



CHANGING THE STORY

Fragments on Heroes, Artists and Interventions: Challenging Gender Ideology and Provoking Active Citizenship through the Arts in Kosovo

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Chapter Six

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Introduction

This chapter emerges from the Kosovo strand of the Arts and Humanities Research Council Global Challenges Research Fund (AHRC GCRF) 'Changing the Story' project (cf. the Introduction of this book), which focuses on civic education practices in the municipalities of Kosovo, with a deliberate emphasis on geographically and socially marginalised spaces and communities outside the capital, Prishtina. It aims to both scope and compare formal (governmental) civic educational programmes, on the one hand, and independent arts-based, civil-society led initiatives, on the other, regarding their work with young people towards active citizenship through the arts. While the wider economic and security context frames many young people's recourse to traditional value orientations (FES 2012, p.13; Gjyshinca 2015), we are not just interested in the ways in which the specific Kosovar context of cultural heritage and memory, as part of civic education both inside and outside the classroom, may have consolidated traditional cultural orientations. Instead, we aim to explore just how such cultural

heritage might also offer educational potential for more critical and active interrogations aimed at advancing social justice for young people in Kosovo, most prominently, through the arts. Thus, on the one hand, our case study reveals some of the pertinent, contextual specificities that underpin a dominant remembrance culture which we describe as framed through patriarchal memory practices, performances and representations. In this we examine the ways in which both this context and the hegemonic culture — whether as a result of local or international historical legacies affecting Kosovo society today — continue to shape and perpetuate socio-political structures of exclusion or inclusion that situate citizenship, both as an epistemic concept and a practice, in the country. While aware of multiple categories of social and political exclusion and division, including urban/rural; generational; ability; and ethnic, in this contribution we focus particularly on gender. We hope to demonstrate that gender as a category of social and political organisation in Kosovo is not just the result of a strong patriarchal heritage but has also been reproduced in the post-war context of both the nationalisation of traditions in the politics of memorialisation (evident in what we describe as the construction of ‘the liberators’ or new ‘fathers of the nation’) and international intervention regimes of governance. On the other hand, and subsequent to such explorations, we present selected contemporary Kosovar artists’ efforts to challenge the socio-cultural mainstream and its gendered reproductions of social and political exclusion, often exactly in reference to patriarchal socio-cultural traditions. This material serves us as a basis for identifying and discussing throughout the often inconspicuous, and inadvertent, secondary processes of marginalisation and silencing; and for hypothesising the ways in which the artist potentials described might or might

not contribute to concrete civic-educational reform and civic activism for social justice in Kosovo. Throughout, we also reflect on what such developmental project collaboration through, with and about an equitable, participatory-based citizenship can, or should, mean in our ongoing collaboration between national and international academic partners; people of different generations; activists, artists, civil society and formal stakeholders; educators, reformers and researchers.

We begin by providing a brief reflection on how we, the authors, have come together in this collaboration. We will then introduce a theoretical framework of practice/action-based citizenship. Subsequently, we unpack the dominant forms and tropes of commemoration in contemporary Kosovo, delineating the specific cultural heritage of patriarchy, familism and nationalism and its impact on socio-political structures of inclusion and exclusion as well as on the prevalent concept of citizenship. We then critically explore, in reference to an international art work known as *Thinking of You*, by artist Alketa Xhafa Mripa, how commemorative art-based practices have dealt with representation and recognition of war and post-conflict, gender and ethnic based violence, as well as the claims made regarding inclusions of marginalized narratives and experiences in Kosovo. Based on selected works, we then describe how art-based interventions have attempted a conversation on collective identity that de-romanticizes and potentially politicizes women's traditionally-framed private work and space allocation (seen as an attack on venerated traditions, with tradition functioning as memory). Examples here include the work of the Haveit art collective, and of artists Nurhan Qehaja, Dren Maliqi and Albert Heta. As public and political legitimacy in

Kosovo are guarded through the new fathers of the nation, we ask how aesthetic practices observed speak of consent, dissent and the politics of representation. In conclusion, and taking inspiration from development anthropologist Arturo Escobar's (2012) ideas about facilitating space for local agency as a prerequisite of more equitable collaboration on all levels, we conclude our reflections with first ideas of how citizenship and alternative identities can be created and opened up to civic educational initiatives in formal education through the arts in and beyond Kosovo.

The precincts of our collaboration

Some members of the team have a long history of working on academic projects together. Sociologist Gusia and social anthropologists Luci and Schwandner-Sievers, collaborated previously on topics such as Human Rights education (Tempus Foundation 2013) and co-creating storylines through Kosovo's frozen conflict's memoryscapes with students from our respective universities for an educational game development framework known as the 'Kosovo fusion project' (2015 to 2016) (Luci and Schwandner-Sievers, forthcoming). With these kinds of collaborative projects we have fostered research-based and reflective practices with, and by, our own students transnationally, provided space for artistic practice and promoted active citizenship. All authors have a broad trajectory of scholarly publications in the study of war memory and its impact on identity politics and societal divisions in Kosovo and the wider region, reflected also in their educational practices and preceding collaborations with civil society activism, particularly at, and with students of, University of Prishtina. For example, Gusia and Luci led a series of ateliers and masterclasses through our Memory Mapping Project (in

collaboration with Forum ZFD and Alter Habitus), generating a participatory and research based methodology with and for students on microhistories not included in official curricula and mainstream memory practices. Pollozhani, who specialises in the study of active citizenship in the wider region, joined the transnational team in 2018 when appointed as postgraduate research assistant to the AHRC GCRF Changing the Story project.

In summary, as academics, researchers, educators and participants in Kosovo's context, we position ourselves not just as academics, but also as feminists and activists. This arises from the fact that we critically explore the socially and politically charged topics of a violent past, but also because our educational work enables a space for research and knowledge production that is ethically charged and engaged. In particular, our engagement with memory work, actors, and practices, seeks to unpack competing regimes of truth and the underpinning, unequal relations of power upon which they are predicated. Whether we challenge and suspend dominant assumptions about the region and identities from within a wider international context which acts upon Kosovo, or the hegemonic memorialisation culture on a national level, by applying theoretically and ethnographically-informed alternative frameworks of understanding that are deemed academically credible, we seek to reveal the inherent tensions of institutions, governance regimes and power that structure the field within which we collaborate. Building on our existing transnational collaborations, the challenge in this new project arises from widening the participatory research paradigm. Referencing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its inherent strategic approach to 'ensure

responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels' (2015, p.25, para. 16.7; see also the questions posed in the introduction to this volume), beyond colleagues and students in the social sciences and humanities, the formal educational sector and the independent civil society sector, we aim to advance our collaboration between academics transnationally, activists, students and other young people, and artists.

Citizenship as Practice

To consider the application of participatory citizenship in any given country, it is important to investigate what citizenship means. While citizenship is often at first glance considered as a legal term implying status, it is evident by terms such as 'active citizenship' or 'participatory citizenship' that something else is expected of citizens. Namely, a legal status is a relatively passive exercise, even when extended to the wider conception of voting or paying tax. Active citizenship, on the other hand, implies agency beyond status: a more critical and engaged form of citizenship. Indeed, there is now wide consensus that citizenship is not solely about status (Isin 2009) or a specific set of rights (Bloemraad 2015). Citizenship is also dependent on its practice, that is, whether one can practice it and how. Feminist scholars (Friedman 2005, Ackelsberg 2005) also attempt to explore citizenship in terms of practice and its relation to gender, as well as the experiences of marginalized groups within the state. This exploration is important because, as Irene Bloemraad notes, 'the relationship between status, rights, participation, and belonging is neither automatic nor necessarily overlapping' (2015, p.

592). Accordingly, individuals can possess the status of citizen and yet not be able to exercise and practice it; take for instance the right of women to vote or to own property.

Indeed, citizenship and gender have always had a tense relationship, beginning from the city-states of ancient Greece, where the concept originates. This tension continued with the formation of nation-states. As Leti Volpp argues, '[w]hich persons have been recognizable as citizens, and what attendant rights they can enjoy, has been highly gendered since the foundation of the very notion of nation-state citizenship' (Volpp 2017, p.156). Socio-economic status, race and ethnicity are other markers of exclusion that persist in the history of citizenship both in terms of status and practice. Today the groups excluded from full status, or who are outside the demos, in most countries are children below voting age, persons with disabilities and persons with criminal offences (Baubock 2017, p.71). However, in terms of practice there is even more nuance. As Bloemraad highlights, the practice of citizenship through claim making, particularly, can precede status (2015, p.592) as it does in the case of asylum seekers or migrant populations. Thus, legal status and practice of citizenship are still two areas that may evade each other. This problematizes further the issue of participatory citizenship if we consider the levels of exclusion from the practice of citizenship in any given country.

In the context of a multi-cultural and post-conflict society such as Kosovo, there can be a great deal of tension between the issue of practice and that of status. When considering transition states dis-integrating from the Soviet Union, Shevel notes that the first focus is 'on defining the constituent nation, with the key questions being if all or

some of the former fellow citizens will be given right to citizenship in the new state and under what conditions' (Shevel 2017, p.409). The same questions plagued Kosovo and most of the countries emerging from former Yugoslavia. Again, this was predominantly a question relating to legal status. This is important, as status became the main marker of success in terms of citizenship, broadly speaking, in Kosovo. As a result, the issue of minority rights and gender rights, including the issue of the participation of women and minorities in public life, has remained a categorisation defined by status. The issue of practice is enveloped in a legalistic jargon concerned with rights inscribed in law but not the wider practice and lived-in experience of citizenship. This view is short-sighted and builds the stage for the challenges we will outline in the empirical part of the chapter as to the limitation of participatory and active citizenship in Kosovo. As Gülçin Erdi Lelandais points out '[c]itizenship can be described as a collection of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and an assembly of rights and duties (civilian, policy and social) that locate an individual within a political regime. Citizenship is thus neither a purely sociological nor a purely legal concept, but rather an interaction between the two' (Erdi Lelandais 2013, p.817). In this chapter we are concerned with both, yet focus more on the sociological aspects of citizenship.

When considering the practices of citizenship, it becomes logical to examine the practices of the state. Citizenship, beyond being inscribed in legal documents, also becomes enforced via symbolic, historical tropes that the state advances through common myths, education and public spaces. Citizenship is an identifier of belonging to a group, thus a collective 'we' becomes imperative. The collective 'we' is constructed

through shared 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) built on constructed tropes that seem primordial and given in the collective memory. Within Kosovo, these can be studied well through acts of war commemoration and the ways in which these acts situate women, young people or any other social category of person not easily aligned with hegemonic mainstream politics and culture. The practice of citizenship as an act of commemoration seeks to establish the 'we' in culturally resonate ways. From the end of the war, a hetero-normative, ethno-patriarchal, commemorative statuary, which replaced the previous ethno-nationalist Serb hegemonic statuary that had communicated to the Albanian population that this was not their place (Clark 2000), appropriated public spaces where citizenship is demonstrated and performed. As we will denote in the empirical sections below, the 'we' that these acts of commemoration and the legacies of the past have established are based on patriarchy, hierarchy and the image of powerful men (the 'liberators'), leaving very little space for others to fit into this image. As Weinstock notes when referring to how dominant groups use the state to affect certain attributes that hinder minorities, '[t]he dominant position which groups that control the state occupy makes it possible for them to ignore the fact that their administration of the supposedly neutral state is often shot through with the symbols, values, and self-understandings of the members of the dominant group, and with a blithe ignorance of the degree to which its norms end up being imposed upon minorities without the need for explicitly coercive legislation' (Weinstock 2017, pp.283-4). In the context of Kosovo, this dominant group not only refers to ethnic dominance, in the sense of ethnic Albanians, but is also gendered and based on hierarchies that disfavour

young people and, in particular, those not fitting ‘the liberators’ image of strong masculinity.

In investigating the commemorative practices and museums dedicated to the Civil Rights movement in the US, Owen J. Dwyer highlights that the:

narrative content of these memorials reflects the types of archival materials that survive, the intentions of their producers, and contemporary politics regarding Civil Rights movement historiography. In turn, through their symbolic power and the large number of visitors who travel to them, these landscapes play a role in contemporary America’s racial politics (Dwyer 2000, p.661).

Thus, commemorations are not only about the past, but they very actively reflect the present state of politics and shape future acts and practices in society. Indeed, as Dwyer concludes, ‘[i]n writing the past in such a powerful fashion, civil rights memorials are sites at which the agenda for the *next* Civil Rights movement is presently undergoing negotiation’ (Dwyer 2000, p.669). The power of symbols, sites and narratives of commemoration is thus not passive. It can move people to action, become a site of claim-making, for pushing the boundaries or for highlighting new spaces. In Kosovo, both the laws dealing with war-time legacies, such as sexual violence, and commemorations of the war, its main players and the values that they represented and defended, have been contested.

In commemorations of war-time struggle, the role of women is largely side-lined, and instead the narrative is constructed around male figures, enforcing a patriarchal society where (ethnic Albanian) men can practice their citizenship, confirmed through their

ostensible ownership of the public space. Dwyer notes a similar tendency in the US, noting that in many museums:

The movement is represented as having been won on the streets, from the pulpit, and in the courtroom — places intimately associated with masculinized leadership in the movement's iconic legacy. Little or no mention is made of the private and semipublic spaces of citizenship: schools, neighbourhoods, and homes where activists found food, shelter and community (Dwyer 2000, p.664).

This is the trend of commemoration in Kosovo, highlighting modes of resistance that were headed by men, while disregarding the crucial role of women in the mobilization of dissent, as well as disregarding their vulnerabilities. The dichotomy of private and public here is particularly important, as it is a dichotomy that entrenches masculinized characteristics of citizenship in status and in practice. As Volpp notes, the exclusion of women not only from the public space but also from forming conceptions of what a citizen is, and what rights they can have (reproductive, maternity leave etc.), was underlined by 'an unquestioned public/private dichotomy, one that consigned women to the private or domestic sphere, reserving citizenship's sphere of the public domain of men' (Volpp 2017, p.156).

Due to this exclusion from the public sphere in Kosovo, women and young people particularly have sought to expand the border of citizenship imposed by symbols and narratives in the public domain. They have sought to challenge both the legalistic constraints of citizenship, and claim the public space through practicing their citizenship. The following section will showcase this through the examination of six art interventions. Here we highlight how artists and activist art have pushed the boundaries of citizenship, opening new and plural imaginative spaces for participating in the remembrance of the

past and the relevance they bear for the present. We thus seek to establish the importance of public sites and commemoration to the practice of citizenship, namely how the public space can serve to define citizenship and how art and activism can expand the boundaries that it imposes.

Postwar Commemoration and Artistic Intervention

Stuart Hall observed some time ago that '[t]he nation-state was never simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation' (Hall 1999, p.38). As such, the symbolic formations of nation-states have significantly relied on the creation of commemorative traditions and their institutionalization (Connerton 2007; Mosse 1990; Smith 2003). The performance of memory, whether materialised in the form of memorials or enacted through cultural rites of remembrance, is a central space for the remaking of collective identities and identity politics. In Kosovo, post-war state building has also entailed massive cultural struggles over meaning and has been reliant on military glorifications and national victimization that have come to constitute a mnemonic hegemony. Memorials of war and martyrdom, capitalized on by the state, have shaped the landscape of collective memories and remembrance, and produce shared symbolic and material spaces for the enactment of national and gender identities simultaneously (Luci and Gusia 2019). Whereas collectivized remembrance is imagined as a resource for dealing with the past in recognizing violence, trauma and resistance, most of these imaginings and recognitions have however produced meta-narratives and a glorified past, predominantly of masculine heroism, and have relied on the erasure of diverse

social histories and subjects (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006; Gusia 2013; Ströhle 2013).

Citizen's participation in commemorative practices has become almost entirely reliant on the readiness to reproduce the hegemonic mnemonic narrative. Ultimately, this has led to the silencing and erasure of experiences that would convey more complex renderings of war and violence. There has been a constant difficulty in imagining alternatives to dealing with the past that move beyond ethnically-based nationalism or the ethnic reconciliation and transitional justice frame. The problem with both is that they emphasize, and thus define, experience as entirely and exclusively ethnically marked. Removed from historical contexts and power dynamics that may speak to other categories of social inclusion and exclusion, such as gender and class, they also solidify a commemorative tradition that qualifies citizenship as male and ethnic (Tamar Mayer 2000).

The discursive and material production of these practices has reinforced exclusionary narratives of the past, a national self-image that emphasises cultural and political homogeneity. Most vividly this is represented in commemorative practices that are often a stage for mobilizing the base of political parties. Although each relies on a significantly localised set of events and actors, their representations of heroes and martyrs are symptomatic of folklorised and sentimentalised narratives of war. Such narratives, and their concomitant rendering of events, places and people, have been elevated to legendary status and sacralised in the popular imagination. In addition, as has been the

case throughout the region, revisionist historiography has sought to produce new national histories that stump the social and political history of state-socialism, but also the politically varied resistances to the violence the system produced. New history textbooks reveal the renderings and narratives maintained by consecutive ministries of education that for almost two decades have been the main supporters of research and teaching institutions throughout the region (Gashi 2016). In Kosovo, these histories of events glorify martyrdom, militarised actionability, and an honourable national manhood, creating connections between a more distant, centuries-old past with recent experiences of violence.



Fig 6.1

Picture for Memory Mapping Atelier (2014). Research visit to Prekaz Memorial with students. Courtesy of Korab Krasniqi, photographer.

Despite the predominance of icons of masculinity, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), activists, academics and artists have continually contested the limitations of the worldview this presents in social and political spaces. For their part, the lack of a national state strategy for dealing with the past points to the state's lack of vision in recognizing the social and educational work deemed necessary for a critical

engagement with the past or the possibility of social transformation. Institutionalised collective memory that has produced specialised knowledge has entailed re-imagining the historical progression of the national community, aided by the pedagogical practices of educational and state institutions. Renaming and re-claiming street names, towns and villages, constructing memorials that become sites of pilgrimage, along with a massive production of academic, literary and artistic work (memoirs, films, museum exhibitions, memorial days, writing of new textbooks and curricula, etc.), are precisely the practices that shape and define citizens' individual and collective rights and identities. This framing leaves little space for the recognition of other kinds of experiences and memories of war, or resistance, but makes all the more important the possibility of voicing personal and collective trauma and grief, as well as enacting rights and recognition of civilian experiences of the past.

Civic initiatives have attempted to push back the erasures but have often been caught between security-policy and state-building in their resistance to nationalism's tautology and imposed provincialisation (Chakrabarty 2000). Women's rights groups in particular have been very active in generating discussion, conducting research to influence policy, and creating new ways of pluralising the narratives and spaces of engagement. The activism of the 1980s and 1990s (Krasniqi 2011; Gusia 2016) relied on national frames for women's emancipation, despite their varying political leanings, and communicated their political and social activism mainly in massively organized protests. Since the mid-2000s, a new generation of young people have raised new questions through their activism about the legacies of the past, and their own ability to challenges the power

dynamics at play in civil society and state institutions (Farnsworth 2011). By representing and performing new forms of remembrance and re-mediating memory, contemporary artists, especially, have foregrounded juxtapositions and intersections between the traditional and modern, nationalism and democracy, power and rights (Boynik 2007).

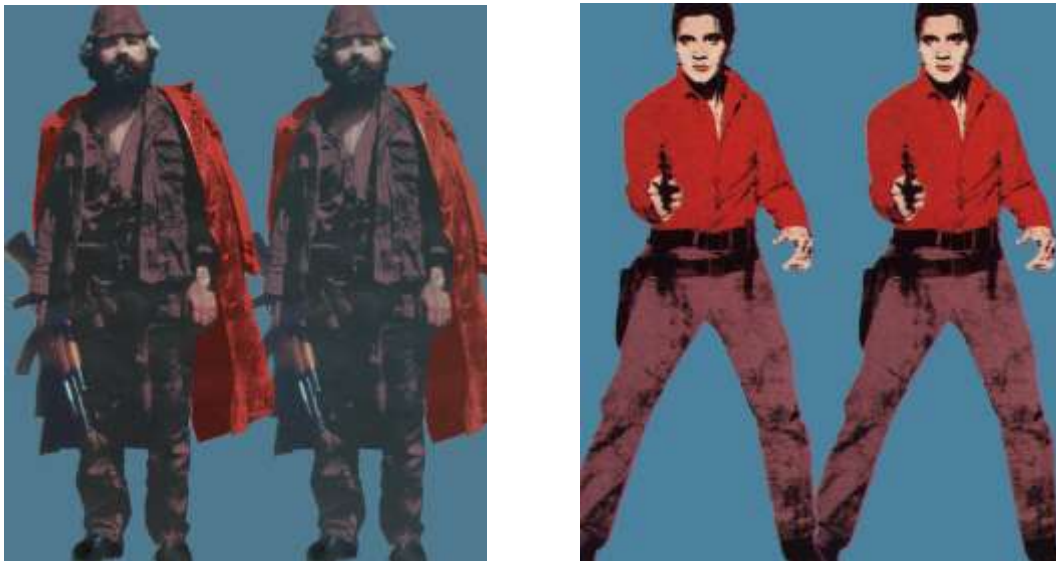


Fig. 6.2a/b Digital print, 180 cm x 150 cm, 2003. Face to Face (1) and (2) print on canvas 160 cm X 180 cm. Courtesy of artist © Dren Maliqi (2003).

In *Face-to-Face*, by Dren Maliqi (2003), Warhol's image of Elvis Presley pointing a gun is placed facing a similar printed image of Adem Jashari in his military uniform. Jashari, also known as a legendary commander, is central to the myth of how the Kosovo Liberation Army was founded and, as such, is also a key figure in Kosovo's national master narrative (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006). Maliqi has explained that he wanted to confront two icons from two different worlds in his work — the West and Kosovo, a pop star and a war hero — because back in 2003, when Maliqi made this

piece, 'the most powerful icon in Kosovo was exactly Jashari' (Cunha 2008). Representing the reproduction of Presley and Jashari points directly to the mass-production of folkloric icons in two different traditions (Jashari and Albanian nationalism - Presley and American racism). The viewer is made to face the myth of two grand figures. The industrial-like use of Jashari's and Presley's image and legacy (in t-shirts, key chains, street names, airports, theatres, etc.) de-sacralises these icons. Their image also disarms the viewer faced by their guns, cowboy and military attire. The work was exhibited in Belgrade, Serbia, but the exhibition never opened for the public as nationalist extremists ransacked it. Maliqi acknowledges that the work was perceived as a provocation but, according to him, it was only an attempt 'to represent, almost like a journalist, what was happening in [his] society in contradistinction to Elvis in another society, at another time' (Cunha 2008). Although the work aims to strip the images from their narrative contexts in order to potentially generate new meanings, for example by identifying Jashari as a modernist figure, they remain over-signified and rooted in specific cultural geographies. Nonetheless, similar interventions still might carry the potential to raise new questions, knowledge and conversations that can elicit citizens' action.

Kosovar artists have sought to challenge the narrow and exclusionary space of remembrance of war and violence and establish ground for publicly intervening in the erasures of commemoration and historical knowledge. For the past fifteen years, contemporary and conceptual artists in Kosovo have produced work that shows commitment to a critical engagement with the past. Albert Heta, a contemporary artist

and lead collaborator in our project, has expressed concern that Kosovo has become ‘a country with diminishing archival culture and disappearing public institutions that can function as a memory of a society, where “history making” as a tool for erasure and engineering the past, for the present power players, is a dominant practice’ (Heta 2012). His intervention *Revelution* aimed to restore and activate the street lighting in the Square of Brotherhood and Unity within the Monument of Revolution. This was built in 1967 and represents part of socialist Yugoslavia’s answer to inter-ethnic relations through the *brotherhood and unity* slogan. Heta’s intervention was to light up a view on the architecture of Kosovar society, at the beginning of intensified urbanisation, and the surplus created by the recent state-building politics used to engineer a project for a new state in Kosovo. According to Heta: ‘*Revelution* is also about how we can expand the space for thinking beyond the stigmatization of unifying social ideas of the past and the eclipse of the signifiers of the anti-fascist struggle of the people of Kosovo’ (Heta 2012). Restoring the lights on the monument and the square was a material and symbolic intervention in the conflicts over the meanings of past commemorative, political and urban spaces, and the politics of the erasure of socialist signifiers.

On the part of development and international donor organizations art, also, has been used as a tool for creating opportunity to enable voice and participation. Mainly focused on inter-ethnic dialogue and exchange, many of these project-based interventions have created possibility for communication and participation of otherwise segregated communities. However, these projects can also become vulnerable to co-optation and accede to the language and mechanisms of the international agencies’ outreach

paradigm. As the introduction to this volume cautions, when '[d]issident meanings are stripped away to ensure coherence', this in turn makes it more difficult for local communities and those smaller, radical groups that often first adopted participatory models to make their voice heard against the din of larger-scale interventions (Cornwall and Brock 2005, p.1057). At the same time, as vernaculars are increasingly commodified (Buden 2018) in a global space of post-conflict and post-war narratives, in Kosovo the absence of an art system or art market means that local artists' work runs the risk of being seen solely as an expression of an internal psychological need for expression, or as an aesthetic surface, rather than as practice that seeks to travel to diverse geographical, cultural and discursive locations. Below we look at the work of two other individual artists and an art collective that aim to generate work that challenges the homogenising tendencies of symbolic formations, the erasures, and exclusion of institutional collective commemorations in Kosovo.

The patriarchy that exists — *Thinking of You*

Perhaps the most marginalised experiences of Kosovo's recent war have been those of the survivors of sexual violence. Largely silenced in public and political discussions, the topic of sexual violence during Kosovo's 1999 war emerged as a subject of public debate only in 2012, when the Kosovo Women's Network raised the issue at their annual 8 March protest. For twelve years Kosovar institutions, independently or under international supervision, built a legal framework to address gender inequality, which largely remained within the paradigm of gender mainstreaming. Sanam N. Anderlini, in a review of the challenges and achievements of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in

various post-conflict contexts, which underlined the need for mainstreaming, along with the need to include women in post-conflict peace-building efforts, concluded that '[w]hatever the reasons for the exclusion or oversight of information regarding women, the net result is a perpetuation of the cycle of invisibility' (2010, p.28). Lynne Alice has also shown that there is an inability and unpreparedness among international agencies and makers-of-peace after war to implement gender-equality provisions. This work is most often passed to the 'local counterparts', who are then evaluated for their ability to achieve 'international standards of democracy and human rights' (2010, p.173). The failures of the latter are most often reported and analysed as reflections of local patriarchy (Farnsworth 2011).

On 14 March 2013, the debate surrounding war time rape entered the formal political sphere, when members of parliament of a former youth movement turned political (opposition) party, *Vetëvendosje* ('Self-Determination'), proposed an amendment to the Law on The Status and The Rights of the Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of Kosovo Liberation Army, Civilian Victims of War and Their Families (Law No. 04/L-054). The proposed amendment suggested the inclusion of survivors of wartime sexual violence. It took another year for the law to be passed (Law No. 04/L-172: 7 April 2014), mainly due to the support of the female president at the time, Atifete Jahjaga, incumbent from 2011 to 2016, who established the National Council for Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence. Another three years passed before the Government Committee for the Recognition and Verification of the Status of Persons Raped During the War in Kosovo (April 2017) was formed.

While recognition of wartime sexual violence has taken shape through law, public commemoration and remembrance of wartime sexual violence have also emerged and become the subject of much discussion and contestation. When the proposal for the amendment of the above-mentioned law was debated in Kosovo Parliament, main opposing arguments included concerns about the burden that the amendment would place on the national budget and hesitation regarding the accuracy of possible claims. There was even a debate about the difficulty of administering medical examinations twelve years after the war.ⁱ The sexist language of the debate during the first reading was protested by a group of feminist scholars and artists, and it was the pressure and back-door debates with MPs on the part of women activists that largely influenced the passing of the law. In an attempt to capture and redefine the terms of the debate, a feminist collective, of which some of this contribution's authors are co-founders — Alter Habitus, Institute for Studies in Society and Culture, together with *Havelit*, a feminist art collective performing on sensitive socio-cultural topics in Prishtina since 2011 — staged a protest performance on 20 March 2013 following the above described parliamentary debate one week earlier (Mehmetaj 2017). They placed folding tables in front of the Kosovo Assembly main gate, covered them with a white linen sheet on which they wrote *Examination*. They placed fresh red apples on cutting boards, and then smashed them with wooden mallets. The activists also printed excerpts from the transcript of the Parliamentary debate and highlighted the misogyny and bigotry of the parliamentary speeches. The printed sheets were then thrown back into the yard of the Parliament. The performance made public past violence towards women's bodies, symbolized by

the apples, for the first time in Kosovo. The topic of women's bodies had been kept separate from narratives of war violence, as well as more recent forms of violence hidden in a process of forgetting that was forging post-war Kosovo.

The following year, the Kosovar Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture, one of the few providers of services and support to survivors of wartime sexual violence, also began a public awareness campaign entitled *Hear My Voice*. This included a public-service announcement on national public television and a music video by artist Eliza Hoxha (*Heshtja e Kangës/Song's Silence*, 2013). Since then fighting stigma has become the focus of awareness raising campaigns by several CSOs, especially those providing support to survivors. That said, it should be noted that already in 2004, artist Nurhan Qehaja produced a video installation entitled *Flag* in which she problematized the naturalization of women's embodiment of national identity as reproducers of cultural, political and biological boundaries. As Nira Yuval-Davis has argued 'women do not just "enter" the national arena: they were always there, a central to its constructions and reproductions' (1997, p.14). Singing the Albanian national anthem in a distorted voice and in the nude, Qehaja stands in front of an erect flagpole. Unlike the use of art for awareness raising, characteristic of how CSOs have approached or appropriated art forms to disseminate messages, Qehaja's and Haveit interventions seek to achieve political subjectivity in the form of protest and political awareness.



Fig 6.3 Photograph of *Thinking of You* installation, courtesy of artist, Alketa Xhafa Mripa (2015) ©.

Thinking of You, by Alketa Xhafa Mripa (2015), produced with Anna di Lellio and supported by Atifete Jahjaga, Kosovo’s former president, brought *installation* — generally regarded as an elitist art form in popular discourse — to the centre of public engagement in both national and international fora. A dedication to survivors of war-time sexual violence, the work was staged in Prishtina’s football stadium, using the field as a canvas where thousands of donated skirts and dresses were hung on clothes-lines. Xhafa-Mripa has noted that she wanted ‘the women to feel the solidarity of the nation coming together’ and create ‘a calming act of letting go’ of the stigma surrounding war-time sexual violence (2017). The work was enacted as a participatory action — people, mainly women, donating skirts and dresses for the installation in publically organized

events all over Kosovo. At the same time, the artist has explained that the work is also dedicated to the survivors of sexual violence all over the world: 'It has its roots in Kosovo, as do I, and women that inspired me, but I hope that at the same time it has a universal language of its own and can be understood and felt by everyone, especially survivors of the war' (TedX Talks 2017).

The work was not imagined as protest art; rather, it was conducted as an invitation for larger community (read 'national') participation and solidarity with survivors of war-time sexual violence. The process of producing the work was embedded in a desire on the part of the artist to emulate collective solidarity. Travelling throughout Kosovo, organizing donation drives, and locating the collections in public symbolically and politically relevant spaces, it called for face-to-face encounters and discussions, in an attempt to foreground subjective experience in political action. In the context of refusal, or even denial, to collectively speak or accept sexual violence as part of the experience of war, donating a skirt or dress to the installation was experienced as an act of solidarity that broke the silence and made recognition possible. The work initiated discussion, locally and internationally, not only on war-time sexual violence in Kosovo but also as a recognized strategy of war, pointing to rape as a core part of women's war-time experience but erasing other kinds of violence and loss.

Haveit — *Tagër*

In 2015, Haveit, a feminist art collective of four artists from Prishtina — Vesa Qena, Hana Qena, Lola Syla, and Alketa Syla — performed a direct intervention into the

assumed sine-qua-non of Albanian culture: namely, its tradition of customary law. In a video performance, the artists pour flour over a copy of the Kanun, a codified text of customary law, spreading it with a rolling pin over the book, which they go on to boil until it liquefies. *Tagër*, the title of the art work, is a performance of women's labour over the persistency of patriarchal dominance of socio-cultural relations and memory. Within a vernacular, and customary tradition, *tagër* implies a right one has, a right one owes, and a right that is given. In its performance, *Tagër* presents one of a series of aesthetic and political challenges to existing gender ideology in Kosovo by claiming the right to reinvent tradition through an active performance of citizenship. The artists' cooking of the Kanun, on the one hand, was considered as a subversive artistic practice that dissolves the gender ideology of national and traditional patriarchy. On the other, it incited reactions of discontent on the way in which it was perceived to demean and mock heritage.ⁱⁱ

Their work has continuously aimed to intervene and instruct, at times even educate, the public on the invisibility of sexism, gender-based violence and bigotry in Kosovo. The publication of *Pushimi i Gjate/Long Break*, an intervention with stories on sexuality that defy hetero-normativity, relied on using the standard design previously applied during socialism, especially in the 1980s, to all selected literary works by the state committee for educational books. *Pushimi i Gjatë* refers to the long-break between periods in school, and was an invitation to engage in a form of education that is not sanctioned but is in opposition to singular narratives of collective national identity. Using texts that defy a popular argument that 'homosexuality is a foreign import to Albanian culture', they

evoke poetry of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth-Century canonical writers of the Albanian national awakening who write of homosexual love and desire. *Haveit* also conducted a public reading of the text in Prishtina's main pedestrian boulevard, which consistently serves as a space for staging protest, state sponsored events and civic activism. It is also a space marked by memorials and institutions that shape and solidify collective memories and produce narratives through which claims to citizenship are made.

Conclusion

This chapter hopes to have demonstrated the extraordinary potential of contemporary artists and arts-based CSOs in Kosovo as they have sought critically to challenge the hegemonic gendering of the nation, as well as the relations and representations of a civic regime based on the ultra-patriarchal ideals and images of the masculine, national liberators. While the latter's statues ubiquitously occupy the country's public spaces, effectively muting divergent perspectives and social groups, the Kosovo strand's project in *Changing the Story* seeks to bring such artist potential together with formal civic education practices in an attempt to facilitate young people's opportunities to imagine different ways of organising society. That said, Kosovo's current generation of young people is generally described as being unusually conservative, perpetuating patriarchal and hetero-normative cultural values, structures and ideals (FES 2012, p.13; Gjyshinca 2015). Thus, the challenge we face is to understand how artistic interventions that are often viewed wholly as provocations might be understood, rather, as inspiration for

critical thinking and creativity in ways that are appealing for their inclusivity both within and beyond the micro-context of Kosovo's social landscapes.

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ⁱ These statements are taken from the transcript of the Parliamentary debate held on 14 March 2013 following the proposal for amending Law 04/L-054. The link to the transcript is no longer available through the Kosovo Assembly website. The authors have in possession a copy of the transcript shared with them by then MP Aida Dërguti.

ⁱⁱ Interview of author (NL) with Lola Sylja (12 February 2018). See Haveit Facebook page for commentary:
<https://web.facebook.com/haveit/photos/a.190377874455654/528505823976189/?type=3&theater>