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Uprooted, Displaced, Resilient:

Kosovar Women's Narratives of Organizing for Survival During the Kosovo War

by

Erjona Gashi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the women in my family who didn't have the privilege to pursue a formal education but whose unwavering wisdom and strength rooted in their lived experience continue to inspire me every day.

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I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Aubrey Huber, for her support, guidance, and mentorship throughout the process of completing this doctoral dissertation. Her expertise, kindness, and constructive feedback have been invaluable in shaping this research and guiding me through the challenges of this marathon called *a dissertation*. My heartfelt gratitude extends to my committee members, Dr. Berry, Dr. Pal, and Dr. Broderick for encouraging me and supporting my academic journey in meaningful ways.

I am deeply thankful to my close and extended family for their patience and understanding and for sharing their stories of the Kosovo War over traditional food like *flija* and *pite* or over a cup of Turkish coffee.

To my people, thank you for being here for me and listening to me vent about graduate school and quitting a zillion times in the past four years. To Niv, my city gal, your friendship has provided much-needed respite during some very demanding moments of this research process and surviving academia and I'm grateful for you and our long writing sessions at Buddy Brew. To Dhuri, my soul-sister, thank you for always standing by my side and encouraging me to grow!

I am deeply indebted to the Kosovar women who generously sat with me and talked about their lived experiences during the Kosovo War. Their resilience, bravery, and self-determination have consistently inspired me, and I am humbled to have had the opportunity to amplify their voices through this dissertation.

To Noli, you're the best thing that has happened to me during the writing of this dissertation. Your presence has brought such comfort and joy to my life, and your encouraging words and nudges have made me continue writing when that was the last thing I wanted to do. *Faleminderit t'gjithëve!* Thank you all!

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to foreground Kosovar women's narratives and organizing properties during the Kosovo War. I examine the overlooked gendered roles and day-to-day lived experiences of Kosovar women, survivors of the Serb genocide, political violence, and oppression, and investigate their organizing properties during the Kosovo War (1998-1999). In acknowledging women's plurality of experiences and perspectives, I challenge the currently pervasive and monolithic narrative of women as passive victims of war present in scholarship in organizational communication and instead make overt the narrative of women as critical organizational actors that sustain lives during and after the war. Using autoethnography and in-depth interviews, I seek to answer the following research questions: (1) How do Kosovar women communicate their everyday lived experiences during the Kosovo War? (2) How do Kosovar women communicate their organizing strategies during the Kosovo War?

This dissertation study seeks to contribute to the recent trend in organizational communication that incorporates perspectives from marginalized and non-U.S. voices to challenge the dominance of U.S.-centered theories in the field. These perspectives are valuable and serve as a possibility for the generation of ideas for better decision-making and the creation of new democratic and participatory methods of organizing. They are also important as they connect individuals from marginalized communities across the globe and depict how people in non-Western places organize. The findings from this study will extend existing research in the communication field, specifically in the realm of feminist organizational communication and

alternative modes of organizing. Engaging with how Kosovar women communicatively organized for survival during the Kosovo War allows me to create a platform for their voices to be heard and organizing efforts to be appreciated by rendering them visible.

CHAPTER ONE: ON BEARING WITNESS

Situating Myself in This Research

Three years have passed since I completed my master's thesis, which was an exploration of my childhood experiences of war in Kosova and the lingering trauma it left behind. Despite working on numerous papers, articles, and book chapters on the subject since then, I find myself grappling with unexpected personal resistance as I embark on my doctoral dissertation.

Over the past few months, I've sat down countless times to revise the kind and insightful feedback from my advisor. Yet, each time I find myself unable to translate those insights into progress. Instead, a palpable aversion to writing takes hold and manifests itself in dreadful physical discomfort and a persistent reluctance to engage with it.

The cycle repeats. I sit, I read relevant articles, I promise myself to write, only to rise from my desk and distract myself with other activities. It's not forgetfulness that plagues me, but rather a deep-seated fear of what writing about war will unearth within me. Having undergone this process before during my master's thesis, I am aware of the potential for re-traumatization that is inherent to writing. Yet, I press on, believing that through writing, I cannot only heal myself but also contribute to a broader collective healing.

Writing has always been my means of making sense of lived experiences, but in this dissertation, I am tasked with bearing witness to the stories of other women affected by war. Their narratives weigh heavy on me, filling me with doubt and anxiety. I am reminded of the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) who eloquently highlights the challenges faced by women from

the Third World in the realm of writing. They confront the stereotypes and barriers imposed upon them, navigating the intersections of language, identity, and class in their quest for academic recognition.

As I navigate this tumultuous terrain, I am compelled to honor the voices of those whose stories I seek to tell, even as the act of bearing witness threatens to retraumatize me. This dissertation is not just about my journey but about amplifying the voices of marginalized women and ensuring their narratives are given the space they deserve.

In beginning the process of writing this dissertation, I, once again, deeply resonated with Anzaldúa's (1987) words as she explains:

> If you are not caught in the maze that (we) are in, it's very difficult to explain to you the hours in the day we do not have. And the hours that we do not have are hours that are translated into survival skills and money. And when one of those hours is taken away it means an hour that we don't have to lie back and stare at the ceiling or an hour that we don't have to talk to a friend. (p. 168)

As a Kosovar woman coming from the Second World, holding a low socio-economic standing, and writing this dissertation in English, I relate to Third World women's stances on language and class, above others, and reflect on how these interlocking webs stand in my way as an academic. I am currently a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate and I teach two courses, work on my dissertation, and hold a non-academic position three days a week so that I can fulfill my survival needs as an international student in the U.S. and ensure I don't drop out of the academy. I struggle to find time to write because I work for more than fifty hours a week, but I write, despite the hurdles and the pain that this writing process causes me. I write to record the erasure that has been going on in my country ever since the war ended.

In the eyes of many, Kosova is not a country, but still, a mere autonomous province in Serbia. Therefore, I do the work of showing the world our historical quest for independence and our resistance against genocide and ethnic erasure. I defy how we, as Kosovar people, are perceived by many in the West, as unsuited for democracy and freedom, and as the heart of a black hole in the middle of Europe. Above all, I write, as a storyteller that bears witness to the day-to-day intricacies of the genocide that my people have survived.

I proclaim myself a "wounded storyteller." Arthur Frank (2013) maintains that "a wounded storyteller is anyone who has suffered and lived to tell the tale" (p. xi). Wounded storytellers care for others and can also be healers. Frank (2013) depicts ill people as wounded storytellers hoping to shift the contemporary idea of illness as passive and ill people as "victims" towards agency and activity. Similarly, I consider people who have survived wars, especially women, not as passive victims of war but as actors of survival and social change. Ending the silence surrounding women's lived experiences of the Kosovo War and speaking their truths is how I strive to create a community of wounded healers" (Frank, 2013, p. xvii)

Relevant Literature

> During the Kosovo War, many refugees were forcibly deported on trains; others left in tractors or on foot. Nearly all were stripped of their valuables and identity papers. Refugees gave eyewitness accounts of Serb forces summarily executing civilians and pillaging and burning entire villages. Women testified that Serb forces harassed and raped them; men spoke of other forms of torture and imprisonment; children remembered seeing members of their family killed.
>
> —Julie A. Mertus, *War's Offensive on Women*

It is 1999. I am five years old when Kosova, the land of my birth, is invaded by Serb forces. The Serb government does not recognize Kosova's autonomy and begins a campaign of ethnic cleansing and oppression intending to erase our culture, history, and language. As a five-year-old child, I cannot grasp the seriousness of the matter. I do not understand where we are

going or why we are leaving my childhood home. All I know is that something must be wrong because I see the panic on the adults' faces. I try to stay out of their way, especially avoiding the women in my family who are packing bags for us to evacuate. I watch from afar as they prepare gurabija, a simple-to-make pastry in bulk to last us for the weeks we are forced to flee for our lives. I try to make sense of the tense situation. I make eye contact with my brothers who are equally confused by all the adults yelling, and running back and forth between our house and my uncle's tractors. No one explains to us what is happening.

***

In the year 1999, I was five years old when the land of my birth, Kosova, fell under the grip of Serb forces, which marked the onset of an atrocious campaign aimed at erasing our autonomy, culture, and language through ethnic cleansing and oppression. As a young child, the gravity of our reality eluded me entirely. I was oblivious to why we suddenly fled our childhood home in Broliq. All I could focus on at the time was the unease and panic etched across the faces of the adults around me. I didn't want to be in their way, so I steered clear of the bustling areas like the living room and the kitchen as the women in my family hurriedly packed our bags and prepared gurabija, a staple pastry, to sustain us through the uncertain weeks ahead.

Trying to understand the tension that permeated the air, I exchanged confused looks with my brothers, who, like me, were at a loss from the chaos of adults darting to and from between our home and my uncle's tractor. No one paused, no one told us children what was happening, so we were left to grapple with our confusion and fear in silence.

***

Bury everything, the pictures, and the books!

Hide the documents!

They're coming. Adem told us they were coming. Take the children out first.

***

In 1999, I was too young to understand the stories of my people, and now, in 2024, I still find those narratives hard to bear witness to because of their painful nature. As a child, I was often shielded from the weightiest aspects of our culture's history, which has persisted into my adulthood.

Within my community in Kosova, people still hesitate to confront and share the most challenging chapters of our past. This hesitation to articulate our collective struggles perpetuates a cycle of transgenerational trauma, affecting not only me but every child born in Kosova. Therefore, breaking free from this inherited unwillingness to revisit our past is imperative for my people. By engaging in conversations about the war, we can collectively begin the process of sensemaking, unraveling the complexities of our shared experiences and transforming our traumatic memories into sources of strength and resilience. In doing so, we contribute to a new narrative of the Kosovo War.

The current prevailing narrative that Kosovars have been caught up in portrays women as victims and men as heroes and martyrs of the war. Anthropologist Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (2006) argues that Kosovar memory politics have been constructed around a narrative of armed resistance and self-sacrifice and have silenced contested memories that would destabilize it. Further, Berisha (2017) asserts that a discourse of martyrdom and glorification of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters established a legitimizing potential for remembrance and

commemoration. However, it marginalized civilian stories, consequently making impossible the acknowledgment of their experiences and attachment of meaning to their losses.

Transnational Feminism

In this dissertation, I amplify marginalized narratives of Kosovar civilians, particularly, women's stories of their lived experiences, to highlight their contributions during and after the Kosovo War. This dissertation draws from and contributes to the ongoing conversations in transnational feminism. According to Conway (2019), the term transnational emerged "as a way to name the dramatically increasing flows of people, things, images, and ideas across the borders of nation-states in an era of 'globalization'" (p. 43). Transnational feminist approaches emerged in the 1980s with scholars attempting to address global feminism and its neglect of inequality and difference between women (Fernandes, 2013). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan coined the term "transnational feminism" in 1994 to offer an alternative to "global feminism" (Briggs, 2016, p. 992). They argued that much of feminist theory prevents an engagement with those "outside the West," thus reproducing a hegemonic West. A transnational feminist perspective informs my work because it is concerned with exploring women's specific locations, identities, and political practices and how they are embedded within transnational inequalities, structures of power, and oppression.

In my dissertation, my goal is to document and analyze how organizing is accomplished in the margins, which contributes to the existing discourses on marginality and non-Western knowledge production. Inspired by transnational feminist theories of decolonizing knowledge in organizations, by centralizing the narratives of Kosovar women, I shift from the perspective on the creation of knowledge as a purely cognitive

process to one as grounded in practice, thus "knowledge as participatory" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 862). In addition, challenging the notion of "sisterhood as global," I aim to join Tlostanova's (2010) call for the inclusion of Second World feminism in transnational feminist frameworks. Producing work that centers on gender issues, struggles, and oppressions of Kosovar women at war will serve as an invitation for feminists from war-torn post-socialist countries in the Second World to stand in solidarity with each other and build alliances that enable us to regain a voice, reclaim, and legitimize our socialist pasts.

Transnational feminist studies have long rejected alliance-building with women of the Second World, which is the category Kosovar women fall under (Bonfiglioli & Ghodsee, 2020). Thapar Björkert and Koobak (2019) noted "the presumably egalitarian and inclusive frame of transnational feminism has failed to advance a truly comparative, cross-regional and transcultural intellectual approach due to its Western-centric framework" (p. 82). It is challenging to deconstruct transnational feminism's Western centricity when the "almost emotional rejection of everything socialist" goes unproblematized (Bonfiglioli & Ghodsee, 2020, p. 170).

Second World Women

Second World women are also absent in the cartography of transnational feminism articulated by Alexander and Mohanty (2010). The cartography articulated three crucial geographies to transnational feminism: "One specific to the racial cartography of the US academy; second a reworking of the Cold War meta geography of First World–Third World; and third a questioning of the sovereignty and self-determination of the liberal nation-state" (Desai, 2015, p. 117). Therefore, many non-U.S. scholars have questioned the place of the Second World feminist perspectives in this articulation. Suchland (2011) argues that post-socialism is a unique place and experience and not recognizing it as such is an oppressive epistemic act. These

scholars assert that the concept of transnational feminism must be reimagined to be more inclusive of "South-to-South" and South-to-periphery" coalitions between scholars and activists on the basis of a deeper understanding of the past. Throughout the Cold War socialist women built (anti-) colonial coalitions with women in the Global South and these coalitions permeated the West and consequently challenged the Western colonial structures from within (Bonfiglioli & Ghodsee, 2020). Ignoring the history of global socialist feminism perpetuates the Western hegemony and serves to commit epistemic injustice even within the framework of transnational feminism.

By highlighting the role of Kosovar women as crucial contributors to the transformation of the Kosovar society through organizing efforts for collective perseverance and survival, storytelling, and meaning making out of the conflict, I challenge the exclusion of the Second World in transnational feminist scholarship as well as defy the politics of women's representation of victimhood. By doing so, I shift the narrative to women as agents of change while providing participants the opportunity to articulate their own personal war narratives. This shift in the dominant discourse opens opportunities for change in the politics of representation of marginalized populations. In other words, this dissertation proposal works to transform the discourse on women and their impact during the war and post-war Kosova. This helps to offer the world Kosovar women's narratives of the war and offers an opportunity for them to articulate and write themselves into the production of history. This will be the basis of an insurgent knowledge of Kosovar women's lives and labor in wartime and serves to fill the current gap about a population whose existence and history have been largely siloed, delegitimized, and unrecognized.

***

It's November 7, 2023. There's a genocide happening in Palestine. More than 10,000 have people been killed in less than one month. The U.S. is supporting Israel instead of Palestine. I am defeated. I think back on my war. I cry. I have been crying almost every day since this genocide began. All it takes is one picture and I break. The trauma is still there. Unprocessed. Invisible. I called my father when this all began. I called to ask how he was feeling, but I couldn't ask him. My voice cracked. I felt a lump in my throat. I talk to my friends about it. The ones who were children during the Kosovo War are also having a hard time. Their trauma is resurfacing. We share stories of Palestinians who are actively resisting oppression. We compare their fate to ours. Every day. We share stories of innocent children being saved from under the rubble. We bear witness. Because we can. Because, as witnesses, we have a responsibility to not turn our heads away. Because we know, that if the world had given up on us back in 1999, we wouldn't be here today.

***

As a survivor of the Kosovo War, sharing the stories of mass torture and genocide is paramount, not only to me as an individual, but also to my people and our cultural identity writ large. For many Kosovars, sharing the stories of the Serb genocide in Kosova serves as an act of resistance against Serbia's attempts to control the narrative of the war and silence the Kosovar people's lived experiences. Sharing these stories communicatively constitutes Kosovar women as agents in shaping the history of the Kosovo War and collectively attesting to the injustices and massive traumatic experiences they were exposed to by the Serb government. If these stories remain untold, Kosovar women's experiences of war and contributions to collective survival will not only become obscured but also erased from history. Moreover, since the majority of the

research focusing on the Kosovo War is conducted by Western scholars, these stories, as told by Kosovar women themselves, will help "correct" any misrepresentations of Kosovar women's realities of war and offer more truthful accounts of their day-to-day endeavors in the form of testimonies.

Contributions to Communication

In addition to extending Kosovar women's narratives of war, this dissertation has a concrete impact on the field of communication, and in particular, feminist organizing. My dissertation is one of the first studies in the field of Communication to explore Kosovar women's narratives and lived experiences during wartime. It builds on the previous studies that have examined the perception of war (Integra, 2008), nationalism (Baliqi, 2017), trauma and stress (Larner & Blow, 2011), and the impact of meaning-making on growth (Kelmendi et al., 2020) by centering on the impact of communication in the wartime context in Kosova. A simple search in the main communication e-databases like *Communication Abstracts, Organizational Communication Abstracts, and Journal of International and Intercultural Communication,* using "kosovo/a+war+women" as a keyword combination produces 0 results published in the topic. Narratives of women from Kosova are absent in communication studies. Given the historical and current erasures of women's narratives in Eastern Europe, there is an urgent socio-cultural calling to document and understand the life stories and experiences of women in war zones and examine how they communicatively organize for collective survival, make meanings of war, and contribute as agents of change. My dissertation addresses this gap by engaging in a narrative approach to collect and document the privatized stories and everyday experiences of women at war.

My dissertation contributes to theoretical conversations in feminist organizing and methodological conversations in autoethnography. In the section below, I showcase the ways in which my dissertation extends conversations to each of these areas. Current research in the field of organizational communication centers on Western organizing, but little is known about organizing from the margins or about marginal organizational actors (Basu & Dutta, 2007; Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). Cruz and Sodeke (2020) employ the term "marginal organizational actors" to refer to disenfranchised subjects of the Global South who are usually depicted as "incapable of organizing" (p. 1). The authors use the term "actor" to foreground agency and the organizing practices of the marginalized (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). Similarly, throughout my dissertation, I will be referring to Kosovar women who have participated in this project as "marginal organizational actors" in an effort to recognize their agency in adapting their organizing efforts to the precarious context of the Kosovo War. The absence of marginal organizational actors in organizational communication theory sustains a Eurocentric organizational narrative (Imas & Weston, 2012). The lack of ongoing conversations pertaining to organizing that is done in response to war and political violence sustains a Eurocentric organizational narrative. Citizens in the U.S. and Western Europe have largely been insulated from the impacts of war on their soil. Thus, this has limited ideas about what counts as organizing. To answer the plea for more global and postcolonial organizing that breaks down boundaries of language, discipline, space, and worldviews, (Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007; Hall, 2011), this dissertation foregrounds the overlooked endeavors of Kosovar women as marginal organizational actors during the Kosovo War and explores their postcolonial (or 2nd world feminist) organizing strategies and care practices.

Furthermore, this dissertation will contribute to feminist debates regarding care work. Feminist care ethicists, for over two decades, have explored the femininization of care, with most feminists foregrounding women's work as family caregivers and highlighting the burden of this sort of work and the moral values ascribed to it, which result in furthering women's already existing marginalized positions in global politics and economies (Ferrant et al., 2014; Eyben, 2012). Care work, as a gendered activity mostly performed by women, holds a lower value in the global labor economy in comparison to paid occupations assumed by men. Therefore, women carry the burden of unpaid care work, which includes the physical, emotional, social, and financial problems of their families and communities to ensure their existence and flourishing. Thus, this work cannot stand at the periphery any longer. Care, analyzed through the intersections of gender, class, and status, highlights structures of inclusion and exclusion and influences the social institutional contexts that shape the patterns of caregivers and receivers (Kröger, 2009).

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

Through this dissertation project, I also supply discursive materials for historical remembrances. I have collected and documented women's lived experiences and stories of war in the format of testimonies. According to the Asaba Memorial Project, which is a joint effort between scholars from the University of South Florida and the people of Asaba to memorialize the murders of civilians during the Nigerian war, communities in which there is a formal commemoration of atrocities appear more resilient than those in which silence prevails. These stories, then, will serve as testimonies of the truth of the Kosovo War and serve as an act of resistance against Serbia's attempts to silence Kosovars and negate the genocide in Kosova. As an act of resistance, testimonials aim to convey "truth," as they create a platform for marginalized people to speak up. They construct a means of defying dominant historical accounts and denouncing oppression and exploitation (Reda, 2016).

By foregrounding the marginalized voices of women, this project will shift the regional discourse from geopolitics to include and explore social change in Kosova, in particular the role of women and their agency during the war. Habermas (1989) argues that "the life worlds and voices of marginalized classes tend to be "privatized" by being denied public recognition (as cited in Jackson, 2002, p. 23). Sharing these women's stories, their private experiences, and their meanings will serve as a starting point towards the reclamation of the public sphere, which Kosovar women were denied after the war. Moreover, this project will help transform Western and non-Western discourse and perspectives of women as mere victims of war to women as agents of change and contribute to conversations pertaining to the role of women in wartime.

Lastly, this dissertation project will surely have local, regional, and transnational value. This research will provide on-the-ground insight and evidence into women's lived experiences of war. It will have practical implications for women's meaning-making processes as well as non-

combat, political, social, and organizational contributions during wartime. Since women bear additional gendered burdens of war, this project also highlights the urgency for women's representation in all political and decision-making processes in pursuit of peace.

In my dissertation, I ask the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Kosovar women communicate their everyday lived experiences during the Kosovo War?

RQ2. How do Kosovar women communicate their organizing strategies during the Kosovo War?

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

I move away from the idea of organizations as entities towards the idea of communication constituting organization (CCO), where I focus my attention on how organizing as a process is accomplished (Schoeneborn et al., 2018). I explore organizations as "ongoing and precarious flows of practice (Schoeneborn et al., 2018, p. 485)" and "networks of nested and overlapping activity systems" (Feldman & Feldman, 2006, p. 862; Ford & Harding, 2004; Hernes, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick, 1979). This means that I consider organizations as systems that come into existence from communication practices. In other words, I explore how organizing happens in communication.

I begin this dissertation with a discussion of the historical context that is crucial for understanding the importance and timeliness of this project. I offer a literature review of organizational communication, specifically feminist organizational communication, in order to offer the reader an idea of the ongoing conversations that I aim to contribute to as well as findings that contextualize my research questions. By engaging with these conversations, I provide contextual knowledge to illuminate my findings and significance. Moreover, I incorporate themes that I aim to unpack later in the analysis section. In particular, I focus on the origins of the Kosovo War, women's experiences at war, as well as women's organizing Afterward, I highlight my methods section detailing the processes of data collection and analysis. Finally, I conclude with a summary description of each of the dissertation chapters.

Chapter Overviews

This dissertation consists of six chapters which an introduction, literature review, methods, two analysis chapters, and a conclusion.

In the opening chapter, I have invited the reader to consider the importance of this dissertation, the scholarly contributions, as well as the ways in which I extend conversations and debates in the field of communication. I began the chapter with a personal autoethnographic narrative of my experience as a child of war to set the tone for the rest of the dissertation and justify my narrative approach.

Chapter two, titled "Small Countries Do Not Die from War but from Silence," serves as the literature review section of this dissertation. Here, I establish the regional context and delve into the historical background of the Kosovo War, offering readers the necessary context to understand the origins of this project, its significance, and the contributions it makes to both academic and non-academic discourse. Additionally, I explore existing literature on the impact

of war on women, with a particular emphasis on Kosovar women. Furthermore, I provide a comprehensive overview of the ongoing conversations within the field of organizational communication, particularly focusing on feminist organizational communication and transnational feminism. Central to this discussion are alternative modes of organizing and the provision of care.

Chapter three, titled "Pouring lives into stories over a cup of coffee in Prishtina," is the methods chapter of this dissertation, where I outline the approaches utilized to explore the experiences of Kosovar women, focusing primarily on autoethnography and in-depth interviews. Firstly, I provide a review of relevant literature on autoethnography, justifying why this method is suitable for addressing my research questions. Afterward, I delve into the process, offering a detailed explanation of the steps I took to gather data through in-depth interviews and informal conversations with my family members. Additionally, I highlight the data analysis process and explain how I turn the interviews into narrative accounts.

Chapter four, “A Silent Observer of the Stories Told Across the Edges of the Wound,” is the first analysis chapter of my dissertation, in which I focus on the first research question pertaining to women’s experiences during the war and how they communicate those experiences. In this chapter, I analyze women’s interviews and “restory” them into three types of narratives—chaos narratives, narratives told across the edges of the wound, and liberation narratives. This step is useful to shape the meaning-making inherent to their stories.

In chapter five, “They Left Flour, Pots, and Pans Behind so We Could Use Them,” I address my second research question focusing on feminist organizational

communication, particularly on the themes of communicative strategies of organizing and care. This analysis chapter provides insight into non-Western ways of organizing, more precisely, within a precarious context such as wartime.

In chapter six, "Kosovar Women in the Process of Archive-making," the concluding chapter, I summarize my dissertation project and the findings and implications that follow. I present the key details of my dissertation and showcase my contribution to conversations within the communication discipline and outside of academia. Finally, I address the limitations of my study and present suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: SMALL COUNTRIES DO NOT DIE FROM WAR BUT FROM SILENCE

The Origins of War

I began the previous chapter by situating myself within this dissertation, recounting a memory from my childhood when, at five years old, alongside my brothers, I tried to make sense of the war looming on the horizon. In this chapter, I continue to explore my familial recollections by sharing a vivid memory of us questioning our grandmother and mother about the reasons we were being displaced, offering a glimpse into my own perspective of the women in my family during that chaotic time.

Subsequently, I delve into the broader context of the Kosovo War, tracing its origins back to the period when Kosova was part of Yugoslavia. I provide a brief overview of the struggles faced by Kosovar people, especially women, particularly in the 1990s when Slobodan Milošević's regime revoked Kosova's autonomy and escalated human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians. Throughout this dissertation, I interchangeably use the terms ethnic Albanians and Kosovars to refer to people from the Republic of Kosova.

To focus on the specific impact of war on women and highlight their agency and resistance, I recall a powerful moment involving my grandmother fearlessly confronting a Serb paramilitary soldier and denouncing the atrocities they were committing in Kosova.

Additionally, I illustrate how my family members organized for survival during the war, laying the groundwork for discussions that my dissertation will contribute to the field of

organizational communication, particularly feminist organizational communication, the provisions of care as labor, and the ethical dimensions of this labor. Finally, I address a gap within the framework of Transnational Feminism, specifically the absence of post-socialist women, as I try to carve out a space where I see myself reflected. Rather than turning away from this absence, I choose to turn towards it. This represents an opportunity for meaningful contribution to the academic discourse on post-socialist women within the framework of transnational feminism.

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We have been on the bus for the past couple of hours. My feet are numb. I want to be outside and play with my friends. Mother told me and my brothers that we were going by the sea. I can't wait to see the sea. But none of my friends or cousins are there. When I woke up in our house in Peja yesterday morning, everyone had left. Alba, Besiana, Tina, Goni, Doni, they had all left. I asked Mother where they were, but she didn't say anything. Violeta, my uncle's daughter, is with us. I don't know why Tina, my sister, is not here, but Violeta is. She's sitting somewhere in the back of the bus with some women I've never seen before. I cannot breathe well here. I don't understand why there are so many women, and why my brothers and I are some of the only children here.

We're going to Montenegro, Mother said, but my father is not with us. None of the men in my family are with us. Mother said my father would meet us there. I haven't seen him in so long. My brother, Fatjon, and I are talking about school. We don't know if we will begin school in Montenegro or we will be back in Broliq by then. The bus stops suddenly. Hakija, the bus driver, shouts and tells everyone to keep quiet. "We are passing a checking point," he yells. My mother wears a veil on her head. Violeta does too. I don't know what's happening. Some men

with guns come inside the bus, screaming at everyone. They ask for our documents and shout "brzi brzi go outside!!!!" The women, one by one, some crying, some sighing, some comforting others, get out of the bus. The soldier yells at me and my brothers to stay still, not move, and not leave the bus. The women, one by one, leave, and Hakija leaves too. I take a peak outside through the window.

They are waiting in this long line; it looks like it's never-ending. I feel relieved. My brothers and I can finally breathe on this stinky bus. We start chasing each other and hopping from one chair to the other, but something doesn't feel right. We are laughing, but the women outside are crying. Some are holding their hands in front of their chest and praying, and whispering to one another, and policemen are shouting and hitting them to stay in line, a single file line. I see Grandmother. I am confused with how she looks. She changed her traditional clothing for more modern clothing, and though she is still wearing a veil, she is no longer wearing the traditional white hat she never takes off.

It's been a couple of hours now and the women haven't returned. I'm hungry and there's nothing to eat. We hop on the chairs again and play some more. Some women are still crying, and some are whispering to each other. I wave at them from the window. I pray for my mother and grandmother and Violeta to come back until I drift to sleep.

Later on, much later on, years after the war had ended, my grandmother would sometimes look back on this moment and say that the paramilitary forces had wanted to forcefully take a lot of women out from the line, and not let them cross the borders to safety, so my cousin Violeta wore a veil to make herself look older, and so did Mother and most of the women.

Later, my grandmother said although she was in constant fear for our family and our people, this moment at the bus was the one she was most scared of during the entire war. She had been sure that the police would kill her with other women in the line, before heading back to kill my brothers and me. She told us she had been certain my mother and all the other women would be shot. She said she worried about me and my brothers and kept thinking about the soldiers taking us away since there was nobody to care for us. Even more than when she yelled at the paramilitary forces a couple of weeks back, and confronted them about raping and impregnating Kosovar women, this was the moment that frightened her the most.

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To center the individual lived experiences of women during the Kosovo War requires an understanding of the geopolitical conflict that imperiled them. The origins of the conflict over Kosova date back hundreds of years ago. However, for the scope of this dissertation, I will only provide the historical context focusing on the late twentieth century, a period known for genocidal fervor, political violence, segregation, mass displacements, and atrocities committed by the Serb government led by Slobodan Milošević, the "Butcher of the Balkans," against Ethnic Albanians in Kosova. The Kosovo War cannot be understood outside of the context of Yugoslavia, especially its disintegration. Yugoslavia comprised eight constituent units, six of which were republics (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and two of which were autonomous provinces in Serbia (Vojvodina and Kosova) (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000).

Kosova, in 1974, under the Yugoslav constitution was declared an autonomous province of Serbia and was afforded a status almost similar to that of a republic but without the benefits of withdrawal from the federation. Ethnic Albanians were classified as a nationality rather than a

nation and did not have the right to a republic and had no rights to withdraw from the federation and demand independence (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000, p. 36). Since Kosova was not a republic it did not have great economic control. Thus, Albanian activists took to the streets to protest for better economic and educational policies. In 1981, students and other demonstrators peacefully protested their oppression by the Yugoslav authorities, which prompted the latter to declare a state of emergency under the claims that the protests constituted a nationalist threat to the stability of the country. Despite the violence and casualties resulting from the first protest between the 11 and 12th of March, 1981, protesters gathered again on two other occasions on the 26th of March as well as between the 1st and 2nd of April across various cities in Kosova. Several thousand people took to the streets chanting "Set our jailed comrades free," and "We demand a Kosovo Republic" (Logoreci, 1982; Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003). After the third protest, the Yugoslav authorities sent armored car patrols and helicopters to control and intimidate the population. Shortly after, they fired Albanian members of the local government and provincial parliament, university professors and teachers, heads of local radio and television services, and people across various professional settings. According to the then Yugoslav Minister of the Interior, Franjo Herljević, thousands of Albanians were arrested and faced grave charges and sentences for participation in the demonstrations (Logoreci, 1982). These movements caused great hostility and polarization between the Serb and Albanian communities during the 1980s.

In 1990, Slobodan Milošević, took control of the Serb Party and revoked Kosova's autonomy which was given in 1974 and afforded Kosova almost equal rights to Yugoslavia's six republics. This initiated an increase in human rights abuses against

Albanians. Milošević's intent was to Serbianize the province by colonizing Albanians and committing ethnic, linguistic, and cultural erasure. Albanian street names were changed to Serb ones. The Albanian institute as well as Albanian radio, television, and newspapers were shut down, and a Serb curriculum for schools and universities was introduced. More than 18,000 Albanian teachers and staff workers were fired for not complying with the Serb curricula. Funding was cut to Albanian schools in Kosova, and Albanians were forbidden from using school buildings unless they followed the Serb curricula (Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003). Around 115,000 Albanians lost their public employment. Serbs were given preferential treatment by the law, especially in the form of loans and free land. While for Albanians it became illegal to buy or lease property from Serbs. In the Declaration on Human Rights and Rights of Members and National Minorities adopted by the Serb parliament in 1992, Albanians were described as a minority with rights "far above the international standards" (Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003, p. 37). They were accused of a century-long campaign of ethnic cleansing against Serbs, which served to justify the institutionalized oppression and discrimination of Albanians in Kosova. Albanians faced day-to-day discrimination from the Serb police in the form of physical violence, threats, and other abuses, as well as ideological discrimination supported by Kosovar Serbs who believed that Serbs were the ethnic superiors in Kosova and that Kosova is "a sacred Serb land" (Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003, p. 37).

As means of resistance to Serb oppression, Kosovar Albanians adopted their own Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Kosova and in 1981 a referendum resulted in 87% in support for Kosova as a sovereign republic. This marked the beginning of a parallel system in Kosova which developed between 1992 and 1996. In secret, under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, head of the League for a Democratic Kosovo (LDK), Kosovar Albanians

created their own institutions separate from the Serb administration. Under the parallel system, 20,000 teachers and administrators were hired to teach in basements, garages, and homes donated by Kosovar Albanians. Organizations like The Mother Theresa Society, The Council for the Defense of Human Rights, The Association of Independent Trades Unions, and The Councils for Reconciliation were also set up to monitor human rights abuses, provide humanitarian healthcare, and offer a parallel justice system. Kosovars were in control of the informal and private sectors whereas Serbs were in control of the public ones. The parallel system, however, was unjust and unequal. Therefore, the situation began to worsen by the mid-1990s with the Dayton Agreement where Kosova did not get any international attention. Kosovar Albanians began to lose hope in a democratic path toward independence and turned to a more violent approach. In the mid-1990s, funded by the Kosovar Diaspora, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) made its first appearance as an armed resistance group. Around 1997, the Serb government denounced KLA as a terrorist organization and used them to justify another wave of atrocities committed towards Kosovar Albanians such as detentions, political trials, arbitrary arrests, torture, illegal searches, as well as murders (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000; Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003).

On February 28th, 1998 the Serbs arrested Adem Jashari, one of the founders of KLA, in his house in Prekaz. In the same week, they also killed 58 members of his family. This prompted an upheaval all over Kosova and village militias began defending their own villages from an escalation of violence. It also marked the beginning of the Kosovo War (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000; Bieber and Daskalovski, 2003).

Amnesty International witnessed a significant increase in human rights violations in Kosova in 1998. Most of the victims were ethnic Albanians (Bieber & Daskalovski, 2003; Friend, 2001). In the summer of 1998, my family was one of the approximately 250,000 ethnic Albanians who were forcibly detained. 50,000 people were out on the streets or in the mountains (Friend, 2001; Ronyane, 2004). Human Rights Watch began documenting torture, killings, rapes, forced expulsions, and other human rights violations committed by Serb government forces against ethnic Albanians in 1999 (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). According to Ronyane (2004), the tensions and genocidal fervor culminated on 24 March 1999 with the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) attack on Milošević's Yugoslavia. Yugoslav forces launched a genocidal campaign in Kosova and through terror and violence forcibly displaced circa 1.5 million people from their homes in Kosova.

On War and Women

Yesterday, hidden behind the pine tree, I saw Grandmother confront the paramilitary soldiers. I wanted to go back to the house we were staying in, but walking back unnoticed through the valley was impossible because of the tractors – perhaps fifty or more – blocking my way. Looking back towards the house, all I could see were the closely packed blue tarps on the tractors, resembling the waves of the sea. Suddenly, Grandmother's voice snapped me from my thoughts about the sea. She was yelling at one of the paramilitary soldiers, a young and muscular man towering over her by twice the height and four times the weight (Gashi, 2020, p. 78).

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Cockburn (1998) contends that war is gendered. Women and girls carry the heaviest burdens of war (Cockburn, 1998). The already unjust and oppressive structures become magnified, affecting women's livelihood and well-being. The scholarly conversations on women's experiences of war focus largely on the negative impact of war on women, however, there is a chasm to be filled in the privatized, everyday lived experiences and realities that women undergo for individual and collective survival. Ibnouf's (2020) review of literature on the impact of war on women identified three bodies of knowledge, "the impact of armed conflict on changing gender roles and relations, women-headed households and post-armed conflict situations, and gender inequality and sexual violence used as a weapon of war" (p. 19). This dissertation focuses on extending the conversations on the ways in which wartime affects women's roles and everyday lives.

Due to the disruptive nature of armed conflicts, women's roles within family systems and society writ large change (Culcasi, 2019; Ibnouf, 2020; Korac, 2004). Women assume new roles and take on more economic responsibilities as family breadwinners, heads of households, and (formal or informal) community organizers all while maintaining their already existing roles as caretakers (Arostegui, 2013). Naturally, the already unpaid labor increases as their roles quadruple. This, in turn, creates exhausting burdens on women who must navigate the tensions of their new roles, specifically the ones threatening the patriarchal dichotomy of the private and public sphere (Culcasi, 2019; Jacobson, 2006; Moruzzi, 2013).

When women are not soldiers, they experience war as refugees, victims of sexual violence, and wartime domestic violence. Depending on their social positioning and the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity, women can be more or less vulnerable to war (Turpin, 1998). Women from developing countries are more susceptible to war and more likely to be displaced from their home countries (Sivard, 1991). As refugees, women often assume both the roles of caretaker and provider as they look after family members and seek food, shelter, and safety in the absence of their spouses or other men in the family (Turpin, 1998; Ibnouf, 2020). Despite the labor that follows from the duality of women's roles during wartime and their efforts for individual and collective survival and peace, they are still excluded from decision-making powers in their societies (Turpin, 1998; Ibnouf, 2020).

In wartime, sexual violence and rape are used as weapons and systematic tools for ethnic cleansing to humiliate and annihilate an enemy (Cockburn, 2013; Luci, 2002). According to Cockburn (2013), "rape is a social, relational phenomenon, with complex meanings capable of being explored, analyzed, and understood" (p. 440). Rape, as a genocidal weapon, stems from the patriarchal idea of ethnicity where a child is thought to inherit the father's ethnicity, implying that if a Serb soldier rapes a Kosovar woman, the child would be a Serb. Moreover, since women are perceived as symbols of the family, giving birth to the enemy's child signifies the breaking of a family, and consequently the larger destruction of a nation (Nikolić- Ristanović, 2002). In addition, rape is used to send a message between men which indicates, "We can take and defile your most valued property" (Cockburn, 2013, p. 441). This reflects a common thread in most wars where rape is a result of distorted and normalized ideas of hegemonic masculinity in a militarized context, which may be inherently linked to pre-existing gender inequality and unequal power dynamics (Henry, 2014).

A cultural acceptance of violence against women places women at great risk. In wartime, the numbers of women battering, and domestic violence usually increase. According to Turpin (1998), this increase in domestic violence originates primarily from uncontrolled weapons during wartime as well as men's experiences in combat where they might express their post-combat frustration and aggressiveness toward the women in their lives (p. 86).

Women experience loss in forms of community, social structures, environmental destruction, loss of family and work, and so on (Turpin, 1998, p. 12). Loss impacts women's experiences in unique ways because of their roles as caretakers. With the loss of their spouses, women take on additional roles as providers for family members and even larger communities. With the environmental loss, women look after wounded soldiers when hospitals are demolished, and basic infrastructure is scarce (Turpin, 1998; Culcasi, 2019). Moreover, environmental loss affects women precisely because of their caretaking roles since women prepare food and secure water and fuel for their communities. When water is polluted and food is scarce, women walk for miles to find clean water, provide food, and even build shelters (Lorentzen and Turpin, 1998; Turpin, 1998; Sousa et al., 2014), activities that further hinder women's struggles for security and safety in wartime.

On War and Kosovar Women

I am a child and I look at my mother this morning as she removes the clothes from the line hanging over the warm stove and tosses them onto the thin foam mattress, which is adorned with blankets that smelled like cow manure when we were in the refugee camp in Deçan only a couple of days ago. This morning, she seems unusually silent. Although

no tears are streaming down her face, and there are no frantic movements around the house, I feel her sadness as she slowly folds the laundry, her gaze fixed on the window.

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The issue of wartime safety was prominent during the Kosovo War. The media portrayals of the Kosovar refugees streaming over the border captured the fact that the majority of people who were displaced, similar to other refugee populations, consisted of women and children, comprising around 80% of the group (McGrath, 2000; Mertus, 2000). Additionally, more than half of all families included pregnant or nursing women, and their medical needs were crucial, especially since they originated from Kosova's poorest area. Even though the challenges faced by the internally displaced families in Kosova were gendered, the solutions implemented only considered the needs and responsibilities of men. The overall image of the Kosovo War depicted decision-making being made in the public arena that excluded women, although decision-making had the most impact on them since they comprised most of the refugees (McGrath, 2000; Mertus, 2000). Women were once again absent from the decision-making structures even though they played an intrinsic role in individual and collective survival. This resulted in women not receiving the health and support they needed.

Mertus (2000) documented interviews with displaced Kosovar women. She portrayed their everyday struggles and showcased a lack of support for the severe stress that they were under from caring for their families and communities amidst the conflict. Her interviews conveyed stories varying from maltreated women in hospitals while giving birth to women being forced to give birth in makeshift hospitals in strangers' basements. In addition, women did not receive counseling or medical attention for sexual violence and the international aid communities did little to help women's concerns (Mertus, 2000, p. 45).

The repercussions of international errors in Kosova were dire for Kosovars, particularly for women and children who became the main targets of violence and were subsequently forced to leave their homes. Aid organizations were not equipped to handle the needs of the displaced individuals who had to seek refuge in countries like Macedonia and Albania. The living conditions in these countries were appalling, with no provision made to accommodate families. Macedonia even kept hundreds of thousands of refugees stranded in a no man's land at the border, with limited access to basic necessities like food, water, and healthcare (Mertus, 2000, p. 38). The officials also forcibly moved many refugees to Albania and other areas, leaving families with no choice but to abandon their belongings and flee in panic. The situation was chaotic, with children getting separated from their parents, and the authorities failing to provide adequate support, information, and sustenance to anyone (Mertus, 2000, p. 47).

Upon entering Macedonia, refugees were directed to overcrowded and unhygienic camps. and were prohibited from communicating with relatives located farther within the country. Despite the fact that a number of Kosovar refugees in Macedonia resided in temporary shelters, such as tents, some chose to stay with family members and received minimal international assistance. In addition, refugees reported harassment from local Macedonians, and local law enforcement failed to provide them with protection. Humanitarian organizations faced challenges due to direct obstructions by the government and indirect interference, primarily through complicated regulations governing foreign business registration.

The situation for refugees in Albania was somewhat similar to that in Macedonia (Mertus, 2000). The underdeveloped infrastructure of Albania and its difficult terrain

made it challenging for international humanitarian aid to provide help to the large influx of refugees crossing the Albanian border. Despite the efforts of NATO and other international forces, conditions in border camps remained poor. For instance, many displaced individuals chose to sleep in their tractors in muddy fields for fear of being relocated or losing their tractors, which represented their only remaining possessions. Border camps were disorganized and unsanitary. Toilets perpetually overflowed and were inoperative amidst additional unhealthy living conditions, such as limited access to clean water (Mertus, 2000, p. 48). In areas where no one had access to running water, the authorities were unable to provide it to the refugees. The refugees, most of whom were women and children lived in a variety of places, not just tents, including abandoned warehouses, workers' quarters, factories, and private accommodations. Camps run by foreign organizations generally provided better living conditions than those run by local municipalities, but regardless of the camp, living conditions were difficult due to factors such as heat, overcrowding, unhealthy water supplies, lack of privacy, inadequate recreational facilities, and lack of fresh food for children. These deficiencies made living conditions for refugees very bleak (Mertus, 2000, p. 48).

As refugees, for three weeks, my family set up camp in a large valley in the village of Isniq before moving to an abandoned house in Peja. Isniq, from afar, looked like a sea of blue tarps that as a child I had mistaken for the sea in Montenegro, where I was told we would be going to start a new life. The tractor, which transported us from Broliq to Isniq. During the day, the tractor turned into a multi-purpose room depending on our needs. It was a kitchen where women would store bread and milk and whatever food they could manage to prepare for the forty people who depended on them. It was a lactation room where pregnant women would hide to breastfeed their newborns. It was also hospital wing where women of my family would look after

people with minor wounds, like my cousin Muhamet, who had accidentally stepped on a pot filled with boiling milk, and got a third-degree burn. Muhamet was lucky, his burn didn't last for too long, partly because of the care he was getting from my aunts, partly because, at war, one had to heal quick since one had to travel often and far, mostly on foot, if the wished to stay alive.

While most of my uncles and my father had dispersed in the woods helping the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), my aunts, my mother, and my female cousins made sure that our life resembled the normalcy we had left behind in Broliq before the war began. The women of my family refused to take bread, the main source of nourishment in wartime, from the paramilitary soldiers because they feared they would poison and murder us. Instead, they baked bread for some thirty members of my family. They baked *gurabija* in makeshift ovens, secured water, and even milk for babies, and ensured children and elderly never went hungry. They organized in informal and invisible ways within the community in Isniq to help each other survive.

Organizing strategies from non-Western actors have started to flourish mainly in organizational communication literature, particularly in studies focusing on visibility/invisibility (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2010, 2012). However, most studies are still largely focused on a U.S.-centered view of visibility as positive and invisibility as nefarious (Cruz, 2015). A U.S.-centered focus might limit the normative ways of invisible organizing in precarious contexts like that of wartime.

Organizational Communication

Although the field of organizational communication is dynamic, the dominant discourse is still largely focused on the United States keeping the voices of marginalized populations in the periphery, as noted by Broadfoot and Munshi (2007). Munshi and McKie (2001) point out that *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication* (Jablin & Putnam, 2001) was primarily authored and reviewed by individuals based in the U.S. Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) contend that the field of organizational communication is constructed through collective imagination, since, within the larger global context, much of the research in the field of organizational communication is analyzed through the lens of the dominant Euro-American intellectual tradition. This approach prioritizes certain concepts, voices, and traditions while overlooking issues of inequality and exploitation within the academic community itself, which serves to reinforce and validate a specific form of reasoning that ultimately contributes to the continued subjugation, domination, and colonization of native, indigenous, and other non-dominant forms of knowledge and organization (Broadfoot and Munshi, 2007).

As such, it is important for organizational communication scholars to explore ways in which they may recover and integrate alternative rationalities, worldviews, and voices into their scholarly understanding of the processes of organizing within diverse contexts (Broadfoot and Munshi, 2007; Imas & Weston, 2012). Uncritically adopting the discourse and knowledge of mainstream Euro-American organizational communication scholarship comes with the risk of internalizing a specific way of navigating and understanding the world. To address this issue, Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) aim to foster a practice of "writing back to the center," whereby scholars from the periphery of organizational communication studies employ their own cultural perspectives and lenses on organizing practices, informed by their experiences and

epistemological frameworks, to critically engage with and potentially redefine commonly used theories and concepts within the field.

As a scholar coming from the Balkans region in the forgotten and often discredited Second World, taking a postcolonial and feminist approach to organizational communication, articulating the modes of organizing that Kosovar women employed to survive the Kosovo War, I aim to amplify the voices of women in the context of wartime as disenfranchised organizational actors (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020) and offer insurgent knowledge that challenges Western organizational theorizing. In the sections below, I offer a detailed description of my engagement with and my contributions to the field of feminist organizational communication, with a specific focus on marginal and alternative feminist ways of organizing.

Engaging with the Margins of Organizational Communication

In recent decades, the field of organizational communication has witnessed an increase in the representation of diverse voices particularly in areas of gender (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Mumby, 1996), race (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003), and globalization (Stohl & Cheney, 2001). According to George Cheney (2000), a renowned scholar in the field, "taking difference seriously means not only allowing the Other to speak but also being open to the possibility that the Other's perspective may come to influence or even supplant your own" (p. 140). Cheney (2000), like many scholars who engage with marginality, emphasizes the need for an open, reflexive, and inclusive approach toward diverse voices in organizational communication research.

My dissertation contributes to the recent trend in organizational communication that incorporates perspectives from marginalized and non-U.S. voices in an effort to

challenge the dominance of U.S.-centered theories in the field (Imas & Weston, 2012; Munshi et al., 2017; Shome & Hodge, 2002). According to Cruz and Sodeke (2020), examining the perspectives of those on the margins can provide valuable insights and help to incorporate these perspectives into theoretical explanations. Imas and Weston (2012) informed by Wacquant (2006) regard the concept of marginality as derogatory since it connotes an approach to organizing that is perceived to be inferior, illegitimate, and unacceptable by mainstream organizational practices rooted in the Western world. Nevertheless, marginality has become increasingly necessary and relevant. Exploring and drawing from alternative ideas may serve as a catalyst, not only rhetorically but also in practice, towards a discourse of organizing that stems from an understanding and meaning of unexplored or marginalized settings that have been ignored or denied a voice (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020; Imas & Weston, 2012).

Imas and Weston (2012) maintain that in engaging with marginality organizational communication scholars might learn values, discourses, and practices that promote a different kind of organizing from those who dwell on the periphery of organizational structures. This involves situating organizing, as grounded in solidarity and basic human rights, even under dangerous circumstances created by violence and crime. However, as Scheper-Hughes (2008) suggests, simply acknowledging and celebrating the everyday resilience of those who have been excluded and oppressed, who live and survive to tell their stories, is already a significant achievement in and of itself (p. 52). This type of insurgent knowledge is valuable and serves as a possibility for the generation of ideas for better decision-making and the creation of new democratic and participatory methods of organizing (Imas & Weston, 2012; Scheper- Hughes, 2008). It is also essential to recognize the significance of this generative knowledge especially as it connects individuals from marginalized communities across the globe and depicts how people

in non-Western places “feel, live, work and experience organization” (Imas & Weston, 2012, p. 208; Scheper- Hughes, 2008).

In this dissertation, my goal is to offer accounts of marginal organizational actors and perspectives from their organizing efforts in dangerous and precarious contexts such as wartime. Engaging with the ways in which Kosovar women communicatively organized for survival during the Kosovo War allows me to create a platform for their voices to be heard and organizing efforts to be appreciated by rendering them visible. Kosovar women were certainly vulnerable to the atrocities of war but were also agents who used their skills and knowledge to organize within their networks for survival and meet their responsibilities for the safety of wider communities. While, at times, I critique the field of organizational communication writ large for a limited engagement with the precarity of wartime, in this dissertation, I focus my efforts on extending current conversations within the field. I contribute to the discourse in feminist organizational communication where I see a rise in research exploring underrepresented populations, in hopes of inviting other scholars to explore gendered organizing in wartime, especially in the neglected region of the Balkans.

Feminist Organizational Communication

Following Buzzanell's (1994) call for feminist engagement, a significant body of research in organizational communication emerged with a focus on power and gender dynamics in various organizational contexts. This research explored topics such as sexual harassment, alternative organizational forms, masculinity and organizing, and the intersections of race, gender, organizing, and resistance (Buzzanell et al. 1997; Mumby, 1996; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). A notable shift in this scholarship was the move away

from viewing gender as a mere variable to adopting social constructionist approaches to studying gender, which allowed for a more nuanced and contextual analysis of gender dynamics in organizations (Cruz & Linabary, 2021; Pal & Nieto, 2023).

Scholars in this field of organizational communication have been considering feminist and egalitarian options for over twenty years to illuminate organizing endeavors outside of corporations or professional environments and foreground the perspectives of underrepresented groups in their academic work (Cruz & Linabary, 2021; Cruz, 2015; Linabary & Hamel, 2015). Yet, despite their potential, feminist organizational communication approaches have often failed to overcome certain obstacles and have even unintentionally reinforced the same problems they aimed to address and criticize (Cruz, 2015). One of these limitations is that feminist approaches frequently prioritize the viewpoints and experiences of affluent, white women in professional contexts (Cruz, 2015; Cruz & Sodeke, 2020; Cruz & Linabary, 2021). On the other hand, there has been an attempt at reflexivity in recent scholarship aimed to explore the past, present, and future of feminist approaches in organizational communication, acknowledging their potential benefits while also confronting their shortcomings and challenges (Cruz and Linabary, 2021).

Feminist organizational communication scholars have broadened our understanding of what constitutes "organizing." Specifically, they have reimagined organizational structures beyond the typical masculine, professional, and corporate settings to include various forms of feminist organizing such as for-profit feminist organizing, transnational feminist networks, feminist bureaucracies, and indigenous organizing (D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2011; Norander & Harter, 2012). These efforts have enriched the field by offering a plurality of voices who were largely underrepresented in this body of scholarship.

Despite the dynamism of feminist organizational communication, some voices remain in the periphery of the field if not absent and erased from the conversation, particularly voices of Black, African, and non-Western feminists (Cruz & Linabary, 2021; Pal & Nieto, 2023). Building on the work of liquid organizing (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020), I aim to stimulate feminist organizational conversations focusing on alternative modes of organizing by marginal organizational actors within the overlooked context of wartime. I believe that engaging with the context of wartime offers opportunities to further reimagine organizing in precarious and oppressive environments and conditions.

Care Work

Women perform 75% of the world's labor of care (Criado-Perez, 2019, p. 70). While the concept of care is widely understood and used in our societies, it remains on the periphery of academic conversations and analysis. Ibnouf (2020) defines care as "an activity essential for the sustenance of life" (p. 53). Care is the provision of time, attention, and support to meet the amalgamation of physical, mental, and social needs of others (Engle et al. 1999; Kröger, 2009). For feminist care ethicists, it is also a political concept that deeply affects and is affected by existing intersectional structures of power and oppression (Tronto, 1993; Robinson, 2011). It regards responsibility as the foundation of our existence (Sevenhuijsen et al., 2003).

Rummery and Fine (2012, as cited in Ibnouf, 2020) identified three core tenets of care. First, care is perceived as a relational concept, "personal concern for the well-being of one or more others" (p. 53). Second, it is understood as an activity, "…a form of labor, tending to the needs of another" (p. 53). Third, it is "a social relationship which serves to distinguish care from other forms of work" (p. 53) Care is thus a trinity: "Relational,

practical and moral simultaneously" (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 54). Acknowledgment of need and tending to it are crucial elements of care work which is driven by practices and values (Held, 2006). Care work has many connotations. It can be understood as, "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto 1995, p. 21). Or "time-consuming and physically demanding work" (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 55). It is often distinguished from other types of work because of the direct relationship "…with a sense of duty, responsibility, and love/affection, that is, it is often viewed as an emotionally driven occupation" (Stuart, 2014, as cited in Ibnouf, 2020, p. 54). Investigating care, as work, has significant implications for our understanding of labor, value, globalization, and the economy.

According to Robinson (2011), care, from a global perspective, constitutes dynamics of power that are determined by gender, class, and race. Care work, as a gendered activity mostly performed by women, holds a lower value in the global labor economy in comparison to paid occupations assumed by men. Therefore, women carry the burden of unpaid care work, which includes the physical, emotional, social, and financial problems of their families and communities to ensure their existence and flourishing. Thus, this work cannot stand at the periphery any longer. Care, analyzed through the intersections of gender, class, and race, highlights structures of inclusion and exclusion and influences the social institutional contexts that shape the patterns of caregivers and receivers (Kröger, 2009).

Exploring care work from the gendered lens of the private/public divide echoes the lack of attention this type of work has garnered in the global economy. Stensöta (2011) argues that since women's emotions and care "belong" in the private sphere, even though care must be recognized as a public policy concern as the pillar of which societies stand to establish life and

well-being, decisions of the public sphere are ultimately left to men (p. 4). Moreover, Robinson (2011) has documented "the centrality of practices of care to the livelihoods of households and the workings of the global political economy" (p. 11). Due to the centrality of care in the global political economy, the modes in which we think about and explain care and the acts of caregiving must be further examined and interrogated. Caregiving can be defined as, "a set of actions one does on behalf of another individual who is unable to do those actions for himself or herself "(Hermanns and Mastel-Smith, 2012, as cited in Ibnouf, 2020, p. 56). Caregivers, on the other hand, are defined as "people who are under obligation to care because of their close kinship or emotional bond with the care recipients" (Schofield et al. 1998, as cited in Ibnouf, 2020, p. 56). This means care is given due to moral responsibility for kinship and family and falls mostly on women due to gendered societal norms.

Feminist care ethicists, for over two decades, have explored the femininization of care, with most feminists foregrounding women's work as family caregivers and highlighting the burden of this sort of work and the moral values ascribed to it, which result in furthering women's already existing marginalized positions in global politics and economies (Ferrant et al., 2014; Eyben, 2012). Marks et al. (2002) assert that caregivers immerse themselves "in the noble aspirations to care for and reduce economic, physical, and emotional burdens for their families and community" (p. 4). Women perform care work to maintain the gendered expectations that society has placed upon them. Ibnouf (2020) asserts, "These norms and values are deeply ingrained in women that it takes active awareness to recognize them on a daily basis" (p. 58). Unpaid care work further exacerbates gender inequalities, especially during wartime when the routines

change and women have to make sure to provide security and safety for their family members and communities and take on the role of a provider on top of their ongoing roles as caregivers.

Feminist Ethics of Care Work in Wartime

Women's unpaid care work during wartime is perceived as "an extension of their regular household duties" rather than a conscious commitment to ensure survival and peace (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 9). The narrative of care as a practice that women embody due to "biological" factors and not as a constructed gendered norm that we socialize women into needs to change. In Robinson's (2011) words, "How we think about care—who is entitled to care and on what terms, who is responsible for care, how care is valued and remunerated—governs the decisions that are made regarding the nature of care at the household, community, state, and transnational levels" (Robinson, 2011, p. 4). This means the change in the narrative of care will foster change in how care is performed and valued and by whom.

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

> A specialized activity in wartime that is difficult to research, but one that makes women a specific kind of protagonist whose knowledge and perspective are necessary to better understand the nature of armed conflicts and the structures that contribute to survival and

well-being of the communities during the war and in post-armed conflict conditions. (p. 59)

For Ibnouf (2020), wartime care work includes women's essential day-to-day arrangements, tasks, and organizing properties that offer emotional, physical, and mental support. This includes care for family and community members, for the sick, the wounded, and the dying, cleaning, cooking, preparing to flee the conflict, standing in solidarity with others and creating networks to maintain cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being whilst striving to minimize and ease pain and suffering (Ibnouf, 2020; Bakker, 2007; Orozco & Leiras, 2017).

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

> The static conceptualization of certain individuals and groups as dependent or —women and children, developing countries, the poor—on empirical grounds...Women's care work can be empowering, and women's strategies for coping with poverty and care deficits

> demonstrate their resilience and active resistance in the face of economic and social obstacles. (p. 10)

At the focus of the feminist ethics of care framework lies the interdependence of human beings and critical interrogation of the patriarchal private/public division. This dissertation follows Fiona Robinson's approach toward an ethics of care that claims that its aim is "… not to uncover a new or more complete or better truth" but to "create a set of ideal types that allow us to 'see' a different world" (Robinson, p. 17). This means, in my dissertation, I offer stories of Kosovar women's provisions of care during wartime to help people witness care being enacted under unusual conditions and understand its implications. Care, in wartime, lies in moral frameworks emphasizing responsibility and relationships, diverging from an emphasis on rights and rules. Care isn't a formal and abstract system of thought, but permeates the fabric of women's day-to-day lives and is indivisible from contextual circumstances. It is anchored in the everyday activities of life rather than adhering to a set of universal principles.

Transnational Feminism

The feminist ethics of care framework and the transnational feminist framework share numerous similarities, particularly in their emphasis on relationships and global connections, their criticism of universalism, and their recognition of the importance of locality and plurality of voices. Both perspectives prioritize contextual understanding. Feminist ethics of care emphasizes the contextual nature of ethical decision-making within relationships, while transnational feminism highlights the significance of considering socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts globally. Additionally, both frameworks acknowledge intersectionality in identities and experiences. Feminist ethics of care recognizes that intersecting factors like gender, race, and class influence care responsibilities. Similarly, transnational feminism adopts an intersectional

approach, addressing how gender issues intersect with other forms of oppression globally. Lastly, both frameworks share a commitment to political engagement and social change. Feminist ethics of care advocate for a reevaluation of societal values to recognize and support care work, while transnational feminism is inherently political, striving to address global inequalities and advocate for women's rights worldwide.

The term transnational emerged "as a way to name the dramatically increasing flows of people, things, images, and ideas across the borders of nation-states in an era of 'globalization'" (Conway, 2019, p. 43). Transnational feminist approaches emerged in 1980s with scholars attempting to address global feminism and its neglect of inequality and differences between women (Fernandes, 2013). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan coined the term "transnational feminism" in 1994 to offer an alternative to "global feminism" (Briggs, 2016, p. 992). They argued that much of feminist theory prevents an engagement with those "outside the West," thus reproducing a hegemonic West.

Chandra Mohanty, for instance, argued that global feminism was concerned with an apolitical understanding of "universal sisterhood, which overlooked the ways in which women's specific locations, identities, and political practices were embedded within transnational inequalities—particularly those linked to colonial relationships of power and structures of global capitalism" (Mohanty, 2003, as cited in Fernandes, 2013, p. 13). As Desai asserts, abstract universals erasure difference, which is in and of itself an oppressive act (Desai, 2015, p. 124).

There have been continuous debates since the field's articulation in mid-1990s in regard to the term's dissemination in feminist writing, representation, significance, and potential to obscure and exclude (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010; Chowdhury, 2011; Desai,

2015; Dufour et al., 2014; Fernandes, 2013; Patil, 2016; Sampaio, 2004; Suchland, 2011). Transnational feminist scholars actively engage in epistemological shifting from an imperialist model of knowledge production towards a collaborative one that serves to decolonize knowledge generation and research (Falcón, 2016, p. 174). Scholars illuminate sociocultural factors that impact power differences, especially colonialism and neocolonialism, global capitalism, and economic structures.

Transnational feminist theory and praxis emphasize intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, social activism and justice, and collaboration and seek to disrupt universalist notions of "women and womanhood" by bringing attention to the differences and inequalities between women around the world and their distinct oppressions, exploitations, and privileges (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Due to the inherent differences in women around the world, transnational feminist scholars aim to foster transnational solidarity and collaboration between feminists in various parts of the world who share the same convictions that differences are foundations for activism.

Some of the core tenets of transnational feminist research are: a) practicing reflexivity, b) intersectional lenses, c) defining global and transnational feminisms inclusively, d) border crossing, e) agency and resistance, f) commitment to decolonization of theory, knowledge, and practice, g) building collaborations, and h) centralizing theories and practices that are geared towards social change and critical consciousness (Enns et al., 2021, p. 13). The tenets I find most crucial for my work, and which I will elaborate on in-depth throughout this dissertation are a) reflexivity, b) agency and resistance, c) commitment to the decolonization of theory, knowledge, and practice, d) local/global binaries and border crossing.

In this literature review, I depicted contextual knowledge that is important in gaining a better understanding of my dissertation and the scholarly conversations that I aim to contribute

to. In particular, I focused on the origins of the Kosovo War, women's experiences at war, as well as women's organizing properties, conversations within the field of organizational communication, as well as within the feminist ethics of care framework, and transnational feminism. In the section below I highlight the methods that I employ in this dissertation to help answer my research questions pertaining to Kosovar women's lived experiences during the Kosovo War and their communicative organizing properties.

CHAPTER THREE: POURING LIVES INTO STORIES OVER A CUP OF COFFEE IN PRISHTINA

Bridging the Life Story and the Research Story

Even though their labor during the war is what kept a generation alive, the Kosovar Women's stories of war, as separate from the stories of the combatants of the Kosovo Liberation Army, have been overlooked and overshadowed. In this chapter, I highlight the methods that I used to collect the stories of Kosovar women and detail my process of analyzing and interpreting them.

As a Kosovar who lived through the war surrounded by the strong works of women, I know we owe our survival and liberation to the women in Kosova. It is because of the women in my family that some 40 members of my family are alive to this day. It is because of their sacrifices and the selfless care they poured into every one of us that we survived. It is because they starved themselves, offering the last morsels of food to children. And it is because of their Albanian songs and fables and hope and reassurance that my family and I felt a sense of normalcy in an environment that was anything but normal.

Their voices, which I once perceived as loud and boisterous, became a powerful testament to their survival tactics during the war—the women in my family were loud as to drown out the noise of airplanes and bombs. Even before the war, their loudness was a defiance against oppression and ethnic cleansing, a way to ensure they were heard in a world that continuously strived to silence them. In the echoes of their voices lies a profound truth—the

resilience of women who found strength in the face of adversity. A strength that I witnessed over and over again in the stories of all the women I interviewed for this project.

In this chapter, I outline the process of data collection and analysis, and explain the use of autoethnography and in-depth interviews, as tools of inquiry. I end this chapter with a reflection on being an insider-outsider—a child of war who now returns home as a researcher. The reflection transitions to the next chapter that foregrounds the lifeworlds or the day-to-day lived experiences and narratives of Kosovar women.

Habermas (1989) argues that "the lifeworlds and voices of marginalized classes tend to be 'privatized' by being denied public recognition" (as cited in Jackson, 2002, p. 23). Sharing Kosovar women's stories, their private experiences, and meanings will serve as a starting point toward the reclamation of the public sphere, which Kosovar women were denied after the war. A narrative approach is relevant to my dissertation because, as Frank (2010) asserts, it helps people construct frameworks for their experiences, "give form—temporal and spatial orientation, coherence, meaning, intention, and especially boundaries—to lives that inherently lack form" (p. 2). Essentially, this means that my dissertation will help Kosovar women to have a platform to for their memories and stories of wartime, which creates cohesive frameworks of their experiences to be able to narratively process the trauma and torture they have undergone at the time.

In my "Introduction to Research Methods" course, in the first semester of my master's degree, I found myself lost in a sea of methods too foreign for me to understand. I was introduced to textual analysis, content analysis, quantitative methods, and critical methods, and fleetingly heard about qualitative methods too, but I didn't understand what

they did either. In my undergraduate program in Kosova, I had only been exposed to (quasi) quantitative methods. We did one survey in one class, and I was told that was it.

In my "Qualitative Methods" course, in the second semester of my master's degree, I understood that was not it. I remember I read an article for that class, Keith Berry's "The Ethnographic Choice," where he had beautifully written that when researchers used methodological practices that were meant for them, they would feel at home. "If they used other methodological practices, those practices would feel strange and weird, kind of like "cold homes that are awfully distant" (Berry, 2011, p. 173). Those lines stayed with me for a long time. I had only been introduced to "Cold homes that [were] awfully distant" I thought to myself, as I continued reading Berry's article.

In my "Narrative Inquiry" course, in the second semester of my Ph.D. degree, I had the chance to take the class with Dr. Berry himself. Through class discussions about the ways stories change us and reflections on the stories that comprise our lives, delving into the books of Freeman, Frank, and Bochner, I came to learn about "The narrative turn," and about stories as a way of living and making a narrative self, of bearing witness and advocacy, and of connecting people into collectivities (Frank, 2013). Two years after I had been briefly introduced to narrative approaches and more specifically, autoethnography, I came to realize that I had finally found a home within a method.

Autoethnography

"New ethnography" writing, such as autoethnography, encourages the researcher to delve into the "truth" of experiences. It situates the author's self within the context of others (Goodall, 2000). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto)

in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273). It is "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text "(Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 6).

Autoethnography centers on personal experience and writing to examine larger cultural practices, structures, and communities, extend existing research, open up to vulnerability, and evoke a response from the reader (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). Autoethnographers focus on *meaning* and *interpretations*. Meanings touch on an individual's sense-making process and on how they understand their everyday experiences, whereas interpretations refer to the ways individuals draw inferences about their lives (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). Autoethnographers engage meaningful experiences, events, or epiphanies of their life and explore how these moments intersect and how meaning is made and discovered (Denzin 2014). For example, as an autoethnographer, I have been able to investigate my own lived experience as a five-year-old child during the Kosovo War and examine larger implications of children's experiences in wartime and the trauma that lingers in them and can be passed intergenerationally long after conflicts end.

By using the self as data, autoethnographers resist "claims to objectivity" and, instead, value "subjectivity and researcher-participant intersubjectivity" (Foster, McAllister, & O'Brien, 2006, p. 47). They play dual roles as researchers and participants in their studies, and therefore further challenge the hegemony of objectivity or "the detached observer" present in canonical research. Thus, they hold a social constructivist and subjectivist stance that refers to reality as "constituted by actors who attach meanings to phenomena, typically through interactions" (Putnam & Banghart, 2017, p. 5). For

Goodall (2000), this approach “provides perspective by incongruity” (p. 75). The world cannot be depicted “exactly as it is” unfiltered through our lens and interpretive schema (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The world is not out there, waiting to be “uncovered” and written about objectively but it is rather something that is “constructed” out of interactions with it (Goodall 2000). The world is filtered through the lens of a human and influenced by the perception of a human, thus narrative approaches bear both the strengths and the limitations of the feelings of a human (Richardson, 2005). Most importantly, autoethnographers bring their values and assumptions into their research sites and allow them to guide their research processes. They acknowledge and welcome subjectivity, emotions, and their entanglement in research rather than attempting to “hide from these matters and assume they don’t exist” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 274).

Autoethnography must be distinguished from genres such as autobiography or memoir, which focus solely on personal stories. An autoethnographer must look at experience analytically and employ scholarly research to construct meaning out of personal experiences and connect them to larger cultural ones. What makes an autoethnographer’s story valid is that they possess theoretical and methodological tools as a researcher (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). They must use these tools to analyze their experience but should also connect their experience to facets of cultural experience, and in doing so, show characteristics of a culture to insiders and outsiders (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). They distinguish cultural experience through the use of data, field notes, interviews, or artifacts and then present its characteristics by employing facets of storytelling and “showing and telling". Consequently, an autoethnographer produces meaningful texts that, unlike traditional research, reach non-academic audiences, thus increasing the

possibility of personal and social change for larger numbers of people (Goodall, 2000; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

I use autoethnography as a way of collecting stories to help me, my participants, and the readers of this dissertation to interpret the world. Stories can deal with human trouble, thus facilitating positive change in people as they probe the construction of frameworks to process events. For instance, Frank (2013) maintains that illness leads to a loss of the "destination and map" that had previously guided a person's life, therefore, to deal with the loss (and their illness), patients turn to narrative as a means of helping them "think differently" by "hearing themselves share their stories, absorbing others' reactions, and experiencing their stories being shared" (p. 1). Stories, then, provide people with a guidance system that directs attention within a "blooming, buzzing confusion" of the world people are cast into (Frank, 2013, p. 46). Similarly, people who undergo war need to share their stories for the same reasons. War is disruptive and carries the potential to drastically change people's lives. Sharing war stories helps the survivors create new frameworks to make meaning out of their experiences and to process the atrocities and the loss that have become part of their lives.

Second, I use autoethnography as a method that allows for stories to serve as vehicles of bearing witness. Bearing witness assumes a responsibility for telling the story of what happened. So, the witness offers a story that is generally silenced or unrecognized. Such stories have an element of a testimony (Frank, 2013), they act as resistance against the oppressors' silencing. René Jara (as cited in Denzin, 2014) describes testimonies as:

> emergency narratives that involve, a problem of repression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or simply survival…The voice that speaks to the reader through the text takes the form of an "I" that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention. (p. 668)

Thus, the marginalized groups, the oppressed, and those who have witnessed violence begin to "regain their voice" and speak truth to power. When there's a narrator, there's an audience ready to hear the story, or "jolted into listening to it" (Denzin, 2014, p. 668). Frank states, "Taking the other's perspective is a necessary step in constructive social change" (2013, p. 94). Through this widening of the circle of lived experience using story sharing, I aim to enable the dissemination of Kosovar women's stories through generations and cultures, shaping and reshaping our individual and collective identities.

Finally, autoethnography helps envision possible futures and reimagine new normals. Possible futures are constructed in collectivity. Collective stories connect a personal story to a larger group (Richardson, 2005). Narratives, then, bring people together and call on them to assert common identities. As Denzin (2014) articulated, "For narratives to flourish, there must be a community to hear… For communities to hear, there must be stories that weave together their history, their identity, their politics. The one—community—feeds upon and into the other—story" (p. 669). Communities, thus, are strengthened by narratives, which seek to broaden their audiences. Through the sharing of Kosovar women's stories and the strengthening of our communities, I hope to make social change possible and write Kosovar women into the production of our Kosovar history.

One autoethnographic dissertation that specifically motivates my project is written by Robin M. Boylorn, an alumnus of the Department of Communication at the University of South

Florida (USF), titled "Southern Black Women: Their Lived Realities". Boylorn's (2009) dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of ten women in her community in North Carolina and highlights their day-to-day lives and the construction of meaning through storytelling. Boylorn, as part of this community of rural black women, carries an insider-outsider standpoint and discusses the ethical implications of such work. She translates the data into stories about rural black women's lives. Similarly, I plan to translate my data from the interviews with women in Kosova into stories about Kosovar women's lived experiences during the Kosovo War. My project will extend conversations in autoethnography regarding lived experience, writing as a therapeutic tool, and insider/outsider ethics in research. In my project, I aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Kosovar women communicate their lived experiences during the Kosovo War?

RQ2. How did Kosovar women communicatively organize for survival during the Kosovo War?

Data Collection

I felt a surge of anxiety before meeting Ajkuna. That was my first in-person interview, and I fretted not only about the process itself but also about how I looked. I wanted to present myself as credible yet approachable, and to create a safe and comfortable space for our conversation. Instead, when Ajkuna texted me, I was wearing a pair of boyfriend jeans and a sweater, casually sipping coffee with a friend who was visiting me in town. Ajkuna asked if we could meet at her house later that day, although I was planning to meet with women in coffee shops or parks in Prishtina.

The anxiety worsened as I didn't think I looked professional enough. I was afraid I'd give Ajkuna the wrong impression, and worried if I looked the part of a researcher or if I was merely

exploiting her story for my research. I asked my friend for reassurance but still, I teetered on the brink of canceling the meeting. Eventually, guilt over wasting Ajkuna's time made me go through with it.

I apologized for my casual jeans and sweater when I arrived at Ajkuna's doorstep, only to find that she welcomed me warmly and was quite unbothered by my appearance. Inside, she treated me like family. She introduced me to her husband, her son, and her two daughters, who all sat beside me in the living room asking me questions about my family, school, and the U.S. Ajkuna had prepared "krofne," a traditional pastry that tastes like a salty donut, and served Russian tea—a gesture of hospitality in Kosova. I chatted with her family for what seemed like an hour or two over krofne and Russian tea and thought back on all the books I had read about interacting with participants and building rapport and how all of them had failed to prepare me for this.

Ajkuna's daughter brewed some Turkish coffee for me before the interview started, and some four or five hours later, Ajkuna thanked me for giving her my time and walked me off to the end of the street.

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For this dissertation, I employ in-depth narrative interviews to explore Kosovar women's lived experiences during the Kosovo War. Narrative interviews help retrospective sensemaking and the shaping of past experience (Pollock, 2005; Simic, 2017). I pay special attention to not only the description of lived experiences but also the expression of emotions and interpretations. I use in-depth interviews to help me create a framework for understanding what the war experiences of women in my family and other women in Kosova must have been like. As an adult, I have realized that I have only inherited the war stories of the men in my family, and thus,

have been conditioned to think that only men can be war heroes and martyrs whereas women are mostly passive participants in wars. Goodall (2006) maintains that "what we inherit narratively from our forebears provides us with a framework for understanding our identity through theirs" (p. 497). He maintains that we do not always inherit a sense of completion. What we inherit, at times, could also be "unfinished business" (p. 497). When we inherit partial stories, it is our responsibility to finish them, to make them whole. In the third year of my program, I am confident enough in my mental, emotional, and academic capacities to attempt to fill the holes in my narrative inheritance. Thus, I am prepared to observe and take note of what war has meant to my family members, especially women, as well as conduct interviews with other women in Kosova to understand their lives at war.

For this project, I collected preliminary data in a face-to-face modality over twelve weeks, in the summer of 2021, in Prishtina, Kosova, after I obtained approval from USF's Institutional Research Board. The participants recruited were Kosovar women above the age of 40 who were survivors of the Kosovo War. Knowledge of participants' gender and age was important because my dissertation aims to explore women's overlooked experiences during the Kosovo War, particularly women who were over the age of 18 during the war.

In the first round of interviews, in the summer of 2021, I recruited the first three of the eight participants from personal experience and online/social media advertisements. I recruited the rest of the participants through a snowball approach based on the first three participants who were willing to guide me to potential new subjects. I contacted the participants through social media. Participants were given a detailed

summary of the research study and were asked if they wanted to join and share their story. They were informed of the purpose of the study, their involvement in it, the possible risks and discomforts, their identifying information, and how it will be used. They were also allowed to contact me at any time with any questions, suggestions, or concerns they might have. They were notified participation is voluntary and there is no compensation. Upon agreeing to join the study, the first three participants were asked to play the dual role of an interview subject and a guide to potential new subjects. I texted or called the participants the following couple of days to arrange a meeting site, date, and time for the face-to-face interviews based on the participants' availability and level of comfort with the site.

Before the face-to-face interview and data collection, I obtained the informed participant's consent. I prepared the consent form in the Albanian language and used technical explanations that were appropriate and easily understood by the participants. The participants were given the chance to ask questions about the project and their participation. I also informed them that they can leave the interview at any time without any penalty or consequence. The participants then gave their consent verbally.

The interviews were conducted in Albanian, the native language of all participants. The Albanian interviews were transcribed and then translated into English for data analysis. I warned the participants that recounting some experiences may temporarily increase emotional distress. However, I also reassured them that they can choose what to disclose, not answer a question, or stop study participation altogether. Additionally, at the conclusion of the study, I provided support resources for any of the study participants to seek support on their own time.

At the beginning of the interviews, I spent some time talking with them to become familiar with each other's backgrounds and create a safe and comfortable space for them to share

their stories. The interviews were minimally structured because the goal was to facilitate the flow of the conversation instead of managing or having any control over it. The in-depth narrative interviews had three components. First, I asked a broad question that allowed the participants to reflect on their lived experiences. Second, I asked follow-up questions to get more clarification on the events that they talked about. I probed them to generate more detail when needed. I used different ways of probing questions, i.e., tell-me-more probe, the echo probe (softly repeating a phrase spoken by the participants), the silent probe (waiting silently until they realized that more explanation is preferred), and the uh-huh probe (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). Third, I asked them if they had any closing thoughts or if they would like to give any advice to people who have similar shared experiences to theirs. Throughout the interviews, I took notes in the form of field notes. I also recorded the interviews via a voice recorder or my mobile phone. Interviews lasted between 60 to 120 minutes.

Similarly, in the winter of 2023, I also spoke to an additional seven women about their lived experiences in wartime in a face-to-face and virtual modality. We conversed over coffee in small coffee shops in Prishtina, the capital of Kosova, or over the phone with the women who lived in the more rural areas. Just like the first time I had conducted these interviews, this second time I also had mixed feelings. I was grappling with heartbreak over how difficult their lives must have been, joy that they are alive and willing to voice their horrendous memories and experiences for the world to remember, and anxiety and doubt over my skills as a researcher. Am I good enough to tell these stories? Am I compassionate enough to sit with these women and let the power of their experiences change me and who I am, not only in academia but in the world writ large?

Just like Anzaldúa (2010), I sometimes believed writing was unnatural for me. Just like Anzaldúa, I sometimes did anything I could to pull it off. Anzaldúa (2010) writes:

> Why does writing seem so unnatural for me? I'll do anything to postpone it- empty the trash, answer the telephone…How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe that we can. What have we to contribute, to give? Our own expectations condition us. Does not our class, our culture, as well as the white man tell us writing is not for women such as us. (Anzaldúa, & Keating, 2010, p. 11)

Pelias (2018) asserts that we write and are brought to the page because we need to know and to figure something out: "We need to know what we think, what we feel, what something means… To sympathize with the pain and suffering that has been endured and to envision what can be done to make life better (p. 80). Truth be told, even while I make progress self-doubt finds ways to affect me. As I reflected on the interviews in the paragraphs above, I wondered if I was enough of an academic to tackle an important and sensitive topic like this war. I was scared I would not be able to bear witness to these stories, to share them with the world, and remain unchanged. But then I thought of Audre Lorde's (1979) words, "When I use my strength in the service of my vision, it makes no difference whether or not I am afraid" (para. 2), and I regained my voice even as I was afraid to speak.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis and narrative analysis to engage with the data from my dissertation. I conducted the analysis inductively, allowing for the emergence of themes from the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories based on my research questions. Initially, I transcribed the interviews in Albanian and then read them before translating them into English. I read them several times to get a general sense of the data. After, I translated them into English,

read them again, and generated an initial list of line-by-line codes. Then, I reviewed these codes numerous times and collated them into potential themes, and later reviewed the themes and generated a thematic 'mind map.' After the broader initial themes emerged, I engaged in the refinement of these themes, and finally the defined and named themes.

The narrative analysis consisted of retelling stories from participants' data according to the themes that emerged during the thematic analysis. Narrative analysis examines how individuals construct and make sense of their experiences through stories. By analyzing narratives, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how individuals make sense of their experiences and how they construct their identities (Riessman, 2008). I conducted the analysis by identifying the key storylines that emerged from the data and examining how participants constructed and conveyed these stories. I analyzed the participants' stories and then organized them into a framework that made sense to me as a reader.

To conduct narrative analysis, I familiarized myself with the transcripts both in Albanian and English to understand the content and structure of the narratives. I looked for crucial aspects like events, experiences, meanings, reactions, explanations, excuses, metaphors etc. I took note of thematic points or transitions between themes. I also noted any interruptions or discontinuities that may contradict themes. Then, I identified emotive language, imagery, metaphors, and passages that indicate the emotions of the participant, and then coded thematic ideas and developed a broad coding frame. I connected the thematic ideas with the previous codes that emerged from the thematic analysis and finally engaged with broader literature and theories in the field.

Finally, I produced a chapter with narratives based on my participants' lived experiences that detail the themes and subthemes emergent from the data. Robin M. Boylorn's (2009) dissertation titled, "Southern Black Women: Their Lived Realities" guided my storying of these interviews. Like Boylorn, I felt that writing these women's experiences into a story allowed them to participate in the process beyond interviews. I wanted their stories to be the lifeblood of this dissertation and written in an evocative and accessible language, rather than a traditional academic jargon they wouldn't understand. Because I believed the academic tone would interfere with the power of these narratives, I dedicated one chapter of my analysis to restorying my participant's experiences and letting the stories speak for themselves, as theories about living and surviving, and another chapter conducting an analysis using the extensive research on the field to help answer my research questions. In seeking some balance in representation, I was, once again, guided by Boylorn's (2009) words:

> It would be useless and futile to collect their experiences with the hope of magnifying and centering their lives if they themselves could not benefit from or translate the meaning. If the text was written in such a way that they could not or would not want to read their own stories, what would be the point"? (p. 79)

In other words, what would be the point of bearing witness to war stories if they did not remain true to the tone of the storytellers and resemble the lives that the survivors lived? Through the stories that I collected, I was also writing my own story as a survivor.

Ethics, Methods, and Reporting Data

As I think on the topic of ethics throughout this dissertation, I, am once again inspired by Boylorn, specifically by her pre-conference lecture at the fourth annual Doing Autoethnography conference back in 2014 where she addresses the ethics within the process of doing

autoethnographic work. Throughout this dissertation, I recognize I am privileged to be the authorial voice in this work, and I understand the importance of being mindful of any potential "blind spots" that may arise because I identify so closely with the women I'm researching.

Therefore, in the process of interviewing my participants as well as writing down their stories, I continuously reflected on the question of "How will I engage with relational ethics as an ethics of "care" and "dignity" in my study" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4)?

In this dissertation, I create a space to situate narratives that are otherwise absent in the academy and to change the ongoing narrative of women as victims of war to one of women as agents of change and key contributors to survival during the Kosovo War. I push back against assumptions about women in wartime, especially pertaining to my geopolitical location, Kosova. Therefore, in the following chapters, I portray Kosovar women and their realities of war as personal, nuanced, and fluid, rather than draw rigid general conclusions about all women in Kosova. I am mindful of the possibility of portraying Kosovar women only as heroines of war who are kind-hearted, care for their communities, and are highly resilient, thus risking telling "a single story" about their identities and experiences, and even risking romanticizing their atrocious and traumatic experiences of wartime.

Thus, to be as ethical as possible, I am committed to offering accurate representations of the women I have interviewed and to staying true to their stories. One way in which I do this is by rewriting their stories in a tone that is true to the interviews I've collected. I respect the lack of cohesion and clarity in many of my participant's stories and I do my best to hold on to those characteristics as I conduct my chapters of

analysis and depict the interviews in a story format. To the best of my abilities, I preserve the voices and language of participants, attempting to stay true to their rhythms, silences, moods, and their own reactions to their memories of war.

Despite facing similar struggles, I am mindful that Kosovar women do not necessarily have the same experiences and do not make meaning of those experiences in the same way collectively. However, as a group that I am studying, because they have undergone similar patterns of experiences, then certain themes might serve to characterize their standpoints in wartime. Ultimately, it is important to note that these standpoints are not homogenous, therefore, differences in individual experiences exist and create a variety of experiential knowledge that shapes how Kosovar women individuals resisted oppressive structures in wartime and how they made meanings out of it.

One of the goals of my work has been to interact with my participants in ways that honor, care for, and support them as they look back and restory the tragedies they have endured. One of the ways I've shown this care and support is by having my participants guide the conversation. Thus, I've framed the interviews as "give-and-take conversations" with Kosovar women rather than structured research interviews on Kosovar women (Ellis, 2017, p. 56). Throughout our conversations, I've reminded myself how relational ethics of care emphasizes the role of connection and feeling and I've asked myself, "what is going on here, what is needed to make this interaction go well, to honor the other person and bring more love and kindness into what I do and who I am as a researcher" (Ellis, 2017, p. 55).

As a result, I met the women in places they were most comfortable in, at their own houses, in little coffee shops in their neighborhoods, or at parks away from other people and noise. I listened to them speak of topics that were not related to my dissertation because I

believed they needed somebody to kindly lend them an ear. This also helped me better understand what is appropriate to ask, how to follow up on their stories, and when to back off, and it made me aware of questions and topics that might make a participant feel too vulnerable. I offered compassion and consolation in the moments they would get too emotional and burst into tears, or a moment of silence, a pat on the back, a hug, depending on what they were comfortable with.

Throughout the interviews, I had to navigate the tension that came from feeling like an insider as well as an outsider (Collins, 1986). As an insider, I was a woman from Kosova who was interested in asking a few questions about the war. I felt as if my identity as a Kosovar is what helped my participants open up to me. Because we have a shared past and I am familiar with their culture, it was easy for me to relate to their stories and understand the context much better than if I were a foreign researcher. I was familiar with the towns and cities they spoke about as well as the streets and landmarks of Prishtina. In the instances when I could nod at them to signal that I knew what they were referring to, I felt the most like an insider.

On the other hand, my identity as a researcher, especially one studying at a university in the U.S., is what created a distance between me and the women I talked to and resulted in me being an outsider, but one who is more respected than a fellow Kosovar. From what I've observed growing up in Kosova, ever since NATO forces liberated us from Serbia, there has been an utter gratefulness, love, and respect for people who come from the U.S. We treat North American individuals as heroes, even if they had nothing to do with NATO's intervention, even if they didn't even know where Kosova was. In their eyes, I passed for a North American, so I was deserving of all of their

kindness and praise. In moments when I was given more praise than what I thought I deserved, I felt uncomfortable and tried to say or do something that would highlight my identity as a Kosovar rather than a researcher in the U.S. academy. For instance, when they praised me for pursuing my education abroad, I deflected and talked about my education in Kosova, as an attempt to bridge a power gap between us. I wished the participants to feel that they were working with me rather than perceive me as this foreign researcher who was researching them. I wanted them to feel like my research partners, not my subjects. Therefore, I've included their voices as raw and unfiltered in the analysis chapters rather than solely analyzing them and coming to a conclusion about what their stories mean.

Reflexivity, Decoloniality, Agency, and Resistance

To conduct compassionate and ethical research, I've used the transnational feminist tenets of reflexivity, decoloniality, agency, and resistance as I explore the lived experiences of Kosovar women who survived the Serb genocide, political violence, and oppression, and examine how they organized for survival during the Kosovo War.

First, reflexivity contributes to an interrogation of my positionality as I embark on this dissertation marathon. As a Kosovar woman/researcher, reflexivity enables me continuously to question my identities as an "outsider" and "insider" in the research process and interaction with my participants, and to be mindful of the privileges that I bring to the interviews and research practices as a researcher from the Global North but with familial and community roots in Kosova, which is neither part of the Global North nor part of the South. Reflexivity allows me to engage in ethical research and representational work of my participants to avoid a monolithic account of Kosovar women's experiences and organizing efforts at war which erases difference and situated lived experience. Through reflexivity, I seek to shift epistemology from an imperial

model of knowledge extraction to a more collaborative one that relies on decolonial ways of conducting research. One way I do this is through storying the lived experiences of my participants so that their participation goes beyond the interview process.

Second, decoloniality is the construction of alternative modes of knowledge that derive from non-Western places. I use Sylvana Falcón (2016) principles to guide my construction of alternative knowledge since they are concerned with positionality and reflexivity, a move from modernist ontologies to relational ones, and an approach towards multilingualism. Some of the ways in which I incorporate her principles are by using words and phrases in Albanian, which is my mother tongue and the native language of my participants, and by foregrounding Kosovar women's lived experiences as sites of knowledge production.

Finally, I use the tenets of reflexivity, agency and resistance, and the politics of place to stand in conversation with the theory of liquid organizing, that perceives organizations as "fluid, boundaryless, shifting organizing" (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020, p. 4). These tenets help me reify "a liquid organizing" that is place-based, political, and historical, which counteracts the current Western assumptions of it being apolitical and ahistorical. Moreover, using transnational feminisms principles of "mindfulness of difference" and "risk of essentialisms" I carefully explore the multiple oppressive contexts—political, economic, and social—in order not to essentialize liquidity, which, according to Cruz and Sodeke (2020) is always raced, classed, gendered, and tied to the nation.

In this chapter, I described the research methods that I used to analyze and interpret the lives of Kosovar women at war, I outlined the process of data collection and analysis, and

explained the use of autoethnography and in-depth interviews, as tools of inquiry. I ended this chapter with ethical considerations and my use of the tenets of transnational feminism to guide my research ethics in this dissertation. I then transition to the next chapter to foreground the lifeworlds or the day-to-day lived experiences and narratives of Kosovar women.

CHAPTER FOUR: A SILENT OBSERVER OF STORIES TOLD ACROSS THE EDGES OF THE WOUND

All sorrows can be borne if you can put them into a story or tell a story about them.

—Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*

I begin this chapter by reflecting on my abilities as a researcher to bear witness and do justice to women's stories of the Kosovo War and then depict these stories into three types: "chaos narratives," which is a type of narrative coined by Arthur Frank (2013), "narratives told around the edges of the wound," and "liberation narratives," which are types of narratives that derived from my research findings. I chose to focus on these three types of narratives since these themes emerged in all of the interviews. I have framed this chapter in the women's narratives in an effort to emphasize their words. I chose to showcase the excerpts that best illuminated a certain typology rather than combining various excerpts and restorying them into one coherent narrative. I do not thoroughly interpret the narratives until the very end of this chapter because I want the reader to read them without interruption and get a sense of fragmentation and lack of coherence that is inherent in how Kosovar women communicated their experiences of war.

This chapter is organized into four parts: 1) the importance of women's wartime narratives, 2) the emergence of chaos in Kosovar women's narratives, 3) Kosovar women's stories of war, which are portrayed in three types of stories (chaos, wound, and liberation), and 4) my

interpretation of these three types of narratives that I've encountered as I attempt to answer my research question on how Kosovar women communicated their experiences of wartime.

The Importance of Women's Wartime Narratives

In this chapter, I ultimately argue that the narratives of Kosovar women's lived experiences during the Kosovo War hold profound significance beyond the mere retelling of events. These stories serve as powerful testimonials to the ethnic cleansing committed against Kosovars and to the resilience, courage, and agency of women amidst the atrocities of the Kosovo War. They offer insights into the untold day-to-day struggles, sacrifices, and triumphs of women who organized in non-combat ways for individual and collective survival. Moreover, these narratives are significant because they challenge dominant, yet simplistic, discourse on war, which often overlooks or marginalizes the experiences of women by portraying them as mere victims of war. By amplifying the voices of Kosovar women, I argue that these narratives compel us to confront the gendered dimensions of wartime and to recognize the integral role that women play in shaping the course of history.

I find it crucial that Kosovar women's voices are shared and understood, thus I foreground them as "walking theory" and give them a platform to be heard. According to Elisabeth Porter (2007), storytelling is essential, but the quality of listening is equally important. She claims that expressing truthful narratives holds significance for women who have experienced trauma, as it fosters the pursuit of justice and healing. Women's testimonies are pivotal in feminist theory, which draws upon the diverse real-life narratives shared by women. Feminist scholars have extensively explored how women's life stories hold the power to shape theory and affirm women as central subjects.

Listening to Kosovar women's narratives involves bearing witness to these stories in the form of testimonies, thereby sharing the responsibility for seeking justice. Documenting and preserving women's stories are integral parts of a broader feminist call to capture women's experiences of war and violence that have been neglected, disregarded, or silenced. This documentation of such stories serves as a means of seeking justice for women's suffering in wartime.

Throughout the writing process, I grappled with my capacity to document the stories of the women I interviewed. I read countless academic and non-academic articles on storytelling to guide me towards becoming more capable of doing justice to these stories, making sense of them, and elaborating on my sensemaking journey in thick description so that I can take the reader along the messiness of the data I have been reading over and over again for the past few weeks.

Honestly, I find myself questioning whether I've truly grasped the narratives shared by my participants, or even my accounts of wartime experiences, and those of my family. I anticipated that engaging with more women, particularly those within my own family, would trigger some revelation within me, allowing me to articulate findings that would illuminate how these women communicate their wartime experiences and how storying these experiences helps them make sense of them. Yet, how can a single interview with me help their sense-making journey when I've conducted numerous interviews and listened to countless war stories, yet still struggle to make sense of it all? I find myself looking up the definition of "sense-making" as English isn't my native language, wondering if perhaps I haven't fully grasped its essence. But, I do. Sense-making is about attaining a clear understanding of something.

Here's where I pause, take in a deep breath, and remind myself that the stories that I share are far from straightforward. They resist simple interpretation, refusing to be neatly confined to one partial understanding. These narratives are fragments of a broken world—tales of erasure, trauma, injustice, violence, power, and resistance. Yet, they are also tales of care, kindness, humanity, and the resilience of people amidst cruelty. I believe only those who have experienced the atrocities of war firsthand can *truly* understand how these women story their day-to-day lived experiences of war. So, how do I, someone who shares that common thread with these women, begin to unravel and interpret their experiences?

The simple answer lies in embracing openness and trusting their vulnerability and honesty, while also being transparent about my own journey and the internal struggles I face as a researcher who is geographically distant from Kosova yet deeply affected by the lingering residue of war trauma. While I may grasp certain aspects of their stories, I acknowledge my complete lack of firsthand experience as a woman during the war, given that I was merely five years old at the time. In moments I couldn't relate to their experiences, I listened intently, gently encouraging them to delve deeper into their memories—the environment, their emotions, the smells, the noises, the people around them. I urged them to take their time, to tell me about their stories at their own pace, while I stayed attentive, absorbing every word.

They shared their experiences with an air of certainty as if their tales were self-evident truths—common sense. When I asked for clarification on certain things, such as how they maintained their hygiene during menstruation or managed to shower, they appeared perplexed and confused by what they deemed as obvious answers. One woman, for instance, was amused by my question, claiming she couldn't even remember such trivial details. I told her, that, now, as a woman, if I had to go through a war, I would be really concerned about my menstrual hygiene

and it's something I contemplate quite often. All of a sudden, she started laughing and said my questions unexpectedly brought memories of her makeshift showers, which she then continued to share in quite some detail. She said she had never thought about those showers again, until that conversation with me.

Another, somewhat more nuanced, response is to let the stories serve as a constant reminder that I must confront the complexities of truth. I must acknowledge and embrace the intricacies embedded within these lived experiences, resisting the temptation to seek tidy and singular conclusions. As I document these narratives, I'm aware of the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the conflict in Ukraine. Despite my wishes for a world where we gain wisdom from past wars, I find myself disheartened, triggered, and retraumatized watching the number of dead people increase by the day.

The Emergence of Chaos in Kosovar Women's Stories

Freeman (2010) maintains that we can only make sense of stories in hindsight, with narrative reflection and temporal distance. During the data analysis, it looked to me as if my participants were not afforded narrative reflection and temporal distance, which reminded me of Frank's (2013) chaos stories, which are stories that are not afforded a coherent, chronological structure. Chaos stories are difficult to hear because they are raw, vulnerable, and unfiltered. Similarly, the stories of my participants are not linear, they do not follow a chronological order. Most of them are fragmented due to the complex works of memory that prevent the participants from recalling details and thick description of their experiences. Some stories are cut short as my participants move to other stories, without any transitions, to only come back to pick up on the initial ones, as if they hadn't interrupted their flow. They move back and forth between stories, and they skip details,

to only offer them later, as an afterthought. Some details are never shared, as they lie behind claims that their memory is weak and they can't truly remember anything else about that event. They go in circles, quickly, superficially, as if they can't wait to be done with sharing a certain story, as if there's another more interesting one that wants to be voiced. Their stories are foggy, and the storytellers use euphemisms and avoid getting to the heart of the story, to their wounds.

Frank (2013) shares how his first encounter with chaos narratives was in hearing Holocaust stories. He says:

> What cannot be evaded in stories told by Holocaust witnesses is the hole in the narrative that cannot be filled in, or to use Lacan's metaphor, cannot be sutured. The story traces the edges of a wound that can only be told around. Words suggest its rawness, but that wound is so much of the body, its insults, agonies, and losses, that words necessarily fail" (p. 98).

Further, he maintains how the storytellers of chaos are "wounded," and because of their wounds, they cannot tell their story in words. To turn their experiences into a story requires a reflective grasp that only comes with distance—hindsight (Frank, 2013; Freeman, 2010). The "wounded storyteller," though, has no distance from their life, and no reflective capacities. This, in turn, makes storytelling impossible. Inherently, because "stories require a sequence of events that are connected through each other over time," the chaos narratives then cannot be considered narratives. Perhaps, Frank (2013) asserts, they can be "an anti-narrative of time without sequence, telling without mediation, and speaking about oneself without being fully able to reflect on oneself" (p. 98).

Because chaos narratives are difficult and uncomfortable to listen to due to the feelings of chaos and lack of structure, people tend to steer away from them, either by directing the

conversations towards a more hopeful narrative or by completely avoiding hearing them. Lawrence Langer (2007), analyzing his oral histories of the Holocaust, observed how the interviewers interrupted chaos stories that the survivors were sharing and redirecting them towards a narrative that showcased "the resiliency of the human spirit" (p. 101). The challenge of listening and bearing witness to these narratives lies in not steering the storyteller away from their feelings, rather really hearing what they have to say. He says:

> Hearing is difficult because the chaos narrative is probably the most embodied form of story. If chaos stories are told on the edges of a wound, they are also told on the edges of speech. Ultimately, chaos is told in the silences that speech cannot penetrate or illuminate. (p. 101)

Despite the challenges, chaos stories need to be honored. Frank (2013) maintains:

> To deny a chaos story is to deny the person telling this story, and people who are being denied cannot be cared for. People whose reality is denied can remain recipients of treatments and services, but they cannot be participants in empathic relations of care. (p. 109)

After sitting with these Kosovar Women's stories for a few weeks and thinking of doing a narrative analysis, looking for patterns, themes, thick description, emotional reactions, evocative language to then restory them into narratives with more coherence and order, I kept going back to Frank's (2013) chaos narratives, fragmented and messy stories that do not inherit a structure and are not easy to listen to—everything that Kosovar women's stories were.

I've reminded myself throughout this dissertation that I want to honor women's stories and concluded that restorying them into traditional narratives with a beginning, middle, and end, with chronological features, and flow, was the opposite of "doing justice

and honoring them." Therefore, I decided to use Frank's typology of chaos narratives to guide me in portraying how Kosovar women communicated their experiences of the Kosovo War. In order to honor these stories, one needs to accept the chaos and the narrative surrounding it, to be able to reimagine new stories and new lives for themselves. Even in the reimagining though, chaos remains embedded in the story's background and still makes its way to the foreground.

Kosovar Women's Stories of War

To answer my first research question that examines how Kosovar women communicate their experiences of the war in the "now," twenty-five years after the war has ended, I read and reread my interview transcripts and continuously came across notions of agency, erasure, power, and oppression, visibility/invisibility, place, outsider/insider, and resistance amongst others, being deeply entangled into women's stories. Thus, I wanted to foreground the stories as "theory that walks," as feminist theory that is grounded in women's lived experience and their testimonies and illustrates the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and narratives that exist within communities in precarious contexts, challenging monolithic portrayals of women's lives and struggles as well as Western-centric epistemologies in the field (Simic, 2017).

Chaos Narratives

> Some people's lives seem to flow in a narrative; mine had many stops and starts. That's what trauma "does. It interrupts the plot. . . It just happens, and then life goes on. No one prepares you for it.
>
> —Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*

On a rainy June day, within the familiar spaces of our former workplace buffet, I reunited with Shqipe, a colleague with whom I had shared a year of friendship back when I used to live in Prishtina, the capital city of Kosova. Our conversation effortlessly drifted from updates on life's twists and turns to the narratives of war and the places we had fled to survive the invasion of Serb forces. As Shqipe recalled her experiences, I found myself transported to the

familiar villages, mountains, and valleys of our region, "Dukagjini." Her stories of fleeing her village amidst the outbreak of war, quickly preparing "gurabija" and baking bread deeply resonated with me. Memories came back as I could vividly recall even the bustling bus stop where Shqipe and her husband selflessly ushered students to safety.

Shqipe:

> It was May 1998. I forget the exact date, but I remember I was teaching at a high school at the time. It was around 3 pm, and at 3 pm sharp, the "Voice of America," a news channel in Albanian, was covering the war in Kosova. Shortly after 3 pm, the school principal asked us to terminate classes for the day and accompany our students to this bus stop, called "Te Plepat" so that students could take the bus and go home. Luli, my husband, was also teaching some courses at the same high school as me, so together we walked students to the bus stop. We had to push them in for the doors to close. The bus was over capacity. So, we couldn't go in. We waited for a couple of hours until a man came by and stopped his car in front of us. I didn't know him, but he said he recognized us. We were all going to Deçan, but the driver said that someone had told him to avoid the area since the Serb checkpoint had settled on the main road. So, we hopped out of the car. I don't remember the date. I feel guilty for not remembering.
>
> We stopped in Strellc and started walking through that village, through the valley, and trespassing people's lands, to get to my family's home. Everyone was scared, panicked, and frustrated about the Serb blockade in Deçan. They said another one settled by the chestnut trees, in a place where you could see the entire region of Dukagjin, and that marked the last day of school.

We stayed there for a couple of days, the village selected men to take turns supervising the area and we got the news that half of the village, from the north of the mosque, the area that had been bombarded a couple of times before, must move to the houses in the south of the mosque. I remember sleeping in one of those houses for two or three nights, and I remember we would go to the basement of Dr. Syl Bruci's house, to get some necessary supplies or food, and I remember we stayed in that basement, together with people from other villages, we stayed hidden because of the bombarding.

The walls were isolated with sandbags, to keep us safe, and there were only a few small spaces that would serve as exits if the house got bombarded. We sat on some very thin foam mattresses, nobody dared to even think about comfort, we all wanted to have a strong roof over our heads.

The men kept supervising the house and the village. Luli, my husband, said we could go back to our house, nobody can predict the bombs, and if we die, at least we die in our own house. So, we left. Luli, I, my father, sister, and brother-in-law, left to go back home. Luli didn't want to sleep with so many people in the room, and I didn't want to be away from him.

In the house, I stayed with him, and there was another couple, Isuf Imeri, with his wife, Zyrafete. He had a machine gun and a long necklace that would hold his bullets, which he never took off. I told him, many times, if we fall asleep, and you rush to flee this house, please don't leave us here. Wake us up so we can flee with you.

I was always afraid of sleep, I was always afraid of making that mistake, drifting into sleep, and waking up to being held captive, having fallen into the Serb soldiers' hands.

But you can't avoid falling asleep, even if you wanted to, despite the continuous loud sounds of the bombs landing in the vicinity, of the shotguns going off…

One night that is fixated on my memory, that I can never possibly forget, was this night with a clear sky, the moon shining brightly over our backyard, and we heard some footsteps, I could see the shadows of the pine trees, I could hear footsteps, but I couldn't see people. I listened to the cracks of the footsteps for a couple of minutes until I finally woke Luli up and told him someone was walking around our backyard. He heard it too. He said he would get the bombs. We had some small bombs to protect us.

We were sure the paramilitary forces had entered our backyard. We were ready to defend ourselves and even sacrifice our lives rather than fall into the hands of the Serb soldiers.

As we were getting ready to throw the bombs, I saw in the shadow, that a cow was walking by. I told Luli I thought it was a cow. He didn't believe me at first. He started walking slowly towards the backyard. I followed him quickly. I didn't want to stay away from him even for a minute. I didn't want to fall into someone's hands, I didn't want to be alive and at the mercy of the Serb soldiers, "*me kon deshmi e gjalle e kerkujna,*" because I knew what would happen to me, I knew what happens to women at war, I had read about women in Bosnia, I knew what had happened to them, I didn't want that to be my destiny.

In one of my WhatsApp conversations with my aunt, Halla, she shared how Shqipe had casually mentioned our interview, which prompted Halla to ask if she could also share her experience of the war with me. As I prepared to peel another layer of my family's history of wartime, a mix of anxiety and fear swirled within me. While I had casually broached the topic of war with my family in the past, this formal interview felt like stepping into uncharted territory. I was

overwhelmed with worry; Was I prepared to hear things I didn't want to hear? Would Halla's emotions become overwhelming? Would she break into tears? How would I comfort her from thousands of miles away? Uncertainty filled the air as I texted her to check in and see if Friday, 2 PM here would work for her.

Halla:

> In Broliq, your father's house was brimming with people who had come from the villages of Kotrodiq and Vranoc. You wouldn't even be able to recognize a familiar face. The house was filled with people, to the extent that they spilled over on the balcony and used that area for sleep.
>
> We could barely rest. We sat on these thin sponges. The children would run around playing, and the women, poor women were baking bread and serving it to everyone, without taking a break. They would bake bread, serve peppers, pastries, and whatever they could make with flour. You could see they feared running out of resources. I don't know how we lived like that. I guess, you can do anything to survive, you can live under the poorest of conditions.
>
> Your grandmother was the host so she would be welcoming refugees in, finding them spaces to sit down, asking women to clean up and cook. Rexhep Sadrija came with a bullet in his leg, your father and sister were attending to the wounds, while Violeta, your cousin, was going to the well to clean their clothes. *Kijamet.*
>
> There were a couple of people from Junik too, your father was taking care of this man who had a bullet in his head, and your cousins would take him outside for air, I don't remember the man now, but I know he was young and wounded. Kijamet. To think we have grown to forget how much we suffered.

I left Broliq with my three children and my in-laws. My father-in-law was paralyzed and in a wheelchair. We had wanted to leave through the mountains a while ago, but we couldn't leave the elderly behind. So, I decided to take the bus to Montenegro. I said goodbye to my oldest son, Berat, and left him in Broliq, with my family, because we knew the paramilitary soldiers were torturing young men, taking them away and using them for labor. I heard some young boys were forced to dig graves and bury the massacred. We didn't want to risk it. The streets were empty.

All we could see was the smoke coming from the nearby villages, from the houses being burnt, and all we could smell was smoke, we could barely stop coughing. We made it into the bus. I was alone with my children and my in-laws. When I got to Peja, the soldiers asked for my identity document, they asked where I was headed, and remained quiet. I was hoping to stay at the bus stop and take the other bus to Montenegro.

We got onto that bus; we were finally safe. Your cousin Arta's friend was also on the bus with her mother and siblings. Shortly after, the bus stopped and went back to Peja. As soon as we got to the bus stop, the paramilitary soldiers came in and yelled my first and last name, "*Ajmone Tahirukaj, brzi, Ajmone Tahirukaj*!"

And then that of a woman from Isniq who was seated three rows ahead of me. They pushed us out of the bus and into the police station. And then my family was forced to stay on the bus, all night long. My father-in-law, paralyzed, all night long, on the bus, and the bus was filled with women and children. *Kijamet*.

And then, we spent the night handcuffed at the police station, they spent the night on the bus, my children too. I wasn't let go until the morning after, they interrogated me all night, they asked me about my husband, where I was going, why I was going alone, and I

lied to them that my husband was in Germany and I was all alone. The woman from Isniq lied too. Her husband was also in Germany.

And then, we were handcuffed to a wooden chair all night long, I sat down and stood up to calm my nerves, I thought I could hear noises, I could hear my father-in-law's sighs and screams, and I swore I could hear my children's cries too, I thought that was my last night, I was convinced I wasn't going to come out of that station alive. And I remember thinking I would die handcuffed to that chair.

Makfire reached out to me through Facebook, offering to share her narrative despite thinking it held less value since she didn't have any family members killed during the war. Humbled, she admitted that her story may not carry the same weight as others, yet expressed a willingness to contribute if it served the greater purpose of my project. At 6 am on a Wednesday, I was ready to connect with Makfire over a WhatsApp video call. When I asked her how she was doing, her voice cracked, and she teared up as she told me her husband passed away from cancer a couple of months ago, so she was not doing well. We spoke about the loss of her husband for what felt like an hour before she began to recall the loss of her father during wartime.

Makfire:

Only a few of our neighbors came back. A few. There was a fear of being left alone to live without any neighbors around. We didn't want to be alone, so we left too. There was a direct line from Prishtina to Shkup, but it was expensive.

And, the problem was that men would be dragged out of the buses and killed in front of their families. They would kill men in the eyes of their families. My older brother helped his wife and children to the bus, but he came back. Luckily, even though he was caught at

the bus stop and put in line to be killed same as other young men, at that moment, somebody called the soldiers, and they let him go. He was lucky.

My father didn't want to leave our home, my mother and my brother were too afraid to go by bus, and follow the long columns of people fleeing away, so I stayed with them. I didn't want to leave my parents alone.

I didn't know if they could take care of themselves, make food, or survive alone. Father had two heart attacks a while ago. We decided to leave. Our neighbors too. We decided to go by train, to Macedonia, and we heard people were using the train from Fushe Kosove. But we had to walk to Fushe Kosove. And my parents were old. So, we didn't leave at all.

We woke up at 5 am to make it to the train station. We walked a few miles and stopped at the street near Bororamizi, you know where that is. Father insisted on not leaving that day, he said he didn't want to leave Kosova, that he wanted to die in his land, but we couldn't leave him behind, so we forced him to come with us, so he was rushing, and we just saw him dragging his body onto our mother's body and slowly falling to the ground. We heard a loud thump. His heart failed him. In one second.

We didn't worry that he died, we worried about how we would take him back home now, on foot. He wasn't breathing. That was his third heart attack. We saw some people pulling their small, one-wheeled wagons filled with suitcases. We asked if we could borrow them to take our dead father back home. We kept asking. We kept walking through the long line of people and asked anybody with a wagon.

Someone heard my brother asking and told him there was an abandoned one a few miles away, on the side of the road. The wheels were flat, so someone left it behind. My brother

walked over there and brought it back. I was holding my father's face between my palms the entire time. I was telling my mother to be quiet, not to cry. He wasn't breathing. We pushed the wagon with my dead father and kept looking down to ignore the gaze of the people staring at us. It was 5 am. Dark.

The flat tires were making loud screeching sounds. Me and my brother would take turns pushing. We ran. We stopped for our mother. She could barely walk. She was old. A soldier yelled at us to stop. My heart stopped. I knew they would take my brother and kill him. I told my mother.

Luckily, he told them our father died on the street, so we are taking him home. They yelled louder, saying we weren't allowed to take him home. We must take his body to a hospital. My brother said that's what we were going to do then. They asked if we had any money, to get them through breakfast. Luckily, my brother did.

We went back to pushing the wagon, ignoring the loud screeching sounds that would make people run to their windows to see what was happening. We stopped by a hill. We couldn't push through. Three young men poked their heads through the small bathroom window of the house next to us, they had heard the loud noise coming from the street. "*Vlla, cka u bo*?"- they whispered and came down to help.

They carried the wagon on their shoulders and helped my brother cross the hill. When we got home, my grandmother, who was paralyzed, saw her son's dead body on the carriage and let out a piercing shriek. "My son, my son!" "*Kadal none*." Quiet grandmother. Be quiet. We are surrounded by soldiers, on all four sides of our house. It is over now. We are at war. We cannot mourn him. It is over now. My brother's here. If the soldiers hear us, they'll come after him. They'll kill him too. I don't care if they kill us, but not him.

Let's bury my father now. Be quiet. *Nalu. Mos kaj*!" We dug a hole as quickly and as quietly as we could and buried him there. Around 5 am. In our backyard. In his house.

When I went to Kosova over winter break a couple of months ago, I visited Broliq and sat with my aunt Shkurta, my uncle Demush, their daughters, Besiana, Violeta, and Alba, all of their children and all of my siblings and nudged the conversations towards wartime. What I call Dada Shkurte's story below is actually a mix of Dada Shkurte's perspective as well as her daughters who continuously jumped to correct Dada Shkurte or added details to her recollection of war. I constructed her story based on my memory and some notes that I left on my phone right after leaving Broliq that day.

Dada Shkurte:

The war began in Spring. We left this house on the third of April. You settled in Peja, and before that stayed in Isniq for a week. From Peja we came back to Broliq, we had twenty cows. We came back to take care of the cows. Your uncle, Baca, stayed in Peja, but we came back and stayed here all winter until Spring came, just the two of us.

Your uncle took thirty people to Albania on his tractor. All the Serb checkpoints wanted money. He gave away eight hundred *marka*, he sold all the hay for a thousand marka, took a hundred liters of gas, he bought a tractor, he knew we would be forced to leave.

When the military occupied Peja, so many refugees came down to seek shelter in Broliq, and then three days later we all had to flee. Two days before we left, the village of Isniq had been displaced, everyone had to abandon their homes, the Serb paramilitary brought tanks and blocked the main street, they trapped us.

After people in Isniq fled, they massacred the village of Lebushe, they killed 80 people, they held them hostage, and then killed all of them, men, women, children, even children.

Only four people survived the massacre. They crawled through villages in the dark, they were wounded, and someone brought them to our house.

We never starved. We took flour, milk, cheese, and honey in the tractor with us. People also left flour behind, on the side of the road, so others could use it. We had pots, and pans, and the sac, and a shovel, and other tools.

Sometimes, I would bake bread, other times pancakes, other times *gurabija*. Sometimes, I would bake bread on the side of the road. The men would walk in the column of people, in front of the tractor, gather wood, and make a fire, so that when the tractor got there the fire would be started, and baking the bread wouldn't take too long. Sometimes, your uncle baked too.

Once he baked three or four breads and gave everyone in the tractor a piece. I have never tasted bread as good as then.

Your uncle and I left the cows to roam free on our land. The whole village did the same. Our neighbor, Laha, had two hundred sheep. Another neighbor stayed home with his sheep. He didn't want to leave them. When the paramilitary soldiers occupied Broliq, we had already left, but this neighbor refused to leave, so the soldiers slaughtered him and his daughter, and all of his sheep, some five hundred of them. They knew he made a lot of money from his sheep.

Our nephew was on his way from Kryshec and heard the loud cries of the sheep. Later, we found out from the villagers that the daughter was hiding five thousand mark in her clothes, and internationals found the money as they were doing an autopsy of their bodies. She took the money to the grave.

***

Chaos narratives unfolded rapidly, driven by the urgency to share significant events, while the subtle nuances of everyday life remained hidden until prompted. Through the stories of Shqipe, Halla, Dada Shkurte, Makfire, I portrayed elements found in all of the interviews I've collected that highlight the chaotic nature of the experiences that Kosovar women recounted. Fragmentation, emotions, and motion are elements illuminated throughout the stories. Firstly, chaos stories lack a coherent narrative structure. Secondly, the narratives above are emotionally charged, reflecting the intense feelings and experiences of the women. Emotions such as fear, confusion, anger, and grief were prevalent throughout the narratives. Lastly, chaos stories were driven by motion or movement. The women recounted a series of events and experiences that involved constant change, upheaval, or movement and displacement from one place to another. All these elements within the stories of Shqipe, Halla, Dada Shkurte, Lirije, Makfire, are weaved together to create a narrative that captures the chaotic and tumultuous nature of their lived experiences in wartime.

In what follows, I illuminate a much narrower type of narrative—a narrative told around the edges of the wound.

Narratives Told Around the Edges of the Wound

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. . . That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past. . .Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years.

—Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

In this section, I showcase women's stories of "walking around the edges of the wound" as I make myself a silent and modest witness and I invite you as the reader to do the same. As a modest witness, I am not primarily concerned with my social location, but I am rather engaged as a witness, "shaping and being shaped by the world I write about" (Fernandes, 2013, p. 128). The ethical imperatives of modest witnessing draw on intellectual traditions that have centered on the ethical responsibility that the witness bears to the situation they witness.

Some of these traditions are: The practice of witnessing social injustice and oppression like the use of *testimonio* in Latin American cultures, and the work of secular social activists who have written as "engaged thinkers speaking out about and against the injustices they observe" (Fernandes, 2013, p. 129). Modest witnessing, then, from a transnational feminist perspective, aims to move beyond traditional properties of reflexivity by bridging ontology and epistemology, and turning the knowledge of oppression into a transformative act by breaking traditional hierarchies of power in knowledge production (Fernandes, 2013, p. 131). In my role as a modest witness, I present the stories of Kosovar women's fears of sexual violence and rape exactly as they were expressed—raw, unpolished, and devoid of attempts to gloss over the uncomfortable aspects to make them more bearable to listen to.

In Kosova, circa 20,000 women were raped during the war, and after collecting data from 900 survivors of wartime sexual assault, the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (2021) stated that rape was indeed used as a weapon of war during the 1998-1999 conflict. Women were locked into what was called "a rape house," to be assaulted and abused by the Serb perpetrators. The idea of rape as a weapon of war has its roots in feminist scholarship, which was the first to point out the inextricable connections between sexual abuse and war. Feminist scholars have maintained a perspective of sexual violence as a form of social power that is

deeply engrained by the operations of gender and is part of the public sphere as a politicized matter (Elshtain, 1995; Enloe, 1998; Harrington, 2010; Owens, 2008).

Rape in wartime is a tactic to assert power and control over a population and instill fear in the communities. The women I interviewed claimed that the fear of being raped was much stronger than the fear of dying. A lot of the women didn't use the word rape but rather alluded to it by saying things like "the worst thing that can happen to a woman," "what happened to women in Bosnia," "what is expected to happen to women in a war," or "a woman's biggest fear" amongst others. This highlights the gravity of rape in wartime and the lifelong wounds caused by it to the point where women refuse to utter the word to minimize the negative effects the word might trigger on them years after the war has ended.

Lirije was twenty-two years old at the outbreak of war. As a young woman, she often hid her beauty, youth, and single status and pretended she was a mother. From what she had heard about the previous wars in Bosnia and Croatia, she had come to believe that the paramilitary soldiers weren't inclined to torture older women but took young women to some abandoned houses in a heartbeat. She knew what happened in those abandoned houses, so she made herself look old to stay out of Serb soldiers' radar and attention.

Lirije:

> We had to leave Isniq after seven days. We didn't trust the Serbs. Who trusts them? Tell me who can trust them? After all they did to us? So, we women ran away. And the men ran towards the mountains, to hide away. Except for my cousin who was driving our tractor. We were so many women and children in that tractor, some fifteen people fit in

half of the space. The other half was filled with blankets and pillows and flour and clothes and whatever we could take from home.

We couldn't see a thing. The tractor was covered in this blue tarp. We couldn't see but we could hear explosions outside. Loud and clear. The tractor stopped. My heartbeat stopped too. I knew what that meant. We had been pulled over at a Serb checkpoint. The woman near me had two children. I asked her for her baby's diaper cloth. I made a headscarf from it. I asked her for her baby too. She had two girls. I took her younger girl and held her on my lap as if she was my baby. As if I were her mother. The baby was crying her heart out.

All you could hear now were the women whispering and crying and praying to God that nothing would happen to us. Women were crying and children were crying and the Serb soldiers outside were yelling "*Jebeni shiptar"* and hitting our tractor with their batons. I didn't want the soldiers to see I am an unmarried young woman. They would stop young women. Take them away.

I wanted them to think I am a mother. They didn't want to have anything to do with mothers, only with young girls. That was what I could come up with at the moment, all scared and panicked. I had to think on my feet.

The Serbs pulled the tarp up, pointed their flashlights on our faces, and kept hitting the tractor with their batons to scare us. I kept my head down. I thought my heart would come out of my chest. It was pounding so hard from fear. I thought it was written on my forehead that I was a young girl, I wasn't a mother. I thought they would know I am lying. I knew there were other girls in the tractor. I didn't want to be the one to fall on their hands. I knew what they did to women. I heard it on the news.

Kimete told me she kept a diary during the war. She was young, around 23, and had so much hope for the future. She said she promised herself she would publish the diary as a book if she were to survive. When I asked if I could read the book, she said life got in the way. She added that the main reason she reached out to me was because she saw it as a chance to get her story out there. She wanted people to know about her life and the turmoil of the war in Kosova, and if she couldn't share her wartime story in a published book, she could at least share it in my dissertation.

Kimete:

> I always forgot about myself. I carried so much sadness for my family members that I didn't have any more capacity to be sad for myself. I forgot to mention earlier, but my father packed my bag and asked me to flee my house and leave for Macedonia. There were rumors that they were taking young girls and you know, taking them to the station or abandoned houses.
>
> My father took me to the bus station, the city roads were still functional, they weren't blocked yet. I told him "No, if you die, I don't have a reason to live!" I thought my two brothers were also dead because we hadn't heard of them in two weeks. We had heard on the news that the village they were staying at was burned to ashes. I couldn't go to Macedonia and leave my father alone. I was scared of being taken away but I was also scared of losing my family. "*Cka mduhet mu jeta pa ta*?" "What reason would I have to live if they get killed?" I thought that if I stay, I can protect them, I can save their lives. My father was yelling at me about how he could not bear watching me being taken away from him by the paramilitary soldiers. I yelled back, telling him I don't want to be the

only survivor in my family. I could see my father was scared for me. I was a burden to him.

Whenever we saw paramilitary soldiers or they stopped us, he would whisper "If only you weren't here with us," and I would whisper back half-heartedly that if I wasn't there, I wouldn't be able to protect them. Silly me, deep down I knew I couldn't even protect myself.

In the mountains, after a couple of days, a caravan of 150,000 people was forcefully returned from Llap to Prishtine and persecuted. Whoever was camping in the mountains was forced to go back. We were forced to go back too. From Podujeva to Prishtina, all the villages in between were displaced by the soldiers.

We walked on foot for a couple of days. The rainiest days of my life. We walked in the mud, in the rain, we were soaked. I wonder how we didn't get sick. When we made it to Grashtice, at the entrance of Prishtina, they took so many people away from the caravan. They pointed randomly "You, you, you!" They took people away quickly. Mostly men. But they took some women too. I prayed for those women. I hoped they would get killed instead. Later we found out they had tortured them first and then killed every single one of them. They took them away from their families, locked them in a rundown house, and killed them. I can still recall their cries for mercy to this day, I have goosebumps.

I sat with Sahare in the backyard of a cozy coffee shop overseeing a green park on a bright and sunny summer day in Prishtina. She was back in town visiting her parents and I was back in town collecting data. In Kosova, she worked as a pediatric doctor with my sister, to whom she reached out to ask if I could interview her. Sahare moved to Germany a couple of years ago to work as a doctor and said her heart burns every day for having left Kosova. She swore she had

never wanted to leave, even during wartime, and it pains her that she left now that Kosova is a free and independent country.

Sahare:

> You know, I thought I was going to be left alone. I can't explain how, but I was hopeful, I was strong, I kept telling myself that everything was going to be okay, and I motivated myself, but there was always a shadow of fear, fear about what could happen, to my brother, my father, and my mother.
>
> I don't know why I wasn't scared for myself. You know what I told myself? Whatever happens, let them kill me. I don't see anything good happening to me, I was under immense pressure for three months, under so much psychological and physical stress, thinking to myself how now I would get killed, thinking of ways they could kill me, how they could break into our house, how they could beat us up, kill us even. My biggest fear was that they could do something to me in front of my family, that was my biggest fear of all time.
>
> I kept telling myself that I wished they would kill me. I became obsessed with the thought they could do something to me. Honestly, I am telling you, I hoped they would kill me before they did something to me.
>
> Nobody in my family talked about it, but I knew those things happened. I was afraid because I was a woman. In the evenings, I could hear women's screams and cries from a nearby checkpoint. I could hear them most of the evenings, and those cries worried me the most. I told myself the same thing could happen to me today, if not today, then tomorrow, the same things could happen.

> Some evenings, I could hear muffled voices, men's thick voices too. They kept them locked in there, they used them, who knows what they did to them, who knows where they took them from. You could hear the screams; you could hear them so loudly. I was afraid of going outside the next day, I was afraid I'd be taken away, I was afraid to even go buy bread, but I had to because if the soldiers saw my father or my brother, they would take them away as they did with most men.

I was on my second cup of coffee while talking to Makfire. She kept bringing up how lucky she was for not having been raped at war, and I found it fascinating how she could bring up luck after everything she had gone through, after the loss of her father, the loss of home, and the loss of everyday normalcy.

Makfire:

> One day they entered the neighborhood, now most of the women stayed silent, they never told anyone about what happened that day, but we knew they had tortured many, they had physically harmed so many women in our neighborhood that day. We were lucky because my brother and aunt spoke Serbian, so when the soldiers came to our house, they told them we were only three people sheltered in the house. We were lucky they didn't come in to check.
>
> We were the only house in the entire neighborhood where the police didn't go in, didn't ask for money, and didn't take the women away. We know of two families whose women, the wives and daughters, were all raped that day. Their house is right next to our house. We share a wall.

They asked for a lot of money from them because they knew their men were in Switzerland. The women had gone through hell that day, while we were spared. We hadn't been touched. Luck!

To be honest, I wasn't afraid of dying, nobody was. We would be shot in our heads and die within seconds. That would be a good death. I was afraid of torture.

In Makovc, the village we passed through, the men were taken away and tortured. Their bodies were dismembered with a chainsaw. They cut people's limbs with a chainsaw. That's what I was afraid of. Rape. Rape. Being raped in front of my family, my parents having to watch that unfold. We heard stories of women being raped in front of the caravan, not only in the eyes of their family but also neighbors, and community. Children being murdered. Men, of course, men. Massacred. Killed. Men, women, children. Tortured. Mercilessly.

As portrayed in the narratives above, all women expressed gratitude for surviving and immediately acknowledged that their own suffering pales in comparison to those who endured the loss of loved ones. Most, if not all, usually emphasized the importance of being resilient and focusing on moving forward rather than dwelling on the pain of the past. This is how liberation narratives, which I detail below, came into existence, with women's brief glimpses into the future to only go back to delving further into the past.

Liberation Narratives

The vantage points from which we customarily view the world are, as William James puts it, "fringed forever by a more" that outstrips and outruns them. This more is also where language reaches its limits, a penumbral region where we are haunted by what the words fail to cover, capture, conceive, and communicate.

—Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*

Each conversation with Kosovar women appeared to end with a story of NATO forces liberating Kosova. Langer (1991), in his analysis of Holocaust oral histories, observes that guiding the witness towards the conclusion of their camp experience serves as a coping mechanism for interviewers, framing liberation as the story's ultimate purpose—a narrative device that, to some extent, seeks to redeem the survivors' harrowing ordeals. I anticipated liberation as the natural endpoint of the interviews, only to realize that none of the women concluded their stories with liberation. While they discussed liberation, they inevitably delved into additional wartime experiences they had forgotten before reaching that point.

In the narratives below, I showcase how Kosovar women spoke of liberation, yet resisted ending their accounts with it and admitting to liberation as a great dividing line that imposed order on their experiences.

While Sahare was recalling the topic of liberation and explaining how she felt when she heard about the NATO agreement on the news, her five-month-old baby started crying. I thought that point signaled the end of our conversation, and I was relieved that would be one of the few conversations to have a happy ending. To my surprise, Sahare asked if I could give her five minutes to feed the baby and she reassured me she would quickly come back and continue her story. As one can imagine, similar to my previous interviews, the one with Sahare didn't conclude with a happy ending.

Sahare:

> I have given birth to my daughter, but I am telling you, there is no greater joy in life than liberation. There is no greater joy. We had been held hostage for three months, there is no greater joy, whenever I am asked to describe the happiest moment of my life, I describe this moment, liberation. There is no greater joy, there is not.

We heard about the NATO agreement on the news. In Rahovec, we always had electricity; power never went out. We only had access to one Albanian channel, and I remember vividly as if it happened today, the evening news ended, and the host said "Goodnight," but then he came back on the camera and announced "The NATO bombarding has begun," an agreement has been reached, but they said that NATO forces wouldn't be able to enter Kosova right away, the agreement would take five days to be set in motion.

We were horrified those five days. We thought the Serbs would cleanse Kosova of all ethnic Albanians in five days. I was never afraid during the war. Now, I am. If somebody were to tell me war would ensue, I would be paralyzed. I would run away. I am so scared now. I wasn't scared at all back then.

Whenever I see footage of the war in Palestine, I break down. It feels as if it's happening to me, again. As if I'm at war. Seeing dead children holding a piece of bread in their hands, it's horrible. *U permendt e mos u ktheft. Once upon a time, but never again.*

Before the tanks entered Rahovec, we saw two helicopters in the sky hovering over the city, and we all rushed outside, in our backyards, and saw soldiers waving at us from their helicopters, we knew they brought us peace. I remember we all waved at them, we were relieved they came to save us, someone came to save us. I remember people, even strangers, everyone hugging each other, crying, waving at the sky, and crying tears of joy.

We all hoped for a better future, we had so much will to build a better country for ourselves. We rebuilt our houses from scratch, we thought we could rebuild the future of our country from scratch too. We loved Kosova, we never wanted to leave.

Now, if war were to happen again, I would leave. I knew what it means to be at war, I know what I have seen, what I have gone through, I have seen corpses, many wounded people, luckily my family hasn't had it hard, our father was taken hostage, and tortured physically and mentally, and used as a body to shield Serb soldiers from NATO, and forced to dig graves for people, but nobody in our family was killed. We were lucky! There was another story I want to tell you about my brother and how we thought he was killed…

As the conversation with Halla was exceeding an hour and a half, I asked about her time in Croatia, which is something she forgot to bring up and I thought I had gotten all wrong as a child. I thought I made up the fact that she and her family had gotten on a motorboat to cross the border to Croatia at some point during the war. So, I had to make sure I didn't imagine it. In talking about Croatia, she also mentioned the NATO forces.

Halla:

After the NATO forces liberated Kosova, Hakija, my husband, said we needed to go back home. We were returned home by plane. We were staying in a refugee camp in Croatia at the time. We didn't have to pay for the flight or anything at all.

The plane was filled with refugees returning to Kosova. We were happy to come back to our land. The house was burned. The first floor was completely burned, the second one was almost demolished because a bomb had fallen in it, only the walls remained, *kijamet,* we inhaled smoke the first few days, everything was burned to ashes.

We came back with the clothes that we were wearing. And we brought some pillows and bed sponges and blankets and pots and pans from the camp in Croatia. I remember the first night back. We all slept in the hallway, because the rooms were burnt. We slept on

the thin bed sponges that I had brought back from the camp. I had taken most of the things from this house to Broliq, hoping the house there would survive.

They burned the house. They burned everything we had. Only one photo album survived. Everything else got burned. Your grandmother yelled at your cousins for saving this album, she told them they should've saved some clothes instead. The TV got burned too. Also, my sewing machine. I sent them to Broliq because the war had already started in Deçan.

We could hear gunshots every day and night. One night, Berati was left home alone. Hakija and I went to one of his cousins on the other side of the village, the phones were still working, so I called him and he said he was scared to go out because he could hear gunshots near the house, so Hakija called a friend of his, who was supervising the village that night, and he helped bring Berati to us. They crawled all the way here, on their stomachs, they couldn't stand up all the way here. Because of the gunshots. My two other children were in Broliq, so then we took Berati to join them too. I will never forget how we slept in the house in Broliq. There were people everywhere, even on the balcony. Your grandmother hosted everyone, your father cleaned people's wounds, and your cousins helped him.

I was trying quite hard not to break into tears while Makfire was talking about a graveyard city and having to bury her father again. I didn't want the focus of the interview to shift to my emotional state, so I pretended I was taking notes to avoid eye contact with Makfire. I knew that if I had looked into her eyes, I wouldn't have been able to keep myself together.

Makfire:

We didn't go out for three weeks. We didn't go out before our father died or after. We didn't even go out in the backyard. We were scared. You were scared of bullets, of snipers. We stayed locked in our house for three weeks, pacing from room to room. Sometimes we listened to news, we didn't have a phone, we didn't know what was going on with anyone, we didn't know where my brother's family was, if they were alive or dead, we couldn't keep in touch with anyone.

We were lucky because, on one of those days, NATO forces liberated Kosova. We realized we were free. We saw the tanks passing by our road, so we went out. We knew NATO freed us. One of our cousins came by and told us that there were some humanitarian aid trucks near the church in Ulpiane, so I walked with my brother and aunt to the other side of Prishtina to find those trucks. Could you believe there was nobody on the streets? We were sad and shocked to see Prishtina dead like that, no cars around, no people around, no movement, not a single body on the street. We didn't find more than fifteen people by the church, waiting for food, mainly pasta, because we had nothing by then, all of our food was gone.

Then we went back home and a couple of days later my sister and my brother and his children came back home. I can still hear their screeching cries when we told them we buried our father in our backyard. The children were crying, they wanted to see their grandfather. They begged us to dig his body from the grave and have them look at their grandfather one last time. They kept asking "Why is our grandfather dead? How is he buried in this hole?"

A month later we reburied him in the neighborhood's graveyard. I'm sorry I'm crying. These were some of the moments I can never forget. Especially my father dying on us. I

remember my grandmother crying, then after the war, we talked about it and she told me I brought her to her senses when I told her she needed to be quiet when she saw the dead body of her son, I told her the Serbs would kill us too. I told her we would all die on that day if she didn't stay quiet. God willing, if it was meant for us to die, we would die. *Qysh t'o kismet.*

I don't know how we found the strength and courage. We were lucky that we didn't have anybody killed. We had distant cousins and neighbors who lost a lot of people at war, their sons were part of the massacres I told you about…We were the lucky ones. The children also had it quite bad. They were isolated for a long time…

Elheme was the only woman I interviewed who served in the Kosovo Liberation Army. She said she had always wanted to join KLA, but she didn't know how. When some KLA members sought shelter in her house in Xhubrel, she begged them to let her join the army, but they resisted. After a couple of days of making them food, pressuring them to teach her how to use a gun, and begging them to let her join their battalion, they finally surrendered, said yes, and gave her an official KLA uniform.

Elheme:

When the war was over, I was allowed to stay only in my region, in Buroje, with my brigade. And when war ended, I was in Xhubrel, in my own village, and I came back home right away, that day, on the 18th of June. I didn't manage to tell you so many other things, details that are similar to what you can see in a movie, I'm sorry I am a little confused about this part. Especially seeing my mother for the first time after…I knew about the massacre in Izbica, I almost lost my mind when I saw the place afterward, because, in my mind, I expected to see if the way I had left it.

I was picturing it exactly as I had left it. I knew people were killed, but I couldn't imagine how much the village was burnt and the houses were demolished. When I first entered the village, I could smell the smoke, I saw many cars and tractors fully burned, the houses were burned too, it all seemed to me like a massive graveyard, a massive graveyard, and when I walked from the mountain to the valleys.

I saw some sheep and a little boy was taking care of them, and, God, I didn't know if I was in a dream, or a sci-fi movie, the boy, from afar, I don't even know how to tell you, not even the movie can portray this, but it was my reality, not a sci-fi movie, the way that little boy recognized me, from afar, 200-300 metres, he started jumping around and calling my name with so much joy "Elheme!! Elheme!!" I was so distracted! I thought I heard birds singing, I didn't think about the massacres for a moment. I was distracted. When I reached the valley, I could smell the stench, the smoke, see the tractors. They had burned houses, tractors, people, everything, it was chaos. Everything was burned to ashes.

Then I saw another cousin slowly approach me, his hands looked as if he had been living in a jungle for the past few years, I tried to calm him down, but he seemed lost, as if he didn't have a soul in his body, he had been trying to clean the mess in his house, he looked sad, and exhausted, couldn't even speak properly, he looked lost. I asked if he was okay, he responded "okay," I said his name, "Beqe," he repeated his name, "Beqe." I asked him about the other families, he said "not here," but didn't tell me where. I could see the burnt houses but my brain couldn't accept that there were no people in those houses, that they had left for Albania.

I kept asking Beqe where other families where and he said “they’re in Albania, they’re in Albania too, they escaped too, they massacred this family, and this family, and this family.” I asked about my family. He said they’re in Buroje, maybe.

Then I saw a man with a tractor pass through the village, and I ran towards him, I had lost my mind, I didn’t know what I was doing, I couldn’t understand what I was doing or feeling, I was just running towards the tractor. Luckily, the man saw me wave at him and stopped. I asked if he was passing through the school and he said he was, so I told him to take me there too. He was too exhausted to talk to me, he didn’t ask who I was or why I was carrying a gun, nothing, he said nothing, just stayed silent. When we got to the school, I saw people walking around with their heads down, they seemed lost and confused, they looked as if they were homeless, their clothes torn, dirty, and smelly, their hair not brushed for ages, the smell was unbearable, of urine, and sweat. Their lips chapped and dry. They asked for water, and food, their skin sunburnt. I felt as if I was walking among dead people, as if they stared right through me.

I walked inside the school hall and saw people lying down, some sleeping, some sighing, some coughing, some laughing deliriously, some whispering my name “Elhemja, elhemja, how is she alive?!” They were my people, people from my village. I don’t know why I couldn’t even ask how they were doing. I kept walking through them, as if I was mute, as if I was dead. Until, in the corner of the classroom, sitting by a window, I saw my mother, sitting, covered in a blanket.

She jumped as soon as she saw me. “Elheme!” I walked closer to mother. She shook my hand and asked how I was. I said I was good and asked how they were alive. She said they were good and asked if I had eaten. Her first question was if I had eaten. She said

she had some bread that she could give me. She insisted on giving me her slice of bread, even though she didn't have much, she wanted to feed me first.

Ajkuna was the first woman I interviewed in person. I spent half a day with her and her family, chatting, eating krofne, and drinking Russian tea and Turkish coffee, before we moved on to her little balcony and started our conversation about the war. There was a quiet contemplation in her gaze as she held her cigarette delicately between her fingertips, took a deep breath, and then began to reflect back on her experiences of war.

Ajkuna:

> We didn't find anything the way we had left them. For us, we didn't only go through physical and emotional violence, but also economic violence. We were poor, and we had to start everything from scratch, from the very beginning. We did everything on our own, with the help of my family, sisters, and brother. We didn't get any aid from the state.
>
> I will never forget, one of my children getting an infection, I went to a small store that had opened, and I asked for baby diapers, I told her I didn't have any money on me but that I would go pay for them when my sister would send me the money from abroad. They gave me the diapers and said I didn't need to pay for them, they said all they wanted was for my daughter to recover. Money wasn't as important as health.
>
> The media wrote about me, saying I was an "Iron Woman," writing about what I had gone through in wartime, my struggle, and then my experience giving my kidney to my husband.
>
> I don't know how I did everything on my own. I don't know how I was so strong, I really don't. I just accepted the reality. I said this is what is meant to happen. God willing! I couldn't give up. Maybe, at times, I wasn't even strong enough to walk, but I crawled, I

knew my children needed me, my daughter is disabled, she is paralyzed and cannot walk, so I knew she needed my strength the most. My daughter…

A Partial Interpretation of Kosovar Women's Stories

In the section below, I begin with a broad interpretation of the narratives I have included in this chapter then move towards a more focused analysis where I investigate each type of narrative individually. My interpretation is partial, just like the stories I have listened to. The stories, told after a temporal distance of 25 years, are limited to women's memory work and ability to re-create an atrocious past. These stories are stories of the present as much as they are of the past. They served to amplify my participants' voice and agency as they provided an unfiltered account of their memories, lives, and emotions and created space for the readers to engage with the true voices of survivors of the Kosovo War. In addition, this was a mode in which I deconstructed power imbalances in research and mitigated the research/participant tensions as I allowed narratives to "speak for themselves," to honor my participants' contributions and acknowledge their right to self-representation without undue interpretation from me, as a researcher. These narratives offered insights into the complexity of the everyday existence and realities in wartime and the sociocultural, historical, and relational contexts that shaped these women's lived experience. Inspired by transnational feminism and ethical practices in oral history, these were some of the ways in which I engaged in ethical research by centering my participants' voices, honoring their agency, and respecting their autonomy in shaping the narratives that best depict their experiences and the writing of themselves into the production of history.

All women who have come forward with an interest in sharing their stories with me have continuously communicated that they have been the lucky ones, meaning they didn't have any family members killed during the war. They attributed their survival to fate and destiny, while, during the interviews, I tried to attribute their survival to their agency, resilience, and efforts to organize. While I did not realize it back then, I was uncomfortable with the power that concepts like fate and destiny possessed in the survival narratives of these women, so, as a researcher, I tried nudging them gently toward what I thought was a more tangible truth—survival because of their conscious strategies for organizing, like collecting wood to make a fire and cooking for a community to avoid starvation. This is one instance where my interpretation as a researcher varied drastically from my participants' interpretation of their experiences. These women's use of words like "luck and destiny" interpreted the stories for themselves and their audience, while my use of words like "organizing" interpreted their experience for me and my audience. As a researcher, I became aware of my tendency to interpret their stories of the past from the point of the present as heroic, positive, and filled with hope, thus seeking control over the narrative even though I consciously conducted unstructured interviews to avoid control over the conversation. Langer (2007) saw this as a common pattern in Holocaust oral histories where the interviewers struggled to detach "the way it was" from how they thought it was (and how they thought it should have been). He goes on to say, "The recording memory converges on the will to interpretation; imagining disaster meets traditional moral authority; chronology faces temporal dissolution, and each competes for control of the narrative (and for our intellectual and emotional response to it)" (Langer, 2007, p. 65).

As I have highlighted in the previous three sections of this chapter, the chaos narratives, the narratives told around the edges of the wound, and the liberation narratives all begin with a

temporal chronology, a past, a present, and a future, but once the narrative progresses, suddenly this chronology gets disrupted by a story that the participant claims is even more interesting or bears more value than the previous one, thus discontinuing their initial accounts and interrupting their efforts at chronology. The narrative, as a whole, then lacks temporal cohesiveness, but the effort to establish it remains present until the narrative ends. Langer (2007) explains that most survivors begin their stories in a mode he calls *in medias res,* which perceives the war as an event situated between prewar and postwar to then move to *in principio,* which views the beginning of the war as a different time for each witness but provides closure for none. Frank (2013) speaks of this temporal confusion in illness stories. He argues that illness disrupts a person's life and inevitably changes it, as well as who the person is. "When illness strikes, a person's present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely thinkable" (Frank, 2013, p. 55). A person loses any expectation of the future because illness is uncertain. Similarly, people in wartime lose expectations of the future because war is precarious and uncertain. What they once imagined their future like, is not possible anymore.

Frank (2013) maintains that in order to make sense of this disruption, people need to tell their stories. Sharing the story with others helps them create new frameworks, or maps as Frank calls them, that help them not only process the event but also process the ways in which they themselves have changed because of the event. Thus, in the case of Kosovar women, as one can see from the narratives above, some women's stories flowed easily and were quite cohesive whereas others were disorganized and cluttered. Based on my interpretation, the women whose stories were more cohesive have already created some sort of a framework to help them story the war and how it has changed their lives,

so I believe this is because they have shared their story of the war more often than the women whose narratives lacked cohesion.

Frank (2013) calls the people whose stories are disorganized, fragmented, and possess no sense of temporality "a narrative wreck" and suggests that the only way out of this narrative wreckage is to share the "self-story." He argues that "in telling these self-stories to others, we may, for most purposes, said to be performing straightforward narrative actions. In saying that we also tell them to ourselves" (Frank, 2013, p.55). Thus, in the process of sharing these stories with me, these Kosovar women have reaffirmed that their stories are worth telling and being listened to by others, because "there is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you" (Neale Hurston, 2006, p. 67). I hope that sharing these narratives will inspire these women, as well as others who have survived wars, to use the power of their voices for collective healing, for transformation within their communities as well as outside, amongst people who will listen to their stories or read their accounts.

In the paragraphs below I illuminate *how* Kosovar women talked about the war through chaos, wound, and liberation narratives.

Chaos Narratives

Chaos narratives were driven by motion as Kosovar women tried to settle into temporal chronology by continuously explaining where they found shelter and for how long. Their stories about motion were rushed, they were big stories that needed to be shared, whereas little stories of everyday life that show the nuances of their realities remained hidden until I asked for them. When I probed women to tell me about the atmosphere in one of the houses they settled in together with other refugees or about the smells and noises in the tractor as they were fleeing for their lives, they answered in short sentences, either as if those details were irrelevant to me or as

if they were too much for them to remember. When I asked for little stories about women at the time they sought shelter, my aunt, for instance, answered simply that they were cooking, baking bread for everyone without taking a break, and in her tone, I could sense annoyance or confusion as if that was taken for granted knowledge, something that shouldn't even be questioned. Most of my participants, when asked about women's role at war, mentioned the private sphere, but since Kosovars were denied a private sphere and made to flee their homes, then women occupied the public sphere which once belonged to men, they cooked and baked bread by the side of the road or in the open valleys where they stopped their tractors, and serve their families and communities.

Women's stories were filled with emotions and all of the women cried while they were remembering their experiences of the war. However, they all seemed confused about their emotional reactions to their storytelling. They apologized for breaking into tears and even questioned the reasons why they were so emotional since, according to them, that wasn't even the most tragic thing they'd experienced and that other stories were worse and that they would share them later on. Women did not only invalidate their emotional states, but proceeded to invalidate their whole experiences of trauma during the wartime arguing that other people had family members killed and were mourning them to this day, but they were the lucky ones, and because they were the lucky ones, they had no reason to be emotional about their lives.

The women's memories were often vague, and their accounts seemed ambiguous. They would begin a story and then ask themselves if that was what actually happened. It was almost as if they were surprised by their recollections, and yet there were also narrative holes that they weren't able to fill. They would forget things and then remember

the details later. Sometimes this happened in the middle of another story, and they would go back to the initial story to offer a conclusion. Or, they would speak more to themselves than to me about the accuracy of their stories. “Was *this* what happened?” “Or, was *this* what happened?” It sounded like, at times, they wouldn’t believe their own stories. This showcased an inherent disorientation and disruption that women experienced as they were confronted with the overwhelming residue of trauma from wartime. Life was unpredictable then, and it sounded like women’s stories were unpredictable now as feelings of confusion, despair, and existential uncertainty were conveyed.

Frank (2013) suggests that chaos narratives can serve as a starting point for individuals to begin the process of meaning-making and narrative reconstruction. By acknowledging the chaos and uncertainty inherent in their experiences, individuals may eventually find ways to reintegrate their stories and identities in a manner that reflects their newfound understanding and resilience in the face of adversity. Overall, chaos stories represent an important aspect of the storytelling process for individuals confronting any mode of suffering, highlighting the complexity and depth of human experiences amid crisis and transformation.

Narratives Told Around the Edges of the Wound

Stories told around the edges of the wound refer to the stories that individuals construct about their experiences of illness, trauma, or suffering, which may not directly address the core of their pain or vulnerability. These narratives often explore the peripheral aspects of the wound, such as the impact on relationships, changes in identity, or the search for meaning and agency in the face of adversity (Frank, 2013).

Kosovar women’s narratives around the edges of the wound reflected women’s multifaceted experiences and complexities of survival, resilience, and trauma. Women recounted

stories that highlighted the various organizing tactics they employed to navigate the harrowing conditions of political violence, persecution, and genocide. These narratives focused on everyday acts of resistance, resourcefulness, and solidarity that enabled them to endure unimaginable suffering and maintain a sense of agency and dignity amidst adversity. Moreover, they painted the importance of interpersonal networks and communities within the context of wartime. Every woman's story depicted gestures of camaraderie, sacrifice, and compassion as well as the profound bonds forged with family members, friends, and even strangers in the face of loss and uncertainty. These narratives illuminated the human capacity for connection and empathy even in the most dehumanizing circumstances.

Langer (2007) in speaking of Holocaust oral histories maintains that "one of the most powerful themes is thus the difficulty of narrating, from the context of normality now, the nature of the abnormality then, an abnormality that still surges into the present to remind us of its potent influence (p. 22). Kosovar women struggled to find the vocabulary to narrate their experiences, thus using euphemisms and steering away from thick description as a means of protecting their vulnerability and focusing on aspects of their experiences that felt less threatening or overwhelming. For example, Kimete said, "There were rumors that they were taking young girls and you know, taking them to the station or abandoned houses." She said "*you know"* to signal something "all women in wartime knew". And, I didn't have to ask for clarification. *I* simply *knew*.

By avoiding direct confrontation with the core of their pain, women aimed to maintain a sense of distance and control over their narratives. One major theme that reflected these narratives told around the edges of the wound was rape and sexual abuse.

Most of the women refused to use the word "rape" but alluded to it using phrases like "the worst thing that can happen to a woman" "you know what," or "something," like in Makfire's account:

> My biggest fear was that they could do *something* to me in front of my family, that was my biggest fear of all time. I kept telling myself that I wished they would kill me. I became obsessed with the thought they could do *something* to me. Honestly, I am telling you, I hoped they would kill me before they did *something* to me.

Other women, like Shqipe, used the word torture to allude to sexual abuse, "To be honest, I wasn't afraid of dying, nobody was. We would be shot in our heads and die within seconds. That would be a good death. I was afraid of *torture".*

All the women, based on their stories, grappled with the enduring legacy of trauma and its impact on their lives long after the war ended. Narratives told around the edges of the wound portrayed how these women struggled to come to terms with their experiences, grappled with survivor guilt and attributed their survival to destiny and luck, and navigated the complexities of memory and commemoration. These stories, as told from the present, shed light on the psychological and emotional impacts of genocide and the ongoing quest for healing and remembrance.

Liberation Narratives

Liberation narratives serve as powerful forms of testimony and bearing witness to the atrocities of war. Most, if not all, Kosovar women that I interviewed said they felt a moral imperative to share their experiences with the world, ensuring that their voices are finally heard, and the memory of the Kosovo War is preserved for future generations and not silenced or erased, especially by Serbia who denies the genocide and refuses to recognize Kosova as an independent nation.

All of the interviews seemed to come to an end with an account of NATO forces liberating Kosova. Langer (2007) in his examination of the Holocaust oral histories notes that steering the witness toward the end of the camp experience is a device used by interviewers to maintain interviews tolerable for themselves and mark liberation as the purpose of the story that can, in a way, redeem the horrors that the survivors experienced. I took liberation to signal the end of the interview, but that was before I realized that my participants were not following a chronological order in their narratives. It wasn't until I sat down with the transcripts that I realized that none of the women ended their stories with liberation. They talked about liberation but always ended up sharing more stories of the war that they had forgotten before getting to the liberation part. Frank (2013) claims that "witnesses, unlike their interviewers, do not think of liberation as any great dividing line that orders their experience" (p. 103). Similarly, Kosovar women seemed reluctant to finish their accounts with liberation as a way of refusing to end their stories in a tidy conclusion found in normal narratives, a conclusion that would expect them to reflect on their experience and speak about the ways in which they make meaning out of their time at war.

Most of the women began telling me new stories that they came to think of, unrelated to liberation and, in most cases, also unrelated to themselves. They ended their account with stories about others, about their daughters, about their time before the war even began, about their youth, about certain foods that they eat now that remind them of the war, or things that trigger them from that time, like seeing police on the streets, witnessing wars and genocides in other parts of the world. A lot of their concluding stories reflected how the war impacts their day-to-day lives now, how the residue of

trauma leaks into the present and catches them off guard. Bessel van Der Kolk (2015) found that regardless of whether the trauma occurred a decade ago or over four decades, his patients struggled to reconcile their wartime experiences with their present lives. Surprisingly, the very events that inflicted immense pain on them had also become their primary source of significance. He furthers that trauma isn't merely an isolated event from the past; it's also the lasting impact that experience has on the mind, brain, and body and how this experience continues to affect how people cope and adapt in the present.

Women briefly mentioned that they still carry the trauma to the present but almost none of them spoke more in-depth about what this trauma looks like or feels. They talked about it as something heavy and they carry it day to day but did not need to seek professional help to cope with or process. It resembles a shadow that they had gotten used to existing with.

For me, the residue of war trauma is most present in how I face uncertainty in my day-to-day life and how I worry about it as if worrying is what helps me cope with things as if worrying prepares me for the worst that can happen. I live near an Air Force base in Tampa, and my body becomes tense whenever I hear helicopters flying over the area or see military airplanes and flyer jets descending on the base. I am afraid of the cold, and I always carry an extra layer even in the summer heat because cold reminds me of the house that I stayed in Isniq when we fled Broliq, a house that had no windows in the middle of winter, and where the adults hung blankets to stop the cold wind from coming in. I am reminded of war when I smell gurabija, this simple-to-make pastry, that women baked in bulk as we were fleeing for our lives. Four years ago, I decided to bake gurabija myself because I was feeling homesick and wanted to eat something that reminded me of home, but instead, as the gurabija were baking in the oven and their aroma permeated the house, I broke down crying in the kitchen. Memories of the war came rushing in and I could

vividly picture my mom and aunt pouring the gurabija from the pan to the big bowl covered in a red checkered cloth and bringing them into the tractor, and I could just feel the panic that I felt as a child and I could hear the adults screaming and my cousins crying. Even as I write about the day when I baked gurabija, I have tears streaming down my face. This happens to me very often as I write this dissertation. On most days, I end my writing sessions in tears, and sometimes I even lie on the floor in a fetal position and wait for what feels like a piercing existential fear to leave my body. I am reminded of Anzaldúa (1987) who describes the painful process of her writing thusly:

> …Because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I sometimes get sick when I do write. I can't stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fever, worsen. But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once they have "meaning" they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy. (p. 70)

My story, even as I am transformed by this dissertation, remains one of chaos as I struggle with questions pertaining to my capabilities to bear witness and do justice to wartime stories. "Why me?" I continuously ask myself. I remind myself that I could've explored other interests, I could've written about other topics, but why war? Am I trying to get closure? Is there something in my past that I am trying to come to terms with? Maybe this dissertation is my way of making peace with a troubled childhood, accepting the horrors of it, and not letting it control my life anymore. It is my responsibility and moral obligation, as a child of war, to give voice to these stories, and to not let the crimes that Serbia committed in Kosova to be erased from our memory.

On the Process of Writing Women's Stories of War

Certain stories are too difficult to convey in thick description, too painful to reveal, and too distressing to articulate. In attempting to articulate chaos, wound, and liberation narratives, I'd settle at my desk with the intention to write, yet I'd find myself engulfed in a sense of defeat before a single word found its way onto the page. Reading the interview transcripts would often make me think of my own memories of war and would evoke physical reactions in me—tears streaming down my cheeks as forgotten feelings flooded back, permeating my entire being. In moments like those, I'd find myself pouring out pages within the span of an hour, only to find myself drained, unable to continue, and incapable of returning to that desk for the rest of the day. Sometimes, days, even weeks passed by before I mustered the strength to resume writing. I struggled to understand how these reactions to my memories persisted, even two decades after the end of the war. In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma,* Bessel van Der Kolk (2015) claims that:

> While we all want to move beyond trauma, the part of our brain that is devoted to ensuring our survival (deep below our rational brain) is not very good at denial. Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger and mobilize disturbed brain circuits and secrete massive amounts of stress hormones. This precipitates unpleasant emotions intense physical sensations, and impulsive and aggressive actions. (p. 18)

Similarly, even during the data collection, as I conducted interviews with my participants, I found myself unable to schedule more than one interview a day, sometimes even a week, without being engulfed by feelings of fear, overwhelm, and loss of control. Each time I engaged with the topic—whether through writing, discussions, or reading articles—I sensed that I was reopening

old wounds. I felt as if I was poking at a wound that the doctor explicitly warned against touching until it heals fully. I continued touching it, yet I couldn't shake the feeling that I was only skimming the surface of the wound, as if I lacked the courage to delve deeper into its core.

I often felt the same thing as I was listening to the women recall their experiences of war. I've felt as though they were racing to reach the end of their narratives, as if they were delicately treading on thin ice, fearing that delving deeper into certain moments might cause the ice to crack beneath them. They skirted around their most challenging times, leaving out painful details. Instead, they focused on the constant movement, the instability, the absence of normalcy, and a sense of belonging. Once again, when I asked about the specifics of their shelters—the sights, sounds, and sensations—they offered only fleeting glimpses: "It was crowded," "I smelled smoke," or "We were hungry." They hesitated to touch on their inward experiences—the discomfort of sleeping in cramped and abandoned houses, the endless chatter within the room, the jostling for space, the relentless coughing or the cries of newborn babies that pierced the silence of the night. I got the sense that they lightly brushed against these moments because they were reluctant to fully confront the overwhelming realities of their past.

I find myself following a similar pattern when talking about the war with my friends or my partner's family. Either I falter early in the conversation, struggling to go into the details, or I brush it off with a laugh, downplaying my own experiences and highlighting the immense hardships faced by others. I remember one friend from my master's program who lost forty relatives in a massacre in his village—how the Serb military spared no one, leaving behind a community of single mothers struggling to

provide for their children— their grief I can't even begin to imagine, yet alone write into a story.

Throughout the writing process, another thing that I found myself grappling with was the challenge of giving voice to women's experiences while also honoring the profound pain they conveyed. It was a difficult balance to attain as I struggled to capture the human essence of these narratives and interpret that essence in my analysis. There were moments when the gravity of the suffering women articulated truly overwhelmed me, and I had to remind myself to approach each story with empathy and sensitivity.

One of the lessons I learned from this writing process was undoubtedly the importance of bearing witness. As researchers, we have a responsibility not only to analyze data and draw conclusions but also to bear witness to the lived realities of those we study. This entails acknowledging the depth of their suffering and creating spaces for amplifying their voices.

Another lesson I learned was the power of storytelling as a tool for healing and empowerment. Many of the women I interviewed spoke of how sharing their stories made them feel better afterward, they spoke of feeling relief, and I thought this came as a result of reclaiming agency through narrative work. As for myself, I can't confidently say that the writing process has been therapeutic, because it has been the absolute contrary, it has triggered a lot of the trauma I thought I had already processed, but the writing has taught me more about the importance of self-care in navigating such emotionally demanding research. In engaging with stories of trauma day in and day out I risked my mental and emotional well-being, so it has been crucial to me to establish boundaries, seek support when needed, and engage in practices that ground me like running and yoga.

Ultimately, my dissertation became not just a scholarly endeavor but a deeply personal journey of empathy, understanding, and advocacy. It reinforced my commitment to amplifying marginalized voices and shedding light on the often-hidden realities and stories of women at war.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEY LEFT FLOUR, POTS, AND PANS BEHIND SO WE COULD USE THEM

Second-World Women in Transnational Feminism

In my second year of graduate school, I took a course titled "Transnational Feminisms." I had briefly heard about the transnational feminism framework in my first year and I had thought this would be a course in which I would learn more about feminisms that cross national borders, thus feminisms from all over the world. Upon reviewing the syllabus, I realized we would learn about Western feminism, Third-World feminism, Black feminism, Latinx, and so on. However, there was nothing on the syllabus about post-socialist feminism, or feminisms deriving from countries that had a socialist past, like Kosova did. At the time, I was used to not seeing myself represented on the syllabus, so I didn't think this absence mattered until my colleague, Eve, brought it up. She was my roommate at the time, a Russian citizen, who was also in my department and taking the class with me. We would always discuss the materials at length and somehow end up getting worked up about *absence*, our absence in the syllabus, and the absence of women from post-socialist countries in the framework of transnational feminism. We thought we had invented something, we had found this gap to fill, until we started looking for articles that were making the same argument as we were. Other people had noticed the gap of post-socialist women (or women from the Second World), and they were speaking up.

We found Tlostanova, Thapar Björkert, and Koobak's "the postsocialist 'missing other' of transnational feminism," an article published in 2019 that came into existence after two

conferences, “TransYugoslav Feminisms: Women’s Heritage Revisited” and “Postcolonialism and East-Central European Literatures” in which the authors noted that postcolonial scholars, mostly those from colonies of the British Empire, did not find it easy to engage with the context of post-socialism. They recognized themselves as pillar of transnational feminism whereas they disregarded post-socialist feminists as legitimate actors in the canon. In their article, Tlostanova, Thapar Björkert, and Koobak (2019) addressed the reasons for the absence of a dialogue between postcolonial and post-socialist feminists and take into consideration temporal dynamics, race, and points of methodological stumbling as seen in transnational feminism. They argued that when collections on transnational feminism discuss the post-socialist subject, they do so from a Western-centric point of view that perpetuates itself as the universal and delocalized view, despite claiming to have moved beyond outdated dichotomies and being influenced by US-centric epistemologies.

According to the authors, the juxtaposition of postcolonial and post-socialist paths reveals that they intersect in various ways, albeit at different points in time and for different reasons. Despite these differences, these intersections lead to similar outcomes and potential collaborations because they represent distinct responses to the same colonial legacy. Post-socialist timeframes differ from postcolonial ones, characterized by a sudden break from socialist ideals rather than a gradual evolution within Western capitalist norms, as seen in postcolonial contexts. Consequently, terms like "return to Europe," "transition," and "transformation" have significantly influenced politics in the post-socialist realm. Despite the intersection, these two positions have continuously failed

to hear one another and missed out on creating postcolonial and post-socialist coalitions (Tlostanova, Thapar Björkert, & Koobak, 2019).

How can academics, then, incorporate post-socialist perspectives into transnational feminism through dialogue and coalitions with fellow transnational feminists and not in silos? Tlostanova, Thapar Björkert, and Koobak (2019) maintain this could happen without the interference of the West in mediating dialogue. It could come to fruition from a refusal to begin any analysis from Western-centric theories or from building off Western feminist templates. It will come from the design of alternative canons of knowledge and a drastic methodological shift away from the dominant Western academic discourses.

Similarly, Koobak and Marling (2014), highlighted this near absence of post-socialist feminisms and argue that post-socialist countries are perceived as almost a "non-region" or a "non-place" where feminist knowledge has not yet fully emerged, it is still in construction and measured against Western epistemologies and genealogies. For them, the way forward is by using decolonial frameworks to reimagine the politics of location and knowledge-production practices within transnational feminist discourse.

In this chapter, I join the coalition between post-socialist and postcolonial feminism (Tlostanova, Thapar-Björket, & Koobak, 2016; Koobak & Marling, 2014). By employing Cruz and Sodeke's (2020) framework of "liquid organizing" to highlight the organizing properties of Kosovar women during the Kosovo War, I stress on our common goal to center the voices of marginalized people within the context of both post-socialist and postcolonial societies. By using Cruz and Sodeke's framework, which is inherently postcolonial, in a post-socialist context, I bring attention to the intersections of postcolonial and post-socialist paths, our shared histories of oppression, critique of power structures, and critical engagements to theory and praxis. Adding

the concept of *solidification*, which is rooted in a post-socialist context, to extend a postcolonial theory like liquid organizing, I promote transnational solidarity and collaboration across different borders and contexts and recognize that our struggles for justice and liberation are interconnected and often require coalitional efforts that transcend national, cultural, and ideological boundaries.

Moreover, this is my attempt to bridge the absence of the post-socialist Other in the realm of transnational feminism by centering the voices of Kosovar women in precarious contexts such as wartime. I use Butler and Athanasiou's (2013) definition of precarity as, "the process or experience of being dispossessed of the material conditions needed for a livable life, such as: food, water, land, homes, and citizenship" (p. 11). Inspired by Zenovich (2018), I add to this definition that precarity comes in the aftermath of being dispossessed which affects social networks and a sense of belonging. Additionally, I address my second research question which examines how Kosovar women communicatively organized for survival during the Kosovo War, by focusing on Kosovar women's properties of liquid organizing. I argue that despite precarity permeating their lives in 1998/1999, their feminist organizing not only highlights notions of intersecting oppressions but also resistance, especially through food and shelter, covering and secrecy, and a local spiritual resilience rooted in community and an orientation towards family and social networks. This is to say, in wartime, their feminist organizing portrays intersecting oppressions as well as various forms of resistance.

In what follows, I offer an interpretation of my findings on Kosovar women's properties of communicatively organizing for survival, provide excerpts from my interviews to illuminate the concepts of motion, solvency, and permeability, and

showcase how care provisions were interweaved in the fabric of women's organizing. In addition, I extend the framework of liquid organizing by coining the term *solidification,* which emerges from a post-socialist context. Lastly, I discuss how Kosovar women's stories of organizing contribute to the construction of a post-socialist feminism.

Properties of Organizing for Survival

Liquid organizing refers to "a type of flexible organizing with hybrid arrangements, flexibility in goals, and equivocal identities. Marginal organizational actors resort to liquidity involuntarily to escape hostile conditions and make a livelihood" (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020, p. 4). I argue that Kosovar women's organizing efforts were pivotal for individual and collective survival during the Kosovo War. Women were not mere victims of war, but instead active agents of change who contributed significantly, in non-combat ways, during wartime. The narratives below contribute to an insurgent knowledge that highlights a critical interrogation of power dynamics and hierarchies within a society undergoing war and embraces alternative epistemologies that challenge dominant Western ways of knowing by centering the experiences and expertise of a marginalized group—women in wartime.

The narratives of women's organizing efforts and care provisions in wartime are important for recognizing women's agency and contributions in conflict contexts, inspiring future activism, documenting history, building solidarity networks, challenging oppressive systems, and promoting peace and justice in communities affected by war.

Women's contributions to organizing efforts during wartime are often overlooked or marginalized in mainstream narratives of conflict. Sharing these stories helps to bring visibility to the vital roles that women play in resistance, resilience, and rebuilding communities amidst the destruction and devastation of war. In addition, highlighting women's organizing efforts

during wartime underscores their agency and capacity for leadership in precarious contexts. It disrupts narratives of women as passive victims of war and instead emphasizes their resilience, resourcefulness, and commitment to social change.

Furthermore, Kosovar women's organizing efforts during wartime contribute to the documentation and preservation of historical narratives that will otherwise be lost or erased. Recording these stories ensures that the experiences and contributions of women in Kosova are remembered and honored for future generations. Moreover, in general, sharing stories of women's organizing during wartime helps to build solidarity networks among activists, scholars, and communities working towards peace and justice. It fosters connections across geographical, cultural, and political boundaries, amplifying the voices of women in conflict-affected regions and strengthening collective efforts for social change.

Finally, women's organizing during wartime challenges patriarchal norms and militaristic ideologies that perpetuate violence and inequality. It offers alternative models of organizing, resistance, and peacebuilding rooted in principles of justice, equality, and human rights, and calls attention to the gendered impacts of conflict and militarization.

Below, based on Cruz and Sodeke's (2020) framework of liquid organizing, specifically building on notions of motion, solvency, and permeability, I portray the properties of Kosovar women's liquid organizing for survival during the Kosovo War. Like Cruz and Sodeke's illustrative case study approach, I do not aim to generalize. Instead, I revisit my data to find representative exemplars of a concept. Foregrounding rich exemplars seemed crucial to documenting marginal organizing, which is seldom understood in non-precarious contexts.

Motion: Agency and Life at Risk

Cruz and Sodeke (2020) refer to motion as "movement across space—multi-sited organizing of individuals circulating through the city—and time—organizing that is interrupted and resumes through time" (p. 8). From figuring out, in coordination with other neighbors, when to flee for their lives and where to find a safe shelter without drawing attention, the women and their families adapted their movements to the flow of life and to avoid the risks of being tortured, raped, or killed by the paramilitary soldiers around them.

Kosovar women narrated their continuous movements, some in the span of months, some in the span of a year, during the Kosovo War. Having been forcibly displaced from their childhood homes by the Serb paramilitary soldiers, they had to find temporary shelter at a distant family member's house, a neighbor's, or remain at a stranger's mercy to take them in at the risk of their own lives. Most women began their recollection of war by emphasizing how they were forced to flee with no knowledge of where to go next. Their lives had become a site of being in motion and adapting to the uncertainty around them.

Buqe lived in a small house in Deçan until hiding in her neighbor's basement and running away in the pouring rain, fleeing for her life, became the norm for a year. Her story began with her father being taken away by the paramilitary forces because, in collaboration with some friends, he set the foundations for the Kosovar police forces, a joint group of people coming together to resist Serb oppression and genocide in Kosova. When the NATO bombings began on the 24th of March 1999, Buqe and her family joined 150 refugees who were fleeing together in one crowded tractor, heading for the Macedonian border. She recalls:

> A neighbor knocked on our door. "Ikni se jon ra deri poshte policia, tash ju hijne neper shpija," he told us the Serb paramilitary soldiers have started breaking into houses in our

> town. He asked us to go to his basement. It was a matter of seconds. We went out wearing house slippers. We were in the first row of houses in our neighborhood, we knew we were the first ones to face the police. We went to his basement and stayed quiet for two hours. Then, we were told to run away because they were going to break into his house next. We started running away. In our house slippers. We were running as fast as we could because they were shooting with snipers in our direction. It was pouring rain. We were thirty-five people fleeing that basement. In pouring rain. Covered in mud. We ran. Then we walked. Without any destination in mind. Only my mother knew where we were going. She said "Po shkojme ne Baran, te dajte". We're going to my family! Luckily, people were organizing to pick up refugees on their tractors. They were picking up everyone. They knew we had all fled Deçan.

Buqe's traumatic experience of sudden displacement and movement at the outbreak of the Kosovo War exemplifies the fluidity and quick adaptation inherent in liquid organizing, highlighting the importance of flexibility and resilience in navigating rapidly changing circumstances in life-threatening environments.

In terms of my ethnographic fieldwork, in wartime contexts, motion at the margins, especially during wartime, was quick and irregular. It differed from motion in Western contexts. It occurred in multiple spaces and was dependent on outside circumstances and threats like military checkpoints and forceful displacements. Motion was strictly driven not by a monetary promise, like in the case of susu groups or street traders in Liberia (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020), but by accentuating the chances of survival, which turned motion into a normative way of being. In the context of Kosovar women's organizing, motion came at the expense of ontological security as people left social and

material environments behind and relinquished control over what happened to them. While motion could be considered a voluntary organizational tool in non-war contexts, the same could not be said about war. In wartime, motion became an organizing property that people were forced into rather than an exercise of free choice. People adapted to motion involuntarily since resistance to it might have hindered their chances of survival. A resistance to motion could have resulted in the end of a life. Many families who had resisted motion and chosen to protect their familial homes and land had been mercilessly massacred, like the founder of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the hero, Adem Jashari, who was killed in his home together with 57 members of his family.

In the interview with Dada Shkurte, my aunt, she recounted the moment when her neighbor in Broliq decided to stay home with his sheep as a sign of resistance. He had some five hundred of them and he didn't want to leave them behind. He didn't want to leave the farm, the cattle, and the land. So, when the paramilitary soldiers occupied Broliq, this neighbor refused to move and flee for his life. Consequently, Serb soldiers slaughtered him, his daughter, and all of his cattle. Another participant, Sahare, also recalled one of her neighbors, a family of six, massacred in their apartment in Rahovec because they had refused to leave their house during the NATO bombings, a time in which Kosovars were allowed to stay home without fearing for their lives and were promised safety and freedom. Refusal to move, even during a ceasefire, meant refusal to live.

In many instances in war, motion began, and was interrupted, but it did not resume over time. While in non-war contexts, the point of interruption is not necessarily a threat to one's livelihood, in wartime, the interruption signaled the end of motion and the promise for its resumption ceased to exist. Sahare shared a moment when paramilitary soldiers stopped the

caravan she was part of and dragged outside the two men who were leading the caravan. The men were hit in the head with batons, while everyone was watching. She said the soldiers took them inside this abandoned house and, all Sahare and her family could hear were gunshots. The caravan stopped, and so did the lives of those two men.

Motion followed the stories of Kosovar women as a central component not only in times of displacement but after they found shelter as well. These women organized to go outside in the public sphere in search of family members' whereabouts, food, and water, and to gather information on the paramilitary checkpoints and gather intel on where danger might come from. Since men were being taken away, tortured, sent to jail, and even killed, they stayed hidden inside their homes, while women took the responsibility of leaving the safety of their houses and risking their lives. This movement brought a shift in the gender dynamics enforced before the war where men surfaced in public and women in the private sphere. Women went out armed with the knowledge of adapting their motion in any unanticipated interaction with paramilitary soldiers. They chose paths that were less frequented by the soldiers and trespassed through people's houses and outskirts, instead of walking on main streets or through the city center.

As one woman, Remzije, then a student at the University of Prishtina and now a professor of journalism, recounted:

> We would trespass through people's properties, houses, and backyards, from one house we would, in some cases, climb the walls or gates to get to the other one. All the houses were abandoned. We would walk maybe 2-3 km through people's yards, sneaking. We couldn't risk being seen walking on the main streets. There was no movement. I never saw anybody walking on the streets.

As this example illustrates, motion was limited by the presence of paramilitary soldiers, and this showcased how it worked as a quick adaptation to limitations rather than an organizing property functioning in the absence of limitations. Women were restricted to going out only for consumption, buying food and bread and the occasional cigarettes, and were forced back into their homes right after. Some of the women admitted they would use food as an excuse to search for family members.

Vlora, who was eighteen years old when the bombarding began, in our conversation, reiterated how afraid she was that something would happen to her parents and, being the oldest child, she would have to take care of her sisters and brother. When talking about movement at war, she explained:

> When we settled in a neighborhood, there was this wounded woman, whose daughter I befriended. She didn't know if her son was dead or alive. He was a student living in Ulpiana. The woman was restless to go outside and find out whether her son was still in his apartment. We decided to go together. The apartment was broken into. Demolished. We walked. The town was silent. We saw a car, so we quickly hid in a building. We were so scared! Tmerr!

These excerpts illuminated motion that was in continuous interruption but resumed over time (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020). In precarious and marginalized contexts like that of Kosovo War, motion became a critical and normative way of organizing for survival and a means of resistance against genocide.

In all the interviews, women spoke about one crucial thing that served to facilitate organizing in motion—money. While with susu groups in Liberia, group members contribute a monetary sum to the group for it to function as a community-based credit association, Kosovar

people also set aside monetary sums to give to Serb paramilitary soldiers to avoid torture, rape, and murder and to be allowed to cross the border to the neighboring countries. While members of the susu group eventually got their money back, Kosovar people, in exchange for their money, got their freedom to continue motion and survive until the next checkpoint where they would need to bribe Serb soldiers again, and so the same process continued until they crossed the border to safety in either Albania, Macedonia, or Montenegro. For example, Makfire remembered how money saved her family's life while other people were killed in the caravan because they didn't have anything to give to the paramilitary soldiers:

> This caravan turned into a big massacre, some 160 or 170 people were killed, and four or five of them were my cousins and were all murdered with a chainsaw. Our tractor was covered in a tarp, but we could hear men's cries and screams and the rumbling sounds of the chainsaw. That day the paramilitary soldiers stopped the caravan to ask people for money. Whoever didn't have one thousand euros couldn't move along. Only people with money were allowed to go. Fortunately, most people knew they had to carry money on them. My cousins had family in Switzerland, and they were given a lot of money and were told to never stay without it. Luckily, we were all on the same tractor, so they gave it for us too. I remember the soldiers pulling the tarp up, holding their big guns in their arms, and asking us for money. I panicked and I offered them a golden necklace I was wearing. They said they didn't care for necklaces, they wanted money. So, my father gave whatever money he had to these soldiers, but I knew he didn't have any money left for other checkpoints. When we were stopped at the next one, at the entrance of Prishtina, I was holding one of my cousin's babies in my arms so that the soldiers wouldn't think I

> was a young woman. The women told me they had hidden some 200-300 euros in the baby's diaper and that I could use it if the soldiers asked for it. I was lucky, the soldiers thought somebody else checked my identification documents and let me go through the line without checking my body and clothes for money. I turned my head back because I was scared for my brothers who were waiting in the other line, but I saw my cousins give money to the soldiers so that they could keep moving along. We survived the checkpoint, but I cannot forget about a few men, cousins of mine, from my father's side, who were killed in that checkpoint, some were young boys, and some were older men. They were all killed that day.

Like the harrowing story recounted above, in the conversations I've had with my family, I was also told that our uncles in Switzerland had sent around a hundred thousand euros to us during the war so that we could safely cross the border to Montenegro and Albania. As a result, nobody in my family was murdered.

When I think about these Serb aggressors taking money from poor innocent Kosovars my blood boils but at the same time, hopelessness takes hold of my body. While money served as a tool that Kosovars used to continue their motion toward freedom, money was also used by the Serb paramilitary soldiers as a tactic to exert control and intimidate the local population. It sent a message of dominance and reinforced the power dynamic between the Serb paramilitary soldiers and Kosovar civilians, instilling fear and compliance. The Serbs used economic measures perhaps as a tactic of psychological warfare but also ethnic cleansing in Kosova. They demoralized the Kosovar people, disrupted their daily lives, and created a sense of helplessness and dependency as well as uncertainty about their future security in their homeland. While in this section I illuminated how Kosovar women organized in quick and irregular motion to survive the

war, in the following section I focus on another facet of organizing, solvency, which is a mode of organizing highly dependent on networks and interpersonal relations with strangers.

Solvency: Food and Shelter as Resistance

Kosovar women talked about coming together with other women, neighbors, distant family members, and even strangers to help each other and care for one another and then "dissolved" and went their separate ways to ensure survival. Solvency refers to "the ability for marginal organizational actors to 'dissolve' into surrounding environments thus creating complex and syncretic modes of organizing" (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020, p. 10). This mode of organizing was ingrained in personal relationships and community and was possible because it a) did not require a lot of infrastructure (money, food, and material resources) to maintain these relationships; and b) they generously shared this infrastructure with each other (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020). Ibnouf (2020) argued that "in war, women make the most of the limited resources to make ends meet. They explore every available option that can improve their livelihood, especially that which increases their food supply" (p. 84). Hynes (2004) asserted that shelter, food, a dependable livelihood, and safety from sexual and physical violence are all elements of well-being. Kosovar women quickly mobilized around food to maintain individual and collective well-being and then dispersed and continued their journey toward freedom outside of Kosova. For example, Kimete's account illustrates this property of solvency:

> In these two days, because the caravan was long and slow, we could stop on the streets, hop out of the tractors, and bake bread. We left our bread half-baked when we heard somebody say "Move! Quick! The police are coming!" We couldn't finish baking the

> bread, so we had to later stop on the road and continue baking it. We could barely light a fire because of the heavy rain. Our neighbor came to help my father hold a jacket above the firepit so that it wouldn't go off. My mother and the neighbor's wife were baking the bread as fast as they could because we didn't know where we would end up. We had to share the bread! Luftës nuk mundesh me i ikë vet. You can't survive the war alone.

As seen in Kimete's story, solvency refers to the ability to effectively address the challenge and struggle of sustenance in a dynamic and precarious environment. In response, Kimete, her family, and neighbors embrace solvency by relying on each other and experimenting with new tactics to bake bread, stopping at a safer place later down the road and holding a jacket over the firepit to create a temporary cover from the rain so that they could bake the bread. Solvency was also an element of Lirije's story:

> The caravan was never-ending. You had time to start a fire. Even boil a chicken. In Zhur, my cousin removed the head of a chicken with her bare hands. She killed the chicken and we managed to let it boil for a good 10-15 minutes. There were stoves left on the streets. They left flour, water, salt, pots and pans behind so we could use them. You could even make pancakes on the street while you were waiting for the caravan to begin moving. The people in our tractor ate the whole chicken. They didn't even ask if it was boiled or not. The whole chicken was gone. No leftovers. This is how we fed ourselves until we crossed the Albanian border. Nobody gave us food in Kosova. We had no aid. Not even from the Red Cross.

Because Kosovars were in continuous motion and displacement from their homes, they did not have any static spaces to prepare food. Due to the absence of material resources, such as kitchens, tools, and utilities, they had to improvise by blending into their environments. They had

to organize to secure food and cook in unsafe and unpredictable environments because they were denied aid and shelter in cities and towns where they did not reside in. Thus, organizing for food could stop or resume at any time depending on external factors (e.g., weather, the presence of the paramilitary soldiers, the caravan's movement).

Dada Shkurte also revealed a sentiment of solvency in her account, sharing how my family depended on the external environment as well as the kindness of fellow stranger refugees for sustenance:

> We never starved. We took flour, milk, cheese, and honey in the tractor with us. People also left flour behind, on the side of the road, so others could use it. We had pots, and pans, and the sac, and a shovel, and other tools. Sometimes, I would bake bread, other times pancakes, other times gurabija. Sometimes, I would bake bread on the side of the road. The men would walk in the caravan of people, in front of the tractor, gather wood, and make a fire, so that when the tractor got there the fire would be started, and baking the bread wouldn't take too long. Sometimes, your uncle baked too. Once he baked three or four breads and gave everyone in the tractor a piece. I have never tasted bread as good as then.

Likewise, this property was relevant to Kimete's journey hiding in the mountains:

> We set up the tent higher in the mountains so that the police wouldn't go that far to check for refugees. We set up a nylon tent. My father and his friend found some wood and we used it to make beds. Then we found a blanket. We lit a fire. We didn't have a place to shower, and we didn't have where to heat up the water. After a couple of days, we found a spring quite far from where we had set our tent, so we would go fill up the buckets and bring them back. We learned to make a firepit. We were city people. We didn't know

> how to survive in the mountains. But we learned. We heated up the water in the firepit, we took showers, rarely, maybe once a month, but we did. And we set up a toilet. It was not fancy or anything, it was just a hole we had dug, based on the toilets we saw at our grandparents long before the war.

These marginal organizational actors organized rapidly by assembling and disassembling improvised infrastructure in insecure environments. For Kimete's family and neighbors in the mountains, this process involved assembling wood to make beds and start a fire, walking long distances to secure water for drinking and showering, and digging up holes to set up toilets. Upon hearing paramilitary soldiers approaching their location, they had to quickly disassemble the tent, the beds, and the firepit, and flee the area, making sure not to forget any necessary and irreplaceable material resources behind.

Makfire also recalled how her family relied on strangers and a material object found on the side of the road to help bury her father who passed away on the street while fleeing for his life:

> At 5 am, we were headed for the train station, but our father, who didn't want to leave our house in Prishtina, collapsed on the street, dying from a sudden heart attack. We wanted to honor his wish to be buried at home, so my brother found a way to transport his body. Eventually, with the help of some men who heard us pushing a loud wagon through the street in the early hours of the morning, we managed to carry our father's body, risking our lives from the soldiers along the way. Without the help of those three young men, we wouldn't have been able to fulfill our father's final wish and bury him in our backyard. We would've needed to bury him on the side of the road.

This vignette portrays solvency in wartime by showcasing how men came together to help Makfire and her brother, even though they didn't know each other before. After the burial, all these people dissolved again into their surrounding environments to not draw any attention. Together, briefly organizing and then scattering around enabled them to negotiate threats of torture and death but also of famine and scarcity as depicted in the narratives of Kimete, Dada Shkurte Lirije and Makfire.

Solvency, like most of the organizing during wartime was shaped by survival issues like security, water, and food, therefore as an attempt to recreate a sense of normalcy and was accomplished through secrecy and attempts at invisibility. Most of the women mentioned how they made sure to wear dark-colored clothes like brown or black so that they could blend easily into the environment (and become invisible) rather than bright colors like white or yellow which would make them stand out. This seemed like an unspoken rule of solvent organizing that everyone seemed aware of.

Elheme, who was part of the Kosovo Liberation Army recalled how her small battalion worked in secrecy to find strategic places in the mountains to hide from the Serb soldiers, spy on the military checkpoints, and help carry wounded civilians to safety through secret paths. She said the army worked closely with the "Mother Theresa" organization, a charitable society with circa 7000 volunteers created during the 1990s to resist the Serb oppression during a time when Albanians were dismissed from their jobs, evicted from their houses and properties, and when education in their native curricula and language was forbidden (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000).

During this time, my father was a doctor for this society and risked his life countless times for the well-being of his patients. Once the military soldiers found out the

location of the house in which my father worked, a house that had been turned into a secret makeshift hospital, they were on their way to shut it down, burn down the house, and kill any patients or doctors they could find. While the other doctors had left upon hearing the news, my father and two nurses risked their own lives to transport all of the patients to our house in Broliq. Once again, my familial home was transformed into a temporary hospital and shelter for people who were wounded and those seeking safety. My cousins, as instructed by my father, played the role of nurses cleaning and attending to people's wounds, and our dinner table was turned into a surgery table where my father removed people's bullets or even, in several instances, amputated their limbs after they had walked into landmines. Other doctors, and friends from Mother Theresa, would secretly bring medication to my family so my father could continue working in secret. I have a vivid memory from those days, one that I wrote about in my master's thesis a few years ago, which, exemplifies solvent organizing as accomplished by relying on networks and communities and in the absence of adequate material infrastructure:

> I hear the hurried slosh of my father's winter boots and mother comes running to the kitchen, panic-stricken, rapidly clearing all the glasses, spoons, and forks from our old, wooden kitchen table. "Twelve gunshot wounds!" my father shouts as he and three men struggle to lay the injured body of a young soldier on the old table creaking under his weight. Blood-covered socks wrapped around the soldier's wet legs. My father, barely maintaining composure, asks for rakija, vodka-like alcohol, to disinfect the wounds. My heart races and my stomach turns as I hastily move away from the corner, bring him a half-empty bottle, and watch him pour it into a clean pair of old socks. His hands, red, both from the cold winter frost and the steaming blood dripping down the soldier's leg, tremble as he gently presses the alcohol-soaked cloth to the bullet area to staunch the

> bleeding. The soldier's piercing shrieks echo through the white walls of the unfurnished room. "Shhh, shhh," I hear my father say, repeatedly, with a rush of color to his face. "More rakija". He looks at me frantically. I stare at him. I cannot move. More blood splashes in my father's white coat and spills over the red and white-checkered tablecloth. (Gashi, 2020, p. 61)

In harmony with Cruz and Sodeke's ethnographic observations, based on the narratives I have born witness to and my memories of wartime, I agree that solvency is indeed "a product of intelligence, resilience, self-organization, and group solidarity, and follows a number of well-worn though unwritten rules" (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020, p. 11). I witnessed first-hand how strangers selflessly came together to help each other survive without expecting any favors in return. A recurring consensus that exemplifies the concept of solvency in wartime, according to all the women I interviewed, was that "Nobody survives the war alone," which depicts Kosovars' heavy reliance on their communities to organize for individual and collective survival and well-being.

While in this section, I highlighted the ways in which Kosovar women relied on their material environments as well as communities to organize for survival, in the following section I detail how organizing became a normative way of existing in wartime, permeating every corner of Kosovar women's being.

Permeability: War and Care as the Fabric of Everyday Life

In the narratives of Kosovar women organizing and caring for others in wartime permeated their lives. Permeability is "the embeddedness of liquid organizing in context and local communities. Organizing infiltrates context and vice versa" (Cruz and Sodeke, 2020, p. 12). Organizing for survival was deeply embedded in the fabric of their everyday experiences and involved their families and communities. There was no possible

separation between private and public realms, as Kosovars were displaced from their homes and technically denied a private sphere. They were forced to stay in crowded concentration-like camps, under an open sky in the mountains, and on the streets with Others like them. Vlora illustrated this in her story:

> The days blended with each other. I'm only telling you what I remember as interesting, or important, not the trivial things, like the table we were eating lunch at, the table that saved my life. It was Eid-Al-Fitr that day. I remember I wanted to bake a cake. The war had broken out in other parts of Kosova, but it seemed distant for us, we thought nothing would happen to us. It was like watching TV and seeing it happen in a foreign land. Itwas Eid-Al-Fitr that day. I remember because I wanted to bake a cake. We sat to have lunch and the police entered at that moment. We were all paralyzed. They were wearing masks. I couldn't even look at them from fear and horror. Their eyes were red. You couldn't see any other features, just the eyes. They told us to leave. We grabbed some food quickly, before they saw us. We grabbed what was on the table. We hid it under our sleeves. And we were thrown outside.

Life went on, even in war. For Vlora and her family, organizing for survival was inherent to their day-to-day lives and was done automatically, without thinking about it. They remembered to grab their food and save it for later. What usually happened within the confines of private life, like sitting together to have a home-cooked meal, now took place in public. Their lives revolved around the organizing in war.

Reedy (2014) maintains that through permeability we look at organizing as life rather than a separate domain. Informal organizing is sustained through informal bonds instead of formal structures like hierarchy. These bonds are created through a shared lifestyle.

For example, in Remzije's case, the bond with her friend was forged by a mere involuntary participation in war:

> We led a life that came to look normal. As a woman, I was afraid. I heard rumors about a girl in my generation. She was raped and killed, and her body was found near a trash container. As a young woman, I didn't have a sense of safety when I went out. I remember when I would go out, I would take my house keys with me and hold them between my fingers and keep my hand in my pocket, so that I could, you know, the moment somebody tries to... Thank God nothing ever happened to me. I learned self-defense methods from a university friend who did karate. She taught me how to attack someone who is aiming to attack you, some sort of taekwondo. Thank God nothing ever happened to me. I know I would be harmed badly.

Similarly, Lirije detailed how she befriended two female strangers in the tractor so that she could ask them for help if stopped by the Serb paramilitary police. Lirije's biggest fear was rape at the hands of the enemy, so upon seeing that one woman was holding two children close to her, and the other woman was covering her baby with a headscarf, Lirije decided to ask if she could borrow the headscarf from her and "borrow" one of the children from the other woman. Their tractor was stopped by the Serb soldiers so Lirije, wearing a headscarf and holding a baby on her lap, pretended to be a mother and concealed her identity to avoid any harassment from the paramilitary soldiers. Lirije trusted her new network to help hide her single status and become invisible in the soldiers' eyes by wearing a headscarf as a preventative measure against sexual harassment and/or rape.

For Kimete, organizing and relying on networks of strangers for survival also became a necessity in her everyday life and occurred naturally without any prior

planning. She had gotten used to quickly fleeing from her shelter when the paramilitary soldiers were in the area, depending on people she had never met before, and caring for strangers in return for their help. Her narrative further depicts the property of permeability:

> Somebody saw a soldier move on to the next building, which was ours. Very quickly we ran away and went to that house. There were three elderly people and a young girl, maybe 4-5 years old, I'm not sure. Among the three elderly people, one was the grandmother of that girl and the other was the grandfather. The girl didn't have any parents. The other older man was the grandfather's brother. The woman of the house, the head of the house, was paralyzed. That family was... simply... in their moments of devastation. A young child living with three elderly.
>
> They hosted us generously because they physically needed us, and we needed shelter. They were a family who had undergone great suffering. The son had died in a car crash, and his spouse had abandoned her newborn baby and left her with the grandparents while she had moved back with her own family, so the grandparents were raising the child. Then the grandmother, from sadness and grief, had become paralyzed. The two men, both very old, were raising the child. They were good financially, but they didn't have any people. They had a tractor, and we had food we had saved...We stuck together for a while. I took care of the grandmother. I always stood next to her. I helped her whenever she needed to go to the bathroom, there was nobody else to help her.
>
> My mother and the other neighbor had to take care of their young children. My brother was 4-5 years old. The daughter was also the same age and she needed baths and somebody to take care of her. So, when my mother was tired, I would help with baths too.

> Even when we left their house, we didn't have the heart to leave them alone. We took them with us as we escaped through the mountains. My family lived in the city, so we didn't have a tractor, this way we took theirs. We shared our food with them and took care of them in exchange for their tractor and because they had saved our lives by sheltering us before. We cared for one another even when we were in trouble, even when we didn't have a place to shower, food to eat, and water to drink.
>
> Of course, we all felt the burden of being in the mountains, but at least we were together. There was also a pregnant woman in the tractor next to us, and I cared for her too. I helped her give birth on the side of the road, ten days later, shortly after midnight.

In Kimete's story, the concept of permeability is highlighted by the interconnectedness, mutual support and care, resource sharing, and fluidity of relationships and roles within two families facing the challenges of wartime displacement and survival. As the families face escalating danger, they demonstrate a fluidity in movement and decision-making. They adapt to changing circumstances by fleeing together through the mountains, sharing transportation and resources along the way. The decision to stick together and support each other reflects a permeability in the boundaries between individual families, as they prioritize collective safety and survival over individual concerns.

For Kosovar women, the reliance community and personal bonds to organize stood in stark contrast to commonly assumed reliance on leadership, authority, regulation, sanctions, and a hierarchy. These personal bonds emerged through a shared lifestyle of struggle and danger at war. When the risks of famine, murder, rape, and torture permeated their lives, collective identity and solidarity with one another influenced their organizing properties. Women, throughout their narratives, emphasized the significance of sustaining the groups they were temporarily part of

and fostering nurturing capabilities. Therefore, they developed resilience, empathy, and coping skills that, in turn, established a community as a fundamental basis for organizing for their individual and collective survival.

Apart from organizing permeating their lives, one property that Kosovar women could not separate themselves from was also care. For them, care was highlighted as an innate moral responsibility for family members, the elderly, children, and neighbors. Kosovar women put themselves at risk to care for others even when it was laborious in physical, emotional, and mental ways because it was also a resource for survival (Ibnouf, 2020).

Kosovar women's narratives affirmed the permeative nature of care to their survival in the war. The ethics of care views the "self" as relational. The self has no "separate, essential core but, rather, becomes a 'self' through relations with others" (Ibnouf, 2020, p. 73). These relations become fundamental for our existence. For Kosovar women, care embodied physical and emotional properties. It was a process and activity they engaged in to ensure the well-being of those around them as well as the bedrock of their organizing. The narratives above highlighted how women cared for others to the detriment of their health and personal needs. They built shelters and offered them to those who needed them, made food and shared it with others, emotionally supported those dependent on them, and performed other acts of service that blurred the division of the private and public spheres. Demonstrating a commitment to care, the basis of human well-being, Kosovar women contributed to individual and collective survival and, ultimately, to peacebuilding in Kosova.

In the narratives above, women mentioned care when talking about family members' physical and material struggles with being displaced from their homeland, or alluded to it, through frames of food, shelter, organizing, and collectiveness. They talked about care always in

relation to others. They worried about the safety of their siblings, parents, and cousins, but rarely admitted they worried about their own. The only time they worried about their safety was in the context of rape and sexual assault. Kosovar women, in a precarious environment such as that of wartime, portrayed how they relied on care as a resource to organize for the preservation of their existence and protection from the enemy. They enacted care when organizing through bonds with each other, securing and preparing food, finding shelter, and supporting one another. While in this section, I covered the three main properties of liquid organizing in wartime, in the following section I expand this theory by coining a fourth property pertinent to wartime that I call "solidification".

Solidification: Returning, Reclaiming, and Planting Roots

I define solidification as the ability of marginal organizational actors to "solidify" and unite after periods of "dissolving." This mode is specific to wartime organizing as it illuminates the reclamation and rebuilding of surrounding environments and settling down. Kosovar women, by the end of their accounts, reflected on their return to Kosova and organizing to reclaim their land, rebuild their burnt houses, and subsequently, as a people, collectively establish governmental institutions and structures. This mode of organizing highlighted the period of reuniting with family members, friends, and communities and solidifying not only material environments but also language, culture, and identity as Kosovars. For Buqe, solidification meant casting a vote in her family in favor of staying in Kosova and finding a job so that she could financially contribute to the renovation of her family's burnt house instead of seeking refugee asylum in the U.S. She explained:

> When we came back, we saw the house was all burned down. My sister and I went back to working as teachers. We were teachers even before the war. My brother quit school and started washing dishes in a coffee shop. He had to help too. We had no aid. Nobody gave us anything. Except for my aunts and uncles. They helped too. The roof of the house was untouched, but the rest was burned down. So, we lived in an apartment, at one of my father's friends, for a year. We renovated one room at a time. It took us two or three years. Then we found our footing. What matters is that we stayed. We thought life was going to be better. We were finally free. We were finally together.

From the excerpt above, Buqe and her family were making work and career choices to solidify their ability to stick together after the war and gain economic stability. What was a liquid organizing during the war, changed into a more solid one as Kosovar people gained back their ontological security, built day-to-day normalcy, and socially reintegrated into their families as well as communities. As Kosovars reclaimed their lost properties and livelihood, communities solidified steadily rather than in motion, and organizing still permeated their lives as the country arranged itself in a more ordered and fixed structure, that as an independent Republic of Kosova rather than an autonomous province of Serbia. Similarly, solidification was salient in Lirije's story and it manifested by coming together with other family members to help renovate their house and finding a job in education to help with financial burdens. Lirije explained:

> When we came back, the whole house was burned down. The cars too. Everything inside of the house was burned down too. Everything. Nothing survived. We managed to clean the ashes on the first floor, the living room, and the hallway, just so that we could get into the house. The men helped us lay down some tarps that my brother and cousin had

> brought back from abroad. We saved a lot of things from when we were refugees. That's how we started from scratch.

Solidification of material environments began from square one with Kosovar people finding their footing in a post-conflict society. For many who lived in villages where war had left its stench, solidification meant a journey of voluntary displacement before setting roots somewhere safe due to security threats. For my family, solidifying our livelihood and well-being meant staying away from landmines planted in the valleys of our house in Broliq, the valleys my brothers, cousins, and I used to roam free in and play football or hide and seek before the war. We moved into an old one-bedroom house in the capital city of Prishtina, surrounded by concrete, with no valleys in sight. That's what safety looked like. My father and sister both found jobs in the hospital nearby, my older brother and I started first grade, and my grandmother and mother stayed home with my little brother, to care for him and to create a nurturing house for the rest of us who had to leave it to go about our days. Remzije's vignette also illustrated this property of organizing towards a more stable life:

> The moment my parents came back, I came back too. They didn't think twice about coming back. They always wanted to come back. Now that the war was over, I could come back too. I knew I could help. I worked with international journalists for over a month. I saw abandoned houses. Bombarded houses. I saw everything. Massacres. People. Corpses. People kept coming back from other places. We were free. We had faith that Kosova has changed, it's moving forward. The war was over.
>
> I remember I went to this village in Mitrovica with a New York Times reporter. People were living in tents, in ruins, everything was demolished. But people told us they were

> here to stay. I remember they offered us Turkish coffee. They didn't have much, but they shared the last of what they had with us.

Remzije's account marked community as an integral aspect of solidified organizing toward peace, stability, and prosperity in a post-conflict society. She was welcomed back to the community with Turkish coffee and an eagerness to help bear witness and document the atrocities Kosovar people had gone through. Being part of this community provided Remzije and others like her with a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose. A sense of belonging contributed to healing, resilience, and a positive outlook for the future.

Solidification was not only material but also the cultural work of solidifying family and cultural identities, rebuilding a sense of place symbolically. While war is about physical destruction, it is also about breaking spirits. So, the organizing that occurred after the war was about both material and spiritual survival and resilience—about the ability to keep going. Sahare's account reflected this engrained resilience and hope:

> I think back on all the strangers I've hugged once we were freed by NATO forces. We were all out on the streets waving at their helicopters, crying tears of joy, hugging each other and congratulating one another on finally becoming liberated. I remember we had so much will to live, to cherish our freedom, to rebuild our future like we rebuilt our houses. My family loved Kosova. My mother and father never wanted to leave, and neither did I. My daughter is one year old now, but I will tell her the truth about the Kosovo War once she grows older. The new generations need to know what happened, how we survived, how lucky they are to be born into freedom, to not know our plight for it. They deserve to know how many lives were lost and how much blood was shed so we can be free. It cost us a lot. Kids need to know.

Kimete's account also portrayed an aspect of this spiritual survival and resilience that centered around historical remembrances. Research shows that communities in which there is formal commemoration of atrocities appear more resilient than those in which silence prevails (Asaba Memorial Project). Kimete recalled:

> We were born in the war. We were brought up differently. The younger generations never experienced war, it's all history to them. Even though my son is young, I've started sharing things with him. He's in 8th grade and they started learning about the Kosovo War.
>
> At times, I tell him things about the war, not the scary events. I do this because I want him to love Kosova as much as I do. That's why I tell him about our collective sacrifices and how hard we had to fight for freedom. I remind him how I had to attend classes in people's basements, how we were poisoned for going to school, and how much willingness we had in each and every one of us to learn in our own language and to fight for our country despite all that was going on. I tell him this so that he knows… so that he learns to love his country as much as I do.
>
> Even my grandparents had fought against the Serb regime. My grandfather especially. Before he died, I started interviewing him a little bit about that time. I was hoping to publish a book someday, to tell the world about our history. When he shared with me about how much they suffered, my suffering seemed so…trivial. Nothing at all. He told me he had to run and hide in the mountains every single night. How he was beaten up every morning. How they hurt him and made him walk with wounds and blood on his feet.

> For entire generations' sake, for their suffering, to honor their lives, I tell our stories and I will not stop telling them to whoever listens. When I think of others who lost their families, my own suffering becomes so minimal, so trivial. It's nothing compared to theirs. Everybody has their story. My brother's wife had three family members killed in the caravan I told you about. An aunt, and two uncles. Three members of her family were killed. That's atrocious. Again, everybody has a story of the war and what matters is that we don't forget about them—we don't forget about the war.

From the narratives above, in post-conflict Kosova, people's solidified organizing was based on material organizing through social networks and shared resources as well as spiritual organizing through individual and collective resilience. Social networks provided emotional support and fostered resilience in those who experienced trauma during war. Although, for Kosovar women, resilience strategies were "actions they had to take at the time to make it out alive." They created their solidified organizing logics in conjunction with their material environments and surrounding social networks. This enabled them to "bounce back" and find ways to survive despite the constraints and the unsafe positions that they occupied in wartime.

In addition, having a strong social network helped foster community cohesion by promoting collective trust, cooperation, and solidarity. This cohesion resulted in a shared identity as Kosovars, an identity they were forbidden to cherish and take pride in before the war, but that was crucial for solidifying social bonds in new communities after the conflict. Social bonds played a vital role in the successful reintegration of displaced Kosovars into their communities, as highlighted in my narrative with my father's cousin offering to shelter my family in his house in Prishtina so that we would not be at risk of stepping on landmines in the village, like so many children of my age at the time. Because communities offered acceptance, assistance, and

inclusion, those who returned to Kosova were more likely to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society, as highlighted in the narratives of Buqe, Lirije, and Remzije, as well as my narrative with my father and sister contributing to the medical field back home.

The narrative accounts presented in this chapter highlighted the characteristics of liquid organizing, and I argue they challenged conventional notions of organizations as static entities, and emphasized the potential for organizing to occur without strict hierarchical structures or centralized authority (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). These insights not only provided an impetus for organizational communication scholars to delve into the dynamics of organizing in precarious contexts, such as wartime but also underscored the pressing need to explore the experiences and organizing efforts of women as marginal organizational actors in these environments.

A preliminary exploration using key search terms like "kosovo/a+war+women" within communication databases including *Communication Abstracts*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Organizational Communication Abstracts*, and *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* yielded zero published results on this population. I argued that the marginalization of narratives pertaining to women from post-socialist countries is not confined solely to organizational communication research but extends to the broader domain of communication studies and is compounded by epistemic injustice and historical erasure within the framework of transnational feminism.

Additionally, considering the impact of conflicts such as the ongoing war in Palestine on the daily lives of women, there is an urgent sociocultural calling to document and bear witness to the life stories and experiences of women living in conflict

zones and examine how they engage in communicatively organizing for survival, constructing meanings of war, and contributing as agents for social change. Thus, the goal of this chapter was to address this scholarly gap by documenting the organizing strategies employed by Kosovar women in the context of the Kosovo War.

Finally, in this chapter, by applying Cruz and Sodeke's (2020) concept of "liquid organizing" to highlight the organizing properties of Kosovar women during the Kosovo War, I emphasized the shared aim of prioritizing the voices of marginalized groups within both post-socialist and postcolonial perspectives. By utilizing this framework in a post-socialist setting, I portrayed the overlapping trajectories of postcolonial and post-socialist experiences and illuminated similar alternative organizational patterns that challenge power and oppression. Coining the notion of "solidification," which is rooted in a wartime context, to extend liquid organizing, I aimed to cultivate transnational solidarity and theoretical collaboration that surpasses geographical, cultural, and ideological boundaries.

CHAPTER SIX: KOSOVAR WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF ARCHIVE-MAKING

The motivation to take all women's lives seriously lies deeper than admiration. Asking "Where are the women?" is motivated by a determination to discover exactly how this world works. One's feminist-informed digging is fueled by a desire to reveal the ideas, relationships, and policies those (usually unequal) gendered workings rely upon.

—Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, beaches, and bases*

This dissertation project was sparked by Enloe's powerful question*: where are the women?* Long before my days in graduate school, narratives of my family's past stirred in me questions about women, about their lives during eras I never knew. I often pondered the stories of grandmother, who died at age 104, when I was 23 years old. Which of her stories did I not hear? Which stories died with her before I had the chance to ask? What was life like for her as a young woman? How did she balance raising six children in a poor village, surviving two wars, tending to the land, and household duties with grace? As I wondered about my grandmother, my thoughts also turned to my aunts.

Memories came back from childhood summers in Broliq, where my cousins from Switzerland and I would get together with my brothers in a bustling household of thirty or more. Our aunts, the unsung heroines, would calmly manage these loud but lively gatherings, caring for us all as if we were no burden at all.

One day, in Prishtina, when I was around 22, I found myself chatting with my father about those idyllic summers. His reminiscences of his uncles and cousins, sitting under grapevines, sipping Turkish tea and laughing without a care, sparked a realization in me. *Where were the women?* What were they doing during our carefree days?

In my mother's era, women were a whirlwind of activity, baking bread, nourishing us with hearty meals, and tending to our every need. Even after her passing, my aunts' tireless dedication never waned. Yet, I couldn't recall a moment of respite for them, a chance to gather, just like the men, under the vines and share in laughter and be in each other's company. These women held us together with invisible threads of love and care.

During that heartfelt conversation with my father, I steered him to tell me about the roles of women in our family during the war. I had been thinking about war for a while then because of the turmoil Serbia was causing near our borders. He reminded me of an unforgettable moment with my grandmother, where she fearlessly confronted a Serb soldier as we set camp in our tractor in Isniq. Despite the soldier flailing his rifle, my grandmother stood her ground and shouted at him, imprinting in my memory a sight of resistance and bravery that I can still vividly recall.

Several years later, as I embarked on my graduate studies in the U.S., the question that had lingered since that conversation with my father resurfaced: *where are the women?* Delving deeper into this inquiry during my first year of Ph.D. studies, I made a conscious effort to seek out and listen to the untold war stories of my aunts and female cousins. Their narratives, often unheard and silenced, were shared willingly once I mentioned the topic. It became clear that my aunts wished for someone to lend them an ear, someone willing to hold space for their experiences, so I was more than willing to be that person.

This dissertation, then, is the culmination of creating a safe haven for the stories of the women in my family and those I interviewed for this project. I explored how Kosovar women communicated about their lived experiences during the Kosovo war and how they organized, both individually and collectively, for survival. Inspired by the groundbreaking work of Patricia

Ewick and Susan Silbey (2003) on the power of storytelling to articulate agency, particularly through narratives of resistance, I sought to provide a platform for Kosovar women as marginal organizational actors, shedding light on their invaluable contributions during and after the Kosovo War.

Chapter Summary

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, titled, **"On Bearing Witness,"** I discussed the significance of my dissertation, its scholarly contributions, and how it enriches ongoing conversations in communication studies. I shared a personal narrative recalling my upbringing during the conflict, laying the groundwork for the autoethnographic approach that I adopted throughout the dissertation.

In chapter two, **"Small countries do not die from war but from silence,"** I conducted a thorough literature review where I contextualized the regional context and delved into the historical backdrop of the Kosovo War. This is crucial for grasping the origin, significance, and contributions of this study to both academic and broader discourses. I also discussed existing research on the impact of war, particularly on Kosovar women, and explored prevailing conversations in organizational communication, highlighting feminist and transnational feminist perspectives. Emphasizing alternative organizational paradigms and provisions of care, this review lied a foundation for the following chapters of analysis.

Chapter three, titled **"Pouring Lives into Stories Over a Cup of Coffee in Prishtina,"** served as the method section of this dissertation, detailing the approaches I employed to examine the experiences of Kosovar women, with a focus on autoethnography and in-depth interviews. Initially, I presented a synthesis of pertinent literature on autoethnography, highlighting the uniqueness of the method for addressing my research questions. Afterward, I provided a

comprehensive overview of the process of collecting data via in-depth interviews and informal discussions with family members and analyzing the data through a thematic and narrative analysis.

In chapter four, **"A Silent Observer of the Stories Told Across the Edges of the Wound,"** I addressed my first research question, "How do Kosovar women communicate their lived experiences during the Kosovo War?" Women recounted narratives of chaos, rape, and liberation, iterating themes of agency, erasure, power dynamics, oppression, visibility/invisibility, sense of place, outsider/insider perspectives, and resistance. To conduct this analysis, I extensively read and reread the interview transcripts and based this chapter on narratives gathered both from women I interviewed, as well as discussions with female family members during family gatherings. I structured the chapter using incomplete and fragmented stories, lacking clear narrative coherence or chronological order to mirror the unstructured nature of interviews with my participants. The vignettes transitioned abruptly from one woman's story to another, devoid of transitional points. This deliberate approach allowed readers to bear witness to chaos narratives—stories inherently messy and challenging to absorb. By doing so, I honored chaos stories without imposing artificial structure, preserving the narrative voice of Kosovar women. I then offered my partial interpretation of these narratives, narratives told at the edges of the wound, and liberation narratives to illuminate how Kosovar women spoke about the war and how they created counter- memories to the war and post- war male-dominated construction of historical narratives.

To articulate Kosovar women's narratives as embodied feminist theory rooted in women's lived experience and testimonies, I borrowed the term "a theory which walks," from the feminist and transitional justice scholar, Oliviera Simic (2017) who worked with women's

stories of wartime sexual violence and rape in Bosnia. Writing Bosnian women's stories, she says:

> Stories of Milka, Tanja, Branka, Jovana and Marija are exemplary stories that represent so many untold, buried accounts that risk never to be documented in feminist archives; but to stay part of a living feminist-activist and experience-based practice knowledge—of a 'theory which walks. (p. 328)

I understood this term as an approach to theory that is not static or rigid but rather dynamic, adaptable, and actively engaged with lived experience. A term that emphasizes the importance of theory that is responsive to the complexities and nuances of gendered realities, continually evolving in dialogue with the diverse voices and contexts within feminist scholarship and activism. It implies a theory that is not detached or abstract but rather actively engaged in social change and justice. This approach showcased the diversity of voices, perspectives, and narratives of women in precarious contexts such as wartime. Moreover, it challenged simplistic portrayals of women's lives and struggles and Western-centric epistemologies prevalent in the field. For instance, through women's narratives, I challenged the single story of women as victims in wartime by showcasing how women were active agents in collective survival. Moreover, I made visible the multiplicity of women's stories, while at the same time looking at how their experiences intersected with collective struggles.

In chapter five, **"They Left Flour, Pots, and Pans Behind so We Could Use Them,"** drawing from Cruz and Sodeke's concept of liquid organizing (2020), particularly focusing on aspects like motion, solvency, and permeability, I described how Kosovar women employed these liquid organizing strategies to survive during the Kosovo War. For example, Buqe, in her story, recounted a traumatic experience of fleeing from Serb paramilitary soldiers during a time

of uncertainty and danger. Her decision to seek refuge in the neighbor's basement reflects a fluid approach to ensuring survival in a rapidly changing situation. Moreover, the community's response to refugees fleeing Deçan, with people informally organizing to pick them up on their tractors, illustrates a collective effort to provide support and help to those in need. This collective effort exemplifies the concept of motion in liquid organizing, where individuals come together from multiple sites and organize in continuous movement to respond to urgent needs and challenges.

Chapter 6, titled **"Kosovar Women in the Process of Archive-Making"** is the conclusion chapter, which summarizes the previous chapters and details the implications of this dissertation, as well as limitations and future directions.

Implications for Methodology, Transnational Feminism, and Organizational Communication

Using in-depth interviews for this dissertation allowed me to create "alternative spaces for knowledge production" (Collins, 2000, p. 71). According to Patricia Hill Collins, "alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth" (Collins, 2000, p. 71). Similarly, through in-depth interviews, Kosovar women were able to engage in self-definition (Collins, 2000) by recalling memories of the past and analyzing them, to reimagine and create future selves and future change. This method provided a space where women historically neglected in history could shape their own narratives and articulate themselves as subjects, "that is, as voices aware of their vocality" (Trouillot, 1995, as cited in Demiri, 2024, p. 25). Finally, in-depth interviews gave Kosovar women a platform to share their lived experience, perspectives, and organizing properties, amplifying their voices and contributions during the

Kosovo War. This method helped counteract marginalization and ensure that women's experiences are recognized, valued, and included in historical narratives.

On the other hand, I employed autoethnography as a method that involves reflecting on personal experiences within broader socio-cultural contexts, to explore larger social phenomena or issues (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). By using this method, I provided rich, nuanced insights into my own process of bearing witness, making sense, and restorying lived experiences of Kosovar women in wartime shedding light on the complex process of writing about others' memories of war as someone who still grapples with her own wartime memories and lingering trauma. Moreover, throughout this dissertation, I reflected on my own subjectivity and positionality as a researcher navigating insider/outsider tension and thus examining my role, biases, and capabilities in conducting research on women's narratives and organizing efforts during wartime.

In the process of writing, I gained a deeper understanding of women's stories of trauma. I learned how such stories are difficult to listen to and interpret, they are multifaceted and complex because they reflect women's unimaginable experiences during wartime. Despite enduring loss, suffering, and grief, women displayed humility, resilience, resourcefulness, care, and agency in navigating the atrocities of wartime.

In addition, through the stories of trauma that I depicted in this dissertation, I learned how interconnected individual, familial, and intergenerational trauma is. I witnessed how the ripple effects of wartime extended beyond personal experiences and impacted entire families, communities, and even future generations. I saw how the residue of trauma still lingered and affected women's day-to-day realities even twenty-five years after the war ended.

By listening to Kosovar women's stories, I learned about the importance of compassionate listening, bearing witness, and empathy. By lending an ear to their experiences with curiosity and respect, I wanted to acknowledge the truthfulness of their narratives and honor their courage to revisit their memories of the war even as they risked being retraumatized by the act of doing so.

Through this dissertation, I have learned not only about women's experiences of trauma and survival but also about myself. Engaging with women's trauma stories has deepened my empathy and humility and has shown how little I still know about women's impact during the war in Kosova but also in its aftermath. I learned more closely about various activists who fought for women's rights when Kosova was an autonomous province of Yugoslavia and those who played a key role in the state-building process right after the war ended. Engaging with these narratives has undoubtedly given me a better grasp of trauma, organizing, and the resilience of women in times of conflict.

In writing the stories of Kosovar women, similar to Cruz and Sodeke's detailed case study methodology, I refrained from generalizing and instead delved into my data to identify themes in alternative organizing. Emphasizing vivid examples based on women's narratives was essential in documenting marginalized forms of organizing, which are often overlooked in Western contexts. The excerpts shared in chapter five portrayed the features of liquid organizing (motion, solvency, and permeability), pushing back against the idea of organizations as rigid and unchanging entities. They also emphasized the possibility of organizing without strict hierarchies or centralized control (Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). My findings not only encourage scholars of organizational communication to delve into the complexities of organizing in dangerous contexts

like wartime but also depict the importance of exploring the experiences and efforts of women as key organizational actors in such environments.

Exploring women's lived experiences and contributions as organizational actors in wartime is essential for fostering resilience, promoting gender equality, and building sustainable peace. By highlighting women's experiences, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of war and its aftermath. Women's non-combat efforts, such as caregiving and informal community organizing, play a vital role in sustaining life and livelihoods amidst chaos and violence. Understanding these efforts is essential for addressing the diverse needs of war-affected populations. Additionally, recognizing and valuing women's agency and leadership in wartime challenges traditional gender roles and power dynamics, paving the way for more inclusive and equitable societies both during and after wartime.

I also adopted a transnational feminist perspective to highlight the tactics of organizing within marginalized contexts and contributing to ongoing discussions on marginality and the production of non-Western knowledge in the field of organizational communication. Drawing from transnational feminist theories that advocate for decolonizing knowledge within organizational settings, my focus on the narratives of Kosovar women shifted my perspective of perceiving knowledge creation as purely cognitive to one deeply rooted in lived experience. Kosovar women sharing their stories, reflections, and perspectives on the Kosovo War, contributed to the creation of knowledge in organizational communication by offering firsthand accounts of their organizing efforts for survival. These narratives provided context, depth, and nuance to liquid organizing, further grounding the framework in the complexities of lived experience.

Furthermore, I challenged the concept of "sisterhood as global" by aligning with Tlostanova's advocacy for integrating Second World feminism into transnational feminist frameworks. Through centering the gender-related issues, struggles, and oppressions faced by Kosovar women during the war, my work extends an invitation to feminists from war-affected post-socialist countries to unite in solidarity, fostering alliances that empower us to reclaim our voices and affirm our socialist histories.

By highlighting the crucial role of Kosovar women in catalyzing societal transformation through their collective resilience efforts, storytelling practices, and sense-making strategies amidst conflict, I challenged the neglect of the Second World within transnational feminist discourse and contested the depiction of women solely as victims. This shift intended to reframe the narrative from women as victims to women as active agents of change while providing space for participants to articulate their own personal narratives of wartime.

Essentially, this dissertation sought to change the ongoing discourse surrounding women's roles during and after the Kosovar War. It not only presented the field of organizational communication with the organizing strategies of Kosovar women for individual and collective survival but also empowered Kosovar women to shape and contribute to the historical narrative by documenting their experiences. This dissertation lays the groundwork for an insurgent knowledge base concerning the lives and contributions of Kosovar women during wartime, addressing the current gap in understanding a population whose existence and historical significance have been marginalized, discredited, and overlooked. By sharing these accounts, Kosovar women became actors in shaping the historical record of the Kosovo War, bearing witness to the injustices and profound traumas inflicted by the Serb authorities. As I previously stated, failure to share these stories risks not only obscuring but also erasing the experiences of

Kosovar women during the war and their role in collective survival. Additionally, given that much of the research on the Kosovo War is conducted by Western scholars, narratives from Kosovar women directly served to rectify potential misrepresentations and provided more personal testimonies of their wartime realities and daily struggles.

My dissertation significantly contributes to theoretical discussions in organizational communication. As previously stated, the ongoing discourse within the field predominantly focuses on Western organizational paradigms, leaving a possibility to fill a gap in understanding organizing practices from marginalized perspectives and the role of marginal organizational actors (Basu & Dutta, 2007; Cruz & Sodeke, 2020). The Eurocentric bias in organizational communication theories perpetuates a limited narrative that overlooks the experiences and strategies of marginal organizational actors (Imas & Weston, 2012). Furthermore, the absence of ongoing discussions regarding organizing in response to war and political violence further reinforces this Eurocentric perspective. This dissertation expands these conversations by foregrounding the experiences and strategies of Kosovar women as marginal organizational actors during the Kosovo War. By doing so, it contributes to a more inclusive and global understanding of organizing that transcends linguistic, disciplinary, spatial, and cultural boundaries (Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007; Hall, 2011).

This dissertation offers insights into women's alternative organizing efforts in wartime including leadership, communication tactics, community dynamics, empowerment, as well as resilience and adaptability. Studying how women organize during wartime provides valuable lessons for organizational communication professionals seeking to enhance their understanding of organizing in crises or other complex and precarious environments. It portrays a nuanced understanding of how women mobilize material resources in precarious environments, and how

they use communication strategies, like networking, information dissemination, and advocacy for survival. Moreover, since women's organizing in wartime often relies on strong collaboration among members of the community understanding how these complex groups communicate, coordinate activities, and navigate interpersonal dynamics are invaluable to fostering collaboration and cohesion within organizations across various non-traditional contexts. Finally, women demonstrate remarkable adaptability and resilience in the face of crises. Examining how they navigate challenges, innovate quick solutions amidst uncertainty and scarcity, and overcome physical and material barriers can inspire organizational communication practitioners to cultivate agility and resilience within their own organizations.

This research also reveals postcolonial and Second World feminist organizing practices and care strategies employed by Kosovar women, and thereby enriches the discourse on feminist organizing specifically pertaining to local insurgent knowledge, collective action and solidarity, and care work. For example, throughout the narratives, we bear witness to how Kosovar women center care and solidarity for their family and community as pillars for survival. Halla recounts how she took care of her paralyzed father-in-law and took him with her when she fled her house in Deçan, refusing to leave him behind. Kimete recalls taking care of the family of the three elderly, and as a favor for them providing shelter, her family helped the elderly flee from paramilitary soldiers and seek refuge in the mountains. I vividly recall my mother, grandmother, sister, and other female cousins tending to the wounded people in our house in Broliq, hosting refugees, washing their clothes, and cooking food for them while they gathered their strength to continue their journey of forcibly leaving Kosova.

Based on my findings, even at war women bear the brunt of care work, which encompasses addressing the physical, emotional, social, and financial needs of their families and

communities to ensure their well-being and development. Thus, it was imperative to me that this work was no longer relegated to the sidelines.

Implications for Feminism Across the World

In addition to scholarly contributions, this dissertation project holds significance at the local, regional, and transnational levels. First, I compiled discursive materials that extended historical remembrances. I gathered and documented women's firsthand experiences and narratives of war in the form of testimonies. These testimonies served as accounts of the truth of the Kosovo War, resisting Serbia's efforts to silence Kosovars and deny the genocide in Kosova. Testimonials, as acts of resistance, strive to convey truth by providing a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, challenging dominant historical narratives, and condemning oppression and exploitation (Reda, 2016).

Second, by amplifying the voices of marginalized women, this project redirected regional discourse from geopolitics to encompass and explore social change in Kosova, particularly focusing on the agency of women during wartime. Sharing these women's stories, their personal experiences, and interpretations served as a catalyst for reclaiming the public sphere, which Kosovar women were deprived of after the war. Furthermore, this project challenged Western and non-Western perspectives of women as mere victims of war and highlighted their roles as agents of change, thus contributing to discussions on the impact of women in wartime.

Lastly, it offered firsthand insights and evidence into women's experiences during wartime, with practical implications for their processes of meaning making and their non-combatant, political, social, and organizational contributions. Given the additional gendered burdens that women bear during the war, this project underscored the urgency of ensuring

women's representation in all political and decision-making processes as a crucial step towards achieving lasting peace.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this project has made valuable contributions to the field of organizational communication, it also has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study's scope was limited as I focused solely on Kosova as a post-conflict area, neglecting other war-torn regions. It is essential for future theoretical and empirical studies to explore liquid organizing in other post-conflict settings in the region, such as Croatia and Bosnia, or even ongoing conflicts outside of the region like Ukraine, or Palestine, among others. This broader approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of alternative organizing strategies in diverse contexts.

Second, in this project I primarily examined women's organizing tactics during wartime, overlooking the potential insights that could be gained from studying men's liquid organizing behaviors in similar contexts. Future research should aim to explore all genders' approaches to liquid organizing during wartime to further develop theoretical frameworks from a more inclusive perspective.

Third, a limitation of this project lies in my expertise in non-Western theories, which made it challenging to interpret the data effectively. While I was trained in Western theoretical frameworks, I recognized the importance of incorporating non-Western perspectives. To address this, I introduced the concept of "solidification" within the Second World context as a way to highlight women's experiences by the end of the war. Moreover, I considered women's narratives as "a theory which walks" to portray their embodied experiences of wartime, to emphasize their agency and subjectivities, to reflect the intersectional nature of lived experience

and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Kosovar women's social realities at war. In addition, by highlighting their personal narratives of resistance, resilience, and empowerment as "walking theory" I challenged and subverted dominant discourses and ideologies that still cause epistemic injustice to women. However, future studies would benefit from scholars with a deeper understanding of non-Western theories, as they can offer fresh insights and perspectives when studying alternative organizing in conflict or post-conflict settings using local theoretical frameworks.

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At the end of this dissertation, I reflect on my mother and grandmother, two strong women who were praised and valued more after their passing than throughout their lives. If it weren't for their bravery, stubbornness, and care, I wouldn't have found my way to this topic.

When I delved into this study, I wished I could call them and ask how they had experienced the war. I imagined conversations where they described managing a household teeming with thirty or forty people and where they shared their memories of packing up our belongings onto the tractor as we fled our home in Broliq. I wished I could ask what went through their minds and their hearts so that I didn't have to rely solely on my memories of them to construct our stories.

I remember Mother walking slowly into our room and her hushed conversations with Dada Shkurte, the urgency in their whispers as they buried my father's medical tomes, important documents, and cherished photographs of our family into the ground. I remember the pang of resentment I felt as a child, frustrated by the chaos and the noise and the panic in adults' faces and the early morning ride in my uncle's tractor. I

remember being angry I couldn't bring my favorite Mickey Mouse sweater and yelling at Grandmother for that and for not letting me sit close to the opening of the tractor to gaze at our village and my childhood home as we drifted away from them. I remember retreating into myself, crossing my arms defensively, and, in protest, refusing to speak to anyone until we arrived in Isniq.

In Isniq, a mix of fear and sadness settled upon my shoulders like the weighted blanket I had left behind. A knot formed in the pit of my stomach from the anxiety of a future I had not dared to think about. I was disoriented and lost as I looked around the valley filled with tractors covered in a blue tarp, and as the incessant cries of babies and shouting of the adults pierced my ears. The once-familiar comforts of home in Broliq seemed like a distant memory, replaced by the stark reality of our new life. I couldn't shake the fear that this temporary refuge in an abandoned house in Isniq wouldn't be so temporary after all.

The realization became worse when I followed Grandmother the next day as she approached the paramilitary soldiers who were yelling at us to flee from Isniq and go back to our homes. I hid behind a big oak tree and made sure she didn't see me. I heard her shouting. I heard the soldiers shouting back, although I didn't understand a word they said. I heard Grandmother tell them about the cows and cattle they killed in Broliq, our burnt house, our poisoned food, and crops, and I heard her say we didn't dare go back. She told them they were fighting with women and children, not with men in the mountains. She called them cowards.

At that moment, I remember watching, heart in my throat, as the soldier leveled his rifle at her chest. Grandmother shouted louder:

“God. Kill me. Shoot me. Use your Goddamn rifle. Take my soul!” she sobbed, her shoulders shaking. She pulled up her chin, thrusting her chest forward, and looked at the soldier with her bloodshot eyes (Gashi, 2020, p. 78).

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