FEMINIST SOLIDARITY AND PRACTICE AMONG WOMEN POLITICIANS IN KOSOVO

By Diona Hoxha

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master´s Degree in Women´s and Gender Studies (GEMMA)

Main Supervisor: Elissa Helms (Central European University)

Second Supervisor: Professor Magdalena Cieślak (University of Lodz)

Vienna, Austria

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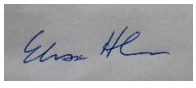
Approval signed by the main Supervisor: 

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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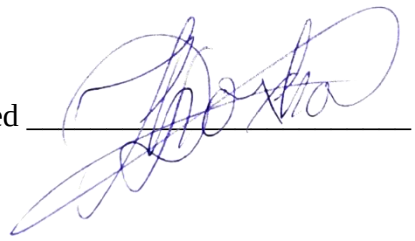
Signed 

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to shed light on the dynamics of the cooperation, solidarity, and feminist sisterhood among women politicians in Kosovo who serve/d between 1980-1999 and 2000-2022. It explores the context in which women politicians have politicized their gender identity, how they have formed intragender alliances, and the mechanisms they have utilized to foster cooperation that transgresses individual differences and party affiliation. In addition, the research explores the forces that work against the strengthening of the sisterhood bonds among women politicians and the factors that influence them to align with other agendas rather than those that involve feminism, or the practice of solidarity based on common oppression. To better understand these dynamics, feminist nationalism, descriptive and substantive representation, and sisterhood solidarity have been used as theoretical concepts to frame the analysis.

Keywords: Solidarity, feminism, sisterhood, feminist nationalism, women politicians in Kosovo.

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this thesis

to my mother who is the epitome of a strong woman and who set my standards high by finishing law school as a mother of two small children and as a full-time worker in postwar Kosovo.

and to my father, a feminist, who empowered me and nurtured my curiosity for knowledge through the years.

My parents, Teuta and Erzen Hoxha, have continuously supported me in my academic and professional journey. Their sacrifices and continuous belief in my abilities have been a driving force in my life.

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This journey would have not been nearly as enjoyable and bearable without the support, kindness, and understanding of my love, Emir Abrashi. Throughout this long, difficult, and fun adventure, he has been a source of peace, encouragement, and unconditional love. His patience and constant words of encouragement propelled me forward in the most challenging times. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, my love!

I am grateful to my supervisor Elissa Helms for her ongoing guidance and enlightenment in this academic journey. She has been involved in my research project from the start and has helped me shape my abstract idea into a more concrete thesis topic. Her knowledge in the history of the Balkans and her empathetic engagement in a topic very dear to me has greatly enhanced the clarity and quality of my work. I am particularly grateful for the dedication and expertise of my second supervisor, Magdalena Cieślak, in proofreading and editing the language of my work, as well as for the constant positive energy she has transmitted throughout the process.

I thank my siblings, Drin and Nika, my cheerleaders, for their endless emotional support and their endless supply of jokes throughout this process.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I need to express my sincere gratitude to the GEMMA scholarship program for investing in me and giving me the opportunity to contribute to knowledge production in the field of gender studies in the context of Kosovo.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAK – Alliance for the Future of Kosovo

ADK – Democratic Alternative of Kosovo

AKR – New Kosovo Alliance

LDK – Democratic League of Kosovo

MP – Member of the Parliament

PDK – Democratic Party of Kosovo

SAP – Socialist Autonomous Province

SDPK – Social Democratic Party of Kosovo

SFRY – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

SOC – Serbian Orthodox Church

VV – Vetëvendosje

INTRODUCTION

My genuine curiosity to understand the dynamics of female solidarity and the intricacies of women's alliances and cooperation in formal politics in Kosovo has motivated me to embark on this research and gain more insights on the topic. After beginning to work more closely with women politicians, with the idea of advancing the gender equality agenda, I began to notice that while publicly there is a sense of solidarity between women, behind the curtain there were many cases of lack of social cohesion and absence of cooperation that did not contribute to the overall empowering women agenda. As an ardent activist and supporter of the gender equality movement, I started pondering on the following questions, which have driven this research: Why don't some women support each other or the cause of gender equality when they get elected to national office? What is the alliance of women politicians with other women colleagues when they contribute to the maintaining of the patriarchal system? What is the relationship between the gender equality agenda (feminism) and the national agenda? While discussing with women politicians and reading more about the context in which they experience/d lack of unity in terms of their gender identity and how their gender identity is politicized, I understood that the answers to the questions I had before starting the research were more intricate than analyzing their behavior on the lines of internalized misogyny and women as gatekeepers of patriarchy. In order to refrain from such simplification of reality, I decided to analyze their experiences through the concept of solidarity and sisterhood.

I use solidarity as a concept to denote support, cooperation, and unity among women politicians in Kosovo which stem from a common struggle. In this thesis, solidarity is used as a category of analysis, that aims to present women politicians' simultaneous struggles in fighting an oppressive political regime and dismantling patriarchal structures. I refer to

sisterhood as a principle of feminist consciousness which seeks to foster a sense of cohesion and empathy among women regardless of their differences. Sisterhood solidarity recognizes the emancipatory and empowering force of collective action and highlights the social progress that can be achieved by supporting and uplifting others.

In order to better understand these dynamics and put the concept of sisterhood solidarity into context, I have collected narratives of women politicians in two time periods in Kosovo (1980-1999 & 2000-2022) through semi-structured interviews in which I have focused on their intragroup relationships by examining their mobilization efforts, alliances, coalitions, and support systems. Women's intragroup relationships and dynamics have received less attention compared to the knowledge produced on the gender dynamics between men and women. Consequently, I wanted to unravel the intragroup dynamics that have affected the change in the political and societal status quo, as well as understand the elements that weaken the intragroup bonds and leads to lack of cooperation and absence of political solidarity practices among women.

The analysis of my findings from the interviews is divided into three main chapters, all of which are grounded in the concept of solidarity. In each chapter, solidarity is examined differently, which reveals different political and social dynamics depending on the time period being examined and on the specific angle I am taking to examine it. In the first analytical chapter I focus on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and nationalism which had great importance during the Yugoslav era and also in later periods. Through feminist critiques of how nationalism is gendered, I argue that women politicians in Kosovo entangled their nationalist activism with their advocacy for gender equality. Participation in the nationalist project assisted them in stepping into the public sphere and gaining validity as agents of change through their advocacy for liberation, political independence, and equal ethnic rights. The nationalist movement called for social unity and solidarity across all differences in order to stand stronger against the

political pressure on ethnic basis, which is why class and gender became generally insignificant at that time. I continue the conversation on the participation of women in politics through political concepts such as descriptive and substantive representation in the second chapter. I explain that women's numerical representation has, in some cases, produced an effect of identifying with women's issues and developing a solidary consciousness to politically advocate for gender equality, and, therefore, advance the position of women in society. Specifically, I illustrate the mobilization of women politicians to deconstruct the stereotypes of the Albanian women in the 1990s and the sexist stereotyping of women politicians in the postwar period. Women developed strategies to unite and form political safety nets, from which they transformed their descriptive representation into a substantive one. And lastly, I talk about women's lived experiences when they faced a lack of female solidarity in their political experience. Power dynamics exist even within the members of one community trying to work together to reach a common cause. I analyze instances when women politicians have not agreed with the mechanisms and views they have used to achieve a specific goal. Despite their collective desire to advance the gender equality agenda, women politicians have struggled to reach to an agreement on how to reach the goal, where in many cases, the lack of an intersectional perspective within the movement has further complicated the power balances within the group. Although not all of them identify as feminists and advocate for gender equality, women politicians have struggled to find group cohesion in many cases in the context of Kosovo. The variety of voices and the relativity of priorities has led to a rupture within the 'sisterhood code' which was considered as a basis to promote group unity and to stand stronger as a political group. I specifically focus on the comparison of generations and the difference in stages of nation building/independence and the dynamics of nationalism/formal politics taking over from feminist agendas. I use the concept of sisterhood solidarity to frame the anticipated

practice by many women politicians in Kosovo – the development of a feminist consciousness to optimize women's political presence and provide an equal and just environment for all.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF KOSOVO

It is important to have a sense of the chronology of the events of Kosovo history and the increasing ethnic tensions in the region in order to understand the context in which my interviewees were working on nation building, independence, contestation of the dominant representations of Albanian stereotypes, and the emancipation of the Albanian women.

Kosovo was an autonomous province and a federal unit of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. SFR Yugoslavia was comprised of six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, as well as two autonomous provinces: Kosovo and Vojvodina (United Nations, Map of Yugoslavia, 2007).

Until 1968, Kosovo as an autonomous province had quite limited self-governing powers as the republican influence from Serbia within the province was part of the normal day to day functioning of the institutional life. The nomenclature and the police were dominated mainly by people of Serb ethnicity. In 1968, the autonomy of Kosovo was significantly strengthened, and the nomenclature and the police, once dominated by Serbs, became Albanian-dominated (Abrahams, 2002, 21). On the 1981 census, 77.42% of Kosovo inhabitants were Albanian, 13.2% were Serbs, and 1.7% were Montenegrin (Bugajski, 2002, 479).

The Albanian-ethnic majority population of Kosovo has relentlessly wanted the status of a republic within SFR Yugoslavia, which was met with fierce opposition from Serbia due to

the fact that, although autonomous, Kosovo still was part of Serbia. In order to find a solution to this, the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito sought for Constitutional amendments in order to find a solution that would suit both sides (Abrahams, 2002, 22). Before continuing to the effects of the constitutional changes, it is worth noting the importance of the religious differences between the Albanians and Serbs. Kosovo has a religious importance for Serbian Orthodox Christianity, and therefore the Serbian nation, both of which consider Kosovo a holy land – a Jerusalem of sorts. The status of holy land is associated with Kosovo ever since the Battle of Kosovo of 1389, which took place in the field of Kosovo, just outside Pristina. In this battle, the Serbian troops led by Prince Lazar were defeated by the invading Ottoman Empire, and this battle and the imagery around it have been a motivation for the last war, as well (Farnsworth, 2008). Under the Ottoman rule, the majority of the Albanian population converted to Islam and thus they enjoyed more privileges and less taxes than the non-Muslim populations, including the Serbs. Religious differences continued to be politicized during the SFRY period and to this day, the Patriarchate of Peja/Peć, located in Kosovo's western city of Peja/Peć, is considered to traditionally be the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). To signal the importance of the Patriarchate of Peja/Peć, the head of the SOC officially holds the title: Archbishop of Peć and Serbian Patriarch.

With the Constitutional changes in SFR Yugoslavia in 1974, both Kosovo and Vojvodina were given greater self-governing powers and a substantial autonomy. Aside from not having the name of ‘republic’ and the lack of army, Kosovo and Vojvodina were equal members on the Federal level in SFR Yugoslavia. The autonomy also meant that the institutions had direct control over the territory and the day to day running of the province. There was also direct control over the healthcare and education systems, and the University of Pristina was founded as the first Albanian language higher education institution in SFR Yugoslavia. Security

was provided from the republican level, i.e. from Serbia, and the federal level, i.e. from Yugoslavia (Abrahams, 2002, 23).

Josip Broz Tito was the politician who kept Yugoslavia in relative peace under the "Brotherhood and Unity" (Abrahams, 2002, 21) slogan , so 1974 to 1981 were years of relative peace in Kosovo as well, and were marked with industrial and infrastructural development. However, the death of Tito in 1980 triggered the fears of many that once the "old man" is gone, Yugoslavia would turn into a battle zone (Abrahams, 2002, 22). The 1974 Constitution was part of a devolution of power away from the center to the republics and provinces. Since most of these had an ethnic affiliation, it easily turned into an ethno-national power struggle once Tito was gone, although the process had started before he died. 1981 began with a massive demonstration in Kosovo that initially started as a student protest and later turned into a nation-wide demonstration against ethnic repression towards Albanians (Bami and Vatoci, 2021, paragraph 3). The demonstration was met with brutal violence from the police, and it was a sad reminder that peace was fragile in Yugoslavia. 1981-1989 were the years in which the communist leadership both in Kosovo and in Yugoslavia were trying their best to keep the nationalist rhetoric under control and secure peace.

This was met with criticism and exposure by elites all over Yugoslavia, and especially from the political elites in Kosovo, where the tones of the Serbian leadership were louder and more threatening due to the fact that Kosovo was considered part of Serbia and the heart of the Serbian orthodoxy.

In 1988, Kaqusha Jashari became the leader of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo. Part of the fact why she was chosen by the Communist League of Kosovo for this position was because of her gender and the party assumptions that she would be easier to manipulate and control (Kerquki, 2021, min 36). However, to the surprise of everyone, she

turned out to be a tougher critic of politics than the previous leader, Azem Vllasi. Kaqusha Jashari came from a mixed family of an Albanian father and a Montenegrin mother. She was indeed very sensitive to separatist nationalism, and put/channeled a lot of energy into fighting nationalism wherever it would come from – within Kosovo or Serbia. This meant that she came at odds with the Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, who could not stand this "head of a woman" (Kerquki, 2021, min 50) getting into his way, and began putting pressure on the Communist League of Kosovo to remove her from the leadership. When she refused to resign, she was fired by the Communist League in the end of 1988, less than a year after being elected (Kerquki, 2021, min 55).

Having had this experience with Kaqusha Jashari, Milosevic was determined to preserve Serb dominance over the whole of Yugoslavia, and to do this, he began the anti-bureaucratic revolution, which ended with the sacking of the whole Provincial leadership in November 1988. This was achieved by taking full control of the Central Committee of the Communist League of Kosovo, and through the forcing of the Provincial Assembly to vote on the reduction of autonomy in March 1989. This basically turned the situation to that of pre-1968, with Kosovo was once again returning under the full control of Serbia. Albanians were fired from the public administration and law enforcement, the University was closed and an apartheid system took hold. The apartheid system was based on ethnic grounds, from which the Albanian part of the population was further pushed into the margins and gradually removed from the public sphere. After the revocation of the autonomy, Milosevic declared the state of emergency in Kosovo, citing risk from demonstrations. This move allowed his regime to impose curfews and to suspend legal and constitutional procedures and rule by decree.

In November 1989, Albanian intellectuals and former members of the Communist League of Kosovo formed the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). LDK served as a platform to oppose the apartheid measures enforced by Serbia, but also to organize the parallel

institutional life within Kosovo (Abrahams, 2002, 19). On July 2nd, 1990, in the town of Kacanik (near the border with Macedonia), the remaining delegates of the Assembly of Kosovo declared the independence of Kosovo, officially named as Republic of Kosova, which was only recognized by Albania. The reason for gathering in Kacanik was that the Assembly building in Pristina was locked and they were not allowed to gather there. On September 7th, 1990, they adopted the Constitution of Kosovo. A few days later, an unofficial referendum was held, in which 99% of the Albanian population voted in favor of the proclamation of the independence, the overall turnout of the Albanian population being 87% (Abrahams, 2002, 29).

The proclamation of independence was, however, not recognized by the Milosevic regime. Despite that, this proclamation served as the corner stone for setting the parallel institutions of Kosovo which was functioning under the shadows. The founder and leader of LDK, Ibrahim Rugova, was elected President of the Republic of Kosova, and Bujar Bukoshi was appointed the Prime Minister of the Government in exile (Abrahams, 2002, 30).

A parallel educational system was formed in what came to be known as 'house schools', where people would open their houses in order to allow Albanian students, denied by Milosevic to study in Albanian, to carry on with their education. Parallel sports federations were also formed and the life of a country was established within another country (Ministria e Arsimit, Shkences, Teknologjise dhe Inovacionit, 2012, paragraph 2). These activities were mainly financed by the government in exile, who was in charge of gathering revenue through donations, mainly from diaspora. The formal institutions continued to provide equal services to the non-Albanian population, it was only the Albanian population that was segregated from the rest of the residing ethnicities in Kosovo.

Although that period, known as Ilegale, was difficult and marked with the fear of repercussions from the Serbian regime, these years offered an opportunity for Albanian society

to break away from (some) patriarchal norms that it was identified with. During Ilegale, the position of women in political decision making was cemented and they were now able to set foot in places where women were not allowed in the past. The activities during these years were closely monitored, and all Albanian political activists were subject to questioning, arrests and harassment by the Serbian state apparatus.

The '90s were marked with constant fear and frequent maltreatment of the Albanian majority population on the part/on behalf of the Serbian police, military and paramilitary forces. President Rugova remained a fierce supporter of non-violent resistance, and continued to believe that a peaceful solution through dialogue was possible, even when everyone else had ceased believing that a solution to the Kosovo issue could be dealt with without an armed conflict.

The intense ethnic tensions culminated with the war in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999 and was conducted between the military might of Serbia, which had inherited most of what was left of the Yugoslav Army, and a group of mainly young idealists who gathered and formed the Kosovo Liberation Army (Abrahams, 2002, 65). The mass-killings and the massacres committed by the Serbian forces against civilian Albanians were documented by international media outlets, which sparked international efforts towards not allowing a second Bosnian story in the European continent. In Rambouillet, France, a conference was organized by the international community (mostly governments of the US and western Europe) in order to sign a peace agreement between the Albanian and the Serbian side (formally still known as the Yugoslav government). The agreement was signed by the Albanian leadership of Kosovo, but was rejected by the Yugoslav government although by then four republics had broken away from the federation. The rejection of the Yugoslav government resulted in the NATO air campaign, which lasted from March 24th to June 11th, 1999. The 78-day bombing campaign

resulted in the liberation of Kosovo and the placement of Kosovo under international administration via the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Abrahams, 2002, 65).

UNMIK continued to administer Kosovo while institutions of self-government and a Constitutional framework were also formed. While the government of Kosovo managed most day to day duties, they had to be coordinated with the UNMIK Administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. While Kosovo formed its police service, the UNMIK police continued to have a great presence throughout the country; and while the former KLA was turned into the Kosovo Protection Corps – a civilian emergency services organization – the security of the country was provided by NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) (Abrahams, 2002, 506).

This situation continued from 1999 until 2008, when the Assembly of Kosovo gathered on February 17th and declared the independence of the Republic of Kosovo (Bilefsky, 2008, par.1). While the first proclamation of independence in 1990 was only recognized by Albania, this time it was done in coordination with the United States and EU member countries such as Germany, France, UK, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands etc., and as a result was recognized by the majority of the world, including the largest democracies in the world. However, even today Kosovo remains only a partially recognized as a country. There are important exceptions of non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood and two main reasons why countries that have not recognized Kosovo as an independent country, are reluctant to do so: (i) those countries may have internal disputes with regions that also request independence, as i the case of Spain with Catalonia or China with Tibet, and (ii) those countries are traditionally closer with Serbia and/or its allies, like Russia, hence they support Serbia's territorial claims over Kosovo. Until the relations between Kosovo and Serbia are normalized, it is highly unlikely that these countries will take steps towards establishing diplomatic relations with the Republic of Kosovo.

Serbia continues claiming that Kosovo is its province that is temporarily under international administration, and keeps lobbying for the non-recognition of the Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign and independent country. With the support of its allies in Russia and China, it has managed to block Kosovo from joining the United Nations as an equal member. To date, 117 countries recognize Kosovo as an independent country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

1.1. Political system in Kosovo from 1980 to present

In this thesis, I will be analyzing women's intra-gender experiences in politics and it is important to understand the political system they were operating in order to make sense of the position of women politicians and the dynamics affecting their non/solidarity.

The Republic of Kosovo is a parliamentary multi-party democracy. Its system and division of powers are less complex than that of the SFRY. The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo) is the legislative body of the country responsible for adopting legislation, electing the President of the Republic, electing the Government as well as the heads of independent bodies. In addition to adopting legislation, the The President of the Republic is the highest elected official in the country, and represents the unity of the people of the Republic of Kosovo (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 83, paragraph 28). The Government of the Republic of Kosovo represents the executive branch in the Republic of Kosovo, which is comprised of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. Besides the implementation of the legislation adopted from the Assembly, the Government is responsible for "making decisions in accordance with the Constitution and laws, proposes draft laws, proposes amendments to existing laws or other acts and may give its opinion on draft laws that are not proposed by it" (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 92/4, paragraph 32).

The same political system was present in Kosovo since the end of the war until the declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, with the only difference being that, under the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, these institutions were called "institutions of self-government", whereas UNMIK maintained veto powers over the decisions of these institutions. Another difference in the pre-independence years is that legislation passed by the Assembly of Kosovo was not promulgated by the President of Kosovo, but rather by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, as a means of maintaining control and oversight over the institutions of self-government and the legislative framework of the country.

The ideological spectrum of the registered parties in Kosovo based on their statute is as following: Center right: Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), and Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK); Center left: Vetevendosje (VV); Liberal democrat orientation: New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) (Krasniqi, 2016, 112). Although the statute of each party clearly defines the position in the political ideology spectrum, the reality is that parties shift between different ideologies based on the policies that are more likely to gain the support of the voters. Therefore, none of the political parties in Kosovo strictly abides by its stated ideology. The political behavior of the parties is highly influenced by the popular thought and demands, hence during the electoral campaigns they tailor the programs to appeal to as many citizens as possible, although the program may not be in line with the party's stated political ideology. It is important to understand these dynamics in order to put the behavior of my interviewees into context and also have in mind that their intra-gender solidarity across parties is not highly shaped by their ideological positions.

The SFRY was a single-party state, where the League of Communists of Yugoslavia – composed of Communist parties from each of the six republics and two autonomous provinces – played the major role within the SFRY. Despite the fact that the League of Communists had

a dominant position, within Yugoslavia there was division of powers as stipulated in the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution. According to the Constitution, the Assembly of the SFRY (1974) was a bicameral body, comprising the Federal Chamber (lower house) and the Chamber of Republics and Provinces (upper house). The Assembly was in charge of adopting legislation and was "the supreme organ of power within the framework of federal rights and duties" (Chapter I, Article 282, paragraph 234). The Presidency of the SFRY was composed of a member from each republic and each autonomous province, who were elected by a secret ballot by the Assemblies of the Republics and Autonomous Provinces at a joint session of all Assemblies in the presence of the President of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Chapter II, article 321, p. 260).

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. Research Scope and Purpose

A qualitative phenomenological method has been used in this research. This method is used to examine how individuals live and give meaning to a particular phenomenon in a specific context. The founder of qualitative phenomenological school, Edmund Husserl, coined the concept of phenomenology by denying that "objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable," as Thomas Groenewald says (2004, 43). Hence, I will be using this methodology to explain how women politicians' lived experiences in their professional careers have shaped their intra and cross-party relationships with fellow women politicians. I will also examine how the meanings of solidarity and cooperation were constructed through Kosovan historical periods, such as state oppression, war, declaration of independence, and state building, as well as what motivations have driven their behavior.

In order to "capture participants' experiences in their own words" as well as grasp the "context and meaning of their actions" (Seitz, 2015, 1), I have conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with women politicians in Kosovo, namely women parliamentarians, party members, ministers, and a president. The interviewees have been divided into two groups of seven – the generation of women politicians that served from 1980 to 1999 and the generation of women politicians that served from 2000 until 2022. The number of women entering public life increased between 1968 and 1989 (Farnsworth, 2008, 21), which led to the birth of a women's movement. However, 1980 marks the year when the political, social, and economic situation in Yugoslavia started deteriorating after Tito's death (Farnsworth, 2008, 23) and the peaceful resistance of the Kosovo Albanians to the system started. After more than a decade of Serbian authorities' systematic oppression of Kosovo Albanians, war erupted on February 28, 1998, and lasted until June 11, 1999 (Abrahams, 2002, 40). In public discussions, be they political, social, economic, or religious, war is used as a time-marker to compare current events, occurrences, or developments, as well as to measure social, economic, and political pro/regress. Consequently, "before the war" and "after the war" are used in such contexts and appeared frequently even during the interviews for this thesis. The early 2000s marked the historic process of Kosovan state-building, while politicians and civil society were simultaneously dealing with releasing political prisoners, finding missing persons, reconstructing and forming institutions, furthering education, addressing gender-based violence, and initiating a local economy (Farnsworth, 2008, 160-255), culminating in the declaration of independence in 2008 (Bilefsky, 2008). Based on the social, political, and economic differences in the two time periods, I asked the interviewees to share their lived experience based on the time period they served in. It is also worth noting that some "after the war" politicians had served even "before the war", but their social role was linked to activism rather than formal politics (being elected in the office). It was interesting to note how their experience in politics as well as relationships

to fellow colleagues/activists/politicians changed after the war. Since these two time periods are significant in marking events in Kosovo's history, I have decided to separate my analysis in a similar manner because I am interested in understanding how the intra-gender dynamics have changed in the context of Kosovo when the politicians were not fighting an oppressive regime and when the country was not only in a survival mode.

2.2. Interviewees and semi-structured interviews

The selection criteria for women activists/politicians of the first group of interviewees was based on their similar experience of:

- Public activism in protest/demonstration organizing;
- Activism in mobilizing the population, raising and distributing funds, spreading information, international advocacy for Kosovo, and
- Cooperation with NGOs dealing with "women's issues";
- Political power they held in the main political party established in 1989 – LDK, which initially started as a movement.

These criteria provided me with a pool of interviewees who had a wide network and interacted, worked, and organized with women activists/politicians. Not every interviewee fulfilled each of the criteria. Some of the interviewed women activists were recommended to me by interviewees with whom I had already spoken. They shared some profiles of women who had been very active politically but were not recognized publicly.

The selection criteria for women politicians of the second group of interviewees was based on:

- Public activism on gender equality;
- Public cooperation with NGOs and civil society, which push the feminist ideology forward;

- Influence they have in party politics and the level of positions they hold within the party and in governmental institutions (how outspoken they are).

The criteria were not entirely applicable to all women politicians, but they helped me narrow the list of potential interviewees to women politicians engaged in feminist activities. I used an intra and cross-party intersectional approach, which would allow me to interview women politicians of different religions (Muslim, Orthodox, Christian, and Protestant), gender expression, education, and political ideology they support/ed (party affiliation).

To complement my analysis, I have additionally examined interviews that were given by women politicians in the 90s in international media, as well as public statements in social media platforms made by women politicians after other politicians' sexist/misogynistic remarks towards other women politicians. These social media statements have been analyzed from 2012, since this was the period when social media started being used as platforms for political expression in Kosovo.

I started contacting the interviewees during the Spring Semester of 2022 via emails, social media networks, and phone (through their assistants' and their personal numbers). I used a database of contacts which I had already in possession from my institutional work experience. Most of the interviews were conducted during June, July, and August, whereas some of them were also conducted in September, 2022. Some of the participants were not available to be interviewed during the period I was physically in Kosovo, which is why we had to agree on conducting the interviews online (in one of the platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Viber). The length of the interviews varied from thirty minutes to three and a half hours.

I informed the participants about my project and gave them an overview of my background, including my professional career (work experience in the Presidency of the Republic of Kosovo) in addition to the academic one. The participants were given space to voice any

concerns and questions they had for me as a researcher as well as for the project I had undertaken. I asked for permission to audio record the interviews prior to the recording and I had them repeat this informed consent in verbal form again after I started recording. Upon their consent to the use of their real names in this thesis, I ensured the participants that in cases of a direct quotation I would send the quote, along with the context in which the quote is used to them prior to the publishing of my thesis. The list of interviewees, along with their professional background details can be found in Appendix 1.

I used an interview guide during our discussion with the participants. The line of questioning was divided into four main areas, namely (i) Introduction, (ii) Being a woman in politics, (iii) Feminism, and (iv) Feminist solidarity and practice, as listed in Appendix 2. It is worth noting that the line of questioning was not the same with each interviewee, and in some instances I did not need to ask the entire list of the planned questions since the interviewees naturally touched upon some of the points I wanted to discuss.

2.3. Positionality and Reflexivity

The inspiration to write on the topic of solidarity and intragroup relationships between women was grounded in my personal experience and observations while working in the Presidency of the Republic of Kosovo. The Cabinet of the 4th President was deeply engaged in activities related to women, youth, and marginalized groups in Kosovo, which enabled me to attend conferences, summits, events, meetings, demonstrations, and hearings where women politicians participated and discussed feminism, the need for social cohesion, and political action. I was intrigued by the power dynamics within the group and the navigation of their gender identity in establishing alliances and forming networks of support for other women politicians. There were instances when female solidarity was present, and in some other cases its lack affected group mobilization and joint action to affect political change and acknowledge

the presence of patriarchal patterns. Consequently, I wanted to better understand how these dynamics shape women politicians' relationships with one another and provide insights into the cases when feminist solidarity is not an inherent value of their professional relationships with colleagues.

As a researcher during the interviews with the women politicians, I was in the position of both an insider and outsider. I was an insider in the sense of my familiarity with the line of work, previous exposure to the group dynamics, and previously established relationships with some of the interviewees. Being an insider helped me gain their trust and receive their willingness to be a part of the research, but some of them were skeptical of sharing their lived experience with the absence of intragender solidarity. I assume they were skeptical of sharing such instances because I could easily identify the women politicians they were referring to given that I know the context and I worked with some of the women politicians. My position as a researcher, and not a politician or an official involved in politics, provided me the space to be considered an outsider. The participants explained some political processes and intraparty dynamics that I had not considered before, but their acknowledgement of my position as an outsider paved the way for me to ask questions which otherwise I could not have asked.

I identified myself as a feminist researcher who wants to contribute to knowledge production about Kosovo from the perspective of a Kosovar. I further disclosed my pure intentions on writing about intragender relationships between women politicians and illustrating the bonds, alliances, and the outcomes of such relationships in society. I also emphasized the need to address the ruptures within the group in order to improve politics. Such declarations increased the participants' desire to become part of the research because they wanted to contribute to the creation of a safer and more inclusive space for women politicians in politics.

CHAPTER 3: NAVIGATING GENDER, NATIONALITY, AND IDENTITY IN KOSOVO POLITICS

Sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis, who has intensively researched nationalism and gender, along with many other feminist scholars, argues that every nationalist project is a gendered one (Yuval-Davis et al., 1989; 2006; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, Yuval-Davis, 1997; 2011; Luci & Gusia, 2015, 202; McClintock, 1991, 104), in which gender roles and identities are (re)constructed within its political, social, and cultural institutions. The complex and entangled history of ethnic and national conflicts in Kosovo provides another example of the use of gender to emphasize and showcase the dominant narratives of nationalism and ethnicity. Each nationalist project, Kosovo's included, provides a site for research on the inclusion and exclusion of both material (physical bodies) and immaterial (ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexuality) political and social constructions – a process characterized by great fluidity depending on the historical moment and context of analysis. In the context of Kosovo, this fluidity of inclusion and exclusion, as a process, has shaped the relations between individual selves and collective identities. Cynthia Cockburn discusses the concepts of individual and collective identities in nationalist projects and argues that "women … come to the [nationalist] projects strongly marked by highly mobilized ethnicities" (1998, 15). Women's mobilized ethnicity serves as the unification point that helped women step into the public domain with greater ease during the 1980s and 1990s in Kosovo, whereas their ethnic and gender identities were used as the basis to push them back to the private domain in the early 2000s.

In this chapter, I analyze the presence and participation of women in politics by focusing on their ethnic identity – which was generally the basis for the nation in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav period – along with their gender identity. Specifically, I will be focusing on the

public/private gender division of spaces in which Kosovo Albanian women politicians were expected to participate depending on the political and social momentum. I will use "feminist nationalism" as a theoretical tool to link women politicians' feminist actions (demands and actions for women's equal rights) and their nationalist activism (demands and actions for ethnic equal rights, liberation, and political independence). I argue that women participated in the nationalist project during the 1980s and 1990s while simultaneously advancing the position of Kosovo Albanian women in society. The legitimacy they gained to participate in the public sphere through the nationalist project paved the way for the change of the gender status quo (women's assigned societal roles and gender social expectations) and the dynamics of power. Lastly, by analyzing the ways women participated in the Kosovan nationalist project, I map the concepts of sacrifice and suffering (*vuajtje*) in the narrations of political activism of the women I interviewed.

3.1. Theoretical framework: Feminist nationalism

Lois West starts her sociological study of feminist nationalism by presenting Virginia Woolf's dilemma of English women who were historically excluded from decision-making and not granted full citizenship rights, and yet they were asked to support the national cause on the brink of World War II (1997, xi). Continuing Woolf's conversation on the dilemma posed half a century before, West asks: "How could women be nationalists when they did not have equal rights? How could women not be nationalists when they loved their country, people, home?" (1997, xii). Such questions can also guide the analysis of the political involvement of women in peaceful resistances, demonstrations, armed forces, war, liberation attempts, and state building in the context of Kosovo.

The debate on the compatibility of feminism and nationalism (the advancement of women's rights within a state/nation) has been ongoing and started to receive proper academic

attention in the 80s. Valentine Moghadam, when discussing women's movements in the 20th century Islamic revolutions, suggests that the adherents of both ideologies typically "view each other with suspicion if not hostility" (1994, 3). On different lines but alongside the opponents of nationalism, who claim that nationalism nurtures exclusion and oppression of the *other*, feminist scholars have shed some light on how women have navigated the tensions between their ethnic, racial, religious, and gender identities, and how they used their own experiences to create variations within nationalist projects. Cynthia Cockburn, a feminist antimilitarist activist and scholar who was part of the Women in Black movement in support of international peace and non-violent resolutions, picks up the conversation on the compatibility of the two ideologies – feminism and nationalism – and explains that the harmony between them depends on the "*kind* of nationalism" and the "*kind* of feminism" one is referring to, since both are "plural movements" (1998, 41).

Cockburn explains the situatedness of the concept of nationalism and how it has different connotations depending on the context. She draws from the example of the Bosnian women and their reluctance to be identified with nationalism. Elissa Helms' ethnographic work on postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina supports Cockburn's arguments by claiming that some Bosnian women positioned themselves against nationalism since they linked it with some of the factors that drove the country to a state of war (2013, 160). Examples of more positive instances of nationalism, according to Cockburn, are more widespread among anti-colonial movements. Kumari Jayawardena, for example, writes from an anti-colonial perspective on the intersection of feminism, nationalism, and anti-colonialism in the context of Sri Lanka, where she explores the shaping and the challenging of the feminist movements in the country by nationalist struggles (1986). Consequently, the variability of the political, economic, historic, and social contexts contributes to the plurality of the movements and adds "s" to feminism, nationalism, and the combination of the two.

Initially, nationalism became part of the political, socio-economic, and academic discourse as an ideology that was gender neutral. However, an intersectional approach towards the studying of nationalism revealed how gendered it was as an ideology and how the gendering of the nationalist projects in many cases was shaped by gendered expectations and constructs. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis discuss the impact of national and ethnic processes on women and argue that the roles of women within a state have become central in the relationship between the state and national collectivities (1989). Furthermore, they argue that the dynamic state-collectivity relation shapes women and their roles in national and ethnic processes. Acknowledging the complexity of these relationships, Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that national and ethnic processes are fluid and not natural or fixed – they are rather constructed by the hegemonic discourses that define the national/ethnic community and depend on the 'utilization' of women as national/ethnic symbols (ibid.).

The terms nation and state connote distinct meanings. A nation is a social construct comprised of a group of people who share common identities linked through culture, language, history, race, or ethnicity, which Benedict Anderson terms as an imagined community (Anderson, 1997), whereas a state is a political entity with a defined territory, a government, permanent population, and ability to make and enforce laws. Among many attempts at analyzing the relationship between women and the state, citizenship is one of the most used as a lens of analysis. Anthias and Yuval-Davis articulate citizenship as "the way the state acts upon the individual" (1989, 6) and this acting, historically, has often been exclusionary towards women. West states that "women are constituted as citizens *differently* than men" (1997, xii) when discussing the dilemma of women who are asked to join nationalist projects while not being granted equal rights as their male counterparts within the state. The gender *difference* within state citizenship projects, as well as the nationalist ones, can be found in the association of nationalism with masculinity, national symbolization of women, in/exclusion of women in

political and military activities, as well as the regulation of women's bodies and reproductive options.

Women within nationalist projects have their own agency and willingly contribute in the national/ethnic processes. Their involvement in such projects reconstructs the collective identity by changing the 'order' and challenging the system. Deniz Kandiyoti analyzes nationalist projects in post-colonial societies and states, showing that women can be both actors and hostages within these projects (1991). Women's acting/agency in these projects, according to Anthias and Yuval-Davis, can take many forms, and they identify five prominent ones:

> (a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; (e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. (1989, 7)

Traces of these forms can be found within nationalist projects in Yugoslavia, especially in the case of Kosovo, which will be further elaborated in this chapter.

More recent works on gendered nationalism and feminist nationalism have built on the so-called waves of studies of gender in nationalist projects. Jon Mulholland, Nicola Montagna, and Erin Sanders-McDonagh have analyzed the intersection of gender and nationalism in several contexts by expanding on the three waves of gendering nationalism (2018). The first wave of the intertwinement of gender and nationalism, according to Mulholland, Montagna, and Sanders-McDonagh, uncovers the gender subtext of each nationalist project through liberation movements, parties, and political systems. The first layer of their analysis in the first wave explores the construction of identity, belonging, and citizenship through traditional gender roles. They build on the second wave of knowledge production on the gendered aspects of nationalism, which they consider to be comprised of a "more precise" definition of the

dynamics between gender and nationalism "over time, and across and within national borders" (2018, v). The last wave of scholarship on the topic maps sexuality in the matrix and highlights the level of in(ex)clusion of queer individuals and sexual minorities within the nationalist projects. In this chapter, I will utilize the knowledge produced on the first and second wave of feminist nationalism, by using Anthias and Yuval Davis' forms of women's participation in the nationalist project. The reason why I am excluding sexuality as one of the categories of my analysis in this research is because it did not become salient in the period I am examining, but this does not imply that it was not present as an identity.

3.2. The nation/state and the class(less) & gendered(less) individual

"How could women be nationalists when
they did not have equal rights?"
(West, 1997, xii)

Among many definitions of the nation, Nira Yuval-Davis uses Benedict Anderson's approach to the construction of the nation as "an imagined community" (1997, 26) constructed and based on particular political and social developments. A nation is not "an eternal and universal phenomenon" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 26) but is a production of contextual occurrences emphasizing people's membership within a particular community. In my interviews conducted with women politicians, particularly with those who served in Kosovan politics during the 1980s and 1990s, membership within the imagined community was based on ethnic identity. The political and social situation under the oppressive Serbian regime marginalized Kosovo Albanians on ethnic grounds by limiting educational, economic, and political opportunities, thus establishing national unity.

Feminist anthropologist Elife Krasniqi in her intersectional analysis of women's activism and political engagements in socialist Yugoslavia and during the 1990s, argues that

the multilayered state and social oppression towards Kosovo Albanians homogenized the identities into the national identity, which became "more important than any difference, be that class, regional, or gender" (2021, 328). Class differences were marked by the urban/rural and intellectual/peasants divide and were socially and politically visible from the mid-1960s. Isabel Ströhle explains the creation of an *underclass,* a class comprised of individuals (peasants) working in agriculture in rural areas, as a result of unequal distribution of the economic benefits of the industrialization of Kosovo (2016). Intellectuals and people living in urban areas became part of the political bureaucratic stratum by being rewarded with institutional positions. The differences blurred by the late 1980s when the state oppression towards Kosovo Albanians intensified (Krasniqi, 2021, 328). The importance of having class differences reduced to unimportant social 'values' with the purpose of mobilizing for the nation was a recurring theme during the interviews I conducted with women politicians/activists prominent between 1980s and 1990s. Samije Zeqiraj, a teacher from the peripheral town of Suhareka who served as a Vice-President of the Women's Forum of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), President of the Suhareka branch of the Women's Forum of LDK before the war, and Member of the Parliament between 2004-2007, shares on how people from all strata of society united to peacefully demonstrate after the constitutional changes of 1989:

> I became politically active when the miners went on strike in 1989. The entire people [referring to Kosovo Albanians from all social stratums] got on their feet with their two fingers up [referring to the peace sign – a symbol of peaceful resistance in Kosovo] when the miners went on strike. Everyone [Kosovo Albanians] wanted to join the demonstration. The people always trusted the intellectuals. They [intellectuals] did not have to convince much; everyone joined the protests with their cars, tractors, women with children holding cradles in their hands. No one wanted to leave the protest, although it was dangerous.

Zeqiraj explains the social cohesion in the name of the nation (*në emër të kombit*) in the context of strikes of the mineworkers of the Trepça mine, located in the north of Kosovo. 1,200 miners were striking for eight days, isolating themselves in the lead and zinc mines of Trepça, to oppose the revocation of the autonomy by the Serbian authorities (Haxhijaj, February 1, 2023).

Although Zeqiraj and other interviewees commonly agreed that social mobilization included all classes of society within the Kosovo Albanian community, in most of the narrations I noticed that the so-called intellectuals and the Kosovo elite had more power in generating greater mobilization. Institutional participation, emancipation, and political privileges provided the elite with more access to material and non-material resources deemed necessary for social mobilization.

Beyond cross-class unification, gender identity became less relevant in terms of being included in the national project during the 1980s and 1990s. Kosovo Albanian women were suffering several layers of oppression. On the one hand, they were oppressed by the Serbian regime based on their ethnicity, which pushed women into the margins by excluding them from public life participation and through state controlled constructed stereotypes and colonial epistemologies, which I and many Kosovan scholars label as propaganda (more on that in the upcoming chapter). On the other hand, women were under an oppressive patriarchal regime in their own community, as a result of which they had less access to resources, as well as social, economic, and political positions. Kosovo Albanian women decided to contribute to the nationalist project for liberation and equal rights as "participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles" and through the "construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories" (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989, 7). Although I did not ask West's question directly to my interviewees, I can conclude from their answers that Kosovo Albanian women became nationalists because participating in the nationalist project was perceived as a necessity to ensure the continuation of the Albanian ethnicity in Kosovo, and was treated as an obligation towards the nation, even though that nation did not grant them equal rights as Kosovo Albanian men especially in the postwar period – during the state building process as it will be further explained later on this chapter.

Besa Gaxherri, a political activist during the 90s and member of the parliament from the parliamentary group of the Democratic League of Kosovo from 2001 to 2021, explains that women's entrance into politics was not welcomed per se, but it was deemed necessary given the political and social circumstances of the nation:

> We cannot escape the Kosovan reality – the engagement of women in politics was not applauded. But in reality, the form, the approach, the historical momentum, our momentum, our circumstances, our timely context, made it happen. Our mentality started to change faster than it would in normal circumstances. We were facing an oppressive state like Serbia and automatically, when a woman was able to become engaged and contribute [to the nationalist project] while being challenged and threatened with her life even, she would automatically gain respect.

The legitimacy women gained to enter the public sphere by becoming part of the nationalist project stemmed from other women just as much as from men. Women encouraged one another to engage in nationalist activities by promoting ethnic and class solidarity. The contribution to the project varied depending on their individual's abilities, their resources in possession, and their geographical location. Some of the women participated in the nationalist project through the 'Ilegalja' underground resistance movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Krasniqi, 2021, 314-318), reconciliation of blood feuds (Luci, 2005, 145-155; Latifi, 2015), the Women's Forum of the Democratic League of Kosovo, women's organizations (Farnsworth, 2008), or the military (Gusia, Krasniqi, & Luci, 2016). Women's engagement in the domain of any of the above entities was considered politics, which blurred the line between politics and activism in my analysis of the statements of interviewees. All of the interviewees homogenized the term politics by labeling each act that contributed to the national project as such.

Most of the women who became part of these political and nationalist engagements were simultaneously working to improve the situation of their ethnic community and to enhance the position of the woman in society. The validation and the respect they received from the people by stepping into the public sphere helped women push the emancipation and empowerment

agenda forward for women in all parts of Kosovo. Nicole Farnsworth, in her oral history project of collecting narrations of national activism from the perspective of Kosovar women, states that most of the women activists pushed forward the national cause rather than "women's causes" (2008, 3). Krasniqi describes the dynamics of women activists' fluid shifts from the "woman's issue" to the "national issue" as competing loyalties based on which women "needed to negotiate with different layers of oppression and strategize and follow their ideals of feminist activism" (2021, 325). Consequently, women used their national identity to reconstruct their gender identity (Mertus, 1999) and secure a better position for the Kosovo Albanian women within their own ethnic group as well as in the multiethnic space of Kosovo. From the evidence I gathered from the interviewees, women managed to penetrate political and social spaces that they had not dared think of entering before. Under the shadow of nationalism, some women performed much more difficult tasks than men who were part of the illegal entities or social movements. The context of social mobilization for liberation allowed women to undertake tasks such as traveling to remote villages, carrying medical equipment to different parts of Kosovo and practicing medicine when it was forbidden, gathering food and beverages to be distributed among the protesters, and using international platforms to globally spread awareness on the unfair and brutal treatment of the Serbian state against Kosovo Albanians. Women transformed the social status quo and challenged relations of power (Luci & Krasniqi, 2006) while 'instrumentalizing' their gender identity for the "national question". Women were taking advantage of the disregard for women as significant actors or threats. This is a classic way to take advantage of patriarchal structures of nationalism and war and has been witnessed in other contexts as well such as the famous case of Algerian women smuggling weapons in for the nationalist forces under their long robes and scarves (Lazreg, 1994).

3.3. The sacrifice and the suffering for the nation

According to Anderson, community members consider their membership as natural (1991, 43), and as something that comes with several obligations, such as one's sacrifice for the imagined community, "including … killing or being killed" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 27). The dedication to fulfill this obligation – the sacrifice for the community – has also been explained as a passion (Kitching, 1985). Membership in the imagined community provides individuals with the sense of belonging, which Yuval-Davis et al. argue is a "thicker concept than that of citizenship and identity" (2006, 215). Belonging evokes a need which is deeply emotional and which melts individual identities into that of the group.

Kosovo Albanian women activists and politicians developed strong emotional connections to the imagined community formed on an ethnic basis, since ethnic identity was the foundation of their systematic state oppression. This emotional bond to the imagined community was strong enough to sacrifice and go through pain. Pain, suffering and sacrifice were frequently used nouns in both generations of women politicians throughout the interviews I conducted. When I asked the older generation about their political engagement and reasons why they entered politics, they made sure to emphasize the ambiguity between politics and activism since they were used interchangeably to refer to the same activities. Along the same lines of argument, they argued that their entrance into the public domain, besides being an obligation for the nation, was based on the commonly shared pain among Kosovo Albanians inflicted by the marginalization and treatment as "second class citizens" (Luci, 2005, 155). Edita Tahiri, a political activist who was a prominent member of the Women's Forum, representative of Kosovo in international media, and member of the leadership of the Democratic League of Kosovo before and after the war, served as a Foreign Minister before the war and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo and Chief Negotiator of Kosovo in

the postwar dialogue with Serbia, whose aim was the reconciliation and reparation of relations between the two countries for a safer and peaceful region. During the interview, I noticed that Tahiri included pain and sacrifice throughout her narration of political experience even in the postwar period. The context in which she was using the terms referred to the individual dangers with which political engagements came with. Being killed while carrying out the national plan was anticipated and accepted with pride. Tahiri told me that "[she is] at peace knowing that [she] had given everything, with all [her] potential to the nation." She treats the engagement for the nation as a mission which was an obligatory one and will continue to be for each generation – an obligation which her generation considered a "privilege".

Suffering (*vuajtje*), as a noun, was used to describe a variety of feelings and emotions in different contexts by the women politicians who participated in this research. The concept of suffering was anchored both in the physical and metaphysical experiences they had throughout the peaceful resistance years, during the war, and during the postwar state-building process of Kosovo. Emotions tied to (memories of) suffering shaped women's narration and centralized their nationalist engagement around it while constructing the political and activist discourse. Sara Ahmed elaborates on the use of pain as a component for social mobilization, and argues that emotions are collective feelings rather than individual ones as widely believed (2004, 20). Understood in that way, emotions shape political processes. The fluidity and dependency of emotions on specific timely, cultural, political, and economic contexts makes the analysis of the impact of emotions on the shaping of processes very complex. Ahmed recognizes the cultural influence in the shaping of emotions by challenging the apoliticality and the subjectivity embedded in them. Luci also touches upon the concept of suffering (*vuajtje)* and recognizes it as a component in the Kosovan cultural framework. She suggests that the resurfacing concept in the stories shared in Kosovo by women who are trying to reconcile with the past "place the violence they experienced, and their role in reconciliation within an "emotive

regime" or "structures of feeling" of an acceptance of the inevitability of (vuajtje) suffering" (2014, 134). Luci suggests that the "emotive regime" stems from the dominant collective feelings that shapes practices. *Vuajtja* in the stories of women was seen as an inevitable component of their lived experience that has become part of the emotional and cultural framework in Kosovo.

I traced the words *vuajtje* and sacrifice in the declarations of women politicians I interviewed, and I identified two main themes under which they were used and the context they developed from. I categorized *vuajtje* in two major recurring themes in their narrations, namely (i) motherhood and (ii) re-patriarchalisation of the social order.

(i) Motherhood

One of the most emphasized themes in their narration and the context of suffering was motherhood. Politically active women received public attention and became targeted by the Serbian regime. The dangers of such targeting entailed being captured, interrogated, tortured, and killed during the 1990s. Women politicians who anticipated such an ending of their nationalist journey, however, were unshaken by the risk. Their political activism did not halt even during the war. They continued their activities of providing food and shelter for the persecuted individuals, gathering information about the political situation and mobilizing the underground government, assisting survivors of sexual violence medically and psychologically, helping people cross the Kosovan borders to safer places, and spreading information about the war situation on international media. They conducted such activities while being targeted by the regime and risking their own lives, sometimes by even going through regions where bullets could catch them.

According to their narratives, being killed, sacrificing the self for the national cause, however, was not as painful as having their families, especially children, endangered as a result

of their contribution to the nation. Some activists and politicians used their identity as mothers to emphasize the pain the people were going through, and that the children Kosovo Albanians were losing due to the ethnic repression. Many protests were organized solely by women, their underlying motive being to use their gender identity and their role as mothers to put an end to the oppression. The most prominent of those was the Bread for Drenica Women's March. During the month of March of 1998, many protests were organized against the violence exercised upon the people of the Drenica region by the Milosevic regime. The Bread for Drenica Women's March is considered to be one of the most influential protests which gave international attention to the crimes being perpetrated in Kosovo. Women activists joined by 12,000 women from all social strata and regions of Kosovo marched in solidarity with the people under siege in Drenica, who did not have access to food and medical supplies, by holding bread in their hands and walking peacefully towards Drenica from Pristina. The marchers were all women, and they wanted to show the world that they as mothers, agents of peace, were demanding an end to the violence and restoration of stability.

Member of the Woman's Forum, founder of the League of the Albanian Woman, and member of the parliament from the ranks of the Democratic Party of Kosovo in the postwar period, Flora Brovina, is attributed to be part of the most active group of women politicians in Kosovo. She was a doctor by profession and used her knowledge to spread awareness about hygiene in the time of war and helped with the medical aid of the survivors of sexual violence. She was arrested by the Serbian police under the charges of "conspiracy against the government" and "terrorism". During our interview, she recalled one moment out of many when she was taken from her home into interrogation by state officials:

> I remember one occasion, when the officials knocked on my door. I was attending a patient and my son, Uranik, was at home. I was not allowed to practice medicine and I did it under the radar. People would be knocking on my door for help. I remember his eyes and the words he stuttered when they took

> me. “Mom, wear thick clothes!”. He was afraid that they will beat and maltreat me.

Brovina, like many politicians who were mothers, felt remorse for the pain they had caused to their loved ones. The sacrifice to join the national cause in this context meant risking the safety of their family and children, and the emotional and psychological damage they could have caused them. Consequently, their identity as mothers was a crucial part of their narrative of the past. On this note, many of the women politicians I interviewed agreed that the combination of their identity as Kosovo Albanian women politicians and as mothers made their experience emotionally and psychologically painful.

Dubravka Zarkov, theorizing the social and political mobilization around motherhood in Yugoslavia, explains how it became “a site for discursive struggle as well as identity politics” (2007, 69). The maternal body and the figure of the mother, she argues, became essential in Yugoslavia in solidifying the national cause and emphasizing national differences. Kosovo Albanian women who were protesting on the streets holding banners “mothers, sisters, and wives” (2007, 73) were considered by Yugoslav feminists to be emphasizing their reproductive roles and their importance in the greater national plan, while not addressing the ‘women’s question’ specifically. Consequently, Albanian women protesters and their mobilization around motherhood was frequently not analyzed through a feminist prism. Zarkov argues that “women demonstrating in Kosovo were condemned as politically unenlightened and patriarchal for defining themselves as mothers” (2007, 72), and points out that some feminists failed to acknowledge the mutually constitutive aspect of gender and ethnic identities, in which motherhood specifically “became a powerful political agency” (2007, 74).

A woman, a mother especially, did not traditionally belong in the public sphere, let alone the streets which were the site of the protests. Women’s identification with motherhood during protests and public discourse enabled them to enter political spaces and have a position in the

national plan. As Zarkov argues, "through motherhood … gender and ethnicity met on the streets of Kosovo" (2007, 74). The political meaning of motherhood was deeper and much more impactful than my interlocutors gave it credit. The placement of motherhood at the forefront of their activism was more than an act of 'victimization' that helped illustrate the oppression and the ethnic struggles of the period. The politization of their identities as mothers may have not been considered feminist; however, it served as a mobilizing center for women to become agents in changing the gender status quo and make social and political change. My interviewees recognized the moral power of motherhood and being women in such a patriarchal framework. Many of them considered motherhood as a natural role and an identity through which they could validate their calls to make a change in the political and social system. Thus, the melting of motherhood with ethnicity becomes an essential part in the analysis of women's lived experiences and their national impact in Kosovo.

(ii) Re-patriarchalisation of the political and social order

Another theme in which sacrifice and pain reoccurred was after the war ended and during the institutional building of the country, which women characterized it as a period of re-patriarchalisation of the social and political order. The war ended on the 10th of June, 1999, but for Kosovo the consequences of war continued to unfold (Farnsworth, 2008, 159). Among the psychological trauma, human losses, missing people, political prisoners, and survivors of sexual violence, the people had to build institutions from scratch as well as distribute power between the government, parliament, civil society, liberation army, and international organizations. While the country was struggling with the post-war situation, activists and local organizations were trying to provide material and nonmaterial resources for people's needs (Farnsworth, 2008, 159-182). According to Elife Krasniqi, the 'socialist progress' that had been attempted in Yugoslavia had come to a halt in Kosovo with the restoration of traditional practices, which she calls re-patriarchalisation (2014, 207). Nita Luci and Vjollca Krasniqi also elaborate on how

the afterwar had a 'Rosie the Rivetter effect' in Kosovo (2006, 19), where instead of women's liberation as a natural anticipation, women were, in fact, pushed back into the private sphere. This pushing back into the private sphere was not based on the name of national/ethnic identity according to my interlocutors, it was rather an unmarked process. A similar treatment was given to women politicians who had been active in political matters with the Democratic League of Kosovo and those women who had been internationalizing the case of Kosovo in the 1990s.

Melihate Termkolli, the delegate of the provincial assembly of Kosovo, President of the Women's Forum and member of the parliament of the Republic of Kosovo in the postwar period, was an interviewee who was the most dissatisfied with the treatment of women politicians after the war. Her dissatisfaction was visible even before I officially started the interview, when we were generally discussing the political situation in Kosovo. On the 23rd of March 1989, when the Assembly of Kosovo was voting to revoke Kosovo's autonomy, out of 190 delegates, only 10 of them voted against, Melihate Termkolli being amongst them (Termkolli, 2022, 125-124). In a tense political and social atmosphere, when the ethnic tensions were on the rise, voting against the revocation was considered a sign of great bravery and sacrifice (in terms of the threats delegates received if they voted against the revocation). Voting against the revocation was perceived as a form of support towards Albanian nationalism by the Serb politicians and state officials as well as disloyalty to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which are some of the reasons the status quo of oppression towards Albanians was threatened. Disappointed, Termkolli offered her take on how the contribution of women after the war ended was not recognized properly and women were pushed to the margins of state-building and decision-making:

> Do you know what happened after the war? In this society, women's sacrifice and contribution to the nation was accepted during the ten years of resistance, during which period, she [the woman] was a politician as well as a mother, a wife, and a daughter. She had to fulfill all these identities, while also being a politician, an armed fighter and so on. After the liberation from the occupation,

> men started running for public functions, while women's sacrifice and contribution were not materialized in institutional participation.

A similar pattern can be traced in several contexts of revolutions, war, conflict, and anti-colonial struggles. Upon the conclusion of the struggle, women experienced a reassertion of their roles, despite their involvement in the mobilization. Their efforts and contribution in the aftermath, in many cases, remain "confined to the footnotes of history" (Jayawardena, 2016, 48). Negotiation of the social positions of women in the post-war period took place in many other countries, in which women were asked to prioritize domestic responsibilities and shift their contribution from the public to the private sphere … again (West, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

3.4. Conclusion

In the case of Kosovo, gendered positionalities of emotion intersect with nationalism and women's double struggles for liberation – that from patriarchy and Serbian nationalism. Suffering, as a perceived emotion by women politicians, was not only often used as an instrument to politically mobilize women, but was also utilized to deconstruct the gender and ethnic power structures maintained by the patriarchy and Serb nationalism.

The imagined community of the Kosovo Albanians, which demanded cohesion in terms of mobilization and identification with the nation before the war, remained the same in principle in the social sphere with slightly more 'modern' changes – those of state-building, institutional reformation, and democratization. Within the 'new' and 'more modern' imagined community, the identity roles required women to regress in the movement they had initiated in the 1980s. The enforcement of the mother identity, which made it possible for women politicians to occupy the streets and have greater access to the public space before Kosovo's liberation, drastically changed in discourse upon liberation. The compromise of the political role for women underwent a 'rebranding' through the increased importance of conservative visions for the

nation, which included patriarchal roles for women as reproducers and socializers of small children, tied to the domestic sphere. However, women politicians were more successful in politicizing motherhood as an identity when the nation was under threat than when it was being consolidated.

I am ending this chapter by leaving West's question "How could women not be nationalists when they loved their country, people, home?" (1997, xii) here to segue to the next chapter, in which I will deepen the analysis of women's political representation in the two time periods, by focusing on the intragroup dynamics (both gender and ethnicity) and the shaping of the concept of solidarity and its manifestation within the group.

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN KOSOVO: OCCUPYING SPACES AND MAKING SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

The nationalist project in the Kosovan context mobilized all social strata to resist the oppressive system, while also reducing the importance of gender differences within the project. The need for social mobilization increased the pace of women's inclusion in the public sphere, which would have otherwise happened gradually and in a more stretched out period. As I have argued in the previous chapter, social respectability and validation of women's participation in the public sphere came as an effect of women's engagement in the nationalist project. Such outcomes enabled less social resistance in terms of making crucial changes to the gender status quo within the imagined community but also in terms of challenging the ethnic and gender stereotypes towards Albanian women sourced in the colonial epistemologies of the Serbian

state and Yugoslavia. It was anticipated that as a result of such political engagement and accepted social changes, women would experience the same acceptance in the political domain in the postwar period and during the state-building process of Kosovo. However, newly formed institutions, the international foreign agencies such as United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo altered those anticipations into symbolic inclusion for women in the political domain (party structures, government and parliament). It is also important to note the local political forces didn't actively try to promote women and they should also be recognized as part of the patriarchal structure women politicians were fighting against - even from within their own parties. Political parties in the postwar period, which were also male-dominated, did not provide as much political space to women and were not actively engaged in empowering women politicians.

This chapter focuses on Albanian women politicians' attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes of the Albanian woman by engaging in the nationalist project through demonstrations/protests, international media presence, and reconciliation of blood feuds in the prewar and war period. I argue that women politicians/activists were working on the "national question" and the "women's question" by challenging the construction and the stereotyping of the Albanian woman during the peaceful resistance, war, and postwar period. I expand my analysis of women's entry to the parliament of Kosovo through the mechanism of quotas and I argue that this mechanism has generated a mandate effect, from which women parliamentarians "stand for" and "act on behalf of" women. I use descriptive representation and substantive representation as theoretical concepts which connect to women's political presence in the national plan for liberation as well as the political participation as elected officials in the post-war period.

I argue that solidarity can be considered as a means to achieve both descriptive and substantive representation of women in politics. Descriptive representation aims to increase the number of women as elected officials in legislatures and substantive representation is concerned with the vocalization of women's perspectives/lived experiences and the channeling of their concerns in politics (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Female solidarity can assist in increasing the trust of the constituency to vote for women, which would result in an increased number of women elected officials. Simultaneously, solidarity among women politicians increases the probability of building political alliances between them, which may result in unified attempts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through policies and laws, which cannot be pushed forward if individual women rely on party agendas only.

4.1. Theoretical Framework: Political representation of women

Representationality is a crucial concept in political theory, which assists in ensuring the inclusion of the perspectives and needs of all individuals and groups of society in political processes (Russo & Cotta, 2020). Political representation assures that the opinions and the voices of citizens with diverse intersections of identities are integrated in political institutions and their outputs. As an integral part of democracy, political representation has been theorized by many scholars, such as Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (1967), who provides some of the most comprehensive explanations of the concept. Over 50 years ago, Pitkin defined two forms of political representation that are still used in contemporary analysis of democratic systems. She conducts a thorough analysis of different ways and contexts of representation, in which descriptive and substantive representations are the most frequently used concepts. According to Pitkin, when elected politicians have a similar intersection of identities as the demographic group they represent, representation is descriptive. With this form of representation, the representative "does not act for others; [they "stand for them"], by virtue of a correspondence

or connection between them, a resemblance or reflection" (Pitkin 1967, 61). Consequently, "standing for" in political terms, translates into the importance of the composition of the legislature, rather than the actions the officials undertake or the policies they promote. Substantive representation, or "acting for" representation, refers to the idea that the elected officials promote agendas, policies, and ideas by acting as an agent of the represented group/people/individuals. Pitkin defines substantive representation "in terms of what the representative does and how [they do] it, or in some combination of these two considerations" (1967, 143). Both types of representation are important; descriptive representation helps to ensure that the elected officials resemble the groups being represented, whereas substantive representation ensures that the electorate's interests, needs, and voices are being pushed forward. Both forms of representation, if standing alone, are not sufficient in serving the best interests of the electorate.

Although descriptive and substantive representations do not reach the optimal representation level when they are not complementary to one another, the link between the two does not necessarily ensure that sharing the intersection of identities with the group an elected official represents automatically leads to advocating their interests. For example, the assumption that all elected women politicians should represent the best interests of their women constituents is flawed as it assumes that all women should behave in terms of their gender identity and poses the risk of treating women as a monolith. Pitkin's theory in reference to women's representation in politics and their political presence as elected officials has been expanded by contemporary scholars, who "[conceptualize] the articulation of women's interests as a fluid process" (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008, 396). In the debate on the correlation between descriptive and substantive representation of women in politics, Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo elaborate on several aspects of why the homogenization of experiences should be treated with great caution in order to avoid the essentialization of women's identities and group

interests. Firstly, they note that concluding a woman's experience by using only one category, e.g. gender, will not provide a comprehensive picture of their entire political presence in politics. Women also have a wide range of perspectives they can offer that are independent of fixed gender identities. And lastly, Franceschet and Piscopo argue that historically male perspectives have had hegemonic power and their perspectives have been prevalent in decision making, which has resulted in the exclusion of perspectives of women as individuals and as a group (2008, 396).

Women politicians and the represented women are not coherent groups with rigid identities, but the presence of women as political elected officials in the parliament, government, and other state institutions can increase the likelihood of having descriptive representation that intersects with substantive representation. This, of course, does not exclude the cases when substantive representation of women's interests can also come from men as elected political officials, not to mention that elected women can also work towards maintaining patriarchal power. Political theory scholars such as Sandra Grey, Manon Tremblay, Drude Dahlerup, Sarah Childs, and Mona Lena Krook have participated in the debate on the critical mass of women in politics and its efficacy in pushing women friendly policies forward (2006). The concept of a critical mass is defined as a "threshold number (or percentage)" of women that is necessary in order to transform the legislative context and increase the number of successful policies that advance women's interests (Grey et al, 2006, 491). In a collection of four essays in the critical mass debate, authors take a critical approach to the concept and conclude that having a significant number of women in legislature is needed, but it is not sufficient to make changes that concern gender equality and the advancement of women's position in politics and society (Grey et al, 2006).

I concur with the critique of the critical mass concept and the uprooting of the assumption that group interests should inherently derive from identity., However, I argue that

descriptive representation is necessary in the political articulation of group interests. I ground my theoretical stance on bell hooks' (1986) concept of political solidarity which refers to women's unification across classes, races, ethnicities, sexualities, and religions as a way to recognize oppression and fight discrimination. hooks addresses the ruptures within the feminist movement and stresses that the lack of intersectionality within the movement has rendered the experiences of some women in the 'margins' invisible, while the dominating narrative of women's oppression is solely based in the oppression and the struggles of women of the center, namely middle class white women. She states that, "As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (1986, 127).

In other words, sexism's omnipresence in society has led to its internalization within individuals who, consequently, continue to maintain the social, political, and economic order without acknowledging how different experiences are shaped. hooks specifically emphasizes the negative effect this internalization has had on the relationship among women and she calls for a unification of women on all fronts by "[living] and [working] in solidarity" in order to "build a sustained feminist movement" (1986, 127). In her calls for sisterhood solidarity, hooks asserts that instead of engaging in interactions that promote disparity, women should rather focus on challenging the status quo by building trust and nurturing respect among each other.

4.2. Colonial epistemologies on the construction of the Albanian woman

Albanians were considered to be ethnically inferior in the Yugoslav context and the Albanian woman was given an even lower position in the social hierarchy (Zarkov, 2007, Luci, 2005; Luci & Krasniqi, 2006). I vividly recall the articulation of the Albanian woman's experience compared to women of other ethnicities in the stories of my grandmothers when

they would be speaking of the past. Innocently, when they would speak of a professionally achieved and educated Albanian woman, who was well groomed and independent of social norms, they would following such statements with a comparative term 'like a Serbian woman'. Consequently, in my mind, the illustrated vivid vision of an Albanian woman was the opposite to that of a Serbian in terms of social positions. My grandmothers and my mother would complement their narration of the lived experience of Albanian women by adding how they would resist the social system aimed at limiting them politically, socially, and economically. In the matrilineal side of my family, many Albanian women were resisting the social 'templates' they were put in through their activism in the private domain (family) and through their political activism and political participation in the public one (Ilegale, Women's Forum of LDK, civil society organizations, appearance in international media, and participation in international conferences). Women who entered the public sphere, especially, were countering these stereotypes and the Serbian state propaganda towards Albanian women through their engagement for the national cause. The stereotypes were grounded in the low literacy rate and high unemployment rates in Kosovo, where women comprised the majority, and in high level of economic dependency (Zarkov, 2007, 20). As a result, Zarkov postulates that "In the gendered narratives of socialist modernity, the Albanian women of Kosovo, uneducated, unemployed, and with numerous offspring, became a metaphor for backwardness throughout socialist Yugoslavia and especially Serbia" (2007, 20). However, these comments ignored the systematic oppression and social expulsion of Kosovo Albanians, which prevented them from having access to education and labor market and they also excluded the rural-urban differences as well.

The apartheid towards Albanians and the structural racism was rooted in the colonial knowledge production starting from the 19th century (Pavlović, 2019; Schwandner-Sievers, 2008). The portrayal of the Albanians in these epistemologies associated them with violence,

blood vengeance, primitivism, isolation of women, illiteracy, and children 'production' (Schwandner-Sievers, 2008, 49-51). Elife Krasniqi argues that the partial and biased presentation of evidence on the framing of Albanians in such derogatory terms before and during socialism was a result of Serbian state propaganda, which was orchestrating obstacles, segregating, and preventing the inclusion of Albanians in the public sphere (2021, 324). Nita Luci also emphasizes the "constant relegation of [Albanian] people as less than second-class citizens" in the position of Kosovo within Serbia in the Yugoslav context (2005, 155). This approach was a tool of political repression and an issue of representation based on structural and economic reasons. There were urban and rural differences in terms of education and natality levels, elements based on which the Albanian population was negatively portrayed, however Yugoslavia and Serbian elite chose to denigrate Albanians and further repress them rather than working to even out the inequalities they faced or give space to cultural traditions on an equal footing with others.

Most of the women politicians I interviewed who were part of the Women's Forum of LDK and who continued their political participation after the war with LDK as a political party as well as other political parties, indicated that the stereotypes prevalent in the Yugoslav context were state administered and aimed at maintaining the political and social order in which Albanians were held at the bottom of the hierarchy. The 'primitivism' and 'backwardness' stereotypes used to characterize Albanians targeted them in the private domain as well as in the public one. Based on such constructions of what it meant to be Albanian, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion on an ethnic basis were present in institutional life, as well as in the socio-economic level across the entire Yugoslav federation. In *Kosovo: How myths and truths started a war* Julie Mertus uses data from a study that addresses stereotypes of different nations and nationalities in Yugoslavia to illustrate ethnic relationships in Yugoslavia (Mertus 1999). Conducted in 1987 with 160 seventeen-year-old high school students of Serbian and Hungarian

ethnicities in Serbia, the survey posed a series of questions addressing the acceptance of people of different nationalities residing in Yugoslavia. In the stereotypical characteristics of Albanians, the top of their list of responses included the following: "undeveloped", "uncultured", "uncivilized", "aggressive", "like to rule", "dirty", and "aggressive" (ibid., 317 - 318). The prominence of such stereotypes and derogatory characteristics of Albanians depict a portion of the ethnic tensions and the exclusionary stances of non-Albanian ethnicities towards Albanians.

In our interview, Edita Tahiri explained that Serb nationalists propagated against Kosovo by stating that Albanians were illiterate, uncivilized, and uncultured. She stated that

> they [referring to state led propaganda] wanted to portray us as primitive so that it would be easier for them to oppress us. They wanted to harm our image internationally. When I served as a foreign minister and represented Kosovo abroad, no one would believe that I was Albanian. When I would speak of emancipated and empowered Kosovar women, no one would believe me.

Representations of Albanian women had been constructed in such a way that seeing a woman politician representing the country was an outlier type of a situation, to say the least. Other women politicians experienced situations similar to Tahiri's, when they were mistaken for non-Albanians since being an Albanian woman and serving in public functions were typically considered as mutually exclusive.

The construction of the Albanian woman is a complex process and has been influenced by several factors, patriarchy (intragroup dynamics) and the ethnic oppression being crucial ones in the matrix. Its construction enforced intergroup comparison and placed Albanian women at the bottom of the hierarchy of social order (Luci & Krasniqi, 2006, 19). Krasniqi explores the dynamics of the triangle of family–tradition–state in reality and their impact in the division of the life of the Albanian woman between the private and the public. Krasniqi argues that the social institution of the family in Kosovo was assumed to "perpetuate … 'femininity'"

that became visible biologically and socially through "the reproduction role" and "dedication and sacrifice for the family" respectively (2014, 203). Family and kinship have historically played an important role in Kosovo and, given their importance in the culture, they became the first marked targets of the Serbian regime. On this note, Krasniqi says:

> On a socio-cultural level, the Serbian state constructed the other by attacking first the Albanian family as an institution: portraying associated gender behaviours as backward and primitive and also as a threat to the Serbian nation. In reaction, Albanians perceived the state as being the source of oppression, whereas the institutions of family and kinship networks became something to defend, since they provided safety and security (2014, 206-207).

Given its 'sacredness' in Kosovo, the institution of family and its expansion in terms of natality were treated with a negative connotation in the Yugoslav context by other countries, specifically Serbia. The natality rates in the 1981 census showed that Albanians were the ethnicity experiencing the highest growth in terms of births, which became a concerning issue for other ethnicities, especially the Serbian one, since they were uncertain of the ""motivations" of Albanians behind such growth" (Krasniqi, 2021, 324). Hivzi Islami explains that although this census showed that that the natality growth stemmed from socio-economic conditions (poorer living conditions, less access to the labor market, limited access to education), rather than ethnic grounds (1989, 41, 43–4), the motives behind such growth were presumed to be "ethnical, religious, or ideological grounds" (Krasniqi, 2021, 324). This assumption implies that Albanians were trying to instrumentalize natality for ideological purposes and women were at the forefront as reproducers. After the demonstrations of 1981, the negative stereotyping on the portrayal of Albanian women only intensified in the Yugoslav media. Understanding the power such peaceful demonstrations can have in disturbing the hegemony of the Serbian state in the region, the oppression became even more brutal on all fronts. Nicole Farnsworth quotes Sevdije Ahmeti, one of the most prominent feminist activists of Kosovo, who worked for the Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, to illustrate the pressure and the attack

on the Albanian woman with the new political developments and the Albanian social peaceful mobilization:

> They (Serbs) created a new stereotype of Albanian woman … Not only a Muslim woman with a scarf, covered. But a stereotype of a woman: she is a birthing machine, and she doesn't know how to do anything except be submissive to the family, to be an uneducated slave … There were different publications showing women as slaves and birthing machines, only able to reproduce like mice. (Quote of Sevdije Ahmeti, Farnsworth, 2008, 59).

The construction of the Albanian woman myth was aimed at discouraging their participation in the peaceful resistance, which would risk the implementation of the Serbian nationalist plan in Kosovo. Having the power of women reduced to their birthing functions only meant that Serbs were trying to weaken half of the participants in the social movement and delegitimize their abilities by pushing them into the private domain. Such assumptions were aimed at undermining the agency of Albanian women and their impact in the movement.

4.3. Descriptive representation transforms into substantive one – women's political engagements in fighting the stereotypes

The political, economic, and social situation in the 1980s and 1990s, as explained in the previous chapter, made it difficult to distinguish between political and non-political acts. The line between political activism and governmental engagements became very ambiguous since the parallel system (the underground government, education and health system) was closely operating in cooperation with individuals, organizations, and members of the LDK movement, which later transformed into a political party. Albanians joined the nationalist project to ensure that the Serbian nationalist plan (suppression of Albanian identity and autonomy, ethnic homogenization, dehumanization of Albanians, and disruption of social and economic structures) would not be implemented. The expansion of the national resistance depended on the number of participants joining the movement. Women's descriptive participation increased

since it was deemed necessary and fundamental, and, as I argue in the previous chapter, their inclusion into public life became legitimized through engagements that had a national motive behind them. However, descriptive representation gradually shifted into a substantive one since women chose to deconstruct the myth and, alongside the nationalist cause, work for Albanian women's empowerment and emancipation.

It was interesting for me to observe that some of the women I interviewed did not consider their political engagement in feminist terms, although I could argue that their entire political activism was feminist as I elaborate later on in this chapter as well as the third chapter of this thesis. According to some of the interviewees, the implementation of the nationalist plan to enhance the position of all Albanians needed to be de-gendered. When asked about the fight for gender equality, all the interviewees, with special emphasis on the older generation, put the notion of nation and struggle for liberation as the main driving force for their activism, while excluding the component of gender from the equation. This by no means suggests that they did not understand the role each of them played in re-shaping gender roles in society; however, the idea of gender had a less important relevance as compared to the idea of national liberation and creation of an independent state; only then would the matter of gender equality gain relevance in their view. Feminism, as understood by many of the women I interviewed, concerns women and women's issues only. The class, ethnic, religious, and racial elements, which are integral parts of the leftist feminist movement, were not perceived as comprising components of feminism by some of the women politicians I interviewed. Consequently, their class and ethnic struggles were defined in terms of nationalist ideology rather than feminist.

Participating in the national plan for liberation meant being part of a greater movement which needed group cohesion and ethnic solidarity beyond gender, class, and religious differences. In our conversation, Melihate Termkolli thinks that her role in the national movement and within the LDK was a "natural obligation" as a citizen and as a fellow Albanian

fighting for liberation. Politically fighting side by side with men (*krah' për krah' me burrat*) was a common term used by women politicians in their stories. It was used in the context of claiming legitimacy for their engagement but, at the same time, for ensuring that their voice and agency in the national plan was recognized.

When speaking about the agency and the voice of women politicians in the plan for liberation, many of the interviewees stated that one of the most influential motivations in their political engagement was the need to change the dominating narrative on Albanian women. While some women denied using their gender identity to navigate the political and social tensions of the time, others stated that they specifically used their gender identity as a rallying point for political struggle and ethnic oppression. In fact, some of these women argued that facing negative stereotypes perpetuated by Serbian nationalist propaganda sparked their desire to join politics and prove the opposite. Samije Zeqiraj recalls one cross-Yugoslav gathering of women in a factory in the small Kosovan town of Suhareka in 1973, in which Serb women were speaking about Albanian women's primitivism and lack of agency within their own households. She felt that the atmosphere in that meeting was hostile towards Albanian women and denigrating as well. Zeqiraj, who was only a teacher at the time, could not bear being simply a witness to the untruths being shared, so she had to stand up and voice her opinions:

> I felt horrible in that meeting. I tried debunking the derogatory remarks she [the Serb woman participant in the meeting] was making towards us. I tried to protect Albanian women in that meeting. When the meeting ended, I decided to become politically active. I could not stand it and I knew all our women needed emancipation.

Zeqiraj started an emancipatory campaign in the region of Suhareka with her husband. Together, they visited many households in the villages, and talked to the head of the households, who would typically be the oldest and the wisest man of the family. The aim was to encourage these men to allow young girls continue their education. Zeqiraj considered women's education crucial to their empowerment and instrumentalized the national cause to legitimize women's

education in the eyes of the elderly men who took the decisions. She expected that convincing these men would require a lot of strength and courage since they were reluctant to allowing such discussions in their homes fearing that the 'moral' standing of the girls would be lost if they attended school. The education campaign in rural areas reverberated across different villages and women's education gradually started being considered as a complementing factor to the strengthening of the national cause (Farnsworth, 2008). The myth of the Albanian woman was highly based on the rural society, which unfortunately, had limited access to education and other state resources from which the urban elite benefited more. Many of the women trying to counter the stereotype tended to be educated urban women, who mobilized to spread the emancipation campaign among rural women.

Sevdije Ahmeti had a similar motive behind the idea to form an independent Albanian women's association, which later transformed into the Women's Forum of LDK. The association, as implied by its name, was supposed to be an independent women's entity which would not function under the shadow of any political party. However, at the first meetings, when the legal status and the registration of the association were being discussed, women voted that the association should function as an entity within LDK, the leader of which – Ibrahim Rugova – promised not to interfere in the association's matters. The association was founded on the 7th of March of 1990 and in less than seven months had more than eighty thousand members (Farnsworth, 2008, 68). The association changed its name into the Women's Forum of LDK on August 24, 1991, an act which signified that the association had lost its political independence (Farnsworth, 2008, 70).

In an interview for Farnsworth, Ahmeti recalls that the idea to counter the negative stereotypes of Albanian women in the Yugoslav media through such an association was a mechanism to protect the Albanian woman (2008, 59). Women had reached descriptive representation by participating in the national movement through demonstrations, documenting

and vocalizing violations of human rights, internationalizing awareness of the oppression, providing humanitarian aid, and assisting in the furthering of education for adults, but they considered that the issue of women was not being given proper attention in this national plan. Consequently, Sevdije decided to form an entity which would allow the organization of women based on their gender identity to counter both oppressive systems at once- patriarchy and ethnic divisions. The aim was to ensure substantive representation and a voicing of women's issues and problems through the prism of gender as well. They wanted to ensure that along the national plan Albanian men would be held accountable for their exclusionary actions towards women, as well as make sure that the myth of the Albanian woman in the Yugoslav context would be dismantled. Sevdije, along with other intellectuals, formed the Independent Women's Association, an apolitical entity whose declaration stated that women of all religions, races, ethnicities, political ideology, and backgrounds were welcome to join. The criteria for joining the association was to be a woman, an identity which would take more priority than their other identities (Farnsworth, 2008, 62). The association's scope of work did not concern 'women's issues' only. It was commonly decided by its members that the association would offer a women's lens in the vocalizing of and advocating for social, political, and economic issues in Kosovo.

Based on the interviews I conducted and the narration of Farnsworth on the formation of the Women's Forum, I argue that the reason behind the inability to stay politically impartial lies in the substantive representation motive. Women joining the association with such intensity was a sign of their long plight of fighting for a voice and the association proved to be such a platform for women. Although they would be descriptively represented within the entity, the historical momentum of the formation of the LDK and its legitimacy in pushing the national plan forward among the people would provide women more space in implementing their goals for women alongside the national project. LDK was leading the national peaceful resistance

and gained public support from the Kosovo Albanians. Consequently, women deemed it more appropriate to be involved in the Forum if it were to operate under the umbrella of LDK.

The impact the Forum had in society was remarkable, whereas the role of women within the entity impacted the national movement in ways the men of LDK, as well as women, had not anticipated before. On this note, Besa Gaxherri recalled:

> I don't know what we were not able to do as women at the time while being members of the Forum. We would enter into places where men could not even pass by because they would risk their lives. As women, we thought that would get away easier than men if we would get caught by the regime. But in fact, we completed tasks which were multiple times more difficult and dangerous.

So, women's activities were taking advantage of patriarchal rules that did not recognize women as significant actors. It was in the women's interest then to keep this system operating so that they could do their work for the nation without being seen as a threat. My interviewees did not specifically address this paradox during our discussions, but such approaches can be framed in the lines of Kandiyoti's theoretical concept of bargaining with patriarchy (1988). This concept refers to activities and approaches that allow individuals to engage with the patriarchal power structures while negotiating and advocating for gender equality and a more inclusive environment within the existing structures. Operating in such a system, the Forum held the power to organize and mobilize women in all parts of Kosovo to become part of the peaceful resistance and liberation plan. Women of the Forum united, despite their diverse identities, to occupy a liberation role within the national movement. Women politicians politicized their gender identity as well as their national one through several women-organized and led activities across the country. Women of the Forum in cooperation with women in different parts of Kosovo and other women-led organizations provided several services to people across the country. Doctors were delivering information sessions on how to take care of their health as well as their family during the occupation when resources were scarce. They were performing abortions across the country and assisting in childbirth as well. When the Albanian-language

university and schools were shut down, women came up with an action plan called 'Every day two hours of classes', as Edita Tahiri related during our interview. This plan then expanded nation-wide and became part of the parallel system project 'house schools', which allowed pupils and students to continue their education in the houses of civilians, who would open their doors for this purpose. The Forum also built solidarity networks to support families with insufficient resources to handle the economic crisis. Parallel to these activities, women were constantly appearing on international media to showcase the unjust treatment of Kosovo Albanians and raise awareness about the potential of a war erupting, in addition to organizing and leading protests, some of them even without the consent of the LDK leadership.

The pride and sense of fulfillment in having contributed to the deconstruction of the image of the Albanian women was present in the narrated stories of the women I interviewed. Zeqiraj smiled proudly when she recalled this proclaimed achievement:

> We managed to prove that we were way more than what we were being portrayed as. In fact, we showed that the women of Kosovo are the driving force of this nation. Even women who had no previous education but wanted to participate in our movement were clever enough to navigate the political currents of the time. When they would be stopped by the police when demonstrating, old women who did not know how to read and write would state that they were in the city looking for milk to feed their grandchildren, when in fact they had come from the villages to participate in the demonstration. Our women showed great resilience, strength, and wisdom – values which were not associated to Albanian women at the time.

Their active participation in the national project had managed to transform their descriptive representation to a substantive one through solidarity and unity. As in every national movement, there are disagreements and contradictions even within the group. Women's political presence was not an exception in this regard; however, this will be elaborated in more detail in the upcoming chapter. Generally, the deconstructing of the stereotype and women's strong participation in the public domain was done through the mobilizing around "the common oppression" (hooks, 1986, 127-128), which in their case was based on gender identity and

ethnicity. The fluidity of such shifts enabled women to claim spaces which traditionally belonged to men.

4.4. Post-war 're-patriarchalisation' of the social and political order

War produces many changes in society and is usually used as a referral point to compare the political, economic, and social situations before war with those of its aftermath. Post-war struggles are not solely a product of war, but "should also be understood as a legacy of the period under Yugoslavia and, later, Serbia" (Krasniqi, 2014, 206). While the country was struggling with the post-war situation, activists and local organizations were trying to provide material and nonmaterial resources for people's needs (Farnsworth, 2008, 159-182). According to Krasniqi, the 'socialist progress' that had been attempted in Yugoslavia, had come to a halt in postwar Kosovo with the restoration of traditional practices, which she calls re-patriarchalisation (2014, 207). The changes that the war brought were unfortunately not positive in terms of women's participation in the public life. Luci and Krasniqi expand the analysis on the postwar 'Rosie the Rivetter effect' in Kosovo (2006, 19), where instead of women's liberation as a natural anticipation, women were, in fact, pushed back into the private sphere.

Women as political agents had become crucial in resisting oppression and changing the gender and ethnic status quo, but women's political and social limits became narrower upon liberation. Family, perceived as the most important societal cell, was considered "crucial to social cohesion" (Krasniqi, 2014, 207) in the postwar period, having been targeted in the past. Krasniqi argues that, especially in rural parts of Kosovo, although the concept of an extended family had changed, women remained hostage to "family, traditional practices and the state" (2014, 204). The family as an institution continued to essentialize the roles of women, which intertwined with traditional practices, bound women to the household through chores, cooking, and caring for the elderly and the children, whereas the state, in terms of its institutions, focused

on the capital and 'central' cities, while families in rural parts of Kosovo were left to solve their problems and disputes within themselves without asking help from the state.

A similar treatment was given to women politicians who had been active in political matters before the war with both the LDK and part of the socialist institutions during the 1980s and 1990s. The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Fourth World Conference of Women Declaration, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security introduced by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) promoted the inclusion of women in all sectors of society and their equal representation in all institutions. Such laws would ensure that the transitional period of Kosovo from socialism to democracy, and from war to peace, would set the foundation for an inclusive and equal society. However, the foreign agencies, locally known as the international community, continued to reproduce the biases and the prejudice towards Albanian women by excluding them from institution building and decision-making processes, and by not recognizing women's political activism and their local knowledge. Women were given opportunities for descriptive representation, but the space and platforms for substantive representation shrank.

According to Nira Yuval Davis, in nationalist projects, women are given the role of reproducing the nation (1997, 33). Although this was present in the period of socialism in Kosovo during the period of Yugoslavia, it stalled during the war, only to reappear as a concept again post liberation. Based on Vjollca Krasniqi's analysis of 'Standards before Status' campaign initiated by United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 2002, women were depicted as mothers, holding boy children in their hands only to symbolize the dichotomy of the woman as a reproducer of the nation and the state-building process as a boy (2007, 3-6). The imagined community of the Kosovo Albanians, which demanded cohesion in terms of mobilization and identification with the nation before the war, remained the same in principle

in the social sphere with slightly more 'modern' changes – those of state-building, institutional reformation, and democratization.

Sevdije Ahmeti, one of the most active women during the resistance who did not have a political function before or after the war, stated that "the international community wanted to say and said that there was no feminist movement here; there was no women's rights movement here – women were not articulate. We were dumb illiterate women" (Farnsworth, 2008, 184). The approach of the international community towards Albanian women seemed to diminish the feminist lens that women had used to improve the situation of the Albanian ethnic group. Women's choice of politicizing their identity as mothers in the national struggle, for example, was an ideological tool with which they helped change the status quo. Motherhood and motherly sacrifice and suffering, as elaborated in the previous chapter, integrated women in the public domain and it was an efficient strategy according to my interviewees. However, such approaches and other choices of women's political participation were not considered feminist by the international community.

The international community organized workshops and training sessions for women to inform them about their rights, ways of being active citizens, and contributing to the promotion of the gender equality agenda. The aim of the international community operating in Kosovo was to raise awareness about gender equality, and to push for the equal representation of women in politics and institution building. However, the international community and male local politicians continued the marginalization of women who had actually been active during the resistance years and during the war by excluding them from decision making processes and institution building. Concerned and offended by such an approach by the international community, Melihate Termkolli stated with great grief in our interview: "We did not need teaching on how to raise a child! Our mothers had been raising children for centuries. They [the international community] would deliver trainings on how to clean up after a child. Really?"

Alongside Albanian women politicians and activists, there were international officers working to include proportional representation of Albanian women in the decision-making processes of the international community, however, the general neglect towards these women was based on the 'cultural' and 'traditional' biases that the international officials arrived in Kosovo with. Lesley Abdela, OSCE Deputy Head of the Department of Democratization vocalized the importance of the inclusion of different ethnic groups in the Joint Interim Administrative Structure, especially the representation of Kosovar women. However, the leadership of the OSCE responded to her with statements such as: "This is a patriarchal society. It's not part of their culture" and "Kosovo is a male society," as stated by the UN Representative in Kosovo Bernard Kouchner (Farnsworth, 2008, 186). The consequences of this approach were the clearly gender defined roles and the enforcement of the stereotype that Albanian women fall prey of a patriarchal culture and have no agency of their own to act and challenge this system. Fortunately, there were also contestation within international institutions about the male-dominated political spaces.

4.5. Women politicians occupying political spaces

Navigating gender identity while occupying male-dominated political spaces requires strategy and different mechanisms in order to surmount gender-based obstacles and biases. Women politicians in Kosovo have grappled with their gender identity as they navigated male-dominated spaces in different manners. Occupation of male-dominated spaces has allowed women to increase their numerical representation in spaces where they could not be present before or be more present in spaces where they were not visible as much. The concept of *Oda* and the parliament are two examples of Kosovan women politicians entering spaces in which they were told they did not belong.

"*Oda*", as a physical space, is a room in traditional Albanian households which used to be a restricted space for decision making on top of serving as a place of receiving guests. Traditionally, Oda as a space meant to establish social order and construct codes of honor along with masculinity and femininity which were based on a customary law called "Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit" (Code of Lekë Dukagjini), or simply *Kanun* – "a corpus of laws, regulations and norms of Albanians" (Latifi, 2015, 100). The Oda served as a central institution in traditional Albanian culture that could be occupied by men only. Gordana Subotić conducted a political ethnographical study on women politicians in the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia (2022), where she focused on the politization of women politicians' ethnic and gender identity in the context of the democratic process in both countries. She dedicates one chapter to women politicians entering the Oda by focusing on how women navigated their gender and ethnicity to occupy such spaces (ibid., 132-158). Subotić argues that in order to survive in politics women had to make "patriarchal bargains" (Kandiyoti, 1988, 274) within the patriarchal system of their ethnic community and the state as well.

I have to agree with Subotić's thoughts on the negotiations women politicians had to make within patriarchal structures while navigating their gender and ethnic identity; however, I have to disagree with her statement that the first woman to enter an Oda was a politician who was campaigning for local elections in 2014. Subotić uses the story of the MP Mimoza Kusari-Lila to illustrate women's entering in male-dominated spaces, which was celebrated by the international community as an achievement towards gender equality. Based on an interview she conducted with MP Kusari Lila, Subotić states that Kusari-Lila was the first woman to ever enter the Oda (2022, 134), which happened during the MP's electoral campaign while she was running for the position of the Mayor of the Municipality of Gjakova in 2014. But, Kosovo Albanian women politicians and activists had in fact entered these male-dominated spaces decades ago, while they were mobilizing for the national project of liberation.

One specific example is the campaign to end blood feuds, in which students, activists, intellectuals, and politicians participated in the early 1990s (Luci, 2014, 6). Blood feuds, locally known as *gjakmarrja* is a traditional resolution mechanism, born out of years of isolation from state and imperial power, which involves cycles of murder or violence between individuals, families, or clans regulated by Kanun as referred to above (Luci, 2005; Latifi, 2015). Men and women, boys and girls, went from village to village to discuss the importance of forgiveness and the need to end this traditional practice of revenge. This campaign was successful in ending the long tradition of feuding families, allowing forgiveness to take place in the name of unification for the nation or, as Luci puts it, to "'reasser[t] political and moral strength" in Albanian belonging" (Luci, 2014, 6). Edi Shukriu, political activist and president of the Women's Forum of LDK said that "many times an old man would forgive the blood of his son in the name of a female student because of the respect he had for her involvement and struggle to bring peace between people" (Farnsworth, 2008, 43).

The role women played in this type of conflict resolution lies on the other end as well, when women were the ones who actually forgave the blood. Luci writes about this historical momentum of Kosovo, when women forgave the blood of "sons, fathers, and brothers" while fulfilling their roles as "mothers, sisters, and daughters" (2005, 151). In addition to the blood reconciliation campaign, women politicians entered Odas to mobilize people in the villages, spread information about demonstrations, and circulate important political information, as related by some of my interviewees tasked with overseeing the work in rural parts of Kosovo during the 1990s. Consequently, women not only entered the Oda, but they also managed to have substantive representation by pushing nationalist ideas forward, emancipating women, and claiming legitimacy in their political engagement. One specific example of emancipation can be extracted from Zeqiraj's story about her campaign in the villages of Kosovo for the encouragement of the eldest men of the families to allow women and girls to receive an

education. She shared one instance with me, which according to her illustrated a typical situation every time she would enter an Oda:

> My husband had established a new branch of education at the gymnasium in Suhareka, where girls could receive education on becoming midwives. I would enter the Oda and talk to the eldest man of the household in order to convince him to let his daughters, nieces, and sisters to receive that education. I would ask him: "when you are sick, would you feel better to get an injection by your granddaughter, or would you feel more comfortable if a nurse from Serbia would do it? Maybe that nurse puts only water in that injection and it will not improve your health at all." I would tell them that their granddaughter would give them what they need and that she would make sure that they received all the attention needed".

Zeqiraj used the political situation to advance the emancipation of women agenda. She explained how proud she felt when the heads of the households would allow women to attend school. Such an engagement served as a platform to build group ethnic solidarity and expand gender alliances among the community. Women entered the Oda when the campaign to end blood feuds and educate women started. Kusari Lila's entry into an Oda in 2014 was made possible thanks to many other women who were political activists in the 1990s.

In the postwar period: the formal political scene (government, parties, the parliament) was a male dominated space. The reserved seat quota system has increased women's descriptive participation in Kosovan politics. At the national level, women managed to occupy another space – the parliament – which, without the quota in place, would have provided a narrower channel for women to become part of politics. The Law on Elections states that the candidate list of each political entity should be comprised of at least 30% male and at least 30% female candidates (General Elections Law, Article 27.1). The quota as a strategy enabled women's inclusion in politics and gradually increased the quantity of women joining politics, as well as changing the perception and attitudes towards the competence of women in political leadership. Atifete Jahjaga, fourth President of the Republic of Kosovo – the nation's first woman president – whose term in the presidency lasted from 2011 to 2016, during our interview stated that

"quotas are absolutely necessary to ensure women's representation in politics and secure their seat at the decision-making tables." She further argued that as a mechanism, quotas have enabled the constituency to help build trust in women as political leaders, and this in turn has resulted in an increased political legitimacy for women. The last national elections in Kosovo held on the 14th of February, 2021, serve as proof of these claims. Out of the 120 elected MPs, 44 are women, which means that 33 of the elected officials secured a seat at the parliament without the help of the quota (Kuvendi i Republikës së Kosovës, 2023).

Quotas can generate a 'mandate effect' which, according to Franceschet and Piscopo, refers to the occurrence when "female legislators perceive an obligation to act on the behalf of women" (2008, 394-395). Although this tends to be problematic in some cases when women are expected to act and behave around their gender identity, some of the women politicians I interviewed, who have been present in Kosovo's political scene since the declaration of independence in 2008, asserted that "acting for" fellow women in politics and women of the country is an absolute obligation which transgresses party politics and ideological differences. The creation of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, supported by the National Democratic Institute, is based on the very ideas of inclusion that surpass political parties and unite women parliamentarians despite their ideological belonging, ethnicity, religion, and backgrounds. The Caucus aims to elevate descriptive representation of women into a substantive one by promoting effective representation of women in the Kosovan society. The Caucus is understood as a platform for solidarity among women politicians, in which they can discuss gender issues as well as agree to support, amend, and propose laws that concern women in all spheres of society. As an entity, the Caucus has taken the responsibility to react towards sexist language used by politicians against women elected officials, coordinate women MPs within their parties to push feminist agendas forward, criticize sexist and misogynist behavior of media, civil society, and other stakeholders , react against gender-based violence and femicide, advocate for

the recognition of the status of survivors of sexual violence as victims of war internationally and internally, provide a platform to build alliances and strengthen the position of women in Kosovo politics by cooperating with international organizations operating in Kosovo (Kuvendi i Republikës së Kosovës, 2023; Grupi i Grave Deputete, 2023).

The Caucus serves as an example to illustrate that women's descriptive representation is not sufficient to improve the position of women and promote gender equality agendas. In order to do so, the Caucus supplements descriptive representation by providing a space for unity among women, where women parliamentarians can promote women's rights and their interests in Kosovo's institutions and its society. The physical occupation of the parliamentary space, which is male dominated, would not do justice to the intersectional nature of gender-based oppression. Consequently, the Caucus can be understood and can serve as a practical example of hooks' sisterhood solidarity concept, which recognizes that gender equality concerns all women and affects them differently depending on the intersection of their identities. The Caucus acknowledges women's oppression as a systemic issue, which deems collective unity in the women's front to resist and change the multiple layers of oppression in the system.

The imperative to work against the negative portrayals of Albanian women that took place more than two decades ago, can be closely related to contemporary politics. During our conversation, Jahjaga asserted that

> While the women (politicians) who paved the way for future politicians were countering the stereotypes of the Albanian woman through their activism on the streets, in the assembly at the time, and in encounters with Yugoslav neighbors, women politicians today continue to fight some stereotypes that prevent their equal representation in politics.

Jahjaga was referring to the constructed model of a woman politician, who is obedient to the party and who needs to conform to specific presentational and beauty standards. Jahjaga believes that throughout her presidential mandate, the media and the political scene commented

on her looks and mundane behavior rather than her policy making and political ideas she was promoting. Other interviewees agree that women politicians receive many comments on the way they look and behave, which does not happen to men politicians. Teuta Sahatqija mentioned an occasion when a woman MP was mocked by the media because of her appearance and, as the head of the Caucus, she decided to unite all MPs in having a unified stance against sexist portrayal of women in written media. She states:

> The Caucus has been formed to help women have a support net, in which they can rely on in case of sexism, misogyny, or discrimination. The Caucus is established to offer a platform of support for women in politics despite their ideological belonging or party affiliation. However, there was this case when I was mobilizing women parliamentarians to react to a sexist portrayal of an MP in the media, one of my colleagues from the parliament said that she did not want to be involved because she dresses appropriately and is unaffected by this problem.

As I elaborated earlier, descriptive representation through quotas does not ensure that women politicians will choose to identify with matters that affect women, which is the case of the MP that Sahatqija mentioned. This brings the discussion to another point, which is the fact that members of the Caucus share different views on what feminism, women's issues, and equality agenda are. An example that would illustrate this range of ideological differences is the Bosnian MP Duda Balje who is also the chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, Gender Equality, Missing Persons, Victims of Sexual Violence during War, and Petitions. Balje has managed to contribute to the solidarity fostered by the Caucus by proposing several amendments and initiatives to the parliament, which were discussed among the members of the Caucus. However, when it comes to amending the Civil Code, a law which prevents same sex marriages, Balje has been among the first to oppose this amendment. She identifies as a conservative politician who wants to promote family values, and voting for an amendment that allows people of the same sex to get married does not conform to her beliefs or the beliefs of her constituents. Being a conservative politician does not mutually exclude being a conservative feminist, who in this case can advocate against same sex marriage. The advocacy for 'women's

issues' depends on how the politicians define women's issues and how they see the best interests of women.

Even though women politicians do not always overcome ideological differences or agree on what a feminist or women centered agenda should be, having an entity that promotes cooperation and solidarity that transcend party lines has enabled women politicians to feel slightly more secure and comfortable in a male dominated space. When it comes to countering contemporary stereotypes of women in politics and showing empathy and support in cases of misogyny and sexism, the political cohesion of women has proven to be an effective tool in discouraging such behavior in future events.

4.6. Conclusion

Feminist solidarity should be essential in linking descriptive and substantive representation of women in politics. The fostering of such solidarity can help policy makers and representatives understand the complexity of women's experiences and the fluidity of their identities. As a tool, solidarity can promote the recognition of unique experiences based on the layers of oppressions that stem from the diverse intersection of identities, which women officials can leverage collectively to challenge the political dynamics and promote fair distribution of resources and attention. Intertwining feminist solidarity in descriptive and substantive representation provides a more nuanced and critical understanding of women as a constituency, but also strengthens the position of women elected officials in the legislature.

Countering national/ethnic stereotypes and attempts to deconstruct the images of women politicians took unified attempts in both generations. The generation of women politicians between 1980s and 1990s was advocating for equality and mobilizing against two oppressive systems at the same time. They politicized their gender identity to provide more

opportunities for women to join the public sphere through nationalism and the utilization of the roles which were meant to hold them hostage to the private sphere i.e. motherhood, to actually subvert the connotation Albanian motherhood and the Albanian woman had in the Yugoslav context. Women politicians collaborated by sharing knowledge, strategies, and experience while navigating their presence in the patriarchal space within their own ethnic community and the oppressive political structures against the ethnic community of Albanians. The existence of the threat of ethnic extinction within the territory of Kosovo contributed to the strengthening of the intragroup solidarity among Albanians and the intragender mobilization to resist and challenge the existing structures. The transition to democracy and the state-building process brought many political and social changes in Kosovo. Women politicians had to adapt to the change of the political scene when several political parties emerged, to the fragmentation of the women's movements in the civil society, to local forces that did not actively engage to include women in formal politics, and to the interferences of the international community which in some cases reduced the exclusion of women from politics to the cultural aspect of the nation. Women politicians serving in the postwar period had to display unity and fight the constant exclusion from institutional life, find new ways to politicize their gender identity, and create new and politically acceptable political identities.

Women had to come together to dismantle negative portrayals and challenge the exclusive political environment. In order to have more successful attempts in overcoming such systematic barriers, women elevated their voices through collaboration and gender-based alliances.

CHAPTER 5: SISTERHOOD REVISITED: IS SOLIDARITY BASED ON "COMMON OPPRESSION" ENOUGH TO FORM AND SUSTAIN ALLIANCES BETWEEN WOMEN POLITICIANS?

Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of the United States of America, is famously quoted within circles of women politicians in Kosovo when they try to emphasize the importance of unity and solidarity between women in politics. Albright's famous saying "there is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women", latest used by her while Hillary Clinton was campaigning for the highest office of the United States in 2016 (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2020, 166), was used in the context of women supporting other women in leadership positions, especially in politics. However, there have been many instances when women politicians prioritized other identity markers before their gender when making decisions and promoting specific agendas. Based on such observations, Gilliard & Okonjo-Iweala ask: "if Madeleine is right, how crowded is that special place in hell going to be?" (2020, 165). The answer to this question is quite complex and is more nuanced than a heaven and hell division between the deeds of women towards one another.

In this chapter I provide an analysis of some of the factors that hinder greater solidarity between women politicians in Kosovo by analyzing their lived experience in instances when they encountered lack of gender-based solidarity by their women colleagues. I also shed light on instances when women politicians prioritize party agendas and promote values which do not conform to the idea of sisterhood solidarity. Lastly, I will provide a comparison between the

approach to women's solidarity among the older and the younger generation of women politicians by looking at the effects of war and independence. The questions I aim to answer in this chapter are: (1) Do women politicians who receive political power within their parties and in governmental institutions necessarily need to serve the interests of their women colleagues? (2) Is lack of solidarity based on the collective identity of gender hampering women's substantive representation in politics?

There's no question that some women have power over others or have more access to power than others. Identifying as a woman, of course, does not necessarily mean that women politicians are attuned to gender-based power or that they consider the existing (patriarchal) gender regime problematic. Mutual support and loyalty to "women's issues" or feminism in their politics can work if women politicians profess such principles. In this chapter, I do not assume that women's solidarity should be grounded solely on gender; however, I analyze how reluctance to adhere to principles of gender-based solidarity affects the establishment of initiatives, alliances, and networks that have political emancipatory power.

5.1. Theoretical framework: Feminist solidarity

> Whatever inequalities may exist among women, they all undergo, even without clearly realizing it, the same oppression, the same exploitation of their body, the same denial of their desire. That is why it is very important for women to be able to join together, and to join together "among themselves." In order to begin to escape from the spaces, roles, and gestures that they have been assigned and taught by the society of men. In order to love each other, even though men have organized a de facto rivalry among women. In order to discover a form of "social existence" other than the one that has always been imposed upon them.
>
> (Irigaray, 1985, 164).

Luce Irigaray argues that all women, despite the differences, experience a common form of oppression, which should serve as the basis for the unification of women in order to face and deconstruct the social roles and the expectations that marginalize women socially and

politically. Grounded in her feminist psychoanalytic theories, Irigaray argues that the women have been taught to see themselves as opponents of other women (rivalry), which has produced a fragmentation within the group that does not contribute to the advancement of women's position in society. To fight this fragmentation and challenge the system which she considers to be constructed by men, Irigaray calls for a unification of women in terms of their collective identity – that of gender. Through bonds "among themselves" (Irigaray, 1985, 164), women can construct a new sense of self, one which does not necessarily internalize the values of the system constructed by men.

According to the passage from Irigaray, the 'rivalry' among women stems from men's construction of the social system, which implies that women do not inherently possess such an attribute. Instead, rivalry among women is a product of men, instilled within women's relationships, which hampers the development of solidarity based on gender identity and weakens women's social, political, and economic progress. The emphasis on the commonality of oppression, according to Irigaray, allows for the politicization of the common experience of women and the formation of a female 'consciousness' that stands stronger in opposition to the system. However, the approach based on the commonality of experience can have a homogenizing effect in capturing the diversity of these experiences and the multiple layers of oppression women of intersecting identities undergo.

hooks acknowledges that there exists 'common oppression' among women and suggests that solidarity among women can exist but feminists should address the power hierarchy that they themselves have created within the movement by homogenizing differences and using sisterhood as an "emotional appeal" (1986, 127) instead of genuinely meaning to provide alliances and bonding between women with different social, political, and economic positions. The fight against the system, according to hooks, should not be based on gender identity only

but instead be focused on fighting all forms of oppression, including but not limited to race, sexuality, class, and religion.

Inspired by a panel discussion entitled "Feminist Nightmares: Women against Women", Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleischner have dedicated an entire book to the concept of sisterhood and situations around the world where the oppressed behave as oppressors – in this case, when women have oppressed other women. They analyze the glamorization of sisterhood and the romanticization of the term within the feminist community, while comparing the practices of feminists and their compliance with the set of values that are anticipated to be components of the ideology. In this chapter, the use of the language 'oppressor' and 'oppressive' when referring to women politicians and their behavior towards other women colleagues does not have the heavily loaded meaning of the words in the traditional sense. Oppressor and oppressive in this context are used to refer to behavior, both intentional and unconscious, that does not have emancipatory power and that does not increase substantive representation of women in politics.

The manifestation of such practices, or the internalization of oppression, Weisser and Fleischner argue, comes as a result of women "operating within that world which the more privileged do not have to engage in" (1994, 6). Navigating the world, which is hierarchically divided differently depending on the context, can lead to unintentional and unconscious intragender domination politics. Hence, women possess the capacity to dominate which. according to hooks, "deconstruct[s] and challenge[s] the simplistic notion that man is the enemy, woman the victim; the notion that men have always been the oppressors" (2016, 468). Women, although in some cases unconsciously, participate in maintaining the system of domination of the patriarchal order. Even though within this system women are constructed to occupy submissive roles based on their sex, the value system that they internalize remains the same. On this note, hooks states:

> It is woman's overall acceptance of the value system of the culture that leads her to passively absorb sexism and willingly assume a pre-determined sex role. Although women do not have the power ruling groups of men often exert, they do not conceptualize power differently (2000, 85).

As can be noted, there are many forces that work against female-based solidarities, and the case of women politicians in Kosovo is no exception. Patriarchal political structures that limit women's access to power and resources within the political entities they represent, intersectional divisions within the group, and internalized patriarchal value systems work against the power of solidarity and prevent women's cohesion. The analysis in this chapter will address the dynamism of the patriarchal power that affects political solidarity among women politicians in Kosovo.

5.2. Perception of tokenism: sisterhood in adversity

Many of my interviewees expressed that they had experienced some form of lack of solidarity/gender-based alliance in their professional political career that reproduced gender barriers for women in politics. As the first woman President of the country, in addition to being the youngest elected President in the region, Atifete Jahjaga declares that, during her mandate, in many cases the most fierce and harsh unconstructive criticism and lack of support came from women politicians themselves:

> Women politicians in Kosovo can be even more judgmental and less constructive than men. I anticipated to receive more support and solidarity from women, especially when I was trying to push for the adoption of laws that affected the women of our society. I could not understand how some women in the parliament would oppose or criticize ideas that were feminist. I expected help in building alliances that would last and benefit all the women in politics and society, not only me as an elected official.

The specific instance Jahjaga was referring to was the parliamentary discussion on the administration of a gynecological exam on the bodies of survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo, twelve years after the war had ended. On the 14th of March, 2013, the Law

on The Status and The Rights of the Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of Kosovo Liberation Army, Civilian Victims of War and Their Families was amended (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2014) to include the status of a victim of war to the survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo, who would receive a monthly compensation as the rest of the 'categories' eligible to receive such a postwar recognition of their suffering and war sacrifice. The majority of the parliamentarians voted in favor of the amendment, but a portion of the MPs voted against with the arguments such as: (i) burdening the state budget, (ii) difficulty to determine the truthfulness of rape claims, and (iii) "difficulty of administering medical exams (rape kits)" after more than a decade (Luci, 2014, 223-224). Among the MPs who voted against were also women. The parliamentary debate on a such sensitive issue was complex and entangled with many political, social, and practical difficulties. However, Jahjaga's disappointment stems from her expectation of women's mobilization based on their gender identity and empathy towards common oppression, such as rape and sexual violence, victims of which were mostly women in 2013).

Jahjaga made the survivors of sexual violence during the war the core group who would receive most attention during her presidency. Thus, she anticipated full support from both men and women in removing the social stigma and giving the survivors the deserved social and political place. Although the amendment support from the entire legislature did not take place, Jahjaga was surprised the most by the lack of solidarity for the cause among women MPs. She considers substantive representation of women in politics a natural and obligatory consequence of their descriptive representation, thus, she anticipated full support in pushing the amendment forward and implementing the law from which thousands of women and men who survived rape during the war would benefit. Jahjaga had a more critical feminist take on this matter, but some women politicians took a much more conservative position and were therefore reluctant to pass this law. Among the above listed reasons why the law amendment was resisted, the

statement that the people were not ready to deal with this aspect of the past was one of the most common justifications, according to Jahjaga.

The mandate effect generated from descriptive representation and the use of quotas as a mechanism to increase women's presence in politics do not have a linear correlation in the political scene in Kosovo as stated by women politicians I interviewed. Many women politicians choose to distance themselves from topics and discussions which are perceived to concern "women's issues". Besa Ismaili is a former MP of the 7th legislature of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, currently serving as advisor to the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) Caucus, who belongs to the Muslim religious community and is one of the two MPs wearing a headscarf as a religious symbol in the parliament during that mandate. Ismaili's religious attire is an exercise of one's right to religious beliefs that allows her to express her religious identity when taking decisions or participating in political decision making. During our interview she admitted that there was a highly gendered separation of labor in politics in Kosovo:

> The Commission for Gender Equality and Missing People During the War in Kosovo was entirely comprised of women MPs. We did not have a single MP in the group who was a man. We had one and he left. In other words, the most important commission in the assemblies of the world, that for human rights, gender equality, and diversification of the political scene, does not have the same value in the Assembly of Kosovo. These commissions are mainly comprised of women because the dominating logic that your biological sex makes you eligible to become a member is still present.

Ismaili criticizes the division of power on a gender basis and recognizes the lack of respect for issues of human rights. Although the commission is comprised of mostly women, the highly separated political responsibilities depending on gender identity, as Ismaili suggests, has had an effect in women politicians' willingness to be associated with 'traditional' political roles that are stereotypical for women. Some of the women politicians attempt to legitimize their political presence as fully fledged elected officials competent to be in charge of 'important' issues such

as security, foreign affairs, economy, law and order, to name but a few by not associating with 'women's issues'.

A similar pattern of distancing from women in the same discipline was found in a study done by Laura Rhoton where she focused on women's advancement and intragroup relationship in STEM at Midwestern University in the United States. Positions in STEM disciplines have traditionally been occupied by men, whereas women have faced gendered "institutional structures, cultures, and practices" (Rhoton, 2011, 696) which have prevented them from making professional advancements in their careers, as well as receiving acceptance in their disciplines in the same manner as men. Rhoton suggests that the "association of science with masculinity" has affected women's professional socialization process within the STEM disciplines (2011, 699). 'Masculine' behavior and practices are considered to be the neutral and the acceptable norm of professionalism, which has led women professionals to distance themselves from 'feminine' practices or becoming engaged in 'women's issues' as a political stance in the discipline. Using distancing as a method to gain professional validation can be witnessed in other male dominated disciplines as well. In politics, for example, women politicians may distance themselves from affiliation to issues that concern women.

The construction of the professional identity in Kosovo politics has some resemblance to Rhoton's findings on women academics in STEM disciplines. Many women politicians refuse to identify as "women in politics" because they consider themselves as equal to their men colleagues. Many of the women I interviewed disclosed their disagreement with the creation of women only entities, such as the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, which serves as a platform of cross-party solidarity between women MPs. Some of them expressed that the platform did not live up to its root of existence – that of supporting women politicians despite their ideological, political, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, but was used instead to promote party agendas in some cases. Hykmete Bajrami, MP of the current legislature representing

LDK, who previously held three ministerial positions – Minister of Finance (June 2020-March 2021), Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (February 2020-June 2020), and Minister of Trade and Industry (December 2014August 2017) – explained in our interview that she did not witness cross party solidarity within the caucus; instead some women used the forum to further party agendas:

> As a group of women politicians within the Caucus, we should be convinced that the policies we try to push forward impact the life of all women in Kosovo and advance the gender equality agenda. We should keep this in mind even if we have to oppose our political parties to implement these ideas or even if the government tells us that we have limitations. We need to have consensus on this as women politicians, but I have not witnessed it, unfortunately. During a debate on selecting members of a board, women from different political parties, who were part of the Caucus, were having a completely political discussion. Demonstratively, I stated that I do not want to be a part of this group anymore because we have the parliament to foster such political discussions. Here we have to be united and discuss cases when we are even discriminated against within our own political parties, not debate and protect our political parties and oppose one another.

Based on her political ethnography of women politicians in the Republic of Kosovo and Serbia, Subotic argues that her interlocutors emphasized that some women politicians were rewarded with political positions because of "their willingness to do all the legwork and to comply with the instructions of those in positions of power (men) – the same men who placed them in their positions in the first place" (2022, 137). Promoting party agendas in settings where gender-based solidarity among women politicians should be displayed, as Hykmete Bajrami shared, can be considered a side-effect of the perception of tokenism. Tokenism is a phenomenon in which generally underrepresented groups, or numerical minorities (Kanter, 1977), are included in processes descriptively, but they are not provided with the power, resources, and opportunities to be fully equal to the majority of men. The quota is perceived by some women politicians to contribute to the phenomenon of tokenism, where the numerical increase of women's participation does not necessarily translate into the quality and professionalism of elected officials.

The perception of tokenism has had an impact on the alliances and solidarity based on gender identity among women politicians in Kosovo. Some elected women politicians do not see the advocation for gender equality and "women's issues" as a natural obligation upon their election. Many of them believe that their party is committed to gender equality and that it respects women; therefore, some of the women party members assume that working for their party is also working towards women's issues, depending on the ideology of the party and the values it stands for. Consequently, some of them prioritize "party soldiership" (Subotic, 2022, 141) over sisterhood solidarity. The quota has also fostered an internal competition among women within political parties, many of my interviewees suggest. As a shortcoming, the quota has generated a competition for scarce resources, since the women candidates who are recommended to be part of the election lists need to be appointed by the party leaders, who are all men. As Ismaili noted in the interview,

> Being obedient to the party's principles, is a criterion for a woman to be promoted within the political party. And women who are not so obedient - not to say servile – who speak their mind, lack party support. We know from experience when I was in politics, when a woman went against the mainstream opinion of the party, she ended up outside the party. The resources are allocated to those women who remain loyal to the party leaders and they advocate for issues that bring them more votes for the party. This kills the feminist consciousness that should exist in each woman politician.

Jahjaga was referring to the feminist consciousness as well when she was revealing her disappointment with the lack of collective action and collaboration from women parliamentarians on the case of survivors of sexual violence during the war. Developing this consciousness, according to both Jahjaga and Ismaili, would help amplify voices and promote gender equality.

The women who were appointed to positions at the top of the party hierarchy, in many cases were perceived to be close to the leadership of the party and not inclusive towards other women in the decision making. The perception of tokenism generated divisions between

women within their own parties and affected cross-party cooperation of women. Edita Tahiri admitted that quantity does not necessarily mean quality when it comes to the political presence of women (interview; Subotic, 2022, 138). She does not link the ability to promote policies and advance human rights agendas with the numerical representation of women. Luljeta Pula thinks along similar lines: she stated that "[the] establish[ment] of the thirty percent quota was an act of goodwill. However, emancipation should come from our society" (Farnsworth, 2008, 198). Both Tahiri and Pula continuously emphasized the concept of 'quality over quantity' of women in politics and professed that professional competence should not be simply analyzed in terms of numbers. Consequently, the rupture within the group can be partially attributed to the perception that women are instrumentalized to meet the quota, while their contributions, abilities, and professionalism are not valued. Tokenism reinforced negative stereotypes about women and diminished women's inclusion efforts and solidarity with one another. Hence, in many cases, women were limited in their ability to advocate for their shared interests based on their collective gender identity as women.

5.3. The intersectionality of political sisterhood

hooks, along with many other feminist scholars and activists (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1981; Anzaldua; 1987; Mohanty, 2003; Collins, 2000), emphasizes the importance of using an intersectional lens within the feminist movement to account for the lived experiences of all oppressed people. Understanding the "politics of location" (Rich, 1984) and the several layers of oppression experienced by individuals or groups who have a different entanglement of identities assumes that the movement is inclusive and does not homogenize experience. Beyond social movements, intersectionality is deemed to be a crucial component of decision-making and thinking, especially in politics by centrist and leftist politicians.

The political system of the Republic of Kosovo, as explained earlier, is a multi-party parliamentary representative democratic republic, in which the legislative power rests on the parliament. Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo on the Structure of the Assembly/Parliament, Paragraphs one and two, provide a legal guarantee of equal representation to all communities residing in Kosovo. Out of a total 120 seats in the Parliament, ten seats are guaranteed for Kosovo Serbs and ten other seats are guaranteed to non-majority communities (Turkish, Bosnian, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian) (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008, Article 64). This constitutional provision has ensured descriptive representation of these communities in the parliament and has also paved the way for their representation in the executive branch, with deputy prime ministerial, ministerial and deputy ministerial positions. The Kosovo Serb community is considered to have reached substantive representation by Kosovar politicians, which allows elected officials descriptively representing those communities to affect policies and have more decision-making power. However, when analyzing the substantive representation of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, many political analysts have argued that the interests of these communities are not being fully advocated for. Isak Skenderi, Executive Director of the NGO Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Kosovo, has admitted that these communities are traditionally "manipulated by mainstream parties on issues that never served the interests of these communities, and even less those of wider society" (Skenderi, 2021, paragraph 13). Skenderi considers descriptive representation a political façade from which the communities do not derive the power that could generate change. The situation worsens when it comes to women members of these communities, since they are even more marginalized both in descriptive and substantive representation in Kosovar politics.

In addition to the lack of substantive representation of ethnic minorities, Besa Ismaili argues that the lack of substantive representation of women of the Muslim community[1] can be witnessed in Kosovan politics as well. During our interview, Ismaili asserted that she did not have a political background prior to 2019; however, she had extended experience in civil society in which she mainly focused on religious tolerance. When she joined PDK, she declared that her previous field work with NGOs and religious communities had benefited her after officially entering party politics. She had a wide network, and she could use those relationships to campaign and support the party. She admits to have lobbied for her women colleagues of the party to the communities to which she had access. However, that solidarity she felt she had extended to her colleagues did not return in the same manner, as she explained:

> We would have extensive discussions with my women colleagues of the party and there were many cases when my opinions were accounted for in the discussion. They were treated through the prism of a different perspective, but in some cases my opinions were considered as abnormal and thus they were not supported. The feminist solidarity should be prioritized above that of general political ideologies. This is missing in Kosovo because to be a woman in politics you need to survive. If some women politicians value one cause as more beneficial to their political survival, they will remain silent for other causes that tamper with that.

Ismaili was referring to the lack of intra party support by the women of PDK to change the administrative order of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) 06/2014 for the code of conduct and disciplinary measures for students of secondary education. This enacted policy prohibits religious attire in schools (2014, Article 3. [Prohibited Actions]. Paragraph 1, sub paragraph 1. 13) and is applied to all religions and genders. However, this administrative instruction's impact has been highly gendered since only girls wearing a headscarf have a public display of religious symbols through their hijab. Young Muslim girls, who have decided to wear a headscarf, cannot find an alternate solution to what they see as a strict obligation as Muslim practitioners. The religion in the way they embrace it requires the

[1] Here, I refer to women politicians who identify as religious and practitioners of religion, specifically Islam.

covering of the head with a headscarf, which is precisely the element of their religious attire that has led to the discrimination against them. Boys who practice religion are not required to wear an attire that distinguishes them from the others, which is why the implications of this decision affects girls only. The MEST instruction has led to the expulsion of hijab wearing girls from high schools, obliging them to continue their education in a religious school only, namely a madrasa, or in private schools. Ismaili anticipated receiving the solidarity of her women colleagues of the party to amend and change this policy that discriminates against Muslim girls; however, her expectations were not met. She declares to have received only moral support, but nothing else.

The lack of intersectional political solidarity among women politicians for issues similar to Ismaili's case stem from Kosovo's attempts to separate the state from religion, and is understood as necessary to embrace European and 'western' values. Islam has not traditionally been a religious value of the European continent, consequently Kosovo has been trying to detach itself from things understood as Islamic values and culture. Many Kosovo politicians choose to remain silent and vote against issues that are not a comprising the element of the 'European package'; hence, the expected intra and cross-party solidarity of women politicians is not present. Feminism or the promotion of women's rights is understood by many women advocates as a secular endeavor and many women politicians in Kosovo follow a similar stance when it comes to this issue. The secularity of their advocation for human rights, led to lack of solidarity with women who choose to follow religious practices and display religious symbols.

The absence of intersectional solidarity among women is also witnessed in settings when a new woman political candidate joins a party and is promoted to positions of power. Shqipe Mjekiqi, who was Senior Political Advisor to former Minister of Internal Affairs, Political Advisor on European Integration to former President of Kosovo, European Integration Officer at the Ministry of Local Government Administration, formally joined LDK in 2021 and

became vice president of LDK from March 2021 to March 2023. Mjekiqi was honest and shared her disappointment with women's lack of cooperation and building of alliances within the party. During our conversation, she stated that the resistance and the lack of support from women of the party stemmed from the perception of threat women politicians who had been in the party for a long time had towards new women members. Since Mjekiqi was closely working with the leadership of the party, in a specific moment which Mjekiqi did not feel comfortable identifying, one of her women colleagues had tailored a plan to gradually push Mjekiqi into dealing with administrative issues within the party so that she would become detached from the leadership and distanced from decision making. Mjekiqi sadly admitted in our discussion:

> I think that the problem is also the women themselves, because I have the impression that many women who are called feminists, do not support each other, and in some cases even try to prevent other women from being promoted. Women see you as competition, for example, but it is not a fair competition. Because even with the electoral lists, for example, as is the case in Kosovo, you have women candidates competing with each other to become part of the party's electoral list. That competition should be fair, but it isn't. As a result, while they try to promote themselves, they try to oppress you, or degrade you, or stop supporting you. Therefore, many more men are promoted than women. We don't have that luxury as women. Because we are few. We should support one another and not become obstacles.

The competition to be proposed as a candidate of the party's electoral list, especially in terms of tenure of being a member of the party, is fierce. Women politicians who have been members of the party for an extended period of time anticipate to have their loyalty to the party be rewarded with a political position or more decision-making power within the party. Consequently, in many cases, the lack of women politicians' collective mobilization within the party and with women members of other parties prevents women's substantive representation in politics and creates more space for political manipulation and instrumentalization by the men who have decision-making powers within parties, as well as in the executive and legislative levels.

5.4. Sisterhood alliances vs. display of 'masculine behavior'

Formal politics, as explained in the first chapter, is considered to be a masculine space given the numerical predomination of men in the field. In such situations, stereotypically 'masculine' practices are accepted as a gender-neutral ideal, whereas stereotypically 'feminine' practices are deemed, in some cases, as less professional, so women who engage in stereotypically feminine behavior are considered to be less competent. Many of my interviewees attributed several adjectives to masculine behavior to explain how some women politicians had grown a 'thicker' skin to survive in politics by adopting some masculine traits. "Aggressive", "fierce", "outspoken", "courageous" and "loud" were some attributes which were continuously linked to women politicians who were considered influential in policy and decision-making in the parties, executive branch, and the legislature. Stereotypically feminine traits, on the other hand, according to the interviewees, were illustrated through adjectives such as "obedient", "conformist", and "follower". Although the framing of such adjectives was used to describe behaviors and practices in politics, I argue that they reflect an essentialist conception of gender practices. However, such categorizations can be useful in analyzing the constructions of the professional identities of women politicians in Kosovo.

Vlora Çitaku started her political career during her teenage years in 1999 and formally joined PDK upon its official establishment after the war. In the course of more than two decades, she was an MP twice, held ministerial and ambassadorial positions, and she currently serves as vice president of PDK. Çitaku's experience with intragender solidarity has fortunately been a pleasant one throughout her entire career. When we were discussing the adoption of masculine traits as a form of political survival, Çitaku shared that she had observed women conforming to more masculine behavior, but she herself did not want to conform to such unwritten and discriminatory professional standards in politics. She asserted:

> I refused to lose my feminine side. When I was elected as an MP and then minister, there were women and men who were kindly and sincerely advising me by saying: "Vlora, maybe you need to keep shorter nails, don't wear high heels". I said no! How does a woman politician need to look like and dress? Whatever she deems appropriate… No one can tell me how to look and what to wear… I have not sacrificed my femininity to be taken more seriously in politics.

Although Citaku was referring to the physical appearance and its impact in politics, which is not necessarily a behavior coded as masculine or feminine, the professional attire becomes a topic of discussion in the Kosovan media, which specifically targets women who dress more stereotypically femininely. Contrary to the distancing practices of women from those "who engage in feminine practices" (Rhoton, 2011, 712) in order to correspond to the universal gender-neutral norm, which is in practice masculine, Çitaku shares that she has experienced support and solidarity by women politicians. In our conversation, she declared that she had not encountered lack of feminist support by other women colleagues throughout her career. To the contrary, women from different parties had supported her in several instances, even when she was not present. She shared one example of feminist solidarity that had been initiated by Teuta Sahatqija, MP of the LDK parliamentary group and head of the Women Parliamentarians Caucus, after one male MP – also from LDK – had made a sexist remark towards Çitaku, who was then a minister. Sahatqija had demonstratively left the parliamentary session along with other women MPs from different political parties to stand in solidarity with Çitaku and hold the MP accountable for his sexist remark. The showcase of public support towards women who had undergone sexist or misogynist remarks by other politicians was considered to be a form of solidarity, and was greatly appreciated by all women politicians.

Other women politicians admitted to having adopted stereotypical masculine traits i.e. raising the voice, acting more aggressively, or sometimes being impolite, in order to receive the attention of colleagues and get their messages across. Besa Gaxherri has often been accused of 'masculine' behavior and I wanted to hear her thoughts on such declarations. She asserted that each profession alters one's personality in some way. The modification of behavior can take

place over the course of some years, and it can, in many cases, be involuntary and unconscious. However, in some specific instances, she said that displaying masculine traits had helped her to be heard when disputing with colleagues:

> When you are sitting at a table and discussing a specific topic, and normally at such tables the majority are men, you try to argue your idea and you notice that the attention is not there. I tried to speak my mind politely, trying to convince them, but with no luck. In such cases I may have raised my voice and sometimes slapped the table for them to take note of what I am saying. Losing your femininity is in some cases imposed on you.

Attribution of stereotypical feminine and masculine behaviors and practices among women politicians were present in the discourse of the members of the Women's Forum of LDK. Luljeta Pula Beqiri was considered to be "aggressive, radical, eloquent, outspoken … and the Women's Association Presidency disliked her" (Farnsworth, 2008, 69). Pula Beqiri was one of the most prominent women of her time, who, according to Flora Brovina during our interview, "put the crown on the head of the Kosovo Albanian woman". Through this statement, Brovina wanted to illustrate the image of Pula Beqiri and the pedestal where she had put the standards of representation. She was fierce, strong-willed, and unafraid to take risks, as many of my interviewees admitted. However, she was considered to be not too cooperative with the women of the Forum who had helped her get to the position she was holding within LDK at the time. Many of my interviewees said that she made decisions without consulting the women of the Forum, and she would often oppose the ideas that the Forum brought forward.

The adoption of masculine traits by women politicians does not necessarily imply that such women will not stand in solidarity with other women politicians. However, in many cases, women who engage in masculine practices refuse to acknowledge sexism in order to receive professional legitimacy and do not form political alliances based on gender identity; instead, they prioritize other identity markers and politicize their presence in politics through other causes, which is often because of the party discipline. Distancing from women politicians who

employ stereotypical traits, either feminine or masculine, can harm women's alliances by creating divisions and enforcing a sense of competition, rather than cultivating alliances that promote respect, inclusivity, and connections based on shared experiences. Such an approach to 'political survival' can also impact the strengthening of gender stereotypes and behaviors and further marginalize women based on their showcase of qualities that do not conform to the stereotypical masculine norms.

5.5. Generational differences to solidarity approaches

Intragender solidarity among women politicians in Kosovo who served in the 1980s and 1990s compared to that of women politicians engaged in politics after the war has undergone transformation. As one would anticipate, political, economic, and social circumstances affect the relationships of the members of a group and they certainly have a great impact on the shifting of the landscape of political activism. Based on the analysis of the interviews I have conducted, I have grouped the differences to solidarity into two groups: (i) Awareness and Discourse and (ii) Political activism.

The 1980s marked the beginning of women's political movement in Kosovo. Women politicians who were at the forefront of the demonstrations, humanitarian actions, and social mobilization initiatives were legitimizing their entry in the public sphere through their calls for liberation and equal rights in terms of ethnicity. In the midst of ethnic political and social struggles, women were also fighting a system which was rigged against them – patriarchy. In such difficult moments of their political engagements against two oppressing systems for women, "activists said the solidarity and support they received from each other encouraged them to continue" (Farnsworth, 2008, 34). Based on the interviews I conducted with women politicians, the strength of the intragender relationships and solidarity were shaped by political factors of the time rather than a feminist ideology, whose principles they were following strictly.

However, even though the feminist discourse was not explicit in terms of theoretical frameworks and perspectives, feminist practice was actually present through women's grassroots activism, practical actions, and initiatives that promoted gender equality and resisted oppressive systems.

The language that these women politicians and activists were using did not explicitly contain feminist terminology or clearly stated feminist principles and goals. For example, many of them mentioned during the interviews that they "needed to be united as women" and have a "single voice" in order to receive their deserving position in society. Shukrije Gashi, a former political prisoner and activist, who participated in the Feminist Conversations discussion with activist and politician women from the Balkan, when talking about women's solidarity and unification stated:

> Although we didn't define ourselves as feminists, yet we still realized that it was something common; a common voice. In an attempt to understand this, we started opening up the Pandora box. I realized that to do more and become equal, we need to speak up. And of course, during years 1970-1980 and on, it was still very difficult to make people speak up, especially about feminism and gender equality. (Gusia, Krasniqi, & Luci, 2016, 20)

Gashi, along with many other activists of her time, did not have a feminist awareness, or a feminist language, to articulate their lived experience and engage deeply with feminist concepts. They understood the importance of unification, despite differences such as class, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. This led to the idea of the creation of an entity, membership criteria of which was solely being a woman.

Many of that generations' politicians did not identify as feminist and continue not to be identified as such. Throughout our interviews, I asked all participants whether they identified as a feminist without giving a definition of how I define feminism. Many of them answered negatively and then added that they fought for equality and not the domination of one gender over the other. Gjylshen Berisha, for example, who was a member of the Women's Forum in

the 1990s and a member of the parliament from 2004 to 2007, during our interview emphasized the importance of equality by admitting:

> I am not a feminist. The violation of the rights of both men and women is wrong according to my opinion. I am on their side of whoever's rights are violated. I believe that both genders should complement each other.

Similar to Berisha, many of my interviewees stated that their political involvement, their social activism, and intragroup cohesion were grounded in their willingness to provide a more equitable society.

The younger generation of women politicians possess the knowledge and the discursive tools to talk about feminism and define behavior and practices that conform, or do not, to feminist ideology. They are more aware about the ideological spectrum of feminism and the need for intersectional approaches to talking about women's experiences. While for the older generation of women politicians intragroup solidarity was a means to survive and stand stronger against the multiple layers of oppression, for many women politicians of the younger generation, group unity is considered to be a natural extension of their descriptive representation in politics, or feminist consciousness, as I have elaborated above.

The reluctance to identify as a feminist is not as emphasized with the younger generation. Many of my interviewees identified as feminist and were open to discussing where specifically they stand within the feminist spectrum. It was evident that exposure to feminist discussions and initiatives in the post war period had an impact on the increased awareness of solidarity and gender sensitive conversations. In addition to such exposures, the legal and institutional space provided to women politicians to form gender-based coalitions, alliances, and networks has also had an immense impact in intragroup solidarity. Specific examples of such instances would be the creation of the

Women Parliamentarians Caucus, whose mission has been explained in the previous chapter, close cooperation between NGOs and government officials, building of transnational women's support systems through participation in conferences, summits, and international organizations.

5.6. Conclusion

Gender identity is one factor that affects women's willingness to embrace the concept of solidarity, but in many cases it is not sufficient to become a priority since identification with identity markers for specific purposes can gain more relevance depending on the context. Similarly, women politicians' descriptive representation does not necessarily need to be translated into a substantive one. Although many of my interviewees believe that substantively representing women and engaging in solidary practices with women colleagues would be an anticipated behavior, some of women politicians decide to distance themselves from 'women's issues' and focus their political power in other fields that have more priority than unity based on gender identity. While identifying with women's issues does not necessarily make for a 'natural' obligation as many of the interviewees admit, lack of collective cohesion prevents the change of the status quo and, in many cases, contributes to maintain the existing patriarchal structures. It is worth reemphasizing that there are many women politicians who identify as conservative and agree with the status quo. They accept patriarchy as a system and navigate their political identity while abiding to such values.

It is important to note that despite women politicians' commitment to implement the values of sisterhood solidarity, the structures in place often make it more difficult to choose allegiance to women's issues. The system in place, which in many cases works against the fostering of solidarity and cooperation among women politicians. A main point of contrast between the two generations of women politicians when it comes to the absence of solidary

practices with one another based on the interviews I conducted was highly shaped by the relationship of women politicians to the nation. Absence of solidarity or weakened bonds of cooperation between women politicians of the older generation were mainly manifested through disagreements on the means to contribute to the national plan and to the liberation efforts. Among the generation of women politicians serving after liberation, the absence of intragender cohesion in many cases was fostered as a result of scarce resources and limited space in formal politics. As a result, many women politicians chose to distance from solidary practices which would be considered feminist by many of their colleagues in order to optimize their presence in the political realm.

CONCLUSION

Tracing solidarity across time and space in the narrations of women politicians in Kosovo through the prism of gender, ethnicity, nationalism, and feminism has revealed different dynamics in the intragroup relationships. Women politicians have managed to unite and change the political and social status quo, establish bridges to support and advocate for gender equality, and provide emancipation and empowerment of women within the group. At the same time, women politicians have reproduced some inequalities and have maintained the patriarchal status quo. Weisser and Fleischner argue that "the issue of women's domination over other women is neither transparent nor monolithic" and is integrated in different settings: "textual and nontextual, public and private, historical and contemporary, theoretical and ordinary everyday experience" (1994, 6).

In this research I found generational differences between women politicians in terms of displaying female solidarity and choosing to pledge allegiance to other agendas that can be considered as non-feminist. The older generation of women politicians linked their activism for

women's rights to the national cause and used their ethnicity as an identity to display their agency within their own community. The inability to agree on the techniques and the means to contribute to the national plan for liberation was mainly the factor that fragmented their unity. Women politicians in the postwar period, on the other hand, had a different relationship to the nation, which influenced their solidary efforts. Their commitment to engage in solidary practices within the community of women politicians was sourced in the need to penetrate the realm of formal politics, which in its beginnings did not provide them with equal access compared to men. While the older generation was fighting a political system that marginalized them in terms of the ethnicity, the young generation of women politicians was struggling for a voice within its own community. The ruptures within the practice of feminist solidarity among women politicians of the young generation was predominantly nurtured by the fight for scarce resources and the perception of being less competent if they engage in practices that are related to 'women's issues'. As a result, many of them chose to distance from the practice of feminist solidarity in order to gain more political validity.

Although it is crucial to understand the forces that in many cases make the development of a feminist consciousness practically impossible, acknowledging the existence of horizontal oppression within members of the same group is crucial in addressing one component that slows the social change. Group cohesion, while recognizing individual differences and unique lived experiences, can serve as a catalyst of equal representation and separation of power, that translates into action and policy change.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. List of Interviewees

Name	Party	Years of political activity	Positions	Interview date
Atifete Jahjaga	Independent	2011-2016	4th President of the Republic of Kosovo	June 2, 2022
Besa Gaxherri	LDK	2001-present	MP, Member of the Leadership of the LDK branch in Peja	July 30, 2022
Vlora Çitaku	PDK	1999-present	Vice president of PDK, Deputy Ambassador to United States, Minister for European Integration, MP	September 7, 2022
Besa Ismaili	PDK	2020-present	MP, advisor to the PDK Caucus	September 4, 2022
Teuta Sahatqija	LDK	2004-present	Head of the Women Parliamentarians Caucus, Vice president OF LDK, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and DiasporA, Consul General of in New York, MP, Chair of the parliamentary group	February 10, 2022
Kaqusha Jashari	SDPK	1987- 2008	10th Prime Minister of Kosovo, 11th President of the League of Communists of Kosovo	July 25, 2022
Feride Hyseni	LDK	1989-1999	delegate (equivalent of today's MPs) of the Assembly of Kosovo in the 90s, during the parallel system	August 10, 2022

Edita Tahiri	LDK, ADK	1980-2017	Minister of Dialogue, Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, MP	September 15, 2022
Shqipe Mjekiqi	LDK	2021-2023	Senior Political Advisor to former Minister of Internal Affairs, , Political Advisor on European Integration to former President of Kosovo, European Integration Officer at the Ministry of Local Government Administration	September 8, 2022
Mimoza Kusari Lila	VV, Alternativa, AKR, AAK, LDK	2009-present	MP, Mayor of Gjakova, Minister of trade and industry, Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo	September 12. 2022
Melihate Termkolli	LDK	1986-2017	delegate of the Assembly of SAP Kosovo, MP, Member of the leadership of LDK, Minister of Public Services, Leader of the Women's Forum of LDK	July 25, 2022
Samije Zeqiraj	LDK	1989-2007	Deputy chairwoman of the Women's Forum	July 26, 2022
Hykmete Bajrami	LDK	2010-present	Minister of Finance of Kosovo, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Minister of Trade and Industry, MP	September 10, 2022
Gjylshen Berisha	LDK	1990-2007	Member of the Women's Forum of LDK, MP	July 31, 2022

Flora Brovina	LDK, PDK	1990-2019	Member of the Women's Forum, proposed presidential candidate, MP	July 31, 2022

Appendix 2. Interview Guide for Thesis Interviewees

Introduction

1. Where are you based in Kosovo at the moment?
2. Let's talk about the start of your political engagements.
    a. When did you formally become a politician?
    b. Why did you decide to take that career path?
    c. Why did you join your political party?
    d. What is the scope of your political engagements in Kosovar politics?

Being a woman politician

1. Can you please share more on your experience as a woman in politics through the years?
2. Has your experience of politics been different from that of your male colleagues, in your view?
    a. How and why would you consider them different?
    b. Have you been discouraged to continue your involvement in politics due to gender related stigma?

3.Do you consider the political competition among men politicians different from that of women? How and why do you think that is the case?

Feminism

1. How did you define feminism in the start of your political career?
    a. Does it differ from the definition you know have?
2. Is feminism a cause that is generally endorsed by women politicians? What about men?
3. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
4. What are some feminist political programs/policies that you had the chance to implement/initiate/ or work on?
    a. What are their impacts in society and in women particularly?
    b. Do you usually take into consideration ethnicity, religion, and age?
    c. To what extent can these programs/policies be pushed even if you did not have the party support?
    d. What do you usually do if the party doesn't support you?
5. Can you identify some ways that women politicians have used to 'survive' in politics?
    a. What is your own experience?

Feminist solidarity and practice

1. How would you define feminist solidarity now and how would you define it back then?
2. Based on your definition of feminism and solidarity, do you think women politicians practice solidarity? i.e. would women politicians rather choose supporting a feminist cause rather than following the party lines?
3. Would you say that there is cross party cooperation between women?
    a. If yes, could you please share some instances?
4. Did/do you witness/experience lack of feminist solidarity from other women politicians?
    a. If yes, why and how so?
    b. If not, what would you say are the motifs behind this behavior?
5. Do you generally receive help from other women politicians to navigate male dominated politics?
    a. If yes, how do/did you receive this help?
    b. If not, why would you say that was the case?
6. How do women politicians organize among themselves and across parties to empower/emancipate other women in society?
7. Do you ever oppose your party when it is about to take a decision, vote a policy, or propose a solution that is sexist or antifeminist?
    a. If yes, would you please share any instance?

<u>Bargaining with patriarchy</u>

1. Do women politicians, who adapted to the political dynamics, sacrifice their feminism or portions of feminism at any point in their careers according to your opinion?
    a. If yes, in what way?
    b. Why would you argue that they do that?
2. Would you say that some women have adopted 'masculine' traits in order to be accepted in politics?
3. How do women politicians navigate through gender norms and traditions?
    a. Is there a difference now from the period when you started your political career?

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