

Albanian Women in Kosovo in 1989-1990: Difficulties in Obtaining Employment and Political and Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

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Abstract

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Albanian women in Kosovo faced difficult political circumstances, which impacted their employment. Analysing relevant sources and focusing on women employment data, this paper aims to elaborate the main challenges and difficulties encountered by Albanian women of Kosovo related to work: employment challenges in circumstances of a very low employment rate among the Albanian population in Kosovo; workplace discrimination during a deteriorating political situation from 1989 on; mass layoffs resulting in many women losing their jobs and consequently losing not only their income, but also all their employment benefits; and the involvement of some of them in a parallel system. In addition, the paper provides information on the circumstances in which women were qualified and started careers, some of which have been pursued to this day. Despite all the barriers, a significant number of Albanian women strove to obtain professional qualifications and employment. After the mass layoffs, some of these women were involved in a parallel system or in businesses working in tough circumstances.

Keywords: women, Kosovo, employment, human rights, parallel system.

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, and especially since the 1960s and the beginning of the second wave of feminism, the number of working women has increased dramatically on a global level, particularly in industrial societies. The increased participation of women in the labour market is considered to be one of the greatest post-war social changes.¹ The

¹ Stichter, Sharon. 1990. *Women, employment and the family: Current debates*, in *Women, employment and the family in the international division of labour*, edited by Stichter, Sharon and Jane L. Parpart. The Macmillan Press LTD:

women's employment rate and employment patterns in different countries of the world mainly depended on economic and household factors, such as domestic work, fertility, decision-making, structure, etc.² The second wave of feminism influenced Yugoslavia as well. The feminist movement emerged there in the early 1970s as a protest and a demand to the socialist state to fulfil its promises related to the equality of women.³

Albanian women in Kosovo were impacted by the movement as well. Their efforts to obtain employment and get integrated are elaborated in the first part of the paper, which provides statistical data indicating the difficulties they encountered in entering the labour force. In particular, it examines discrimination against women on grounds of political and ethnic affiliation and gender. Even the women who managed to get a job faced significant challenges and difficulties in the workplace, especially after the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy status, which will be covered in the second part of the paper. The third part focuses on the mass layoffs of the Albanian population in Kosovo, affecting working women, completely changing their position in society and their financial situation and leaving many of them jobless. The final part of the paper sheds light on the involvement of Albanian women in parallel institutions or in private businesses in Kosovo after the mass layoffs, their distinguished public role, and various challenges and difficulties during their work in the new political and social circumstances. The paper covers the years 1989 and 1990 that radically changed the lives of Albanian working women. They experienced a major transition from living and working in Yugoslavia's socialist regime, where they were discriminated against mostly because they were Albanian, to living and working within a parallel system, also described below, where they would actively participate in all the processes leading towards the country's liberation.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s in Kosovo, political factors played a dominant role in the employment rate of women. Political developments in Kosovo during 1989-1990 resulted in not only discriminatory government policies towards the Albanian population but also human rights violations. The meeting of the Provincial Assembly of Kosovo on 23 March 1989 and the session of the Serbian Assembly in Belgrade on 28 March 1989, which, in fact, abolished the autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo⁴, would be followed by demonstrations and protests of Albanians and their arrests, killings and harassment by the police. From June 1990 on, Serbia took radical "provisional measures", which became permanent and included the dismissal of thousands of Kosovo Albanian citizens, the closure of the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts, cultural and other public institutions or, in some cases, their affiliation with relevant Serbian institutions.⁵ As a response to these measures, on 2 July 1990, the Assembly of Kosovo solemnly proclaimed "The Constitutional Declaration on Kosovo as an Independent and Equal Entity within the Federation (Confederation) of

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & London, 11-71, 11. See also introduction of same book, 1; Tilly, Lousie A. and Joan W. Scott. 1989. *Women, work, and family*. New York & London: Routledge, 214-5, 229.

² Stichter, *Women, employment and the family*, 11-12, 62.

³ Lóránd, Zsófia. 2018. *The feminist challenge to the socialist state in Yugoslavia*. Basingstokes: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-3, 223-224.

⁴ The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was made up of six republics and two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina).

⁵ Malcolm, Noel. 1998. *Kosovo: A short history*. London: Macmillan, 344-346; Independent International Commission in Kosovo. 2000. *The Kosovo report: Conflict, response, lessons learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 41-42; Judah, Tim. 2002. *Kosova: Luftë dhe Hakmarrje*. Prishtinë: KOHA & Tiranë: SHLK, 87-91; Shmitt, Oliver Jens. 2012. *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër e një Treve Qendrore Ballkanike*. Prishtinë: KOHA, 242-245; Vickers, Miranda. 2004. *Midis Serbëve dhe Shqiptarëve: Një histori e Kosovës*. Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 286.

Yugoslavia and an Equal Subject with Other Units of the Federation (Confederation).⁶ This was followed by the dissolution of the Assembly and the Government of Kosovo by Serbia and the dismissal of more than 80,000 Albanian employees pursuant to the Labour Relations Act in Kosovo.⁷ There are also other data concerning the number of dismissed employees. For example, according to the data of the Kosovo Albanian Association of Trade Unions, 115,000 out of 170,000 Albanians were dismissed from the public sector.⁸

Even before 1989, the Yugoslav state did not do much for the emancipation of Albanian women, especially in the villages, where it barely made any attempt to improve the position of women in society. Despite political and social difficulties, such as the patriarchal Albanian family in some cases, Albanian women managed to overcome barriers and integrate into the labour market, particularly in the cities. This was especially the case after the 1974 Yugoslav constitutional amendments.⁹ As in other countries, women's employment had a major impact on household restructuring and a change in the lifestyle of families,¹⁰ including an increase in the disposable income of families and the participation of women in family decision-making.

Difficulties Encountered by Albanian Women in Entering the Job Market

In socialist regimes, the massive integration of the population into the labour market had a positive impact in terms of a higher employment rate of women. States needed to include women in the labour force, and this encouraged the promotion of women's rights.¹¹ In post-war Yugoslavia, industrialisation offered opportunities for the employment of all, including women. Their work, mainly in factories, brought economic and other work benefits such as cheap housing, healthcare, etc.¹² The inclusion of women in the economy of Kosovo began during the 1950s, mainly in light industry. Their number was quite low due to poor economic development and prevailing traditional views. Gradually, however, with an increasing level of education and rural-urban migrations, the number of working women rose as well.¹³ However, this was not satisfactory since the issue of employment of the Albanian population of both genders was quite challenging in Kosovo, and unemployment was an obvious phenomenon even before the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy.

Looking back to the 1970s, although Kosovo experienced slight economic growth, it nevertheless remained the most underdeveloped entity of Yugoslavia,¹⁴ and unemployment was prevalent, especially in rural areas. Half of the Albanian public sector employees came

⁶ Agjensia Shtetërore e Arkivave të Kosovës (hereinafter: ASHAK), Koleksion, Deklarata Kushtetuese e KAK, 1990. *Koleksion, Deklarata Kushtetuese e KAK*, Vol. I.

⁷ Malcolm. *Kosovo*, 346-347; Judah, *Kosova: Luftë dhe Hakmarrje*, 91; Vickers, *Midis Serbëve dhe Shqiptarëve*, 297-298.

⁸ Independent International Commission in Kosovo, *The Kosovo report*, 42.

⁹ Schmitt, *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër*, 214-15.

¹⁰ Rubery, Jill, Mark Smith and Colette Fagan. 2003. *Women's employment in Europe: Trends and prospects*. London & New York: Routledge, 13.

¹¹ Verdery, Katherine. 1996. *What was socialism and what comes next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 64.

¹² Bonfiglioli, Chiara. 2020. *Women and industry in the Balkans: The rise and fall of the Yugoslav textile sector*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 3.

¹³ Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës. 2011. *Kosova: Vështrim Monografik*. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 161-162.

¹⁴ Ströhle, Isabel. 2016. *Of social inequalities in a socialist society: The creation of a rural underclass in Yugoslav Kosovo*, in *Social inequalities and discontent in Yugoslav socialism*, edited by Archer, Rory / Duda, Igor and Paul Stubbs. London & New York: Routledge, 112-131, 119-121; *lessons learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Islami, Hivzi. 2008. Studime demografike: 100 vjet të zhvillimit demografik të Kosovës, (Botimi i dytë i plotësuar). Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 211.

from the cities of Prishtina and Mitrovica, which depicts the large disparity in employment between urban and rural areas.¹⁵ Social and economic differences between urban and rural areas in general also affected the position of women in society, confining them to the household in rural areas, whereas urban women had more opportunities for employment.¹⁶

Prishtina, as the capital and administrative centre and Mitrovica, as the industrial and mining centre, offered opportunities for education, professional advancement and employment in various economic and non-economic sectors. Similar opportunities were offered in other cities of Kosovo with industrial potential, such as Peja, Prizren and Gjakova. Women benefited in all of them in terms of employment, education and family well-being. On the other hand, in Kosovo's rural areas, there was hardly any industrial and economic development and vacancies were mostly filled by men. Many villages lacked proper road and communication infrastructure, which made it very difficult or impossible for women to commute to the cities to work. In addition, rural areas lacked high schools, some even primary schools. Therefore, it was very difficult for young women to receive an education and advance professionally. As a consequence of difficult economic conditions, parents could not afford to educate all their children and, in many cases, educated only their sons. Due to these factors, women in rural areas differed from those in urban areas in all aspects of life. However, even within the cities, there were differences in women's social and economic status.

Whereas in 1971, 18.6% of the working-age population was unemployed, in 1981, unemployment increased to 27.5%.¹⁷ In 1981, an average of 433 persons were employed per 1,000 working-age residents of Yugoslavia, whereas the average in Kosovo was 234 persons.¹⁸ Unemployment persisted during the 1980s. In 1988, there was a significant difference in the unemployment rate in Yugoslavia as a whole (14.2%) and in Kosovo (36.3%).¹⁹ Underdevelopment and unemployment were the result of Yugoslav discriminatory economic policies against Kosovo, including a constant lack of investments. During the 1945-1990 period, investments in Kosovo accounted for only about 3% of total federal investment.²⁰ Discriminatory employment policies affected Albanian women in particular. Since their household and families took up a lot of their time, as a rule, men had priority in employment, and the few vacancies that existed were first filled by men.

In 1989, there were more than 60,000 families in Kosovo, most of them Albanian, with no employed family member.²¹ According to the data of the Self-Governing Community of Interest (*Bashkësia Vetëqeverisë e Interesit*, hereinafter: BVI) of Employment published in the daily Rilindja in 1989, the number of employed in the capital of Kosovo Prishtina decreased as compared to the previous year. Consequently, women were affected by this general reduction in the number of employed. A total of 921 women (of all nationalities) were

¹⁵ Ströhle, *Of social inequalities*, 119-121.

¹⁶ Mujika Chao, Itziar. 2020. Women's activism in the civil resistance movement in Kosovo (1989-1997): Characteristics, development, encounters. *Nationalities Papers* 48(5), 843-860, 845.

¹⁷ Vickers, *Midis Serbëve dhe shqiptarëve*, 231; Detrez, Raymond. 2004. *Kosova: Luftë e Shtyrë*. Tirana: Skanderbeg Books, 66.

¹⁸ Krasniqi, Memli Sh. 2021. *Kosova (1981-1989): Fillimi i Shpërbërjes së RSF të Jugosllavisë*. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 143-44.

¹⁹ Clark, Howard. 2000. *Civil resistance in Kosovo*. London, Sterling & Virginia: Pluto Press, 216.

²⁰ Verli, Marenglen. 2000. *Ekonomia e Kosovës në vargonjtë e politikës jugosllave 1945-1990*. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 370.

²¹ Krasniqi, Mark. 1990. *Roli i traditës në vetëdijen Reproductive ndër shqiptarët dhe mundësia e transformimit të saj*, in *Gjurmime Albanologjike: Folklor dhe etnologji*, 19-1989. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 86-87.

employed, 14% less than the previous year.²² Unlike Kosovo, in most European countries, the women's employment rate increased during the 1980s and in the early 1990s.²³

Since few Albanians were employed in the public sector, they focused more on other economic activities such as agriculture, family businesses and trade. Women contributed significantly to these sectors. An important source of income was also emigrants' money since incomes earned in other European countries were mainly sent to families in Kosovo.²⁴

In terms of employment, Albanian women were highly discriminated against on the grounds of ethnic affiliation. In Kosovo, Serbs were in a better position than Albanians with respect to employment.²⁵ According to a 1989 Kosovo statistical publication referring to the status in 1988, 69.3% of the employed were Albanians while 21.8% were Serbs,²⁶ although Albanians accounted for 77.4% of Kosovo's population and Serbs only 13.2%.²⁷ The same statistics showed that in 1988, 23% of employees were women.²⁸ Of 54,824 employed women in Kosovo, 29,304 were Albanians and 18,017 were Serbs.²⁹ As the statistics show, the percentage of employed Albanian women was lower than that of Serbian women, considering the overall percentage of the Albanian population in Kosovo (77.4%) and the Serbian population (only 13.2%).

In addition to political and ethnic grounds, Albanian women were also discriminated against on the grounds of gender since there were more employed Albanian men than women. In Kosovo in 1989, 30,185 women sought employment for the first time through an employment agency.³⁰ Statistics published in the daily press in 1990 show that even in the early 1990s, the issue of employment was problem-ridden and directly affected women. According to a weekly briefing of BVI published in the daily press in late February 1990, 108 persons applied for jobs in Prishtina, 64 of whom were Albanians. Out of them, 17 were finally employed, of whom only nine were Albanians, and only three were women.³¹ In the first quarter of 1990, BVI of Employment in Prishtina reported that 139 women were employed, 24.1% less than in the same period the previous year. Women accounted for only 17.2% of the total number of employed.³² All these data indicate a gender disparity in the employment process. Despite the difficulties they encountered while trying to get a job, the interest of Kosovo women in

²² ASHAK, Fondi "Rilindja". Azemi, Dritë. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Azemi, Dritë. Punësimi gjatë vitit të kaluar: Përparësi familjet pa asnjë të punësuar, *Rilindja*, 24. March 1990, 18.

²³ Rubery, Jill / Smith, Mark / Fagan, Colette and Damian Grimshaw. 2014. *Women and European employment*. London & New York: Routledge, 15.

²⁴ Woodward, Susan L. 1995. *Socialist unemployment: The political economy of Yugoslavia 1945-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 342.

²⁵ Bieber, Florian. 2015. *Serbs in Kosovo*, in *Civic and uncivic values in Kosovo*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P / Simkus, Albert and Ola Listhaug. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 175-198, 179.

²⁶ Agjencioni i Statistikave të Kosovës [Kosovo Agency of Statistics, ASK]. 1989. *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Kosova 1989, XIV*. Prishtina: Pokrajinski Zavod za Statistiku, 61.

²⁷ The data on the percentage of population by ethnicity derive from the 1981 census, see: ASK, *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Kosova 1989*, 31; See also, Bieber, *Serbs in Kosovo*, 179-180; Independent International Commission in Kosovo, *The Kosovo report*, 39.

²⁸ ASK, *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Kosova 1989*, 44.

²⁹ ASK, *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Kosova 1989*, 65.

³⁰ Živković, Milovan. (ed.). 1990. *Statistički godišnjak SR Srbije, 1990. godina 23*. Beograd: Socijalistička Republika Srbija, Republički Zavod za Statistiku (accessed: 23. March 2022).

³¹ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". R., D. Punësimi gjatë javës së kaluar: Pak femra zënë punë, *Rilindja*, 28. February 1990, 14.

³² ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Demiri, Rexhep. Numëri i madh i të papunëve: Zënia me punë e femrave, *Rilindja*, 6. June 1990, 13.

employment grew, and the number of (young) women who completed secondary or higher education or university studies increased.³³ Being aware of the trends of the time, they understood that it was only by means of education and employment that they could become economically independent, improve their position within the family and become part of the decision-making process. Interest in employment grew even among women who had no professional qualifications. Proof of this is the interest to attend vocational courses, such as tailoring. After completing it, they would have the opportunity to be employed in textile manufacturing.³⁴ Unfortunately, even some university-educated young women who could not find employment attended vocational courses in order to find employment in the growing textile industry and in the rising number of boutiques.³⁵

Even when women were able to find jobs, they were discriminated against in the workplace. In many cases, they could not get adequate jobs and often complained about marginalisation and injustices from other staff, such as unfair distribution of flats.³⁶ Another injustice they experienced was low maternity allowances during maternity leave, which forced them to return to work before their maternity leave ended. The situation continued until November 1989, when a federal act on labour relations amended it in the women's favour.³⁷ This issue was especially important for women in Kosovo, given the high number of births.³⁸ The fertility rate in 1983 was 4.29.³⁹ The employment of Albanian women contributed to a gradual decrease in the birth rate among working women.

Gender discrimination in the workplace was evident in the fact that men occupied most managerial positions. Apart from a few exceptions, women in Kosovo were mostly rejected as candidates for management positions.⁴⁰ For example, at the University of Prishtina, from 1970, when it was founded, until 1991, there were no female rectors, and there were only 5 female vice-rectors for a total of 27.⁴¹

As in other countries, factors related to households in Kosovo played an important role related to the position of women in society and their employment. As Sharon Stichter observes, in general, women spend more time taking care of children and doing household chores, resulting in them having fewer skills than men, less working experience, lower salaries, and fewer opportunities to choose jobs.⁴² One of the factors having a negative impact on women's employment was a deep-rooted view that women's household work is "natural". Silvia Federici emphasises that housework is generally not considered work since it is unpaid and has become the women's responsibility and their "natural attribute".⁴³ Similar views

³³ ASHAK. 1989. Fondi "Rilindja". Kajtazi, M. Pse ankohen femrat tona: Papunësia. Brengë më e madhe, *Rilindja*, 19. January 1989, 14.

³⁴ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Rexhepi, Ismail. Në Bashkësinë Lokale të Gllgovcit të Komunës së Lipjanit: Kursin e rrobaqepësisë e ndjekin 70 vajza, *Rilindja*, 5. February 1990, 16.

³⁵ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Hasani, Maxhide. 1990. Kur nuk bëjnë punë dy diploma. *Rilindja*, 5. July 1990, 13.

³⁶ ASHAK, *Pse ankohen femrat tona*, 14. Some workers in the public sector were granted the right to flats.

³⁷ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja", Rukovci, N. Gjatësia e pushimit të lindjes dhe kompenzimet material: Pranë fëmijës 270 ditë. *Rilindja*, 3. May 1990, 12.

³⁸ Detrez, *Kosova: Lufta e Shtyrë*, 66.

³⁹ Kaser, Karl. 2008. *Patriarchy after patriarchy: Gender relations in Turkey and in the Balkans 1500-2000*. Wien & Berlin: LIT, 172.

⁴⁰ Schmitt, *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër*, 214.

⁴¹ Bërxulli, Dashmir and Faton Berisha (eds.). 2020. *50 Vjet Universitet, 1970-2020: 50 Vjet Universiteti i Prishtinës*. Prishtinë: University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", 95-96.

⁴² Stichter, *Women, employment and the family*, 27.

⁴³ Federici, Silvia. 2020 *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle, revised and expanded edition*. Online: PM Press.

existed in Kosovo as well, where part of the population considered that the woman was the one in the family who was responsible for housework and that she only belonged to the domain of the household. This negatively affected the possibility of some women getting employed. Nevertheless, a significant share of the population, especially in the cities, began to embrace the idea of the employment of women. The Albanian daily press in Kosovo wrote affirmatively about it and gave space to Albanian women who advanced professionally, which proves that people were generally willing to motivate and support women in their efforts to become educated and progress.⁴⁴

The education of Albanian youth at the University of Prishtina, and more frequent contacts with European countries where some of them were employed or educated had a positive effect in terms of raising their awareness and gradually moving young women and men away from deep-rooted views that women are part of the household. Gradually, the small family consisting of a few members and two working parents began to be seen as a model family, especially in the cities.

Employed Albanian Women Before the Mass Layoffs: The Impact of Political Circumstances at Work

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the employment rate of women in Kosovo was significantly lower than that of men. For example, in 1989, the number of employed persons per 1,000 was 244, only 56 of whom were women.⁴⁵ The data for the years covered by this paper show that the number of female employees was higher in some sectors and lower in others. Most working women were employed in economic sectors such as industry and mining, agriculture and fishing, forestry, water management, construction industry, transport and connections, trade, hospitality industry, craftsmanship, housing – communal activities, financial and other services. This was followed by women employed in non-economic sectors, such as education and culture, healthcare and social welfare, socio-political communities and organisations.⁴⁶ Gendering in the division of labour was typical of socialist societies. Their main sectors, including bureaucracy, were dominated by men.⁴⁷ The lack of a proper representation of women, particularly in non-economic sectors, illustrates another aspect of gender discrimination of working women in Kosovo.

Even within sectors, women were usually employed in jobs requiring less decision-making and fewer responsibilities, whereas men had jobs that were more important and required more responsibilities. There were also gender stereotypes concerning jobs. For example, women were usually teachers at lower levels of education since it was considered that a female teacher and a mother would be more suitable for children, while men were teachers at higher levels of education, especially in university.

Employed women improved the financial status of their families, but at the same time, all the housework was their responsibility. This was a big challenge since they had to do

⁴⁴ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Ibishi, Ç. 1990. Gruaja me skalpel, Rilindja, 1. February 1990, 14; Piraj, Sami. 1990. Interpreti dëshmohe në skenë. *Rilindja* 30, 31. December 1989, 1./2. January 1990, 14.

⁴⁵ Živković, *Statistički Godišnjak SR Srbije 1990.*, 93-94, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G1990/Pdf/G19902001.pdf>, (accessed: 23.03.2022).

⁴⁶ Živković, *Statistički Godišnjak SR Srbije 1990*, 98-100; Živković, Milovan. (ed.). 1991. *Statistički godišnjak Srbije, 1991. godina 24*. Beograd: Republika Srbija, Republički Zavod za Statistiku (accessed: 23. March 2022).

⁴⁷ Verdery, *What was socialism*, 66-67.

housework at night or during the weekend. As Silvia Federici explains, many women worked 60 to 90 hours per week, which was extremely stressful and harmful to their health.⁴⁸

The establishment of the High Pedagogical School in 1958, the Faculty of Philosophy in 1960 and the University of Prishtina in 1970 played a crucial role in the education, advancement and employment of women. Not only did the number of female students constantly grow, but the number of female teachers gradually increased as well. In the 1970s, women obtained doctoral degrees in various fields, and their numbers increased from the 1980s onwards. The higher numbers of women attending university studies were reflected in an increase in women's political activism since a sizeable number of women would become worthy activists in the future.⁴⁹

Generally speaking, the number of students in the general population was quite high. There were 247.7 students per 1,000 inhabitants in Kosovo, whereas the Yugoslav average was 194.9 students per 1,000 inhabitants.⁵⁰ In the 1988-1989 academic year, there were 11,913 female students on a total of 35,574 students in Kosovo higher schools, faculties and the Faculty of Arts. The faculties most often chosen by female students were the Faculty of Philology (with 1,526 female students) and the Faculty of Medicine (with 1,351 female students). At the same time, they showed an even greater interest in the Pedagogical High Schools (2,958 female students).⁵¹ Not only did the number of female students increase, but they also distinguished themselves more during their studies. Thus, in the 1989-1990 academic year, out of 57 laureate students at the University of Prishtina, 29 were female students.⁵² In addition to the field of science, women asserted themselves even more in the field of arts. Albanian writers, singers, and actresses had already flourishing careers.⁵³

Some Albanian women in Kosovo held political functions and distinguished themselves in their political activity and their courage. Kaqusha Jashari was Chair of the Provincial Executive Council and one of Kosovo's representatives in the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. In 1988, Milošević forced the Provincial Party Committee to dismiss her and the other Kosovo representative, Azem Vllasi and to replace them with politicians who would not oppose the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy.⁵⁴

Women became increasingly engaged in politics from 1989 on when political circumstances in Kosovo changed significantly. On 23 March 1989, the Assembly of Kosovo was in session to debate amendments to the 1974 Constitution. It was at this session that Kosovo's autonomy was abolished. The majority of delegates voted in favour of the proposed amendments; only ten of them dared to vote against them. One of these delegates was

⁴⁸ Federici, Silvia. 2020. *Beyond the periphery of the skin: Rethinking, remaking, and reclaiming the body in contemporary capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press, 36-37.

⁴⁹ Koliqi, Hajrullah. 2009. *Gruaja ndër shekuj: Arsimimi dhe Emancipimi i Saj*. Prishtinë: Shtëpia botuese Libri Shkollor, 354-357; Mujika Chao, *Women's activism*, 846-847.

⁵⁰ Vickers, *Midis Serbëve dhe Shqiptarëve*, 242; Detrez, *Kosova: Lufta e Shtyrë*, 59.

⁵¹ ASK, Stolić, *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Kosova 1989*, 313.

⁵² Çoçaj, N. 1990. Laureatët e çmimit "Student i Dalluar", *Bota e Re* 6, Viti XII, 15. March 1990, 3.

⁵³ Koliqi, *Gruaja ndër shekuj*, 355.

⁵⁴ Fransworth, Nicole (ed.). 2008. *History is herstory too: The history of women in civil society in Kosovo, 1980-2004*. Prishtina: Kosovar Gender Studies Centre, 31-32.

Melihate Tërmkolli, who took the floor to express her opposition to the constitutional amendments.⁵⁵

Several women, Maliqe Bajoku, Fetije Shala, Ilirjana Jusufi, Lucia Laqi, Feride Hyseni, Qefsere Boshnjaku, Afijete Azizi, Refika Belegu, Binaze Jashari, Hanife Elshani, Kadrije Ismajli, Leonora Zajmi, Besa Basha, Gjyljeta Mulla, Selvije Xhinaj, Kadrije Dajqi Gashi, Mikereme Nishliu, Sanije Çitaku, were among the signatories of the aforementioned Constitutional Declaration on Kosovo as an Independent and Equal Entity within the Federation (Confederation) of Yugoslavia and an Equal Subject with Other Units in the Federation (Confederation), proclaimed by the Assembly of Kosovo.⁵⁶ The Albanian delegates of the Assembly of Kosovo had to adopt this Constitutional Declaration under most unusual conditions outside the closed building of the Assembly of Kosovo.⁵⁷ On 2 July, two women stood with the delegates in front of the Assembly. They were Eva Brantley, U.S. lawyer and human rights and freedoms expert, and Luljeta Pula–Beqiri, university professor and the first president of the Women’s Association of LDK (later on LDK). Both were taken to the police station for interrogation.⁵⁸ The State Security Service decided not only to expel Eva Brantley but also to ban her from entering Yugoslavia for three years. At the same time, Luljeta Pula–Beqiri was charged with providing accommodation to Eva Brantley without reporting it.⁵⁹ This case illustrates how the Milošević regime cracked down on all who supported Kosovo Albanians.

A deteriorating political situation in Kosovo significantly affected the work of Albanian public sector employees. From 18 to 23 March 1990, approximately 7,000 Albanian schoolchildren in Kosovo were poisoned.⁶⁰ Although the Serbian authorities denied this, claiming it was mass hysteria, international researchers found neuro-toxic gases in the blood samples of the sick children. The UN toxicologist concluded that the poisonous substance called sarin was present in the blood tests, otherwise used in chemical weapons. The substance was manufactured by the Yugoslav Army.⁶¹ Among the victims of the poisoning were working women, particularly female teachers and doctors, as well as female students.⁶² A report by the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (*Këshilli për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave dhe Lirive të Njeriut*, KMDL NJ), Mitrovica Sub-Council, shows that out of 231 Albanians poisoned in the municipality of Mitrovica during the March–April 1990 period, 191 were (young) women.⁶³ In addition to numerous reports and sources containing evidence of the poisoning of students of all ages, there was a press report about a group of approximately

⁵⁵ Schmit, *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër*, 243; Imeraj, Shkodran. 2021. *Kosova 1968-1990*. Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë “Ali Hadri”, 169; ASHAK. 1989 Fondi “Rilindja”. Çelaj, Z. / Bajra, Y. / Rugova, Rr. / Bislimi, R. / Gjata, M. and B. Skenderi.. Dje, në Kuvendin e KSA të Kosovës: U dha pëlqimi për ndryshimet në Kushtetutën e RS të Serbisë. *Rilindja*, 24. March 1989, 1-3.

⁵⁶ ASHAK, Koleksion, Deklarata Kushtetuese e KAK, Vol. I.

⁵⁷ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 346.

⁵⁸ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi “Rilindja”. Rugova, Rrustem / Bislimi, Ramadan / Stavileci, Blerim / and Kelmend Hapçiu. Eva Bredli e Luljeta Pula u marrën në pyetje. *Rilindja*, 3. July 1990, 3.

⁵⁹ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi “Rilindja”, Rugova, Rrustem / Bislimi, Ramadan / Stavileci, Blerim and Kelmend Hapçiu. Kumtesë nga shtabi i njërive të veqanta të milicisë: Eva Elias. Bredli u burgos për shkak të solidarizimit me shqiptarët, *Rilindja*, 3. July 1990, 3; Pula, Luljeta. 2020. *Rrëfimi i një jete për Kosovën*. Prishtinë: Koha, 170-171.

⁶⁰ Clark, *Civil resistance in Kosovo*, xvi, 58.

⁶¹ Mertus, Julie A. 1999. *Kosovo: How myths and truths started a war*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 187-196; Clark, *Civil resistance in Kosovo*, 58; Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 345.

⁶² Mertus, *Kosovo: How myths and truths*, 221-226.

⁶³ Arkivi i KMDL NJ [Archive of Këshilli Për Mbrojtjen e Të Drejtave Dhe Lirive Të Njeriut / Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms]. *KMDL NJ, Prishtinë, Nënkëshilli në Mitrovicë, Terrori i Policisë Serbe Ndaj Femrës Shqiptare*, 3.

30 women, including their female teacher, who were poisoned while attending a tailoring course on the premises of an elementary school in Klina.⁶⁴

Given such difficult political circumstances in Kosovo at the time, one should emphasise the distress of many physicians when imprisoned, repeatedly interrogated and poisoned. Paulina Lumezi, a general practitioner in the Health Centre in the town of Ferizaj and President of the Ferizaj branch of the LDK Women's Association, was interrogated five times by the State Security Services at the so-called "informational conversation". The first time, on 23 March, Dr Lumezi was interrogated because she had provided medical assistance to persons poisoned in the Catholic church in Ferizaj and later because she had notified the International Delegation for Human Rights about a shortage of medicines. After her last interrogation, she was ill-treated by members of the State Security Service.⁶⁵ In addition to being ill-treated, the physicians who treated the poisoned victims also suffered the after-effects of the poisoning.⁶⁶

In September 1990, the doctors and workers of the Ferizaj Health Centre protested against the violence and terror of the Milošević regime against the Albanian population, including the imprisonment of some doctors and health workers of this institution, including Dr Paulina Lumezi.⁶⁷

Despite the extreme working conditions during the years 1989-1990, constant provocations by the Serbian authorities and threats to their lives, Albanian women continued to work in the public sector until they were fired. Being employed in these years of major political and socio-economic turmoil meant offering various forms of resistance to the degradation of the status of Kosovo and having the opportunity to offer help from different workplaces.

Previously mentioned facts indicate that Kosovo was a specific case in Yugoslavia where Albanian women suffered ethnic, political and gender discrimination at work. This was aggravated by the constant threats they received while performing their work. The country's economic underdevelopment, poverty and the presence of patriarchal elements increased their distress and challenges.

Women and Mass Dismissals of Albanians

The position of women in post-socialist societies, including Yugoslavia, changed significantly. The increasing unemployment rate there had the biggest impact on women.⁶⁸ However, the high unemployment rate in Kosovo during the 1990s was a consequence of the newly emerged political situation, which differed from other countries. After the abolition of the province's autonomy, the public administration was dominated by local Serbs since Albanians were expelled or refused to go to work under the new circumstances. Thus, only Serbs worked in healthcare, education, media and other institutions.⁶⁹ The Albanian population in Kosovo established parallel institutions, including administration, schools, a university, and a

⁶⁴ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". D., M. Dje në Klinë, U helmuan reth 30 femra. *Rilindja*, 15. July 1990, 10.

⁶⁵ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Sh., A. Mjekja 5 herë në "bisedë-zyrtare. *Rilindja*, 15. July 1990, 11.

⁶⁶ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Makolli, Sabrije. U helmuan nga të helmuarit. *Rilindja*, 5. July 1990, 13.

⁶⁷ Sh., A. 1990. Reagim i Shoqatës së Mjekëve e të SP të Shtëpisë së Shëndetit në Ferizaj: Dhunë e paparë në shëndetësi. *Fjala* 20, September 1990, 10.

⁶⁸ Kaser, *Patriarchy after patriarchy*, 191.

⁶⁹ Bieber, *Serbs in Kosovo*, 183.

healthcare system. Although men still held key positions in this parallel structure, women played an active role, as we shall see later.⁷⁰

Since Albanian women were part of enterprises and institutions where discriminatory laws and violent measures were practised, they also suffered consequences.⁷¹ A large number of women who lost their jobs returned to their households, many others engaged in the parallel system, and some in the private sector, although men had more opportunities to find jobs in this sector.⁷² According to a KMDLNJ report, less than 3% of Albanian women were employed in 1993 due to a process of mass dismissal that began in Kosovo in 1990.⁷³ The expulsion of Albanian professors and students from the University of Prishtina in the early 1990s resulted in a large number of students, including female students, dropping out and giving up their intended careers. In comparison with the 1989-1990 academic year, the number of university enrollees was almost halved in the 1995-1996 academic year in the parallel education system.⁷⁴

The closure of the University of Prishtina to Albanian professors and students interrupted a great surge in the education, professional advancement and emancipation of Albanian (young) women, having long-term repercussions. Many female students who had ambition and professional potential found it impossible to study at the Parallel University of Prishtina due to economic and security reasons. As a result, they were forced either to return to their household chores or to look for alternative employment opportunities, such as working in private businesses or migrating to a European country. One of the destinations was Albania, where, after several decades of communist isolation, the process of democratisation set in, and a number of Kosovo Albanians went there to study or work.

In 1990, the Albanian healthcare personnel previously dismissed organised clinics in private facilities.⁷⁵ Each fired woman had a bitter experience. One of the women, Prof. Dr Asene Agai, a professor at the Institute of Histology, said that her notice of dismissal was sent to her office by the administration of the Serbian director while she was holding exams:

*"[...] They left the notice of dismissal on my desk. I did not sign it. I begged them to at least give me time to finish the exams. I was not allowed [...] I established the Institute of Histology, and now I had to leave [...] When I went out to the corridor, there were many people around me. Some of the students even cried [...]".*⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Mertus, Julie. 2000. *War's offensive on women: The humanitarian challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 38.

⁷¹ Arkivi i KMDLNJ. 1996. *Pozita e Gruas Shqiptare në Kosovë në Proceset e Zhvillimit*. Hartuan: Nekibe Kelmendi dhe Lirije Osmani, Korrik.

⁷² Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, *Kosova: Vështrim Historik*, 162.

⁷³ Arkivi i KMDLNJ. Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, Prishtinë: Albanian Women, as Police and Military Victims of Violence during 1993.

⁷⁴ Judah, *Kosova*, 97-99. In the 1991-1992 academic year, the number of Albanian students was 19,620. The number dropped to 13,805 in the 1996-1997 academic year. See also, Kandiç, Natasha (ed.). 1998. *Nën lupë: Të drejtat në Kosovë*. Beograd: Fondi për të drejtën humanitare. For the expulsion of Albanian professors and students from the entities of the University of Prishtina, see: Bërçullli and Berisha, *50 Vjet Universitet*, 51-62.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch Helsinki. 1993. *Open wounds: Human rights abuses in Kosovo*. New York, Washington, Los Angeles & London: Human Rights Watch, 126, 128-129; Schwartz, Stephen. 2005. *Kosova: Prejardhja e Një Luftë*. Prishtinë: Rrokullia, 123.

⁷⁶ S. A. 1990. Dy rrëfime për dy poshtërsi: Më dhimbjen studentët. *Bota e Re* 17, Viti XII, 15. October 1990, 4.

Since there was no other Albanian professor of histology, she promised to prepare a book for the students so that they could continue studying even if the exams were not held.⁷⁷ Dr. Drita Mekuli, an internist in the Prishtina hospital, was dismissed on 16 September 1990, and her notice of dismissal was delivered to her by three Serbian employees who worked in the same clinic, giving her only 30 minutes to leave.⁷⁸ Dr Flora Brovina, who was one of the first doctors to be dismissed, spoke of her determination and advocated, as she put it, “[...] the need to serve our people regardless of whether we were at work or not [...]”.⁷⁹

Muradije Shehu, who worked at Radio Prishtina, recalls: “It was the hardest moment when the Serbian police came in the building. We were transmitting programs directly when they switched off the transmission.”⁸⁰ Primary school teacher Kimete Dida emphasises solidarity among colleagues as another aspect in these difficult times. In 1990, the Albanian teachers at her school were under pressure to accept Serbian curricula, starting with the first and fifth classes. When the teachers refused, the salaries of the first and fifth-class teachers were not paid. The Albanian school staff, as she describes, shared their salaries to support them financially. Finally, everyone’s salaries were not paid, recalls teacher Dida, who was on maternity leave at the time. Although she was legally entitled to her salary since she had worked for 13 years in education, her salary was also not paid.⁸¹

Violent measures and dismissals severely affected the Albanian women since they were not only deprived of financial resources but also of the rights previously granted to employees such as child allowance, healthcare protection, maternity leave, the right to a pension, the right to treatment in medical treatment centres, etc.⁸² “[...] The meaning of unemployment thus extended beyond the loss of potential wealth for society and the loss of income and identity for the unemployed [...] To be unemployed was to be excluded from full membership in society [...],” emphasises Susan L. Woodward, elaborating on the unemployment in Yugoslavia, where the socialist workplace was the main unit of organising.⁸³

The employment of women and all of the previously mentioned rights granted to them in socialist regimes increased the authority of women within families.⁸⁴ They were gradually included in decision-making, and the economic status of families improved thanks to women’s work.

The prospects of returning to their household chores were perceived pessimistically by the Albanian working women, many of whom had overcome many challenges to attain social and economic independence. They could affect their status within the family and their established authority. Moreover, they would indicate the return of stereotypes and gender roles practised for so long in some Albanian families in Kosovo, which would be unacceptable for educated and employed women. The economic aspect was a huge concern. In families where both

⁷⁷ S. A. 1990, *Dy rrëfime për dy poshtërsi*.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch. *Yugoslavia: Human rights abuses in Kosovo 1990-1992* (accessed: 25. April 2022).

⁷⁹ Luci, Nita and Vjollca Krasniqi. (eds.). 2006. *Politika e Kujtesës dhe Përkatësisë: Historitë Personale të Grave në Kosovë [Politics of Remembrance and Belonging: Life Histories of Albanian Women in Kosovo]*. Prishtinë: Centre for Research and Gender Policy, 75, 227.

⁸⁰ Fransworth, *History is herstory too*, 46.

⁸¹ Luci and Krasniqi. *Politika e Kujtesës*, 91-92, 239.

⁸² Arkivi i KMDLNJ, *Pozita e Gruas Shqiptare*.

⁸³ Woodward, *Socialist unemployment*, 4.

⁸⁴ Verdery, *What was socialism*, 64-65.

spouses worked, in most cases, both were fired; therefore, ensuring a livelihood turned out to be an immense challenge.

The years discussed here and the preceding years were characterised by an increase in Albanian emigration from Kosovo when, due to severe Serbian repression and high unemployment, many Albanians left Kosovo for Central Europe and Scandinavia.⁸⁵ Although there is no precise number of Albanian asylum seekers from Kosovo, it is estimated that in the late 20th century, approximately 350,000 sought asylum in member countries of the Council of Europe.⁸⁶ This process had a significant impact on women. In many cases, heads of families and sons emigrated, whereas the women remained with their husbands' families. In urban areas, all the burden and responsibility for the family fell on the women.⁸⁷ Even in cases where women also emigrated, only some of them could find employment, usually not in the professions they had practised in Kosovo. Their integration into these European states was their next challenge due to social and cultural differences.

Involvement of Albanian Women in the Parallel System

Once a parallel system of Albanian institutions in Kosovo was established, Albanian women became actively involved, and their role grew in each walk of life. During this period, working women experienced a major turning point as they started working under completely different conditions. The lives of many of them were endangered on a daily basis. Many working women could not have the same jobs as before the mass dismissals. Many of them had to learn and practice completely new professions, which was a major sacrifice.

Working conditions in the education and healthcare sectors, where the number of working women was quite high, were unfavourable because clinics and schools continued to operate on private premises, and organisers and teachers were often arrested or subjected to violence by the Serbian police.⁸⁸ The situation was no better at the Parallel University of Prishtina, whose classes and exams were organised in private homes and premises, in some primary schools and on the premises of Alaudin Medrese, etc.⁸⁹ The lack of libraries, laboratories, and scientific tools made academic work, including women teachers, extremely difficult.⁹⁰

In the healthcare sector, we should definitely mention the founding of the Mother Teresa Association in 1990. The Association established many humanitarian aid branches and sub-branches, and from 1992 on, it coordinated the entire parallel healthcare system in Kosovo.⁹¹

In 1993, Human Rights Watch / Helsinki visited some private health clinics, which were mainly organised on a voluntary basis. In one of these clinics in Mitrovica that was used as a model of how private clinics generally functioned in Kosovo, the care for women giving birth and newborns was highlighted as the greatest challenge. Doctors indicated a huge increase

⁸⁵ Schmitt, *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër*, 220.

⁸⁶ Islami, Hivzi. 2012. *Aspekti Etnik i Migrimeve: Shqiptarët në Rrjedhat e Shpërnguljeve të Dhunshme*. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 91; Islami, *Studime Demografike*, 438.

⁸⁷ Mujika Chao, *Women's activism*, 846.

⁸⁸ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 349.

⁸⁹ Kostovicova, Denisa. 2005. *Kosovo: The politics of identity and space*. New York: Routledge, 103-4.

⁹⁰ Elsie, Robert. 2004. *Historical dictionary of Kosova*. Lanham, Maryland-Toronto-Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 184-185.

⁹¹ Fransworth, *History is herstory too*, 47, 51; The Mother Teresa Association opened 104 local medical centres in Kosovo from 1992 to February 1999, see: Përgjoka, Pjetër and Rami Berisha. (eds.). 2005. *Dashuri për të gjithë, "Nëna Tereze"*. Prishtinë: SHBK "Nëna Tereze", 33-35.

in infant mortality since pregnant women lacked proper nutrition and access to healthcare as a result of the deteriorating political situation. Another cause was inadequate conditions in private clinics, including a lack of vaccines.⁹² Due to the political situation, women more frequently decided to give birth in private clinics or at home out of fear. According to official statistics of the Ministry of Health in Kosovo, 13 women died at childbirth in 1990.⁹³ All of this coincided with the goals of the Serbian government, which was to reduce the birth rate of the Albanian population, for which they had a programme, and to increase the birth rate of the Serbian population, to whom they allocated special benefits.⁹⁴

Thousands of Albanian women served in the parallel healthcare system. With their expertise and professionalism, they not only played a role in the well-being of Kosovo Albanians by treating them but were also engaged in humanitarian activities. Many women were engaged in the Mother Teresa Association.⁹⁵ The meeting of the Constituent Assembly of the Mother Teresa Association was held on 10 May 1990 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Prishtina, and Albanologist Prof Dr Resmie Kryeziu was elected member of the working presidency. Out of 15 members of the Presidency of the Association, three were Albanian women intellectuals. Many women were members of the Constituent Assembly of the Association, which demonstrates that they were no longer on the margins of social or political developments.⁹⁶ At least half of the 2,000 members of the Association engaged in healthcare were women who worked in extremely harsh conditions. As stated by a gynaecologist working as a field doctor of the Mother Teresa Association, they were under surveillance by the Serbian police and at risk of being arrested.⁹⁷

As the mass dismissal of Albanians removed them entirely from the sector of the state economy, the Albanian population established small family businesses.⁹⁸ This phenomenon was a real game-changer in terms of women's employment. Some women, especially in the cities, joined family businesses, and during the 1990s, some women even established their own businesses, some of which are still in operation. Women running businesses had not been common practice in Kosovo; therefore, this was very challenging due to the gender stereotypes that prevailed.

In the parallel system, many women of different professions engaged in politics, and their political careers were launched at that time. The establishment of the Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK), the first post-communist party, on 23 December 1989 was an event that changed the situation in Kosovo. The party was founded by intellectuals and by the people of Kosovo at the time the League of Communists of Kosovo was disintegrating and expressed its commitment to an independent and democratic Kosovo. Nekibe Kelmendi, a well-known lawyer, was elected member of the party leadership at the

⁹² Human Rights Watch, *Open wounds*, 129-130.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, *Open wounds*, 132-133.

⁹⁴ Arkivi i KMDLNJ, *Pozita e Gruas Shqiptare*.

⁹⁵ Behrami, Majlinda / Carpintero. José and Nicole Fransworth. 2021. *Një ulëse në tryezë: Kontributi i grave në proceset e ndërtimit të paqes në Kosovë dhe pritjet e tyre nga këto procese* (accessed: 24. April 2022).

⁹⁶ Përgjokaj and Berisha, *Nëna Tereze*, 15-16, 19-20.

⁹⁷ DioGuardi, Shirley Cloyes. 2016. "Breaking the protracted silence about genocidal rape in Kosova," in *Women and genocide: Gendered experiences of violence, survival and resistance* edited by DiGiorgio-Lutz, JoAnn and Donna Gosbee. Toronto: Women's Press, 213-244, 219.

⁹⁸ Schmitt, *Kosova: Histori e Shkurtër*, 250.

party's constituent assembly on 23 December. She had also been one of the founders of the KLMDNJ in Prishtina.⁹⁹

Towards the end of 1989, but before the foundation of the LDK, the Independent Women's Association was founded by Albanian women intellectuals who worked in the Library of Kosovo and were indignant over the negative portrayal of Albanian women in the Serbian media. These women began to meet in October; however, the majority of them soon voted to join the LDK, thus creating the Women's Forum within the LDK.¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that despite the extraordinary commitment of these women, in most cases, they were ignored in the decision-making since party decisions were mainly made by men.¹⁰¹

During the peaceful civil resistance in Kosovo, Albanian women had a chance to play a greater public role.¹⁰² Since the threat of violence affected everyone, the engagement for freedom and democracy became everyone's preoccupation, regardless of gender. In these circumstances, all women, young and old, rural or urban, employed or housewives, could engage and contribute to their country's freedom.¹⁰³ In addition to the women who were directly involved in political structures, many women got involved in various political activities at the time. For example, in Peja on 19 February 1990, 600 Albanian women of different ages and walks of life protested against political oppression and for their security and freedom and those of their children.¹⁰⁴ According to Julie Mertus, "[...] the call for solidarity among Kosovo Albanians is so strong and the price for leaving this order so great that Albanian women cannot choose to emphasise their gender identity over the Albanian one."¹⁰⁵ This solidarity and priority was evident on International Women's Day, 8 March 1990, which Albanian women did not celebrate, giving up gifts and organising symbolic activities and protests against the situation in the country.¹⁰⁶

Despite the tremendous contribution of women in general and those engaged in politics in particular during the peaceful resistance to the Milošević regime, their role remains overlooked by society, both then and, unfortunately, today as well.¹⁰⁷ It is expected that further research, studies and publications of social sciences and humanities will shed light

⁹⁹ Kraja, Mehmet. (ed.). 2018. *Fjalori Enciklopedik i Kosovës, I, A-K*. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 772; Kraja, Mehmet. (ed.). 2018. *Fjalori Enciklopedik i Kosovës, II, L-ZH*. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 971.

¹⁰⁰ Behrami and Fransworth, *Një ulëse në tryezë*, 25-26; Krasniqi, Elife. 2021. Same goal, different paths, different class: Women's feminist political engagements in Kosovo from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s. *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 69(2-3), 325-327; Fransworth, *History is herstory too*, 65-66; Luci, Nita and Linda Gusia. 2015. "Our men will not have amnesia": Civic engagement, emancipation, and transformations of the gendered public in Kosovo, in *Civic and uncivic values in Kosovo*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. / Simkus, Albert and Ola Listhaug. Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 199-219, 202.

¹⁰¹ Behrami and Fransworth, *Një ulëse në tryezë*, 26-27.

¹⁰² Clark, *Civil resistance*, 3.

¹⁰³ DioGuardi, *Breaking the protracted silence*, 218.

¹⁰⁴ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". N., H. Në Pejë dje protestuan 600 femra të kombësisë shqiptare: Duam siguri dhe Liri për ne dhe për fëmijët tanë. *Rilindja*, 20. February 1990, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Mertus, Julie. 2005. *Gratë në Kosovë: terrene të kontestuara, Roli i identitetit kombëtar në formimin dhe sfidimin e identitetit gjinor*, in *Përmbledhje në Studime Gjinore*, edited by Luci, Nita and Linda Gusia. Prishtinë: Qendra Kosovare për Studime Gjinore, 155-182, 158.

¹⁰⁶ ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". Kremtimi i 8 Marsit në Kosovë: Shënim Modest, *Rilindja*, 9. March 1990, 4; ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". A., Y. Tubim i grave të rajoneve të ndryshme të Krahinës në Lupç të Podujevës: Fëmijëve t'u kthehet gëzimi, *Rilindja*, 9. March 1990, 4; ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". T., R. Disa gra shqiptare nuk festuan, *Rilindja*, 9. March 1990, 4; ASHAK. 1990. Fondi "Rilindja". S. A. Shoqata e gruas e LDK për kremtimin e 8 Marsit, *Rilindja*, 7. March 1990, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Di Lellio, Anna and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers. 2006. Komandanti legjendar: Ndërtimi i një master. *Narracioni Shqiptar në Kosovën e Pasluftës. Përpyekja* 23, 77-95, 87.

on many aspects of the work and the contribution of women in the late 20th century and affirm their contribution.

Conclusion

The political situation in Kosovo in the 1980s had an impact on the social life of the Albanian population, aggravating it significantly. As a result of the political situation, the Yugoslav state's investments in the emancipation of women were modest, and as the situation worsened with the abolition of the autonomy of the Province of Kosovo, it ceased altogether. In terms of employment, even before the mass layoffs in Kosovo, Albanian women were discriminated against on political, national and gender grounds. Although they invested great efforts in their professional advancement, they encountered major difficulties in obtaining employment, as documented in 1989-1990 sources. In general, there was great discrimination against the Albanian population in Kosovo in terms of employment. Unemployment was rampant for decades. Kosovo was the least developed region in Yugoslavia, and employment opportunities were scarce. In addition to this political aspect, Albanian women, in some cases, especially in rural areas, encountered difficulties while trying to advance due to patriarchal families that did not always support them in their endeavours. Despite all these obstacles, women persisted in their efforts to receive education and obtain employment.

The mass dismissal of Albanian employees in Kosovo drastically changed the lives of Albanian working women. A significant number of them became unemployed, and some became part of the parallel system, especially in education and healthcare, facing even greater challenges and difficulties. Since many Albanians who were excluded from the social economy sector during the 1990s established private family businesses, some women joined these businesses. Some women, mostly intellectuals and those previously employed were also involved in politics in the parallel system, launching their political careers. In general, after the abolition of autonomy and throughout the 1990s, at a time when massive commitment to the country's freedom was required, women, whether employed or unemployed, had the opportunity to join the cause.

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