Kosovo in the Yugoslav 1980s

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Same Goal, Different Paths, Different Class: Women's Feminist Political Engagements in Kosovo from the Mid-1970s until the Mid-1990s

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Abstract: The year 1989, when Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy, was a break that changed also the course of women's political engagements. Women had always to negotiate and strategise with different layers of power and against different forms of oppression—state and patriarchal oppression and cultural racism as well as class oppression. The author highlights the convergences and divergences of women's political activism in the political dynamics of late socialism and then in the 1990s in Kosovo. She looks at gender, class and national dimensions of women's political engagements with a focus on women who were part of the underground resistance movement commonly known as *Ilegalja* in the 1970s and 1980s as well as women intellectuals who held high state positions and were considered a part of the elite. After 1989, many engaged in the peaceful resistance movement of the 1990s.

Keywords: feminism, Kosovo, class, resistance

Introduction

Socialism in Yugoslavia is considered by many to have been a progressive modernity project that positively affected women's lives. While this may be true on many levels, socialist benefits and progress did not extend uniformly across Yugoslavia. Due to political and economic factors, the pace of progress in Kosovo was slow, especially among the Albanian population, and particularly among women. State injustice toward Albanians and the severe economic conditions in which they lived, both during the interwar period and after World War II, resulted in their mistrust toward the state and generally in society's retreat toward the

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family as the main provider of social security (Krasniqi 2018; Latifi 2015; Schmitt 2012 (2008), 164). At the same time, family was a site where patriarchy was maintained. Walby distinguishes two main forms of patriarchy: “private patriarchy [...] based upon household production as the main site of women’s oppression,” and “public patriarchy [...] based principally in public sites such as employment and the state” (1990, 24). Despite state measures that sought to promote gender equality through legislation or other forms of affirmative actions, state patriarchy coexisted with private patriarchy (Krasniqi 2018, 242). In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*, SFRJ) and after the 1999 war, Albanian women in Kosovo found ways to engage politically and create strategies to resist both public and private patriarchy. All this while, they were fighting other forms of oppression within Yugoslavia, such as nationalism and cultural racism toward Albanians as well as class inequality, commonly insufficiently researched when examining the struggle of Albanian women in Kosovo. Albanian official historiography (but not alone) has given a poor account of women as political actors, which would mean going beyond the traditional frame of family and kinship. Mainly, feminist scholars are the ones who are closing these gaps (Farnsworth 2008; Luci 2014; Luci and Gusia 2015; Gusia 2016; Gusia, Krasniqi and Luci 2016; Mujika Chao 2020).

In this article, I examine women’s political engagement in Kosovo in response to multiple oppression toward Albanians in the SFRJ, and specifically within the Socialist Republic of Serbia (SR Serbia) and later during the 1990s. I show differences in terms of class and political positionings of women, including “elite” women and women in the so-called underground resistance movement commonly known as *Ilegalja* (Illegality). I highlight ways by which Albanian women have negotiated their activism with both central and local political power and patriarchies, and how their engagements converged and diverged within the landscape of politics and civil society in Kosovo after Serbia revoked the province’s autonomy in 1989. I focus on three categories of women’s activism and resistance through time—gender, nation and class—which were the identities based on which Albanian women were oppressed. I explore differences and commonalities in women’s political engagements from within Kosovo’s political spectrum in the period from the mid-1970s up to the mid-1990s. I reveal these dynamics through content and discourse analysis of the only state-published women’s magazine of that time, *Kosovarja* and the *Ilegalja* underground paper/zine, which stood in opposition to the state.

Interviews provided me with an in-depth understanding of the goals and strategies of women’s activism within larger movements. The use of the intersectionality framework allowed me to examine the topic not only from the perspective of marginalised subjects (Crenshaw 2011), but also from the perspective of “the vexed dynamics of difference and solidarities of sameness” (Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 787).

I express my gratitude to my aunt, Shukrije Gashi, a former *Ilegalja* activist, a former political prisoner, and a feminist activist, from whom initially I learned about *Ilegalja*, and who in 2008, and many times after in our private conversations, gladly shared her knowledge and experience with me. I extend my gratitude also to my other interview partners: Saime Isufi, Shemsije Elshani, Shefqet Cakiqi-Llapashtica, all former *Ilegalja* members, and Nazlije Bala, a former member of the Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK) and feminist activist—interviewed in winter 2020; Bahtije Abrashi, a retired teacher and former head of the Conference of Women for the Social Activity of Kosovo Women (*Konferenca per Aktivitetin Shoqëror të Grave të Kosovës*)—hereafter the Conference of Women—and her daughter Linda Abrashi, a journalist at *Radio Television Prishtina* until it was shut down by Serbian forces in July 1990—interviewed in spring 2021.

Women's Struggles for Equality in Kosovo's Political Context from the Mid-1970s until 1989

Although the 1970s are generally considered to have been Yugoslavia's "golden years," Kosovo remained behind the other regions. From the mid-1960s Kosovo benefited from the Federal Fund for Crediting Accelerated Development in the Underdeveloped Republics and Autonomous Provinces, a development that was visible mainly in urban areas. Families in rural areas benefited from migrant remittances when Yugoslavia from the end of the 1960s onwards enabled labour migration to other European countries (Islami 1979, 243; Reineck 1991, 119). Contrary to what was proclaimed by the communist ideology, the existing unequal economic distribution gave way to increasing disparities, such as between the city and the village, or between intellectual versus physical labour (Djilas 1957, 37). The unequal economic investments and distribution created a "new class", as defined by Milovan Djilas, a political bureaucratic stratum "made of those who have special privileges and economic preferences because of the administrative monopoly they hold" (Djilas 1957, 39). In Kosovo, many of the men of this "new class" brought their wives into holding state positions, intellectuals that constituted, in a way, an "elite."

In this period, Isabel Ströhle argues, also the *underclass* was created, which was the stratum who dealt with agriculture in rural areas, and it was excluded from the benefits of industrialisation in Kosovo (2016, 112–31, 116, 121–4). These class disparities were vehemently expressed in the demonstration of 1981, which together with the demonstration of 1968 was mainly organised by *Ilegalja* groups.

What had started as an act of revolt against the poor conditions in the students' canteen with Bahrije Kastrati (2010, 370), an *Ilegalja* activist, throwing down a tray of food, turned into a massive demonstration that remains in collective memory as the “spring of 1981.” Dejan Jović argued that “the inequality felt by the Kosovo Albanians had three dimensions: economic, political and ethnic” (2009, 177). This certainly is correct, albeit most of what has been written about the demonstrations of 1981 and 1968 in Kosovo has focused exclusively on their national dimension, which is on aspects such as the demand for Kosovo's status upgrade to a republic, or self-determination in the case of 1968. The socioeconomic dimension of both demonstrations has largely been neglected.

In case of the demonstrations of 1968, this dimension was clearly present in the speeches prepared by the organisers, who, for example, condemned the inequality between the city and village (Novosella 1993, 36; 2008, 20). In 1981, then, apart from the trigger that started the demonstration, the social, or class, dimension was visible immediately in the choice of slogans: “Trepça is working, Belgrade is building” (*Trepça punon, Beogradi ndërton*); “Workers-peasants, we are one and not separated” (*Punëtorë-fshatarë, jemi një e të pandarë*); “Some on the armchair, some without bread” (*Disa në fotele, disa pa bukë*), and others (Avdyli 2011; Horvat 1988, 130–40). The police's brutal handling of the latter demonstration left many injured or even killed. Kosovo's intellectual and especially political elite, with few exceptions, strongly condemned the demonstration and installed what were called “differentiation” measures, which meant firing, suspending, and sentencing many Albanian staff in public institutions as well as University of Prishtina (UP) students (Hetemi 2020, 174–5). It is estimated that between 1981 and 1988, every third Albanian in Kosovo “passed through the hands of police” (Horvat 1988, 97). Using excessive violence, inspectors and police violated basic human rights of prisoners and those in custody during interrogation (Lama, Rrëfime për Kosovën, 2021), even with minors, which prompted the intervention of Amnesty International (Interview with Hava Shala, 13 and 14 Oct 2016). Consequently, the gap between the people and the political elite grew wider, while the relations with *Ilegalja* activists became closer.

What Was the *Ilegalja* Movement?

Within the SFRJ, and especially in Kosovo, which initially was recognised as a region and only later as a political unit, Albanians experienced particularly harsh political, economic, and social inequalities, as well as state-led violence. The non-implementation of what the Bujani Resolution of 1944 had promised—that Albanians in Kosovo would have the right to self-determination if they joined the

war against the fascist and national socialist occupiers—and the oppression and violence of the state secret service, headed by Aleksandar Ranković between 1944 and 1966, created uncertainties and anger among Albanians (Horvat 1988, 84–5; Magaš 1993, 28 and 33–4; Malcolm 1998, 308 and 315; Pula 2020, 26; Ramet 2006, 155–6; Schwandner-Sievers 2013, 955). As a reaction to these circumstances, the first political underground groups were formed, which clandestinely operated in opposition to the state. These various formations made up the movement at large, known commonly as *Ilegalja*, a term which nowadays, together with the term “underground,” is contested by some of its former members. One of them, Bardhyl Mahmuti, a political scientist, argues that “it is crucial [...] that the issue of legality/illegality does not carry an evaluating meaning when it comes to the activities [of the movement], but only the legitimacy of an action.” Mahmuti considers that instead it was the way in which Kosovo was annexed to Serbia in 1945 that was illegal: “The activities [of *Ilegalja*] against this power [of the state], whether openly or in secret, were activities that were in accordance with the right of any nation for self-determination, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Charta of the United Nations and considered a universal value” (Mahmuti, March 2020). While I recognise this discussion, in this study, I do use the term *Ilegalja* to refer to the movement in question, principally to acknowledge the resistance and subversion of women toward both the state and patriarchy.

Ilegalja groups and organisations had different political objectives in different periods of time, which, simply described, could be as follows: After World War II, they strove for Kosovo’s unification with Albania; from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, they demanded for Kosovo the status of a republic and then of an Albanian republic in Yugoslavia. After 1989, some *Ilegalja* groups, especially those who founded the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, UÇK) once more turned to propagating the unification with Albania (Çeku 2004, 29–98; Krasniqi 2011). *Ilegalja*’s main platform of work and ideology was a national one. Due to the poor economic development in Kosovo and exploitative policies (Islami 2008, 210), social equality was another segment important to the movement. In addition, experiencing Yugoslav/Serbian cultural racism, *Ilegalja* was inspired by literature such as Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961 and translated into Albanian in 1984, to acquire an anticolonial stance. The issue of gender equality, or specifically women’s emancipation, was regarded as a matter of course. Saima Isufi, a former member of *Ilegalja*—especially active in the 1970s and the early 1980s—maintained that the women’s role in the movement was inseparable from the role of the men, that they fought, as the saying went, “shoulder-to-shoulder with the men” (*krah për krah me burrat*). Young women often created their own groups, usually named “Girls’ group” (*Grupi i vajzave*), which either operated independently or as a branch of a larger organisation. An

example was the Women's Union (*Bashkimi i Grave*, WU), a branch that operated within the Movement for an Albanian Socialist Republic in Yugoslavia (*Lëvizja për Republikën Socialiste Shqiptare në Jugosllavi*, LRSSHJ). This organisation, whose goal is revealed in its very name, united various subgroups under its umbrella. Formed in 1982, they formulated 13 principles, of which five expressed how the movement counted on the support of all progressive forces in Yugoslavia in a joint fight "against hegemonic, colonial, chauvinist and reactionary forces" (Press Release of the Leading Committee of LRSSHJ, 1982, private archive of A. Isufi).

Women's Discourses of Emancipation and the National Question

An important medium through which *Ilegalja* groups reached the population was their underground press (Çeku 2004, 60). Among these printed outlets, given to me by a former member of *Ilegalja*, Ahmet Isufi, in 2006 from his private archive, I came across a 1982 edition of *Kosovarja e Re*, which was produced by the WU and dedicated to women. The state-published *Kosovarja* originated in the Conference of Women. It was first published in 1971 and became very popular. The Conference of Women was a transformation of sorts from the *Fronti Antifashist i Grave* (Anti-fascist Front of Women, AFW), founded during World War II within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), and existing until the early 1950s. In Kosovo, the AFW was known mostly for their campaigns against illiteracy and the Muslim veil (Bakija-Gunga 1983; Kojçini Ukaj 1985).

A strict comparison of *Kosovarja* and *Kosovarja e Re* is difficult because I could not find more editions of the latter. However, it suffices to see how both *Kosovarja* and *Kosovarja e Re* used the same socialist discourse against the bourgeoisie and how both aimed at women's emancipation in Kosovo. As was the case in other communist systems, in the SFRJ a strong attempt was made to construct a role model of the new communist woman (note the singular), in Kosovo: the new Albanian woman. Within the Yugoslav socialist modernity, but also in other countries of southeastern Europe with a Muslim population, the image was that of an educated woman, without a veil or a headscarf, employed, a proletarian living in a nuclear household, having a small number of children. In all numbers of *Kosovarja* of the 1970s and 1980s, only a few women were depicted with traditional clothes, headscarves for example, because these were considered to be a backward Ottoman legacy. *Kosovarja e Re*, which opposed the Yugoslav state, had no different aim. In an article of the 1982 edition, the same (or similar) ideal of emancipated women was evoked:

The Kosovar woman never lacked the patriotism, the intelligence, and the braveness to be equal with men in the class fight nor in the fight for independence and national equality, so she does not hold responsibility for not participating more massively in the war. Responsible for this is the cultivation of the primitive traditions that were planted into Kosovo in the past, which have maltreated Kosovar women and undermined their role, and also the state instruments of the foreign conqueror that have fed that type of mistreatment. (Krasniqi 2011, 109)

The article went on to emphasise how women “fight for national freedom [...] and for their equality in society, by giving a punch to conservative petty bourgeois forces that unjustly condition women’s freedom” (Krasniqi 2011, 109). This type of narrative, where the lack of women’s emancipation is attributed to the conservative bourgeoisie and reactionary forces, could be found often in books on women, published by the only Albanian-language state-owned publishing house *Rilindja*, the Institute of History, and other official institutions (Bakija-Gunga 1986; Begolli 1984). In some of the underground gazettes, such as *Liria* (Freedom) or *Zëri i Popullit* (People’s Voice), the reference for the “new class” often was the “new bourgeoisie,” and not the “red bourgeoisie,” as it had been used in the 1968 demonstration (Žilnik 2008). Despite this discursive similarity of *Kosovarja* and the quoted *Kosovarja e Re* article (or *Liria*, *Zëri i Popullit*, for that matter), the significant difference between them remained the sense of group belonging, which was distinctly based on how the Kosovo question in Yugoslavia was interpreted respectively.

Drita Bakija-Gunga (1943–2020), a historian at the Institute of History, in relation to the national question considered that women intellectuals in state positions and *Ilegalja* women activists had the same goals, the only difference among them being the way in which they operated. According to Bakija-Gunga, the former wanted to resolve issues through institutional ways and the latter through radical means (Krasniqi 2011, 108). Thus, the distinction concerning the approach of the Kosovo question reflected also on the women’s question. Women in *Ilegalja* did not see women’s emancipation as separate from the national struggle. Shukrije Gashi, a former political prisoner, former *Ilegalja* member and feminist activist, argues that Albanian women in Kosovo, especially *Ilegalja* members, were subjected to oppression twice: by the state and by patriarchy. There was a constant threat and danger of imprisonment and even murder by the police. A good life, according to Gashi, was possible only for those who were in power and declared themselves as Yugoslavs, not for those who considered themselves Albanians (Krasniqi 2011, 110).

These differences were articulated also between the so-called Titoists, a term used for those who supported and bore sympathy toward Tito and his entourage, and the so-called Enverists, a term applied to *Ilegalja* activists because of the influence that Enver Hoxha’s Albania had on them. Stephen Schwartz maintains

that in fact this juxtaposition was never fully valid, since neither did the Enverists entirely support Enver Hoxha, nor those considered Titoists were all loyal to Tito's Yugoslavia (Schwartz 2009).

Despite the social and economic privileges that women in high state positions had, those who did not agree with the Party felt the state political pressure and control. It was expected not to divert from the overall party line. The disagreements that women may have had though did not seem to be reflected in *Kosovarja* articles. For instance, the Conference of Women condemned the demonstrations of 1981 and held meetings with women homemakers to inform them “correctly” about the demonstration (Dobësitë tona, *Kosovarja*, July 1981; Me informim të drejtë, *Kosovarja*, June 1981). Bahtije Abrashi, who at that time was the head of the Conference of Women for Prishtina, did criticise the demonstrations (Aktivitet i Aktiviteteve, *Kosovarja*, May 1981) but did not agree with the aftermath “differentiations” (Interview, Spring 2021). Later, being the Head of the Conference on the Kosovo level between 1986 and 1989, Abrashi maintained that “starting from the local community to the federal level, every meeting was a separate trauma. Every word said, every word written was measured [by the state] to the milligram. What did she say? How did she say it?” (Luci & Krasniqi 2006, 27).

Class Cleavages and Socialist Social Reproduction in Kosovo

The first international feminist conference in Yugoslavia “Comrade-ess woman. The women's question—a new approach” (*Drug-ca Žena. Žensko pitanje—novi pristup*) took place in Belgrade from 27 to 30 March 1978. Aiming at gathering feminists from Europe and all Yugoslav republics, this conference critiqued “the socialist patriarchy and the socialist concept of women's fate” (Papić 2012). Judging from the names of those who were present (Blagojević 1998, 49–50), it does not seem that Albanian women participated in the conference. Regardless of progressive leftist ideas, in this period Yugoslav feminism was centrist, that is, focused on the Yugoslav capitals such as Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade. Media information about the peripheries, Kosovo among them, was either scarce or largely biased, as former journalist Linda Shala recalls. This further helped the already imbued colonial imaginaries about Albanian women. Both the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and the Conference of Women criticised the feminist conference (Licht and Drakulić 1997; Papić 2012, 281). *Kosovarja* did not cover the event at all. Given the brittle status of Kosovo, as an autonomous

province within the SR Serbia because of the constitution of 1974, *Kosovarja* would have found it difficult to go openly against the LCY.

Within Kosovo, the capital Prishtina was a centre, but because many of the high state functionaries came originally from the former partisan strongholds in the western and northern parts of Kosovo (Ströhle 2016, 117), no periphery was strictly defined. The regional differences were noticed and to some extent, although tacitly, made into a hierarchy of social and class differences, of power and prestige. These dynamics had to do primarily with work. As Susan Woodward argued, “to be unemployed was to be excluded from full membership in society—a loss of full citizenship rights, a second-class status, a disenfranchisement” (Woodward 1995, 4). This fits also with respect to the terms that were used—*inkuadruar* (included) for everyone employed, whereas *organizuar* (organised) for anyone who had pledged as a member of one of the *Ilegalja* groups or organisations. Some were thus more included than others, meaning that the elite, given their high-status employment, participated fully in the Yugoslav socialist modernity. Among other aspects, this meant alternative ways of regulating social reproduction.

The last pages of *Kosovarja* were reserved for such topics as housekeeping, decoration, cooking, and fashion. The statal Provincial Entity for Advancing Homemaking (*Enti Krahinor i përparimit të Amvisnisë*) commonly known as *Amvisnia* (Homemaking) was very active, especially in villages. Their work was like the Antifascist Women's Front's bulletins, the content of which partially (or mostly) was addressed to women and dedicated to homemaking, child rearing, nurture, and related matters. *Amvisnia* organised courses and lectures, with the aim at “advancing and enabling women for better life within the frame of family where she lives” (Kujdes i mjaftueshëm për femrën amvise. *Kosovarja*, July–August 1978). In contrast, *Kosovarja* problematised the issue of social reproduction, respectively housekeeping and care, being solely the responsibility of women. This was the social reality of women, regardless of their political affiliations (state or underground group) and class.

Needless to say, there were exceptions. Saime Isufi, whose husband Kadri Zeka, a prominent leader of *Ilegalja*, was murdered together with the Gërvalla brothers by the Yugoslav State Secret Service in southern Germany in 1982, related that in their relationship both household work and political activism were shared. Shemsije Elshani, a former *Ilegalja* member and former political prisoner, rejected the assigned “women's roles” and maintained that daughters, as long as they lived with their parental family, enjoyed more freedom than once they married. Then, many were expected to fulfil the roles of traditional brides and sacrifice their political activism for a “family life”. Social reproduction seems to have become a topic of discussion only from the 1970s onwards. Didare Dukagjini, head of the Kosovo AFW and later a socialist functionary, described how back in the 1950s,

even though she and her husband (Todor Đorđević) were “new people in a new society,” still it was self-understood that the household work belonged to her. She said that it occurred to none of them that this domain also “required a modernisation as we could not be equal as long as this patriarchal division of labour existed, since from this begins everything” (Mallesheviq 2016, 76).

When the number of employed women increased, *Kosovarja* stressed the need for *ndihmëse* (helpers or assistants) and suggested that this job could be performed by women who lived in agricultural areas, or those with no education or only a basic one (Pse ‘t’i ndihmohet’ femrës? *Kosovarja*, Apr 1978; Ndhimëset e shtëpisë - ‘Tabu’. *Kosovarja*, Sep 1978). For many employed women, especially for the “more included” ones, hiring a “helper” became a solution. For instance, for childcare, as nannies, a common practice was hiring Roma and Ashkali women. It was seldom that Albanian women would agree to perform this job. In 1977, in the capital Prishtina, out of 41 women registered as “helpers” only four were Albanians. The *Kosovarja* article on this topic informed readers that as “helper”, they would be considered as “included” and as such entitled to all employees’ benefits and social protection (Ndhimëset e shtëpisë - ‘Tabu’. *Kosovarja*, Sep 1977).

As Nancy Fraser argues, in the three capitalist regimes of the second half of the 20th and the 21st century (liberal, state managed, and global financial capitalism) social reproduction kept being gendered by and large on the back of women (Fraser 2016; Leonard and Fraser 2016). In Kosovo, the racialised aspect of care, in the case of nannies and/or “helpers”, exploited the class hierarchy that the system it produced, and it deepened social cleavages further. It enabled the elite women to have a “good life” and with it came also social prestige. However, this landscape of social relations and prestige did not last long. As Slobodan Milošević climbed the stairs to power from the mid-1980s, this plurality of belongings (class/ideology) became less significant in Kosovo. After 1989, Albanians were reduced to their national identity and, as such, were a target of attack from the Serbian state.

The Political Rupture and Social Cohesion after 1989. Convergence and Divergence of Differences

With Milošević entering the political scene in Yugoslavia, the political landscape changed definitively. In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts drafted a Memorandum, which, among other things, demanded the reduction of Kosovo’s autonomy, the cutting of links with Albania, and the de-Albanianisation of Kosovo (Grupa akademika SANU 1986; cf. Stefanov 2021, in this issue; Vickers 1998, 222). The Memorandum preceded the full-blown severity of Serbian state nationalism.

In 1989, Kosovo Albanian political mobilisation came forth through the Trepça miners' protest and then strike. This was the last attempt at "a defense of the constitutional principles of 1974 and the provincial leadership in Kosovo [which] was under attack by Milošević" (Pula 2004, 803). Already in the mid-1970s, Adem Demaçi (1935–2018), founder of the first *Ilegalja* groups, who spent 28 years in prison, had pondered that the rights that had just been guaranteed by the 1974 constitution could be removed by the authorities at any time (Gashi 2018). On 23 March 1989, this indeed happened when Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy. This was a "wake-up" call even for the handful of people who had remained loyal to Yugoslavia, both to its socialist progressive idea and to the state itself. In 1990, by a special legal adoption and authorisation, Serbia introduced "temporary measures" (Fetahu 1992; Kelmendi 1994) ruling that all those working in public institutions who did not comply with the imposed Belgrade policies would be fired. In Kosovo, by 1992 70% of Albanians were expelled from their jobs (Hockenos 2003, 181). Albanian-language media were shut down, and Kosovo Albanian Assembly members were suspended. Albanians recall this period as a time of apartheid, sudden experience of poverty, systematic state violence, and killings. At this point, most Albanians were poor, trying to survive in different ways, including the massive youth emigration. The entire dynamics of relationships, class positions and prestige changed radically. Diana Mahmuti, a columnist of the former weekly *Java*, in her memoir describes these changing dynamics as the entrance into the "twilight zone":

Kosovo entered a twilight zone. Above all, everyone (almost) changed their opinion about the Slavs [...]. Somehow, for some Albanians in those times (some of them named *honest*) [which is an Albanian cynical reference for Albanian placemen collaborators with Serbia], the Slavs represented a sort of people with special status in society. People with an approach and perception that need to be copied as only with such model and life led in that way, you could go forward. To get modernized and emancipated. 'We also have only two children!' *We*, meaning Albanians, like *them*, referring to Serbs, said aunt R., who was living a floor below [...] 'Only peasants make lots of children.' Soon after, the same aunt came and asked for baking powder and of course stayed for a quick coffee and started with her new fairy tale: 'See how badly we have remained! None of us working! If we had more children, perhaps one of them would go abroad to work and would *help* us. The new thesis of aunt R. said that peasants, Albanians, yesterday being farmers, smelling like *opanga* [type of shoes worn by peasants], uncultured, primitive, and illiterate, that every year give birth to a child, today had become the lucky ones and prove themselves to have been a strategist in financial respect. Hm! Really?! (2007, 16–7)

This nuanced description exemplifies how much the events of 1989 had shaken the foundation of Kosovo Albanian society. Social and cultural racism against Albanians in Yugoslavia stemmed from colonial epistemologies and knowledge

produced from at least the mid-19th century (cf. Schwandner-Sievers 2008; Pavlović 2019, 3, 13). This “knowledge” framed Albanians only in relation to customary law (blood-feud revenge), unskilled labour, isolation of women, high natality, and lack of education. Many of these “findings” during socialism (or earlier) neglected empirical evidence—after all it was the state that orchestrated obstacles for the education of Albanians (cf. Malcolm 1998, 267; Ramet 2006, 47–8; Schmitt 2012, 143), propagated what characterised the Albanian family, and similar matters, as for example illustrated by an article on “Albanian extended families” of Croatian social anthropologist Vera Stein Erlich (1976).

Since the 1980s, especially from the mid-1980s onwards, cultural racism was openly expressed and especially in mainstream Serbian media. Albanian men were depicted as rapists whereas women were “baby factories.” On the issue of the former, investigations showed that in reality Kosovo had the fewest reported cases of sexual violence. The percentage of rapes on ethnic basis corresponded to ethnic representation in the Albanian and Serbian population and that this crime against Serbian women in Kosovo was committed more by Serbian male perpetrators than Albanian ones (Mertus 1999, 8; Popovic, Janča, and Petovar 1990, 26). As per the issue of natality, the 1981 census results showing that Albanians had reached the highest peak of population growth in Yugoslavia, opened a wide discussion, especially on the “motivations” of Albanians behind such growth. As Hivzi Islami argued, this growth was based on a social-class component rather than on ethnical, religious, or ideological grounds, all motives attributed to the Albanians (1989, 41 and 43–4; Kaufman 1999; Mertus 1999, 8). For instance, for the year 1981, the percentage of birth of all ethnicities was less in the more developed republics than in the underdeveloped republics and provinces (Islami 2008, 100–1). Regardless, the high natality of Albanians was not discussed in these terms but rather as an ethnic and cultural feature of Albanians. For a certain stratum of Albanians, too, culturally this became a characteristic of “peasants”, and not of urban dwellers, or simply of those who were not sufficiently “modernised.” Bahtije Abrashi recalled that a frequent question, “wherever you went, the question was how many children you have” (Luci and Krasniqi 2006, 29). On the level of public patriarchy, the state politicised reproductive policies ethnically—controlling the births of Albanian women while encouraging the natality of Serbian and Macedonian women (Islami 2008, 43–4; cf. Drakulić 1993, 127; Milić 1993, 113). In 1993 in Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church created an award called *Majke Jugovića* (the mother of Jugović) to Serbian women who had four or more children (Stevanović 2008).

The social cleavages, which mostly rested on economic (under)development, after 1989, as described by Mahmuti, became blurred. This was reflected also in the flux of everyday practices, cultural ones too, which in a way disturbed the

dynamics of identity politics and, foremost, removed the “veil”, in William E. B. Du Bois’ term. I dare to use here Du Bois’ famous quote that in the American world “the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight” and that this world “yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world”. Du Bois names this a “double-consciousness”, which is a “sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others [...], and a ‘two-ness’” (2007 (1903), 8). In the context of certain Kosovo Albanians before and during the breakup of Yugoslavia, this “two-ness”, which for some was forced and for some aspired to, started to avulse. This rupture, political and social, saw the beginning of a mobilisation of a movement (besides *Ilegalja*), the largest of that time, the *rezistenca paqsore* (the peaceful resistance).

The peaceful resistance movement was conceptualised and conducted through the Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK), established in December 1989 (Clark 2000, 56) and led by the former head of Kosovo’s League of Writers Ibrahim Rugova, until his death in 2006. Those who had previously held state positions, and even some prominent *Ilegalja* members, joined the LDK. On a volunteer basis for most of their activities, the LDK created the Finance Council within Kosovo and from the diaspora everybody was to contribute a 3% tax per income (Hajrizi, Kastrati, and Shatri 2007). This council was the backbone of the so-called parallel state, which was set up as an alternative to the purge of Albanians from public institutions. The education was now organised in Albanian houses, warehouses, garages, basements, and mosques. So was the health system (mostly in private empty buildings), while cultural events would take place in restaurants, cafés and churches, and sport games outdoors. The society and cities were completely ethnically segregated. As a consequence of being threatened, the Albanian identity was strengthened, as were the social cohesion and solidarity (Clark 2000, 95–115; Hockenos 2003, 184–7; Pula 2004, 806 and 812).

The Women’s Movement and Competing Loyalties

Despite the socialist progress in terms of bringing women to the public sphere through work, with the expulsion of Albanians from public institutions women were pushed back into the private domain—to a large degree, this meant also away from the counter-public sphere that was being created. Observing their missing presence in the nascent so-called political pluralism, women organised themselves. Initiated and represented by the prominent feminist Sevdije Ahmeti (1944–2016), first informal meetings of small groups of women took place at the Library of Kosovo—small also due to the law that forbade the gathering of more than three persons. At

the meeting of 10 October 1989, considered to be the first formal one, 25 women, academics, journalists, and actors among them, gathered and founded the Independent Women's Association (*Shoqata e Pavarur e Grave*, IWA). The motives to create such an organisation initially were to respond to the changes in political climate and specifically to oppose Serbian cultural racism against Albanian women, reflected especially in the media (Farnsworth 2008, 59–61). The international media had started to pick up this stereotypical image which presented one single story about Albanians—that in the old quarters of Prishtina where the old mosques are, men wear the white skull cap and women headscarves. The Serbian state propaganda aimed at presenting the conflict in religious and national terms although obviously Catholic Albanians were not spared from any of the state oppression and violence. Serbian state oppression, gender stereotypes, private and public patriarchy, the issue of national oppression, as well as the international community, made up the vortex in which Albanian women found themselves. The IWA wanted to change the course things were taking, basing their work on three principles: being open to all women regardless of their national, ethnic and religious identity; being non-partisan; and dealing with issues that concern both women and also the wider population (Farnsworth 2008, 62–3). The first activity of this so-formed group of independent women intellectuals in Kosovo, and also the last, was a letter to condemn the killing of Albanian soldiers in the Yugoslav army. The official response of the Army in these murder cases was that the deceased soldier committed suicide and to ask the family not to open the coffins. Families did open the coffins to find out that the dead bodies often had bullets in their backs (Nuk vras slloven as kroat, *Kosovarja*, Sept 1991, 10–1; Opozita demokratike, *Kosovarja*, July 1990, 11; Paragjykime apo diç tjetër, *Kosovarja*, Jan 1991, 10–1). The IWA letter of protest was sent to Veljko Kadijević, a Serbian general of the Yugoslav army and minister of defence, and Janez Drnovšek, President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia at that time (Farnsworth 2008, 64).

In one IWA meeting, the LDK leadership was invited, and the latter invited IWA to join the LDK. Out of 40 women members of IWA, fewer than five voted against. Sevdije Ahmeti, called this process “a great betrayal” (Farnsworth 2008, 66). The competing loyalties toward the national cause or the cause of women's rights, among other things, later led to the creation of the first women's non-governmental organisations in Kosovo. On 8 March 1990, the new Women's Association as part of LDK, led by Luljeta Pula-Beqiri, a chemical engineer, announced publicly the official separation from the Socialist Women's League, which was simultaneously holding a meeting in the same building. The IWA expanded in all Kosovo, reaching up to 80,000 members, and continued politically to condemn the Serbian state oppression and violations. This was especially due to Luljeta Pula-Beqiri's engagement, whom others describe as brave, sharp,

and charismatic (Farnsworth 2008, 68–9). During this period, further condemnation of the murders of Albanian soldiers was issued. This time the Association published in *Kosovarja* an “Appeal to all Yugoslav Mothers” (*Apel të gjitha nënave të Jugosllavisë*) requesting them to raise “their voice as mothers” and help Albanian mothers to shed light on these cases (*Kosovarja*, June 1990, 1). Such political motherhood was starting to be expressed in other parts of Yugoslavia as well, when the sequence of wars started in Slovenia in 1991. Women opposed the Yugoslav army for taking their sons to war fronts (Drakulić 1993, 126–9; Milić 1993, 181). These struggles were unsuccessful, as most women, also including feminists (with exceptions), “recognised and respected their national interest over women’s issues” (Duhaček 1993, 134–5). By this time, and throughout the 1990s, *Kosovarja* reported on state discrimination and violence, which was a shift from what *Kosovarja* had been reporting before the year 1990. It mirrored the political, social, economic, and cultural situation of Albanians in Kosovo, including women’s position in society. Certainly, this work too was under police threat and violence. Sanije Gashi, editor-in-chief since the beginning of the publication of *Kosovarja*, was arrested for publishing photographs of murdered Albanian soldiers in coffins (Gusia 2016, 92). The funeral of these soldiers had a massive participation, which, it must be emphasised, apart from honouring the murdered and their families, was a form of “silent” resistance and form of protest against the regime.

The Convergence of Differences and the Proliferation of Women’s Activism

Within the LDK, the IWA increased the party’s women membership rapidly. More than the gender-identity motive, joining the LDK at that time was a way to resist Serbian state oppression and violence, but also to show loyalty to the national struggle. Just as the former Communist Party of Yugoslavia had done with the Antifascist Front of Women, the LDK also started slowly to narrow the space of women; it swallowed the IWA. Initially, they did so by making remarks that there was no need for the IWA deal with politics, but should instead concern themselves with women’s and children’s issues. Luljeta Pula-Beqiri disagreed. As someone who did not compromise on her convictions, she opposed the fact that there were no women representatives in the LDK committee (Gusia 2016, 24). She strove for women’s emancipation and empowerment through direct political engagement, not through a separate entity. Eventually she resigned. As she wrote, she refused to deal with “women’s and children’s issues” and founded the Social Democratic Party (Gusia 2016, 93; Pula 2020).

With the agreement of other women, the IWA transmogrified into the Women's Forum of the LDK (hereafter the Forum), formally declared as such in August 1991 (Farnsworth 2008, 77; Pula 2020, 118). The LDK's book about the Forum, prepared for publication by the latter's former head Melihate Tërmkolli, gives 7 March 1990 as the date of the Forum's founding (Forumi i Gruas 2009, 13). The book nowhere mentions that the Forum had its foundation in the IWA. On 2 July 1990, the Albanian delegates of Kosovo's Assembly declared Kosovo a republic outside of the Assembly building, as the Serbian delegates had hindered the Albanian ones from entering. The Serbian parliament dissolved the Kosovo parliament and government three days later and fired arbitrarily on the workers. On 7 September, Albanian delegates promulgated the new constitution which declared Kosovo an independent state (Clark 2000, 73).

The Forum continued its work, expanding everywhere in Kosovo. Some women of former groups of *Ilegalja* joined LDK, whereas some others supported them in various ways although not becoming members. Most of the women who had formerly been positioned in state organs were now positioned in the Forum. *Kosovarja* followed their work, for example publishing interviews with Edita Tahiri, head of the Forum and minister of foreign affairs of what now was the Republic of Kosovo. The Forum generally dealt mainly with humanitarian aid, health, social, and educational issues (Farnsworth 2008, 68). *Kosovarja* during this period celebrated male politicians (mainly from the LDK), and intellectuals too, often featuring their portraits as posters. Solidarity became the mantra of the day. The space for contention against patriarchy was narrowed as the space for the national struggle expanded. In the context of severe Serbian state oppression, the "sameness" regarding national identity became more important than any difference, be that class, regional, or gender. The effect of this period was not only national mobilisation but foremost established national unity. This was reached not least with yet another massive movement—the Blood Feud Reconciliation (*Pajtimi i Gjaqeve*)—existing between 1990 and 1992. Initiated by former *Ilegalja* activists, Hava Shala, Myrvete Dreshaj, Akile Dedincaj among them, and later joined by many among the academic and intellectual elite, this movement reconciled family disputes and blood feuds. According to Nita Luci it "provided the most significant site for the transformation and mobilization of Albanian political resistance in Kosova [...]" (Luci 2014, 93–5).

From the mid-1990s, a rather new political atmosphere, also within the women's movement, started to emerge. Certain events revealed power dynamics and class differences, which in turn changed the stream of feminist activism. One such example is the second elective assembly of the LDK Women's Forum, held on 24 October 1995 in the village of Samadrexhë in northern Kosovo (Forumi i Gruas 2009). Nazlije Bala, feminist and Forum activist, highlighted in this meeting the

procedural and statutory violation for electing the committee of the Women's Forum. The response of the Committee against her and other women was harsh, insinuating that they were Serbian infiltrated elements. Bala's reproach was that a group of women, "the former bourgeoisie elite", as she put it, strove to remain in a position of high power within the Forum. Without zooming in on the details of the internal dynamics, the LDK and the Forum had converged their differences, until this event. The women in the committee, according to Bala, did not allow criticism, especially from those "who were not at their level". Bala and other women communicated this issue to higher instances of the LDK and were told that it was not the time for divergences of any kind, that they needed to sacrifice for the sake of the heavy political situations in which Albanians were, and for the national cause. In response, Bala left the Forum and founded a woman's non-governmental organisation. During this period, NGOs shaped the women's movement further and thereby broke the LDK's mainstream politics. As a solution to these competing loyalties—the national cause and the women's rights struggle—the women used "national identity in order to shape gender identity" (Mertus 1999, 172). They needed to negotiate with different layers of oppression and strategise and follow their ideals of feminist activism. Such was the case with the NGO *Motrat Qiriazi* (Qiriazi sisters) who started work on literacy and women's empowerment in rural areas with the slogan "With a Pencil to Europe – Stop Illiteracy" (*Me laps në Evropë – Analfabetizmit Stop*) (*Kosovarja*, July 1990, 16–7). Another example, among many more, was the Centre for Protection of Women and Children, which educated women in their reproductive health and empowerment (Farnsworth 2008). Women took to the streets and organised demonstrations, at times as mothers, sisters, daughters, many other times as oppressed Albanian citizens and activists of women's human rights. During this period, as Luci and Gusia argue, "being visible was not just about claiming public space but also demonstrated to the international community a new emancipated nation where women take the streets and are active citizens" (Luci and Gusia 2015, 208).

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the intersectional political engagements and activism of women under the multilayered state and social oppression in Kosovo between socialist Yugoslavia and the 1990s. Specifically, I have examined the category of class, entangled with gender and nation, as these all were identity facets based on which Albanians were oppressed. I reveal the dynamics within Kosovo, as a result of private and public patriarchy, unjust state policies and politics as well as colonialist epistemologies in the context of Yugoslavia, later Serbia. Through the women's

socialist state-owned magazine *Kosovarja*, and briefly also through the underground movement *Ilegalja*'s paper *Kosovarja e Re*, I discern three aspects of women's political engagement: national identity; women's emancipation; and class (in) equality. These dynamics reveal various forms of women's organised contentions. Furthermore, they produced class friction based on opportunities that were not given equally, and privileges that were not only gendered but also class dependent. There were differences and commonalities between women who engaged in *Ilegalja* and women who held high positions in state-owned jobs. Women in *Ilegalja* were engaged within a national frame with women's emancipation, whereas women in high state positions used the "socialist modernity" paradigm to work on women's emancipation. The two groups acknowledged that they may have the same goal in terms of women's emancipation but used different paths to attain these goals.

With the political changes after 1989, women's strategies converged. At this point, the whole structure of the socialist state, with the benefits that it had entailed, crumbled. This meant that the very foundation in which class differences survived, fell, at least for a while. Simultaneously, the political, social, and cultural rupture merged these differences through the "solidarity of sameness", that is prevailing the national identity over the class and the gender one. Political friction, expressed in class terms, reappeared but was not given significance. This was palpable in the LDK Women's Forum, where the core group was made up of the former intellectual elite. Regardless of what type of activism women performed, the imperative of the political dynamics made all other identity politics succumb to national liberation.

The reasoning behind this was the idea that with national liberation, women's rights would come automatically, a stream of transformations that was visible also in *Kosovarja*. While before 1990 the breach of national and human rights of Albanians was not a topic here, from the 1990s onwards, along with issues pertaining to women, this magazine reported and heavily opposed the Serbian state discrimination and violations toward Albanians. The different forms of political engagement of women, in relation to women's emancipation and class equality, was to develop and perform now within the larger movement for national liberation. State or national ideologies stifled feminist struggles whenever they ventured to operate without serving any other cause. However, feminists used the national cause to fight both private and public patriarchy. While after the independence of Kosovo in 2008, feminists by and large changed the patterns of their activism, the struggle continues.

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Bionote

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