contributions still remain sidelined. Despite the construction of a collective narrative of national liberation, women's voices and the multitude of their experiences are mostly not accounted for. Similar to post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (Helms, 2013), discussions about women's position and experiences in post-war Kosova are primarily defined by a politics of victimhood, which appropriates the figure of the female victim in the function of nationalist sentiments and legitimacy. Although there have been important civic initiatives addressing sexual violence during the war beyond the fetishising of female victimhood (Di Lellio, 2016), the public and institutional discourse is primarily dominated by essentialist gender tropes. Deemed only as victims by the state and the international community, the articulation of women's social and political agency has mostly been absent from the state-building discourse in post-war Kosova.

Despite this continuous marginalisation of women's subjectivities in state-building narratives, feminist counter-public and scholars (Luci, 2005; Farnsworth, 2008; Luci & Gusia, 2015; Gusia, Krasniqi & Luci, 2016; Mujika Chao, 2020; Krasniqi, 2021) have collected, documented and written about histories of women activists who were engaged in different social and political movements in Kosova during the 1980s and 1990s. These movements included the campaign for women's literacy, national liberation movements, civic and armed resistance against the regime of Milosevic, as well as transnational activism for women's rights. The period of parallel Albanian political, social and cultural life in the 1990s Kosova, when alternative forms of civic mobilisation substituted for institutional life, was specifically characterised by the increased involvement of women activists in street demonstrations, political forums, literacy and health centres. By supporting the national cause, women activists constituted themselves as political agents and created new channels, such as women-led NGOs and alternative forms of community mobilisation, to articulate their demands for women's rights (Clark, 2000; Kostovicova, 2005). Demanding a proliferation and a critical interrogation of memory landscapes and a recognition of women's voices in the country's recent

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history, feminist researchers in Kosova have opposed the male-dominated politics of remembrance.

With this aim in mind, in this chapter, I examine oral histories of four Kosovar Albanian women activists involved in various struggles for women's rights and national liberation during the 1980s and 1990s in Kosova. I try to understand how these women activists articulate their subjectivities and positionalities in relation to nationalist movements, civil as well as armed resistance against the regime of Milosevic, war-time, and the post-war period in Kosova? What kind of stories do they choose to tell for themselves when asked to narrate their life stories? What meaning do they ascribe to their experiences of activism? I discuss stories of everyday resistance that women activists narrate to "understand their conditions, improve their lives, help each other, or fight against the limits put on them by their historical situation" (Buss, 2017, p. 35). I argue that through the practice of narrating subversive stories, women activists position themselves as subjects who, in different periods of their personal and professional life, resisted different structures of power in their everyday milieus – in their families, in the prisons of Milosevic's regime, or in the post-war male-dominated public space in Kosova.

The way I think about stories of everyday resistance is mainly informed by the work of sociologists Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey. Looking at narratives of law and how people make sense of their engagement with legal authority, Ewick and Silbey (2003) argue that narrating practices, specifically stories of resistance, create the discursive spaces where power structures can be exposed, opposed and transformed. They note that the critical perspective retrospectivity enacted by telling stories of resistance allows narrators to articulate their own agency and imagine possibilities of unsettling their everyday reality. As Ewick and Silbey put it:

> Stories that are capable of countering the hegemonic are those which bridge, without denying, the particularities of experience and subjectivities and those which bear witness to what is unimagined and unexpressed. Subversive stories, then, do not oppose the general and collective as much as they seek to appropriate them; they do not merely articulate the immediate and particular as much as they aim to transcend them. Subversive stories are narratives that employ the connection between the particular and the general by locating the individual within social organization.
>
> (1995, p. 220)

I also deploy the notion of "counter-memory" (Foucault, 1977) to argue that memories of women activists constitute "everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 269) that challenges the totalising character of official historical narratives in the former Yugoslavia and post-war Kosova. Serving as counter-memories, women activists' narratives contest "the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor" (Hartman, 2019). I argue that these life narratives make two main interventions: they counter

tropes of racist discourse against Albanian women in the former Yugoslavia and they challenge the male-dominated post-war master-narrative (Schwander-Sievers & Di Lellio, 2006) and practices of remembering centred around glorified manhood.

By analyzing how women's narratives are positioned in the larger national memory landscape in Kosova, I claim that they constitute a feminist epistemic intervention in the post-war political memory, exposing "memories which are constructed, staged, used and abused for political action and formation of group identities" (Assmann, 2010, p. 41).

A note on method, oral history and memory-work

The oral histories of women activists discussed in this chapter were conducted by Oral History Kosovo, a collective of researchers based in Prishtina, that has created an online archive of life stories that, in one way or another, intersect with broader historical events.

The interviews conducted[1] with women activists were conceived as a feminist intervention in the official historical account in Kosova, which in most cases fails to represent women's subjectivities and their political engagements.

The narratives presented in the chapter belong to Xhejrane Lokaj, a women's rights activist and midwife, dedicated to women's health issues; Nazlie Bala, a human rights activist, currently serving as a political advisor to the Ministry of Justice; Shukrije Gashi, a human rights activist and former political prisoner; and Vjosa Dobruna, a paediatrician, a human rights activist and former ambassador of Kosova to the Netherlands. I selected these narratives because each of them intersects with broader political realities that were pivotal to statebuilding processes in Kosova. Xhejrane's story highlights the struggle for women's education in rural areas, Nazlie's and Shukrije's stories document the harsh persecution of citizens and activists during the 1980s by Milosevic's regime, while Vjosa's story elaborates on the complex relationship of women's activism with national peaceful and armed resistances during the 1990s. The chapter looks at the "radical imagination and wayward practices" (Hartman, 2019) that animated the lives of these activists through the lenses of feminist thought in Kosova and puts these life stories in conversation with each other and broader post-war historical narratives.

Methodologically, I share my broadest agreement with Alessandro Portelli, who asserts that "each interview is an experience before it becomes a text" (1997, p. xiii). Having not interviewed the women activists personally, I am aware that I do not share the experiential aspect of the interview process and fieldwork. Recognizing that "an inter/view is an exchange between two subjects" (Portelli, 1991, p. 31), I am conscious that my presence in the interviews might have influenced the conversations and, consequently, shaped different narratives. I am aware that the narratives I analyse do not present the lives of the women activists; rather, they represent the stories these women chose to share about themselves during specific intersubjective exchanges. As Portelli says, "Oral testimony, in fact, is never the same twice. […] Even the same interviewer gets different versions from the same narrator at different times" (p. 55).

I use the English translation of the transcripts, which attempt to preserve the structure and rhythm of the spoken word. Nevertheless, I am aware of the textual transformations that a narrative undergoes when its medium changes, first from orality into a written text, and then from Albanian into the English language. Portelli rightfully notes that,

> Oral sources are oral sources…The transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies changes and interpretation… Expecting the transcript to replace the tape for scientific purposes is equivalent to doing art criticism on reproductions, or literary criticism on translations.
>
> (1991, p. 47)

The women activists, despite their shared space of feminist politics and activism in Kosova, do not comprise a homogeneous group. Reading through their personal histories, one notices that they occupy different class geographies, educational backgrounds, as well as cultural and social capital. When recalling their childhood memories, most of them explicitly address their class positions. Clothes, food, childhood toys, gifts, and living spaces, are often used to index poverty or its absence. For example, concerning clothing, Nazlie, narrates a similar sense of class shame as discussed by bell hooks in her work, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000):

> Our parents always intended to buy us clothes that would last for the next winter as well, while we children always thought the clothes were only for one season. When we were in the clothes shop trying on winter jackets, the sleeves reached down to here [shows the length of the sleeves with her hands]. They were big, and we said, "Dad, but the jacket is big." He said, "Raise your arms up." When you raise your arms up, the sleeves get shortened. And then he said, "Eh, it fits you perfectly." This was repeated until we were older and didn't have to wear the same jacket for two or three years.

On the other hand, Vjosa, narrates different experiences regarding the possession of material goods during childhood:

> We would go from Gjakova – we would take buses, trains – to Belgrade to see our father every two to three months. Those were excellent trips. So, we had good memories; they used to buy toys at that time, all things for children. When we went to Belgrade to [visit] our father [who was studying there], we would find many toys waiting for us, many clothes, many things.

Noticing these differences, a methodological question that guided me was how to write about a narrative body that speaks about shared collective intellectual, political, and social endeavours in which the women activists partook, without rendering invisible their personal experiences and the differences that exist between them. This question becomes even more important to me, when I recall Portelli's assessment that "oral history is a science and art of the individual" (1997, p. 57).

He emphasises that the respect for the differences is at the core of the oral history ethics. He notes that what oral history teaches, "is not the abstract importance of the individual proclaimed by liberal competitive capitalism, but the equal rights and the importance of every individual" (p. 58). Following this line of thought, I aim to make visible the multiplicity of women's stories of activism, while at the same time looking at how their experiences intersect within collective struggles.

Generating long accounts of personal memories upon certain historical events, oral history also serves as a practice through which narrators construct their own selves and position those selves in their social milieu. Historian Lynn Abrams considers that this aspect of "self-construction" through storytelling of personal histories constitutes one of the main aspects of oral history methodology. Abrams notes that, "in the oral history context we are especially interested in how the interviewee constructs an identity – or subject position – for him or herself by drawing upon available cultural constructions in the public discourse" (2016, p. 54).

The importance of acknowledging peoples' subjectivities when accounting for a historical event is also emphasised by Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995). Theorising the complexity and ambiguity of historical narratives, he considers that any historical description that does not centre subjective narratives of people who were engaged in a historical event is a partial one. This said, oral history creates a space where people historically neglected in the writings of history can articulate themselves as subjects, "that is, as voices aware of their vocality" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 23).

Often, oral history as a research method that is not dependent on the usage of historical written sources – which most of the time are created by and belong to institutional structures of power – has served as an excavating tool of marginal narratives (Portelli, 1997; Buss, 2017). In this respect, memory and practices of remembering suppressed subjectivities are considered epistemic interventions that create alternative spaces of knowledge production. In Patricia Hill Collins' words, "alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth" (2000, p. 271).

In her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins argues that self-definition as a transformative practice is intrinsically linked to a critical epistemology that originates from narratives that historically have been pushed to the margins of historical records. She considers that the sharing of subversive narratives enables women to "refuse relinquishing control over their self-definitions" (p. 205). The subversive potency of everyday life stories, to a large extent, comes as the result of the reflexive character that the process of remembering the past entails in itself. Feminist scholar Frigga Haug, argues that the recalling of personal memories is not just a mere description of past sequences of life, but a critical scrutinising tool. Using memory-work as a research method that blurs the division between the subject and the object of the scientific inquiry, in *Female Sexualization*, Haug together with "Das Argument Collective" – a feminist journal founded in the late 1950s, through a process of reflection and writing of their memories, used "experience as a basis of knowledge" (1987, p. 34), to investigate how female sexuality is socially

constructed. By doing so, Haug believes that the conventional division between theoretical work and everyday life gets disrupted, leading to a methodology that uses past experiences of women as a basis for the articulation of a feminist critique. She argues that the deliberate story-telling constitutes a practice of "living historically" (p. 50) that enables the narrators to critically analyse the past, with the aim of imagining and creating future change.

Stories of everyday resistance

Coming from a large family, Xhejrane's struggle for gender equality and social justice started early in her youth when confronted with a patriarchal social order in her surroundings. Raised among her sisters without a brother, Xhejrane felt the social pressure that her mother had undergone because she hadn't given birth to a boy. At the end of elementary school, in the 1960s, Xhejrane was faced with obstacles to continue high school. Most of the time, women in her village were supposed to get married early in their youth and the continuation of education was not an option for them.

Recalling her reactions and emotions towards arranged marriages, Xhejrane narrates that back in her adolescence, she always said to herself, "Oh God, when I grow up, do I really have to get married? Should I do nothing else with my life?" This question and her belief that education is a non-negotiable right, pushed Xhejrane to undertake something that was almost unimaginable at that time in her village: to run away from home in order to get enrolled in high school. This is how Xhejrane remembers the night she left behind her family in the village and went alone to the nearest city:

> It was the end of September and I felt a strong desire to go to school. One night, while all my family was sleeping, I woke up from bed, without any money – we never had money in our hands. I only had my school certificate with me. I went straight to the police station in Deçan. It wasn't easy because our village was five or six kilometers away [from Deçan]. I had only one request: I wanted to be educated and my family didn't let me. Some other women also did what I did – three or four women from Podujeva and Prishtina. That's what the newspaper wrote about them. I saw it as a solution, so I did it too. My family's reaction was horrible, but I stayed with my cousin Halil Haxhaj. He had an apartment in Deçan where I stayed for a few days. The institutions dealt with my case; the police banned my family from seeing me. I never saw them, even though they continuously tried to see me. What I had done was a disgrace at that time and my father felt very bad. He felt judged by tradition and other family members. I was considered a stubborn, rebellious girl. What I had done was a shame for the family and the punishment was very harsh. It was a concern for other relatives too. The situation wasn't easy at all, but I would still act the same today. […] It was a surprise that I, a daughter of a villager, went to high school.

In this fragment, Xhejrane articulates her personal struggle for education. She is well aware of the structural obstacles she had to oppose. Her father, her broader family circle, the patriarchal tradition and the class position for Xhejrane were the power structures that impeded her from continuing her education. Nevertheless, what seems significant for me is the fact that Xhejrane also mentions the structures of support and solidarity, such as her cousin and the educational institutions. In her story of resistance, Xhejrane notes that the subversive acts of other women were what encouraged her to seek an education, emphasising the importance of sharing resistance stories among women. In this case, the newspaper served as a medium that encouraged solidarity and support in Xhejrane's village, where these elements were absent.[2]

The subject position of a "rebellious girl" that Xhejrane deploys is also present in the narrative of Nazlie. She narrates an episode from her elementary school days when her "misbehavior" was used as an excuse by state authorities to act against her family:

> On May 25[3], the schools observed a minute of silence. I was in seventh grade, and during a moment of silence it sometimes happened that kids would smile or burst into laughter. On one occasion, I laughed during the minute of silence and couldn't stop. The teachers convened a meeting to condemn me as a counter-revolutionary, a *rebel*, because I did not keep quiet. After that meeting, I was expelled from school. Then after that, they took action against my father who was the head technician of the Ramiz Sadiku health center. They demoted him to a simple technician, and the purge continued, targeting some other family members. This was the first time I experienced the bite of the regime.

In this case what was considered rebellious was defined by state authorities. However, Nazlie also narrates how the position of the rebel was deployed by the youth as a way of identifying with international counterculture movements that emerged in the 1960s and as a political stance against the politics of Milosevic in the former Yugoslavia. She proudly states that she "was a kind of punk girl", recalling the clothes she used to wear as a way of expressing her political discontent. Nazlie's narrative of deploying fashion for political purposes reminds me of Tanisha Ford's (2015) research on politics of style among black feminist activists in the 1960s, in the United States. In her book, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*, Ford argues that during the Black Freedom struggle, black women deliberately incorporated beauty and fashion into their politics as a strategy for claiming visibility. Ford considers that alongside formal politics, nonconforming cultural practices of beauty and fashion were essential to black people's everyday struggle for liberation.

Stories of Shukrije illustrate a kind of resistance that directly confronted the authority of Milosevic's regime in Kosova. Being a political activist, her narratives are full of stories about underground political mobilisation, participation in mass protests and dissemination of political pamphlets. In the beginning of the 1980s,

Shukrije belonged to *Ilegalja*, an umbrella name that refers to the underground resistance movement composed of small groups of political activists, who articulated their discontent about the position of Kosovar Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. It was an *Ilegalja* activist, who with an act of discontent in the students' canteen, triggered the events that then led to the organisation of the massive demonstrations of 1981 (Schwandner-Sievers, 2013; Hetemi, 2020; Krasniqi, 2011, 2021). The demonstrations were violently suppressed, and a large number of Albanian students were imprisoned, including Shukrije. In her more than six-hour-long oral history, Shukrije narrates in detail her attempts to avoid arrest by the Serbian forces. One of her many stories is this one:

> The next day, early in the morning, we went to buy shoes. I made sure the shoes were comfortable so that I could run quickly to avoid the danger. While looking in different shops, my uncle's daughter noticed an agent who was following us. The person selling in the shop had also noticed him so he asked me to go into the changing-room. The shop assistant knew he was one of the notorious agents of UDB [State Security Administration of the former Yugoslavia], so he went to the front of the shop to make sure the agent was leaving. Then he called me and told me, "Fast please, get out through the upper part of the building!" And that's what we did. From there we started running and again from afar, my uncle's daughter saw some other UDB people who were on the move. We managed to get home through the side streets. At that point, we agreed that the danger was imminent and I should do something to avoid arrest.

Shukrije continues her story of resistance, narrating about all her hiding places and her life in illegality. Most of the time, she stayed at the houses of her cousins or with families considered trustworthy by the nationalist movement. Nevertheless, despite her resistance, in 1983 she was arrested and sent to prison. Shukrije narrates many interrogation sequences in prison where she was asked to give information about other people involved in the *Ilegalja* movement and their activities. Recalling those moments, Shukrije emphasises her decision not to reveal any information that could harm her friends or the movement, despite the continuous warning that she would not be allowed to continue her education:

> I had already decided not to talk. Whatever he [the prison interrogator] said, I continued to keep silent. He said, "Do you know what waits for you if you don't cooperate?" I said, "No, I don't know! I know nothing, because I have done nothing!"

The intersection between Albanian struggles for national liberation and women's activism in Kosova is also evident in the narrative of Vjosa. In the early 1990s, alongside Sevdije Ahmeti, a human rights activist and significant figure in the women's movement (Gusia, 2016), Vjosa, co-founded the Center for the Protection of Women and Children. Politically engaged since her youth, throughout her

narrative, Vjosa constructs her life story as a continuous struggle for national and women's liberation. She depicts how, during the 1990s, even ordinary activities, such as reading Albanian literature, attending college, celebrating national holidays, speaking in the native language, or seeking healthcare services were acts of resistance for Albanians in Kosova.

What interests me the most in Vjosa's narrative is her clear articulation of the autonomy of women's rights activism from other organisational structures that operated in Kosova in the 1990s, such as the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) and the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA). Without diminishing the importance of political structures of national resistance, Vjosa is well aware that in many cases male-led structures prioritised general national security at the expense of women's needs. She narrates a moment during her fieldwork as a medical doctor when she resisted to follow the orders of the KLA:

> We went to do fieldwork, for example, and the KLA would stop us: "Where are you going? Let us check the medicines. Who gave you permission to enter our territory?" Once in Malisheva, they stopped us and they would not let us leave. It was the case when the army had intervened in Rahovec and the whole population was leaving; they were going to Malisheva. We had entered Malisheva, we knew where to go and help people. Back then, I was the only one with a car, since I did not want to put other women at risk, but I had an English activist with me. We went to the hospital in Malisheva and practically treated the wounded with the Malisheva hospital director. However, later on, KLA soldiers arrived and without asking who I was, started, "Who has allowed you to enter our territory? Where is your permission from Adem Demaçi?[4] Where is your written permission?" I got very upset and told him, "Go away, I am Vjosa Dobruna, and I will not recognize your legal authority here. This is my place as much as yours. I have as much right as you do, so do not approach me." Even though we delivered some babies, some babies had died, a woman had died … I mean, it was a catastrophic situation, and they came and said, "Who has given you permission to enter?" So, for us as women, there were many doubts.

This passage illustrates that the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, which had the status of an NGO, operated independently from other political structures and clearly focused on the issues of women's rights and women's health. Vjosa notes that male leaders of that time often criticised her, arguing that her work did not contribute to the overall political situation in Kosova. Recalling those moments, Vjosa says, "They [Democratic League of Kosova] did not see it [the activity of Center for the Protection of Women and Children] as valuable. In the beginning, I would go when they called me; then I started to ignore them completely".

During her work as a medical doctor and human rights activist, Vjosa was frequently confronted by Serbian police forces as well. She narrates how the police would raid the offices of the Center for the Protection of Women and Children. In

one instance, she recounts being called to the police station and her courage hinged on a pair of shoes she loved:

> I had a pair of Bruno Magli shoes. I always wanted to buy expensive shoes. Everyone said that when interrogated by the police, besides being beaten, they were also sexually harassed. The first time they sent me to the police station, I was wearing those shoes. I left the police station in the center of Prishtina and walked, looking at my shoes the whole time saying, "Oh, these shoes brought me luck. I will never stop wearing them." Many times, when I talked with the now-deceased Bajram Kelmendi,[5] he told me, "Vjosa, tell me immediately when they call you, do not go to the police without me." And we always laughed when he said, "Are you wearing your Bruno Magli shoes?" I would say, "Yes." "Did they beat you up?" I said, "No, no. I passed this time without sexual harassment. The shoes are bringing me luck." Even when they deported me from Kosova, I wore the same shoes.

Vjosa's almost irrational belief in her shoes as luck-bringing objects reminds me of what Croatian anthropologist Ivana Maček (2009) in her ethnography of Bosnian war, *Sarajevo Under Siege*, refers to as "magical thinking". According to Maček, during wartime, people create all kinds of everyday resistance mechanisms, or personal "magical" routines that help them oppose an objectively unbearable situation.

Women's activism in the 1990s, besides providing basic health services for Albanian women, was also focused on troubling the racialized underpinnings of Milosevic's politics in Kosova (Arsenijevic, 2007; Rexhepi, 2023, p. 23). The ultimate target of the derogatory discourse circulating mainly in the official Serbian media was Albanian women. They were portrayed and perceived as "backward" and without participation in the public sphere. Through Malthusian rhetoric, they were accused of a high natality rate, which was used to justify stigmatising perceptions about Albanians in Kosova. Feminist scholars Nita Luci and Linda Gusia (2015) note that the social agency of Albanian women served the function of countering the stereotypical propaganda of Milosevic's media. Depicting the work of Sevdije Ahmeti, they write:

> Sevdije Ahmeti remembers the anger she felt for the ways that Yugoslav and international media represented Kosovar women: "they created new stereotypes about Albanian women as Muslims, birthing machines who did not know anything except how to be submissive to the family, [they were] basically uneducated slaves." Countering the negative stereotypes produced in the Yugoslav media and, additionally, showing the world that Albanian women had social agency, was one of the main objectives of the Independent Women's Association. (p. 202)

In this sense, the public visibility of women in street demonstrations and their civic engagements countered the stereotypical figure of oppressed Albanian women. One of the most important events that signified women's social agency was the march,

"Bread for Drenica" where around 12,000 women marched, carrying loaves of bread in their hands, as a form of protest against the military siege in the region of Drenica, one of the most war-torn regions of the country (Clark, 2000, p. 175). Before this demonstration, women activists had protested in front of the US Information Office against the violation of human rights in Kosova. These demonstrations were widely covered by international media platforms and played a significant role in countering the stereotypical discourse propagandised by the regime's media.

Conclusion

During the 1980s and 1990s, women's civic and political activism in Kosova was manifold and part of different local, national and regional geographies. Women activists were engaged in literacy campaigns in rural areas, addressing women's health issues, participating in the campaign for blood reconciliation, joining movements for national liberation, contributing to and armed resistance against Milosevic's regime and forming regional feminist solidarities. Throughout this period, through their collective activist engagements, women created new spaces where they publicly articulated their political and social agency.

Nevertheless, after the war, mainstream practices of remembrance have not accounted for the role and contribution of women activists in different struggles for national liberation and human and civil rights. In this respect, life stories of women activists found in this chapter recover a history of women's subjectivities and indicate the absence of women's voices in conversations about the national past. Analysing their narratives, I have sought to understand the intersection between their activisms and broader historical events in the late twentieth century Kosova. I think of this chapter as an exercise in "epistemic disobedience"; that is, as "dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories" (Mignolo, 2011). In this sense, the life narratives of these women challenge the totalising and homogenising tendencies of mainstream historical accounts in Kosova. They leave room for contradictions, nuances, combination, and articulate a "promise of a future world that resided in waywardness and the refusal to be governed" (Hartman, 2019). Serving as "bearers of living memories" (Chivallon, 2016, p. 67), through their stories of resistance, women activists disrupt the discursive authority of official narratives that centre only the male heroic figure.

Through their life narratives, Xhejrane, Nazlie, Shukrije and Vjosa indicate that their subject positions are multiple and contextual. Recalling their memories of childhood, youth, activism and professional life, they reflect on the structural obstacles they faced in their everyday life, and construct themselves as subversive actors in their day-to-day relationships. They self-identify as rebellious, militants of collective cause, or as women's rights activists. All the same, they recognise the oppressive power structures that intersect through their daily lives. Refusing to tell linear, reductive narratives of triumph, they do not shy away from stories about patriarchal family members, sexual harassment or fearful police interrogation. By doing justice to their real lived experiences, they narrate the moments of subject-making in all their complexity and ambiguities.

Xhejrane presents herself as the young girl who rebelled against the oppressive traditional norms in her family and village community. Her determination to seek an education defines her as a fighter for emancipation who is now committed to working as a women's rights activist. Nazlie's story shows that through her unintentional act of laughing, she became a denunciator of the repressive state regime. Shukrije's prison stories emphasise her militant commitment to her fellow anti-regime activists and the collective cause. Vjosa foremostly positions herself as a women's rights activist. For her, her duty in service to women is as legitimate and significant as any national cause.

Stories of resistance of women activists constitute counter-memories to the post-war male-dominated construction of historical narratives and racist tropes of the regime's discourse in former Yugoslavia. Troubling these dominant narratives, they create what anthropologist Marie-Aude Fouéré calls a continuous "process of archive making" (2016, p. 84) – a discursive collective space that explores the history of the 1980s and 1990s in Kosova through the multiplicity of everyday lived experiences of women activists.

Notes

1 The four oral histories on which I focus were conducted between July 2012 and March 2015. Their lengths range from 54 to 388 minutes. I joined the Oral History Kosovo team during the 2015–2016 period, hence most of the interviews with women activists that I use in this chapter were conducted without my participation. My work at Oral History Kosovo mostly focused on the blood feuds reconciliation campaign. However, I also contributed to transcribing some of the women activists' oral histories, including parts of Shukrije's life story.

2 In Xhejrane's case, the police served as a supportive structure that countered the patriarchal authority of her family. Nevertheless, other women's stories, who were not supported and protected by the justice system (Marku, 2016), show that Xhejrane's case is not representative of the relationship between women's security and state institutions in Kosova today. Anthropologist Eli Krasniqi (2014) argues that in the post-war period, despite significant changes made in the legislation for gender equality, patriarchal practices are still well ingrained in the justice system. Analyzing cases of divorce, gender-based violence and inheritance, Krasniqi emphasises that state mechanisms called to protect women, often, reproduce existing patriarchal structures in the name of preserving traditional family values.

3 After Tito's death, on 4 May, 1980, schools throughout Yugoslavia observed a minute of silence every year on the anniversary of his death. Here, Nazlie mistakenly confuses May 25, the Day of Youth in Yugoslavia, for Tito's day of death.

4 During 1998–1999, Adem Demaçi (1936–2018) served as the general political representative of the KLA. He was one of the most well-known political activists for national liberation and a defender of human rights. He endured 28 years of imprisonment for his political activity. In 1991, he was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

5 Bajram Kelmendi was an Albanian lawyer, human rights activist, and one of the founders of the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina. In 1998, he filed charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia against

Slobodan Milosevič for war crimes committed in Kosova. In 1999, Kelmendi and his two sons were arrested by the Serbian police at his house, and the next day they were found executed in Prishtina.

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3 How women KLA combatants complicated notions of patriarchy and masculinity[1]

Adem Ferizaj

Introduction

When Western media write about women guerrillas and/or women combatants, an admiring but also Orientalist tone prevails towards these usually non-European subjects. A recent example of this is the media coverage of Kurdish women fighting against the "Islamic State" (Dewan & Balkiz, 2017; Joignot, 2017; Meffert, 2016). Referring to the case of Kurdish women fighters, Dilar Dirik deconstructs this Eurocentric approach by highlighting three points. Firstly, Western media presented women combatants as a new phenomenon, even though women's participation in the war is a constant element of the Kurdish struggle. Secondly, these Western discourses have exercised epistemic violence by using empty signifiers of white feminism like "empowerment" or "agency" in relation to Kurdish women. Thirdly, the mediatisation of Kurdish women combatants has led to increased political support for this struggle by the West through Europeanising their struggle. In other words, those women subjects have been temporarily "liberated" from non-modern representation at the expense of being used as white feminism's projection screen for "progress" in "Oriental" geopolitical cartographies (Dirik, 2014; for the argument on the Europeanisation of non-Western subjects see Rexhepi, 2016, p. 32).

Women combatants of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army or *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*) were barely mediatised in local and international media during the Kosovo War in the 1990s.[2] However, they formed, for instance, the brigade "The Girls with Red Ribbons" (*Vajzat me kordele të kuqe*) under the leadership of Xhevë Lladrovci.[3] According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the KLA had a total of 25,723 combatants, of whom 3.33%, or 857 combatants, were women (cited in Duclos, 2000). These figures should be treated with caution for they are exaggerated for at least two reasons: on the one hand, even KLA veterans consider these figures "to be inflated" based on their subjective war experience (Ströhle, 2010, p. 481). On the other hand, IOM did not distinguish between members of the KLA and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (FARK or *Forcat e Armatosura të Republikës së Kosovës*),[4] another armed group on the Albanian side during the Kosovo War (Ströhle, 2013, p. 260).

Between October and December 2016, I conducted seven in-depth interviews with former women combatants and two interviews with former male combatants.

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This limited number of interviewees is a consequence of the Kosovar post-war context that generally stigmatises women combatants, renders them invisible in public debates and consequently makes most of them reluctant to speak to researchers about their past. Therefore, I conducted life-time narratives in Albanian to gain a better understanding of the combatants' war-related activities – a method that is in line with recent academic findings in similar situations (McNeill & Douglas, 2017, p. 6; Pretto, 2011, p. 71). Considering these circumstances, another important methodological aspect was to preserve the anonymity of the respondents to reduce their possible self-censorship (Wiles et al., 2008, p. 417). My positionality as a male researcher comes with certain privileges that should be disclosed in a work, where gender-based stigmatisation was a major methodological obstacle. During the research process, I sometimes felt uncomfortable creating academic knowledge from the lived experiences of women combatants whose post-war veteran status is mainly characterised by the suppression of their war contribution. Even though I was aware of my uneasy positionality to research this topic, hardly anything was written about Kosovo-Albanian women combatants. My decision to nevertheless deal with this topic was primarily motivated to counteract the erasure of these women from Kosovo's recent history.

One of the few scholarly articles on women KLA combatants is by Virginia Stephens, who argues that the post-war silence about women combatants was "a deliberate choice of silencing that reinforces patriarchal gender relations and roles" (2014, p. 127). My interviews with KLA women veterans confirm this process of silencing in the post-war period. More insights on this topic are to come in the following years. For instance, Drivalda Delia is currently doing a PhD on this topic at the University of Regensburg under the following working title: "Transformative Politics in a Highly Militarised Environment? Girls' and Women Participation in the Kosovo Liberation Army". From my research, it appears that the role of the women KLA combatants was very diverse. There were combatants on the first front and guards, but also women who gathered strategic military information and military doctors – and many other tasks. One of the main arguments of this chapter is therefore that the KLA has not assigned a precise function to women as the "other" gender, although this has been the case in some guerrilla armies in recent decades (Alison, 2004, p. 457; Gayer, 2012, p. 7; Lacroix, 2011, p. 7). Although the presence of women combatants has sometimes challenged the patriarchal mindset within the KLA, this attitude has been omnipresent in the guerrilla army throughout the war. Thus, Xhevë Lladrovci was only the leader of the brigade "The Girls with Red Ribbons" and not a commander, as was the case with the leadership positions of other units.[5] On the question of what motivated these women to join the KLA, three hypotheses can be derived from my research: firstly, the participation in the Kosovo War can be considered as a continuation of political engagement by other means. Secondly, the involvement in the war seems to be a direct reaction to the systematic killings by the Yugoslav-Serbian colonial regime in the 1990s. Thirdly, partaking was sometimes forced by circumstances – for example, the impossibility to escape. In these cases, one could speak of involuntary decisions.

Another argument of this chapter is that colonial violence of the Serbian regime in Kosovo in the 1990s has led to a more flexible understanding of masculinities

and femininities among the oppressed. Although misogynistic prejudices were widespread in the guerrilla army during the war, the very fact that women KLA combatants fought like their male counterparts on the front lines illustrates this social dynamic. This hypothesis is in line with postcolonial knowledge productions, especially decolonial feminisms (Bouteldja, 2016; Connell, 2016; El-Tayeb, 2011, 2014; Lugones, 2008; Oyěwùmí, 1997). These approaches distance themselves from applying Eurocentric concepts to non-Western contexts to avoid "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 1988, p. 279). In other words, this chapter seeks to answer the following two questions: What role did Serbian colonial violence in the 1990s in Kosovo play in shaping gendered Albanian identities? How to theorise Albanian women as colonised subjects in the former Yugoslavia while considering the local Albanian patriarchal system? This framing is particularly useful in the Albanian case where gender dynamics cannot be fully grasped by only considering patriarchy without contextualising the position of Albanian societies[6] within the current geopolitical system. In the Kosovo of the 1990s, Serbian colonial violence had a profound impact on the gendered relations of the oppressed bodies. The Reconciliation Movement (*Pajtimi i gjaqeve*) from 1990 to 1992 was such a direct consequence of colonial oppression. It called on Albanian families to reconcile with other families in order to resist Serbian colonial violence and had a significant impact on Albanian masculinities in particular (Luci, 2011, pp. 78–81). According to Luci, a new axis in gender relations was added in the 1990s in Kosovo. Albanian masculinities were constructed not only against Albanian femininities, but also against the oppressive colonial system in place (2011, pp. 78–81).

In the post-war period, there is a silence in public discourse about women KLA combatants, which indicates a certain social stigmatisation attached to them, although their male counterparts were hailed after the war. The different treatment of KLA veterans based on their gender identity is evident and points to a stabilisation of patriarchal norms in the post-war period.

In the first part of this chapter, I refer to the case of women KLA combatants to present the advantages of a decolonial analysis of Albanian patriarchy in comparison to Eurocentric approaches. In the second part, the specificities of Kosovo-Albanian gender relations in the 1990s will be elaborated. In the third part, the role of KLA women combatants will be analysed.

The importance of decolonial feminism in the Albanian context

> Violence and women: the subject is gloomy, challenging for those who work on it. It is full of pitfalls because it is easily diffused into a large number of unquestioned commonplaces, firmly rooted stereotypes, and it also arouses real feelings of disgust or fascination, which are difficult to sort out.
>
> (Dauphin & Farge, 1997, p. 11)

In the academic discipline of international relations (IR), three feminist currents can be distinguished: liberal feminism, standpoint feminism and post-structural feminism (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, pp. 44–45). They all are part of critical security studies, a more alternative approach to matters of security in IR.

The main difference with the more traditional strands of IR is that security studies are not exclusively state-centred, that is they go beyond "typical" actors in IR like international organisations, state institutions or politicians. Critical security studies consider more destabilising factors through *broadening* (for instance, environmental, economic, and political matters) and *deepening* (for example, institutional, individual, and biospheric aspects) (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, pp. 2–5). To date, there is no consensus on what a "critical" approach to gender inequality in IR should look like (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, p. 33). The only thing all three feminist currents agree on is "that research in security has been overwhelmingly the study of men by men" (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, p. 35).

For Cynthia Enloe, the main aim of liberal feminism is to make women visible in international security issues where they have traditionally been considered irrelevant (Enloe, 2000, p. 1). If one were to look at sex-workers at military bases, liberal feminism would be interested in understanding their actual activities ignoring the structural dimensions related to the subjects studied. When it comes to standpoint feminism, the work of Ann Tickner is indispensable. Her approach differs from Enloe's in that it challenges the positivist worldview of liberal feminism (Tickner, 1992, p. 5). Tickner is interested in understanding "how the discipline of international relations might look if gender were included as a category of analysis and if women's experiences were part of the subject matter out of which its theories are constructed" (1992, p. 5). Going back to the example of sex-workers at military bases, standpoint feminism would theorise these experiences in such a way that new IR concepts would emerge. Post-structural feminism criticises both liberal and standpoint feminism "for essentialising and universalising the 'women' subject, and calls for a politicisation of all claims made in the name of gendered difference" (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, p. 45). Post-structural feminism, whose leading scholar in feminist IR perspectives is Spike V. Peterson, assumes that there are no men and no women, but only notions of masculinities and femininities, based on which gender identities are created (1992, p. 12). By focusing on ontological and epistemological processes, Peterson explains the post-structuralist approach to gender as "feminism [that] is not just about 'women,' nor the addition of women to male-stream constructions; it is about transforming ways of being and knowing" (1992, p. 20).

Rebecca Grant, who has analysed the role of the women combatant from a post-structuralist perspective, argues that "the gap between gender issues and the study of security is still wide" (1992, p. 87). Women combatants are the best example of the "oxymoronic" relationship between feminism and IR. In Grant's words, "it [women war experience] breaks down the cherished stereotype of the 'beautiful soul'. It also undercuts, however, the idea that for women, the experience of war is essentially and irrevocably different from that of men" (1992, p. 91). Put differently, one can argue that the lived experiences of women combatants have many similarities with male combatants. And if this were to be the case, the question would arise whether it is possible to develop an epistemology of the women combatant? To this day, there is no such epistemology (Grant, 1992, pp. 89–93).

Although these feminist currents address different aspects of structural patriarchal oppression in the realm of IR, all three have in common that they formulate their critique in a Eurocentric way. Liberal, standpoint and post-structural feminism, for instance, all accept the gender binary as an (a)-historical fact (Peterson, 1992, p. 12). It can be argued that this is a very Eurocentric hypothesis, for it ignores the hypothesis that some communities only adopted a hierarchical system of gender relations due to European colonialism (Lugones, 2008, p. 2).[7] This example shows that feminist approaches to IR base their epistemology on Western social experiences. Furthermore, the texts analysed do not directly address the epistemological differences between social concepts that might result from considering Western and non-Western specificities. Therefore, decolonial feminist approaches are necessary for an epistemological and ontological theorisation that goes beyond Western gender relations.

In other words, the first trap that exists in academic works on women guerrilla combatants is the question of which theoretical framework to use. The application of a Eurocentric concept can exert epistemic violence because when one talks about guerrilla armies, i.e., freedom-fighting military formations of colonised peoples, one is dealing with non-Western contexts (Spivak, 1988, p. 279). The main research question here is therefore how the Balkans can be theorised from a decolonial perspective. Tailored to this chapter, it would be: How to theorise Albanian women as colonised subjects in the former Yugoslavia beyond the local Albanian patriarchal system?

Explaining how Western knowledge productions on the Orient are based on preconceived stereotypes, Edward Said has argued that such a discourse is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (2003, p. 3). Although Maria Todorova is hesitant to apply Said's Orientalism to the Balkans, she acknowledges that stereotypes on the Balkans with Orientalist features exist in Western discourses about the region, which she calls "Balkanism" (2009, p. 20). According to Piro Rexhepi, the reasons why Todorova does not consider the Balkans from a postcolonial perspective – that is that the region is inhabited by predominantly Christian populations and that there was no complicity in European colonial aspirations of the region – are simplistic and disregard two main aspects: "How did the Balkans become predominantly Christian and how do we account for colonial legacies such as the Hapsburg one in Bosnia-Herzegovina?" (2018, p. 3). With regards to this chapter, the same questions can be asked for the "settler colonisation of Kosovo by the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes after the Balkan Wars" that resulted in "what Jovanović calls the Serb post-Ottoman 'Reconquista' (2015, 95) colonisation of Kosovo" (Rexhepi, 2022, p. 14). Enis Sulstarova, who has demonstrated that an Albanian variant of Orientalism exists, confirms Rexhepi's argument. Sulstarova points out that the West and the Orient are presented in Albanian discourses in a mutually exclusive way – the West as paradise, progress and ideal scenario for Albanian society, while the Orient is presented as hell, barbarity and worst possible scenario for Albanian society (2013, p. 9).

The binary between the West and the Orient also exists in feminist knowledge productions. Maria Lugones has analysed this relationship under the concept of "Coloniality of Gender", which she defines as "the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system in subjecting us – both women and men of colour – in all domains of existence" (2008, p. 1). Lugones' concept can be considered in conversation with Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, known for coining the influential concept of intersectionality (1989, 1991), in the sense that Lugones also distances herself from conventional feminism, often referred to as white feminism: "white bourgeois feminists theorised white womanhood as if all women were white […] That is, they did not understand themselves in intersectional terms, at the intersection of race, gender, and other forceful marks of subjection or domination" (2008, p. 13). Therefore, she wonders if there is such a thing as "sisterhood" between white and non-white women (Lugones, 2008, p. 13).

From Fatima El-Tayeb's work on how the European Union (EU) deals with marginalised identities, Muslims in this case, one can at least surmise that Albanians, as a Muslim-majority population, are not unambiguously acknowledged as white (2014, pp. 9–11). Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmî, too, doubts that patriarchy can be considered a transcultural universal system (1997, p. 20). According to Oyěwùmî, European colonialism used gender as an instrument to dominate colonised subjects – women became "those who do not have a penis", "those who do not have power" and "those who cannot participate in the public arena" (1997, p. 34). Therefore, "what women *are not* defines them as women, while the male is assumed to be the norm" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 34 emphasis in original). Oyěwùmî highlights that this gender hierarchy was not characteristic of the Yoruba people before the beginning of European colonialism (1997, p. 34). Against the backdrop of this scholarly debate, Raewyn Connell, for example, has reformulated the concept of hegemonic masculinities, and the conclusions are in line with the principles of decolonial feminisms (2016, p. 306). This researcher has pointed out that hegemonic masculinities have been predominantly theorised in Western socio-political contexts and the existence of different hierarchies of masculinities cannot be disconnected from the way coloniality functions globally (Connell, 2016, p. 303).

For this reason, when analysing a socio-political phenomenon in Kosovo in the 1990s, where Serbian colonialism was omnipresent, it is not enough from a feminist perspective to refer to Eurocentric approaches, which considers patriarchy as the primary source of women's oppression. In such a context, a concept must be used that at least includes colonial violence in its critique of patriarchy. If this is not done, it becomes difficult to grasp anti-colonial, or counter-hegemonic, actions of women combatants of the KLA in its entirety.

Gender dynamics in Kosovo in the 1990s

In academic knowledge productions on Kosovo during Yugoslavia, the gender aspect is only dealt with in a few papers. A positive exception is Elife Krasniqi's article examining the roles of women in *Ilegalja*, the Albanian movement that sought to liberate Kosovo from Yugoslav colonialism after 1945. Her approach could be

described as intersectional, as she analyses not only the gender dimension but also the racial dimension by focusing on the lived experiences of oppressed Albanian women under the Yugoslav colonial regime (for the racialisation of Albanianness, see Rexhepi, 2022). On the one hand, Krasniqi points to the patriarchal oppression to which the women members of *Ilegalja* were subjected: "Being a woman and activist of Ilegalja was not an easy position in a patriarchal society as there was social prize to pay which mainly was the stigmatisation from the society" (2011, pp. 105–106). On the other hand, she highlights aspects of the political oppression for these racialised women – "the fear that everyone you meet could be a spy of UDB [Yugoslav State Security Administration]" (Krasniqi, 2011, p. 106). Through the case of Shukrie Gashi, a former *Ilegalja* activist of the 1980s to 1990s and a former political prisoner, Krasniqi demonstrates how these two discriminations reinforced each other:

> After she was released from prison, many companies to which she applied for jobs closed the door to her saying they would not have a job for her. Some feared the trouble by the state if they would hire her and some simply believed that she was a state enemy. Some of the professors at the faculty refused to let her sit in the exam. Only a few friends dared to talk to her and visit her at her house as it was under police surveillance all the time.
>
> (2011, p. 110)

Krasniqi's work makes it clear that "typical" gender oppression, where patriarchal oppression is the primary source of discrimination, is not the only gendered injustice experienced by women political activists in colonised contexts. This observation also applies to women combatants of the KLA.

Another insight emerging from Krasniqi's study is that no women joined *Ilegalja* for purely "feminist" reasons (2011, pp. 99–111). At the same time, this is not to mean that gender inequality was not a motivation for becoming a member of *Ilegalja*. From the year 1980, the emancipation of Albanian women was an integral part of the movement's programme. Shukrie Gashi, an activist of this movement who was imprisoned for political reasons, formulated the *Ilegalja* agenda as "gender equality through national liberation" (Krasniqi, 2011, p. 108). Another activist Safete Rogova explained that "[w]e were led by a larger cause, we got aware and we asked for our rights and gender issue was in the second plan" (as cited in Krasniqi, 2011, p. 108). Krasniqi concludes that "the fact that these women had the courage not to follow the unwritten rules that confined women to the inside walls of the house, demonstrates their gender awareness as well" (2011, p. 108).

Gender inequality shaped Kosovar society in the 1990s. A feminist consciousness was also present among the political activists, but one must consider other discriminatory factors besides gender to make this visible. This particularity can be explained as follows: in contrast to Western contexts, Albanian discourses in Kosovo in the 1990s revolved mainly around Serbian colonial oppression. Therefore, an awareness of gender oppression was not verbalised, although it was present. In other words, if only the gender aspects of the women KLA combatants

are examined, there is a risk that the results will not be conclusive. Julie Mertus' work on the roles of Albanian women in Kosovo during the 1990s is a case in point in this regard. When she asked her interviewees about the gender-specific problems they faced as women, "the usual initial response is one of confused and embarrassed laughter: 'No one asked that before'" (Mertus, 1996, p. 270). On the one hand, this could mean that the interviewee actually did not consider the gender aspect of her political activity. On the other hand, this could mean that the respondent was aware of the gender dynamics but was only confused by the researcher's gender-identity-focused wording, as this framing was not very common in Kosovo's political vocabulary in the 1990s.

Nita Luci presents Albanian masculinities in a binary fashion – men who invest in tradition, nation and family, versus "modern" men who do not identify with these values (2011, pp. 78–81). According to her, due to Serbian colonial violence in Kosovo, the apartheid system of the 1990s added a new axis in gender relations in the sense that Albanian masculinities were constructed not only against Albanian femininities, but now also against the apartheid system (Luci, 2011, pp. 78–81).[8] This "new" attitude was most evident in the Reconciliation Movement (*Pajtimi i gjaqeve*) from 1990 to 1992, which called on Albanian families to reconcile with other families in order to resist Serbian colonial violence (Luci, 2011, pp. 78–81). Luci explains this by pointing out that "paradoxically, traditional values would eradicate Kosovo-Albanian backwardness and initiate the cultural return to Europe" (2011, p. 79). In doing so, Luci refers to discursive "rules" as theorised in Sulstarova's Albanian Orientalism (2013) and creates a binary between the West ("the cultural return to Europe") and the Orient ("traditional values" and "Kosovo-Albanian backwardness") (2011, p. 79).

Even though Luci's theoretical framework can be considered problematic due to the reproduction of Albanian Orientalism, her work helps in concretising a concept for women combatants for the KLA. What becomes apparent in Luci's article is that Kosovo-Albanian masculinities were able to adapt to the circumstances of the 1990s by drawing on traditional values and not trying to imitate a Western ideal. The flexibility of these masculinities could be theorised as counter-hegemonic in the sense that it breaks down the conventional wisdom that (white) masculinities are the eternal enemy of femininities or of those gender identity formations that contradict the hegemonic perception of how men should be.

The apartheid system in Kosovo caused by Serbian colonial violence not only had an impact on Albanian masculinities, but also made Albanian femininities more flexible. Women, for example, were the first to express their dissatisfaction with Ibrahim Rugova's policy of peaceful resistance in 1996 (Clark, 2000, p. 148). During this period, women also became more visible in politics – the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK, *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*), for instance, established the "LDK Women's Forum". According to Mertus, the main aim of these measures was "to present a positive view of Albanian women to the outside world and to suppress negative views" (1996, p. 268). Theorising both the political and social extreme situation in Kosovo during the 1990s, one can speak of a reconfiguration

of gender relations, in which notions of masculinity and femininity were made more flexible.

In terms of gender-specific dynamics, Howard Clark points out the social differences between Prishtina and peripheral regions by arguing that the roles of women tended to be "pushed into service roles", including "a turn towards Muslim schools and hence traditions" (2000, p. 146). Mertus agrees with this urban–rural divide but highlights that the racialised representation of rural Albanian femininities were already present in Yugoslav media even before the 1990s, where "Albanian woman [were portrayed] as the illiterate village woman in traditional Muslim dress, encircled by a dozen children and imprisoned by a brick wall" (1996, p. 266). Although Islamophobia is not directly analysed in either work, they add that it formed an important aspect in the gender relations of the time. In Kosovo in the 1990s, not only colonial and patriarchal oppression prevailed, but class discrimination also affected gender.

The role of women combatants of the KLA

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, women's participation in warfare has been a constant element of anti-colonial struggles of oppressed peoples. This argument also applies to the Albanian one. Probably, the most known Albanian women combatant is the Kaçak leader Shote Galica (1895–1927), who fought against Serbian colonial occupation for 12 years. After the death of her husband Azem Galica, who also was a leader of this movement, she continued the fight and recruited other women in the armed struggle (Farnsworth, 2008, p. 12). This also means that Shote Galica was not the only women Albanian freedom fighter at the beginning of the twentieth century.[9]

Many local women fought against the occupation of Albania by fascist Italy in 1939. The anti-fascist combatant Margarita Tutulani (1925–1943) became a folk heroine in communist Albania (Elsie, 2012, p. 452). After the Italian colonial regime killed Tutulani, the published photos of her mutilated body shocked the Albanian public and motivated many other women to join the anti-fascist resistance (Elsie, 2012, p. 452). The 1979 movie *The Girls with Red Ribbons* (*Vajzat me kordele të kuqe*) by Gëzim Erebara tells the story of these young women by focussing on Jeta, a schoolgirl who rebels with her friends against the Italian fascist high school. The KLA also had an all-women brigade called "The Girls with Red Ribbons".[10] This is no coincidence, as many leaders of the Kosovo-Albanian guerrilla army saw their war as a continuation of the partisan war against the fascists in World War II (Hamza, 2015, p. 170).

From my research, it appears that most of the women KLA combatants were recruited from Kosovo, with only a small number coming from the Albanian diaspora. Based on the interviews with women veterans, three reasons can be given for joining the KLA. The first motivation to become a KLA combatant was to continue political activism by other means. This was the case for all interviewees who were older than 20 at the time of the war. They all were politically active in the Kosovo-Albanian liberation struggle the years before the war.

One such women combatant grew up in Vushtrri. She was the daughter of two intellectuals and only 16 years old, "when the miners of Trepça demonstrated, when the Serbian regime poisoned the canteens of Albanian schools, when Slobodan Milošević came to power".[11] This woman was in Switzerland when the KLA went public in 1997. Through one of her professors, she got in contact with the KLA fund "The Homeland Calling" ("Vendlindja thërret") and travelled back to Kosovo to join the Kosovo-Albanian guerrilla army.[12] Another woman fighter from the village of Carrabregu i Poshtëm near Deçan had been politically active since 1989. As the daughter of a worker, she considered her participation in the war of liberation as "the logical continuation of her earlier political activity".[13] Moreover, she had been convinced since 1989 that:

> Armed struggle was the only way to free Kosovo from the Serbian regime of violence because living under this apartheid system basically meant being sentenced to death, regardless of what one had done. The 90s were the decade when the Serbs poisoned Albanian schoolchildren, when there was no more security for us. For example, one of my friends from my class, Mentor Tolaj, was killed on his way to school on 17 May 1991.[14]

Another guerrilla who joined the KLA was the daughter of a miner and came from Prishtina:

> Growing up in the 80s and 90s was difficult: Serbian repression, apartheid system. This meant that I did not have a childhood in the classical sense. My youth was political activity. Although this kind of activity was not typical for a young person, I liked it very much because the ideal was very high: to stand up for your people, for your nation.[15]

The woman from Prishtina added another aspect that proves the continuation of Serbian colonial violence against Albanians: 16 of her family members were killed by Serbian troops in 1921, only her grandfather survived the massacre.[16] She was one of the few women combatants who joined the KLA without the support of her parents. She justified her parents' refusal with the fact that the KLA was still operating covertly at that time.[17] Another women combatant from the village of Rastavica near Deçan started her political activity in 1981. Therefore, she considered her participation in armed struggle as "inevitable".[18]

The second motivation for women combatants to join the KLA seems to be a direct result of Serbian colonial crimes in Kosovo in the late 1990s. This is especially true for the women interviewed who were younger than 20 during the war period. One such case is the daughter of a peasant from the village of Kodrali near Deçan, who was only 17 years old when she became a KLA fighter:

> The desire and will motivated me to get closer to my goal, my ideal to help the soldiers to free them from the oppressors. At that time, I was an intern [at the

> hospital] and the feeling of humanism drove me. I realised that I had the opportunity and the professional skills to help when it was most needed.
>
> (Zgjimi, 2000)

The parents of the 17-year-old supported her decision. Another woman combatant from Gjakova was only 16 years old when she became part of the KLA. Her father was a graphic designer, and her mother was a worker. She recalled that as a schoolchild, “it happened very often that Serbian soldiers circled her at checkpoints and sexually harassed her”.[19] With her friends at school, she talked about the political situation, not about homework:

> One day, I saw a KLA women combatant on television and that gave me the idea to become one of them. After the broadcast, I told my parents about my decision, but on the one hand they didn’t take me seriously. On the other hand, they were also against my decision.[20]

Her father was worried that his daughter might “disturb” the combatants in their work. This reaction is an expression of the firmly rooted patriarchal stereotype that women are not suited for war. In spring 1998, she left a letter to her parents and joined the KLA without asking their permission. Her disappearance led to rumours such as: “She did not become a fighter, but a man who loved her ‘stole’ her so that they could live together”.[21] This example shows how patriarchal oppression can complicate the decision of a woman who wants to become a combatant. Another women combatant who had grown up in Germany returned to Kosovo with her entire family of six to help the KLA after the massacre of the Jashari family on 5 March 1998.[22] She was only 14 years old when she joined the KLA together with her father. In the interview, she highlighted her close relationship with her father and said that one reason for her to become part of the KLA was to please him.[23] Because of her age, not all combatants appreciated the fact that a 14-year-old girl was fighting with them.[24] Another case is the participation of Mervete Maksutaj, who became a combatant to avenge her brother who was killed by the Serbian regime (Radio Televizioni i Kosovës (RTK), 2015). She died at the age of 20 in a symbolic action avenging the murder of her brother at the hospital in Peja, where a memorial sign was erected for her.

The final motivation for partaking in the war seems to have been the lack of a precise motivation. A typical case was that escape was no longer possible and the person was put in a position to participate in the war. A women KLA combatant interviewed said she had met several women combatants who happened to be in that situation.[25]

One of the findings from this research is that the role of women combatants was not precisely defined by the KLA leadership. Therefore, the role of women combatants was very diverse: They fought at the front, guarded, transported weapons, gathered military strategic information or nursed wounded soldiers. The lack of conceptualising the role of women combatants in the guerrilla strategy

of the KLA was also consistent with my interviewees, as the women combatants themselves refused to consider women as a separate group within the KLA.

Although it has been argued that notions of masculinities and femininities became more flexible in Kosovo in the 1990s, one of the conclusions from the interviews is that a patriarchal mentality was still pervasive within the KLA. Misogynist prejudices like "women are not fit for war" or "there were no women combatants, only whores", which are still widespread after the war, illustrate this. Another example is Xhevë Lladrovci, who only was leader of the "The Girls with Red Ribbons", but not commander like the male leaders of other brigades.[26] This gender-specific discriminatory way of thinking also meant that women combatants were not able to show their full potential as soldiers during the war.[27]

One women combatant who helped in artillery in the Pashtrik zone highlighted that there were hardly any gender differences in the treatment of the soldiers: "We received the same military training, carried ammunition like them [the men] and shot like them. The only difference was that all women received first aid training, regardless of their will".[28] Another women combatant who gathered strategic military information in the Dukagjin region told that "women combatants were very respected by their colleagues, but in the beginning, there were prejudices like 'women are far too fragile to partake in war.'"[29] Women were much less likely to desert than men.[30] However, the women interviewed did not offer any explanation as to why this was the case. Another women combatant who fought on the first front during the war – besides guard duty, caring for injured fighters and gathering strategic military intelligence – noticed a certain kind of masculine jealousy towards women who were better soldiers than men.[31] In these cases, envious men often tried to prevent military activities by women by pointing to the patriarchal social role of men as protectors of women.[32] One woman combatant interviewed, who was a military doctor during the war, pointed out that many women were nurses for soldiers without officially being KLA members – including tasks such as washing clothes, preparing food and organisation of blood donations.[33] This was confirmed by another interviewee.[34] After the war, these women were not considered war veterans in most cases.

The all-women brigade "The Girls with Red Ribbons" was founded in a village next to Drenas in 1998.[35] At the beginning, they did not participate in fights, but were merely a training group. The leader of the "The Girls with Red Ribbons" was initially Xhevë Lladrovci, as one of the respondents told. She remembered that:

> Later, a group of "The Girls with Red Ribbons" was formed in the region of Dukagjin. If I recall correctly, 15 women belonged to this group, but only 3 of them actively participated in military action. Eventually, the "The Girls with Red Ribbons" joined the brigade 132.[36]

Every member of the "The Girls with Red Ribbons" had a Kalashnikov and two bombs with them. One of them also was Mervete Maksutaj.[37] Another member of this all-women brigade pointed out "what a motivating effect their daily marching song had on the population".[38] At one point in 1999, there were many "Girls with

Red Ribbons" and most of them had short hair.[39] When she thought back to that time, the veteran really did not understand why so little was said about the women KLA combatants after the war.[40]

The patriarchal mindset within the Kosovo-Albanian guerrilla army was omnipresent throughout the war and one of its most brutal results was sexual violence to which women combatants were subjected. On this issue, one women interviewee, who was a soldier, nurse, weapon transporter, and guard, commented as follows:

> One of the commanders wanted to sleep with me, but I refused. The next day, in front of all the soldiers, he asked me to make him coffee. I refused again because serving coffee is not a military order. Then this commander punished me by making me transport weapons and dig holes for our snipers.[41]

After this experience, this women combatant never slept without a gun under her pillow again, and the decision to keep her hair short also served to avoid sexual harassment. As for the atmosphere between women combatants, she said that there were women combatants in her brigade who made jokes behind the backs of other women combatants. The story with the coffee did not only happen to her, but also to many other women who, unlike her, carried out this "mission". When asked about the role of women combatants of the KLA, she answered with an anecdote:

> When Xhevë Lladrovci and Fehmi Lladrovci were killed, another women combatant was also killed, but no one knows her today. It is interesting that society chose the married woman as a war heroine and erased the unmarried one from memory.[42]

She has also found that "many women veterans are too modest when they talk about their past as fighters".[43] While their male counterparts tend to exaggerate their contribution after the war, most women do not talk about their past as combatants at all. And if they do decide to do so, they are very reticent – and end up downplaying their contribution.

Also striking is the uneasiness of women veterans to talk about their KLA past, which all too often devolves into silence. This is a point where my research is in line with Virgina Stephens' work who has highlighted this point (2014, p. 126). One conclusion from the interviews with women KLA combatants is that the time after the war was more difficult for them than during the war. According to one interviewee, the silence of these women is very understandable, as it is very difficult to address one's past as a women combatant without family support against the backdrop of a stigmatising social atmosphere.[44]

The initiative to establish an association of women KLA veterans to resist against their post-war marginalisation also failed.[45] Although the exact reasons for this are unclear, it is an indication of the re-traditionalisation of Kosovo-Albanian society in the post-war period. It seems that the Western presence in Kosovo after the war has only increased the invisibility of women combatants. One interviewee pointed out that the international demilitarisation campaigns of the post-war period

were only aimed at men.[46] Another woman combatant said that “the Westerners arrived after the war and took our weapons without asking us. They decided for us. This really was disappointing and in retrospect the real end of the KLA”.[47]

The stigmatisation of women combatants was also reinforced by Kosovo-Albanian post-war discourses: “After the war, women combatants were portrayed as ‘sex slaves’ of the commanders”.[48] Consequently, “many women who fought during the war have no courage to speak out. That is why they went from the first front to the kitchen after the war”.[49] Another woman KLA veteran did not understand “why a woman could run a hospital during the war but is not allowed to do so after the war”.[50] One former woman KLA combatant, who basically executed all kinds of tasks during the war, had the impression that she was “freer during the war than she is today”.[51]

Conclusion

This chapter used the example of women KLA combatants to argue that a decolonial feminist school of thought needs to be established in the academic field of IR alongside liberal, standpoint and post-structural feminism. However, my contribution to the ongoing scientific debates on critical security studies is still in its early stages. Further research on other case studies could be useful in this regard. One way of doing this would be to study more wars waged in the post-communist context after the end of the Cold War against Muslim-majority populations – for example, the Bosnian War (1992–1995) or the two wars in Chechnya (1994–1996 and 1999–2009).

In terms of academic debates on women and violence, or more specifically on their participation in guerrilla warfare, the findings of this chapter also invite further scholarly investigation. With my interviewees, their past as fighters in society was mostly known. One of the shortcomings of my research is that I was not able to document the narratives of those women who hide their past as guerrilla fighters to this day. Therefore, the chapter’s contribution to the academic literature on the silencing of women combatants in the post-war period is limited and more research is needed.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on an earlier version of my article that was published in Albanian under the title “Trupat femërorë në luftë: Rasti i luftëtareve të UÇK-së.” *Politikja*, 2 (2018), 108–128. I translated and revised it for this publication.

2 Conventionally, the Kosovo War is narrowed down to the years 1998–1999. However, because anti-Albanian racism in Kosovo has become increasingly violent since 1989, I refer to the entire decade of the 1990s as a war. This structural discrimination, emanating from the Serbian side, ranged from mass firings and food poisoning to political assassinations. As this chapter will show, all these events were decisive factors for women to join the freedom fighters of the KLA.

3 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 and 24 November 2016.

4 This military unit was part of the political party LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo or *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*).
5 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016.
6 The plural is used here intentionally because this chapter attempts to go beyond a nation-state approach by theorising different Albanian identity formations in the context of European modernity.
7 This is not to say that no gendered oppression existed prior to European colonialism, but to highlight that the gender binary as known today is not (a)-historical and universal but is context-specific and local in its emergence, i.e., the result of the hegemonic ambitions of European modernity.
8 Although the term "apartheid system" is used here, this is not done to make a 1:1 analogy with racial segregation in South Africa. The use of such an analogy runs the risk of reproducing anti-black racism, as Albanian identities as a Muslim-majority Balkan population are constituted differently from Black identity formations in South Africa. However, the term is employed here because it continues to be used in Kosovo-Albanian discourse to describe the 1990s in Kosovo. A separate term to describe the trajectories of racial segregation in Kosovo in the 1990s has not yet been developed.
9 Other well-known Albanian women combatants from this period were Baftie Seferi or Tringë Smajli.
10 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 and 24 November 2016.
11 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 4 November 2016.
12 Ibid.
13 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 23 November 2016.
14 Ibid.
15 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 1 December 2016.
19 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 December 2016.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 24 November 2016.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 December 2016.
26 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016.
27 Ibid., and anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 November 2016.

28 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 4 November 2016.
29 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 23 November 2016.
30 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016; anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 4 November 2016.
31 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016.
32 Ibid.
33 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 1 December 2016.
34 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 November 2016.
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36 Ibid.
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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 November 2016.
42 Ibid.
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44 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Gjakova on 16 and 17 November 2016.
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47 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 4 November 2016.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 23 November 2016.
51 Anonymised interview by the author of this chapter with a former women KLA combatant, conducted in Prishtina on 22 November 2016.

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4 Women's individual and collective labour of care during the Kosovo War

The overlooked heroines

Erjona Gashi

Introduction

In 1999, when my family was displaced from the war in Kosova, I was five. Although my memories are sparse, I do remember trying to stay out of the adults' way, especially women, as they packed bags for us to evacuate or prepared *gurabija,* a simple-to-make pastry in bulk to last us for the weeks we were fleeing for our lives. Growing up, I heard heroic stories about the war from the men in my family. I vividly recall uncles sharing moments of their week-long escapes in the mountains during wintertime, and how they were stopped and physically tortured by Serb paramilitary forces. I heard stories about my father, a doctor at the time, who fearlessly collected patients in our two-story house in Broliq, a village in Peja, Kosova; he attended to their wounds and saved their lives. Even though I vaguely remembered my mother, sister, and female cousins also helping my father care for his patients, I never heard their stories. It wasn't until I directly asked them about their experiences of war, some 20 years after the war had ended, that I realised there was a gap that needed to be filled in what I narratively inherited from the women in my family.

Therefore, in this chapter, I foreground the importance of women's wartime narratives by focusing on care as a tactic for survival. I examine the overlooked gendered roles and day-to-day lived experiences of five Kosovar women, survivors of the Serbian genocide, political violence and oppression, and investigate their performances of care during the Kosovo War (1998–1999). In acknowledging women's plurality of experiences and perspectives as caregivers, I challenge the currently pervasive and monolithic narrative of women as passive victims of war present in scholarship on conflict and peacebuilding and instead make overt the narrative of women as critical agents that sustain lives during and after the war (Akbal, 2017; Ibnouf, 2020). Culcasi (2019) contends that within conflict settings women's gender performances and traditional roles undergo a shift. As these performances shift towards women taking more traditionally masculine practices of providing means of subsistence for the family, their traditional gendered responsibility as the caretaker of the family does not lessen. "Instead, most of the women take on the double burden of navigating the gendered responsibilities of being the masculine provider and the feminine caretaker" (Culcasi, 2019, p. 474).

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Relations of care carry essential implications in contexts of humanitarian crisis and peacebuilding, health and well-being, and women's work efforts in the global economy. I echo Robinson's (2011) call to foreground women's lived experiences and performances of care work as central rather than marginal issues in wartime. Women's everyday care work provisions and responsibilities are essential for saving lives in armed conflicts and their agency as caregivers to ensure the security of their families and wider communities must be acknowledged and recognised.

In this chapter, I bring forth a nuanced understanding of this overlooked issue in wartime, namely the day-to-day experiences of women and their efforts of care. I build on the idea that care is a global political issue and that decisions regarding the provision and distribution of care are of profound moral significance, "insofar as they are central to the survival and security of people around the world" (Robinson, 2011, p. 3). In wartime, however, the politics of care become even more prevalent and complex. Care ethicists emphasise that the practices and responsibilities of care stem from relationships, which are shaped by both material and discursive factors. However, in the context of war, numerous relationships are disrupted as people are displaced from their communities. Consequently, the care practices that were once provided by close-knit communities also vanish. Therefore, it becomes crucial to adopt a relational perspective when examining the politics of care during wartime. This perspective enables us to recognise marginalised individuals and groups who often remain on the fringes of global political discussions. For instance, elderly women in wartime struggling to bear the weight of caring for their grandchildren, pregnant women facing immense challenges without access to healthcare and women striving to rebuild households and livelihood networks in the aftermath of conflict. These examples are just a few illustrations of the pressing issues that arise when considering the politics of care during wartime.

In the section below, I render a review of the literature on the ways in which women are impacted by the war. Then, I focus on the notions of "care" and "caregiving" as unpaid work that women engage in at war. Finally, I employ the feminist ethics of care framework to highlight the care practices that Kosovar women enacted to ensure individual and collective survival during the Kosovo War.

This chapter is not intended to provide detailed historical accounts but instead speak about an experience true to Kosovar women's communicative memory, emotions and personal interpretations. I do not want to claim this is how every Kosovar has, or should, interpret war events. Throughout this piece, I refer to my homeland as Kosova, instead of the often-used Kosovo, because Kosova is the name most Albanians use to refer to it as an independent nation rather than an autonomous province of Serbia.

The impact of war on women

War affects women "from the bedroom to the battlefield", Cockburn argued two decades ago (1998, p. 8). This foregrounds the comprehensive impact of

armed conflicts on women's lives, encompassing both the intimate spaces of their personal lives and the broader context of warfare. Cockburn (1998) claims that the consequences of war extend beyond traditional notions of battlefields and military engagements. She states that women are affected by war in various interconnected ways, ranging from the private and domestic sphere (symbolised by the bedroom) to the public and violent realm of armed conflict (symbolised by the battlefield). Cockburn's assertion highlights the pervasive nature of the impact of war on women, emphasising that their experiences and vulnerabilities transcend a single domain. Furthermore, she recognises that the effects of armed conflicts are not confined solely to combat zones, but permeate every aspect of women's lives, including their homes, families, relationships and personal well-being. By acknowledging the broad scope of war's influence, Cockburn (1998) centres the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by women in times of conflict. Therefore, she maintains that the already unjust and oppressive patriarchal structures become magnified, affecting women's livelihood and well-being.

The scholarly conversations on women's experiences of war focus largely on the negative impact of war on women, namely displacement and exposure to physical and sexual violence, health and reproductive issues, economic hardships, and trauma and psychological impact, however, there is a lacuna to be filled in the privatised, everyday lived experiences and realities that women undergo for individual and collective survival. Ibnouf's (2020) review of literature on the impact of war on women identified three bodies of knowledge: "the impact of armed conflict on changing gender roles and relations, women-headed households and post-armed conflict situations, and gender inequality and sexual violence used as a weapon of war" (p. 19). This chapter focuses on extending the conversations on women's roles and everyday lives in wartime.

Due to the disruptive nature of armed conflicts, women and girls carry the heaviest burdens of war as their roles within family systems and society writ large change (Culcasi, 2019; Korac, 2004). Women assume new roles and take on more economic responsibilities as family breadwinners, heads of households, and (formal or informal) community organisers all while maintaining their already existing roles as caretakers (Arostegui, 2013). Naturally, the already unpaid labour increases as their roles quadruple. This, in turn, creates exhausting burdens on women who must navigate the tensions of their new roles, specifically the ones threatening the patriarchal dichotomy of the private and public sphere like being heads of the household (Culcasi, 2019; Jacobson, 2006; Moruzzi, 2013).

Employing narrative interviews with five Kosovar women between the ages of 18 and 22 who lived in Kosova during the war and using the feminist ethics of care framework, I expand theorising on the labour of care in wartime and show the importance of women's care provisions for individual and collective survival. In the following section, I emphasise the feminist discourse surrounding the concept of care work and its tenets as well as its role in the global economy and the sustenance of life and well-being.

Care work

Women perform 75% of the world's labour of care (Criado-Perez, 2021). While the concept of care is widely understood and used in our societies, it remains on the periphery of academic conversations and analysis. Ibnouf (2020) defines care as "an activity essential for the sustenance of life (p. 53)". Care is the provision of time, attention, and support to meet the amalgamation of physical, mental and social needs of others (Engle et al. 1999; Kröger, 2009). For feminist care ethicists, it is also a political concept that deeply affects and is affected by existing intersectional structures of power and oppression (Tronto, 1993; Robinson, 2011). It regards responsibility as the foundation of our existence (Sevenhuijsen, 2000).

Rummery and Fine (2012) identified three core tenets of care. First, care is perceived as a relational concept, "personal concern for the well-being of one or more others". Second, it is understood as an activity, "…a form of labor, tending to the needs of another". Third, it is "a social relationship which serves to distinguish care from other forms of work" (p. 322). Care is thus a trinity: "relational, practical and moral simultaneously" (Rummery & Fine, 2012, p. 323). Acknowledgment of need and tending to it are crucial elements of care work which is driven by practices and values (Held, 2006). It can be understood as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto, 1995, p. 21). Or, "time-consuming and physically demanding work" (Rummery & Fine, 2012, p. 323). It is often distinguished from other types of work because of the direct relationship "…with a sense of duty, responsibility, and love/affection, that is, it is often viewed as an emotionally driven occupation" (Stuart, 2014, p. 30). Investigating care, as work, has significant implications for our understanding of labour, value, globalisation and the economy.

"Relations of care in a global context are constructed by relations of power determined primarily by gender, class, and race" (Robinson, 2011, p. 5). Care work, as a gendered activity mostly performed by women, holds a lower value in the global labour economy in comparison to paid occupations assumed by men. Therefore, women carry the burden of unpaid care work, which includes the physical, emotional, social and financial problems of their families and communities to ensure their existence and flourishing. Thus, this work cannot stand at the margins any longer. Care, analysed through the intersections of gender, class and status, highlights structures of inclusion and exclusion and influences the social institutional contexts that shape the patterns of caregivers and receivers (Kröger, 2009).

Exploring care work from the gendered lens of the private/public divide echoes the lack of attention this type of work has garnered in the global economy. Stensöta (2011) argues that since women's emotions and care "belong" in the private sphere, it leaves decisions of the public sphere to men, even though care must be recognised as a public policy concern because it is the pillar on which societies stand to establish life and well-being. Various works in sociology and economy claim that if provisions of care were to be disrupted or absent, then the well-being and security

of a society is threatened. Moreover, scholars have documented "the centrality of practices of care to the livelihoods of households and the workings of the global political economy" (Robinson, 2011, p. 11). Due to the centrality of care in the global economy, the modes in which we think about and explain care and acts of caregiving must be further examined and interrogated.

Feminist care ethicists, for over two decades, have explored the feminisation of care, with most feminists foregrounding women's work as family caregivers and highlighting the burden of this sort of work and the moral values ascribed to it, which result in furthering women's already existing marginalised positions in global politics and economies (Ferrant et al., 2014; Eyben, 2012). Marks et al. (2002) assert that caregivers immerse themselves "in the noble aspirations to care for and reduce economic, physical, and emotional burdens for their families and community" (p. 658). Women perform care work to maintain the gendered expectations that society has placed upon them. Because these expectations are deeply ingrained in women, it takes active critical thinking and questioning to be aware of them on a day-to-day basis (Maluleke, 2012). Critical thinking and the interrogation of gendered norms must be emphasised in contexts such as wartime where women's care responsibilities and burden increase drastically. The ethics of care, rooted in feminist theory, offers a valuable framework for analysing and addressing these gendered norms, promoting a more equitable distribution of care and recognising the inherent value of caregiving in diverse social contexts. By applying this lens, I aim to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding women's care work and the transformative change that it cultivates within societies.

Ethics of wartime care work

Women's care work during wartime is perceived as "an extension of their regular household duties" rather than a conscious commitment to ensure survival and peace (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 9)". The narrative of care as a practice that women embody due to "biological" factors and not as a constructed gendered norm that women are socialised into needs to change. In Robinson's words,

> how we think about care—who is entitled to care and on what terms, who is responsible for care, how care is valued and remunerated—governs the decisions that are made regarding the nature of care at the household, community, state, and transnational levels.
>
> (Robinson, 2011, p. 4)

From a feminist standpoint, the household work that women perform in the private sphere is often seen as problematic precisely due to the unpaid nature of such work that leads women to subordination and further marginalisation (Ibnouf, 2020; Robinson, 2011). Women's gendered social position in wartime affects their everyday realities and lives, "… that are always already heavy with concern not only for themselves but also for a range of particular others for whom they take responsibility" (Robinson, 2011, p. 7).

Ibnouf (2020) re-conceptualises care work as

> specialised activity in wartime that is difficult to research, but one that makes women a specific kind of protagonist whose knowledge and perspective are necessary to better understand the nature of armed conflicts and the structures that contribute to survival and well-being of the communities during the war and in post-armed conflict conditions.
>
> (p. 59)

For Bakker (2007) and Orozco and Leiras (2017), wartime care work includes women's essential day-to-day arrangements, tasks and organising properties that offer emotional, physical and mental support, care for family and community members, for the sick, the wounded, and the dying, cleaning, cooking, preparing to flee the conflict, standing in solidarity with others and creating networks to maintain cognitive, emotional and physical well-being whilst striving to minimise and ease pain and suffering.

Robinson argues that "those who care for others, and those who are most in need of care, are among the world's most marginalised people" (Robinson, 2011, p. 8). Looking at these marginalised people from the lens of care enables us to understand different perspectives that are usually invisible in scholarly conversations in international relations, state building and human security literature. A feminist ethics of care framework highlights lived experiences of women affected by war and allows for an insurgent knowledge that challenges the grand narratives of women as victims of war who are confined to the private sphere, possess no agency, and play no role in social change during and after a conflict.

At the focus of the feminist ethics of care framework lies the interdependence between individuals and the importance of critically examining the patriarchal division between private and public spheres. This chapter follows Fiona Robinson's approach towards an ethics of care that claims that its aim is "… not to uncover a new or more complete or better truth" but to "create a set of ideal types that allow us to 'see' a different world" (Robinson, 2011, p. 17). This means, in this chapter, I engage with stories of Kosovar women's labour of care during wartime and discuss the political implications of such labour during wartime. In the ensuing section, I provide a brief methodological overview of the process of collecting and analysing Kosovar women's stories of war.

Kosovar women's lived experiences in wartime

I employ in-depth narrative interviews to explore the lived experiences of five Kosovar women who were between the ages of 18 and 22 during the Kosovo War. Buqe, Remzije, Kimete, Lirije and Vlora come from a lower middle-class socio-economic status in Kosova. During the war, their families had just enough money to get them by but borrowed money from their networks to cover the expenses of having to flee Kosova and survive the war. In the summer of 2021, I created a poster for a research call and shared it on social media, in a Facebook group

with thousands of members. The call targeted Kosovar women over the age of 40 who were interested in sharing their own story of how they survived the Kosovo War. Buqe, Remzije, Kimete, Lirije and Vlora were the first ones to respond to my call for research participants and to express an interest to engage in conversations about their experiences in wartime. Some of these women commented on my post and others reached out via messenger. I gave them more details of the study and we set up a date, time and place to meet. Some of the interviews took place at the participants' houses and others in quiet coffee shops in Prishtina. During the interviews, I paid special attention to not only the description of lived experiences but also the expression of emotions and interpretations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). The interviews were minimally structured because the goal was to facilitate the flow of the conversation instead of managing or having any control over it. Initially, before we began with the recorded interview, we spoke about our day, their thoughts and feelings about participating in this research, and we engaged in small talk to get to know each other. This rapport building typically lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Afterwards, the in-depth narrative interviews, which lasted between 30–90 minutes, had three components. First, I asked a broad question like, "When you think back on your experience during the war, what comes to mind? What do you remember from back then?" Questions of this nature allowed the participants more freedom to start their stories based on events that really stuck with them to this day, instead of sharing in a cohesive chronological order. Second, I asked follow-up questions to get more clarification on the events that they talked about. Third, I asked if they had any closing thoughts or if they would like to give any advice to people who have similar shared experiences to theirs. Asking these final questions probed the participants to reflect on any pieces of information that they might have accidentally left out earlier on but still wanted to share. These questions also intended to bring some closure to their stories. I was interested in their advice because I believe it to be beneficial towards collective healing and showcasing the invaluable knowledge and wisdom that stems from lived experience. I conducted the interviews in Albanian, the native language of all participants. Then, I transcribed the interviews in Albanian and later translated them into English for data analysis.

I used thematic analysis to engage with the data. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing for the emergence of themes rather than imposing pre-existing categories based on any research questions. Even though I did not directly ask questions related to the topic of care, this theme, along with resilience and organising, permeated their narratives.

In the rest of this section, I offer a brief background on the lives of the women I've interviewed, Buqe, Remzije, Kimete, Lirije and Vlora, who consented to their real names being used for the purpose of this project.

Buqe lived in a small house in Deçan before taking refuge in a neighbour's basement a few blocks down her street to escape the paramilitary soldiers who had begun surrounding her town. After hiding in the basement for two days, she was forced to run away with her family of six and other refugees upon hearing gunshots coming in the direction of the house they were sheltered in. She said they followed the crowds towards Carrabreg, a village nearby, but when they got there, her father

decided to turn back to Deçan to check in on other friends and neighbours and left Buqe, who was around 19 years old at the time, alone with her mother and siblings at a cousin's house in Carrabreg. Buqe narrated:

> *S'kemi pasë as pare me veti, as bukë, as qebe, hiç kurgjo s'kemi guxu me marrë, jemi ikë, qashtu qysh jemi kon, me papuqe, skom pasë vakt as mu mathë.*

She said they fled with no money or food on them, no blankets either; they didn't dare take anything from their house, they ran away as soon as they heard gunshots, with nothing on them. She was wearing in-door slippers…there was no time to even put her shoes on. In Buqe's story, care was portrayed as a responsiveness to basic material needs such as shelter, clothing and food. Her neighbour, and later, her cousin, offered Buqe and her family a roof over their heads and temporarily helped alleviate any threats or pain that could be caused by the paramilitary soldiers had they stayed in their own house in Deçan. Thus, care involved protection as well as maintenance of networks and family relations.

Remzije lived in Prishtina, the capital of Kosova, as a student when the war began. She was an active member of student resistance groups in Prishtina in the early 1990s demanding education in native Albanian and a better quality of life for people in Kosova. She detailed her experience within the parallel system and described the ways in which people around her organised, in secret, to turn their houses into schools where youth could be taught under Albanian curricula. She explained how she had wanted to join the Kosovo Liberation Army but was unable to, so she went to pursue higher education in Germany to raise awareness about the atrocities happening in Kosova and to seek help from German authorities if something were to happen to her family. She came back right after the war ended and joined foreign journalists in uncovering massacres around Kosova and filming the repercussions of war.

Kimete also lived in Prishtina when the war started. At the beginning of our conversation, she confessed that she had avoided talking about the war for 20 years for fear of having to revisit the trauma lingering from it. She recalled her family being stuck in their tiny apartment in Prishtina while the rest of the neighbourhood fled to the villages nearby to seek safety from the paramilitary forces. She wished she lived in a house in a village at the time instead of her apartment in Prishtina. "When you live in a house, there are more ways to flee. You have many windows you can jump out of if you need to run away. Whereas, when you live in an apartment, you can only enter and exit through your main door. You are trapped". – she said. She added:

> *Kur jeton n'banesë, mundesh me ikë veç prej një dere, mundesh me hi e me hip veç prej asaj dere, s'mundesh me ikë për dritare. A kur je në shpi, ki shumë mundësi me ikë, nëse ushtarët hijnë prej derës, ti mundesh me ikë prej dritarës. Nuk munden me të nguju.*

Lirije was 23 years old when the war broke out. She lived in Llukë, a village near Deçan, before she moved to Ulqin, in Montenegro, with her mother, siblings and grandfather after her father was taken to jail by the paramilitary forces. Upon not

hearing anything about her father for a couple of weeks, she made the trip back to Kosova to find out whether he was still alive. She remembered being afraid to travel alone but felt a responsibility to do it as she was the youngest woman in her family. She explained:

> *Me ndodhë diçka, unë jom e re, muj iki, muj ngaj, a nana menxi ecë për veti, edhe i duhet me kqyrë agën se aga s'dojke me ikë, thojke lemni qitu n'Llukë, lemni le të m'vrajnë.*

She said it was easier for her to travel, fight paramilitary forces or even run away from them if she needed to and for her mother to stay put in Ulqin (Montenegro) and take care of her grandfather who was paralysed.

Vlora, the last of the interviewees, was 18 years old during the war and lived in an apartment in Prishtina with her family. As the oldest child, she was constantly worried about having to take care of her brother and sisters if something were to happen to her parents. Soon after the war began, she moved with her family into a cousin's house in a safer neighbourhood in Prishtina for two weeks until food became scarce. Afterward, her father decided it was safe for them to return to their apartment. Vlora occasionally went out to search for family members and friends or to get bread at a bakery nearby. One day as she was climbing the stairs, a young man, around the age of 20, came out of one of the apartments in her building and begged her for some bread. She said this scrawny young man had been hiding in his apartment for two weeks with nothing to eat or drink and then after that day she fed him regularly until they had to flee the apartment. After pausing for a moment, she added:

> *Sot e asaj dite është gjallë ai djalë, s'mkujtohet emri, ama e di që është gjallë.*

"I know the man we fed survived the war, he's still alive", Vlora said.

In the descriptions above, I offered a glimpse into the lives of Buqe, Remzije, Kimete, Lirije and Vlora. In the following section, I delve deeper into their day-to-day experiences of war and unpack practices of care in which they engaged in to survive the war. I foreground their narratives of care, organising and resistance because such narratives are rarely heard in public. From being continuously displaced to witnessing home invasions and people being taken away from the caravans and killed in front of their families, these Kosovar women used everyday sites like homes, tractors, streets, and bonds within networks to organise and care for their families and larger communities.

Care work through networks, food and shelter

During the war, care was deeply embedded in the fabric of women's everyday experiences and involved their families and communities. There was no possible separation between private and public realms, as these Kosovar women were displaced from their homes and technically denied a private sphere. They were

forced to stay in crowded concentration-like camps, under an open sky in the mountains and on the streets with others like them.

Kosovar women relied on communities, friends and neighbours to obtain help in taking care of family members and receive protection from Serb paramilitary forces. Due to the cascading disruptions of war, women's accounts portrayed an involuntary abandonment of old networks. The displacement, torture and murder of Kosovars impeded the relationships with the communities they had before the eruption of war. While prior to the war, people prioritised maintaining strong connections with their communities, during the war the importance shifted towards building new communities with those in the same material environments as them (in tractors, valleys, mountains and camps).

For instance, Lirije looked back on how she befriended two female strangers who were in the same tractor as her and asked them for help in case the Serb paramilitary police would stop them. Upon seeing that one woman was holding two children close to her, and the other woman was covering her baby with a headscarf, Lirije asked if she could borrow the headscarf and one of the children. When their tractor did indeed get stopped by the paramilitary forces, Lirije was wearing a headscarf and holding a baby on her lap, pretending to be a mother, and concealing her identity to avoid harassment from the paramilitary soldiers. Lirije trusted her new network to help hide her single status and become invisible in the soldiers' eyes by wearing a headscarf as a preventative measure against sexual harassment and/or rape. By borrowing a headscarf, Lirije evoked the trope of motherhood, a highly valued identity in a patriarchal society, as a protecting mechanism not only against the soldiers' gaze but also physical and sexual harassment and violence. In addition, the headscarf served to make her less of an obvious target, thus reducing the risk of the soldiers perceiving her through a sexualised lens or as an object of visual pleasure.

Kosovar women created their new networks in motion. From figuring out when to flee for their lives, where to find a safe shelter without drawing attention and where to collect and prepare food to curb their hunger, Kosovar women and their families mobilised within and adapted their networks to the flow of life (interruption and resumption). They relied on networks for reciprocal care and to avoid the risks of being tortured, raped or killed by paramilitary soldiers. Lirije rendered a moment where her family members and neighbours came together to make food after days of famine. The coming together was echoed in other women's narratives as well. Lirije said, "Together, we survived the war. Nobody could have survived alone".

Kimete also shared a similar sentiment:

> For two days we were stuck in a caravan from Podujeva to Prishtina with around 150.000 people who were forced to turn back to Kosova after we tried to cross the border with Macedonia. My family and I were in a tractor, but most people were on foot, walking for hours, even in the heavy rain. Because the caravan was long and slow, we stopped on the streets, hopped out of the tractors, and baked bread to nourish ourselves. We left our bread half-baked when we heard

> somebody say "Move! Quick! The police are coming!" We couldn't finish baking the bread, so we had to stop on the road and try again. We could barely light a fire because of the rain. Our new neighbour, with whom we decided to stick together in case we needed each other's help, came to give my father a hand and held a jacket above the firepit so that the fire wouldn't go off. My mother and the neighbour's wife were baking the bread as fast as they could because we didn't know where we would end up. We had to share the bread! You cannot survive war alone. *Luftës nuk mundesh me i ikë vet*.

Kimete's story highlights the relational aspect of care and emphasises care as rooted in the context of webs of relationships even with individuals she had not known prior to the war.

The women are embedded in a discourse of care as an action and moral value as they came together with strangers to help each other and temporarily care for one another but then went their separate ways to ensure survival. This mode of caring where people briefly get together to support each other and then part ways is ingrained in personal relationships and moral obligations and is possible because it does not require a lot of infrastructure (money, food and material resources) and because people generously shared what infrastructure they had with each other. For example, Lirije also recalled an experience while waiting in the caravan with thousands of refugees who were forced to flee Kosova:

> The caravan was never-ending. You had time to start a fire. Even boil a chicken. In Zhur, my cousin removed the head of a chicken with her bare hands. She killed the chicken and we let it boil for a good 10–15 minutes. There were stoves left on the streets. People left flour, water, salt, pots, and pans behind so we could use them. We could even make pancakes on the street because they were quick and easy to make while we were waiting for the caravan to begin moving. The people in our tractor ate the whole chicken. They didn't even care if it was boiled or not. The whole chicken was gone in a few seconds.

Kimete also reminisced on her day-to-day experiences being part of a caravan and described how she helped a pregnant woman give birth. She said:

> I remember this pregnant woman saying she needed to urinate. Her sister-in-law, who was my mother's friend, told me "Kimete, could you please help her get off the tractor?" I was holding her by the arm. It was pitch dark out. After midnight. Heavy rain. It had been raining all day. There were a lot of trees and bushes by the side of the road, so we walked toward them slowly. She hid behind a bush close by, so I patiently waited for her. It didn't even cross my mind at the time, I was 18, a child, and I didn't know anything. I saw her lie down in the mud. I got closer and she asked me to hold her hand. And then hold the baby. I couldn't see anything. But then I heard the baby cry. And I held her until the sister came. She had also heard the cries.

The experiences of Kosovar women during the war revealed a deep entanglement of care within their daily lives, involving their families and communities. Displacement from their own properties and the denial of a private sphere resulted in the women being forced to reside in crowded camps, tractors, strangers' houses and out in the streets alongside others facing similar circumstances. In their quest for survival, these women relied heavily on their communities, friends and neighbours. However, the disruptions caused by the war led to an involuntary abandonment of networks, as the displacement, torture and murder of Kosovars severed their relationships with their pre-war communities. Consequently, the women shifted their focus towards building new communities based on shared material environments. The accounts of Kosovar women during this period emphasise the vital role of care and resilience in constructing communal bonds and forming new connections amidst the challenges of war.

Conclusion

The interviewed women talked about care in relation to others. For them, care embodied material, physical and emotional properties. They cared for others to the detriment of their health and personal needs. One of the women shared that even though her mother was old and had arthritis she still took care of her grandfather, fed him, helped him get out of bed and bathed him since he was paralysed and unable to move. Even in wartime, life went on with women as the "natural" caregivers as they selflessly offered to take in people who were displaced and had nowhere to go, cooked food and shared it with others, emotionally supported those dependent on them and performed other acts of service that blurred the division of the private and public spheres like going out in the public to secure sustenance, visiting family members and friends to make sure they are safe and searching for information from others on safest routes to flee Kosova. Narratives from this chapter illuminated the ways in which home invasions, displacement, bombarding, constant surveillance and violence provoked fear, anxiety, humiliation, grief and helplessness, factors that incontrovertibly impacted women's well-being and care capacities during the Kosovo War. The interviewed women show how, in a precarious environment such as that of wartime, they relied on care as a resource to preserve their existence and protection from the enemy. They enacted care through bonds with each other, securing and preparing food, finding shelter and supporting one another.

Based on the narrative accounts of Buqe, Remzije, Kimete, Lirije and Vlora, it appeared that their lived experiences correspond with the feminist literature on the logic of gendered systems at war where women assume the dual roles of caregivers and providers as well as protectors of their families and the overwhelming increase in burdens that come with such roles. The findings from the interviews also echoed Ibnouf's (2020) conclusions regarding the use and maintenance of social networks as bases of survival and protection in difficult times. Kosovar women centred on the importance of care provisions with the community (old or new) for physical

and emotional survival during wartime. For these women, caring for others was selfless. They cared primarily out of a moral and cultural obligation, but also out of empathy and love.

This chapter focused on Kosovar women as indispensable agents of change during the Kosovo War by exploring their gendered day-to-day roles and lived experiences. I highlighted the care properties that Kosovar women engaged in as vital to the well-being and survival of their families and communities. In recognising women's multitude of experiences as caregivers, I hoped to challenge the ongoing narrative of women as passive victims of war present in literature bodies on peacebuilding and women during conflict and instead forefront the narrative of women as critical agents in the pursuits of peace.

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Section II

Places and spaces of women in war and peace

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5 On the lack of women's representation in the Museum of Kosovo

The paradox of the "Goddess on the Throne"

Andi Haxhiu

Introduction

"A woman has no tribe". In the concluding paragraph of her seminal text, Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations, cultural sociologist Joane Nagel (1998) refers to this Southern African Tswana proverb questioning whether her experience of citizenship as a woman may be different to the citizenship experience of men. Through this proverbial assertion, Nagel (1998, p. 261) clearly indicates that "for many women the nation does not 'feel' the same as it does to many men" because women are not expected to "defend [their] country, run [their] country, or represent [their] country". While obviously women do all these things – as citizens, as members of the nation, as activists, as leaders – their contribution is less valued and acknowledged because their roles are embedded within the masculine structure of the state institutions (Pateman, 1991; Enloe, 1993; Connell, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The scripts where these societal roles unfold are masculinist projections of nations "written primarily by men, for men, and about men, and that women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and women's proper 'place'" within the wider national story (Nagel, 1998, p. 243).

Considering the upsurge in scholarship on nationalism in the last decades, it is perturbing how none of the canonical texts on nationalism studies (notably Anderson [1983] 1996; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Smith, 1991) "take [gender] seriously into account, and it is often taken as an implicit premise that nations are essentially male" (Eriksen, 2017, p. 1438). Gender and nationalism studies theorist Nira Yuval-Davis (1993, 1997) emphasises how even primordialist discourse (most notably Geertz, 1963; van der Berghe, 1981) on kinship, ancestry and national (re)production has ignored gender's significance in the nation-building and statebuilding. In fact, as Yuval Davis (1997: 2) brilliantly argues, "it is women – and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia – who reproduce nations biologically, culturally, and symbolically". However, despite some early notable exceptions in exploring gender in nationalism studies (Chatterjee, 1989; Mosse, 1985), women's omission from the mainstream nationalism discussions has engendered a body of literature chronicling women's systemic lack of representation in the national narratives (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989; Walby, 1997;

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Nagel, 1998). This institutionalisation of gendered norms has been a by-product of structural sexism and misogyny present in politics, art and culture (Nagel, 1998; Nochlin, 2006; Pollock, 2013; Grant, 2021).

This chapter departs from these puzzling dilemmas and engages in a reading of the permanent exhibitions and women's overall representation in the National Museum of Kosovo (NMK). Recognised as an important institution of power, the NMK has embraced this institutional expectation and responsibility in providing museum visitors, at least tentatively, with answers for Kosovo's national history. However, this chapter does not engage analytically with the factual depiction of women's history in the museum; instead, it reads the exhibition-as-text and employs a feminist critique in deconstructing the masculinised discursive structures that bring nationalist grammar into existence (Porter, 2012; Anderson, 1996, p. 163).

It is precisely the nationalist lexicon and gendered symbolism that I deemed crucial to research in the NMK. Considering the rather recently developed museological tradition in post-independence Kosovo, I argue that it is essential to provide a chronological examination of the NMK and explore how this institution has been bound to intense socio-political developments since it was founded. Depending on the societal dynamics between Kosovo Albanians and Serbia, the NMK experienced varying degrees of state-framed pressure on how to tell Kosovo's (national) history. For this reason, I will first contextualise NMK's relevance during different socio-political junctures and provide a historical overview of its institutional adjustments. Secondly, I employ a feminist critique to analyse how current displays and collections in the museum do not depict the histories and experiences of women "as fully and truthfully as those of men" (Porter, 1996, p. 106). I do so by deconstructing the nation-as-family scripts in the NMK – a powerful metaphorical assertion capable of reproducing and maintaining men's roles as active participants who dominate the national story.

In reading the museum-as-text, I document through photographs of displayed artefacts and textual analysis of labels how women's stories are widely excluded from the museum narratives. Whereas, when represented, I uncover how their societal roles in the national story unfold as "supporting actors" because of the predominantly masculinised interpretations of history (Nagel, 1998; Yuval Davis, 1997; Eriksen, 2017). I entail a mixed methods approach to delve deeper into documentary analysis, NMK's curatorial practices and institutional decision-making. Finally, I investigate how the Goddess on the Throne – a female deity – has become the centrepiece of the permanent exhibition in the NMK despite predominantly masculine narratives. I argue that this alleged paradox is rather common within nationalism's repertoire and, in fact, it is essential in reproducing these masculinised narratives and gendered stereotypes in the statebuilding process (Anderson, 1996; Nagel, 1998; Mosse, 1996).

A historical overview of the National Museum of Kosovo

The Kosovo Provincial Council (KPC) established the Kosovo Provincial Museum in 1947. Due to spatial limitations, along with the political resistance to establishing a site for exhibiting Kosovo's history, the Kosovo Provincial Museum was only

Figure 5.1 Entrance of the National Museum of Kosovo. Picture taken by author.

functionalised in 1949 and opened to the public two years later, in 1951. KPC's decision in 1947 was an important step in setting the tone for the existence of a nascent National Museum of Kosovo. Its mandate has long involved researching, collecting, preserving, restoring, conserving and presenting "the movable cultural-historical heritage since prehistoric times up to the present in the territory of the Republic of Kosovo" (Museum Statute, 2018).

Considering the complex post-World War II implications and the tense political setting in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the establishment of the museum was acknowledged among Kosovo's most relevant socio-cultural accomplishments of the majority Albanian community at that time (Shkodra, 2019). However, due to the sporadically recurring ethnic tensions, it was only in 1970 that the professional sectors of Archaeology, Ethnography, History and Nature were amalgamated under the Museum of Kosovo as the primary institution in displaying and exhibiting Kosovo's history (Reçica, 2022). This administrative change indicated an increasing autonomy in curatorial choices and exhibiting practices for the Albanian museum professionals who were widely under-represented within the institution (Shkodra, 2019).

In 1976, the Museum of Kosovo was transferred to its present-day facility – an 1885 building located in the heart of Prishtina's old city centre and characterised by a unique Austro-Hungarian architectural design. To this day, the building is

Figure 5.2 The permanent exhibition of History galleries in the NMK. Picture taken by author.

distinguishable from the overall architectural legacy of Kosovo and remains a crucial institution in guarding the largest collection of Kosovo's cultural heritage in existence. Political developments and the intensification of the ethnic divide since 1981 instigated a restructuring process of the museological culture in Kosovo that initiated the emergence of the Museum of Revolution of the Nations and Nationalities of Kosovo (Shkodra, 2019). This ideologically imposed discourse on "revolution", inter-ethnic solidarity, brotherhood and unity was widely present in the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia (SFR). Ironically enough, what had been externally perceived as a model of a multi-national coexistence, collapsed internally through a cycle of devastating inter-ethnic wars resulting in the largest human casualties in the region since the end of World War II (Silber & Little, 1996). The beginning of the end of Yugoslavia and the eruption of inter-ethnic tensions that stripped Kosovo of its autonomy in 1989 simultaneously impacted its independence in collecting, exhibiting and curating practices. Therefore, at the peak of tensions in Bosnia in 1995, Serbia's Parliament decided to shut down the Museum of Revolution and downgrade the Museum of Kosovo's competencies to a municipal level – the Museum of Prishtina (Reçica, 2022).

The exacerbation in the number of hostilities and atrocities during the Kosovo war (1998–1999) influenced the active engagement of the international

community in seeking modalities for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Despite numerous peaceful resolution attempts, in the period between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2000, a total of 13,535 people were killed or went missing (Judah, 2008). Simultaneously, the Museum of Prishtina – the forced amalgamation of the Museum of Revolution and the Museum of Kosovo – was continuously stripped and stolen of its objects in both the archaeological and ethnological sections. According to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Kosovo (2022), there are 1,247 documented stolen artefacts from Kosovo's institutions that remain unrepatriated in Belgrade. The only returned artefact is the Goddess on the Throne – repatriated only in 2002 due to the mediation and insistence of the former head of the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Michael Steiner.

While the Museum of Kosovo was operationalised immediately after the war, its building was utilised for the needs of the UNMIK. It was only in 2002 that the Museum of Kosovo and UNMIK reached a mutual agreement for the museum to continue occupying the same building. However, the post-war situation left the museum understaffed and without legislative support to preserve, restore and display Kosovo's cultural heritage. Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport restructured and added to the existing legislative and administrative regulations to shape the law on Cultural Heritage. Despite sporadic institutional and internal advancements, the Museum of Kosovo proceeded to operate under its 1978 Statute for over 40 years (Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, 2018). On 24 December 2018, the Museum of Kosovo was renamed to the National Museum of Kosovo and received a new statute that regulates its mandate, organisational structure, funding and further important institutional and bureaucratic arrangements.

Kosovo's heritage industry and the evolution of the museum are correlated with wider socio-historical and political developments. For this reason, I categorise four socio-historical episodes in Kosovo's cultural legacy that mark pivotal junctures in the shaping of the national- and identity-building process: (a) The intensification of Yugoslav influence in Kosovo during the 1970s; (b) The decline of Yugoslav influence in Kosovo during the 1980s; (c) Kosovo War (1998–1999); and (d) Kosovo's Declaration of Independence in 2008. While the rise of collecting and curatorial freedom in the 1970s appeared rather auspicious, the "apartheid-like" decade of the 1990s almost irreparably impacted sectors of Kosovo's cultural heritage industry and imposed a decline on the overall museum culture. Evidently, cultural existence in the public space for the Albanians during this time became impossible. Following the war (1998–1999), sporadic institutional interests in the NMK have tried to revive a political agenda to increase civil society's interest in Kosovo's rich cultural history. However, to refer to Nora Weller's (2019) metaphorically phrased article title, post-independence societal and institutional indifference towards the national museum suggested the saddening *death of museum culture* in Kosovo. Yet, the revival of museum culture seems probable.

The increasing annual number of visitors to the National Museum of Kosovo in 2022 marks an encouraging indication regarding the museum's place as a crucial institution of power in exhibiting Kosovo's cultural heritage. According to the

then-Director of the Museum of Kosovo, Ajet Leci (2023), 40,000 visitors attended the permanent and temporary exhibitions in 2022 – triplicating the number of visitors compared to 2021. Though, these visitor data are an exception because the number of museum visits increased during MANIFESTA Biennale 14 – a cultural event that took place in Prishtina and selected the NMK as one of the main venues for showcasing artist interventions (Manifesta, 2023). Benefiting from this momentum, Leci (2023) has, at least declaratively, increased the expectations for a possible renovation plan for the museum storage and to improve artefacts preservation and conservation surroundings. This would be the second major renovation undertaken in the NMK after infrastructural reconstructions that happened between 2012 and 2016 (Shkodra, 2019).

However, despite being the primary repository of Kosovo's artefacts and responsible for exhibiting a collection of more than 50,000 artefacts today, the current conditions of the National Museum of Kosovo do not reflect the investments made by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (Kosovo's Council for Cultural Heritage, 2018). Despite sporadic interests from numerous politicians and government officials in utilising the repatriation of stolen artefacts from Serbia for rhetorical and electoral purposes, the NMK remains understaffed, lacks professional lighting in the exhibition halls, does not monitor humidity guidelines as required by the international conservation and preservation standards and, very importantly, does not provide sufficient interpretative and didactic labels regarding the artefacts on display (Kosovo's Council for Cultural Heritage, 2018). Such overall treatment of the museum showcases the lack of institutional agenda and political rigour in supporting and utilising the NMK as one of the most important institutions in exhibiting and narrating the – or a – national story.

Masculinity and the National Museum of Kosovo: Excluding women from the national story

It is almost idiosyncratic for states to collect things that signify the presence of a people in a territory (Anderson, 1996). Therefore, no institution collects and displays the artefacts of national experience more structurally than the national museum while enabling and legitimising a "roomful of objects with national standing to acknowledge that the state has a 'real' identity" (Weiser, 2017, p. 67). For this reason, "the museum, and the museumising imagination, are profoundly political" devices that enable the most rhetorical intersection between monumental archaeology, tourism and national artefacts (Anderson, 1996, p. 178; McCrone, 1998). This interdisciplinary nexus posits the state as the guardian of tradition and cultural heritage, allowing the national museum to bear the imprint of state institutions in telling the – or a – national story (McCrone, 1998, p. 54). Due to this presumed institutional relevance in telling the story of a nation, national museums have played a noteworthy role in the constitution of a public and the transformation of local subjects into national citizens (Bennet, 1995; Macdonald, 2003; Preziosi, 1998).

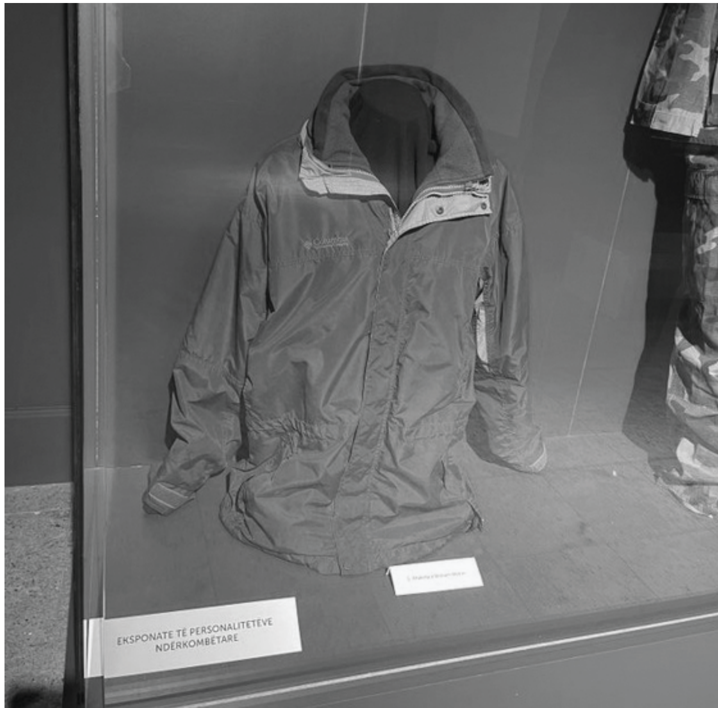

Figure 5.3 William Walker's jacket. Picture taken by author.

In his intriguing argument on museum's cultural force, Luis Raposo (2012), opened his speech at ICOM Conference with an evocative statement: "When you want a nation, make a museum". This, evidently, is a simplistic and exaggerated perspective on the museum's function in the nation-building and statebuilding process. However, it poses a good point of departure in examining how Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, at least theoretically, posed numerous opportunities for the National Museum of Kosovo to actively engage in framing a polyvocal and inclusive national story.[1]

In contrast to these expectations on inclusivity, national museums often exhibit unnuanced representations of history and serve as capturers and celebrators of dominant national myths (Preziosi, 2006). In the case of the NMK, the heroisms of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the peaceful resistance of the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) enjoy two of the most historically and socially significant narrative themes in the museum. Thus, these actors and their stories occupy a significant portion of the history section in the National Museum of Kosovo. In fact, as per objects on display, the exhibition on Kosovo's contemporary history in the NMK can be categorised as fourfold: (a) KLA and previous social and military activism in Kosovo; (b) Ibrahim Rugova's belongings and his "peaceful resistance" rhetoric in achieving independence; (c) the presence of international support and extensive appreciation for the NATO-led humanitarian intervention; and finally, (d) the post-independence developments.

Figure 5.4 KLA's camouflage clothing. Picture taken by author.

In reading the NMK's exhibition as representation and text (Bal, 1992; Porter, 2012), I observe that not all genders occupy their part of history as equal participants in Kosovo's statebuilding. In contrast, the unnuanced depiction of Kosovo's modern history offers a biased narrative of the statebuilding process while ignoring essential historical events of those who lived through war and have vivid memories of Kosovo's contemporary history. For example, the curatorial teams of the National Museum of Kosovo have, among others, neglected many women's stories who were politically active in the 1990s (Krasniqi, 2021), participated in the KLA in the mid and late 1990s (Stephens, 2014) and, inadvertently or not, excluded the stories of an estimating 20,000 women who were assaulted and raped during the war (Karcic & Domi, 2022). Although aware of Kosovo's masculinised romanticisation of the national story, the exclusion of women's participation in exchange for NMK's rather simplified portrayal of history "by looking down the barrel of a gun" remains appalling (Weller, 2019).

Following the 1998–1999 war, there has been increasing attention in studying gender inequality in Kosovo. Kosovo's feminist scholarship has continuously demonstrated how masculine structures embedded in the national institution have overlooked the role of women in the processes of liberation, resistance and statebuilding. Drawing from this premise, I presumed that increasing and

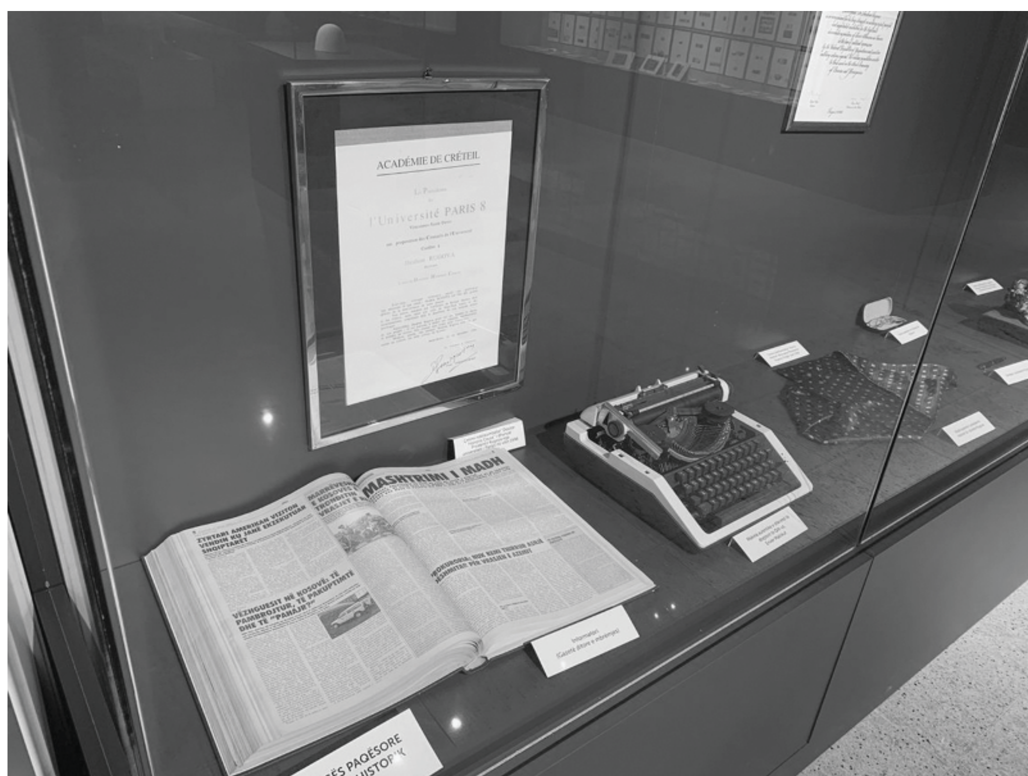

Figure 5.5 Rugova's scarf. Picture taken by author.

improving inclusivity in museum displays and collections would mean more material about women and, consequently, better representation. Nevertheless, this has often been deemed insufficient and rather oversimplistic. Even if and when represented, women's roles in the national museums are portrayed as "relatively passive, shallow, undeveloped, muted and closed; whereas, the roles of men are, in contrast, relatively active, deep, highly developed and articulated, fully pronounced and open" (Porter, 1996, p. 110). The discrepancies and differences in the representation of the histories of men and women in the national museums are a derivative of the institutionalised gendered assumptions on the intricate relationship between masculinity and nationhood.

These biases are evident in the NMK because the curation of the permanent exhibition is dominated primarily by men whose perspectives and positionality influence the (re)presentation of history – On the other hand, feminist theorisations on statebuilding in Kosovo have focused on the chronicling of women's stories and their representation within the nationalist discourse. Such predominantly women-exclusive feminist critiques fail to acknowledge that nationalism typically emerges from "masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation, and masculinised hope" (Enloe, 1990, p. 45; Nagel, 1998, p. 243). In fact, the emergence of modern nationalism occurred simultaneously with

Figure 5.6 Declaration of Independence. Picture taken by author.

Western masculinity and, from the very first time, the “male-position-accepted-as-natural” was co-opted by nationalist movements (Mosse, 1996, p. 7; Nochlin, 1971). Drawing from art historian Linda Nochlin’s (1971) seminal essay, Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists, Nagel (2017, p. 43) identifies that the overrepresentation of men as central subjects of the national story relates with an “entrenched misconception of what is the nation and its proper representation”.

The longstanding close ties between masculinity, nation-building and statebuilding are often manifested through rhetorical depictions of “patriotic manhood and exalted motherhood” as almost exclusive signifiers of nationalist ideology in the national museum narrative (Nagel, 2017, p. 44). The National Museum of Kosovo, like most variations of national museums around the world, almost exclusively narrates male-dominating stories while reproducing masculine cultural themes that correspond well to manliness and its terminology. Nagel (1998, pp. 251–252) brings to attention that the everyday “microculture” of masculinity and terminology of “honour, cowardice, bravery and duty” resonates very well “with the demands of nationalism” and, in particular, with its militaristic side – fighting wars, fighting for freedom, defending honour and protecting their women (Nagel, 1998, pp. 251–252). The latter is essential to nationalist rhetoric because

"the imagery and threat of rape is perhaps the most powerful tool in nationalist repertoires of mobilisation" (Nagel, 1998, p. 44).

In the National Museum of Kosovo, women are almost entirely absent from the contemporary history exhibition. The text panel telling the story of artefacts on display consistently focus on military camouflage clothing, martyrdom, resistance, guns, evidence from Serbian occupation, KLA symbols, independence struggle and other artefacts representing peaceful resistance by the DLK leaders, Ibrahim Rugova and Fehmi Agani. In prioritising this *pride* and *heroic discourse*, the NMK text panels and objects narrate an idea of Kosovo that lives in the imagery of manliness.

While there are evident cross-cultural differences in women's representation, the language of nationalism continuously reproduces a "symbolic connection between images of gender, family and the individual on the one hand, and images of the nation on the other" (Eriksen, 2017, p. 1440). Therefore, the masculine discursive structure comes into being through metaphorical depictions that impose the script of the nation-as-family. Central to this role are mothers, rather than fathers, depicted as cultural reproducers of the nation because, for the masculinist perceptions of the nation, it is women who are actually responsible "for the everyday socialisation of children" (Eriksen, 2017, p. 1441). Secondly, the almost consensual phrasing of

Figure 5.7 Madeleine Albright's belonging displayed in the National Museum of Kosovo. Picture taken by author.

first languages as mother tongue instead of father tongue is particularly signifying how nationalist grammar renders itself visible through the gendered images of the nation.

In this overall script of the nation-as-family, the father's representation as the image of the nation is twofold. In peaceful times, the imagery of the father personifying the nation is represented through feminine gendered images – i.e., hardworking farmer (Eriksen, 2017; Yuval Davis & Anthias, 1989). Whereas, in turbulent situations, the image of the father is personified as a military officer commanding the horizontal comradeship of his – thus nation's – sons (Anderson, 1996; Eriksen, 2017). Contrary to sons whose societal roles are embedded within the masculine discourse of fraternal relationships whose honour is subject to the protection of sisters and mothers, the image of sister and daughter, on the other hand, is that of readiness for sacrifice – which, simultaneously, indicates the most passive role within the nation-as-family script.

The National Museum of Kosovo embraces these hierarchical gender relations framed through a masculine perspective of nationhood. This gendered discourse provides an opportunity to symbolically feed Kosovo's contemporary history with stories of heroic men who dominate national imagery. While the National Museum of Kosovo sporadically mentions women who contributed to Kosovo's statebuilding process, they are idealised conceptions of strong women comparable to the then-United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who was crucial in facilitating and fostering the humanitarian intervention in 1999. The NMK displays Albright's relevance through some of her belongings – including a US flag, her cattleman (cowboy hat), and the "Hands of Hope Award" awarded by the National Albanian American Council in 2002. It is almost ironic how Albright's hat is, probably inadvertently, displayed through a masculinised lens and naming – cattleman and/or cowboy hat.

The National Museum of Kosovo also displays a mosaic of the Albanian-Indian catholic nun, Agnes Bojaxhiu, who is globally recognised as St. Mother Teresa – an idealised saint whose representation in the museum is widely uncontextualised. The display of Mother Teresa's mosaic in the museum is evidently related to her Albanian ethnic ties and is detached from Kosovo's contemporary history and narrative themes. Men's stories however are consistently present throughout the permanent exhibition. In contrast, women's presence within the national story is determined by either moral legitimacy or militaristic relevance as seen by masculine perspectives on nationness. In this case, St. Mother Teresa and US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, fit coherently within either the masculine projections of their societal roles or the overall ethnocentric patterns of Kosovo's national story. In fact, both instances provide an opportunity for the nationalist grammar to seize and manipulate gendered symbolism and evoke messages of courage, duty, sacrifice and peace – all part of the masculine lexicon structured under institutionalised patriarchy.

In Kosovo's post-war setting, the combination of the heroics of the national struggle and the ongoing statebuilding process prompted multifaceted opportunities in thinking about the impending versions of an inclusive Kosovar society.

Figure 5.8 St. Mother Teresa's mosaic displayed in the National Museum of Kosovo. Picture taken by author.

Envisioning the future became the "point of practical orientation in the form of a telos [end or goal] in the making" that focuses especially on "[the goals of] the nation and its 'special mission'" (Berger & Lorenz, 2008, p. 13). While these critical socio-political junctures increase the likelihoods of change and progress, it is often the case that the patriarchal gender norms are often reasserted as dominant (see Sluga, 1998). This does not insinuate that Kosovo's post-conflict situation has not stimulated overall progress regarding women's position in society. On the contrary, progress is largely evident, reported and acknowledged on different layers of the public sphere (UN Kosovo Team, 2022). However, the lack of representation of women's stories in the NMK's permanent exhibition explicates how the reproduction of men's role as active participants in shaping the national story is institutionally and societally prioritised in the public sphere.

Countering the existing gendered images that are legitimised by the institutionalised masculinity in the NMK appears rather essential in echoing women's voices within the – or a- national story (Fraser, 1990). For example, the Kosovar Gender Studies Centre's (2008) book title, *History is Herstory Too*, poses a powerful departure point in countering his-stories as the bulwark of national history. This widely used metaphorical assertion enables one to rethink and deconstruct the masculinised themes that dominate the existing museum narratives.

Similar to other museums in the world, this criticism of representation politics poses a pivotal moment in pushing for a more polyvocal and inclusive display of the national objects and national stories in the NMK. Nonetheless, while women's stories remain underrepresented in the National Museum of Kosovo, it is somewhat paradoxical how Kosovo's public discourse and imagery are increasingly shaped by a gendered symbol – a goddess enthroned.

The conundrum of the Goddess on the Throne

The Goddess on the Throne is a female deity widely recognised as the epicentre of the permanent exhibition in the Archaeology section of the National Museum of Kosovo. Shaped in the form of an anthropomorphic terracotta figurine, the Goddess on the Throne reflects the cult of the great mother idol and is displayed in a stoic female posture with a diadem on its head as a signifier of its dignity and sovereignty (Berisha, 2012). Dating from the fourth-third millennium BC in what is widely recognised as the Neolithic period in the Balkans, the artefact was only found in 1956 after several rescue excavations in Kosovo. Accordingly, the Goddess on the Throne became a distinct institutional logo for the National Museum of Kosovo and was, simultaneously, adopted as Prishtina's official symbol.

Figure 5.9 The Goddess on the Throne displayed in the National Museum of Kosovo. Picture taken by author.

Today, the symbolic power that the Goddess on the Throne engenders is largely associated with its silhouette being Prishtina's official logo and its branding being used in numerous public schools, municipal buildings, street art, and other city-related infrastructure. This overall exposure to the symbol has significantly influenced the artefact's reputation as the most recognisable object in the National Museum of Kosovo. However, since there are numerous similar-looking terracotta figurines displayed next to the Goddess on the Throne today, it is evident that the object's symbolic power is not only related to its logoisation as Prishtina's official symbol.

After its return from Serbia to Kosovo in 2002, the artefact has been, deliberately or not, heavily imbued with a symbolic power that shapes – and is shaped from – the societal developments outside the museum walls (Macdonald, 2003, p. 15). Thus, being the only repatriated artefact out of 1,248 stolen objects from Serbia during the war, the Goddess on the Throne has acquired an aura that can, at least in principle, resonate powerful identifying ties with the state. The intertwining impact of archaeological excavations, institutional logoisation and politicisation of historical narratives is not uncommon within nationalism's discursive repertoire. In fact, the logoisation of the Goddess on the Throne elucidates that the musing and research of the archaeologist and the historian, among others, "give[s] voice to

Figure 5.10 Different terracotta figurines surrounding the Goddess on the Throne in the National Museum of Kosovo. Picture taken by author.

wider [national] aspirations that they have conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols" (Smith, 1991, p. 93).

Considering the prevalent masculine narratives in the NMK, it is indeed thought-provoking to resolve, at least tentatively, this conundrum framed as a paradox: Why does a national museum with an almost exclusively male-centred narrative brand itself around the image of a female deity? Numerous reports on Kosovo's cultural heritage that are funded by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (Berisha, 2012, pp. 26–27) portray the artefact as a goddess enthroned reflecting "the cult of a great mother idol". This phrasing – the cult of a mother idol – reproduces the gender dynamics and the existing hierarchical gender relations in Kosovo's traditional narration of history. Furthermore, such wording fits effortlessly into the masculinised narrations of the nation-as-family where the image of women and their representation within the museum narratives is almost strictly associated with motherhood (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Thus, drawing from nationalism's lexicon, most interpretations of the Goddess on the Throne, inadvertently or not, replicate the masculine discourse on women's role in biologically and culturally reproducing the nation – positioning women-as-mother as rather passive actors in the nation-building and statebuilding process.

While the public recognition of the Goddess on the Throne also draws attention because of its role as object-as-logo, its silhouette and image, on the other hand, have transcended the artefact's institutional and material presence. This has enabled the Goddess-as-logo to become, among other things, a personal identifying marker. To illustrate, a significant number of miniature versions of the artefact and its image have increasingly been adopted as pins, filigree work, paintings, graffiti, tattoos, hung artwork and pieces of jewellery. Despite the motivations behind these forms of art, this multi-layered reproduction of the Goddess on the Throne indicates the growing relevance of its symbolism. Therefore, these increasing manifestations of the Goddess on the Throne as a virtual coat of arms can be interpreted as, but not limited to, an expression of the aura that the object acquires when imbued with socio-political meaning (Bucciantini, 2018). Ultimately, this process of reproducibility raises a twofold dilemma: Does Kosovo's nationalism seize and manipulate its images, and if yes, what are the rhetorical assertions that these gendered symbols convey?

Emile Durkheim (2001 [1912], p. 331) argues that social life, "in all its aspects and at every moment of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism". Thus, in the national museum, some of the primary narrative-shaping functions of the artefact are drawn from its properties of materiality and the symbolic power that the artefact lures. In the case of the image of the Goddess on the Throne, the continuous recurring public exposure and its logoisation as NMK's and Prishtina's official symbol have simultaneously increased the relevance of the artefact itself – its aura. Thus, by juxtaposing Kosovo's citizens vis-à-vis different variations of the image of the Goddess on the Throne, the object has become "authentic only after the first copy of it [was] produced" (MacCannell, 1999, p. 47). In this case, the reproduced images are the aura that enables bridging the "relationship between the original object and its socially constructed importance" (MacCannell, 1999, p. 48).

Figure 5.11 "Personal" Goddess on the Throne. (A) Hung artwork. (B) Tattoos adorn the forearms of Kosovar youth. Picture taken by author.

Since the image of the Goddess on the Throne has been increasingly reproduced, the display of the authentic artefact in the NMK has attracted more visitors. Simultaneously, due to its continuously negotiated social and institutional prominence, its symbolic relevance in the personification of the nation has consecutively amplified (Anderson, 1996). By considering the predominantly men-centred narratives in the NMK and the complexity of its role in the public sphere, it was rather obvious that the reproducibility of the Goddess-as-logo has also, inadvertently or not, reproduced a masculinised perspective on the artefact. This, again, is not uncommon within nationalism's repertoire when dealing with gendered symbolism. Numerous gendered symbols – Brazil's "Effigy of the Republic", Finland's "The Finnish Maiden", India's Mother Goddess "Bharat Mata" and the United States' "Statue of Liberty" – occupy significant rhetorical power in the personification of their respective nations. Their images, however, are charged with messages of strength, courage, equanimity, dignity and peace – a terminology characteristic of masculinity that reproduces gender stereotypes and responds well to the demands of nationalism (Eriksen, 2017; Nagel, 2017). The Goddess on the Throne makes no exception. Whereas, on the other hand, men personifying the nation – the gendered symbolism of "John Bull" in the United Kingdom or "Uncle Sam" in the United States – are depicted as rather active participants in the nation-building and statebuilding process.

What initially appears as paradoxical that a female deity – a gendered symbol – has become the centrepiece of a men-centred museum narrative is, actually, rather common in gendered personifications of the nation. However, what remains evident is that even a goddess enthroned is, despite its relevance, still bound to masculinised and patriarchal interpretations of womanhood. This reverberates the necessity to counter these institutionally embedded national his-stories where women's societal roles unfold as only supportive actors. If not contested, the existing predominately masculinised narratives in the NMK will consecutively impact the overall citizenship experience of women and consider them as unequal participants in the statebuilding process.

Conclusion: An opportunity for inclusion?

During my fieldwork in the National Museum of Kosovo in 2019, I saw numerous children queuing to see the document of the Declaration of Independence. Drawing from the nationalist lexicon, I noticed that the future of the nation – its children – were in front of the document that had institutionalised Kosovo's independence. Where I would typically expect to see a sense of pride and collective consciousness, I realise this young, disappointed girl who whispers to her best friend: "This is not for us; this is a men's museum". No reflection, reading, nor interview had stuck with me for longer. Similar to Nagel's (1998) concluding argument, it was testimonial and eye-opening to see a young girl's disappointment that her citizenship experience was different from those of men. National Museums of Kosovo had, inadvertently or not, excluded the stories of

women – their stories – from the national story. It is not only that women are insufficiently represented in the museum; instead, even when represented, their stories reproduce the existing masculine narratives and gendered symbolism as narrated by the museum.

Reading the artefacts on display, I conclude that parallel with the traditional narration of history in Kosovo, the NMK, similar to other national institutions, disproportionately favours men within the national imagery as active participants in Kosovo's statebuilding process. In the case of the NMK, women's actorness in Kosovo's statebuilding is relegated to supporting roles – as mothers of the nation, vessels of reproducing nation, agents for inculcating national culture and national housekeepers (Nagel, 1998). With this predominately masculine narrative that glorifies the heroics of men, the National Museum of Kosovo fails to acknowledge and represent many women's stories who were politically active in the 1990s (Szelag, 2021; Krasniqi, 2009), participated in the KLA (Krasniqi, 2014), and, most appallingly, does not integrate the stories nor mention anything about an estimated 20,000 women who were assaulted and raped during the Kosovo war (Gusia, 2014).

The National Museum of Kosovo is an institution focused on depicting history from a masculine lens. Central discursive themes and objects on display are structured and layered under a nationalist terminology that responds well to the demands of nationalism and evokes messages of courage, duty, sacrifice and peace – all part of the masculine lexicon and the language of nationalism (Eriksen, 2017). The rare exceptions of women's representation in the museum, including the then-Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, and Albanian-Indian catholic nun, St. Mother Teresa, do indeed reproduce masculine narratives. In these instances, these representations of idealised versions of women – a saint and a strong leader-figure – respond well to the requirements of institutionalised patriarchy and nationalism's lexicon centred on manliness.

Despite the fact that women's stories remain underrepresented in the NMK, the logoisation of the Goddess on the Throne, at least presumably, entails a conundrum framed as a paradox. However, it is exactly this alleged paradox that is continuously present within nationalism's discursive repertoire. Through this gendered symbolism, the NMK enables reproducing and maintaining the masculine interpretations of the Goddess on the Throne as the cult of a mother idol. This wording present in numerous institutional reports fits perfectly with the nation-as-family script that categorises mothers as crucial actors to the constituency of nations; however, it is also a strong indicator of the masculine notions that cannot detach womanhood from motherhood. This preconceived masculine supposition signifies how these scripts in the museum are primarily written "by men, for men, and about men" where women are, by design, "supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and women's proper 'place'" within the wider national story (Nagel, 1998, p. 243). In conclusion, the National Museum of Kosovo has to overcome the existing curatorial and displaying tendencies that portray history through the lens of his-stories. History, in fact, is herstory too.

Note

1 In contrast to one "true" univocal narrative, polyvocality signifies the use of multiple voices as a narrative mode – being that as an alternative to encourage diverse readings of the narrative texts instead of promoting a particular version of a national story. In museum studies, this perspective echoes Peter Vergo's (1989) argument on the plurality of meanings.

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6 Gender violence, recognition and state responsibilities

Ardiana Shala and Blerina Këllezi

Introduction

Transitional Justice Processes are complex and often intergenerational processes which are integral to healing and building resilience in post-war societies (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2017). They include bringing justice to victims, establishing truth, ensuring accountability, offering reparations to survivors and reaching reconciliation and peace (Clark & Ungar, 2021). However, most societies, like Kosova, struggle to implement these processes even decades after the war (Manjoo & McRaith, 2011). In Kosova, the first conviction on charges of war rape that resulted in imprisonment took place in 2021 (Humanitarian Law Center, 2021). It was only in 2014, 15 years after the war, that the Kosova government officially approved the amendment of the Law on *The status and the rights of the martyrs, invalids, veterans, members of Kosova liberation army, civilian victims of war and their families* (Law No. 04/L-054; Republic of Kosova) to include and recognise sexual violence survivors officially as civilian war victims. The amendment provided the opportunity for survivors to apply for their status recognition and upon successful verification, receive a pension. In practice, this was made possible in 2018. It is the main recognition offered to the survivors of war rape in Kosova but many have not applied despite the promise of anonymity, due to the widespread stigmatisation still present 20 years after the war (Shala, 2023). It is not known how survivors dealt with this long-term stigmatisation, or how the law amendment contributed to justice for survivors.

One key contributor to the experiences of survivors after war, are public discourses. Public discourses, including those in parliament, play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining stigma and silencing the experiences of survivors. Analysing refugees' discourses from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gratton (2008) noticed that female war rape survivors were described as "worthless", "prostitutes" etc. On the other hand, male war rape survivors[1] were described as "homosexual" within a culture where homosexuality is perceived as anti-normative. This research is in line with the gendered experiences that Sideris (2003) observed in women's testimonies from Mozambique, where rape led to the loss of women's "purity" and therefore dishonoured her family. Similar observations were made by Këllezi and Reicher (2014) in Kosova following the 1998–1999 war, where rape

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remained “unspeakable” for women and men due to its cultural meaning. Even when there is compassion and understanding of the trauma victims have endured, society still labels these victims as “damaged goods” (Bennett et al., 1995). These studies highlight the important roles played by culture and gender norms on how war rape is understood and responded to within patriarchal societies.

This chapter will analyse the identity-based experience and understanding of justice and state recognition focusing on three different aspects and experiences: survivors, professionals and political discourses. First, we will pay attention to the experiences and strategies used by survivors in Kosova to deal with and overcome the long-term impact of war rape and the stigmatisation in the aftermath of the war (study 1). The chapter argues that despite the widespread pressure and marginalisation, war rape survivors are not passive victims, and their views can successfully inform strategies that enable them to overcome stigmatisation and create social-political shifts on justice, collective memory and discursive violence. Second, we will turn to the experience and impact of the law amendment focusing on the accounts of professionals and activists working with war rape survivors and on the ways they supported the survivors and facilitated access to justice (study 2). While the accounts of the survivors allow us to understand their experiences of justice and state recognition first-hand, the accounts of professionals help to understand how support was provided and which strategies were used to bring about change, which included the Law amendment. Finally, this chapter will analyse the political discourses around the Law amendment that led to the recognition of war rape survivors as war victims (study 3). This final analysis aims at understanding discourses used to recognise and support survivors, or to deny the support and recognition. Together these three perspectives (survivors, professionals and political discourses) provide a more in-depth analysis of the understanding and impact of justice/state recognition processes. Before presenting each study, we outline how culture and gender influence the way individuals make sense and respond to events such as war rape.

Two main qualitative approaches were used. Studies 1 and 2 consisted of semi-structured interviews which were analysed using Theoretical Thematic Analysis (TTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015) informed by the Social Identity Approach. TTA was considered appropriate because it allows an in-depth analysis of the participants’ experiences and meaning-making while also accounting for the social context (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Shala, 2023). In Study 3, a Critical Discursive Approach, (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) informed by rhetorical and discursive approaches to discourse (Billig, 1996; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edley, 2001) and social constructivism (Burr, 2015), was used to investigate political speeches relating to war rape survivors’ recognition by the State. A greater focus was put on the speaker’s action orientation and unpacking how meanings, subjects and objects are constructed in and through discourses, and how identities and beliefs are embedded in these meanings. Taking a feminist critical approach, the analysis then looked closer at how interactions and language are embedded within socio-historical context and considered wider social and political consequences of discursive patterns (Wetherell, 1998).

On rape and war

Rape and other forms of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) in war have been an integral part of warfare throughout history (Brownmiller, 1986), targeting mostly women. Examples from World War II include the rape of civilian women in Korea, China and the Philippines by the Japanese army (Brownmiller, 1986), and German women by the Soviet army (Messerschmidt, 2006). SGBV has been prevalent in many wars and conflicts after World War II. For example, in the Yugoslav Wars during the 1990s, rape was used towards an estimated 12,000–50,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 20,000 individuals in Kosova (Human Rights Watch, 2000; Swiss & Giller, 1993). Reports of rape being used as a weapon of war have most recently also come from the Ukrainian war (UN, 2022).

Historically, war rape and other forms of SGBV have been silenced and rarely documented (Waxman, 2017). Evidence of silencing can be observed from historical accounts of systematic rape (e.g., female Holocaust survivors; Sinnreich, 2008) and war narratives which have ignored or sidelined women's experiences (Waxman, 2017). War experiences of being subjected to sexual violence are often excluded from public, collective and formal commemoration, while war narratives that portray experiences of male heroism are frequently documented (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014; Muzaini & Yeoh, 2005). Women's experiences of war rape were even excluded from universal principles of Human Rights (Reilly, 2009). For example, neither Nuremberg nor Tokyo War Crime Trials included war rape as a specific crime (Levy, 1994).

Feminist activists worldwide have argued for war rapes to be considered acts of genocide. Among others, they refer to events in Bosnia, where the perpetrators (ethnic Serbians) were deliberately targeting and raping Bosnian Muslim women, in a genocidal war for political and territorial control over Bosnia (Buss, 2009; MacKinnon, 2006). It is the arguments on Bosnia and Rwanda that led to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court becoming the first international legal document to recognise war-related SGBV as an act of genocide (Article 6), a crime against humanity (Article 7) and war crime (Article 8) (ICC, 2011). In 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the case "Prosecutor *v.* Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic" found the accused guilty on charges based solely on crimes of sexual violence against women (ICTY, 2001). This was the first time in the history of international war crime prosecution that war-related sexual violence was exclusively prosecuted as a war crime and a crime against humanity. These legal changes following the wars in Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia indicated a shift in international political and legal discourses in relation to war rape and sexual violence.

This is reflected in the UN resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (including Resolution 1325, UNSC, 2000), which advocate for the participation of women and girls in peacebuilding processes, to reduce existing gender power imbalances and gain a better understanding of how men and women experience war and peace differently due to socio-political factors that perpetuate gender-based inequalities. The subsequent resolutions within the international agenda mainly focus on wartime

sexual violence (e.g. Resolution 1820 aiming at prevention strategies of SGBV at war, UNSCR, 2008). Other developments at the global level mark a positive step towards addressing war rape and other forms of war-related SGBV as well. These new developments promote more democratic and inclusive approaches to justice in post-war and conflict, known as Transitional Justice Processes (Annan, 2004).

The impact of group processes on war rape consequences in post-war periods

Culture and gender identities can shape the way we see the world, think, feel and interact with others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The role and value of these identities can intensify around war and conflict due to the increased divisions between parties in conflict, as was experienced in Kosova. As the Albanians adopted a parallel system in the 1990s to deal with the oppression by the Serb regime, they also started to rely on traditional customary law, the Kanun. Kanun is a patriarchal code which enhances the salience of cultural and gender identities. For example, Kanun links the value of women to the preservation of "honour" for self and family, and the value of men to protect the honour of their wife (daughter, sister, mother) and their nations (Elsie, 2014; Hasluck, 1954).

Given the centrality of gender identities and the patriarchal nature of Kanun, using rape as a weapon of war (Rittner & Roth, 2012) is effective in violating identity norms regarding women's sexual purity (Sideris, 2003) and masculinity/strength (Carlson, 2006). This cultural meaning of war rape has added to the long-term consequences for survivors (Këllezi & Reicher, 2012; 2014): women, their relatives and whole communities appraised war rape as identity violating, which led to the silencing of survivors, because speaking out would threaten their honour and the family's honour, and highlight failure of their male relatives and ethnic group to protect them (which would also be norm-violating). This phenomenon was defined as a "double insult": the first being from the outgroup (perpetrating the violence) and the second from the ingroup such as family, community or the state (excluding, undermining and silencing their experiences) (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014). Many survivors were silenced from publicly sharing their stories, while recognition for their suffering and access to justice was also delayed. In what follows, we will explain the three studies and showcase the interlocutors' interactions, discourse and worldmaking of survivors of sexual violence.

Study 1: Recognition of war rape as an instrument to validate victims' truth and innocence

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 war rape victims/survivors (conducted face to face between 2019 and 2021), focusing on the long-term impact of war rape, transitional justice and on survivor's views on the law amendment/recognition as a form of justice. The participants were ethnic Albanian from different regions of Kosova, were from both rural and urban areas and belonged to different age groups (ranged 36–71). Overall, 18 out of 20 were women and 2 out of 20

were men; 18 out of 20 were unemployed and 17 out of 20 had children. Four out of 20 participants were the age of 18 or under when they were raped during the war. Details of participants and methodology are outlined elsewhere (Shala, 2022; 2023). The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Participants spoke of long-term stigma and discrimination, feeling blamed and/or the truth of their accounts being contested and not believed. They refer to how a legal recognition through the law amendment would challenge both of these negative responses. As a participant, Hana, explained:

> Justice is to give all people equally what is right, their right […] Justice should be given based on merit. […] Even after twenty years, I know what happened to me. Truth cannot be forgotten. Lies will be forgotten. […] I hope they don't forget these categories. This was not done for pleasure, this was violence, the violence from the Serbian.
>
> (Hana)

Echoing other participants' thoughts and feelings, Hana understood justice as a form of establishing truth and challenging attributions of prejudice, guilt and blame. Justice was perceived as a form of breaking the meaning attributed to rape through patriarchal gender-based ideologies. Justice could be achieved by formal recognition and establishing a clear and shared narrative of the past, when rape was a violence from the shared enemy. Participants felt the law amendment would help to recognise their experience as the truth by incorporating their experience into the collective war narrative.

> My family supported me […] This has to do with morality, it touches; it violates your human integrity, you know. But then, I decided to talk, because war, everywhere else where there has been war, things like this happen, and one should talk the truth. […] because we are those who have experienced this political war at the hands of the Serbian regime, […] better to tell the truth, than to hide it. […] so that your status will be valued. The world should know the price we paid.
>
> (Bashkim)

As the above account illustrates, initial reluctance to seek out state recognition was overcome through family support and the psychological and political need to speak out the truth. For survivors, it is important to frame war rape as political violence that needs to be shared and documented to achieve justice and establish their position within the wider historical and political context. Inclusion through legal recognition meant that survivors' experiences became part of the shared narrative of the freedom's struggle, but also reinforced their membership and belonging in the ethnic group (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014). Many survivors were frustrated that they had to wait for 15 years after the war for the introduction of the law amendment and legal recognition of their suffering:

> If the law would have been amended earlier, people would have relaxed a little bit more, even though you have experienced what you did, you would say to yourself with more positivity: the state is doing something for you, you are part of this nation.
>
> (Hekuran)

As Hekuran (and many other participants) explained, the lack of public and state recognition of their war experiences impacted survivors' self-image and sense of belonging to the nation. Being denied formal recognition undermined the sense of self and legitimised stigmatisation at the family and community level (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014), both of which hinder healing and recovery. On the other hand, formal recognition of victims and support for justice-seeking could contribute to reductions in social stigma and improvements in war rape survivors' well-being (Sharlach, 2000).

> I listen to the news a lot, and you can hear there is much more support now […] I can see that women are much freer now. Those who this has happened to and others who this did not happen to, back then, they were all much more restricted in their liberties. […] now I feel a little bit better, because they are mentioning you somewhere, they are raising their voices somewhere.
>
> (Era)

For most participants the increase of public discourses on war rape in itself was experienced as a positive shift, benefiting their well-being and challenging the stigmatisation. In addition, Era, as many other female survivors, defined these changes as freedom ("women are much freer now"), suggesting that the law amendment was perceived as the result of the gender emancipation already occurring in Kosova as evidenced by the freedom of movement and increased employment of women. A strong influence on the development of the law amendment was the work of civil society and human rights activists. Their experiences of and within these processes were explored in the next study.

Study 2: The law amendment: From rejection and threats to recognition

Twenty professionals from civil society organisations and/or human rights activists (medical professionals, journalists, psychologists, NGO directors, human rights activists) were interviewed to examine the strategies used by NGOs and other professionals working with survivors of SGBV to challenge the impact of stigma and achieve public and formal recognition by society and the state. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Like survivors, the professionals faced resistance when trying to achieve their aims:

> The whole narrative of the fighters, everything was about how "we protected/defended the civil population". So, […] talking about the number of women raped at war, you were attacked from all sides. The narrative that they protected

> the population then crumbled; as well as their manhood, their patriarchalism, that they were protectors/defenders, and despite that in these cases they couldn't have protected anyone, and that feeling, first the patriarchalism, second them being show-off as they were, and they created a situation where women not only were ashamed, but they also were afraid to speak up. We too were in danger if we talked about that issue.
>
> (Buna, Human Rights Activist; Physician)

As this account illustrates, the acceptable public narratives are those associated with pride and resistance. As a result, accounts that undermine these narratives and violate traditional gender norms are perceived as a threat to the identity of the heroic fighter/resistance and their status and standing in society. Such was the perceived threat, that survivors as well as activists working on the issue were silenced. Many activists and professionals initially tried to bring upon change by talking directly to politicians.

> I went to all the political leaders, who were respected as leaders, and I requested that they go public and say that women and girls, boys that were raped at war, it was not their fault; rape was used as a weapon of war, they are victims like all the others. Not one, no one wanted to; (name of a prominent political figure) said to me, "Buna, don't ask me to get mixed in those issues, for God's sake". Religious leaders almost kicked me out of the door.
>
> (Buna, Human Rights Activist; Physician)

Participants' efforts to initiate political collaboration for a law change were met with rejection and hostility as politicians and religious leaders feared getting involved publicly. A key challenge thus for addressing stigma associated with war rape, is that for everyone (not only the victims) talking publicly about war rape was stigmatising in itself. As a result, many professionals working with war rape survivors were forced to keep a low profile on their work for decades to protect both war rape survivors' identities, themselves and the organisations they worked for from stigma and threats. Furthermore, professionals had to find ways to both support and protect survivors directly, and influence social change towards recognition of war rape survivors by society and state institutions (see for more Di Lellio & Kraja, 2021).

> Our approach was about protecting, providing safety, but we never challenged them to talk about their stories. […] So, politicians started to deal with the issue, when they saw that the international community based in Kosova was interested to support this category, and this is how that chain of events started; embassies showed interest, started raising the funds for us NGOs; this made it possible for us to intensify and increase our work-capacity […]; further the participation of the women [survivors] themselves.
>
> (Jeta, Psychologist)

The shared perception among professionals was that once the issue was brought into the public domain there was no turning back, and the reaction that followed triggered a chain of events (foreign embassies being involved and more funding being raised) that defined its success. Their approach to go public using "outside" organisations was useful as the organisations who worked directly with survivors had to focus on protecting the survivors and their own organisations. It is the collaboration with organisations focusing on human rights and advocacy that produced a movement towards change, which inevitably generated more support and new collaborations. In addition, the activism of war rape survivors themselves is being recognised by the organisations, which shows that contrary to the public construction of their victimhood as passive and sensitive, survivors were actively engaging with their cause and the creation and application of Transitional Justice Processes.

Despite this support among organisations and civil society, the process of initiating the law amendment met with further political resistance, including during parliamentary debates. The next study investigates the political discourses of negotiating the law amendment to recognise war rape survivors as victims of war.

Study 3: War rape recognition discourses in the parliament of Kosova

Before the law amendment was approved, a political debate took place in Kosova's national parliament between those who supported and those who rejected this proposition of the law amendment (Luci & Gusia, 2019). We look at how support and rejection of the law amendment were discursively negotiated in two Kosova parliamentary sessions (14/15/19.03.2013 and 20.03.2014). The data was analysed using Critical Discursive Psychology (thereafter CDP) informed by rhetorical and discursive approaches to discourse (Billig, 1996; Edwards & Potter, 1992) and social constructivism (Burr, 2015). We refer to participants as "speakers".

The political debate was being performed between two main groups who positioned themselves in favour ("The propositional discourses") and in opposition ("The oppositional discourses") of the law amendment respectively. The shared repertoire are as follows: (1) benevolent sexism was used by both groups to make opposing claims. The other two were interpretative repertoires that we identified: (2) otherness (used by the "oppositional discourse" group) and (3) shared fate (used by the "propositional discourse" group), which were classified as distinctive interpretative repertoires.

The Law is a man: Rejection/support of the law through gender norms

Within the "Benevolent sexism repertoire", discourses are characterised by statements that oppose or support the law amendment based on gender stereotypes (e.g., protective paternalism or idealisation of women: see Glick & Fiske, 1997). In the following extract, from "The oppositional discourses" group, the speaker argues that the proposed law is useless, because their motherhood identity would stop survivors from coming forward:

> Until today the statistics reveal that of only those who have come forward revealing they have been raped, they do not even reach 2000 in number, while we know that in Kosova there are many more raped women, who are now mothers, have created families, who do not even want that their issue be opened again.
>
> (Rita Hajzeraj-Beqaj, LDK, March, 2013)

Talking to the shared cultural understanding of the mother's role in society, the above account is an excellent example of benevolent sexism which is rooted in patriarchal gender roles that define women strictly bound to motherhood. Motherhood has been widely theorised in feminist research (e.g., Gieve, 1987), often observing how motherhood and womanhood were treated as meaning one and the same, and how the caretaker role of women is culturally constructed as a "natural" role (McMahon, 1995). This naturalisation of motherhood leaves no space for women who do not want to become mothers, nor for mothers who do not enjoy their mothering role (Snitow, 1992) and excludes war rape victims who do not fall within any of these categories at all.

In addition, the expectations of a "mother" to make a certain choice are culturally shaped. The possibilities of making other choices are silenced by the speaker above, and what is being invoked here is an image of a "good mother" (Coats & Fraustino, 2015), a mother that sacrifices herself for the protection of the family by not wanting "their issues to be opened again". As such, the law amendment is constructed as a potential risk for women/mothers. This is done through the "coming forward to reveal that they were raped" argument presented as a condition that needs to be completed by survivors for them to be able to make use of the law.

> We know that the majority of the female gender, that suffered during the war, has hesitated to document that they were part of this crime in Kosova. Therefore, having in mind these two factors, lack of exact registration of them and their hesitation to declare that they really were raped, makes us as MPs think a little further as to whom in fact are we wishing to help, to whose mill are we bringing water? as the proverb goes. Based on the fact that if we legitimise a law like this, thinking of helping them, and in fact we are not helping them, because they are not declaring, but hesitate to disclose and receive help.
>
> (Gëzim Kelmendi, PD, March 2013)

Within the oppositional discourses the meaning of law amendment is constructed as a tool to document if war rape survivors are telling the truth. In a social context where "the majority hesitated to document" the exact number is unachievable, so the speaker above implies that the law will be ineffective. When stating "their hesitation to declare that they were really raped" the speaker is emphasizing that he is not talking about some others who were not "really raped". The implicit suggestion made here is that there are victims "who hesitate to declare that they really were raped", and that there will be fake testimonies. So, on one hand, the credibility of war rape survivors and their trustworthiness is being called into question, and on

the other hand, the lack of "exact registration" is construed as a problem that arises because war rape survivors do not want to "disclose" *and* "receive help".

The language used here positions war rape survivors on one hand as victims of stigma associated with the hesitation to disclose their victim identities, and on the other hand as agents of their will, who have a choice in disclosing and receiving help, but they "hesitate". As such, the responsibility is being attributed to the survivors and with that the blame for why the law cannot be approved.

Benevolent sexism repertoire was also used within "The propositional discourses". In the next account, a member of the party in power, the Democratic Party of Kosova, distances himself from his party's position and supports the law amendment.

> We have to deal here with a very sensitive category, that of sexual violence, that has happened to our sisters, mothers and our wives, and so we can forgive many things, we can forgive Serbia many things, but we cannot forgive the sexual violence and the torture they have committed against us.[…] Therefore, these categories need to be protected by law and Serbia needs to be told that it has committed crimes, has perpetrated violence and this will not be forgotten.[…] We protect a value, we protect our own mother, we also protect our future, our families.
>
> (Nait Hasani, PDK, March, 2013)

By invoking traditional gender roles, the above speaker is speaking to the shared cultural understanding of the meaning of "sisters, mothers and wives" within the concept of the family. The deployment of "our" *in* that sentence is achieving at least two different functions. One is that the listeners are invited to imagine their own "sisters, mothers and wives" and the other is that the word serves to remind others of the shared responsibility as a national group. This shared responsibility is invited into imagination by invoking twice the shared national identity, first through talking about the crimes that Serbia (the enemy) as the aggressor has perpetrated "against us". By invoking the identity of the enemy (Serbia) the speaker is managing the differences in arguments about the law amendment between the different parties by inviting everyone to focus their attention on a common enemy. Second, the shared responsibility is invoked through the "mother" as a symbol of the "the familial future" (Yula-Davis, 1997 p. 45) that needs protection to be able to fulfil her role of reproducing and securing its future.

While women too, have sisters and mothers, they are not expected (traditionally, and legally for that matter) to have wives. So, by adding and concluding with the "wives" in that "three-part-list" (Jefferson, 1990), the imagined family is one that belongs to the men. In other words, this means that the law is conceptualised as a "man" and "sisters, mothers and wives" as his objects that need to be protected. This is a great example of what Yuval-Davis (1980) has framed as the objectification of women's role in the collective. While mothers, and arguably also sisters and wives (most of whom are also expected to be mothers) symbolise unity and honour in the collective national identity, as women they are given only an object position within discourses that frame the politics of the national identity.

Distinctive repertoires

The objection to the law amendment does not necessarily involve at all times an objection to the recognition of war rape survivors' status, but rather is focused on the different ways proposed on how to achieve the recognition by the state.

Within the "otherness repertoire" the oppositional discourse group invokes discourses of "separation", "special status" and "otherness" to object to the proposed law amendment and thematise the recognition of war rape survivors. For example, in the next extract, the speaker argues for a separate law for war rape survivors' "treatment".

> By all means, the pain of all of us as MPs and the feelings and obligation, first as institutionalists, is that this category be treated and be treated specially, with a separate law, where all these women raped during the war would be treated […] It would be good that this […] that a new legal initiative is started and that initiative be dedicated only to this category and based on it to seek compensation based on international legislation; and not do this in this form and abuse this in the name of the families of martyrs, in the name of war victims, in the name of invalids and veterans.
>
> (Bekim Haxhiu, PDK, March, 2013)

In this speech arguments are made to position "all these women raped*"* within an imagined "separate law". The separation implies that war rape survivors should not be included in the existing law, which includes other categories such as "martyrs, invalids, veterans, members of Kosova liberation army, civilian victims of war and their families". However, in order to avoid being interpreted as rejecting support for war rape survivors, the concept of "special treatment" is invoked. The "special" categorisation of war rape survivors implicitly speaks to the different value that war rape survivors hold in society compared to all the other war survivor categories already included in the law. What distinguishes them from the others is that their experiences are seen to have violated valued social norms and thus invoke a sense of shame (individually as well as collectively), while the other categories are associated with decent self-sacrifice (civilian victims) and heroism and pride (veterans, martyrs) (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014).

The inclusion of war rape survivors in the same law as the war veterans is construed as an abuse "in the name of …". While the speaker argues, explicitly, for "new legal initiative… dedicated only" to war rape survivors as a special status, implicitly he is also arguing for the protection of the "special status" of war veterans and other categories in the existing law by excluding war rape victims from the law.

Different from the "separation discourses" within the oppositional group, the propositional group discourses are dominated by a "Shared fate repertoire" by emphasising the shared collective meaning of the experience of war.

> The reason we asked for the amendment of the existing law and did not draft a separate one, is that this was the request of this category themselves. They

> are a product of war the same as the other categories and do not want different treatment, which would prolong their stigmatisation from the community.
>
> (Albana Gashi, VV, March, 2013)

In response to the claims for separation, the above speaker argues in favour of inclusion of war rape survivors in the same law. First, she explains that this "was the request of this category" indicating that there has been a conversation with war rape survivors prior to drafting the law proposition, the recommendations of whom have been acknowledged. Herewith, she is recognising survivors' agency on the matter of how the law amendment was conceptualised. She then constructs a meaning of the relationship between "othering" and the experience of stigmatisation by saying: "They are a product of war, the same as the other categories". She then argues that, because they are "the same", excluding them from this law "would prolong the stigmatisation". This account serves as an example of discourses that focus on the consequences of the law amendment directly and discuss both positive consequences (inclusion) and negative consequences in case of objection (exclusion) thereby constructing the meaning of the law amendment as a form of social justice that addresses the stigma of war rape.

Conclusion

The results from the three studies on which we have focused highlight the long-term consequences and exclusion of war rape from political narratives of war. While survivors perceived the increase in discourse as a positive change (compared to 15 years of political silence), being talked about is not equal to being recognised. The analysis highlights how injustices are politically legitimised through gendered discourses of victimhood and motherhood, reducing women's position to traditional gender roles that undermine their agency, resilience and independence and empower stigma and exclusion.

The patterns of exclusion of war rape survivors observed in this work reflect previous research. War discourses have been historically dominated by patriarchal constructions of "national boundaries" (Yuval-Davis, 1980), reflecting gendered discourses where sexuality and women's bodies serve as territorial markers of the cultural boundaries of the shared national identity and honour. This forced identity as the "bearer of the national collective" (Yuval-Davis, 1980, p. 15) bound to patriarchal gender roles, turns into what Mercer (1990, p. 61) called a "burden of representation" which is heavy to bear, and when not upheld it can lead to serious consequences (Këllezi & Reicher, 2014; Rozario, 1991). There is an important divergence, however. While women have been given this national burden, they have been excluded from participation in the politics of constructing the shared identity of the nation (Mayer, 2000). As such, women retain an object position in discourses of nationhood and shared national experiences in general where the construction of "womanhood" has a property of "otherness" (Yuval-Davis, 2003, p. 19). In other words: men construct "women" (e.g., "as sensitive victims"

ignoring their resilience and agency) and where women are naturalised as the "sisters, mothers, wives" who need protection, the male "protector" identity continues to remain unquestioned.

The implications are that victims will not come forward while stigmatisation persists and when discourses continue to objectify them, to question their credibility, to misidentify them (e.g., excluding men and people of non-binary genders) and to position them as sensitive and with no agency, yet at fault for not coming forward and concealing their victim identity. The intended inclusion in the name of the collective/national interest restricts belonging to all who do not fit within these categories (mother, good mother, sister, wife, male war rape survivors etc.). Discourses thus can be used to legitimise structural cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) defined as the legitimisation itself of dehumanising and prejudicial practices, injustices, marginalisation, stigma and so forth, against a group of people, perpetrated through cultural factors that shape and give meaning to social life. Gibson (2018) defined these discursive practices as "discursive violence". Naturalising patriarchal gender norms in and through discourses can be a form of discursive violence that perpetuates and exacerbates injustices resulting from those norms.

As we saw from survivors' accounts themselves, public and political discourses are integral for processes of meaning-making of the past. They are integral to Transitional Justice Processes, as part of challenging or legitimising cultural structures. They affect how survivors perceive themselves represented in and through political discourses, their sense of belonging to the national identity, but also how societies react to survivors and how they build resilience with their collective history across generations (Clark & Ungar, 2021). To break the cycle of "discursive violence" in relation to stigmatised war experiences it is essential to use Transitional Justice Processes, which alongside the immediate impact in providing meaningful support for victims, also consider long-term transgenerational needs for understanding the past and involve broader emancipation strategies of marginalised groups in society. The goal should be to combat stigma and discrimination by engaging in more equal collective memory practices through inclusive historical narratives. Foremost, future policies and strategies should aim to deconstruct traditional meanings of national identity and its connection to manhood, so that women and people of non-binary genders can have space to construct themselves as part of the national identity in processes of dealing with the past and building the future.

Note

1 Although less frequently, men can also be targets of war sexual violence (e.g., Bosnian prison camps) (Carlson, 2006), and their experiences of war rape are less recognised and documented. While this chapter recognises and investigates both men and women as victims of war rape, it does also analyse the role of pre-existing structural gender inequalities (Butler, 1990) that disadvantage war victims before, during and after the war.

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Section III

(Re)making Kosovo. (Re)making gender

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7 Reconfiguring womanhood

The making of gender and the state in the newly independent Kosovo

Rozafa Berisha

Introduction

"I have worked hard not to disappoint Kosovo and to make the country proud"[1] (Top channel, 2021). Such were the words of the 30-year-old female judoka Majlinda Kelmendi on the occasion of her retirement when she received the "Shote Galica" award from the Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani. Having brought Kosovo the first Olympic medal in the summer of 2016, Majlinda had left behind a splendid career recognised and applauded by various political figures in Kosovo for "putting the new country on the map". As one of the most admired figures for her contribution to Kosovo's international recognition through sports, she was featured in books about the most successful women of Albanian recent history, was part of various campaigns for women's empowerment and was the fourth woman to have a statue erected in Kosovo, after Mother Teresa and Madeleine Albright and Kosovo Liberation Army fighter, Xhevë Lladrovci. With teary eyes, on the day of her retirement she thanked the president and the people for having announced her as "the hero of Kosovo".

Portrayed variously as the face and the modern hero of Kosovo, Majlinda Kelmendi is perhaps the figure most closely associated with the new nation-state, representing what this nation-state is and aspires to be: young, developed and recognised world-wide. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in February 2008, following the war and a successive eight-year period of being a UN protectorate. Since then, it sought to consolidate its statehood by building domestic institutions and adhering to ideals of liberal statebuilding to eventually advance into a full-fledged, internationally recognised EU member state. Yet, not only was the vision and objective of creating a modern, democratic European member state a macro-political concern, but "Europeanisation" also provided a wider societal model and even "a way of life" (Musliu, 2021, p. 3) for Kosovar citizens. Largely communicated to the public through the rhetoric of Europeanisation, such political aspiration encapsulated a neoliberal agenda of development, where national progress is tied to individual economic self-realisation. Cultural values and premises of neoliberalism such as the valourisation of free, rationalised and meritocratic agents abstracted from existing socio-economic structures were promoted as the new and desirable qualities. In this respect, the project of Kosovo as a European state in the making prompted a reconfiguration of national identities that adhere to

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the agenda of the statebuilding project and Europeanisation. And figures such as Majlinda Kelmendi came to embody its ideal national subject.

This chapter is concerned with the making of the gendered national subjects in the newly independent Kosovo through a twofold analysis. The first examines the ideological layers and the temporal politics that have animated this reconfiguration, while the second inquires ethnographically how these top-down discourses play out on the ground level for young women. I contend that there has been a top-down reconfiguration of national womanhood in light of shifting modalities of nationalism of pre- and post-independent Kosovo, punctuated by two historical bouts: the war and the past struggle for liberation, and the future-oriented nation-state building project. Clearly, a complex process as is the making of a new national womanhood cannot be contained into a monolithic vision, with manifold regimes of knowledge, discourses and representations existing simultaneously and extending way beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Among various social groups and in different contexts, the figure of the woman is indeed central to the engagement with wider political and social changes (Bier, 2011, p. 2). Yet, I view the modalities of nationalism that pertain to the state- and nation-building project in Kosovo as a major force in this gendered process of reconfiguration, as well as a force through which other influential global currents, such as neoliberalism, get systematically framed.

The chapter situates itself within an invaluable body of feminist scholarship in Kosovo that explores the gendering of national identities and the temporal politics at the heart of this process (Luci, 2005; Di Lellio & Schwandner-Sievers, 2006; Krasniqi, 2007; Krasniqi, 2021; Luci, 2014; Luci & Gusia, 2015). Taking a cue from this scholarship, I explore anthropologically some of the political, social and cultural endeavours oriented towards a creation of a new (as well as young) vanguard female citizenry in the service of building the future "European" state. In light of this, the chapter teases out its ideological layers and temporal politics to uncover that "the new Kosovar woman" not only exists as an ideological and symbolic construct but also reifies the promises of the statebuilding project for young women, the aim of which being to shape one's expectations about what is to come. Despite the widespread prevalence of such promises, however, in this chapter I identify a disconnection between these and young women's lived realities who face economic uncertainties and an institutional system that fails to meet their expectations. The disconnect is manifested in both affective and practical terms – that is, as a general sense of "waiting" and as future-oriented micro-strategies mediated by existing structures (i.e., one's socioeconomic position and their social capital). Such disconnect reveals the unfulfilled promises of the new Europeanising Kosovo.

The methodological choices for this chapter reflect my twofold analysis. The methodology primarily entails a discursive analysis of the official discourse as for instance exemplified by the speech and the award Kosovo's president gave to Majlinda Kelmendi, as well as state-mediated and popular representations of the new Kosovar woman. In addition, I draw on ethnographic insights that bring to the fore the lived experiences of young women. The ethnographic material presented in this chapter was collected during a one-year fieldwork in the city of Southern Mitrovica

between 2018 and 2019. As part of my PhD project, I was researching young women's hopes and future oriented practices in relation to the projected optimism and the promises of the statebuilding project (Berisha, 2022). My fieldwork consisted of participant observation in their future-oriented practices that took place in and beyond institutional settings. One of these settings was the University of Mitrovica, where I regularly joined a group of young women (aged 18 to 30) in their lectures and other daily activities. I've also conducted informal conversations, semi-structured and repeated interviews with key interlocutors. In this chapter, I follow the trajectory of a key informant from this group of female students, yet I also incorporate insights that emerged from conversations and practices observed during the time I conducted fieldwork at the university. My methodological choice to take an individual as "a primary unit of analysis" (Miller, 2009, p. 1) rests on its power to capture in more in-depth and systematic manner the constraints and potentials through which one lives. Despite its specificity, this individual experience foregrounds the wider experiences of young women who anchored their hopes on higher education for attaining some notions of the ideal national subject. Crucially, it reveals the ways individual and intimate experiences intersect with wider socio-political context, thereby explicating the dynamics between the subjective and the structural.

The gendering of national identities before independence

While the mobilisation of Kosovar young women as the representatives of the rising nation-state is novel, women's involvement in the national project is of course not new. Distinct ideologies of gender, materialised in visual representations, discursive practices and publicly circulated signs, have been central throughout various moments of Kosovo's recent history. This opening section will foreground politics of gender in Kosovo prior to its independence. It inquires how these politics rather than existing in vacuum are always "constitutive of (and constituted by) other political claims, narratives, and frameworks" (Bier, 2011, p. 5).

Within the nationalist framework women were constructed primarily as gendered and ethnic political subjects (Luci, 2002), a process cemented through what anthropologist Vanesa Fong (2004) would call "filial nationalism". This is a conception of nationhood in which the nation is imagined not so much as a community along Benedict Anderson's (1991) lines but as kin with a sentimental and filial devotion that applies simultaneously to the family and the nation. In the context of 1990s Kosovo, this modality of nationalism was mobilised in forging national cohesion and solidarity amidst Slobodan Milošević's systematic repression of the Kosovar Albanian population and the imposition of martial law. The making of national politics according to a filial nationalism, as anthropologist Nita Luci (2005) has noted, drew heavily on "the meanings and practices of forging local kin, and other connections of relatedness through the code of honour,[2] as a basis for a nationalist social movement" and belonging (p. 148). Nonetheless, it was the change in the Kosovar Albanian political strategy from a peaceful to an armed resistance almost a decade later that most strongly mobilised filial nationalism and the solidification of "traditional" womanhood and manhood at a national

level according to the patriarchal kinship paradigm (Luci, 2014). National womanhood drew on the patriarchal structures of the extended family for a redefinition of womanhood with a deeper valuation for motherhood. Thus, the mobilisation of women in the nationalist project, as Luci (2005) notes, required a redefinition of women's roles most often as being in the "service" of the nation and performing care labour such as "taking care of the wounded, refugees, and displaced persons, and holding family life together while men serve at the front" (p. 75).[3] By contrast, national manhood was equated with apparent virtues of honour, patriotism and militarism (Munn, 2008).

In the post-war period, filial nationalism and patriarchal kinship metaphors remained intact albeit with a key difference: they were institutionalised and materialised in the public sphere through the processes of memory making. Within the state-sponsored collective memory framework, notions of hegemonic masculinity that celebrate martyrdom became the meta-narrative presented in public rituals and memorials (Di Lellio & Schwandner-Sievers, 2006; Ströhle, 2010; Luci, 2014). It is worth noting that the memory production in post-war Kosovo had a manifold role: a legitimising political practice, a collective means for coping with a traumatic past (Luci & Gusia, 2019), and equally important, a mobilisation of the collective desire for statehood. As summarised succinctly by Anna Di Lellio and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (2006):

> The national myth-making activity of Albanian memory entrepreneurs in Kosovo has used cultural scripts taken from the patriarchal tradition. They are based on the resistance until death and the trans-generational obligation to remember and complete the work of martyrs … [T]his has shifted the focus from the "shameful" experiences of victimization/humiliation to imparting pride. Prospectively, it provides an icon of national solidarity, strengthens Albanian national political identity, and makes claim to independence non-negotiable.
>
> (Di Lellio & Schwandner-Sievers, 2006, pp. 526–527)

As this passage notes, memorisation in post-war Kosovo has been deeply gendered-biased. It has been built almost exclusively around the male combatant, whilst women's political engagement, positions and victimhood have been largely silenced. Regardless of its hegemonic power, this process did not go unchallenged with multiple counter memories and acts of remembrance existing alongside (Berisha, 2017). However, scholars have observed that gendered national identities in post-war Kosovo have been reproduced not only through the framework of collective memory – sustained by filial nationalism – but also through simultaneous workings of international governance. Vjollca Krasniqi (2007), for instance, argues that an intertwining of international peacekeepers and local nationalist patriarchs led to a "normalization of hierarchical restructurings of gender" (p. 2). Krasniqi analyses the gendered politics of representation observed in the UN posters where images of boyhood infantilise men and Kosovo society as a whole. While justifying international supervision, such depiction has generated "local patriarchal vulnerabilities" (Krasniqi, 2007, p. 21), deepening the need to reassert domestic

political authority. At the same time, the local political advertisement has evoked and reproduced culturally acceptable feminine conduct whereby women were expected to act the role of the mothers of the nation. As a result, international and national politics of representation have led to the reinforcement of the existing gendered ideologies.

As outlined in this section, scholars in anthropology and beyond have mainly focused on filial nationalism, examining how patriarchal kinship idioms consolidated through the framework of collective memory, have structured the gendering process of national identities. For the purposes of this chapter, it is pertinent to now turn the attention to the new modalities of nationalism, and the ways its future-oriented temporal politics has led to a reconfiguration of national womanhood.

"The new Kosovar woman"

With Kosovo's independence in 2008, new modalities of nationalism congregated a multiplicity of historical and political repertoires, all hinged on the aspiration of building a European member nation-state. The most notable shifts of the new modalities of nationalism were its temporal politics and ideological orientation: unlike filial nationalism that had been built around the patriarchal kinship structures and had been cemented in the post-war collective memory framework, the new modalities of nationalism were primarily premised on the future-making of the European, multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo nation-state. Inevitably, these shifts reflected on gender ideologies and the reconfiguration of national womanhood along the lines of the statebuilding project. Political, legal, visual and symbolic mechanisms served this purpose, constituting a mutually dependent system for constructing a European nation-state and, by extension, European national subjects. The most significant mechanisms in this regard were perhaps the NEWBORN monument and the acclaimed nation-brand Young Europeans campaign, which helped set the ground for understanding the emergence of the "new Kosovar woman".

The NEWBORN monument was revealed to the public on the day of independence in a joyful and celebratory atmosphere. Created by the local designer Fisnik Ismaili, the typographic sculpture was located at the heart of the Capital Prishtina next to which stood the poster "New life is born, new hope is born". Embodying this sense of newness and hope, the NEWBORN monument came to represent the emerging state of Kosovo that was new in more than one way: young both in terms of statehood and its population. "NEWBORN" was, however, more than a monument and more than a symbol. It was an "ideology" (Ströhle, 2012) that depicted the society in amnesic terms, calling for a break from violence and socialism and, by virtue of this dissociation with the past, it oriented the society towards a new political future. In the subsequent years, the NEWBORN monument would serve as a national symbol and a public script for contouring the post-independence national identity based on the principles of multi-ethnicity and European integration (Boguslaw, 2021, p. 751; Ströhle, 2012).

A sequence of the NEWBORN monument, the Young Europeans campaign on the other hand, was an enormously expensive multimedia campaign. Commissioned by the government of Kosovo and realised by the company BBR Saatchi & Saatchi Tel Aviv, the campaign consisted of billboards, posters, ads and a video clip that circulated internationally and domestically. While also capturing hopes and a new vision for Kosovars, the campaign capitalised on the idea of Kosovo being the youngest nation in Europe by elevating it into a branding national characteristic. It thus promoted youthfulness as the main asset for the building of a European nation-state. This agenda was visibly present in the main video which depicted hard-working Kosovar youth as they painted yellow puzzles in spectacular scenery. The young people then carried the puzzles to a large green field where they were assembled to create a map of Kosovo. In the end, while the youth looked on happily at the fruits of their labour, the camera zoomed out to include the whole map of Europe, to which Kosovo has been added.

In her study about the strategies of reinventing Kosovar society after independence, historian Isabel Ströhle (2012) considers the Young Europeans campaign as well as the NEWBORN monument, as "designed to transform Kosovo's image of war and violence into an image of youth and 'a spirit of optimism and enterprise you won't find anywhere else'" (p. 228). While in the pre-independence period the public discourse had been largely dominated by the memory of war, as explained in the previous section, after independence this discourse was replaced by a multi-ethnic and civic one with an explicitly European-oriented perspective (Ströhle, 2012). With its emphasis on a multi-ethnic and civic vision, and an underlying valourisation of free, hard-working and meritocratic individuals, this European orientation presents a specific conflation with neoliberal values and premises. As the scholar Nadia Kaneva (2018) argues, nation-state building in Kosovo "articulate[s] the agenda of neoliberal development with the project of producing national subjects within the parameters of a reconstituted, neoliberal nation-state" (p. 75). It is within this neoliberal framework that youth are enlisted to fashion themselves into the ideal national subjects and carve out Kosovo's political future.

From this brief discussion on the conflation between Europeanising agenda and neoliberalism within the new modalities of nationalism, we can begin to notice a redefinition of gendered representations that has taken place in post-independence Kosovo. My argument here is that within the new modalities of nationalism, specific profiles of young women that adhere to the cultural values of Europeanisation and neoliberalism came to occupy a significant role in the national imagination as the ideal national subjects. Crucially, the promotion of young women as ideal national subjects was not only located in the aesthetic and symbolic realm: in those visions they were mandated as political and historical subjects, and a young vanguard force in the building of the new state. For instance, the exemplar of the new national subject became the internationally and professionally acclaimed young women such as the athlete Majlinda Kelmendi, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and the two British-Kosovar Albanian pop stars Rita Ora and Dua Lipa (see Figure 7.1). The three (the list has been expanded to include many other women) are continuously celebrated as the "image of Kosovo" in light of their

Figure 7.1 "Bac, çikat na e zbardhën ftyrën". Copyright 2023 by Hallakate. Used with permission.

international success in their respective industries, variously referred to as the "Heroines of Kosovo", "Women of Kosovo", or "Kosovo Pride". A closer reading of what these acclaimed figures represent makes it clear that, among others, they embody some of the core cultural values and premises of neoliberalism such as hard work, individual will, self-development and entrepreneurial spirit assured by the ideology of meritocracy. Having embodied these characteristics, they came to stand as powerful symbols of the state aspirations for establishing a liberal, emancipatory, modern and secular nation-state, presented to both domestic and international audiences. Virtues such as hard work, self-reliance and individual success are prioritised as inherent to national character, and thus, individual acts, in whichever field they may be, are hailed as patriotic acts that serve the statebuilding project. Yet, as we shall see, while this reconfiguration of gendered national identities presents notable discontinuities with the past, it is concomitantly legitimised by filial nationalism.

Below the images of Majlinda Kelmendi and the two British-Kosovar Albanian pop-stars Rita Ora and Dua Lipa, the poster contains the phrase "*Bac, çikat na e zbardhën ftyrën*" (Uncle, the girls are making us proud). The reference to *Bac* (uncle) speaks directly to Adem Jashari, the Kosovo Liberation Army commander

killed during the war, around whom the national master narrative and post-war memorialisation have been built (Di Lellio & Schwandner-Sievers, 2006). In line with filial nationalism, Adem Jashari was personified as the father of the nation, hence, all deeds of Kosovar Albanians who have helped to improve the state's image and contribute to the statebuilding project are presented as in gratitude to him. Again, the new national subject is here fed both by a sense of filial nationalism and the new modalities of nationalism that bear the parameters of neoliberalism and promote a neoliberal subjectivity. The poster is also an apt visualisation of how neoliberal premises enshrined in the new modalities of nationalism are legitimised by filial nationalism and the underlying patriarchal script that animates it. Another example is the Shote Galica prize awarded to Majlinda Kelmendi which opened this chapter. While Majlinda Kelmendi has won an Olympic medal, putting the new Kosovo state on the geopolitical map through sports, Shote Galica was a Kosovar Albanian female insurgent who partook in the large-scale Kaçak movement born out of the Albanian revolt against the annexation of Kosovo from the Yugoslav Kingdom in the early twentieth century. As an exceptional historical figure, Shote Galica came to epitomise an intersection between resistance and the fight for national liberation as much as liberation from gender norms of the time. It is thus no coincidence that this prize was awarded to Majlinda Kelmendi to commemorate her achievements in the struggle for statehood recognition – a derivative of a longer intergenerational struggle for national liberation – as much as for promoting a specific vision of national womanhood for the future. As these examples illustrate, the new modalities of nationalism did not replace the filial one even if the temporal conditions that produced them are chronological. Instead, they overlap into a somewhat contradictory narrative: filial nationalism ensures commemoration of, continuity with and adhesion to ethnonationalist affiliation, while the new modalities of nationalism place the emphasis on the future of the national (European) self. These potentially incongruous political rationales in the present manifestations of nationalism(s) in Kosovo are solved through a temporal anchoring of the past commemoration and the future orientation of the nationhood.

As significant as these dominant state narratives are for their aesthetic and symbolic function, I argue that they mediate a much larger ideological, political and temporal orientation, acting as promises of the nation-state building project. They promise to their targeted public that their involvement in the nation-state project will enable the attainability of some of the notions of neoliberal success, upward mobility and national belonging. On an ideological level, the very word promise, as anthropologist of infrastructure Brian Larkin (2018) argued, "cannot be theorised or understood outside of the political orders that predate it and bring it into existence" (p. 182). So far, I have traced the political orders that emanate this promissory national subject. In the following, I complement this top-down analysis with an examination of how individuals negotiate their imagination and belonging into the national project of statebuilding and attempt to construct their gendered subjectivities. In other words, I ask how are images, discourses and processes received on the ground, and how are they redeployed, negotiated and domesticated by the young women themselves? As the last section will argue, there

is a disconnect between these presented promises and lived realities as the ideal subject is rarely rendered tangible.

Anticipating the disconnect: The case of Jeta

Among the group of young women, whose aspirations and the practical means to pursue them I was researching, the figure of Majlinda Kelmendi was met with firm admiration. They spoke of Kelmendi in an affirmative tone, corroborating this by actively sharing her victories in sports on their private social media accounts. Embodying the circulated cultural values and premises of a hard-working, meritocratic and professionally successful young woman, Kelmendi was indeed what most held to be the archetype of the Kosovar young woman. For my interlocutors, the path to some of the notions of the new womanhood, such as professional success and economic independence materialised around tangible sites and institutions where these notions get supposedly fulfilled. One of those sites was the University.

Having had a long and significant history for the Kosovar Albanian national self, higher education after independence acquired an important role in the new modalities of nationalism. Together with five other universities,[4] Mitrovica University opened in 2013 and was considered by the political elite as a would-be vehicle of the "Europeanisation" and economic development of the country (Avdyli, 2019). Bearing already a strong cultural value attached to it, higher education presented a promise for young women to achieve upward mobility and tailor themselves into the archetype of the national subject simultaneously. In theory, higher education in Kosovo was presented as a central, meritocratic path that would enable this forward movement.

Since the early stages of my fieldwork, however, young women at the University voiced how structural impediments and an overall predicament saturated their future paths. To illustrate this point, I present the trajectory of a 21-year-old female student whom I will call Jeta.[5] It is worth mentioning that this case is illustrative of a wider reality, and although differently classed women had different resources to carave out a future for themselves, the structural impediments were widely regarded as determining one's future trajectory. Having decided to study economic engineering, Jeta was the first family member to pursue a degree in higher education, allowing her to aspire for a secure job and middle-class respectability. Nonetheless, Jeta was quick to warn me that her trajectory would not be nearly close to the images of success circulating around her. "None of us who complete our degrees in economic engineering usually find work in our profession", Jeta asserted as we were walking out of the Faculty of Economics. After completing her degree, Jeta anticipated that she, similar to her peers, would struggle to find a stable job. Having a degree that she considered will not equip her with the skills needed for the job market, whilst navigating large unemployment rates among youth of around 40 per cent (Trading Economics, 2021), she envisaged that she will be left with few options. Quantifying the possibility of her hope to find a job in her profession in a state institution or a private company, Jeta noted that "there is only a slim chance, maybe closer to zero".

Like many other students, Jeta would often mention how the prevailing path to individual success was the possession of connections mobilised to achieve one's

goals, particularly so when finding a job. *Me të njofshëm*, as is locally referred to, means getting things done through personal relations and affinities rather than institutionalised venues. Such discourse of a lack of meritocracy has not only become the most accessible device for justifying the (mis)workings of the socio-political order but also, importantly, has become the ground which shapes one's attitudes and actions towards their future. It is rhetorically mobilised as a major obstacle in the path to the fulfilment of personal hopes and collective promises as it directly negates the premise of hard work and meritocracy so powerfully ingrained in the new modalities of nationalism and the tangible sites that concretise them. Beyond the local concerns with the lack of meritocracy, statistically speaking, widespread higher education rather than delivering its promise has created a category of educated un/underemployed, who make up a large part of the unemployed youth in Kosovo (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, 2022). The gender gap in employment reflects the disproportionately higher unemployment rates among young women (Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, 2022).

In light of this discordance, I have found that among young women there is an anticipated and experienced disconnect between these state-sponsored promissory images of the national subject and their lived realities. To return to Jeta's story, this disconnect takes both an affective and practical mode, being experienced as a general sense of "waiting" and materialising as future-oriented micro-strategies to influence one's future prospects that often get mediated by the existing structures as class position. Despite the promises for individual success, it is socioeconomic background and social and cultural capital that determines different outcomes in terms of life chances, a point to which I will return shortly.

In an interview conducted in 2019, Jeta evoked the unfulfilled promises and a collective sense of waiting while providing a commentary on the Young European campaign:

> Remember the video that was made about us being the youngest state in the world, about 10 years ago? The youth there were 20 years old, now they are 30, and nothing has changed. Absolutely nothing! It just feels like that has been a camouflage for the lack of change that was about to come after that.

Her example of the Young Europeans campaign is perhaps not a coincidence given that this presented the utmost propelling force of hope and promise for a European individual and collective future. However, Jeta presents it only as a snapshot of a frozen promise, juxtaposing it to the collective waiting that has characterised the post-independence period. Her statement echoes Ströhle's (2012) observation that what these state-sponsored campaigns in reality did was to project all "hopes for a prosperous life onto the prospect of EU integration" (p. 238), nurturing youth visions for a distant future. By pointing at how the promises embedded in the nation-state project were not delivered, Jeta insinuates collective waiting as a predominant affective and temporal experience present among young women in particular, and youth in general. In simple terms, waiting emerges as temporal engagement when what is hoped for or what is promised has not yet been actualised (Bandak & Janeja, 2018). Jeta is here speaking of a specific type of waiting which

is structurally imposed, and a long-term one that "creates a relatively stable condition" (Gasparini, 1995, p. 36), leading to a reclassification of one's status as a waiting subject.

Yet, although waiting affects ones' agentive self-perception and abilities to imagine alternative future paths (Greenberg, 2011), young women work towards their futures alongside and in spite of these unfulfilled promises. This takes me to the second aspect, namely how young women engage in future-oriented micro-strategies to influence their future prospects amidst this disconnect. Considering that Jeta believed that university education would not fulfil her hope for a meaningful career, economic independence and upward mobility – in her view largely due to the lack of meritocracy – she sought to participate in various entrepreneurship programs and trainings held by numerous NGOs to complement her degree in economic engineering. The accumulative purpose of those programs ought to lever her chances to find a job after graduation as it was hoped to aid the process of the marketisation of the self – ironically put by many other young women as Jeta herself as a job done "for the sake of the CV". Concurrently, Jeta maintained silent aspirations to obtain a master's degree abroad. In many of our conversations, she mentioned how she'd be ready to take on a scholarship for studying in the West for that would make her more competitive in the job market once she would come back, saying: "I am observing people who are coming back from aboard that they are taken, how to say, more seriously. Probably because there's a different quality of education".

However, Jeta found it hard to compete for scholarships given her lack of English language skills and possibly, she reckoned, the quality of education she has gotten at the University. In this sense, despite the micro-strategies as was the participation in various trainings and programs, the possibilities for attaining the ideal of individual professional success depended largely on class positions, social capital, a solid educational background and a familiarity with the neoliberal job market and values. This is of course not to say that the attainability of these promises was entirely impossible. Rather, the chances of forward movement are favoured by one's class positions that bestows on individuals the capacity to navigate various fields and futures plans (see Jeffery, 2010) than they are by the real structures that promise undifferentiated support for individuals' "progress" on a meritocratic basis. Jeta's and other young women's participation in several of those programs while waiting for the promises to fulfil is an indication that there is a perceived and lived disconnect between the circulated promises and expectations on the one hand, and the real possibilities of achieving them on the other. Young women experience this disconnection as they seek involvement in the statebuilding project and while they are hailed as the vanguard citizenry of the new Kosovo state. Finally, it should not be sidelined that this discontent plays out in a peculiar conflation between statebuilding and neoliberal rationalities "that impact on people's lives in varied, and often, unequal ways" (Loftsdóttir, 2016, p. 341).

Conclusion

New political projects require interventions across different domains. Marked by a history of war and far-reaching political and economic transformations, the

process of statebuilding in Kosovo presented a critical point for reshaping the domain of gender identities. This chapter has uncovered the complex and contradictory process surrounding the emergence of the "new Kosovar woman" as the ideal female national subject. The chapter has particularly focused on the temporal politics and ideological layers that have animated this specific reconfiguration of national womanhood by locating it mainly, but not only, within the new modalities of nationalism prevalent in the post-independence period. The new modalities of nationalism in the Kosovar statebuilding context exist on the same plane with the Europeanising and neoliberal agenda of development. As such, the new female national subject has been built around the multiple axis of national identification, Europeanisation and neoliberalism, all of which cohere to the aspired, political future of the Kosovo state. Within this reconfiguration, the state's representation of young women as agents of social and economic change in multiple discursive, material and institutional practices that the chapter has dealt with, suggests that young women's personal development is presented as essential for the collective project of statebuilding. In other words, young women's personal development is considered as crucial for advancing the national cause. Of particular relevance to my analysis was how these images and projections offer a model of what young women can potentially become: they serve as exemplars of an ideal national subject to aspire to. Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted with female university students in Southern Mitrovica, the chapter has illustrated how for young women, grappling with high unemployment and institutional dysfunction, this model of subjecthood remains an unfulfilled promise of statehood.

Such a foregrounding of gender in the statebuilding context of Kosovo draws attention to an intricate intersection between wider political and economic orders, local histories and lived realities. Situated at this intersection, the circulated ideal national subject often leads to complex and contradictory outcomes. This ideal is on the one hand fed by patriarchal norms as a mechanism for preserving the ethno-nationalist identity. On the other, the meritocratic ethos that emphasises the neoliberal premises of individual hard work, will and development associated with the ideal national subject, obscures the existing realities of socioeconomic inequalities, particularly gendered ones. These realities, I have argued, significantly determine the future trajectories and opportunities accessible to young women. An anthropologically informed analysis of the statebuilding project in Kosovo, therefore, sheds light on the tangible effects of the statebuilding process. Ultimately, it unveils gendered experiences that arise from a complex interplay of multiple agendas of statebuilding, Europeanisation and neoliberalisation that underlie national subject making.

Notes

1 All translations from Albanian to English are my own.

2 As Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (2001) argues, *kanun* and *besa* "traditions" have been effectively mobilised by Albanians in other historical moments to build internal cohesion and peace at a national level. Nation-state politics in Kosovo, for instance, have

raised local kinship relations to the national level, such that the nation has come to stand as a metaphor of kinship. Concepts such as *besa* (oath, or word of honour) and *amanet* (ancestral pledge, or cross-generational obligation), sanctioned by principles of honour and shame, when elevated to this level, oblige faithfulness to the national cause and duty to fulfil the martyrs' and ancestors' desires for independence and national unity (see Luci, 2005, 2014).

3 For more on women's labour of care during the war in Kosovo, see Chapter 4 by Erjona Gashi in this volume.

4 Former President Hashim Thaçi initaited a campaign between 2009 and 2015 to transform existing faculties within the University of Prishtina into independent public universities. As a result, six new universities were established during this period: the "Ukshin Hoti" University of Prizren in 2009, "Kadri Zeka" University in Gjilan in 2013, "Fehmi Agani" University in Gjakova in 2013, "Isa Boletini" University of Mitrovica in 2013 and the University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj in 2015. While these new universities formed the core of Thaçi's vision for modernisation, Europeanisation and economic development outlined in the "New Mission" political campaign in 2014, experts criticised the decision for its political motivations, pointing out the lack of qualified staff and sustainable plans for the future (see Avdyli, 2019).

5 The name has been changed to protect the informant's anonymity.

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8 Contesting and/or legitimising Kosovo's independence

The case of women MPs in the national parliament of Kosovo

Enduena Klajiqi

Introduction

The war in Kosovo in 1998–1999 was the last sequence of the violent breakdown of Yugoslavia. The conclusion of the war brought with itself international efforts at statebuilding in Kosovo from the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the NATO Mission in Kosovo (KFOR) and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). Enacted in 2008 from the blueprint of the former special UN envoy for Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, Kosovo's Constitution guarantees the rights of representation in public institutions to its ethnic minorities. The Serbian minority under the constitution is reserved ten seats in the parliament of Kosovo. Serbian minority parliamentary representation in Kosovo has been long dominated by one political party, that of the Serbian List (*Srpska Lista/Lista Serbe*). The Serbian List was founded in 2014, amid EU pressure towards Belgrade to cease the operation of its parallel municipalities and EU efforts to extend Kosovo's elections to the north of Kosovo (International Crisis Group, 2021). It was then the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vucic, who encouraged voters – local Serbs in Kosovo – to participate in the Kosovo elections in 2014, the first to include the north of Kosovo (Nikolić, 2014). The Serbian List since its founding has operated as an extension of Serbia on Kosovo's politics as it routinely challenges or defies Kosovo's statehood. The party openly declares its support to the Serbian government, but especially to its President Aleksander Vucic (Vulovic, 2022). Consequently, the Serbian List has managed to hold a monopoly over Serbian minority representation politics due to its clear support from Belgrade and its branding as an extension of the Serbian state in Kosovo.

The politics of the Serbian List oftentimes as an extension of Serbia's interests have created conflictual episodes, one of which was the withdrawal of the Kosovo Serbian representatives from all institutional bodies in Kosovo. The party had announced the withdrawal of all its parliament members from their mandate on 5 November 2022 after the suspension of the head of the Kosovo Police in the North of Kosovo, Nenad Djuric. Djuric had been suspended due to his refusal to apply the decision of Kosovo's government on the re-registration of cars that had previously held Serbian plates to the official RKS plates of the Republic of Kosovo. The event was a consequence of a license plate dispute between Kosovo

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and Serbia which became the primary reason for the flare-up of tensions in the North of Kosovo. Kosovo's stance that all license plates pre-dating its independence must be swapped for RKS plates of the Republic of Kosovo, was diametrically opposed to the stance of Serbia and the Serbian population in the north of Kosovo who view Kosovo as a part of Serbia and reject the notion of accepting license plates with RKS symbols.[1] On 17 November 2022, the *Serbian List* decided to return its members to the national parliament of the Republic of Kosovo. Herein, previous members of parliament were replaced with new ones. Nevertheless, in their appearance in the parliament, the Serbian List officials stated that their decision to return to parliament was entirely political, and by no means would entail the return of the Serb community to Kosovo's institutions (ATV, 2022).

This withdrawal and subsequent return of the Serbian List's representatives to the parliament reflects one of multiple accounts of the minority representation paradox in the country. The Serbian List is the biggest minority political party in Kosovo, yet it remains a paradox in Kosovo's institutional configuration. The party contests Kosovo's sovereignty while representing its constituents in the very same parliament of the state they contest. These representatives negotiate the terms of their representation with the Kosovo government daily, while engaging with the state to represent their constituents. While denying its existence, these political representatives continue to negotiate with state institutions on various issues important to their communities such as committees on minority rights and language use. To this end, the representational politics of the Serbian List party in Kosovo occur through the denial of its very existence, and as such, both challenge and legitimise Kosovo as a state all at once. This dynamic is followed also by the women parliamentarians of the Serbian List. Kosovo's parliament as a space of contestation does not only guarantee representation of ethnicity but as well as gender, as Kosovo employs a 30% gender quota (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosova, 2008). This representation is worthy of examination as "essentialist representation" of women within statebuilding and nation-building processes can both limit or enhance agency within the binds of nationalism (Krasniqi et al., 2020)

This chapter elaborates on how Serbian women MPs in Kosovo's national parliament challenge and/or legitimise the state of Kosovo. The case of Serbian women parliament members is an interesting case study in dissecting the gender–nationalism nexus and its operation in representative politics. The examination of the intersection of gender and ethnicity sheds light on the particular ways in which Serbian Women MPs challenge/legitimise Kosovo's state. Furthermore, centring an intersectional inquiry on the representation of the Serbian community problematises the gendered effects of ethnic minority representation. The analysis is conducted through the utilisation of discourse analysis of official statements, interview excerpts, speeches, press releases and official document statements of Serbian women MPs from the period between January 2014 and December 2022. This timeline is chosen as 2014 was the first instance in which elections were held in the entirety of Kosovo's territory, including the north of Kosovo. These statements include all women MPs of the Serbian List before and after the withdrawal of the Serbian List from Kosovo's institutions, who constitute the following: Oliviera

Zdravkovic, Ksenija Bozovic, Biljana Maksic as the recent representatives who gained their mandate after the withdrawal of Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo institutions; and representatives Miljana Nikolić, Verica Ceranic, Jasmina Dedic and Dragana Antonijevic as the representatives of the Serbian List before the withdrawal of representatives from Kosovo's institutions on 17 November 2022.

Overall, 40 "texts" including official statements, interview excerpts, speeches, press releases and official documents were analysed to conduct the discourse analysis. It is worth noting that there are few interview excerpts and official statements solely from these women representatives, and most of their official statements are delivered through the Serbian List website and social media outlets. Furthermore, elaborate information about the biographies of these members of parliament is scarce as well. These members of the national parliament are predominantly from the North of Mitrovica, then followed by Gracanica and the South of Mitrovica such as Verica Ceranic. There is little information about their demographic composition as there is little media coverage of these MPs; however, many hold university degrees and predominantly are aged 40–55 years during their time in office. The absence of these Serbian women MPs from the media follows the trend of the Serbian List's party's lack of media appearances. Nevertheless, this trend is more pronounced with these MPs.

The Serbian List is presented mostly in Serbian minorities' spoken and written media in Kosovo and media outlets in Serbia, and there are very limited appearances of the party in spoken and written media formats in the Albanian language. The media landscapes of the Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo remain in parallel, although the public broadcasting network Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) and a few media outlets such as Kosovo 2.0 and Koha publish content in the Serbian language. Furthermore, speeches of members of the Serbian List in the national parliament are also limited as oftentimes the party members boycott parliamentary sessions depending on the topics which are discussed. The boycott itself represents a tension on the representational politics of the Serbian List and the representational paradox of the Serbian minority in Kosovo. This limited appearance in local media is furthermore gendered. The Serbian List has fulfilled the required gender quota of 30% as per Kosovo's laws, however, the communication with the media is mostly handled through its male leadership. Thus, there is a clearer absence of statements by women of the Serbian List, although women representatives of the Serbian List are active in protests organised by the party. Through an analysis of speeches and statements, this chapter argues that Serbian women MPs tend to, mostly, reserve their discourse in aid of the nationalist sentiment. Occasions of gender-related discourse and stances are scarce, and almost exclusively in service of the Serbian List party and its nationalist rhetoric.

This chapter's contributions are twofold. Firstly, it sheds light on the gender–nationalism nexus in contemporary post-war Kosovo contributing to a greater understanding of intersectional representation. And secondly, it centres these confrontational "encounters" between intersectional representation and the state to analyse the statebuilding of Kosovo in the making. The following chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, a brief literature review on discourse and

entanglements between feminism and nationalism is presented. Secondly, an analysis of the excerpts of Serbian women members of the national parliament is presented through the dichotomy of challenging/legitimising the state. And finally, the conclusion ties the chapter together and arguments how the line between contestation and legitimation towards Kosovo's state is blurred, as engagement with the Kosovo state includes both proponents simultaneously.

On feminism, nationalism and discourse

Poststructuralist feminist theorists argue that the state is moulded and formed by discourses. Therefore, they advocate for the study of discourses on the state which enables a more substantial and nuanced analysis on the ways in which citizens engage with the state (Kantola, 2006, p. 2). The post-structuralist feminist theorists of the state highlight the specific importance of context; discourses are to be analysed based on this contextual background whereas grand theories on the state are to be replaced with the detailed theorisation of states based on their particularites (ibid.). The study of discourses in itself is the study of power, whereas there is room for the study of ways in which subjects attempt to undermine or validate these dominant discourses (ibid., p. 3). In this research tradition, the "neutrality" of the state is not taken at face value. This approach highlights "the differentiated nature of the state", where the state is neither depicted as a negative nor positive resource for feminists, which leaves room for the analysis of states on a case-by-case basis (Kantola, 2006, pp. 12–13). This allows for a more complex, elaborate and multifaceted study of the relations between the state and gender (ibid.). A feminist theorisation of the state, however, is not only solely based on the identity of "woman" but also rooted in other factors which gender intersects with such as race and ethnicity (Rhode, 1994, p. 1183). These factors alter discourses, as there is not "one woman" and thus these intersections are crucial in understanding the lived experience of subjects, a crucial centre of feminist research tradition (MacLeod & O'Reilly, 2019, p. 3).

The concepts of truth and memory play an important role here, as subjects operate on their lived experiences which are founded on these notions. The concepts of memory and truth are central to how discourse production is analysed and are complementary to the feminist theorisations of the state (Okech, 2021, p. 4). The case of the statebuilding process of Kosovo is no exception. Commemoration and memorisation practices shape the building of the state as they reflect the politics of the present and shape future actions and practices (Gusia et al., 2019, p. 10). Gusia and others (2019, pp. 11–12) argue that the state of Kosovo has been commemorated through the exclusion of women, where the narrative of the state has been centred around the male and as such reproducing a patriarchal society in which citizenship is to be practiced by the ultimate citizens: the ethnic Albanian men. Krasniqi (2016) dwells on the memorisation landscape highlighting the Jashari Family Memorial as the ultimate manifestation of the legitimacy of the state of Kosovo and the symbolism of which unites the discourse in Kosovo. The discourse on the Jashari memorial was pushed forward by the political elites

(ex-KLA soldiers[2]) who gained profit from such a narrative in the aftermath of the war and during the statebuilding process (Krasniqi, 2016, p. 5). On the other hand, the discourse of the Serbian minority political elites has been vastly different, characterised by an adamant rejection of Kosovo's independence and continual alignment with the Serbian state's policies regarding Kosovo, centred around a narrative of protection of Serbian livelihood and heritage from the state of Kosovo. Experiences of Serbs in Kosovo have many similarities with those in Bosnia and Croatia, whereas exclusion from state structures and the rise of myths about the oppression of Serbs in the new states were used to legitimise nationalist discourses (Keil, 2017, p. 44). Simultaneously, the integration of Serbs in these new states was difficult as they were stigmatised and perceived as the main aggressors of the Yugoslav wars (ibid.).

The engagement of Serbian minority political elites in Kosovo with the Kosovo state is to be read against this background – discourses reflect the ways in which interactions based on these perceptions are solidified. The dynamics of nationalism carry in themselves gendered effects, as the theoretical assumption of the feminist critique of the state is that the state is gendered (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022, p. 76). The dynamics of everyday nationalism also reinforce gender asymmetries in post-conflict societies, whereas women's exclusion and marginalisation become the by-product of such practices (Krasniqi et al., 2020, p. 462). The interplay between gender and nationalism is thus one which is riddled with tensions. National history is typically depicted by feminists as male, while feminism is depicted as an international enterprise (Reekie, 1992 as cited in Curthoys, 1993, p. 25). Hamilton's (2010) emphasis on the primacy of the national struggle over feminist activism in the Basque country sheds light on the interplay between feminism and nationalism. The nationalist claim is that the national or ethnic identity of an individual or collective takes a primary role over all other identities of an individual (class, gender, sexuality), as the nation is equated oftentimes with family (Hamilton, 2010, p. 89). Nationalistic rhetoric praises the role of women as mothers in aid of the national sentiment, and feminism as such is regarded as a secondary political aim and even a point of diversion from the national cause (ibid.).

Feminism has been seen as a distraction to the greater nationalistic cause for Albanians and Serbians alike by ruling parties and state institutions. During the *Ilegalja* movement in Kosovo in the 1990s, the solidarity of the population was designed to serve the national cause of Albanians for liberation. As such feminist and the nationalist struggle became inversely correlated: as the space for national struggle expanded the space for critique against patriarchal structures shrunk (Krasniqi, 2021, p. 328). The ruling party of the time, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) positioned women as "aids" to the national cause, whereas their role was "being supportive and supplementary to the interest of the nation" (Mujika Chao, 2020, p. 8). Documenting violence against women at the time was seen as a "women's issue", a distraction to the national cause at a time when the Albanians had more urgent issues to address, namely that of national struggle (ibid., p. 9). Likewise, in Serbia, the feminist and anti-war activist organisations such as Women in Black or the Autonomous Women's Centre were vilified by the Serbian

state for their activism which sharply criticised Serbia's repressive politics against the Kosovar Albanians and was committed to fostering links and cooperation with Kosovar Albanian feminist and women's activists (Kajevska, 2017). Women's groups such as Women in Black who retained their anti-nationalist stance during the wars in Yugoslavia were exposed to nationalist rage by their societies and the state-run media and persisted under harassment and their portrayal as traitors of the nation (Batinic, 2001, p. 6).

Patterns such as equating systematic violence towards women as "women's issue", equating women as mere "aids" to nationalist causes and exclusion of women from decision-making in the name of the nation are the root causes as to why feminist scholarship has been critical to the concept of nationalism, often-times depicting its misogynistic assumptions, discourses and practices (Hasso, 1998, p. 441). However, women's involvement in nationalistic rhetoric is to be studied on its merit. Viewing women as nationalist agents sheds further light on explaining the salience of women's national identities (ibid., p. 442). This in turn illustrates how women as actors use, are used by and construct nationalism on their own terms (ibid.). This utilisation and construction of nationalism in its own terms has also led to instances of exacerbated tension within feminist movements, as well as instances of disruption of feminist solidarity and feminist activism. In the 1990s, feminist activists in the Yugoslav landscape utilised the (self-designated) brandings of "nationalist and "anti-nationalist" to camp into different blocs of their activism, and utilised these classifications to increase their feminist legitimacy while decreasing the legitimacy of other feminists who were not like-minded in their views of the unfolding wars (Kajevska, 2017). Thus, the feminist activists gave self-designated labelling and strategically labelled other feminist activists for uplifting their own legitimacy and reputation (ibid.). As such, these concepts should not be taken at face value. Kajevska (2017) argues that researchers should remain open-minded in their study of the concepts of "feminism" and "nation-alism" and their interplays, as these concepts are always context-dependent. This falls in line with Cockburn's (1998, p. 41) argument that the compatibility of fem-inism and nationalism is highly dependent upon the kinds of nationalism and fem-inism at hand since both are plural movements.

Discourses of challenging Kosovo's statehood

The paradox of representational minority politics in Kosovo is evident from various statements made by the parliamentarians of the Serbian List party. However, lines between contestation and legitimation become blurred once party officials interact with the Kosovo institutions in order to advance the interests of their constituents. In the analysis of these texts, the recurring themes in the dis-course of Serbian women MPs through which they contested the Kosovo state surrounded around: *(1) the Defense of Serbia's national interests, (2) the apparent extinction of the Serbian minority by the Kosovo state, (3) rejection of the Kosovo institutions, (4) contestation of Kosovo state's identity through politics of remem-brance and (5) calls for self-exclusion.* This portion of the chapter illustrates these

recurring themes through examples of excerpts derived from the textual materials above mentioned.

A recurring theme in the discourses presented was the *defense of national interests* which was equated with the survival of the Serbian community. Miljana Nikolić – a previous parliament member in her mandate from February 2021 until the withdrawal of the Kosovo Serbs from institutions in November 2022 – issued a joint statement with fellow party members following a call to the Serbian community to vote on the upcoming elections in 2021 and stated that the Serbian List embodied the "defense of national interests within the institutions" (Kosovo Online, 2021b). In this statement, she referred to Kosovo's institutions as a tool to be utilised for the expression of interests of the Kosovo Serbs, equating this to Serbia's national interests. Thus, the inclusion in Kosovo's institutions is depicted as a back-door manoeuver in the realisation of Serbia's interests. In the very same official statement, Nikolić used the discourse of rejection of the Kosovo institutions, whereas she referred to Kosovo Serbian political opponents as those "who boast of the support of Albanians and Kurti" referring to Kosovo's leading candidate for Prime Minister Albin Kurti.[3] Nikolić in this statement highlights the ethnic component, and attempts to discredit Kosovo Serbian opposition members by associating them with Kosovo's government (in formation) and its institutions. Her statement insinuated that the Serbian List's political rivals in North Mitrovica do not have the support of Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic, and therefore can be de-legitimised in their attempts to the representation of Kosovo Serbs. Nikolić, simultaneously, equates the representation of Kosovo Serbs to be equated with the interests of the Serbian Progressive Party in Serbia.

The *rejection of Kosovo institutions* was accompanied by an illustration of the alleged attempted *extinction of the minority Serbs by the Kosovo institutions.* In an interview excerpt posted by the official website of the Serbian List, Nikolić illustrated this supposed threat of the extinction of Serbians from Kosovo. In this interview, she equates the national struggle of Kosovo Albanians with the extinction of the Serbian population in Kosovo. An example of this is how Nikolić paints the period after the fall of Rankovic[4] as one in which "Serbs from Kosovo began to immigrate from Kosovo and Metohija en masse, and the immigration of Albanians from Albania to Kosovo" (Srpska Lista, 2017). She also implies that the Yugoslav 1974 constitution was an unfortunate event that allowed Albanians to achieve a state within a state, after which point Kosovo Serbs grew up with demonstrations, violence and chaos as "Albanians used their imaginary cases for their cause" (ibid.), referencing the mass poisoning of Albanian students in 1990[5] which Nikolić argues to have been invented in order for Albanians to justify their intentions for independence from Serbia. Nikolić implies in this interview that the ethnic Albanians' resistance against the repression from the Serbian state and call for national liberation were based on fictitious conditions or "imaginary cases", and was a manoeuver for the expulsion and eventual extinction of Serbs from Kosovo. Thus, Nikolić juxtaposes the livelihood of the Serbian community in Kosovo with the achievement of national liberation for Albanians in Kosovo in a zero-sum-game format.

Additionally, Nikolić makes a reference to the inter-ethnic violence unrest in March 2004 by stating that it was orchestrated "by the hands of the enemy" equating the violent ethnic incidents that sparked across Kosovo as directed by the Albanian Kosovo leadership. In the later part of the interview, she references how previous leadership in Northern Mitrovica had failed to "have our livelihood improved and to guarantee our survival" (Srpska Lista, 2017) which for her became a motivation for joining the Serbian List. Nikolić here utilises the rhetoric of the threat of extinction of the Kosovo Serbs as a legitimation claim for the Serbian List. The narrative of the threat of extinction of the Serbian minority routinely utilised by Serbia's institutions (United Nations, 2022) has been repeated by the Serbian List political party, especially during periods of political and ethnic tension in Kosovo (Srpska Lista, 2022). Nikolić's discourse, therefore, aligns with the discourse used by her political party, the Serbian List. In the midst of the license place dispute in 2022 and the rise of the barricades in the North of Mitrovica thereafter, the Serbian List made an official statement that evokes support for the barricades on the basis of fighting off "the greatest threat to the survival of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija" (Srpska Lista, 2022).

In the above-mentioned interview excerpt, Nikolić engages also in a *contestation of Kosovo state's identity through politics of remembrance*, where she encourages her viewers to learn history not only through books but also through familial ties: history is "also taught from our elderly as are our grandmothers and grandfathers who describe their life experiences and conditions which they have lived in the past, and this book cannot be found anywhere else" (Srpska Lista, 2017). Nikolić thus encourages the audience to engage in a political exercise, one which will showcase the experiences of the elderly in the dealings with the Albanians and conclude to the "true history" of Kosovo. It is implied that the conclusion of this exercise for the Kosovo Serbs is that the "true history" of Kosovo should not allow for no other than a rejection of Kosovo's statehood. Tied to this excerpt is her commentary on Aleksander Rankovic, whose fall she deems as a turning point in the history of the Serbian people. The narrative Nikolić follows is one which implies Rankovic's fall as a great tragedy to the Serbian nation, since she ties this to the Yugoslav Constitution in 1974. Nikolić implies that Yugoslav Constitution made things much harder for Kosovo Serbians, and that this was a direct consequence of the loss of Rankovic's control over Kosovo. The glorification and mystification of Rankovic's policies on Kosovo, and the call to politics of remembrance through familial ties which depict Yugoslav politics, is utilised as a narrative to legitimise the Serbian opposition to Kosovo's institutions and statehood. Through a historical narrative and the emphasis on the "truth", Nikolić leans on nationalist rhetoric to claim a "true history", and to call on contesting the foundational tenets of Kosovo's state identity.

Another prominent discourse in the analysed texts was the *call for self-exclusion of Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo's institutions.* These calls entailed the rejection and disengagement of the Kosovo Serbian population with Kosovo's state structures and institutions. Paradoxically, this was conducted in a manner that encouraged participation in municipal elections in Northern Mitrovica. In the 2014 period

before the municipal elections, which were the first elections that were held in the entirety of Kosovo including the north, discourse of self-exclusion from Kosovo's institutions and notion of statehood was witnessed. Nikolić called upon voters in Northern Mitrovica to cast their ballots for Goran Rakic, as the only way in which "they will confirm the existence and legitimacy of Serb institutions in Kosovo and Metohija" (United Nations Office in Belgrade, 2014). The installment of the head of the Serbian List, Goran Rakic, was therefore depicted as an extension of the Serbian influence and symbolic of Serb institutions in North Mitrovica.

Discourses of legitimation of Kosovo's statehood

Contrary to the public encounters of contestation of Kosovo's statehood and institutions, the involvement and engagement of the Serbian women members of parliament with the institutions of Kosovo leave room for a direct and indirect form of legitimation. The performativity of representative politics infers an indirect legitimation of Kosovo's institutions. This performative representation allows for an indirect legitimation as the party abides by Kosovo's law framework and processes of Kosovo's institutions in the process. Additionally, the Serbian List also uses these mechanisms which stipulate Kosovo's statehood and authority to protect and promote the interests of the Serbian community in Kosovo. These acts of legitimation of Kosovo's institutions most frequently were recorded in processes that required lobbying of interests of ethnic minority communities in Kosovo. Nevertheless, the paradox of representation remains evident as these performances of indirect legitimation are measures against the backdrop of Serbia's national interest. The prominent discourses of legitimation which were identified in the above-mentioned analysed texts are *(1) Participation in Kosovo's institutional setting, (2) calls for participation in electoral processes, (3) negotiation with Kosovo institutions on minority rights (and 4) collaboration with Kosovo officials in minority community issues.*

The most explicit form of legitimation of Kosovo's institutions by Serbian women members of the national parliament is the *participation in Kosovo's institutional settings*. The lack of guarantee of such participation of Serbian minorities in Kosovo's institutions became evident with the withdrawal of Serbian members from Kosovo's parliament, judiciary, police structures and municipality positions on 5 November 2022. As aforementioned, the boycott of Kosovo's institutions came as a response to the suspension of the head of Kosovo Police in North Mitrovica who refused to enforce a decision from the Kosovo government to replace the license plates issued by Serbia to the RKS license plates in the North of Mitrovica. Nevertheless, Serbian women MPs held other positions in Kosovo's institutional framework besides representation in the national parliament, thus participating in Kosovo's institutional settings. Ksenija Bozovic was appointed as Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Economy, as a candidate for the Serbian List (Kosovo Online, 2021a). She raised many questions about participation in the elections under the Serbian List. Bozovic, a member of the Citizens Initiative for Freedom, Democracy, and Justice claimed that her participation in

Kosovo's institutions under the Serbian List banner has been done "as a question of survival in the politics of the SDP", in which it was an absolute necessity in the representation of Serbs since "Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija have no other country than Serbia" (Danas, 2019). The event became quite contentious since Bozovic, was a close political ally to Oliver Ivanovic (Danas, 2019), whose assassination in January 2018 was oftentimes connected to the vice-president of the Serbian List. However, participation in Kosovo's institutional framework is justified through the cause of survival of Serbian interests. Upon the return to the parliament of Kosovo Serbs, Bozovic stated that the Serbian List "took mandates in the Assembly of Kosovo in order to keep them" (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2022).

Another case of legitimation of Kosovo's statehood is done through representatives' *calls to the Kosovo Serbs for participating in Kosovo's elections.* Miljana Nikolić in a joint statement with her party members praised the "high awareness and responsibility shown by our citizens in the electoral process" claiming "Serbian harmony and Serbian unity will win again this time" (Kosovo Online, 2021b). The representative together with her party members encouraged Kosovo Serbs to vote in order to represent their interests. While denying Kosovo's statehood, these representatives simultaneously attempt to secure their seats in Kosovo's national parliament from political opponents under discourses of national unity. The most interesting component perhaps is *negotiation with Kosovo institutions on minority rights*. This has been the most direct form of engagement and legitimation of Kosovo's statehood by these representatives documented so far. A case illustrating this negotiation process is the Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Returns led by Miljana Nikolić. As head of the committee, Nikolić engaged in a negotiation process with her fellow community members on drafting recommendations on the guarantee of rights and interests of Kosovo's minority communities, which were then sent to be discussed and ratified in Kosovo's parliament. Here, as head of the committee, Nikolić made calls for the advancement of community rights, the livelihood of collective centres for returnees, the social well-being of these communities and the integration of returnees to their previous residences (Assembly of Kosovo, 2020a). The rhetoric which was used in these committees depicted by the official documents is one of direct legitimation of Kosovo's institutions and its procedures, whereas Nikolić as head of this commission engages in a discussion on the constitutional requirements needed for altering the law on public holidays in Kosovo.

This committee also depicted *collaboration with Kosovo officials in minority communities' issues*, where the representative Nikolić stated that "the commission's intention is not only its observatory and regulatory role but also the role of facilitator of cooperation" between Kosovo's institutions on the rights and interests of these communities (ibid.). An inclusive approach was required in which "an active engagement of society as a whole" was encouraged by the head of the committee (ibid.). The collaboration was evident in cases that concerned the interests of Serbian women representatives. An illustrative example of which is the participation of representative Danijela Vujicic, the former Chief of Cabinet in Kosovo's Ministry for Agriculture and member of the Serbian List in a joint UN–EU multi-ethnic

training project, which intended to reflect upon the participation of women in political and peace processes, such as the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina (United Nations Mission in Kosovo, 2020). The project intended to foster cooperation among the participants with regard to women's empowerment and gender equality, as well as to attain contacts from abroad.

Between contestation and legitimation of Kosovo's statehood: A representational grey area?

The feminist critique of the state has resulted in the engagement with the state to be in an "opt-in" and "opt-out" dichotomy (Kantola, 2006, p. 13). Engagement with the state has been seen as possible by the liberal feminist camp to produce gender equality, while the radical and Marxist camp opts for a lack of involvement under the possibility of a potential corruption of feminist activism under a patriarchal system (Kantola, 2006). The post-structuralist feminist scholarship breaks this theoretical dichotomy by placing emphasis on "differentiated states" and emphasising the importance of the contextual background of the state itself (ibid., 2006, p. 2). The post-structuralist feminist approach allows, thus, an analysis of the case of the Kosovo state by considering its intricacies, which is of utmost importance considering the representational paradox with which Serbian women MPs engage. The representational paradox englobes by default the entire entity of the representatives of the Serbian list due to their rejection of Kosovo's statehood and participation in Kosovo's institutions simultaneously. The encounters of contestation and legitimation are utilised in order to negotiate the terms under which these representatives operate: representing their constituencies while refusing to recognise the authority of the institutions which they represent. Therefore, these MPs perform a representational grey zone that lacks a coherent formula in their operational practices. These representatives shift from contestation to legitimation dependent upon the topics which are treated in the national parliament or its working committees, the agenda discussed in the EU-mediated Pristina–Belgrade dialogue and electoral cycles, as depicted by the discourses showcased in the previous sections. However, Serbian women MPs are detailed in new dimensions in this representational paradox as the gender component is utilised in service of nationalist sentiments in stakes of high tension. Therefore, encounters in which Serbian women MPs challenge and legitimise Kosovo's statehood are context dependent, and prone to fluctuations depending upon the levels of tension between Kosovo and Serbia.

There is a clear difference between the discourses which are presented to the electorate through official statements, media outlets and speeches in protest on the other hand, compared to the discourses and practices within Kosovo's institutional framework. An example that illustrates this phenomenon is a public protest staged in North Mitrovica in 2021, where Miljana Nikolić was a participant. The protesters held banners with messages such as "Stop the Witch Hunt on White Coats", and "Doctors are heroes everywhere in the world, and for Pristina, they are criminals" (KoSSev, 2021). This protest was staged as a response to the backlash from

Prishtina who deemed the import of COVID-19 vaccines into Kosovo's territory by Serbia as illegal. On the other hand, at a meeting of the Committee on Rights and Interests of Communities and Returnees in 2020, as head of the committee, Nikolić negotiated and cooperated with government representatives on draft proposals for cushioning the impact of COVID-19 on minority communities in Kosovo (Assembly of Kosovo, 2020b). Thus, the ways in which Kosovo's statehood is challenged and legitimated are highly dependent upon the communication outlets and setting. In other instances, such sharp contrast was not witnessed but an act of challenging/legitimising all at once. This was especially evident in the pre-election statements in 2014 – the first elections in which the north of Mitrovica was to participate. Here, participation in Kosovo's ultimate act of statehood was seen as vital to Serbia's national interest. The discourses which were more prevalent on the grounds of contestation were those that alluded to nationalistic sentiments, while acts of direct and indirect legitimation alluded towards a pragmatic approach to securing the rights and interests of the Serbian minority in Kosovo. The prominent discourses which were discovered in the limited excerpts of interviews, official statements, official documents and press releases showcase how the representation of their constituents is based on their ethnic identity.

An interesting exception to these processes of representation is found in a protest staged by the Serbian List which puts gender in the forefront, but again in the service of the nation. The gender–nationalism nexus is perhaps most clearly expressed through the organisation of women's protests by the Serbian List, which were conducted at times of high tension in Kosovo over issues regarding Kosovo's sovereignty such as a women's protest against the 100% tax[6] on 3 December 2018 or the women's protest against the issuance of license plate fines on 23 November 2022. Thousands of Serbian women living in northern Kosovo attended a protest organised by the Serbian List against the decision of Kosovo's government to continue with fines in the license plate debacle of late 2022 (Koha, 2022). "Mothers and daughters" in Northern Kosovo through this protest objected to the decision of Kosovo's government, deeming it unilateral holding protest signs with phrases such as "United Women Free the Ghetto" and "Kurti, I won't give you my children". These discursive practices and encounters confirm Hamilton's (2010) emphasis on the oftentimes primary role that national or ethnic identity takes on in comparison to other identities such as class, gender or sexuality. The protest of women and girls in the North of Mitrovica exemplifies how the role of women as mothers is used in aid of the national sentiment, whereas feminism is regarded as a secondary political aim (Hamilton, 2010, p. 89). In such cases, the national cause gains primacy while women are utilised for its goals. The discourses of the threat of extinction of the Serbian minority, and the need for protection of the Serbian List, a close affiliate of Serbia's government, align with the nationalist presumption that the nation is equated with family (ibid.). The interplay between nationalism and feminism in the case of Serbian women representatives is one in which nationalism takes primacy – materialising the possibility for this to be done on the backs of women. A possible reflection of such a dynamic is the reported kidnappings of two Serbian women in the North of Kosovo, who allegedly have been sent to Serbia

by Serbian intelligence agents in December of 2022 during the tensions over the license plate disputes (Top Channel, 2022). The Serbian List as a political party, nor the Serbian women representatives have not made any comments regarding the events, signalling as to how the service towards the nation is done on the backs of women, whereas women's interests are highlighted when in favour of nationalist sentiments and legitimacy, and sidelined when they conflict with the interest of these nationalist sentiments.

Conclusion

The Serbian List has been the primary political party for the Serbian minority community in Kosovo since the 2014 elections – the first instance of elections in Kosovo in the entirety of its territory including the North of Kosovo. The Serbian List finds itself in an awkward position, it does not recognise the independence of Kosovo and adamantly rejects its premise while partaking in Kosovo's institutions. The political party represents its constituents in the very same parliament of the state that it contests. This chapter dwelled on one specific dimension of this representational paradox, the ways in which the Serbian women members of parliament engage with the state of Kosovo; more specifically, how these representatives negotiate with its statehood through acts of contestation and legitimation of its foundational tenets. It aimed to explore and highlight the gender–nationalism nexus in the discourses, practices and political actions of these representatives. Drawing from a discourse analysis of official statements, interview excerpts, speeches, press releases and official documents, the chapter showcased how these two ideologies interact – complemented by a review of the Serbian List's official statements and political actions. The chapter modus operandi was the post-structuralist feminist theorisation of the state in which the state is perceived to be shaped and formed by discourses, which determine the ways in which its citizens engage with it (Kantola, 2006). The theory was utilised due to its attention to the contextual backdrop of a state, rather than the use of a dichotomy for the "opt-in" and "opt-out" involved which characterises other strands of feminism. This "differentiated nature of the state" allows for a more multifaceted and complex investigation of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Kantola, 2006). This chapter was also informed by previous literature on the interplay between feminism and nationalism. Hamilton's (2020) explanation of the primacy of nationalism in comparison to feminism was utilised in the analysis of the discourses of the Serbian women members of the parliament of Kosovo.

The chapter concludes that the discourses of contestation of Serbian women members of parliament are surrounded around the themes of *(1) the Defense of Serbia's national interests, (2) the extinction of the Serbian minority by the Kosovo state, (3) the rejection of the Kosovo institutions, (4) contestation of Kosovo state's identity through politics of remembrance and (5) calls for self-exclusion.* This was depicted by calls for Serbian unity and protection from the Serbian state, distance from Kosovo's concept of statehood and the utilisation of politics of remembrance including glorification and mystification of Serbian statements as claims for the

rejection of Kosovo's statehood. On the other hand, its' direct and indirect practices of legitimation of Kosovo's statehood were identified through the recurring themes of *(1) participation in Kosovo's institutional setting, (2) calls for participation in electoral processes, (3) negotiation with Kosovo institutions on minority rights and (4) collaboration with Kosovo officials in minority communities' issues.* The discursive practices had an apparent contrast with the acts of contestation in the setting of participation in Kosovo's institutional framework, whereas a spirit of collaboration and negotiation was evident in securing the interests of the Serbian minority, i.e., in the Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Returns. This chapter found that the politics of intersectional representation of Serbian women MPs occur in a paradoxical manner, in which contestation and legitimation of Kosovo's statehood are done all at once. A shift in discourse between contestation and legitimation was done however based on the audience targeted. More pronounced nationalist rhetoric was evident in pre-electoral stages and media appearances and reports, while a more pragmatic approach was carried in the inner functioning of Kosovo's institutions.

In the case of Serbian women members of parliament, it can be concluded that the gender–nationalism nexus can be described as one in which the ethnic component takes precedence over the gender component, whereas gender is utilised in service to nationalist sentiments. The protest organised by the Serbian List and participated by these representatives under the banner of a "mothers and daughters" protest can be exemplified as a case in which women are used in the aid of the national sentiment aligning with Hamilton's (2010, p. 89) analysis. This is also exemplified through the silence of these representatives regarding the kidnapping of two Serbian women from the North of Mitrovica to Serbia (Top Channel, 2022). The notion of a multi-ethnic state under which the Kosovo statehood has been built cannot cohabitate with a hollow representation of its minorities. The representational patterns of the Serbian List depict the paradoxical state in which the party finds itself. The stance of non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood by its minority hinders the chances of substantial representation. On the other hand, the recent license plate dispute between Kosovo and Serbia has demonstrated that while constitutionally granted, the representation of the Serbian minority is not guaranteed. The lack of such "genuine" representation hinders the functioning of Kosovo's state for all ethnic communities in Kosovo.

Notes

1 The government of Serbia decided on December 25, 2023 to allow all vehicles with RKS symbols from Kosovo to enter Serbia. The decision was intended to be enforced from January 1, 2024. Serbia added a declaration alongside with this decision stressing that allowing vehicles with RKS symbols does not entail the recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty. (Radio Free Europe, 2023).

2 Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was a guerrilla movement in the late 1990s that sought Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Various prominent figures of the KLA became political leaders in post-war Kosovo.

3 The parliamentary elections of February 2021 were called after the disbandment of the Vetevendosje and Democratic League of Kosovo coalition and a loss of no-confidence motion by Albin Kurti which resulted in Avdullah Hoti from the Democratic League of Kosovo to serve as Prime Minister. Kurti took the case to the Constitutional Court which ruled it unconstitutional and called for new elections (Bytyqi, 2020).
4 Aleksandar Rankovic was a prominent Yugoslav communist politician, holding various positions including Secret Police Chief of Yugoslavia during which he launched a ruthless targeting campaign of the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo (Petrovic & Stefanovic, 2010).
5 On 22 March 1990, ethnic Albanian students fell ill with a variance of suspicious symptoms, which would strike various parts of the ethnic Albanian students in Kosovo over the next years.
6 On 6 November 2018 the Kosovo government decided to impose a 100% tax on Serbian goods as a retaliation for Serbia's decision to block Kosovo membership to Interpol.

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9 Conclusion

Other(ed) ways to understand statebuilding

Itziar Mujika Chao and Vjosa Musliu

Literature in (international) statebuilding in Kosovo has been burgeoning ever since the former came under the UN administration in 1999 after the NATO intervention against Serbia's military sites that effectively put an end to the war of Serbia against Kosovo. The pending political status of Kosovo between 1999 and 2008; its struggles with the finalisation of its independence from 2008 onwards; the deployment of a comprehensive UN administering mission (1999–2008), followed by a deployment of an EU rule of law mission (2008–current); and its diplomatic and recognition conundrums to enter in the society of independent states have made the Kosovo an ideal "case study" for IR and its subdisciplines.

These political, economic and social changes undergoing through the international statebuilding became a primary focus of scholars in IR and its subdisciplines. As we showed in the introduction of this edited volume, despite the saturation of Kosovo as a "case study" in the literature of (international) statebuilding, what has not gathered much interest are feminist and women-led initiatives in processes of statebuilding. To a large extent, this is not pertinent to Kosovo only. Lyytikäinen et al. (2021) rightly observe that contributions of women to processes of statebuilding as well as feminist scholars and activists proper have historically been written out of peace and state building research and have been actively reduced to appendages to the field with their contributions appropriated for its development but unworthy of mention as independent producers of knowledge.

In recent decades, IR has become more cognisant of the co-constitutive relationship between gender, justice and statebuilding. Feminist IR scholars have shown that many "women-friendly states" have crafted their foreign policies with notions of gender equality and empowerment through deliberate policies to include more women in peace and statebuilding (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2021). Others have shown that while combatant women in wartime are able to exercise agency which under "normal circumstances" they could not, in the aftermath of the wars they emerge not only as politicised and mobilised activists but also as persons who previously held positions of leadership and responsibility, representing a key but often neglected source of statebuilding capital (Gilmartin, 2020). Others have shown that gender justice, be that in legal justice or in women's courts and tribunals, is essential to post-war peace and

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statebuilding alike (O'Reilly, 2022). For example, Natil argues that the women's engagement in community peacebuilding in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) is entangled in fighting multiple layers of oppression that are concomitant to state and family structures (Natil, 2020). In her study, *Muscular interventionism*, O'Reilly (2012) argues that the international statebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina self-identifies with an interventionist model of masculinity which equates manliness with a responsibility to protect a vulnerable/backward/ feminised Balkan "other" from violence and harm.

Feminist IR scholars have captured the contested and ambiguous interplays of shifting gender relations in post-conflict statebuidling contexts and have revealed the limits of women's agency and the hierarchical norms (Björkdahl et al., 2015), feminist activism (Mujika Chao, 2020), as well as the unequal gender relations in processes of statebuilding (Krasniqi et al., 2020) by bringing together gender, sexuality, race or class as power structures (Wibben & Donahoe, 2020). Others have argued that despite this noticeable contribution, IR literature remains poor in exploring intersectionality in feminist peace and statebuilding (Stavrevska & Smith, 2020), and that international statebuilding mechanisms in post-war contexts have remained blind to the masculinised character of statebuilding policies which prioritise masculinised institutions of security (Musliu, 2021), and neglect the feminised realm of health, education and social welfare (Reeves, 2021).

Sociologists and social anthropologists have been more successful in addressing the overlooked role of feminist movements in the practice of statebuilding in Kosovo, from interrogating counter-memory in post-war statebuilding (Demiri, 2018), to the participation of women in the parliament (Subotić, 2022); from feminist activism (Gusia et al., 2019; Luci & Gusia, 2019), (active) silence as a form of resistance to institutional neglect (Pollozhani, 2019; Di Lellio, 2016; Luci, 2002) and contemporary forms of contention (Pollozhani, 2019), to women's intervention in civil society and state institutions (Farnsworth, 2011; Gusia et al., 2019). Di Lellio (2016) and Luci (2002) have separately observed that feminist activists in post-war Kosovo were primarily concerned with addressing issues of rape victims during the war.

Aligning with these contributions, this edited volume has critically questioned and challenged mainstream statebuilding practices, actors, dynamics and institutions in Kosovo through gender and feminist encounters. By paying attention and examining various and different feminist encounters with mainstream liberal statebuilding dynamics in Kosovo, we have focused on *other(ed)* encounters of statebuilding. As explained by the authors in this volume, such experiences are critical and at times they even oppose official statebuilding practices. In these contributions, we have identified and located different – generally ignored and unseen – encounters of statebuilding that visibly question and expand the limits and margins of traditional statebuilding practices. By doing so through feminist lenses, we have tried to (1) bring visibility to how statebuilding, as it has traditionally been understood, is unambiguously gendered, patriarchal and androcentric and (2) how everyday, informal and non-institutional acts and practices are also

intrinsic parts of statebuilding practices that tend to respond to the claims and needs of different communities and groups.

Seeking to understand statebuilding outside of an exclusively liberal and institutional realm, we have aimed at opening up the spectrum of what are traditionally understood as statebuilding practices; contested ideas that presume that statebuilding practices in Kosovo only took place in the postwar period; and that they are almost exclusively promoted by international organisations and agencies, or that they even pertain to external liberal interventionist practices. The feminist encounters we have paid attention to in this volume, understood as critical, disruptive and contentious acts, manifest in different ways the patriarchal bias and androcentrism of statebuilding practices, whether they are institutionalised or not. Despite the increasing interest in critical feminist perspectives within peace and conflict studies and more visibly within research conducted on conflict and post-conflict settings, feminist contributions to statebuilding are visibly scarce – and so is the attention that feminist encounters in different settings tend to receive, overall.

Where are the women?

We started to think and problematise the idea of this edited volume, we were provoked and inspired by Enloe's still timely question: *where are the women?* (1990) As we read, wrote and searched for contributions, we kept asking *where are the women in processes of statebuilding in Kosovo? Where are the women in popular, academic and public narratives of the state in Kosovo? Where are the women in the statebuilding literature in IR in Kosovo?*

Following these questions, we have tried to make space to imagine what feminist statebuilding would look like. Departing from different historical and developmental points, the authors in this edited volume take different approaches to statebuilding. They are, overall, critical viewpoints to mainstream liberal statebuilding, and intend to foreground what is usually marginalised: seemingly unimportant acts, discourses and materialities of engaging with statebuilding practices. In doing so, the chapters in this edited volume explore a different range of themes: the traditional marginalisation of women from informal statebuilding practices and the resisting and contesting dynamics they develop in order to be taken into account; the gender-dynamics of everyday life in war, and how survival is not – exclusively – dependent on the roles that hegemonic masculinities embody and acquire, but also on the individual and collective labour of care that is overwhelmingly carried out by women in the seeming margins of the conflict; how women also directly participate in and support seemingly masculine realms such as guerrilla warfare; how institutional statebuilding dynamics and practices exclude gender-based violence and violence against women – in this case, sexual violence through the war – in post-war reconstruction; how national museums evoke specific narratives of the war through specific bodies, (re)inscribing values of militarism and feminised goddess as symbols of nation-building narratives; how memory-making is not neutral and is indeed gendered, and how mainstream

memory-making remembers specific experiences, mainly those of men – and remembered by men, among others.

Still, as the chapters in this volume have demonstrated, naturalised gender binaries still feature all aspects of statebuilding, and are simultaneously reproduced by statebuilding practices: the warrior men, the victim women, the women that care. And, yet, as Choi et al. affirm (2022, p. 515), “contradictions abound”: “we know that the reality is so much more complex than these tired tropes, even as they continue to be deployed in state, military, and popular cultural representations to justify militarisation and securitisation”. And in these kinds of processes, silence is central to such constant reproduction. When we talk about feminist encounters in statebuilding, as critical feminist perspectives constantly expose, it is not – only – about quantity, but – also – about lived experiences and continuous relational dynamics; who and what is seen and who and what is silenced, how such positionings are used, and how the spaces in between silence and voice – or visibility, influence, agency – are navigated (Parpart & Parashar, 2019). In this volume we have traced this stubborn silencing – as well as responses, oppositions or reactions – across three thematic layers: 1) *the unwomanly face of the war;* 2) *places and spaces of women in war and peace;* 3) *(re)making Kosovo; (re)making gender.* As the chapters by Lirika Demiri, Adem Ferizaj and Erjona Gashi in this volume explain, such silencing reinforces gender-based structures, and can even (re)produce specific dynamics in conflict contexts. Women activists’ claims and work were deemed as secondary, sidelined from the primary narratives of statebuidling – women’s political claims and agencies were uncomfortable, often identified as “stubborn”, not necessarily as activists or militants. However, as Demiri highlights, “stories of resistance of women activists constitute counter-memories to the post-war male-dominated construction of historical narratives and racist tropes of the regime’s discourse in former Yugoslavia”. Similar dynamics were evident in how women combatants were identified and are currently remembered: although they were central to the everyday functioning of the army – women equally participated in taking arms or collecting and preparing munition, as well as working as nurses and organising blood donations, or continuously doing tasks such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning – KLA women have broadly been silenced. In Chapter 3, Ferizaj explains how women were not seen as central fighters, and most of them were not considered war veterans in most cases. Even when they have been considered war veterans, they were identified as exceptional or punctual, yet again voicing or silencing specific experiences and narratives. As Ferizaj explains, not all KLA women combatants are remembered equally: “When Xhevë Lladrovci and Fehmi Lladrovci were killed, another woman combatant was also killed, but no one knows her today (…) society chose the married woman as a war heroine and erased the unmarried one from memory”.

Focusing on the centrality – and, again, silencing – of care work in wartime, in Chapter 4, Gashi shows how there is no space that the war does not touch. Elsewhere, Cynthia Cockburn clearly explained it – coinciding with the war in Kosovo: “war affects women ‘from the bedroom to the battlefield’” (1998, p. 8).

As Gashi underlines, “women’s lived experiences and performances of care work” are central in contexts of war, yet naturalised and, yet again, silenced. But war touches everything – including what masculinised spaces and roles are unable – or reject – to reach. Survival is not – cannot be – individual, and care work is central in order to survive, materially, physically and emotionally.

In Chapter 5, Andi Haxhiu focuses on different spaces and practices of remembrance, both focusing on what is identified – and what is not – as heritage, and how heritage, as traditionally understood, also reproduces specific gendered norms. Haxhiu meticulously traces how the National Museum of Kosovo has, throughout the years, given space and made visible militarist masculine narratives of the war – simultaneously centring its image on a “female deity reflecting the cult of a mother idol”, “despite the fact that women’s stories remain underrepresented” in the museum.

The last three chapters compose a critical perspective of what are usually identified as postwar statebuilding dynamics. Likewise, in Chapter 6, Ardiana Shala and Blerina Këllezi focus on how post-war institutions have dealt with the experiences of wartime sexual violence survivors, by focusing on the 2014 Law Amendment that recognised wartime sexual violence survivors as war victims and the different discourses that emanated from different political parties. In Chapter 7, Rozafa Berisha focuses on how post-independence statebuilding practices produce neoliberal citizenships, which, simultaneously, are built upon specific gender regimes that reproduce traditional binaries under apparently “modern” tags. Through the etiquette of the “young European woman”, neoliberal values are naturalised and made desirable, yet disconnected from the reality, needs and claims of young Kosovar women. As Berisha states, “new political projects require interventions across different domains”, but such moves are also built upon specific gendered experiences. In Chapter 8, Enduena Klajiqi centres on how specific accounts of multi-ethnicity can be experienced or used. By looking at how Serb women MPs engage with Kosovo institutions – as well as with their own parties –, Klajiqi exposes the ways in which these MPs navigate through the institutions that they simultaneously and in different situations both challenge and legitimise. The chapter exposes how different statebuilding acts and practices use and mobilise gender with specific goals; in this case, as Klajiqi states, “gender is utilised in service to nationalist sentiments”.

These valuable contributions notwithstanding, at the end of this writing process, depressingly, we are circling back to the same question: *where are the women?* (Enloe, 1990). The chapters in this volume focus on specific gendered experiences and feminist encounters with statebuilding, and are critical to the systemic gendered and political (re)production of macro and micro statebuilding dynamics and practices. When we ask *where are the women?* outside the epistemic community in IR and statebuilding, the question is equally pertinent. For example, the main boulevards and axial streets in Pristina are a representation of the different political periods in which Kosovo has been going through. Walking through all the main streets in Pristina, one observes the following street names: Ibrahim Rugova (pacific movement of the 1990s); Zahir Pajaziti (KLA); Luan Haradinaj (KLA);

Fehmi Agani (pacific movement of the 1990s); UÇK (KLA); Lidhja e Prizrenit (nineteenth century); Ahmet Krasniqi (KLA). Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers (2006), Demaj (2019) and Albertini (2012) have separately shown that – much like during previous historical periods – the remaking of Prishtina in the post-war period was concomitant to stressing its *Albanianness* narrated, almost exclusively, through the barrel of the gun of male liberators.

Streets and boulevards named after women remain very much the exception. In smaller cities, the presence of women's statues and monuments is even more limited. More auxiliary streets in Prishtina are also named after men – most of whom fought in the 1998–1999 war. Such streets are populated with statues of men celebrating the barrel of the gun. A notable exception is the *Heroinat* monument, built in 2015, commemorating the approximately 20,000 survivors of sexual violence during the war. In 2019, local authorities built a statue of the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, for her contribution in the liberation of Kosovo.

On the one hand, to the laic eye, the public space of Prishtina renders visible four women figures: a saint (Mother Teresa), victims of wartime rape (Heroinat monument), a former US politician (Madeleine Albright) and a supernatural deity (The Goddess on the Throne). This particular rendering of the *woman figure* in the public space requires a further – and much needed – problematisation not only as to what do these figures (statues) represent for the "state" but at the same time, what *woman figure* stands in between the saint, the supernatural deity, the wartime rape victims and a former US secretary of state. On the other hand, the public space of Prishtina has been intermittently – but continuously and in different ways – disrupted by feminist and women-led activism (Di Lellio, 2021). More recent notable examples in this regard are the marches for liberation and end to violence in the late 1990s, Qiriazi Sister's work to fight illiteracy in the 1990s (see for more Musliu, 2021), marches and awareness campaigns of the Kosovo Women Network, symbolic acts of the Haveit Feminist Collective, Alketa Xhafa-Mripa, Project 17, Orange Girl, Kolektivi Për Mendim dhe Veprim Feminist (The Collective for Feminist Thinking and Action), Qika Organisation, Artpolis and Grazeta, among others. Both theatre and film in Kosovo have been at the forefront of voicing, unearthing and foregrounding feminist and queer critique to processes of (international) statebuilding in Kosovo (see for more Neziraj, 2008, 2020; Basha, 2012). Kosovo's cinematography – directed overwhelmingly by women directors – has been at the forefront of the international audience's attention with movies such as *Hive*, *Vera Dreams of the Sea*, *Lioness*, *Aga's House, Zana*, to name a few,[1] narrating the story of liberation, resilience and war through women's characters and stories. Called by *The Guardian*, Kosovo's feminist frontline, these movies masterfully deconstruct the intersectionality of gender, patriarchy, heteronormativity and trauma in post-war settings. Di Lellio and Schwander-Sievers (2006) and Di Lellio and Kraja (2022) have shown that both Kosovar theatre and film are bringing to light stories that confront the heroic official memory which erased the suffering of civilians as a feminised effect. More research is needed for a proper mapping out of the feminist activism in Kosovo as

well as their intersectional work disrupting the knots among patriarchy, capitalism and heteronormativity.

Since its declaration of independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008, Kosovo has had two women Presidents: Atifete Jahjaga (2011–2016) and Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu (2021–ongoing). The latter is the most voted politician in the history of Kosovo since 1999. Edita Tahiri, another senior politician from Kosovo, is to date the only woman who led the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia as minister of dialogue with the Government of Kosovo (2014–2017). Do these encounters tell us something about feminist statebuilding in Kosovo and statebuilding *tout court?* Even though their mandates are not dealt with in this volume, it is pertinent to ask to what extent their time in office has disrupted the hegemonic masculinised statebuilding. At the same time, to what extent have their mandates been inscribed and legimitised via and through the masculine state.

Feminist contributions at the global level, including at the regional level, have continuously warned us that the presence of women per se does not necessarily mean ensuring the presence of feminist perspectives or know-how. Such contributions bring us to the feminist critique of neoliberal global practices that have visibly shaped the development of women-centred international policies in the last decades, such as the international Women, Peace and Security agenda that was initiated with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Including gender does not necessarily mean having a gender perspective, and having a gender perspective does not necessarily mean taking a feminist position. What is more, even when feminists are part of statebuilding processes, it does not necessarily mean that they will be guarantors of a feminist turn. As mentioned above, we are speaking of a feminist presence in visibly masculinised spaces, which complicates any change.

It has been 24 years since the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was adopted in 2000. Despite the many resolutions and gender movements that followed since, women and women-led initiatives remain grossly absent and silenced in literature in statebuilding. Most of the research on women (-led) initiatives on statebuilding in Kosovo consulted for this edited volume was from sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Inspired by Dwyer's question: *who's afraid of feminism* (2010), we ask who's afraid of feminism in statebuilding and other related sub-disciplines in IR? This question becomes even more pertinent considering the *extractive* nature of IR. As a discipline, IR has been traditionally, if not notoriously, characterised by its extractivist nature. Centred and developed primarily in the Anglo-Saxon hemisphere, the "whereabouts of the IR field" have traditionally been far away from the said hemisphere. Wars, civil conflicts, inter-country disputes taking place in all corners of the world have been systematically looked at with magnifying glasses to create IR theories, sub-disciplines and schools of thought in the "hemispheres of power" (see for an elaborate discussion Stavrevska et al., 2023). Simultaneously, they have traditionally remained oblivious to the everyday sociological realities in the ground (see more for more Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2018; Rutazibwa, 2020). At the same time, literature in statebuilding (much like other sub-disciplines of IR) remains oblivious, and non-extractive by choice, from other social sciences

subdisciplines where feminist, queer, postcolonial and decolonial inquiries have long ago challenged and redefined the canons of knowledge. Conveniently, IR remains masculine and heteronormative. As we conclude this edited volume, we are again perplexed by the same questions we asked at the outset: *where are the women in processes of statebuilding in Kosovo? Where are the women in the popular, academic, public narrations of the state in Kosovo? Where are the women in the statebuilding literature in IR in Kosovo?*

Open spaces for more diverse voices

The high volume of scholarly work focusing on (international) statebuilding in Kosovo notwithstanding, putting together an edited volume to focus on feminist encounters of statebuilding seems like an easy exercise "to fill the gap in the literature" and to open spaces for more diverse voices. Even though the chapters in this volume systematically demonstrated the jaw dropping absence in IR literature of women-led and feminist encounters in statebuilding in Kosovo, we humbly recognise that we have merely scratched the surface of this debate. In this section, we reflect on some of the limitations and blind spots in our contribution.

First and foremost, although we aimed at bringing forward different feminist encounters in statebuilding practices, as co-editors of this volume we are aware of the partial fulfilment of this goal. We are conscious that, on the one hand, we have not been able to pay attention to as many statebuilding practices that are critical to mainstream liberal statebuilding; and, on the other hand, the edited volume does not gather initiatives developed from and within all ethnic groups in Kosovo. However, we have made an effort to bring together *other(ed)* experiences and statebuilding practices through feminist lenses.

As co-editors, we are aware that a big part of this volume focuses on Albanian experiences, accounts and narratives in relation to statebuilding – with the exception of Klajiqi's chapter focusing on Serbian women MPs. Such a focus, we believe, is not a mere coincidence, as all contributing authors are ethnically Albanian. It is also a reflection of the ongoing conflict between Kosovo and Serbia after more than twenty years since the end of the war and the not consolidated inter-ethnic and/or inter-country epistemic communities. Therefore, though this edited volume does focus on empty spaces within the statebuilding literature overall and the research on statebuilding in Kosovo, but we are also aware that the inclusion of Roma, Serbian, Ashkali and other voices, would have further problematised other *othered* encounters of statebuilding and/or state-contestation in Kosovo. This omission is particularly important considering that the Albanian homogenisation of the statebuilding trajectory in post-war Kosovo as well as international statebuilding efforts have oftentimes been exclusionary and violent towards the non-Albanian subject and in particular towards the Roma (Neziraj, 2009, 2023; Musliu, 2017). Despite the lack of success in including researchers from ethnic minority groups in Kosovo, as co-editors we believe that this edited volume has opened up different paths in regard to what can be identified as statebuilding, and what statebuilding through gender and feminist lenses could look like.

Second and relatedly, as co-editors of this volume, we have used the term Kosov*o* in the title of the book, as well as in the introductory and concluding chapters. This is primarily because the book is written and published in English. Many contributors in this volume however, refer to it as Kosov*a*. Over the past five years, many in the political and intellectual public space in Kosovo have been opting for using Kosov*a* instead of Kosov*o*, in the quest to decolonise the toponymy from the Serbian influence that in turn had become the English/international name for Kosovo.[2] The debate about the politics of toponymy is beyond the scope of this edited volume. It was a decision of both co-editors not to impose such a move on the authors of the volume, and therefore, to let them choose which option they want to use. Hence, and as you have been able to note throughout the chapters, both Kosovo and Kosova are used interchangeably.

Thirdly, not all initiatives gathered in this volume are identified by their own protagonists themselves as feminists per se. However, even if they do not necessarily identify as such, they do constitute critical encounters with masculine practices of statebuiding. When referring to feminist acts, initiatives or encounters, we have almost exclusively focused on women-led initiatives, as well as on exclusionary practices of statebuilding in relation to women. To that end, we are aware of the essentialist risks of such a move, and consider it as indicative of the situation of and difficulties faced by non-binary and dissident gender identities – and researchers – globally, including Kosovo. On this point, the intervention from Puar (2013) is particularly relevant to show that processes of intervention and (international) statebuilding have consistently rendered queer bodies into heteronormativity. Along the same lines, Rexhepi (2023) shows that throughout the Balkan region, LGBTIQ+ politics are characterised by early post-socialism (homo) nationalist activism dominated by wealthy, urban, cisgender activists detached from social justice. For him, questions of sexuality in the region have continuously reinforced ideals of sexual rights aligned with nationalism and recognisable EU and US models of sexuality. Overall, the chapters draw a comprehensive image of what traditional or mainstream statebuilding constitutes, means and looks like. In doing so, they render visible the hegemonic masculinity inherent to statebuilding processes enabled through patriarchal modes and – often violent – gendered devices of transmitting such masculinity. As we stated in the outset, asking “where are the women” (Enloe, 1990) is mandatory in order to break patriarchal imaginaries in politics. However, it is also necessary to identify gender as a fluid and relational power structure and a system that enables the manifestation of patriarchal values and violence, not only against women, but also against non-binary and dissident identities and bodies. As co-editors we understand this is a constant exercise. While the volume does focus mostly on women and gender, we are aware that queerness is not featured in the arguments presented within the chapters in this book, which we consider not only as an empty space but also as a critical space for future research on the co-constitutive relations between statebuilding and power. More research on how women, men and non-binary and dissident gender identities and groups produce and reproduce gender in statebuilding practices, how they experience such practices, and why and how they conform to, oppose, contest or navigate through them would enable us to elucidate other(ed) encounters to statebuilding.

Notes

1 See more on Kosovo's theatre and cinematography: Di Lellio, 2018; 2019; Limani, 2020; Felperin, 2021; Armistead, 2022; Lemercier, 2021.
2 A similar trend has been noticed since the early 2000s in Ukraine with the gradual change of Kiev (the Russian spelling of the capital city turned into the English/internationally recognised name) to Kyiv (the Ukrainian spelling). See for more: Burlyuk and Musliu, 2018.

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