

**EX-COMBATANTS AS CIVIC ACTIVISTS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES:  
THE CASE OF KLA IN KOSOVO**

by  
LIRIKA AGUSHOLLI

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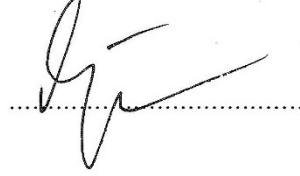
**EX-COMBATANTS AS CIVIC ACTIVISTS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES:  
THE CASE OF KLA IN KOSOVO**

Approved by:

Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik  
(Thesis Supervisor)



Asst. Prof. Zeynep Gülrü Göker



Asst. Prof. Merve Özkan Borsa



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## ABSTRACT

### EX-COMBATANTS AS CIVIC ACTIVISTS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES: THE CASE OF KLA IN KOSOVO

LIRIKA AGUSHOLLI

CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION M.A THESIS, JULY 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Keywords: ex-combatants, post-conflict societies, civil society, peacebuilding

This research explores how ex-combatants can contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies through civic activism. Kosovo Liberation Army's ex-combatants are selected as a case study. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with KLA ex-combatants. The data collected from this study reveals that ex-combatants describe themselves as civic activists who contribute to peacebuilding and are enthusiastic about helping their community and post-conflict Kosovo. However, their peacebuilding capacities are limited, firstly, because of the sensitivity and nature of their civic activism and secondly, by their perceptions of what 'peacebuilding activities' mean. Some of them argue that peacebuilding activities are 'morally accepted' if they are intended to help the community they belong to, that is, solely the Albanian population of Kosovo. Others argue that peacebuilding should not be limited to only one ethnicity. The decision to join the civil society is similar with the decision to join the armed group. The education level of ex-combatants was depicted as an important element that influenced the type of civic activism they are engaged to. Civic activism was not perceived as a potent tool for decision-making changes or peacebuilding incentives. Participants recognize civic activism as an influencer; they argue that the main change and peacebuilding can emerge from the parliament. However, one-third of the participants exclude the chance of involvement in politics for two reasons: because they do not want to take advantage of their combatant lives, and because they think political life is not suitable for their characters. Thus, they choose to remain in areas where they can be more productive.

## ÖZET

### ÇATIŞMA SONRASI TOPLUMLARDA SIVİL AKTIVİST OLARAK ESKİ SAVAŞÇILAR: KOSOVO KURTULUŞ ORDUSU VAKASI

LIRIKA AGUSHOLLI

UYUŞMAZLIK ANALIZI VE ÇÖZÜMÜ YÜKSEK LISANS TEZİ TEMMUZ, 2019

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Anahtar Kelimeler: eski savaşçılar, çatışma sonrası toplumlar, sivil toplum, barış inşası

Bu araştırma eski savaşçıların çatışma sonrası toplumlarda sivil aktivizm yoluyla nasıl barış inşasına katkı sağlayabileceklerini incelemektedir. Kosova Kurtuluş Ordusu'ndaki (KLA) eski savaşçılar vaka çalışması olarak seçilmiştir. KLA'ya mensup 15 eski savaşçı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışmadan toplanan veriler göstermektedir ki eski savaşçılar kendilerini barış inşasına katkı sağlayan sivil aktivistler olarak görmekte ve kendi toplumlarına ve çatışma sonrası Kosova'ya yardım etme konusunda isteklidirler. Ne var ki, onların barış inşası konusundaki kapasiteleri öncelikle onları sivil aktivizm anlayışlarının duyarlılığı ve doğası gereği, ardından da onların barış inşası eylemlerinin ne olduğuna dair algıları yüzünden sınırlı kalmaktadır. Bazıları iddia etmektedir ki barış inşası eylemleri kendilerinin ait olduğu topluluğa, yani sadece Kosova'daki Arnavut nüfusa, yardım etmeyi amaçladığı sürece ahlaki olarak kabul edilebilirdir. Diğerleri ise barış inşası sadece bir etnisite ile sınırlandırılmamalıdır. Sivil topluma katılma kararı, silahlı mücadeleye katılma kararı ile benzerlik göstermektedir. Eski savaşçıların eğitim seviyesinin içinde buldukları sivil aktivizm tarzında oldukça etkili bir unsur olarak öne çıkmıştır. Sivil aktivizm karar vermede ya da barış inşasını teşvik etmede kuvvetli bir araç olarak algılanmamıştır. Katılımcılar sivil aktivizmin etki gücüne sahip olduğunu kabul etmekle birlikte asıl değişim ve barış inşasının parlamento tarafından sağlanacağını iddia etmektedirler. Ne var ki, katılımcıların üçte biri siyasete katılma seçeneğini iki sebepten yok saymaktadır: savaşçı olarak geçirdikleri zaman üzerinden avantaj elde etmek istememeleri ve siyasetin karakterlerine uygun olmadığını düşünmeleri. Dolayısıyla, daha verimli olacakları alanlarda kalmayı tercih etmektedirler.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is statically proven that thirty percent of the global conflicts restarted within ten years of the termination of the conflict (Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis 2000). Post-conflict societies have the unfortunate fate to inherit the problems that led to a violent conflict once. The chances of re-emergence of conflict are dependent on several factors such as non-functioning institutional apparatus, destroyed economy, constant circulation of arms, and the failures to demobilize-disarm-reintegrate ex-combatants (Ball 2001). Therefore, there has been increasing attention towards the role of ex-combatants in post-conflict societies. Among several factors that influence the stability of post-conflict societies, the literature depicts ex-combatants as crucial factors for the reconstruction of the society (Theidor 2009; Fusato 2003; Clark 2013).

Additionally, the role of civil society in post-conflict reconstruction is perceived to have an essential part in paving the way towards a process of cooperation and conflict administration. Non-state actors such as civil society organizations are depicted as assistants in the prevention and reemergence of conflicts (Orjuela 2013; Van Tongeren 1998). The power of civil society stands on its flexibility and the power to gauge the grassroots of the conflict.

The literature on conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding conceptualize ex-combatants as both peacebuilders and peace spoilers. Several studies argue that ex-combatants are recognized to be one of the primary sources of instability in post-war environments (Themner, 2013; Nussio 2018; Sheed 2008; Kaplan and Nussio 2015). Other studies shed light on the peacebuilding potential of ex-combatants factualizing that ex-combatants can be and sometimes are unexploited assets for peacebuilding in post-war situations (Emerson 2012; Simic and Milojevic 2014; Fridriksdottir 2018; Clubb 2014).

The current study analyzes the role of ex-combatants in the peacebuilding process in post-conflict societies through civic activism. The study is focused on ex-combatants of the Kosovo Liberation Army (*'Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosoves' – UÇK*). Using Kosovo's KLA example, it tries to answer the following research question: "How do the ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies through civic activism?" This thesis aims

to contribute to the field by offering a detailed analysis of how ex-combatants perceive their roles and skills through civic activism in a post-conflict society.

The research is focused on exploring the roles the ex-KLA members play in the post-conflict Kosovo's civil life, and their perceptions of the contribution they make to the country. Moreover, their motivations to join armed groups, their reintegration journeys, how their communities perceived them, and their civic activities are elaborated. During the field research, data about their personal histories, re-integration journeys, and decisions to join both armed organization and civil society were collected using a semi-structured interview method.

The thesis proceeds as follows. In the next chapter, a literature review on post-conflict societies, ex-combatants, and the role of civil society in post-conflict societies will be presented. The third chapter will cover the case study, by analyzing the conflict between Kosovo and Serbia, the emergence of the KLA as a conflict party in the war, and some demographics about the ex-combatants of the KLA. In the fourth chapter, I will present my detailed methodology employed. In the fifth chapter, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews will be analyzed. Lastly, the general findings of the thesis will be put forth in the conclusion chapter, including some implications for future studies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to understand the effects of war on former combatants, whether and how they survive in the post-conflict stages, and how they contribute to the peacebuilding of their countries, primarily through their involvement to the civil society activities.

Most of the literature on ex-combatants in post-conflict societies is focused on the success and failure of DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) programs. Plentiful research has been done on the engagement of ex-combatants in political structures in post-conflict and on their reintegration into civilian life. Few studies (Rolston 2007, Mitchell 2008, Clubb 2016; Emerson 2012, Simic and Milojevic 2014, Fridriksdottir 2018) have contributed to the aspect of analyzing former combatants as potential peacebuilders through civic activism. I aim to contribute to this aspect by exploring the role of former KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) combatant's in Kosovar civil society, integrated after the war in 1999. This is an important topic considering that the literature on the Kosovo war does not pay attention to the study of Kosovar ex-combatants as potential peacebuilders.

More research and study are essential to have an understanding on why former combatants join civil society activities, how is their reintegration process is affected by their membership in CS and do they contribute to peacebuilding of their countries.

Thus, the research question of this thesis is *whether and how ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies through civic activism?*

### 2.1. Characteristics of Post-conflict Societies

Brinkerhoff (2005) defines post-conflict as the period when the violence and disagreements have been terminated in the overall territory of a state. Similarly, Todorovski, Zevenberhen and Molen (2016) define a post-conflict environment as 'the situation with an

absence of armed conflict and a modicum of political process' (Todorovski, Zevenberhen and Molen 2016, 318). Scholars argue that the post-conflict situation (absence of armed conflict) is temporary. It is statistically proven that thirty percent of the global conflicts, restarted within ten years of the termination of the conflict (Bigombe, Collier & Sambanis; 2000). Why does this happen? Bigombe et al., (2000) argues that societies that were once in war have the unfortunate fate to inherit the problems that lead to a violent conflict once. This heritage of problems can be a source for a restoration of the conflict again.

Collier (2000) maintains that a lack of economic prospects in post-conflict societies can lead to a relapse of the conflict. Put differently, the more poverty there is in a society, the higher the chance for re-emergence of violence. Collier & Hoeffler (2004) analyzing the factor of ethnic domination in post-conflict societies, state that if there is an unequal distribution of resources in post-conflict societies between different ethnic entities, thus, (ethnic domination) increases the chance of conflict re-emergence. Moreover, Ishiyama & Batta (2011) state that the intensity of conflict is an important feature of why conflicts re-emerge. For instance, if a conflict resulted in significant fatalities (high number of deaths or a high number of raped women), it leaves space for revenge in post-conflict. Ishiyama & Batta (2011) as well as discuss the problem of ex-combatants in post-conflict. They argue that ex-combatants have the potential to spoil the peace, if not satisfied with settlement agreements and post-conflict conditions.

Ball (2001), introduces three common characteristics that post-conflict societies share. Firstly, Ball (2001) stresses that in post-conflict societies, there is a non-functioning institutional apparatus, a constant conflict for power and a corrupted legal and political structure. A second characteristic is a destroyed economic and social order (Ball 2001). Lastly, Ball (2001) argues that in post-conflict societies, there is a constant circulation of arms and a constant struggle to demobilize/disarm/reintegrate ex-combatants. As the focus of this thesis is ex-combatants, the next section will be about the third characteristics stated by Ball, DDR in post-conflict.

### **2.1.1. DDR in Post-Conflict**

Phayal et al. (2015) argue that for sustainable peace in post-conflict there is a necessity of several elements, such as protection of human rights, refugee return, free and fair elections and demobilization-disarmament of ex-combatants (Phayal et al. 2015). Other scholars like Theidon, (2009), Fusato (2003), Clark (2013) argue that disarmament, demobilization, and

reintegration of former combatants are crucial factors for post-conflict reconstruction. DDR essentially is part of the strategy to secure peace after war, becoming one of the standard forms of eliminating security threats in the immediate post-conflict societies (Jennings, 2008). DDR implies the inevitability that transition from conflict to peace is not a reachable task if the transfer of former combatants to civilian life and their capability to earn livelihoods through peaceful means rather than war is not achieved (Fusato 2003). The main goal of DDR is to return ex-combatants to a 'healthy' civilian life and to achieve an integrated and sustainable democracy (Kingma 2002). Therefore, DDR programs since the 1990s have become necessary steps toward a post-war rehabilitation; UN, international and internal NGOs have emphasized the position of DDR of ex-combatants as a critical factor towards sustainable peace (Waldorf 2013).

## **DDR**

DDR is a threefold process as implied by the name. 'Disarmament' includes the efforts to reduce and eliminate weapons in post-conflict societies and make the re-mobilization of ex-combatants ideally impossible (Phayal et al. 2015; Fusato 2003). Fusato (2003) argues that disarmament requires security and should be completed in a short time period, to eliminate the possibility of stealing arms and reemergence of violence. 'Demobilization' contains the pulling apart of military units, and transition from 'combatant' identity to 'civilian' identity (Fusato 2003; Knight 2008). This stage includes activities as orientation programs and transportation of ex-combatants back to their communities (Fusato, 2003).

Different from the processes of disarmament and demobilization which are tangible, 'Reintegration' process is a sensitive one, which requires safety and security for former combatants, including their dependents (Jennings 2008; Knight 2008). To maintain the successful transition from war to peace, effective reintegration of former combatants into civilian life is crucial. In this stage, a provision of cash, long-term jobs, and education are provided to former combatants, in exchange for the commitment of not going back to conflict (Jennings 2008; Kinght 2008). A crucial element in the reintegration stage is the process of helping ex-combatants to find a 'place' to reintegrate in post-conflict societies (Kingma 1999). Hence, the following section will elaborate reintegration stage, and try to answer the question of why ex-combatants need to be reintegrated to societies.

## **2.2. Reintegration of Ex-combatants**

### **2.2.1. Ex-combatant**

UN in its 'Guideline and Principles for DDR' report defines an ex-combatant as the soldier who is registered as disarmed officially (UN 1999). However, Nilsson (2005) implies that the definition that the UN proposes is inefficient and incompetent since it doesn't refer who should be registered as a former combatant.

He instead (2005) suggests that the definition for an ex-combatant should be as follows: 'an individual who has taken a direct part in the hostilities on behalf of one of the warring parties. The individual must also either have been discharged from or have voluntarily left the military group he or she was serving in' (Nilsson 2005, 16). For the sake of clarity, in this thesis, I will adopt this definition of ex-combatants.

### **2.2.2. Motivation to Join Armed Groups**

The literature on why some individuals decide to join armed groups introduces different justifications and incentives. The socio-structural approaches argue that individuals that emerge from societies where there is poverty, inequality, and social exclusion have a higher chance to become part of armed groups (Bosi and Porta 2012, 363). Additionally, (Bosi and Porta 2012, 363) assert the fact that armed groups attract individuals described as idealistic with aspirations for a long-term benefit.

Bosi and Porta (2012) state that individuals may join insurgent groups due to ideological beliefs (political cause) and lack of other options. In other words, individuals may join the armed group when the best option for them is to be part of insurgent groups rather than remaining in the actual position in society. Apart from these individuals can potentially join insurgent groups as explained by Bosi and Porta, if they are socially related with other individuals who already are part of the armed groups; in other words, if friends, family, colleagues have joined insurgent groups, it raises the possibility of them to connect with groups (Bosi and Porta 2012, 364).

Oppression as a phenomenon is discussed in the literature to be a catalysator that effects the level of recruitment by armed groups. However, Bosi and Porta, for example, argue that oppression may depend on either its specifics or if it is indiscriminate, additionally an essential element it is also on how it is perceived by the whole population (Bosi and Porta 2012, 365). Furthermore, explicit stress and trauma have a specific power on paving the way towards mobilization to an insurgent group (Bosi and Porta 2012, 356)

Vinci, on his analysis about Somalian soldiers, identifies two factors that lead and motivated them to join armed groups. Firstly, he points out the loyalty towards a particular groups' cause, emphasizing that mostly that cause is a kind of religious loyalty (Vinci 2006, 82). Secondly, armed groups may be seen as a source to get rid of poverty. Thus, the likelihood of individuals who lack economic prosperities to join armed forces is higher (Vinci 2006, 82).

### **2.2.3. Reintegration**

Kingma (2000) and Wiegink (2013) argue that reintegration is a social and economic process, that former combatants face attaining the civilian status. Differently, Wessells (2006) considers reintegration as a twofold process: a) individual acceptance of the combatants, and b) community acceptance and support. Nelson (2005) proposes the following definition, which brings the attention not only to the former combatants but also to their families also: 'a societal process aiming at the economic, political and social assimilation of ex-combatants and their families into civil society' (Nelson 2005, 27).

UNDP adapts a more comprehensive definition. In its practice book (2005) for DDR in post-conflict societies UNDP defines the reintegration as 'the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income; a social and economic process are primarily taking place in communities at the local level' (UNDP 2005, 12).

### **2.2.4. Need for Re-Integration of the Ex-Combatants**

Weinstein and Humphreys (2007) argue that the intention of DDR programs is to decrease the risk of a possible return to conflict. They argue that if ex-combatants do not demobilize, disarm, and reintegrate properly, it can be a cause to a resumption of conflict. The



reason why they should be reintegrated is simply forward that if they do not, the probability of them to reorganize and spoil the peace is high (Weinstein & Humphreys 2007). On the same context but focusing more on the economic reintegration of ex-combatants, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) reason that if ex-combatants don't have a decent livelihood in post-conflict, the higher is the risk to connect with other former combatants and jeopardize post-conflict stability.

Kaplan and Nussio (2015) argue that if ex-combatants reintegrate, they will be kept away from the possibility of rearming and it will 'abolish' the chances of a reunion with individuals whom they fought together. Therefore, in a way, if the reintegration process is successful, the process of demobilization will be successful too.

Bowd&Ozerdem (2013) and Lundin (1998) argue that if ex-combatants reintegrate, they transit from the status of a 'killing machine' to a new identity that is 'become a person again.' (pp.460). Additionally, Bowd and Ozerdem (2013) argue that the psychosocial support given in the reintegration phase is beneficial on the aspect of accepting the conversion from military identity to the civilian one.

## **2.3. Ex-Combatants as Peacebuilders and Peace Spoilers**

### **2.3.1. Challenges of Reintegrating Ex-Combatants**

Indeed, the measurement of the success of reintegration programs for ex-combatants remains to be a challenge for scholars (Ozerdem and Bowd 2013; Vries and Wiegink 2011; Gear 2002). In other words, different from stages of disarmament and demobilization, the success of which can be evident by the number of collected arms or demobilized combatants, reintegration stage remains to be unmeasurable. Ozerdem and Bowd (2013) argue that what is called 'reintegration success' is complex to be defined since it changes according to expectations and political agendas.

Ozerdem and Bowd (2013) and Vries and Wiegink (2011) argue that the lack of community acceptance, stigmatization, stereotyping, lack of support from state leaders are the challenges that programs of reintegration face during implementation. Ozerdem and Bowd (2013) and Gear (2002) state that traumas and psychological conditions created at ex-combatants like depression, anxiety, post-stress disorder and dependence on drugs can limit the

access/success of reintegration programs towards ex-combatants. Alternatively stated, ex-combatants become non-cooperative in these conditions, thus, create a challenge to reintegrate them. Apart from that, Vries and Wiegink (2011) and Gear (2002) claim that because ex-combatants are not used to live in a civilian mindset, and the personality created in the military or in organized armed groups is difficult to overcome.

Gear (2002) describes as 'hostile' the environment where ex-combatants will reintegrate. She argues that in post-conflict, there is a hostile economy (few opportunities for employment) and a hostile community (destroyed social order and lack of community empathy). Otherwise stated, Gear (2002) presents this 'hostility' as a challenge for DDR programs to function effectively. From this perspective, Berdal (1996) along the same lines as Vries and Wiegink (2001) and Gear (2002), argues that in protracted conflicts former combatants remain for a long time in the military. Hence the military skills will be difficult to leave behind. Put differently, ex-combatants that for a long time have been living in military settings will have difficulties in the process of reintegration to civilian life.

Within this framework Cock (1993) argues that ex-combatants may often experience 'returning hero syndrome,' which is manifested with the need to utilize acts of heroism in society, thereof when they cannot accomplish this task desperation follows (Cock 1993 cited in Gear 2002). Thus, Gear (2002) discusses that when ex-combatants obtain the feelings of desperation and disappointment during the reintegration process, they become inaccessible for reintegration programs to influence them.

### **2.3.2. Ex-Combatants as Peace Spoilers**

#### **Peace spoiler**

Stedman (1997) presents the fact that every peace process generates spoilers. Accordingly, spoilers cannot be spoilers if there is not a peaceful situation to spoil (Sheed, 2008). This occurs for the fact that not every negotiation or settlement satisfies needs of all side. On the same framework as Stedman, Nilsson, and Kovacs (2011) argue that spoilers only appear when there is a settlement that is not beneficial for them. Stedman (1997) divides spoiler of peace in post-conflict societies in two groups: a) inside spoiler and b) outside spoilers. Inside spoilers are defined to be individuals that are part of peace negotiations and have shown the willingness to accept the negotiation but still fail to implement the agreement (Stedman, 1997). Outside spoilers different from inside spoilers are defined to be individuals that are left out from

the peace negotiations or draw away themselves (Stedman 1997). The broad definition that Stedman adapts to the term of the spoiler is ‘leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview and interests, and use of violence to undermine attempts to achieve it’ (Stedman 1997, 5). Parallel with Stedman, Reiter (2015) conceptualizes spoilers as ‘actors who use violence or threats of violence in an overt attempt to undermine and terminate a peace agreement’ (pp.92). Contrary, to the definition of Stedman (1997), scholars maintain that spoilers do not always use the means of violence to achieve its goals, but often they do use non-violent tactics also (Nilsson and Kovacs 2011; Pearlman 2009; Zahar 2008; Yonekawa 2014).

### **Possibilities of Ex-combatants to Become Spoilers**

Themner (2013) argues that ex-combatants are recognized to be one of the primary sources of instability in post-war situations. He argues that ex-combatants are predisposed to violence and can be spoilers of peace because of the absence of economic prospects, lack of security, and easy access to arms in post-conflict societies. Themner (2013) on the same topic, explains that ex-combatants refuse to join societies that are hostile to them. In addition, democratic environments created in post-conflict societies are not the kind of environments that ex-combatants are used to deal with the problems. In other words, solving conflicts peacefully is not a situation that ex-combatants can adapt quickly.

The fact that in the majority of cases, ex-combatants enroll in the military at an early age, in post-conflict, they lack education and employment experience (Themner 2013). Consequently, scholars argue that disappointment in this period can push these individuals to spoil post-war stability. Nussio (2018) makes a connection between ex-combatants’ ‘skills of violence’ with the possibility of them becoming a spoiler in post-conflict societies, arguing that after demobilization, those skills can be used again. Additionally, he argues that reintegration programs discriminate ex-combatants in terms of rank and importance, paying more attention to high-rank combatants (Nussio, 2018).

Additionally, Kaplan and Nussio (2015) argue that ex-combatants may become spoilers if there is a high number of criminal organizations in the country they reside and weak family bonds. However, Sheed (2008) presents that spoilers emerge from the events that happened before the peace settlement or sometimes emerge from the requirements of the agreement itself. In other words, Sheed (2008) argues that if ex-combatants become spoilers, they already have

been influenced by the events before the peace. Therefore, if the conditions in post-conflict societies influence ex-combatants to turn into spoilers is still questionable and vague.

### **2.3.3. Peacebuilding roles in post-conflict**

Even though peacebuilding, as a concept was first formulated in 1975 (Paffenholz, 2013), in the international sphere it was revealed for the first time by the UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali in a document named *An Agenda for Peace* (Lederach 1997;). Secretary-General proposed a general agenda for the United Nations to cope with conflicts, thus, proposed preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding as mechanisms to achieve this goal (Lambourne and Herro 2008; World Bank 2006; Fetherston 2000). Alternatively stated, he proposed a scheme that is adequate for conflicts that need various and multiple response mechanisms towards sustainable peace. Lederach (1997) argues that the Secretary General's and UN's policies towards divided societies, particularly peacebuilding, are solely directed to the assistance of peace negotiations and do not address the roots of conflicts. For this reason, he indicates that peacebuilding shouldn't be conceptualized exclusively as 'post accord reconstruction,' but more as a set of processes/approaches/stages that are essential towards sustainable peace.

Lederach (1997) conceptualizes peacebuilding as a social construct, hence insists on the term to be conceptualized as a process that requires 'investment and materials, architectural design and coordination of labor, laying of a foundation, and detailed finish work, as well as continuing maintenance' (Lederach 1997, 20). With regard to the functionality of peacebuilding, he illustrates leadership in conflict-affected populations in the form of a pyramid.

## Types of Actors

## Approaches to Building Peace

### Level 1: Top Leadership

Military/political/religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high-level negotiations  
Emphasizes cease-fire  
Led by highly visible, single mediator

### Level 2: Middle-Range Leadership

Leaders respected in sectors  
Ethnic/religious leaders  
Academics/intellectuals  
Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)

Problem-solving workshops  
Training in conflict resolution  
Peace commissions  
Insider-partial teams

### Level 3: Grassroots Leadership

Local leaders  
Leaders of indigenous NGOs  
Community developers  
Local health officials  
Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions  
Grassroots training  
Prejudice reduction  
Psychosocial work in postwar trauma

Affected Population

Derived from John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 39.

Lederach (1997) divides leadership in post-conflict in three tracks of actors, specifically top level (a track I), middle range (track II), and grassroots leadership (track III). In track one, top-level leadership is illustrated, containing foremost political, military, or religious leaders, focusing on outcome-oriented approaches (Lederach 1997) and in track two, containing academics, humanitarian leaders focusing in resolution-oriented approach, with technics like problem-solving workshops (Lederach 1997) and in track three, containing local leaders, leaders of indigenous NGOs, or community developers characterized by more active engagement as trauma healing or community dialogue (Lederach 1997).

The purpose of this thesis is to measure the role of ex-combatants in post-conflict societies through civic activism; henceforth, I will be focusing on track two and track three, analyzing civic activism in post-conflict. For that matter, Lederach (1997) argues that track two and track three have ‘the greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term’ (Lederach, 1997, 60).

## **2.4. Civic Activism in Post-Conflict**

### **2.4.1 Civil Society and Civic Activism**

In the literature, the term civil society is argued to be complicated. Consequently, there are different interpretations. Civil Society Index (CSI) defines CS as the sphere of an individual's life where he/she associates with other individuals, separated by the family, state and the market (Fioramonti, Heinrich 2007). Civil society in the literature is interpreted to be both as incompatible with the state and working in harmony with the state. Anderson (1998) emphasizes the fact that the state also has the primary duty to protect its citizens. Thus, civil society's duty is the same as the states (Anderson, 1998). Anderson (1998) also argues that in most of the cases, it is the state that makes civil society possible, therefore, if the state was authoritative, the civil society wouldn't be able to exist.

The term civic engagement/activity is defined in World Bank report/paper (2006) as 'the participation of private actors in the public sphere, conducted through direct and indirect civil society organizations and citizen interactions with government, business community and external agencies to influence decision making or peruse common goals' ( World Bank Report 2006, 2). I will use the term of civil society to include the activities of civic engagement and civil societies; in other words, as the quote above implies civic engagement is conducted mainly through civil society organizations.

#### **2.4.1. Role of Civil Society in Post-Conflict**

The literature on the role of civil society in post-conflict societies and in peacebuilding lists them as follows: promoting reconciliation, encouraging non-violent forms for conflict administration, monitoring the process of human rights protection and social injustices, being the key role to prevent violence and the resurrection of violence, promoting new peaceful ways for dialogue between groups ( Harpviken and Kjellman 2004; Douma and Klem 2004). Argued by Chazan (1992), the role of civil society in a post-conflict environment should be to have a part in the process of building bridges of cooperation, thus, ignore and avoid national, ethnic and religious differences.

In southern Africa, civil organizations had the duty to help former combatants to reconcile and reintegrate in a post-conflict environment (Colvin 2007). Therefore, in this context, civil society organizations have fulfilled the duties of trauma counseling, victim support, demobilization, memorialization, and reparations (Colvin 2007). Colvin (2007) argues that when former combatants are adjusting in the life after a conflict, civil society with its power can serve as a bridge between the state and the civilians and can help to promote awareness towards them.

Peinado (nd) argues that one of the damages that violent conflict induces it is said to be the division and polarization of the society, thus, in this direction, the leading actor that should heal this damage is the civil society. This is because civil society is less visible than the state, more flexible, and has more resources to engage in grassroots of the conflict. Civil society must have the power to be the voice of all communities in post-conflict stages and pave the way towards peace and reconciliation between individuals of different communities within a state (Peinado nd).

#### **2.4.2. Importance of Civic Engagement**

Orjuela (2003) claims that the literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding is principally focused on how the international community and state actors can intermediate violent conflicts. She maintains that non-state actors, for instance, local civil society actors are precepted as assistants in the prevention of violent conflict; thus, their role mainly is underrated. Ross and Rothman (1999), as well as support this claim, and additionally, add the fact that non-state actors commonly are more effective than state actors because they can be more responsive and flexible in post-conflict peacebuilding. On the same terms, Van Tongeren (1998) argues that non-state actors are ‘able to talk to several parties without losing their credibility and to deal directly with the grass-roots population’ (Van Tongeren 1998 cited in Orjuela 2003).

World Bank Report (2006) maintains that civil society’s successful efforts throughout the world (for instance the success of civil society mediators in Mozambique) turned the attention to the potential of non-state actors, precisely civil society and civic engagement. In this context, a prominent scholar who accentuated the importance of non-state actors is John Paul Lederach with his contribution of peacebuilding pyramid, which became a model for most approaches in peacebuilding (World Bank Report 2006).

The importance of non-state actors has also been emphasized by multilateral agencies, international organizations and bilateral donors (World Bank Report 2006), for instance in 2005 the UN Security Council stressed the capacity of an active civil society in peacebuilding efforts (UN Security Council report, 2005). World Bank Report also points out the official peace efforts in Guatemala and Afghanistan, where civil society was active in the process and affected the nature of peace agreement positively. Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) argue that an active/vibrant civil society and civic engagement are crucial to ‘boost the accountability of government toward their citizens, to strengthen public policy decisions and to increase the effectiveness of development interventions’ (pp.1, 2006). Within this context, ex-combatants have been seen as an essential asset in the peacebuilding process; Fridriksdottir (2018) argues that ex-combatants can contribute as agents of peace with civic activities. Therefore, the following section will provide examples from countries where ex-combatants took such roles.

### **2.4.3. Civil Society in Kosovo**

KCSF (2011) defines civil society in Kosovo as a sphere divided from the family, state and the market (KCSF 2011, 19). The civil society sector in Kosovo is defined by the definition of non-profit and it comprises registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and media (KCSF 2011, 19).

After the war in 1999 vast funds emerged from the international donors to support the re-building of the country in post-conflict, therefore, the majority of the civil society organizations based in Kosovo are oriented in this aspect (KCSF 2011).

According to the report of Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (2018) the number of registered NGOs in Kosovo is 9,545; 95% of them are registered as associations and 5% as foundations, and majority of the civil society organizations are based in the capital city of Pristina (KCSF 2018, 8).

Interestingly, only 1,000 of the registered NGOs are active and conduct activities (KCSF 2018).

Kosovar Civil Society Foundation lists the types of the civil society organizations in Kosovo according to their main areas of focus and their impact in society. Therefore, according to KCSF report of 2018 types and focus of civil society activities and organizations in Kosovo are as follow: ‘democratization, rule of law, education, monitoring of the work of institutions, fight against the corruption, drafting and implementing policies and legislations, agriculture,



human rights, economic development, culture-youth-sport, gender equality and empowerment of women, environmental protection' (KCSF 2018, 48).

#### **2.4.4. Ex-Combatants as Peacebuilders**

Emerson (2012) in its study about ex-combatants in Northern Ireland, analyzes the initiative 'From prison to peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners,' which was an initiative that brought together young people with loyalist and republican ex-combatants. Emerson (2012) argues that these kinds of programs have the potential to raise awareness among young people about armed conflict. He additionally claims that if ex-combatants share their stories with young people about the consequences of war, sensibilization about the harms of conflict would be easier. A similar study has been conducted by Simic&Milojevic (2014) on the potential peacebuilding capacity of former Serbian combatants. They argue that ex-combatants carry the potential to affect the visions of youth towards participation in armed conflicts, since listening experiences about conflicts directly from the ones who actually were fighting, appears to be influential.

Fridriksdottir (2018) argues that in literature for conflict resolution, ex-combatants mainly are potential peace spoilers. He argues that it is logical to consider them as spoilers since, in many countries around the world, they indeed had spoiled the peace in post-conflict times. Yet, many studies indicate the potential of ex-combatants to spoil the peace is less than it is commonly argued. Fridriksdottir (2018), in its study for ex-combatants in Burundi, concludes that being a combatant during armed conflict and working for peace in post-conflict times is possible and acceptable. Ex-combatants can be and sometimes are unexploited assets for peacebuilding in post-war situations, however, in Burundi ex-combatants have not been valued for their efforts towards social activism since they are always considered as a threat in society (Fridriksdottir 2018). In other words, in societies where ex-combatants have a negative reputation, there is not much space and opportunities for them to express themselves as peacebuilders.

Different from the study of ex-combatants in Burundi, Clubb (2014) presents how former combatants in Northern Ireland by taking roles in the community contributed to the awareness of 'terrorism' and political violence. Clubb (2014) argues that ex-combatants in post-conflict societies have the potential to raise awareness towards violence, which is a role that the state couldn't realize. In his study Clubb (2014) additionally claims that the example of IRA's

former combatants encouraged former combatants of other groups to take such roles, emphasizing the fact that when these activities come from ex-combatants and not from the state, they provide higher credibility in the eyes of citizens. In this context, Mitchell (2008) argues that ex-combatants have a crucial function in post-conflict peacebuilding. He justifies this argument, analyzing the role of ex-combatants in Northern Ireland, that played an essential role in mediating with remaining active combatants during armed conflict, a role that state institutions failed to achieve.

However, ex-combatants can practice their roles as peacebuilders when they are accepted by their community as legitimate. Otherwise, as in the case of Burundi ex-combatants, their efforts can be fruitless. Lopez, Andreouli and Howarth (2015) on their study about Columbian former combatants, present that when state and civic organizations offer opportunities to former combatants to become part of civic activities, they pave the way to their successful reintegration. This study reasons that if there is a will to heal society from a grassroots perspective, ex-combatants can be key actors in this aspect.

Contrary to other studies for engagement of ex-combatants in civic activities in post-conflict, Ouais and Rowayheb (2017) conducted a study on Lebanese ex-combatants that were on opposite sides during the armed conflict. They argue that when ex-combatants fight for a cause' in armed conflict (as for independence or human rights), the probability of them to engage in peacebuilding is higher. The case of Lebanese ex-combatants is peculiar since ex-combatants that were on opposite sides during the war founded a non-governmental organization (Fighters for Peace FFP) to urge peace and coexistence after the war ended (Ouais and Rowayheb 2017).

This thesis review's purpose was to help the readers to understand the concepts about the reintegration of ex-combatants and their potential, whether as spoilers or peacebuilders in post-conflict societies. The literature on post-conflict societies claims that ex-combatants have the potential to influence post-conflict society — their role, whether as peacebuilders or spoilers, is determined by several factors. While there are many studies that conclude their potential as spoilers, in recent years there is an emergence of studies that analyze ex-combatants as effective peacebuilders. More research and study are required to gain a better understanding on how and whether can ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding through civic engagement.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative studies measure the construct of social reality and cultural meanings; at the same time, they focus on interactive processes and events (Neuman, 2014; 17). Theory and data are incorporated/fused, and simultaneously, the researcher is involved in the research, as opposed to the detachment of a quantitative researcher (Neuman, 2014:17). Additionally, qualitative studies carry the potential to discover new issues and explore new paradigms during the research. This study does not test hypotheses; instead, it has the aim of shaping hypotheses based on the research question and observation of the social roles and realities of participants.

The methodology is shaped by the aim of discovering and observing the current roles of former combatants in a post-conflict society, employing interviews for data collection. The potential of former combatants in post-conflict societies is a quite controversial and vague issue in the existing literature. Thus, this study aims to contribute to this aspect by raising the questions of whether and how ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies through civic activism.

These questions can be adequately answered while observing and interviewing participants in their natural setting, where the researcher can iteratively consider their stories and gather ideas (Neuman, 2014:51). This study, for this reason, is analyzed by qualitative methods using field research with an in-depth understanding of participants' stories (Neuman, 2014:103).

This study seeks to examine whether and how ex-combatants contribute and reintegrate to post-conflict societies. Kosovo Liberation Army's ex-combatants were selected as a case study, and fifteen of them were interviewed. The interviews were conducted with ex-combatants currently living in Kosovo and aged between forty and fifty-two. At the time they were combatants, they were aged between nineteen and thirty-two. A total of three women and twelve men were interviewed. In the interviews, participants were asked if they wished to remain anonymous; all female participants chose to remain anonymous; ten male participants also chose to remain anonymous, but five male participants did not have problem with sharing

their identities. However, for the sake of confidentiality and because some of the participants are now public figures in Kosovo, they are referred to in this text with numbers. A complete list of research participants, including their age, civic engagement, and current employment is provided in the Appendix B (see Table no.1)

### **3.1. Interview Method**

This study aims to gather information on *how* former combatants engage in civic activism and how they see this role in a post-conflict society. A semi-structured interview model was used for data-gathering. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate to focus and ‘make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues’ in which the ‘interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:1002). Apart from this, semi-structured interviews are conducted to serve the researcher as ‘knowledge-producer’ in seeking answers to ‘how interviewees experience their world, its episodes, and events’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:1003).

To answer the research question of this study, it is essential to analyze the actions and attitudes of the participants. With a semi-structured interview, a researcher, in addition to the answers of participants, can analyze their behavior during the interview and the hesitation to answer particular questions (Mosley 2013, 7). These elements are beneficial in a qualitative study because they can influence the overall context of the research and help the researcher in the process of answering and producing hypotheses based on the research question (Mosley 2013, 36)

The interview participants of this study are former combatants of the Kosovo Liberation Army, currently living in post-conflict Kosovo, who have been and are engaged in civic activism after the war.

I applied snowball sampling as a method to reach participants. In the literature, snowball sampling is referred to as ‘referral sampling’ or ‘respondent-driven sampling,’ which helps the research to reach other participants through the references of previous interviewees (Mosley 2013, 41). To reach the potential participants, I had to contact several associations for veterans, acquaintances engaged in different NGOs in Kosovo, and members of my family who had been part of the Kosovo Liberation Army. I requested from them to reach out former combatants who have been engaged in civic activism in the post-conflict Kosovo. This method provided a

way to build trust between the participants and me because they had been reached by individuals who know me and were assured about the confidentiality of the information.

Despite this fact, several participants were hesitant about my profile and my country of residence, Turkey. Because of the troublesome image of Turkey lately in the news, they had several questions about my intentions and the usage of this study. Thus, they had their doubts about consenting to a voice recording. Therefore, participants were ensured about the confidentiality of the study by providing ‘Sabanci University’s Ethical Board’ consent form (see consent form in Appendix A)

The data was collected during January and February 2019. The interviews began at the beginning of January and ended at the beginning of February. The meetings were arranged in two different cities: the capital city of Kosovo, Pristina, and the city of Peja. Ten participants requested to meet in Pristina, where they currently live and work. Five participants were based in the city of Peja. Meetings in Pristina were held in places that participants requested: eight interviews were conducted in noiseless coffee shops requested by participants; two interviews were conducted in parliamentary offices (where these participants work). Five interviews in Peja were conducted in the offices of NGOs where the participants were currently employed at the time of the interviews.

All interviews were voice-recorded for better analysis. One of the participants voice-recorded the interview themselves in case it would be misused, and another did not accept to meet without the gatekeeper who helped contact him. A gatekeeper is a ‘person with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site’ (Neuman 2014, 441). In this case the gatekeeper was an acquaintance of mine, working in the same organization with the participant.

This hesitancy of participants was also due to the current political developments about the KLA; a special court for war crimes conducted by the KLA members has recently been created. The special court’s aim is to investigate crimes that may have been conducted by former KLA soldiers during the war, towards Serbian and Albanian civilians. Thus, the participants were suspicious that the information could be used in this matter. However, several members of my family having also been part of the KLA, helped me to build a trust line. Therefore, there was a need to build trust between the interviewer and other participants that did not have information about my family identity. The consent form provided by ‘Sabanci University’s Ethical Board’ was again used; this had positive effects in their comfortability during the interview. The consent form was provided both in English and in Albanian.

Questions were articulated in a sensitive manner to avoid participants’ discomfort. Despite this, participants were informed that they could decide to withdraw from the interview

if they were uncomfortable with the questions. Personal information and voice records were kept strictly confidential, limited to the principal investigator, and ensured that they would not be published in the study or any other form. Interview questions were designed to gather information about demographic variables, the background history of the participants, and their history of civic engagement. Before conducting the interview, the participants were offered the chance to receive the questions beforehand, to ensure a comfortable atmosphere with the interviewer. Three participants of the study asked the list of questions and then decided whether they would participate in the study.

The interview initially started with a presentation of the participants to the interviewer, including age, background, and education which allowed the interviewees to relax. Later, the question of military background and civic engagement background were asked. All the interviews were held in the Albanian language; they were transcribed verbatim in Albanian and then translated to English.

## **4. BACKGROUND OF THE KOSOVO WAR**

### **4.1. The Conflict from Two Different Broad Perspectives**

The existent literature on the Kosovo War analyzes the causes of conflict from two perspectives: the Serbian perspective, and Albanian perspective.

From the Serbian point of view, the importance of Kosovo territory began from the time of Slav people's arrival in Europe in the fourth century AD, during the time of the of great migrations. Slav people are divided into three groups: Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 12). In the tenth century AD, Serbs were settled in Kosovo (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 12; Judah 1999, 5-18). The literature from the Serbian point of view argues that from the tenth to twelfth century AD, the Serbians culturally invested in Kosovo region, making the region 'the heart of the Serbian culture.' By the twelfth century, the region was part of the Medieval Serbian Empire (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 12; Judah 1999, 5-18; Emmert 1999, 218). However, this situation did not last long as by the year 1385 the region fell under the power of the Ottoman Empire. According to Serbian historians, the religious imposition by Ottomans to Serbian population resulted in the mass extinction of Serbian people from Kosovo region, which created the condition for new Albanian settlers who were Muslim by faith, to settle in Kosovo. Thus, by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Serbian population in Kosovo was decreased compared to the number of Albanians (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 13; Judah 1999, 5-18; Emmert 1999, 219).

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, many other historical events influenced the fate of the region. Serbian historians mark the end of the Second World War as a significant event that shaped the future of Kosovo, as by the end of WWII to the year 1974 Kosovo was an 'autonomous region' within Yugoslavia, with a separate constitution and equal rights with other federal states (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 13-15). However, in 1974 the autonomy rights were annulled, and with the death of Tito (the leader of Yugoslavia) in 1980, the situation changed.

Serbian historians marked this period as the period when Albanians started to ‘attack’ the Serbian population in Kosovo and destroying the Serbian historical monuments (Judah 1999). They aimed to create the ‘great Albania’ by incorporating Kosovo in the state of Albania. With the rise of Milosevic to power at the end of the 1980s, the situation started getting worse (Papasotiriou 2002; Troebest 1998). In Serbian history, Milosevic is described to be the leader that heard the voice of Serbian people. Moreover, what they wished was to have Kosovo back in the territories of Serbia (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 16). Thus, at the beginning of the 90s, martial law was created to stop potential revolts of Albanians rebels and to prevent the killings of ‘innocent’ Serbian people (Bieber and Uzidas 2003; Kubo 2010).

From the Kosovar Albanians perspective, the history of the conflict is different. Albanian historians claim that the ancestors of Albanians, the Illyrians, had been long settled in the region of Kosovo before the Serbs started to settle in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD (Bieber and Uzidas 2003, 16). The Serbian expansion continued until the Ottoman domination; however, even under the Ottoman rule, the Serbian population continued to occupy the territories that ‘belong’ to the Albanians. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Albanian sources claim that from 1914 to 1941 there was a period of a ‘serbianization’ of the territory, and thousands of Albanian families were expelled or killed (Bieber and Uzidas 2003; Judah 1999, 5-18). The testimony for this is the agreement between Tito and Turkey’s Foreign Affair Minister Fuad Koprulu in 1953, where Turkey accepted to greet 400,000 Albanians from Kosovo to its territories (Bieber and Uzidas 2003). Thus, the domination of Albanians in Kosovar territory decreased from 90% to 70%.

The situation got worse with the death of Tito in 1980. With the abolition of the autonomy status of Kosovo, the terror began for Albanians (Troebest 1998). Albanian historians claim that many Albanian politicians like Ibrahim Rugova tried to find a solution for the ethnic problem in peaceful ways, with mediation and negotiation, but they failed (Papasotiriou 2002 ; Troebest 1998). Thus, many Kosovar Albanians started believing that all roads led to the creation of an insurgency group.

## **4.2. Escalation of Situation**

The existing literature on the Kosovo War shows the period from 1989 to 1999 as the ‘Milosevic Era.’ Ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs reached its highest peak when



Milosevic came to power. Kubo (2010) argues that measures like the expulsion of Albanians from workplaces, the annulment of autonomy, and the ‘renewal’ of Serbian nationalism influenced the Albanian uprisings (Kubo 2010, 1138). Serbian became the only official language, with the abolishment of the Albanian language from the institutions and official businesses (Troebest 1998, 17). The Albanian leader of the Communist Party of Kosovo was dismissed by Milosevic, with the appointment of a new member which could be ‘easily’ controlled (Troebest 1998). These occasions disrupted the already tensioned ethnic relations between the Albanians and Serbs. On 24 January 1989, mass demonstrations led by Kosovar Albanians started with slogans ‘Kosova Republika’ in Pristina, demanding equal status as the other republics of Yugoslavia, such as Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia (Troebest 1998, 18). By September 1990, 115,000 Albanians were expelled from their jobs in every public institution and all cultural activities, associations, and newspapers in Albanian were officially banned (Troebest 1998, 20)

Consequently, the Albanian elite initiated the first steps toward possible independence in the future. In 1990 Albanian Members of the Kosovo Parliament, as a part of autonomy system took drastic steps and declared Kosovo independent (Kubo 2010). In the same period, Albanians organized elections to elect their president, Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the main Albanian party, Democratic League of Kosovo. In this period, a ‘parallel state’ or ‘parallel society’ was created in Kosovo (Kubo 2010, 1139). In other words, Albanians created their tax system, education system, and mobilized toward total independence from Yugoslavia.

However, the ruling class of Albanians did not use violent actions toward the Serbian regime but tried to solve the situation with peaceful means. Kubo (2010) states that this was due to four facts: *firstly*, the ideologies of the 90s, especially in eastern Europe, were towards a quiet resolution of conflict with the maintenance of parallel government; *secondly*, the Albanians had been portrayed as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘villagers’ for many years by the Serbs, thus, the democratic party argued that applying violent means would complete this image, and would negatively influence the image of Albanians in Europe; *thirdly*, again the leader of the democratic party of Albanians, Rugova, was insecure about the power of Albanians as an army, arguing that Serbian army is waiting for a pretext to massacre Albanians. Consequently, mobilizing to an armed organization was not wise; and *lastly*, at the beginning of the 90s Albania, with President Sali Berisha at that time, did not support the independence of Kosovo, nor an insurgent group to fight for independence (Kubo 2010; 1136-1340). For this reason, Rugova, the President of the ‘shadow’ and ‘parallel’ state of Kosovo, gained sympathy from the European states (Troebest 1998). From 1992 until the appearance of the Kosovo Liberation

Army in 1996, Kosovo survived with its 'shadow' government. However, the Albanian population could not survive with a second-class economy, a political suppression, discrimination, thus, many also believed that it was evident from the conditions that these parallel structures would not last long (Troebest 1998).

A turning point in the conflict is the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the Bosnian war. Kosovo issue was not mentioned in the agreement, and any attention was given to its solution by foreign powers. (Troebest 1998). Kubo (2010) states that despite mass demonstrations of Albanians to attract the attention of western states, in the Dayton agreement, European states' 'eyes were closed.' Dayton Agreement's outcomes led to a distancing of several Albanian political actors from the peaceful movement of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, thus, considering revolting as an option (Troebest 1998, 20). Troebest (1998) argues that Dayton influenced the division of the political elite of Kosovar Albanians in two groups: the pacifists and activists/militants. The activists/militants considered that the option of revolting and 'active civil resistance' against the repression is the only solution for the future of Kosovo (Troebest 1998, 21). The genesis of Kosovo Liberation Army begins from this period, post-Dayton agreement, it was the time when Kosovo Albanians 'realized that passive resistance has failed as a strategy' (Judah, 1999: 12). Additionally, the existing literature on Kosovo war states that the Albanian illegal organizations were created in diaspora from the 1980s have a decisive influence in the creation of KLA.

### **4.3. Formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)**

The problems of Albanians in Kosovo were not addressed in the Dayton Agreement. This was a disappointment for the population and led to distrust towards the peaceful politics of Ibrahim Rugova and the party that he was leading, the Democratic League of Kosovo (Papasotiriou 2002, 43). Following the year of the Dayton Agreement, in 1996, the Kosovo Liberation Army performed its first violent attack by assassinating a Serbian policeman (Kubo 2010, 1142). Two other assassinations of Serbian policemen occurred in 1996 (Kubo 2010, 1143). Until 1997 there was not any information about the organization or individuals that were behind these murders. Judah described the genesis of KLA as 'a small group of men who occasionally shot Serbian policemen (Judah 1999, 13). The organization was created in 1993 in Pristina by several Albanian 'radicals' that opposed the peaceful resolution of Kosovo issue

(Comments 1998, 1). However, it was at the end of the year 1997 when several men with military uniforms, and eagle emblems in their arms that represented the Albanian flag, were seen at a funeral of an Albanian activist killed by the Serbian police (Kubo 2010, 1144). It was the first time that the KLA soldiers were seen in public, even by the Albanian population of Kosovo. However, the attacks of the KLA towards the Serbian police during the years 1996 and 1997 were low because of its weaponry deficiency. The reports from the Serbian Government show that 10 Serbian policeman and 24 civilians died between years 1996-97 (cf. Kubo 2010, 1143). The funds gathered by Albanian diaspora and Albanians activists abroad were not sufficient to attack the heavy weaponry of Serbia.

A turning point in the strengthening of the KLA is argued to be the collapse of the Albanian Government in 1997 (Judah, Kosovo's road to war 1999, 17). Thousands of weapons were sold to the KLA by Albanian officials for several dollars, strengthening the KLA militarily and influencing the membership of other Kosovar Albanians (Judah, Kosovo's road to war 1999, 18-19).

Additionally, books and reports on the KLA distinguish the Jashari family, from the village of Prekaz (Kosovo) as a crucial factor in KLA's activities and mobilization. Judah (1999) argues that the association of Jashari's strengthened the ties of KLA with Albanians villages. However, on 28 February 1998, 80 members of the Jashari family were assassinated by Serbian police (Judah, Kosovo's road to war 1999, 15-18). The death of Jashari family members caused an unexpected uprising of KLA, and the number of Albanians that joined the armed organization rose (Judah 1999, 18-19; Kubo 2010, 1145). Kubo (2010) argues that the reason why many Albanians did not join KLA until 1998 was because of the peaceful politics of Rugova and its party, where he still had a considerable influence in the Albanian population; and secondly because the population was aware of the power of the Serbian military. Edita Tahiri, a member of Rugova's pacifist party, in an interview with Kubo (2010) states that even fractions of the Democratic Party were convinced that peaceful means were not sufficient, thus, the armed mobilization was the only option left (cf. Kubo 2010, 1145). Still, until the Jashari massacre, most Albanians were prevented from joining KLA by the leadership of Rugova (Kubo 2010, 1130-1145).

After the Jashari massacre in 1998, the Serbian police continued the assassinations in other villages, such as Likoshan, Çirez, and Drenica (Judah, Kosovo's road to war 1999, 15-18). According to Kubo (2010), the massacres of Serbian soldiers in these villages started the 'official war for Kosovo' (pp: 1146). In this period, the UN called for a ceasefire, and NATO issued a warning for Serbia in case it does not stop the attacks (Kubo 2010, 1142).

Many historians, both Albanian and internationals, claim that the Jashari massacre and massacres in other villages as well by Serbian regime influenced the membership of many young Albanians into KLA fractions. The number of KLA soldiers in May 1998 was 1,200 and by July 1998 reached 25,000 (Kubo 2010, 1147). Despite, the increased number of soldiers the structure and leadership of KLA was not stable and organized; thus, the organization did not even have a 'general headquarters' until May 1999 (Kubo 2010; 1147). Preeminent commanders of KLA Agim Çeku, Suleyman Selimi and Ramush Haradinaj in several interviews after the war declared that even KLA was not expecting the rapid number of Albanians that urged to join KLA (cf. Judah 1999, 15-18).

With the strengthening of KLA, the conflict escalated. The fightings intensified in March 1999 (Kubo 2010). Consequently, around 300,000 Kosovar Albanians became refugees in Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, and thousands of others were internally displaced, mostly in the mountains (Judah, Kosovo's road to war 1999).

The intensification of hostilities and the flux of refugees reached the attention of international media and European states. Thus, the UN called for a second ceasefire (Kubo 2010). Milosevic intimidated by the threats of NATO, accepted an agreement to cease the hostilities, but in this case, KLA took advantage and started its activities to dominate several Albanian villages (Kubo 2010,1142; Judah 1999, 15-18). The expansion of KLA triggered the Serbian regime to attack again. With the entire massive military of what remained from Yugoslavia, the Serbian army started the actions to abolish the KLA structures in the whole territory of Kosovo (Kubo 2010, 1149). UN member countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Russia) again initiated a peaceful talk in Rambouillet, France, between Albanian leaders - KLA commanders and Serbian delegation; however, the Serbian delegation, instructed by Milosevic, refused to sign the agreement. Thus, NATO airstrikes towards Belgrade began on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1999 and lasted for 78 days, until the day Milosevic was capitulated (Kubo 2010, 1149).

#### **4.4. Post-Conflict Kosovo**

As the bombings of NATO ended, it was estimated that nearly 1.4 million Kosovo Albanians were refugees in neighboring countries of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania (Judah 2008, 88). The bombings ended on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, and according to the UN

Security Council Resolution 1244 for Kosovo, Serbian troops had to evacuate Kosovo territory within few days after the NATO intervention and KLA had to demobilize (Judah 2008, 91). Directly after the war ceased NATO troops and UN administration were deployed in Kosovo, and the return of Albanian refugees began in the summer of 1999 (Judah 2008, 91). Serbian population of Kosovo after the NATO intervention and withdrawal of Serbian troops started to leave their homes in Kosovo and migrate to Serbia (Judah 2008, 92).

After the collapse of Serbian administration in Kosovo, the power was in the hands of the leaders of KLA and the United Nations. Judah (2008) illustrates the post-conflict situation in Kosovo as totally chaotic, with a collapse of order and law. However, UN administration established in Kosovo did not allow all the institutional power to be directed by KLA thus using the Resolution 1244 it formed the 'UNMIK' (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) (Judah 2008, 94). UNMIK aimed to 'rebuild' Kosovo and train Albanian politicians, most of whom were the former KLA combatants, on how to rule and sustain a state (Judah 2008, 94). According to the Resolution 1244, the KLA members could transfer in Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), which was created by the UN not as an army, but as a force that would help only in natural emergencies, such as fires.

After the war was over in 1999 'UNMIK Government' was positioned in Kosovo. The situation in Kosovo between 1999-2008 is argued to be chaotic in terms of reformation of the whole system and the 'education' of the new leaders of the new state (Cocozzelli 2009). Because there was not a peace agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, the road to independence was in the hand of the European states and the United States. After nine years from the conflict, Kosovo was functioning under the supervision of EU and UN administrations.

Kosovo declared independence on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2008. However, the UN resolution 1244 remained active, and the newly created state by Albanians was controlled by the UN and EU (Judah 2008, 150). International surveillance in Kosovo's new institutions led mostly by Albanians, created conditions for the remaining Serbian population in Kosovo to be part of the newly created institutions, with quotas for minorities. Kosovo soon after the independence declaration was recognized as a state by the United States and the majority of European Union countries (Cocozzelli 2009, 2).

However, post-conflict Kosovo is a low-income state, with high numbers of unemployment and a weak economy (Ozerdem 2003, 388). There is still a tension between the remaining Serbian population and Albanians, even though the number of Serbian minorities residing in Kosovo is relatively low (Ozerdem 2003, 389).

#### **4.5. Former KLA Combatants in Post-Conflict Kosovo**

One of the conditions, as stated in the article 15 of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 for Kosovo was the demobilization and disarmament of the Kosovo Liberation Army (Perritt 2008, 153). KLA, as an organization ceased officially in the year 2000 (Judah 2008, 98; Bekaj 2010, 27). Thousands of former combatants of KLA joined the newly formed and unarmed Kosovo Protection Corps and Kosovo Police Service (Perritt 2008, 152). Bekaj (2010) argues that a high number of former combatants preferred to join the KPC. A considerable number got employed in local or international organizations and private companies (Bekaj 2010, 27). High ranked commanders and generals of the KLA created political parties and put their candidacies for political posts (Perritt 2008, 153). Of course, this was possible due to the withdrawal of Serbian administration. Other combatants returned to their homes in cities and villages, and their jobs or universities (Perritt 2008).

International Organization for Migration (IOM) was responsible for the registration of the former KLA combatants. Approximately, 25,723 individuals were registered as former KLA soldiers, and 20,000 of them applied to join the KPC, but only 5,000 of them were accepted (cf. Bekaj 2010, 29; Ozerdem 2003, 388). The data from the IOM reports concludes that 60% of the combatants of KLA were between the ages of 18 and 29, 29% were between 30 and 40, and 11% were older than 40 years old (cf. Ozerdem 2003, 388). Only 3 % of the KLA combatants were women, and 75% of them were between 18 and 29 years old (cf. Ozerdem 2003, 388)

Bekaj (2010) states that the KLA leadership intentionally pushed and directed the former KLA soldiers to integrate into structures of the KPC and KPS, to make their reintegration easier (Bekaj 2010, 31). Both structures, KPC-KPS, employed a relatively high number of former KLA combatants.

The transition from combatant to politician was also an essential fact in post-conflict Kosovo. Three main parties emerged after the war, with former commanders as leaders. Twenty years after the war the political scene is still dominated by former KLA combatants.

Several studies have been conducted on how former KLA combatants incorporated into politics and are part of the current decision-making mechanisms in Kosovo. Additionally, the incorporation of KLA former combatants into KPC and KPS has been an interesting factor to be analyzed in the current literature.

This shows that plenty of research has been done on the engagement and peacebuilding capacity of former KLA combatants through politics and newly formed KPC and KPS. However, almost no research has been conducted on the integration of former KLA combatants into civil society and their impact on the peacebuilding of post-conflict Kosovo through civic activism. Therefore, this study aims to focus on the peacebuilding capacities of former combatants in post-conflict societies through civic activism tools; a topic understudied so far.

## **5. DATA ANALYSIS**

In line with the research question and the findings from the semi-structured interviews, the analysis chapter is divided into three sections: ex-combatants' motivations to join the armed forces, their reintegration journeys and civic activism in post-conflict Kosovo.

### **5.1. Motivation to Join the Armed Forces**

This section of the analysis addresses the motivations behind participants' integration into the armed organization the Kosovo Liberation Army. The fifteen participants of the study provided more than one reason for joining the organization. From the data collected from the interviews and by coding and analyzing the interviews, in total, four themes were noted regarding the motivations that stimulated their integration: (1) Social exclusion, deprivation from education and public life; (2) Moral obligation; (3) Nationalistic family background; (4) Economic deprivation.

One of the common themes that appeared during the interviews was the experience of social exclusion, deprivation from education, and public life. Seven of the interviewees mentioned these factors as essential elements that influenced their state of mind while deciding whether to join the armed organization. Awareness that they were being excluded from the system, employment, and public institutions led to a frustration toward the system, and thus a desire to improve these conditions emerged. Importantly, social exclusion and discrimination were noteworthy features that increased the desire for mobilization. On another note, many of the stories narrated in personal histories of participants about frequent events/incidents with the other dominant group (in this case Serbs) and how they (participants/sub-group) were the



‘victims’ or ‘sufferers. These incidents led to a need to mobilize or as stated in the words of participants, to take revenge.

During the interviews, there was a tendency of participants to compare their situations with other situations of minorities such as Kurds or Crimean Tatars. In some cases, participants drew similarities even with cases such as the United States, where slavery had been practiced. In such instances, the decision was described concerning massive discrimination towards them, describing mobilization as the only logical solution. This logical solution is expressed in terms of rather than living a ‘miserable’ life, unemployed, discriminated against and excluded, that it would be better to join an organization that has a possibility of changing their living conditions. One of the participants described discrimination by taking examples from his daily life during the 1990s when he was a student at Pristina University. His story is provided below:

‘You know how Afro-Americans suffered and still suffer from discrimination in the United States, that is how I prefer to describe my youth years. It was terrible discrimination. During my university years, I was going back to my village on weekends by bus. And I was allowed to use the bus if there was not any Serbian waiting for it. And of course, I had to sit in the back of the bus. The front seats were reserved for Serbians. At those years there was a kind of a club in Pristina called ‘Grand Hotel,’ and it had a sign in the entrance. Do you know what the sign said? It was written: ‘entrance not allowed for dogs and Albanians.’ You know in these cases the best choice was to get a gun and go to the mountains, only then could we be equal to them!’

(interviewee no.1 /23 January 2019, Pristina)

In this context one the of the interviewees emphasized the fact that many other combatants that joined the KLA at that time were driven by the thought that once they were armed, they could be equal to the dominant side. One of the factors that differentiated them was that the other side had weaponry. Consequently, mobilizing in an armed organization that provided this protection appeared to be a reasonable/rational alternative to interrupt this exclusion. Two participants argue:

‘There was a lot of discrimination. I did not have any Serbian friends. They would not become friends with us. They considered us villagers and ignorant. In Pristina, for example, after 4 pm, you could not speak with a loud voice in Albanian or mention Albanian names. Also, in coffee shops or other places, Albanians would not stay after 10 pm. There was not a written rule, but we all knew that if you stayed late something bad would happen. It affected me a lot. It was living under constant stress. Albanians either were working as waiters or selling cigarettes in bazaars.’

(interviewee no.4 / 24January 2019/ Pristina)

‘I was aware that I was a normal human being and Serbs also were human beings. And you are being discriminated against because you are Albanian because you do not speak their language because you have a different ethnicity because you are not Serbian because you are not him. And it’s in human character to be free. And to be free, we had to fight.’

(interviewee no.6/ 22January/ 2019)

Within this framework, data from the interviews show that interviewees focus on the importance of education in their mother language. Some interviewees stated their disappointment that they had to attend parallel education, in secret houses, clandestinely from the state. Parallel education, as explained by the interviewees, was the system of education created by Albanians in the 1990s, when the Serbian regime prohibited education in the Albanian language. As a response to this decision, to continue the education in the Albanian language, they mobilized Albanian teachers. Many Albanians voluntarily opened the doors of their houses to serve as schools. Because of their ethnicity, participants state that they were excluded from the education system. They could not attend schools in the Serbian language either. Additionally, as seen in some cases of this study, it provided them spare time to engage with the insurgent group actively. Three of the responses in this context are provided below:

‘When you experience a kind of apartheid, and exclusion from the system, you are forced to maintain the education in a parallel system, and when you have the feeling that you are the greatest criminal in the world all because of the dominant ethnicity, the need to do something is powerful.’

(interviewee no.5 / 16January 2019/ Pristina)

‘Consequently, we also were expelled from schools and continued our education in the secret houses that some Albanians would voluntarily offer to teachers so they could continue their classes. Generally, we were extremely excluded from everything; from institutions, from society, from everywhere. And all of these, of course, influenced me and others to join armed forces, there was no other choice.’

(interviewee no.2 / 15January 2019, Pristina)

‘My nationalism and motivation to join the KLA came from the circumstances under which I was grown up. In 1992 I finished my primary and high school education in secret houses. I was beaten up by the police many times without any reason. So, attending private schools was a kind of resistance. Also, it was activism. It is the life experience that leads you to decide to integrate into insurgent groups.’

(interviewee no.7/ 10January 2019/ Peja)

Five of the participants addressed the expulsion of their parents from their jobs in public institutions. With the rise of Slobodan Milosevic to power at the end of the 1980s in Yugoslavia, a new wave of Serbian nationalism came along. As narrated by several participants in their self-

reflection stories, this new wave of nationalism led to the expulsion of Albanian works from state institutions as well as exempting Albanian students from the education system. By creating unemployment and depriving Albanian education privileges, the system was facilitating the emergence of a fragile environment; where the potential of the people from minority joining the armed organization was increased. Participant no.4 explains that he migrated to London to help his family financially after his parents got excluded from their positions in state institutions. He says:

‘There was not any perspective in Kosovo for Albanians. I was working as a waiter; my parents were excluded from their jobs. I was attending private/secret schools. It was stressful. I was in London when I heard that KLA was formed. From there, my friends and I we joined the KLA the second we got the news that they needed soldiers.’

(interviewee no.4 / 24January 2019/ Pristina)

Among their motivations for joining the KLA, three of the interviewees mentioned the feeling of a moral obligation toward the homeland. Their engagement in a group that had the objective to liberate the region was conceptualized as a duty that every individual should embrace. Interestingly, all the participants stated that they did not have an ideological path at the time they joined; neither did they know if KLA had one.

‘There is not a higher honor than the honor to serve your country. What do we call country? The country, as you say in Turkish, Vatan, is your home, your family, your friends. And if these elements are being threatened, even the world’s greatest pacific person would protect these elements at any cost. Because this is in human’s nature, we are animals, and animals protect themselves when other species are threatening them. This is an obligation that we have, a moral one.’

(interviewee no.1 / 23January 2019, Pristina)

Family background is another theme that emerged during the interviews, addressing the motivation to integrate into an armed organization. Four of the interviewees expressed that they had the support of their families, and they were raised in families that had nationalistic values. The participants’ families were involved in other illegal Albanians movement, that were active before the KLA. Interviewees state that when they heard that KLA was formed their families supported their decision to join the armed group. Three participants said:

‘My family was nationalist. In the 1980s, we read the illegal newspapers of Albanians; we were anti-Yugoslavs. My big brother was part of illegal movements before KLA was formed. I consider that I was formed by these elements also. Therefore, when my rancor and family history were combined, it created my personality. When I joined KLA, I felt that I had fulfilled my life mission. I had the chance to do something for all my lost years.’

(interviewee no. 9/ 16January 2019/ Pristina)

‘I lived in a village in the region of Drenica, and we were extremely discriminated against and neglected. I had a very nationalist family; all of my brothers had joined KLA. As a woman, they initially did not allow me to join, they said you could take care of us and wash our clothes. But then we saw that people are leaving Kosovo they are not joining KLA, and they needed soldiers, and when I said I want to join they couldn’t say we don’t need you, they forgot I was a woman. I had the chance to fight for all the things that my family had taught me.’

(interviewee no.13/ 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019/ Peja)

‘My family traditionally was involved in the national cause. From the 1920s, my family has conducted activities for the rights of Albanians. And of course, every individual that gets involved in armed forces does this for some persuasions and ideologies that it has. In my case, it was the family and the ideologies that I had at that time.’

(interviewee no. 8/ 25January 2019/ Pristina)

Economic deprivation was among the motivations that three of the interviewees mentioned during the interview. Unemployment and discrimination in the process of employee recruiting in public institutions influenced their decisions.

‘I decided to join because of economic reasons and no perspective for Albanians. There were no available jobs; we could not work in state institutions. We were outsiders; they looked at us with disgrace. Thus, I had to leave Kosovo illegally and go to Switzerland. I was furious at the system that made me do that.’

(interviewee no. 9/ 16January 2019/ Pristina)

‘I decided to join KLA because of the non-perceptiveness and economic conditions. We had no future. I did not have the chance to go to school because the schools in Albanian were closed. I was choiceless. I was not married; I had no kids, nothing to lose.’

(interviewee no.10/ 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019/ Peja)

‘I had a shop in my neighborhood, they closed it, I was left unemployed. I could not finish high school because they shut down education in Albanian. At the beginning of the year 1999, they came to our houses, ripped our Yugoslav passports, and said that we had to leave. We went as refugees in Albania, and when I went there, I found KLA training camps and mobilized immediately. I had to do something, and armed force was the only choice left.’

(interviewee no.11/ 30January/ Peja)

Even though the interview was not focused on the difference between the individuals who joined KLA and those who did not, three interviewees argued and spared their time explaining why only a minor number of Albanians mobilized. Only 2-3% of the overall population of ethnic Albanians joined the armed group. Two of them argued that one individual has to be spiritually prepared to fight, and not all Albanians had the same nationalistic culture.

‘It is true that a small number of Albanians joined KLA, maybe 2-3% of the overall population. I consider that normal because not all of us were raised in a nationalist spirit, and others joined because they had no other choice. From the risk, they saw it logical to give a contribution.’

(interviewee no.3/ 17January, 2019 / Pristina)

‘I consider that the population was not ready, spiritually, for war. That is why only 2% of the population joined KLA. There were Albanians having coffee in the cities while we were fighting in the mountains. However, this is not their fault; it is the fault of politics. The population had to be prepared and mobilized for the war. Then we could organize an uprising.’

(interviewee no.2 / 15January 2019, Pristina)

However, two of the interviewees at the same time argued that it is a disgrace for an adult individual not to join an uprising when the matter concerns the homeland. They claimed that joining the armed group has nothing to do with courage but rather the instinct that one has to protect his/her territory. One of the interviewees argued that:

‘It is true that a minor number of Albanians joined KLA. Only 2% of the population joined KLA, and it is a shame to tell this to somebody. I did not go to war because I was brave or because I had a courage’s character. I went to war because I was a coward. I went to war because I wanted to protect myself and my circle and my home. And once you are there in the frontline, you realize that there is no way back, you are engaged in a historical verdict.’

(interviewee no.1 /23 January 2019, Pristina)

Joining the KLA was part of the stories of the ex-combatants, who remained in the group for particular amount of times. After the war ended, ex-combatants reintegrated into the society and joined civil society organizations. I will now focus on the reintegration of ex-combatant’s reintegration journeys.

## **5.2. Reintegration Journey**

### 5.2.1. Community Reaction

Community reaction is considered as one of the essential components that influence the process of reintegration of former combatants, according to the literature on reintegration. In their field studies, Ozerdem & Bowd (2013) and Vries & Wiegink (2011) state that community acceptance/rejection directly influences the process of reintegration of former combatants. If ex-combatants return to a judgmental and critical community, their chances for a successful reintegration decrease. In the same context, Gear (2002) discusses the argument that an antagonistic community is a significant challenge for DDR programs implemented in post-conflict societies.

By exploring the answers of participants, three themes emerged to describe the nature of community reaction at the time conflict was over and combatants returned in the civilian environment: (1). Reception as a hero; (2). A judgmental welcoming; (3) No specific reaction.

While self-reflecting their return into civilian society after the conflict had ceased, nearly all ex-combatants had to take a few minutes to elaborate their sentences in order to explain how they felt the community reaction. The first answers of all the interviewees at first were 'I did not think about it' or 'I had other issues than to analyze the community reaction.' However, after a few minutes, all of them reflected on how they comprehended the community's reaction.

A total of eight interviewees remarked that they were welcomed as 'heroes' after the war was over with some elaborating on the respect that they gained because they were part of KLA. This warm, welcoming attitude from the community is seen as a positive catalysator of their process of resettlement in society. One of the interviewees discussed how, even today, twenty years after the war, the respect of the community for his contribution continued. During the interview, he mentioned several times how positive reception influenced his reintegration, making a comeback easier. The positive reaction gave him the feeling that he did something beneficial for the community, and now the community is paying him back with respect for a lifetime. Other interviewees also stated gratefulness of the community as one of the factors that alleviated their return:

'Even today I am a hero in my family, among my friends and in my job. Absolutely yes. I have maximal respect even from the artist community that I belong to.'

(interviewee no.1, Pristina)

Several interviewees pointed out the fact that their families hadn't supported them on the decision to join armed groups, but nevertheless, treated them as they were 'heroes' upon their return. The group of these interviewees in questions about the motivation to join armed groups stated that their families did not belong to the nationalistic background; thus, their membership was influenced mostly by social exclusion. Interviewee no.7 said:

'My family was frightened to death for my membership in armed groups; however, when I was back, they were behaving like I was a hero that saved them from the enemy. And that felt good man!'

(interviewee no.7, Pristina)

Two of the interviews stated that they might have been welcomed as heroes because of their injuries. They belong to a group known as 'the handicap individuals of the Kosovo Liberation War,' thus the respect given to them is connected with people's empathy towards their sacrifice. The positive reception by the community created an environment which assisted the reintegration of ex-combatants positively. One interviewee stated the following as regards of his reintegration process:

'When I was back in the city I was injured, I had two bullets in my leg, I could not walk, I still cannot. I was seen as a hero, maybe because of my injury. I went there with my two legs, and I was back in a wheelchair. The first days after the war was over my friends and people in my neighborhood were competing on who gets to push me in my wheelchair and tell the city that 'this is our friend, he saved us, he lost two legs for this freedom.' Maybe this kind of greeting, as a hero, made me forget a little bit the fact that I will not walk again, ever.'

(interviewee no.11, Peja)

Apart from the interviewees that reflected the community reception as welcoming and positive, three of the interviewees used the word 'judgmental' to describe the reaction they received from the community. They did not describe this reaction as totally negative or rejective. Perceptions of civilians that were not members of the armed group are described to be negative by ex-combatants due to some cases that occurred immediately after the conflict. During the interviews, these three ex-combatants explained these cases to be: ex-soldiers occupying abandoned properties of displaced Serbian people and fear of institutional powers being kept in the hands of ex-combatants and member of KLA.

Participants of the study stated that in post-conflict Kosovo, the community perceived them as the 'new threats' for the newly liberated state. Therefore, these three ex-combatants applied to NGOs in the post-conflict period, arguing that employment in state institutions will

not be personally satisfying. In other words, they argued that working in state institutions would be perceived as them being rewarded by the state for their contribution in the armed conflict. As argued by the two participants below:

‘I do not think that the community was grateful for what we did, they did not know that we love life, and we did not want to die either. We risked a lot. They saw us as the crazy ones that risked the lives of the ones who did not want war. For this reason, many soldiers are still not reintegrated in society; they cannot find a job either.’  
(interviewee no.3, Pristina)

‘After the war, there was an impression that soldiers of KLA were using and occupying the properties of Serbs of Kosovo who fled after NATO came. They all thought that now we will rule them because we fought. I think that they sometimes saw us as the new occupiers.’  
(Interviewee no.4, Pristina)

However, when asked if the judgmental reaction of community influenced their reintegration, the participants argued that it was just an emotional barrier, but it did not interrupt their integration or the process of finding employment.

In contrast, three of the interviewees stated that they did not perceive any specific reaction towards them by the community when they returned from the battles. One of them stated that:

‘There was not a specific reaction; I did not feel either a warm welcoming or something to greet me that I was in the war.’  
(interviewee no.9, Pristina)

### **5.2.2. DDR**

A question (see Appendix C, 6) directed to the ex-combatants was aimed at understanding their engagement with procedures of DDR (demobilization, disarmament, reintegration) implemented by International Organization for Migration (IOM), on whether they participated in their methods and if they were beneficial for them in the overall process of reintegration.

As previously discussed in the literature review chapter, DDR of former combatants is classified as one of the crucial factors for sustainable peace in post-conflict societies (Phayal et al., 2015). The literature on peace stability in post-conflict societies contends that DDR of ex-



combatants is essentially a standard form of strategy to eliminate peace spoilers in a post-conflict environment (Theidon 2009; Fusato 2003; Clark 2013). DDR, especially after the 1990s, has been portrayed as a necessary step in immediate post-conflict recovery.

DDR process in former KLA combatants both in literature and in face-to-face interviews with the participants of this study is fragmentary vague. In the literature, there is no straightforward evidence for the procedures of DDR implemented in Kosovo. However, some studies analyze how a fraction of KLA ex-combatants was included in the transformation of KLA into Official Forces of Kosovo (FSK). Participants of this study acknowledge their awareness for IOM's DDR program in the aftermath of the conflict, but only four of them benefited from the program's procedures, through financial aid.

As DDR intends to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants into a civilian identity, the questions presented to the former combatants of this study had the aim of understanding the effectiveness of the DDR program in Kosovo. All participants of the study had knowledge about IOM but not definite information about the intention and aim of the DDR program.

Eight of the interviewees stated that when the conflict ceased, they handed over their arms in KLA units, and that is how, according to them, they demobilized and terminated the war period. When asked about the reason for this decision, a total of three groups of responses emerged. Firstly, they had limited knowledge about IOM's intentions and aims, thus being part of those procedures seemed not logical at that time due to the lack of information. Secondly, five of the interviewees mentioned that they refused and ignored being involved in everything that had to do with war or conflict. When the war was terminated, the engagement with procedures that were involved with the conflict was perceived as unnecessary, and just wanted to continue their normal lives. Two of them stated:

‘We handed out the arms in KLA's headquarters, and I did not want to be part of IOM structures. We just gave the names to someone; I do not remember that clearly, but I know that I just wanted to be back and get over with this war thing.’

(interviewee no.2, Pristina)

‘I did not want to be part of IOM procedures. We left the arms in KLA's headquarters and that is it. So, that is my demobilization. I think that IOM did an interesting job to socialize ex-combatants, and that was their mission; I do not know whether they were successful. I thought I did not need their help; I just wanted to go back and continue my university classes.’

(interviewee no.1, Pristina)

The third group of participants argued that when the conflict was over, and they got the news that NATO had intervened, IOM did not try to reach them, nor did they know where IOM's bases or assistance was provided.

Two of the participants stated that they registered in IOM's registration bases but did not continue with further procedures. When asked about the reasons, they stated that they did not have information about other activities, either the organization provided additional information. One of them indicated:

'IOM's registration and their procedures were entirely on a volunteer basis, so many of us did not even know what they were doing. I was registered in their databases and left. I was glad that I survived so I did not want to deal with anyone at that time, moreover with internationals.'

(interviewee no.9, Pristina)

Another participant explained that when they were returning from the mountains to the city of Peja, during the journey, they were stopped by the organization's camps and were registered as demobilized soldiers. Additionally, similarly as the majority of other participants they did not have information for intentions of the DDR programs. He perceived that being part of this kind of procedures would mean to remember the war again. Thus, after the registration procedure, he was determined to be back in the city immediately. He argued:

'I was registered as a demobilized combatant by IOM. However, I did not continue further with other procedures that they had. I just wanted to go back and continue my medical faculty, and to be honest; I do not think that they were very interested in helping; it was a very formal process.'

(interviewee no.12, Peja)

As discussed in the previous chapter of literature review, disarmament part of DDR aims to reduce and eliminate weapons in post-conflict period (Phayal 2015; Fusato 2003). Analyzing the interviews of this study, we can conclude that participants did deliver their arms, some cases to KLA, some cases to IOM's camps. Despite that, two other elements of the DDR, demobilization, and reintegration processes were not accomplished. The demobilization procedure it is argued to include activities as orientation programs and transportation of ex-combatants to their communities (Fusato 2003). However, all participants in this study stated that they did not benefit from such activities.

Secondly, to achieve a successful transition from instability and constant conflict, effective reintegration of former combatants is crucial. In the literature of DDR, reintegration

is argued to be possible by different means such as a provision of cash, long-term jobs, education, or training courses (Jennings 2008; Knight 2008). Four participants of the study explained that they received a financial help/provision of cash in the immediate post-conflict period. Two of them notified that they received a kind of scholarship to assist them in continuing the studies. One of them explained that besides the scholarship, additionally, he received agricultural tools from the same organization, to assist family business back in the village. However, the same participant reflected that this scholarship helped him in a way but added the fact that in this kind of cases, psychological support would be efficient and needed. He argued:

‘I was part of IOM procedures, and they treated me well. I was a student at that time, and they gave me a six months scholarship. Additionally, they also gave my family agricultural tools for our farm in the village. These were the means of how they helped us. Mostly financially, but no other procedures, I needed support, emotionally.’  
(interviewee no. 8, Pristina)

Similarly, another participant highlighted the need for emotional support, and several times mentioned the gratefulness he had for the financial assistance. The literature on DDR pays attention to the same factor mentioned by the participants, stating that the psychological support given to ex-combatants in the reintegration period alleviates the transition from a military identity to the civilian identity. He added:

‘I was part of procedures of IOM. They did not do much; we registered and handed out the arms. They asked me if I could do something with an amount of money, I said yes, I can open a coffee shop. So, they transferred an amount of money in my account, and I invested that. That is what they did for our reintegration. It was a good gesture from their side, but I don’t know if that was sufficient!’  
(interviewee no.10, Peja)

### **5.2.3. Transition to Civilian Life**

Having considered the community reception and demobilization procedures’ effectivity, two questions of the interview (see Appendix C, 7-8) aim to understand the reintegration journeys of former ex-combatants. This part of the analysis will be focused on the new identity of former combatants: as civilians without arms.

Reintegration is defined in the literature as a non-measurable process due to the sensitive nature and outcome complexity (Ozerdem and Bowd 2013). Several studies in the reintegration of former combatants argue the difficulty of transition from military mindset to civilian mindset,

highlighting it as one of the crucial emotional transitions of militaristic individuals. Civilian mindset is arduous to adjust for individuals that resided for a particular period in militaristic environments. Thus, the personality created into these environments is difficult to overcome (Vries&Wiegink 2011; Gear 2002).

Analyzing and coding the interviews of this study in a total of three themes emerged regarding the reintegration difficulties and the accommodation to civilian life: (1) difficulty of reintegration because of ex-combatants' strong belonging to a 'soldier identity'; (2) Manageable because war and military were against my values; (3)Difficult because there was no cause left to fight for.

Four participants mentioned that the returning period was complicated and convoluted. The new life after the conflict was described as 'routine' because the uniform and the symbolic values of the war vanished.

The literature in the reintegration of former combatants' states that the duty to protect other people, and 'the motherland,' remains active also when the conflict is over. The ex-combatants mentioned the power that the 'uniform' has given to them during the fightings. Thus, a relationship is displayed between the new mindset in post-conflict and the one they left behind. The need to protect other people is still active, even twenty years after the conflict. For instance, one of the former soldiers argued that the identity gained during the war is impossible to fade away, even if reintegration was accomplished. He argued:

'Once a soldier, always a soldier. Reintegration, however successful let it be, cannot make you forget the fact that you have been a soldier once. Not always in the war concept, but I still see myself as a guardian of a child, of an old woman passing the road, of a stray dog. I will always have the identity of a protector.'

(interviewee no.7, Peja)

Along the same line's participants reflect on how the routine life in post-conflict was challenging to adjust. Even necessary activities as waking up early in the morning, going to work, and having coffee with friends in the city, were seen as unusual. Several former combatants use the word 'missing adrenaline' to describe the reintegration phase, and the normal daily life was perceived as tedious.

The soldier uniform was conceptualized by participants as a factor that gave them power. One of the participants, even in the day of the interview, came with his soldier uniform, KLA emblem in his shoulder, and military hat lined up with an eagle (nationalist symbol). When he learned that my thesis advisor is not Albanian, he immediately gave me a KLA

emblem to give it to her as a present. The membership to KLA is a source of pride to him, and he argues that we (Kosovar Albanians) should tell the world the glory war of the KLA. He expressed that:

‘It was tough for me to reintegrate, firstly I could not accept the fact that I am in a wheelchair. Secondly, I was used to living in the mountains. With my soldier friends, my uniform and my gun. It was not easy to be back in the city. Maybe because I kept myself busy with the thought that I am protecting my people, and after the war, I had nothing to protect.’

(interviewee no.11, Peja)

While discussing the reintegration journey and the peripeties of the new environment, one participant emphasized the fact that even the basic activities of daily life, that the majority of people conceptualize as ordinary and do not allocate time to analyze them; to former combatants, these activities are complex to perceive. He said that:

‘It was not easy. However, with the help of my friends, I somehow managed to adapt to society. We were used in life in the mountains, and the civilized life was strange for me, kind of. Waking up in the morning, going to work and stuff like that, you know very routine. I think I was used to the status of the ‘strong guy’ with my gun and my friends.’

(interviewee no.10, Peja)

However, it is important to mention that the participants that addressed the reintegration as difficult, joined the KLA at an early age, mostly seventeen and eighteen. Adulthood started in military parameters, and the ‘real’ life started in conflict aftermath. Consequently, it was difficult for them to reintegrate due to the adaption into a militaristic setting at an early age.

Three participants presented another example of difficulties during reintegration and adjustment to civilian life. They stated that it was difficult to reintegrate because they did not have something to dream of, something ‘impossible’ to fight for. Not because they missed the status of the ‘strong’ or because they missed their uniform or weapons. One of them said:

‘After the war was over it was an emptiness for me. I had big dilemmas about my life. What should I do now? What should I do with my life now? I had many depressive periods, PTSD, maybe for a year. I stayed in my village after I was demobilized, that was the time of reflection. But it was a difficult process, I was in KLA for maybe two years, and the normal life seemed so dull. However, with the help of family and friends, I decided to continue my studies, and now I am a professor. Life is strange, right?’

(interviewee no.8, Pristina)

The quote above is important for two reasons – firstly, it shows the need of the ex-combatants for healing and psychological treatment after the war, and secondly, it implies the emptiness and reflections of ex-combatants toward the new normal life they had to adjust. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a factor that several ex-combatants mentioned as an obstacle in the reintegration process of theirs. However, as it will be argued in the upcoming pages of this chapter, neither the international organizations responsible for the ex-combatant reintegration or the Kosovar government created after the war did not provide any support for them in this aspect.

Seven participants added that reintegration journey and adjustment to civilian mindset was not difficult because freedom and normal life is what they fought for. Most of them repetitively used the words ‘back to my normal life’, ‘start working as a normal human being,’ ‘military was not my goal.’

Importantly, participants mentioned the fact of KLA transformation into a task force after the conflict. They explained that they had the chances to get part of the newly created organization. All participants (including the group with attached feelings for combatant identity) refused to be part of such a newly created task force. They argued that the newly created force was not what they were hoping to be employed in after the war and the wages provided by the task at the time were very low.

These seven participants expressed estranged feelings toward military identity. They underlined that being a soldier does not fall under their ‘profession’ perceptions. Two of them stated that:

‘After the KLA was transformed into a kind of an army thing. I did not have any interest to join them. I just wanted to go back to my normal life. I started working immediately. I speak English, so it was easy for me to find work with internationals. Being a soldier wasn’t my profession, I accomplished my duty towards my country, and now was the time to go back to normal.’

(interviewee no.5, Pristina)

‘It was not my life goal to be part of an army, and after the war, I did not miss my uniform or my gun. After the war, my purpose was to go back to a normal life, the life of a twenty-one-year-old. In the post-conflict phase, I had problems with traumas, the things that I had seen during the war. Sometimes they come and haunt me. Maybe I had PTSD I do not know; I never was cured about this. However, I can argue that every soldier has this problem, the memories of the war. After the war, you see everything from a different angle.’

(interviewee no.3, Pristina)

The data coming out from this research also shows that finding employment after the war helped former combatants' reintegration. Three of the participants stated that former combatants were found in deep emptiness and institutional ignorance. Employment was seen as a catalysator for an easier reintegration. The relation between employment and adjustment to civilian mindset is an essential factor towards reintegration effectivity. One of the participants stated:

'Reintegration was easy for me because immediately after the war I found a job. I lived in London before, so my English was good and started working in an NGO. However, those soldiers who did not have any skills or foreign languages were deeply ignored, even today, I know ex-soldiers that are in depression, addicted to drugs, the reintegration was not easy. However, for me, the fact that I survived was enough to encourage me to continue my normal life. The army was too much for my personality.'

(interviewee no.4, Pristina)

Reintegration process is acquired when the factors of civilian status and sustainable employment are accomplished (UNDP 2005). In post-conflict states, there is a hostile economy and few employment opportunities. Thus, employment of former combatants is a difficult task to achieve (Gear 2002). Additionally, most studies in post-conflict societies while analyzing the reintegration of former combatants claim that because of the lack of education and employment experience, integration into the economy is tough (Themner 2013; Nussio 2018).

Findings of this study suggest that the employment of KLA former combatants was more accessible due to two factors: (1) because of their knowledge of English language and (2) their university education. Interestingly, employment was not influenced by their combatant identity.

Eight participants stated that because of the English language and their master's degrees they were able to join international organizations that were focused on helping post-conflict Kosovo. Two of the participants also have PhD titles. All participants stated that they can speak English language because some of them lived abroad before the war started in 1999 due to difficult circumstances in Kosovo; and because several participants immediately after the war engaged in international organizations and were in a constant contact with foreign individuals.

Seven participants informed that before the war started, they were already enrolled in university; thus, after the conflict with the re-opening of the University of Pristina, they immediately graduated and were integrated into job opportunities. In self-reflecting their

experiences, all participants stated that they did not have difficulties in the process of finding a job.

When asked whether the identity of a soldier helped them in the process of employment, all participants stated that there was not a positive influence of that identity. The answers to this question differed on the aspect of why they think it did not influence and whether the employers were aware of their identity.

One of them stated that the identity of a former combatant would be beneficial just in cases when the combatant is in the political sphere. The usage of combatant identity can be beneficial mainly to gain voters trust and for electoral campaigns. However, they state that in other domains of society, you cannot benefit from that identity:

‘In every society not only in Kosovo even if you want to act and live like a normal civilian it is not possible because everyone knows your past. For example, if you apply to a job position in a particular administration, they automatically ask ‘why is he applying here, what is his purpose?’.’

(interviewee no.2, Pristina)

The participant no.2 argued that this critical point of view of employers occurs, however, it does not mean that it will influence the application negatively, but it will raise questions about one’s intention and that it is unavoidable.

In most cases, ex-combatant identity did not help nor influenced employment positively. Interestingly participants stated that they did not feel ‘comfortable’ to mention the fact that they were part of KLA, during job applications. They did not feel ‘comfortable’ when they were introduced as former combatants.

Several participants acknowledged that even the colleagues nor their managers/supervisors were not aware of their soldier identity. They argued that the contribution for motherland given at that time should not be used for other means, and it is unethical to take advantage of that identity. One of them argued:

‘When I started working in a media outlet after the war, my colleagues and my supervisor learned that I was in KLA after a year and a half. I do not like to mention that I fought; it was something personal that I felt I had to do it. I do not see it logical to scream to people ‘hey, do you know that I was an ex-combatant’. It is just illogical and unmatured.’

(interviewee no.9, Pristina)



The employment opportunities that participants had in post-conflict did not require the skills that they gained during the period in the military. The positions they engaged in war aftermath they argued to be ‘antipodes’ of the army; thus, being a former combatant would not be beneficial for them. Participant no.8 stated:

‘It did not influence my employment because the jobs that I did after the war was over were antipodes of an army. The people that I was a colleague did not have any affiliation with war. And I was not feeling comfortable to present myself as an ex-soldier, I fought because I felt an obligation and that should stay there. I did not want to use that contribution for a job position. But I am not sure whether the employers evaluated my applications differently because I was in KLA.’

(interviewee no.8, Pristina)

Intriguingly, three female participants of the study argued that after the war, the employers both in private and in civil society sector did not even bother to ask if they had been part of the KLA. Employers automatically assumed that women were not part of the armed conflict. Additionally, female participants added the fact that they did not inform their colleagues for their engagement in the armed conflict. When asked about the reason behind this, they expressed that it was not necessary for other people to know about this personal experience. They stated that if there would be something positive that they could benefit from this identity, maybe they would take advantage of it, however, at that time it was not necessary to inform other people. Two of them explained that:

‘After the war, they did not even ask the women if they were in the war. So, they automatically assumed that I wasn’t. It didn’t influence any of my employment. Any of my colleagues did not know that I was part of KLA, I told them after many years.’

(interviewee no. 5, Pristina)

‘Even my colleague, your friend, that arranged this interview with me learned this two years ago. And we are working together for a long time now. Funny right?’

(interviewee no. 3, Pristina)

Discussing the transition to civilian life and employment ‘gender’ is not conceptualized as a particular factor that influenced these processes because as stated above, they do not prefer to express their membership to the KLA during the employment process. From what is seen from the interview’s women do not express their gender as an important facilitator in the process of transition to the civilian life.

### 5.3. Civic Activism in Post-Conflict Kosovo

#### 5.3.1. The Reasons behind Civic Activism

This sub-section of the study will be focused on why participants decided to engage in civic activism, how they joined, and why did they decided to join the civil society.

Before starting the discussion, it is important to state what types of civil society organizations exist in Kosovo. According to the report of Kosovar Civil Society Foundation conducted in 2018, civil society organizations in Kosovo are mainly focused in areas such as democratization, rule of law, education and monitoring of the work of institutions (KCSF 2018, 48). Participants of this study are/were engaged in NGOs that are peace related.

Ten participants explained that there was a large number of international organizations in Kosovo after the war, established to assist state and society building. Consequently, they needed assistance from locals for Albanian language and field assistance. These participants argued that they offered generous payments, for that time, therefore the decision to engage in civic activism in post-conflict was slightly depended on this fact.

Participants of this studies are/were engaged in different civic activities, such as encouraging non-violent forms for ethnic peace, assisting traumatized people, media, promoting human rights, promoting anti-corruption, assisting raped women, environmental rights, lobbying for missing people and helping war invalids and their families.

From the answers of the participants, a total of two themes emerged on why they decided to engage in civic activism in post-conflict, with an identity of an ex-combatant: (1) For personal satisfaction and the need to contribute to the betterment of the society; (2) To promote peace/ethnic tolerance

In reflecting on their journeys, five ex-combatants use the word ‘personal satisfaction’ to explained why they decided to join civil society activities. One female ex-combatant, currently working at the Association of Martyrs’ Families, explains that working in civil society and cooperating with former combatants’ families ‘fulfilled’ the need ‘to do something good,’ especially for less privileged people. She explains that the families of martyrs of the war were a special category of the Kosovar society, and they needed extra assistance and financial care. She said:

‘It gives me satisfaction to work in these kinds of organizations; it is a good feeling that I still help and contribute to less lucky people.’  
(interviewee no.13, Peja)

The feeling to contribute somehow to society is persistent, and the majority of the participants argued that they perceived themselves as ‘soldiers’ in post-conflict. The need to serve was entrenched to their characters.

Similarly, another participant argued that former combatants should continue contributing to Kosovo. The contributing term here is used in a sense ‘to do something for their motherland Kosovo,’ even if the conflict was over. The participants that had this perception argued that they should contribute to post-conflict to make it worth the ‘holy war.’

Participants mentioned a relationship between the identity of a protector they had during the war, with the identity of a ‘help provider’ created in the post-conflict area. Remarkably, these participants perceived the identity of a ‘help-provider’ created while working in civil society with the identity they had while soldiers as the same:

‘It makes me feel good; I feel self-accomplished. Before I was working here, I owned a bar here in Peja. But when I started to work here, I realized that what I was missing was the contributing and helping the others.’  
(interviewee no.10, Peja)

The moral obligation term was frequently used to express their relationship with civil society activities. The identity of the soldier is entrenched in the activities following the war. However, the identity of a soldier does not seem to be static, in a context that it did not remain an identity of a combatant, but a transformed identity, the identity of a ‘protector’ or ‘help provider.’ Participants expressed that they felt they should help other people, specifically the marginalized people. Their contribution perception is divided, namely pre-war contribution, war, and post-war contribution to Kosovo. Some of the responses are provided below:

‘I still have a kind of soldier identity inside of me. It does not go away in the context that I have to help someone, to contribute. I worked a lot with people with disabilities; they are like my weak spot. I continue to work for them. I feel like I have a duty to take care of the weak. After the war, I was focused specially to work for marginalized people.’  
(interviewee no.2, Pristina)

‘I got engaged in these kinds of activities because I felt it was a duty of ours to protect and serve to our country after the war also. This feeling is important. I conceptualize the engagement after the war as a continuity of our pre-war contribution.’ (interviewee no.7, Peja)

Several participants stated that they joined the civil society to promote peace and ethnic tolerance. Building on this point, in a polarized society as Kosovo, and harsh history, these perceptions leave marks in the whole context of the topic. Participants explained that promoting ethnic peace and tolerance in a post-conflict society is a challenging task. They occasionally have been marked as ‘traitors’ by the Albanian community. They argue that even if the war was between the two ethnicities, the post-conflict environment should be peaceful enough for both ethnicities, Albanians, and Serbians to live together. Two of the answers are provided below:

‘I argue that we can live together with the Serbs in Kosovo. KLA did not fight just for the Albanians but also for the Serbian minority that lives in Kosovo. We all together must build Kosovo, and for me through the civic engagement and especially media can do this.’

(interviewee no.1, Pristina)

‘I always define myself as a peacebuilder. I was part of armed groups because I wanted peace, after the war, I engaged with media and civil society because I wanted a sustainable peace for everyone.’

(interviewee no.8, Pristina)

### **5.3.2. Civic Activities**

Having discussed the reasons behind engagement in civil society, the type of civic engagement of the participants should also be considered. As a result of coding and analysis of the interviews, two types of civic activism emerged: (1). Civic activism to a specific part of the Kosovar society (Albanian ethnicity and particular group/category of society, e.g., invalid former combatants); (2). Civic activism for peace and tolerance for all ethnicities living in post-conflict Kosovo.

Seven participants of this study were/are engaged in civic activities with a focus in a particular category and ethnicity of society. As explained above, this category includes invalids of war, families of martyrs, disabled people, and raped women during the war.

Three ex-combatants are involved in organizations that help invalids of war, martyrs’ families and veterans of war (mainly former combatants with financial difficulties). During the interviews, these participants expressed that they engaged in these activities to serve to this particular category of society. For instance, interviewee no.13 explained that she joined KLA with her four brothers, but one of her brothers, unfortunately, was wounded during the fightings and passed away in 1999. After the war (2000) she was employed in the office for martyrs’

families as a secretary, and in 2001 she became the head of this organization. Throughout the interview, she explained with joy the activities that the organization conducts to help this particular category of society. She says:

‘From 2000 to 2007 we visited the families of the martyrs, took notes on what they need. We helped them financially, not all of them but the very desperate cases. We get funds from companies and allocate them to these families, it is not easy, but it is worth it.’

(interviewee no.13, Peja)

Similarly, interviewee no.10 was employed in the organization of war invalids. Himself a war invalid argues that the community should be grateful for the contribution that KLA members did for the ‘motherland.’ Therefore, civil society organizations will help the society accept and pay respect to former combatants but at the same time acknowledge former combatants that their contribution will not be forgotten. When asked why he decided to join this kind of civic activism and whether former combatants could be civic activists and contribute to post-conflict peacebuilding, he added that only with this kind of civic activism can be a positive development for the society. With organizations where the focus is pointed in their contribution and sacrifices. If former combatants are aware that they are being respected, they will be ‘good’, citizens as he explained:

‘I am vice-chairman in the Organization for Veterans. We constantly try to collect funds and help the families of veterans. They all have a monthly stipend for their contribution.’

(interviewee no.10, Peja)

In the same way, interviewee no.11, an activist at the organization of war invalids, himself also an invalid, using the wheelchair, shares the same thoughts as the participant cited above. He adds that many former combatants got involved in politics and in other civic activities, emphasizing that they forget about other former combatants.

Participants that are involved in activities focused on a specific ethnicity and category of society argue that Albanians suffered a lot before and during the war. They added the fact that the war was fought in 1999 for the welfare of the Albanian population. Therefore, the peacebuilding incentives and activities in post-conflict Kosovo should be focused on the Albanian population of Kosovo only, and not towards the Serbian, Bosnian or Turkish population. The participant argues that he started working in the organization for the handicap/invalid people of war. They socialize with them and help them with daily struggles.

He stated that 'it gives him satisfaction to be able to help someone, even in his condition.' When asked about his peacebuilding potential in a post-conflict Kosovo, he argued that it was possible for former combatants to be peacebuilders. However, a lot of societal and institutional attention should be concentrated on former combatants, to keep them away from 'bad thoughts.' What he tried to argue was that with enough attention and support from institutions and society, former combatants would be potential peacebuilders. However, their 'good' behaviors should not be taken for granted.

Interestingly, participants argue that their involvement in the war provides them validity to engage in activities that are focused on the wellbeing of former combatants. They argue that because they suffered from the war, they have compassion and sympathy toward former combatants. When asked whether other individuals could be successful in this kind of civic activities toward special categories of society, they answered with skepticism. One of them explained: 'I am not sure whether they could understand the sufferings and create empathy with them.'

Other three interviewees of this group explained that after the war they engaged in civic activities which also focused on a particular category of people. One of them described that he engaged in organizations that promoted human rights for people with mental disabilities and their families. He added that this group was his weak spot, thus focusing on solving their problems provided him satisfaction.

'After the war, I became the director at the Center for Human Rights in Pristina. We had a lot of projects. Especially, to secure health care for individuals with disabilities. Then we created the Network Against Poverty, to help poor families in post-conflict. However, what is the most important activity for me is the project where we helped the people with Down Syndrome.'

(interviewee no.2, Pristina)

In conversation with two other ex-combatants (no.6 and no.5) the importance of empathy was pointed out as an essential constituent in the process of actually being a peace 'defender' in post-conflict. They argued that people that did not suffer from the hostilities of the war would not be able to work towards a peace creation. However, their engagement remains related to somehow 'left over' problems of the war. One of them dedicated many years to the cause of missing people during the war and lobbying/pressuring both the international and Serbian community about this case. He explained:

‘We dealt mostly with missing people and art. We saw art as a vehicle for social change. However, we were focused mostly on the topic of missing people. There are 236,000 missing Albanians during the war, and no one knows what happened to them.’

(interviewee no.6, Pristina)

A noteworthy story was told by a former female combatant that was engaged in networks for the rights of women and raped women during the war. Her involvement on this issue was connected with the membership in the KLA, and the atrocities she witnessed through the war. However, when asked why she decided to join and lobbied for women rights, she argued that:

‘It was a sensitive issue at the same time suitable for me because men were not comfortable fighting for the issue of raped women during the war.’

(interviewee no.5, Pristina)

Another interesting topic that emerged in the interviews about civic engagement was the direction of civic engagement of six participants. Their engagement was not limited just with a particular group or ethnicity of Kosovar society. They differ from other former combatants because they argued that post-conflict peace should be enjoyed by all ethnicities of Kosovo, and that the war in 1999 was fought against the Serbian regime, and not against the Serbian population.

It was quite remarkable to hear the stories on what kind of activities they conducted and were part of. Interviewee no.1 explained that he was part of different activities that promoted peace and tolerance, so after the war, all communities would be engrossed in building a peaceful Kosovo. He said that:

‘Immediately after the war, I was working in a media outlet, and I had an idea to open a multiethnic radio in Lipjan (a small city in Kosovo). They did not support me, but I really wanted to make that work. However, later, I got engaged in different activities. Three years ago, there were floods in Serbia, and I organized some of my friends also to go there and help them. However, they didn’t accept us at the border, and we came back. I recently opened a newspaper with the mission to fight corruption and organized crime, with facts and the truths, to inform the population what is happening.’

(interviewee no.1, Pristina)

Another participant in the same context explained how ethnic hate could be abolished with simple acts. In a radio station that he owned; he arranged a talk with another radio station

based in Belgrade. Their aim was to create an atmosphere for the exchange of experiences and thoughts of former combatants from both sides, Albanian and Serbian. He explained that:

‘Me and my friends opened a radio, it is still active today. We do a lot of projects. One that I would specify is the tentative dialogue that we tried to do between former Serbian combatants and former Albanian combatants. We arranged a radio in Belgrade, they invited former Serbian combatants, and we invited former KLA combatants. It lasted for like 10 minutes, the Serbians left, because they were getting angry with KLA’s soldiers’ answers. They didn’t say anything insulting, just explaining why they decided to join KLA, you know things that really happened. But they couldn’t stand it. So, it failed.’

(interviewee no.4, Pristina)

The main aim was to give the population the message that war should be a memory and left in the past, and the future is what we all should be focused on. This argument is articulated mainly by this group of participants. The current story is interesting because it shows us a different angle of former combatants – the thought that population should move on and change the mindset.

It is crucial to gauge the reasons behind these motivations. For this reason, the participants were asked continuously on what motivated them to engage in peace-promoting activities and what differs them from the others that didn’t engage in promoting peace and tolerance. The responses involved notions like, ‘we all have the same power, but some don’t have the will to promote inter-ethnic peace’, ‘education is important’ and ‘family and personal history differ.’

In essence, this provides an attractive illustration of how former combatants differentiate themselves from other former combatants. They argue that promoting peace and ethnic tolerance is a ‘taboo’ topic in Kosovar society.

Two participants explained how the media played an essential role in the process of healing and peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. Therefore, with the media outlets, they tried to contribute to post-conflict peacebuilding. Two of the stories are provided below:

‘We were aware that after the war media will have a huge influence. Especially, for minorities, the Serbians that remained in Kosovo after the war. So, we created a media monitoring group and monitored the discourse that the media was using. if it was using hate language, we automatically warned them. We wrote a lot of reports about this to the internationals. I think it was very successful.’

(interviewee no.8, Pristina)



‘With media, we tried to put the truth in citizens’ eyes. We were reporting everything. What was happening with our taxes, what KLA commanders were doing with institutions. You know I wasn’t afraid, not a little bit. I don’t know why. I don’t really know where the courage came from.’

(interviewee no.9, Pristina)

Different from the participants that were involved in civic activism engaged towards a particular category of society, e.g., veterans of war, these six participants put a focus on a broader range. In these cases, participants perpetually used such arguments as ‘we need to inform citizens,’ ‘create awareness’ and ‘build a future together.’ This is an interesting observation for specific reasons. Initially, the focus of these combatants is not limited within the Albanian community. They argue that peacebuilding is something more than just helping KLA combatants reintegrate. We may argue that this difference between former combatants may be because of their level of education. Two examples of their activities are provided below:

‘After the war, we created an environmentalist organization to clean the nature after the war, there was a lot of destructions. I did this with other former combatants. At the same time, I was working with ‘Save the children’, an international organization. We had a lot of awareness projects. Teaching kids on how to be aware of mines. Also, in Serbian villages because after the war still, they were a lot of active mines.’

(interviewee no.7, Peja)

‘After the war, for a time I worked for UNCHR we assisted the returning refugees with food, clothing, and children with textbooks. Currently, I work in an anti-corruption NGO, we prepare reports constantly to inform the citizens about the conditions of the state, and about the tax expenditure.’

(interviewee no.3, Pristina)

However, these activities may not be welcomed in a post-conflict society, where the identity of the new nation is mainly built on the war and war heroism. The next section will consider the possible costs of former combatants as part of civic engagement and activism.

### **5.3.3. Possible Costs of Civic Activism with the Identity of an Ex-Combatant**

Another question (see Appendix C, 12) addressed to the participants was aimed at understanding if the civic engagement of theirs had possible costs as it was discussed in the previous section. Civic engagement of the participants is divided into two different orientations.: One of them was engagement in civic activism to contribute to peacebuilding

through activities focused in Albanian ethnicity— The other one is the engagement in civic activism to contribute to peacebuilding focused in peace and tolerance for all categories of Kosovar society.

Participants that were involved in civic engagement in organizations and activities toward a specific group of society, with organizations such as ‘NGO for protection of veterans rights’, ‘NGO for protection of martyrs families’, ‘NGO for protection of handicap people of war’, were asked about the possible costs of their participation. The answers included such arguments as ‘the whole society is happy for what we do,’ ‘we help the people that saved us,’ ‘our engagement is for the good people, so we don’t have to worry.’ These answers are important for two reasons – firstly, they show how these former combatants gained appreciation from the society for what they do because they are conceptualized as ‘serving’ to the ones who saved us; secondly, the activities of them are focused only on Albanian ethnicity, abolishing the risk of being conceptualized as ‘traitors’.

However, when talking about emotional barriers of the activities they conduct, interviewees expressed that it has its own problems. They argued that being part of these NGOs didn’t let them forget the war or any factor related to the war. When asked if this is a positive or a negative issue, they answered with skepticism. The answers included, ‘I don’t know, if I didn’t work here, I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing something else,’ ( Participant no.14) ‘it is hard, but somehow we get to see other former combatants and what they do.’(Participant no.12)

Consequently, leaving the identity of a soldier and the factors related to war is quite difficult and complicated for several participants; therefore, being involved in such activities provides pleasure. Additionally, society’s gratefulness continues, even if the war was over for twenty years.

Differently, from the participants that belonged to this group, there were two participants were distinguished in this matter. As argued above, these participants were divided into terms that they were engaged in civic activism focused in particular groups of society, and most importantly, Albanian ethnicity. However, participants no.6 and no.5 were engaged in organizations that were protecting the rights of missing Albanian people during the war. Their activities include pressuring the international community and the Kosovar government. Participants expressed that they weren’t excluded or judged by society because they were fighting for the rights of Albanians. But they were perceived by the international community and government officials as peace spoilers. One of them explained by stating the bellow:

‘After being part of a protest against negotiations I had to quit my job. I was working partly in the World Bank, and when they saw my photo in protests holding the cart ‘UNMIK go home’ they were not satisfied. I can say that it was difficult for me to find jobs because I was part of these protest and civil society and not because I was part of KLA.’

(interviewee no.5, Pristina)

This particular response opens the discussion on what kind of civic activism would former combatants be perceived positively, by both Kosovar society and the international community. As seen, in these cases, only participants that were engaged in activism focused in special categories of society, the same ethnicity, and did not demand changes or pressure the government, did not have difficulties in this process. Cases mentioned above are focused in special categories of society, the same ethnicity; however, they are involved in organizations that are not compatible with the intentions of ruling class, international community, and donors.

The answers of participants involved in civic activities that are not only focused on one category and ethnicity are quite different. Interviewee no.7, focused on the protection of the environment, awareness towards active mines and protection of human and minority rights, argued that in post-conflict societies, former combatants should be careful about what they promote. The societal sensitivity is high in post-conflict, he argued, thus, if you are dealing or promoting something that wasn’t related to the war and hero soldiers, you can be easily excluded. His excerpt is provided below:

‘It wasn’t easy to do these kinds of activities after the war. To talk about human rights, minority rights or environmental rights was dangerous because people had lost members of their families, women were raped, and when they saw you dealing with these things, they would get angry. I remember when we created the organization for environment ‘Aquila,’ we went to a seminar in Hungary to specialize in running an NGO. The people were so surprised; they were saying ‘look at this crazy guy trying to save the plants’

(interviewee no.7, Peja)

Despite being excluded or judged by society, three participants pointed out other risks. For instance, interviewee no.4 stated how he, with some other friends, including former combatants, tried to organize an event, not only with Albanians but also inviting Serbian people also. However, the risk of doing so, in a still overly sensitive society, is high. In other words, the participant explained how he tried to embrace an identity of post-conflict peacebuilder, but unfortunately, that is quite a difficult task to achieve. However, if peace is a task to be achieved, then it shouldn’t be focused only on the dominant ethnicity, in this case, Albanians. He said:

‘Once we organized a festival to promote ethnic peace. We invited DJs both Albanian, Serbian and Bosnak. The Serbian were afraid to come, so we met with them on the border and took them. But after that we were attacked by some Albanians, they had knives and stuff. I can say that it is still pretty sensitive and dangerous to organize events to promote inter-ethnic peace.’

(interviewee no.4, Pristina)

Interestingly enough, the other two participants engaged in civic activism in mostly media and informing the public had the same concerns. If you do something that is outside of the limits of the comfort zone of the society, the risk of being judged, excluded, or threatened is high. In the sense of peacebuilding, participants argue that their intention of choosing to be involved in civic activism was to achieve peacebuilding. However, they stood skeptical if they achieved the task of being noted as peacebuilders. Not because their intention isn’t in that direction, but sometimes the conditions in post-conflict made this task impossible. By saying conditions in post-conflict, they mainly referred to the ruling class (mostly former KLA commandants) and societal mentality. According to the participants, especially those that are currently part of media, to expose news that are not beneficial to the ruling class is dangerous. They could be easily excluded from their jobs. Secondly, the social mentality here is referred to the mentality of population in the sense that the image of KLA shouldn’t be stained.

‘It is quite difficult to be part of this job, personally speaking, I get attacked a lot. Not physically but we publish a lot of reports, and sometimes there can be unsatisfied people with that. During the war, we had the risk to die; now, we have other challenges.’

(interviewee no.3, Pristina)

‘Once we published some news to report about Islamism and extremism. There was a case that the government had taken funds from some kind of extremist organization or something I don’t remember very clearly. But they came to our offices and broke our windows. So, it’s quite dangerous. It had its costs, but it’s worth it. sometimes we write about important people, sometimes they sue us sometimes they don’t.’

(interviewee no.9, Pristina)

Having discussed the civic activism of the participants and the possible costs of being part of civil society, two interview questions should be considered – whether they perceive civic engagement as a tool to influence the decision-making process and the possibility of the participants to be engaged in politics. These questions are important for two reasons – how former combatants intend to make positive changes in post-conflict society through civil society and if it is a relative tool (civil society) to make changes without being involved in politics.

Remarkably, all participants of the study argued that civil society could influence decision-making and change political agenda; however, being part of politics, was an advantage. Ultimately decisions are taken at the parliament. Thus, civil society has its own limits.

One participant argued that there is no other way to influence the decision-making process other than politics. A vibrant society, of course would help to influence decisions, but at the end of the day, it would be the politics that decide.

Several participants argued that civil society has an impact on Kosovo, but it would be correct to define it just as an ‘influencer’ in political debates and political agendas. Thus, civil society and their civic activities had a limit on what they can actually change.

Three of the participants, continually active in civil society in after war period, now part of parliament as deputies, argued that within the civil society they influenced many cases. However, they realized that the persuasive power was actually in parliament. Three of the excerpts are provided below:

‘We achieved to create and changes agendas and raise questions about some important cases. So, I think it has a huge influence. At least I thought so. But when I became a vice-minister, I understood that the real decisions are taken in the parliament.’

(interviewee no.9, Pristina)

‘With civil society, you can influence but not as much when you are part of the parliament. We did both, we transformed our civic movement in a kind of party, and we have seats now in parliament. But we didn’t leave our methods, we still organize protests and do a lot of awareness to citizens.’

(interviewee no.6, Pristina)

‘Being part of civil society, it has its own positive sides, but you can only influence something if you are part of the parliament. I personally see myself as a feminist representer in the parliament.’

(interviewee no.5, Pristina)

Besides this fact, not all participants were interested in being involved in politics; some of them have thought-provoking reasons. Seven participants stated that they excluded the possibility of involvement in politics. They were asked about the reasons, and if they considered that within politics, they could influence decisions and contribute to peacebuilding in this way. Several participants argued that involvement in politics is ‘dirty,’ and that their position in civil society provides them conformity and peace. They stated that they could easily communicate

with the category of people they wanted to help. Thus, their role as a peace influencer was kind of achieved within these limits.

When analyzing this topic, interviewees interestingly argued that they did not want to be perceived by the society as former combatants that take advantage of their contributions in the war for power in politics. It is important to explain that the majority of politicians in Kosovo are former combatants, including the current Prime Minister and the President. However, since the independence of Kosovo, many corruption scandals occurred, and the trust of citizens towards politicians is shallow. This may be an important factor that these former combatants refuse to be involved in politics even though they believe they can influence better through political tools. Mainly they argued that they chose to protect their image in public rather than creating an ‘opportunists’ image, as argued by the following two participants:

‘I think this way it is easier to communicate directly with people and the category of people that we help. We pressure political parties, so they do not forget us. But politics are not for me; they seem too dirty.’

(interviewee no.14, Peja)

‘I think that I am included in politics through media because we influence them enough. But I wouldn’t like to be that, because in Kosovo politicians are not seen as very good people, I prefer to stay in my position. And I don’t want them to think that I am using my contribution in the war for a seat in parliament.’

(interviewee no.4, Pristina)

Additionally, these interviewees argued that in civil society, they were provided with freedom of speech. They perceived the involvement in politics as a limitation to their skills and the horizon of influencing the society positively. One of them argued:

‘The bridge between politics and citizens is a civil society. Civil society is the only tool to maintain social welfare. Maybe I don’t have a luxury chair, but I know that I work with honor. Maybe in civil society, I am a ‘greyhound,’ but I have the freedom to speak whatever I want. In politics, maybe I would be a trained police dog, but I would have the rope in my neck, directing me where to go and what to smell.’

(interviewee no.3, Pristina)

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the pages above, I analyzed whether and how former combatants become peacebuilders in post-conflict Kosovo. In my analysis, three main themes emerged. I will discuss briefly the findings of each part and the relations that they have with each other.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether and how ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. Through the data analysis, I have argued that former combatants describe themselves as civic activists who contribute to peacebuilding and are enthusiastic about helping their community and post-conflict Kosovo. However, their peacebuilding capacities are limited firstly, by the nature/sensitivity of their civic activism, and secondly, by their perceptions of what ‘peacebuilding activities’ mean. Some of them argue that peacebuilding activities are ‘morally accepted’ if they are built to help only the Albanian community. These two factors will be analyzed below.

The data collected from this study suggests that there is a link between the decision to join/mobilize into an armed organization and the reason to engage in civic activism. As stated in the section of ‘motivations to join armed forces,’ participants had different factors that influenced their decisions to join the armed group. These factors can be listed as combatants being influenced by their nationalist families, their sense of moral obligation, social exclusion, and economic difficulties they faced before they joined the KLA. In several cases it was noticed that the participants with ‘nationalist family background’ and a sense of ‘moral obligation’ had the tendency to engage in civic activism in post-conflict Kosovo, focusing on and working with a particular category of people. This category of people is defined as Albanian ethnicity, Albanian women, and Albanian veterans. Both of these groups used the same expression to explain why they decided to join the armed organization and why they decided to engage in civic activism in post-conflict, concentrated on particular groups of society. The reasons included answers, such as ‘to serve my people’, ‘to feel the moral obligation to help my people’. The word ‘my’ is an important determinant in this context. The participants continuously tended to create a relationship between their decisions for both before and after war engagement. To

serve “my people,” or continue serving/contributing to ‘my’ people is vital for two reasons: in a sense, former combatants take the position of protecting “their” people after the war, trying to preserve their soldier identity. That takes us to the conclusion that they have still attached feelings for the ‘protector’ identity. Secondly, they perceive peacebuilding as an activity where they help the Albanian ethnicity only.

However, the identity of a soldier doesn’t seem to be a static one. In a context that didn’t remain an identity of a combatant, but a transformed to the identity of a ‘protector’ or a ‘help provider’ in post-conflict Kosovo.

The findings propose that former combatants that are engaged in civic activism related to a category that isn’t ‘sensitive’, e.g., the protection of veterans rights, a topic that isn’t crucial neither to the international community nor national government have low chances to have possible negative costs for the ex-combatants. Importantly, ex-combatants who work on these topics continue to be regarded as heroes by the society.

In contrast, the participants who justified their engagement in armed organization for reasons of social exclusion, deprivation from education, and economic difficulties are engaged in civic activism that aims to promote peace and solidarity for all ethnicities in Kosovo. In the data analyzing the process, this was depicted as a reaction to what they experienced before and during the war. They were discriminated against and socially and economically excluded themselves before the war; thus, for them it was not logical and humane to continue applying this to other minorities after the war. These participants expressed that the contribution during the war was oriented not just to Albanians but for the all ethnicities to live together in independent Kosovo.

One of the possible reasons for this significant difference in perceptions of civic activism between these two groups of participants might be due to their level of education. The group of participants that is focused on civic activism and peacebuilding directed only to Albanians had only primary or secondary education (high school). The group of participants who focused on civic activism directed to all ethnicities and promoting of solidarity had higher education, such as degrees of Bachelor, Master, and even Ph.D. Additionally, several participants of the second group (with bachelor, Master and PhD) have studied and lived abroad. It can be assumed that the interaction with different cultures abroad, and interaction with people from several other nationalities changed their perspectives towards Serbian people who live in Kosovo and what actually peacebuilding means.

One-third of the answers described their perception of how their communities received them as positive. They were welcomed as heroes or as interviewees called as ‘the ones who



saved them.’ The positive reception was categorized as a decisive factor in their reintegration phase. Several interviewees expressed the community reception as negative for their membership in the armed organization. However, this factor didn’t have an influence on their reintegration.

Contrary to many cases in global conflicts, in no case of the re-integration of ex-combatants were DDR procedures applied. There were four participants who only financially benefited from IOM’s programs but did not continue with any other further procedures. Participants argued that the need for psychological support was necessary at the time of reintegration. However, that wasn’t provided by any institution.

The study findings suggest that ex-combatants who didn’t have difficulties in the transition to civilian life, have a higher probability of being engaged in civic activism and peace-promotion that includes all ethnicities. This may be as a result of two reasons: these former combatants did not express that they had a strong bond with their soldier identity, and they did not perceive themselves as protectors of an ethnicity. Thus, peacebuilding concept to them was not something perceived as limited to a specific category but related to other processes and ethnicities as well.

The identity of an ex-combatant is not a decisive factor that helps in employment, but assessments like English knowledge are stated to influence the employment process. In this context, three women participants of the study stated that they did not feel comfortable expressing their soldier identity in job environments. It was mainly patriarchal practices and sexist prejudices, such as ‘women don’t belong to militaries’ or ‘god knows what she did there with all those men’ that these women felt that they needed to hide their ex-combatants backgrounds. However, the findings suggest that employment opportunities former soldiers had in post-conflict didn’t require the skills they gained during the period in the military.

In all cases, civic activism was not perceived as a potent tool for decision-making changes or peacebuilding incentives. The findings indicate that participants recognize civic activism as an influencer for peacebuilding, but they argue that the main change and peacebuilding can emerge from the parliament. However, one-third of the participants excluded their chances of involvement in politics for two reasons: a) because they don’t want to take advantage of their ex-combatant backgrounds, and b) because they do not think that political life is not suitable for their characters, thus they choose to remain in areas where they can be more productive.

In this study I sought to answer how ex-combatants through their engagement in civil society could contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. The main aim of this thesis

was to contribute to the understudied issue of the capacities and perceptions of ex-combatants for peacebuilding activities. The findings of the study have several implications for the future elaboration of the role of ex-combatants in civil society.

An important implication of this study derives from the finding that education was depicted as a factor that determines the choice of ex-combatants' direction toward civic engagement. In other words, there is a link between education and type of civic activism. Ex-combatants in post-conflict societies tend to focus on different peacebuilding activities, namely, civic activities focused on one ethnic population and civic activities focused on inter-ethnic peace promotion. Ex-combatants with only primary and secondary education focus on civic activities that are directed to the population that they belong. In contrary, ex-combatants with Bachelor, Master and PhD titles focus on the activities promoting inter-ethnic peace and human rights. This offers the opportunity to hypothesize that the level of education should be considered as a critical source in the future studies for the type and role of ex-combatants in civic activism and peacebuilding.

Another implication stems from the link between the decision to join armed organization and decision to engage in civic activism in post-conflict societies. Similarities were depicted while analyzing the answers on why they joined armed organization and civil society. Further research is necessary to shed light on the dynamics of these decisions and to conduct interviews with other ex-combatants from other armed organizations.

Building on this point additionally, the recruitment to the civil society of ex-combatants in post-conflict societies can be a factor that influences their understanding of the citizenship notion. Their experiences in civil society and their type of civic activism may transform their understanding of the notion of the citizenship and their democratic values, leaving space for further studies in this aspect.

Lastly, ex-combatants do not perceive civil society as a tool that can influence the decision-making mechanisms due to the restrictions of political ruling class in Kosovo, arguing that the only way to influence is by being part of the parliament and political parties. However, in order to provide more insight of this argument the research should be expanded in other states as this argument is valid for Kosovo.

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## APPENDIX A



### **Sabancı University**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Study Title:** Ex-combatants as peacebuilders in post-conflict societies

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik / Thesis Advisor

**Co-Investigator:** Lirika Agusholli / MA Student

**Interviewer:** Lirika Agusholli

#### The purpose of this study:

This study aims to gather information for the MA thesis research of Lirika Agusholli who is Conflict Analysis and Resolution Master Program student, under the responsibility of Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik from Sabancı University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

#### The specific objectives of the proposed research are summarized as follows:

The purpose of this study is to understand whether and how ex-combatants contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict society through civic activism. The study also tries to understand the experiences of ex-combatants after the war and their relations with the community.

#### During the experiment you will be asked to:

Answer the open-ended questions about your civic engagement after the war and the experiences that you had in post-conflict reintegration during the phases of finding employment and integrating into community.

#### You may find the following risks or discomfort from participating in this Study:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your data will be anonymous and confidential. No names will be taken, and nobody will know which data are yours. Data will be handled only for research purposes as a group. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time. You may stop the interview at any time, and you can skip any questions which you don't want to answer. Participation in this study will involve no costs or payments to you. Your responses will be confidential. The interview will be recorded with the voice recorder if you accept. Otherwise notes will be taken.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Co-Investigator, Lirika Agusholli, at (551) 4139755 or by email at [lirika@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:lirika@sabanciuniv.edu).

If you believe that your rights have been violated in any way, please contact Prof. Mehmet Yıldız, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at Sabancı University at (216) 300-1301 or by email at [meyildiz@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:meyildiz@sabanciuniv.edu).

By signing this consent form, you are indicating your consent to participate in this study.

Agree to be audio/video taped:  Yes  No

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Civic activism activity</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Date and Place of interview</b>	<b>Recruitment years in the KLA</b>
Nr:1	41	Male	Media activist	Journalist	23 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	Two years
Nr:2	44	Male	Coordinator for a human rights NGO	Politician	15 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	Two years
Nr:3	40	Female	Coordinator for anti-corruption NGO	Coordinator for anti-corruption NGO	17 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	Two years
Nr:4	44	Male	Coordinator at the NGO for healing children with war trauma	Journalist	24 January 2019- Pristina, Kosovo	One and a half year
Nr:5	46	Female	Activist for the rights of women raped during the war	Politician	16 January 2019 - Pristina, Kosovo	11 months
Nr:6	44	Male	Activist for anti-corruption and finding of lost people during the war	Politician	22 January 2019- Pristina, Kosovo	Two and a half years

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Civic activism activity</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Date and Place of interview</b>	<b>Recruitment years in the KLA</b>
Nr:7	42	Male	Coordinator for cleaning of the environment NGO	Public administration employee	10 January 2019 – Peja, Kosovo	One year
Nr:8	40	Male	Activist for human rights	Professor, Politician	25 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	18 months
Nr:9	49	Male	Activist for the cleaning of environment after the war destruction	Journalist	16 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	One year
Nr:10	45	Male	Coordinator at the Association of War Invalids	Coordinator at the NGO for the protection of rights of ex-combatants	1 <sup>st</sup> of February 2019 – Peja, Kosovo	Two years

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Civic activism activity</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Date and Place of interview</b>	<b>Recruitment years in the KLA</b>
Nr:11	42	Male	Activist at the Association of War Invalids	Activist at NGO for the protection of handicapped people during the war	30 January 2019 – Peja, Kosovo	One year
Nr:12	52	Male	Activist at the organization of War veterans	Dentist	30 January 2019 – Peja, Kosovo	One year
Nr:13	41	Female	Coordinator at the Association of martyrs' families	Coordinator at the NGO for protection of the rights of families of KLA combatants	1 <sup>st</sup> February 2019- Peja, Kosovo	One and a half year
Nr: 14	45	Male	Coordinator at the Association of War Invalids	Coordinator at the NGO for the protection of rights of handicapped people during the war	1 <sup>st</sup> February 2019 – Peja, Kosovo	One year and a half
Nr:15	48	Male	Anti-corruption NGO	Politician	14 January 2019 – Pristina, Kosovo	Two years

## APPENDIX C

### Interview questions:

1. Can you introduce yourself, your birthplace, age, education level, occupation, ethnicity etcetera?
2. How and when did you decide to join the armed forces? Are there other family members who also joined?
3. For how long were you a combatant? Did you leave before the war ended? If so, why?
4. When and how did you demobilize and disarm?
5. Was transition from military life to civilian life difficult? If so, what areas was it the most difficult?
6. Can you explain briefly the reintegration procedures after the war ended? Were there any third party helping for/monitoring the process?
7. Now how would you reflect about your experience as a combatant? Are your feelings any different now than it used to be when you were a combatant?
8. Can you explain your experiences after the war? Which area did you choose to work- to support yourself and your family?
9. Was it easy for you to find a job as an ex-combatant?
10. Why did you decide to engage in civic activism? Was it a voluntary choice?
11. Can you describe the NGO that you are working/worked?
12. What are the benefits of being a civic activist and possible costs for an ex-combatant and for a post-conflict society?
13. Do you think that your identity as an ex-combatant influenced your employment?
14. Can you describe the civic activities that you conducted as part of civil society?
15. Did you ever decide to engage in politics? Why? Why not?
16. Do you think your experiences and identity would also help Kosovo in other ways?