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Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo.

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THE FOLLOWING PART OF THIS THESIS HAS BEEN REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION/CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS:

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Abbreviations

CAT	Cognitive Analytic Therapy
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
HLC	Humanitarian Law Centre
ICC	The International Criminal Court
ICT	International Criminal Tribunal
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IFOR	(NATO) Implementation Forces [in Kosovo]
KLA/UÇK	Kosovo Liberation Army *(Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës)*
KMB	Kosovo Memory Book (Database)
KRCT	The Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRF	The National Referral Mechanism
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UN	United Nations
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR 955	United Nations Security Council Resolution 955

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University of London, supported and engaged so well in bringing forth the social, cultural and political issues in Kosovo is evident that we live in a globalised community. It shows that by not being afraid to undertake international research, we can open the possibility for expanding our production of knowledge pertaining to various geopolitical issues. This thesis and the women's voices would not have reached people in the UK or around the world if it weren't for Mariam, Aylish, and Carla's tireless work. Thank you all for your patience, compassion, endless support and valuable insight.

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I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my brother *Genc* and cousin *Nita* who were killed during the political conflict in Kosovo.

Declaration

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Preface

Elaborated thoroughly herein are three critical components that make up the Doctoral Thesis Portfolio. The first section details scientific research exploring the ways in which Kosovar-Albanian female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence made sense of their traumatic war experience in Kosovo. The second part presents a client case study, exploring childhood trauma, sexual violence and identity using Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT). The third part comprises of a journal article, intended for publishing.

Part One: *Research Study*

Presented here is a novel piece of investigative work, which explored how life was negotiated by Kosovar-Albanian women in the aftermath of war and sexual violence. This was an international study conducted in Kosovo, semi-structured interviews were carried out in the native language (Albanian) and local dialect (Gheg) of both myself and the narrators. Participants were female survivors who had been subjected to rape and or other forms of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. The objective of this research investigation was to explicate the way survivors constructed and thus brought order to personal narratives of traumatic war experiences. With a particular interest in shifts related to identity, intra-psychic and interpersonal relationships, within a social, cultural and political milieu. Critical narrative analysis is a multifarious methodology, which attended to the complexity of meaning that women made of their traumatic experiences, whilst also providing a lens through which both the micro (intra-psychic/inter-personal) and macro (social/cultural/political) levels of analysis could be arranged (Langdridge, 2007). This study offered a solid platform for women's voices to be heard beyond the confines of their socio-cultural and political context. Additionally, valid contributions were made to: 1) psychological theory and praxis, 2) provisions for international legislations and humanitarian first response interventions, 3) discussions related to peace psychology, 4) cultural awareness in treatment plans and application when working with refugee and asylum-seeking women in the U.K.

Part Two: *Client Study*

Clinical application of my psychological work is epitomized in a client study presented in this section. This study, enriched my understanding of issues pertaining to race, identity and sexual violence within non-conflict landscapes, as well as the significance of cultural sensitivity in the context of an ever-growing global community, especially in the case of psychological theory and practice (Cooper & McLeod, 2007). This piece of work was completed within a secondary care setting that delivered time-limited CAT therapy and provided psychological treatment for the clients presentation of mixed-anxiety and depressive disorder. While, I acknowledged that CAT is a useful and effective modality, which I

endeavour to utilise in my own clinical practice, I also found that often times approaches recommended by NICE guidelines for anxiety and depression are chiefly evidence based.

The challenges that emerged in this therapeutic work, raised questions concerning the embodied assumptions which epitomise Western cultural ideologies, including the domineering focus on individualism. Often times these were inharmonious with the clients search for identity and a collectivist cultural understanding. The multicultural theory in pluralism offers a diligent consideration of the cultural diversity of the client, therapist and supervisor and acknowledges the importance of enhancing therapeutic practice that comprises multiple perspectives regarding curative modifications (Pedersen, 1991). The flexibility, openness and adaptability of pluralism is well aligned with my own critical realist epistemology and Counselling Psychology ethos. An additional learning opportunity presented itself in the unprecedented upsurge of the Covid-19 pandemic, which appraised my ability to manage the unpredictable and organic fluctuation of life, to negotiate remote work, address challenges in a genuine and empathetic manner, and in the midst of uncertainty, provide the client with a safe and contained remote therapeutic landscape.

Part Three: *Empirical Article* – (Elsevier) Women's Studies International Forum

Assembled here is an empirical article, which centres on the data retrieved from the research as delineated in stage one. Developed with aspiration to be propounded for publication to Elsevier's Women's Studies International Forum. The bimonthly peer-reviewed academic journal encompasses multidisciplinary and international feminist research applicable to women's studies. The journal, endeavours the reviewal of current knowledge and evaluation of the modus operandi of its construction and dissemination, and appraises the implications this bears for women's lives. It prioritises women's lived subjective experiences related to psychological, historical, social, cultural and political complexities. As such, this journal is esteemed as a crucial asset for health care professionals operating in the realm of multicultural, co-educational and international psychological well-being.

Sexual violence has been a part of wars and political conflicts since the beginning of time, utilised systematically to administer maximal physical, psychological, cultural and social harm. The absence of psychological investigations into conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo has led to an insufficient understanding of the historical impact of conflict-related sexual violence amongst Kosovar-Albanian females. This research elucidated the ways in which women constructed and brought order to personal narratives of traumatic war experiences of sexual violence. With a particular focus on identity and intra-psychic/inter-personal relations for survivors prior to and in the aftermath of sexual violence. This article thus presented rape as a weapon of war and the dehumanisation of Kosovar-Albanian women, families and nation. Women's experiences were contextualised within the social, cultural and political milieu. The findings of this investigation offered an opportunity to understand for the first time since

the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo, Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence.

Thematic Connections

Undertaking the task of examining this topic, I came to see the paramount sway of various comparable historical antecedents that have loomed over in my own personal life – the political conflict followed by the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo is prominent as a case in point. What I cultivated experientially prior to, during and in the aftermath of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo is the heart and soul of my work. I have spent my life ruminating on the question "How can human beings have the capacity to evince nauseating torture and violence upon one another?". I am the descendent of various Albanian tribes who were for many centuries plagued by violence and barbarity. As a result, my ancestor's lives were perpetually disrupted, with little opportunity to settle in one place and to build a normal life. I believe the abovementioned question that I have been grappling with has been transmitted to me intergenerationally and strengthened through my own encounter with inhumanity. I was raised in a relatively peaceful, philosophically and spiritually inclined family that was shook to its core and stained by violence. At age three, during Kosovo's political-conflict, I witnessed my younger brother's death that came as a result of a chemical gas poisoning by Serb forces, three months later my twelve-year old cousin succumbed to the same fate. It was during this time that my mother was also poisoned, though she survived the initial poisoning, she was later diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma. Like many other Albanian families, mine too were activists, which made us targets for the Serb forces, with numerous home invasions and family members beaten and arrested. As such, my childhood was replete with fear and terror. As I grappled with both the concept and reality of death, violence and terror, I developed a curiosity for human psychology. It is no surprise then that for me, this psychological research goes beyond the doctoral thesis, to bring to my family and community intergenerational healing, and in the least symbolic justice.

In this portfolio women's stories are woven together by their collective experiences of sexual violence and overwhelming sense of dehumanisation, both in times of peace and armed conflict (Olujic, 1998). Outlined here is the notion that sexual violence is a universal phenomenon, it is not unique to a particular culture, place or people nor is it spatially or temporal limited. As it stands, women are at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence and the repercussions of this are substantial, for both the individual and the community at large. The women of this research were also brought together by their shared sense of resilience, by drawing strength from their national, social and personal identities, by their compelling need to break their silence, to tell their stories, and to seek justice. Through the collective, didactic, and cathartic facets of testimony (Nutkiewicz, 2003) both narrators and I (the listener), with a desire to know and be known, embarked on a reciprocal journey that is storytelling (Frank, 2013). If as Estés (1999, p. 255) posited "A story is seed" and "We [the listeners/readers/who are bearing witness to it]

are its soil", then we know that a seed germinates in complete darkness and sprouts by stretching itself upward in search for light, based on this premise, the atrocities as depicted by narrators in this study refused to stay buried, reminding us that, to remember and to tell the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for restoration of order and healing (Herman, 1992).

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PART ONE: Doctoral Research

Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo.

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Abstract

Sexual violence has been a part of wars and political conflicts since the beginning of time. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been utilised systematically in contemporary armed conflicts to administer maximal physical, psychological, cultural and social harm. These atrocities and human rights infringements have only recently evoked an imperative global discussion. The acts of sexual violence have principally been understood to be innate contingencies attributed to a male biological drive. This impeded an extensive inquest into the meanings and operations of cumulative sexual violence demonstrated on women. This qualitative investigation centres around how Kosovar-Albanian females construct and make sense of their experiences of sexual violence circa 23 years post war Kosovo. This study has a particular interest in how various forms of identity are negotiated in light of survivors experiences and the impact of their experiences on their intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships within a socio-political and cultural context. This research presents phenomenological data gathered in Kosovo among survivors of rape and sexual violence and the study methods included a critical narrative analysis of 7 semi-structured interviews.

The data yielded from this research was explored through a multivariant theoretical lens, which included aspects of feminism, psychology, sociology, and politics. The findings from this psychological investigation indicated that systemic use of rape and sexual violence in war or political conflict harmed the physical and psychological existence of Kosovar-Albanian women, seriously damaging intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships and compromising personal and collective identity. It was concluded that sexual violence against women acquires a symbolic meaning and should be examined within the context of the body politics and gender systems. The discoveries made by this research investigation evoked further discussion regarding social and political implications for the realm of Counselling Psychology and our moral obligations to humanity at large. In addition to contributions towards therapeutic theory and practice, and developments for future investigations.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction to Chapter

Recent wars have brought sexual violence to prominence eliciting a much needed, global discussion. Previous research has shed light on the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia, countries in Africa and Latin America where political-conflicts are active at present (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014; Kelly, Betancourt, Mukwege, Lipton & VanRooyen, 2011; Mukaman & Brysiewicz, 2008; Skjelsbaek, 2012). The absence of psychological investigations into conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo has led to an insufficient understanding of the historical impact of conflict-related sexual violence amongst Kosovar-Albanian females. This is especially alarming when considering that between 23,000 and 45,600 Kosovar-Albanian women and girls are thought to have been subjected to some form of rape or sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007). As maintained by a Human Rights Watch report released in 2001, sexual violence was utilised in Kosovo as a weapon of war and systematic *ethnic cleansing* by Serbian and Yugoslavian forces (Booth, 2001). This is therefore a propitious juncture for research to excavate the core essence of this issue and bring survivors narratives to light.

1.1 Chapter Overview

With this research investigation I hoped to gain a better understanding of the construction of meaning and experience of a particular population (Kosovar-Albanian women) in post, during and in the aftermath of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo, relative to a specific phenomenon (sexual violence) and with a particular interest in concepts such as identity and intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships. This research investigation was an inquiry into and an elucidation of the ways in which Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo constructed and thus brought order to personal narratives of traumatic war experiences of sexual violence. Here, I aspired to explore and contextualise women's understanding of traumatic experiences through their narratives, within a political and cultural milieu and in this way, illuminate on psychological developments and nuances. To sanction the aims of this investigation, I gravitated towards narrative inquiry on account of its fundamental features, including; the construction of meaning, most pressing matter being the participant's voice, the capacity to value social and political facets, close attention to the social construction of subjectivities and its inherent openness to reflexivity, all of which designated narrative analysis as a distinct and proficient methodology for this investigation (Riessman, 1993). A focal point for this chapter, was to take the audience on a voyage through time, while noting pertinent primordial, historical, socio-cultural, political and contextual dispositions, upon which the topic of sexual violence subsists.

As I journeyed through this research investigation, I briefly examined the ever-growing scholarly literature and found myself feeling overwhelmed by the complexity and versatility of the

methodologies, ontological and epistemic frameworks as well as the data sources that were currently being used in the discipline. In addition, as a researcher, I found it incredibly difficult to detach myself from the emotional content that permeates conflict-related sexual violence literature and was thus cautious about how this psychological and emotional experience might impact the interpretation and analysis of the data yielded. On account of the present psychological investigation and its objectives, which sought to highlight Kosovar-Albanian women's subjective experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, as well as the innovative nature of this inquiry, I made a decision to postpone the completion of the introduction chapter while I finalised the data analysis. When we look to current psychological research that assess conflict-related sexual violence, we observe a great deal of variance in its composition, intensity, and the perpetrators accountable for these human rights violations over various time junctures, including in times of peace, war/political conflicts, and in the aftermath of war (Nordås & Cohen, 2021).

Given, the scarcity of ethically inclined psychological research, which centres on survivors' subjective experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, remaining curious about the multifariousness of academic research in the discipline was found to be critically significant. For this reason, the deliberate postponement of the introduction chapter[1] aspired to reduce the risk of excessive and unintentional sway from the current literature, allowing for survivors' narratives to flow without interruptions and to be obtained, carefully examined and presented in the ways that they themselves intended. This inaugural chapter, is divided into two sections. The first, commenced with a thorough presentation of principle terms and definitions. This was especially important when considering the research topic, as there is no universally accepted definition of sexual violence, and terms such as "War rape" and "Sexual violence in armed conflict" or "Sexual violence in war or political conflict" are all frequently used interchangeably. Followed by an extensive evaluation of essential theoretical motifs, and to help contextualise this investigation, I included a brief historical account of Kosovo. Part two, includes a reviewal of relevant literature in this domain.

1.2 Part One: Demystifying Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

The chronicle of humanity's savagery to their fellow human beings is an extensive and conscious-stricken narrative that spans out to the dawn of time, one replete with profound negligence for human

[1] The critical decision to postpone the writing of the introduction chapter following the completion of the data analysis presented a number of benefits: (1) Principally, this particular sequencing of the writing process provided me with invaluable insight into the social, cultural, and political facets of the data thus equipping me with an extensive comprehension of women's narratives prior to engaging with current scholarly work. (Dunleavy, 2003; James & Slater, 2013; Carter, Guerin & Aitchinson, 2020). (2) As a result, once I began to write the introduction chapter, I was able to provide a more accurate account of the existing literature, which highlighted the importance of the data yielded (Dunleavy, 2003; James & Slater, 2013; Carter, Guerin & Aitchinson, 2020). (3) This process allowed me to hone in on existing literature in a more focused manner, and to delve into literature that aligned with the findings of the current study as well as to identify any existing gaps in literature and to evaluate these critically (Dunleavy, 2003; James & Slater, 2013; Carter, Guerin & Aitchinson, 2020).

life, unmitigated relinquishment of moral integrity and scarce nuances of hope (Hirschauer, 2014). While, humanities failures are heterogenous and compounded by widespread de-sensitisation, global complacency and state-centrism, the recent examination of past failures have solicited the international community to develop a collective moral imperative and engendered much needed redemptive global maturity (Hirschauer, 2014).

Violence, according to Zaleski (2018) makes part of early moral dialogues and is among the first narratives illustrated in the Bible, which depicts a gruesome conflict whereby Cain slaughters his own brother Abel. Brutality has since been a phenomenon, continuously discovered by archaeologists at excavation sites, including evidence dating back 5,000 years. In these cases, Mesolithic hunter-gatherers destroyed entire villages killing all men, women and children. The victim's skulls were collected as memorabilia and marked as celebratory triumphs (Zaleski, 2018). Regrettably, primordial history has been, for the most part, catalogued in blood. Historically, the only other phenomenon that has pulsated with as much relevance at the heart of wars and political conflicts has been sexual violence (Zaleski, 2018). The alliance between sex and violence has been preserved through the ages in various writings and mythology. Examples include the marriage of Mars (the roman god of war) and Venus (the goddess of love and sex), as well as Sigmund Freud's connection between the twin human instinct of Eros (life instinct) and Thanatos (the death instinct), as being the two antagonistic forces that govern life (Freud, 1923; Zaleski, 2018).

The act of rape was methodically woven into Greek mythological narratives as an orthodox, mundane occurrence endorsed merely as women's admissible fate (Deacy & Pierce, 1997). As asserted by these myths, the male gods, Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Hades and Pan "Raped with zest, trickery and frequency" and the mortal goddess women "Hera, Io, Europa, Cassandra, Leda rarely suffered serious consequences beyond getting pregnant and bearing a child" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 603). Such illustrations served to advance the progression of women's narratives and to show their engagement in various recovery activities, one method included the ridding of the impurity caused by the rapes "Hera […] would bathe yearly in a river to restore her virginity" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 603). In her work termed *"Men, women and rape*", Brownmiller (1975) asserts that rape has perpetually coexisted with wars of religion and revolution, more notably, it has been utilised as a weapon of war for terror and revenge, and even as a palliative treatment for lethargy. In an anthropological analysis, Dr. Margaret Mead, as covered in (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 606), inquired about primitive societies such as the Plains Indian culture and their understanding of the function of rape. This revealed that in the historical memory of many dislocated societies "A bad woman was fair game for any man" and *a bad woman* was defined as a woman who lacked male conservancy or "A woman who was quarrelsome and vituperative" as opposed to the traditional standards that necessitated women to be docile and

submissive, thus further solidifying the notion that perceived rape as "A great adventure" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 606-607).

Sexual violence and war and/or political conflicts are historically, politically and mythologically analogous, and provide the context which enables the manifestation of barbarism and abuse of power to proliferate (Skjelsbæk, 2012). In this way, rape has been used as a metaphor for political developments. Take for instance, Japan's mammoth and unbridled military attack on Nanking following the 1937 invasion of Shanghai, which is frequently noted as the *Rape of Nanking*, and the horrors of which have seldom been replicated in the history of mankind (Chang, 1991). Nexus to the mass extermination of Chinese civilians was also the raping of women (Skjelsbæk, 2012, p. 48; Enloe, 2000). As described in Chang (1991, p. 86) Takokoro Kozo, a former Japanese soldier in Nanking explained that "Women suffered most […] No matter how young or old, they all could not escape the fate of being raped".[2] In recent decades an estimated 51 countries in both developed and developing nations have been affected by conflict-related sexual violence (Bastick et al., 2007). According to Heineman (2011) a partial approximation includes 50,000 rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 250,000 crimes of sexual violence in the wars that plagued Sierra Leone in the 1990s, as well as up to 500,000 rapes in the Rwandan genocide. Atrocities and reports of rape in ongoing conflicts in Sudan (Luedke & Logan, 2018), Uganda (Kinyanda et al., 2010), and the Congo (Banwell, 2014) that subsequently consigned renewed attention to this antiquated issue: conflict-related sexual violence.

1.2.1 International Law

Until recently sexual violence was not considered as an established and categorical criminal violation nor was a definition offered under international law. While, rape was prohibited under various customary international humanitarian law provisions, it was not explicitly judicially marked as an international crime (Campbell, 2022). The construction of sexual violence as a legally defined socially injurious conduct under public international law, according to Campbell (2022), came as a result of the convergence of a number of social moves that stretched and operated beyond national and international levels from the 1970s leading to the 1990s. These transnational shifts, were instrumental in the formulation of sexual violence as a harm inflicted upon both the individual and society on a global scale (Campbell, 2022).

[2] Despite the objections appealed by Western nations, the Japanese government, instead of claiming responsibility for human rights violations and exercising appropriate judicatory measures in prosecuting its perpetrators, made allowance for an even more horrific endeavour, an underground structure of military prostitution otherwise known as stations for sexual comfort to transpire, one that would alternatively reward soldiers for their contribution to the battlefield (Chang, 1991). Thus, in this way, bypassing international scrutiny. This implicated, hundreds of thousands of purchased or kidnapped women across Asia, which came to be known by the highly controversial term "Comfort women" (Qiu, Zhiliang & Lifei, 2014).

What makes up the substructures of international criminal law is the category[3] of international crimes (Campbell, 2022). The act of criminalisation in compliance with international law constructs relationships between people as *legal*, on the premise that, it shapes and presents these relations as rights and legal commitments (Campbell, 2022). It was during the 1970s and onwards that we saw the emergence of national and international feminist movements, who through advocacy, brought the prevalence and injuriousness of sexual violence centre stage to global politics, and in this way sought legislative reform (Lóránd, 2018). This led to an asymmetrical and partial acknowledgement of the complexities that surround sexual violence, which focused primarily on the injuriousness of sexual violence on women as individuals and as a group of people (Campbell, 2022). This elicited a much needed, global discussion pertaining to revisions of penal legislations in national jurisdictions, which was seen to be the case in various conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (Campbell, 2022). During the establishment of the ICTY, the resolutions considered by states and organisations, which addressed national legal reforms, demanded the establishment of international norms (Campbell, 2022). These national criminal legislative amendments went further to inform the progression of international humanitarian law, and formed the foundation of the jurisdiction of the ICTY, along with legislations like *Furundžija* (Campbell, 2022). For instance, jurisprudence like Furundžija, by engaging in a more expansive examination of the concept of rape in national criminal codes, allowed for the detection of aspects of rape to be seen as an international human violation (Campbell, 2022).

It was at this time, that sexual violence against women came to be marked as a "Discriminatory violation of human rights at the international level" (Campbell, 2022, p. 33), followed by the formation of international legal norms by humanitarian law, which indeed prioritised equal protection for women. The United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women conducted the proceedings to tackle particular concerns pertaining to women in armed conflict, and concluding with the 1974 formation of the General Assembly Declaration on the Protection of Women and children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (Campbell, 2022). The impact of armed conflict on women, especially conflict-related sexual violence in various conflicts including Bangladesh, was thus addressed at the UN Conference on Women carried out in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985 (Manjoo, 2018). While, the subject of armed conflict and its impact on women was less notable in the formal UN

3 These categorisations go beyond the development of legal relations between people as legal persons to be extended to the connection of individuals to *society* (Campbell, 2022). As such, any contemporary criminal legislation commences from infringement of the norms, which at the international level, are considered to be conceptual and formal indications of the harmed public interest of society at large (Campbell, 2022). In this way, these legal norms define what is marked by law as *social injury* or socially detrimental conduct (Campbell, 2022). The doctrine of *social harm* (pertains to the permanent adverse effect on peoples protected interests, as well as the interests of the nation or community) encapsulates how international criminal law communicates the process of safeguarding the interests of society at the international level (Campbell, 2022). By directing our focus on the conception of *harm* in sexual violence infringements, we are able to establish a connection between who is harmed (subject/individual) and in what way/s this is injurious (nation/community) within the legal framework of international offences (Campbell, 2022).

program between 1974 and 1990, it resurfaced within the milieu of violence carried out against women in the 1990s (Gardam & Jarvis, 2001; Campbell, 2022).

Women's rights and violence against women in armed conflict were not addressed in The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women's (1979) (CEDAW) formal provisions (Campbell, 2022). However, this changed in February 1992, when the CEDAW Committee endorsed the General Recommendation No. 19, which dealt with violence against women (Campbell, 2022). While, *General Recommendation No. 19* explained that discrimination in the CEDAW incorporated gender-based violence against women, and more specifically *sexual harm* as being forms of such violations, it did not treat conflict-related sexual violence as such (Campbell, 2022). The definition of gender-based violence, as it was acquired by the UN General Assembly (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women) in 1994, held that such violence "Violated the right not to be subject to torture (19(7)(b)) and 'right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict' (19(7)(c))" (Campbell, 2022, p. 34). While this international law was not legally acceptable across nations, it nevertheless held legal relevance in the maturation of sexual violence as an international crime: firstly, sexual violence was recognised as an infringement of international human rights norms, and secondly, such *sexual harm* was thought to breach the axiom of fair protection of women by humanitarian legal standards (Campbell, 2022). In this way, by legally classifying sexual violence as a violation of cardinal international legal norms, it became vital for the acknowledgment and jurisprudential progression, of sexual violence violation cases that later came before the ICTY (Campbell, 2022).

The Yugoslavian conflicts, and particularly the Bosnia war were detailed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions from September 1991, as encompassing extensive and major breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law, which was subsequently seen as a cause of alarm to transnational peace and security under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Campbell, 2022). In October 1992, as stipulated in the reports of the UN Commission of Experts and as developed by the UNSC, sexual violence was legally framed for the first time as a severe violation of international humanitarian law, and this was announced in February 1993 (Campbell, 2022). Further to this, in March 1993, sexual violence was recognised as the empirical reason for demanding the formation of state accountability for genocide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Campbell, 2022). Then, in April 1993, the initial UNSC Resolution criminalised and violation of humanitarian law and identified the colossal and systematically assembled imprisonment and sexual violation of women as distinctly outlined in a comprehensive reprobation of humanitarian law violations in war/conflicts (Campbell, 2022). This Resolution made part of the formation of the ICTY in May 1993 (Campbell, 2022). Sexual violence was recognised by the international community as an unlawful political medium of armed conflict, in particular, the prosecution of men within the context of imprisonment and the methodical and extensive

demonstration of rape of women. Sexual violence was thus judicially outlined as a militaristic and political violation, and on this basis thus seen as an infringement to the international community at large and within the legal framework of international humanitarian law, it became formally codified as an internationally recognised crime (Campbell, 2022).

The implementation of these transnational legal norms necessitated the formation of an international court, before which such humanitarian law violations could be impleaded (Campbell, 2022). In response to the constituted threat to international peace and security, and with the aim to restore global order, under chapter VII (Resolution 808 and 827) the Security Council formed an ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal (ICT) (Meron, 1993). For once, within the global security landscape, conflict-related sexual violence became recognised as a *weapon of war* and thus an acute and critical global security concern with expansive security implications (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Tompkins, 1994). For the first time since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals resolution 8 to 7 were approved by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in May 1993, officially authorising the formation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia[4] (ICTY), which included: Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Croatia (Skjelsbæk, 2012). In November 1994, following from the Rwandan genocide, an additional resolution United Nations Security Council Resolution 955 (UNSCR 955), was approved and came to formulate the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) (de Brouwer, 2005). These considerable advances had an inevitable impact on the disposition and implication of gender crimes when investigating human rights violations, genocide and other war crimes (Campbell, 2012; Krystalli, 2014; Campbell, 2022).

Contrary to the idea that the establishment of this court was contingent on sexual violence alone, the court was instead based on the depiction of the war or conflict as a direct concern for transnational peace and security (Campbell, 2022). In this way, the formation of the ICTY, materialised international criminal law in legal and social establishments mediated through legal praxis (Campbell, 2022). In this way, the development of the ICTY was the product of an extremely controversial political struggle, as opposed to the idea that it was an automatic success of righteous standards, feminist politics, or international law (Campbell, 2022). In contrast to the perspective held by numerous feminist scholars, who perceived conflict-related sexual violence as a transition from being regarded solely as a domestic issue to a matter of global concern, it has long been recognised that sexual violence holds significance at the international level. This recognition is reflected in international legislation, where sexual violence is acknowledged as impacting the "Protected public interests of states (in military law or the laws of

[4] Since July 2017, circa 4650 witnesses have been brought before the ICTY, among these, approximately 600 are female witnesses with the majority involved in conflict-related sexual violence cases (Campbell, Demir & O'Reilly, 2019). Furthermore, 48% of those individuals who have been brought before the ICTY obtain accusations for perpetrating crimes related to sexual violence in their indictments (Campbell, Demir & O'Reilly, 2019). Campbell (2007) poised that for the ICTY, holding perpetrators liable for sexual violence in the former-Yugoslavian conflicts is recognised as a fundamental accomplishment.

war) or the values of the international society of states (in crimes against humanity)." (Campbell, 2022, p. 39). In this way, sexual violence in the conflicts that permeated the former Yugoslavia came to be understood in accordance with a novel kind of statute in accordance with the principles and norms of public international law, which was international criminalisation (Campbell, 2022). It was during this period, when the ICTY came to be formed that there was a shift from international humanitarian law, which regulates armed conflict, to international criminal law that addresses international crimes. This transition signifies a movement from safeguarding the interests of the international society of states to protecting the interests of the broader international community (Campbell, 2022).

This came to signify the primary foundational category within the realm of legal classification[5], specifically the legal classification of international crimes (Campbell, 2022). The ICTY jurisprudence established rape and sexual violence under international customary law in the three following ways; first, it demands the criminal prosecution of the perpetrators, secondly, it is considered as a crime against humanity and can constitute genocide, both in times of peace and war (Campbell, 2022). And finally, according to the ICTY jurisprudence, sexual violence may comprise of serious infringement of the Geneva Conventions, and may be considered an act of genocide, thus urging the national commitment to impede and implementation in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and Genocide Convention (Campbell, 2022). The international criminal tribunal jurisprudence and the International Criminal Court (ICC) have not established rape or sexual violence as separate violations under conventional or customary norms (Campbell, 2022). Instead, rape and sexual violence continue to be auxiliary conducts, noted as transnational violations merely when framed by the conditioning factors of international crimes, meaning by alternative methods of domestic criminality, and is only illegalised in cases where it is a component of the grave breaches of international violations (Campbell, 2022). Further to this, October 2000 UNSC brought forth a radical and transformative resolution 1325, in addition to recognising women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence and re-emphasising the international organisations obligation to protect women within war zones it also aimed to involve women in international dialogues regarding peace-making efforts both civilian and military (Campbell, 2007; Campbell, 2016; Skjelsbæk, 2012). This endorsed the rational for the subsequent resolutions in 2008 (UNSCR 1820), in 2009 (UNSCR 1888), in 2010 (UNSCR 1960), and in 2013 (UNSCR 2106) (Krystalli, 2014).

5 The ICTY's jurisdiction was contingent to severe breaches of customary international humanitarian law, rules that bind all nations, irrespective of their part as signatories or not to particular agreements or accords (Campbell, 2022). The ICTY Statute lay out "The following categories of violations criminalised under customary humanitarian law: war crimes, that is, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions (Art. 2) or violations of the laws or customs of war (Art. 3); genocide, that is, the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group (Art. 4); and crimes against humanity, that is, a widespread and systematic attack directed against any civilian population (Art. 5). Following the position under international customary law, the Statute expressly specified only one crime of sexual violence, namely rape, as a crime against humanity (Art. 5(g))" (Campbell, 2022, p. 41). In the jurisdiction of the ICTY Statute, egregious crimes make up the categorisation of international violations, which include, war crimes genocide, and crimes against humanity (Campbell, 2022).

1.2.2 Definitions of key terms

Given the contested disposition of various relevant terms, explicit and categorical definitions may assist us to navigate through this research investigation (Wood, 2018). In this research en masse, I used the multilateral term conflict-related sexual violence to reflect the various acts of sexual violence that were executed (Buss, Lebert, Rutherford, Sharkey & Aginam, 2014). Terms such as *rape, sexual violence* and *sexual assault* are all often utilised synonymously to describe similar acts of violence and violation (Wood, 2006). Rape refers more explicitly to "Sexual penetration […] with specific body parts" whereas sexual violence is a term, which encompasses a wide range of violations, this broad spectrum incorporates "Rape, coerced undressing, and non-penetrating sexual assault" (Wood, 2006, p. 308). Other's go further to include non-violent though psychologically and verbal sexual abuses, that are both dehumanising and humiliating in nature (Hynes et al., 2004). As seen in Zaleski (2015), McDougall (1998) stated in the UN Commission on Human Rights, war rape is characterised as a "Deliberate and strategic decision on the part of combatants to intimidate and destroy 'The enemy' as a whole by raping and enslaving women who are identified as members of the opposing group" (p. 392). In this research, sexual violence was seen as a weapon of war[6] and an instrument of ethnic cleansing and genocide[7] (See footnote 6&7 for definitions).

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6 When I use the term *weapon of war*, I am referring to the general usage of the term weapon as defined in Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1997, p. 1616) as: "(1) Any instrument or device for use in an attack or defence in combat, fighting, or war, as a sword, rifle, cannon, and so on; (2) anything used against an opponent, adversary, or victim; or (3) (*Zool*) any part or organ serving for attack or defence, as claws, horn, teeth, stings". Further to this, I have also included the ICTY proceedings below in (Article 5) Crimes against humanity, which determined that premeditated and systematic execution of rape as a weapon is synonymous with executing a planned attack on non-combatants (Gramercy Books; Distributed by Crown, 1997). The ICTY identifies five factors that define such attacks: "(i) There must be an attack. (ii) The acts of the perpetrator must be part of the attack. (iii) The attack must be 'directed against any civilian population.' (iv) The attack must be 'widespread or systematic.' (v) The perpetrator must know of the wider context in which his acts occur and know that his acts are part of the attack" (Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac & Vukovic, 2001, para. 401).

7 Sexual violence has also been used as an instrument for ethnic cleansing and genocide, for instance deliberately targeting a homogenous group of people predicated on to their collective national and ethnic identity, race, religion, culture and heritage (Engle, 2005; Sharlach, 2000). The term *genocide* is generally used to describe the extinction, or undertaken extinction, of a group on the basis of their race or religion (Mackinnon, 2005). Though some survive, rape and other acts of sexual violence, these human rights violations are categorised and prosecuted as crimes with genocidal intent (Sharlach, 2000). I used the definition of genocide in the genocide provision of the ICTY and ICTR Statutes Article 4, which translates as follows: (1) The [ICTY] shall have the power to prosecute persons committing genocide as defined in paragraph 2 of this article or of committing any of the other acts enumerated in paragraph 3 of this article. (2) Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; *(b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;* (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) *imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group*; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (3) The following acts shall be punishable: (a) genocide; (b) conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) attempt to commit genocide; (e) complicity in genocide (UN, 2002;2019). For further information see: UN Security, Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (as amended on 17 May 2002), 25 May 1993, retrieved from: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3dda28414.html

1.3 Theorising conflict-related sexual violence

The human capacity to devise and engage in the intentional annihilation of another group of human beings continues to be for many categorically unfathomable. A pluralistic framework consisting of psychological, biological, sociological, political, and cultural conceptualisations is required to produce a comprehensive theoretical account of conflict-related sexual violence. As we consider some of the theoretical perspectives of conflict-related sexual violence, it is important to bear in mind, that to attempted to explain the actions of individuals, groups, political institutions, and nations, while also considering all actors, those perpetrating acts of sexual violence in war/conflict and survivors who were at the receiving end of the barbarity, including spatial and temporal issues, would have been an ambitious task (Roberts, 2008). Given that this research prioritised women's subjective experiences within a social, cultural and political context, I attempted to cover the most relevant aspects.

1.3.1 Biological Theoretical Perspective

Sexual violence, and more specifically rape, is seen as a cyclical adaptive issue for women across evolutionary history (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). A general theory follows that behaviour analogous to sexual violence is inherent to men and subsequently a biological condition that has emerged as a result of our evolutionary history (Littlewood, 1997; McKibbin, Shackelford, Goetz & Starratt, 2008). Central to the evolutionary theory of the human propensity for sexual violence, is the notion that sexual coercion and rape are most plausible among male species who have greater aggressive tendencies, are more eager and ambitious to mate, express sexual assertion, and are less intolerant in the mate selection process (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). With this in mind, biology-based theories of wartime sexual violence depict, men as acquiring genetically predisposed tendencies for sexual aggression that disembogue in the unmethodical conditions of war "Like the vented gas of a pressure cooker" (Gottschall, 2004, p. 133). Characteristics attributed to males, their morphological adaptations that make them fit for combat, their ability to tap into their combative temperament more effectively than women, more inclined to participate in wars, and subsequently have more access to the vulnerable population[8] in war, including the raping of women and girls, being such examples (Roberts, 2007). From this perspective, it is thought that rape in war is understood as an inevitable and natural occurrence (Gottschall, 2004; Schiessl, 2002).

While the biological determinist theory holds that war-rape operates under genetic governance, the expected narrow scope of cross-conflict fluctuation in the prevalence, intensity, character, barbarity of war rape is not evident (Gottschall, 2004). The theory is constrained in its capacity to account for the

[8] When we focus on the demographic hallmarks of victims of sexual violence in the context of war, the biological determinist theory explains that provided sexual desire is the motivating factor for wartime rape, it may be assumed that females at the pinnacle of their youthfulness, physical attractiveness and fertility would be targeted by male soldiers. Cross-cultural research on attractiveness indicates that according to men, young women are regarded as most attractive, and by this token, would thus be disproportionately more vulnerable to wartime rape (Buss, 1989). This is further supported by evidence that claims young women to also be overrepresented in peacetime rape (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000).

extensive ethnographic research which reveal the existence of *rape-free* societies and that in many armed conflicts male soldiers abstain from perpetrating crimes of sexual violence (Seifert, 1996). Take for example, the Yanomani population of Brazil in tribal warfare, the men do not launch attacks exclusively to apprehend and assault women (Roberts, 2007). The rigid biological adaptations, as a way to secure the continuity and preserve the perpetrators genetic endowment (Buss, 1995), do not make provision for the general assertion that women are often murdered during or in the aftermath of rape, which invalidates the passing of gene theory (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010; Good & Sherrod, 2001). Thus, rejecting the notion that conflict-related sexual violence is a "Blind genetic drive" (Gottschall, 2004, p. 134). Recent biology-based theories of human psychology grounded on pluralistic principles reported that "Every feature of every phenotype is fully and equally codetermined by the interaction of the organism's genes and its environments" (Gottschall, 2004, p. 134), thus, coequal significance is ought to be placed on both genetic and sociocultural components.

1.3.2 Theorising from a feministic perspective

Ideologies and socio-political movements that inspire the theory of feminism and seek to define the social, cultural, political, economic and personal equality of the sexes, have been observed throughout time, space and across various cultures. To examine the extensive list of literature pertaining to feminist theory would be an impossible task, as such, my focus here was primarily on material that is pertinent to the research topic under investigation. While I acknowledge that a considerable part of this theoretical perspective will not be presented here, for a more comprehensive and elaborate account, I invite the reader to delve into the works of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) *The Second Sex*; Betty Friedan (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, and Brownmiller (1975) *Against our Will*, Bracewell (2000), Seifert (1996) and MacKinnon (2016) for a more elaborate discussion around the topic of sexual violence.

Feminist approaches have queried and disputed all traditionalist gender views and confronted with assertiveness highly influential institutions be it religious, health care professions, economic, socio-political and judicial constitutions, together with any gender axioms they produced, which have been disadvantageous towards women (Smith, 2010). The architects of feminism can be traced back to Venetian writer and activist Christine de Pizan (1405) and her book; *The book of the City of Ladies,* where she defended women's triumphs and contested prevalent stereotypes (Brown-Grant, 1999). In part, the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was a succession of preceding analysis concerning women's nature, in which Mary Wollstonecraft advocated forcefully for women's equal rights to education, wealth and position in society (Bryson, 2016). Feminist perspectives on conflict-related sexual violence have complied with the abovementioned principles and rigorously questioned dominant social, cultural and political discourses, including rigid survivor subjectivities, gender biases, and the prototypical, unidimensional narratives that focus on worldwide generalisabilities rather than the heterogeneity of survivors subjective lived experiences (Bos, 2006; Henry, 2016). Sexual violence was

considered both a "Consequence and cause of gender inequality" in the Cross-Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse (HM Government, 2007, p. iii), inequity, that feminists have been challenging throughout various epochs (Kearns, D'Inverno & Reidy, 2020; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

The central premise of the second wave feminist agenda, was the question surrounding social and political institutions and dominant cultural discourses concerning gender and gendered relations (Helgeson, 2012). Feminist theories, challenged the traditional view that considered gender to be an individual's static attribute, instead they recognised gender to be a dynamic social construct, one that is mutative (Helgeson, 2012). From this perspective, gender is seen a social category, constructed by society and cannot be divorced from its social, cultural and political context (Alison, 2007). In this way, the community is divided into two distinct categories *men* and *women*, with each sex being attributed particular traits and characteristics; men associated with *masculinity* and women with *femininity*, which are thought to be embodied and manifested in gendered interactions and that sustain and preserve the gendered social fabric (Wharton, 2005). Ascribed to gender are values in personality and identity formation, which are considered suitable masculine and feminine traits and behaviours (Davis, Evans & Lorber, 2006). Gender schemas, cognitive structures and ideal frameworks are developed, which then facilitate peoples integration and adjustment of their cognitive and behavioural process within quotidian life (Wharton, 2005).

This binary division is compounded by other social categories including age, race, ethnicity, economic class, religion and sexual orientation and as these various structures engage in collaboration with one another they form a hierarchical system of dominance (superiority) at one end and subordination (inferiority) at the other (Davis, Evans & Lorber, 2006). According to feminist theories, the idealised forms of gender in a particular socio-cultural and political milieu is on one hand the sexually dominant male (hegemonic masculinity), while on the other is the sexually submissive female (emphasised femininity) (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2002). Hegemonic masculinity is made up of certain attributes, which include, high levels of aggression, physiological strength, sexual performance, offering protection to women (Goodman & Epstein, 2008). Considered generally to be larger in size and acquire physical strength, men were thought to make better manual workers and soldiers in the military (Cohn & Enloe, 2003; Donaldson, 1993). Defined solely by their biological reproductive capacity, women are often emblematically perceived as gentle, caretakers, nurturers who are fragile and vulnerable (Alison, 2007; Chrisler & McCreary, 2010; Gilson, 2016). Enloe (2015) poised that fragility is gendered and females are perceived to be less powerful and imprudent. On the contrary, Gilson (2016) highlighted the association between vulnerability (dependency, weakness, and susceptibility to harm, "exploitation or threat to one's […] autonomy" (p, 72)) and femininity. Given that the impact of gender divisions extends beyond the intra-psychic and interpersonal relationships to include social, political and cultural

institutions, it is considered to be a system of power, which honours and benefits men at women's detriment (Enloe, 2015).

Systemic feminist psychodynamic theorists such as Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg and Walker (1990), perceive gender as a deeply internalised psychic structure that is developed and integrated between 12 and 36 months, and hold that gender is a method of social learning as opposed to a biological static structure. They explain that, boys and girls generally begin their journey of becoming people by defining themselves inside the boundaries of their relationship to their mother, in a process known as asymmetrical parenting (Goldner et al., 1990). While both girls and boys forge their gendered identities within a feminine relational context, the girl continues to be an integral part of the mother's psychological landscape, and her psychic structure is formed in connection with someone who is homologous to her (Goldner et al., 1990). Conversely, the boy's identity is developed via an experience of contrast, in this way attaining an understanding of what it is to be masculine derives from learning to be "Not-feminine" and through dis-identification with the mother (Goldner et al., 1990, p. 4). In adulthood, when this early maternal bond is echoed in life experiences it threatens the man's gender structure, in that the mother and all women, prevail as incessant reminders of what must be surrendered to be a man, which negate issues for the psychological foundation of masculinity (Goldner et al., 1990). Phallic narcissism and castration anxiety being key factors in understanding male reparative and destructive aims concerning femininity and the female body (Figlio, 2010).

A radical feminist ideology, presented the problem of conflict-related sexual violence or wartime rape in the scope of male-female gendered power relations (Alison, 2007). In her book *Against Our Will*, published in 1975, Susan Brownmiller reframed sexual violence as being synonymous with political violence, which was perpetrated implicitly by men with intent to intimidate women and keep them in a perpetual state of fear (Alison, 2007; Smith, 2010). Gendered violence was seen as an effective mechanism of oppression and de-personalisation of women, which declines their social, cultural and political status and subsequently leads them to recourse to male protection (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010; Littlewood, 1997; Malamuth, Heavey & Linz, 1996). In this way, female subjugation was corresponded with patriarchal convention (male domination and aggression, inequality) and misogynistic culture (discrimination, mythology surrounding sex) (McKibbin, Shackelford, Goetz & Starratt, 2008; Smith, 2010). The UN in the 1993 General Assembly, reported that sexual violence perpetrated against women in war is "A manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men." (Assembly, 1993, p. 1; MacKinnon, 2016). Further to this point, Alison (2007) poised that "War provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women." (p. 79).

McPhail (2016) explains that, while gender inequalities are considered pervasive on the broad spectrum of war and political conflicts, they are acts rooted in opportunistic motives for particular political agendas. In this way, the female body becomes politized within a particular national landscape, whereby rape and sexual torture of women is considered a significant part of the hostility (Seifert, 1996). Thus, moving away from the longstanding opinion that views sex synonymous with rape, as a means to an end for sexual fulfilment, to focus on rape as a phenomenon of power, manifested in the form of violence (Alison, 2007; Malamuth, Heavey & Linz, 1996; Palmer, 1988). Seifert (1996) asserted that nauseating quasi-ritualistic torture upon the feminine body following rape, whereby women were subjected to other forms of torture, for instance severed breasts, torn vagina, cuts and cigarette burns can only be explained as a hatred of femininity. From this perspective, the act of rape in war bears no relevance to sexuality, instead it is recognised as a pseudo-sexual act (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979; Seifert, 1996).

Another focus point for feminists has been the topic of sexuality, Schiessl (2002) poised that heteronormativity was seen as an integral part of hegemonic masculinity and rape, even the rape of men served as a means to reassert hetero-masculinity (Connell, 2012; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men are thus emasculated by process of feminisation and/or homo-sexualisation (Schulz, 2018). So, through warring and especially via engagement in sexual violence men share the *spoils of war*, rape is recognised as an agent with the potential to vitalise male bonds among soldiers and a reward for their bravery (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Schiessl, 2002). Adhering to the assumption that soldiers, by default were warranted sexual rights to women's bodies (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Traditionally, the heteronormative power of men and claim over women, identified them as the sole protector both domestically and from the threat of other men or groups (Enloe, 2000). On the other hand, women's sexuality, reproductive potency and virginity are the reference point for examining the reasons why sexual violence in war is detrimental not only to women's intra-psychic relations but how it annihilates their core relationships with their families, the communities and even nations (Milillo, 2006).

For instance, there is a general agreement that the term *rape* designates the sexual appropriation of a woman or girl against their will, the terms genesis is rooted in the Latin *raptus*, which signifies *theft* (Catty, 2011). The earliest use of this word was to describe the abduction of a man's wife or daughter, irrespective of whether physical or sexual violation had occurred (Catty, 2011). Catty (2011) further explained that the word *rape* connoted both meanings; non-consensual intercourse and the remnants the act itself emitted, which unfavourably impacted the females role and social and moral status within her local culture. In this way, women's personal understanding of the importance of virginity seem to be enmeshed with the social, cultural and mythological doctrines that define it (Peel, 2004). For instance, the loss of virginity continues to be marked, in traditional cultures, by a torn hymen at first penetration (Peel, 2004). The loss of virginity, whether via consensual means or rape, has detrimental social

consequences for the female, whereby she is unremittingly violated, made impure, contaminated and spoiled by the perpetrators sexual act (Peel, 2004).

Rape, in addition to being an attack on women, is also seen as an attack on the honour of the men (Farwell, 2004). Within patriarchal systems, whereby power hierarchies and social norms relate to masculinity and femininity and its relation to women's bodies, the act of rape is portrayed as a demonstration of the perpetrators masculinity, while the victim and her family particularly her husband is perceived as feminised (Mackenzie, 2010). The ramifications for women in such cases, include both personal (trauma), and societal (stigmatisation, marginalisation, ostracism) (Peel, 2004). In addition to this, by engaging in any form of sexual activity, women bring shame and dishonour to their families and especially to their males relatives (Brownmiller, 1975). Raped women are often disowned by their families and deemed unsuitable for marriage, and subsequently left with no social or economic support (Milillo, 2006). Women are further disadvantaged, because often rape is not exempt from negative connotations, social stigma, marginalisation and even ostracism and the blame is equally dispersed among the survivors as it is on the perpetrators (Milillo, 2006). The social stigma attached to wives and mothers who endured rape are judged equal to adultery, to this point Brownmiller, (1975) and Tesanovic (2002, p. 3) (as cited in Milillo, 2006, p. 199) added that "When your sexuality is destroyed, so is your motherhood and your dignity".

Further to this, narratives about the nation are premised on specific gender identities both masculine and feminine (Peet & Sjoberg, 2020). For instance, if we look at this through patriarchal metaphoric symbolism, the female body is seen as a nurturing vessel for the male seed, the men own the seed (determine the child's identity) and have power and control over the seedbed in which their seeds are planted (Farwell, 2004). Generally, nations and their territories are viewed symbolically as female, to be protected from external enemies, with an important aim to preserve the motherlands honour (Farwell, 2004). Given that it is women who ensure the continuity of the race, culture and symbolism "Gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers, and reproducers of narratives of nations" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 39). The protection of honour by women of the community is done through marriage and their adherence to cultural rituals that preserve and sustain "A pure lineage and pure ethnic-cultural identity" (Farwell, 2004, p. 395). The act of rape becomes an effective strategy because it creates disorder by desecrating the authority and property assured to males, as well as violating established norms relating to the family (Mackenzie, 2010).

The family system is depicted as a group's *centre of gravity*, thus striking the enemy's moral structure is seen as a prerequisite to ensure their physical submission (Peet & Sjoberg, 2020). Embedded in the dominant cultural and political rhetoric is the notion that men's failure to protect and secure their women or nation, demonstrated masculine impotence, in this way men are symbolically castrated and

obliterated their claim to the females body and the nations land (Peet & Sjoberg, 2020). To maximise the demoralisation of the opposing ethnic-group, perpetrators raped women in the presence of their families and communities (Farwell, 2004). Rape then, is seen as a weapon of war used to destroy and defeat another group both physically and psychologically (Cohen, 2013a; Schiessl, 2002). Indeed, sexual violence is noted as a forceful instrument of war as it successfully exploits the socio-culture and political discourses that constitute the underpinning of customs, practices and structures that conjointly secure social stability (Maciejczak, 2013).

1.4 Brief Historical Account: Kosovo

As previously indicated, this inaugural chapter was intentionally established following the completion of the analysis, as a way to circumvent myself from being excessively and perhaps even unconsciously influenced by the existing literature in the field. Instead, my aim was to allow the flow of survivors narratives to emerge without interruptions and to be captured, analysed and presented as closely as possible to how survivors themselves intended. It became evident in the course of the interview process and later the data analysis, that the temporal progression of historical, political and cultural events assumed significant value in women's narratives. It seemed that to frame sexual violence within a historical, social, cultural and political context served women in their endeavour to make sense of/and cope with the impact and repercussions of being sexually violated.

So, it was my impression, that to aid the researcher and wider audience's understanding of conflict-related sexual violence, the women in this study, felt it was necessary to acknowledge that their experiences of sexual violence came as a result of a long and disastrous political conflict between two ethnic groups (Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians) that for centuries permeated the territory of Kosovo. It became evident from the data yielded that this historical, social and political context provided the fertile ground for the development of various identity narratives, which were then used by women to construct meaning and bring order to traumatic war experiences. Indeed, it felt important to include below some historical information pertaining to the inter-ethnic tension that has accumulated over many centuries. Firstly, to aid the reader and I to contextualise women's narratives within a historical, cultural, political and social milieu. Secondly, this information was included with the hopes that it would increase our understanding of how the inter-ethnic tension between the Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians contributed towards the formation of in-groups (Kosovar-Albanians) and out-groups (Serb forces and people) and the ways in which women in this study presented and positioned themselves in relation to the perpetrators (Serb forces). This contextual information also helps us (myself and the reader) to understand, from the women's perspective, *how* and *why* sexual violence was the chosen weapon of war, as women themselves referred to it.

As we will see in the upcoming chapters, the women in this study explicitly believed that sexual violence was a longstanding propaganda perpetuated and intensified over many decades by Serbian politicians, scholars and people. This line of inquiry was also echoed in Bracewell's (2000) work, where she posited that in addition to a broad spectrum of stereotypes that were generated to describe the psychology, behaviour and temperament of the Kosovar-Albanian population, rape was one of the most notorious, and the outcry came with calamitous political consequences (Bracewell, 2000). She further explained that in their quest, Serb scholars and media outlets accused Albanian men of using rape against Serbian women in Kosovo, as such sexual violence in Kosovo was interpreted as a strategically devised movement with an aim to dehumanise and humiliate the Serb nation in Kosovo (Bracewell, 2000). In the 1980s public discourse rooted in nationalistic propaganda yoked sexual violence to acute anxieties related to gender and the conception of a Serbian nationhood suffering imperilment at the hands of an aggressive Albanian chauvinist agenda (Bracewell, 2000). As a consequence of this, sexual violence in Kosovo was confederated with apartheidlike politics (Di Lellio & Kraja, 2021). Thus, the politicisation and hysteria over nationalist rape was seen as a primitive endeavour to engineer public persuasion, further exacerbate the tension between Serbs and Albanians and sustain Serbian paranoia (Bracewell, 2000). Further to this, histrionic and sensationalist presentation of sexual violence were in the background of ongoing measures to resuscitate the territorial claim in Kosovo (Del Zotto, 2002). In this way, having this historical and political backdrop to understanding women's narratives may help us to attain a more cohesive understanding of women's experiences and, more generally, the complex intricacies of conflict-related sexual violence.

Further to this, women's narratives were laden with issues pertaining to gender-power structures within the more local socio-cultural and political context. For instance, it was clear from women's narratives that patriarchal conventions and ideologies were deeply ingrained in the Kosovar-Albanian cultural perspective. Against this background, women reported that, survivors who had experienced sexual violence were seen as contaminated, damaged, and were thought to possess a lower moral value. Pursuant to the survivors in the present investigation, these dominant cultural narratives, which were thought to be embedded in primordial customs and traditions and associated with gender-relations in pre-war Kosovo, had an undeniable effect on survivor's intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships. While, the women in this study did not make reference to any particular cultural code of conduct, women pointed out perpetually to various Kosovar-Albanian traditions and cultural norms, which bore great similarities to those outlined in the *Kanun of Lek*ë *Dukagjini (*A traditional legal system in the Albanian community, thoroughly elaborated in the following section). The most prominent cultural norms outlined in women's narratives, where those pertaining to women's treatment and position (social, cultural and economic) in the patriarchal family structure and local communities. While, I as a Kosovar-Albanian woman who is familiar with the local culture and traditions understood these gender-power structures to have originated from the longstanding influence of the *Kanun of Lek*ë *Dukagjini*,

indeed, I was cognisant of the possibility that, the general reader may not be acquainted with this cultural knowledge. Thus, having an understanding of the abiding dominant cultural customs and traditions that exist within the Kosovar-Albanian local communities, may help us to understand how in the aftermath of sexual violence women were treated by their families and communities and the subsequent impact this had on their intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships.

While, as a researcher, I recognised my own omnipresence in the research and rigorously scrutinised my own influence in the co-construction of the data yielded, it is important to note here that this study was rooted in narrative principles, which prioritises the voices and subjective experiences of participants. Thus, in this research my position on the subject of conflict-related sexual violence was determined by the ways in which the narratives emerged directly from the women themselves, and it was my aim to present this data as closely as possible to the ways in which participants intended. Nevertheless, the historical, cultural and political information, as presented in the section below, enabled me to gain a more cohesive understanding of how the women in this study constructed and thus brought order to their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence. The information, which I included below served me well in the write up of the discussion and critical synthesis of data, and refined my understanding of conflict-related sexual violence on a macro (social, cultural and political) and micro (intra-psychic and inter-personal) level. Given then that this was an international research with foci on Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, it felt fitting and even necessary to thoroughly address the longstanding political conflict that plagued this region and to include some key information about the kanun and the traditional role of the Kosovar-Albanian woman. The understanding that these historical and political events occurred sporadically throughout time and are ridden with complexities, was another reason for my decision to diligently outline them in this section. Thus, by including and sequencing this historical information herein, I believe will provide the reader with a more comprehensive understanding of the women's narratives as presented in the proceeding chapters. Outlined below are four subsections; setting, gender-relations in pre-war Kosovo, the kanun and the traditional role of the Kosovar-Albanian woman and finally the history of inter-ethnic tension.

1.4.1 Setting

This section, expounds on the framing of sexual violence within the social, cultural and historical discourses. Kosovo is an inland province in south-eastern Europe. The partially recognised state is located at the heart of the Balkan peninsula, surrounded by Serbia to the north and east, Albanian to the southwest, Macedonia to the southeast and Montenegro to the west. With circa two million citizens (Albanians being the largest ethnic-group); 70% of which are under the age of 35, Kosovo is reputed the youngest country in Europe. Presented below is a map (fig.1), which outlines the present-day territorial markers of Kosovo in the Balkans (Parliament, 2018).

Figure 1: Map of present-day Kosovo in the Balkans

1.4.2 Gender-relations in pre-war Kosovo

Relative to social and political affairs, Arsovska (2006) poised that scientific theory does not emerge in a vacuum but rather in a socially conditioned climate, which regulates a comprehensive mechanism of ideologies and principles that over time become subconsciously undisputable truths. In the case of Kosovo, it is a perplexing task to assess gender-relations and conflict-related sexual violence, without examining the influence of the 15th century traditional legal system in the Albanian community termed the *Kanun of Lek*ë *Dukagjini*[9] (Kanuni I Lekë Dukagjinit*)* (Mangalakova, 2004; Bardhoshi, 2012). The term *Kanun* is affiliated with the English word *cannon* meaning "Decrees of ecclesiastical law" (Elsie, 2012 p. 1). The essential premise of this traditional legal system is the focus on equality and reciprocity[10] (Bardhoshi, 2012).

9 Though it acquired the name of Prince Lekë Dukagjini III, the genesis of this juridical system is alleged to be rooted in ancient primordial times, owing to the profound transformations that occurred in the aftermath of the of the Ottoman invasion, quite possibly in retaliation to these changes and for preservation of Albanian customs (Bardhoshi, 2012; Sadiku, 2014).

10 As we attempt to comprehend the geopolitical landscape inhabited by Albanians and the impact of the Kanun, it is important to acknowledge that the Albanians of south-eastern Europe are composed of two groups; the Ghegs and Tosks. The code of the Kanun, was especially embraced by the Albanian Ghegs who used it to regulated both private and social aspects of their lives. The domineering characteristics of the Gheg subculture have symptomatically impacted in its entirety the Albanian values, beliefs, traditions and ethical framework (Sadiku, 2014). Primacy to the Kanun were conventions that were transferred across generations via oral rituals and degreed by the solicitation of senior male patriarchs (Mangalakova, 2004). In the most recent published version of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini in 1989, the code was systemised into twelve sections; (1) The Church, (2) The Family, (3) Marriage, (4) House, Livestock and Property, (5) Work, (6) Transfer of Property, (7) The Spoken Word, (8) Honour, (9), Damages, (10) The Law Regarding Crimes, (11) Judicial Law, and (12) Exemptions and Exceptions (Elsie, 2012). The Kanun was seen as a pertinent system, which functioned in parallel to national legislations and provided justice and supervision in repairing civil

In the Kanun truce and hospitality were considered as ideal virtues, while honour outlined the highest moral principle and was thought to attain more significance than life itself "An offense to honour is never forgiven" and according to the Kanun "A man who has been dishonoured, is considered dead" (Sadiku, 2014, p. 108). In the Kanun, the anatomy of the family is narrated as emblematically authoritarian and patriarchal in structure, generally commanded by the eldest male member (father or his sons) (Yamamoto, 2005). The unit consists of a collective living arrangement, inclusive of the elderly and extended family members, thus establishing a sense of belongingness and a heightened sense of affiliation for the individual with the family and the community (Yamamoto, 2005). Any infringement of the customary framework is recognised as a direct insult to the collective group honour (Sadiku, 2014).

1.4.3 The Kanun and the traditional role of the Kosovar-Albanian Woman

Considered as the cornerstone of the Albanian culture, the Kanun determines the traditional gender roles of the Albanian woman in relation to the Albanian man (Arsovska, 2006). While the principles encompassing the Kanun provide social structure, it is also embellished with disadvantageous conditions for women. Historically, the Kanun prescribed that marriages ought to be arranged by the woman's family, and once finalised, the girl is expected to transfer to the house of her husband's parents and live under their authority (Cockburn, 1998; Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). While the men are assigned to heavy manual labour, the women are chiefly respected on their roles as wives and mothers with their roles limited to bearing and raising children, and attending to domestic tasks (Young & Twigg, 2009).

Inheritance under the Kanun code was only the right of a man, women were merely able to preserve their given name and a sense of personal identity, as following their marriage women were identified, initially as *novel brides*, then referred to as "The wife of X" and at the latter stages of their lives were known as "The old woman of X" (Young & Twigg, 2009, p. 121). Further, article no. 29 of the Kanun explains that "A woman is a sack, made to endure as long as she lives in her husband's house" (Young & Twigg, 2009, p. 119). Thus, with no rights of her own and no rights over her children, the woman's value is determined by her womb and whether it can bear a son for her husband (Young & Twigg, 2009).

This patriarchal institution[11] fostered the model of a submissive and docile woman, who would be obedient to the males in her life (Arsovska, 2006). On the night of the wedding, the groom would be

matters including blood feuds (Sadiku, 2014). Previously static in the background of a coercive tyranny, from the ashes of the communist order emerged a renewed Kanun, bound by three additional ideals, (1) truce, (2) hospitality, and (3) honour (Sadiku, 2014). In this way the Kanun revived its social and political relevance, and the Albanian people took pride in the principles which made part of the foundation of their Albanian culture and identity.

11 A patriarchal triangle, is highlighted by Young and Twigg (2009), which alludes to the social components that perpetuated and sustained this framework, inclusive of "a) patrilineal descent, b) village exogamy, and c) inheritance in the male line" (p, 119).

gifted by the bride's parents a "Bullet wrapped in straw" and in the case that the woman disobeys or dishonours her husband he would be justified to use this bullet to kill her (Elsie, 2012, p. 4). Alongside this prescription was the notion that widows or unmarried women who had been dishonourable would be "Set on fire alive" (Mangalakova, 2004, p. 6). Contrary to the stringent tone of the Kanun in relation to women and their position within Kosovar-Albanian family and community, Mangalakova (2004) highlighted that under the Kanun women's dignity is protected, and they are afforded full immunity from blood feuds (Elsie, 2012).

Though post-war Kosovo has promptly embraced European values demonstrating to the world its rapid progressivity in various economic, social and political matters including gender equality, fragments of the Kanun and its perpetual effects are visible within Kosovar-Albanian families, especially those who reside in rural areas, which continue to press women into traditional roles. Sadiku (2014) attempted to anatomise the role of the Kanun in the present day and provide a rationale for its longevity by borrowing the term *habitus* from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe the internalisation of the social, cultural and political distinctions into subjective dispositions and ideologies, which still remain at the heart of Kosovar-Albanian cultural identity and which govern some aspects of quotidian life (Tarifa, 2008).

1.4.4 The History of Inter-ethnic Tension

Before we delve into the history of inter-ethnic tension between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs, it may be useful to first address the definition of national identity (See footnote)[12]. The matter of Kosovo, in the final analysis, can be categorised as one of the most torrential and intractable political conflicts in the Balkans (Malcolm, 1998), having endured some of the most barbaric human rights violations. When the most recent war broke out, Kosovo was certainly the region acutely devastated by mass murder, genocide, torture and sexual violence, atrocities attributable to the fractured dynamics between two specific ethnic groups that inhabited this region; Serbs and Albanians (Hewer & Vitija, 2013; Vickers, 1998). A turbulent relationship between the two ethnic groups is believed to be the cardinal source of contention throughout history, which further aggravated the territorial dispute and right over Kosovo. In their efforts to frame this discord and warrant their political standpoint, each group turns to primordial

12 For scholars in the Western Balkans, the definition of national identity extends beyond boarders and citizenship to include the uniting of people via shared origin (primordial ancestry), symbolism, common culture, language and religion, an identity that is sustained by the *law of blood* (Pratto, Žeželj, Maloku, Turjačanin & Branković, 2017). This cultural-ethnic approach explicates that in the Balkans various ethnicities are scattered across boarders for instance, the Albanians make up for the majority of demographic in Kosovo, and neighbouring Albania, there are also Albanians in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia (Pratto et al., 2017). As such, Albanians in the Balkans are affiliated with their nation as an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1983). Findings from a recent study investigating the complexities of social identity in Kosovo shows that for the Kosovar-Albanian majority, ethnic and national identity are substantially synonymous and Kosovar national identity is viewed as Albanian ethnic identity (Maloku et al., 2016). Perhaps, this explains why ethnic identity remains substantially politicised and ethnic groups are confined by ethnocentric political objectives (Pratto et al., 2017).

history, social and cultural memory, and mythology, thus claiming they are indeed native to the area (Hewer &Vitija, 2013).

It was the twentieth century, that bore witness to the most poignant political developments in this region, especially the constitution of the modern state of Albania, which came to formation in the ruins of a collapsed Ottoman Empire (Vickers, 1998). When canvasing thoroughly the status of Kosovo, we notice that historical accounts are made up of heterogenous perspectives: The Serbian mythological perspective commences in the fourth century AD marking the Slavic arrival in Europe at the time of the great migrations, and their settlement in Kosovo between the seventh and tenth centuries. Contrary to this, the Albanians perspective holds that the Serbs began to populate the region of the Albanians in a categorical and systemic manner in the twelfth century onwards and had migrated from Russia (Stipcevic, 1996). The longstanding theory that Albanians share a direct cultural and ethnic ancestral lineage with the ancient Illyrians, an ancient population that existed during the Bronze age (Vickers, 1998). Kosovar-Albanians claim that because Kosovo forms part of an ancient Illyrian territory they are subsequently indigenous inhabitants of Kosovo and have an indisputable and natural right to this region (Malcolm, 1998). This historical narrative further endorsed the long held national rhetoric that Kosovo should naturally be annexed to the rest of modern Albania (Hewer &Vitija, 2013). Serbs on the other hand depict the Albanians as colonisers and persecutors of the Serbs, presenting firmly the argument that Albanians are immigrants with no legitimate right to reside in this region (Malcolm, 1998).

This brought to prominence the multi-layered and polyphonic ways in which various ethnic groups inhabiting the Balkans perceived themselves. To frame present cultural and political narratives, both homogenous groups rely on past historical accounts and seek archaeological evidence[13] to substantiate their claims (Bieber & Daskalovski, 2003). During the Nemanjić period, Kosovo was integrated into the Serbian medieval empire, it was at this time that the Serbs united as a national group under the mantel of the Serbian orthodox patriarchate (Bieber & Daskalovski, 2003). Serbian churches and monasteries were established across Kosovo, marking this region as the religious, political and economic marrow of the Serbian dynasty (Vickers, 1998). The prestige of the patriarchate was utilised as an instrument to wield political influence, ascertain ecclesiastical order and jurisdiction (Bieber &

13 Excavation of Neolithic, Iron Age, Medieval and Bronze Age sites all of which have been confirmed to possess features pertaining to ancient Illyrian people (Gashi, 2016; Falaski & Hasani, 2002; Vicker, 1998). The surfacing of evidence inclusive of names of places and people have verified an Illyrian presence in the territory of Kosovo, more specifically an Illyrian tribe identified as ancient Dardanians who inhabited this region (Dobruna-Salihu, 2012). Additional evidence comes from philologists who have categorically confirmed that the Albanian linguistic system, with its idiosyncratic vocabulary, phenetic and morphology codes has originated from the ancient Illyrian language (Gashi, 2016; Falaski & Hasani, 2002; Vicker, 1998). In opposition to the Serbian efforts to assimilate Kosovar-Albanians into Serb culture, the Albanians held their pre-Christian lineage in a tight grip, with an aim to preserve their Pelasgian and Illyrian heritage and ensure its subsistence and durability (Pavlović, Draško & Halili, 2019). It was Johann George von Hahn's book titled Albanische Studien [Albanian Studies] published in Vienna in 1854, which poised that due to their direct ancestral linage with the Illyrians and prehistoric Pelasgians, the Albanian people are autochthonous (Von Hahn, 2015). In this way, by disputing Serb historical accounts, Von Hahn subsequently validated the Albanian historical account.

Daskalovski, 2003). Serbs relied on ethno-nationalistic myth that holds, in the battle of Kosovo in 1389, King Lazar was visited by an angel who presented him with an ultimatum, asked to consider victory or defeat against the Ottoman empire, he chose to be martyred as defeat guaranteed him a place in a heavenly kingdom (Bieber & Daskalovski, 2003; Hewer & Vitija, 2013). Serbian folklore pulsates at the heart of Serbian social and political consciousness, which holds that Kosovo is replete with theological significance, considered sacred land and the nucleus of the Serbian culture, heritage and identity (Čolovič, 2019).

In 1912 the territory of Albania declared its independence and Kosovo was annexed to the Serbian Kingdom[14]. Bookbinder (2005) explained that aspects of the Nazi racial theory were borrowed to separate people in this region on account of racial pseudo-science that amalgamated ethnicity, religion, racial biological theory into an acutely toxic seethe. Balkan leaders utilised a contorted notion of ethnicity, to engender discord and hostilities between Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians (Bookbinder, 2005). With the exception of the Albanians, the other groups were congregated by their shared Slavic ethnic heritage, though they were demarcated by their diverging histories, religion and political standpoint (Bookbinder, 2005). In this way, the concept of *ethnic cleansing* became centrepiece of Balkan political discourse and a general consensus emerged among Serb scholars, philosophers, psychologists and leaders who were affiliated with the Greater Serbia nationalistic agenda (Bookbinder, 2005). For instance, a paper titled "The expulsion of the Albanians" was published by Yugoslavian hero Vasa Cubrilovic, at its core, this was an outline of prospective military tactics for attaining "Ethnic balance in Kosovo" (Bookbinder, 2005, p. 100).

Historically, Albanians have been the recipients of unceasing propaganda initiated by Serbs, which intended to extend the territory of Serbia into Albanian terrain (Jezernik, 1995; Saliu, 2012). Part of this propaganda was the development of negative stereotypes, which were aggressive and abundant and depicted a dehumanising image of Albanians (Saliu, 2012). Initiated directly by state-controlled institutions from both political and academic realms (Pavlović, Draško & Halili, 2019). The inter-ethnic tension between the Serbian minority and Albanian majority were characterised by old grievances, resentment, distrust, and a tendency to treat all Albanians as suspicious and fanatic nationalists. Pavlović, Draško and Halili (2019) explained these stereotypes[15] in terms of a sub-category of

14 Kosovo's requisition was considered a victorious endeavour as it symbolised the emancipation of holy land that belonged to their predecessors (Doja & Abazi, 2021; Vickers, 1998). A census carried out in this region by Serb authorities indicated that 90% of Kosovo's inhabitants were Albanian (Gashi, 2016). Making up the demographic majority, Albania's were viewed by a neurotic Serbian state as noxious and untamed barbarians who were an imperilment to the security and stability of the region (Doja & Abazi, 2021; Vickers, 1998).

15 The most deplorable propaganda against Albanians may have commenced in 1913, with the publication of Serbian then Prime Minister and scholar Vladan Djordjević's book titled *Arnauti i Velike Sile.* Djordjević's book was embellished with overt racism, prejudice and pervert abuse towards Albanians (Jezernik, 1995; Jezernik, 2007). The book made denigrating claims that the Albanians were sub-human, species that have not undergone full biological evolution "Among

Balkanism noted as *Albanianism,* which saw Albanian's as corrupt, violent, dirty, poor, ignorant and criminally inclined, stereotypes, which further exacerbated the *us* and *them* between the two ethic groups (Tajfel, 1981).

In Tito's Yugoslavia, when Kosovo was still annexed to Serbia, there was a brief relational symbiosis between Serbs and Albanians in this region (Malcolm, 1998). However, following Tito's death in 1981, came the collapse of Yugoslavia, at which time Serbia revived its Great-Serbian bourgeoisie and imperialist agenda[16] (Banac, 1988; Mazower, 2000). The permanence of Serbia's discriminatory discourse towards Kosovar-Albanian's in Kosovo was perpetuated by Serbia's president Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s, who reduced political, social and cultural autonomy in Kosovo (Pavlović, Draško & Halili, 2019). In a diachronic approach, Milošević together with the Serbian media and other intellectuals revived irredentist claims over this territory, most prominently the battle of Kosovo, as a way to warrant the annexation, or as they called it, the reclaiming of Kosovo (Todorova, 2005). The pressing matter centred on the increase of a Muslim Albanian demographic in Kosovo, which propagated that among other threats, Albanians were also executing ethnically saturated rape and sexual violence against Serb women in Kosovo (Todorova, 2005). Thus, further fuelling apathy and hatred, which eventually lead to an inter-ethnic conflict and the 1998-1999 war (Todorova, 2005). The Serbs saw two options, to assimilate the Kosovar-Albanian's into Serb culture or eradicate them altogether (Banac, 1988). Effectively, the Serbs began an ethnic cleansing campaign mission, which sought to force Kosovar-Albanians to emigrate out of Kosovo, proceeded by killings, genocide and sexual violence.

1.5 Part Two: Review of Current and Available Literature

As noted previously, multitudinous disciplines coalesce to thoroughly examine the topic of conflict-related sexual violence, with wide breadth and scope, the disciplinary loci of literature went from being ill-defined and marginalised to being investigated with acceleration. It was merely two decades ago when the first known research article was published in the area of political sciences concerning *sexual violence* relative to *war/political conflict* (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Conflict-related sexual violence has emerged from its historical experience of "Silence and neglect" to generating circa 500 published journal articles in a period of one year (2017-2018), thereby constituting itself as a highly visible research discipline (Baaz & Stern, 2014, p. 584; Campbell, 2018). While, there have been hundreds of

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the Albanians, there are people with tails similar to monkeys, hanging down from trees and so ignorant that they cannot distinguish sugar from snow" (Pavlović, Draško & Halili, 2019, p.22).

16 Yugoslavia's economic recession of the mid 1980s and stagnation of the socialist party, nationalist ideologies and contention over political power resulted in the fragmentation of nations (Mazower, 2000). The issue of Kosovo became a central political concern for many Serbs (Booth, 2001; Mazower, 2000).

recorded annual publications between 2001-2022, psychological research investigating Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo was relatively scarce[17].

Albeit there are studies, which have looked at this topic and from various political, social and cultural perspectives[18] we have yet to hear Kosovar-Albanian women's subjective experiences presented via psychological research. Subsequently, in reviewing available literature, I focused primarily on literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and countries such as The Republic of The Congo and Rwanda, and proceeded to include Kosovo and pertinent events. Given that this research was survivor-centred, I decided to focus the literature review primarily on research pertaining to the impact of conflict-sexual violence on survivors by exploring the psychological, physical and social impact on survivors subjective experiences. This section is divided into three sections; first, I thoroughly elaborated on how I came to position myself in the conflict-related sexual violence literature and the ontological and epistemic challenges of conflict-related sexual violence research. Secondly, I present existing literature that highlights women's subjective experiences of rape and sexual violence in war or political conflict. Finally, I bring the chapter to an end by addressing pertinent events concerning conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo.

1.5.1 The positioning of the researcher in conflict-related sexual violence literature

As the phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence became increasingly more visible it was also faced with a number of limitations and significant political and conceptual concerns (Campbell, 2018). In dealing with these challenges, Buss, Lebert, Rutherford, Sharkey and Abinam (2014, p. 15) encourage researchers to turn our attention to knowledge and the production of knowledge by reviewing what has been considered visible and contemplate an some important questions: "What we know, how we know, who knows, and what we still need to know about women, conflict and sexual violence". In our efforts to discover robust and suffice answers to these questions, Campbell (2018) recommends that

17 The academic literature considered for this investigation was extracted from PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, Women's Health, Women's Studies International, Conflict and Health, Social Identities: Journal for the study for race, nation and culture. Key terms where: 'Conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo', 'Balkan history and sexual violence', 'Social memory, identity and sexual violence in conflict zones', 'Sexual violence and mental health in conflict zones', 'War rape', 'Physical and psychological impact of sexual violence'. This was refined to the following themes: Narratives of female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, physical, psychological and social impact of conflict-related sexual violence. This study prioritised women's experiences. Due to the paucity of research in Kosovo, there was no restrictions on time of publication, however, I attempted to stay in close proximity to the most recent wars of the 1990s in the Balkans.

18 With only a number of publications reviewing the phenomenon of sexual violence from various theoretic perspectives including: Legislations both international and domestic (Di Lellio & Kraja, 2021; Elshani, 2020; Krasniqi, 2021a; Krasniqi, 2021b; Krasniqi, Sokolic & Kostovicova, 2020); More general war experiences of the Kosovar-Albanian people (Freedman, 2000); Domestic violence in post-war Kosovo (Farnsworth & Qosja-Mustafa, 2008; Kelmendi, 2015). General understanding of mental health in the Kosovar-Albanian community in the aftermath of war (Morina & Emmelkamp, 2012; Morina & Ford, 2008; Morina, Ford, Risch & Morina, 2010; Ringdal, Ringdal & Simkus, 2007; Roth, Ekblad & Ågren, 2006; Schick, Morina, Klaghofer, Schnyder & Müller, 2013). Art activism against social stigma (Di Lellio, Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019).

we recourse to exploring ontological and epistemological challenges that encompass the study of conflict-related sexual violence, which will be thoroughly elaborated in the sections below.

While the decision to postpone the write up of this chapter until after the data analysis, was intended as a precautionary measure to strengthen methodological rigour, I also acknowledged my own omnipresence in this qualitative research and the co-construction that I anticipated would take place between survivors and me throughout the research process (Langdrige, 2007). Though I diligently reflected on the parallels between the participants and myself, including aspects of our shared identity, cultural background, and experiences of political conflict and explored how these impacted on the data analysis process, I believe the dynamics between these factors had the potential to influence the trajectory of the literature that I may have been drawn to. For instance, previous academic work, specifically a Master's dissertation that examined the dynamics of art and social memory in Kosovo, as well as a co-authored journal article published in Social Identities, which explored identity within the Kosovar-Albanian diaspora in Britain - particularly in the context of Kosovo's independence - may have further influenced this trajectory. Thus, these academic endeavours, in conjunction with my personal identity (British Kosovar-Albanian woman) and personal experiences of the conflict in Kosovo, undoubtedly moulded the current study's research framework and contextual understanding. In my efforts to contextualise women's experience of conflict-related sexual-violence, the accumulation of expert knowledge in various realms, including geo-politics, history, social memory, identity (social, cultural, national, personal), inter-ethnic group-dynamics and political conflict may have prompted me to turn to scholars such as Seifert (1996), Schiessl (2002), Baaz and Stern (2009), Milillo (2006), Catty (2011), Peel (2004), Farwell (2004), Mackenzie (2010), Peet and Sjoberg (2020), Allport (1979), Tajfel and Turner (1979), and Baumeister and Leary (1995).

Further to this point, as I ventured into the process of writing this chapter, I found myself gravitating towards Skjelsbaek's (2001; 2006; 2012) and Clark's (2017) work, which focused primarily on conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Perhaps this was because the 1994 war in Bosnia bore many similarities to the 1998 Kosovar war. For instance, both Bosniak Muslim women and Kosovar-Albanian women were targeted for rape and sexual violence based on their gender and ethnic identities and by the same perpetrator (Serb forces). Considering the paucity of research on conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, it became crucial to examine the existing studies conducted in the neighbouring region in order to gain insights into the intricate nature of this issue. I then proceed to expand my research to the African continent, exploring conflict-related sexual violence in countries like The Republic of the Congo and Rwanda (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014; Kelly, Betancourt, Mukwege, Lipton & VanRooyen, 2011; Mukaman & Brysiewicz, 2008).

As I proceeded to engage with the conflict-related sexual violence academic literature, it became apparent that the trajectory of research developed in two distinctive progressive periods, notably emerging from the horrific events of large-scale sexual violations in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995 and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). A compelling regulatory argument, which was put forward by progressive feminist scholars, highlighted the urgency to include and thoroughly analyse conflict-related sexual violence both in academia and through the mechanisms of justice (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). By integrating precise narratives that depict the abhorrence of survivors' experiences, and to present these actualities as they are, gave scholars and legislators an opportunity to establish this phenomenon's association to *ethnic* conflicts (MacKinnon, 1994; Seifert, 1996). In this way, rape and other forms of sexual violence came to be identified as *weapons of war* (Card, 1996; Farwell, 2004), and human rights infringements with genocidal objectives (Sharlach, 2000).

While much of the qualitative research that focused on investigating women's subjective experiences of conflict-related rape and/or sexual violence swayed towards this dominant discourse, it was important for me to acknowledge that investigating conflict-related sexual violence constitutes various methodological challenges (Wood, 2009). Potential challenges include restricted access to survivors who are willing to share their stories, security concerns and the politicisation of the data yielded (Wood, 2009). The current scholarly work depends largely on survivors' subjective and idiosyncratic experiences; personal testimonies may not be confirmable nor representative (Wood, 2009). These implications can have a subsequent impact on the trustworthiness and reliability of the empirical data and can contribute to biases in the data yielded (Wood, 2009). Further to this, it is widely chronicled that the context of war or political conflict generates the right conditions for crimes of sexual violence to be obscured. Thus, in such disordered circumstances, crimes of this nature are more likely to go unprosecuted, thus permitting the perpetrators to evade accountability and justice (Skjelsbæk, 2012). Additionally, the dominant cultural narratives surrounding sexual violence, which encompass the experience of shame, humiliation, marginalisation, social stigma, and the fear of rejection and ostracism by their immediate families and the wider communities further perpetuates the silencing of rape survivors (Skjelsbæk, 2012). Consequently, women who do report their experiences are in reduced numbers and do so well after its occurrence. For these reasons, researchers investigating the ramifications this has on survivors face major challenges and have to resort to understanding these traumatic events retrospectively (Skjelsbæk, 2012). Given that narratives are not static, rather they are prone with the passing of time to undergo various transformations and re-constructions, then the more time passes the more difficult it becomes to ascertain the original narrative, which can lead to the data being potentially misrepresentative of the actual occurrences.

In this way, scholars are advised against forming ubiquitous or cross-cultural generalisations from exclusively relying on survivors' subjective accounts, concerning the prevalence and tactical nature of rape as a weapon of war (Baaz & Stern, 2013). It is contended as a particularly important task for researcher to evade essentialising women's experiences in conflict situations and reducing women to being mere victims of sexual violence (Baaz & Stern, 2013). This approach has the propensity to exacerbate and perpetuate cultural stereotypes, strengthen victimisation and hinder women's power, agency and resilience (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Hence, if we look beyond the generality of rape as a weapon of war, we have more breadth for the development of a more nuanced understanding of women's roles and diverse experiences within conflict zones (Baaz & Stern, 2013). To establish rape exclusively as a weapon of war, may overshadow additional manifestations of barbarity and violence that are executed in the course of active conflicts and in their aftermath (Baaz & Stern, 2013). This propensity to see rape as a weapon of war can lead to the omission of other essential concerns, including a broader spectrum of human rights infringements (torture, murder, enslavement, displacement), subsequently contributing to an asymmetrical understanding of the profundities indigenous to wars and conflicts (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Thus, the increasing visibility of scientific research in this discipline may not necessarily be an accurate demonstration of the range and prevalence of rape and sexual violence in conflict, thereby underscoring a potential hindrance in the categorisation of rape as a weapon of war (Wood, 2009). In my research investigation, it was thus important to thoroughly reflect on and process any preconceived concepts about conflict-related sexual violence, remain curious about women's subjective experiences, pay attention to how they themselves constructed meaning and brought order to their narratives.

Other epistemic challenges, include the extensive notion that sees conflict-related sexual violence as a pervasive and universal element of war/political conflict, that is perpetuated chiefly by men against women (Skjelsbaek, 2001; 2006; 2012; Clark, 2017). Important aspects employed to enhance our understanding of sexual violence included gender analysis (Brownmiller, 1975; Enloe, 2000), identity politics (Weitsman, 2008), and the complex socio-political implications inherent in brutal crimes (Milillo, 2006). One such example, is seen in gender analysis, whereby it is emphasised that women are calculatedly targeted within the context of war, as a deliberate measure for strengthening military hetero-masculinity or to further tyrannise particular homogenous groups based on their racial, ethnic, religious or political identities and with the aspiration to cause maximum psychological injury, they feminise and dishonour these group members as a collective (Skjelsbæk, 2001; Nordås & Cohen, 2021). It is no surprise then that sexual violence has been characterised by scholars as an unavoidable derivative of war/political conflict, which invades and infringes the family honour (Farwell, 2004; (Mackenzie, 2010). While I approached this line of inquiry with moderate scepticism, it nevertheless proved invaluable in my own endeavour to comprehend Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence within a cultural and socio-political context.

While I attended to a holistic and adaptable approach in my positioning within conflict-related sexual violence research, (which was especially significant for the progression of understanding of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, where there is an existing paucity in research and understanding remains deficient) it is imperative to mention here that this psychological investigation narrowed its focus on Kosovar-Albanian women's subjective and idiosyncratic experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo. Although the discussion pertaining to Kosovar-Albanian men's experiences of sexual violence was recognised as an important line of inquiry, which requires extensive and elaborate investigations, in this study male experiences were not the subject of this research. In this way, I acknowledged that men, women, girls and boys are all vulnerable targets to conflict-related sexual violence and that females[19] are not excluded from perpetrating such crimes nor are males disqualified from being victims (Carpenter, 2006; Cohen, 2013b; Houge, 2008; Sivakumaran, 2007; Wood, 2006; 2009). While, there has been a surge from the research community to encourage scholar to orchestrate more inclusive research by addressing further categorises in their investigations, like *female perpetrators* or *male victims,* Campbell (2018) explained that extending the number of categories has been shown to contribute little to the implications surrounding sexual violence in conflict, thus she advises that we instead include and confront gender relations (Campbell, 2018). In this way, a focus on gender relations may facilitate our understanding of how wars are combated, who fights them, and who are the targets and recipients of such violence (Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006). The principal concern here is set in acknowledging not just the inclusion of *invisible* individuals and actions (including additional categorisations to our research studies) but just as well in shedding light on political, social and cultural processes as a result of which categories such as *identity* and *conflict* decide the visibility or invisibility of specific people and violent incidents (Campbell, 2018).

The context in which systems of power relations and structures of oppression intersect have real consequences for the challenges and intricate dynamics that women experience (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). According to feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, the term *intersectionality,* describes the intersecting systems of oppression and discrimination experienced by individuals who are members of several disenfranchised and marginalised groups (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Further to this, intersectionality is considered an invaluable apparatus, which can help us to review systemic oppression, power dynamics, exploitation, marginalisation, ostracism, as well as the privileges that forge peoples lived experiences (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Thus it is argued that as researchers we are unable to establish a cohesive understanding of the individual who may belong to multiple marginalised groups in a vacuum, nor can we comprehend all facets of their identity by merely focusing on the reviewal of one expression of their identity in isolation (Zipfel, Campbell &

19 Isle Koch; in World War II Germany, Biljana Plavšić; in the Former Yugoslavia and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko; in Rawanda (Campbell, 2007; Campbell, Muncer & Bibel, 1998; Sjoberg, 2016), are pertinent examples of female perpetrators, as well as the atrocities that took place in the Abu Ghraib facility at the hands of American female troops (Leiby, 2009a; 2009b).

Mühlhäuser, 2019). In a similar way, in the context of war or political conflict, survivors' experiences of conflict-related sexual violence are thought to be impacted by individuals' alliances with particular social and national groups (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019) explain that to foster a cohesive understanding of and to confront challenges lived out by particular people, at a particular time and within a particular context, it is crucial for researchers to engage with the intersection of a multitude of identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity and more. In much the same way, intersectionality was utilised during the wars in the former-Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide, particularly with intersections of gender, race and ethnicity (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

Further to this point, Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019) hold that scholars, in their endeavour to investigation identity, have transformed the analysis of gender and ethnicity into the ethnicisation of gender. This shift, was thought to have emerged from the tendency for researcher in their commencement of psychological investigations, to hold pre-conceived ideas about particular social identities as appose to analysing power relations (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). In doing so, scholars, notably from the West (countries in Western Europe and the US) endorsed the idea that identities are inflexible classifications of the ontological condition of particular individuals (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Thus, ontological standpoints, which had serious repercussions for the ways in which conflict-related sexual violence was analysed, renewed the narrative that continually characterised Africa and the Balkans in an ethnicised manner, whereby men in the local context were portrayed as perpetrators/rapists and the women depicted as victims and recipients of human rights abuses (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019) argues that this line of inquiry can lead to the essentialisation of identity. In this way, two pronounced ontological subjects were identified, on one hand they identified a Western male/female non-aggressive rescuer and defender of the female local victim, this subject was thought to be proactive in advocacy and seeking justice for survivors (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). On the contrary, the people in the local cultural context were characterised by sexually violent masculinity and seen to be susceptible to rape and sexual violence (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). According to Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019), feminist scholars in their pursuit to produce knowledge in the field of conflict-related sexual violence are susceptible to making the assumption that the locals within conflict/war zones are exclusively associated with collective identities; ethnic, gender, racial identities as a case in point. While, on the contrary, the Westerner (researcher/scholar) is regarded too progressive and contemporary to be associated with such primitive identities (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

According to Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019) the abovementioned scenario is seen as a significant example of specific ontological substructures, which are principal components of the process of *othering* the participants from ourselves as researchers. Instead of disputing the hegemonical praxis and challenging the collusion with prevalent narratives that permeate modern wars and violence crimes, this research trajectory instead reconfirms and perpetuates it. Zipfel, Campbell and Mühlhäuser (2019) advice researchers to shift the research approach from exclusively investigating rigid and inherent identities and identity politics to instead consider identities as dynamic effects determined by social and cultural histories and power dynamics within a given context. Thus, by integrating the reviewal of systemic inequalities, social power dynamics, and identifying injustices on an international and nation level, researchers are in a better position to reveal nuances of knowledge that may otherwise be concealed by undue emphasis on identities alone (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

In the analysis of knowledge production in conflict-related sexual violence literature, Aroussi (2020) contended that NGO's and media coverage of graphic accounts of rape narratives may be perceived as voyeuristic, whereby women's suffering was exploited in the quest for funding, sensational stories or to further academic careers. Aroussi (2020) goes on to say that while the axiom of *doing no harm* is a crucial component of research ethics it does not necessarily warrant ethically compliant research, thus to investigate human suffering, according to her, can only be legitimate and righteous if it contributed toward putting a halt on that suffering. This task, while ambitious, both anchored and guided me through my research journey. Further to this point, Phillips and Greene (2022) examined the wide-spread systematic bias that permeates the discipline of psychology, which is excessively focused on the Western population. They go on to explain that despite the exorbitant experiences of war and conflict, non-Western countries are often marginalised or inadequately investigated in the conflict literature (Phillips & Greene, 2022; Sattari, Bae, Berkes & Weinberg, 2022). One significant implication of this Western bias is that our knowledge consortium is possibly skewed, and focused on a small number of countries in the West, from which wider cross-cultural generalisations are made (Phillips & Greene, 2022). Utilising Western models and applying them to other countries can be seen as a reductionist approach (See discussion chapter for further elaboration), as it does not allow us to expand on our knowledge of other cultures and how they experience certain phenomenon, in this case conflict-related sexual violence. Perhaps, one way to mitigate for this paucity is to turn our research focus on countries that are less frequently investigated, as I have done with the present investigation. The gatekeepers of research, which include journal editors, reviewers, grant decision committees and doctoral research supervisors can encourage a less-biased body of research by paying more attention in their research evaluations to under-researched or over-researched topics (Phillips & Greene, 2022).

1.5.2 Other Available Research

1.5.2.1 Sexual violence as a weapon of war

In principle, dehumanisation, barbarism and excessive tyranny found in conflict-related sexual violence embody the core attributes of genocidal operation and objective (Roberts, 2008). In recent history, such atrocities have been chronicled in various parts of the world including but not limited to Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, women belonging to particular homogenous groups (religious, ethnic or other), were particularly vulnerable to mass rapes, forced pregnancies and sexual torture (Skjelsbaek, 2001; Skjelsbaek, 2012). In this way, sexual violence characterised genocidal aims and made part of a wider politized military objective to dominate and destroy in total or in part a civilian group regarded as *secondary* citizens (Farwell, 2004; MacKinnon, 1994).

Founded on interviews carried out with male and female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia, Clark (2017) detected five causal factors that support our understanding of conflict-related sexual violence, in particular, she refers to humiliation, revenge, group dynamics, opportunism and entitlement. Factors, that were not exclusive to the Bosnian war but seen to be prevalent cross-culturally and in various conflicts including in the DRC and Rwanda. Mukamana and Brysiewicz (2008) explained that during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, circa 1,000,000 Rwandan men, women and children from the Tutsi minority ethnic group were massacred by the militias. During this time, a quarter of a million women and girls were thought to have been raped (Matovu, 2004). Mythology, saw Tutsi women as sexually superior within the cultural context and more desirable than women of other ethnic groups, one woman recalled being told by a solider "I would like to taste […] a Tutsi woman" before being raped (Mullins, 2009, p. 730). Rape was thus identified as a weapon to dehumanise Tutsi women and as a form of revenge on the women (that under normal condition they could not attain) and their communities and transpired out of former inter-personal grievances between different ethnic groups (Mukamana & Brysiewicz, 2008; Mullins, 2009). A logistic regression analysis in DRC determined that women's social class, age, residing in urban or rural areas, and education were not factors, that decreased the chances of being subjected to sexual violence (Peterman, Palermo & Bredenkamp, 2011).

Further to this, a mixed-method study, investigating women's experience of conflict related sexual violence in DRC, found that of the 255 women surveyed, who attended a hospital and two NGOs seeking medical treatment, 193 (75.5%) reported having experienced rape, (29%) of those were abandoned and rejected by their immediate families and (6.2%) by the wider communities (Kelly et al., 2011). Of these women (83%) identified the perpetrator by their military uniforms and gang rapes were three times more likely among this group (Kelly et al., 2011). Gang rapes transpired in conjunction with village invasions, lootings, the rape attacks were intensified by incorporating other instruments

including guns, and humiliation was exacerbated via forced incest (Kelly et al., 2011). Rape was often carried out in the presence of the community and family members (Burnet, 2012). This was also evident in the 1994 Bosnian war, where rapes were carried out in homes, public contexts, rape camps, and concentration camps (Snyder, Gabbard, May & Zulcic, 2006). Within the pastoral cultures of the Balkans, where female chastity is central to family and community, honour rape was seen by survivors as a moral attack against women, their families and community (Sofos, 1996). Rape was considered by survivors as a method of ethnic cleansing and the occupation of the womb via forced pregnancies as genocide (Fisher, 1996). Skjelsbæk (2006) poised that in the Bosnian war, forced impregnation was an alarming example of how women's sexual identities in conjunction with political, religious and national identities were violated and misused. In this way, the women's bodies become an extension of the battlefield, where ethnic conflict and combat continued.

1.5.2.2 Identity development and narrative construction

The current literature on the Bosnian war, shows that women who experienced conflict-related sexual violence utilised primordial, social, political, cultural and religious knowledge to frame their traumatic experiences and to support their understanding of their present lives. Bosniak women organised and presented their narratives in a chronological manner, each story comprised with a beginning, middle and an end[20]. Chronological order according to Skjelsbæk (2006), helped women to give them meaning and sustain a sense of order in their lives. Similar to the findings of the present study, Bosniak women, understood the war in Bosnia to be as a direct result of an age-old antipathy between two ethnic groups in this region; Muslim Bosniaks and the Serbs. According to Bosniak women, their eligibility for war rape was assessed by Serb perpetrators on the combination of their gender identity and ethnic identity (Skjelsbæk, 2006). Rape was described by women as a weapon of war, used with intent to disempower, debase, dominate, control, humiliate and instil terror and fear (Skjelsbæk, 2006). The physical and emotional invasion that constitute the act of rape was also described as an attack on women's dignity, moral value and self-worth (Clark, 2017). Indeed, this kind of humiliation was described as having long-lasting and profound implications for survivors intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships, fundamentally changing the person that they were prior to the rapes (Clark, 2017).

As such, in the aftermath of war in Bosnia, two markedly different narrative plots were formed by women, notably, ethnic survivor and gender victim. The construction of these plots depended entirely on how the women positioned themselves against the existent and prospective conduct of additional

20 The beginning depicted accounts of life during pre-war Bosnia. This story outlined a harmonious life, multi-ethnic coexistence and peace. In the middle, a substantial part of women's narratives was focused on the commencement of war and the abrupt and horrific violence they were subjected to. Weaved in to this narrative, were additional stories that depicted the loss of homes, members of the family, and friends in the wider community. Stories were concluded with an ending, which highlighted the events of post-conflict life. Life in the war's aftermath, were centred on how sexual violence impacted on their lives, their family dynamics, socio-economic issues, and the unsureness of future possibilities, rebuilding their lives and attaining justice.

characters in their narratives; including the Serb antagonists in their story (Skjelsbæk, 2006). The narrator is considered to be a complex psychosocial subject and a zealous agent that engages in a social world, as such the socio-political and cultural context, which is outside of the individual, is thought to influence how, what, and why components of the story are considered crucial and pertinent (Skjelsbæk, 2006). For those who identified themselves as *ethnic victims,* there emerged a dominant survivor narrative, which was marked by lack of shame and guilt, familial support and survivors' active participation in seeking justice (Skjelsbæk, 2006). These women were determined to show that their experiences of sexual violence did not render them passive nor silent, and they refused to construct a narrative that depicted the destruction of their female identities (Skjelsbæk, 2006). Instead, they saw themselves as capable mothers, wives and caretakers of their families. The construction of this narrative, gave way for women to be united through their shared ethnicity with other in-group members as survivors of war, rather than to be othered by their experiences of sexual violence. Contrary to this, women who identified themselves as *female victims*, constructed victim narratives that were defined by shame, guilt, secrecy and deception as ways to protect themselves from social stigma, marginalisation and ostracism (Skjelsbæk, 2006). The narratives that emerged from survivors experiences determined the implications on intra-psychic, interpersonal and societal relations (Skjelsbæk, 2006). Women's dehumanisation was narrativized in two ways, on the personal level it was described as having destroyed the nucleus of the female identity, both in terms of sexual and procreative capabilities (Skjelsbæk, 2006). On the other hand, stories of dysfunctional womanhood, which comprised of women feeling contaminated and dirty, were embodied in their inter-personal dynamics with social relationships and family members, in which women saw themselves through the eyes of their socio-cultural context, ideas about themselves that then became an integral part of their intra-psychic landscape (Skjelsbæk, 2006).

1.5.2.3 Living within a patriarchal context

In patriarchal societies the women symbolised the family's code of honour and shame, and their value and worth, was based on their roles as mothers and wives (Cockburn, 1998; Olujic, 1998). Mukamana and Brysiewicz (2008) reported that for women in Rwandan society virginity was strongly associated with purity and social value. The sexual transition for a girl into a woman was marked by loss of virginity (sexual intercourse) within the perimeter of marriage (Mukamana & Brysiewicz, 2008). Virginity was considered a vital part of a girl's identity, which allowed her to be a member of a specific social group and loss of virginity through rape was synonymous with loss of dignity, respect, identity and group membership (Mukamana & Brysiewicz, 2008). Survivors no longer belonged with the in-group of girls nor in-group of women, which impacted negatively their eligibility for marriage as well as other social dynamics (Mukamana & Brysiewicz, 2008). Due to rigid cultural norms regarding chastity and gender roles (Traunmüller, Kijewski & Freitag, 2019) silence and secrecy were utilised by survivors as ways of safeguarding themselves and their families from stigma, marginalisation and ostracism (Mollon, 2002; Rober & Rosenblatt, 2017; Turshen, 2000).

1.5.2.4 Physical and Psychological Impact

Disintegrated family dynamics and lack of meaningful connections with the community placed survivors at risk of developing further psychological disorders and mental health conditions, including high prevalence of trauma and susceptibility to all psychiatric presentations such as eating disorders, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, self-harm, phobia, and psychosis (Dillon, Johnstone & Longden, 2014). Compromised physical health, including traumatic or obstetric fistula, high-risk sexual behaviour, chronic pelvic pain, bleeding during pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014). This led to major social ramifications, inclusive of stigmatisation, marginalisation and ostracism. Though it was important to acknowledge the physical and psychological prevalence[21] of sexual violence, due to the word restrictions of this study and that the current research was centralised on survivors subjective experiences of conflict-related sexual violence, I thus decided to place this section in the footnote below.

1.5.2.5 Motherhood as a source of resilience

While the abovementioned research foregrounds the challenges and complexities of conflict-related sexual violence, evidence shows that women drew strength and resilience from their mother identity. Motherhood was regarded as a transformative process, which promoted resilience, empowerment and liberation for Rwandan genocide-rape survivors (Zraly, Rubin & Mukamana, 2013). It was reported that motherhood via its emblematic quality reduced the stigma of genocide-rape, cultivated positive

21 Co-morbidity of PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) and depression were found to be highly prevalent among individuals who were exposed to conflict-related war combined with life threat and traumatic loss, causing long-term psychosocial dysregulation (Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar & Steel, 2004). These co-morbidities were further exacerbated by a perceived scarcity in justice, redress for impunity and trauma. Symptoms of PTSD and depression were compounded by the social, political and economic ramifications in the aftermath of war (Verelst, De Schryver, Broekaert & Derluyn, 2014). For women survivors, exposure to political violence enhanced the probability of sustaining physical, psychological and sexual intimate-partner violence in the occupied Palestinian region, Sierra Leone and Libera (Clark et al., 2010). The sexual violence perpetrated in armed conflict had devastating and persistent health and social ramifications for survivors. For example, a study reported that conflict-related sexual violence has damaging effects on adverse reproductive health outcomes, including a higher prevalence for traumatic or obstetric fistula (an abnormal passageway that connects the vagina and the rectum), high-risk sexual behaviour, chronic pelvic pain, bleeding during pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, lack of desire for sexual intercourse, and no desire for children (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014). Women who had experienced conflict-related sexual violence were more likely to be rejected by their husbands, of fear of disease and contamination from their wives (Kelly et al., 2011). Those who suffered from fistula as a consequence of war were also more likely to be rejected by their husbands. There was a strong connection between women suffering from fistula and more severe PTSD symptomology (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014). Reports further explicated that fistula had major social ramifications, which causes family discord and shattered community ties, sending women into isolation to avoid the social stigma and abuse. This form of rejection further contributed to the severity of women's PTSD symptomology (Dossa, Zunzunegui, Hatem & Fraser, 2014). Further to this, women with pregnancies resulting from conflict-related sexual violence in DRC reported suffering from psychological and emotional trauma relative to their experiences, whilst also managing and coping with the fear of anticipated stigma and rejection within their cultural context (Scott et al., 2017). These women reported experiencing sleep dysregulation, anxiety and depression and were more likely to consider terminating their pregnancy (Scott et al., 2017). Children born of sexual violence were also at high risk of experiencing stigma, both inside the mother's family (whereby their spouses would deny financial support for the child) and the community at large (Denov, 2015; Kelly et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2017). Recent expansion in scientific research, has determined that BDNF (gene codes for brain-derived neurotrophic factor) is a key factor in regulating the development of neural structure, synaptic plasticity, cell differentiation, bodily functions, placental and foetus development (Kertes et al., 2017). The study reported that prenatal maternal traumatic exposure extensively alters BDNF methylation. Lower levels of BDNF were reported in blood sample retrieved from mother who had experienced conflict-related trauma and stress, which was also identified in the offspring and transmitted via pre-birth exposure (Kertes et al., 2017). Traumatic war experiences such as rape and sexual violence, are not reducible to a single event, as demonstrated in this study, it has intergenerational implications.

emotion, strengthened distress tolerance, and gave women's lives meaning and purpose (Zraly, Rubin & Mukamana, 2013). These findings were echoed in research in Bosnia (Simic, 2009) and Guatemala among the Mayan society, where motherhood is recognised as a divine experience (Jayakumar, 2014).

1.5.3 Rape as a weapon of war: A critical analysis

By turning to the scholarly research provided in this chapter, we can see that the concept of *rape as a weapon of war* surfaced as the principal model for confronting and understanding conflict-related sexual violence globe wide. This concept has developed into the predominant hermeneutic method widely accepted by the research community, and utilised by legislative bodies as well as the media Nordås & Cohen, 2021). This framework embodies both political and intellectual appeal and demonstrated a broad spectrum of applicability, it is thus considered the chief and commonly employed theory for understanding and addressing sexual violence in times of war or armed conflict (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). On this account, sexual violence encompasses various forms and manifestations, inclusive of the rape of various individuals of all ages and genders, sexual torture, abortion, forced pregnancies. In addition to this, there is a broad variance in the context, timeframe, and among the perpetrators of such human rights violations (Wood, 2009). To attain a more comprehensive understanding as to why the narrative of *rape as a weapon of war* has resonated so potently among the universality of extensive and brutal conflict-related sexual violence, further analysis is warranted.

As a point of departure, in the critical evaluation of the literature, I turned to the specific language that was utilised to mould the narrative which depicts rape as a weapon of war and its subsequent conceptual implications. The expression "Weapon of war" surfaced during the Balkan trials and thereafter continued to be extensively used by UN systems, scholars, and the mainstream media to detail and characterise sexual violence during times of conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 46). As such, the framing of sexual violence as a *weapon*, gave rise to a question among advocacy groups, who urged us to contemplate, if rape is indeed a weapon of war, then how can it be competently disarmed? (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Precise measures were then taken in 2010 by the United Nations, to establish more accurate terminology when taking about rape and conflict-related sexual violence and announced their proclivity for using the term *tactic* as opposed to *weapon* (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Baaz and Stern (2013) explained that while strategy infers an extensive agenda with the purpose of fulfilling political objective in combat, tactic can be identified as the distinct procedure that was utilised to carry out the strategy (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Rape can thus be seen as a deliberate weapon, which holds fixed objectives, commonly wielded by cognisant actors like military commanders or soldiers, who go on to execute rape with barbaric intent, in this way the perpetrators are thus responsible for their actions (Baaz & Stern, 2013). The contention that sexual violence is systematic, strategic and tactical indicates that the individual perpetrators who committee these gender-based crimes, operate within the confines of a

moral and ethical framework, one that scholar are able to analyse and understand (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Against this backdrop, it may be plausible to assume that perpetrators can be identified, held to account, legally prosecuted and even redressed (Baaz & Stern, 2013).

The rape as a weapon of war narrative then offers more stringent ways of placing culpability on the perpetrator, this discourse also facilitates the necessity for attaining retributive justice and put a halt on impunity (Baaz & Stern, 2013). While the seductive nature of the discourse, which encompasses rape as a weapon of war, is positioned in its capacity to effect crucial change, indeed, this line of inquiry is not congruent with the recent scholarly research, which demonstrates that rape in war/political conflict persists to be the least condemned crime to date by any international court (Sverdolv, 2017). In this way, Wood (2009) explains that conflict settings and armed forces demonstrate nuanced complexities that challenge the reductive and all-encompassing scholarly discourse, which holds that rape is a weapon of war. Consequently, attempting to prescribe a single narrative and to rely on this to make cross-cultural and universal generalisations is likely to fail to yield effective solutions and idiosyncratic redress (Wood, 2009; Wood, 2014; Nordås & Cohen, 2021). Nordås and Cohen (2021) explain that this line of inquiry has the potential to provide fragmentary answers and prompt further investigations, but would require scholars to engaged in rigorous research investigations, critical reflexivity, and open-ended examination.

An additional critique of the narrative that rape is merely a weapon or war contend that this framework is insubstantial in its capacity to embrace the multifaceted etiological factors that are situated at the centre of conflict-related sexual violence (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Cohen, Green & Wood, 2013; Wood, 2014). They further argue that, to align rape with militaristic objectives does not rationalise the complex interaction of diverse components that foster its development in the context of war or armed conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Cohen, Green & Wood, 2013). Instead, researchers are advised to consider additional components that may influence rape, such as pre-war gender inequalities, cultural standards, economic situation, power dynamics, systemic oppressions, prolonged inter-ethnic tension, which are all thought to lend to the prevalence of rape and the brutality that accompanies war and conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Cohen, Green & Wood, 2013). As such, sexual violations can originate from multiple sources, including the unlawful conduct of individual soldiers, undisciplined militias, or the collapse of societal structures in war-ravaged areas (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Cohen, Green & Wood, 2013). Therefore, to ensure that the wider socio-cultural and political context from within which war emerges is considered, and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the primary causes of conflict related sexual violence, scholars must make an effort to widen their focus from the narrative that rape is a strategic weapon of war to include other important factors as stated above (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Cohen, Green & Wood, 2013).

To further solidify the assertion that rape is a weapon of war, Brownmiller (1975, p. 32) posited that "War provides men with the perfect psychologic backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women." Albeit, Baaz and Stern (2018) challenged this perspective, contending that it contains two errors pertaining to wartime rape. Firstly, it insinuates that such crimes are rooted in men's contempt for women, thus outlining the existence of pre-war gender inequality (Baaz & Stern, 2018). Secondly, it holds that the majority of men, if presented with the opportunity will perpetrate rape or sexual violations (Baaz & Stern, 2018). However, Baaz and Stern (2018) explain that the observed variances in conflict-related sexual violence are not sufficiently explicated by concepts of patriarchy or the presence of opportunity to commit such crimes. Patriarchal mechanisms were thought to be necessary aspects for the development of the large-scale rape and sexual violence as they offer us a rational, which is based on social and cultural norms, that permit sexual violence against inferior groups (Baaz & Stern, 2018). This does not however provide an adequate explication for its variation among armed groups, as various groups that come from patriarchal communities do not participate in sexual violence in wars and conflict zones (Baaz & Stern, 2018). In the same way, theories of opportunism which attribute male sexual drive to uncontrollable execution of rape and sexual violence are deficient in their ability to account for individuals standards of perpetration (Baaz & Stern, 2018). Wood (2006) offers an alternative perspective, she explains that the extensive dissemination of sexual violence increases at the time of war, as a result of heightened incentives as opposed to the mere increase in opportunity.

Wood (2009) explained that rape and sexual violence are occasionally completely absent from particular wars and/or political conflicts. One potential explanation is that the armed groups actively engaged in combat inflict minimal violence of any nature upon civilians (Wood, 2009). This is clearly seen in the case of insurgent groups like the LTTE in Sri Lanka and various Marxist-Leninist groups that are engaged in various forms of violence against civilians but scarcely participate in rape or sexual violence (Wood, 2009). Counter to other scholars, who have focused primarily on opportunism and strategy, Wood (2019) posited a more nuanced comprehension of the phenomenon of sexual violence. According to Wood (2019) sexual violence does not occur as a result of explicit top-down orders or an explicit military strategy, but surfaces when commanders either endorse or fail to handle this via disciplinary measures. If left unmanaged, the prevalence of sexual violence increases with the increase in peer socialisation as well as the personal predispositions of combatants (Wood 2018). In this way, a significant implication becomes evident, widespread atrocities, does not equate a deliberate strategic rational, as Wood (2018) has outlined sexual violence can occur on a large scale without explicit commands from leaders (Wood 2018).

Further to this, Nordås and Cohen (2021) outline that while exact cross-national data on the number of individuals impacted by sexual violence are limited, evidence indicates that there is variety in the identities of both victims and survivors. While the narrative that describes males as victims and females

as perpetrators is often exclude, evidence shows active female liaison in sexual violence during particular conflicts. Prominent instances of female perpetrators that were prosecuted for such crimes include Isle Koch in World War II Germany, Biljana Plavšić in the Former Yugoslavia, and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko in Rwanda (Campbell, 2007; Campbell, Muncer & Bibel, 1998; Sjoberg, 2016). This is further extended to the atrocities that were carried out in the Abu Ghraib facility by American female troops (Leiby, 2009a; 2009b). Indeed, a narrow focus on rape as a weapon of war, increases the risk of disregarding a rich opportunity to gain insight into male experiences of sexual violence in the context of war. Cohen (2016) challenged the idea that rape was chiefly motivated by individual opportunism or direct orders stemming from military hierarchies. Instead, Cohen (2016) poised that military ideologies are recognised as crucial factors in comprehending the control displayed by armed groups (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). Further to this, Wood (2006) explained that sexual violence has been understood to facilitate multifaceted purposes within armed group, notably it can be utilised as a reward to incentivise soldiers to engage in sexual violence, or as a potentiality to cultivate solidarity and cohesion among military units (Wood, 2006). While these critiques dispute the characterisation of rape as a weapon of war, they cease to invalidate the existence or significance of conflict-related sexual violence (Cohen & Nordås 2014). Given that conflicts are laden with complexities and are multifaceted in nature, and include various actors with distinct and specific motivations and goals, this issue thus requires a holistic outline of the complex social, economic, and political dynamics that are in operation in a conflict setting (Cohen & Nordås 2014). The research outlined in this section have crucial implications for the progression of policies and procedures, and strategies for intervention and advocacy relevant to conflict-related sexual violence (Cohen & Nordås 2014).

1.5.4 Conflict-related sexual violence: Kosovo

Between February 1998 and June 1999 crimes committed by Serbian forces were multifarious, the most notorious were sexual crimes against women and girls which included; violent cavity searches, torture, rapes, severe physical assaults (for pregnant women even forced miscarriages), and humiliation for both survivors and family members (Halili & Xhemajli, 2020). According to human rights watch reports, in the immediate aftermath of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo just 96 cases of rape by Serbian forces against Kosovar-Albanian women were reported (Skjelsbæk, 2012). In 2001 however, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that the prevalence of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo was about 4.3% for those who had been raped, and 6.1% who had either been raped or had witnessed rape (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007). On the premise of these statistics, it was proposed that between 23,000 and 45,600 women had been subjected to some form of sexual violence in Kosovo (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007). The substantial asymmetry in these numbers, is attributed to the under reporting of rape and sexual violence among Kosovar-Albanian women, who live in perpetual fear of being marginalised, stigmatised, ostracised and even death (Di Lellio & Kraja, 2021).

The subsequent debris that survivors have been left to work through, has been a harrowing process, impacting women's psychological, physical, emotional, social, economic and political lives (Di Lellio, Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019). In the initial aftermath of the war in Kosovo, British journalist John Van Weenen (2000) travelled with the charity "Task Force Albania", which was among the leading foreign aid agencies to enter Kosovo with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 16th June 1999. He gathered first and second hand, verbal war testimony from Kosovar-Albanian people including various activists and health professionals. In his book *"Task force Albania: The Kosovo Connection"* Weenen (2000) explained that most survivors had been abandoned by their husbands "Psychologically raped a second time" and that "These women's needs have really never been addressed. Wherever you go in Kosovo you bump into victims, but these particular ones gain nothing from talking. You just rape their psyche a second time" (p. 123-131).

Weenen (2000, p. 123-124) poised that rape and sexual violence were and continued to be "Kosovo's dark secret" and there were "Very few [women] who managed to break the 'Metallic silence' that surrounds the issue of being '*Touched*'", from his interactions with the locals, Weenen explained that the dominant cultural discourse held that "Rape is not a word that Kosovar women ever use […] rape has yet to enter their ancient lexicon" (Di Lellio & Kraja, 2021). The extensive number of "'*Touched'* women" who were "Violated, tortured and left for dead" where described as having been "Heaped" by shame "On the houses of their husbands", who have been "Degraded, disgraced, and will carry this trauma like a bullet for the rest of their lives" and who "See the war every day in their minds, in their bodies, through their rape-babies" (Weenen, 2000, p. 123). Weenen (2000) was told by the activists and professionals that "Once you touch the woman, you touch the honour of the family" and as a result "Rape […] is worse than death" (p. 124). Rape, according to the interviewee's was essentially about "Power and control, humiliation and revenge" and "What better way to damage the enemy's morale than to hit at *his* family[22]? […] just to dehumanise, just to degrade" (p. 124). This was echoed in Weenen's conversation with a Kosovar-Albanian man, who contemplated on a hypothetical war rape scenario involving his own wife, "I could not accept my wife. She would be dirty, evil, the castle of the enemy,' and he went on to say "A lot of women have been very sensible. They have kept quiet about it" (2000, p. 127). Though Weenen's (2000) interactions[23] with Kosovar-Albanian people in the

22 Based on the accumulated information from interviews with Kosovar-Albanian activists and health professionals the general premise according to Weenen (2000) was that "The Serbs knew this. Belgrade had, for years, put out propaganda that the only thing Albanian women could do was produce like mice. So, daughters were gang-raped in front of their fathers, wives in front of their husbands, nieces in front of their uncles, mothers in front of their children, just to dehumanise, just to degrade" (p. 124).

23 At the time of Weenen's visit to Kosovo, he met with 29-year old Luljeta Selimi, a journalist and trainee gynaecologist, who described her experience of being arrested by Serb forces whilst helping a friend deliver her baby, and who was then subjected to nine hours of torture and disposed of on the side of the road. After being rescued, Selimi sought out to document survivors testimonies "I want[ed] the world to know what happened to my country, to these women" (Weenen, 2000, p. 131). Selimi assured Weener that he, a British man, "Will never find these women" (2000, p. 131).

aftermath of war are fascinating and give us a glimpse of the immediate challenges faced, yet again, survivor's voices are not heard. In part, Weenen (2000) was discouraged from locating survivors and assured that to ask survivors to speak about these experiences would be akin to raping them for a second time. Though, I believe these cautions were well intentioned, as a consequence, it may have added to survivors "Metallic silencing" as well as to the paucity in early research and documentation of these atrocities (Weenen, 2000, p. 123). Thus, perpetuating our lack of understanding of Kosovar-Albanian women survivor's experiences.

In addition to experiencing war crimes, Godec (2010) highlighted the danger and scope for additional post-war sexual abuses; the phenomenon of post-war forced prostitution, trafficking and systemic sexual violence in Kosovo subsequent to the NATO intervention[24]. According to reports generated by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in the subsequent months of their arrival, the establishment of 18 brothels in the surrounding premise of the military bases were identified (Godec, 2010). The association was clear, with the increase in military presence came increased impunity for gender-based violence, in this way, the demand for sexual exploitation was perpetuated by international peacekeepers (Olsson et al., 2020; Anderson et al., 1998). The impact of the war, previous experiences of sexual violence (in conflict), the socio-economic collapse and lack of cultural support for women contributed to Kosovar-Albanian women's vulnerability (Godec, 2010).

These problems required multidisciplinary involvement of all government agencies, that are geared towards affirming free health care services, biopsychosocial treatment, economic support, access to legal services and opportunity to get justice (Elshani, 2020; Halili & Xhemajli, 2020). Contrary to international laws that centre on rehabilitation as a form of reparation compounded by redress, satisfaction, indemnity and ensured continued peace and security, domestic legislations in Kosovo have been restricted to compensation and rehabilitation alone (Elshani, 2020). For Kosovar-Albanian survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, for a long time this meant disqualification from benefiting from the abovementioned services (Elshani, 2020). Following Kosovo's independence in 2008, the first legal act to be legislated, which sought to provide benefits for survivors that emerged from the Kosovo war was no. 04/L-054 on the Status and Rights of the Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of the

24 Following the UN's unsuccessful diplomatic initiative to terminate the mass murder and genocide of the Kosovar-Albanian population by Serb military and paramilitary forces in Kosovo, NATO commenced with a rigorous seventy-eight-day bombing campaign against Serbia (Lambeth, 2001). When the war ended, 40,000 UN Kosovo Force (KFOR) troops together with hundreds of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) personnel were deployed to Kosovo, alongside 250 international non-government organisations (Godec, 2010). This was also the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whereby United Nations launched an investigation into human abuses by their own peacekeeping personal in the interim of complaints concerning rape and engagement of local women in sexual commerce (Peterman, Palermo & Bredenkamp, 2011). These prolonged concerns have been compounded by the paucity in UNMIKs investigative diligence, thus pushing the narrative forward that masculine militarism is permitted to violate women in a recipient nation without legal ramifications (Nordås & Rustad, 2013). Further extending the jurisdictional gap, allowing alleged perpetrators to evade prosecution.

Kosova Liberation Army, Civilian Victims of War and their Families (Elshani, 2020). After much deliberation, on April 23, 2014, amendments were made to this law to include survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.[25] Further to this, to reduce stigma and further harm, Gusia (2014) explained that under this law survivors were given a pseudo-status: *war invalids*. While, such reparative strategies have the potential to further exacerbate survivors silencing, a report amended for Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, stipulated that some survivors preferred to be categorised under *invalids*, as this offered them anonymity and protection from the prevailing social stigma, findings that were echoed in the current research (Gusia, 2014).

A deeply rooted patriarchal presence in Kosovo, created a relatively unsafe, unsupportive and extremely stigmatised social landscape, negatively impacting women's lives. Even with the support offered by organisations such as The Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT), reports show that 80% of survivors who frequent the organisation resort to secrecy and have not shared their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence with their husbands for fear of the stigma, marginalisation, abandonment and even some form of abuse (Elshani, 2020). While the ICTY has commanded responsibility to prevent and contend impunity, Kosovar-Albanian survivors, have yet to see the international community oblige the Serbian government to extradite and bring to justice individuals who violated human rights and perpetrated crimes of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo (Halili & Xhemajli, 2020).

Over the years, a noticeable paucity of information pertaining to women survivors lived experiences prevailed merely surfacing sporadically in various writings, artwork, and film. As such, creative measures have been adopted in an effort to expand awareness and reduce the stigma associated with survivors experiences (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). With Films such as Three Windows and a Hanging (*Tri Dritare dhe Një Varje*) directed by Isa Qosja (2014), Blackbirds (*Fëllanzat*) by Gazmend Bërlajolli (2017), and HIVE (*Zgjoi)* nominated for an Oscar and directed by Blerta Basholli (2021), renewed attention was given to stigmatisation and gender issue in Kosovo, which have gradually evolved into politicised international debates (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). Women's voices were also revived through various art projects. Most notably, is the symbolic display, on June 12, 2015 (marking NATO's intervention and Kosovo's Liberation Day), the Thinking of You art installation. This installation was exhibited by hanging circa 5,000 dresses and skirts donated from women all over Kosovo from washing lines in Prishtina's (Capital city of Kosovo) male dominated

25 In accordance with law no. 04/L-054 survivors were authorised to the following benefits: (1) Pension, (2) Health services abroad for treatment of deteriorated health conditions that are a consequence of the war and for which there is no treatment in Kosovo, (3) Priority in employment in the public and private sector, (4) Release of property tax for victims who are in difficult economic conditions, (5) Residential care in collective social housing for persons in difficult economic conditions, and (6) Urgent medical assistance (Di Lellio, 2016; Elshani, 2020; Halili & Xhemajli, 2020). This law is restricted to sexual crimes committed between 27 February 1998 to 20 June 1999, any experience of sexual violence that may have occurred on the periphery of these days are considered to be beyond the bounds of this law (Elshani, 2020), thus leading many survivors of sexual violence to not seek benefits.

football stadium[26] (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). Art[27] was considered "A powerful form of storytelling with the potential to counter stigmatization by invoking empathy through identification" (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020, p. 467).

The waving dresses were used as proxy for waving flags, emblematic of the development of gender hierarchies in post-war and post-independence Kosovo (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). The mnemonic power of art, was utilised to bring to light Kosovo's long-held secret, that is conflict-related sexual violence (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). 17 years post-war Kosovo, the installation revived what had become an immutable national conversation (Di Lellio, Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019), symbolically "Airing out the laundry" of the unfathomable atrocities that permeated Kosovo (Di Lellio,

26 The installation was assembled by the British-Kosovar contemporary artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa together with the producer of the installation an American professor and academic Anna Di Lellio (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020).

27 For many century's oral tradition was regarded as a pivotal instrument through which Kosovar-Albanian people could ensure the continuity and preservation of their history and identity (Hewer & Vitija, 2013). Epic poetry, in particular has had an extensive impact on history, national identity and psychological developments (Di Lellio & Elsie, 2009). It is thought that oral traditions have been passed on from generation to generation for hundreds of years and date back to the ancient Illyrians (Gashi, 2007). Considering that there was an ongoing attempt to assimilate Kosovar-Albanians into the culture and tradition of those in power at different times throughout history (including the Ottoman Empire and later the Serbian oppression) meant that Kosovar-Albanians relied on their oral traditions to preserve their culture, heritage, traditions and identity. Despite the violent efforts to eradicate Kosovar-Albanian folk culture and oral traditions, epic poetry survived and thrived under the Serbian political oppression, as it inspired and contributed to a prolific body of folk songs that depicted heroic figures, historical events, legendary tales and defiance in the political and historical backdrop (Di Lellio & Elsie, 2009). With Kosovo's autonomy and sovereignty came new opportunities and multiple ways of documenting history, thus in some ways gradually retiring oral tradition from its original role. The cultural pressures to uphold the rapid evolution of a population predominated by a younger demographic created a cultural shift, whereby Kosovo's music industry embraced more modern music genres. Thus, Kosovo's independence, Western cultural influence, modernisation and freedom of expression has inspired a wealth of artistic velocity. In the same way as epic poetry, art is now playing a significant role in documenting, preserving, processing and healing social memories, especially those pertaining to war trauma. It may thus be argued that what becomes an important social tool is temporally and spatially relative. My own unpublished masters dissertation investigating art and social memory in Kosovo together with recent events clearly demonstrate that art is harmoniously integrated into the Kosovar-Albanian culture as a mnemonic mechanism utilised for the conveyance and preservation of social representation of history and identity (Andelković, Dimitrijević & Sretenović, 2006). An additional aspect of this argument is that art bears therapeutic properties and has the potential to heal individual as well as collective war related traumas. Kosovo's harrowing fate and both the heart-churning horrors and resilience of the Kosovar-Albanian people have been a source of inspiration for many established Kosovar-Albanian artists in Kosovo. This includes the work of: Agron Mulliqi, who has expressed an interest in alternative art inspired by archaeological artefacts discovered in Prishtina, which date back to ancient Illyrian culture and people. His work focuses on the connection between modern day Albanians and ancient Illyrians, Albanian history and identity (See https://www.facebook.com/people/Agron-Mulliqi/100036309856203/); Zeni Ballazhi, has presented various art constellations depicting peace and reconciliation (Mother Teresa's poem recited at her acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize) written on sheep skin, emblematic of peace and the goodness of humanity. Other installations drew inspiration from the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo, mass movement and the refugee experience. Zeni is also the production designer for films such as "Three windows and a. hanging", which depicts the life of a rape survivor in the aftermath of the Kosovo war (See https://en-gb.facebook.com/zeni.ballazhi); Naim Spahiu, an established artist and coordinator in Kosovo's national gallery, the focus of his artwork has been the socio-political conflict and its impact on his hometown North Mitrovica, which is on the border with Serbia and where inter-ethnic tension still persists to this day. His "Time Swimmers" collection also depicts the impact of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo (See https://arts-select.com/naim-spahiu/); Miradije Ramiqi-Mustafa, an established artist and poet, and a professor at the faculty of arts at the University of Prishtina. War and trauma are the premise of her art and poetry (See https://atunispoetry.com/2013/03/02/miradije-ramiqi/); Saranda Bogujevci, one of three children to survive the Bogujevci family massacre in Podujeca in March of 1999. Through the art exhibition "Bogujevci / / Visual History" she was able to tell her story, her grief, and to begin her journey to healing. In a bold and courageous effort to tell the truth and bring war crimes centre stage to both domestic and international political discourses, as well as to demand justice for the family members that were killed in the massacre, Saranda, took her exhibition to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia (See https://cargocollective.com/jehona/BOGUJEVCI-Visual-History). At present, Saranda Bogujevci is a member of the Assembly of Kosovo and is actively engaged in political activities; Isa Alimusaj's art was centred on the Dardan (An ancient Illyrian tribe that lived in the Kosovo region) profiles, using a stone technique he illustrates the strength and tenacity of the Kosovar-Albanian people throughout the centuries (See https://imagomundicollection.org/artworks/isa-alimusaj-cycle-dardanian-profiles-1/); Mehmet Beluli is another established artist in Kosovo, with one of his most notable art installations being the reconstruction of his house, that had been completely burned and destroyed by Serb forces during the war in Kosovo (See https://m.facebook.com/pg/mehmetbehluli/photos/).

Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019, p. 1547). The installation drew the unwavering support of Kosovo's first female president, Atifete Jahjaga, who marked its commencement by donating the first piece, a skirt (Di Lellio, Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019). Jahjaga's public display of support for survivors had a ripple effect on the media across the country infringing on both the asymmetrical balance of power and public denial that "Made survivors both invisible and visible, both unrecognized and objects of ridicule and condemnation" (Di Lellio, Rushiti & Tahiraj, 2019, p. 1550). This art installation in addition to presenting a new way of perceiving historical memories, worked to empower survivors by uniting them via this collaborative endeavour (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2020). Given that, art and literature play a formative role in social and political discourses, which sculpt the conceptualisation of rape and violence within a culture and consign to it both ideological and narrative functions, creative work, according to Catty (2011) recurrently, inscribes male power and female subordination. Thus, in its reviewal, rape is often utilised symbolically or as a metaphor in dominant narratives and considered a *natural* and *inevitable* reality, which subsequently serves to supplant women's voices and marginalise their traumatic experiences. Catty (2011) advised that, to reveal the modes through which rape is normalised or mystified, we must modify the portrayal of rape in the social and political discourse that is made available to us by our local cultures. Indeed, in the case of Kosovo, a first step may be ethically inclined psychological research, which can shed light on survivors subjective experiences and work towards expanding the current rigidity of the dominant cultural discourse surrounding conflict-related sexual violence.

1.6 Conclusion

What becomes apparent through this literature review is that each conflict is enveloped in its own idiosyncratic complexities. Indeed, the implications and impacts of conflict-related sexual violence are temporally, spatially and culturally determined. Any understanding of the effects and consequences of conflict-related sexual violence is contingent on fundamental interactions with survivors, perpetrators, the conditions of the conflict, as well as the socio-cultural landscape in which the acts of sexual violence occurred. Although, the studies above raised important issues most were funded by Western organisations, which led me to further deliberate on the ripple effect of funding on research outcomes. Given that research funding takes the form of projects, needs or programs and is often done in the form of money, time or effort, it thus influences and stimulates both the volume and the productivity of the research in a particular field and can lead to *funding bias* (Sattari, Bae, Berkes & Weinberg, 2022). This refers to the proclivity of a scientific study to support the interest of the study's financial funder, in a process, whereby the results of scientific research undergo distortion and modification to favour a particular outcome that is desirable to the funder (Sattari, Bae, Berkes & Weinberg, 2022). For instance, as a result of pressure from the funder/s to contribute towards attainment of criminal accountability, political and logistic reform, researchers investigating conflict-related sexual violence, to ensure the continuation of funds, may have reduced their scope of investigation to the understanding of the political

context and prevalence of sexual violence, and in doing so set aside knowledge pertaining to women's subjective experience. Thus, reducing women's experiences to politics and further contributing towards women's subjugation and silencing. Much of the research available is centred on quantitative and mixed-methods analysis, though this was useful in giving us some idea about the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence, it is limited in its ability to extract more meaningful rich data relative to narrators subjective experiences. Qualitative interviews with survivors, may have been more suited for this sensitive topic (Riessman, 2008).

1.7 Rational

Rape and sexual violence have been side-lined as private problems pertaining solely to women, hence hidden and ridden with shame and considered too contemptible to address (Skjelsbæk, 2012). This cultural rhetoric has sustained and perpetuated the ongoing silencing of women's stories and hampered their narratives from contributing towards psychological research and policy change (Skjelsbæk, 2012). In the same way, prosecutions by international organisations have been sporadic[28] and conflict-related sexual violence still proceeds to be the least condemned war crime in history (Sverdolv, 2017). Twenty-three years post war Kosovo, and we have yet to hear from the women themselves through ethically compliant psychological research. I hope the present investigation will address this lacuna and contribute nuance knowledge to theory and practice in the realm of counselling psychology.

1.8 Research Question and Aims

The objective of this research investigation is to elucidate the way survivors construct and thus bring order to personal narratives of traumatic war or post-war experiences of sexual violence. By giving survivors a voice, I hope to access their understanding of the repercussions of these on their daily lives and interactions with others. The study has a particular interest in whether there had been a shift in survivors' individual and national identities following the experience of sexual violence and how this was described and understood by them in their construction of narratives. Finally, there is a focus on intra-psychic and inter-personal relations for survivors before and after the sexual violence. This study therefore endeavours to investigate and contextualise survivors' understanding of experiences within a cultural and political milieu.

28 As of September 2016, the ICTY, has indicted 161 individuals, 78 of them, in addition to being accused for various war crimes also had sexual violence as additional charge in their indictment (UNIRMCT, n.d.). In accordance with Aricle 7(1) of the ICTY statute, 32 of these individuals were convicted for their accountability for crimes of sexual violence and under Article 7(3) of the Statute four individuals were further considered to be culpable for their failure to impede the perpetrators and thus either aiding or abetting crimes against humanity (UNIRMCT, n.d.). Further to this, an additional 65 to 70 individuals were prosecuted under the ICTR, 35 of which were extended charges pertaining to sexual violence by the end of the mandate in 2010 (UNIRMCT, n.d.; de Brouwer, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2. Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the research process. Firstly, a discussion of the research strategy and selected methodology. Then the research design and methods will be delineated, which include the process of recruitment, data collection, transcribing and translating and data analysis. Further on ethical considerations will be addressed where the limitations of this study will be attended to. Finally, I will specify methodological and personal reflexivity and the challenges faced and resolved.

2.1 Rational for Qualitative Research

Central to the qualitative research process is the prioritisation of the construction of meaning, acquiring an understanding of this meaning through the participants subjective accounts whilst also considering the socio-political context in which meaning is assembled (Willig, 2013). With this in mind, a qualitative methodology was considered to be most appropriate for the aims of this investigation. Qualitative methodologies bear naturalistic and interpretative qualities and thus foreground the prioritisation of the individual's subjective and inter-subjective experience, while also committing to an egalitarian, non-hierarchical alliance and an appreciation of the individual as a unique being (Douglas, Woolfe, Strawbridge, Kasket & Galbraith, 2016). These values align with humanistic principles on which the discipline of Counselling Psychology is established. As a liminal discipline, Counselling Psychology is positioned between traditional orthodox psychologies and other realms such as psychotherapy, which offers a fertile ground for multiplicity of knowledge as well as practice (Davy, 2010). The practice of research is recognised as a formation of social action, which strives, in the final analysis, much the same as therapeutic work, to reduce human suffering (McLeod, 2003). This task is attended to through the expansion of compassionate understanding and unimpeded systems of interdisciplinary investigation (McLeod, 2003). Qualitative methodologies are more philosophically congruent with the Counselling Psychology ethos (Cooper, 2011) and thus aligned with my own personal humanistic philosophy. This understanding guided my decision to employ a qualitative approach to this research investigation.

The openness to possibility gives Counselling Psychology a powerful edge, the more we restrict this openness the more we risk diverging towards grandiosity, narcissism and omnipotence (Davy, 2010). In order to investigate ethically, it was a necessary task to acknowledge the multiple and diverse interpretations of the same data (Willig, 2012). In addition to narrative methodologies, I considered Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it is concerned with how a particular phenomenon is experienced by a particular person at a particular time and place and aims to seize an experience and elucidate its meanings (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009). Although, both IPA and narrative methodologies intersect in that they have their roots in phenomenology and are both

concerned with narratives (Langdridge, 2007) the view in narrative approaches that language constructs rather than describes reality seemed more fitting for this investigation.

2.2 Part One: Epistemological Framework

A critical deliberation of ontology, which pertains to the nature of reality and what is real in the world; for example, what happened to people physically and psychologically, followed by a consideration of epistemology, which deals with our knowledge of reality and how knowledge is formed and understood; for instance, the reports about what happened and how those reports are interpreted (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), was essential, as it determined my engagement in the research process and understanding of the knowledge yielded (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Historically, narrative methodologies have emerged from a social constructionist framework and thus oscillate more towards a relativist perspective, in that it understands language to be a form of "Social action that constructs versions of reality" (Willig, 2012, p. 11). Principal to this approach is the notion that external reality does not influence how we communicate about it, on the contrary, reality is constructed through discourse, hence nothing can survive outside of the text (Burr, 2003). These perspectives, each contend with the precarious reduction of ontology to epistemology, for instance reduces reality to human knowledge (Fletcher, 2017). To circumvent around the limitations of both social constructionist and relativist approaches, I turned to critical realism, a philosophical paradigm, which aims to resolve this tension by employing aspects of both realism and relativism to generate an extensive reporting of ontology and epistemology. Indeed, critical realism sees the world as laden with theory but not necessarily governed by it, and subsequently holds that human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

2.2.1 Ontology

As such, a critical realist ontological paradigm was placed at the core of this study, and its multiple ways of perceiving reality permitted me to leverage its key feature *retroduction*, to delineate on deeper and more complex systems of the phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence. To engage in this topic more deeply, I borrowed from Roy Bhaskar's view of the social world, which holds that actors shape their social worlds and are subsequently restricted by social mechanisms rooted in social life (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This ontological conceptualisation comprises of three layers of reality, notably the *empirical domain*, the *actual domain* and the *real domain* (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). The first layer of reality is demonstrated in our sensorial experiences, much of this, is examples of the empirical engagement with our reality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). In the case of the present study, this pertains to women's immediate experience of being sexually violated. The *actual level* of reality relates to the things that happen in the world outside the confines of our sensory experience and irrespective of our engagement with it (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). As previous research has demonstrated, sexual violence is under no circumstances uncomplicated to characterise

and assess in reality. This is on account, that sexual violence is generally executed within the context of war or conflict zones, and transpires in conjunction with other war crimes and is volitional, premeditated and carried out systematically, in a manner that generates maximum destruction and leaves very little forensic evidence (Fletcher, 2017; Patel & Pilgrim, 2018). This, in combination with the dominant culture narrative within the local culture and the collective silencing of women's experiences, contributes further to the challenges of gaining access to this knowledge and to bring this to light. On this account, survivors were considered to be the essential witnesses to their own traumatic experiences and themselves the source of information (Fletcher, 2017; Patel & Pilgrim, 2018).

Thus, central to the present study is the view that reality does not necessarily have to be observable or experienced for it to acquire ontological significance (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). In much the same way, the *actual level* of reality in the critical realist perspective, maintains that the researcher's inability to measure an event does not necessarily mean that it doesn't not exist or that we are unable to acquire knowledge of its existence. In this way, this ontological position acknowledged the existence of a subjective reality, but rigorously scrutinises the researcher's examination and presentation of this reality (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Willig, 2013). This was well aligned with the narrative aspiration of this research, making provision for the reciprocation between myself as researcher and the participants (Emerson & Frosh, 2004), and interrogating my researcher role at all levels to foreground its impact on the movement and substance of the data and the significance it brought to the interpretation (Frost, 2009; Willig, 2012).

Bhaskar (1978) offers an additional layer of reality, he refers to as the *real level*, the systems of which operate below the surface of the empirical and actual levels (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This pertains to entities or structures which are usually only perceived through their effects via generative mechanisms that give rise to events and phenomena. Bhaskar (1978), further extends the *real level* to the psychological and social aspects of being[29]. In the case of this study, this pertains to deep social and political structures that perpetuate tensions and conflicts between social and ethnic groups (Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians). This is further extended to increased tension and instability within the in-group (The *othering* of Kosovar-Albanian survivors). For instance, the dominant cultural rhetoric that sees survivors as having been damaged and less-worthy following sexual violence, may tell us something

29 For instance, critical realism holds that reality is layered, if our objective is to look at one level of reality and determine the systems from which it operates, indeed, an additional facet of reality is situated underneath it, which engenders its essential laws and operations. For example, in the present study, women's experience of self as contaminated and dehumanised in the aftermath of sexual violence, was found to be heavily rooted in the dominant culture narratives regarding gender-power structures and women's position within this social hierarchy. These cultural narratives were then internalised by women and subsequently determined their intra-psychic as well as inter-personal relationships. While, an in-depth analysis of reality is encouraged in critical realism, it does caution the researcher to avoid efforts to reduce one layer of reality to its deeper layers (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This is particularly important for the present study, because as we have seen in previous rape and armed conflict literature, old-age inter-ethnic conflicts, nationalistic objectives and patriarchal systems have the potential to overshadow women's subjective experiences and reduce them to politics.

about the women's underlying psychic structures and inter-personal relationships. The mechanisms that comprise this domain of reality are thought to operate in a synergistic manner and generate the observable impact on the empirical and actual layers of experience (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). By keeping account of this impact, we are able to draw hypothesis about the existence and nature of these underlying mechanisms (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

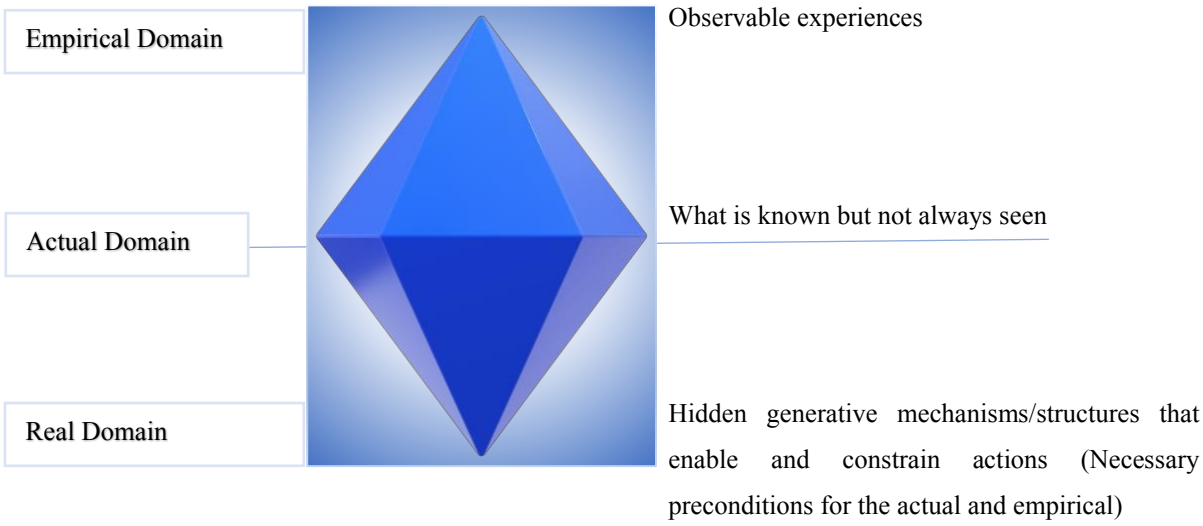

Figure 2: A diagrammatical (ice-burg) presentation of the levels of reality as presented in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978).

2.2.2 Epistemology

The aims of the current study were centralised on going "Beyond the study of localised deployment of discursive resources" to make "Connections between the discourses that are used within a particular local and the wider sociocultural context (Willig, 2012, p. 12). I was interested in exploring the ways in which survivors of conflict-related sexual violence constructed and thus brought order to their experiences whilst also looking into conflict-related sexual violence more generally in the wider social context. This psychological investigation went further to explore the connections between discourses used in a wider socio-cultural context and within the more localised context. For example, Serbia's political administration used sexual-violence as a weapon of war in Kosovo. The findings in the present study showed that the act of sexual-violence as it was implemented in the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo served to terrorise and destroy the individual, the family unit, and at large the Kosovar-Albanian race. In addition to this, the act of sexual-violence was utilised to dehumanise the Kosovar-Albanian female and thereby emasculate the Kosovar-Albanian man or from the Serb perspective, the *enemy*. The dominant discourses regarding conflict-related sexual violence within the more localised socio-cultural

context in Kosovo were concerned with the contamination of the integrity of the Kosovar-Albanian family. By understanding what sexual-violence was and identifying dominant discourses which encompass it, I then looked to explore the ways in which such discourses positioned survivors (held low value positions and felt morally inferior, humiliated, shamed) and I then identified the repercussion of this (stigmatised, pathologized, labelled, marginalised and ostracised).

By contextualising talk in social, cultural and political material structures, I made reference to something outside of the text and the various structures, which are seen to exist outside of the text and as such "Invoked a reality that pre-existed and indeed shaped the ways in which individuals constructed meaning within their context" (Willig, 2012, p. 12). In this way, this epistemological framework attended to both micro (subjective and inter-personal) and macro (social, cultural, political) aspects of the present research (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2013). This epistemic paradigm coincided with a critical realist perspective, which recognised the constructive power of language that lies at the heart of narrative methodologies (Willig, 2012). The critical realist paradigm considers the psychological and social conditions, which influence the accessibility of particular narratives that can be used to create meaning and order in individual versions of reality (Ponterotto, 2005). As such, these human rights violations are thought to have emerged from deeply rooted and complex historical, political, social and cultural powers, which are commonly saturated in oppressive political interventions (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), ethnic-cleansing missions and genocide, as was demonstrated by Serb forces in Kosovo against Kosovar-Albanians.

According to Bhaskar (1978), intransitive and transitive worlds make up the critical realist epistemological framework. Intransitive refers to the world that objectively exists whilst transitive pertains to people's construction of that reality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). With this in mind, the *real* in the present study was underpinned by the act of sexual violence as a horrific crime and a human rights violation, intransitive sexual violence can thus exist even if it is not described at the empirical or actual levels of reality. Whilst also acknowledging the existence of an internal world, and recognising that *how* sexual violence was experienced transitively within the intra-psychic and inter-subjective reality by individuals was contextualised by the sociocultural and political context in which they were situated[30] (Maxwell, 2012). Central to critical realism is also the human agency to mould outcomes in social life. Its key feature; analytical depth makes this philosophical paradigm desirably to action research, as it provides researchers with the conditions to yield a deep and meaningful comprehension of the social world and the essence of the issues which they endeavour to tackle

30 Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) caution us that, in our transitive descriptions of sexual violence to make reference to our social, political and cultural values and milieu is prerequisite to avoid relativism, and the existence of various ways of describing nauseating violence helps us to evade positivism's universalism.

(Maxwell, 2012). For instance, the current research, by shedding light on Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence, which have been previously neglected and distorted, may develop and progress theories, which reveal more perceptive view of reality, eventually, narrowing the chasm between the intransitive and transitive domains.

2.3 Part Two: Methodology

2.3.1 Narrative Methodology

Proceeding now to the methodological approach of this investigation and the rationale for this selection. I gravitated towards narrative inquiry on account of its fundamental features, including; most pressing matter being the participant's subjectivity, construction of meaning, capacity to value social and political facets, close attention to the social construction of subjectivities and its inherent openness to reflexivity, all of which designated narrative analysis as a distinct and proficient methodology for this investigation (Riessman, 1993). This form of analysis was well suited to my ontological and epistemic position as it is primarily concerned with stories, especially those communicated in interviews and daily life. The idea being that narratives are fundamental to personal sense-making and the process of constructing narratives is associated with social discourses that transpire in an interactional or intersubjective context (Manning & Cullum-Sawn, 1994). Similar to critical realists, narrative analysts generally dismiss the concept of a single truth, instead they are concerned with how people narrate their own versions of reality (Bruner, 1991; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016). I felt that this intimate and holistic approach allowed for the in-depth exploration of participants' experience of sexual violence in political-conflict and lent itself well to the sensitive nature of this topic (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The purpose and objective of this investigation was to comprehend how life is negotiated in the aftermath of war and sexual violence by reporting the immanent features of social objects (concepts and roles; individual and organisational; descriptions and norms) that may influence survivors intra-psychic, inter-subjective and social interactions (Willig, 2013). As such this psychological research focused chiefly on experience, construction, and descriptions of survivor's narratives. This study cohered with an idiographic research emphasis[31], which aimed to understand each participant as a distinctive, complex entity and took into account the motive of the individual who produced knowledge (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). This phenomenological feature of narrative inquiry is committed to comprehending social phenomena from the actor's idiosyncratic position and was

[31] Fundamental to narrative analysis is a pronounced interpretative aim and by bringing into service my own psychological knowledge and prior international research experience in Kosovo may have allowed for non-observable systems inclusive of cultural nuances (historical implications of political conflict in Kosovo, identity work, and implication of gender), intra-psychic and inter-subjective experiences and the meaning that is generated within the scope of language and dialect that is available within this context to be investigated and culminated in a co-constructed observation, which united both participants and researcher (Langdrige, 2007).

implemented in this research to study how the world was experienced by survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo (Husserl, 1962; Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992). I then conveyed this insight to recommendations for counselling psychology theory and clinical practice.

2.3.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative[32] is seen as a portmaneteau term in present-day Western social sciences, used descriptively the term works to connote a specific acute understanding (Andrews et al., 2008). Narrative research in psychology offers a preliminary definition which recognises narrative as an extensive account of lived experiences within a context developed over time (Riessman, 2008). The term holds heterogenous meanings and its applications depends on the discipline and according to Riessman (2008), an adherent of narrative methods, these are much the same as 'Story'. As such, narrators generate stories by linking events in progression and in doing so provide "Accounts of events, as well as the social and cultural practices for the circulation of meanings […] [highlighting] a human perspective and interpretation on those events" (Hiles, Cermák & Chrz, 2009, p. 2). Frank (2013, p. 33) recognises "Stories as artful representations of lives" in that they are dialogical and exist in human discourse. In this way, storytelling is a performative function, as stories are told with an audience in mind whilst "[anticipating] future responses, including the retelling of the story, with variations" (Frank, 2013, p. 33). Fundamental to narrative is the concept of temporal fluidity, which holds that meaning is inherently fluctuating and perpetually constructed and reconstructed, thus narrative can be seen as representational sequence of events that go beyond linearity (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008). Narrative analysis[33] came to prominence in the transition from quantitative positivist psychology in the direction of a psychology that recognises and considers the significance of language, cultural context, lived subjective experience and the organising principles of human action (Riessman, 1993). Narrative theory[34] in psychology, prioritises the human existence as it is lived, endured and interpreted by human beings (Crossley, 2000).

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32 Narrative form may have developed in maturation from the examination of Aristotelian tragedy and philosophic treatise pertaining to poetic art and journeyed through to contemporary literary analysis (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008).

33 Narrative analysis assumed that as human beings we are born into a world of narratives and it is through our construction and interchange of stories in our daily social affiliation that we negotiate the meaning of our lives (Sarbin, 1986). According to various narrative theories these meanings are mediated by and communicated through our rootedness, commencing from our birth, in social and cultural narratives (Willig, 2013) and remain fluid and contextual as opposed to solid and permeating (Reissman, 1993). The way in which we experience ourselves, others and the world overall is inextricably bound by our application and comprehension of the rhetorical and moral assets that are obtainable to us within our culture (Sarbin, 1986). Meaning is therefore engendered and negotiated within the bounds of a social context.

34 In addition to offering us a system through which we can examine the world, narratives also innately construct our world and because of this they acquire ontological prominence (Sarbin, 1986). Narratives can therefore help us to impose structure on the course of lived experience and offer us the opportunity to define ourselves (Sarbin, 1986; Murray, 2003). This position looks at the notion of self and identity as shaped by narratives (Bruner, 1991; Murray, 2003), rather than existing in a vacuum, identity is thought to be multidimensional and approached through a psychosocial, inter-subjective, dialogic and performative lens (Bruner, 1991; McAdams, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this way, an interaction is evoked between the individual and social narrative, which goes beyond informing us about the individual narrator to tell us about a homogeneous group and their histories (Ricoeur, 1980; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Narrative inquiry interrogates the ways in which people appropriate certain voices in their individual narratives that are undoubtably linked to their political interests within a particular context (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). It is especially in times of discord and incongruity in experience of self or society that people search for the tools to organise and navigate their lives (Riessman, 1993; Willig, 2013). Further from this, Bakhtin (1984) explains that people manoeuvre within a polyphonic environment in which

Primacy to selecting a narrative methodology was that it enabled survivors to express their subjective accounts according to their own idiosyncratic rules. Narrative inquiry allowed the flow of lived experience to progress and unfold without interruption (Murray, 2003) and their narratives to be analysed holistically. Hunter (2010) and others highlight the healing qualities that are foregrounded in narrative psychology in both therapeutic modalities such as Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) and narrative interviewing in narrative research, which focus on women's courage, strength and resilience and encourages survivors to find a voice and re-author their lives narrative from one of chaos to stories that are more fulfilling and liberating (Crossley, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

2.3.3 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis makes up a broad spectrum of methods, though they are united by the idea that the pertinent reality in research is the one that is experienced by the storytellers (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). The aim here is to understand the ways in which the narrator organises and thus brings order to their experiences, and through constructing narratives about their lives generate links between events and make sense of them (Willig, 2013). In addition to being guided by the aims of the research, narrative analysts principally focus on investigating "How stories are structured and the ways in which they work, […] who produces them and by what means" as well as to consider "The mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted" (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 2). Stories are defined as temporally structured with a beginning, middle and end and bound together by identifiable compositions of events described as plots (Sarbin, 1986) and principal to plot structure are complex human dilemmas and challenges for which we attempt to find solutions (Crossely, 2000). These plots can then be categorised into various genres (horror, tragedy, war) and others (Hiles & Čermák, 2009) and share six principle properties: context, actors, actuation of events, endeavours, repercussions and responses (McAdams, 1993). These models are considered to be a useful starting point in analysis as they enable the reduction of text to identifiable narratives (Frost, 2009). Other methods of analysis include, thematic analysis; narrative content; structural analysis;

various narratives disseminate and compete for power and influence. For example, 17 February 2008 marks two diverging cultural and political experiences for Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia. For the Kosovar-Albanians this symbolises Kosovo's independence, triumph and sovereignty and the end of a calamitous war, however for the vast majority of Serbs this marks the end of their national aspirations for Kosovo (Hewer & Vitija, 2011). These contrastive historical explications epitomize the stories that are reconstructed via social exchange, inclusive of indoctrination, mythology and commemorative customs (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007) and go on to sculpt the collective memory of a homogenous group and their construction and formation of identity within a sociocultural and political context (Hammack, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012). In the interaction between narrator and social context moral substructures are developed, which govern the narrators role within their socio-political context. This fit well with the aims of the present study which sought to understand how the act of sexual violence in conflict is positioned to a point on the continuum of what is considered morally upstanding and what is not in Kosovo (Crossley, 2000). This offered an opportunity to comprehend survivors positioned in relation to the in-group or out-group as well as to identify the perpetrators within the dominant cultural narrative. Sarbin (1986) explains that it is through storytelling that we become ethical beings, justify our actions and take responsibility for our lives.

narrative form, and dialogic analysis; the dynamical interaction through which narratives are generated (Riessman, 2008; 2005).

As such the content, form and context of narratives are considered, while preserving as much as possible the text as whole (Frost, 2009). These models of analysis variously attend to spoken communication and the transcripts and the micro (categorical/particular events) and macro (holistic/the entire interview) structuring of both (Frost, 2009; Hiles & Čermák, 2009). Equal importance is placed on both the ways in which stories are told and their content, and a flexible leeway is offered for stories and their endings to shift with time, context and audience (Frost, 2009). Centring on the context in which a story is generated is principle to various narrative methods, chiefly to Langdridge's (2007) Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), which acknowledges the variety in story-telling performance and function across settings (Hiles & Čermák, 2007; 2009).

2.3.4 Rational for Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA)

The existing variability in how social and psychological phenomenon can be investigated in narrative analysis may be attributed to the theoretical bricolage that exists in narrative research (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008). Before settling on a particular method of analysis, I explored various adherents of narrative analysis[35]. I decided on Darren Langdridge's variant of CNA, as it attended to the complexity of meaning that participants made of their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence. CNA was developed in maturation from Paul Ricouer's interpretive phenomenological work, however, Langdridge (2007) acknowledges that his method includes aspects of other methods. CNA is concerned with human nature and the way in which human lives come to be understood in their entirety and is especially suited to research pertaining to issues of power and politics (Langdrige, 2007). The principal distinguishing feature that sets CNA apart from other methods of analysis is that it is focused on interrogating the text using aspects of social theory, which integrated well with the focus of the present research on both the micro (intra-psychic/inter-personal) and macro (social/cultural/political) levels of analysis (Langdridge, 2007).

CNA provided a well-structured model, which allowed me to uphold the integrity of narratives, and attend to the sensitivity of the text with the upmost diligence. Similar to other interpretive methods of phenomenology CNA is idiographic, in addition to being suited for individual casework, it is also possible to identify patterns of narrative across participants, this was well suited to the aims of this study

35 I was drawn to the work of Polkinghrone (1988) (self and identity); Bakhtin's (1984) (political identity); MacAdams (1993) (six principles of narrative); Sarbin's (1986) (chronological flow); and White and Epston (1990) and Hunter's (2010) (narrative healing). I then explored various paradigms of narrative analysis within the realm of psychology, more specifically Reisman's (2008) thematic, structural, dialogic analysis, Hiles & Čermák's (2007;2009) narrative oriented inquiry (NOI), Frank's (2013) more recent development of dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) and finally Langdridge's (2007) critical narrative analysis (CNA). As such, my decision on which method to use was guided by the aims and objectives of the investigation.

(Langdridge, 2007). The parallels that existed between myself and the participants (identity, cultural heritage and experiences of political conflict) unavoidably exerted influence on the data analysis. As such, I was drawn to (Stage 1) of CNA which focused on researchers reflexivity and (Stage 3), which focused on participants engagement in the development of identity in their stories. CNA is recognised for its complex nature and as such abbreviations and additions are considered valid and suitable (Langdridge, 2007). I included aspects of structural, dialogic and performative (See Stage 4 & 5) analysis to this research, these features offered a more holistic viewing of the text, thus captured and illuminated contextual nuances that may have otherwise been lost in the transcription and translation process. Narrative inquiry may be seen as a multifaceted and inclusive approach to research with the "Potential to be the great discovery for psychology, offering a portal to human experience and awareness" (Hiles, Čermák & Chrz, 2017, p. 26).

2.4 Part Three: Research Design and Methods of Analysis

2.4.1 Recruitment

Participants were recruited via a non-government organisation (NGO) based in Prishtinë, Kosovo, which deals with cases of war rape and sexual violence victims, the name of which will be kept anonymous to protect the participants in this study. Throughout the study, I refer to this organisation as an NGO. Recruiting through this organisation ensured individual case credibility as all seven participants' allegations were reported and documented to government institutions via the NGO. In order to respect individual agency and control potential participants were tentatively approached by key workers at the NGO, and provided with information regarding the research study. My contact details were given to those who showed interest in the study and this was done in a private setting to avoid shaming and ensure confidentiality (Willig, 2013).

2.4.2 Interview setting

I established connections with [redacted] NGO based in Prishtina, Kosovo (See Appendix 1 & 2 & 3) in 2018. This organization was established in 2017 with a mission to reduce traumatic symptoms caused by rape or other forms of sexual violence obtained prior to, during or after the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo and to ensure survivors integration in social and public life. The NGO provides survivors with psychosocial assistance, counselling, legal and economic empowerment. The organisation consists of a multi-disciplinary team comprised of key workers and psychiatrist. I travelled to Kosovo at a scheduled time and conducted the interviews in Kosovo; the native country of both participants and I. Appropriate insurance was acquired through City, University to ensure this process was within the legal remit.

To reduce the level of risk and ensure the safety of both parties, whilst conducting interviews with survivors, I was under the supervision of NGO's executive director. A solid self-care programme was established in Kosovo, which consisted of 1) an on-site psychiatrist who was available before, during and after interviews to provide emotional de-briefing if and when necessary, this coincided with my on-going personal therapy in London via face-time when I was in Kosovo, and 2) International supervisor as well as my research supervisor in London whom I updated on the progress of the work consistently. All interviews were carried out in the NGO premise. The NGO carried out a risk assessment before my travels to Kosovo, to acknowledge and implement appropriate measures and ensure the safety and wellbeing of researcher and participants.

2.4.3 Sampling

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilised to investigate the topic of conflict-related sexual violence and participants who explained their experiences of this were thus recruited (Willig, 2013). Participants were female survivors above the age of 18 who had been subjected to rape and or other forms of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. For each participant a biographical narrative profile is afforded in the following chapter and participants' paintings also make part of this profile. All seven participants reported experiencing some form of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. I recruited seven participants for this study, as this was deemed appropriate for the Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) methodology and in-depth data analysis of extensive and complex life stories (Langdridge, 2007). As an ethical measure, it was also important for me to carefully consider and implement an exclusion-criteria for participants, as a way to ensure the safety of participants and reduce the risk of exacerbating any existing psychological conditions.

2.4.4 Pre-Interview Process: Telephone Screening

The aim of this investigation was to capture the narrative constructions of experiences of conflict-related sexual violence and this in itself is considered a universally atrocious phenomenon, thus some level of distress was necessary in order for me to capture this in the study. On the other hand, caution was applied to reduce risk and regression of general wellbeing. Participants who initiated contact and showed interest in the research underwent a rigorous one-stage telephone screening process (See Appendix 4a & 4b). At each stage the dignity, rights, and psychological wellbeing of participants was the primary consideration of this study (Willig, 2013). The telephone screening process aimed to exclude anyone who was known to be actively self-harming, have an enduring mental illness such as psychosis or schizophrenia, was pregnant at the time, or was known to be suicidal or had been in the last six months. Individuals who met any of the exclusion criteria would have been considered highly vulnerable and the sensitive nature of the study could potentially regress their psychological and emotional wellbeing and evoke re-traumatization. All seven participants who were interviewed for this

study met the inclusion criteria. To ensure that I was fully supported in this process, the telephone screening was done from the NGO's office with the international supervisor present.

During the telephone screening process, the researcher asked each participant who met the criteria whether they would prefer to have an information sheet and consent form sent to them prior to the scheduled interview. Although, this option was given to participants none of them requested for these to be provided prior to the interview[36]. Following from the telephone screening process, a brief discussion took place with the international supervisor and the clinical team to confirm the participants who meet the criteria. I then contacted each participant and schedule an interview that would take place in the NGO's office in Prishtina, during working hours 9-5 Monday-Friday. Participants were also notified that as part of the interview process a recording device would be used.

2.4.5 Narrative Interviews

Interview schedules (See Appendix 5a & 5b) were constructed based on the recommendations specified by other narrative researchers (Crossley, 2000; Reissman, 1993), paying close attention to phenomenological facets of participants' life. Langdridge (2007) outlines that semi-structured interviews permit both the flexibility and consistency that is necessary in narrative research. The non-directive function of this interview process and use of prompting also allowed for sufficient flexibility, which encouraged participants to generate sufficient data (Langdrige, 2007). As a qualitative research practitioner, I relied on the participants to offer their in-depth responses to questions about how they construct or make sense of their experiences and this humanistic, interpretive approach allowed for non-detectable human conditions, for instance survivors subjective experience of sexual violence to be explored (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). These interviews were thus a source of rich descriptions and explanations of human processes of sexual violence in political conflict and provided novel integrations that are further elaborated in later chapters (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2011). The semi-structured interviews were established in two parts, discussed below.

The NGO's counselling department utilises art therapy as a form of rehabilitation. During the telephone screening a gentle suggestion was made, where participants were asked to select one art piece that they had created to discuss as a starting point for the interview. Participants were assured that this was optional, however, all brought a chosen artwork to their scheduled interviews. Although, much of the artwork done by women at the NGO is in the public domain, consent was given by all participants for their anonymous artwork to be presented in this research and beyond (See Appendix 6a & 6b). Part one of the interview was intended to enhance safety, trust and establish a non-judgmental foundation for the

36 Some participants explained that they do not have email addresses others expressed not feeling safe to have these documents addressing sexual violence in their homes and preferred to discuss them in the premise of the organisation where the interview took place.

rest of the interview and was recognised as a tentative leeway to access sensitive content. Participants were offered the chance to discuss their connection in terms of meaning, purpose and motivation with the art. Willig (2016) explained that object elicitation in qualitative research allows the researcher to proceed beyond accessing meaning-making via discourse alone. The second part of the interview schedule pertained to life prior to, during and after the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo.

Participants were greeted upon their arrival, made to feel comfortable and hot drinks were provided, then led to the assigned therapy room where the interviews were carried out. Participants were presented with the information sheet (See Appendix 7a & 7b) and had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research, discuss any inquiries, concerns, clarities, withdraw if they wish, or to continue with the interview (Willig, 2013). Once the participant read through the information sheet, had all their questions answered and felt ready to continue with the interview, a consent form was presented (See Appendix 6a & 6b). The participants were asked to read through the consent form and were given time to ask any questions in relation to this, all questions were thoroughly discussed and clarified. At this stage, if the participants wanted to continue with the interview, they were asked to sign the consent form.

As an ethical commitment to allow for agency and control, at this stage participants were assured once again that they can withdraw from the study at any point before, during or after the interview until the withdrawal cut off period, which was set to two weeks following the completion of the transcription procedure. I then checked in with the participants to determine whether they needed a break prior to commencing with the interview and this was addressed accordingly. I then began the process of interviewing by putting on the audio-recorder. Time structure for the interviews ranged between eighteen minutes to an hour. Although, I prepared for and acknowledged that the interviews may take longer, due to breaks, or in cases where interviewees may need to be stopped and rescheduled for a different day (limited by the duration of my stay in Kosovo) none of the interviews extended over an hour and none required rescheduling.

Participants were notified as the interview came to an end and given ample opportunity to add any further details to their narratives. Once the data was collected participants were provided with a de-briefing form (See Appendix 8a & 8b), further information regarding the interview was provided and participants were made aware that there were no fixed expectations for the data, however that some themes may come up including (politics, identity, physical and psychological health, stigmatisation, social isolation etc.). The importance of this research was emphasised considering the under reporting of this type of violence and the stigma that is associated with it. In the case that their participation in the study raised any concerns participants were provided with the contact details of the NGO were additional counselling or de-briefing would be arranged. A final check-in was carried out to ensure participants were feeling well enough to get back to their lives after the interview, in which subsequent

support was made available via the clinical team at the NGO. Once transcriptions were completed, participants were given two weeks to make contact with the organisation to request their transcripts to be sent over to them for verification. Of the seven participants none asked for their transcripts and all confirmed to the executive director for the researcher to proceed with the analysis.

2.4.6 Language in Narrative Research

Language is the main medium in narrative research whereby researchers attain a comprehensive account of how the cultural and socio-political context is experienced, understood, interpreted, constructed and accounted for (Santos, Black & Sandelowski, 2015). Regarded as a social relic, language is formulated within a cultural and historical setting and may transmit specific social and political meanings, which in turn contribute to the construction of facets of one's identity (Filep, 2009). This coincides with the critical realist epistemic framework of this research, which holds that knowledge is mediated but not reduced by language and social reality as experienced by people is unique to one's own language, which in turn is governed by the interaction procedures between people in a given time and place (Gergen, 1989). The richness of these experiences is commonly captured in stories and metaphors (Polkinghorne, 2007).

2.4.7 Language in Kosovo: Standard Albanian and the Gheg Dialect

This was an international study conducted in Kosovo (See Appendix 9). As a bilingual researcher[37] fluent in the local language (Standard Albanian) and dialect (Gheg) I took the decision to conduct the interviews in the Albanian language for a number of reasons. Firstly, to accommodate to my participants linguistic needs and maximise the potency and yield of an organic and authentic account. To further support this decision, I turned to Caldwell-Harris and Ayçiçeği-Dinn's (2009) research, which suggests that people are more likely to be authentic and emotionally inclined when speaking about sensitive topics in their mother tongue. Secondly, I considered Smith, Chen and Liu's (2008) recommendation, that to conduct interviews in the local language is one way to circumvent challenges pertaining to interpretation and to assure that precise meaning is acquired at the stage of analysis. Further to this, leaning towards the Gheg dialect[38] relatively moderated the power-dynamics between the participants and I and instead engendered a less formal and more comfortable interview setting. As such, language was a vital apparatus in this study, used to convey details pertaining to cultural beliefs and values and

37 Filep (2009) explained that a researcher's personal history and heritage play a vital role in the process of orchestrating research interviews in different languages. My position as a British Kosovar-Albanian woman who migrated to the U.K as a refugee may have placed me in a valuable position to conduct this research. Preserving and cultivating my proficiency in the Albanian language is a critical part of my identity, culture, heritage and overall self-concept. Conducting research in Kosovo with a local name *Shpresa*, which is a commonly used noun etymologically rooted in the Albanian language and translates as *hope*, according to (Filep, 2009) is an advantage as it elicits likeness.

38 Participants preferred to speak in the Gheg dialect as this was their natural way of speaking, albeit a number of participants who intermittently used Standard Albanian, I assumed that participants might have been under the impression that the latter provided greater scope for linguistic eloquence and the sternness needed to strengthen narrative validity and legitimacy. Perhaps, this was what they presumed was required to meet the "expectations" of an international doctoral level research interview.

thus gave voice to the participants heritage and was a point of reference for personal and national identity and pride (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994). In this way, applying cultural sensitivity allowed me to acknowledge participants' social and cultural systems as well as the language in which these elements were revealed (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994).

2.4.8 Transcription and Translation Process

The transcribing procedure consists of conveying audio-recorded talk emerging from semi-structured interviews verbatim into a written form (Filep, 2009), and brings "Immediacy and transparency to the phenomena under study by allowing the audience access to inspect the data on which the analysis is based" (Nikander, 2008, p. 225). The translation process on the other hand is defined as the transference of "Meaning from a source language to a target language" (Esposito, 2001, p. 570). In this study, I transcribed the audio-recordings of seven semi-structured interviews conducted in the Albanian language. The dialogues were recorded verbatim on a word document and the depth and quality of these transcriptions was congruent with the requirements of Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA). The translator is considered an interpreter who processes the vocabulary, grammatical structure, uniqueness of the individual and contextual aspects of the source language (Albanian) to conceptualise meaning and then utilises pertinent vocabulary and grammatical structure that is culturally relevant to the target language (English) to construct and convey meaning (Clark, Birkhead, Fernandez & Egger, 2017; Larson, 1998). Validity in qualitative research is thus measured by the close proximity of the meanings as experienced by the participants to the meanings interpreted by the researcher in the final analysis (Polkinghorne, 2007).

I migrated to the U.K at the age of eight and while I am fluent in the Albanian language, I consider English to be my first language. As a result, I felt more competent in utilising the English language to convey my thoughts and generate complex evaluative arguments required for doctoral level research. With this in mind, I decided to first translate the data from Albanian to English and then commence with the analysis process in English. According to Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson and Deeg (2010) challenges in the interpretation and representation of meaning are more pronounced when the cultural context differs and interlingual translation is required. I was thus aware that analysing data in this order might propagated several research implications[39], firstly, I considered that meaning may have been slightly

[39] Filep (2009) advises researchers to be aware of a number of complexities that arise when conducting interviews and translating the data within a multicultural milieu, in that we do not translate language in a vacuum but rather translate and interpret the culture within which it operates. The translation process thus poses questions regarding the suitability of literal or non-literal translation as well as the meaning and content some words and phrases convey in a particular cultural setting that is not in another. In the process of translating my data I was attentive to words, phrases or phonetic sounds, which may not translate into English straightforwardly. The challenges I encountered during the translation process were not limited to the use of language or dialect but included the cultural fabric within which the language operated, prior to translation and interpretation (Filep, 2009; Ho, Holloway & Stenhouse, 2019). Considering that the Gheg dialect is common among regions that were historically occupied by the Ottoman empire and Serbian political regime, I had to consider the possibility that participants may

hindered in the translation process, and hindered for a second time during the data analysis. Perhaps, the meaning in the data could have been more rigorously contained had I, at first, analysed the original transcripts in (Albanian) and then translated the finalised analysis to English. Although, at the time I did not consider this as an option as analysing the data in English felt more natural and organic. For validation and methodological control and to minimise these research implications, a professional Kosovar-Albanian female interpreter[40] proficient in the Gheg dialect, was employed by the researcher to examine and verify the finalised translations. Five randomly selected pages for each participant were verified (See Appendix 10). The anonymised transcripts were shared with the translator in password protected word document files and a confidentiality agreement was signed by interpreter (See Appendix 11). At the pre-interview stage participants were informed that an interpreter would verify the translations and this was clearly stated on the consent form (See Appendix 6a & 6b) (Ho, Holloway & Stenhouse, 2019).

Interview transcripts were organised on a word document. I utilised a variation of the Jefferson method in the transcription process (See Appendix 12), borrowed from (Davidson, 2010). Notes were made using comment boxes on the right-hand side (See Appendix 13). Additional in-depth notes were formulated on a separate word document for each participant (See Appendix 14). Then from this, themes were generated (See Appendix 15) and in-depth individual narrative analysis for each participant (See Appendix 16). Further, cognitive and emotional reflections, which I revisited during the write up, were collected in a reflexive diary (See Appendix 17). During the transcription and translation phase I listened to the audio-recording of the interviews multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the translation. I proceed with the analysis by re-reading the English transcripts multiple times to become familiarised with the sociocultural and political context and the body of the text more holistically.

2.5 Stages of Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA)

Six stage of analysis are proposed by CNA, each stage is designed to supply the researcher with particular instruments that guide and facilitate the examination of the phenomenon pertaining to the study (Langdridge, 2007), for the standardised CNA protocol see Langdridge (2007). The six stages attributed to CNA are outlined below in figure 3 and elaborated under each stage as employed in the study and the additional sub-stages applied clarified.

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use some words that originate from the Turkish and Slavic languages. In the translation process I adhered to a somewhat literal method of translation whilst also acknowledging that various possibilities could derive from the data.

40 When selecting an interpreter for this task it was important to consider the interpreters background; Mrs Musliu was born and raised in Kosovo, but migrated to the U.K due to the political conflict in the early 90s and was as a result familiar with the social, cultural and political situation in Kosovo. At the time of her collaborative work with me on the translations she had over twenty years of experience working as a professional Albanian interpreter and translator in the U.K. This warranted Mrs Musliu the adeptness and skill to identify erroneous translations effectively and ensure the preciseness of meaning and cultural context in the translations from Albanian to English.

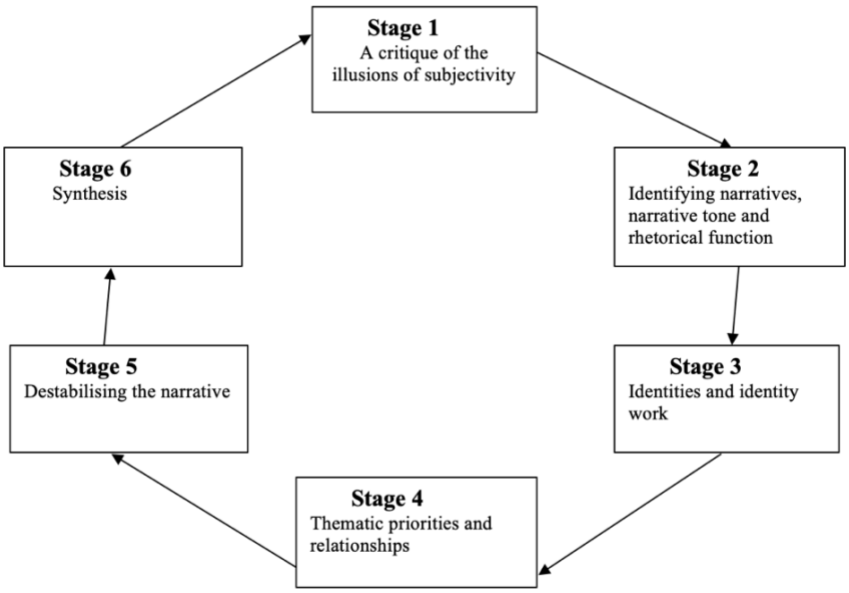


Figure 3: Model of Critical Narrative Analysis

2.5.1 Stage 1: A critique of the illusions of subjectivity

At this point, Langdridge (2007) recommends that the researcher subjects herself to critique by critically engaging with social theory and employing hermeneutics best fitted to the research investigation, and through reflection on questions of gender, age, political power, culture, race and ethnicity, illuminate her preconceptions and assumptions on the subject matter. Here, I commenced with each analysis, through a session of reflexive evaluation of my own position in relation to the topic under investigation. I turned to Langdridge's (2007) reflexive development questions to guide me through the research process (See Appendix 18). This included thinking and feeling my responses to sexual violence within the limits of my own background and personal experience, whilst also considering the implications of my values and beliefs on the construction and interpretation of the data. I maintained a reflective journal where I continuously recorded relevant self-examinations and deliberated on how use of self may hinder or assist my research (See Appendix 17). I also engaged in creative work, which allowed me to feel through the research topic in a much deeper subconscious way (See Appendix 19).

2.5.2 Stage 2: Identifying narratives, narrative tones and rhetorical function

This stage is concerned with identifying distinct narratives in the data. I firstly began by reading through the text and sought to find the quantity and form of any narratives with a beginning, middle and end. In order to find what Langdridge (2007) referred to as a "Master narrative" that according to him is

perpetually regulated by the aims of the study, I scanned through the text and described individual narratives using one or two sentences. I repeated this process, and in the subsequent examinations of the text, I sought to find both the general and more specific tones of each interview, recording notable revelations about the meanings being expressed as well as any shifts in tone and their possible function all through, in the context of the research topic (See Appendix 13). My dual role as a transcriptionist and translator required that I revisit the audio-recording and text of the interviews multiple times. As I engaged in this laborious task, I made notes of any pronounced shifts in content and tone, pertaining to non-verbal communication (distinct movements, tone-descriptive words and imagery (visual, auditory, tactile) in comment boxes on the right-hand side (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Adhering to the phenomenological aspect of this study and as advised by Langdridge (2007), I employed the most suitable descriptors available rather than slotting them into a predetermined substructure.

In maturation from studying the tone, I then aimed to identify the rhetorical function in the text. This involved asking two important questions as advised by Langdridge (2007, p.138) "What does this particular story seem to be doing?" and "What kind of story is being told?". I looked within the narratives to see if there were any dialogical features present including opinions and attitudes, justifications, criticisms, explanations, implicit or explicit and positive or negative in nature (See Appendix 14). The meaning of narratives whether brief or detailed was comprehended within the broader framework of participants discourses. In this way Langdridge (2007) asserts that we can position the participant in accordance with the "Wider world of stories" that the narrator occupies (p. 138). In view of the existing parallels (background, experiences of war and identity) between myself and the participants, I was inclined to also explore the dynamic relationship between the participants and I and where they positioned themselves with me.

2.5.3 Stage 3: Identities and identity work

Identities are produced narratively via the stories we relate, which are subsequently constrained by the time, culture and the language that is available to the narrator (Langdridge, 2007). With this in mind, at this stage, I explored the text and observed the particular self being conjured into existence in a narrative whilst asking "What kind of person does this particular narrative construct and how does this relate to what we know of the person and the topic being discussed?" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 138). The narrative tone and rhetorical function were crucial facets in allowing a specific sense of self to emerge into being (See Appendix 14). Whilst working on this stage, I also recorded notes whilst highlighting applicable segments on the text and reflected these in my journal, the emergence and construction of my own identity in relation to the research was also interwoven in the painting process (See Appendix 19).

2.5.4 Stage 4a: Thematic priorities and relationships

The aim here was to identify principle themes and relationships between themes within the narratives. To preserve meaning and coherence in narratives Langdridge (2007) recommends that we first identify the principle themes and avoid breaking down the original text as much as possible. I worked through the transcripts systematically and sought out themes via close reading identifying links and connections between them. I noted principle phrases, sentences, words and novel ideas as they emerged from the text in comment boxes on the right-hand side. I periodically, revisited stage 1 and considered how my own views about the topic may impact the above process. I proceeded to do this for each transcript and then made a list of all my ideas on a table in a separate document, which was seceded from the original text. Then, I organised them into clusters of meaning whilst identifying distinct themes, collapsing some into one category, and refining subthemes using separate notes (See Appendix 15).

2.5.5 Stage 4b: Structural analysis (An additional feature adjunct to CNA)

To capture the full essence of meaning and experience in the transcripts this study considered an abbreviated and additional version of thematic analysis not inherent in Langdridge (2007), to include aspects of structural analysis as advised by Riessman (2008). Riessman (2008) refers to William Labov's development of structural narrative analysis, which recommends that the analyst looks at the way a story is communicated and its function in the overall narrative. This required a thorough examination of syntactic and prosodic characteristics of talk that are beyond its referential substance (Riessman, 2008). This study thus explored grammatical errors or shifts, paraphrasing, metaphors, syntaxes and punctuation choices, silences, pauses, stutters, utterances, emphasis, tone and volume in addition to dialogic hallmarks such as crying, laughter, self-interruption, apologies and contradictions (Labov, 1997; Riessman, 2008), which can be seemingly innocuous but nevertheless change the meaning of transcripts (Clark, Birkhead, Fernandez & Egger, 2017). Abovementioned narrative form and rhetorical function were noted in comment boxes on the right-hand side of the transcripts (See Appendix 13&14). Both functions enriched and gave insight into thematic analysis of narratives (See Appendix 15), and enabled the researcher to capture a more holistic account of survivors stories, which may have otherwise been buried or lost within the sensitive nature of the topic (Riessman, 2008). For instance, some participants were unable to find adequate words to describe the heinous nature of their experiences or were overwhelmed by shame and could not bring themselves to verbalise aspects of their experience. This stage of analysis allowed me to find aspects of these experiences in participants non-verbal communication; long assertive gaze, nods, loud exhales and tense body language.

2.5.6 Stage 5a: Destabilising the narrative

Here the critical analysis is turned on the narratives communicated by the participants, a process considered to be "Explicitly political" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 139). I observed the ways in which narratives operated in the local context and the wider sociocultural and political context and the

connections between the two (Willig, 2012). Women's personal narratives and culturally dominant narratives regarding conflict-related sexual violence were explored and the sociocultural, political and psychological connections between these were investigated (See Appendix 14) (Willig, 2012). Here, the researcher is advised against projecting a "Superior interpretation" onto participants lived experience, instead the focus is shifted on to proposing novel outlooks for the aim of the investigation (Langdridge, 2007, p. 149). As I worked through this stage, I was mindful about my own philosophical doctrines and contextual position (Ricoeur, 1980).

2.5.7 Stage 5b: Interactional analysis (Supplemental feature to CNA)

Here, I focused on the discursive and dialogical approaches, looking to understand how the telling of the stories inexorably echoed considerations of the dominant local social context and the interactional dynamics between myself and the participants within the setting. Given that Langdridge (2007) does not provide an outline on how to do this in his CNA model, I was drawn to the works of, Frank (2013), Willig 2017), Riessman (2008) and Hiles, ermk & Chrz, (2017, p. 3) who stress the importance of "Examining the detail of a narrator's expression within its complex dialogical environment". Here, I re-read the text and sought to detect the preferred self that women exhibited and considered the ways that I may have contributed to this co-construction (Riesman, 2008). It was assumed that my presence and the women's view of me would naturally influence the anatomy of their narratives, and this was seen as an inextricable and invaluable part of the process, that was carefully deliberate on, and which mobilised my comprehension of the narratives as they unearthed. Given that "Story grammar" can vary from culture to culture and that the interviews were carried out in Kosovo, in the native language (Albanian) and local dialect (Gheg) (Langdridge, 2007, p. 131), it felt important to explore how women chose to perform component parts of their narratives by employing stylistic hallmarks, namely sound effects and direct speech (Appendix 13 & 14 & 15).

2.5.8 Stage 5c: Performative analysis (Additional feature to CNA)

The unspoken in the dynamics between myself and the participants become apparent at the preliminary stages of the interviews, where certain gestures reflected particular embodied emotional and psychological distress. For instance, massaging of their hands (self-soothing), revealing their scars (validating their experiences), removing shoes, fluctuating body-temperature (flushes) and sound effects (tuts). Given that narration is viewed as a performance by a participant who "Involves, persuades, and moves an audience through language and gesture, 'Doing' rather than telling alone" (Riesman, 2008, p. 5), it felt important to also address gesture, gaze, and other displays that were enacted and embodied by participants and to consider what these might mean in the dynamic interaction between myself and the participant and within the context of the interview (See Appendix 13 & 14 & 15 & 16).

2.5.9 Stage 6: A Critical Synthesis

This final stage required the production of a critical synthesis of the data. Langdridge (2007) suggests that there is no prescriptive protocol outlining by what methods this can be done, though he points out the value of presenting key narratives and themes whilst prioritising the participants subjectivity and voice, which he emphasises should not be embedded underneath the researcher's own subjectivism or the social theoretical predisposition exerted. The findings in this study were framed by a pluralistic framework[41], for further guidance, I utilised a hermeneutic circle as suggested by Langdridge (2007), whereby six hermeneutic features were considered, see figure 4[42] below. As I progressed through this stage, I re-visited the transcripts, notations and analysis, then constructed individual narratives for each participant (See Appendix 15). I then deliberated on the ways in which sexual violence impacted on how survivors related to themselves and others and how meaning was generated and various identities constructed within their socio-cultural and political context. Each idiographic narrative was critically synthesised through my own interpretations, I perpetually deliberated on novel concepts as they emerged and developed the data accordingly. In this way, the material from the thematic analysis (See Appendix 14 & 15), generated three chronological time junctures, which framed the subsequent themes and their inherent components, discussed in the ensuing chapter (See Appendix 16).

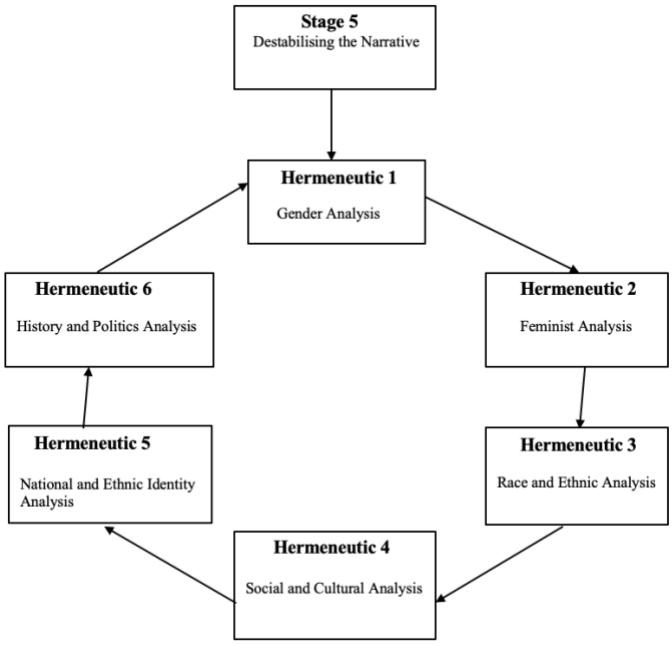


Figure 4: A diagrammatical presentation of an adapted hermeneutics circle with six adapted features relevant to the current study.

41 Which relied on psychological (Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg & Walker, 1990), biological (Gottschall, 2004; Thornhill & Palmer, 2000), socio-political (Bracewell, 2000; Brownmiller, 1975; 2005; Seifert, 1996; MacKinnon, 2016), and cultural (Alison, 2007; Farewell, 2004; Helgeson, 2012; Peet & Sjoberg, 2020; Schiessl, 2002; Maciejczak, 2013) conceptualisations to produce a comprehensive theoretical account of conflict-related sexual violence.

42 I used this model as a blueprint for my analysis and borrowed from analytical analysis and dialogic analysis to attend to various features of the study of conflict-related sexual violence. This was taken from: Langdridge, D. (2007). Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method. Harlow: Pearson Education.

2.6 *Methodological, Personal and Embodied Reflexivity*

2.6.1 Qualitative Research and Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher investigating women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence, I was primarily interested in meaning and interpretation, and as such, it was crucial for me to be attentive to the ways in which my own assumptions, ideologies and personal narratives influenced my interpretation of the text (Cooper et al., 2012; Ratner, 2002). Commitment to reflexivity is considered to be a fundamental component of narrative methodology, as meaning is not detected in data but rather given to data (Cooper et al., 2012). Consequently, this process integrated a perpetual assessment of my internal responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the investigative procedure (Finlay, 2002a; 2002b). Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999, p. 2) suggests that before commencing with a study "Researchers begin with an early or rudimentary version of a formative theory and a research model" that may evolve from the researchers personal and professional experience and pre-existing knowledge on the sample group and topic of investigation (Bold, 2012). While this was not an ethnographic research, it should be noted that the current study was developed from a Masters dissertation investigating the dynamics of art and social memory: representations of history and identity in Kosovo and a co-authored journal article published in August 2013 by Social Identities exploring identity after Kosovo's independence within the Kosovar-Albanian Diaspora in Britain.

The culmination of previously acquired theoretical and conceptual knowledge regarding the implications for social memory, identity and political conflict in Kosovo, served me well in my position as a critical narrative analyst who inquired about identity shifts, intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships, and the contextualization of narratives within the socio-political and cultural framework. These skills served as a map that guided the present research and offered an opportunity to develop its initial aims and objectives. My own personal Kosovar-Albanian identity, heritage and familiarity with the social and cultural setting may have also placed me in a privileged position, which enabled participants to recount their experiences in richer detail. According to Josselson (2007) "The greater the degree of rapport and trust, the greater the degree of self-revealing and, with this, the greater degree of trust that the researcher will treat the material thus obtained with respect and compassion" (p. 539). Due to the word restrictions of this study, I included a section in the appendices titled Reflexivity: Art Odyssey, which includes a thorough outline of *Use of Self* within the research and my use of art[43] in the reflexive process (See Appendix 19).

43 Art is recognised as a powerful methodological medium for expression of one's human experience and considered inherently human, social and communicative (McCaffrey & Edwards, 2015). I recognised and appreciated the importance of reflexivity in CNA as a pivotal and ongoing process and as an additional non-narrative measure, I chose to include three paintings depicting my research journey. This multifaceted application of human creativity initiated the emergence of significant contextual material that would otherwise have been neglected and remained unnoticed in the analysis and dissemination procedure. I was keen to

2.7 Part Four: Ethical Considerations and Permissions

This study complied with the BPS ethical guidelines (BPS, 2014). Foregrounding two fundamental doctrine of ethical research, firstly to circumvent participants from any maltreat or harm and secondly, to have informed consent. It was thus imperative to refer to both to BPS Code for Human Ethics (2010) and BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009) throughout. Ethical approval was granted from City, University ethics committee (See Appendix 20) and to ensure that this research study identified and complied with all requirements concerning local ethical approval, research governance and data protection in Kosovo, ethical approval was also obtained using Health Professional's Code of Ethics in Kosovo via the NGO (See Appendix 21).

2.7.1 Ethical Considerations in Narrative Work

According to Adams (2008) narratives are the apparatus, which help us to understand and negotiate both the idiosyncratic and interpersonal aspect of life as we live it, a rigorous deliberation of narrative ethics was thus imperative in this research. What gives narrative inquiry value and meaning is that the researcher endeavours to "Obtain data from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant's life" (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). Given that a narrative interview is "A jointly conducted enterprise between interviewer and interviewee" (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 5), the trust and rapport that is developed between the researcher and participant determines the nature of the narratives disclosed (Josselson, 2007). With this in mind, I addressed all aspects of the current research in an empathic, non-judgmental manner, with diligence, tolerance and emotional responsivity (verbal and non-verbal communication) (Josselson, 2007). Considering the sensitive nature of the research topic, I also demonstrated a capacity to hold affect-laden content as it emerged from the narratives, which gave the participants the assurance needed to feel contained and further elaborate on the significance of the narratives shared (Josselson, 2007). To ensure that these narratives were presented with precision and rigour, a wide range of excerpts from the transcripts were presented in the final write up of the analysis. Another ethical challenge that permeates narrative research is the researchers omnipresence in the interpretation and co-construction of narratives (Gilgun, 2008). As I proceeded with my role as a transcriptionist, translator and analyst, the data obtained from the interviews was handled with the utmost respect and compassion. Seeing that the goal of the current research was to give *voice* to a group of underrepresented survivors, the key ethical perspective here was to highlight my own reflexivity and

explore the many non-narrative engendered processes in art creation that transcend literal meaning and consequently excavate deeper subconscious processes of my own reflexivity (See Appendix 19 for a thorough outline).

explicitly report the "Biases, aims and positioning of the knower [researcher] and the circumstances under which the knowledge was created" (Josselson, 2007, p. 549). In doing so, I acknowledged and accepted responsibility for my part in the interpretation and co-construction of the narratives as they were represented and reiterated that the data yielded did not claim to represent an absolute truth. Indeed, when working with sensitive topics, researchers can become de-sensitised to the transcripts (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007). With this understanding, I was extremely diligent and respectful in the handling of the interview material to maintain the dignity of the survivors stories and acknowledge that what may be a doctoral thesis for me are the intimate narratives of people who lived through them (Josselson, 2007).

2.7.2 Sensitive Research Topic

Gender-based violence research transcends beyond the standard ethical protocol to include awareness and sensitivity to the "Rights, beliefs and cultural contexts of the participants, as well as their position within a patriarchal or hierarchical power relations, in society and in our research relationship" (Etherington, 2007, p. 602). This may be due to the potentially threatening and traumatic nature of the subject matter and that some narratives may be disclosed in the research for the first time (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007). Naturally, the safety of the participants, researcher and staff at NGO was paramount and thus considered in all research decisions (Ellsberg, Heise & World Health Organization, 2005). The primary ethical concern related to researching women's experiences of sexual violence in conflict is the risk of the males in the women's life who may disprove the sharing of this information based on the social and cultural implications that could unfold for their family *honour* (Ellsberg, Heise & World Health Organization, 2005). This possibility was considered, however, the executive director at NGO confirmed that the women who frequented the organisation were continuously monitored and safeguarded and such risks were not common. Nevertheless, information about the study was not advertised or provided to the wider community and the study was kept discrete. The interviews were carried out in a safe and contained space at the NGO office, some participants brought with them a trusted female friend or family member who waited for them in the waiting area. I considered that if there were signs of immediate risk to the participants decisions would be made with clinical staff at NGO on the appropriate actions.

Interviews focused on an intimate and sensitive subject matter can evoke strong emotional material and can prompt participants to conjure up distressing and horrific memories. I relied on my inter-personal and therapeutic skills that I acquired during my training as a counselling psychologist and clinical work in various gender-violence clinics to handle every aspect of the research process with the utmost diligence and respect, foregrounded a non-judgmental attitude and made the aims of the research known whenever necessary. Additional measure included paying careful attention at the debrief stage where participants were made aware of the psychological support available to them via the NGO.

I also prepared myself for the effects that the interview questions could have on women and how best to respond to these. Most participants who became emotional during the interview diligently choose to proceed, after having some time to recover. I consulted with both the executive director and psychiatrist on how to identify and respond appropriately to symptoms of distress as well as how to terminate an interview if the impact of the questions become too negative. We agreed that this decision would be a collaborative one to ensure women had agency all through the interviews. I frequently checked in with participants, reminded them to take breaks, they were given the option to reschedule for another time or terminate indefinitely and allowed them time to make these decisions. Interviews ended on speaking about women's hopes for the future and aimed to emphasis on their strengths. The healing and therapeutic qualities found in narrative methodologies served me well throughout the interview process, though it was important, as a researcher, to avoid a quasi-therapeutic correspondence between the participants and I[44] (Willig, 2013; White & Epston, 1990).

2.7.3 Ethical Considerations for the Researcher

Researchers also have an ethical obligation to minimize possible risks to themselves whilst working with affect-laden material. The most common risk for researchers is the psychological toll of bearing witness to horrific accounts of participants experiences (Dickson-swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2009). Any qualitative endeavour is regarded an embodied experience and by using myself and my body as an instrument to experience the research "Both intellectually and emotionally" and was receptive to the women's suffering and this gave me a heightened sense of my own "Mortality and vulnerability" (Dickson-swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2009, p. 62-70). In this way, I brought forth the deep profundity in the emotional material, like anger, fear and disgust that were immersed in the text.

In my role as transcriptionist, translator and analyst, I was required to interact with and assimilate "The voices and stories of research" (Warr, 2004, p. 586). This was emotionally overwhelming and subsequently prolonged the analysis of the data. In my reflections, I reported challenges with maintaining sleep hygiene, anxiety and depression, and social withdrawal, all of which are symptoms of vicarious traumatisation, which is defined as "The process by which individuals listening to and working with the traumatic experiences of others begin to experience the effects of trauma themselves." (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2009, p. 72). To manage this, I had regular opportunities for supervision and emotional debriefing, and engaged in creative activities and

44 To manage the researcher-therapist balance was challenging. This was especially the case when considering that the material conveyed by participants was in most part horrific and nauseating. Thus, to remain silent in such moments, as a way to avoid placing myself in a therapist position would have been unethical and inhumane. I believe, that in my facilitation of the interviews, I upheld a healthy and flexible balance between my role as researcher and therapist, and offered my skills accordingly.

journaling. I worked with a personal therapist on a weekly basis for three years and within the safety of a therapeutic relationship, I was able to process and regulate past traumas (Gilgun, 2008). This permitted me to sustain the requirements of the research topic and enhanced my capacity to interact more thoroughly with the text (Gilgun, 2008).

2.7.4 Ethics in the Recruitment Process

To respect individual agency and control potential participants were tentatively approached by keyworkers at the NGO, and provided with information regarding the research study, the aims of which, were clearly stated throughout this process. This was a way to evade pressure on potential participants to comply if approached directly by the researcher or clinical staff. Although, keyworkers were trained to deal with sensitive matters, I was aware that how they approach potential participant and explain the research study could directly impact on the narratives yielded. Key workers were briefed prior to the recruitment process and it was reiterated that any information relayed to participants regarding the study be done in a private setting to avoid shaming, that they be approached in a tentative manner, are mindful not to come across as stigmatising, labelling or pathologising. Ensuring that participants were aware, at all times, that participation in the research was entirely their choice.

The key workers were advised to be aware of the tone and words used when talking to potential participants not to pressurise or influence their decision. To circumvent placing expectations or making the participants feel pressured to provide invaluable details of their narratives monetary incentives were not offered in exchange for their participation in the research. However, in the effort to establish a warm and welcoming environment hot drinks and water were provided and travel expenses were reimbursed with a maximum of five euros. I intended to ask participants about what motivated them to part taking in the research, however, this instigation was not required as they willingly showed their appreciation and gratitude for my efforts to undertake research in this subject matter, as according to them no one had shown an interest in documenting their experiences since it happened. They all expressed wanting their voices to be heard on a global arena and for this reason, I was under the impression that they all had expectations for this research to transcend beyond the purpose of this thesis. It seems important to mention here that my interest to publish articles, case studies, and to engage in talks, conferences and lectures centred on material accumulated from this thesis was made explicit in the information sheet and consent form and I believed that this might have been what participants were ultimately hoping for. This frame of reference was integrated into the analysis process and aided a more holistic understanding of their narratives[45]. Finally, it was emphasised to participants that they are able to withdraw from the

[45] The analysis showed that the narratives were directed to the researcher, the perpetrators, participants family members, the community in Kosovo, Kosovo's political structures, as well as the world at large. The narrative tone became progressively assertive and bold as participants directed their focus to an extended audience that surpassed the researcher and the interview room.

study at any time before, during and after the interview process without any obligation or consequence (Willig, 2013). My desire to listen to survivors life stories irrespective of what they may be was highlighted, participants were assured that there was no correct or incorrect way of doing this and would not be measured or judged in accordance with these polarities.

2.7.5 Limits to Confidentiality

The confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, dignity, rights and overall wellbeing of participants was thoroughly respected throughout this research (Willig, 2013). Deception was not used in this study as the nature of this narrative investigation relied on the trustworthiness and genuineness of the participant's narratives (Yardley, 2017). Participant were acquainted with the objectives of this research (See Appendix 7a&7b) as part of a doctoral thesis accessible to the public (Willig, 2013) and consent was obtained from participants prior to data collection (See Appendix 6a&6b). Personal and identifying information was not incorporated in the research, instead pseudonyms were allocated as a way of protecting participant's identity. Demographic questions can lead to identifiable information and were not included in this research, with the exception of age and relationship status, that were related to questions in the interview schedule, that had crucial relevance to the aims of the study. These questions alone did not raise concerns about identification of the participant's identity.

Due to the sensitive research topic ethical considerations transcended beyond the common guidelines, as stated above, to include safeguarding and disclosures of war crimes. Participants were informed that confidentiality may be breached in the case that concerns arise regarding the safety of participants; the health and welfare of children; or vulnerable adults; and safety of others (Willig, 2013). In the present study, I considered that historically relevant information may transpire from the text. For example, details pertaining to war crimes, including identifiable information concerning perpetrators, locations, and narratives that include third parties. It is important to reiterate here that the cases of all seven participants presented in this study were reported by participants to government institutions, all of which were investigated and closed with no further actions taken. As such, the crimes related to conflict-related sexual violence illuminated in this research have previously been documented and investigated by United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and Kosovo's police. As a precautionary measure, complete transcripts were not made available in the appendices, and the citations provided in the analysis were anonymised to maintain confidentiality.

2.7.6 Data Protection

Personal information and data were stored in a password protected file. All documents, including information sheets (See Appendix 7a&7b), consent forms (See Appendix 6a&6b), de-briefing sheets (See Appendix 8a&8b), screening questions (See Appendix 4a&4b), and interview questions (See Appendix 5a&5b), were translated and made available in the native language of participants. The

consent forms were scanned from the NGO office to the City one-drive and the hard copies were securely destroyed in accordance with the City, University of London procedures. Once the thesis was completed and handed in all data was deleted from all electronic devices and only City, University of London, securely stored the anonymised transcripts.

Although, the BPS recommend that data be stored for up to 10 years following publication, City, University acknowledged that anonymised transcripts might represent historically important data and should therefore be kept indefinitely by City, University. Participants were therefore informed about the possibility that others (either now or in the future) may reuse the data in psychological research that may lead to further publications, conferences, talks, and public talks/ lectures. Any future reuse of the data will only be made available to studies that have been granted ethical approval and working in line with BPS research guidelines. Participants were informed about this process via the information sheet, and consent form and were given an opportunity to consider this carefully (See Appendix 7a,7b& Appendix 6a,6b).

2.8 Part Five: Methodological Rigor

2.8.1 Validity

Validity confronts the extensiveness of measures taken in a research investigation to ensure that it is properly conducted and meets empirical standards of rigour (Polkinghorne, 2007). Whilst the traditional scientific doctrine assumes an "Objective" universal reality that can be measured without researcher's interference, the narrative approach rooted in phenomenology holds that the knowledge we produce about ourselves and the world is moderated and restricted by psychological, social, historic and political phenomena (Williams & Morrow, 2009, p. 577). According to Webster and Mertova (2007) "Reliability in narrative research […] refers to the dependability of the data, while validity […] refers to the strength of the analysis of data" (p. 93). As such, access to "Trustworthiness" of the stories as narrated by participants is regarded as the cornerstone of validity and reliability (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 90).

Yardley (2008) identifies four essential procedural categories for trustworthiness, which included attentive awareness to context, reliability and rigour, transparency and consistency and influence, each is attended to below. Given the co-constructive endeavour in narrative research, reflexivity was an overarching apparatus that wove all of Yardley's categories together, and was addressed rigorously in the first stage of CNA and re-examined continuously throughout the study. Firstly, the criteria for partaking in this study was limited to Kosovar-Albanian women who experienced some form of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. Recruitment via the NGO ensured the credibility of the experiences

of sexual violence as all cases presented in this study were reported and documented to government institutions and all women held a *war invalid*[46] certificate.

Contextual challenges in narrative studies may include participants willingness and ability to be unreserved and congruent with their authentic cognitive and emotional material (Willig, 2013). As illustrated in other parts of this chapter, it was a skilful task from the part of the researcher to consider appropriate ethical measures that would minimise the risk to participants whilst also creating a respectful, safe and non-judgmental space, which would enable participants to tell their stories and subsequently ensure the retrieval of rich quality data.

When considering reliability and rigour the researcher is expected to be able to demonstrate a level of sensitivity to the data by not merely imposing pre-conceived classifications on the text but instead diligently examining the meanings produced by the participants (Yardley, 2008). Willig (2013) asserts that a narrative approach can be evaluated by determining the degree to which it effectively grounds its observations (interpretations of narratives) within the conditions that produce them (narrative data), and that they are firmly supported by theoretical evidence (Polkinghorne, 2007). In an attempt to contextualise the interpretations drawn from the narratives, I upkept a curious approach to reflexivity, which helped me to identify and differentiate my own constructions from the participants narratives and this was demonstrated via quotations from the text (Langdridge, 2007). To further strengthen the transparency and consistency of this research, I presented in an explicit and informative manner the ways in which psychological theories emerged from the text (Yardley, 2008). CNA offers six stages of analysis, each stage is thoroughly outlined in this chapter, exhibiting a transparent progression of my engagement with the text, which explicitly outlines research decisions and how certain conclusions were drawn, with evidence appended in the appendices.

Influence refers to the necessity for research to produce knowledge that is useful (Yardley, 2008). The absence of psychological research investigating Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo makes this study one of the first of this kind. Although, the aim of this investigation was not to make claims or generalisations beyond the experiences of the seven participants in this study, previous qualitative research on conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia (Where women and girls experienced a similar fate to those in Kosovo and by the same perpetrators) and other countries in Africa, South America and Asia exhibit similar themes to this study. It is thus impossible to deny that this study may provide nuances regarding survivor's experiences, inform psychological interventions, as well as to refine more effective first response strategies for international

46 An alternative yet controversial term used in Kosovo with intent to eradicate the stigma that is associated with being a *victim* of *sexual violence*.

organisations in political conflict. Above all, I aim to publish articles from this thesis and fill in the prevailing gap in research concerning this topic.

2.8.2 Methodological Challenges

2.8.2.1 Ethical Approval in Kosovo

Given that Kosovo does not have a BPS or HCPC equivalent, it was especially challenging to obtain ethical approval in Kosovo. Though, I approached various local universities in Prishtina, the response was unyielding. I then quired about ethical codes and guidelines and no university was willing to share these documents with me. I sought support from various MPs, politicians, health professionals, all of which were unable to guide or direct me to any institution with the capacity to provide ethical approval. The lack of support from government and non-government institutions may have been attributed to various factors, including incompetent government structures for international research, financial motives (I did not offer incentives to anyone who I reach out to for assistance), and finally a deeply rooted patriarchal presence in Kosovo. Acknowledging sexual violence as a reality may have been an anxiety provoking subject and a threat to the emasculation of Kosovar-Albanian men. The latter coincided with the conflict-related sexual violence research in various countries around the world and in part may have led to the political contamination of female survivors experiences in Kosovo.

This experience left me feeling psychologically and emotionally exhausted, through which I acquired a glimpse of what it may be like for survivors to live in a country that refuses to acknowledge their experiences[47]. I recognised the socio-political resistance as a reflection of the dominant social narrative in Kosovo and deliberated on how the phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence was positioned within the cultural and political landscape. At this critical juncture in the research journey, I recognised the possibility that, I may not be able to carry out this research. Given the discipline of psychology's growing commitment to social justice, as a trainee counselling psychologist, I deliberated on my personal and professional ethical responsibility with regard to socio-political issues, locally and on the global arena. The challenges I faced in Kosovo compelled me to explore my position within this discipline and ask important questions such as "To what extent is my professional position political? Do I accept the resistance and stand back from this research topic? How would my inaction then contribution to the injustice? As such, stepping back from this research topic was not an option for me as I strongly believe that any misalignment between psychologists' professional ethics and political

[47] This collective denial may have served to further silence women (as they did me) and exacerbate re-traumatisation. This initial experience, and the culmination of frustration towards the injustice I felt, I believe carried through to the interviews, whereby I assumed women would have had similar experiences within their families and socio-political context. I reflected periodically in my research journal and spoke with my supervisor to untangle my own preconceptions from women's experiences and explored the impact of this on the analysis. Though, the majority of interviews in the current study showed that the women's experiences were similar to my own.

action can, even unintentionally perpetuate social injustices (Allen & Dodd, 2018). By denying that my position as a trainee counselling psychologist is in and of itself political, I too would be colluding with the idea that assigns all the burden onto the survivors and relinquishing the wider social and political structures from their obligation to uphold the welfare of all their population (Lloyd & Pollard, 2018). With this in mind, I was determined to overcome this challenge and in collaboration with my research supervisor an alternative method for ethical approval was initiated[48]. These challenges provided a fertile ground for the development of ethical and professional maturity and inspired me to remain proactive in social affairs as well as to utilise my position after qualifying as a counselling psychologist in this field for further advocacy.

48 This was a laborious task as it involved me translating an entire ethical code (for health professionals in Kosovo) from Albanian into English and senior staff at NGO who were eager to surpass these challenges thoroughly evaluated my research proposal and all documents pertaining to the research against the ethical code and verified that the proposed research study met the local ethical criteria for research in Kosovo.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

3. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I present a thorough critical narrative analysis (CNA) of seven participant interviews. Here, I endeavoured to synthesise and organise the narrative data in three parts using the analytical framework illustrated in the previous chapter. Stages one to five of CNA are outlined here, a continuation of stage five and elaboration of stage six of CNA, where narratives are destabilised and synthesised across participants are presented in the discussion chapter that follows. The first part of this chapter commenced with the first stage of the analysis procedure, which focused on my reflexive journey and critique of the illusions of my own subjectivity relative to the topic under investigation. Followed by stage two, where participants are introduced and their narrative tone and rhetorical function are presented through biographical profiles. Part three focuses on the emergence and development of identities across participants and an integration of the findings from the narrative analysis where themes that transpired across participants' narratives were highlighted.

3.1 Part one: A critique of the illusions of the subject

Fundamental to CNA is the conceptualisation that both researcher and participant are united in a co-constructive endeavour throughout the research process, and as such, I did not claim to be an objective entity located outside of the research but rather reflected on how my own background and experience may have impacted on the analysis. Webster and Mertova (2007) explained that multiple realities are negotiated and constructed socially by an individual within a particular time and place, under this philosophical framework the data cannot epitomize a particular truth. Although, the assumption was that data in the form of personal descriptions regarding life experiences and meaning can provide understanding regarding unnoticed though notable sectors of the human condition (Polkinghorne, 2007), the findings were inevitably my own interpretations.

According to Langdridge (2007, p. 42) central to understanding is self-examination, in that "We always speak from […] a position dependent on our history and culture". Based on this viewpoint, all cognizance emerged from the accumulation of preconceptions regarding the topic under investigation and these "Pre-judgments" were therefore addressed directly and in a transparent manner prior to and across all stages of the research. This was accomplished via a thorough engagement in a set of reflexive questions (See Appendix 18) as advised by Langdrige (2007). The knowledge that emerged from this practice and the ongoing deliberations thereafter guided me to identify the heterogenous positions (as a white, 34-year-old, British Kosovar-Albanian, heterosexual woman, spiritually inclined (non-religious), a trainee psychologist, a translator, transcriptionist and narrative analysist) that I took when investigating women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo, this information was a key component in the analysis procedure.

In this study, I assumed that the survivors and I would be "Us" rather than "Other" to one another (Oguntoku, 1998, p. 526). I believed that my experiences of war and political-conflict and the repercussion of these would further heighten my empathic capacity. I assumed that our shared heritage, historical narratives, political stance, cultural beliefs and Kosovar-Albanian identity would qualify me to represent women's experiences with legitimacy and authenticity as an "Insider" circumventing the mistakes that researchers considered to be outsiders might be prone to (Oguntoku, 1998, p. 526). For instance, lack of cultural awareness might have led to the hindrance of meaning in context. I was aware that my representation as an "Insider" would determine how my interviewees were represented in the research findings and the *voices* that were prioritised in the text (Roulston, 2010). I considered that the salient similarities between interviewees and myself as well as my intra-psychic and inter-personal understanding of my own cultural heritage may have enriched my competencies to build rapport and sympathise with participants, who shared with me rich emotional experiences that may otherwise have gone unheard. On the contrary, our shared identity and cultural values depending on where the participants positioned me in relation to these and perhaps questioning my motive for this study, may have germinated a level of fear of being judged within the limitations of (and because of) their experiences of stigmatisation within our shared culture. This may have consequently engendered a greater level of shame, limiting participants from opening up more fully about their experiences. In my reflexive journey, I deliberated and reflected on various possibilities[49]. To manage these challenges more effectively, I relied on the core conditions incorporated in narrative interviewing that are similar to those we adhere to in a therapeutic setting. This included; unconditional positive regard, active

49 At the onset of this research, the resistance that I experienced at an institutional and social level, whilst attempting to gain ethical approval in Kosovo gave me the impression that perhaps there is something about the act of sexual-violence that is deeply triggering for people in Kosovo and it was my belief that this was especially the case for men. As, the majority of individuals in powerful positions that I sought support from happened to be men, their tone and attitude went from being positive, interested in offering their assistance to completely withdrawn as soon as they were made aware about the nature of the topic. On account of this belief, I may have been more inclined to the idea that women's position in their families and communities changed drastically and in a negative way after the sexual violence. During the data analysis, it was thus important for me to remain open to various narratives (perhaps some men are supportive of their wives/daughters etc) and to understand that this issue is multifarious, thus making use of all the stage of Critical Narrative Analysis to ensure that meaning was not limited to or reduced by my own beliefs. As a result of these experiences and culminated beliefs, as a researcher, I acknowledged that there was a higher risk of inadvertently placing women in a victim role (with negative connotations), which may not have been a true reflection of their humanness as well as to capture their multifaceted nature (their qualities, their strengths, their resilience and tenacity to overcome adversity). It was important for me to recognise how my eagerness to shed light on this topic, and the focus on the negativity surrounding women's experiences, especially within their local culture, may have come across as disempowering. The implications of my enthusiasm, for instance, my interpretations of the data may have come across as patronising, pitting, portraying survivors as helpless and powerless victims and reducing women merely to their experiences of sexual-violence. In this way, unintentionally adding to the cyclical nature of the stigmatisation and marginalisation created and perpetuated by the social and political context. Awareness around these challenges helped me to reflect, for instance, when examining the text on questions of what is being triggered and unearthed within me? And in which direction is this pulling? What do I need right now? In my interrogation of the text am I trying to heal, change, control something related to me? Answering these questions in an honest and transparent way in turn allowed me to work on my own personal needs separately from the analysis of the text and in this way allow the narratives to emerge as close in proximity as possible to how the participants would have wanted them to be received and presented in this study by me. Therefore, acknowledging a more holistic account of the participants, making room for their vulnerabilities without taking away from their strengths. Allowing identity to emerge as the participants wanted them to.

engagement and listening, non-judgmental and safe space, and congruence, and remained compassionate, respectful and diligent at all times (Hunter, 2010).

During the interview process, it became clear to me that despite the abovementioned similarities there were substantial distinctions that needed to be acknowledged as well as the possibility that I had fallen victim to the "Seduction of sameness" (Oguntoku, 1998). While, I empathised with the feelings of shame and humiliation described and shared a portion of anger and overall devastation of war, I could not pretend to know what it was like for women to experience the war and the sexual violence in its entirety, as well as, the issues that exist within their cultural, social, economic and political context. Any effort to compare this to my own experiences of political-conflict would have been derisive. On this account, by positioning the "Self" in close proximity "To the subject" I may have unconsciously focused more intensely on investigating the similarities I shared with the participants (Pillow, 2003, p. 182) and given that the aim of the current study was to give *voice* to a disenfranchised group, this may have perpetuated and concealed the unbalanced power dynamic between myself as a privileged researcher and the participants.

Confronted with our differences (place of residence, age, socio-economic status and education) which had the potency to create a gap between "Us" and our realities, I was mindful that my position as a trainee psychologist could have unintentionally offered me as a privileged researcher who sought to *rescue* the *victimised women,* which had the potential to add to the already existing pathology surrounding survivors position in society as weak and vulnerable. Where I may have unconsciously viewed women as hopeless and powerless victims, I may have prompted victim narratives or even elicited survivor narratives from women who may have wanted to revolt against victim labels. Neither one offering an organic account of their experiences but rather masking the polysemy of multiple positions, interests and agencies in the context analysed[50] (Macbeth, 2001). In this way, supervision, psychological therapy, my reflective dairy and creative work offered me ample opportunity to reflect on this material as well as to examine the transference and counter-transference that emerged. My engagement in these multifarious activities, prompted me to wonder whether the women shared somewhat of the emotional and psychological pain, isolation and disconnection from themselves, their families and communities that I experienced in my journey through this research. Revisiting the transcripts with this newly gained self-awareness gave me the opportunity to analyse narratives from a more informed perspective, whilst untangling my own material from that of the participants (See Appendix 19).

50 In addition to this, I noticed that women closer to me in age were less likely to offer more detailed historical perspectives than women who were older than me. Perhaps, this was because the women who were older than me, assumed that I, as a younger woman who lived outside of Kosovo did not have a full understanding of the history of Kosovo. Given that history was a crucial component in the backdrop of their narratives women may have felt obligated to set the scene more thoroughly.

3.2 Part Two: Biographical Narratives

Below, I presented a brief summary of the seven women who part took in the present research investigation, offered in the order in which the interviews were carried out. The biographical profiles as delineated below were not intended to epitomise the true and accurate nature of who the women are. In lieu, I anticipated that by offering some contextual details about the respondents and my own interpretations of these, may throw light on the cultural, social, political and historical context, in which narrative were co-constructed. Given that the aim of this study was to give *voice* to a marginalised group of women who survived conflict-related sexual violence and recognising the urgency evident in their narratives for their *voices* to be heard globally, I felt it was important not to reduce women to a group of survivors but rather to share some compelling information about them in an effort to honour and illuminate their individual idiosyncrasies and uniqueness.

In addition to offering women a platform through which they could be *heard*, a visual display of women's paintings depicting their experiences of sexual violence was also included. As discussed in chapter two under narrative interviews, participants had all completed a piece of creative work in an art therapy session run by the NGO from which I recruited, a process that occurred prior to the interviews and had no connection to this study. As a starting point, I invited participants to bring their paintings to the interviews and though this was optional, all seven women agreed. Below, I included a brief summary outlining the purpose and motivation behind the art, as presented by the narrators, followed by direct quotes from women's transcripts. I hoped that the biographical profiles presented below in conjunction with the analysis, which ensues would provide a comprehensive account of the perplexity and multi-faceted nature of women's experiences prior to, during, and in the aftermath of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo. The narrative tones and rhetorical functions, identity work and principal themes are described below. A thorough examination of dialogic, stylistic and performative techniques of talk were also presented.

3.3 Identifying narratives

3.3.1 Afërdita[51]

[redacted]

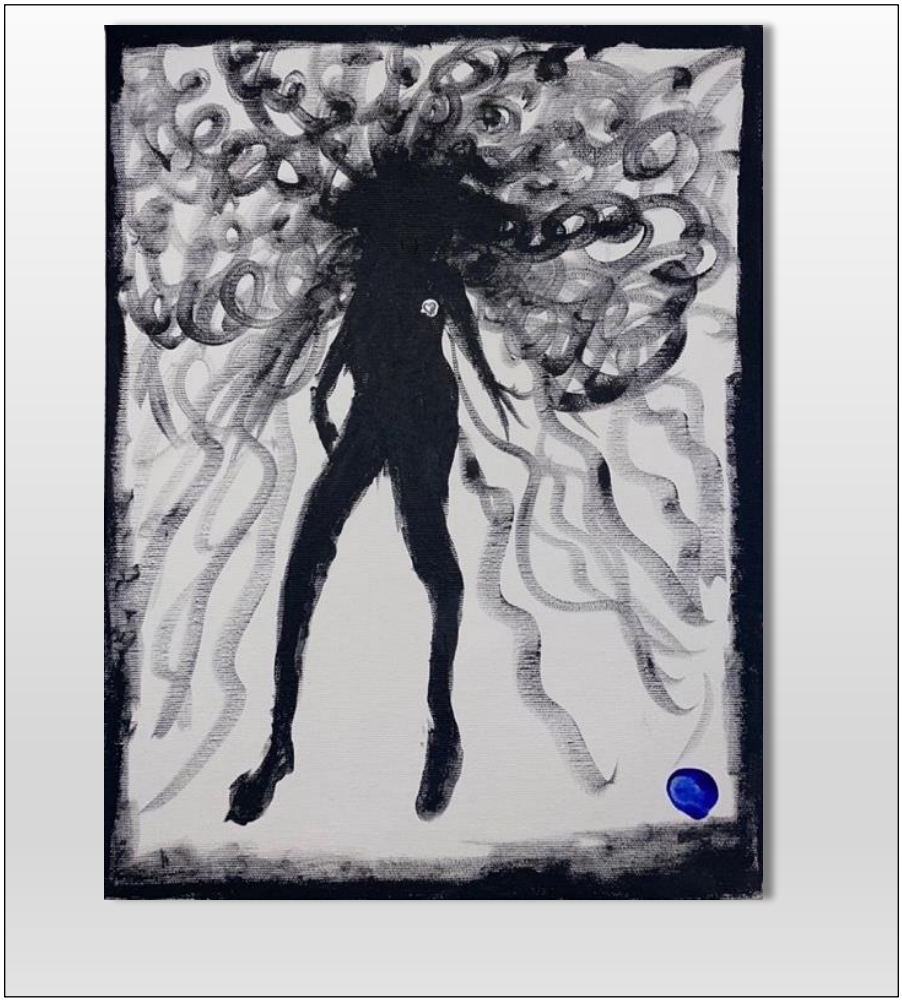
Afërdita presented in a calm and collected manner and on the whole, her tone was bold and assertive. Afërdita's narrative was predominantly chronological, and commenced with vivid descriptions of life prior to the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. Afërdita's tone was sad and reminiscent as she recollected her husband's activism against the Serbian political regime, participation in Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA) and the perpetual movement to avoid the Serb police force. Afërdita then described the start of the war, when her husband and brother in law were brutally murdered whilst trying to protect the family. Afërdita's narrative was overwhelmingly tragic and stomach-churning as she described how the perpetrators demonstrated physical, psychological and emotional torture on the children, the elderly and the women and girls. Afërdita described enduring the horrors of sexual violence whilst [redacted] pregnant and in the presence of her children and family. In the aftermath of war, Afërdita described experiencing shame related to her admission into a neuropsychiatric hospital for treatment related to war trauma and the detrimental impact of the cultural stigma on her sons' mental wellbeing. Afërdita turned to God, her identity as a mother, being amongst other survivors and her family for strength and courage to overcome adversity. Her tone was bold and powerful as she talked about her solid Kosovar-Albanian identity, heritage and national pride. Afërdita's narrative came to a close in an optimistic fashion with a focus on progressive resolutions, which inadvertently hindered the Serbian political objective in Kosovo.

[51] To preserve participants' confidentiality all names and identifying details were altered and all the participants were referred to by pseudonyms.

3.3.2 Afërdita's Painting

Afërdita explained that her painting depicted the perpetrators attempt to contaminate her and turn her life into darkness. Purity was related exclusively to the heart but the rest of the body was seen to be contaminated by the shame and humiliation of the sexual violence. Through a self-portrait, she responded to these attempts by emphasising her femininity, pure heart, strength, courage and tenacity to overcome the horrors that eventuated. Afërdita explained that her painting does not merely epitomise the experience of a Kosovar-Albanian woman but the experience of a human being and through her art, she hoped to connect cross-culturally with others.

"One can never humiliate a strong woman with anything! […] The heart is still white, they tried to dress us up in black but a human being must be stronger than stone" **(1:21-28)**



3.3.3 Dardana

While eager to talk, Dardana was very anxious and self-soothed by perpetually massaging her hands. Dardana was visibly saddened and grieving and during the interview I reflected on how delicate and fragile she appeared. Dardana had travelled a long distance to participate in the interview and while I was moderately concerned, to avoid disempowering her, I decided to move through the interview at her pace. Simultaneously, her psychological and emotional wellbeing was at the core of the interview, this care was maintained via regular check in's and reminders of her agency and control and that she could take breaks if and when required. Dardana's narrative was primarily chronological, and commenced with accounts of life prior to the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. While her and her family experienced economic deprivation, Dardana felt complete within herself, was surrounded by her family and friends and was generally a happy person. At the onset of the war Dardana was abducted by Serb forces and subjected to days of rape and sexual-violence. Dardana's tone became demoralised and pessimistic as she explained that although post-war life was more manageable and the living conditions vastly improved, the rapes left her with a permanent stain. She described feeling indefinitely contaminated and contended with an incessant subjective emptiness. Twenty-years post war and Dardana was still suffering from the injuries she sustained during the sexual violence, including obstetric fistula and pain on both wrists from being tied up with barbed wire. The general narrative tone was enormously tragic, distressing and at times agonising, filled with loss and heartbreak yet her delivery was very eloquent and poetic. Dardana became visibly upset and her tone subdued as she described her relationship with a man that she loved prior to the war, a man who abandoned her once he discovered that she had been raped. Her cries emanated from a deeply wounded place, caused by rejection, abandonment and betrayal. A marriage arranged by her father with an elderly man ensued and for her living in a loveless marriage was synonymous with death and with limited options she was morally compelled to endure the insufferable for the sake of her children.

3.3.4 Dardana's Painting

For Dardan the painting process was a liberating and cathartic experience through which she attempted to educate people and compel them to strive to understand the horrors that she experienced. In her narrative, Dardana described how she and the other women were tied up with barbed wire and tortured, and their efforts to reach out to one another and offer solace failed. Through this painting Dardana sought to resolve this state of powerlessness and regain autonomy by re-creating her own escape, here she and the other women are seen holding hands standing tall and strong as they walk away from the houses where they had been kept hostage, to seize their freedom.

*"I have experienced the evil that humanity can do […] Words are not enough… my souls voice has colour and someone else will see it and will hear the echoes of my soul by looking at this painting"***(23:835-847)**

3.3.5 Liria

[redacted] The duration of this interview was just over 17 minutes, making this the briefest of all seven interviews.

At the time of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo Liria was only [redacted]teen-years of age, when she was abducted from her family, held captive in a rape house and subjected to days of sexual violence. During the interview, Liria often resorted to laconic responses and conveyed a practical and pragmatic narrative that was compendious and unembellished. I sensed that this was by no means due to a lack of interest in the interview process nor did it suggest to me her inability to express herself. Instead, I considered the possibility that Liria's emotional development may have laid dormant 20-years post war Kosovo, as the age of trauma onset appeared to be consistent with the way she expressed herself in the interview. Liria's narrative followed a chronological sequence, she presented childlike in nature, was soft-spoken and laughed anxiously as she described her experience of sexual violence. Her emotional pain and discomfort were negotiated and communicated to me through non-verbal language such as long gazes, nods and fluctuating body temperature (flushes). Liria's tone was heart-breaking as she described the loss of her innocence and shattered dreams. Sometime after the war Liria got married and gave birth to a daughter, she became visibly uncomfortable as she explained that two years into her marriage her husband learned about her experience of sexual violence and no longer deemed her to be an honourable wife nor a fit mother to raise their daughter, he dropped her off at her father's house and filed for a divorce. Liria described this process to be as painful as removing her nails from her flesh and in the midst of her suffering she attempted suicide by throwing herself into a self-made bonfire [redacted], her family's prompt intervention saved her life and they were her main source of support thereafter. Liria's narrative took a more positive and hopeful turn following her second marriage and the birth of her two daughters and came to end in a bold manner as she expressed wanting to break her long-held silence and hoped that her voice would reach the entire world.

3.3.6 Liria's Painting

For Liria, her painting was a visual documentation of war crimes, which captured the terror and dismay of her experience. Visible in her painting are buildings engulfed with flames, which Liria believed were executed with intent to destroy war crime evidence, in particular rape camps. The perpetrators identified as the Serb police were painted black, comparatively she explained her decision to paint herself in bright yellow positioned outside the rape camp, as a powerful symbol of freedom, victory and unity with other Kosovar-Albanian women. Liria hoped that this painting would reach people and inspire them to support survivors in their journey towards recovery.

"I wanted to express the pain in my soul, […] let my heart speak […]shows how our lives became filled with darkness." **(39:1427-1430)**

3.3.7 Baresha

[redacted]Baresha was graceful and elegant in delivering her narrative.

Baresha highlighted the ongoing political conflict prior to the war in Kosovo and the role of women in an already existing patriarchal society. Irrespective of all the challenges women experienced, Baresha explained that they were grateful and content with their lives because, in addition to having all their family members alive and well, they also enjoyed healthy inter-personal relationships and sustained intra-psychic tranquillity. Baresha explained that during the war her husband was away with work in [redacted], thereby she was especially devoted to protecting her two young children. To evade the perpetrator's and seek safety she was inclined to periodic movement to various locations. In an attempt to protect the family, some of the male relatives joined the KLA, unfortunately they were all met by Serb forces who proceeded to kill the men in uniforms and violently rape the women and girls. During the rapes, Baresha recalled falling unconscious, held suspended in the vacuity of her mind by the echoing of her children's heart-wrenching screams. She described feeling immersed in guilt, shame and powerlessness by her inability to save her children from bearing witness to these heinous crimes. Following from the war, Baresha's narrative took a more resilient stance, which was partly due to her husband's moral support. She felt seen, heard and acknowledged in her suffering by her husband, which marked a significant shift in her self-perception from a state of victimisation to one of empowerment.

3.3.8 Baresha's Painting

In her painting, Baresha expressed the ways in which nature offered her a non-judgmental space where she could emerge in her authentic form and where she felt embraced as a human being. Depicted here were six trees to commemorate her father and brother who were killed by Serb forces. She also honoured the sacred bond she shared with her cow that spanned over two decades and who she considered to be a source of emotional support and inspiration. For Baresha, this painting was an expression of gratitude, with which she aspired to give hope to those who are in despair.

*"Nothing comes of darkness only bad things […] if you continue to stay in the darkness you will keep everyone else hostage in the darkness with you."***(54:1975-1978)**

3.3.9 Arbëresha

[redacted] Arbëresha is a business owner, she presented herself as a strong and independent woman.

Prior to the war Arbëresha had rebelled against local traditions, which she claimed were rooted in patriarchal values, her tone was desolate as she spoke about women's oppression and lack of autonomy. Her decision to find love on her own terms and marry her husband without her family's blessing brought subsequent dishonour to her family who then disconnected from her for [redacted] years. Despite the uncertainties and the political conflict, Arbëresha enjoyed a relatively normal life, was sociable and had great relationships with others. In her narrative Arbëresha described having a healthy martial relationship with her husband, which was based on love, harmony and understanding. As the war commenced, Arbëresha's husband joined the KLA whilst she stayed home with her two small sons. In an effort to stay united and safe, she was then joined by her sister whose husband also joined the KLA. While seeking safety in a village they were ambushed by Serb forced and subjected to days of sexual violence. Arbëresha explained that once the first group of perpetrators left, her and her sister continued their journey back to her home in [redacted] to seek safety, but instead, they were once again confronted by a second group of Serb perpetrators and subjected to the same horrors. Sexual violence was seen as an all-encompassing tragedy that took over her entire life, she yearned to build meaningful friendships but was crippled by an overwhelming fear of being exposed to the wider cultural context and the harmful impact of this on her life. Above all else, she was terrified of being rejected and abandoned by her family and community and exhaustively preserved her secret to protect her dignity, honour and status.

3.3.10 Arbëresha's Painting

In her painting, Arbëresha depicted the duality between the light and the darkness of the human condition (rape house in parallel with flowers/Serb perpetrator in parallel to a light at the end of the tunnel), which represented both the horrors of the war and the hope that carried her through. To re-gain power and agency over her story, Arbëresha externalised the perpetrator from her intra-psychic landscape on to the canvas. It was anticipated by Arbëresha that to acquire human pliancy and resilience, even under the most horrific conditions, could have the potential to inspire people in their times of hardship. It was through this painting that Arbëresha sought acknowledgement, validation and justice for the pain she and others had suffered during the war.

*"This work was done against my will and to have survived it for this, I am proud!"***(79:2896-2897)**

3.3.11 Shqiponja

[redacted] Shqiponja was unable to conceive due to the injuries she sustained during the sexual violence, though together with her husband they adopted [redacted] daughter who was orphaned during the war.

Shqiponja was visibly nervous and self-conscious about her limited education, and how that might hinder her ability to contribute meaningfully to this doctoral study, thus brought to prominence the imbalanced power-dynamics between us. Her narrative unfolded progressively, prior to the war Shqiponja's tone was vibrant, colourful and melodic as she described having richer more fulfilling relationships within her family who were all alive and well. Shqiponja described having psychological and spiritual autonomy and placed emphasis on feeling a sense of internal peace. Shqiponja's narrative then proceeded to clearly stipulate that it was during the war, whilst seeking refuge deep in the forest that she [redacted] abducted by Serb forces and brutally raped. Her tone was sad and dejected as she grieved the physical injuries she sustained and the loss of an opportunity to have her own family. Following from the war, Shqiponja willingly stepped into motherhood via adoption and her role as a mother gave her a sense of purpose and inspiration in life. In her narrative Shqiponja [redacted] was confronted by a sense of sadness and loss, because her daughter now an adult, had reconnected with her biological mother. Shqiponja's marriage was also wounded by the sexual violence, though she employed an indirect narrative technique to give hypothetical examples of how other men executed passive aggression, emotional abuse and victim blaming, to voice her own experiences without explicitly denouncing, condemning or betraying her husband. Shqiponja concluded her narrative on a more hopeful note, from her perspective to live her life fully was her way of commemorating those who lost their lives for the freedom that she now enjoys.

3.3.12 Shqiponja's Painting

For Shqiponja, this painting addressed the washing away of the malignancy, contamination and toxicity of the sexual violence. While the water symbolised the process of purging and absolving oneself of the poison of the enemy, the nakedness and long hair addressed the preservation of femininity. Shqiponja explained that mother nature represented purity, growth and goodness, which helped her to restore to a version of herself that existed prior to the sexual violence when she felt a sense of wholeness and internal purity.

*"I am trying to wash away the stains, all the poison that they put into our bodies and souls. I am trying to get rid of it all, to wash the body, the soul and my heart […]in this lake. The darkness is left behind, and the water here is the hope for a better life"***(102:3733-3736)**

3.3.13 Teuta

[redacted] Teuta's nervousness was observed in her frequent use of epizeuxis[52]. Teuta's embodied trauma was visible physiologically and she regulated her anxiety by frequently massaging her hands.

Teuta often dwelled in silence and concluded her narratives with long terrified gazes, leaving me to marinate in the horrors of her experiences. Teuta's narrative unfolded chronologically, prior to the war she focused chiefly on building a healthy family. On the onset of the war, Teuta's husband joined the KLA while she took care of her children and the elderly, she described the incessant movement to various location to seek safety and being confronted by the Serb forces who then carried out lootings, violent attacks, killings and rapes. Teuta was raped in multiple locations, including a school that was converted into a rape camp, in her home and in the fields, different groups of perpetrators were described to have operated in a similar manner. Approximately thirty men were shot and killed in the fields, where they hid. Teuta's tone was one of shock and horror as she described how the Serbs set two horses on fire, how they galloped uncontrollably, whinnied and convulsed in agony as they burned alive. In post-war Kosovo, sexual violence was regarded as the destruction of spirituality and the contamination of her sacred internal being. Teuta experienced self-animosity, self-doubted and remained suspicious, anxious and fearful. Teuta believed that the Serbs placed poison in them and they were now withered, damaged and even rotted. Teuta felt an overwhelming sense of shame related to the vulgarity of the acts that were performed on her in the presence of her children and family. She no longer felt herself to be a valuable member of her in-group and experienced a disconnection from her national identity. Teuta hoped to have freedom of expression without judgment and to be able to live a full and meaningful life. Her tone was assertive and bold as she described a desire to seek justice for her and her family.

52 A figure of speech in which she repeated a word or phrase in immediate successions. See Oxford Dictionary.

3.3.14 Teuta's Painting

Teuta explained that being of service to others and taking care of her animals and garden gave her a sense of purpose, motivation and hope for life, and this was where she drew inspiration for her painting. This process was described by Tetua to be a spiritual act, one that helped her to disconnect from her pain and to liberate her soul and psyche from the darkness of the sexual violence. Teuta explained that nature encouraged her to focus on cultivating her future rather than to be held hostage by the horrors of her past. Above all else, for Teuta, the clear skies and doves symbolised peace and justice and was her way of affirming that every person deserves to live a full life and to celebrate their humanity.

*"No one has ever listened to us […] Even if we draw on mud it would be enough for us, to do a single line to express our pain and to express our experiences!"***(133:4872-4879)**

3.4 Part Three: Analysis of the Narratives

In this psychological research, the findings illuminated the ways in which life in the aftermath of war and sexual violence was negotiated by Kosovar-Albanian women in Kosovo. Here, I outlined the identities that were developed narratively via the stories that participants relayed, which were notably restricted by historical, political, and socio-cultural context as well as the language that was available to them. The narrative sequences that emerged were fundamental to women's personal sense-making and transpired in a chronological manner; life prior to, during and in the aftermath of sexual violence. To preserve the heterogeneity and idiosyncrasies related to women's personal experiences, in addition to incorporating comprehensive excerpts, I also included all syntactic and prosodic characteristics of talk, dialogical hallmarks, stylistic features and performative displays that were embodied (See Appendix 13 for table of keys). My own observations were also bracketed in the citations in bold. Further to this, five main themes and the subsequent subthemes that emerged from the research data are demonstrated below in figure 5.

Main Themes				
1. Examining the past to give meaning to the present	**2. Understanding rape as a weapon of war used to dehumanise women, their families and nation**	**3. Living within a highly patriarchal and misogynous milieu**	**4. Coping with an internal war**	**5. Moving forward: Challenging government institutions and advocating for lasting change**
Subthemes				
"Us Albanians have a very bitter history […] we paid for this freedom with our blood"	*"This was a political weapon for ethnic cleansing"*	*"Survivors of war, […] it means you overcome something even if there is no desire to overcome it."*	*"They took a piece of my soul […] they took away my humanity"*	*"They couldn't keep us stagnant […] we moved […] progressed […] succeeded"*
"Our identity was always at the heart of every political conflict in Kosovo"	*"What can we do *we got used to horror*"*	*"I should be grateful to him for deciding to stay with me"*	*"I am a bad person because they forced me to do bad things"*	*"Male and female have the same rights now […] I would like for us to also have these equal rights."*
"They couldn't crack our identity"	*"To violate the morality of the Albanians"*	*"I don't even deserve to be alive"*	*"I am not at fault for what happened […] God gives you the power"*	
"Even the religion […] played a role here"		*"I didn't deserve to be a mother"*	*"Death would have been better for us then to be touched here."*	
"Can one remain under the sole of another's foot forever?"		*"That was my biggest fear […] I said to myself now I will have to leave my children without a mother"*		
"Serbs! […] they were without mercy, without a soul, without a heart"		*"It would be like stripping me naked again in front of everyone's eyes!"*		
		"I found that there is nothing a mother would not do for her children"		
		"I will surpass it myself […] I don't want to channel my trauma to my children"		
		"They said its shameful, […] they always said 'Do not discuss this with anyone'"		

Figure 5: This is a table exhibiting the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.

3.4.1 1) Examining the past to give meaning to the present

In their narratives, participants reported consistent and clear chronicles of ancient historical, social, political and psychological developments. To give meaning to traumatic experiences, notably those related to the war and sexual violence, undoubtably required drawing upon a wider collective understanding to provide the background against which sound explanations could be framed. From this perspective, it was common for the narrators to recourse to the past in order to make sense of the present. All interviewee's without exception felt it was important to set a historical and political frame for their audience before delving into accounts of the war and sexual violence.

"Us Albanians have a very bitter history* […] *we paid for this freedom with our blood"

As a beginning point, I presented the identity work that emerged from the findings and which set the pace for the rest of this psychological investigation. Accounts of sexual violence and inhumanity were prolific in women's narratives and this contributed vastly towards the development of a number of identities, inclusive of; national identity (Kosovar-Albanian), personal identity (womanhood and/or motherhood), and survivors identity (shared experience of war and/or sexual violence), which epitomized the fluidity and contextual disposition of identity development. This was demonstrated in a diagrammatic presentation in figure 6 below.

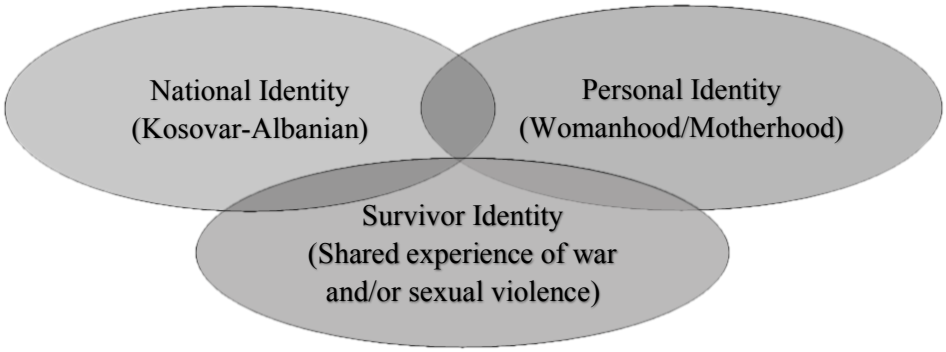


Figure 6: This is a schematic presentation of notable identities that emerged from the data.

"Our identity was always at the heart of every political conflict in Kosovo"

In women's narratives, Kosovar-Albanian people were positioned as protagonists and victims in the conflict as well as the preceding war in Kosovo, while the Serbian forces and people were regarded as the antagonists and perpetrators. From the onset, it was clear to me that the women were eager, even passionate about outlining their separateness from the Serbian forces and people, in terms of race, identity, culture, traditions, history, religion and psychology. All narrators assimilated within a Kosovar-Albanian identity and the majority of women went further to make a link between this identity

and the continuity of their historical, political, and cultural connection to the ancient Illyrian people, who they believed to be the direct ancestors of the modern-day Albanians and whose existence in this region predates the Serbs, thus warranting them a natural territorial right in Kosovo. In their narratives, the women made reference to historical and archaeological discoveries to support their claims, whilst strongly dismissing the Serbian version of historical events, which according to narrators was incoherent and replete with mythology.

Teuta: *The Serbs are under the impression that Kosovo is theirs, but understanding this is a simple task, there are anthropologists, scientists, there are many historians that have evidence to show that Albanians decent from Illyrians and that we are one of the oldest people in Europe. The only facts Serbs have is made up stories,(2) mythologies that do not have a leg to stand on anywhere in the world. All this destruction had to do with the land, with the culture, with the language and about everything. They always wanted to make us completely vanish, if they could see the ground open up and to swallow us whole, they would have been satisfied!* […] *Us Albanians have a very bitter history, with lots of turmoil* […] *we are free now* […] *paid for this freedom with our blood and violence!!***(136:4984-5596)**[53]

To further extend the interstice between Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians narrators also noted their distinct linguistic systems and heritage. While, the Slavic language (Cyrillic) was thought to be native to the Serbs, the Albanian language was presumed to be inherited from their ancient Pelasgian and Illyrian ancestors. I understood, this prosodic association to be Dardana's way of strengthening the Kosovar-Albanian claim over Kosovo. Dardana, understood the restriction of autonomy and the hindrance to the percolation of Kosovar-Albanian social, historical and political memory as a direct threat to their Kosovar-Albanian identity.

Dardana: *They hated us first and foremost because we are Albanian and then they tried to find other reasons to justify their crimes. So, we are different from them in many ways, our languages are completely different, they speak Cyrillic the Slavic language whereas we speak Albanian which comes from Latin, our language is the language of the Pelasgians and the Illyrians. Kosovo was always ours but for centuries they chopped our lands into pieces and then they tried to evaporate us, to assimilate us into their culture, to speak their language and for us to forget our own identity.* […] *Our identity was always at the heart of every political conflict in Kosovo, that's why all of this happened* […] *the people who were massacred, those who bled their blood, but also us females and the struggles we went through.***(28:1004-1191)**

"They couldn't crack our identity"

A common belief in women's narratives was that the Serb political administration attempted to assimilate Kosovar-Albanians into a Serb identity, and all seven women reported that they had been prohibited from acknowledging and celebrating their Kosovar-Albanian identity both prior to and during the war in Kosovo. The women explained that to avoid persecution they were compelled to

[53] Narrative extracts are referenced by transcript page and first line number followed by the last line number.

conceal their Kosovar-Albanian identity. In this way, the Serbian regime tyrannically attained power and dominance over Kosovo with aspirations to ethnically cleanse Kosovar-Albanians. In addition to, solidifying the distinction between Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians, according to the women, this political endeavour served to strengthen national identity, patriotism and further unite Kosovar-Albanians in their collective pursuit to liberate themselves from the Serbian oppression. This was outlined in Shqiponja's narrative below, which was filled with national pride as she described the psychological tenacity sustained by her homogenous group and their ability to support one another during the conflict.

Shqiponja: *Even though the Serbs restricted all our avenues, we didn't have any kind of rights as Albanians and life outside our house was difficult, it was difficult to progress or to do anything without fear* […]*There was an undeclared war even before the 98 war. The Serbs butchered and minced our people, they kicked us out of our jobs, they hated us, they tried to assimilate us into the Serb culture, obviously this did not happen, they tried to erase our history, they tried to erase our language, there was a time when they even closed down the Albanian schools, they kicked people out of their jobs, they guarded the hospitals with Serb army, Albanians were not allowed to even get medical assistance there because they would shoot you in front of the doors of the hospital if you tried to go inside. This was our reality back then, but us Albanians we were all very connected, we Albanians were so connected, and we all tried to support one another, they couldn't crack our identity.***(105:3825-3848)**

"Even the religion* […] *played a role here"

The significance of the religious difference between Kosovar-Albanians (who were predominantly Muslim) and Serbs (who were predominantly Orthodox Christian) was noted in some of the narratives. Dardana cautioned the reader that it would be naïve for us to assume that this religious distinction did not factor into the political conflict/war and sexual violence and proceeded to cite an example from the horrors that ensued in Bosnia several years prior to the war in Kosovo, whereby thousands of Bosniak Muslims were killed and women raped by Serb forces, on account of their national and religious identity. I understood the efforts she made to extend beyond the war in Kosovo to include atrocities from Bosnia as further evidence to solidify her depiction of the Serb forces as the antagonists of the Balkans, who utilised every aspect of their human condition to maximise their ethnic-cleansing mission.

Dardana: *I noticed who they were because the majority of them had crosses, they were all wearing crosses! {**What did the cross symbolise?}** Their religion, they were Christian, pure Serb! (hhh) (3) **{Aha, do you think there was a religious element to the war in Kosovo?}** Yes, I think they used it as some sort of justification* […] *Now, in these circumstances it it is normal to think that even the religion had a, played a role here, the majority of Kosovar-Albanians are Muslim and the majority of Serbs are Catholic, you look at what happened to the Muslim Bosnikas not even five years before us!(2)***(27:994-1016)**

"Can one remain under the sole of another's foot forever?"

Teuta described the emergence of a Serb nationalist rhetoric in Kosovo, whereby the Serb political administration anticipated that the mounting racial discrimination combined with lack of autonomy and barbarism would engender the emigration of Kosovar-Albanians and yield them sole political power in

Kosovo. Teuta's tone was assertive as she explained that when the Serb political impetus proved ineffective, they recurred to intensive militaristic tactics, including "The raping of women".

Teuta: *We struggled a great deal* […] *we couldn't even celebrate our own identity* […]*The Serbs, they tried to cause us Albanians so much damage because they thought that if they stopped our schools from running, our work, if they do not allow us to practice our own culture, to speak our own language and to simply just live that we would then run away to Albania or somewhere and we leave our lands. When they saw that this is something we didn't intent on doing they increased their level of torture, and they began with the killings of people, with the raping of women, with tortures and massacre.***(135:4934-4957)**

By all accounts, the Kosovar-Albanian retaliation against Serb forces eventually led to the (1998-1999) war. Though they were impacted differently, the women explained that the war solicited an active engagement of both females (civilians) and males (soldiers). While the majority of men in their efforts to protect the Kosovar-Albanian people, in the women's narratives, joined Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA), the majority of women were left behind to take care of their children, the ill, and the elderly. Dardana's tone was filled with pride and assertiveness as she recalled risking her own life to save her mother. I wondered whether this was her way of bringing to the surface, the pre-existing gender-inequalities within her family and community, as being partly due to a strong patriarchal presence in Kosovo, which preceded the war.

Dardana: *I was left there with my mother* […] *she had undergone six operations she was unable to escape and I wouldn't leave her behind, and she would say "leave me, you go" I would say "I will never leave you ever".***(26:947-950)**

A common sentiment across the narratives was women's pressing need to present the Kosovar-Albanian men who joined the KLA as *ordinary* men who were obligated by the upsurge in violence from the Serb forces to put on their uniforms. The KLA soldiers in women's narratives were regarded as *protectors* of the Kosovar-Albanian people, a narrative which, I believed developed to counter the Serbian national rhetoric that portrayed the KLA as a terrorist organisation and the perpetrators in the war. This was demonstrated below in Arbëresha's narrative, where emotive language and a compelling question "Can one remain under the sole of another's foot forever?" was utilised perhaps to persuade the reader to empathise with their experience of oppression, and from this desperate standpoint, to evaluate the dire decision that was made by ordinary men to leave their families behind and to join the KLA. By portraying themselves and the Kosovar-Albanian population as defenceless victims living under intolerable conditions, I believe the narrators warranted the KLA moral immunity for their role in the casualties sustained by Serb forces during the war.

Arbëresha: *My husband was dressed in the KLA uniform, it wasn't easy to tell your husband to go out there, to protect the Albanian people and for me to be home alone with two small children but those*

*were the circumstances back then, was either to survive forever or to remain occupied and under the Serb oppression. Can one remain under the sole of another's foot forever? It's not tolerable […] it is better to risk it all!***(88:3233-3239)**

Teuta: *We knew that we were not doing anything wrong, we were not at fault, we were not carrying out massacres.***(137:4995-4996)**

"Serbs!* […] *they were without mercy, without a soul, without a heart"

As the war accelerated, the women described the perpetrators intent to instill fear and terror via increased physical and psychological violence. This was demonstrated in Afërdita and Teutua's narratives below in a gruesome outline of the barbarism, which foreshadowed the rapes that ensued. I interpreted the chronicles of additional war crimes to serve the purpose of shocking the audience, with intent to evoke a similar emotional turmoil that women themselves may have felt. Subsequently inviting the reader to acknowledge that the rapes were not isolated events, which occurred in the periphery of war but rather in conjunction with other war crimes. To frame rape in the context of war seemed important to women, perhaps because in its aftermath, it rendered them of the latent guilt and blame that was incessantly plunged into them by their family and community.

Afërdita's tone was stomach-churning as she described being assaulted and her five-year-old son ordered at knife point to identify his father's lifeless body.

Afërdita: *I saw that the boys were killed* […] *They stroke, they abused everyone, they snatched my eldest son right out of my hands and threatened to cut him up, *he was five years old at the time*. But, I do not know why but my son didn't make a sound, with all that, a knife to his throat* […] *They hit me on my head with the back of the machine gun and when the machine gun made contact with my skull it fractured. To this day you can see how the skull bone attached in the wrong way [i], and I don't even have one tooth left in my mouth that is mine [i], they are all broken from when I was attacked then [i]. All of these are prosthetics [i]***(6:186-204)**

Teuta was animated, used repetition and turned to involve me by posing a rhetorical question "Do you know the horror?". I was instantly drawn to her narrative and shared somewhat of the rage and terror described.

Teuta: *When we went to* [redacted] *they took 30 men there…{**Aha** (2)} And they beat them in our presence and some were shot and killed. {**Aha**}* […] *there were many Serbs, they made us get off of all the tractors one by one and they searched us. {**Aha**}*[…]*that's were the two horses on fire came their screams were horrific, they were burning alive do you know what I mean? They had set them up on fire and then they were running through the forest. (hhhh) {**Aha**} Do you know the horror? (hhh)* […]*the horse's they had this much [Makes a gesture with her hands] foam coming out of their mouths. I could feel their pain, it was as though a human was on fire, it was like you know like watching a child.***(146:5328-5366)**

Unable to rationalise the unfathomable horrors that they experienced, Serb forces were further depicted by women to be inherently evil and non-human who lacked benevolence and compassion and had the willingness to execute unforgiving barbarism without clemency.

Liria: *Serbs!* […] *we knew, because how can I say it, they were without mercy, without a soul, without a heart.***(42:1540- 1545)**

3.4.2 2) Understanding rape as a weapon of war used to dehumanise women, their families and nation

Once narrator's set the socio-political scene, they went on to deconstruct their traumatic war experiences.

"This was a political weapon for ethnic cleansing"

Sexual violence was understood by the narrators to be a politically motivated act and an appendage of Serbia's ethnic cleansing mission in Kosovo, which according to some of the narrators was orchestrated in Belgrade by Serbia's then prime minister Slobodan Milošević. As such, narrators considered Kosovar-Albanian women and girls to be a part of the inferior group in the war and thus vulnerable targets susceptible to sexual violence based on their gender, race and national identity. Below, Shqiponja used sarcasm "This was not an idea that fell from the sky" to deflate any alternative perspectives and presented her narrative as a non-negotiable version of reality, an attitude that was echoed by all the participants.

Shqiponja: *This was 100% premeditated, they did not come and commit these crimes here spontaneously this was not an idea that fell from the sky, but it was an idea that came from Milosevic, this was a political weapon for ethnic cleansing, just like the Army the way that they equip them with armament, with guns, this too was an armament, equipment for the total destruction of the individual, of a woman, of the Albanian mothers and sisters, the community and all of the Kosovar-Albanians.***(108:3965-3971)**

Shqiponja went further to highlight the a-sexuality of the victims by acknowledging the brutality that was carried out on older women and very young girls, thus reinforcing the association between sexual violence and the ethnic cleansing mission in Kosovo.

Shqiponja: *They raped young girls that had never had an intimate relationship, that were virgins, there were elderly women, they didn't look at who or what they were they, was she an Albanian female? Then, they did the darkest most heinous things to them. They lived for these things, that's why they came to Kosovo* […] *they all continuously looked for where they could find an Albanian female, they didn't look at how old she was or how young she may be, or if she is sick or well or how she is or how she is not, they just saw an opportunity to demonstrate terror and they demonstrated terror.***(110:4026-4036)**

"What can we do *we got used to horror*"

Further to this, women also acknowledged that the perpetrators used the context of war to enact their sadistic fantasies on Kosovar-Albanian females. In addition to being systemised, the rapes according to Arbëresha and Dardana were also celebrated as triumphs with feasts and alcohol at the women's detriment.

Arbëresha: *They were eating and drinking, and they were drunks.***(84:3059)**

In her narrative, Dardana depicted her subjective experience of sexual violence solely from her perspective as a woman, not through the lens of national identity, which I believe helped her to focus on and process her own victimisation without reducing her narrative to politics alone. In addition to intellectualising her experience, this victimised state allowed her to delve deeper into her physiological and emotional parts, which was evident in her use of sighs, deep inhales, exhales and long gazes. Then, Dardana expressed a desire to show me the scars wrapped around her wrists, incurred at the time of the rapes, at which point she was restrained with barbed wire and as I observed them, I felt my stomach-churn. I wondered whether the vivid descriptions she offered combined with physical evidence, went beyond to authenticate her testimony and mount incriminating evidence against the Serb perpetrators, perhaps, to say something about the anonymity offered by this study and how it may have provided the conditions necessary for Dardana to break her silence and simply grieve the horrors of her experience with the reader and I.

Dardana: *When they took us inside they began to divide us, there were two, three rooms there* […] *they began grabbing us one was dragging us from one side, the other from the other side, and they were swearing like in both Albanian and Serbian* […] *And they took us and they *undressed us* [g.2] initially it was just our upper body. (hhhh)***)** […] *They left us naked like that, then they took the glasses with Raki* […] *they forced us to* […] *serve them to their mouths, whilst they drank, we stood there naked,* […] **Afterwards* they took us and they proceeded to undress us down below,(2) they would pull us here and there, they would twirl us around in that state, then I know that there were three of them […] I still have the scars on both my wrists [i] (sss). {**Yes, I see them. [ebl]*** […] *One of them was holding *my legs* and the other was holding my arms [Swallows hard and there is fear in her voice].* […] *The one who *raped me*, and he was you know BIG and FAT so much so that I am not aware of what happened for most part of the ordeal (hhh) I went in and out of consciousness here, after some time, they would come back again, they would take it in turns. One would come the other would go, but they would never stop! (3)* […] *then, they took my hands and they tied them together I know it was with a chain, it was the barbed wire type, they tied my hands [g.3].***(21:759-801)**

"To violate the morality of the Albanians"

Women reported that, the Kosovar-Albanian female was regarded as the carrier of honour, both within their local culture (family and community) and nation (Kosovar-Albanian identity), and regarded as a potential method through which the Serb forces could reach and harm the Kosovar-Albanian men. By

violating the Kosovar-Albanian female they aimed to emasculate the Kosovar-Albanian men, gain power and dominance and maximise the overall physical and psychological harm to families, communities and nation. Here, Teuta's narrative lamented what she considered to be sexual violence's most damage: the contamination of women's morality and honour. The victimisation of women was described as a portrayal of a violated though innocent population withstanding the inhumanity demonstrated by the male Serb antagonist.

Teuta: *To violate our morality [g.5]* […] *to violate the morality of the Albanians and to say "See what we are doing to their wives"* […] *"And look at what we are now going to do to the wives and daughters of the Albanians" and they were swearing in Serbian.* […] *it was simply to violate our morality, to kill us, to destroy our families, to ensure that we are left with the repercussions of this for life, both physically and spiritually and with the trauma.***(144:5258- 5281)**

According to Shqiponja, this association was also used metaphorically to address the violation of Kosovar-Albanian people and the collective rape of the Kosovar-Albanian identity.

Shqiponja: *It happened to all of Kosovo* […] *what happened is something that was *awaiting everyone*.***(106:3869-3884)**

A common belief held by all narrators was that sexual violence, in addition to being used for the purpose of dehumanising the women, was extended to causing physical damage to women's reproductive potency. In Teuta's narrative women's fertility and multi-faceted nature was deemed a direct threat to the perpetrators political mission because according to her, it had the potential, through procreation, to ensure the continuity of the Kosovar-Albanian race. Indirectly, offering the reader a perspective on what may have been indicative of Serbia's burgeoning anxiety pertaining to their national eugenics.

Teuta: *They knew that family means everything to us, I mean everything, and that was our power and they saw that all these other things didn't stop us they knew very well that the next attack had to be on our family systems. Because they knew that that is where the most destruction will be done! They knew that an Albanian female is strong and they will take care of their family, raise children, not just to raise them but Albanian mothers were also educators, historians, economists, doctors, psychologists, you had to play all these different roles.***(136:4964-4971)**

This coincided with Afërdita's experience as she was [redacted] pregnant at the time of the rapes, which may have been intended to induce a miscarriage. In addition to calling attention to Serb force's displays of inhumanity, perhaps from a wider political perspective this (the aim to terminate fetal life) can also be catalogued as an exacerbation of ethnic-cleansing.

Afërdita: *I was [redacted] pregnant with my youngest at the time of the sexual violence.***(16:585-586)**

Further, Shqiponja's tone brimmed with covert rage as she explained that the physical injuries sustained during the sexual violence compromised her ability to conceive, subsequently robbing her of the opportunity to have the family she hoped for. The genital injuries and vaginal trauma reported by women was also mirrored by Dardana, though the rapes did not impact her fertility, she described her prolonged struggle with fistula to have massively impacted her intimate life. I wondered whether the damage to Kosovar-Albanian women's reproductive potency was an accessory to Serb forces' political mission, which may have been intended to cease the continuation of the Kosovar-Albanian race.

Shqiponja: *Before the war I always said I will not go without having a child because you know that is the feeling that I had, for a child,* […] *this feeling is long gone, it is gone, because it felt like they took away even that love that I had.* […] *I had it I had it I had that desire and now after the war I don't have this.***(4317-4323, p)**

Arbëresha further stated that the perpetrators were operating from a primitive state of male sexuality, through penial penetration the perpetrators were thought to have administered their *poison* to the females. The female body was viewed as a vessel, which surrogated the enemy's poison, in this way, sustaining the perpetrators internal presence even in their physical absence, and thus guaranteed the continuation of psychological harm.

Arbëresha*: They did crack my soul though, because it broke the boundaries of morality, intimacy, spiritual and emotional everything.* […] *The "Shkijet" [Serbs] massacred us Albanians for centuries, to us most of them were like poison, and for something of theirs to enter your body by force, this is a type of poison that warps your soul slowly but surely a stain that can never be removed ever!***(91:3316-3323)**

In their perceived counter-position, the Serb forces were thought to have used the Kosovar-Albanian female body as medium of communication to effectively transfer messages to the Kosovar-Albanian soldiers in the KLA. This was notable in Dardana's narrative below, where she offered the reader a direct quote from the perpetrators both in their native language and a translation. To me, her apology prior to quoting the perpetrators indicated that profanity did not come naturally to her, and though she seemed uncomfortable it felt important for Dardana that she share with me the perpetrators use of derogatory terms, the purpose of which was believed to be to denounce and shame the women. She explained that the Serb forces took great epicaricacy[54] in women's dismay and powerlessness, as they provoked them with further questions related to the whereabouts of the KLA and mocked the KLA's

54 A term used to define the act of rejoicing at or deriving pleasure from the misfortunes of others. See Oxford Dictionary.

inability to protect them. As understood by Dardana, this was Serb forces' attempt to emasculate the Kosovar-Albanian men and subsequently punish the KLA for retaliating against their political mission.

Dardana: *They would say things like (2) I apologise for the language I am embarrassed to express it in the same way they did "Jebemti kurvoshqiptarski" which means "Fuck you, you Albanian bitch" and at all times they would ask us "Where is your army now?" they would say "Desi UQK?" "Where are the KLA?".***(27:986-990)**

This form of revenge was extended to NATO as they too were seen to be allied with the Kosovar-Albanians and had bombed Belgrade in efforts to end the war. Meanwhile, the Serb forces as noted by Teuta below, attempted to psychologically manipulate their victims by imputing NATO to create confusion about who the perpetrators were in the war. All things considered, in women's narratives NATO and the KLA were positioned in the same category, as *protectors* of the Kosovar-Albanian people. Perhaps, NATOs intervention, in addition to offering a sense of relief also validated their victim status and war experiences.

Tetua: *They were saying that they were there to protect us from NATO "And now look at how NATO is bombing us"* […] *"And look at what we are now going to do to the wives and daughters of the Albanian"* […] *The second time they raped us was because they wanted to take revenge on NATO when they entered the situation.***(144:5264-5279)**

3.4.3 3) Living within a highly patriarchal and misogynous milieu

Narrators' understanding of the war and sexual violence was not simply defined by their counter position relative to the Serb forces, but was created in tandem with an extensive range of socio-cultural and political gender conceptualisations, which prevailed within their local context.

"Survivors of war,* […] *it means you overcome something even if there is no desire to overcome it."

As such, in the debris from war and sexual violence surfaced a survivors' identity. In addition to bringing Kosovar-Albanian women together in their collective experience of sexual violence, a survivors identity also united families and the nation in their shared experience of war and collective pursuit to restore and rebuild. It is worth mentioning however, that while the broader conditions of war allied women with their family and society, sexual violence as an isolated matter, due to its negative cultural connotations, engendered separateness.

Afërdita: *I tried to survive, and for this reason there is a very well-intentioned title that says survivors of war.* […] *Survivors of war, that is to say* […] *you overcome something even if there is no desire to overcome it.***(11:380-382)**

Baresha: *We spoke, {Mm}, within that group of women that we had been in. {**Aha**} As for anywhere else, not even my sister knows, and neither do others not even now.***(65:2363-2372)**

In their attempt to bring order to the chaos that ensued and in their construction of meaning, various narrative perspectives were utilised by women. Notably, narrators oscillated between first and second person perspectives, each shift predicated on the level of shame and negative emotion concomitant with the memories recalled. When describing narratives that depicted external objects Afërdita utilised a second person perspective "your house" and "your cattle", which were less personal to the individual and thus less emotionally charged. As she described the impact of the violence on her and her fellow Kosovar-Albanians, she stepped into a first persons perspective "poisoned us", which reflected national solidarity and deeper emotional pain. When describing the rapes however, though impacted personally, Afërdita everted back to a second person perspective "they raped the women" perhaps to create tolerable distance between herself and the negative connotation associated with rapes and subsequently rejecting a victim status (powerless, vulnerable and contaminated). Such shifts were reflected periodically in all the emergent narratives yielded in this investigation. Additionally, the proclivity to minimise individual trauma and the preference to speak in the plural, may have indicated that survivors believed their narratives, in part, mirrored the experience of the collective.

Afërdita: *They burned down your house, they killed your cattle, they poisoned our wells, to poison us, they raped the women, they would kill the men.(***9:303-308)**

Four of the seven women interviewed reported that twenty years post war Kosovo and they were still married to the same men that they had been with prior to the sexual violence. For some narrators, husbands who had lost family members to the war and had been soldiers in the KLA were familiar with Serbs war tactics and were thus considered to be more compassionate, understanding and supportive towards their wives. This was echoed in Baresha's narrative below, where she offered a direct quote from her personal dialogue with her husband. I believed that this was Baresha's expression of love and gratitude to her husband and a way of authenticating how her experiences were normalised, self-blame disseminated and the healing process set in motion. This level of support allowed Baresha to epitomize a survivor identity, through which she gained personal agency and empowerment.

Baresha: *I am still married to the same person* […] *his brothers were killed, he came to a house that was left full of orphans,* […] *he tried to embrace us and bring us together and he said "This is nothing, look at what they have done,* […] *you all did not do this work! This was done by the 'Shka' [Serbs],* […] *that tried to stain you all, but I will never stain you or anything, you are the members of my family and to me you will always be the way you always have been!"* […] *I felt like I had nothing, like I healed.* **(72:2627-2663)**

"I should be grateful to him for deciding to stay with me"

On the contrary, Teuta explained that while her husband had been [redacted] in the KLA, he nevertheless subjected her to some form of emotional and psychology abuse. Teuta's tone progressed from anger to depletion as she described the unbalanced power dynamics in her marriage. Perhaps, by directly quoting her husband Teuta wanted to illuminate the latent aggression and implicit blame which permeated his tone as he interrogated her "Why you?" implying that she had in some manner provoked the sexual violence. Here, Teuta was positioned on a lower moral hierarchy to her husband and his decision to stay with her despite the sexual violence further amplified his dominance within this patriarchal family structure. The cultural impulse to assign responsibility onto the victim instead of the perpetrator notable here, was felt by the majority of women interviewed.

Teuta: [redacted] *my husband was in the war, but sometimes he will mention it when something happens, he will say something "Why you? Why did it have to happen to you specifically?" but it is not as bad as what I have heard about other women whose husbands left them* […] *we have this black cloud between us* […] *I don't feel strong, I feel like half a person now* […] *it's like I should be grateful to him for deciding to stay with me because most wouldn't stay with their wives.***(156:5707-5764)**

"I don't even deserve to be alive"

In Arbëresha's narrative gender discourse in post-war Kosovo, in much the same way attested that while the acts of sexual violence only affirmed the antagonist's power and dominance, being submitted to male rape dishonoured the victim, their families, communities and nation.

Arbëresha: *Females are delicate things, in Kosovo, which is a small place, in a small village, people are not used to speaking about these kinds of things* […] *We never spoke about intimacy or how you even do the deed let alone rape! If someone as little as saw you speaking with a 'Shka' [Serb] they went insane and they called you a traitor let alone what was done to us!* […] *Shkijet" [Serbs] were aware that if you want to completely kill the Albanians then touch them by touching their women.***(90:3300-3368)**

Initially, Dardana hesitated to explicitly address the taboos surrounding sex and the inextricable link, in the Kosovar-Albanian culture, between female purity and virginit. I sensed this was out of respect for me and her uncertainty pertaining to my position as a Kosovar-Albanian woman within this cultural paradigm. Once reassured, she continued to describe herself as a *damaged object*, whilst simultaneously measuring her self-worth against the impurity caused by the sexual violence. Dardana resorted to her identity as a woman through which she expressed feeling defeated and punished by the Serb forces, and all the males in her life, including her father, her ex-boyfriend who left her, and her current husband. She makes reference to women's endurance as a way of comforting herself within an unbearable circumstance and with limited options.

Dardana: *We Albanians have a tradition that if you are not* […] *how can I express this, if you are not a virgin then* […] *here you have no value, in Kosovo this is how it is! For us this is what it is. Let alone with a Serb, this is death! Because he was the enemy, enemy, and so, I would say "I don't even deserve to be alive".* […] *Before the war, I was seeing this man but when he understood what had happened, when I told him,* […] *he said to me *'No, I can't do this any longer'* and that's where I said 'I do not have anything left there is nothing left to live for and I cannot bear to live any longer.'* […] *I just wanted to kill myself somewhere, but then very quickly my father found me a husband,* […] *I didn't even want to marry him.***(29:1067-1229)**

"I didn't deserve to be a mother"

Similarly, it was Liria's understanding that in her ex-husbands opinion, her experiences of sexual violence and subsequent moral contamination demoted her from the role of a wife and mother. Within her ex-husband's family, Liria believed to be viewed as a *disposable object*, considered less valuable and morally inferior. Her use of imagery and an evocative metaphor *"*It was like removing my nails from the flesh of my fingers" allowed the reader to experience the authenticity of her emotions and empathise with her feelings of betrayal and the pain of losing her daughter. It became obvious to me early on that women understood how difficult it may be for the reader to *imagine* the horrors, which they experienced. Narrators mitigated this by making great efforts to narrate comprehensive depictions of their subjective experiences and appealed to their audience for their understanding, Liria pleaded below "IMAGINE THAT! This is not a movie it's my reality". Narrators frequently solicited for my understanding "Do you know what I mean?"**(125:4590)** posed by Shqiponja and "You know?" repeated throughout by Teuta, which I believed was indicative of the misrepresentation they endured within their local context.

Liria: *When *I had to leave my daughter, it was like removing my nails from the flesh of my fingers*,* […] *my ex-husband's family and him thought that I didn't deserve to be a mother, they couldn't have a woman like like me raise a girl, they took my daughter away because of something that was done to me by Serbs in the war, IMAGINE THAT! This is not a movie it's my reality.***(43:1585-1590)**

"That was my biggest fear […] I said to myself now I will have to leave my children without a mother"

In any case, narrators all described being in a constant state of hyper-vigilance and hyper-arousal, and preoccupied with a chronic fear of being exposed, rejected and abandoned by their families and/or communities. This was demonstrated in Arbëresha and Liria's narrative below, where we get a sense of the cultural ambiance in which they resided and the grave repercussions that were anticipated within a society that was deemed to be psychologically, emotionally and intellectually inept to cope with the complexities of sexual violence.

Arbëresha: *I said my husband will never forgive me! {**You feared that your husband would not accept you because of what happened**?} Yes, that was my biggest fear, this was bigger than the thing that happened to me. I said to myself now I will have to leave my children without a mother without a father.***(84:3080-3087)**

Liria: *I never went outside, I had to defend myself, so that I do not give material to people for them to then go and talk […] I have two children and I do not want to have to leave my children yet again.* **(44:1612-1633)**

"It would be like stripping me naked again in front of everyone's eyes!"

In this way, the women reported feeling an overwhelming sense of shame and humiliation and protected themselves via self-isolation. It was common for women to express a significant level of paranoia, distrust towards others and to avoid experiencing judgment and rejection they subsequently distanced themselves from their friends and family. Arbëresha's tone was expedient and her excessive use of repetition mirrored her fear of being habitually exposed and humiliated.

Arbëresha: *I am not very sociable, I am not, I am not at all. I have no idea what to talk about with people because I am always afraid, *I always worry* about making a mistake, or what if I blur out something* […] *I don't really have any friends* […] *I hold my problems in and boil within myself* […] *I try to protect myself* […] *I simply do not trust many people* […] *My secret will be out and then I will feel exposed, that my truth, I would feel the same way I felt in those moments when the criminals stripped me bare, it would be like stripping me naked again in front of everyone's eyes! It would be horrific for me.***(87:3174-3218)**

"I found that there is nothing a mother would not do for her children"

In coping with these cultural pressures, narrators all drew strength and courage from their mother identity, which was the most static and coherent identity reported throughout the narratives. Women took pride in their role as protectors of their children and this role gave them a heightened sense of purpose, value and worth. In this way, women's highest potentialities were manifested through their roles as mothers. This was evident in Teuta's struggle to survive the harsh conditions in the aftermath of war, although in her role as a mother it seemed she had no choice but to be strong, a sentiment shared across all narratives. To create a lasting impression on her audience Teuta posed a hyperbole "I had to crawl on my hands and knees […] to keep fighting", and invited the reader to sympathise with the challenges she faced.

Teuta: *I said to myself right there that I must live for my children* […] *I found that there is nothing a mother would not do for her children, and I didn't want to leave my children as orphans* […] *and to cut their futures in the neck, at the end of the day this was the Shkije [Serbs] objective, to destroy families* […] *Even though there is nothing more difficult, I had to crawl on my hands and knees* […] *to keep fighting for myself and for my children.***(150:5480-5496)**

"I will surpass it myself* […] *I don't want to channel my trauma to my children"

The impact of sexual violence extended beyond the narrators to impinge their children, secrecy provided the necessary tools to protect their psychological and emotional wellbeing. By omitting their experiences from their interactions with their children, who were all adults at the time of the interviews, women felt they were protecting them from the stigma and judgment that existed within their cultural context. This is seen in Arbëresha's narrative below:

Arbëresha: *I will surpass it myself, I will deal with these things and will not burden anyone else with my own stuff.* […] *I don't want to channel my trauma to my children* […] *I don't want them to be judged based on what happened to me. I don't want the repercussions of the war, the politics, the history to take space in my children's lives now and in their future. I don't want anything at all to stop them from progressing. This is something that has the potential to stop them psychologically they would have to wrestle with this thing it would eat them up inside.***(93:3410-3430)**

Afërdita reflected on the mental health stigma she and her sons experienced during her stay in a neuropsychiatric hospital, to honour her children and ensure their wellbeing she was obliged to terminate her treatment and find alternative solutions. I felt it was important to Afërdita that the reader understood the severity of stigma in Kosovo, which extended beyond the immediate community to include health care professionals. Though, reverse psychology tactics like the one used by Afërdita's psychiatrist below, are commonly accepted manipulative strategies utilised in discourse within the Kosovar-Albanian culture to prompt positive change, I sensed that with this disclosure Afërdita delineated on how isolated she felt in her journey to recovery. Afërdita's desire to be recognised as a resilient and honourable mother who sacrificed for her children was mirrored by all the women in the study. In contending with an overwhelming sense of loss, I believe it was important for women to preserve their strengths, which were merely epitomised through their relationships with their children.

Afërdita: *I was admitted to the neuropsychiatry hospital. It was there that I saw, erm, how hard it was for the children* […] *because in our Albanian communities it is a problem if they see that you are consulting with a psychologist* […] *I was traumatising my children* […] *I made a decision to only move forward, let the past remain the past* […] *the psychiatrist would say "It's shameful for someone to see you in hospital, look at how amazing your sons are".***(16:590-656)**

The efforts made to safeguard their children simultaneously helped narrators to protect themselves from the pervasive fear of rejection and abandonment. For these women, it was a pivotal task to effectively isolate their war trauma, barring its transmission to the next generation and its ability to cause perpetual and irreparable damage. Above all else, for narrators, motherhood was a rich source of empowerment, strength and courage in the face of tragedy.

Shqiponja: *I want to protect my girl but also myself. Here in Kosovo even the children will then be judged* […] *especially when you are a female.***(127:4643-4647)**

"They said its shameful,* […] *they always said 'Do not discuss this with anyone'"

Requests to commit to secrecy were common across all narratives, typically initiated by male family members and presented to narrators as a sign of honour and respect for their families. Afërdita explained rather enthusiastically that while, after the war, she enjoyed her newly found autonomy and was well respected by her family, the request for secrecy was thought to be an attempt to avoid the extensive dissemination of shame and stigma associated with this type of violence. Afërdita's tone carried latent anger as she assertively cautioned her fellow Kosovar-Albanians that despite all efforts to safeguard her secret, exposure was inevitable, especially when considering the overwhelming number of witnesses and the possibility that video footage of the rapes may be at large. Whilst, I felt it was important for Afërdita that she remained respectful to her family, by tactfully challenging the dominant cultural rhetoric, I believed was her way of breaking her prolonged silence, which judging by her self-assertive tone was a cathartic experience.

Aferdita: *The only thing is they obviously said that they wouldn't like for what happened to become known, but this was inevitable, there was no way that it could not be known because there were seventy or eighty soldiers that were very close to us* […] *they know about our case. I have continuously said that we can say it didn't happen all we like, there might be someone out there who has video footage of the rapes!* […] *{**Why do you think they asked you to not make it known? and how did it make you feel to be told this?**}Because they felt, they said its shameful,* […] *they always said "Do not discuss this with anyone, we know what happened but do not discuss it with others" It was hard but we understood, the time and the community, it was horrific.***(14:488-503)**

3.4.4 4) Coping with an internal war

In dialogues regarding the impact of sexual violence it was common for women to describe a perpetual internal conflict.

"They took a piece of my soul* […] *they took away my humanity"

A pronounced reservation was apparent in discussions regarding women's value and character, partly because in the aftermath of sexual violence, an acute modification in women's intra-psychic relationships led to the development of a distorted sense of self. Whereby women no longer considered themselves to be *normal women,* which evoked a notable disconnection from their sense of their own womanhood. This was evident in Teuta's dichotomized self-perception, while she grieved the loss of a perceived past self (sociable, valuable and pure) that existed prior to the rapes, she simultaneously rejected the current perceived self (worthless, disabled, small, deficient), which she had no desire to associate with.

Teuta: *To say it is good […]would be just a formality because it is no longer good, I will never be the way I was, I will never be good until death,* […] *spiritually I am not good because the memories of what happened always haunt me. (sss) {**Aha**}* […] *now there is something, a certain void* […] *{**If you could name this void what would it be called?**} Well, to name it, it's like a person who is born for example with a disability you know?* […] *they took a piece of my soul and they left a void there for life* […] *it is a deficiency* […] *I feel very small, I feel like I am less of person now then I was before, they took away my humanity.***(147:5378-5421)**

By all accounts, women were eager to share, as coherently as possible, their experience of intra-psychic conflict. For instance, during her interview Shqiponja bridged the internal chasm between her and I, by utilising my white shirt as a symbolic canvas upon which she externalised her internal feelings of contamination "Like that white shirt you have on if you put a black stain on it everyone will see […] {**Is that how you feel?}** Yes, this is how I feel inside"**(121:4411-4417).** This internal conflict was echoed by Arbëresha in her narrative below, where a series of rhetorical questions were presented, perhaps, to engage the reader more thoroughly in her suffering and the subsequent feelings of self-blame and regret. The questions posed to some of the women by their husbands "Why you?" mirrored the questions they then proceeded to asked themselves "Why me?". Thus, reflected below, to the reader was the process by which Afërdita internalised a wounded male ego replete with self-loathing, which further pulsated her perception of self as contaminated as well as the subsequent regret and self-blame.

Arbëresha: *I am at war with myself at all times. Had I not been working and I do not ever stop, if I sit for one minute and there is no one else close to me, my mind will not go anywhere else but there! "How did it happen? Why did it happen to me? How did this happen to me? Why me? If only I had known not to go there!" (2)* […] *this is something that can never be removed, this is a stain* […] *The word rape and especially from a Serb means that you are besmirched, you are dirty, that you are a person without value, because with that situation they took away from me my human value in my eyes and the way I see myself and in the eyes of others! (2)***(85:3100-3295)**

"I am a bad person because they forced me to do bad things"

The moral injury sustained during the sexual violence, led Arbëresha to embody the "dirty" and "bad" associated with the rapes to be enmeshed with her personal character and human values. Arbëresha's self-perception as a "bad person" was rationalised via self-accusation "I *allowed* it to happen to me" followed by a proclamation "I didn't have the *power* to fight back". This abrupt contradiction may give us insight into the origins of her internal conflict as being rooted in the roles attributed to females within her local culture. Where it appeared that the men had a latent expectation for the women left behind in the war to undertake preventative measures for war rape. From this perspective, I understood that the women who were raped felt weak and worthless because they believed that they had *failed* to protect themselves from the Serb forces, and for this reason had brought dishonour to their families.

Arbëresha: *You say to yourself "I am the most disgusting person in the world"* […] *Being force to do something against your own will, a really bad thing to do without wanting to,* […] *you feel* […] *that*

you are a very bad person […] ***{What do you think you did for you to be a bad person?}*** *Well, the things that were done to me, that I allowed it to happen to me, that I didn't have the power to fight back, that I couldn't save myself* […] *I am a bad person because they forced me to do bad things* […] *A dirty thing!***(95:3491-3527)**

"I am not at fault for what happened* […] *God gives you the power"

Similar intra-psychic shifts were seen in Dardana's narrative below, her tone was lowered to a whisper and replete with repent as she appealed to *God* for forgiveness, giving me the impression that on some subconscious level she felt that in being raped she had committed a sin. Then, her tone shifted from a plea to assuming a protagonist position in her story and with conviction asserted her innocence. Perhaps, this fluctuation reflected Dardana's attempts to convince herself, in opposition to the dominant cultural rhetoric, that she was in fact a victim in the war. This role brought her comfort as it implied that *God* was on her side, a belief, which subsequently warranted her moral superiority to the perpetrators and in the least empowered her to rise above her circumstances.

Dardana: *I believe in God *may he forgive us*, and knowing that I am not at fault for what happened* […] *God gives you the power.(***37:1331-1336)**

"Death would have been better for us then to be touched here."

Following from the sexual violence, all narrators were faced with the harrowing task of understanding both psychologically and physiologically their encounter with malevolence and their own mortality. Hence, it was not surprising that in the aftermath of war all narrators reported experiencing suicidal ideations. For women, death was considered a way to circumvent having to live with the shame and humiliation of sexual violence. While men survivors who had been soldiers in the KLA gained status and respect within their communities, the women survivors of sexual violence were met with a much darker reality, one that was replete with shame, humiliation, marginalisation and even ostracism. Dardana explained that death would have granted the women martyr status, in which case they would have been commemorated as war heroines. In being alive however, women had no choice but to live with the detrimental repercussions inextricably linked to the rapes. Despite the implicit undertone of anger directed towards their homogenous group, for the majority of women, there was no expressed desire to reject a Kosovar-Albanian identity. I sensed that this was because to deny their national identity had the potential to de-stabilise how women had come to understand their experiences of sexual violence and their perceived position within their current context, which would otherwise send their lives into further chaos.

Dardana: *They tarnished our morals* […] *death would have been better for us then to be touched here. Had they killed us at least we would have been declared and commemorated as heroes but this way we are left without our morality and our voices are nowhere to be heard.***(28:1028-1032)**

3.4.5 5) Moving forward: Challenging government institutions and advocating for lasting change

Narratives were brought to a close by women expressing their hopes for a more progressive Kosovo, one that emancipates survivors from the stigma, judgment and marginalisation, which imbues their local culture.

"They couldn't keep us stagnant […] we moved […] progressed […] succeeded"

Further, quotidian aphorism's such as, "For us this is what it is", "This was our reality back then" and "In Kosovo this is how it is!" were often used by narrators to frame their position within their culture context, as powerless and hopeless victims who were not seen, heard or acknowledged by their fellow Kosovar-Albanians. A prevalent sentiment was that, narrators had been forced by moral inhibitors set by their local culture to accept their altered reality, in this way relinquishing the political institutions from any responsibility towards accommodating survivors in Kosovo. For instance, Afërdita's tone was pessimistic as she criticised the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) for unethical practice, and claimed that they had protected the Serb perpetrators on some jurisdictional level. This, according to Afërdita hindered justice from being served and created a leeway for Serbia to continue, from a distance, to denounce survivors and their traumatic experiences to this day. The prolonged suffering evoked by the lack of justice was mirrored by all narrators.

Aferdita: *I have given the names and surnames of these individuals in court, I have given them to UNMIK, ULEX and to the Kosovo's police.* […] *I have lost confidence in them* […] *I don't trust them, […] there is still no word, so Serbia continues to denounce us, even though we are the victims, because there is no justice for this ordeal!***(7:246-264)**

Afërdita further explained that recently Kosovo's government took modest measures to alleviate the stigma attached to being a victim of rape by providing benefits to survivors under a pseudo status "War invalids". Though this initiative may help alleviate part of the shame felt by women in the short-term, for me, it raised further questions "In the long run, will this political plaster suffice to heal deeper national wounds?" or "Will this merely perpetuate and sustain the existing cultural pathology and prolong Kosovo's national acknowledgment of conflict-related sexual violence as being a non-negotiable reality, which permeates its recent history?". Perhaps, the enigma of the phenomenon that is conflict-related sexual violence is still at its embryonic stage, and its capacity to yield adequate answers for these ponderous questions remains to be seen. Nevertheless, this remains an important national inquiry, which I believe demands further attention.

Afërdita: *Commissions in Kosovo's government […] have started some type of retirement benefit for survivors[…]even though they do not state there that they are war victims of sexual violence but instead it states that they are war invalids and so we all feel so much better and content within ourselves […]it is more tolerable, because this removes some kind of stigma.***(15:542-558)**

"Male and female have the same rights now* […] *I would like for us to also have these equal rights."

For narrators, breaking their prolonged silence was comparable to the procurement of justice, scarcely obtained through the judicial system. Women expressed a desire for their voices to be heard globally, for their experiences to be acknowledged and their suffering validated. In this way, they hoped to be able to live authentic, enriching and progressive lives. I believe women's engagement in this study, extended beyond the sharing of their traumatic war experiences with a wider audience to also convey a powerful message to the perpetrators, who they believed evaded justice, which was echoed by all the women and summarised by Afërdita "I am certain that what they had in mind did not transcend into reality because Albanian females are very strong and will overcome any obstacle" **(3:103-105).** Women further advocated for equal rights for survivors and were determined to be part of this transformative process via various social and political endeavour, that could provide the fertile grounds for peace, reparation and reconciliation. Through advocacy, they hoped to ease the connotative tie between sexual-violence and moral injury and to shift the prevailing cultural discourse, from one that is reductive, pathologising and inimical to women's morality, to one that is tolerant, accepting and that accentuates women's unbelievable strength, courage and humanity.

Dardana: *My hopes are only that* […] *for our voices to be heard somewhere, for others to know, not only in Kosovo but in the entire world,* […] *for others to also trust us!* […] *male and female have the same rights now, but, but, but I would like for us to also have these equal rights.***(37:1362-1374)**

Afërdita: *Will we forget? Well, we will never forget, but they couldn't keep us stagnant where we were 20 years ago, but we moved and we have progressed, so we have succeeded with our own strength.***(11:395-397)**

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

4. Chapter Overview

In this final chapter, a critical synthesis of the data was carried out using critical narrative analysis. The cultural narratives that framed women as holding the family's morality, and rape as essentially dehumanising the women (as opposed to the male perpetrators) was a central finding of this study. Here, I highlight the impact of these cultural implications on the phenomenological, lived experience of the women. Novel concepts were developed throughout the research procedure to include those in the helping profession and extended to international organisations. The second part of this chapter weaves together the research en masse, firstly a reviewal of the yielded findings and its application to the discipline of counselling psychology theory and praxis is presented. Here, I addressed important questions regarding counselling psychologist's personal and professional identity, political position and moral responsibility within local communities and in the global arena. Then, I considered the implications of this research in terms of social justice, policy reform and first response interventions in conflict zones as well as cautions for working with refugees and asylum seekers in the U.K. Lastly, the limitations of this study were discussed and promising areas for forthcoming psychological investigations were highlighted. The study was brought to an end with an epilogue, which reflects on some final contemplations.

4.1 Part One: Synthesis and Discussion

Before I delve into the synthesis and discussion of the findings of this study, it may be noteworthy to mention that throughout this research investigation, I viewed narrators as *experts* about this topic of investigation, and noticed that my tendency to privilege women's accounts transpired from my aspiration to respond in opposition to the dominant social, cultural and political narratives in Kosovo within which survivors of conflict-related sexual violence were devalued, disregarded, silenced and ostracised (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 420). From this perspective, I considered that the paradigm of *giving voice* to a marginalised group such as women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in which there is a tendency to idealise women's "voices" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 420), had the potential to deindividualize and reduce survivors experiences to politics and assume that women did not have a voice to begin with, a process that may have unintentionally perpetuated stigma, labelling and pathologizing. Through the reflexive process, which included supervision, personal therapy, painting and creative writing, I was able to de-tangle my own material from that of the narrators. I acknowledged explicitly that the presentation of the findings of this study are my interpretations, I continuously strove to present the data gathered as closely as possible to the ways in which the narrators intended.

4.1.1 "Are women human?"

In all respects, the question "Are women human?" as contemplated by MacKinnon (2006, p. 2) accompanied me throughout the maturation and write up of this psychological research. At first glance, one might be in a haste to challenge the audacity of the querist and affirm "Of course women are human!". However, the reality of war and political conflict for women and girls as presented in the preceding chapter, was replete with egregious torture and violence. Perhaps, to gloss over this question is merely a means to pacify the mounting anxiety that is attributed to our ongoing struggle to rationalise the implementation of nauseating inhumanity. Indeed, a closer examination of this issue may raise an additional question "If in fact women are human, then why do they continue to be the targets and recipients of such horrific acts of violence?". As the yielded data suggested, according to survivors, conflict-related sexual violence was used by Serb forces during the (1998-1999) Kosovar war, as a systematic weapon of war for the execution of ethnic-cleansing and cultural genocide with the intent to terrorise, control, dominate, destroy and expel Kosovar-Albanians from Kosovo and to gain territorial control of this region. That being said, the most eminent finding positioned at the core of this psychological investigation was the ways in which sexual violence was used for the total dehumanisation of the Kosovar-Albanian women, seriously harming their physical and psychological existence, damaging intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships and compromising personal and collective identity, injuries that transmitted to survivor's families, communities and nation.

4.1.2 Inter-ethnic tension: '*Us*' and '*Them*'

Given that conflict-related sexual violence was marked in this study as a gender issue and human rights violation, the narratives in this psychological investigation were not intended to merely mirror the women's own intra-psychic position and principles, but also the dominant cultural, social and political narratives that governed the ways in which meaning was constructed and organised. Through a concept described as *narrative engagement,* Hammack and Pilecki (2012, p. 77) suggest that for narrators there is an engagement with collective stories of "What it means to inhabit a particular political entity". For instance, being a member of a particular ethnic group, in this case, Kosovar-Albanian, carried with it a more extensive narrativization of the group's "History, identity and ideology" (Hammack & Pilecki, 2012, p. 77). As such, the narrative sequences that emerged were critical to women's personal sense-making and ensued in a chronological manner; life prior to, during and in the aftermath of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo, while sexual violence was described as having occurred in the midst of the war. Central to narrative is the concept of temporal fluidity, in which meaning is thought to fluctuate as it undergoes various constructions within a context developed over time (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008; Riessman, 1994; 2008). On this account, it was common practice for narrators to recourse to the past to aid their understanding of their present lives, especially pertaining to traumatic war experiences.

The phenomenon of sexual violence was recognised by women to be the summit of a mammoth territorial struggle concerning the province of Kosovo between two ethnic groups; Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians, that dates back to ancient history with both ethnic groups claiming to be native to this region. The inter-ethnic tension was thought to have fluctuated over centuries, merely reaching a boiling point in the 1980s and 1990s and detonating into Serbia's barbaric war on Kosovar-Albanians in 1998. According to the psychodynamic-based frustration-aggression hypothesis "Frustrated goals leave people in a state of heightened goal-oriented arousal that can only be dissipated through aggression" (McKeown, Haji, & Ferguson, 2016, p. 4; Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer & Sears, 1939). As noted in women's stories, the inter-group conflict between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs was generated by restrictive and opposing goals that only one ethnic group could achieve. It was reported that the Serbian political agenda was concerned with annexation of land, threat to group security, military power and economic appraisals. Generally, this aggression is thought to erupt on minority groups that are considered different, weaker and thus defenceless targets, as was seen to be the case in the war with the Kosovar-Albanian people (Dollard et al., 1939). The narratives that followed depicted sexual violence as having been netted at the heart of the Serbia's ethno-nationalist propaganda, which according to the women in this study, cultivated the imperialist aspiration for a *Greater Serbia,* Teuta explained *"All this destruction had to do with the land, with the culture, with the language […] They always wanted to make us completely vanish"*(136:4989-4991). Sexual violence and especially rape were thought to have become a noticeable epidemic, even prior to the war, among the Serbian national discourse, further exacerbating the ethnic-tension and hostility. According to the women, this was done gradually by constricting political autonomy, creating intolerable living conditions, upsurge in violence (beatings, torture, imprisonment, mass murder, rapes) and finally expelling Kosovar-Albanians from their homes to neighbouring countries.

With this in mind, it seemed important for the narrators to make a clear and cohesive distinction between the in-group to which *they* belonged; *us* (Kosovar-Albanian) and the out-group to which the *other* (Serbs) belonged; *them*. In their narratives the women positioned themselves and the members of their homogenous group (Kosovar-Albanians) as protagonists and victims in the political conflict and the subsequent war, while the members of the out-group (Serbian forces and people) were identified as the perpetrators and antagonists. As depicted in women's narratives, these complex social interactions had the potential to produce and give prominence to in-group and out-groups disunity and propelled these two groups in the direction of barbaric violence (Allport, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain that our emotional commitment and in-group dynamics have ramification for our psychological wellness, attitudes and actions. Social identities have thus been seen as a potential source and motivation for prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and nationalism (McDermott, 2009). In this way, social identity

theory[55] provided a valuable psychological outlook on the genesis of the Serbian nationalism, especially when considering that human beings have a proclivity to harbour loyalty toward their in-groups which have the capacity to engender and direct malevolence to out-groups (Galtung, 1964; Turner, Brown & Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Distinct social groups that operate within a political context, can thus be impacted by the collective stereotypes and discrimination held firmly by one group to another, especially if this group marks its superiority and influence and is well-equipped for military combat, as was the case with the Serb forces (Abrams & Hogg, 2004).

For the narrators, history, race, identity, language, culture, religion, politics, and psychology were all significant markers that delineated their separateness from the Serb forces and people. By setting themselves apart from the Serb people, Kosovar-Albanian's united with other Albanian people in Kosovo and neighbouring regions as part of an *imagined community* and connected with their primordial ancestors (Ancient Illyrians) via the *law of blood* (Maloku, Derks, Laar, & Ellemers, 2016; Pratto, Žeželj, Maloku, Turjačanin & Branković, 2017) to sustain and preserve their Kosovar-Albanian national and ethnic identity, with which they strongly identified, as Shqiponja noted *"Us Albanians we were all very connected […] they couldn't crack our identity.***(**105:3846-3848). Further to this, it was clear from the women's narratives that the Serbian political aspiration to assimilate Kosovar-Albanian's into a Serbian identity merely solidified the Kosovar-Albanian identity, stimulated patriotism and united the Kosovar-Albanian community in their collective undertaking to liberate themselves from the Serbian political tyranny. For the majority of women, the aftermath of war, did not reduce the significance of their national identity, instead it united women in their collective war experiences, shared loss and desire to rebuild. By giving them some illusion of strength and purpose, their national identity was an important source of resilience and empowerment for the women and their homogenous group.

When discussing their national identity, women's narratives depicted a more powerful tone, as it gave them scope for evaluating and coping with the horrors of their experiences, whilst also providing

55 Henri Tajfel's development of the social identity theory in the late 1970s (Turner, Brown & Tajfel 1979), came from a desire to understand intergroup relations, conflict and cooperation between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Central component of the social identity theory as poised by Tajfel (1970) are social categorisations and motivations. Social categorisation which illuminates an acute distinction between in-groups and out-groups within a social context, whereby they bracket themselves and others into meaningful comportments (McDermott, 2009; McKeown, Haji & Ferguson, 2016). In addition to social categorisation, comparative facets, individual identity, psychological distinctiveness and cultural norms, are also processes that account for the distinctions between in-groups and out-groups and which exert influence on the manifestation of in-group favouritism (Tajfel, 1970). Self-identification and the categorisation of others on account of mutual group membership is recognised in the realm of social psychology as social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). In addition to bridging the gap between the individual and the social context, social identities play an important part in the development of one's self-perception and understanding of the social world (Abrams & Hogg, 2006; Abrams & Hogg, 2010). Social identity theory was explained by Tajfel as the process by which individuals are aware that they belong to a particular social group and experience some sense of emotional value, which is attributed to their social group (Tajfel, 1970; 1981). Members of a social group are integrated by a collective identity, which monitors and sustains the principles, beliefs, and behaviours attributed to them that help define who they are (Pratto, Žeželj, Maloku, Turjačanin & Branković, 2017). Utilising their membership to define themselves across various categories inclusive of race, religion, sex and so on, group members infer fulfilment and contentment from their participation in the in-group (McDermott, 2009).

validation and psychological relief from self-blame. Given that humans are intrinsically social beings who acquire an evolutionary-rooted desire for social interactions and personal connections, being part of the in-group seemed to have provided Kosovar-Albanian women a sense of order and belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), especially amidst inter-ethnic tension. Indeed, it is via these social interactions, that people are thought to build cohesive connections, common purpose, and feel a sense of security and permanence (Tajfel, 1981;1986), which were crucial components for ensuring the survival of the Kosovar-Albanian culture and people. Findings, which echoed previous research in Bosnia, The Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, where territorial disputes, old grievances and inter-ethnic tension lead to the most barbaric political outbursts, wars, genocide, mass murder and rape (Benard, 1994; Brownmiller, 1975; Enloe, 2014; Hynes, 2004; Skjelsbæk, 2006). As we have seen in women's narratives, inter-group relations cannot be reduced to within-group relations or psychological processes, instead Jackson (1993) advises we consider the broader socio-political and environmental conditions and the role they play in moulding these group dynamics.

4.1.3 Women's bodies as an extension of the battlefield

In the analysis, sexual violence was described by women as a weapon of war and a political instrument implemented in a systematic manner for political and military objectives and with the intention to ethnically cleansing Kosovar-Albanians. When deliberating on sexual violence against the backdrop of political or armed conflict, there is the question "When does sexual violence become a weapon of war?" (Zaleski, 2015, p. 5; Nordås and Cohen, 2021). The widely held scholastic evaluation is that, the modulation of sexual violence in conflict is demarcated by the extension of violence from being directed on a micro scheme by soldiers towards individual men, women, children and the elderly to extensively include the macro socio-political and cultural chassis in which such crimes are committed (Skjesbæk, 2001). This evaluation is well aligned with women's narratives regarding the events that unfolded in Kosovo, findings that were also echoed in research by Card (1996), Mackenzie (2010), Kirby (2015) and Milillo (2006). The findings in this study, challenge the ongoing deliberations by scholars such as Wood (2009; 2014), Baaz and Stern (2013), and Nordås and Cohen (2021) among others who have seriously contested the conceptualisation of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. In this study, the women believed they were targeted by the perpetrators based on two factors, firstly their gender identities (female) and secondly, their ethnic identities (Kosovar-Albanian). In their narratives, all seven women identified four groups of perpetrators who subjected them to sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. These were described as: (1)Serbian police force, (2)Serbian military forces, (3)Serbian paramilitary forces as well as (4) individuals from the Roma community. Women explained that these distinct groups of perpetrators operated co-actively across Kosovo, and were united by their shared mission to ethnically cleanse Kosovar-Albanians. With the exception of individuals from the Roma community, the other three groups were further confederated by their national Serbian identity.

In all accounts, it was reported that women were firstly, confronted by a group of perpetrators, which was habitually composed of some combination of the four varieties described above, followed by repeated rapes at the hands of multiple perpetrators. Some women were seized and raped in their homes, while others were abducted and held captive in what they referred to as *rape camps* for an extended period of time. In their narratives, the women held strong convictions that sexual violence was utilised as a *weapon of war* in the Kosovar war. To confer greater credibility to their convictions, the women in this psychological research cited numerous direct quotes as expressed by the perpetrators, in which their tones were antagonistic and their malevolent objectives clearly outlined, *"We […] will show you all"* (141: 5169-5170) and *"'Look at what we are now going to do to the wives and daughters of the Albanians'"(*144: 5270-5271). Further to this, the use of the plural "we" may be indicative of the perpetrators collectivist approach to executing sexual violence. Indeed, in their narratives the women explained that they were aware of the pre-war propaganda that was utilised by Serb forces, which was thought to have led to the widespread execution of sexual violence.

In women's narratives, sexual violence was depicted as a phenomenon of the male-female gendered power relations in Kosovo, which preceded the (1998-1999) war. Prior to the war, the Kosovar-Albanian culture and customs were heavily influenced by the principles of the Leke Dukagjini traditional code of conduct, which promoted male dominance, saw males as leaders of their family, and placed responsibility on men to protect the honour of their women and revenge any injury inflicted upon them (Papadopoulos, 2007). The subjugation of women, as described by narrator's was aligned with these patriarchal conventions, whereby women were seen as docile and in need of male protection. On the onset of the war, the majority of Kosovar-Albanian men in the women's stories, joined the KLA and were devoted to protecting their land and people, the women on the other hand, in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers played a pivotal role in offering emotional and psychological support to their families and took pride in taking care of their children, the ill and the elderly. Though, as seen in the data, this gendered role left the Kosovar-Albanian women vulnerable to the barbarity of war. The findings in the present study were well aligned with the *continuum* argument, posed by Nordås and Cohen (2021), which posits that the pre-war status of women in society can be predictive of wartime sexual violence. For example, in the case of the Guatemalan conflict, Boesten (2017) as cited in Nordås and Cohen (2021) contended that although the magnitude and brutality of the acts were shaped by the conflict, the fundamental ideology underlying these acts, which was rooted in racism and sexism, existed prior to the onset of the conflict.

Similar to Peet and Sjoberg (2020), the women in this study saw the family system as being the group's *centre of gravity*; the heart and soul of their moral sanctity, value, meaning, purpose and power. Within this traditional culture, women, on the premise of their reproductive roles were also seen as the bearers

of the Kosovar-Albanian culture, in other words, they were considered to be the *wealth* that required male protection. According to Diken and Laustsen (2005, p. 117) the etymological development of the term *rape* originates in the Latin 'rapere' which translates to "Steal, seize or carry away". Thus, through the act of rape the perpetrator aimed to *steal wealth* that was owned by another man. Pursuant to this argument, the Serb forces sought to devalue the Kosovar-Albanian women and consequently the *wealth* of the Kosovar-Albanian men (Diken & Laustsen, 2005). Through the acts of rape, they transformed the Kosovar-Albanian women from invaluable objects into abject figures. Diken and Laustsen (2005) referred to this process as *rape pollution*, and in the women's cases, devaluation sought to solidify the existing patriarchal structure and went beyond the inflicting of harm on the recipient of the attack with intent to dissolve the social organisation of the out-group and guarantee their physical submission. In this way, the act of rape, in addition to becoming an efficacious tactic that engendered disorder via violation of power and assets warranted to Kosovar-Albanian males, also defiled traditional norms that were positioned at the core of the family structure (Mackenzie, 2010). Similar political tactics were observed in the Bosnian war, whereby Serb forces utilised genocidal rape to contaminate the women, destroy their families and communities (Hynes, 2004).

Farwell (2004) explained that conflict-related sexual violence during ethnic conflicts is a strategy for 'Infiltrating or destroying [racial/cultural/national] boundaries and attacking the honour of the community and the purity of its lineage' (p. 395). Rape as sexualised violence in women's narratives can thus be seen as an act which aspired to terrorise, humiliate, destroy and dehumanise women, premised on their gendered identity as women, beyond patriarchal speculation, women were electively targeted based on the intersection of gender with nationality and ethnicity (Salih, Kaur & Yahya, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Farwell (2004) poised that, traditionally women have been used as emblematic personifications of a nation, and the men shared a collective moral obligation to protect and preserve the honour of their wives and motherland from the external enemy. Women in this study, were thus seen as vehicles of communication between two enemy groups; Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians, *"[Serbs] were aware that if you want to completely kill the Albanians then touch them by touching their women.*(92:3366-3368). In this way, the women came to be the "Embodied boundaries of the nation-state" and for this reason, became the targets for violence directed at the Kosovar-Albanian population as a collective (Buss, 2009, p. 148).

With this in mind, the inter-ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo was described in the narratives as an issue of competing masculinities. A link between heroic masculinity and Serbian national identity as described by Serbian writer Danilo Kis in Bracewell (2000, p. 570) held that "Testicles" were "A national symbol" and "A trademark of the race" while other people were thought to have "Luck, tradition, erudition, history, reason" the Serbian people had "Balls". Standards of success and failure were thus extended from the socio-political podium to the landscape of women's bodies, in

this way, the female body was viewed as a vessel invaded through penial penetration by the Serb enemy. Revenge and malevolence towards the KLA were outlined by women as principle motives for the continuation of torture and rape. At the time of the rapes, the Serb forces contemptuously harassed the women by asking them "*'Where is your army now?'"*(27:986) thus mocking with malice the Kosovar-Albanian men's inability to protect and secure their women and nation. If we take Schulz (2018) conceptualisation of heterosexuality as being an integral part of manliness, then on this account, we can evaluate the raping of the Kosovar-Albanian women to be a process through which Serb forces asserted their virility and masculine potency. Followed by, the domination, feminisation and emasculation of the Kosovar-Albanian men *"There is no difference between raping their wives and raping them"(*59:2170-2171). For the Kosovar-Albanian men, this was believed to be the utmost humiliation; an experience of emblematic castration *"A stripping of their manhood"*(59:2171) and a hallmark of complete conquest "*[Rape] happened to all of Kosovo*"(106:3869) (Brownmiller, 1975; Goldstein, 2001). Raped women thus became "The castle of the enemy" (Weenen, 2000, p. 127). As reflected in the present study, women believed rape to serve a quasi-pestilential function as they described themselves as having become life-long surrogates of the enemy's administered poison; *"A type of poison that warps your soul slowly but surely a stain that can never be removed ever!*(91:3322-3323). The perpetrators intent was believed to be, to ensure the internal longevity of the perpetrator and to perpetuate the psychological injury to the women with the hope that it will bleed into the wider community.

Further to this, in women's narratives, NATOs intervention was thought to have agitated the Serb forces and incited further rapes. Given that the premise of effective combat for such military establishments, relies on ideals of *protector masculinity*; rationality, loyalty and dominance (Aoláin, Cahn, Haynes & Valji, 2018), and that NATO's intervention was perceived as a coercive operation, with the intent to coax Milosevic to surrender (Lambeth, 2001). Indeed, NATO through its alliance with the Kosovar-Albanian people may have been seen as an extension of the Kosovar-Albanian masculinity, thus, putting a halt on Serbian men's opportunity to reaffirm their manhood and a direct threat to Serb nationalism. As such, Kosovar-Albanian women were not eliminated from sexual violence based on their age, marital status, being pregnant, education or socio-economic status. The perpetrators *"Didn't look at who or what they were […] was she an Albanian female? Then, they did the darkest most heinous things to them."*(110:4027-4029). The present study was well aligned with the findings of Seifert (1996) and Groth and Birnbaum (1979), as it highlighted the a-sexuality of the victims and identified rape as a pseudo-sexual act, which was positioned at the heart of Serbian politics and bore nationalistic aims for ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. These findings challenged the long-standing biological theories that attribute a genetically predisposed uncontrollable sex drive to men and seriously question the "Blind genetic drive" hypothesis (Gottschall, 2004, p. 134; Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). Perhaps, to say something about the complexity surrounding the intersectionality of gender and politics relative to

sexual violence. But, also to inform international organisations about the repercussions of their military interventions, and as they embark on their peace keeping missions how they might go about reducing the risk of *revenge harm* from opposing groups to civilians on the ground.

4.1.4 Living within a patriarchal and misogynist context: "Who 'owns' the women's honour?"

The experience of sexual violence was described by women as a "Blow in the soul of [their] hearts" (60:2175), which *"Left a void there for life"*(148:5412) and fostered the destruction of their *"human value"*(90:3294-3295) with contaminative repercussions on their integrity and a collapse of their moral value. In this way, shame and humiliation plagued women's lives and distorted their self-perception, the "dirty" and the "bad" became a deeply integrated and unchangeable part of their personal character and moral worth. According to Bakhtin (1986), the social construction of the mind and of being conscious of oneself takes "Place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness […] a person has no internal sovereign territory; he[/she] is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself[/herself], he[/she] looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another" (Ryle & Kerr, 2002, p. 36-37). Perhaps, the women began to look at themselves through the eyes of their community and by its standards saw themselves as valueless. To understand the traumatic impact of rape, Diken and Laustsen (2005) poised that the symbolic intersection between the bodily and psychic interiors must be considered. The body's internal landscape is recognised as a sanctity and its most private and intimate part. The vagina is thus understood to be "The gate to the woman's soul by which act of entry property in her body is claimed" (Miller, 1997, p. 102). The act of rape is thus traumatic "Because it invades our innermost intimacy" (Seifert, 1994, p. 55) and transforms an individual's inner being from a valuable object into an abject (Diken & Laustsen, 2005). Similar atrocities were carried out in Rawanda, on the basis of mythological attributes that considered Tutsi women as racially superior to other ethnic groups and sexual violence was one way to strip them of their social power and cultural worth (Mukamana & Brysiewicz, 2008; Mullins, 2009).

In a patriarchal society like Kosovo, where "The birth of a boy was often celebrated by the firing of a gun, and the birth of a girl, with tears" (Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 272-273), and where "An offense to honour is never forgiven" (Sadiku, 2014, p. 108), rape together with the negative hallmarks that constitute it, as presented in women's narratives, merely contributed towards the conservation of the sexual-power structure of their community. As such, the majority of Kosovar-Albanian men in the wars aftermath were described as having experienced a growing anxiety about the wartime social disorder that was exhausted by Serb forces upon their women. Liria's husband, after finding out that she had been raped asked for a divorce and through cultural codes of conduct, which are designed to favour men, forced her to leave behind her one-year old daughter. Liria explained that her ex-husband and his

family believed she didn't "*Deserve to be a mother, they couldn't have a woman like [her] raise a girl"* (44:1587-1588). These narratives echoed findings by Brownmiller (1975) who poised that the destruction of a woman's sexuality is synonymous with the spoliation of her motherhood and dignity. Dardana experienced a similar fate, as the man she loved left her because she had been raped during the war, as such, she measured her self-worth against the impurity inflicted by the rapes *"I don't even deserve to be alive"*(30:1082-1083). The men, in women's narratives, though in the majority, stayed with their wives irrespective of the sexual violence, expressed both latent and overt aggression towards their women in relation to its occurrence, for instance, Teuta was interrogated by her husband *"Why you?*"(156:5709), which she took to imply she had in some way instigated the sexual violence. In this way, women described themselves as damaged and disposable objects who were completely dehumanised by the act of sexual violence and the cultural impulse to blame and shame them for being victims of such violations. This cultural imperative was thought to displace the priority from one that recognises the traumatic impact and protects and prevents such atrocities, to focusing exclusively on women's chastity, thus bringing into question "Who 'owns' the women's honour? [and] Who defines what an 'honourable woman' is?" (Skjelsbæk, 2012, p. 74). If we look to women's narratives, we find the answer to this question enveloped in a deeply rooted patriarchal system in Kosovo, where the women's honour was owned and defined by the men.

Seidler (2000) explained that shame is inherent in the formation of the self, and a crucial component of the structure of self is the experience of who one is in relation to the other (Winnicott, 1967; 1969). For instance, if early life interactions do not reflect experiences of existing as a real person, especially for the mother, then the sentiment of unreality becomes heavily ingrained in the sense of self, a feeling that accompanies individuals through to adulthood. Winnicott's object relations theory is foregrounded in the idea that "I am seen, therefore I exist" (Mollon, 2002, p. 11). Perhaps then, for Kosovar-Albanian women, to not be seen, heard or embraced by their communities without stigma and judgment, gave way to a feeling of '*I do not exist'*. Given that women experienced an invasion and destruction of their *home*, both the physical land and the interiority of their bodies, it was no surprise then, that a deep sense of loss of *home* was ingrained in their narratives. Papadopoulos's (2007, p. 16) concept of *nostalgic disorientation* comes close to describing this suffering. The experience of nostalgic disorientation is described as a "Sense of deep ache" and yearning for a home that has been lost, which has left a "A hole" and "A lack of confidence […] in one's own existence" (Papadopoulos, 2007, p. 16). From a psycho-analytical perspective, the home is regarded a symbol of one's self and "After the body itself, the home is seen as the most powerful extension of the psyche" (Després, 1991, p. 100). In addition to providing physical security and health, the home according to Maslow's (1954) theory of personality is also a "locus per excellence for maintaining inter-personal relationships, answering the human need for social intercourse" thus aiding the amalgamation of the various facets of the personality and strengthening psychic self-regulation (Després, 1991, p. 100; Maslow & Lewis, 1987). In other words,

the war in combination with the sexual violence invaded and destroyed women's physical and internal homes, subsequently *othering* them from their families, communities and from themselves, leaving them catastrophically dehumanised. In this way, the majority of women in the present study, suffered dual-dehumanisation, once at the hands of the male Serb forces and secondly by the men within their own families and communities. The dehumanisation of an individual, as poised by Haslam, Loughnan, Reynolds and Wilson (2007) is the perspective that certain people should be denied uniquely human rights and specific out-groups are therefore denied the privilege, activities or agency that are ordinarily ascribed to in-groups. The experience of being dehumanised, as we have witnessed in the women's narratives, thus erased women's voice from social, political and cultural discourse, offended their dignity, and affected both their intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships (Haslam, Loughnan, Kashima & Bain, 2008).

4.1.5 Intersectionality of survivors identities

If we shift our focus to the idea of intersectionality, which addresses the intricate interconnections and interactions among diverse dimensions of an individual's identity (including gender, race, social class, ethnicity and more), we can gain a comprehensive understanding of how women's identities were constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in three distinct time periods in Kosovo: before the war, during the war, and after the war (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). In their narratives, women explained that prior to the war the construction of ethnic, racial and cultural identities (Kosovar-Albanian), which through interconnectedness with gender identity (females) and for some even a mother identity, allowed women to enjoy certain cultural privileges within a pre-war milieu (Clark, 2022; Isaac & Jurasz, 2018). For example, women were perceived to be the heart and soul of the family system and the carriers and transferrers of the Kosovar-Albanian culture and traditions to the next generation. Thus, valuable and pivotal embodiments of cultural identity. The interaction between their gender, racial and ethnic identities (Kosovar-Albanian women) allowed women, in their pursuit to survive the Serbian oppression, to be united and feel a sense of belongingness with other members of their homogenous group in a collective national identity (Kosovar-Albanian).

This took a drastic turn for the worst at the time of the war, notably in the context of women's experiences with conflict-related sexual violence. Women who experienced conflict-related sexual violence also witnessed a deconstruction of their identities (Kosovar-Albanian females/mothers/wives) in various ways, and as a result of this women faced unique challenges related to gender roles, societal expectations and gender-based discrimination, marginalisation and even ostracism. This, subsequently shaped women's experiences, perspectives and the opportunities that were available to them (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). The experience of rape and sexual violence meant that women were considered to be contaminated, dirty and worthless, characterisations that profoundly impacted

women's intimate relationships with their husbands, as well as diminishing their sense of self (intra-psychic relationship), which manifested itself in trauma, stigmatisation, shame, and guilt. In this way, intersectionality acknowledges that women's experiences were impacted not only by their gender identity but also by factors such as their ethnicity, which further shaped the construction of meaning and impact of the violence (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Women's experiences of rape and conflict-related sexual violence were also shaped by the intersection between their ethnic, racial and cultural identities. In this way, the intersection of these factors influenced how women's experiences were perceived within their families and communities, the cultural and societal responses to their trauma and what support was available to them (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Furthermore, socioeconomic factors intersected with gender and other dimensions of identity to impact the resources, opportunities and support that was available to women in the aftermath of war (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

In their narratives, women described being faced with various socioeconomic challenges in the aftermath of the war, and these disparities inevitably shaped women's access to mental health services, economic opportunities and the process of identity reconstruction (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). In the aftermath of the Kosovar war, women expressed having no choice but to be strong for their children and family members who relied on them. The reconstruction of identity, fell largely on the nurturing of a mother identity, which essentially bridged the interconnectedness with their gender, racial, ethnic and cultural identities. Thus, alleviating suffering and giving women a renewed and dignified sense of self. On this account, as practitioners in our endeavour to provide holistic and culturally sensitive support for individuals who have experiences rape and/or sexual violence, whether on domestic lands or in other countries, in peacetime or war, it is important to understand the intersectionality of identities. By acknowledging the idiosyncratic challenges and opportunities that arise from the interaction of various identities, psychological interventions can be formulated to tackle survivors particular needs (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019). Thus, endorsing a more inclusive and coherent method to their identity construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, notably following traumatic life events (Zipfel, Campbell & Mühlhäuser, 2019).

4.1.6 "Kosovo's dark secret" veiled by a "Metallic silence"

Despite the efforts made through various artworks, films and writings (Krasniqi, Sokolić & Kostovicova, 2018), twenty-three years post-war Kosovo and the narratives, as presented in the current investigation continued to depict conflict-related sexual violence as "Kosovo's dark secret", veiled by a "Metallic silence" (Weenen, 2000, p. 123-124). In the narratives, for the majority of Kosovar-Albanian men, to acknowledge that sexual violence had occurred and especially to the women in their own families, was a reminder that they had failed to protect them, and thus threatened their sense of

national-identity as well as their individual male identities. Thus, pushing forward the national rhetoric that collectively denied the women's experiences and sentenced them to intolerable silence. In women's narratives, the men requested that they keep their experience a secret. Women's experiences were, in most part, invalidated and almost exclusively removed from the discourse of sexual violence except for emblems of traditional roles, male honour, and symbols of the Kosovar-Albanian nation. Silence was merely an accessible and permissible recourse for women. Addressing the true nature of their experience, had the potency to evoke vehement psychological suffering for survivors, and was comparable with betraying their family and violating the family code of honour. This was also a common safeguarding practice among women in Bosnia, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as a way to withstand the harsh cultural conditions in the aftermath of sexual violence (Clark et al., 2010; Horn, Puffer, Roesch & Lehmann, 2014; Mollon, 2002; Rober & Rosenblatt, 2017).

In this way, secrets are seen as systemic phenomena that shape families and dynamical relationships (Rober & Rosenblatt, 2017). In Western psychological theory and practice, the centrality pertaining to silence is a polyhedral one, the meaning of which is deeply entrenched in the cultural, socio-political and historical context (Peel, 2004). In women's narratives, silence was juxtaposed with secrecy, in addition to helping women to evade the shame, humiliation, marginalisation and ostracism, silent also revealed a firm bond between the women and their national identity and cultural traditions, whereby honour, devotion and loyalty to one's family, community and nation were given prioritisation over their own individual requirements and demands (Peel, 2004). Further to this, motherhood allowed women to connect deeply with their primal protective nature, as such, they described withholding their experiences of sexual violence from their children, as a way to protect them from inter-generational trauma. These findings were also echoed among Rwandan, Bosnian and Guatemalan mother's (Zraly, Rubin & Mukamana, 2013).

Repression of speech and denial are central to the psychological conceptualisation of silence in that they are common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) (Blaauw & Lähteenmäki, 2002). Giving voice to one's idiosyncratic experiences, notably in relation to traumatic narratives, is generally a shared and prescriptive psychological objective among psychologist's when formulating treatment. In my own personal experience working with refugees and asylum seeking women in gender-based violence clinics between (2017-2021), notably women who had survived sex trafficking, sexual violence and political torture, the necessary action, from the abovementioned standpoint was the breaking of the silence and the verbalising of one's experience, which was seen as a breaking away from political subjugation (Walton, Schleien, Brake, Trovato & Oakes, 2012).

That being said, it may be important to consider that proposed psychological interventions as recommended by NICE guidelines for symptoms pertaining to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),

mixed-anxiety and depressive disorders, which are commonly attributed to people who have had traumatic experiences in armed conflict, generally epitomise inferences regarding human nature that emulate Western cultural customs and signify an individualistic disposition (Cooper, 2011). By Western psychological theory and practice, I am making reference to the dominant structures, principles and therapeutic approaches that have originated from Western cultures, notably countries in Western-Europe and the US. Western psychological theory and practice comprises of a variety of psychological modalities and paradigms, inclusive of psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic and systemic models, and among more recently developed approaches include Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) and Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). Each one offering a distinct examination into and comprehension of human psychological process, behaviours as well as general psychological wellbeing. These psychological approaches play a vital role in informing research and evidence-based clinical practice, including the development of psychological assessments, diagnoses, the provision of treatment plans for a variety of mental health disorders and interventions, which are tailored for alleviating distress and fostering psychological wellbeing and personal growth.

The discipline of psychology is concerned with establishing a coherent understanding of the impact of culture and cultural variation on individual's cognitive processes, emotional experience, and how these in combination manifest into their behaviour repertoires (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Exploring cultural differences means we might first focus on how individuals come to develop their self-identity and forge connections with others, within their homogenous groups and communities, which they are a part of (Brewer & Chen, 2007). In Western cultures, notably countries in Western Europe like the UK, and the US, the primary facet of self-definition is centred on individual autonomy and distinctiveness from others (Brewer & Chen, 2007). By contrast, in collectivist cultures the self is principally determined by social immersion and interdependence within the homogenous group (Brewer & Chen, 2007). This variance is seen as both a cultural attribute (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism) and as a psychological construct (e.g., independent vs. interdependent) (Brewer & Chen, 2007). In this way, Brewer and Chen (2007, p.133) posited that societies that have a preference for individualism give primacy to facets such as self-awareness, which they call "*'I' consciousness"*, and which pertains to individual initiative, the right to privacy, autonomy, emotional independence, pursuit of pleasure, financial security, universalism and a reliance on the concept of free will to make sense of their lives (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Shapiro, 2016). Conversely, collectivist cultures lend weight to collectivist awareness, which they identify as "*'we' consciousness",* and which pertains to, collective identity, emotional interdependence, group solidarity, sharing, fulfilling duties and obligations, and group decision-making (Brewer & Chen, 2007, p. 134). The individual is regarded as an integral part of the collective that takes into account other people in the immediate family, those in the community, and include both living and ancestral, and these individuals turn to nature to make sense of their lives (Shapiro, 2016). These contrasting perspectives have important ramifications for the progression and development of theory

and its clinical application within the discipline (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Thus, clinicians are advised, when engaging in culturally sensitive therapeutic work, not to make the erroneous assumption that their personal cultural-specific position holds universal validity, particularly in the case of gender-specific behaviours and attitudes that have been revealed to be culturally specific rather than universal verities (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010).

Further to this, Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016) explain that individuals from collectivistic cultures, prioritise the well-being of others and the collective over their own personal interests. As seen in the present study, women's homogenous group (Kosovar-Albanian community) held great importance and served as their primary purpose, for which they were prepared to make personal sacrifices (keeping their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence a secret to protect their family's honour) in the interest of their families, and particularly for their children. This was reflected in the ways in which women utilised language within their cultural context. According to Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016), language is considered a cultural tool used by individuals in diverse cultures to mould and express their identities. In a similar manner, the Kosovar-Albanian women in the present study displayed a propensity to use collective pronouns such as "we," "us," and "our," when describing their experiences of rape and sexual violence, while the use of individualistic pronouns like "I" or "me" were increasingly more rare (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). In this way, Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016) explained that in collectivist cultures, the self is considered a significant part of the whole; any traumatic event that may impact the individual is treated as a collective trauma and becomes the burden of the entire homogenous group (Goldsmith, Martin & Smith, 2014). It is important to mention here that the employment of colloquial expressions may alter the manner in which experiences are described and the narratives constructed (Goldsmith, Martin & Smith, 2014). As we engage in culturally attuned therapeutic work with individuals from collectivist cultures, this language preference may have a succeeding effect on our ability to retrieve crucial information during the assessment phase and the development of a cohesive psychological treatment plan (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016; Moodley & Lee, 2020), which could bring about erroneous diagnoses and unbeneficial psychological interventions (Moodley & Lee, 2020).

In collectivist cultures, symptoms of trauma are commonly described using physiological symptoms, for instance, somatisation which is a pertinent presentation of PTSD has been found to be highly prevalent among collectivist cultures (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). To understand PTSD, we must first look at how the individual is impacted by the homogenous group to which they belong. For instance, the individuals interconnectedness with the homogenous group, means that their social role is carefully examined, notably in regard to whether the experience of any traumatic event impacts or hindered the individual's role within that particular group. The examination of a person's social role extends to include any moral injury, which could cause potential contamination of their worth both personally and collectively. As well as the individual's capacity to maintain their role, position and

functionality within that group (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). Thus, any sense of marginalisation has the potential to conjure up intense feelings of rejection, leaving the individual with both their personal and collective significance reduced (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). Thus, with any traumatic experience the individual endures both private harm and public humiliation and this evokes an intensified experience of the dual impact of trauma (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). As a result of this experience, individuals then find it challenging to cope with feelings of isolation, alienation and detachment from their families and communities, which are all symptoms of PTSD (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016).

It is thus important to acknowledge some implications for practitioner's culturally attuned engagement in clinical praxis, notably when working with individuals who originate from collectivist cultures. Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016) suggest that group therapies may be highly beneficial for individuals from collectivist cultures, particularly when used for psychological treatment. This form of therapy has been found to reduce shame and alleviate the sense of alienation and isolation and cultivate a sense of self-empowerment, challenging feelings of hopelessness and powerfulness (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). In the present study, women outlined unique methods, which they implemented during their healing process. One such method was engagement within a female exclusive group, which was composed of Kosovar-Albanian women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. These groups, offered a confidential, safe, non-judgmental space for women to candidly express themselves exempt from stigma and shame. In their narratives, women expressed that, in these groups, they were brought together by their shared language, dialect, national identity and experiences of conflict-related sexual violence, all of which fostered the ideal conditions for catharsis and to experience a sense of empowerment. For instance, in her narrative Baresha explained "*We spoke, {Mm}, within that group of women that we had been in. […]we would discuss this with each other, and then even with friends from other circles in organisations when we started attending women's organisations for women. (2)*(65:2363-2390).

Further to this, women from rural areas were obligated to engage in collective agricultural activities, and this work too assumed a therapeutic capacity. In her narrative, Afërdita explained that by engaged in these activities, the women embarked on a shared psychological and emotional journey, where they began the healing process, felt a sense of liberation, empowerment and restoration of hope "*We used to talk especially when we would go out to work the fields, we would grapple with this conversation among the women, and there were times when we would completely forget that we were out in the fields talking about that time and what happened to us, and it would be too late and we would realise "Oh dear God we are out in the fields and we have completely forgotten", you know? Because we had all had the same experience, we would all relive it as if we were there in that same moment when it happened, but we did it, we overcame it, because we were all very close and connected with one another. This is a huge*

*motivational push because you speak and share it with someone, it's the lightness of the soul, it's liberating when you discuss it with someone."(*12-13: 437-450).

According to Moodley and Lee (2020) approximately 70%-80% of the world's population emanate from collectivistic cultures, on account of this they recognise the significance of group therapy in offering a beneficial setting for ethnic, cultural and race dialogues to unfold. Group therapies were designed for the purpose of alleviating tension and encourage compassion and accord, and this aim was thought to be achieved by confronting various power dynamics, biases, racism, discrimination and the sociocultural impact on different racial groups in group therapy (Moodley & Lee, 2020). It is thought that by engaging in open dialogues and attuning to emotional participation, group members would be presented with an opportunity to cultivate self-awareness and understanding (Moodley & Lee, 2020). In light of the present racial climate, Moodley and Lee (2020) present group therapy as a valuable instrument in efficaciously addressing mental health concerns stemming from racism and discrimination. Moodley and Lee (2020) explain that, in order to beneficially engaged with cultural diversity in group therapy, practitioners must embrace an approachable, non-judgmental, group-centred approach and reflect on their own prejudices, beliefs and biases and how these might subsequently influence their facilitation of the group, as such, open discussions are encouraged.

While group therapies are generally reputed as beneficial for culturally sensitive therapeutic work, they may not be appropriate for all individuals, even if they originate from a collectivist culture. Burgess and Campbell (2014) outline some possible challenges and limitation related to the efficacy of group therapies in diverse cultural contexts. Burgess and Campbell (2014) analysed the prevalence of mental health concerns among low income communities and looked at how women navigated and coped with emotional distress. Their findings underscored the inherent impact of poverty, cultural norms, unemployment and intergenerational conflict on women's dialogues pertaining to mental health and wellbeing (Burgess & Campbell, 2014). Women's emotional experiences were inevitably moulded by these factors, notably inter-personal relationships being at the hub of the narratives constructed where they depicted their worry and sadness (Burgess & Campbell, 2014). While women leveraged local support systems, sought out problem-solving and interpersonal group therapy and joined support groups, and considered these resources as practicable interventions to facilitated their mental health, Burgess and Campbell (2014) found that these social connections in collectivist cultures attain dual effects. Chiefly functioning as both the origin of distress and possible solution, this was seen to be the case notably in cultures that foreground familial dynamics, as was demonstrated in multiple African contexts that maintained strong kin-based duties (Burgess & Campbell, 2014).

An example of this was observed in the act of advice seeking both in the community and in group therapies, which was regarded as an active coping scheme, but did not yield positive alterations in the

fundamental causes of women's distress (Burgess & Campbell, 2014). Often times Burgess and Campbell (2014) found that the advice that was given to women in these group reinforced culturally dominant narratives, which encouraging women to tolerate and welcome challenging circumstances as unalterable and potentially permanent aspect of their life. Further to this, in the study women identified the family unit and the community as protective factors, for their mental wellbeing. However, women also outlined that their interactions with faith-based organisations, traditional healers and engagement with community leaders were found to perpetuate AIDS-related stigma and denial, further exacerbating women's copying strategies within challenging social contexts and with limited resources (Burgess & Campbell, 2014).

Burgess and Campbell's (2014) outlined two key factors for fostering community mental health competence: empowering people to exert their power and agency and set up supportive social spaces to cultivate group dialogue and assistance. These factors are considered to be important in cultivating community collaboration in the realm of mental health. A holistic approach to mental health within the community was outlined (Burgess & Campbell, 2014). Further to this point, Burgess and Campbell (2014) argued that psychological disorders such as depression and PTSD are better understood as complex socio-cultural responses to adversity rather than the over simplistic nature of psychiatric classifications, which give priority to the individuals pathology while disregarding the inherent impact of the social, cultural, political and economic context. On this account, Burgess and Campbell (2014) advocate for holistic research that accounts for the full complexity that encompasses an individual's life, rather than reducing them to psychological categorisations.

Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016) caution researcher to be mindful, particularly in regard to the pertinence of Western psychology theory and practice as being the globe wide standard framework. Engelbrecht and Jobson (2016) argue that this perception is more a socio-political construct than a universal take on psychological processes and human behaviour. Practitioners are thus encouraged to be mindful when utilising Western standardised diagnostic systems, as can often overshadow the idiosyncratic experiences of individuals from different cultures, and hinder an opportunity to explore the individuals rich emotional experience (Willig, 2017; Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). While Western psychology has contributed massively to the progression of the discipline of psychology, it is not an exclusive contributor, thus it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to maintain a healthy curiosity and actively foster their cultural awareness, via engagement with critical methodologies and multicultural training (Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2016). As we have seen outlined in the present study, indigenous psychological healing practices were utilised by women and were found to be incredibly effective. Indeed, this is an example of how vital it is for researchers and practitioners to integrate diverse cultural perspectives and expand culturally sensitive methods in the field of psychology, both in research investigations and clinical praxis.

4.1.7 Breaking the silence

As Wenner (2000) documented, in the immediate aftermath of the war in Kosovo, women struggled to put into language, the horrors that were done to them, and the only word that came close to describing their experiences was "Touched". Being *touched* by the enemy connotated having been contaminated, made dirty, even evil (Wenner, 2000). Indeed, the depth and breadth of language, as it was utilised by narrators in the present study, demonstrated that over the years the local culture has made some progress in providing a wider vocabulary for survivors to construct and make sense of their experiences. Given that stories are regarded as "Artful representations of [our] lives", which prevail in human discourse (Frank, 2013, p. 33), the process of naming our experiences has the potential to reveal our position in the matter. Hahn and Ivie (1988, p. 15) held that a "Symbolic act is a dancing of an attitude", naming a situation thus allows us to observe and respond to that experience. For instance, as we witnessed happening in the latter stages of the narratives, by re-authoring aspects of their experiences, the women opened the possibility for re-defining themselves in a non-pathologising and non-problematic way, reclaiming agency and empowerment (Frank, 2013). Perhaps, the most prominent observable change over the years, was in women's growing desire to now be heard, while Liria hoped for women's "*Voices to reach the entire world*"(49:1780), Afëredita noted that to be seen, heard and acknowledged would be a *"A type of therapy […] to heal old wounds"* one that would raise *"[Women's] authority [and] change people's perception, so that they know that these women are strong, wise, enlightened, with a pure heart! [g.2]*(19:695-703).

4.2 Part Two: Conclusion

4.3 Application to Counselling Psychology

A pivotal point of reflection for this psychological investigation was to recognise and outline its implications for theory and praxis in the discipline of counselling psychology. Perhaps, an important start would be to acknowledge that this study makes part of the conditions for the achievement of a professional doctorate in counselling psychology.

4.3.1 Social Justice

Given the discipline of counselling psychology's growing commitment to social justice (Allen & Dodd, 2018), perhaps the most profound contribution that this study has made to this field, is to cast light on Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence for the first time since the ending of the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. To my knowledge, there have been no psychological research (qualitative, quantitative or other) that have focused on Kosovar-Albanian women's subjective experiences of conflict-related sexual violence, making this piece of research and any future

publications the first of its kind. In the least, then this research has offered a solid platform, for women's voices to be heard outside the bounds of their socio-cultural and political context.

Additionally, the artful, implicit, and context-dependent ontology of therapeutic work within the realm of counselling psychology was epitomised in this qualitative research (Bannister, 1966; Polkinghorne, 1992). By inviting participants to be an audience to their own performance of stories within a safe and non-judgmental space, stories that have been primarily associated with stigma and pathology, I believe was a therapeutic process, which offered women the opportunity to reconstruct a coherent self and embody this self in the stories they told (Murray, 2018). In this way, women were satiated with a sense of hope and an enhanced sense of personal agency (White & Epston, 1990). This openness to possibility and acceptability, gives counselling psychology a powerful edge (Davy, 2010) and it's multifaceted nature means that counselling psychologists take various roles, from therapist and researcher to being involved in management and leadership, supervision, training, policy development and social justice work (Kasket, 2012). Further to this, the British Psychological Society highlights the growing emphasis on evidence based therapeutic practice and the vitality of research on psychological treatment (BPS, 2021a;2021b). Through any of these realms, it then becomes possible to bring forth productive conversations that have the power to instigate the development of more refined therapeutic interventions within clinical praxis.

4.3.2 Provision for Humanitarian first response interventions

Skjelsbæk (2012) poised that the accumulation of knowledge and experience at the end of the wars in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina placed the international community in a more advantageous position, in that, they believed to be adequately equipped to manage the complexities of sexual violence and to facilitate an effective humanitarian intervention in Kosovo. Albeit, the reality on the ground merely reflected these quasi-proficiencies. As highlighted in the introduction chapter, the asymmetry between the (96) recorded cases of sexual violence in the immediate aftermath of the war in Kosovo in contrast to the (23,000 to 45,600) cases that were later estimated (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz, 2007), is alarming. Thus urging us to deliberate on important questions such as "Why were Kosovar-Albanian women and girls less likely to report their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in the immediate aftermath of the war?" and "What efforts were made by international organisations to document war crimes in a sensitive and ethical manner?" as well as to deliberate on "How counselling psychology might contribute to the provision of humanitarian interventions and to further enhance the efficacy with which interventions are mediated now and in the future?".

Indeed, a review of past errors might aid our attempts to adequately answer the above-posed questions. Human Rights Watch together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA & Crossette, 2010) noted a multitude of challenges in the process of documenting sexual violence in Kosovo. During the

initial interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo various errors were made whereby male NGO personnel were thought to have utilised a megaphone in refugee camps to invite victims of sexual violence to come forth and report their experiences (Skjelsbæk, 2012). By disregarding women's privacy and dignity these unethical interventions, rather than creating a safe and non-judgmental space, further exacerbated their trauma and distress. A deeply rooted patriarchal presence in Kosovo and the traditional gender roles, as reported in the current study, may have inhibited women from breaking their silence, making the abovementioned approach detrimental to the overall objective of reaching survivors who required assistance (Skjelsbæk, 2012).

Perhaps, the findings of the present study, caution the international audience about the historical, cultural, social and political implications of this form of violence, which according to the women interviewed was used as a weapon of war to dehumanise women and girls. Annexed to women's experiences of sexual violence was an acute fear of being exposed to the broader social context and the shame, rejection and abandonment that may follow from their families and communities. These considerations are paramount to the process of retrieving and documenting sensitive information from a severally traumatised population, especially in conflict zones. This study may therefore inform the provision of UN's humanitarian interventions (Takooshian & Shahinian, 2008), by offering a novel paradigm to the mapping and chronicle of atrocities in war and political conflict, which if done tentatively and in a professional manner can also contribute towards prosecutions at the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). An additional contribution of this study may also be to shed light on the increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation following international peace keeping interventions in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo.[56] By giving prominence to the limitations, malevolent potential and the partiality of humanitarian procedures, this study may, in addition to giving a platform to a disenfranchised group, also highlight the dangers of military interventionism, and contribute towards more refined international laws, that are aligned both conceptually and in their practical application to ensure the safety of women in the host country (Godec, 2010).

56 This study may potentially offer some insight into the issues raised by Godec (2010) pertaining to the increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation following international peace keeping interventions in the aftermath of war in Kosovo as addressed in earlier chapters (See Literature Review in introduction). Various solutions have been offered for this prevailing issue, the first being the re-evaluating the military culture and its inextricable link between masculinity and militarism (Godec, 2010). Secondly, they propose training programmes for the military and peace-keeping personnel to expand on diversity and gender awareness (Godec, 2010). Finally, they demand that the Security Resolution 1325 undergo a thorough re-evaluation followed by a re-draft, hence incorporating a more inclusive approach, and having women part take in the decision-making procedures, giving them the opportunity to make valuable and beneficial contributions at senior levels within these institutions (Godec, 2010). On this accounts, women's rights and security matters are distinct considerations and separate from interventionalist programs, thus not reducing and sensationalising women's experiences for political and economic gain. A genuine understanding of women's traumatic war experiences would see beyond the crisis point which advocates for military intervention and instead look to the aftermath of their arrival (Godec, 2010). I believe, the present study can contribute, even in a small way to this discussion. Based on Godec's findings, I considered "What obligations, if any, do counselling psychologists have in the process of evaluating the security and psychological impact of international law and its virtuousness on women's lives in war/conflict and in its aftermath?". Perhaps, by offering a genuine understanding of Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence in post-war Kosovo, the present study as a by-product also helps us to evaluate the efficacy of international interventions pertaining to matters of women's peace and security.

4.3.3 Access to Mental Health services in the UK: Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Furthermore, I believe that this exploratory study has the potential to teach us about different ways of working with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK[57]. Active wars and political conflicts have exacerbated the mass movement of displaced refugees in Europe, urging us to consider an important question "How prepared are we in the helping profession to support refugees and asylum seekers?". UNHCR statistics illustrate that at the end of 2020 there were 132,349 refugees and 77,245 pending asylum cases in the UK, this report goes further to show that these people are five times more likely to suffer from mental health issues and less likely than the general population to access mental health services and to receive support[58]. In the case of female survivors of sexual violence, one argument holds that in addition to language barriers, their challenges are compounded by past traumatic experiences,

57 Contemporary analysis into gender-based violence among the Albanian diaspora (refugees and asylum seekers) in the U.K revealed a high prevalence of trafficking (Coy & Sharp-Jeffs, 2016; Dowling, Moreton & Wright, 2007; Tahiraj, 2017). Pursuant to a report released by The National Referral Mechanism (NRF) in 2017, Albanian women and girls made up for the greatest number of subjects, for instance, in England, of the 1090 referrals reported, 93% were noted as potential victims of trafficking with intent for sexual exploitation (Home Office 2016; Home Office 2020). Non-government organisations such as the Shpresa Programme and Solace Women's Aid allied through the *Empower project*, and discovered that of all the women who attended the organisation 95% were victims of sexual violence (Coy & Sharp-Jeffs, 2016). While, gender-based violence is presented on a continuum, it is compounded by the intersection of other factors, inclusive of gender, sexuality, race, class, nationality, ethnicity and religion (Turner, 2017). Studies reveal that the prevalence of rape and sexual violence is much more prominent among the asylum seeking and refugee female population (Anitha 2011; Araujo et al., 2019; Refugee Council, 2009; Pillai, 2001). Further to this, Stephen-Smith (2008) poised that females who had previously experienced some kind of sexual violence were considerably more vulnerable to enduring further abuses. Additionally, a strong patriarchal presence in the Albanian community both in the native country and among the diaspora in the U.K, has been seen to regulate traditional norms and values that sanction violence against women and accord social and economic control to the men, thus foster the conditions for sexual violence to occur (King & Vullnetari, 2009; Tahiraj, 2017). Gendered-violence is thus perpetuated by a number of factors, including cultural inhibitors that may impede the females ability to disclose and report experiences of abuse, scarcity of resources (help lines), safe houses, access to judicial assistance, and psychological treatment (Amnesty International, 2010; Baillot, Cowan & Munro, 2012).

58 Gill, Wright and Brew (2014) highlight the *triple trauma of the refugee: 1)* commencing with the trauma sustained in the native country, 2) then seeking safety by migrating to a new country and the traumatic experience of that journey and finally 3) the trauma of resettlement in the host country as research shows that the overall health and in particular mental health declines among refugees after reaching the U.K. The journey through the asylum process is an arduous one, which further exacerbates mental health decline, referred to as *Home Office syndrome*, which may be fostered by prolonged periods of uncertainty for refugee status (Gill, Wright & Bew, 2014; Nasser-Eddin, 2017). Access to health care for refugees and asylum seekers is a perplexing task, in addition to funding cuts, long waiting times, primary and secondary care services are not always equipped to deal with culturally sensitive people (Vernon & Feldman, 2014). This is well aligned with my own experiencing working in a secondary care service, where I was approached by a senior psychologist and asked to offer my viewpoint on the growing list of Albanian women seeking psychological treatment for traumatic experiences related to sexual violence. Further to this point, the senior health professional asked my opinion on the sincerity of these cases and how I as a practitioner might go about identifying any fraudulent conduct or deception as a means to secure refugee status. It was difficult not to assume that these questions were being directed at me specifically due to my Kosovar-Albanian cultural heritage with the presumption that I may acquire some inside information. Although, this inquest may have been purely based on investigative curiosity, nevertheless, I believe it is important to understand the full repercussion of this line of inquiry on the client in therapy, which may include 1) unequal power dynamics between client and therapist, 2) damaging the therapeutic alliance, 3) reducing safety within the therapeutic space. 4) regressing the clients overall psychological wellbeing. Ultimately, raising ethical deliberations and the question "As practitioner psychologists, is it our role to interrogate and investigate potential criminal activity, that is not directly disclosed to us among refugees and asylum seekers related to their home office claims?". On this account, I believe it is important to usher forward training in cultural diversity, as it stands, to understand refugees and asylum seekers means to also understand why they have been forced to leave their homes in the first place. The political, social and cultural and economic circumstances that may be at play and with this in mind to think of how best to tailor therapy to benefit them. The present study, in its endeavour to illuminate a thorough account of Kosovar-Albanian women's experience of sexual violence and its cultural, social and political contextualisation may offer us an opportunity to learn about the various ways of providing psychological treatment to refugees and asylum-seeking women in the UK.

inherent distrust in people and institutions, and cultural taboos surrounding sex, gender and sexual contamination (Baillot, Cowan & Munro, 2012).

Furthermore, Hawkins and Shohet (2012) explain that the language of psychology is foregrounded in Western vocabulary, the valence of words concerning trauma, psychological therapy and mental health may differ significantly in different languages (Tribe, 1999). BPS good practice guidelines (2011) advocate the pluralistic approach, which is also at the heart of counselling psychology theory and practice, as it places emphasis on cultural perspective, identity, language preferences, and considers both the culture of origin and the host culture. Interventions that fit well with the clients own life-model are prioritised, for example offering client's the opportunity to re-create their narratives in their mother tongue may facilitate range and depth of expression without losing idiosyncratic and cultural forms of expression and identity (Papadopoulos & Byng-Hall, 2002). Subsequently, permitting a more organic metacommunication and therapeutic alliance, which Addis and Jacobson (2000), report to increase direct improvements and significantly reduce drop-out rates. Dominant psychological approaches advised by NICE guidelines for presentations, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mixed-anxiety and depressive disorder, that are common among this population are usually embodied with suppositions about human nature that mirror Western cultural traditions and that denote an individualistic position, which may be divergent from the collectivist cultural conditions refugees and asylum seekers adhere to (Cooper, 2011).

Perhaps, this study can illuminate a cultural understanding of sexual violence, facilitate community-based services, which can help assist treatment plans and psychological interventions. Offering further details pertaining to systemically inherent inequalities that both create the context for gender-based violence and obstruct women's authority to effectively dispute violence and abuse (Sokoloff, 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). The experience of shame and stigma seem to be inevitable ramifications of sexual violence for refugee and asylum-seeking women, as they are marginalised and even ostracised from their families and communities (Russell, 2014). Social isolation, in addition to deteriorating their mental health, also positions women in a vulnerable state to be exploited, disempowered, and have their agency removed and gives way to further abuses (Hubbard, Payton & Robinson, 2013). Recent cuts to funding and modifications in the commissioning practices, have exacerbated the general paucity of psychological services to assist and support refugee and asylum-seeking survivors of sexual violence (Coy & Sharp-Jeffs, 2016). This was further exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, as many specialist services placed a temporary halt on their referral system and prior to the pandemic 1 in 4 referrals to refugee services was declined as a result of overwhelming waiting lists (Refugee Council, 2009). Mainstream services have shown to have a more Western approach to therapy, and limited in their cultural competence, by this I mean to have a wider understanding of cultural diversity and the needs of different populations.

In my own clinical practice, working with refugees and asylum seekers[59] in a gender-based violence clinic at the British Refugee Council, I found that, the connection between a culture and its healing rituals is a multifaceted phenomenon, in that the systems that people use to sustain and preserve their psychological equilibrium are culturally relative (Tribe, 1999). Perhaps, the findings of the present study give us some insight into the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, religion, language and nationality and how these factors might contribute towards the obstacles that women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence experience as refugees and in their asylum process (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson, 2013; King & Vullnetari, 2009). Thus, to understanding their idiosyncratic experiences may give [us] in the health profession, an opportunity to refine our cultural sensitivity and navigate client-centred psychological intervention with more efficacy and care (Frost et al., 2010; Milton, 2010). In addition to this, it may further encourage biopsychosocial therapeutic formulation and treatment plans centred on an empowerment, collaborative, egalitarian approach (Drumm, Pittman & Perry, 2001). As well as, training programs for working with refugees and asylum seekers, which may include: systemic support, language specialism and legal expertise (Singh, 2005).

4.4 Limitations of the study

The objective of this research investigation was to elucidate the ways in which Kosovar-Albanian women constructed and thus brought order to personal narratives of traumatic war experiences of sexual violence. Given the absence of research exploring this topic within this context and among this population, this study presented a unique and exciting opportunity to explore the abovementioned objectives. Nevertheless, due to its modest sample size the aim of this investigation was not to make claims or generalisations beyond the experiences of the seven participants in this study nor was there a desire for the seven women to operate as delegates for all survivors of conflict-related sexual violence

59 A preliminary consideration, when working with refugees and asylum seekers may include the understanding that to be a refugee is entirely a socio-political and legal phenomenon, with psychological ramifications (Papadopoulos, 2007). The process of dislocation, relocation, and resettlement fosters a multitude of needs, which require multifarious and multi-dimensional solutions. When working with refugees and asylum seekers we may turn to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs to help us to understand the continuum of needs that may be required, starting from basic human needs for survival, which include shelter, food to the need for belonging, love and self-actualisation (Maslow & Lewis, 1987; Papadopoulos, 2007). While, there is not one diagnostic category of psychological or psychopathological traits that can be attributed to refugees or asylum seekers, the loss of home and a deep sense of *nostalgic disorientation* (Nostalgic disorientation is conceptualised by Papadopoulos (2007, p.16) as disorientation enveloped in a "Sense of deep ache" "A hole" and " a lack of confidence […] in one's own existence" that results from loss of one's home. A term, which according to Papadopoulos, (2007, p.18) is closest in meaning to "Ontological insecurity" or "Existential anxiety".) congregates refugees in their perpetual pursuit to restore this particular loss. The psychological and psychosomatic symptoms associated with *nostalgic disorientation* such as; frozenness, hyper vigilance, hyper arousal, disordered sleep hygiene, heightened anxiety, are all often mistaken for symptoms of PTSD by western clinical practice diagnostic standards (Papadopoulos, 2007). Erroneous diagnoses, may lead to ineffective formulations and interventions that have the potential to rupture communication, give way to misunderstanding, compromise the therapeutic alliance and subsequently regress client's psychological overall wellbeing. Instead, meeting the client where they are and maintaining a healthy curiosity about their world may be more beneficial for the restoration and vitalisation of their resilience. On this account, I believe it is important to usher forward training in cultural diversity, as it stands, to understand refugees and asylum seekers means to also understand why they have been forced to leave their homes in the first place. The political, social, cultural and economic circumstances that may be at play and with this in mind to think of how best to tailor therapy to benefit them. The present study, in its endeavour to illuminate a thorough account of Kosovar-Albanian women's experience of sexual violence and its cultural, social and political contextualisation may offer us an opportunity to learn about the various ways of providing psychological treatment to refugees and asylum-seeking women in the UK.

in Kosovo and beyond. The yielded data clearly showed that sexual violence, the ways in which it is utilised by perpetrators and the ways in which it is understood by the victims is time and culture specific. Langdridge (2007) cautions the researcher, that the elected research approach Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) is labour intensive. This was especially the case with the present study, given my dual-role as transcriber and translator. During this process, I often became overwhelmed by the data and the time requirements of processing and coding, though it would have been fascinating to have interviewed more survivors, I believe that CNA's prioritisation of depth over scope, would have compromised the richness of the yielded material (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

Further, validity in qualitative research was measured by the close proximity of the meanings as experienced by the participants to the meanings interpreted by the researcher in the final analysis (Polkinghorne, 2007). I was aware that carrying out this research in the local language (Albanian) and dialect (Gheg) and transcribing this in its original form, then proceeding to translate it into English and finally to analyse the data in English had the potential to hinder the transference of meaning as it was intended by the participants (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010). Despite these anxieties, I was assured by Ho, Holloway and Stenhouse's (2019) recommendation that in research investigating vulnerable groups and sensitive topics, the researcher be allotted the dual role of transcriptionist and translator. In this way, adopting a dual role enabled me to engage more deeply with the data translation and the attentiveness necessitated by this process meant that I came to know the data intimately, which enriched my understanding of the individuals subjective experience and meaning. Further to this, the dual roles facilitated awareness about cultural nuances, giving me a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges pertaining to meaning and concept equivalence in the course of translating and analysing data (Temple & Young, 2004). As discussed above, CNA dedicates stage one of the analysis procedure to reflexivity where the illusions of the researcher are deconstructed, a process which enabled me to be more transparent throughout the analytic and translation process and consequently minimise the overall risk of hinderance to meaning and misinterpretation (Ho, Holloway & Stenhouse, 2019). Such research implications were further minimised, by inviting a professional Kosovar-Albanian interpreter to verify the accuracy and cultural meaning of the transcripts.

4.5 Future Research Considerations

The current study was centralised on feminist objectives, to provide a platform whereby a disenfranchised group of survivors could voice their experiences and to challenge cultural, social and political power structures that perpetuate their ongoing struggle with stigma and marginalisation. Pursuing a similar goal, much of the feminist research has focused primarily on survivors and excluded examining the subjective experience of the perpetrators (Houge, 2008). A general consensus has long maintained that perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence are mentally disordered and immoral beings who are pathologically inclined to commit such atrocities (Cohen, 2013a; Connell, 2000; Price,

2001). Recognising that the perpetrators in the narratives that we construct too are human, invites us to acknowledge that any normal individual has within them the capacity, under certain conditions, to become a perpetrator (Baaz & Stern, 2008; Moser & Clark, 2001) and this unnerves us on a deep human level[60]. The *Subculture of Violence Theory* posited by criminologists Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti holds that similar to all human behaviours, violent assaultive transgressions ought to be seen from the socio-cultural, political and historical context in which they emanate (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Social groups justify their actions as honourable and even obligatory by warranting brutality and violence as a means through which they can ensure the groups security and sustain social order (Arsovska, 2006). Is there then another story to be told? and if so, why should we listen? (Baaz & Stern, 2013).

Max Weber's (1968) *verstehen* theory conceptualises this phenomenon and could provide the foundation for future research, as it encourages us, in the helping profession, to strive to understand on an experiential level the motives and beliefs that govern individuals' actions (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). To give us a comprehensive account of conflict-related sexual violence, one direction future research might take is to investigate via direct interviews with perpetrators of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo why they elected this specific form of violence? This research question can then be bisected into other sub-questions such as "How did the perpetrators warrant their actions?" It would be interesting to understand "What was the intention, purpose and motivation that governed their actions?". This line of inquiry, is distinctively scarce given the tremendous complexities rooted in obtaining access to perpetrators and warrant their participation and contribution (Baaz & Stern, 2008). Although, a remarkably ambitious research consideration, I believe this line of inquiry has the potential to expose broader nuances about the human condition, which have the potential to contribute toward more refined rehabilitative psychological treatments for both survivors and perpetrators as well as the development of precautionary measures that we might take to prevent future atrocities from occurring.

4.6 Conclusion

A principal focus of this investigation was Kosovar-Albanian females' experiences of sexual violence during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. Major conclusions were generated by this research, notably that Kosovar-Albanian women described conflict-related sexual violence as a weapon of war, which according to them was used by Serb forces for the purpose of dehumanising Kosovar-Albanian females, their families, communities and nation. Conflict-related sexual violence was enveloped with silence in the Kosovar-Albanian cultural context, a process which generated sanctions which abutted the overt

60 "[Those perpetrating violence] were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal ... this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together." (Arendt, 2006, p. 4)

narration of the experience of rape, thus fostered the continuation of rape as a collective national secret (Mookherjee, 2006). As it emerged from the present study, Kosovar-Albanian women had long been positioned in stories related to their experiences without having notable participation in the development of their stories, which were typically negative and replete with pathology. Willig and Rogers (2017) suggested that this may be because women were generally considered to be emblematic characters within monomyths, that were chiefly male dominated. Further to this, researching women and girls and their experiences of sexual-violence has been especially omitted from peace and security literature. This paucity, is owing to the view that security concerns are historically a male experience and juxtaposed with masculinity. Arnd-Linder, Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah (2018, p. 77), encourage us to "Go beyond superficial observations and reveal the women who […] have been made invisible in the power spheres of international policies and global security". With this research and any publications hereafter, I hope to amplify Kosovar-Albanian women's voice and influence in the social, cultural, political and psychological realms of society both local and global wide.

Epilogue

In the final analysis, I bring this doctoral research en masse to an end and ponder on some final observations. Borrowing from Wilkinson (1988), I gave thought to disciplinary reflexivity, which entailed a critical stance towards the research in context and deliberated on questions like "How might the findings [of this investigation] impact on the discipline and my career in it?" and "What political implications might arise as a result of the research?". The findings yielded in this study unquestionably address war crimes and human rights violations that were committed during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo, which have not been thoroughly investigated by the Serbian judicial system nor have a substantial number of perpetrators been held accountable. This study may therefore challenge dominant social, cultural and political narratives maintained by the current Serbian political administration and supported by the majority of the Serbian population, that portray Kosovar-Albanians as perpetrators and terrorists. Narratives, that have perpetually circulated in dialogues between the two countries, in UN (United Nations), EU (European Union) and ICTY mediated discussions related to jus cogens and in national and international media coverage. In this way, the findings of this study may be met with resistance, because to accept the narratives as they are presented in this study means to acknowledge that war crimes were in fact committed by the Serbian forces against Kosovar-Albanians in Kosovo and to hold perpetrators accountable may undermine Serb's national identity, collective social memory, as well as, their representation of history.

Looking towards the future, I present for deliberation a compelling question "Where does the discipline of counselling psychology position itself amid political conflicts, and what if anything can it contribute towards reconciliation?"[61]. Roberts, Bećirević and Paul (2011) define reconciliation as the process by which a person or nation confront the past and recognise any personal liability for their failures. They assert that for this to be effective the *truth* about geopolitical events must be stated (Roberts, Bećirević & Paul, 2011). For the Kosovar-Albanian women who suffered sexual-violence, peace and reconciliation rest upon two matters: the desire for justice to be served and their voices heard. While countries such as Germany have fostered a strongly ingrained consensus countering forthcoming wars, this consensus is scarce in other nations, especially countries such as Serbia, whose social representation of history and collective memories embody justified warring in the Balkans (Schott, 2008). The absence of alacrity among the Serbian general population to reappraise the political decisions that led to the wars both in Kosovo and Bosnia continues to persist. An opinion poll carried out in Serbia in 2006, showed that the majority of those surveyed denied that mass killings, rapes and genocide were executed by Serb forces in Bosnia (Roberts, 2007). Further to this, the majority expressed their objection to the apprehension and extradition of prominent individuals who were considered national heroes, including Ratko Mladić to the ICTY (Roberts, 2007). A more recent poll conducted in Serbia by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) in 2020 echoed the abovementioned hostility, as the majority of Serbia's nationals who were surveyed revealed "They were not ready to give up on Kosovo" (Euractiv, 2020, p. 1). A bold statement, which disregards the fact that Kosovo has been an independent and sovereign country since 2008 and recognised as such by 117 countries worldwide. As it stands, the broader public have scarcely felt an obligation to revise their disposition or rectify their previous errors.

Roberts, Bećirević and Paul (2011) poised that these narratives and culture of denial have been endorsed and perpetuated by psychologist's contributions in the west, by reviving the myth that disseminates comparative liability for the Balkan wars across all ethnic groups[62] inclusive of Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks and later Kosovar-Albanians (Nizich, 1994; Stephens, 1993; Stiglmayer, 1994). They caution psychologists, that to preserve a neutral position and abstain from allocating culpability, especially in

61 As a science and profession, the discipline of counselling psychology functions within the context of human society and thus bears responsibilities to society (Allan, 2013; King & Meernik, 2019; Penić, Drury & Bady, 2021). The aim to protect and promote human rights, as a way to serve humanity in a globalising world makes up the core of all psychological ethics and codes of conduct (Gauthier & Sinclair, 2020). The British Psychological Society (2021a) promotes ethical standards and offers sufficient flexibility in a world of constant change, among a variety of approaches, contexts and methods. Making room for novel ethical difficulties, which may include unprecedented circumstances that arise as a result of scientific and technological developments, climate change, or global political wars and conflicts. Hence, (i) Respect; (ii) Competence; (iii) Responsibility; (iv) Integrity are the four ethical principles that stand at the core of counselling psychologist's duty and obligation (British Psychological Society, 2021a; British Psychological Society, 2021b). International organisations such as United Nations and Amnesty International tackle breaches of human rights and endorse universal ethical principles for psychologists. While the premise of these principles is founded upon respect for our collective humanity, it also values and honours cultural diversity (Pettifor, 2004).

62 Skjelsbæk (2006) pointed to the Helskinki Watch Report, established in 1993, which recognises rape as being used by all warring parties in the Yugoslavian conflicts. This political discourse was further emphasised in other publications including Nizich (1994) and Stiglmayer (1994). Skjelsbæk (2006) cautions analysts to be conscientious when reporting comments regarding these conflicts, and one way of doing this, she suggests, is to highlight that the majority of these crimes were committed by Serb forces, in Bosnia – against the Muslim population and in Kosovo against Kosovar-Albanias.

the case of asymmetrical armed conflicts, which unfold as a consequence of an unprovoked hostile war executed by a heavily armed group in opposition to another indefensible group such as the non-military population, is to disregard ethnic-cleansing, genocide, mass murder and rape[63] (Roberts, Bećirević & Paul, 2011). They advise individuals in the helping profession that in order for psychological variables and mechanisms to be beneficially embodied into broader hermeneutic methods, which include social, cultural, historical and political milieu, psychologists must first be inclined to accept difficult and unpleasant truths (Roberts, Bećirević & Paul, 2011).

As a research practitioner and trainee counselling psychologist on the verge of qualification, I was compelled to deliberate on my own professional identity, duty to tell uncomfortable truths and the ripple effect of any potential contributions I might make to the discipline. During the write up of this research investigation, I was confronted with various anxieties related to the potential political implications of the research topic. For instance, while the reflexive activities both in writing and creative work led to significant new insights, profoundly influencing my growth as a narrative researcher (Watt, 2007) occasionally this process felt overly saturated and self-indulgent. I believe this was an unconscious attempt, on my part, to uphold the trustworthiness of my own biographical experiences related to the

63 The focus of this investigation was not to justify the violence committed by both Serb forces and/or Kosovar-Albanian's, rather to shed light on Kosovar-Albanian women's subjective experience of conflict-related sexual violence. Nevertheless, to gain a thorough understanding of the implications of war and inter-ethnic conflict Whittaker (2007, p. 269) urges us to consider that "Different people view violent acts in different ways. In conflicts of power, one person's violence is another person's selfless benevolence […] It is often proclaimed that one group's criminal terroristic activity is another group's liberation movement fought by heroic freedom fighters". For instance, both ethnic groups Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians prepared for and defined the war in Kosovo in different ways. The Serb forces saw the upsurge of war in Kosovo as the re-claiming of their ancestors land, and relied on history and mythology to warrant the violence and barbarity that was implemented on the Kosovar-Albanian population. On the other hand, Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA), although considered a terrorist organisation by Serbs, was regarded by Kosovar-Albanian's as a liberation group that was made up of ordinary Kosovar-Albanian men and some women who attempted to protect Kosovar-Albanian civilians from the Serb forces. Whittaker (2007) advises us to consider Bandura's (1998) concept of 'moral disengagement' and 'cognitive reconstruction' as a way for ordinary socialised people to transform into loyal and proficient soldiers, who morally justify their undertakings and disconnect from orthodox, socialised and humane principles (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961). In addition to this, Behar (2014) a former prosecutor at the ICTY, in his book titled *"Tell It to the World: International Justice and the Secret Campaign to Hide Mass Murder in Kosovo"* explained that there is a general expectation for those in his previous profession to bring justice to countries plagued by mass violence. Behar, goes on to explain that, although this is a tempting narrative to consider, geopolitical issues are fundamentally more complex. Instead, he argues that if we evaluate the psychology and narrativizing of those who directed or personally committed unfathomable atrocities we can see that they were themselves driven to act based on their own sense of victimhood and injustice (Behar, 2014). It is important to outline here that during the development of the present psychological investigation, I acknowledged that war crimes were committed by Kosovar-Albanian's against Serb civilians as well as Serb forces during the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo but on a much smaller scale to the atrocities committed by Serb forces against the Kosovar-Albanians. In February 2015, the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) released the Kosovo Memory Book (KMB) Database, which contained data related to the human losses, both in deaths and disappearances in the events related to the Kosovar war during the period of *January 1st 1998 – December 31st 2000* (Humanitarian Law Center, 2015). According to the KMB Database, which consisted of 31,600 documents from various sources, a total of 13,535 individuals were killed or disappeared during and in the context of the armed conflict in Kosovo (Humanitarian Law Center, 2015). Of those, *10,812 were Albanians*, *2,197 were Serbs*, meanwhile *526 casualties were individuals from other ethnic groups* including Roma, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, and other non-Albanians (Humanitarian Law Center, 2015). See Humanitarian Law Center (February, 2015). Human Losses: The Kosovo Memory Book Database. Retrieved from: http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=28185&lang=de. Hence, when commenting on these atrocities, it is important to address that the war in Kosovo was an asymmetrical one with Serb forces being fully prepared for military armed conflict, while the Kosovar-Albanian civilians and especially Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA) were insufficiently armed, ill-prepared and incompetently governed, which fostered a destabilised climate and gave way for ethnic cleansing to proceed (Bookbinder, 2005). Nevertheless, my opinion on whether wars can be just are aligned with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Hannah Arendt, who hold that "Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimate" (Schott, 2008, p. 123). Hence, encouraging us to have a serious debate about the ethical implications of war and usher us to instead find alternatives to militaristic mechanisms.

Serbian political administration. In any evaluation of the conflict, I was silenced by a long-established and acute fear of the Serbian government and more generally Serbian people and took tentative measures to be *politically correct*. When presenting the findings of this study, I found myself regressing into this powerless position and while consumed by my own anxieties, I may have rendered the *voices* and *influence* of the participants in a way that would confirm my own experiences of the war and political-conflict. However, it was through my engagement in the reflexive process, that I found within me the courage to firmly assert, for the first time, that the war crimes presented in this study could not be embellished in scientific jargon nor was the intent of this research to be polite about the atrocities that were committed in Kosovo against the Kosovar-Albanian people, as doing so would have further perpetuated a collective suppression of survivors experiences. Instead, this study was centralised on understanding Kosovar-Albanian women's experiences of conflict-related sexual violence and to demonstrate this as closely as possible to the ways in which it was intended by the survivor's themselves! All things considered, I believe the present study has outlined the inextricable link between politics and psychology (Kertzer & Tingley, 2018) and emphasised how through psychological research we can shed light on injustices, advocate for those who are impacted and create a platform to have their voices heard. I can only hope that through this psychological investigation, I have done the narrator's and the experiences they shared justice.

In closing, I am deeply honoured and grateful to have been the trusted person who Afërdita, Dardana, Liria, Baresha, Arbëresha, Shqiponja and Teuta shared their incredibly powerful life experiences with. Together, as researcher and narrator's, we set out on a voyage to explore the darkest corners of humanity. Through many challenges, tears, moments of defeat, inconsolable interrogations of our collective humanity and the grapple with an existential crisis, my strength was perpetually revived by the narrator's courage, bravery and resilience. Despite the tremendous burden of their experiences, the women exhibited an impassioned desire to toil on, to love, to dream, to illuminate the darkness of the world, to strive to reduce suffering and to make the world a better place. As I prepare to take on this new professional role, I am determined to do the same. It was through this doctoral training that I, a British-Kosovar-Albanian woman and former refugee and asylum seeker came to recognise my own core pain; nostalgic disorientation (nostos in classic Greek meaning "Returning home" and nostalgia pertains to the pain that accompanies the feeling of longing to return home (Papadopoulos, 2019, p. 15-16)). At eight-years-old, I was forced to leave the place I called home, in search for a new home in the U.K and ever since, I have endured the harrowing restlessness that comes with not belonging completely to a particular place or people. Through this research journey, I have been compelled to re-evaluate my personal history and heritage, to lodge my roots deep into the womb of the earth, to nurture these roots, to stand tall and to witness myself blossom. I understand now that I belong to the earth and all of humanity! Among many things, this journey has brought to me healing and hope, and given that my name *Shpresa,* translates to *Hope*, it has returned me back *home* to *myself.*

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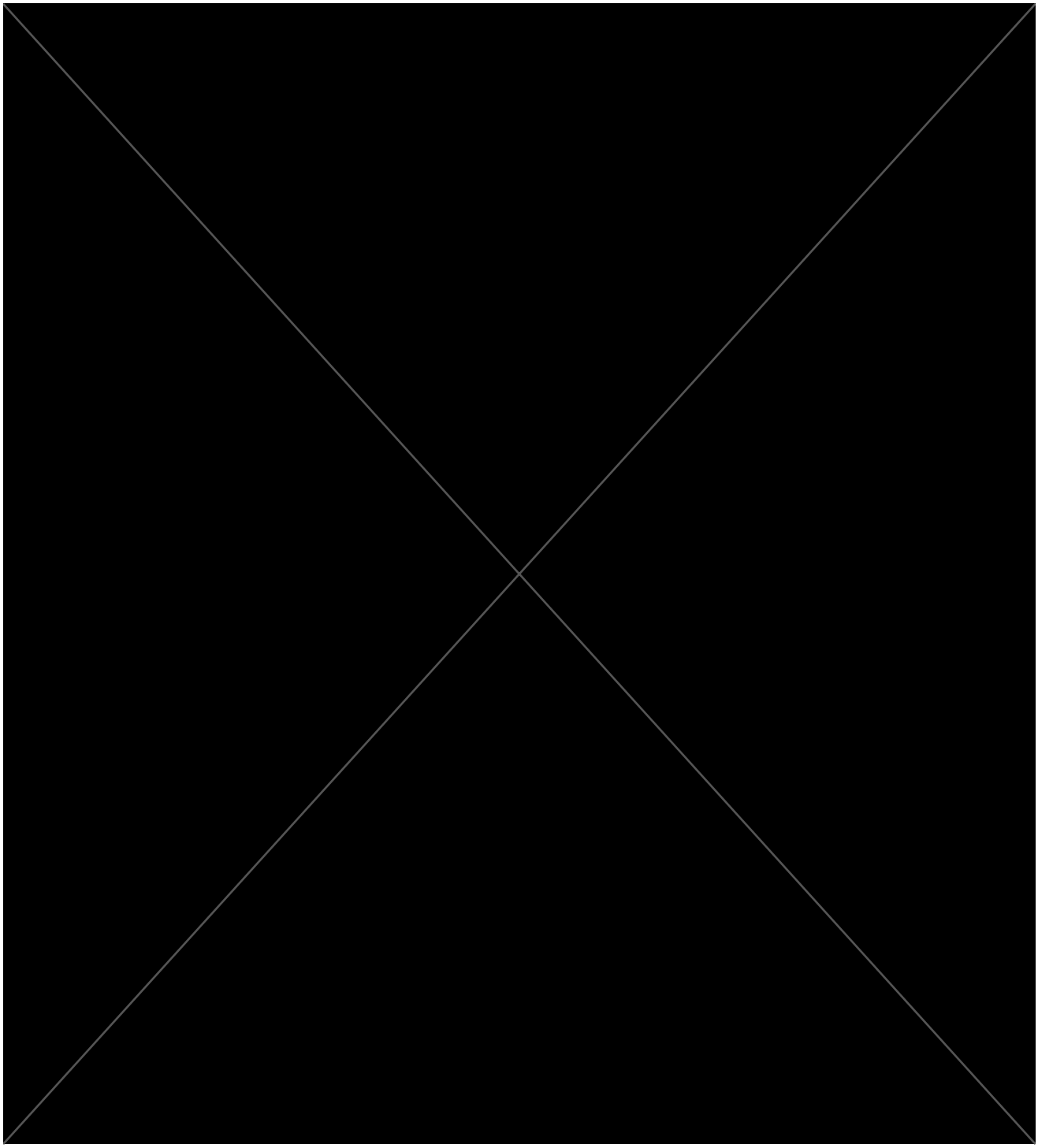
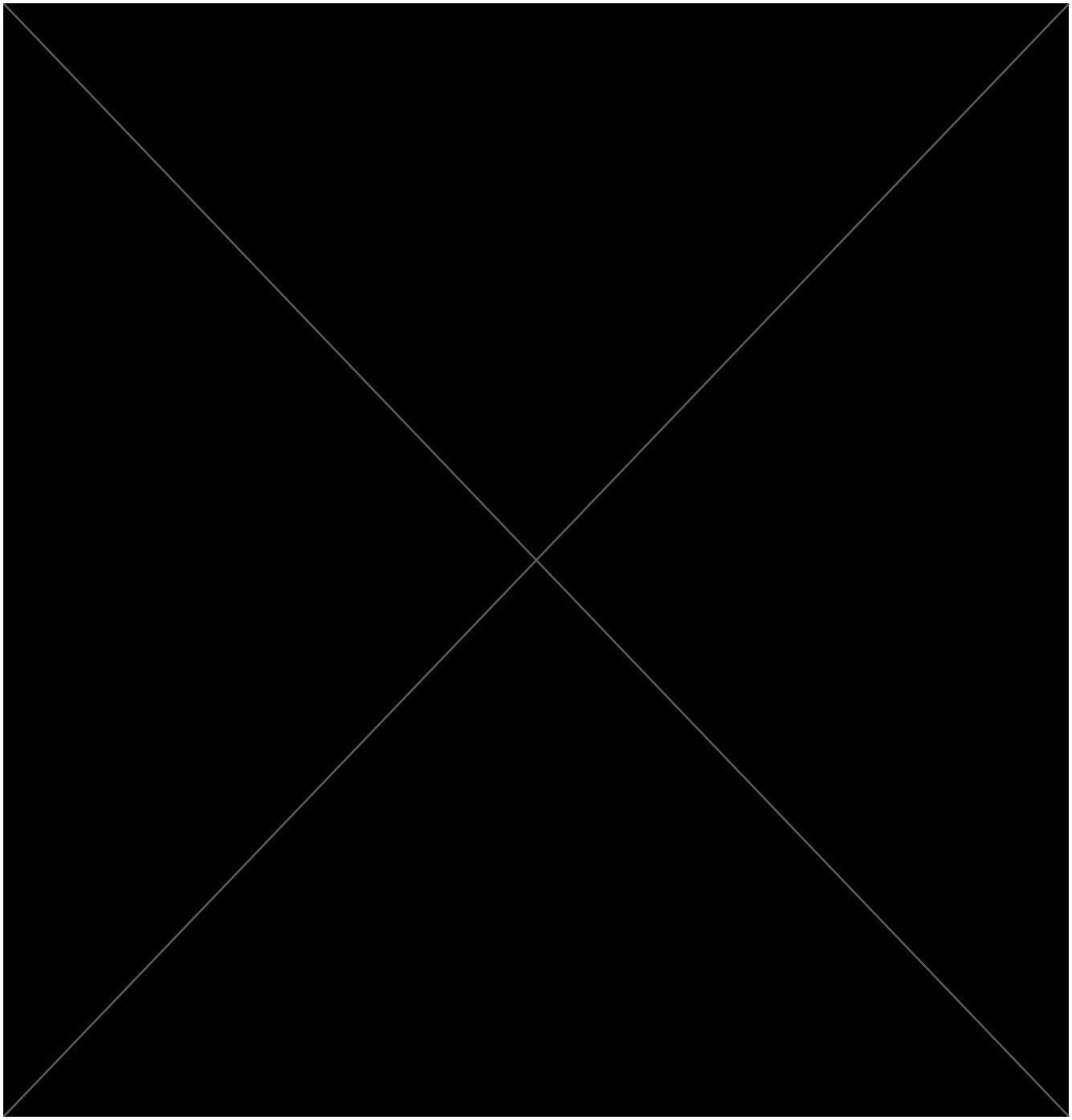
Appendices

Appendix 1: Collaboration with [redacted]





Appendix 2: Point of Contact

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

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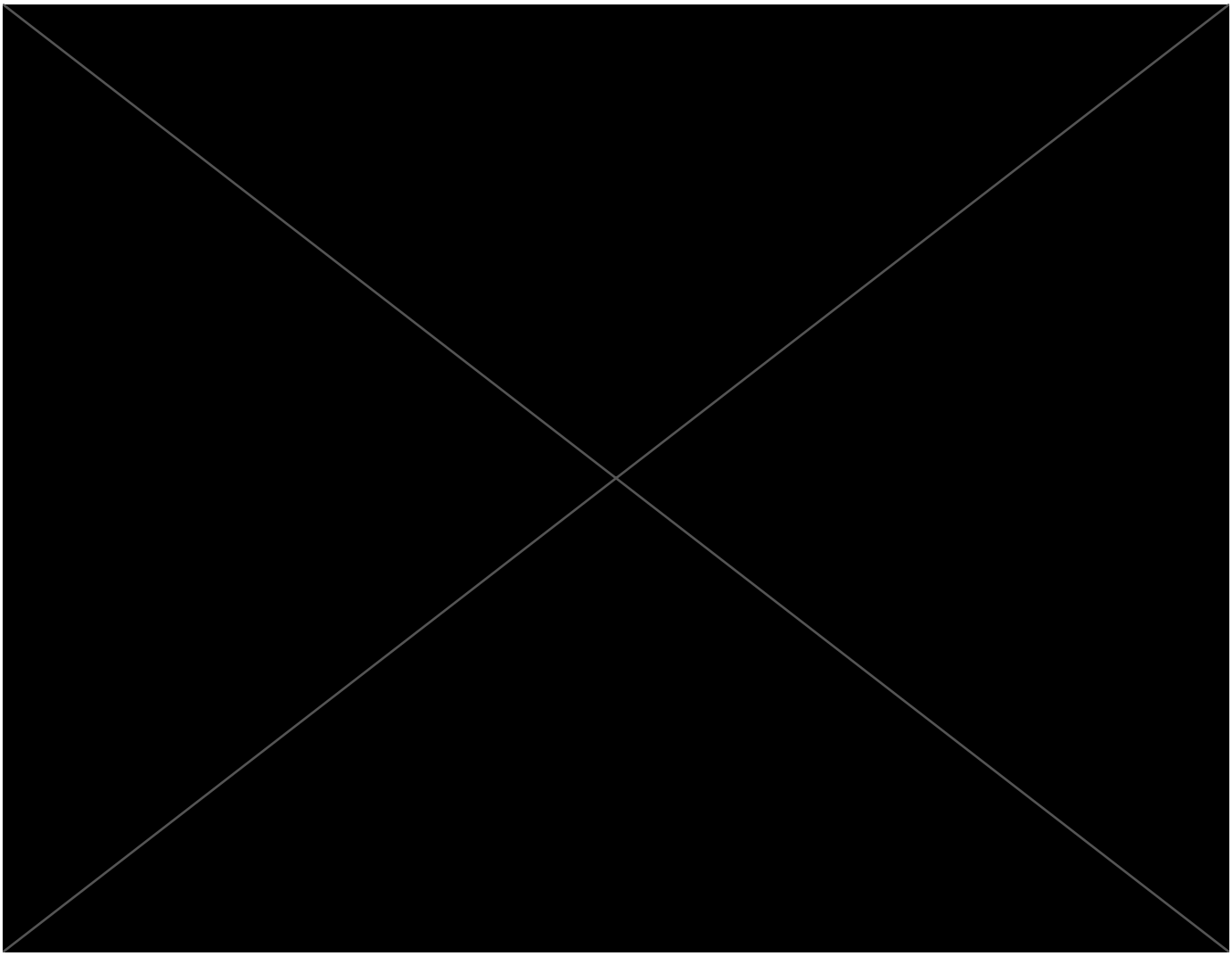
[redacted]

Appendix 3: Ambassador's Letter of Support



Appendix 4a: Screening Questions

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of researcher and potential participants, the screening process will be carried out from the premise of the [redacted] (international supervisor) present.

Introduction:

- Individuals who contacted the researcher and showed interest in the study will be contacted
- The researcher will present herself and the study
- The potential participant will be made aware of the purpose of the call
- The potential participant will be given an opportunity to ask any questions about the study and these will be answered and clarified accordingly

Collection of basic information:

- **Age**:
- **Marital status:**
  -Married, Single, Engaged, Divorced, Separated, Other (Specify)
- **How would you describe your ethnic or cultural background**?
  -Albanian, Kosovar-Albanian, Albanian-Kosovar, Other (Specify)
- **As per the leaflet you were given, is it ok for me to assume you have had an experience of sexual violence or rape during the 1998-1999 War in Kosovo or prior to this during the political conflict in Kosovo**?
- **Have you discussed this experience** [redacted]

General day-to-day questions (Risk Assessment):

- How is your sleep? Would you say you sleep well and sufficiently?
  -Do you have nightmares? And if so, how often?

- How are you eating? Is it regularly?
- Are you currently pregnant?
- How would you describe your energy levels? Are you feeling very low on energy? Not so bad? Very energised? And if we had to describe this what would it look like?
- What is your mood like?
- Are you currently experiencing feelings of depression and anxiety?

- In the case that you experience any feelings of depression or anxiety during the interview how would I know this was happening?
- What do you think would be helpful if this were to happen?

- Do you currently have a clinical diagnosis of psychosis or schizophrenia?
  - If yes, are you currently receiving psychological treatment related to this diagnosis?
- Are you currently engaging in self-harming behaviour at the present time?
  -If yes, how?
  -Has this happened in the past? How many times?
  -Have you spoken to anyone about this before?
  -What happened and how did you cope with this in the past?
  -Is anyone else aware of this at present? If so, who?
- Have you thought about taking your own life[redacted]
  - When was the last time you had these thoughts?
  - What stopped you from taking action?

If there appears to be immediate danger or risk to the individual, the potential participant will be informed and given details of [redacted] psychological support and deal with risk management. This will be done in a tentative and supportive manner. Given that my internal supervisor will be present during these calls, if someone is in immediate danger the calls will be handed over to the supervisor so that appointments and plans can be made immediately.

Protective/ Supportive Network:

- Is there someone close to you with whom you feel you can talk?
- [redacted]
- Do you think there is any reason for you not to take part in this study?

Questions about the Research Study:

- Do you have any further questions in regard to this study?
- Would you like me to e-mail you the information sheet and consent form so that you can have a look at them, prior to our meeting? You may wish to discuss this with others or you can contact me to further discuss if you find you have questions. On the day of the scheduled

interview we will go through the information sheet and consent form to ensure you are clear on both and the consent form will be signed then.

- Should we then set up a date for the interview?
  - The interview will take approximately one hour, with some time before and after for briefing.
  - If for whatever reason you are unable to make the scheduled time please let me know and we can reschedule.
  - [redacted] would like to ask you to bring one or more artwork that you have created. This will be discussed in the interview. Please be aware that this is optional and only bring something if you wish

Any other Questions?

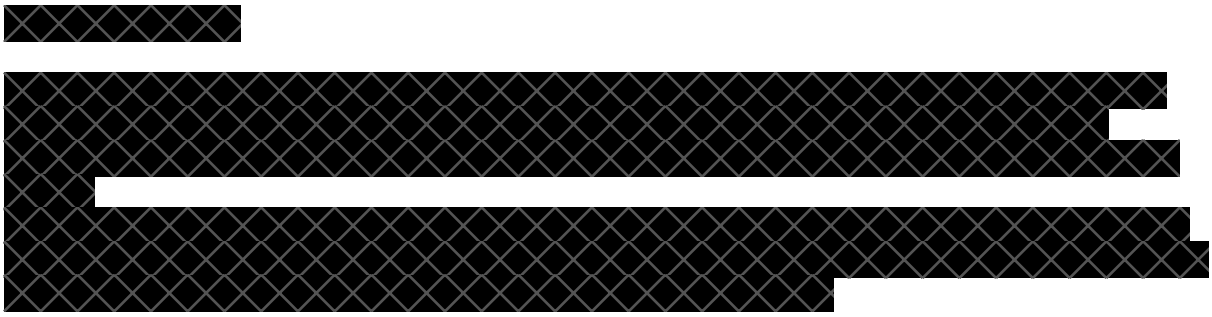
- [redacted]
- [redacted].
- **We will see each other on _____ at _____.**
- **Sign:_____ Date: _____.**

Thank you for your time and participation.

No Participation

- Participants who currently have a diagnosis of psychosis or schizophrenia, experiencing high levels of anxiety or extremely low mood, are pregnant, are known to self-harm or feeling suicidal or have done in the last six months will not meet the criteria to take part in the study.
- This will be discussed with them in a tentative and respectful manner during the telephone screening and if necessary, [redacted]

Appendix 4b: Pyetjet e shqyrtimit



Appendix 5a: Interview Questions

Below are the semi-structured interview questions:

Q1. Relationship Status: a) Married b) Engaged c) Partner d) Single
e) Other (Please specify)

Part One- Focus on art (Optional if participants decided to bring a piece of art and want to discuss it)

Q2. What does this piece of art mean to you?

Q3. What was the motivation and purpose behind this work?

Q4. What were your intentions when you produced this piece of work?

Q5. When you look at this piece of art how does it make you feel now?

Q6. Seeing that this piece of art is in the public domain, how do you hope this to be received by others?

Part Two – Focus on their narratives of life before, during and after the war in Kosovo (Including the experience of sexual violence)

Q7. What was life like for you before the 1998-1999 War in Kosovo?

Q8. How did the events coming up to the sexual violence unfold?

Q9. Do you know who the perpetrators were? And why do you think they chose this form of violence?

Q10. How did you manage to escape the ordeal?

Q11. How did you relate to yourself then? How do you relate to yourself now?

Q12. Were you able to speak to anyone about what happened? If not why? And what was the experience of not being able to speak to anyone like? If yes, who? And what was this experience like?

Q13. How did you relate to others then? How do you relate to others now?

Q14. Which of the categories below most accurately demonstrates how you identified yourself before the sexual violence?

(a) Albanian
(b) Kosovar-Albanian
(c) Kosovar
(d) Other *(please specify)*

Q15. Considering all the things we have discussed above what is life like living in post war Kosovo for you?

Q16. (Depending on how the participant answers question 1) - Is this relationship/marriage with the same person whom you were with prior to the sexual-violence? How has the sexual-violence impacted your relationship with your partner?

Q17. Do you have any children? If so, are your children aware of the experiences you have had? If so, how do you think your experience of sexual-violence has impacted them?

Q18. Which of the categories below most accurately demonstrate how you identify yourself after the sexual-violence?

(a) Albanian
(b) Kosovar-Albanian
(c) Kosovar
(d) Other *(please specify)*

Q19. How have you managed to cope with the consequences of the sexual-violence?

Q20. What are your hopes for the future?

The following prompts to evoke narratives where considered:

- I wonder if you could explain that in a little more detail.
- What are your thoughts/feelings about that/this now?
- I wonder if you could try and put into words what that/this means to you?
- Why do you think that is the case?
- Tell me why that particular moment stands out?
- Tell me what happened? And then what happened?
- Why do you think you feel that way?
- Any other important memory that stands out?

Appendix 5b: Pyetjet e Intervistës

Më poshtë janë pyetjet e intervistimit gjysmë të strukturuar:

Q1. Statusi i marrëdhënieve: a) e martuar b) e fejuar c) partner
d) e vetëm e) Të tjera (Ju lutemi specifikoni)

Pjesa e parë - Fokusimi në art (Opsional nëse pjesëmarrësit vendosën të sjellin një pjesë të artit dhe duan të diskutojnë atë)

Q2. Çfarë do të thotë kjo pjesë e artit për ju?

Q3. Cili ishte motivimi dhe qëllimi prapa kësaj pune?

Q4. Cilat ishin qëllimet tuaja kur keni punuar këtë pjesë arti?

Q5. Kur shikoni në këtë pjesë të artit, si ju bën të ndiheni tani?

Q6. Duke parë se kjo pjesë e artit është në domenin publik, si shpresoni që kjo të pranohet nga të tjerët?

Pjesa e dytë - Fokusimi në rrëfimet e tyre të jetës para, gjatë dhe pas luftës në Kosovë (Përfshirë përvojën e dhunës seksuale)

Q7. Si ishte jeta për ju para Luftës së 1998-1999 në Kosovë?

Q8. Si u shpalosën ngjarjet që erdhën deri në dhunën seksuale?

Q9. A e dini se kush ishin kryesit? Dhe pse mendoni se ata zgjodhën këtë formë të dhunës?

Q10. Si keni arritur të ikni nga kjo përvojë e hidhur?

Q11. Si u lidhët me veten atëherë? Si është lidhja juaj me veten tuaj tani?

Q12. A ishit në gjendje të flisnin me ndonjëri për atë që ndodhi? Nëse jo, pse? Dhe si ishte përjetimi i pamundësis për të diskutuar me ndonjëri për këtë? Nëse po, më kë? Dhe si e pëjetoje këtë?

Q13. Si u ishin marrëdhënjet e tua më tëtjerët atëherë? Dhe si janë marrëdhënjet e tua më tëtjerët tani?

Q14. Cila nga kategoritë më poshtë tregon më saktë se si u identifikuat para dhunës seksuale?

(a) Shqiptar (b) Kosovar-Shqiptare (c) Kosovar (d) Të tjera (ju lutemi specifikoni)

Q15. Duke marrë parasysh të gjitha gjërat që kemi diskutuar më lart si është jeta në Kosovën e pasluftës për ju?

Q16. (Varësisht se si pjesëmarrësi i përgjigjet pyetjes 1) - A është kjo marrëdhënie / martesa me të njëjtin person me të cilin keni qenë me para dhunës seksuale? Si ka ndikuar dhuna seksuale në marrëdhënien tuaj me partnerin tuaj?

Q17. A keni ndonjë fëmijë? Nëse po, a janë fëmijët tuaj të vetëdijshëm për përvojat që keni pasur? Nëse po, si mendoni se përvoja e dhunës seksuale i ka ndikuar ato?

Q18. Cilat nga kategoritë më poshtë tregojnë më së miri se si identifikoni veten tuaj pas dhunës seksuale?

(a) Shqiptar (b) Kosovar-Shqiptare (c) Kosovar (d) Të tjera (ju lutemi specifikoni)

Q19. Si keni arritur të përballoni pasojat e dhunës seksuale?

Q20. Cilat janë shpresat tuaja për të ardhmen?

Nxitjet e mëposhtme për të evokuar rrëfime kur merren parasysh:

• Pyes veten nëse mund ta shpjegoni atë me pak më shumë detaje.
• Cilat janë mendimet / ndjenjat tuaja rreth asaj tani?
• Pyes veten nëse mund të provoni të thoni me fjalë se çfarë do të thotë ajo për ju?
• Pse mendoni se është kështu?
• Më tregoni pse spikat ai moment i veçantë?
• Më tregoni çfarë ndodhi? Dhe pastaj çfarë ndodhi?
• Pse mendoni se ndiheni ashtu?
• Ndonjë kujtesë tjetër e rëndësishme që bie në sy?

Appendix 6a: Consent Form

Title of Study: Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: ***Narratives from within a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo***

Ethical approval code: [ETH1819-0257]

		Please initial box
1	I agree to take part in this above City, University of London research project. I confirm that I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.	
	I understand this will involves: • Be interviewed by the researcher • Allow the interview to be audiotaped	
2	This information will be held and processed for the following purposes: • As part of a study which considers the narratives of female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. • This study makes up part of the researcher's thesis, which is submitted as part of city, University's Professional Doctorate in Counselling psychology. • The data will be analysed (using critical narrative analysis) as part of this study and will be quoted within it, although identities will be protected by the use of a pseudonym. I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No Identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. The transcripts may represent historically important data and the data may therefore be reuse for further psychological studies dealing with the topic of sexual violence, the data will only be reused in studies which have been given ethics approval. [redacted] I understand that the transcripts may have potential historically important data and will therefore be kept indefinitely by City, University of London. I understand that my data cannot be withdrawn once the thesis has been published into the public domain, or publications have been made available to the public domain. I understand that my anonymous data will be made open access, e.g. to underpin journal publication or other future research collaborations.	

	I understand that the tape and transcripts will be kept in secure conditions and that no other person other than the researcher will have access to the original recording. I understand that if I choose to include and discuss art work that I have done as part of the interview it will be used in the thesis, publications, conferences but not connect to me, my anonymity will be protected at all times. I understand that quotes may be used in the report and any resulting publications but that no information that could lead to me being identified will be included in any report or publication resulting from this research. I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write-up of the research. I confirm that I have had the project explained to me, and have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.	
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	
4	I agree to City, University of London's recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purposes set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on City, University of London's complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
5	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix 6b: Forma e Pëlqimit

Titulli i studimit: Të mbijetuarit e dhunës seksuale që kanë të bëjnë me konfliktin: Tregime nga brenda një grupi të vogël të femrave Kosovare Shqiptare në Kosovë

Kodi i miratimit etik: [ETH1819-0257]

Ju lutemi vuani shenje ne kutinë

1	Unë pajtohem të marr pjesë në këtë projekt hulumtimi të qytetit, Universiteti i Londrës. Unë konfirmoj që kam pasur projektin e shpjeguar për mua, dhe kam lexuar fletën e informacionit pjesëmarrës, të cilin mund ta mbaj për shënimet e mia.	
	Unë e kuptoj se kjo do të përfshijë: • Të intervistoheni nga hulumtuesi • Lejoni intervistën të jetë audiotaped	
2	Ky informacion do të mbahet dhe përpunohet për qëllimet e mëposhtme: • Si pjesë e një studimi që shqyrton tregimet e të mbijetuarave femra të dhunës seksuale të lidhura me konfliktin. • Ky studim përbën një pjesë të tezës së studiuesit, e cila paraqitet si pjesë e qytetit, Doktoratës Profesionale të Universitetit në Psikologjinë e Këshillimit. • Të dhënat do të analizohen (duke përdorur analiza narrative) si pjesë e këtij studimi dhe do të citohet brenda tij, edhe pse identitetet do të mbrohen me anë të përdorimit të një pseudonimi. Unë e kuptoj se çdo informacion që jap unë është konfidencial dhe se asnjë informacion që mund të çojë në identifikimin e ndonjë individi nuk do të zbulohet në asnjë raport për projektin ose për ndonjë palë tjetër. Nuk do të publikohen të dhëna personale të identifikueshme. E kuptoj se nëse zgjedh të përfshij dhe diskutoj punën e artit që kam bërë si pjesë e intervistës do të përdoret në tezën, botimet, konferencat, por nuk do të lidhen me mua, anonimati im do të mbrohet në çdo kohë. Transkriptet mund të përfaqësojnë të dhëna historikisht të rëndësishme dhe të dhënat mund të ripërdoren për studime të mëtejshme psikologjike që kanë të bëjnë me temën e dhunës seksuale, të dhënat do të përdoren vetëm në studime të cilave u është dhënë miratimi i etikës. [redacted] Unë e kuptoj se transkriptet mund të kenë të dhëna të rëndësishme historikisht të rëndësishme dhe prandaj do të mbahen për një kohë të pacaktuar nga City, University of London. Unë e kuptoj se të dhënat e mia nuk mund të tërhiqen pasi teza të jetë publikuar në domenin publik, ose publikimet janë vënë në dispozicion të domenit publik. Unë e kuptoj se të dhënat e mia anonime do të bëhen qasje të hapur, p.sh. për të mbështetur botimin e revistës ose bashkëpunimet e tjera kërkimore në të ardhmen. Të dhënat e identifikueshme nuk do të ndahen me asnjë organizatë tjetër. Unë e kuptoj se kaseta dhe transkriptet do të mbahet në kushte të sigurta dhe se asnjë person tjetër përveç studiuesit nuk do të ketë qasje në regjistrimin origjinal.	

	Unë e kuptoj se nëse zgjedh të përfshij dhe të diskutoj punën e artit që kam bërë si pjesë e intervistës do të përdoret në tezën, botimet, konferencat, por nuk do të lidhen me mua, anonimiteti im do të mbrohet në çdo kohë. Unë e kuptoj që citimet mund të përdoren në raport dhe në çdo botim që rezulton, por që asnjë informacion që nuk mund të çojë në identifikimin tim do të përfshihet në çdo raport apo publikim që rezulton nga ky hulumtim. Unë e kuptoj se do të jap një transkript të të dhënave që kanë të bëjnë me mua për miratimin tim para se të përfshihet në shkrimin e hulumtimit. Unë konfirmoj që unë kam pasur projektin e shpjeguar për mua, dhe kam lexuar fletën e informacionit pjesëmarrës, të cilat unë mund të mbaj për shënimet e mia. Më është dhënë mundësia për të bërë pyetje dhe i kam pasur përgjigje në kënaqësinë time.	
3	Unë e kuptoj se pjesëmarrja ime është vullnetare, që unë mund të zgjedh të mos marrë pjesë pjesërisht ose tërësisht të projektit dhe se unë mund të tërhiqem në çdo fazë të projektit pa u penalizuar ose në ndonjë mënyrë të pafavorshme.	
4	Unë pajtohem me regjistrimin dhe përpunimin e këtij informacioni në lidhje me mua nga City, University of London. Unë e kuptoj se ky informacion do të përdoret vetëm për qëllimet e përcaktuara në këtë deklaratë dhe pëlqimi im është i kushtëzuar nga përmbushja e detyrave dhe detyrimeve të tij nga Bashkia e Universitetit të Londrës sipas Rregullores së Përgjithshme të Mbrojtjes së të Dhënave (GDPR).	
5	Pajtohem të marr pjesë në studimin e mësipërm.	

_____ _____ _____

Emri i pjesëmarrësit Nënshkrimi Data

_____ _____ _____

Emri i hulumtuesit Nënshkrimi Data

Appendix 7a: Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: *Narratives from within a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo*

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask the researcher any clarifying questions or to provide further information regarding the nature of this research study.

What is the purpose of the study?

Sexual violence is a gender, economic, psychological, and health issue and a human rights violation. This study comprises a particular interest and aims to explore the ways in which survivors of conflict-related sexual violence organise and thus bring order to their experience through their narratives. This is a propitious juncture for research to excavate the core essence of this issue and it is hoped that the findings of this research provide a fertile ground for the development of more refined, culturally sensitive, and innovative application to therapeutic theory and practice in Counselling Psychology. This research study is a component of a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University London, [redacted]

Why have I been invited?

[redacted]

Do I have to take part?

Partaking in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the study. You may withdraw from the study at any stage before, during or after without being penalized or disadvantaged. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decided to take part in the study an interview will be schedule [redacted]

- ***TIME:*** *You will be invited to attend an interview with the researcher that will last approximately 60minutes. However, this may extend beyond this if participants require breaks or want to reschedule to continue the interview on another day.*

- ***LOCATION:*** [redacted]
- ***ART:*** *As part of the interview process for this study, you may want to select one or more piece of art that you have worked on* [redacted]
- ***SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW & RECORDING****: The interviews will be audio recorded and will be instantly transferred to a secure laptop that is password protected and deleted from the audio recording device. All recorded materials will be destroyed in accordance with City, University policies at the end of the study. The researcher will be the only person with access to this data.*
- ***DATA ANALYSIS****: After the interview has been recorded, it will be transcribed in its original form in Albanian then it will be translated into English. During this process any identifying or person details will be changed to ensure your identity and personal details remain anonymous. You will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym that you are happy with the way you are represented in the research study. Critical narrative analysis methods will be utilised to analyse data; these techniques focus exclusively on the content of the narratives that you share. Please note that quotes from the data may be used in the main body of the research analysis, however, removing all identifiable and personal information to guarantee complete confidentiality.*
- ***CONSENT:*** *You will be asked to sign a consent form once you are satisfied that you understand the study and its rationale.*

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic the interview process may evoke psychological distress, should this happen the interview process will be terminated promptly and an onsite counsellor will be provided [redacted]*. At all stages, you will be reminded that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw consent at any time.*

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This research will be instrumental in challenging the taboo surrounding the subject of war rape, social shame and stigma connected to being a victim. Considering the insufficiency of international research in this domain the proposed research may provide insight into trauma and more effective Counselling Psychology practice on a wider scale. Should this thesis be published it will be the first scientific research study to investigate this topic among survivors in Kosovo and will be significant in advocacy work and encourage government policies for the rights survivors in Kosovo as well as worldwide. It is hoped that the results of this research will also be informative for International Humanitarian organisations in developing more proficient crisis interventions in conflict zones.

What will happen when the research study stops?

In the unlikely event that the research study is terminated any data, audio recording, or transcripts collected up to the point of discontinuation will be completely destroyed.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

This research study intends to comply with BPS (British Psychological Society) ethical guidelines ensuring that the anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality of participants are respected at all times. Personal and identifying information will not be incorporated in the research, in order to protect participant identity a pseudonym will be allocated. It will be made clear that confidentiality may be breached in the case that concerns arise regarding the safety of participants; the health and welfare of children; or vulnerable adults; and safety of others. All data, transcripts, notes and recording will be stored in an encrypted and password protected laptop and kept in a locked filing cabinet.

The researcher and the research supervisor will be the only people to have access to the data collected from this interview. This information will not be shared with other universities or researchers.

You will be given a transcript of data concerning you for your approval before it is included in the write-up of the research. The way in which you would like this to be provided will be negotiated with you and this will be sent to you via e-mail or post. In the case that you do not approve of the transcript and want to edit them by removing or adding information you are free to do so. In the case that you feel you do not want your interview to be included in the research all data pertaining to you will be destroyed immediately.

What should I do if I want to take part?

Should you be interested in participating in this study [redacted]

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The discoveries of the study will be the basis for a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology although may also be publicized through journals and academic conferences. [redacted] *It is important that you are informed and clear that both the thesis and any future publications may incorporate some direct quotes from your interview, though all personal details will be altered to protect your identity from being recognized or known. Should you be interested in possessing a copy of the thesis or research findings following the completion of the study you can contact me and I will make certain that you receive a copy.*

Data will be kept indefinitely

The transcripts may represent historically important data and will be stored indefinitely by City, University of London. [redacted]

If you do not wish the data to be kept indefinitely, be made available to other interested parties or reused?

[redacted]

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

The participant is free to leave, without explanation or penalty, at any time during the study. Data may be withdrawn at any stage during the data collection period (January 2019).

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: **Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: *Narratives from within a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo***

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office E214
City University London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City University London holds insurance policies, which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

If you are unable to get in touch with City, University of London please contact my research supervisor in Kosovo:

[redacted]

[redacted]

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London [redacted]

Further information and contact details:

[redacted]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 7b: Fleta e Informacionit për Pjesëmarrësin

Titulli i studimit: Të mbijetuaratë e dhunës seksuale që kanë të bëjnë me konflikt: Tregime nga brenda një grupi të vogël të femrave Kosovare Shqiptare në Kosovë

Appendix 8a: Debrief Information

Title of Study: Narratives from Female Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Thank you for taking part in this study. Now that it's finished, we'd like to tell you a bit more about it.

This study endeavours to explore how survivors of conflict-related sexual violence organise and thus bring order to their experience through their narratives. Taking into account the sensitive nature of this topic an ethical decision was made to incorporate art in the process of collecting data. It was intentional that you were asked to select a piece of art and the first part of the semi-structured interview was aimed at generating a discussion about the art, giving you agency and control. This was also done to try and minimise any pressure to talk about the sexual violence throughout the study with art being the safe topic that you could resort back to in the case that you felt discomfort or distress.

There are no fixed expectations for the data as we expect that women's stories will be different and unique and this is the fundamental basis of this research. Nevertheless, the following themes may come up: Politics, identity, social memory, gender, culture, physical and psychological health, stigmatisation, social isolation, and abandonment. Existing research has argued that conflict-related sexual violence may actually unite patriarchal societies and this research is interested to discover whether this is the narrative in Kosovo. An additional interest for this study is also the conceptualisation of morality and female roles and moral expectations and her position within the family dynamic and society at large.

The stigma attached to this form of violence may have led to under reporting of this form of violence further emphasising the importance of this piece of research as a platform for allowing survivors to share their stories in a safe and non-judgmental space.

If your participation in this study has raised any concerns for you, please contact [redacted]

Appendix 8b: Informacionet e Debriefit

Titulli i Studimit: Të mbijetuarit e dhunës seksuale që kanë të bëjnë me konfliktin rregime nga brenda një grupi të vogël të femrave kosovare shqiptare në Kosovë

[redacted]

Appendix 9: Linguistic System in Kosovo

The language system in this region is comprised of the standard Albanian language is the unifying linguistic system in Kosovo. There are two predominant dialects in the Albanian speaking regions which include Kosovo, Albania, North-Western of the Republic of Macedonia, South of Serbia and South of Montenegro. The Gheg dialect is customarily to Kosovo and Northern Albania whereas the Toska dialect is more common in South of Albania, though both dialects are mutually comprehensible (Elsie, 2015). I am proficient in both dialects.

The ethnic distribution and Albanian speaking regions in the Western Balkans are demonstrated in the map below:

The above map was retrieved from:

Washington, D.C. Central Intelligence Agency (2008). *Ethnic distribution in the western Balkans.* 36 x 36 cm. Retrieved from: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g6841e.ct002411

Appendix 10: Translation Verification

[redacted]

Translation Verification

Tuesday 22 February 2021

Dear, City University of London

I, **Miss Drita Musliu,** Albanian Interpreter and Translator, a member of NRPSI, IOL and ITI, can confirm that I have examined 7 transcripts provided to me by **Miss Shpresa Vitija** *(Trainee Counselling Psychologist and Research Practitioner currently studying a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City, University of London)*. For the purpose of verifying transcript translations from Albanian to English, data that form part of **Miss Shpresa Vitija's** research thesis:

Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo.

I can confirm that I have examined all of the transcripts provided to me in Albanian language (with Kosovan dialect), and based on this I can verify that the translated transcripts from Albanian into English are accurate and therefore a true reflection of the original transcript.

[redacted]

Sig[redacted] DRITA MUSLIU 22-02-21

Name Date

Appendix 11: Confidentiality Agreement with Interpreter

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
EST 1894

Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement is between:

Miss Shpresa Vitija *(Trainee Counselling Psychologist and Research Practitioner currently studying a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City, University of London)*

and

Mrs Drita Musliu *(Professional Albanian Translator and Interpreter)*

for

Verification of transcript translation from Albanian to English, data that form part of this research thesis:

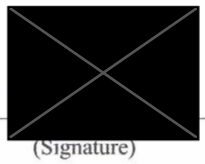
Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo.

I **Mrs Drita Musliu**, through my involvement with and work on **(*Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian females in Kosovo)*** will have access to anonymised data which contains sensitive information about experience of conflict-related sexual violence. I understand that access to this confidential information and data carries with it responsibility to guard against unauthorised use and to abide by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To treat information as confidential means to not divulge it or make it accessible to anyone who is not a project member. Such a disclosure would violate the confidentiality promised to participants and would violate City, University ethics policies.

I **Mrs Drita Musliu** (Professional Albanian Translator and Interpreter) agree to fulfil my responsibility on this project in accordance with the following:

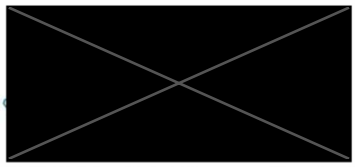
1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential. I will not discuss or share the research information with anyone other than with the Researcher or others identified by the researcher.
2. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information to the Researcher when I have completed the research tasks or upon request.
4. Destroy all research information regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher after consulting with the Researcher.
5. Comply with the instructions of the Researcher about requirement to physically and/or electronically secure records (including password protection, file/ folder encryption, and/or use of secure electronic transfer of records through file sharing, use of virtual private networks).
6. Not allow any personally identifiable information to which I have access to be accessible from outside U.K (unless specifically instructed otherwise in writing by the Researcher).
7. Provide a signed document to the researcher once the translation of transcripts has been verified.

Interpreter

Drita Musliu  17-02-2021

(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Researcher

Shpresa Vitija  **16/02/21**

(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Appendix 12: Transcription Symbols

A variation of the Jefferson method was utilised in the transcription process borrowed from:

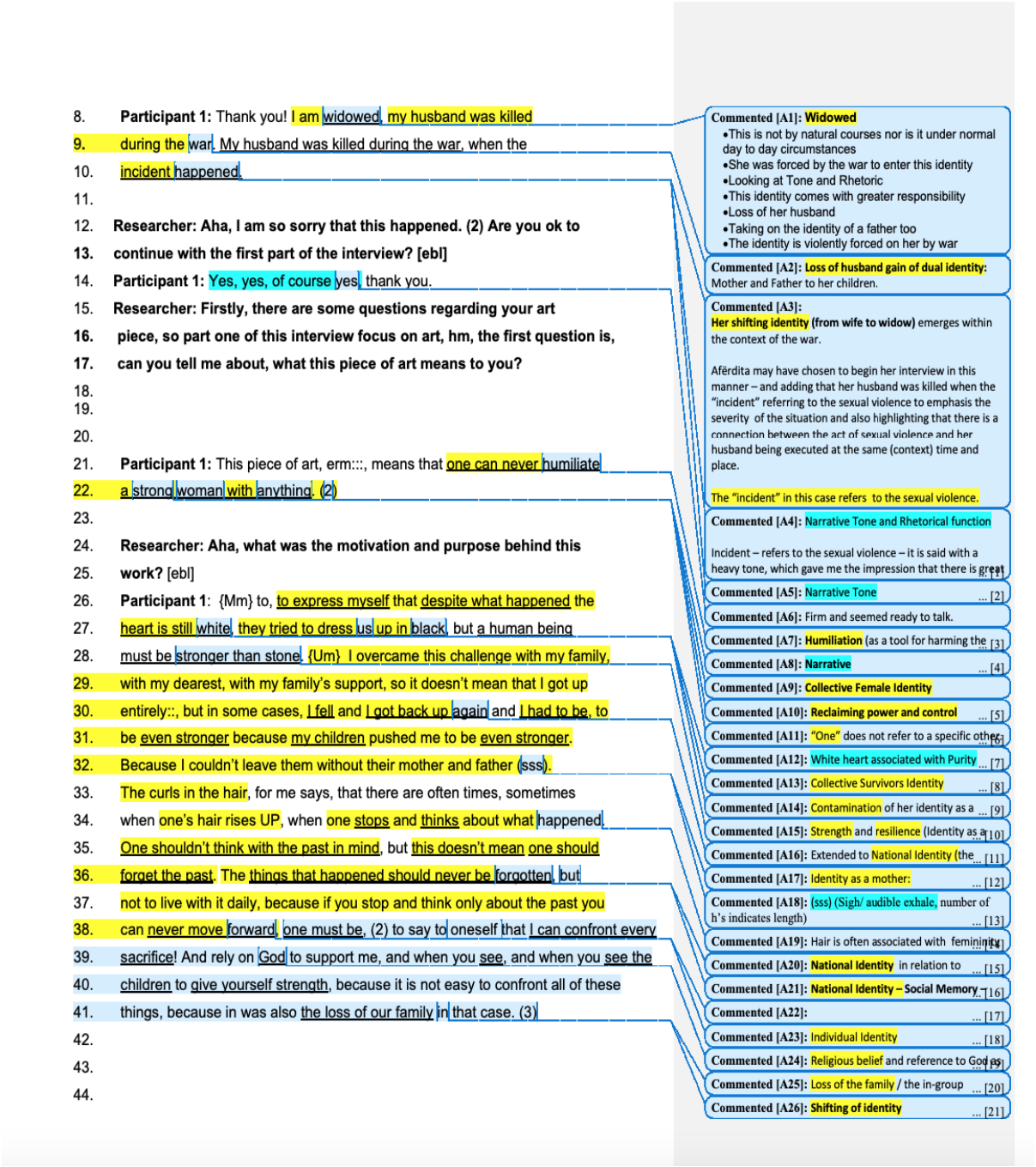
Davidson, C. (2010). Transcription matters: Transcribing talk and interaction to facilitate conversation analysis of the taken-for-granted in young children's interactions. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *8*(2), 115-131. The symbols can be interpreted as viewed below:

Table 1: Transcription symbols

[…]	Some interim dialogue removed
[ ]	Implied wording inserted / note descriptors
=	Talk between speakers that latches or follows without a break between
(2)	Used to indicate length of silences, pauses and gaps measured in seconds
…	Drifting off/ Pause
?	Rising inflection
(hhh)	Audible inhale, number of h's indicates length
(sss)	Sigh/ audible exhale, number of s's indicates length
!	To indicate strong feelings, or to show emphasis
Un	Underline shows emphasis, increased loudness, with capitals indicating even greater emphasis
SO	Upper case indicates loudness
softer	Words between asterisks indicates softness in voice
:::	Indicates that a prior sound is prolonged (the number of colons used to indicate the length of the sound)
(laughs)	Interviewee laughs (nervous laugh)
(smiles)	Interviewee smiles
(crying)	Interviewee becomes visibly upset and begins to cry
[ebl]	Researcher showing Empathic Body Language (Inclusive of: Facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, posture open and non-judgmental, active listening, engaged attention)
[mh]	Self-soothing via messaging the hands/ anxiety/ nervous (embodied trauma)
[g.1]	Gaze/ sadness/ terror /measured in seconds
[i]	Exhibiting the scares related to injuries sustained during the sexual violence
Italics	Words I did not recognise the meaning of and clarified during the interview
(nodding)	nodding of the head
{ }	Filler sounds (for example: "um", "uh", "mm" or "Ncuk" a sound synonymous with to a tut expressing an exclamation of disapproval.)
"XXX"	Quotation marks (interviewee's quoting other people in their narratives)

Appendix 13: Initial transcript notes for Afërdita

Yellow refers to coding for identity, light blue refers to coding for narrative, tone and rhetoric function and other notes are highlighted in green. As I read through the transcript multiple times, I made additional notes. Below is an example of this:



8. **Participant 1:** Thank you! I am widowed, my husband was killed
9. during the war. My husband was killed during the war, when the
10. incident happened.
11.
12. **Researcher: Aha, I am so sorry that this happened. (2) Are you ok to**
13. **continue with the first part of the interview? [ebl]**
14. **Participant 1:** Yes, yes, of course yes, thank you.
15. **Researcher: Firstly, there are some questions regarding your art**
16. **piece, so part one of this interview focus on art, hm, the first question is,**
17. **can you tell me about, what this piece of art means to you?**
18.
19.
20.
21. **Participant 1:** This piece of art, erm:::, means that one can never humiliate
22. a strong woman with anything. (2)
23.
24. **Researcher: Aha, what was the motivation and purpose behind this**
25. **work?** [ebl]
26. **Participant 1**: {Mm} to, to express myself that despite what happened the
27. heart is still white, they tried to dress us up in black, but a human being
28. must be stronger than stone. {Um} I overcame this challenge with my family,
29. with my dearest, with my family's support, so it doesn't mean that I got up
30. entirely::, but in some cases, I fell and I got back up again and I had to be, to
31. be even stronger because my children pushed me to be even stronger.
32. Because I couldn't leave them without their mother and father (sss).
33. The curls in the hair, for me says, that there are often times, sometimes
34. when one's hair rises UP, when one stops and thinks about what happened.
35. One shouldn't think with the past in mind, but this doesn't mean one should
36. forget the past. The things that happened should never be forgotten, but
37. not to live with it daily, because if you stop and think only about the past you
38. can never move forward, one must be. (2) to say to oneself that I can confront every
39. sacrifice! And rely on God to support me, and when you see, and when you see the
40. children to give yourself strength, because it is not easy to confront all of these
41. things, because in was also the loss of our family in that case. (3)
42.
43.
44.

Commented [A1]: Widowed
- This is not by natural courses nor is it under normal day to day circumstances
- She was forced by the war to enter this identity
- Looking at Tone and Rhetoric
- This identity comes with greater responsibility
- Loss of her husband
- Taking on the identity of a father too
- The identity is violently forced on her by war

Commented [A2]: Loss of husband gain of dual identity: Mother and Father to her children.

Commented [A3]:
Her shifting identity (from wife to widow) emerges within the context of the war.

Afërdita may have chosen to begin her interview in this manner – and adding that her husband was killed when the "incident" referring to the sexual violence to emphasis the severity of the situation and also highlighting that there is a connection between the act of sexual violence and her husband being executed at the same (context) time and place.

The "incident" in this case refers to the sexual violence.

Commented [A4]: Narrative Tone and Rhetorical function

Incident – refers to the sexual violence – it is said with a heavy tone, which gave me the impression that there is great ... [1]

Commented [A5]: Narrative Tone ... [2]

Commented [A6]: Firm and seemed ready to talk.

Commented [A7]: Humiliation (as a tool for harming the ... [3]

Commented [A8]: Narrative ... [4]

Commented [A9]: Collective Female Identity

Commented [A10]: Reclaiming power and control ... [5]

Commented [A11]: "One" does not refer to a specific other ... [6]

Commented [A12]: White heart associated with Purity ... [7]

Commented [A13]: Collective Survivors Identity ... [8]

Commented [A14]: Contamination of her identity as a ... [9]

Commented [A15]: Strength and resilience (Identity as a ... [10]

Commented [A16]: Extended to National Identity (the ... [11]

Commented [A17]: Identity as a mother: ... [12]

Commented [A18]: (sss) (Sigh/ audible exhale, number of h's indicates length) ... [13]

Commented [A19]: Hair is often associated with femininity ... [14]

Commented [A20]: National Identity in relation to ... [15]

Commented [A21]: National Identity – Social Memory ... [16]

Commented [A22]: ... [17]

Commented [A23]: Individual Identity ... [18]

Commented [A24]: Religious belief and reference to God as ... [19]

Commented [A25]: Loss of the family / the in-group ... [20]

Commented [A26]: Shifting of identity ... [21]

Researcher: Aha [ebl]

Participant 1: It was enough that you had a wound on this side, by what happened, on one side you had the children, but on the other side you had corpses laying, you had to walk there, (2) near the corpses:, but this made you strong, when you GRABBED your children by the hand and walked on you continued on the path, to live for the children, it was during this time, before we even left the scene, when we questioned why they didn't just kill us all? But we were forced by the Serbs and Roma's to leave the dead bodies lying there and to *walk past them and to turn our backs to them*, *to leave behind the family members who were killed*, there is nothing harder than this [g.2], however, the other thing is that on one hand the family members were killed, and on the other hand the family members of those that were killed were then raped. In addition to this there were children there, there were elderly women, there was also an elderly gentleman, my husband's close relative so this was death in itself for the family, and it was extremely heavy for me too (hhh).

Researcher: Aha [ebl]

Participant 1: So, this painting symbolises, that, {um}, the hand that is positioned there, is because, this comes from the logic of the brain, that encourages you to move your hand and to take a step, that's what this is.

Researcher: Aha, when you look at this piece of art how does it make you feel now?

Participant 1: (2) Well, when I see this painting, I see myself, I see how strong I had to be to survive. Even though we faced much hardship until we got up again, but when you do not give up or surrender God will help you and give you strength. So, this is entirely what I wanted to express through the painting. (2)

Researcher: Seeing that this piece of art is in the public domain, how do you hope this to be received by others?

Participant 1: We, {mm} (2), I don't know, because:: here in Kosovo victims of

Commented [A27]: Horrors of the war (overwhelming)

Horrors of the war, witnessing murder and having to walk past them and in the moment pick up the courage to continue for her children. It is as though her identity as mother was also what kept her going and where she drew her motivation to continue living from. Although it feels like what she is saying is that she had no other choice but to continue moving forward.

When she says "dead bodies laying on the ground" it is very matter of fact, very shocking and perhaps her intention her is to get straight to the point and shock the audience with her narrative.

Commented [A28]: Corpses lying (one of which is her husband who had just been killed). ... [22]

Commented [A29]: ... [23]

Commented [A30]: Death would have been easier than being kept alive. What was the motive behind the sexual ... [24]

Commented [A31]: Instil terror and control ... [25]

Commented [A32]: Sense of Betrayal – "Turning their backs" on their family members who had just been killed ... [26]

Commented [A33]: Instil terror and establish political control ... [27]

Commented [A34]: Perpetrators ... [28]

Commented [A35]: Two selves, family members and women. ... [29]

Commented [A36]: National Identity associated with survivor status. ... [30]

Commented [A37]: Rhetorical Function ... [31]

Commented [A38]: The layers of trauma continue all through the generations: ... [32]

Commented [A39]: shame. ... [33]

Commented [A40]: Identity shifts post sexual violence ... [34]

Commented [A41]: In Afërdita's painting a feminine figure is exhibited at the centre of the canvas. Her hand on her hip ... [35]

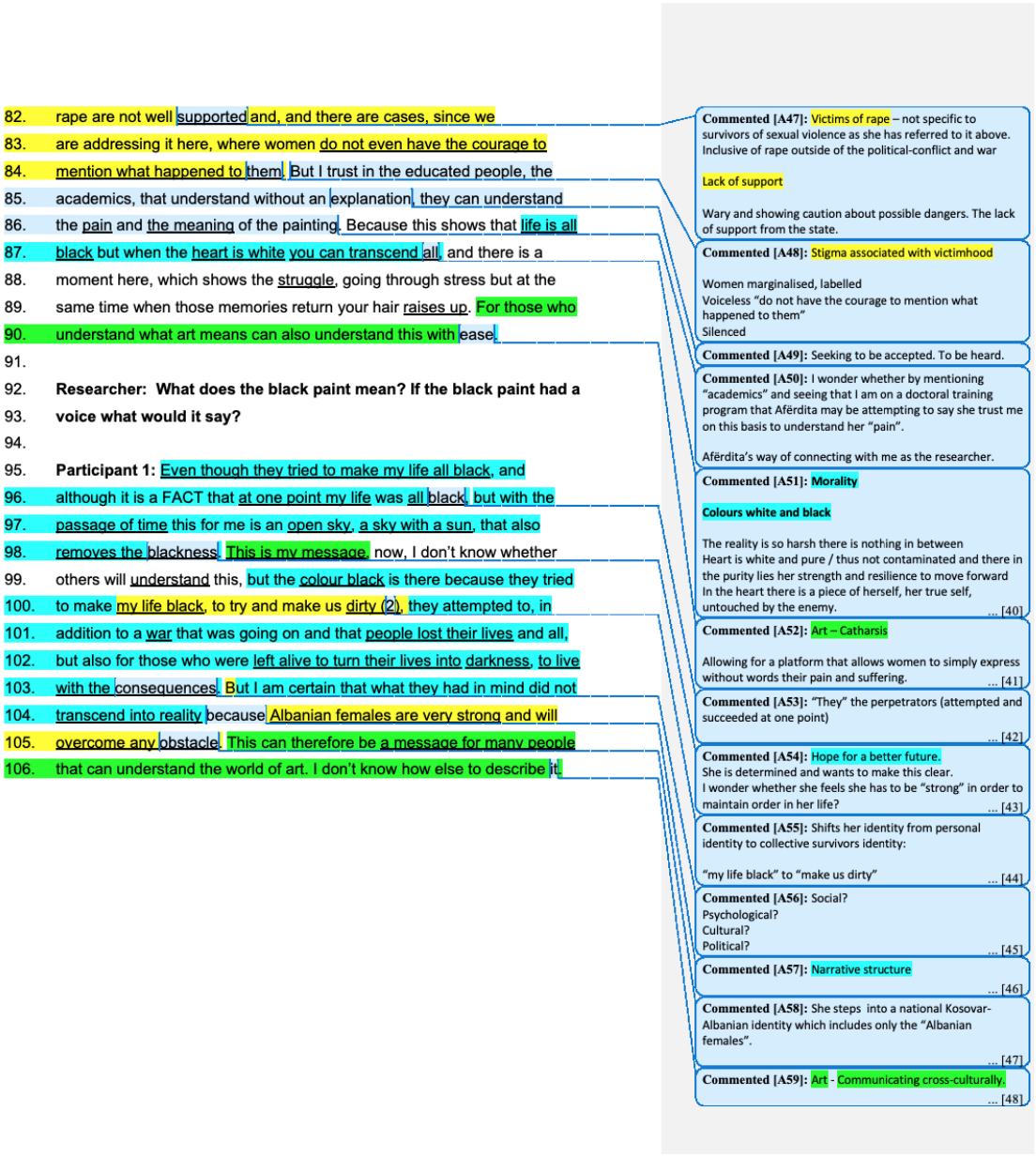
Commented [A42]: Mind and body connection is emphasised here. Connection to self and others. The ... [36]

Commented [A43]: Art as a medium of channelling internal subjective reality ... [37]

Commented [A44]: Identity of a strong woman who had to survive ... [38]

Commented [A45]: Strength as a recurring necessity. ... [39]

Commented [A46]: Hesitation


82. rape are not well supported and, and there are cases, since we
83. are addressing it here, where women do not even have the courage to
84. mention what happened to them. But I trust in the educated people, the
85. academics, that understand without an explanation, they can understand
86. the pain and the meaning of the painting. Because this shows that life is all
87. black but when the heart is white you can transcend all, and there is a
88. moment here, which shows the struggle, going through stress but at the
89. same time when those memories return your hair raises up. For those who
90. understand what art means can also understand this with ease.
91.
92. Researcher: What does the black paint mean? If the black paint had a
93. voice what would it say?
94.
95. Participant 1: Even though they tried to make my life all black, and
96. although it is a FACT that at one point my life was all black, but with the
97. passage of time this for me is an open sky, a sky with a sun, that also
98. removes the blackness. This is my message, now, I don't know whether
99. others will understand this, but the colour black is there because they tried
100. to make my life black, to try and make us dirty (2), they attempted to, in
101. addition to a war that was going on and that people lost their lives and all,
102. but also for those who were left alive to turn their lives into darkness, to live
103. with the consequences. But I am certain that what they had in mind did not
104. transcend into reality because Albanian females are very strong and will
105. overcome any obstacle. This can therefore be a message for many people
106. that can understand the world of art. I don't know how else to describe it.
Commented [A47]: Victims of rape – not specific to survivors of sexual violence as she has referred to it above. Inclusive of rape outside of the political-conflict and war
Lack of support
Wary and showing caution about possible dangers. The lack of support from the state.
Commented [A48]: Stigma associated with victimhood
Women marginalised, labelled
Voiceless "do not have the courage to mention what happened to them"
Silenced
Commented [A49]: Seeking to be accepted. To be heard.
Commented [A50]: I wonder whether by mentioning "academics" and seeing that I am on a doctoral training program that Afërdita may be attempting to say she trust me on this basis to understand her "pain".
Afërdita's way of connecting with me as the researcher.
Commented [A51]: Morality
Colours white and black
The reality is so harsh there is nothing in between
Heart is white and pure / thus not contaminated and there in the purity lies her strength and resilience to move forward
In the heart there is a piece of herself, her true self, untouched by the enemy. ... [40]
Commented [A52]: Art – Catharsis
Allowing for a platform that allows women to simply express without words their pain and suffering. ... [41]
Commented [A53]: "They" the perpetrators (attempted and succeeded at one point) ... [42]
Commented [A54]: Hope for a better future.
She is determined and wants to make this clear.
I wonder whether she feels she has to be "strong" in order to maintain order in her life? ... [43]
Commented [A55]: Shifts her identity from personal identity to collective survivors identity:
"my life black" to "make us dirty" ... [44]
Commented [A56]: Social?
Psychological?
Cultural?
Political? ... [45]
Commented [A57]: Narrative structure ... [46]
Commented [A58]: She steps into a national Kosovar-Albanian identity which includes only the "Albanian females". ... [47]
Commented [A59]: Art - Communicating cross-culturally. ... [48]

Page 1: [1] Commented [A4] Author

Narrative Tone and Rhetorical function

Incident – refers to the sexual violence – it is said with a heavy tone, which gave me the impression that there is great pain and suffering that was endured and this was extremely frightening.

Unable to name the sexual violence? Is it due to the shame? (incident) does not do the act justice. But the pain and the tone in her voice suggests that it is the survivor protecting herself from the label.

Undertone
Underplaying the severity

Page 1: [2] Commented [A5] Author

Narrative Tone

The participant is assertive, her eyes firm, she is shuffling in her chair and appears to be slightly anxious but you can hardly tell.

From the beginning of the interview we see the political implications of sexual violence as a weapon of war. Her husband was killed during the war and at the time of the sexual violence.

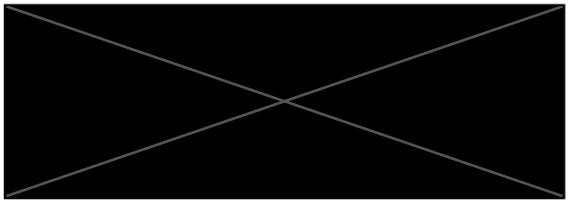
Page 1: [3] Commented [A7] Author

Humiliation (as a tool for harming the identity of the woman)

Page 1: [4] Commented [A8] Author

Narrative
The client starts of the interview in a very powerful manner, using words such as "never humiliate or put down a strong woman with anything" to describe her inner feelings about her external reality. This may indicate that the individual has not had an opportunity to speak up and is ready to voice her experiences.

She is talking about self and all the women collectively.



Relates to morality and perhaps the cultural expectations of a woman's role within that community.

Page 1: [5] Commented [A10] Author

Reclaiming power and control
(collective female identity as a source of strength)

Shifting the power dynamics

The word "woman" is her statement is important here because it suggests that the potential (humiliation) against a (woman) is different to that of a man. This is especially interesting in the context of sexual violence and what this means for women?

By making this powerful statement she is entering her collective female identity through which she is stripping the "other" who could try to "humiliate" her of their power to do so by saying they "can never humiliate a strong woman with anything". And with this statement and within this identity she changes the power-dynamics between herself (from victim to survivor) and the potential "other" (in-group or out-group).

"humiliate a strong woman with anything" Perhaps she is referring to using the sexual violence to stigmatise her, ostracise her, discriminate against her, contaminate her.

Her tone here is strong and powerful – I sense there is some experience of others trying humiliate her with something and she is sending a message here to say you cannot.

Using her collective female identity to give herself a voice.

Page 1: [6] Commented [A11] Author

"One" does not refer to a specific other.

This could be directed to those in the out-group (Serbs/Romas) as well as those in the in-group (Kosovar-Albanians) and any other.

Page 1: [7] Commented [A12] Author

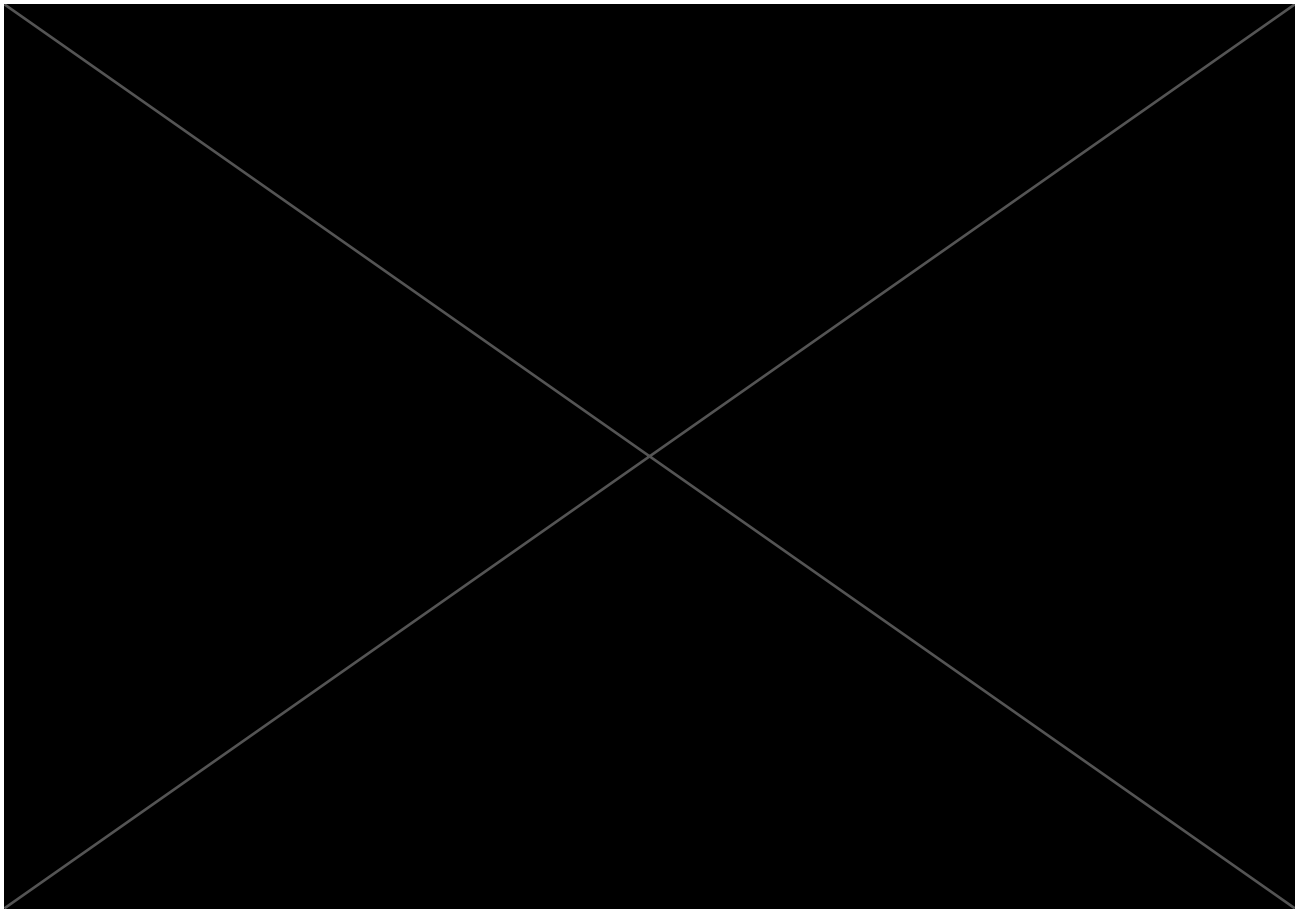
White heart associated with Purity

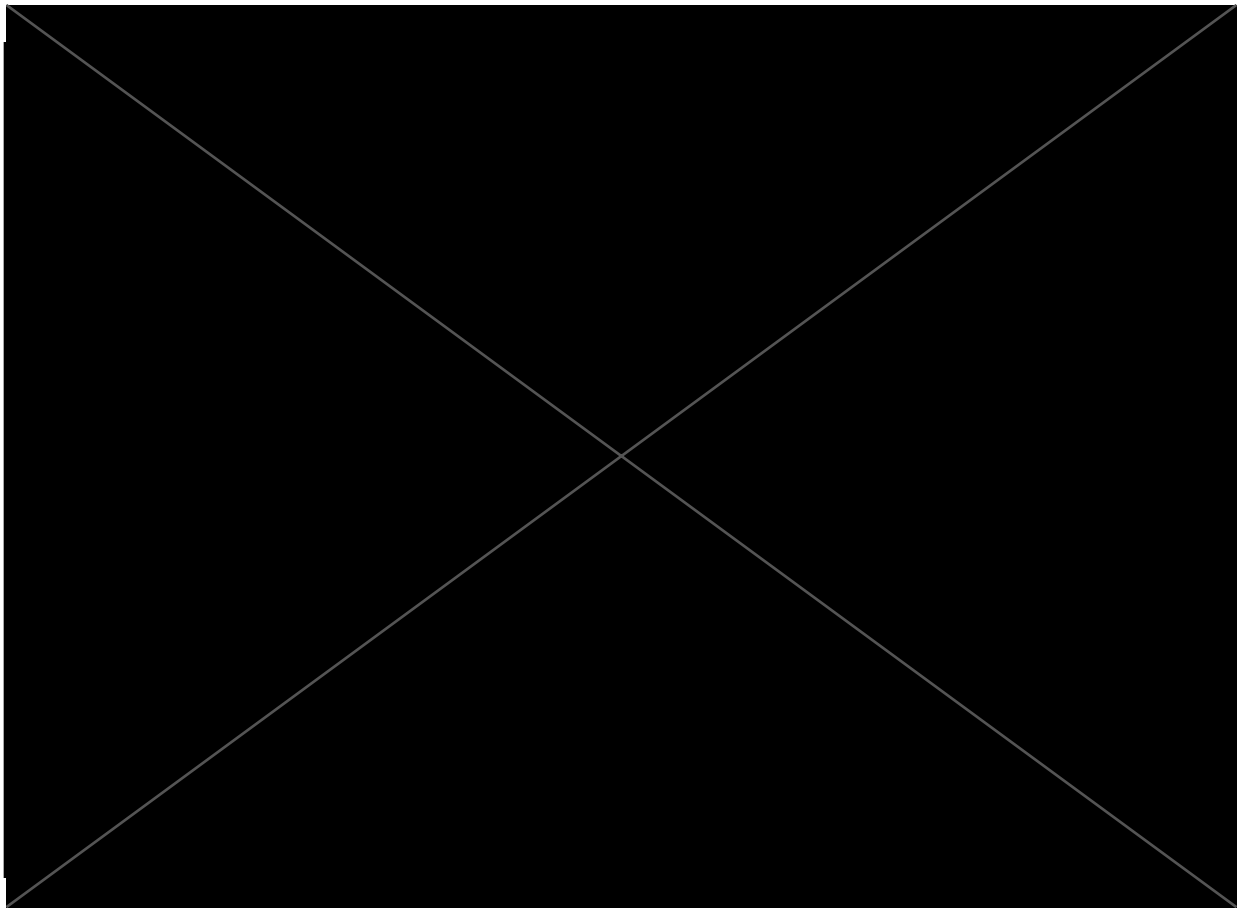
Feeling contaminated, the darkness symbolises the horrors of the sexual violence, fear, loneliness, disorientation, loss, humiliation, worthlessness and the only thing that remains white and pure is the heart.

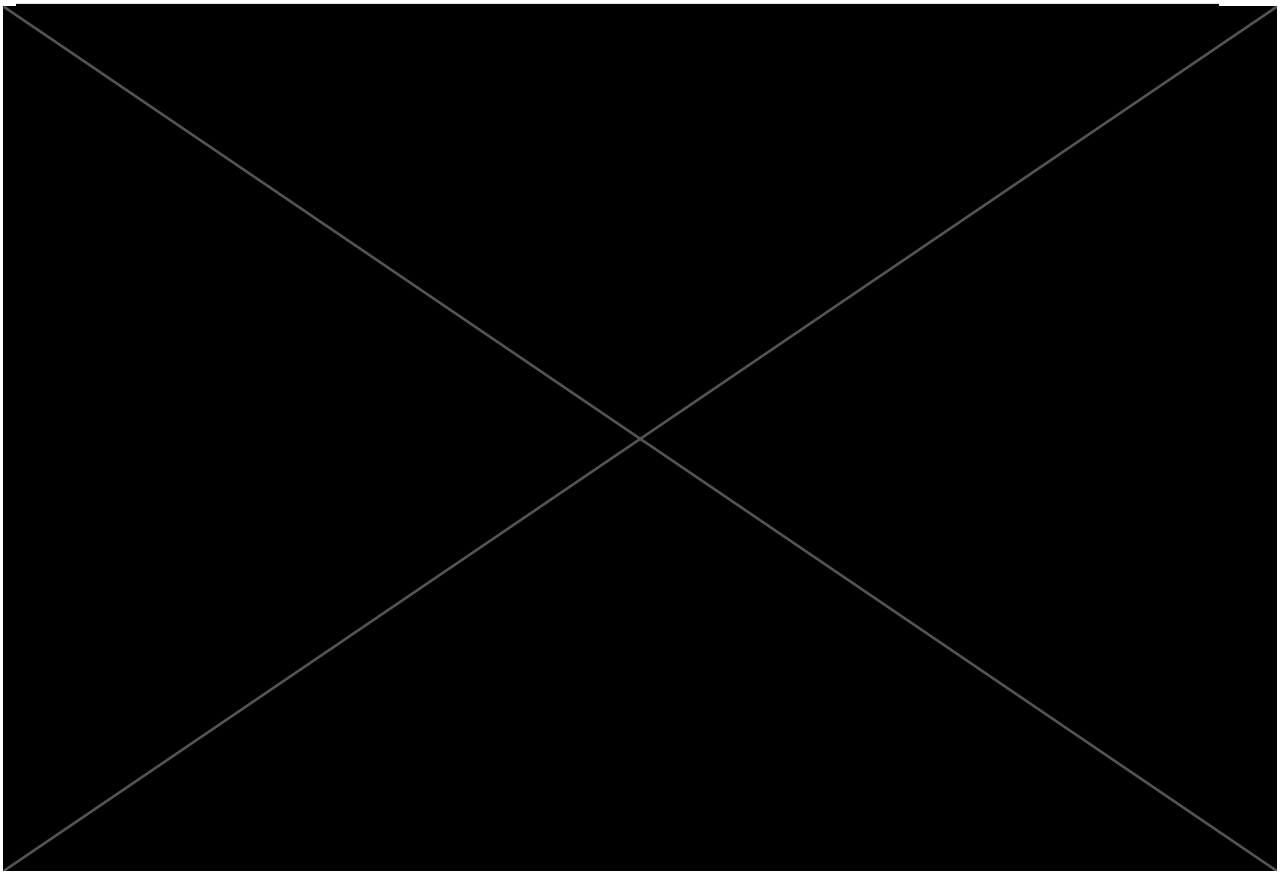
The narrative here relates to a woman's sexuality and honour – purity related only to the heart but the rest of the body is contaminated by the humiliation of the sexual violence.

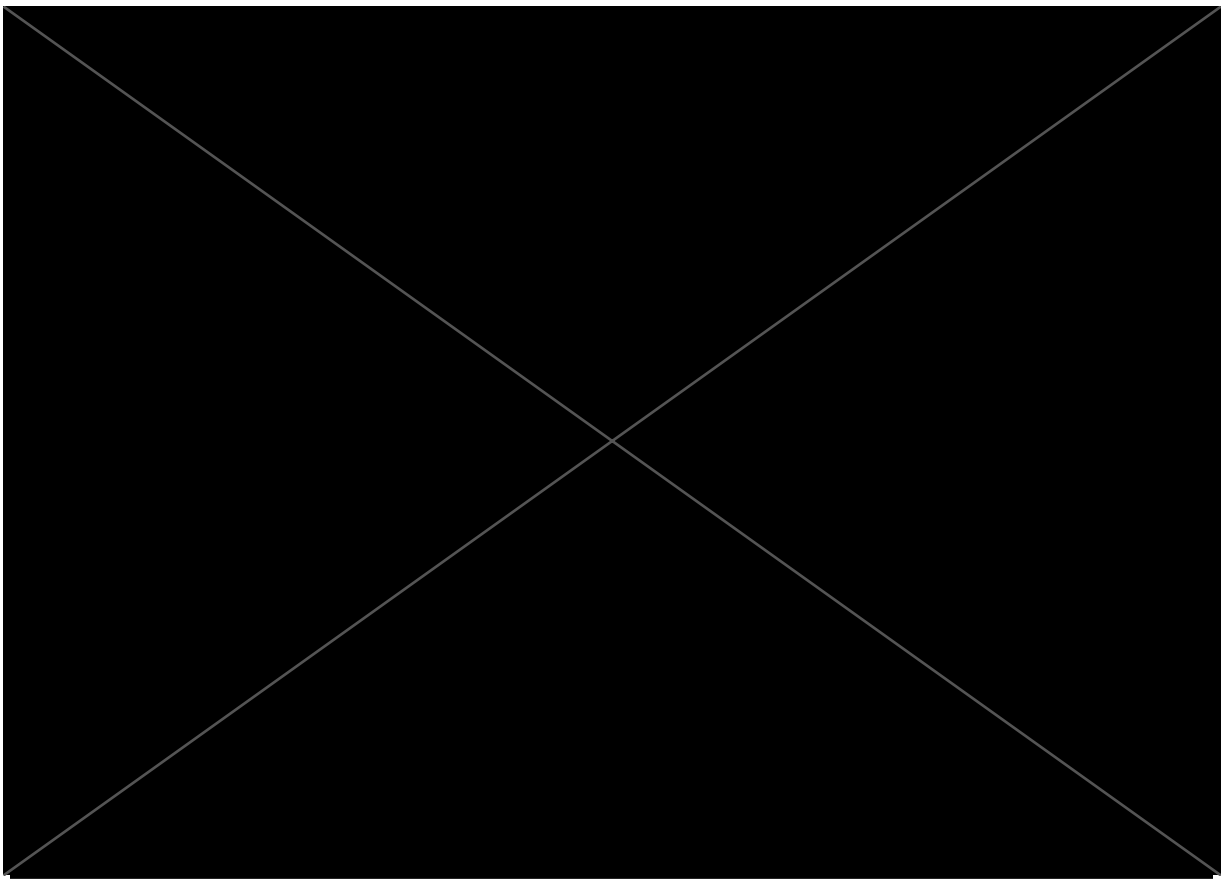
Page 1: [8] Commented [A13] Author

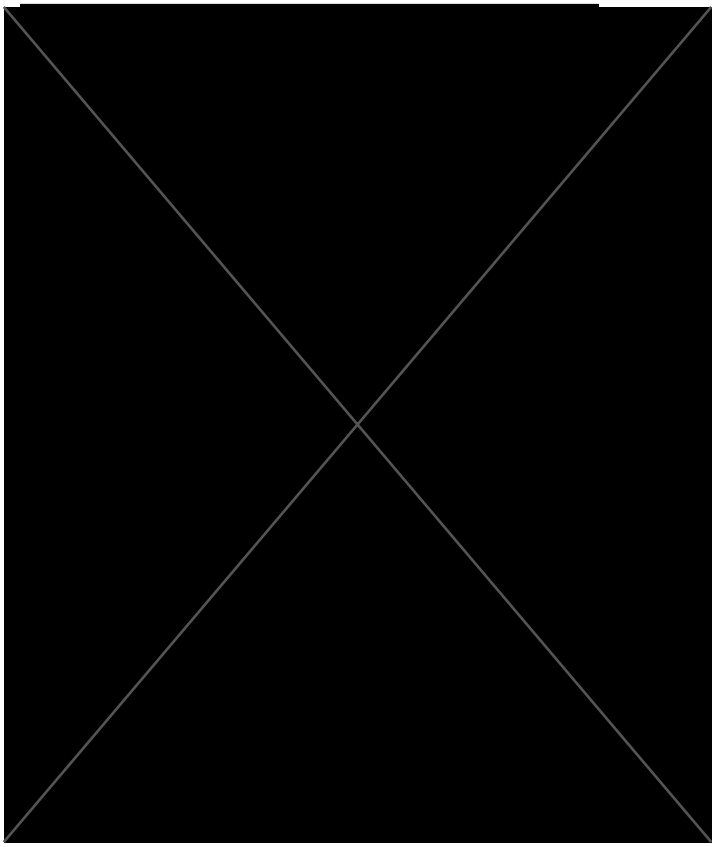
Collective Survivors Identity











Appendix 14: Initial analysis notes for Afërdita

Stages of Analysis: Notes for Afërdita

Stage 1: Critique of subjectivity

- What does the topic mean for me?
- What beliefs and opinions do I hold about it?
- Impact and implications of my own heritage, identity, cultural awareness and experiences?
- Impact of reading on this?
- Assumptions underpinning my position?
- My understanding of these topics?
- My way of being in the world?

My reflections

- Anxious about bearing witness to her narrative. What will it unearth in me? What will I be left with? How will I cope with my own material (personal experiences of the political conflict)?
- How can I separate my own material from the participant? Keep reflecting.
- Listening to her narrative was difficult, tried to withhold it as much as possible in the interview process, to hold the affect-laden material and safe space. Afterwards I cried. I felt sick. I was angry. I felt hate and rage for the perpetrators.
- My views on what justice, moral structures, ethics, right and wrong mean?
- How can human beings have the capacity to do such heinous things to others?
- Questioning what it means to be a human being and my place in this world?
- I was struck by Afërfita's presence, she presented very calm, reassured, kind and graceful yet she held her head up, sat up straight in her chair, and at one point before we began the interview, I felt small and even intimidated by her strength and courage. Her energy was very strong in the room and I was drawn in to her story, I remained engaged and was moved and inspired by her.
- I found it difficult to balance narrative interviewing / wanted to reassure her but also didn't want to disempower or interrupt the flow of the narrative.
- Do I have the tendency to go into "rescuer" mode? Why?
- Was I trying to be the "ideal researcher"?
- My assumptions were that women who experienced conflict-related sexual violence were marginalised, stigmatised, labelled, not supported – as I later found this is not always the case!
- Is this view reducing women to the labels of this research? By trying to give them a voice am I assuming they don't already have one?
- Be mindful of the "seductivity of sameness" . Exploring my own naivety as a research. Acknowledging the differences between researcher and participant and subsequent implications for this research.

Stage 2: Narratives, tone, rhetorical function

Master Narrative: *Despite what happened the heart is still white, they tried to dress us up in black but a human being must be stronger than stone. […] One can never humiliate a strong woman with anything!*

Key Narratives:

Narratives were predominantly chronological and developed in three time-frames as presented below:

Prior to the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo:

- Prior to the war, the danger was an external enemy, which also threatened the psychological, emotional and spiritual safety.
- The narrative depicts a very anxious environment, uncertainty, constantly on the run, surviving not living, and not belonging, sense of self and identity are threatened.
- The narrative explains how restricted they were because of their race and their political beliefs. Thus, deprived of living a normal life. No marriage certificate, no passport, no identification card due to activism would risk being arrested.

During the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo:

- The perpetrators in this narrative are principally "Serb police force, military, and paramilitaries as well as some individuals from the Roma community. Kosovar-Albanian's were positioned as victims.
- March [redacted] 1999 left homes to seek safety in the mountains and forests.
- [redacted]April 1999 became desperate for food and decided to go back to the house with the other [redacted]
- On the journey back home to retrieve food Serb forces identified the husband and his brothers dressed in the Kosovo Liberation Army uniform (KLA), and proceeded to brutally kill and massacre them as they attempted to protect their family members.
- The horror and tragedy ensued and to save the remaining women and children and the elderly they had to deny any connection to the KLA soldiers.
- The perpetrators violently attacked and abused everyone.
- Aferdita was violently raped whilst [redacted] regnant by Serb and Roma perpetrators in the presence of her two young boys (3 and 5) and 53 others family members just moments after witnessing the killing of her husband.
- Sexual violence as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing regime to terrorise and control .
- She depicted the horrors, heinousness, powerlessness, hopelessness of war.

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo:

- As a mother, no choice but to be strong and courageous and to rebuild a life for the children.
- The perpetrators attempted to terrorise, humiliate, stain, contaminate and destroy the individual, family unity and community.
- Strength, courage and surviving these experiences seems to be the cornerstones of her live. A way to commemorate and stay loyal to those that lost their lives in the war (her husband and other family members).
- Remembering vs forgetting their experiences and the implications for either one?
- Hopes for a better future.

Tone:

Optimistic, pessimistic, comic, tragic, good/bad things happening? Perceptions of these? Hope? Imagery?

- The overall tone is bold, powerful, assertive, and self-assured.

- Her tone is sad and reminiscent when talking about her brief married life with her husband before the war and his death.
- Her tone gets louder, filled with sadness and anxiety when describing the events that led up to the sexual violence.
- She demonstrated her strength and resilience to overcome atrocity. Fighting to be heard.
- Her tone reflects devastation when describing the details of the sexual violence, how her husband was murdered and then massacred.
- Hopeless and powerless tone when describing her inability to protect her young children from bearing witness to the traumatic events.
- Overwhelmingly tragic and stomach-churning as she described how the perpetrators took her five-year old son with a knife to his throat to look at his father's dead body and as they picked his lifeless head up by the hair demanding that the young body tell them if he recognises who he is. Her tone is nothing short of heart-breaking as she describes her surprise when her son [redacted] would understand the predicament they were in and say no.
- Her tone becomes removed and withdrawn when describing the moments after the sexual violence, perhaps depicting the shock and trauma.
- The above narratives were followed by optimism, which focused on resolutions, resilience, empowerment, strength, support and triumph as a way of not allowing the enemy to win.
- The tone of her narrative took a lighter and more positive stance at the latter stages of her narrative.
- [redacted]
- Narrative towards the end of the interview diverged slightly to talk about war crimes more generally and Afërdita utilise medico-legal accounts and case statistics to elaborate on her experiences. I found myself thinking whether this pessimistic tone echoed her previous experiences of being silenced and her credibility questioned as her stable pace becomes more rapid and filled with anger and frustration about United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and Kosovo's police department and their lack of support in seeking justice for her and her family.
- Her tone is more powerful and energetic when she talks with pride about her Kosovar-Albanian identity.
- In concluding the interview Afërdita's tone became inspired and hopeful as she spoke about her future endeavours to contribute towards projects and activities that would bring healing to survivors.

Rhetoric:

Opinion, excuse, explanation, justification, criticism, evaluation, perceived counter positions.

- From the beginning the perpetrators (Serbs and individuals from the Roma community) are identified and held accountable for the crimes they committed.
- The repercussions of their crimes are elaborated in the context and almost immediately after that solutions are offered to overcome these challenges.
- Afërdita was very vocal about her perceived counter positions, Serbs and the Roma individuals who part took in the killing of her family members and sexual violence were seen as the enemy, who had a specific mission for genocide and ethnic cleansing of Kosovar-Albanian's in Kosovo.

- [redacted]
- She thoroughly explained her husband's political position in Kosovo and that his role as an activist placed them at risk in Kosovo under Serbian political administration.
- Her husband's participation in Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA) is also described and explained in a way that positions him as someone who was protecting his family from the enemy and removes blame from him.
- In his death he is referred to and spoken about as a hero, and she remains faithful to him as her husband and is clear that she will continue to do so for the rest of her life.
- Reasons for not staying in the neuro-psychiatric hospital to complete her treatment are also given, she says she was faced with the stigma associated with the hospital and to avoid her children being impacted she found an alternative way of healing herself through activities in nature.
- Some contradictions arose when Afërdita spoke about the support she received from her family. On one hand she explains that they were supportive of her but also explained that they asked her not to tell others about what happened to her because of the shame and stigma associated with sexual violence. I felt that she was protecting her family and was loyal to them, though I noticed a slight undertone of frustration and that she may have felt silenced by their requests to keep what happened a secret. Though she quickly gives ample evidence to challenge their request, by explaining its inevitability to be known in the community seeing that there were an overwhelming number of witnesses to the crimes that took place.
- Afërdita challenges the dominant cultural rhetoric and desire to silence her and her experience by addressing that there might be video evidence of the rapes that could circulate the world, and makes mention of the overwhelming number of witnesses including the KLA soldiers who were stationed on the next hill, as a way of cautioning her in-group that no matter how much effort they put into trying to cover these experiences they will eventually come out. It was my sense that by challenging these dominant cultural narratives Afërdita aimed to have her story told.

Art:

Purpose of the painting?

- Art as a medium of channelling her internal subjective reality and is a reflection of her internal psychological state "When I see this painting, I see myself, I see how strong I had to be to survive" (p.2, line 72).

What was it about?

- The painting simultaneously exhibited Afërdita's past, present and future narratives and was a raw, unrehearsed, in-the-moment reflection on lived experiences and how she chose to depict those in the painting. The painting is restricted to two colours, she painted herself entirely black with the exception of her heart, which is painted white.

Motivation behind it?

- Afërdita selected an art piece that she painted depicting the shock and disbelief of the heinous crimes committed against her and her family. She painted a chilling portrayal of the rising of the hair, a natural human instinctual expression of terror. The painting is powerful and I was struck by the way she had depicted herself in a very feminine manner standing tall with one leg out and her hand on her hip.
- She expressed feeling like the perpetrators tried to contaminate and stain her and make her life black, but her narrative end with optimism and tenacity whereby with the passing of time she now sees an open sky with a sun and has removed the blackness.
- It also resembled my first painting and I wondered about what this may mean and reflected on this in my own art presentations.

What was she hoping people would get from it?

- To show people that through sexual violence the perpetrators tried to destroy her and other Kosovar-Albanian women but it also seems important to her that the audience understand how strong she has had to be in order to survive this experience.
- Art does not require language in order to communicate emotions and instinctual experiences.
- Afërdtia stated that the art here speaks for itself, which gives her an opportunity to connect without words and to communicate her narrative cross-culturally.
- Afërdita goes beyond her own personal identity and national identity to include humanity as she explains that this is not just the experience of a Kosovar-Albanian woman but the experience of a human being.

Stage 3: Identity work

Presents self as:

- A clear distinction between herself (the members of her in-group, Kosovar-Albanians) and the perpetrators in her story (Serbs and Roma's) and how her identity sets the scene for the conflict between the two national identities Serbs and Kosovar-Albanians.

- Identifies herself as a woman, a mother and a Kosovar-Albanian. She presented as being proud of her Albanian heritage and placed emphasis on her own understanding of how her female identity was attacked through sexual violence as a way of contaminating her.
- It was her understanding that this was done with the intent to extend this contamination to her national identity.
- Overall, she presents herself as extremely resilient, strong and courageous.
- Explicit about her experiences of countless admissions to the neuro-psychiatric hospital in Kosovo, where she felt stigmatised and labelled as *crazy* by the community. Witnessing her children's concern for her and the stigma that inevitably impacted on their lives and how they were viewed by others in the community.
- It is as though she had no other choice but to turn to her identity as a mother as a source of motivation and to overcome her mental health issues outside of the mental health services.

Positions herself:

- Based on our shared heritage, culture, identity and language I was considered to be part of the "in-group" in my dynamic interaction with Afërdita.
- She presented herself as a strong woman and a strong mother and despite her experiences strength is a recurring necessity.
- I felt it was important for her that I saw her as a strong woman who was not going to allow the enemy to win.
- Stepping into a collective survivor identity Afërdita maintains her master narrative "One cannot humiliate a strong woman" in order to avoid humiliation she must sustain her strength.
- Her identity as a mother was a source of strength and support, to protect her children and to be of service to them. It almost seems like she had no choice but to be strong for her sons.
- She positions herself with other Albanian women as being strong anyway.
- When she allows or finds herself stopping and confronting what has happened it seems to me that this is as a woman rather than as a mother, although of course the two are intertwined.
- Refusal to accept the blackness that was tried to be imposed on her
- The necessity of support from family thus embracing a national identity and God.
- By grouping herself with other women who may or may not be mothers, there is an additional resource to develop and maintain this strength.

Stage 5: Destabilising the narrative

How she understands her experiences of sexual violence?

Overall, she understands herself in the following ways:

- Her being a woman put her at risk of being raped in war/ to destroy their morality.
- Sexual violence took place in the same context as her husband's murder, they are inextricably bound by the social, political and cultural context from her perspective and she makes this association clear from the start of the interview.
- She understands sexual violence as a systematic weapon of war, and intentionally used for ethnic cleansing mission in Kosovo; killed the men, raped their women, killed their cattle, poisoned their wells.
- She reflects on a question they all pondered on immediately after they were robbed, violently attacked and raped "Why didn't they just kill us all?" questioning the intent of the perpetrator. But instead they were subjected to further psychological, emotional and physical torture.
- She seems to understand sexual violence as a deliberate act, which was done with the intent to instil fear and terror and to gain control.

- Attempt to exterminate an entire race of people.
- She understands the sexual violence relative to the political conflict and war between the two ethnic groups (Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs).

Stigmatisation and labelling in the family, community?

- A fear that others in the community are aware of her situation, wanting to keep it a secret. But there is also a desire to speak up and voice her experiences. Perhaps, this study by providing anonymity has provided the safety to be able to speak freely about her experiences.
- Mental health / leaving neuro-psychiatric hospital without completing her treatment due to the stigma associated with the hospital and how this was impacting her children negatively in the community. People would find out that there is something wrong with their mother.
- Afërdita seems to understand that sexual violence did not only impact her as an individual but also her sons, her family and community at large.

How does the individual see themselves and account for their experience?

- Overall, she felt hurt, unprotected, powerless but her children gave her the strength to continue fighting.
- She seems to continuously engage in dialogues with self, and is resourceful in that she turns to herself for answers, motivation and self-validation.
- She sees herself as someone who has endured unfathomable experiences but yet has managed to somehow continue to live, continue to love her children, continue to be strong because if she is not strong, then the enemy wins. The enemy although not physically present is still roaming in her psychic landscape.

<u>Dialogic:</u>

Dialogue, dramatization

- Was calm, collected and for the most part followed a chronological order in her delivery of narratives.
- I felt that Afërdita conveyed her narrative in a serious and diligent manner and to me seemed appropriate for the narrative that was being told.

What is the influence of the interviewer, setting, social circumstances?

- Questions were set in a way that provided framing and containment. This may have influenced the flow and direction of her narratives.

Why did she tell this story at this point?

- She seems eager and ready to voice her experience. Part taking in a psychological research study of this kind for the first time.
- An inherent desire to speak about the injustices that were done to her and her family and other Kosovar-Albanians.

Who is this utterance being directed at?

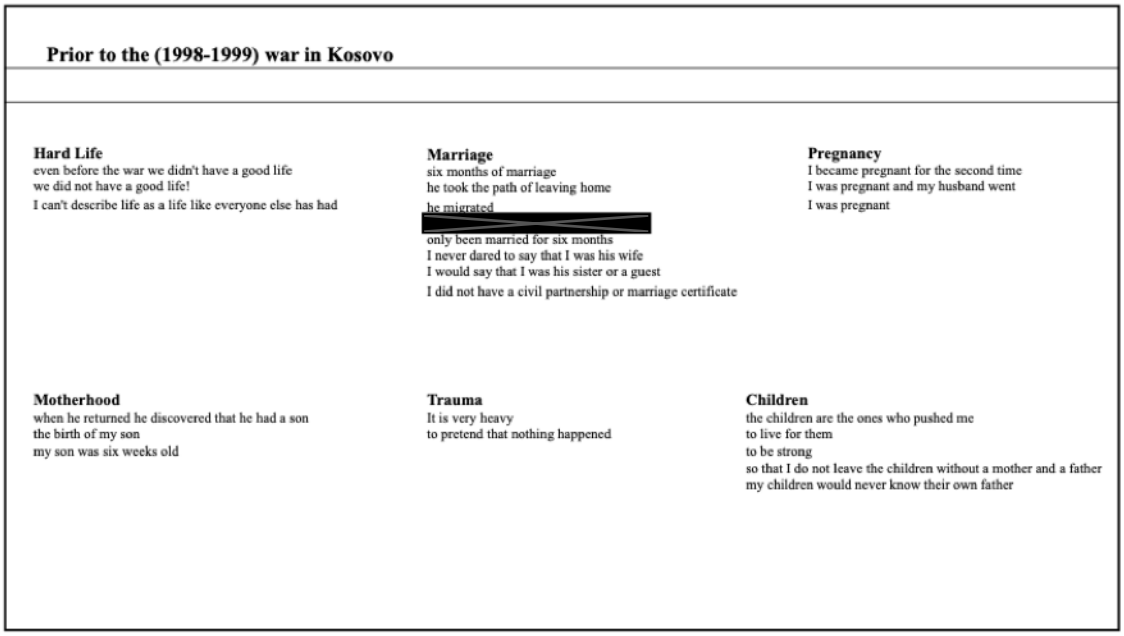
- It felt like the narrative was being directed not only to me as the researcher but also to others who may read it. I also stated in the information and consent sheets that interviews may be used for future publications, lectures, seminars, talks and perhaps this also had an impact in how narratives were delivered. Perhaps, the audience in mind was also the perpetrators of these crimes, in some way telling them through this research that they did not win that she did not give up and their mission to destroy her failed.

When is it being said and why? For what purpose?

- A human rights violation was carried out, injustice was done to her and her family, she lost her husband and has had to remain strong in order to overcome these experiences.
- Her way of seeking some form of justice for what happened to her and her family.
- Voicing her experiences
- Telling the world what happened in Kosovo to Kosovar-Albanians.

Appendix 15: Initial thematic analysis for Afërdita

Afërdita's narratives emerged in a chronological order and in three time-frames: prior to, during and after the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. The emerging themes were divided in two categories, personal; which related to Afërdita's life more specifically and general; which included wider socio-cultural and political narratives. Below is an example of this:



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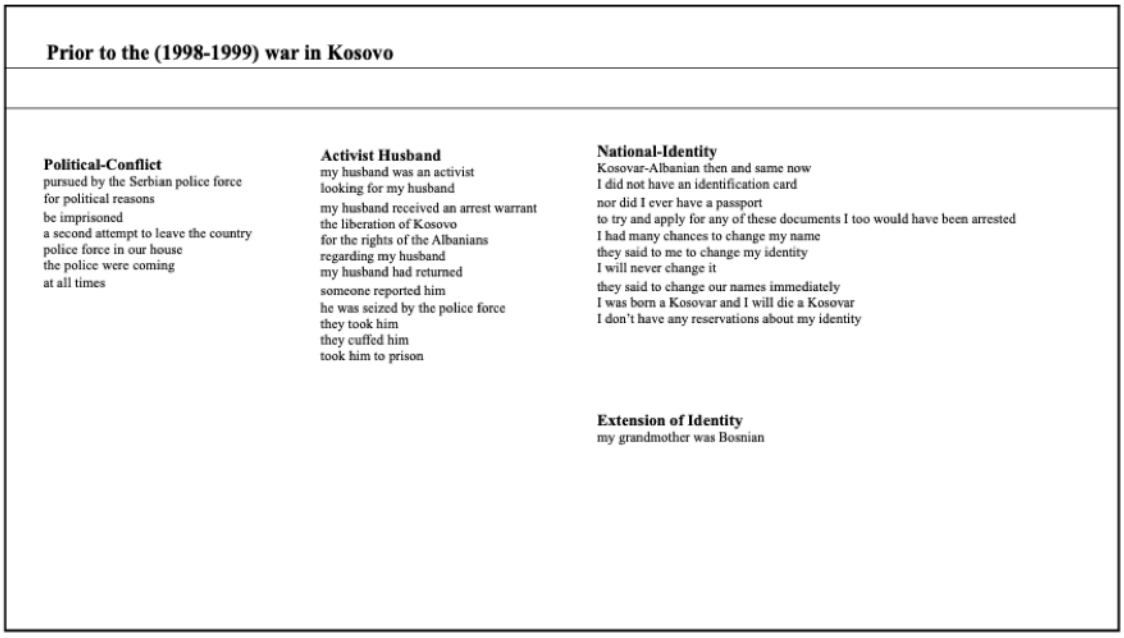

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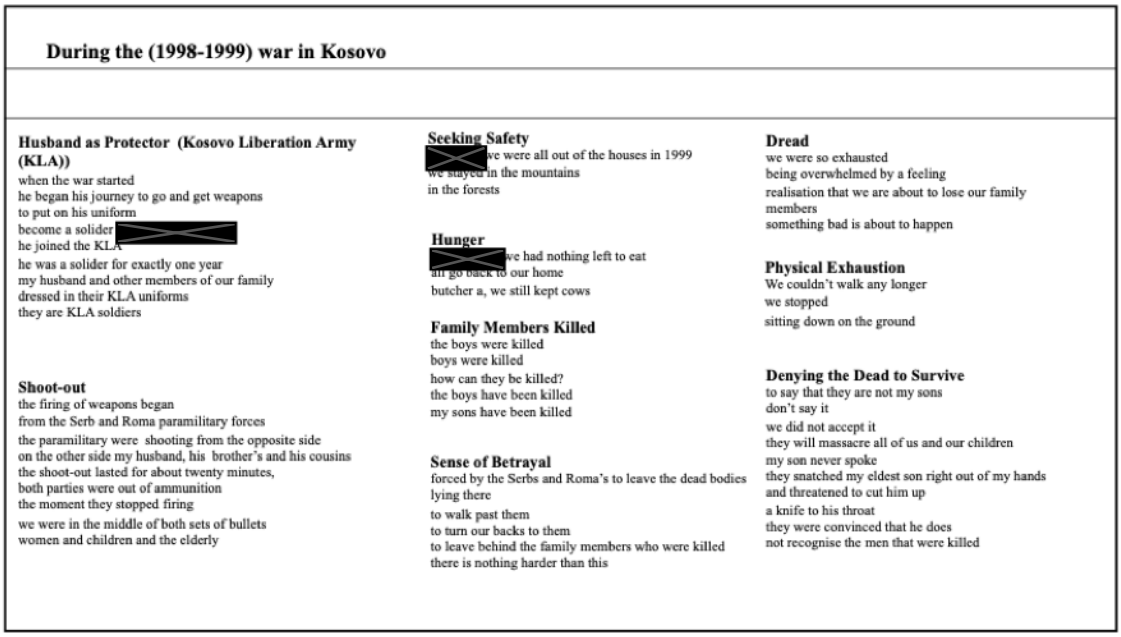
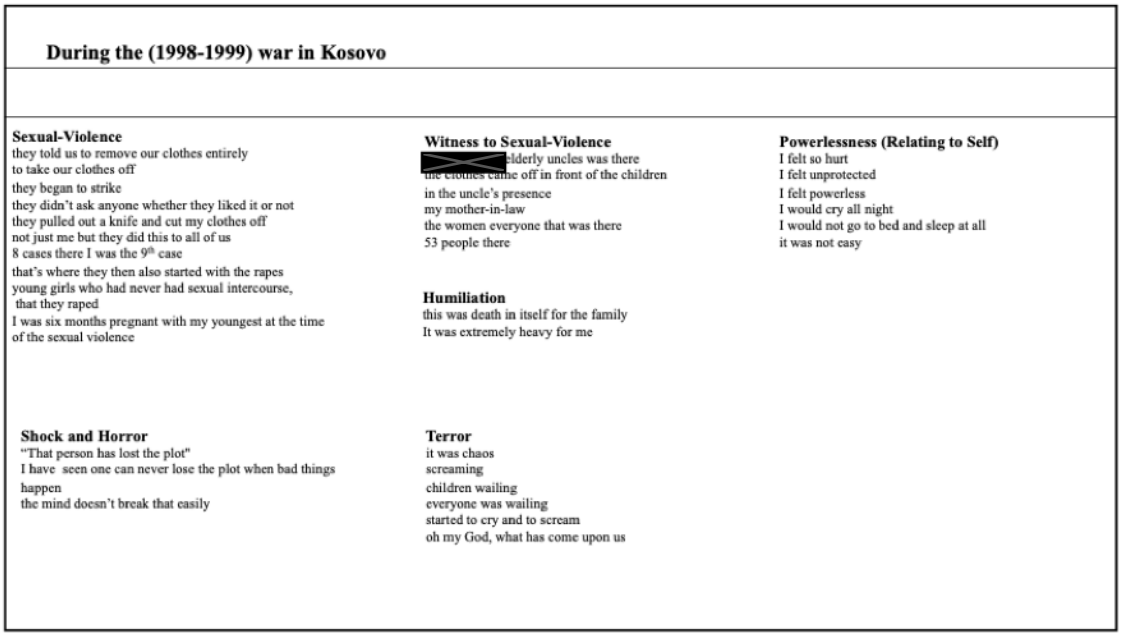
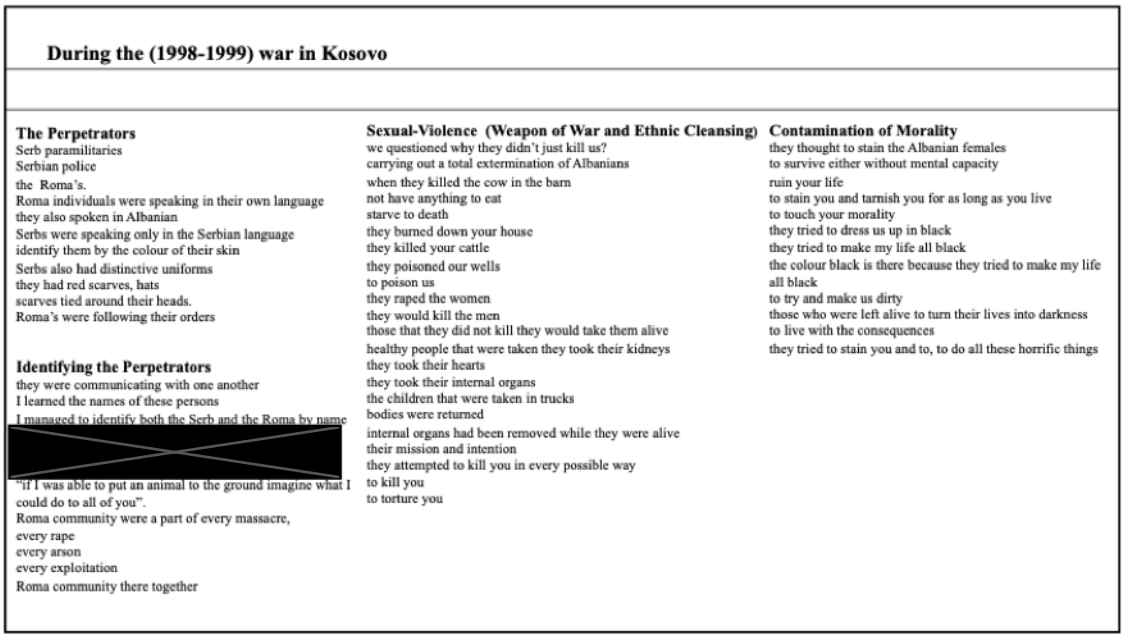

During the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo
Husband as Protector (Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA))
when the war started
he began his journey to go and get weapons
to put on his uniform
become a solider [redacted]
he joined the KLA
he was a solider for exactly one year
my husband and other members of our family
dressed in their KLA uniforms
they are KLA soldiers
Shoot-out
the firing of weapons began
from the Serb and Roma paramilitary forces
the paramilitary were shooting from the opposite side
on the other side my husband, his brother's and his cousins
the shoot-out lasted for about twenty minutes,
both parties were out of ammunition
the moment they stopped firing
we were in the middle of both sets of bullets
women and children and the elderly
Seeking Safety
[redacted]we were all out of the houses in 1999
we stayed in the mountains
in the forests
Hunger
[redacted]we had nothing left to eat
all go back to our home
butcher a, we still kept cows
Family Members Killed
the boys were killed
boys were killed
how can they be killed?
the boys have been killed
my sons have been killed
Sense of Betrayal
forced by the Serbs and Roma's to leave the dead bodies lying there
to walk past them
to turn our backs to them
to leave behind the family members who were killed
there is nothing harder than this
Dread
we were so exhausted
being overwhelmed by a feeling
realisation that we are about to lose our family members
something bad is about to happen
Physical Exhaustion
We couldn't walk any longer
we stopped
sitting down on the ground
Denying the Dead to Survive
to say that they are not my sons
don't say it
we did not accept it
they will massacre all of us and our children
my son never spoke
they snatched my eldest son right out of my hands
and threatened to cut him up
a knife to his throat
they were convinced that he does
not recognise the men that were killed

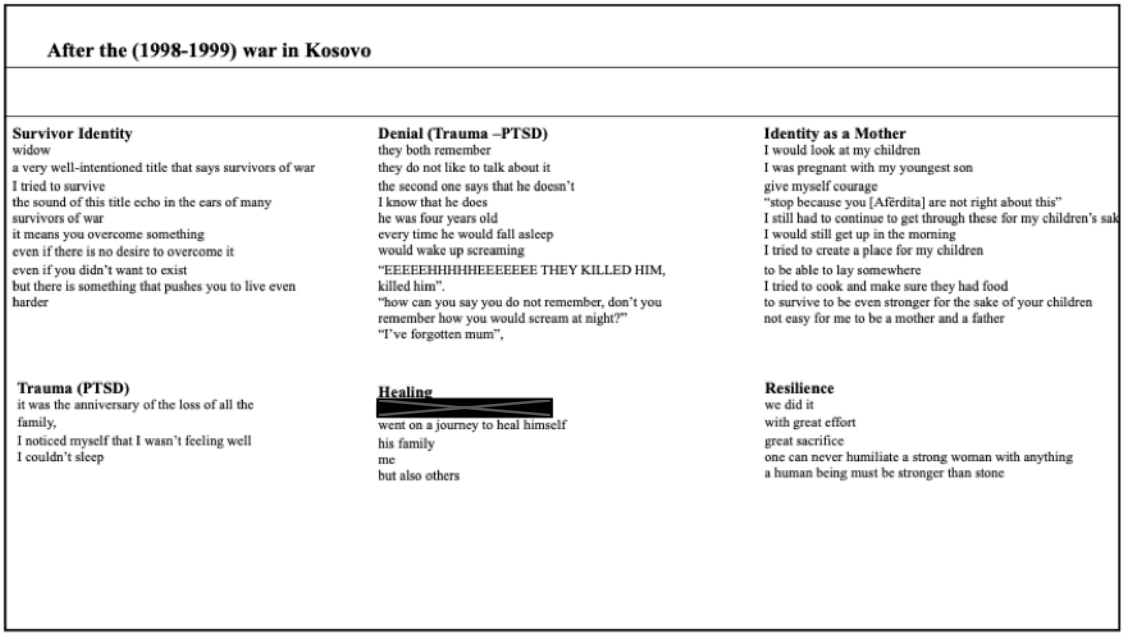
3


During the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo
Sexual-Violence
they told us to remove our clothes entirely
to take our clothes off
they began to strike
they didn't ask anyone whether they liked it or not
they pulled out a knife and cut my clothes off
not just me but they did this to all of us
8 cases there I was the 9th case
that's where they then also started with the rapes
young girls who had never had sexual intercourse,
that they raped
I was six months pregnant with my youngest at the time
of the sexual violence
Shock and Horror
"That person has lost the plot"
I have seen one can never lose the plot when bad things happen
the mind doesn't break that easily
Witness to Sexual-Violence
[redacted]elderly uncles was there
the clothes came off in front of the children
in the uncle's presence
my mother-in-law
the women everyone that was there
53 people there
Humiliation
this was death in itself for the family
It was extremely heavy for me
Terror
it was chaos
screaming
children wailing
everyone was wailing
started to cry and to scream
oh my God, what has come upon us
Powerlessness (Relating to Self)
I felt so hurt
I felt unprotected
I felt powerless
I would cry all night
I would not go to bed and sleep at all
it was not easy

4


During the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo
The Perpetrators
Serb paramilitaries
Serbian police
the Roma's.
Roma individuals were speaking in their own language
they also spoken in Albanian
Serbs were speaking only in the Serbian language
identify them by the colour of their skin
Serbs also had distinctive uniforms
they had red scarves, hats
scarves tied around their heads.
Roma's were following their orders
Identifying the Perpetrators
they were communicating with one another
I learned the names of these persons
I managed to identify both the Serb and the Roma by name
[redacted]
"if I was able to put an animal to the ground imagine what I could do to all of you".
Roma community were a part of every massacre,
every rape
every arson
every exploitation
Roma community there together
Sexual-Violence (Weapon of War and Ethnic Cleansing)
we questioned why they didn't just kill us?
carrying out a total extermination of Albanians
when they killed the cow in the barn
not have anything to eat
starve to death
they burned down your house
they killed your cattle
they poisoned our wells
to poison us
they raped the women
they would kill the men
those that they did not kill they would take them alive
healthy people that were taken they took their kidneys
they took their hearts
they took their internal organs
the children that were taken in trucks
bodies were returned
internal organs had been removed while they were alive
their mission and intention
they attempted to kill you in every possible way
to kill you
to torture you
Contamination of Morality
they thought to stain the Albanian females
to survive either without mental capacity
ruin your life
to stain you and tarnish you for as long as you live
to touch your morality
they tried to dress us up in black
they tried to make my life all black
the colour black is there because they tried to make my life all black
to try and make us dirty
those who were left alive to turn their lives into darkness
to live with the consequences
they tried to stain you and to, to do all these horrific things

5

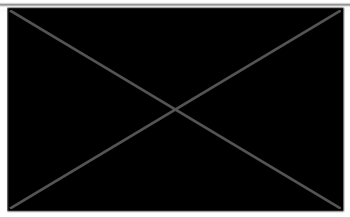

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo
Survivor Identity
widow
a very well-intentioned title that says survivors of war
I tried to survive
the sound of this title echo in the ears of many survivors of war
it means you overcome something
even if there is no desire to overcome it
even if you didn't want to exist
but there is something that pushes you to live even harder
Denial (Trauma –PTSD)
they both remember
they do not like to talk about it
the second one says that he doesn't
I know that he does
he was four years old
every time he would fall asleep
would wake up screaming
"EEEEEHHHHHEEEEEEE THEY KILLED HIM, killed him".
"how can you say you do not remember, don't you remember how you would scream at night?"
"I've forgotten mum",
Identity as a Mother
I would look at my children
I was pregnant with my youngest son
give myself courage
"stop because you [Afërdita] are not right about this"
I still had to continue to get through these for my children's sak
I would still get up in the morning
I tried to create a place for my children
to be able to lay somewhere
I tried to cook and make sure they had food
to survive to be even stronger for the sake of your children
not easy for me to be a mother and a father
Trauma (PTSD)
it was the anniversary of the loss of all the family,
I noticed myself that I wasn't feeling well
I couldn't sleep
Healing
[redacted]
went on a journey to heal himself
his family
me
but also others
Resilience
we did it
with great effort
great sacrifice
one can never humiliate a strong woman with anything
a human being must be stronger than stone

6

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo

Collective Survivor Identity (Source of Strength)
spoke with my sister-in-law
my uncle's daughter-in-law
my auntie's daughters.
we used to talk especially when we would go out to work the fields
we would grapple with this
conversation among the women
talking about that time and what happened to us
we had all had the same experience
we would all relive it as if we were there in that same moment
but we did it
we overcame
we were all very close and connected with one another
this is a huge motivational push
you speak and share it with someone
it's the lightness of the soul
it's liberating when you discuss it with someone

God (Source of Support)
rely on God to support me
God will help you and give you strength
and thank God
OH MY GOD, what has come upon us
one cannot lose their mind without God's will



Loyalty
my husband passed away, now I am different
I will never even attempt to get married again
it isn't about the sexual violence that happened
I do not want to get married again
maybe even today if I wanted to, I could get married
I myself have never had the desire to get married again after my husband passed
I myself have never even thought about going that way
I was able to get through it even like this
without getting married

Family
grateful and thankful to my family
my husband's family
all have had mutual respect
were not trying to further destroy the family
more importantly to rebuild it to restore
only a few people that didn't know
most people were aware of what happened to us
not a single member of our family that was not somehow touched by the war
even though I was without a husband
I have had support from my husband's family
from my own family
I do not have any bitterness or anything

7

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo

Stigma in the Community
I could be walking down the street
I would instantly think they would be talking about what happened to me
very hard, especially going out into the city
It was very hard
especially the first few years after the war
It was hard but we understood
the time and the community
it was horrific

Shame
the only thing is they obviously said that they wouldn't like for what happened to become known
because they felt, they said its shameful
it was short and shame
to know that this happened in our family
but this was inevitable,
seventy or eighty soldiers that were very close to us
they know everything that happened
we can say it didn't happen all we like, there might be someone out there who has video footage of the rape

Silenced
they [family] always said "Do not discuss
this with anyone,
we know what happened but do not
discuss it with others

Stigma and Medication
I took a calming tablet
It was an an organic one
my son saw he said "mum, again with the calming tables ay?"
I said "your mother cannot sleep"
he said "get rid of it do not take these tablets".
don't like to see me with calming tablets
I had to get through everything without medication
I was hurting my children

Purity (Morality)
the heart is still white
when the heart is white you can
transcend all

Lack of Self-Care
I look so much older in the picture after the war
you were dressed all in black clothing
you didn't have the slightest bit of care for yourself
you did not give any kind of importance
not to your hair
your clothing
or anything at all

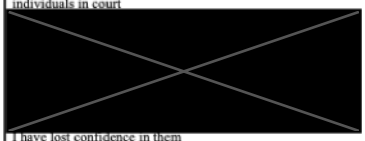
Stigma and Mental Health Services
I was in hospital
neuropsychiatry hospital
when my children came to see me
"Mum, if only you were not at this hospital!".
I saw, {mm}, how hard it was for the children
harder for them to see me in the neuropsychiatric hospital
than the situation that happened
"our mother is not well in the mind"
this stung more
I also saw my children's stress
after two days I left the hospital
the children suffered greatly through this experience
in our Albanian communities it is a problem if they see that you are consulting with a psychologist
"They have lost their minds!"
If you need a psychologist you are a person who is psychologically unstable
I tried the hospital
I wasted my time
I was traumatising my children
the psychiatrist would say "It's shameful for someone to see you in hospital, look at how amazing your sons are"

Assumptions
'What a pity, look at what she has become".
we would think that they were saying "Oh
look here come those who were raped".

8

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo

Injustice
have given the names and surnames of these individuals in court



I have lost confidence in them
friendship with Serbia and Serbian prosecution system
don't trust them
Serbia continues to denounce us
even though we are the victims
there is no justice for this ordeal

Uncertainty
we did know anything more about anyone
we had other family members who had stepped on mine
didn't know whether they were alive or dead
other family members that had been arrested
were still alive or whether they had been killed
those who were taken from us alive
were returned five years later just remains in coffins

Remembering vs Forgetting
will we forget?
we will never forget
this was something that can never be forgotten
you you cannot forget it
but one should not live each day with it in mind
that will kill and hurt you
If you stay occupied only with that event only
you can never stop taking antidepressants
your head from your pillow
put this behind your back
leave it behind you
to walk forward and to proceed in life
the things that happened should never be forgotten
one shouldn't think with the past in mind
this doesn't mean one should forget the past

Strength = Triumph (National-identity)
not good to satisfy the enemy's desire
"because of everything that happened
they are now killing themselves even after the war"
tried to think only positively
not to drift off to the negatives
pushed me not to fulfil the enemy's desire
in spite of what happened to me to continue being strong
they couldn't keep us stagnant where we were 20 years ago
we moved and we have progressed
we have succeeded with our own strength
I am certain that what they had in mind did not
transcend into reality
Albanian females are very strong and will overcome
any obstacle

9

After the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo

Government Support
commissions in Kosovo's government
retirement benefit for survivors of sexual-violence in war
more people are more open and likely to come forward
to be identified as victims of war sexual violence

Social Change
this was unheard of before
more civilised and to understand things
to understand that there is no shame in this thing
has happened to us
it was not done out of our own desire or willingness
done to us by the enemy
things are much different now in comparison to before
It has changed because today you have the support of the state

War Invalid Status
those who have received pensions today also have the status
they do not state there that they are war victims of sexual violence
it states that they are war invalids
we all feel so much better and content within ourselves
even though war invalid is written there and not victim of war
it is more tolerable
because this removes some kind of stigma
it is easier to apply for benefits and other aids

Independence
now life is completely different
completely, completely,
at least you go out a you can work a little
you are independent
and self-reliant
you no long depend on anyone else
so it is very different now.

Freedom and Status
I am much more respected and everything now
we have more freedom to go out
we have more freedom
I work
charity work

Coping mechanisms
we did have psychologists after the war
international psychologists with interpreters
They would take the children out in the garden and play
we also had contact with them and we would engage with
their support.
also a collective family collaboration
the children
we overcame it

Hope for the future
now we are trying to just be our authentic selves
to help the victims of war
arrange for some kind of activities
to get them together
empowering
we all have a real need for one another
this would be a type of therapy
go for walks, to talk, to have conversations
heal old wounds

10

Appendix 16: Individual narrative construction for Afërdita

Afërdita

Despite what happened the heart is still white, they tried to dress us up in black but a human being must be stronger than stone. […] One can never humiliate a strong woman with anything!

Afërdita commenced her narrative by describing life prior to the (1998-1999) war in Kosovo. She described the daily challenges that her and her family faced whilst trying to keep some form of normality within the political-conflict. Afërdita's tone is sad and reminiscent as she recollects her husband's return to Kosovo and the circumstances in which he met his firstborn son.

*Even before the war we didn't have a good life, why didn't we have a good life? Because we did not have a good life! Because after six months of marriage my husband received an arrest warrant for political reasons, to be imprisoned, and my husband refused to go to jail, for political reasons, but instead he took the path of leaving home and he migrated and so, I was *pregnant* and my husband went to* [redacted]

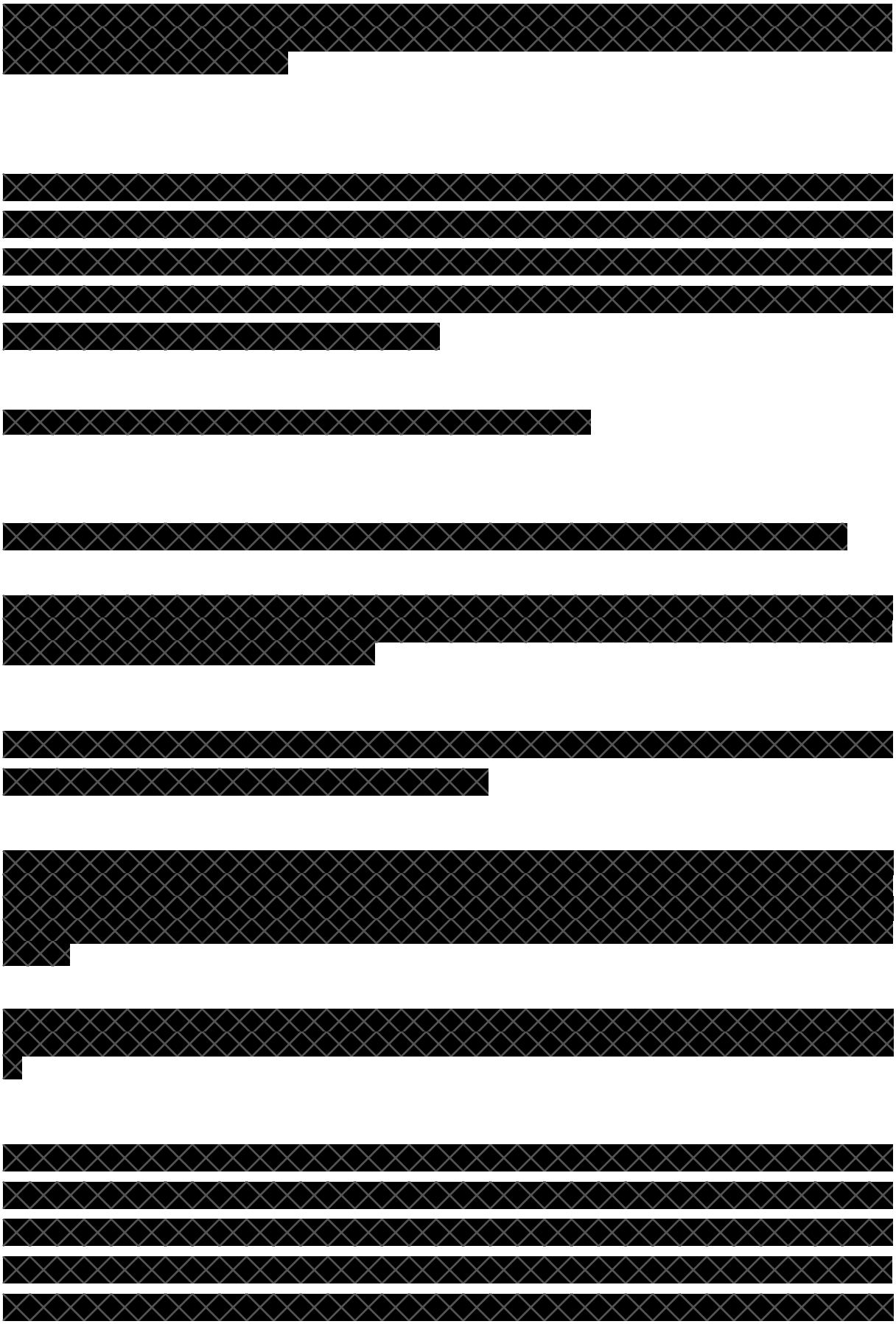
When he returned, he discovered that he had a son! And in the time that he was here, I became pregnant for the second time with my second son.

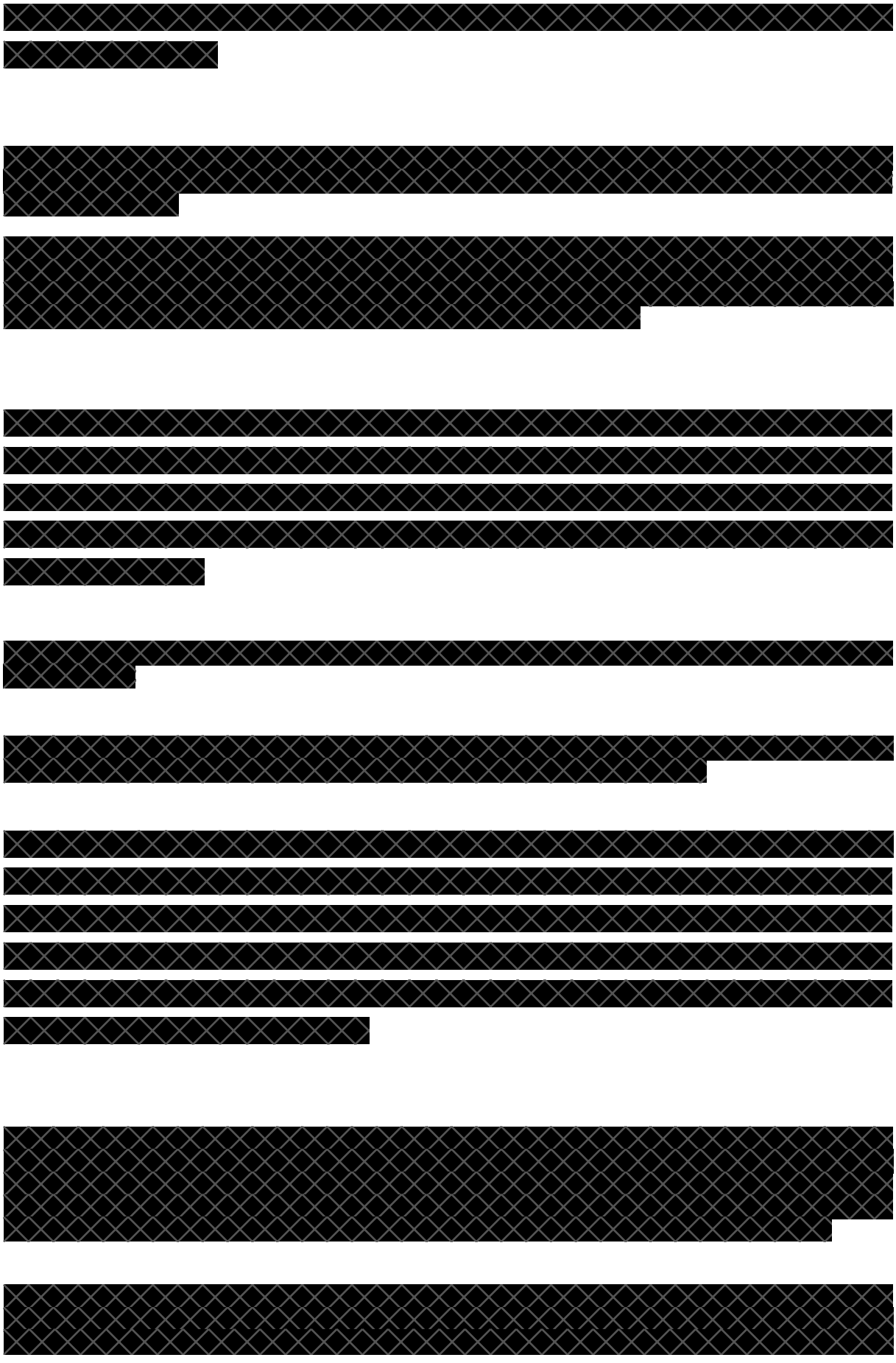
Aferdita's tone then slows down as she talks about her husband's perpetual movement to avoid the Serb police force, and the subsequent family discord that ensued. She describes feelings of relief as she talks about her husbands near escape from the Serb police. Here the tone is sad as Afërdita explains the repercussions of her husband being an activist and advocating for the equal rights of the Kosovar-Albanians in Kosovo. She explains how as a result she was never able to experience a normal marriage, to validate her marriage, to celebrate her marriage, nor was she able to enjoy becoming a mother. She also describes the challenges she faced in her husband's absence.

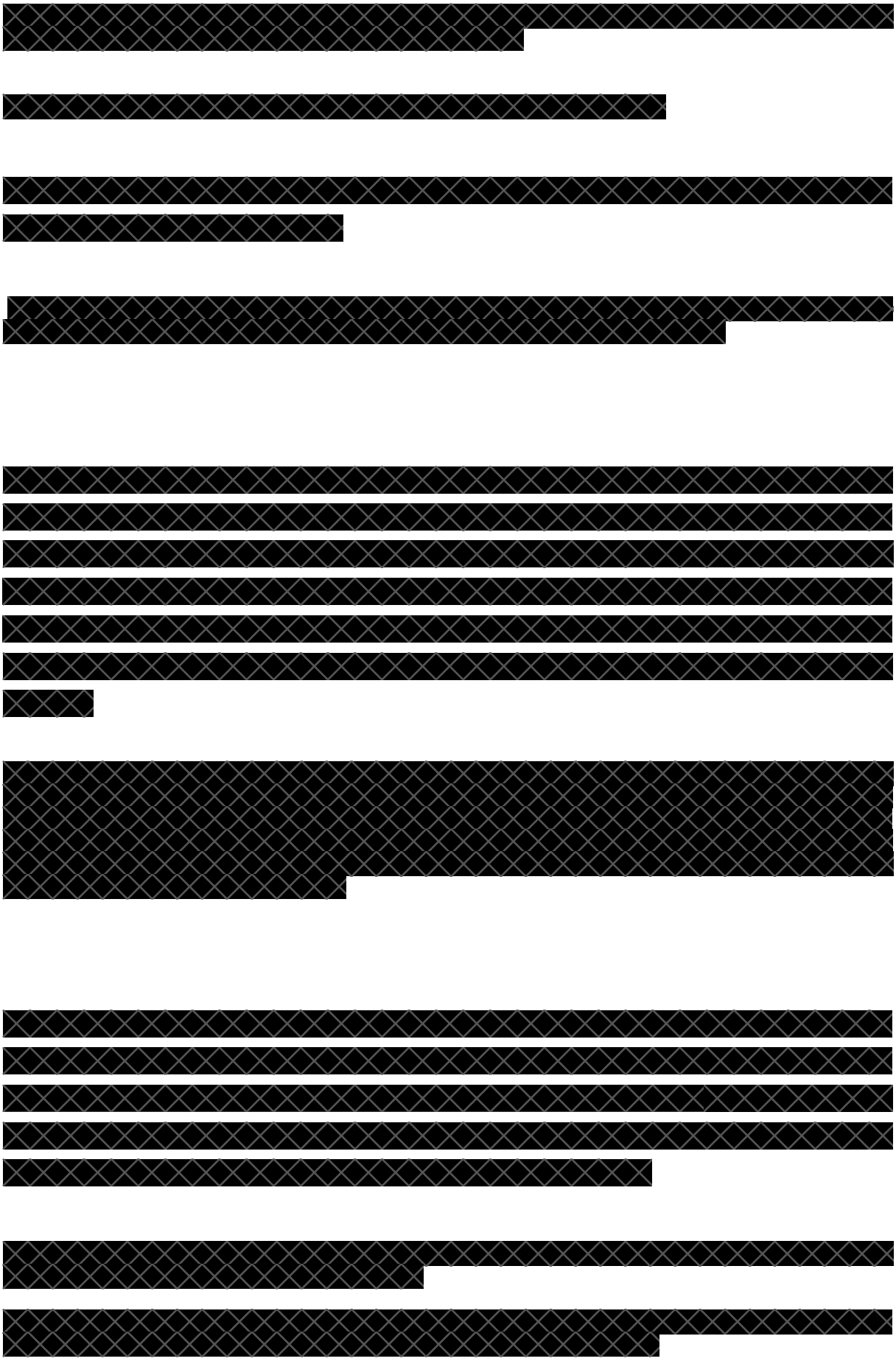
He then made a second attempt to leave the country and go back to [redacted] *and thank God on the same day he left we had the police force in our house looking for my husband.*

I never dared to say that I was his wife. Or, if I saw or heard that the police were coming, I would go to the neighbour's house, or to my own family's home, or when they caught me in our house, I would say that I was his sister, or a guest, because even at that time he was being pursued by the Serbian police force.

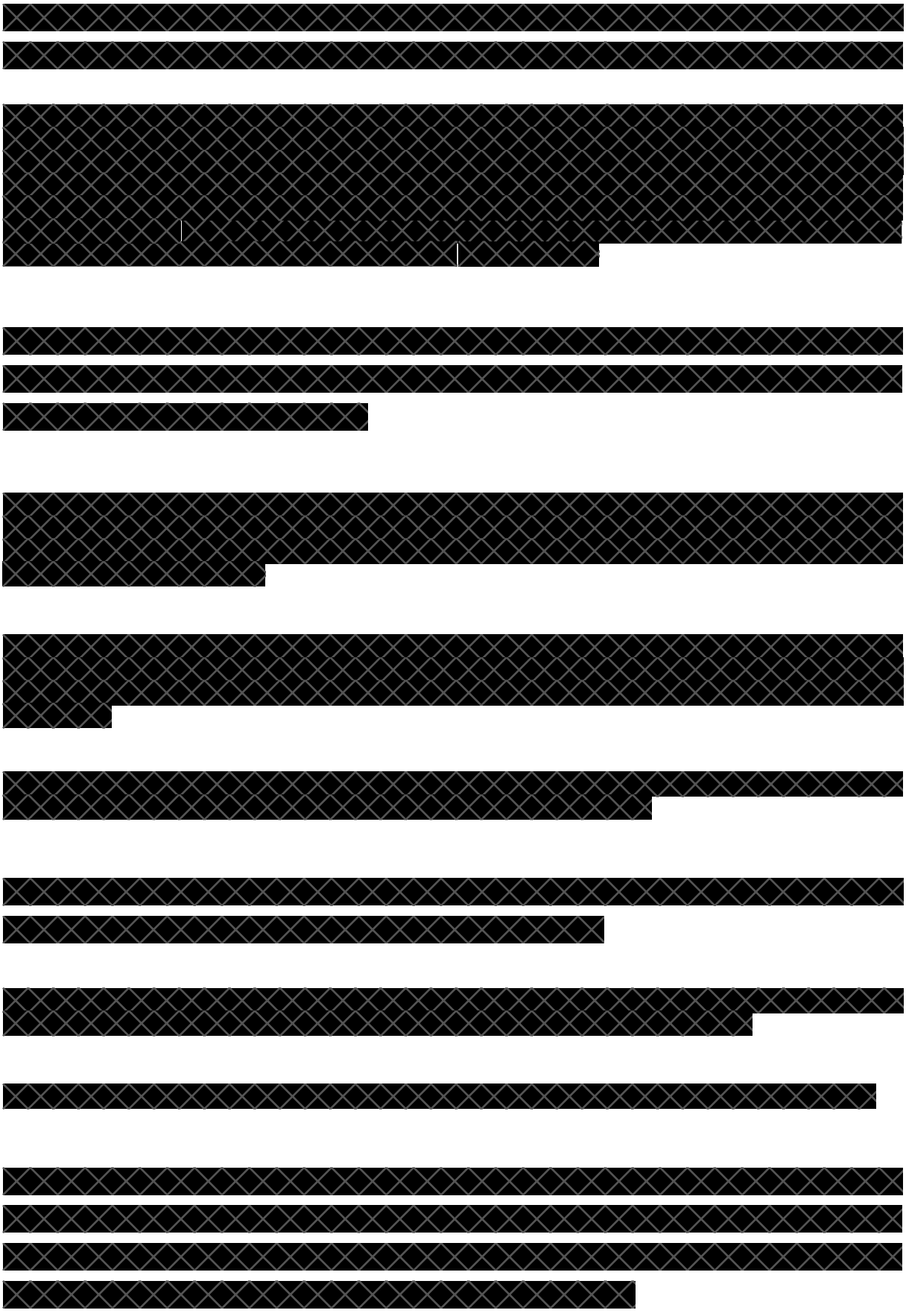
[redacted]







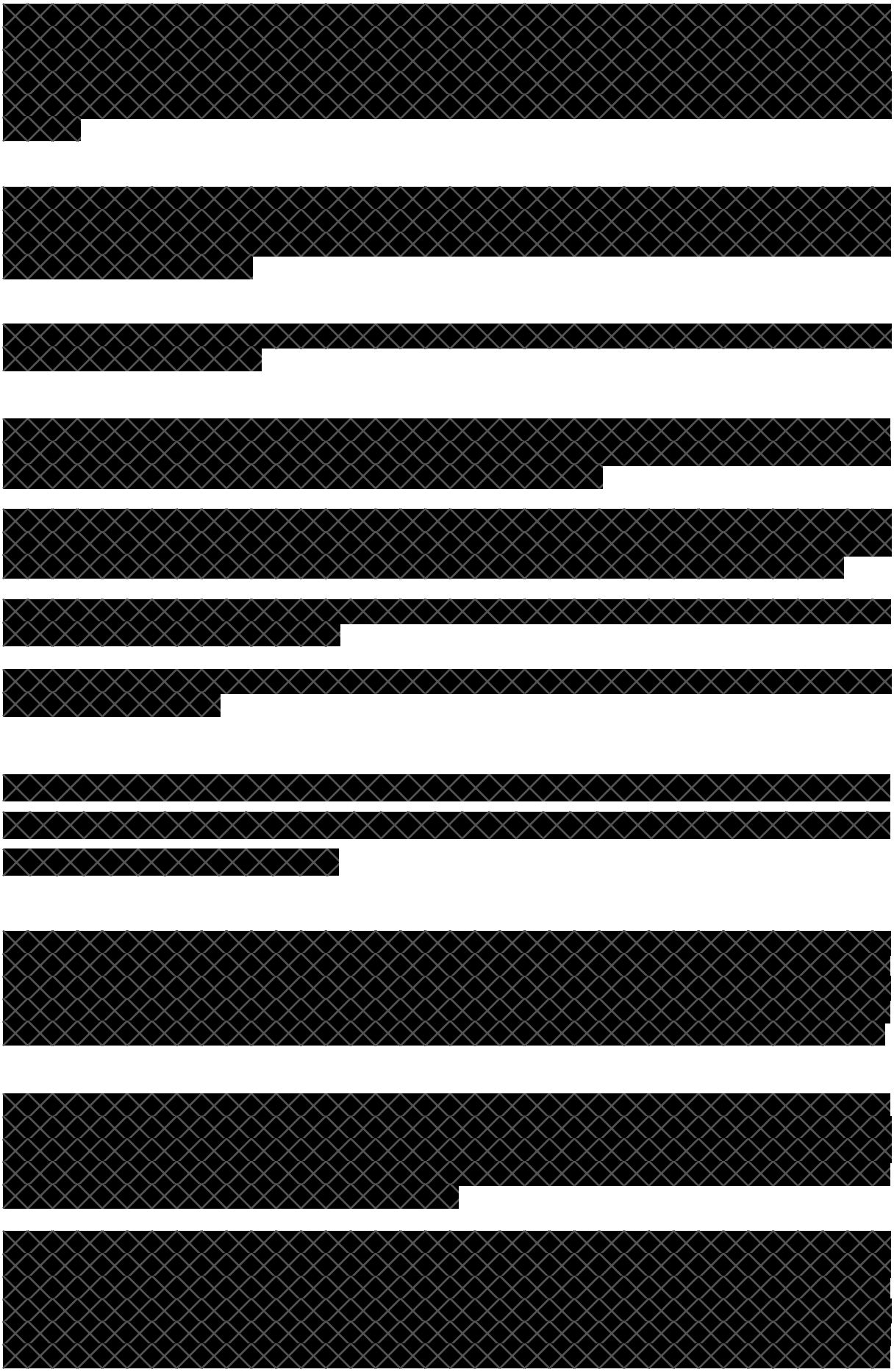
[redacted]

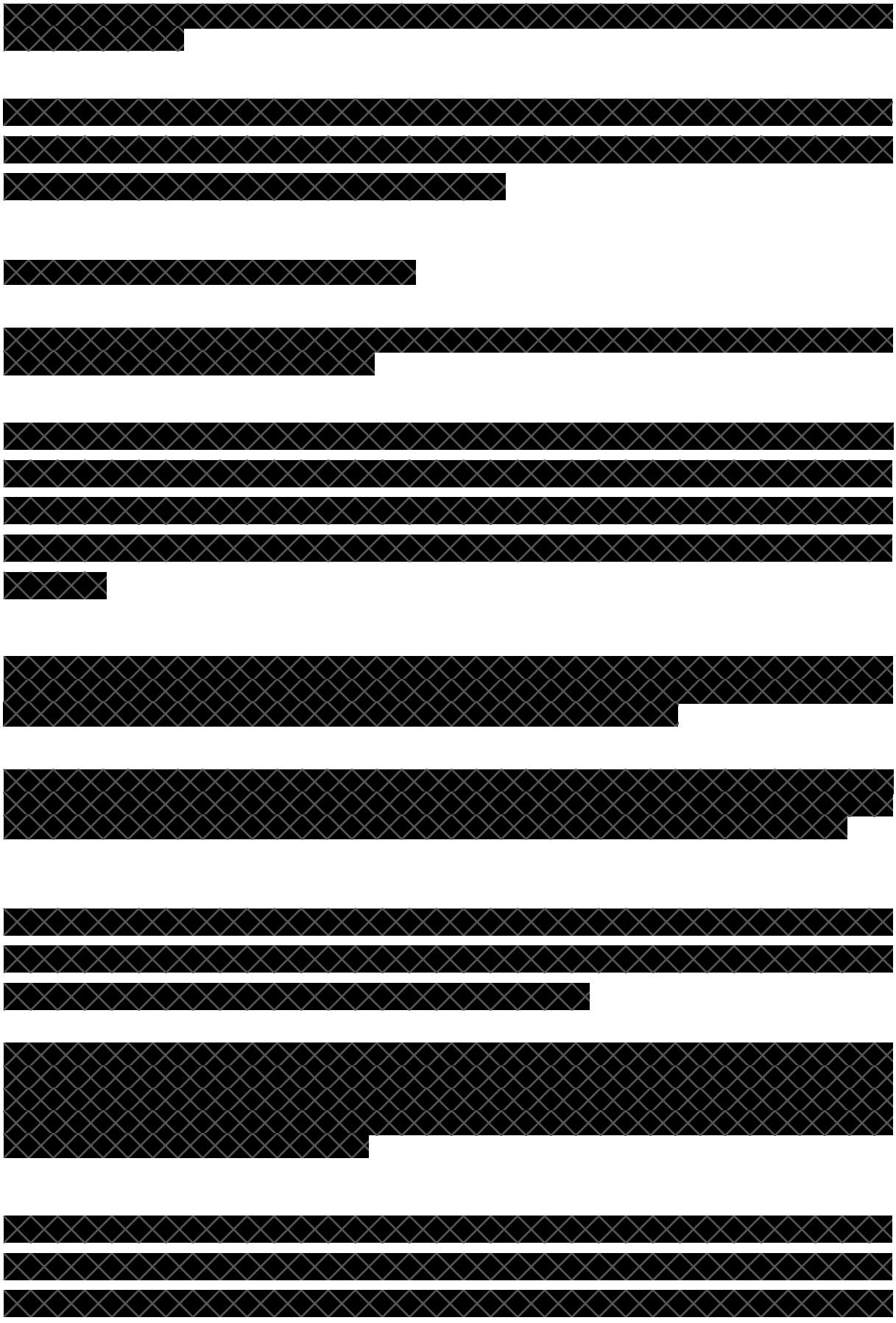


[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]





[redacted]

To bring Afërdita's narrative to a close, she understands the act of sexual violence that she experienced to be rooted in the political tension that was present between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. According to her narrative, Afërdita holds that she was vulnerable to conflict-related sexual-violence because of her race (Kosovar-Albanian) as well as her husband's role as activist and involvement with the Kosovo's Liberation Army (KLA). In her evaluation she concludes that this type of violence had a political intent and was executed as part of the ethnic cleansing mission in Kosovo. Her evaluation goes further to suggest that conflict-related violence was also used as a way of contaminating the morality of the Kosovar-Albanian females. Despite the injustice, the uncertainty, the physical, psychological and

emotional impact, the stigma in her own community, the silencing, her struggle with which parts of the experience to remember and which parts to let go of, her overall narrative is one of triumph and overcoming. As a mother it seems she didn't see herself as having a choice but to be strong for her children. Finding strength and courage in being among other women who shared similar experiences, in her family, in God, and in her determination to move forward and not to allow the "enemy" to determine how she chooses to live her life [redacted]. Her narrative goes further, to describe her hopes for a better future, one where survivors can be their authentic selves and to help one another heal.

Appendix 17: Reflexive Diary Example

Below is an entry from my reflective diary illustrating cognitive, emotional and spiritual developments throughout the research, shifts, challenges faced and decisions made:

Reflexive Diary

Initial Entry Date: Thursday 17 January 2019

Research Phase: Prior to Interviews

Recent Developments: Ethical Approval still outstanding **(Both in the U.K and in Kosovo)**

- Interviews are set to take place this summer. Amendments to the ethical application require immediate attention and will be resubmitted in the next couple of months.

Topics of Discussion:

Incorporating art in the interviews

Consideration of the manner in which interviews would be conducted and anticipating how this process might be experienced by participants and myself was something I thoroughly explored. I was of the opinion that the topic of sexual violence is in and of itself harrowing and with this in mind I felt that beginning the interviews by delving directly into this discussion could be rather harsh and unempathetic. [redacted] art work to the interviews would create a benign leeway for this sensitive topic to be explored as well as to empower participants by shifting the power dynamic between participant and researcher. [redacted]art [redacted]a gentle way to delve into more sensitive content and could also be used as an object to deflect or withdraw from the research topic and interview process, if participants felt it necessary. [redacted] Initially, I was concerned that this methodological integration would divert the focus of the research, however, I was promptly assured by Willig's (2016) findings, which indicated that object elicitation in qualitative research is a useful and enriching tool.

In preparation for the interviews, I was anxious and afraid of the anticipated nature of the topic and content that I would bear witness to, and for the first time in my research journey, I questioned my competence and capacity to continue with the investigation. Although, the overt motive for incorporating art in the interviews was to maximise ethical rigor and minimise unnecessary harm to the participants, upon reflection, perhaps subconsciously this was also to protect my own psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing. [redacted]

Ethical Approval in Kosovo

[redacted]

Update: 30/02/19

[redacted]

Why is the topic of sexual violence so uncomfortable, particularly for people in powerful position within the Kosovar social and political structures?

[redacted] Kosovo has been an independent country since 2008 yet the discussion surrounding conflict-related sexual violence was merely put on the parliament agenda for discussion in 2014. It has taken somewhat 15 years, for this matter to be centre stage in Kosovo's parliament. The scarce social, cultural and political effort to address this matter and provide appropriate reparations to survivors is beyond heart-breaking. This collective denial of sexual violence from social consciousness may further exacerbate women's psychological wellbeing, [redacted] and further silencing them.

What is my own motive and intent?

[redacted]

<u>Update: 27/05/2019 (Ethical Approval in Kosovo)</u>

[redacted]

Update: 24/06/2019 (Ethical Approval in U.K)

Following from the ethical re-submission, I have now received the green light from City, University ethical committee. [redacted]

How this experience might impact my position in the research?

- I may be more inclined to the idea that women's position in their families and communities changed drastically and in a negative way after the sexual violence.
- As a result of these experiences and culminated beliefs (as a researcher) I believe I am at risk of inadvertently placing the women in a victim role (which may have a negative connotation and not be a true reflection of their humanness as well as to capture their multifaceted nature (their qualities, their strengths, their resilience, their incredible ability to overcome adversity, their tenacity).
- I feel it is important for me to see how my eagerness to shed light on this topic and an exaggerated account of their experiences, although they may be negative, can also come across as disempowering. It is important for me to acknowledge the implications my enthusiasm can have, for example it can come across in my interpretation of the data as patronising, pitting, portraying survivors as victims and reducing them to their experiences of sexual-violence (and as such adding to the cyclical nature of the stigmatisation and marginalisation created and perpetuated by the social and political context).
- Awareness around these challenges may help me to reflect when examining the text on questions of what is being triggered and unearthed within me? And in which direction is this pulling? What do I need right now? In my interrogation of the text am I trying to heal, change, control something related to me? Answering these questions in an honest and transparent way in turn may allow me to work on my own personal needs separately from the analysis of the text and in this way allow the narratives to emerge as close in proximity as possible to how the participants would have wanted them to be received and presented in this study by me. Therefore, acknowledging a more holistic account of the participants, making room for their vulnerabilities without taking away from their strengths. Allowing identity to emerge as the participants wanted them to.
- [redacted]

[redacted] It is important then that when I am analysing the data that I am open to various narratives (perhaps some men are supportive of their /wives/daughters etc) and to understand that this issue is multifarious, thus making use of all the stage of Critical Narrative Analysis to ensure that meaning is not limited to my own beliefs.

Update: 25/03/21

In order to resolve the above challenge I have decided that it is pivotal (during the transcription, translation and analysis process) in addition to looking at narrative [redacted]tone and rhetorical function to also analyse the data structurally and pay attention to the language used by participants and its function (imagery, emphasis, non-verbal communication (gesture that may give some indication or emphasis for a certain type of meaning).

Impact

Looking at dialogical features of the text/ looking at the dynamic relationship between myself and the participants. For example, I feel like some of the interviews were more challenging for me than others. For example, I felt a real shift in the power-dynamics when interviewing Participant 3- Liria [redacted]. This interview was also the shortest interview of all (18 minutes in length). I felt Liria regressed into a childlike state in parts of the interviews especially when she was talking about the details of the sexual violence (looking down, laughing whilst talking about heinous experiences, massaging one hand in another, flushing). Perhaps, this was her way of coping with being the position of a participant who was telling me the horrors she experienced. I felt that our closeness in age and the distinction in our current realities (me being a doctoral student, privileged in my researcher position) may have played a role in the non-verbal communication as well as dialogical and structural aspects of how she used language and her narratives to convey her story. I feel that because of the sensitive nature of the topic the other elements considered above that may seem innocuous have the potential to actually change the meaning of the narratives being told and as such I will be conducting this in the analysis process.

Appendix 18: Questions for Reflexive Development

These questions were used as a guide throughout the research process. They were offered by Langdridge, D. (2007). Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method (pg. 59). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Below are a series of questions that a researcher might wish to reflect on in the context of a research project taking reflexive issues seriously:

1. Why am I carrying out this study?
2. What do I hope to achieve with this research?
3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?
    - Am I an insider or outsider?
    - Do I empathize with the participants and their experience?
4. Who am I, and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors?
5. How do I feel about the work?

    - Are there external pressures influencing the work?

6. How will my subject position influence the analysis?
7. How might the outside world influence the presentation of findings?
8. How might the findings impact on the participants?
    - Might they lead to harm and, if so, how can I justify this happening?
9. How might the findings impact on the discipline and my career in it?
    - Might they lead to personal problems, and how prepared am I to deal with these should they arise?

10. How might the findings impact on wider understandings of the topic?

- How might your colleagues respond to the research?
- What would the newspapers make of the research?
- Does the research have any implications for future funding (of similar research and/or related organizations)?
- What political implications might arise as a result of the research?

Appendix 19: Reflexivity: Art Odyssey

Use of Self

By virtue of my role and status as an individual and researcher, I had the potential to impact and contribute to the present research investigation (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007; 2009). As such, I was mindful of my own intra-psychic and inter-personal material, in addition to the rotations of transference and countertransference that may have been at work during the process of collecting and analysing data. Mann (1991) explains that we are incapable of experiencing ourselves directly and in the same way that others experience us. This challenged me to think deeply about how my British Kosovar-Albanian identity and personal experiences of political-conflict may have restricted my ability to perceive participants as they were. Perhaps, I saw my participants through the lens of my own experiences of political-conflict, discrimination, violence, torture and loss. The aspiration for this research topic may have been an unconscious desire to resolve personal trauma and to attain some form of justice for the crimes committed against me, my family and the Kosovar-Albanian population.

This led to the culmination of anger and humiliation, which may have impacted how I interpreted the text. Perhaps, in that heightened state, I was eager to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable, because I didn't get the chance to do this in my own narrative, (for instance my brother's death came as a direct result of chemical poisoning by Serb forces, my cousin Nita's death, my mother's illnesses following the poisoning, other forms of violence, beatings, killings of other family members, all went unrecognised and the perpetrators were never brought to justice), thus doing this vicariously through my participants, whether it be those who carried out the acts of sexual violence or those thereafter who did not support the survivors. In my reflections it became clear to me that I was trying to be the "Perfect researcher" by unconsciously stepping into the role of a rescuer, perhaps as a way of giving survivors what I may have needed; *a voice.* Through personal therapy, I came to realise that the narrators in this study already had a *voice*, and by implying that I was giving them a voice, I was subsequently disempowering them. I was also mindful about the dialogical features of the interview process such as tone, emphasis and dialect as well as the non-verbal communication that I may have conveyed on a subconscious level, encouraging certain narratives and perhaps restricting others (Riessman, 2008).

As such, when investigating conflict-related sexual violence, I worked from a feminist perspective. In the present study the perpetrators of sexual violence in political conflict were identified as men, I anticipated that this would be the case from the onset. This assumption derived from my growing knowledge on the subject, previous research in the field and clinical experiences I accumulated throughout my doctoral training whilst working in various gender-based violence clinics. This may

have warranted me the position of a "Connected knower", which according to Gilgun (2008) is "A person who uses the self – emotions, cognitions, memories, and personal experience – as a strategy for understanding" (p. 184). As such, my view on men who committed these heinous crimes was ultimately shaped by my personal and professional experiences. When conducting this research, it was my assumption that men's views and understanding of women were formed within and influenced by the social, cultural and political structures to which they belonged, and that they drew from these structures to either justify sexual violence or to make sense of it.

Reflexivity was thus a fundamental part of this research endeavour. I remained open and explicit in my research journey and addressed how my own world views may influence what I detected or what I did not in the data and utilised personal therapy and supervision accordingly. I also considered that my endeavour to obtain self-knowledge through reflexivity may not have been exclusively limited to altruism but rather a predisposition to obtain power and influence over my physical, psychological and emotional landscape, as a way of coping with the unpredictability's of everyday life. To maintain the integrity of the reflexivity process, I continuously turned to Langdridge's (2007) reflective questions (See Appendix 18), which helped me to detangle my own material from that of the participants.

Art Odyssey

To incorporate my own art in this research study was originally set out to be a medium through which I hoped to channel historical and vicarious trauma hauled from the interviews. It was my intention that this activity be kept separate from the analysis process, however, as I proceeded with the research, I noticed in my reflective entries that the creative process as well as the completed paintings had a much more profound impact on the analysis than I initially anticipated. Below, I highlighted the impact of the interviews on the creative work as well as the ways in which the creative process impacted on me and subsequently on the analysis.

"To find the images which were concealed in the emotions - I was inwardly calmed and reassured. Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn to pieces by them." – ***Carl Jung***

Art is considered an object that transcends in some pronounced manner its pragmatic purpose, which generally embodies treasured cultural values and principles (Stokstad & Cothren, 2011). For me the creative process was born out of a desire to express inner chaos (Emunah, 1990), as such, art was an intimate and cathartic tool, where words did not suffice to describe an emotion or thought, colours much the same as narratives, began to tell a story on the canvas. Creative work is known to activate the right hemisphere of the brain germinating mental stimulation and creating a leeway through which one can safely express repressed trauma (Oliverio & Maldonato, 2014). Throughout this process, I often felt

myself regress into a childlike state, where I became stagnant and unable to fully articulate myself, at these critical junctures in the research process art equipped me with the communication tools that I needed to be able to process, give voice to and heal from my own personal traumas (Linehan,1996).

In much the same way as Carl Jung, who held a phenomenological perspective on art, I too recognised that art is inherently psychological, and in this study, I gave emphasis to the psychic implications of art over its aesthetic features (Laganà, 2007), though these too held emblematic relevance. When contemplating the three paintings for this research, Van Gennep's concept of liminality (as cited in Haring, Sorin & Caltabiano, 2020), resonated with me. This ritual is described as having three transitional stages: separation from society, the liminal stage, and finally the stage of reintegration into society, with change or transformation occurring during the liminal stage (Turner, 1974). In a similar way the paintings exhibited below emerged in three transitional stages, at each stage capturing a snapshot of my own intra-psychic experience in relation to the research. I deliberate more extensively on each stage below.

Painting One: Woman in Flames (Separation from Society)

Emblematised in the painting above is my experience of the initial stages of the research journey. [redacted] I also considered whether "Survivors feel ostracised by their communities and political structures?" and if so, "Have they felt disconnected from their communities?". I then went on to deliberate on "Whether there was a subsequent impact on their intra-psychic and inter-personal dynamics?".

[redacted] According to art experts such a Weyl (1952) who coined the concept of monograph symmetry, human beings transmit their innate desire for order through artistic virtuosity, especially in response to permeating chaos and disruption in their lives (Fang, Kotz & Ng, 2018). With this in mind, all three paintings exhibited here are balanced in symmetrical order, I believe this was my unconscious attempt to seek order, control, and regularity amidst the emotional and physical turbulence that I encountered during the initial stages of the research (McManus, 2005). A similar theme followed in all participants' paintings that were brought to the interviews and I was intrigued by the resemblance between Afërdita's painting and the painting exhibited above. Both were self-portraits exhibiting the determination, passion, courage and strength to stand tall and strong in the face of adversity. Further to this, in the painting above, I presented the polarities of the human experience, for instance the contrast between the black and white background symbolising life and death, health and illness, and femininity (softness) and masculinity (raging fire). I believe that by externalising the inner inferno, I began to reclaim my own strength: a symbol of catharsis. The endeavour to balance these polarities may be situated at the core of my humanness and effort to comprehend my position in the cosmos (Miller & Baldwin Jr, 2013). All of which, inspired me to shift into various aspects of my identity (A white, 34-year-old, British Kosovar-Albanian, heterosexual, woman, spiritually inclined (non-religious), research practitioner and trainee counselling psychologist, residing in the UK) during the analysis process and to look at the text from each lens to illuminate a more holistic understanding of the narratives.

Painting Two: Restoration (Liminal Stage)

This painting unveiled my experience of the interviewing procedure. I refer to this part of my reflexivity as the uncovering of the self and emergence of authenticity. Bearing witness to the horrors described in women's narratives was a stomach-churning and nauseating experience. One that challenged me to question our collective humanity and our capacity for destruction. I felt vulnerable, depressed, disconnected from myself and others and experienced nightmares related to war, conflict and sexual violence. These nightmares were physically, psychologically and emotionally exhausting. At this stage, I wanted to disconnect from the text completely and felt an urge to *discard* my participants, perhaps in a similar way that others had, but instantly, I was overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and began questioning my own morality "Am I a good person? Why am I feeling this way?". At this time, I began to wonder about this internal chaos, and how much of it belonged to me and how much was being channelled through me from the participants stories. Through this painting, I depicted the transference and counter transference that I may have embodied from the interviews, thus exhibited here may be a reflection of participant's feelings of isolation, physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion as a result of their experiences of conflict-related sexual violence as well as their appeals to be seen and heard.

If we turn now to the aesthetic features of the painting, artistically, a circle is emblematic for wholeness and in the Hindu tradition represents the eternal creation and destruction of the cosmos (Laganà, 2007).

The moon in this painting, may thus be seen to represent the death of the old-self and birth of an evolved-self. Here, I drew inspiration from Carl Jung and his description of the ouroboros, which he described as the serpent that eats and recreates itself (Dunne, 2015). Just like the serpent, the naked body, as depicted here, symbolises the shedding of an old self, the letting go of everything that does not belong to me, including; cultural ideologues and inter-generational trauma's. Instead, by going back to the source, in this case the universe, I underwent a healing period, and learned to embrace a new restored self. I believe that by confronting my own personal history, heritage and trauma's, I was able to heal old wounds. Indeed, this was aligned with women's narratives, especially in the latter stages of the interviews where they described a deep yearning to break their prolonged silence and step into a more empowered self.

According to McManus (2005) the body is the centralised hub of the human identity, in women's narratives, in the aftermath of sexual violence, a disordered relationship between the women and their bodies was depicted. This was inextricably linked to the ways in which, the female body became an extension of the battle field during the Kosovar war. As such, the dominant cultural rhetoric held that women's bodies were poisoned, contaminated, ruined, occupied and made impure by the perpetrators. In this way, women's humanity was thought to have been compromised. Within the confines of the patriarchal structure that sustains cultural order in Kosovo, a women's purity was determined by her sexual activity, which directly impacted the honour of the family. In this way, women are often regarded as an extension of their family members and not as idiosyncratic individuals having a unique human experience here on earth. Women's contamination was seen to be synonymous with the contamination of their families and communities. These dominant cultural narratives were then internalised by women, which directly influenced how they saw themselves, most notably, in a negative light. In most part, women's experiences of sexual violence remained hidden and ridden with shame and the blame was more often than not, placed on the female survivors rather than the male perpetrators. In my own experience of the dominant cultural narratives and gender power structures in Kosovo, though, on a much smaller scale and not related to sexual violence [redacted] I have witnessed myself and other women in my family and community suffer this form of scrutiny and discrimination. Especially, pertaining to life decision that are not in harmony with the traditional expectations for a woman, for instance, [redacted] to be assertive, [redacted], and to fight cultural injustices. In this painting, a strong female identity is depicted and was, in part, a protest against these orthodox ideologies.This painting bore some symbolic resemblance to Shqiponja's painting, which depicted a woman who, in a river under the moon light, attended to her injuries of sexual violence and in this way, sought to empower and re-create herself. Though, I did not experience conflict-related sexual violence myself, I wondered whether as Kosovar-Albanian women we have felt a shared sense of shame in our experience of being stained in various ways by our own communities, and through the creative process we attempted to wash away these impurities. Perhaps, we turned to nature

(universe/mountains/fields/lakes) as a source of psychic nourishment and reclamation of our own power and agency.

Painting Three: Wholeness (Coming Back to Society)

In maturation from the liminal stage, this painting depicted the final phase of the research, which was referred to as the reintegration of self in to society (Haring, Sorin & Caltabiano, 2020). Here, you can see the weaving of my ancient Kosovar-Albanian heritage together with my identity as a British woman, as well as, the elements of an evolved future self (counselling psychologist) and a sense of integration and belongingness in all aspects of this identity. Entering a process Jung (1959) called 'Individuation' of becoming a single homogenous being, which is the central aim of psychic wholeness (unifying the consciousness and unconscious) and healing from past trauma (Laganà, 2007). The interviews in this research offered a rich endowed context in which primordial and collective memories and narratives

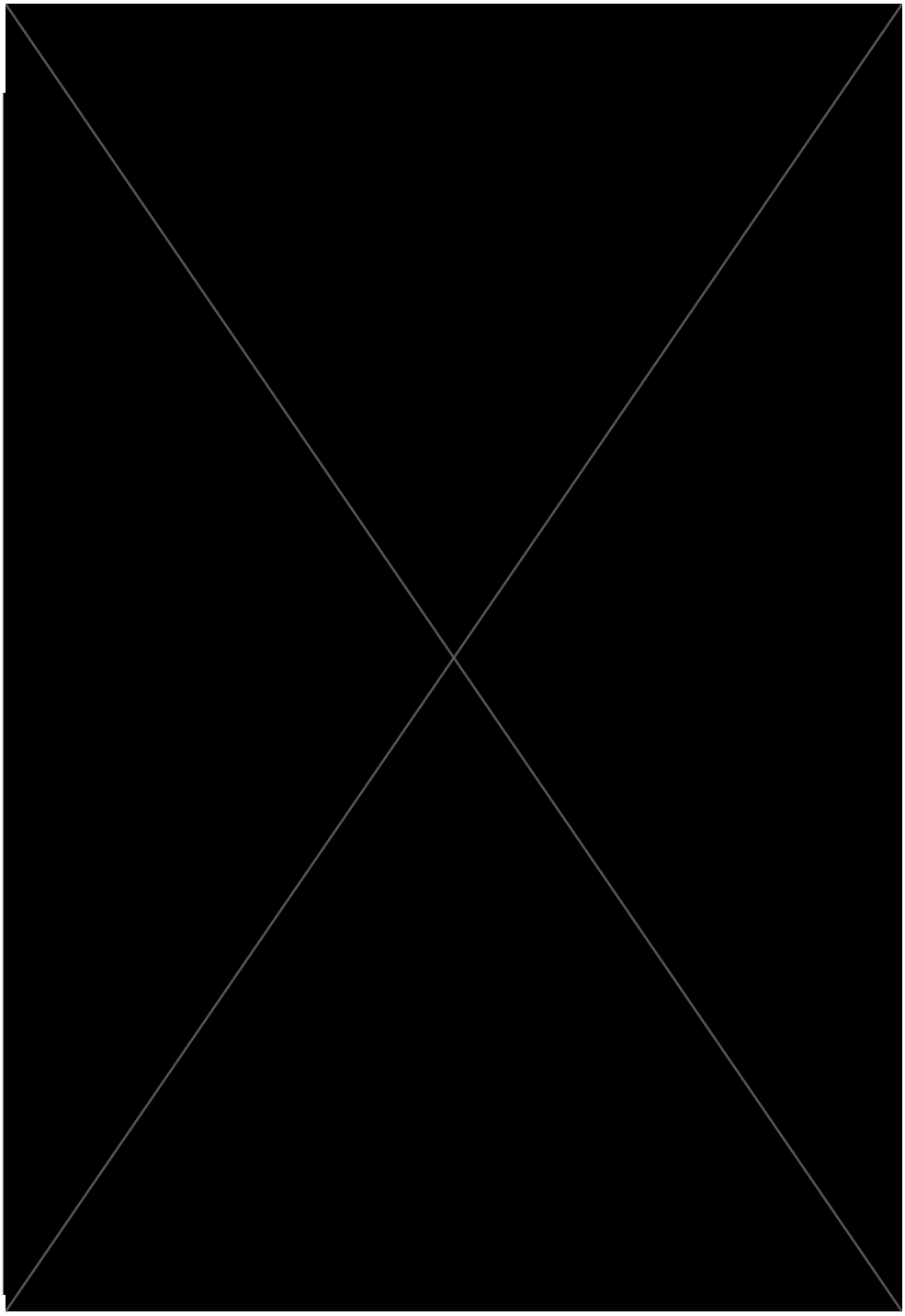
could manifest and redress transpire (Woodcock, 2001). By entering and exploring the labyrinth of horror and barbarity that comprised sexual violence, women were initially confronted with an atavistic fear. Though, it was evident to me that by taking part in this study and in the process of making the latent content of their narratives clear women accessed their ability to heal. By talking about their experiences of the rapes, the women were able to integrate deep-seated feelings, which had previously been negated into more meaningful, all embracing, personal, social and cultural order and understanding of what happened to them. In the later stages of the interviews, women's narratives underwent a transformative process, whereby women explicitly expressed a desire to seek justice, to be heard, to actively contribute towards social change and to tackle the existing stigma within their communities. Despite the ill treatment that most women received from their own families and communities, this did not deter them from embracing their culture, traditions and their national identities, instead it seemed to have revived their strength to make positive changes. In the same way, the creative work for me was not merely exoticism, but rather a leeway which helped me to affirm my inner world and consolidated me with something beyond myself. [redacted] In this painting, I honoured all seven participants by placing seven golden emblems across the Albanian traditional hair-dress.

Appendix 20: Ethical Approval in the U.K

Ethics ETH1819-0257: Miss Shpresa Vitija (Medium risk)

Date Created	23 Oct 2018
Date Submitted	08 Nov 2018
Date of last resubmission	16 Jun 2019
Date forwarded to committee	24 Jun 2019
Date of committee meeting	09 Jan 2019
Academic Staff	Miss Shpresa Vitija
Student ID	[redacted]
Category	Doctoral Researcher
Supervisor	Dr Mariam Tarik
Project	Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Narratives from a small group of Kosovar-Albanian Females in Kosovo
School	School of Arts and Social Sciences
Department	Psychology
Current status	Approved after amendments made

Appendix 21: Ethical Approval in Kosovo



PART TWO: Clinical Case Study

"Looking at myself in the mirror, I now see hope": Exploring and confronting childhood trauma, sexual violence and identity using Cognitive Analytic Therapy.

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Professional Doctorate of Counselling Psychology

City, University London

Department of Psychology

PART THREE: Empirical Article

Elsevier - Women's Studies International Forum

-Intend to submit-

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Professional Doctorate of Counselling Psychology

City, University London

Department of Psychology

Prefix

This empirical article is a concise review of the data retrieved from the doctoral thesis with intent for submission to the Elsevier, Women's Studies International Forum. The aim of this article, to bring to the forefront gender-issues in armed conflict and human rights violations, was well aligned with the Women's Studies International Forum priorities, which focus on contributing nuance knowledge to understanding women's lived subjective experiences relative to psychological, historical, social, cultural and political context. It is through this kind of psychological research, that we in the helping profession are able to shed light on injustices, advocate for disenfranchised groups of people, create a platform to have their voices heard, as well as to contribute meaningfully to more refine psychological treatments and clinical praxis. The article presented herein, is set forth utilising the journals appropriate format as stipulated in the author guidelines for manuscripts (Elsevier, n.d.).

City, University of London

Rape as a weapon of war: The dehumanisation of Kosovar-Albanian women, families and nation.

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Abstract

Rape has been utilised systematically in contemporary armed conflicts to administer maximal physical, psychological, cultural and social harm. These atrocities and human rights infringements have only recently evoked an imperative global discussion. This qualitative investigation centres around how Kosovar-Albanian females construct and make sense of their experiences of sexual violence circa 20 years post war Kosovo. This study has a particular interest in how various forms of identity are negotiated in light of survivor's experiences and the impact of their experiences on their intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships within a socio-political and cultural context. This research presents phenomenological data gathered in Kosovo among survivors of rape and sexual violence and the study methods included a critical narrative analysis of 7 semi-structured interviews.

The data yielded from this research was explored through a multivariant theoretical lens, which included aspects of feminism, psychology, sociology, and politics. The findings from this psychological investigation indicated that systemic use of rape and sexual violence in war or political conflict harmed the physical and psychological existence of Kosovar-Albanian women, seriously damaging intra-psychic and inter-personal relationships and compromising personal and collective identity. It was concluded that sexual violence against women acquires a symbolic meaning and should be examined within the context of the body politics and gender systems. The discoveries made by this research investigation evoked further discussion regarding social and political implications for the realm of Counselling Psychology in the West and our moral obligations to humanity at large. In addition to contributions towards therapeutic theory and practice, and developments for future investigations.

Keywords: Rape, Sexual Violence, War, Political Conflict, Kosovo, Ethnic-cleansing, Kosovar-Albanian women, National and ethnic Identity

Introduction

Rape has pulsated at the heart of war and conflict since the beginning of time (Zaleski, 2018). In her work termed *"Men, women and rape*", Brownmiller (1975) asserts that rape has perpetually coexisted with wars of religion and revolution, more notably, it has been utilised as a weapon of war for terror and revenge, and even as a palliative treatment for lethargy. In an anthropological analysis, Dr. Margaret Mead, as covered in (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 606), inquired about primitive societies such as the Plains Indian culture and their understanding of the function of rape. This revealed that in the historical memory of many dislocated societies "A bad woman was fair game for any man" and *a bad woman* was defined as a woman who lacked male conservancy or "A woman who was quarrelsome and vituperative" as appose to the traditional standards that necessitated women to be docile and submissive, thus further solidifying the notion that perceived rape as "A great adventure" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 606-607).

Sexual violence and war and/or political conflicts are historically, politically and mythologically analogous, and provide the context which enables the manifestation of barbarism and abuse of power to proliferate (Skjelsbæk, 2012). In this way, rape has been used as a metaphor for political developments. Take for instance, Japan's mammoth and unbridled military attack on Nanking following the 1937 invasion of Shanghai, which is frequently noted as the *Rape of Nanking*, and the horrors of which have seldom been replicated in the history of mankind (Chang, 1991). Nexus to the mass extermination of Chinese civilians was also the raping of women (Skjelsbæk, 2012, p. 48; Enloe, 2000). As described in Chang (1991, p. 86) Takokoro Kozo, a former Japanese soldier in Nanking explained that "Women suffered most […] No matter how young or old, they all could not escape the fate of being raped".[1]

In recent decades an estimated 51 countries in both developed and developing nations have been affected by conflict-related sexual violence (Bastick, Grimm, & Kunz, 2007). According to Heineman (2011) a partial approximation includes 50,000 rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 250,000 crimes of sexual violence in the wars that plagued Sierra Leone in the 1990s, as well as up to 500,000 rapes in the Rwandan genocide. Atrocities and reports of rape in ongoing conflicts in Sudan (Luedke & Logan, 2018), Uganda (Kinyanda et al., 2010), and The Congo (Banwell, 2014) that subsequently consigned renewed attention to this antiquated issue: conflict-related sexual violence.
On account of the perennial and immense atrocities of sexual violence in the former-Yugoslavia and Rwandan the international community was compelled to participate in the formation and development

1 Despite the objections appealed by Western nations, the Japanese government, instead of claiming responsibility for human rights violations and exercising appropriate judicatory measures in prosecuting its perpetrators, made allowance for an even more horrific endeavour, an underground structure of military prostitution otherwise known as stations for sexual comfort to transpire, one that would alternatively reward soldiers for their contribution to the battlefield (Chang, 1991). Thus, in this way, bypassing international scrutiny. This implicated, hundreds of thousands of purchased or kidnapped women across Asia, which came to be known by the highly controversial term "Comfort women" (Qiu & Zhiliang & Lifei, 2014).