PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES: WOMEN'S TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZING IN POST-CONFLICT AREAS

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ABSTRACT

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PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES: WOMEN'S TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZING IN POST-CONFLICT AREAS (292 pp.)

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In this dissertation, I provide an in-depth qualitative study of the struggles and triumphs of organizing for peace at Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman), an overtly feminist women’s international non-governmental organization (NGO). A fundamental lived problem motivates my research: how to translate feminist ideologies into the practices of building alliances with women across national, ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries. In particular, I investigate how Kvinna till Kvinna, a Swedish organization, develops and maintains partnerships with women’s organizations in the Balkan region. Through extensive analysis, I show how Kvinna till Kvinna is able to foster partnerships that are based principles of empowerment despite obvious power imbalances. Their unique approach to peacebuilding and reconstruction work involves a dialogic approach to partnerships, extensive networking activities, negotiating access to crucial resources, and openness to alternative conceptions of what it means to contribute to and sustain peaceful society.

To situate the analysis of Kvinna till Kvinna, I first build a framework that addresses metatheoretical issues that cut across organizing for social change, global feminisms, and pragmatisms. Specifically, I show how a critical ethic of care can be used to pull together common threads that are woven into social change, poststructural and
postcolonial feminisms, and pragmatist thinking. I then move to explaining how this study is situated within communication literature on feminist organizational communication and alternative organizing and argue that this research fills an important gap in the literature on transnational feminist organizing.

The results of this study are organized into seven themes that include different facets of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work including partnership relationships, networking, organizational structure, and specific ways that a feminist ideology enables creativity, care, and imagination to thrive. Also discussed throughout are contradictions inherent in feminist organizing and how they are negotiated through an emphasis on constant reflection about issues of power and positionality. I articulate these interpretations by weaving among participant voices, organizational discourses, and my own theoretical sensibilities.

Finally, I discuss theoretical and practical implications of the results of my work with Kvinna till Kvinna. In doing so, I revisit some of the long-standing tensions surrounding feminist and bureaucratic forms of organizing to further the argument that bureaucratic structures can be appropriated in unique ways that serve feminist missions and goals. At the same time, demands from external stakeholders can be constraining, but need not be disabling. I also explain how my work opens up space for re-envisioning ethical frames for organizing and how reclaiming an ethic of care is a viable alternative for understanding organizing that is motivated by social change causes. Ultimately, I argue that Kvinna till Kvinna fosters feminist principles in both its ideologies and practices by providing space for women to collectively participate in change. This segues
into the practical implications of this study that make the case taking seriously feminist organizations as models at both the policy and local grassroots levels.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Lynn M. Harter

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I dedicate this dissertation to you in the hope of a more peaceful future.
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CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

“I keep thinking about the march I joined today. It’s bigger and stronger than war. That’s why it will win. The people must be the ones to win, not the war; because war has nothing to do with humanity. War is something inhuman.”

(Zlata Filipović, 1995, p. 33)

Each day, we are bombarded with images, stories, and soundbites about violent conflict taking place somewhere in the world. This quote serves as a poignant example and is taken from the diary of Zlata Filiopović, a 12 year old girl living in Sarajevo at the height of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that lasted from 1992 - 1995. During the long and drawn out conflict in the Balkan region, I was in high school and in the beginning years of my undergraduate study. I remember the Dayton Peace Accords as they took place in Ohio, only 90 minutes from my hometown, and I vaguely recollect the 1999 conflict in Kosovo as I was busy graduating from college and embarking upon my first job. Since that time, the world has experienced and continues to experience numerous violent conflicts in Kuwait, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Sudan, and the ongoing U.S. led offensives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Surrounding each of these situations is international interest in the economic, political, and humanitarian consequences of war and questions of intervention. In addition to state initiated attempts to negotiate peace (such as the Dayton Peace Accords), there are numerous organizations involved in efforts to provide relief and resources for reconstruction of infrastructure and state services in the aftermath of war.
As I have witnessed from afar numerous conflicts unfold in my lifetime, I have been acutely aware of how it is we (I) come to pay attention to and care about certain instances of human suffering while at other times the distance between my life and the life of someone on the news is incomprehensible. The ways in which perspectives shift and change depending upon both geographic and social location became especially clear to me when I lived in Sweden for two years from 2002 – 2004. Prior to that, I had been abroad a few times but only for short, leisurely vacations. Living and studying in Sweden marked a critical shift in my understanding of how important perspective is in the ways in which we make sense of international events. I distinctly remember walking through Stockholm with a friend during my first few weeks living there. As we came to an open square, he warned me – “oh, you don’t want to go over there; it’s the Palestinians protesting the U.S.; they’re probably burning your flag.” Not too far from us was a group of people holding signs and yelling in protest about the U.S. involvement in Israel and Palestine. I watched briefly in amazement and thought about how these are the types of protests often shown briefly on the nightly news with a voiceover from an anchorperson talking about another anti-U.S. protest.

Here before me were real people – the “others” who when projected through mass media, often become objectified to such a great extent that we forget that they are actual people and dismiss their rhetoric as irrational or misinformed. This example perhaps reveals more about my own naiveté, having grown up in a small town in southern Ohio and for the first time coming face to face with the idea that the world is a much more contentious place than I had ever experienced or imagined. Over time, these experiences
accumulated in ways that taught me to respect and at times be overwhelmed by the vastness of difference and multiplicity of perspectives. While living in Sweden, I was exposed to and paid attention to things that I never had before – debates on immigration in Western and Eastern European contexts, Sweden’s long history of commitment to international development work, and the issues of ongoing expansion of the European Union. Because I was literally and metaphorically in a different location – I experienced what Burke (1954/1984) called “perspective by incongruity” – my ways of knowing and being were challenged and I experienced life from a new and often uncomfortable point of view.

Perspective by incongruity can provide as many opportunities as it does challenges and motivates my current work. This research project challenges long-standing, solidified orientations toward understanding how and why we intervene in the suffering of others. By focusing on the discourses and practices of the Swedish nongovernmental organization (NGO), Kvinna till Kvinna (Woman to Woman), this dissertation explores organizing for social change that crosses national, ethnic, political, and religious boundaries so that our frameworks for understanding the irreducible contingencies of such work can be expanded. Kvinna till Kvinna is a peace-building organization that focuses its efforts primarily on the needs and struggles of women in post-conflict societies. The organization was created in 1993 in response to the evolving war in the Balkan region. Since that time, they have worked to incorporate women into the processes of peace negotiation and in the (re)building of democratic institutions. Although they recognize the severe and irreversible consequences of conflict, they also
see opportunities for women to participate in the reconstruction of a society that has been deeply fragmented. They have tried to set themselves apart from aid organizations such as the Red Cross and Save the Children by arguing that women are not only victims of war – they are also invaluable resources for building and maintaining peace. One of their main strategies has been to provide resources to women’s organizations within post-conflict regions so that they might network and learn from each other. Further, they have been instrumental in trying to provide access to services that empower women to take active roles in rebuilding their societies – such as legal services, psychosocial support to deal with the aftermath of war, medical care, and being able to meet in safe and secure environments. Unique to Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing is not only their specific focus on women, but also their attempts to collaborate with grassroots organizations in ways that resist traditional development driven agendas.

As a feminist organizational communication scholar, I find Kvinna till Kvinna’s work to be situated at the intersections of several recent and ongoing problematics found in communication theory and in third wave and global feminisms. Kvinna till Kvinna is a boundary-spanning organization (Harter & Krone, 2001) in that they participate in global conversations about women’s rights while at the same time work in local contexts to help women realize their rights and potentialities in post-conflict areas. They provide an alternative example to the much maligned traditional top-down approach to development organizing, and they strive to “make room for change” rather than to authoritatively create change. All of this, though, is not without constant struggles and challenges including the paradoxes that underlie alternative and participatory ways of organizing
such as survival and social change, stability and change, access to material and discursive resources, and control and resistance (see Harter & Krone, 2001; Trethewey, 1997; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Their work provides an entrée into understanding what Ganesh, Zoller and Cheney (2005) have termed “the countervailing forces of ‘globalization from below’” (p. 172) and an opportunity to explore resistance as collective activity. This is important because, although communication scholars have recently made significant contributions to understanding resistance as inseparable from control and power (see Tracy, 2000; Tretheway, 1997, 2000), much of the focus has been on individual acts of resistance within specific organizations.

Feminist theorists, on the other hand, have had an ongoing concern with difference and the extent to which difference can be engaged without losing a sense of purpose in developing transformative theories and practices. Kvinna till Kvinna, even in its very name (Woman to Woman), is living the struggles of difference and solidarity as it reaches beyond its home borders to identify with women who have vastly different social, economic, and political experiences than those of women living in Sweden. They do, though, also manage to find similarities in these relationships. Subjectivities emerge, intersect, and are at times contested as individuals participate in the collaborative efforts between Kvinna till Kvinna and local organizations. Across development communication, many feminist and postcolonial theorists have been instrumental in pushing us to recognize not only the plurality and shifting nature of identity and experience – but also the multiple and often overlapping forces of oppression.

Relationships between “Western” NGOs and women’s movements in contexts that are
deemed “underdeveloped” or “Nonwestern” are wrought with undeniable historical and economic linkages that have shaped their current relationships (Harding, 1998; Mohanty, 2003). The recognition that these relationships are complex and the failures of many one-way, top-down administered development initiatives have given rise to recent trends of adopting “participation” and “empowerment” as explicit goals for development agendas.

Even though there is a wealth of literature dealing with alternative and feminist ways of organizing and global feminisms, there is still work to be done in developing more robust frameworks that can help us understand the complexities of transnational organizing. For example, many postcolonial accounts of transnational development work take a Marxist critical approach – arguing, rightfully, that capitalism and Western economic dominance cannot be overlooked. The tendency with these approaches is to imply that there is little to no transformative potential in international alliances because of the inequality of power relations. By contrast, many accounts of participatory practices in organizing tend to celebrate the potential of feminist practices without engaging the realities of global-local organizing. Keeping these two tendencies of wanting to understand organizing practices and maintaining awareness of power relations in play with one another is difficult and demanding. I argue that we can remain both hopeful and skeptical about the potentialities (and limits) of transnational organizing by (1) starting with the practices of an actual community (organization) and (2) committing to understanding both how and why such a community organizes the way that it does. In so doing, I agree with Rathgeber (1995) in her statement that:
A truly postmodern feminist approach to development would recognize and build upon the reality of these diverging views rather than denigrating the efforts of development agencies as either inherently conservative and self-serving or excessively bureaucratic. Obviously agency workers have neither the capacity nor the right to speak for the intended beneficiaries of their efforts…However, the discourse of progressive individuals within agencies should be recognized and interpreted as an alternative voice in itself. (p. 212)

As such, I argue that poststructural and postcolonial feminist theories and pragmatist philosophies are informing departure points for understanding how Kvinna till Kvinna organizes. To interrogate why is to engage head on questions of self and other, difference and solidarity, individual and society, and universal and particular. Mindry (2001) termed this type of discourse a “politics of virtue” that shapes the ways in which women relate to each other in and through organizations. She argued that “The kinds of historically significant, transnational moralizing discourses have remained largely unexamined in the literature on women, nongovernmental organizations and development” (p. 1189). These kinds of questions are challenging and complex, but they open up possibilities for a more deeply contextualized understanding of transnational organizations as well as the emergence of nets of collective action (Czarniawska, 1997). To work towards this, we must be willing to pose such questions as “How do women in these very different geographical, social, and political locations perceive their relationships to one another? What are their interests and investments in these projects and relationships?” (Mindry, 2001, p. 1193). These questions are posed with the aim of
gaining insight into how commitments to certain virtues and ideals are constructed, articulated, and translated into practice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first explore the issues outlined above by exploring salient features in understanding gender and conflict and post-conflict societies. Then, drawing upon feminist and pragmatist philosophies, I build a theoretical backdrop to frame these concerns. I explore some of the key tenets and contentions of these different perspectives and make my own arguments as to which concepts I found most compelling in sensitizing me to embark on this project. Finally, I summarize my theoretical standpoint, highlighting the core issues that are further taken up in the literature review in the next chapter.

Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping in Post-Conflict Regions

Much research on the relationship between conflict and gender has emerged from practitioners and nongovernmental organizations. Handrahan (2004) argued that although practitioners publish numerous reports on gender and conflict, “international development agencies routinely ignore gender and women’s issues when designing and implementing post-conflict development programmes” (p. 431). Why is this so, that women’s issues should be ignored in the process of building sustainable peace? Part of this stems from cultural and historical constructions of war and masculinity. Goldstein (2001) noted that the “regularity in gender roles in war contrasts with the much greater diversity found both in war itself and in gender roles outside war” (p. 57). In other words, the association of masculinity with war is deeply rooted and has persevered across cultures and time with few exceptions, thus giving rise to a lack of concern with feminist
perspectives in both theory and policy. One way to make sense of this cultural construction is by looking at gender and conflict as situated in broader constructions of gender and national or state interests.

Ranchod-Nilson (2000) argued that in recent years the focus of feminist scholarship on nationalism and political participation has shifted from studying women’s involvement in political activism to a focus on understanding how broader conceptual categories such as nation, state, and citizen are gendered. These concepts are contradictory and contested, leading us to ask if it is even possible to identify a “women’s” agenda amidst the overlapping and competing agendas involved in struggles for national identity. In light of this postmodern turn, a central question in interrogating these issues then becomes “what is the meaning of gender dimensions of representation for the cultural construction of nations and the ways in which we understand women’s activism, struggle, and involvement in nationalist movements?” (Ranchod-Nilson, 2000, p. 165). Involvement in national and civil conflicts in the name of nationalism is a gendered process and gender norms are often reified during war times. The association between men, war, fighting, and violence is unquestioned “because it is taken for granted that it is men who fight, men who lead troops or guerilla movements, men who negotiate peace, men who wear blue helmets, and men who head UN agencies” (Handrahan, 2004, p. 432, emphasis in original). Male participation in conflict is necessary and expected and signifies respectable and honorable citizenship, thereby leading to a positive identity for men during conflict (Handrahan, 2004). By contrast, women’s participation in conflict or nationalist efforts is usually only noted because it is the exception to the norm. Women,
though, do not escape violence, indeed they often become victims of rape and sexual violence (see Handrahan, 2004; Tomasson, 2006).

During war times, the fluidity of these conceptual categories is foregrounded as gendered social ordering of community and society is afforded opportunity to shift and slide along with the disruption of societal conflict. These gendered constructions of nation and of state serve the purpose of revealing and reproducing “the ‘citizen-warrior’ values associated with men in producing and controlling the state (patria) and the ‘mother’ values associated with women in reproducing the home, family, and nation” (Meyer, 2000, p. 120). Women’s struggles become caught in the balance between the need to minimize the disruption caused by war by providing continuity in private spheres of life and the political needs and commitments of the conflict itself (Youngs, 2001).

Conflict and the Public/Private Divide

The expectation that women should maintain the family and home during times of conflict exemplifies the ways in which men and women “have been socially produced and reproduced in relation to the divisions between the public and private” (Youngs, 2000, p. 47). The family and home serve as symbolic and material sources of safety, sustenance, and protection from the outside turmoil. Writing about the experience of conflict in Serbia, Andjelkovic (1998) explained that, as the state disintegrated, the family became evermore important as a bastion of support and security. She stated that “the family was seen as the only hope and refuge…the family remained the sole financial base for an individual while society was passing through radical and severe political, economic, and social changes” (p. 238). While the men are fighting, many women in
conflict areas strive to provide continuity for their family’s lives in the face of uncertainty and disruption.

Although we might see the socially constructed boundaries between public and private more clearly demarcated in war torn societies, individuals also (re)interpret these gendered spaces to advocate social change. Recognizing the influential force of the family as a safe haven, women activists have drawn upon the maternal frame as a resource to gain political voice. Foss and Domenici (2001), for example, have highlighted the protest activities of the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and their role in gaining international attention for domestic conflict. Maternal framing is not only accessible to those opposing war, but can also serve as a powerful resource to encourage patriotism and support of soldiers. Bayard de Volo (2004) argued that, during Nicaragua’s Contra Wars, opposing political parties were each able to mobilize “mothers” to support their pro-war and anti-war causes. From these examples, we can understand how public and private involve interdependencies and contradictions and are ongoing communicative accomplishments (Youngs, 2001).

Also highlighting the tension between public/private is the idea that women themselves are to be protected and sheltered from war. As Goldstein (2001) argued, “Not just the soldier, but the whole society participates in constructing a feminine sphere to be preserved from war, just as Hegel’s ‘beautiful soul’ protects the appearance of purity by cultivating innocence about the harsh world” (p. 304). Both symbolically and in practice, women serve as nurturers and caretakers, providing refuge for sons, soldiers, and husbands. This boundary of protection and purity, though, is often shattered by the
realities of rape, genital mutilation, and sexual violence against women living in embattled areas. For example, Kvinna till Kvinna (2000) found that “Thousands of women and young girls in Bosnia and Herzegovinia were assaulted during the war…as systematic rape was used as part of the war strategy” (p. 36). These crimes against women give rise to concerns and needs unique to women in conflict and post-conflict society.

As societies try to rebuild in the aftermath of violence, war crimes against women as well as ongoing domestic violence against women are of central concern to organizations concerned with women’s issues. During conflict, social norms are disrupted and the continuum of sexual relations between men and women, with war brides at one end and rape at the other, becomes distorted (Goldstein, 2001). In other words, although rape and sexual violence against women occurs during peacetime, during war they become less socially taboo and are often constructed as part of the extreme circumstances of war. Handrahan (2004) pointed out that gender, in particular femininity, becomes a boundary marking a conquest of victory for the enemy. Women who suffer from rape at the hands of the ethnic other are often forced into silence as admitting that they were violated would bring “harm and shame both to their surviving male relatives and to themselves” (p. 435). Although the international community is becoming more aware of the atrocities committed against women during war, social stigma surrounding sexual contamination remains a powerful force as communities transition from conflict to post-conflict.
Women, Peacebuilding, and Participation in Civil Society

The peacebuilding process is difficult, contentious, and contradictory for fractured and divided societies. The international community has placed much faith in the capability of democratic institutions and the building of civil society to help facilitate and sustain peace (Belloni, 2001). According to Handrahan (2004), though, the post-conflict experience is often marked by struggle and competition for male identity and power as the international community has filled the leadership vacuum created during conflict. This fragility is accentuated by the international community’s idealized conception of civil society, which often “misunderstands the struggle to overcome nationalist fragmentation” (Belloni, 2001, p. 163). Moreover, this tension between the ideal and real leads to civil society building as an externally driven process that can foster dependency upon international resources and can stifle equal, cooperative relationships between international and national groups (Belloni, 2001). Adelman and Frey (1997), in their groundbreaking work on a community living with AIDS, also found that communities that emerge out of suffering are particularly vulnerable to the stigmatization and debilitating effects of dependencies. Thus, important to keep in mind in post-conflict situations is that dependency can undermine relationships both at the macro and the micro levels.

Establishing democratic practices and encouraging participation in civil society has been of concern for many transnational organizations who work with women’s initiatives in post-conflict and developing regions. As Cornwall (2003) noted,
Participation has become development orthodoxy. Holding out the spaces for the less vocal and powerful to exercise their voices and begin to gain more choices, participatory approaches would appear to offer a lot to those struggling to bring about more equitable development. (p. 1325)

The democratic principle of full participation, though, is difficult to uphold while at the same time allowing for multiple voices to be heard. Moreover, the timing of participatory practices is crucial to the outcomes of such methods (Dutta, 2006). In transnational organizing, these differences emerge in part out of the interests of global and local actors. As an international NGO seeks to promote democracy and voice in a particular community, the commitment to democracy can subjugate local identity, needs, and concerns.

Phillips (1993) described the disjuncture between the ideals of liberal democracy and feminist perspectives that seek to be inclusive of difference by explaining that democracy is premised upon “an abstract, degendered, ‘neutered’ individual as the basis for our aspirations and goals” (p. 71). This impulse towards universality surges through much of the discourse surrounding democratic development and has been raised by many feminists as problematic (e.g. Cornwall, 1998; Parpart, 1995). By “insisting on equality despite all differences, women have been encouraged to deny aspects of themselves and to conform to some unitary norm” (Phillips, 1993, p. 56). This norm, in turn, has never been gender neutral. However, this is not an either-or argument, and Phillips (1993) asserted that, in theorizing democracy to encompass difference and feminist perspectives, “feminism cannot afford to situate itself for difference and against universality, for the
impulse that takes us beyond our immediate and specific difference is a vital necessity in any radical transformation” (p. 71). Democratic ideals such as participation and voice are difficult to foster, and it is utopian to think that an idealized environment could be created.

The activities of transnational NGOs are situated within broader discourses of liberal democracy and the struggle to accept difference while adhering and upholding democratic “rights” for all people. Benhabib (2002) explained that “it is very difficult to accept the ‘other’ as deeply different while recognizing his/her fundamental human equality and dignity” (p. 8). For NGOs that seek to foster democratic equality and participation, they are taking part in both a moral and a political dialogue. These dialogues “begin with the presumption of respect, equality, and reciprocity between the participants” (Benhabib, 2002, p. 11). Problems arise, though, when this background of assumptions extends to treating cultures as coherent identities with clearly demarcated boundaries, erasing or filling the space needed for complex and dynamic dialogue. For these reasons, Benhabib argued that, in order to foster a democracy that allows for cultural pluralism, “Democratic theorists should support movements for equality and justice and for increasing the space of narrative self-determination in cultural terms” (p. 19).

Enacting these democratic ideals and principles becomes much messier in practice. Participatory development discourse resonates strongly with liberal democratic development agendas as well as with feminist organizing (Cornwall, 2003). As such, participation and gender have become tightly coupled terms in development organizing.
and participatory development has become a strong trend in transnational organizing. Cornwall (2003) cautioned, though, that in recent years, “the rapid spread of participatory approaches led to their use by powerful international institutions to lend their prescriptions authenticity and legitimacy, submerging the more radical dimensions of participatory practice” (p. 1327). The range of participation that is initiated through gender-progressive NGOs varies greatly from sustained opportunities to participate in deliberative processes, which closely reflect Benhabib’s (2002) ideals, to one-off performances or tokenism.

Moreover, through participation initiatives, paradoxes can emerge. As Cornwall (2003) aptly pointed out, “What if the ‘needs’ women profess are connected with fulfilling their duties as wives and mothers?” (p. 1330). In light of this, we need to question if women’s involvement in nationalist agendas are misguided in that they reify their subordination and to understand how conflict, as Ridd (1987) noted, “is a curious paradox…however much it may be outwardly directed towards bringing about change in society, can be at the same time an inherently conservative agent” (p. 3). These contradictions call for close examination of the reconciliation of women’s active participation with broader issues of how representations of women overwhelmingly position them as caretakers and subordinates to men. Exploring women’s participation in this way has implications for the gendered dimensions of social movements, citizenship, and state structures (Ranchod-Nilson, 2000).

As an overtly feminist peace organization, Kvinna till Kvinna sits at the confluence of the issues mentioned above as members seek to build partnerships with
local women’s organizations in post-conflict regions. Since 1993, they have been supporting women’s empowerment projects by forming long-term relationships with partner organizations in the Balkan region, including the countries of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia. The organization has grown from a loose network of three women peace activist founders to a formal foundation that today employs 38 women in both Stockholm and regional field offices. Their field work has also expanded to include offices in the South Caucasus and the Middle East regions, and they are currently exploring the possibility of opening field offices in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kvinna till Kvinna’s approach to rebuilding a peaceful society after conflict sets them apart from other development aid organizations in that they (a) focus solely on the needs of women and strengthening the women’s movement, (b) argue that there is a direct connection between supporting women’s participation in peace processes and attaining sustainable peace, (c) believe in long-term field presence and close relationships with partners versus a short-term project approach, and (d) work to make the contributions of women to peace and democratic society visible in the international community. In addition to their field work, Kvinna till Kvinna has a communication branch located in Stockholm that collects information from partners in the various field regions to generate reports, seminars, workshops, and exhibits aimed at changing taken-for-granted assumptions about women in conflict and post-conflict areas.

Kvinna till Kvinna is a “Western” feminist organization working to create alliances and affect social change with feminist organizations in “Nonwestern” regions
(the meanings of Western and Nonwestern are debatable and it is problematic to reproduce such a binary, however, I use these terms loosely here, following the lead of Narayan, 1997, who argued that such terms can be useful, but problematic when their meanings become so fixed we cease to recognize their problematic nature). Further, Kvinna till Kvinna’s ideology and organizing practices are *transnational* in that they supersede national boundaries (Moghadem, 2005). They believe in a global sisterhood and that transcends cultural differences and provides a motivation for reaching out to women in conflict areas, but the ways in which they do so suggest sensitivity to issues of difference, power inequities, and ethical relationships. For these reasons, I posit that postcolonial feminism, with its roots in understanding the social and historical circumstances that shape relationships such as “Western and Nonwestern,” is a useful theoretical backdrop for this study. Narayan (1997) also promoted this viewpoint when she argued that a postcolonial perspective can (and should) be used to make sense of contemporary global relationships and connections between different societies and that “postcolonial” should not be fixed to specific geographies (i.e., Indian contexts). Combined with poststructural feminism, postcolonial feminism gains robustness as a departure point for analyzing a transnational organization from a distinctly communicative perspective. At its foundation, poststructural feminism is concerned with *discourse, subjectivity*, and *power*, three inherently communicative dimensions of organizing that gain richness and depth from postcolonial contextualization. I also incorporate pragmatist thinking into this theoretical framework for its concern with solidarity and community.
I will now turn attention to fleshing out my metatheoretical orientation. Before exploring some of the key intersections and divergences I see among poststructural and postcolonial feminisms and pragmatisms, I provide an overview of my own feminist standpoint. This standpoint is not static, but at this point in time, it represents the commitments I hold as a feminist/pragmatist scholar. Also, articulating my standpoint serves as an entrée into a more in-depth discussion of global-local tensions, subjectivity, difference, social change, and public/private spheres of life.

My Global-Local Feminist Standpoint

My global feminist standpoint is informed by poststructural and postcolonial feminisms as well as key tenets of pragmatist philosophy. In articulating this standpoint, I begin with poststructural and pragmatist feminisms and then explain why postcolonial standpoints are integral to a global perspective. Taking poststructural feminist ideas as my departure point, there are two overarching points that need to be emphasized. The first is that discourse is at the center of analysis. For poststructural feminists, it is in and through various discourses that social organization occurs, subjectivities emerge, and power relations and their related material realities take shape. In other words, life takes on meaning through language. Discourse is constitutive – and it is within the interaction of competing discourses, not outside of discourse, that the potential for new and transformative ways of making meaning exist. Philosophers from Wittgenstein (1973) to Foucault (1980a) have recognized the constitutive power of language and discourse in calling into being social institutions, individual and collective subjectivities, and political struggles over meaning. As Lupton (2003) stated:
The poststructuralist concept of *discourse* marries the structuralist semiotic concern with the form and structure of language and the ways in which meaning is established with an understanding that language does not exist in a social vacuum but is embedded in social and political settings and used for certain purposes. Discourse, in this usage, can be described as a pattern of words, figures of speech, concepts, values and symbols. A discourse is a coherent way of describing and categorizing the social and physical worlds. (p. 20)

This definition can be expanded to add that discourse is also consequential to social and material realities and that it is always contested. By centering discourse, poststructural feminists are thereby positioned to both *deconstruct* the workings of power and institutionalized inequalities and to *reconstruct* meaning by identifying and analyzing opportunities for resistance (Weedon, 1997). This emphasis on discourse guides inquiry towards certain questions that deal broadly with (a) subjectivity, and (b) ways of organizing.

First, theorizing subjectivity and the multiple processes of subjectification emerge from this discursive view. Drawing heavily upon the work of Foucault, poststructural feminists have found much use for his project of decentering the individual. Responding to the dominant paradigm of liberal humanism, Foucault argued that subjectivity is incoherent, discontinuous, and an ongoing process. For poststructural feminists, this shift away from the individual as a coherent, rational being who has ultimate sovereignty opens new possibilities for understanding individuals as inhabiting, contesting, and reconfiguring multiple subject positions. These subjectivities reside in culturally and
historically specific discourses – discourses which collide and compete for dominant meaning. As Weedon (1997) explained, “The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist” (p. 40). These battles are complex, as are individual identities. Poststructural and third wave feminists have recently been concerned with how gender, class, and race, as monikers of identity, vie for resources around which to rally for social change. Through the exercise of power, certain subject positions become legitimized while others are marginalized or even denied.

Second, by taking discourse as the departure point for understanding social life, organizations are thus discursive accomplishments. Both actual and potential ways of organizing occur in language (Weedon, 1997), and organizations are constantly produced and reproduced through both macro-level and micro-level practices. Organizations sustain social order by reifying cultural norms, beliefs, and values. This reification is apparent in the concrete everyday actions of individuals. The process of organizing allows for social order which can also, in turn, become institutionalized and used as a form of disciplinary control (Foucault, 1977; Turner, 1995). An organization, then, is not a container that can be understood separately from either individuals or broader societal and historical discourses from which it evolves. Poststructural feminists are concerned with how knowledges become solidified through this process of reproduction and reification. Power operates to institutionalize and fix certain meanings, certain ways of organizing (e.g., hierarchical bureaucracies), and at the same time disqualify alternatives. However, power is both repressive and productive – meaning that new knowledges are
also developed and that subjugated knowledges can be reclaimed. Understanding that organizations play a vital role in this process is crucial to both destabilizing “common sense” about how things should be done, and also recognizing opportunities for alternative knowledges to circulate.

Beyond a discourse-centered focus, feminist scholars maintain that theory – as a form of knowledge production – is inseparable from practice. This point represents a commitment to three interrelated principles: (1) reflexivity, (2) materiality, and (3) irreducibility. Feminists have long been concerned with the practice of reflexivity and an understanding of both one’s own standpoint as well as the relationship between theory and experience. Reflexivity is an ongoing practice and is not something that work is subjected to after it is produced; rather it is present even in the ways in which projects, organizations, discourses, etc. are selected for study. Feminist philosopher Seigfried (2002) drew upon the work of John Dewey to argue that “reflective thinking begins with the existential situation of everyday experience” (p. 54). These everyday experiences give rise to theory, just as theory helps understand and further explore experience. Therefore, the choice made to study the needs and struggles of a certain group is an exercise in reflexivity and in asking such questions as: How is theory answerable, or not, to the practical exigencies of these individuals? (see also Fraser, 1989; Harding, 1998; Weedon, 1997).

The second commitment involved in adhering to the notion that theory and practice are integrally related is an understanding that there are material consequences to theory. As Weedon (1997) argued, poststructural feminist theory is a “mode of
knowledge production” (p. 40). Therefore, the representations, subject positions, and power relations which are created, reified, and contested are political endeavors. Discourse is “at once constrained by and generative of material conditions” (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. xxvii). In turn, discourses gain traction through concrete, material practices.

If we take theory and practice to be interrelated, then, we must also recognize the interrelatedness of the material and symbolic realms of life. Recently, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argued that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and materiality. This approach “examines the reciprocal, dialectical, and mutually defining character of the symbolic/discursive and material conditions of organizing” (p. 124). Other feminists have echoed this perspective in calls for a materially engaged transformative politics, one that resists the postmodern impulse to deny material circumstances (see Fraser, 1989; Mohanty, 2003). As Mohanty (2003) aptly stated,

Feminist struggles are waged on at least two simultaneous, interconnected levels: an ideological, discursive level that addresses questions of representation (womanhood/femininity), and a material, experiential, daily-life level that focuses on the micropolitics of work, home, family, sexuality, and so on. (p. 64)

To adopt a dialectical approach to these macro and micro struggles is to acknowledge that (1) even though reality is socially constructed, there are enduring material features of social order; (2) communication is also a material act in that individuals embody and enact discourses; and (3) material realities are influenced and shaped by discourse (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004).
Finally, recognizing the theory-practice relationship involves a commitment to understanding the world as infinitely complex and to accept the irreducibility of those complexities. Power relations, for example, are dispersed, multivocal, and fragmented. They cannot be isolated to show one direct cause or institution that is accountable for oppressive practices. There are multiple tensions which are constituted by and permeate all social relations. To claim that theory must be answerable to life is to accept that theory will always be partial, indeterminate, and culturally/historically specific. This does not, however, make theory or experience less valuable or tenable. Rather, this perspective allows for the questioning of dominant conceptual frameworks and for the broadening of potential new theories, subjectivities, practices, organizations, etc.

From a poststructural feminist perspective, turning to postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminism is a way to further contextualize inquiry by locating relationships in broader geopolitical and historical contingencies. As Shome and Hegde (2002) argued, “postcolonial scholarship provides a historical and international depth to the understanding of cultural power” (p. 252). To that end, postcolonial studies focus on the ongoing interrelationships between colonizers and colonized, and the processes of decolonization. This perspective, though, is not limited by geographic location. Rather, as a theoretical lens, it focuses critical attention on the historical context of colonialism and the ways in which the dominance of Western modernity has, and continues to, set scientific, political, and economic agendas.
In connecting postcolonialism and feminism, Harding (1998) explained: 

*Postcolonial* is not a geographical, national, or racial category, nor is *feminist* a women’s identity, let alone a biological category. *Postcolonial* and *feminist* are not identities in the sense of pre-existing natural or social roles into which one is born or which one otherwise unreflectively acquires. (p. 17, emphasis in original)

Postcolonial feminism can be thought of as a set of “commitments to chosen political struggles” (Harding, 1998, p. 17). As such, a commitment to social change is given enhanced credence by adopting a postcolonial feminist perspective – which is a “transformative stance” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 250).

A poststructural and postcolonial feminist perspective served as a departure point for this dissertation and provides a useful framework for making sense of transnational organizing. In the following, I draw upon this framework to discuss some of the key concepts that surround feminist organizing theory and practice: global-local tensions, difference and solidarity, subjectivity, social change, and public and private.

**Feminisms, Pragmatisms, and a Critical Ethic of Care**

In this section, I discuss some of the key issues that cut across feminist and pragmatist theorizing that speaks to organizing in transnational contexts. I begin with a discussion of global-local relationships and the politics of knowledge production that have historically shaped and continue to shape these relationships. Then, I explore issues of subjectivity and signifying practices, arguing that a fluid conception of the subject can offer possibilities for transformation and agency. I turn attention next to the issue of difference and solidarity by integrating feminist and pragmatic perspectives. In the
discussion of social change, I advocate a dialectical approach to social change that recognizes the contingencies of organizing. Finally, I explore the concept of public/private and propose that a critical ethic of care is integral to reframing the public/private relationship and to understanding transnational networks. This section concludes with a brief summary and research questions.

**Global-Local Relationships**

Postcolonial feminists, in particular, have been concerned with the dynamics of global-local relationships. This has risen amidst debate about whether or not globalization is a new phenomena or a process of neo-colonialism that continues to structure the world according to North/South and East/West hierarchical relations (Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005). Code (2000) described the ways in which feminists approach theorizing and organizing in a transnational world as filled with both optimism and despair. On the one hand, hope is fueled by the underlying dream of global optimization and unity – which, of course, simplifies (and denies) the complexities of difference. On the other hand, the sheer depth of those complexities can result in political and theoretical inertia and exhaustion. I agree with Code, though, that this debate, which is typically cast in terms of relativism vs. absolutism, can serve to block productive scholarship and praxis. She reframed the relationship between the global and local as a dialectical one that needs to be held in constant tension. In the following, I discuss two significant processes which continue to hold the global-local in irresolvable tension by constantly reproducing the relationship between the two – the politics of knowledge production and dialectic of resistance and control.
The production and circulation of knowledge has been a central concern for postcolonial feminists and a way to make sense of structures of power and oppression that characterize colonizer/colonized relations. This dynamic can be traced back to the Enlightenment and the advent of modern scientific inquiry. The age of modernity encompasses two significant processes: European expansion and the rise of modern science. A postcolonial perspective requires that we question the relationship between these two processes. Further, traditional accounts of scientific discovery emphasize the spread of science technology because of European expansion. These Eurocentric descriptions do not recognize that colonization is fundamentally a relationship and that influence flowed both ways in this process (see Harding, 1998; Narayan, 1997).

To look at the systematic way in which knowledge is produced from a poststructural perspective is to recognize that it is both discursive and political. Foucault (1980a) argued that knowledge and power are inseparable. In his project of genealogy, he argued that knowledges are discursively created and accumulate over time, becoming solidified “regimes of truth.” Once discourse becomes taken for granted in society to the extent where it is no longer questioned, truths become “Truth” and serve as a powerful discursive resource for how we evaluate and make sense of the world. In this process of truth building and accumulation, certain knowledges are buried and throughout history, sets of knowledges have been rendered inadequate and thus de-valued (Foucault, 1980a). Discourse and knowledge production are enmeshed with power relations and “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1980b, pp. 100-101).
Therefore, discourse, and power relations are instable and fluctuating and provide means for not only control but also resistance.

Foucault argued that control and resistance are inseparable, thereby emphasizing that power is both *repressive* and *productive*. For Foucault, it is impossible to conceive of power and domination without an understanding of freedom and resistance. Power relations are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable and are only possible when there is “a certain degree of freedom on both sides” (Foucault, 1997, p. 283). Further, power constantly produces new discourses and new knowledge, giving rise to shifting practices and institutions. Recently, scholars have questioned the ways in which Foucault’s conceptions of control and resistance have been taken up in theory. For example, Hall (1996) argued that Foucault himself did not emphasize enough individuals’ capacity for resistance, leading to an over-emphasis on power as constraining in many Foucauldian analyses. In organizational communication, Mumby (2005) has also argued that a more nuanced understanding of resistance is needed. The main thrust of his position is that theorizing in the field has evolved around a binary of control and resistance which results in a tendency to focus on one or the other without an understanding of how control and resistance mutually implicate each other. To that end, a dialectical approach to understanding resistance and control is required in order to “explore the possibilities that exist in keeping the opposites in tension and play” (Mumby, 2005, p. 23).

Although Mumby’s (2005) work is critical in providing an overview of how control and resistance have been theorized in organizational communication, the dialectical approach that he put forward maintains a perspective from within the
organization. In other words, though he critiques the way in which control has been associated with the organization while resistance has been associated with individuals, his focus is still upon “organizational actors” and “workplace practices” (p. 23). A dialectical approach to control and resistance is productive in many ways, but if limited to within the organization it can lend itself to continuing to conceptualize resistance as individual acts. Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney (2005), on other hand, have argued that the focus on resistance needs to be expanded to include “collective resistance to power from the point of view of movements that work to resist and transform ideologies, practices, and institutions that support and constitute neo-liberalism” (p. 170). Collective resistance, as much as individual resistance, is not only reactionary to phenomena such as globalization, cultural imperialism, and violent conflict, it is also generative of new possibilities. This is an appealing perspective to adopt for looking at transnational organizing that emerges with the specific intent of disrupting hegemonic practices and discourses. Important to keep in mind, though, is that social movements are also political and contested. Collective resistance is not a seamless entity but, rather, a contingent process and outcome of organizing practices.

In postcolonial contexts, the systematic production of knowledge about what counts as legitimate “truth” and the ways in which we cast each other as well as our relationships with each other have been carried out in specific ways. First, Harding (1998) explained that there has been a “unity of science” thesis underlying common understandings of scientific knowledge. This thesis denies the ways in which knowledge is culturally and historically situated and that scientific inquiry begins with a choice of
questions or problems to explore. These choices are influenced by local languages and interactions with nature – which are culturally specific. In this way, “modern sciences also produce patterns of systematic ignorance” (Harding, 1998, p. 54). Second, Narayan (1997) outlined ways in which we continue to lock ourselves into a “colonialist stance” by (re)producing our knowledge of the other in particular ways. This occurs when we (a) fail to contextualize relationships historically, thereby discursively erasing history; (b) ignore the politics of specificity that encompasses interrelated features of gender, race, class, religion, etc.; and, (c) overlook the legacies of colonization and adhere to the notion that colonization is a process of the past.

The global-local tension surrounding the production of knowledge is not one that can be resolved by reaching an optimum level or state of globalization. In fact, globalization itself is a hotly contested term and, for some, has been identified as the “new” colonization (see Mohanty, 2004). The importance of reclaiming and restoring subjugated knowledges does not rest on the notion that local knowledge is more accurate or is a better way of uncovering the “Truth.” Instead, such attempts at reclamation are driven by the motivation to deconstruct regimes of truth manifest in certain power relations that mask and obscure institutionalized social inequities. Reclaiming such knowledges is, in itself, a political act, and some feminists have argued that only those from the subjugated position can understand such knowledge (i.e., Hartsock, 2004). This position, though, has limitations when applied to the context of coalition-building among women’s movements and organizations. Other feminist theorists, who are also informed by Hartsock’s standpoint theory, have rearticulated feminist epistemologies so that
difference and subjugation need not stand in opposition to feminist politics. I will take up these arguments, drawing specifically upon Jaggar (2000), in a later discussion of difference and solidarity. First, though, I focus on the notion of subjectivity and signifying practices.

Subjectivities and Signifying Practices

Subjectivity has been a foundational concern for poststructural and postcolonial feminisms. Recently, there has been much focus on the interrelationships between subjectivity, representation, and agency. Feminists have been concerned with the subjectivities that are made available to marginalized groups in and through dominant discourses. Further, they have sought to understand how individuals can play an active and/or complicit role in inhabiting or denying certain subject positions. In third wave feminisms, there has also been interest in understanding how we reconcile the demands for a stable subject with the demands of multiple identities and interests – namely gender, race, class, and culture (see Harding, 2004; Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). I explore the issues of subjectivity, representation, and agency by focusing on some of the more contentious issues.

Subjectivity and subjectification. For Foucault, subjectivity is understood as arising in and through particular discourses. Power relations circulate throughout these discourses, compelling scholars to pursue the investigation of subjectivity as part of the political struggle against oppressive practices. For example, to understand “woman” as a discursive subject position opens the possibility for seeking alternative ways to perform, or inhabit such a position. This discursive understanding of subjectivity has allowed
feminists to move away from the idea that identities are “fixed.” Sawicki (1996) articulated this point well when she stated:

Through genealogical analysis, description and criticism of existing power/knowledge regimes, Foucault (and Bartky) hoped to open the space necessary for resistance by freeing us from uncritical adherence to particular disciplines and identities, or, using his later terminology particular “technologies of the self.” (p. 166)

This space for resistance, though, has also been a source of critique of Foucault. As he attempted to offer an alternative to the humanist concept of subject-as-center, many have argued that understanding subjectivities as an effect of power relations is not productive as a means for understanding why and how to resist subjectivities. Fraser (1989), in her critique of Foucault’s project to bare the inequities of humanism, argued that Foucault did not provide a substantive alternative. Ultimately, her critique rests on the notion that deconstructing power relations involved in producing certain subjectivities accomplishes little without a normative ethical framework that helps individuals decide why they should resist the knowledge/power regime. I argue, though, that through her critique, Fraser has attempted to position Foucault into a modernist paradigm which he explicitly rejects. Through the discontinuities of subjectivity, change and resistance are possible, but their outcomes need to be reconceived as more open and emergent. Fraser herself captured Foucault’s emphasis on the discontinuity of the subject:

Foucault has succeeded in producing a species of Kulturkritik that does not rely on – indeed, that explicitly repudiates the subject-object framework in all of its
familiar guises. He rejects the notion of progress – not only its self-congratulatory Whiggish form but also in the more critical and sophisticated form in which it appears in Marxism and some versions of German Critical Theory. Thus, he produces genuine indictments of objectionable aspects of modern culture without presupposing a Hegelian teleology and unitary subject of history. (p. 41)

The emphasis on a discontinuous historical subject resonates strongly with the sentiments of postcolonial feminist scholars who have problematized the ways in which we (re)produce categories such as “Third World Woman.” This is a problem not only of representation, but also of the process of subjectification and of understanding how discourses constitute subjects in relation to master narratives of history and scientific progress. Discursive formations of what it means to be a “Third World Woman” take shape across different textual and institutional sites and at particular historical moments. By interrogating these formations, we can look at not only images that are circulated, but also the rules and practices that shape what is sayable and knowable and the subject positions made available within that formation (Hall, 1996).

**Representation.** Representation can be thought of in two ways: (a) as a standing in for something or someone else in textual and visual contexts, and (b) as a part or version that represents a greater whole. Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) referred to this as the dilemma of theorizing representation and raised the questions: “Where do the representations begin and end? Or do they? And what part do we play in filling in the presuppositions that make those representations ‘work,’ or have meaning, layers of meaning, even when we want to resist them?” (p. 171). Postcolonial feminist theorists
have been concerned with the layered meanings of representation in both of these two
dimensions. First, the idea that there is a postcolonial, or Third World monolithic subject
who represents the “real” plight and experience of subaltern women is problematic and
highly contested. Second, the ways in which nonwestern women are asked to represent –
often through participation and voice – also is a contradictory process.

Narayan (1997) summarized the struggles over representation by specifying three
ways in which representation is especially ambiguous. First, any account of an issue is an
interpretation and, thus, a representation (this is also a central argument for Bakhtin,
1993). Interpretation is mediated through authorship of, for example, feminist accounts of
Third World issues. Second, these accounts might or might not be representative of the
views of women at large. Third, the authorization of representatives is often not
considered in relation to the accounts given. Even if representatives of communities,
organizations, or political parties are democratically elected, this cannot (and I argue will
never) ensure uncontested representation of a larger group’s interests. Narayan described
this final ambiguity as both the hope and disappointment of encounters between Western
women and the cultural “other.” From the Western standpoint, there is often the hope that
this other represents the Third World perspective and is an authentic insider.
Disappointment follows when the other does not live up to the demands of difference and
fails to fulfill the position of native informant. Moreover, the question of authority is one
that is directly confronted; instead it is assumed that authority derives from personal
experience. As Roof and Wiegman (1995) claimed:

In this sense, experience as ground for authority substitutes for and masks
reasoning and logic, while preventing critics from certain ontologically defined
groups from assuming authority in any other way. Hence, women can only speak
about/for women, lesbians about/for lesbians, and so on. Authority becomes a
matter of propriety, of a seemly match between identity and critical object. (p. 94)

This assumption of authority colludes with Narayan’s (1997) notion of the demand for
difference in disallowing the “Third World Woman” authority to speak on anything other
than her native context (see also Trinh, 1989).

Representation also continues to be a source of irritation in encounters between
colonizer/colonized in the ways that both are reproduced as seamless and totalized
entities. Knowledges are produced through representations, and simplified, uncritical
portrayals of Western/Nonwestern women are part of a broader set of power relations
involving gender, nation, race, and cultural imperialism. For many postcolonial theorists,
there has also emerged a radical distrust of representation in general (Rajan, 1993). This
distrust stems largely from the recognition that at stake in constructions of women and
female identity is “the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation
both signifies and serves” (Rajan, 1993, p. 187). As such, recent postcolonial
deconstructions of representation (which are mediated or occur through direct political
participation and accounts) have sought to articulate alternative narrations of
globalization – ones that are nuanced by sensitivity to the hegemony of capitalism and the
consumerism-as-progress thesis (e.g., Parameswaran, 2002). These critiques are
motivated by the transformative potential of postcolonial theory and a desire to (re)claim
agency and voice of the subject.
Agency. In light of the emergence of postcolonial feminism, a debate has emerged among poststructural feminists as to whether or not political objectives can be realized without a stable, unified, subject. Further, poststructural feminists have taken criticism for their lack of political “position.” If we reconceptualize our understanding of agency as a political prerogative instead of human action that is generated and enacted by an existing subject (Butler & Scott, 1992), we can begin to see that there are multiple, contingent possibilities for agency opened up by critical understandings of subjectivity. The problem of insisting on a stable subject in order to achieve agency is summarized by Butler (1992) in the following:

To claim that politics requires a stable subject is to claim that there can be no political opposition to that claim. Indeed, that claim implies that a critique of the subject cannot be a politically informed critique, but rather, an act which puts into jeopardy politics as such. To require the subject means to foreclose the domain of the political, and that foreclosure, installed analytically as an essential feature of the political, enforces the boundaries of the domain of the political in such a way that that enforcement is protected from political scrutiny. (p. 4)

Butler argued that to reify the discursive foreclosure of possible subject positions is not to instill the subject with agency but, actually, to do the exact opposite and diminish agency by guarding against critique of certain subjectivities. As Sawicki (1996) argued, for Butler, agency is not denied because subjectivity is fragmented; rather “it is simply reformulated as enactments of variation within regulated, normative, and habitual processes of signification” (p. 167).
The idea of contingent, non-prescribed agency as a political goal aligns with the complexities of voice that have been brought to the forefront by postcolonial feminists. Shome and Hegde (2002) have questioned not only how the colonized are positioned through representations – but can they speak? Not only are there hegemonic imperialist structures to consider, but also initiating social action and gaining voice is difficult if not impossible when survival is at stake (i.e. conflict situations; see Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, & Carson-Stern, 2004). If so, is voice romanticized in such ways that undermine the potential for transformation and agency? Narayan (1997) further complicated attempts at recovering or inserting other voices by pointing to the ways in which such aims often result in a reflection of the West. In other words, your voice helps me see myself better. In this way, the Third World often serves as a “mirror” for the West and a colonialist stance is reproduced. Even if guided by a motive to critically understand the other, this constant return to the self denies the possibility for dialogic encounters between cultures.

Difference and Solidarity

One of the most pressing problems in current global feminist literature is the issue of how to adequately account for and engage difference while, at the same time, building alliances in order to mobilize political efforts. This problem becomes even more complicated if we accept, as I suggested above, that subjectivities are fluid rather than fixed identities. In postcolonial scholarship, the notion of hybridity has been used to replace identity in order to capture the notion of a cosmopolitan self consciousness which emerges from the intersections of multiple cultural and geographical positions. However,
this idea has been criticized for failing to recognize the materiality of circumstances which constrain the choices of individuals to perform their identities in particular ways. In other words, subjects are called into being in and through discourses which might or might not allow space for subjects to resist those positions.

Although I have argued for the importance of a fluid conception of subjectivity, I turn now to fleshing out what that means in terms of constructing collective group identities and seeking political gains through efforts to build solidarity. Mohanty (2003) delineated specific analytic traps that occur in efforts to build a sense of “global sisterhood.” First, as already discussed, the assumption of women as an already constituted subject position is problematic. When considering collective activity, though, the categorizing of women becomes even more complicated as women become a category of analysis that is affected by certain institutions, thereby objectifying the group as a whole. Second, there is often uncritical proof of the universality of women’s conditions as a result of unreflexive methodologies that gain traction through practicing cultural reductionism. Third, reductionism is perpetuated as underlying presuppositions of power and struggle are implicated in these methodologies and analyses.

In recent years, there have been strident moves to both recognize differences between and among social groups and to correct some of the sweeping categorizations that have characterized previous scholarship and politics. This shift has often taken the form of celebrating plurality and commodifying difference into a laudatory category. Narayan (1997) explained this well in what she termed “the anthropological perspective” (p. 124). This perspective is enacted by demonstrating a need to know about the other
combined with a commitment to refraining from any type of criticism. These types of encounters foreclose the possibility for cross-cultural dialogue and ignore the notion that cultures “are both rich and flawed, in complex and interesting ways” (Narayan, 1997, p. 134). Another way that cultural difference is upheld as an un-interrogated category is in the treatment of difference as an add-on to existing institutions or structures. There is hesitation to fully address difference as a disruption and to recognize the contingency of solidified institutions and practices. Accepting and/or tolerating difference become norms that guide our thinking and obstruct our ability to imagine change in the way we do things as a result of engaging difference. Further, as Mohanty (2003) argued, moves to include voices from others – who are different and have not traditionally been heard, does not in and of itself make those voices significant (see also Roof & Wiegman, 1995). What is significant is how multiple different voices and texts are consumed and how they are institutionally located.

Beyond how difference is both encountered and represented remains the question of how to build social movement organizations amidst the irreducibility of plurality. The concept of community is highly contested terrain for feminists committed to international agendas. To strive to build coalitions that are not forged on a foundation of transcending difference but, rather, seek to actively engage difference is not an easy theoretical or practical pursuit. One move has been to accept that global-local tensions cannot be resolved and to dismiss the concept of cross-cultural community altogether. Another approach is to reinstate the need for universal norms (e.g., Benhabib, 2002; Habermas, 1984), which diminishes the importance of experience of different situations and context.
I argue that, although difficult, there are ways to seek solidarity with others that are both politically productive and do not sacrifice difference in the name of community. I agree with Mohanty (2003) in her argument that “The challenge, then, is to find ways of conceptualizing community differently without dismissing its appeal and importance” (p. 85).

In order to re-conceptualize community as an important, albeit contested space for allowing political mobilization to emerge, I argue that feminists can build on pragmatist conceptions of community. Dewey (1916/1944) argued that difference is both a necessity and a challenge to fostering democratic communities. His criteria for measuring democratic community are captured in the following:

We cannot set up, out of our heads, something we regard as an ideal society. We must base our conceptions upon societies which actually exist, in order to have any assurance that our ideal is a practicable one. But, as we have just seen, the ideal cannot simply repeat the traits which are actually found. The problem is to extract the desirable traits of forms of community life which suggest improvement. Now in any social group whatever, even in a gang of thieves, we find some interest held in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups. From these two traits we derive our standard. How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association? ...
In short, [in a democratic community] there are many interests consciously communicated and shared; and there are varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. (p. 83)

This conception of community is appealing to feminists for several reasons. First, it recognizes that any theory of community must be grounded in the experiences of actual communities – not on utopian notions of transcending daily lived struggles. Second, by emphasizing the need for multiple interests to be shared, Dewey centers difference not as an add-on to existing communities, but as necessary for communities to flourish. Finally, the idea of full and free interplay with other forms of association allows room for feminists to recognize that communities, identities, and even sources of oppression are interconnected. A community, in other words, need not be based on a singular concept of association with others.

More recent work by scholars such as Rorty (1989), Depew and Peters (2001), and Shepherd (2001) builds on the pragmatist thinking of both Dewey (1916/1944) and James (1991) to situate discourse and language as fundamental to the creation and continual process of community. Depew and Peters (2001, citing Depew and citing Peters) posited that:

communication can lead to community precisely because communication creates the mutually recognizing and mutually respecting individuals whose relationships constitute communities in the first place. Prior to communicative interaction there are no individual; posterior to communicative interaction, there are only individuals who are members of communities. (p. 11)
This is resonant with Rorty’s position that there are no traditions, communities, or truths that take on meaning outside of language. Therefore, it is in and through language, and the process of redescribing our world that we bring about changes in thought and actions. Rory argued that a liberal society (and by extension, democratic communities), then, ought to be less concerned with justifying their aims through building foundations than with constantly seeking to improve self descriptions through re-articulation.

From this, we get a discourse-centered conception of community that recognizes that communities are contingent and dynamic. Because they are constantly (re)described through communication, communities are fluid entities that emerge from the interplay of multiple voices. This conception, though, is lacking from a feminist perspective in that it doesn’t recognize the ways in which power relations structure the ongoing contingencies. Interactions (and participation) will be both enabled and constrained by the circulation of power through the very discourses that call communities into being. Many postcolonial scholars are cognizant of this and from a critical perspective are highly skeptical of any notion of “global” communities or of Western/Nonwestern alliances. However, feminist philosophers, such as Jaggar (2000), have argued that despite the inevitability of disagreement across cultural boundaries – there remains traces of a global feminist discourse community.

Jaggar (2000) illustrated that within global women’s movements there have emerged alliances, or discourse communities, that are both discursively closed and discursively opened. Her position is that we should not argue for all such communities to be inclusive and that to do so would be to separate them from their historical,
geographical, and economic contexts. Instead, dependent upon the situation of the discursive community, it will be at times more politically productive to exclude members and at times productive to be more inclusive. The objective, then, is in line with Rorty’s philosophy of maintaining an *ongoing conversation* about the motives, aims, and politics of such discursive communities. For example, in order to protect the security of women and to first carve out a discursive space where women can openly discuss issues of violence (domestic and otherwise), many communities have purposefully excluded men. As these communities, and their discourse, shifts, though, there might become a time when the inclusion of men is useful. On a more global level, Jaggar’s (2000) argument allows for the possibility of alliances and coalitions among different social groups, but the nature of such a discursive community cannot be known before it emerges in discourse. In other words, as Rorty (1989) would concur, the shape and nature of any community has to remain contingent and open to multiple configurations.

*Dialectics of Development and Social Change*

Across pragmatist, postcolonial, and poststructural perspectives, two tenets hold. First, *transformation* of current situations and discourses is a motivating force. This can be brought about in a number of different ways. Recovering or seeking marginalized voices, deconstructing mechanisms of oppression, and embracing diversity as a creative force that fosters freedom and democracy are just a few of the broader approaches to social change. Each of these perspectives offers resources for imagining the world differently than it is today. Second, *theory* and *praxis* are integrated endeavors throughout these perspectives. Theory arises from experience and experience, in turn, holds theory
accountable. This reciprocal relationship between theory and praxis is also fundamental to the goal of social change and transformation. Feminist and pragmatist philosopher Seigfreid (2002) articulated this clearly in her statement, “Because experience is a transaction between organisms and their physical and social environment, such resolutions are a means of growth for the self as well as a means of transforming oppressive situations into liberating ones” (p. 51).

Social change is both a motivation and a practice for feminist scholars. In the study of actual communities and organizations, though, social change is anything but a neutral and unifying concept. The goals of change are wrought with paradoxes and contradictions and intersecting power relations influence the processes and outcomes of change. These goals, in turn, are entangled with the form and structure of organization, and the relationship between feminist and/or progressive social change agendas and bureaucratic forms of organization are perceived by scholars and practitioners as contradictory, if not altogether incompatible (Ashcraft, 2000; Cornwall, 2003). Recently, poststructural accounts of organizations have recognized paradox, contradiction, and tension as key features of organizational life. These features are magnified in organizations that are committed to social change. As such, current scholarship has acknowledged that bureaucracy cannot merely be dismissed as a masculine form of organizing – many alternative forms of organizing emerge out of and/or adopt bureaucratic principles (Ashcraft, 2006; du Gay, 2000).

Feminists in development work have challenged the goals and practices enacted by international agencies and the top-down model that has characterized so much of
development work (see Marchand & Parpart, 1995). As development and aid “experts” have experienced the failures of many large scale projects that have attempted to reduce conflict, poverty, etc., there has been a steady trend toward seeking alternative ways of approaching social change that enact principles of participation and empowerment and value local knowledge. These principles, though, are also contested and cannot be enacted separate from the historical and social baggage that the many years of colonization and Western economic and political influence. Therefore, as more participatory approaches to change continue in practice, so do the critiques of these practices continue from both scholars and practitioners.

Given the complicated nature of social change, I advocate a dialectical approach to making sense of how collectives organize and mobilize resources for change. Recently, social change scholars Papa et al. (2006) argued for this approach on the basis that organizing is permeated by ongoing irresolvable tensions, thereby recognizing the irreducible complexities involved in such work. Dialectical thinking, in the Western world, has roots in the philosophy of Hegel (1969) and then later, Karl Marx (1977). Hegel (1969) outlined the process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, whereby tensions between opposites (thesis-antithesis) are constantly being overcome (synthesis). Each new plane of synthesis was a higher level of historical progress, and for Hegel, there was an ultimate unity driving this historical process. Marx (1977) further developed these ideas in his doctrine of material dialectics which emphasized the economic forces of oppression and the underlying contradictions of capitalism. Ultimately, Marx believed
these dialectical tensions would lead to emancipation of the proletariat through revolution and overthrow of the bourgeois.

In adopting a dialectical approach to organizing and development, one of the most difficult remnants to shed from these historical perspectives is the commitment to progress (or in Hegel’s view, unity), and ultimate emancipation. Russian philosopher Bakhtin (1981) provided a slightly different view of dialectics that offers a way to understand unity and difference as constant, ongoing tensions, without privileging unity above difference. According to Bakhtin (1981), “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance” (p. 271). Contemporary uptakes on Bakhtin’s understanding of dialectics have mostly focused on recognizing common dialectical tensions in interpersonal relationships (see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Rawlins, 1992). However, many organizational scholars have embraced paradox, contradiction, and dialectical tensions as integral to our understanding of organizational practices (Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). My point is that in practice, and in some organizational theorizing, a recognition of tensions does not necessarily mean that a commitment to progress that has characterized Western modernist thought is relinquished.

A case in point is the definition of organizing for social change that was put forward by Papa et al. (2006): “the process through which a group of individuals gains control of its future” (p. 37). I argue that this definition has the potential to slide into a
view of ultimate emancipation that is achieved once that control is gained, even though
the aforementioned authors state that “social change emerges in a nonlinear, circuitous,
and dialectic process of struggle between competing poles of communicative action” (p. 49). The dialectical approach to organizing that I am arguing for wants to resist the notion
of what Bakhtin (1981) called “an all-encompassing language” (p. 266) that forecloses
the need for constant critique and further social change. This is in line with the views I
laid out previously on difference and solidarity. Rorty (1989) made a similar argument in
his notion that there is no final vocabulary. Any justification of a final, unifying
vocabulary will be circular in that it could only cite other features or standards within that
vocabulary (or culture) to justify criteria.

Holding steady a view of a contingent future while enacting and theorizing social
change is not an easy accomplishment. Many feminist and postcolonial critiques of
development work have argued either implicitly or explicitly that change remains
analogous to progress in the eyes of those who mobilize transnational efforts. This is
problematic on many levels as notions of progress are defined by the Western developed
world and cannot be disentangled from capitalistic economic systems and consumer
culture. A dialectical approach to organizing can be revealing of some of these socio-
historical tensions that emerge and characterize ongoing struggles for change. For
example, Papa et al. (2006) outline the following dialectical tensions relevant to
organizing for social change: control and emancipation, oppression and empowerment,
dissemination and dialogue, and fragmentation and unity. Other organizational dialectics
that have been theorized recently include: power and resistance, discourse and
materiality, and a dialectic of gender relations (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; see also Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004); survival and social change (Harter, et al. 2004); and the paradox of stability and change (Harter & Krone, 2001). Each of these tensions recognizes the discordance between macro and micro level practices and the both/and nature of organizing.

**Public Problems and Private Selves**

One of the enduring lynchpins of feminist theorizing has been interrogation of the symbolic and material structuring of public and private spheres of life (Fraser, 1989). Feminists have argued that the bifurcation between public/private is false and often driven by economic and ideological forces that serve to keep women, their work, and their interests outside of the public domain. To that end, most feminists argue that the personal is political and that there is a need to understand the interests that are served by theories and practices that continue to insist on a clear demarcation between public/private. This matters because the structuring of public/private shapes our understandings of who we are, what counts as valuable work, and who gets to participate in the ongoing articulation of “public” problems. Recently, feminist organizational communication scholar Mumby (2000) argued that an emerging trend in critical scholarship is to understand “the relationship between the public and private spheres of human interaction and, more specifically, the processes through which this relationship is constituted” (p. 5). Mumby (2000) called for more emphasis on this relationship, arguing that feminist theory provides resources from which to radically reframe the public/private interconnection. In this section, I extend Mumby’s argument by positing
that a critical ethic of care is an invaluable framework for making sense of public/private in global-local relationships. This framework provides a way to conceptualize public/private that extends beyond discrete organizations and individuals, and it allows feminists to engage in social theorizing at a broader level which is imperative for international contexts. In other words, I argue that the public/private relationship is deeply intertwined with how and why we come to care about others. I begin by synthesizing some influential pragmatic and feminist views on public/private.

Thus far, I have drawn upon pragmatist and feminist philosophies to discuss issues that are salient to making sense of global-local relationships. In conceptualizing public/private, though, there is much discord between these strands of thinking. On the one hand, pragmatist philosophy equips us to pay attention to the extent to which democracy fosters a multiplicity of views and voices and also takes the aim of liberal society to be the reduction of human suffering (Rorty, 1989). Feminist philosophy, on the other hand, finds many resources in this pragmatist framework, but reminds us to remain vigilant about the relationships of power and societal structures that reinforce exclusionary and marginalizing practices. Moreover, feminists have been instrumental in critiquing the extent to which some pragmatist conceptions of public reify the public/private binary.

Fraser (1989) argued that Rorty’s work recognizes a tension between Romanticism and Pragmatism and that he tries to reconcile the impulse of self-creation with the need for social responsibility. Ultimately, according to Fraser, Rorty’s position falls short of accomplishing this as it serves to:
bifurcate the map of culture down the middle. On one side will be public life, the reserve of pragmatism, the sphere where utility and solidarity predominate. On the other side will be private life, the preserve of Romanticism, the sphere of self-discovery, sublimity, and irony. (p. 100)

Fraser is uncomfortable with this position as it overstates both community and the individual and creates a sharp divide between theory and practice. Her main contention is that an over-assumption of solidarity combined with relegating individual self-discovery to the private sphere de-radicalizes political discourse.

I argued previously that combining Rorty’s conception of solidarity with Jaggar’s ideas on global discourse communities is useful in creating a framework that engages difference. Yet, I agree with Fraser (1989) in that Rorty’s view of self-description as being a wholly private endeavor leaves many questions for feminists who want to know whose interests are served by preserving a public/private binary. An alternative to Fraser’s reading of Rorty could argue that in light of a strong emphasis on community there is a need to also allow space for personal poetic (re)creation that throughout history has been subjugated and subsumed by language that privileges public problems and a public self. This reading, though, also leaves much room for critique. By not wanting to privilege public over private or pragmatism over romanticism Rorty reifies a binary that lends itself easily to the notion that needs or issues that fall outside of the concerns of a community concern can be labeled as “personal” and therefore a matter of self-(re)discovery.
A different departure point for constructing a more fluid conception of public/private is the work of pragmatist John Dewey (1927/1954). He argued that an all too common and ingrained misconception is the association of individual with private and community with public. For Dewey, the distinction between public and private life has to do with the extent and scope of the consequences of our social actions.

We take then our point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action as to secure some consequences and avoid others. Following this clew, we are led to remark that the consequences are of two kinds, those which affect the persons directly engaged in a transaction, others beyond those immediately concerned. In this distinction we find the germ of the distinction between the private and the public. (p. 12)

By arguing that the consequences of associated living are what brings a public into being, and that all living is associated living, Dewey’s public/private distinction captures the fluidity of experience for which Fraser (1989) and others have argued. Yet, the question of connecting theory to practice and for finding spaces for transformation remains.

Resources are allocated and structured according to the ongoing construction of public/private in everyday life which is influenced by long-standing traditions in political thought of a clear distinction between public and private. What are the resources, then, for reconstructing public/private as a practice?

If we are to not only deconstruct and demystify practices that (re)produce structural inequality, we need a framework for reconstruction in order for social change
and transformation to take place. This raises many significant issues in global-local relationships as it involves mediating between public problems and more immediately felt personal needs. This issue has resulted in different approaches to conceptualizing public/private spheres of life and for trying to develop guiding norms of behavior. One predominant approach both in theory and practice has been to uphold the liberal, individual rights-based framework that for the most part clearly demarcates the public sphere. Other approaches have focused on personal self-creation to the extent that the relevance of private experience to international problems has been obscured. In order to ask the question – why do we organize to create relationships with others who are distanced from us temporally and spatially – we need an ontology that is both public and private. To explain these relationships in terms of efforts to diminish human suffering is both monolithic and reductive and leaves many unanswered questions (i.e., Who defines suffering? See Spelman, 1997). To explain these relationships in terms of upholding basic human rights is also reductive and ignores the many contradictions of trying to universalize norms and behaviors. Finally, to only understand these relationships in terms of their personal impact on individuals is to ignore the global-political potential of feminist theorizing. Building upon the work of Robinson (1999), I argue that a critical ethic of care is a productive framework for creating an ontology of relating (communicating) that is complex enough to address the public/private relationship in asking the question – why do we care?

In practice, actions are mediated through institutions such as international and state governments, legal and medical institutions, and political and economic systems.
Questions as to how these institutions should be constructed have been of central concern for democratic theorists and democratic thinking has been and continues to be heavily influenced by liberal rights-based ideology. Based on social contract theory, this ideology assumes that individuals enter into relationships with one another out of choice and that humans are individual, self-interested agents. As such, there is a presupposition of an equality of power in relationships, and individual liberty is upheld as the primary moral motivation. In practice, this ideology works itself into the language of individual rights which are to be upheld for all citizens, all humans, etc. Rights language has a longstanding and authoritative position in liberal political thought, and it has been a valuable and often necessary resource for drawing attention to rights violations. Yet, as many feminist scholars have recognized, there is much lacking in the framework of individual rights to understand the complexities of motivations and moral responses involved in human relations. This critique gains further traction when one examines the discordance between having a human rights or women’s rights declaration signed at the national level and the everyday practices of people’s lives. Rights do not speak for or enact themselves; they must be interpreted and enforced through human interaction.

These critiques have led some contemporary scholars to try to reconcile the language of rights with a more contextualized and relational conception of individuals. Benhabib (2002) argued that universal norms are necessary in order to guard against radical ethical particularism. Culling together various examples of how moral relativism can have severe and detrimental effects for women (e.g., she uses the example of a Hmong male immigrant who was released on rape charges because his behavior was
deemed to be within his particular cultural norms); her argument is compelling. Drawing upon Habermas’ discourse ethics, she argued for a global dialogic community that could be sustained through upholding certain norms and through a commitment to the rights of individuals to freely (re)create their narrative selves. Although Benhabib’s argument for a cosmopolitan universal ethics is appealing, it is also problematic with its insistence on upholding universal moral claims. Benhabib’s universal ethics is much more fluid and dialogic than Habermas’ public sphere, but in the end she offers a way to transcend rather than engage difference.

Another popular contemporary approach to re-conceptualizing the inherent individualism of liberal thought is communitarianism. In theory, communitarianism has emerged in contrast to the stark individualism of the liberal tradition. The key tenets of communitarianism posit that there is value in the communality of life not found in liberal ideology and that, through attachment to community, ethics and self emerge. This latter aspect has been an important corrective to liberalism in that it sees the self as constituted in relation to others rather than as a pre-existing being inscribed with rights. There are also clear similarities between communitarian and pragmatist thinking in that communitarianism “starts from the community, and that the individual finds meaning in life by virtue of his or her membership in a political community” (Robinson, 1999, p. 72). However, communitarian philosophy is built on a rather narrow conception of community. Putnam (2000) exemplified this in his argument that social capital, which refers to “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them,” (p. 19) is on the decline in U.S. society. His
ideas about the types of communities that foster social capital are limited and they are all 
prefixed social groups. This narrow conception of community is problematic for 
feminists in particular in that it is easily lends itself to conservative ideas about traditional 
communities harboring moral values and it leaves little space for the emergence of 
alternative and resistive organizations. Further, identification with others beyond the 
community is not attended to, making it difficult to translate communitarianism in terms 
of global-local organizing (Robinson, 1999).

Given the limitations of the above frameworks, I argue that a feminist critical 
 ethic of care is both applicable and useful to making sense of international inter-
organizational relationships. An ethic of care takes as its departure point the idea that 
individuals are interdependent and because of this relationality, attentiveness, 
responsibility, and responsiveness become primary ethical concerns. As Robinson (1999) 
aptly stated:

Thus, enquiry into the question of our moral responses to situations of human 
suffering would no longer be seen as solely a problem of justification, or of 
resolving the conflict between universal moral duty and individual self-interest; 
rather, it becomes an exercise in understanding how human suffering and 
exclusion are shaped by a series of collective social, political, and economic 
decisions and social and economic relations. (p. 33)

An ethic of care appeals to both feminist and pragmatist sensibilities in that it requires us 
to start from lived experiences and the stories and struggles of real people in order to 
understand what motivates us to care about others. Because it is also critical, this
perspective also recognizes that power circulates in all relations and the emphasis on care should not mitigate our attention to oppression, but instead more finely tune it toward transformation of oppressive practices.

Proposing a critical ethic of care framework for reframing the public/private relationship and for understanding how local organizing practices are connected to broader, historical ideological structures concerning individuals and society is not without its problems and questions. Care, as a practice and a concept is saturated with cultural and historical gendered meaning and has been constructed as distinctly feminine. Moreover, as an alternative the traditional justice orientation towards moral reasoning, early conceptions of an ethic of care have been criticized for reifying a distinct male/female binary. In her foundational work on the differences between male and female approaches to moral reasoning, Gilligan (1987) argued that a justice approach ignores the perspective of women. This perspective, the care perspective, prioritizes relationality and attachment over autonomy and detachment. As such, she argued that gendered experiences lead men and women to approach moral reasoning differently. Her work, although undeniably influential across many disciplines, has been criticized for essentializing women and thereby reifying the idea that practicing care is women’s work. Wood (1994) criticized Gilligan’s work on these grounds and also for further dichotomizing male/female.

Despite the baggage of essentialism associated with the foundations of an ethic of care, there continues to be increased interest in feminist work with how a care perspective can give insight into political practices (see White, 2000). Robinson’s (1999) work
represents an important evolution in developing an ethic of care. She explicitly calls for
the de-coupling of care and gender – arguing that it is not a distinctly feminine moral
approach, but one that has promise for feminist work. A critical ethic of care provides an
alternative to a liberal justice framework that
does not resemble an ethical theory but rather a kind of moral, phenomenology,
which explores the sociopolitical conditions, the moral and psychological
dispositions, the personal and social relations, and the individuals and institutional
strategies which may work towards overcoming exclusion and promoting care and
focused moral attention on a global scale. (p. 7)
The question, then, is not whether or not care is distinctly feminine or masculine – but,
what alternatives does it provide to traditional conceptions of how and why individuals
and collectives consciously create communities that span multiple borders. To connect
back to Mumby’s (2000) argument for reframing the public/private relationship, starting
with an ethic of care perspective has the potential to radically transform how we theorize
public/private. Instead of starting with the concern for the relationship between the
individual and society, the departure point is a concern for how we make sense of the

In connecting care to transnational organizing processes and the practices of
women’s NGOs and grassroots organizations there are many possibilities opened up with
this approach. First, there are many international and local women’s organizations that
recognize the limitations of the human rights framework and of liberal democracy as it is
mediated predominantly through institutions of capitalism. Yet, they forge connections
and create alliances that both resist such global (and globalizing) discourses while at the same time recognizing the need to speak in and through this discourse to receive funding, support, raise awareness, etc. Surrounding and embedded in these practices are strong moralist discourses that are contested and negotiated in the everyday unfolding of organizing (Mindry, 2001). To more fully understand these tensions, we need to be able to interrogate why collectives organize transnationally and how identities between organizations are shaped in relation to each other. These questions require a more dynamic understanding of the public/private relationship that recognizes the blurred boundaries between public problems and private selves.

Summary

Transnational organizing is situated at the intersection of multiple circulating discourses of feminisms, postcolonial relationships, political and economic prescriptions, and moral reasoning. In this chapter, I discussed some of the broadest and deepest social issues that have significant implications for researching alliances and cooperation among women’s organizations. This chapter has served as a way to articulate my own standpoint and sensitized me to enter my specific field context. I did not set out to prove whether or not the arguments I have made are “True.” Rather, I took them up to participate in an ongoing conversation about how we can continue to construct theory that is answerable to life and that life will challenge, extend, and modify theory.

The idea that theory and practice are mutually informing and inseparable is salient across feminist and pragmatist philosophies. To that end, I set out to understand how women are organizing for social change across national, ethnic, religious, and political
boundaries. Many of these women have either experienced or observed incomprehensible violence in their lifetime and create coalitions in efforts to resist not only traditional ways of organizing, but also the violence and chaos that has been forced upon them. My goal was to work with participants to understand how organizing unfolds to provide alternatives for identities, relationships, and society at large. This is in line with Narayan’s (1997) argument that a colonialist stance is a choice, not a matter of location and that the only way to mitigate it is by developing more nuanced understandings of actual relationships between and among women.

Women in post-conflict societies face significant challenges in trying to overcome suffering and rebuild a more peaceful society. Although women historically have faced marginalization in the world of international politics, their peace-building activities have been substantial (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, Parpart, & Lautze, 2005). Through sensitivity to the issues I have outlined in this chapter and a commitment to openness toward understanding new possibilities for organizing, my aim was to produce a meaningful account of such activities. This research shows that there are significant insights to be gained from understanding resistance and care as collective activities rather than only individual acts. From the macro philosophical perspective I have developed in this chapter, I turn now in the next chapter to a more specific literature review of feminist organizational communication studies.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter demonstrates how I situate the discourses and practices of Kvinna till Kvinna within feminist organizational communication and how this research addresses significant gaps in organizational theorizing. First, I review feminist organizational communication literature by outlining three key moments of synthesis in the field. Then, I address relevant corollary literature on alternative organizing, focusing specifically on organizational forms, organizing as discourse, and international and postcolonial perspectives. To close, I summarize how this dissertation draws on past theorizing in each of these areas and speaks to important contemporary issues across each body of work. Throughout this literature review, I articulate connections and disconnections between these works and my broader theoretical orientation presented in chapter one.

Feminist Organizational Communication

There has been an increasing interest in feminist organizational communication in recent years. These works have ranged in breadth and depth from theorizing feminine styles of leadership and organizing, to alternative organizational forms, to the relationships between macro-societal discourses about gender and organizing processes. Moreover, this vast and growing body of literature does not adhere to any one variation of feminism, making a precise definition of feminist organizing intricate and elusive. Further complicating the picture is the intermingling of modernist and postmodernist tendencies in both feminist and organizational theories. Recently, several scholars have pushed for more in-depth and clearer understandings of the relationships between feminism(s), gender, and organizational communication by articulating their own
understandings and providing useful categorizations of the issues surrounding such theorizing thus far. In the following, I review three of these foundational pieces by Buzzanell (1994), Mumby (1996), and Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) with the goal of explaining how feminist organizing has been positioned in organizational communication. In doing so, I tease out some of the core issues and concepts that feminist organizational theories cultivate.

In her landmark piece on feminist organizational communication theorizing, Buzzanell (1994) argued that feminist perspectives in organizational communication held much positive potential for alternative enactments of organizing. Building on the work of Putnam (1990) and Mumby (1993), she addressed the need they had identified for more research that focused on gender issues and feminist perspectives in organizational communication. Feminist alternatives to traditional assumptions about the motives and outcomes of organizing open up possibilities for both awareness and change regarding gender relations. According to Buzzanell (1994), the focus of feminist organizational communication theory is: “how language creates gendered relationships; how communication reaffirms hierarchies that subordinate organization members and alternative views; and how women express and interpret organizational experiences” (p. 342). To that end, Buzzanell forwarded three traditional and alternative themes to understanding organizing processes: (a) an ethic of competitive individualism versus the cooperative enactment of organization, (b) cause and effect linear thinking versus integrative thinking, and (3) separation and autonomy versus connectedness. This thematic schema is useful for calling into question the ethical frameworks assumed to
guide “traditional” organizational life and for making sense of some of the possibilities feminist organizing has to offer.

In addition to synthesizing the key tenets of feminist organizational communication theory, Buzzanell (1994) provided a typology of major feminist approaches (liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, contemporary socialist, existentialist, postmodern, and revisionist/cultural) and outlined an overview of each. In describing postmodern feminists, under which poststructural work is encapsulated, she argued that they are the least likely to cultivate cooperative ethics because of their view that difference cannot be unified and their reluctance to work for change based on normative ideals. However, she did note that more attention on alternative organizational forms from postmodern feminist perspectives, as opposed to traditional bureaucratic forms most prevalent in organizational literature, could yield insight into how a cooperative ethic can be engendered in and through organizational structure.

In contrast to Buzzanell’s (1994) hesitant optimism about the capacity of postmodern feminist perspectives to create change, Mumby (1996) fully embraced the potential of affirmative postmodern feminist perspectives on organizational communication. According to Mumby, an affirmative postmodern feminism reclaims the transformative potential of feminism and focuses attention on the body as both performative and mediated form, the micro, local practices of power, and the role of discourse in creating and sustaining gendered power relations. Mumby argued for why a postmodern feminist approach is needed in organizational communication. First, a postmodern feminist perspective can complicate the traditional approach to research on
gender and organizing that has (a) reinforced male-female binaries by accentuating differences in their leadership and managerial styles; (b) focused mostly on bureaucratic, corporate, forms of organizations; and (c) undertheorized the ongoing (and problematic) production of gender through communication, power, and identity.

Second, a postmodern feminist perspective enriches our understanding of alternative forms of organizing. Mumby argued that much of the work in the area of alternative organizing falls under the umbrella of neo-Marxist approaches that emphasize the value inherent in egalitarianism as resistant to patriarchal structures (e.g., Gottfried & Weiss, 1994), and the individual resistance strategies that members enact within an organization. A postmodern perspective, on the other hand, can shed insight into one of the fundamental tensions of feminist alternative organizing, enacting a feminist ideology through organizing that is enmeshed in the practical and material exigencies of organizational life, by bringing together both a concern for collective action and deconstructing power relations.

Finally, a postmodern feminist perspective can deepen questions about the representational practices of organizational research. The politics that guide contributions to knowledge production are opened to scrutiny as underlying assumptions of organizational research, such as gender and race neutrality, are deconstructed. Altogether, Mumby made a compelling case for the potential of a postmodern feminist perspective that does not preclude collective political engagement, but instead, asks theorists to interrogate the foundations and motives for such engagement.
One of the most recent turning points in taking stock of feminist organizational communication came from Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) in their book *Reworking Gender: A Feminist Communicology of Organization*. This volume organizes past literature on gender and organizing into four frames that contain similar strands of research: (a) *gender organizes discourse*, which highlights the gender-as-variable mode of analysis; (b) *discourse disorganizes gender*, which emphasizes the socially constructed process of “doing gender”; (c) *organizing (en)genders discourse*, which focuses on alternative forms of organizing and the contradictions of the ideology-practice relationship; and (d) *discourse engenders organization*, which takes a meta-perspective on the organization-society relationship by analyzing communication about organizing (i.e., as represented in popular culture). Similar to the argument made by Mumby (1996), Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) posited that the points of alignment and contention across these works have broadly been subjectivity, power, and discourse (Mumby, 1996 specifically mentions the body as a locus of identity in contrast to subjectivity).

Building on these past works, the authors proposed a “feminist communicology of organization” with the aim of integrating critical modernist and postmodernist perspectives of feminist organizational communication through six theoretical premises: (a) the instability of subjectivity, (b) the dialectic of power and resistance, (c) the importance of historical context in unpacking gendered organizing, (d) the dialectic of discourse and materiality, (e) the dialectic of gender relations (masculinities/femininities) and, (f) an ethical imperative of political engagement in feminist organizing. In terms of this project, there are strong connections between Ashcraft and Mumby’s work and
Weedon’s (1997) points about the centrality of subjectivity, discourse, and power, Fraser’s (1989) interests in carving out discursive space for counter-publics, and Mohanty’s (2003) concerns about materiality and praxis in global feminisms. Ashcraft and Mumby, though, specifically ground their work in an organizational communication perspective. Moreover, their work echoes the demand put forward by Buzzanell (1994) and Mumby (1996) for feminist organizational communication scholars to complicate and assess the relationships between feminist ideologies and organizing practices in ways that move us beyond gender as a static conceptual category (for example, shifting from studying gender in organizations to a recognition that all organizing is fundamentally gendered).

Now that I have painted with broad strokes some of the key moments of crystallization in literature specifically on feminist organizational communication, I turn to tracing related work that has addressed overarching themes in feminist organizational communication. Included in this wider scope of research is literature on alternative organizing and on women and peace movements.

Alternative Organizing

Much work in organizational communication has been devoted in recent years to examining alternatives to traditional, mainstream organizations that embody the structures, ideals, and practices of bureaucracy. Feminist activists, on the other hand, have long been practicing such alternatives that value collectivist principles such as democracy, empowerment, and egalitarianism. In this section, I highlight core concerns that have emerged as key intersections between organizational communication theorizing
about alternative organizations and the feminist organizing practices. First, I discuss the ongoing concern with alternative organizational forms. Next, I highlight some of the core themes found in the conception of organizing as discourse. Finally, I examine international and postcolonial perspectives on alternative organizing.

**Organizational Forms**

A useful departure point for framing the concern for alternative organizational forms in both theory and practice is to recount the pervasive dilemma between bureaucracy and feminism(s) that underpins organizing processes (Acker, 1995; Ferguson, 1984). Bureaucracy has been characterized as antithetical to feminism as it is thought to be “a structural manifestation of male domination” (Ashcraft, 2001, p. 1302). Historically, this debate has hinged on the notion that there are fundamental ethical contradictions between bureaucratic organizing and feminist organizing. First, traditional enactments of bureaucracy value a hegemonic rational logic of organizing that prioritizes efficiency and effectiveness. For such an organization to function, workers are valued based on their productivity and ideally have no outside competing demands or obligations. As Acker (1995) argued, the ideal worker then, in this supposedly gender-neutral workplace, is male. This logic is both deeply entrenched in and reinforces the division of work and private life at the societal level in industrial cultures. This separation of public and private spheres of life, and organizing based on binaries such as male-female domains, gives rise to the argument that bureaucracy and feminism are oppositional in nature.
The second contradiction found in the bureaucracy-feminism relationship revolves around the ideology-practice relationship. Much sociological work on feminist organizations has chronicled the erosion of feminist ideals in relation to increased bureaucratic controls and formalization of structures (see, for example, Farrell, 1995). This phenomenon can manifest itself in several different ways. For example, as an organization experiences growth, greater centralization of decision-making power is necessary in order to maintain effectiveness (see Riger, 1994 for an overview of growth stages in feminist organizations). Hierarchal management structures are thus created and authority is centralized in leadership positions. This process can lay bare tensions between collectivist ideals that foster shared leadership and equal participation of members and the need to get things done in a timely and efficient manner.

Another way that the ideology-practice contradiction emerges is in the formalization of procedures and practices that guide organizational life, thus emphasizing the impersonal and dispassionate aspects of the job to the detriment of political and activist impulses. Finally, the tensions between guiding ideology and actual practice can be found in the relationships an organization has with outside stakeholders. Along with growth often comes the need for greater financial resources, prompting many organizations (especially non-profit, social movement organizations), to attain external funding. Funding can enable feminist organizations to carry out their goals, but often comes with rigid requirements regarding financial accounting, producing tangible outcomes, and project development. These requirements can constrain the political
agenda of an organization and in extreme cases, co-opt and manipulate feminist organizing to serve other purposes (Farrell, 1995).

In organizational studies, there has been a shift in recent years to reframe these fundamental tensions so that the multidimensionality of both bureaucratic and feminist ways of organizing is engaged rather than framing them as monolithic, polar oppositional forces (see Ashcraft, 2001; 2006; Buzzanell, 1994; Martin, 1990). This shift has hinged on the argument that much of the research on the failings of feminist organizations upheld a pure, ideal form of feminism that was difficult, if not impossible, to adhere to in practice. This shift also reflects heedfulness to the argument that feminist research has privileged abstract, ideal theorizing over concrete practices. Gottfried and Weiss (1994), for example, utilized the concept of “compound feminist organization” to analyze the organizational form taken by a women’s council situated within the bureaucratic confines of a university as a way to negotiate different “pure” feminist goals that resulted in “impure” practices.

In organizational communication, Ashcraft (1998, 2000, 2001, 2006) has been especially prominent in shifting feminist organizational research away from a focus on pure/impure and feminist/bureaucratic forms to recognizing and theorizing the messiness of hybrid forms of organizing. In 2001, she put forward the model of “organized dissonance” to analyze a specific type of hybrid organization (in this case, a feminist organization) that strives to achieve paradoxical goals such as empowerment and performance. This form unfolds not spontaneously but, rather, through “the strategic union of forms presumed hostile” (p. 1304) that places feminist practices, or alternatives,
and bureaucratic structures on equal footing with one another. As such, organized
dissonance is shaped by constant, lived tensions experienced in organizing around
sustained paradoxes. The impetus for this research is that feminist organizations, through
their unique hybridity, can offer viable alternatives forms and practices to traditional
management studies that have largely ignored feminist organizations.

In 2006, Ashcraft revisited and revised her model of organized dissonance in light
of the recent flux of theorizing about postbureaucratic organizing (see DeSanctis & Fulk,
1999; Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994). In general, postbureaucratic forms of organizing
have rejected rigid hierarchal structures associated with traditional bureaucracy in order
to respond and adapt to the flexibility demanded by an increasingly globalized
environment (Applegate, 1999). According to Ashcraft (2006), this suggests that hybrid
organizing is a more mainstream phenomenon than it is a unique alternative. Feminist
bureaucracies should thus be included in organizational research not as novelties, but as
established prototypical examples of postbureaucratic forms. This work also adds
emphasis to the dialectical texture of organizing in such forms. Across both of these
works, Ashcraft argued for the need for more work on developing grounded models of
postbureaucratic forms that capture their unfolding in practice and discourse and further
challenge our theorized assumptions about alternative organizing.

In addition to Ashcraft’s theorizing on feminist bureaucracy and hybrid forms,
there have been several other recent influential works on the “irrationalities” of practicing
alternative forms. One body of work has focused on cooperative ways of organizing and
the ways in which democratic goals and values shape everyday practices (Cheney, 1995;
1999; Harter, 2004; Harter & Krone, 2001; Harter, et al., 2008). Cheney, for example, in his work on the Mondragón Cooperatives of Spain (1995, 1999) illustrated the challenges and opportunities of engaging in alternative value-based organizing (i.e., cooperation, participation, solidarity) as opposed to market-driven goals. Although this work is not situated as specifically feminist organizational scholarship, the emphasis on democracy, participation, and equality as discursively constructed values and practices around which organizing takes place echoes many of the values articulated in feminist organizing. Harter and Krone (2001) and Harter (2004), on the other hand, focused on the enactment of democratic ideologies in a cooperative support organization and draw parallels with feminist organizing principles. Across all of these works, paradox, tension, and contradiction are found to be salient features of cooperative organizing. I will later review the trend toward dialectical approaches in organizational communication, but for now would like to emphasize that these examples contribute in important ways to providing grounded accounts of alternative, cooperative *forms* of organizing. They also offer insight into interorganizational cooperation and networking, concepts to which I now turn as the final topic within alternative organizational forms.

It is beyond the scope of this research to review the wealth of literature on interorganizational cooperation and networks, so I have narrowed the scope to focus on what is most relevant to feminist organizational theorizing. There is much evidence suggesting that feminist organizations form interorganizational alliances and networks (see the anthology by Ferree & Martin, 1995, that chronicles numerous examples of this from the U.S. women’s movement). To date, though, organizational communication has
not turned to feminist organizations in theorizing about these processes (for exception, see Dempsey, Parker, & Krone, 2007). Instead, two different approaches to interorganizational cooperation and networks can be broadly mapped in the literature: those that explore community organizing initiatives, and those that measure the effectiveness of interorganizational communication through network analysis. I briefly review relevant features of each approach in the following.

First, the literature on interorganizational cooperation that is grounded in community organizing tends to emphasize the importance of democratic values and is thereby related to the work of Cheney and others mentioned above. For example, Eisenberg (1995), working from the context of school-community partnerships, argued that the conceptual foundations of interorganizational cooperation are in need of an overhaul in organizational communication. The motive for interorganizational cooperation has largely been treated as a rational endeavor, reflecting the belief that an organization develops such relationships in an attempt “to maximize its own goals while at the same time giving up as little autonomy as possible” (p. 132). Eisenberg argued that, in practice, many interorganizational arrangements fail because of false assumptions about the importance of agreement, openness, and planning in the communication between partners. As such, he put forward a “counter-rational alternative” as a normative guide for interorganizational relationships that suggested the following: (a) commitment to coordinated action over agreement; (b) starting with the client, or end user’s voice; (c) avoiding master plans for the relationship and instead allowing the cooperation to emerge; (d) cultivating weak ties in the network; (e) drawing upon narrative sensibilities
to create joint plots regarding the story of the relationship (in efforts to privilege diversity over agreement); (f) maintaining focus on the bigger political goals in order to foster social change; (g) cultivating boundary spanners who can “provide a communication linkage between disparate groups” (p. 139); (h) allowing space to imagine unthinkable alternatives; and (j) fostering dialogue within the partnerships. These ideas overlap with many of the goals of feminist organizing that seek cooperative ways of working together in order to bring about social change.

In a similar vein, Heath (2007) drew on dialogic theory to understand how democracy is negotiated in a community collaboration also situated in an educational context. Heath distinguished interorganizational collaboration from coordination and cooperation. Drawing upon Gray’s (1989) work on collaborating, she argued that coordination and cooperation are based upon predetermined solutions and outcomes while collaboration necessitates indeterminancy in decision-making in order to reach creative solutions.

The second body of work on interorganizational cooperation focuses on the effectiveness of relationships through the lenses of social network theory and resource dependency theory. For example, Doerfel and Taylor (2004) analyzed the civil society movement in Croatia and found that the interorganizational cooperation efforts of 18 different civil society organizations, for the most part, modeled resource-dependency theory. Resource-dependency theory posits that organizations will be more likely to engage in cooperation the greater their dependency is upon network connections for resources (this is resonant with the “rational approach” to interorganizational cooperation
to which Eisenberg, 1995, provided an alternative). Their use of social network theory modeled the density of network connections in Croatian civil society overtime and impact of structural holes on maintaining such connections.

Another recent exemplar of this approach can be found in Garner’s (2006) work on NASA’s interorganizational network and the power imbalances therein. Integrating resource-dependency theory and structuration theory, Garner emphasized the pitfalls of dependency on external stakeholders and the role such imbalanced network relationships played in the 2003 Columbia Shuttle disaster. Both of these examples of a rational approach to interorganizational cooperation foreground the pragmatic motives of forming such alliances (i.e., access to resources), but they do not allow for other possible motives, such as feminist ethics and principles.

Consequently, Buzzanell (1994) argued that a key value of feminist organizational communication theorizing is that it motivates theorists to ask different research questions and integrate alternative points of view in theory building. Specifically, she proposed that approaches to network analyses could be enriched through a feminist approach that reframes network research from its traditional focus on developing typologies and measuring properties of linkages. This orientation toward understanding networks has been valuable to communication research, but it does not capture the nuances of networking process such as the discursive nature of the relationships and the different types of support found in networks. As Buzzanell (1994) put it,
The behind-the-scenes individuals are never mentioned in final reports nor are their contributions considered bottom line. Yet, they are integral linkages – not just overt, observable, goal-oriented links in network analyses. Why not study networks to note gender relation development emergence, or the development of community contacts between organizational members and relevant environment members? How are gender relations woven into the fabric of different types of networks? How is gender made visible at times? How do we continue to reproduce gender ideologies and gendered organizational processes? (p. 364)

Weighing this argument against the literature reviewed above, a feminist organizational communication perspective on interorganizational and network process still has much unfulfilled potential. I now shift from an overview of organizational forms to culling out the key themes that have emerged in the trend in alternative organizing literature to conceptualize organizing as discourse.

Organizing as Discourse

Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) recognized that there has been a critical mass of scholarship in the past 20 years that has treated organizations as discourse. More recently, the field of organizational communication has experienced a shift in focus from “gender in organizations” to “gendered organizing” that has allowed for scholars to focus on “the ways in which communication practices constitute subjectivities amid routine, situated, and systemic relations of power” (p. 114). In this section, I highlight two key features, consequential to this study, of the ways in which literature on feminist and alternative organizing have embraced the “gendered organizing as discursively constructed”
perspective: 1) dialectical approaches to organizing; and 2) narrative approaches to organizing.

In chapter one, I outlined a dialectical approach to social change as part of my metatheoretical approach to understanding global and feminist organizing processes. Across organizational communication research, and especially in studies focused on alternative ways of organizing, there has been a parallel trend to adopt dialectical and tensional approaches as a departure point for analysis (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Although the organizational contexts vary, the research on the dialectical and contradictory nature of organizing shares two common axioms: 1) tension is endemic to organizing and 2) lived tensions can be both enabling and constraining to organizational life. As such, the research adopting this approach has started from points of contradiction, paradox, irony, and tension as ways to understand the multilayered texture of organizational life rather than as dilemmas to be resolved (Ashcraft 2000; 2001; Harter, 2004; Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Trethewey, 1999). Numerous tensions have been identified in the literature on alternative forms of organizing, including many which coalesce around the fundamental contradiction of putting feminist and participatory ideologies into practice. I turn to two of these tensions that have been salient to feminist organizational communication perspectives: resistance and control and discourse and materiality.

The dialectic of resistance and control is of special interest to feminist organizational communication research (and postmodern feminist perspectives) because it represents a manifestation of issues surrounding power and subjectivity. Trethewey (1999) drew upon Foucault’s notion that power and resistance are inextricably linked to
show how clients at a human service organization engaged in parody, rule-breaking, game playing, and outright bitching with their social workers in order to reconfigure relationships of dependence and dominance. Although their resistance resulted in transformation, it at the same time reproduced aspects of the client-as-dependent, social worker-as-dominant script.

A second important contradiction in alternative organizing is the dialectic of discourse and materiality. Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) argued that using this dialectic as a point of departure for analyzing organizing allows researchers to explore “how the material world itself is subject to and defined by human discursive possibilities” (p. 124). In 2006, Cheney and Cloud specifically addressed the importance of this dialectic in response to a trend they perceived in organizational research toward “discursive indulgence” (p. 505). They argued that there is a need to pay attention to the material constraints that emerge from inequalities in economic and political power if the realistic range of possibilities for workers’ actions (i.e., opportunities for resistance are shaped not only in discourse). As mentioned in chapter one, the importance of understanding this dialectic for feminist organizing (in addition to the reasons discussed above) is that it speaks directly to the need for feminist theorizing to be answerable to practice.

Another noteworthy development in the organizing as discourse shift has been the emphasis on narrative and performance in organizational literature (as also noted by Mumby 1996; and exemplified by Mumby, 1987; see also Czarniawska, 1997). As a symbolic sensemaking process, narrative theory helps scholars understand the ways in which members actively participate in resisting, reproducing, and performing
organizational discourses (Mumby, 1987). Storytelling is used in organizations to assimilate members into organizational culture, navigate power relations and conflict, and negotiate identities (Smith & Keyton, 2001). Moreover, embodied performance is implicated in narrative approaches in that “narrative is both a making and a doing” (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). For example, in their portrayal of a collaborative arts studio for people with and without disabilities, Harter et al. (2006) showed how members perform a counter-narrative (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001) of disability that challenges hegemonic discourses that function to marginalize people with disabilities. Narrative perspectives can thus be useful for understanding identities and cultures within organizations as well as how organizing itself is intertextually connected to broader societal discourses. 

*International and Postcolonial Perspectives*

So far in this section, I have discussed literature on alternative organizing that looks at organizational form and the significant trends in situating gendered organizing-as-discourse. I now look to one final important dimension that has to date been overlooked to some extent in general in alternative organizing and to a greater extent specifically in feminist organizational communication theorizing. There remains much for room for growth in the integration of international and global perspectives on alternative organizing, both in the organizational contexts chosen for study and the theoretical lenses chosen to frame the studies. First, I note several exceptions to organizational context found in alternative organizing literature. Then, I argue that
postcolonial feminism has been overlooked in feminist organizational communication and can be taken up as a valuable resource in understanding global organizing.

Although numerous organizational communication scholars have argued for expanding our research contexts beyond U.S. borders (Shome & Hegde, 2002; Stohl, 1993), such work remains outside of the mainstream theorizing in the discipline. There are, though, several exceptions in the literature on alternative organizing. Cheney (1999), studied the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in the Basque Country of Spain in his work on how democratic values are translated into practice despite, and with the help of, market pressures. In their collection of case studies on organizing for social change, Papa, et al. (2006) include their work with the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, a dairy cooperative in India, and Taru, the popular Indian radio program. Harter, Sharma, Pant, Singhal, and Sharma (2007) also focused on India in their work on how participatory performances furthered the social change goals of Taru.

Even though there are notable examples of studying alternative organizing in contexts beyond U.S. borders, postcolonial perspectives on such activities are lacking. Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) recently took up this issue and argued that the consistent privileging of Euro-American theoretical traditions in organizational communication lead to further colonization and oppression of other forms of understanding. Drawing from Shome (1996), they argued that, in order to engage in postcolonial reflexivity, organizational communication needs to actively engage the problematics of voice, rationality, and organization. Further, such reflexivity involves “challenging misrepresentations of others without resorting to essentialism and engaging in an analysis
of how we as scholars are inscribed in the very structures of power we are trying to escape” (p. 254). These arguments track with the points made in chapter one as to why a postcolonial lens is fruitful for understanding the transnational organizing practices of Kvinna till Kvinna.

Summary and Research Questions

As a transnational feminist organization, Kvinna till Kvinna provides a robust site for exploring contemporary issues in feminist organizational communication and alternative organizing. From a feminist organizational communication perspective, Kvinna till Kvinna provides a site in which to continue to explore ideology-practice relationships with the added complexity of transnational relationships. In terms of organizational form, Kvinna till Kvinna’s alternative approach to peace and development work, as well as their networking activities, can further theorizing about hybrid forms and open new questions about how to approach organizing practices from different angles. To that end, the case of Kvinna till Kvinna provides a useful context for applying postcolonial feminist theories that have thus far been largely absent in organizational communication. Based on the theoretical arguments made in chapter one and the literature reviewed in this chapter, the following research questions framed this inquiry:

RQ1: How does Kvinna till Kvinna enact feminist ideologies?

RQ2: Why do participants create and maintain partnerships?

RQ2a: How are these relationships (re)produced through discourse?

RQ2b: Whose interests are served (and whose are marginalized) through Kvinna till Kvinna’s cooperative efforts?
RQ3: How do participants experience and make sense of tensions and contradictions that emerge in enacting a feminist ideology?

RQ4: What symbolic and material resources and/or obstacles for collective action and resistance does inter-organization cooperation provide?
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

In this chapter, I outline my methodological orientation to this study and explain how it relates to my feminist and pragmatist sensitivities. To begin, I trace key points of intersection between interpretive and feminist epistemologies. I next explain which methods of data collection were chosen for this project and my approach to using each. Then, I turn attention to the practices of research by telling the story of my fieldwork. This is done by first painting a portrait of the organization Kvinna till Kvinna and then charting the different phases of my research process. I’ve organized these phases as such: (1) site selection and access, (2) fieldwork, and (3) discourse analysis. Although I find these turning points useful in recounting the story of my research, there was significant overlap in the different phases as the research unfolded in practice, as will be made clear below.

Intersections of Interpretive and Feminist Epistemologies

Recently, organizational scholars Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) argued for a reconception of qualitative research methodology that puts primary emphasis on research as a fundamentally interpretative activity and thus recognizes the complexities and messiness of working with empirical material. Qualitative research methods in social sciences have varied widely in terms of the degree to which they are grounded in interpretive and/or positivist epistemological paradigms. For example, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), has roots in both paradigms with its systematic approach to the coding of empirical “data” and adherence to the notion that theorizing is driven by the local, and varied problems encountered by social actors. Similarly, different variations of
ethnography (i.e., inductive ethnography) have also placed much emphasis on data
collection methods to the detriment of interpretive activities. Contrary to these “data-
oriented” approaches that blend interpretive and positivist influences, some poststructural
and postmodern approaches (i.e., discourse analysis) have emphasized interpretation and
text to the extent that the empirical world is rendered useless, or too problematic, to theorizing.

To address these problematics in qualitative research, Alvesson and Sköldberg
(2000) put forward a methodological approach called reflexive interpretation that
strategically combines awareness of the problems and potentials of grounded theory,
hermeneutics, critical theory, and poststructural and postmodern methodologies. Within
this approach, there is room to allow for different metatheoretical commitments, such as
poststructuralism(s) and feminism(s) to play off of one another throughout the research
process and at the same time adopt certain procedures, such as coding, in order to help in
this process. Because interpretation is foregrounded over a strict adherence to collection
procedures, one of the main goals of reflexive interpretation is to problematize theory,
language, perceptions and representations, and social reality. In this way, reflexive
interpretation overlaps in useful ways with the feminist and pragmatist commitments I
outlined in chapter one. For these reasons, I have chosen reflexive interpretation as the
methodological basis for the design of this research project. In the remainder of this
section, I elaborate on the commonalities between reflexive interpretation and feminist
approaches to research (drawing specifically on feminist ethnography), and explain the
choices I’ve made in engaging in reflexive research.
The choice to rely on interpretive research methods for this study is reflective of my commitments to poststructural and postcolonial feminist paradigms laid out in chapter one. Although these paradigms are by no means unified, I have argued for the key tenets that knowledge is socially constructed, subjectivities are unstable, and that discourse is central to understanding symbolic and material realities. I have also posited that difference is a central concern in global-local relationships and that an ethic of care is one way that we might make sense of political alliances and motivations for social change. Taken together, all of these arguments fit (although not necessarily neatly) within a feminist orientation that sensitizes me to see the world in particular ways and thereby influenced the design of this project. Interpretive methods are well suited for the arguments I have made thus far because theory and lived experience are understood as always already interpreted. In other words, there is no pure, or value-free “data.” Denzin (1997) aptly articulated this relationship between language, experience, and interpretation when he stated: “Language and speech do not mirror experience: They create experience and in the process of creation constantly and defer that which being described” (p. 5).

There are a few intersections between feminisms and interpretive research that are worthy of more explanation. First, as I mentioned earlier, I have argued for a conception of knowledge that is socially constructed and inseparable from power. For feminist ethnographers, this requires an understanding that all knowledge claims are situated, partial, and indeterminate. This view could easily lend itself to a position of hopeless and infinite relativism that leaves us skeptical, if not downright pessimistic about our ability to research the world in which we live. But, this does not have to be the case. Rather,
understanding knowledge as locally situated and as ongoing relational accomplishments requires attentiveness to the ways in which knowledge/power structure relationships. My goal through this research has been to produce a viable and plausible account of organizational life as it is experienced through this cooperative network. Yet, in addition to my theoretical lens, my status as an outsider and a researcher inevitably shaped the construction of knowledge. Participants also exercised power in the choices they make to disclose and share their experiences, but by and large I maintain that it is my responsibility to be aware of the asymmetrical power relations constituted by entering the field as “researcher.”

Another common and related thread that runs through poststructural and postcolonial feminist thought is the move toward challenging the subject/object binary that has characterized modernist scientific research. Because I have argued that subjectivity is fluid and shifting, it follows that I am concerned about the constitution of subjectivities rather than persons and communities as objects of description. As feminist ethnographer Visweswaran (1994) argued, “the question is not really whether anthropologists can represent people better, but whether we can be accountable to people’s own struggles for self-representation and self-determination” (p. 32). This issue also connects back to arguments about voice and representation that were made in chapter one.

One aspect of interpretive and feminist research that has been the focus of much attention is that of reflexivity (as evident by Alvesson & Sköldberg’s choice of the term reflexive interpretation). Earlier in chapter one, I stated that adopting a global feminist
standpoint required a commitment to reflexivity. In this section, I outline what that commitment entails in regard to the methods of inquiry and analysis involved in this project. Feminist thought has a long history of arguing for reflexivity in research, but articulating what counts as reflexivity and then practicing reflexivity is no small undertaking. There are several different ways in which reflexivity can be considered: through knowledge claims, authority and positionality, interpretation, and research procedures.

First, as I alluded to earlier in this chapter, the ongoing construction of knowledge is a political endeavor. Postcolonial theories have been especially attuned to pointing out how knowledge is created relationally (e.g., between colonizer and colonized) and that power circulates in and through these relationships. Moreover, knowledge organizes and structures relationships between and among participants and researchers. As Visweswaran (1994) argued, “what we come to know is engendered by relations of power” (p. 77). Attending to the politics of knowledge in reflexive research involves not only recognizing asymmetrical knowledge/power relations, but also exposing those politics in the (re)telling of stories and discourses collected. The idea that knowledge is political is inherently bound up with ideas of authority and positionality in research (see Nagar, 2002).

Authority is an acute concern when considering ethnography’s historical relationship with colonialism. With its roots in anthropology, ethnography traditionally sought to present the “Native Other” from the perspective of the other. In light of the reflexive turn in qualitative research, issues of representation and voice have come to the
forefront and researchers have been confronted with the questions of who can speak for whom and on what basis authority is legitimated. In authorizing certain accounts and ignoring others, ethnographers are inherently bound up in the project of creating and projecting identities for others. One way that this has been addressed is to incorporate detailed accounts of the author’s positionality vis-à-vis the participants. Yet, the degree to which this practice constitutes reflexivity is not without limits. Narayan (1997) argued that many “Western” attempts to know the “Other” result in a persistent reflection upon the West, rather than a reflexive engagement in learning from others. Elaborating upon one’s positionality is not enough in and of itself to question the structures of authority. I agree with Visweswaran (1994) that there is a difference between questioning authority and being able to let go of authority. According to Visweswaran, this is a distinction between self-reflexive ethnography and deconstructive ethnography. Although I’m not comfortable with the label of deconstructive ethnography as I feel it privileges deconstruction to the detriment of reconstruction, I find the approach towards authority useful and complementary to reflexive interpretation. As Visweswaran (1994) argued, “Self-reflexive anthropology questions its own authority; deconstructive anthropology attempts to abandon or forfeit its authority, knowing that it is impossible to do so” (p. 70).

Collaborating with participants, rather than treating them as knowing subjects who can shed light on the object of inquiry, is one way that authority can be dispersed. I emphasize here that I agree that authority cannot be altogether relinquished and to believe so would be to ignore the issues of positionality discussed earlier. By adopting a more
dialogical approach to interpretive research, collaboration between researchers and participants can be a way to not only disperse authority, but also recognize the relationality of knowledge (Harding, 1998).

Other dimensions of reflexivity involve interpretation and research practices (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Research is fundamentally an interpretive activity, and it is just as impossible to separate subjects and objects of research. In the following, I outline how I have carried out ethnographic fieldwork and discourse analysis with the goal of reflexivity foregrounded.

Methodological Strategies

I have argued thus far for why a research design that emphasizes interpretation and reflexivity over strictly data-centered, or deconstruction-centered methods is an appropriate fit for this project. Analyzing the discourses of Kvinna till Kvinna through the experiences and accounts of various stakeholders, though, also requires that I thoughtfully adopt certain strategies for conducting fieldwork. Drawing again upon both feminist and interpretive commitments, I chose the following strategies for collecting discourses and learning about practices: participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and research photography. In this way, I’ve enacted both data-driven and polyphony-driven approaches in this study. This marks an important shift, according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), from traditional grounded theory approaches and postmodern ethnographic approaches, respectively. Data-driven means that my approach to the discourses collected recognized the constant and consistent interpreted nature of the material, including ongoing awareness of my own interpretations. I argue that my
work was also polyphony-driven because I constantly enacted a concern for authority and multiplicity of voices in enhancing the political and social relevance of the project. I turn now to briefly describing each of the discourse collection strategies chosen before telling the story of how they were enacted in the next section.

**Participant-Observation**

Observation was a primary method of discourse collection while I was in the field. The goal for observation was to experience and record the social setting of the organization(s) in order to immerse myself in the context of social action. My role was that of an “outsider,” and my status as researcher was known by all participants (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). This role was one that I constantly negotiated with participants in striving to build rapport and perform in responsible ways that made sense to the participants. Negotiating this role actually began as I started to work with the organization to gain access in August, 2006. During that time, I presented myself as a researcher who was interested in understanding and learning from Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizational practices and the relationships they have created with partner organizations. As this project continued to unfold, my relationship with participants, especially those in the headquarter office became increasingly close and by the end resembled co-worker friendship relationships.

One way to think about how the role of observer varied during my field work is to understand observation as taking place on a continuum from complete participant to complete observer (Lindlof, 1995). However, the efficacy of this typology is ambiguous as it positions the researcher as more of a participant or more of an observer. In my work,
the level of participation/observation on any given day varied depending on the field context. One key to making sense of these observations was my field notes, which are also a significant source of discourse for this research. Fieldnotes were a primary means for me to come to terms with and interpret observations made in the field (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I have used fieldnotes as trace artifacts of experience and as a means of preserving insights of those experiences. Further, as Gonzalez (2000) argued, the social scene shaped my research practices just as I influenced the scene. What I recorded from the field represents what was an ongoing process of sensing through sound, smell, and feeling that occurs through interaction with the scene. In other words, my goal was not to bracket my sensemaking process as separate from the context of social interaction. My participation was interdependently connected with the interactions I captured through field notes.

I wrote up field notes during participant observations and/or as soon as possible afterwards. All notes were typed, dated, and kept on my personal laptop. Altogether, I logged 375 hours of observation that resulted in 150 typed single-spaced pages of field notes.

*In-depth Interviews*

Interviews also provided a way for me to interact with participants and have in-depth discussions with them. The interview is an integral part of qualitative work because it allows for participants and researchers to broach topics that they might not have the opportunity to otherwise (Patton, 2002). Before formal individual in-depth interviews took place, though, I had numerous informal interactions with many of the participants.
These informal dialogues, along with other trace artifacts (e.g. documents, photographs) shaped the nature of the temporally demarcated in-depth interviews and helped me build rapport with interviewees.

I agree with Miller and Crabtree (2004) that in-depth interviewing is “a partnership on a conversational research journey” (p. 185). As such, I adopted a semi-structured approach to these interviews, using a protocol of open-ended questions and probes to guide the conversations (see Appendices A and B). In practice, I modified these questions based on what I already about the interviewee through our previous interactions. Numerous questions also emerged during the interview process (see Fontana & Frey, 2000). I conducted 31 in-depth interviews with participants (see Appendix C), with each lasting approximately one hour. Twenty-three of these were with Kvinna till Kvinna members and eight were with partners. Most interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and no interview was less than 40 minutes. Several Kvinna till Kvinna members were interviewed more than once throughout my time in the field (altogether, 19 different women from Kvinna till Kvinna were interviewed). Interviews were recorded and transcribed and notes from interview sessions were included in my field notes.

Of particular concern to me when conducting the interviews were rapport and respect. As stated previously, I viewed the interviews as a negotiated conversation. Therefore, rapport was not the sole property of me, the researcher, and it was not something that I could will upon the situation. Rapport was a social accomplishment that was constructed in the interactions between me and the interviewee (Lofland, 1995). I tried to be as respectful of participants and their experiences as possible by expressing my
appreciation of their time and willingness to meet with me. I was also often reminded of Visweswaran’s (1994) useful description of the “messiness” of ethnographic interviews and that silence on certain topics was at times as significant as voice.

Document Analysis

Documents serve many purposes in organizations and can be a valuable source for learning about an organization’s history, public image, and everyday practices. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued that documents are significant in three main ways. First, they are connected to the social actions that being studied. Second, they can help in reconstructing past events and the ongoing unfolding of organizational life that cannot be observed. Finally, documents often codify and embody social rules and norms that guide organizational practices. On their own, documents are limited in the depth and breadth of information they can provide. But, when combined with other methods of inquiry, documents stimulate paths of inquiry in observations and interviews (Patton, 2002). In that spirit, I used organizational documents to learn more about Kvinna till Kvinna and the organizations with which it partners and to open my senses to further questions and points of conversation I could bring up during interviews.

Kvinna till Kvinna’s thematic reports have featured prominently in my discourse analysis as they provide valuable insight into how Kvinna till Kvinna relates with partners (see Table 1). I also relied on organizational documents from Kvinna till Kvinna and their partner organizations such as training material, memos, mission statements, press releases, and websites.
Research Photography

Entering a research setting involves being confronted with the visual availability of culture (Ball, 1998). These visual aspects inevitably influence and shape the sense-making process, but in practice, visual artifacts are rarely captured in research I have included photo images in this project as a means of recognizing the multiple ways that a researcher “senses” the field. Moreover, visual images provide an opportunity to share with the audience another dimension of the social context and to humanize the discourse (see Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006, for a similar example).

Photographic methods have a long history in the field of anthropology (see Bateson & Mead, 1942) and are often associated with the legacies of colonialism. Historically, documentary photography was used by colonizers to capture the “reality” and exoticness of natives. Given this, there has been a turn away from image-based research in ethnographic methods, especially photography (Banks, 1998). The concern with photography also stems from modernist notions of realism and the vulnerability of images to interference and manipulation (Winston, 1998). Yet, in postmodern spirit and recognizing that all texts, visual and otherwise, are partial, involve matters of selection and perception, and are polysemic in nature, possibilities are opened for including images in interpretive work.

As I entered contexts that were new and different for me, I used photography as a way to exercise reflexivity in understanding my own sense-making process. Over the course of my field work, I took 173 photos to capture notions of spatiality, displays of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work, and images of the women partners who granted me
permission to photograph them in their work. I have included a few of the photos in my results, providing both juxtaposition with and complementing the text. My intention was not to use visual images as a means for documenting and presenting exotic difference or to have direct window to accessing the “real world.” My hope was instead that, by interweaving them into my results, they will spark further conversation and questions about Kvinna till Kvinna’s work and the work of their partners.

Discourse Analysis

To analyze the discourses collected, I used the four levels of interpretation put forward by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) to allow different material, ideas, and theories to play off of each other. The first level, interaction with empirical material, involved reading and re-reading fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and organizational documents. In order to keep track of the vast amount discourse, I used NVivo software to catalog all of the interviews and fieldnotes on my laptop. The second level, interpretation, involved studying empirical material for underlying meanings. As insights began to emerge, I created free nodes in NVivo, allowing myself to categorize anything that seemed significant. Critical interpretation is the third level and involves reflection on ideology and power. While I was in the field, I would often check my critical interpretations with members in interviews. For example, toward the end of my research, I facilitated a group discussion on the meanings of bureaucracy and activism, two ideologically saturated terms I had heard time again in conversations. Eventually, these critical interpretations helped me to refine and reduce the initial themes I had categorized.
The fourth level of interpretation involves reflection on my own text production and language use. This has been an ongoing process throughout my research. For example, once the interviews were transcribed, I sent them to each interviewee and allowed them the opportunity to provide feedback, make clarifications, and ask questions. This resulted in several useful comments that caused me to check my own language use. Also, writing this dissertation has been a constant process of re-reading and revising based on my own and other’s reflections. It is important to note that these four levels of interpretation were not mutually exclusive, they occurred simultaneously throughout, with different levels receiving emphasis depending on what phase the research was in.

Now that I have outlined how I collected and analyzed discourse, it is appropriate to discuss standards of rigor in interpretive and ethnographic research. These standards have been conceptualized in many different ways across qualitative work and in the following I argue for the standards that are relevant to this project.

Standards of Rigor

Given that knowledge is situated, temporary, and partial, it is tempting to dispense altogether with the traditional hallmarks of quality research – validity and reliability. The total abandonment of any research criteria, though, has been a source of critique for interpretive work and researchers have addressed it varying ways. One way is to try to adhere to postpositivist criteria as much as possible, relying on measurements such as sample size, inter-coder reliability, etc. Another approach has been the inductive-analytic understanding of empirical data. This approach has traditionally been aligned with grounded theory and the idea that “data speaks for itself” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000;
Clarke, 2005). Feminist and postcolonial philosophies have challenged this notion and argued that the power relations constituted between researchers and participants always shape and influence the “data.” Therefore, themes do not emerge on their own separate from the researchers (this is similar to the point I made earlier about the subject/object binary). Visweswaran (1994) captured this tension of interpretive work well:

It is not that facts disappear, but that their limits are exposed. Those concerned with the reliability of “data” need to first address the purposes for which reliability is being marshaled. Of course, such analyses are naked, discursive exercises in power, but then all social analysis is ultimately, no matter how transparent or unremarked its claim to authority. Might showing some of the junctures where power operates in an analysis open up knew ways of accountable seeing? (p. 82)

So, the question remains of how to assess the rigor of poststructural and postcolonial feminist work.

I suggest that standards of rigor should not be abandoned, but rather that the messiness of doing interpretive work should be confronted directly. As Clarke (2005) argued,

We need to address head-on the inconsistencies, irregularities, and downright messiness of the empirical world – not scrub it clean and dress it up...This does not mean presenting raw data – but rather doing even more analysis and extended reflection that can take rawness into fuller and more explicit account. (p. 15)
Therefore, one question that can be posed to interpretive work is how complicated is the picture it projects and the possibilities it opens for peoples lives. This is not to say that complexity should be manufactured, but a complex and multi-vocal account should raise more questions than provide neat and tidy answers. As Denzin (2000) argued, criteria for interpretive work should look at not only what a text describes, but what it does. Is the text evocative and creative? Does the inspire and move people to deeper insights? Does the text generate a politics of hope by remaining critical of how things are but also imagining how they could be otherwise?

Another critique leveled at interpretive work is its usefulness in contexts outside of the specific research venue. Stewart (1998) claimed that “Ethnographers cannot aspire to generalizability or external validity, but they can aspire to perspicacity, which is the capacity to produce applicable insights” (p. 47). This resonates with the notion that theory and praxis share a reciprocal relationship and that theory must be accountable to life. Further, there are limits to knowing and regardless of criteria, misunderstandings can occur. There are certain practices of rigor for interpretive work that remain respectful of these limitations but also seek to diminish them. These include a lengthy time in the field, seeking out reorienting and disconfirming observations (which again speaks to reflexivity), developing relationships with participants, having a high level of attentiveness and engagement with the social context, and using multiple modes of data collection.

I would like to reiterate that my goal has not been to put forward an all-encompassing and final account of Kvinna till Kvinna. I instead have strived towards
providing a more complicated picture of organizational life that challenges what we “know,” sparks dialogue that leads to more questions, and opens up possibilities for organizing differently. As Alvesson and Sköldberg argued, “richness in points,” meaning insights and questions raised, should also be a criteria of reflexive, interpretive work. To provide further contextualization of how I exercised these methodological commitments, I next provide an organizational portrait of Kvinna till Kvinna and then recount my research experiences.

History and Overview of Kvinna till Kvinna

Kvinna till Kvinna began in 1993 through the efforts of three Swedish women peace activists: Kerstin, Ella Liden (to distinguish from the other Ella mentioned throughout the text), and Camilla. In response to Swedish news media reports on the atrocities and horrendous conditions women in Bosnia-Herzegovina were enduring as a result of the war, these women organized around the idea that women in Sweden could offer support to women in the Balkans, whose needs were often overlooked by mainstream relief and aid organizations. One of the first large-scale campaigns was entitled “Send a Woman’s Package.” In cooperation with the Swedish post office, Kvinna till Kvinna arranged for Swedish women to send items such as tampons, underwear, and food to women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The response was overwhelming, resulting in 20,000 packages sent and newfound notoriety for Kvinna till Kvinna in Sweden.

A turning point came in 1995, when Kvinna till Kvinna formally became a foundation, further legitimating their status as a Swedish organization. In 2005, in
another step in the process of formalization, Kvinna till Kvinna re-organized into its current structure (see Figure 1). Under this current organizational structure, Kvinna till Kvinna’s operations fall into three categories: administration, communication, and field work. The administration branch focuses on the day to day managing of the organization, including human resources and accounting issues. Although I had contact with all of the women in the Stockholm office, the administrative activities were not a main focus of my research. Therefore, I will turn to explaining in more detail the activities of the communication and field work branches of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work.

The communication branch is involved in influencing Swedish actors, such as government officials, to act in the UN and EU on behalf of the women and issues Kvinna till Kvinna supports. They also seek to educate the Swedish general public through its newsletter (published five times a year), and by creating forums for public exhibits and roundtable discussions around women’s issues in post-conflict areas. Further, the communication branch also targets the international community. For example, in January, 2006, Kvinna till Kvinna wrote an open letter to Martti Ahtisaari, UN Special Envoy for Kosovo, urging him to demand that women be included in further talks about the status of Kosovo.
Figure 1: Kvinna till Kvinna’s Formal Organization Chart

Board of Directors (11)
Secretary General

Head of Communication

Information Officers (3)

Press and Communication Officer

Communication Officer

Project Coordinator

Managing Director

Administrative Assistant

Human Resource Administrator

Project Controllers (2)

Fundraising Officer

Head of Development Cooperation

Macedonia
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinator (Skopje)

Albania, Montenegro, Serbia
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinators (2)
(Tirana, Belgrade)

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinators (2)
(Lisevo, Pëshëria)

South Caucasus
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinators (3)
(Tbilisi)

Israel, Palestine
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinators (2)
(Jerusalem)

Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon
Home Coordinator
Field Coordinators (2)
(Annan)
One important activity of the communication branch that features prominently in my research is the reports they publish highlighting the challenges to participation in democratic processes that women in post-conflict areas face, as well as the positive work that women are doing. For example, in the Spring of 2006, Kvinna till Kvinna published the report *To Make Room for Changes: Peace Strategies from Women Organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. This report emphasized the peace and democracy work of the women’s movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was based on interviews with their partners in the country. Also, the women featured in the report criticized the international community for their exclusion of women in the reconstruction process. In launching the report, Kvinna till Kvinna held roundtable talks in Sarajevo, coordinated together with the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Table 1 provides a complete list of Kvinna till Kvinna’s thematic reports.

In addition to their communication activities, a central way that Kvinna till Kvinna’s mandate is carried out is through their field work. Currently, Kvinna till Kvinna operates in six different field areas (these are depicted in Figure 1). Each area has a field team which is made up of a home coordinator and field coordinators. The home coordinator works mainly in the Stockholm office and her responsibilities are to provide a link between the field office and the headquarter office. The field coordinators work in the field office and their main responsibilities are to maintain the relationships with the partners. Home coordinators come together once a week for a meeting with the Head of Development Cooperation, who oversees the field operations, to share news about their team and partners.
Table 1 (continued on pp. 116-117)

Kvinna till Kvinna Thematic Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Engendering the Peace Process: A Gender Approach to Dayton and Beyond</em></td>
<td>An analysis of the Dayton Peace Accords in comparison to the UN Beijing Declaration, including a proposal for including women in the peace process to comply with Resolution 1325.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Getting it Right: A Gender Approach to UNMIK Administration in Kosovo</em></td>
<td>An analysis of how the women’s movement in Kosovo has been largely ignored in policymaking by the UN and OSCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>War is Not Over with the Last Bullet</em></td>
<td>A study of psychosocial work carried out in women’s centers in BiH and Croatia. Based on interviews with over 200 women in the region, the report emphasizes the connection between healing and the integration of women into rebuilding process.</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Voices from the Field: About Prosecution of Sexualised Violence in and International Context</em></td>
<td>A summary of a 2003 seminar held by Kvinna till Kvinna in Stockholm examining how women have been treated as witnesses at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rethink! A Handbook for Sustainable Peace</em></td>
<td>Through examples of women’s participation in peace processes and the positive impact on development, this report provides a model including women throughout the rebuilding process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Security on Whose Terms? If Men and Women were Equal</em></td>
<td>Analyzes connections between women’s lack of freedom of movement and speech in post-conflict in the name of “security” and their inability to participate in politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>To Make Room for Changes: Peace Strategies from Women Organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina</em></td>
<td>Based on interviews with partner organizations in BiH and Croatia, this report analyzed the achievements of women in peacebuilding 10 years after the Dayton Peace Accords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pushing the Limits:</em></td>
<td>Profiles the lives of six young women from the South Caucasus region, Israel/Palestine, and Serbia to show how women struggle with rights to their bodies, violence, free movement, and organizing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Young Women’s Voices about War,</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Peace, and Power</em></td>
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*Note.* These reports are available for download in both Swedish and English at [http://www.iKvinna till Kvinna.se](http://www.iKvinna till Kvinna.se).

The field teams have a great deal of autonomy in decision-making within their group and in relating with the partner organizations. The role of the Head of Development Cooperation is to be a discussion partner if needed, but decisions and discussions regarding with which groups to form partnerships, coordinating networking activities, and organizing events with partners are generated at the team level. Within each team, the level of communication between the field coordinators and the home coordinator fluctuates depending on the team, but for the most part they seem to remain in close contact with each other via email and phone. Also, the home coordinators travel to the field offices several times throughout the year for network meetings and budget planning. Several women within Kvinna till Kvinna have changed roles throughout their tenure there, and it is not uncommon for someone who has worked as a field coordinator to later take a position in the Stockholm office.
**Feminist Orientation**

An overtly feminist organization, Kvinna till Kvinna adopts what they call a “feministic approach” to peace and development work. This is reflected in their mandate, which states that their overall purpose is:

1. to carry out projects within war and conflict affected areas that in turn promote women’s self-reliance, self-esteem, psychosocial and/or physical health or contribute to the promotion of women’s participation in the construction of democratic civil society.

2. to promote studies and research concerning the effects of war and armed conflict on women.

3. to publicise facts and information concerning the effects of war and raise public opinion in favour of peaceful conflict resolution using non-military methods.

In addition, Kvinna till Kvinna states that they are an independent organization that operates regardless of religious, political, national, or ethnic affiliation. In practice, Kvinna till Kvinna receives approximately 90% of its funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), a branch of the Swedish government. Other funds come from private donations from individuals and organizations.

Now that I have outlined the organizational structure and feminist orientation of Kvinna till Kvinna, I turn to provide an account of my journey with the organization. My goal in doing so is to shed light on how the process of doing reflexive interpretive work unfolded and to provide further contextualization of the organization to frame the results of the study.
A Reflexive Account of My Research Journey with Kvinna till Kvinna

Phase 1: Site Selection, Access, and Preparation

I first heard of Kvinna till Kvinna during a conversation I had while visiting family in Stockholm during winter break, 2005. Given my interest in both feminist and international organizing, I was immediately interested in their mission to support women’s empowerment projects in post-conflict regions. Upon returning to the U.S., I began to look for more information about the organization through their website and news articles in the Swedish media. These initial scene casing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) activities further piqued my interest in the organization. During the winter of 2006, I took a graduate seminar in global feminisms and chose to use Kvinna till Kvinna as a basis for my final paper. The purpose of this paper was to build a theoretical framework for understanding how a women’s NGO engaging in transnational work sits at the nexus of several contemporary issues in global feminisms. Then, in the spring of 2006, I analyzed discourse about Kvinna till Kvinna and their approach to gender and peacebuilding for a graduate seminar on conflict studies. Needless to say, my interest in the organization had continued to increase and I was wondering at the possibility of working with them for my dissertation research.

I first contacted the organization via email and then phone, in the early summer of 2006 to see about the possibility of meeting with them while I would be in Stockholm that summer. My initial contact was with Kerstin Grebäck, the General Secretary at the time. I was excited that she agreed to meet with me in August and I sent her a revised version of my conflict seminar paper so that she could better understand my interest in
the organization. Before leaving for Sweden that summer, I had an in-depth conversation with my advisor about the advantages and disadvantages of doing international research for my dissertation. Given the issues of feminist transnational organizing that I was interested in, Kvinna till Kvinna seemed to be an interesting research site. But, I would need to consider the time and resources needed to spend a lengthy time abroad and logistically I could work this out. The planning process for a large research project is fraught with ambiguity, and mine was no exception. I looked forward to my meeting with Kvinna till Kvinna, but I spent a considerable amount of time prior to that weighing the pros and cons of such a project and crafting different scenarios for how a field study might take place and questions to ask during the meeting (and although my initial contact was positive and indicated interest in my research, there was also the ambiguity if whether or not I could gain access).

My first meeting with Kvinna till Kvinna was with Kerstin and Annika, a communication officer at the time. I explained my background, including my experience having lived in Sweden before, research interests, and why I was interested in Kvinna till Kvinna for study. We immediately found that my research interests coincided with current concerns Kvinna till Kvinna was facing, such as how much to “support” their partners and in what ways. I then asked numerous questions about the organization with the goal of finding out how the image I had formed of Kvinna till Kvinna through my research was both similar and dissimilar in practice. For the most part, the discourses about Kvinna till Kvinna that I had gathered reflected their current operations. An exception was that I didn’t realize that they anticipated phasing out of the Balkan region
soon, starting with Croatia. By the close of the meeting, we were all enthusiastic about working together. Kerstin let me know that ultimately, allowing me access to the organization was a board decision. We agreed that I would send a more concise proposal to her in the coming weeks that she could present to the board. Also, we talked about different ways that I might study Kvinna till Kvinna’s field work and mentioned specifically the Balkans and the South Caucasus as possibilities.

I was excited by the meeting and typed up my meeting notes on the plane on the return trip to Ohio. Shortly thereafter, I met again with my advisor and discussed mostly the advantages of taking on this project for my dissertation. With her support of the project, I decided to pursue it further and wrote up a project proposal for the board. I received notice from Kerstin in late September, 2006, that they had approved my project and that we would be in touch as the spring drew closer. I submitted my application to IRB for review and received approval shortly thereafter.

Later that fall, I received an email from Lovisa Olsson, a home coordinator at Kvinna till Kvinna, indicating that she was my new contact and that Kerstin had left the organization. I made arrangements to meet with Lovisa during a trip to Stockholm in December of 2006 so that I could meet her in person we could further discuss details about my field work. This meeting went well in terms of discussing plans, although I sensed that I had been made Lovisa’s responsibility without her full participation in that choice. This awareness played a part in my self-consciousness about entering the field as an “outsider,” although that diminished as my field work unfolded.
During the winter of 2007, I wrote my dissertation proposal and defended it in early April, 2007. I was in contact with Lovisa via email and making final arrangements for my study of their field work wherein I would travel to several field offices. We decided that the Balkan region would be the best area to conduct this part of my research. This choice was motivated by several factors: (a) it was the region where Kvinna till Kvinna had its longest established partners; (b) it would be safe and easy for me to travel to different field offices on my own; and (c) Lovisa was the home coordinator for Bosnia-Herzegovina and had a planned trip there in May, providing a natural entry point for me into the region. In addition to the preparation I had done through my dissertation proposal, I began to gather as much information as I could about the Balkans. In line with Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2000) argument that creativity in research is fueled by being widely read in various types of texts, I read memoir accounts of the Bosnian war, watched films such as No Man’s Land (2001), and read travel guides. Basically, I tried to absorb any material that would help familiarize me with the cultural contexts I would soon come to encounter.

Phase 2: Conducting Field Work

I began my field work in the Stockholm office in April, 2007. As my main contact and initial gate keeper, Lovisa met with me often and provided me with numerous suggestions of meetings I could attend and different people who would be visiting the office. On any given day, someone was out of the office, so I was able to sit at a desk and work. For the first few weeks, I shared an office with Lena, the home coordinator for Serbia and Montenegro. Through our daily interaction, we developed a friendly co-
working relationship that enabled me to ask many questions about Kvinna till Kvinna as they came up. I quickly established a routine of arriving at 9:00 AM and leaving at 5:00 PM, the typical working hours of Kvinna till Kvinna staff. During my first week, the field coordinators from all of the field offices were there for an annual meeting. This gave me the opportunity to meet with the field coordinators whom I would be meeting later in their respective field offices. These initial meetings were not formal interviews but, rather a chance for us to meet one another, me to explain my research, and to plan for different partners with whom I could meet. Also, I had the opportunity to meet with several women in the Stockholm office, both in the communication department and field department. This gave me an opportunity to gain an understanding of the overall organization. Also, these initial meetings gave rise to further questions that I was able to pose later in my field work during more formal interviews. I took extensive fieldnotes during this time, spending any downtime at my desk typing notes from meetings and observations. I was also given access to organizational documents, such as reports from partners, which I spent much time reading.

In the beginning of May, 2007, I left for Sarajevo with Lovisa and Lena (see Figure 2 for a map of the Balkan region). I spent one week in Sarajevo, first attending the network meeting, then spending time in the field office. I also had the opportunity to accompany the field coordinators on several meetings with partners in and around Sarajevo. I interviewed both Esther and Natalie during my time there and felt that I was beginning to understand what it meant to live and work as a Kvinna till Kvinna field coordinator.
Figure 2: Map of Balkan Region
At the end of the week, I left by bus for the city Tuzla. There, I met with Mira, from partner organization Horizonti, and spent one night. The next day, I again traveled by bus to the city of Bijeljina, on the border of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, where I met with Mara from partner organization Lara. After my interview with Mara, I again traveled by bus to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. Both of these interviews had went well and I was looking forward to spending time at another Kvinna till Kvinna field office.

I spent one and a half weeks in Belgrade and during the first half of my time there, I was mostly with Karin, a field coordinator. We traveled to meet with a new partner organization in Novi Sad and I also traveled by plane with her to Montenegro. In Montenegro, we met with two different partner organizations over two days, one in Pljevlja, Bona Fide, and Anima, in the coastal town of Kotor. After much traveling together, I felt quite comfortable with Karin, which allowed me to ask her innumerable questions about Kvinna till Kvinna and her experiences living in Serbia and working with the local women’s movements. Karin took some time off during the second half of my stay there, and I spent time with Ella, the other field coordinator in Belgrade. Ella took me to meet several partners in Belgrade and I also spent a fair amount of time with her in the office. Before leaving Belgrade, I interviewed both Karin and Ella in the office.

My next journey was again by bus to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. The bus was packed with people, which made it different from the previous bus journeys. Entering Kosovo was also a very different experience as there were security checkpoints both on the Serbian side and Kosovar side. When I arrived in Pristina, Lea, the field coordinator there, picked me up and took me to the office where I stayed for the week (in Sarajevo
and Belgrade I had stayed in a hotel). This really allowed me to get a feel for the role of
the field coordinator as I was there when Lea arrived until she left. I also accompanied
her on several meetings with partners and different errands throughout the week. And I
had the opportunity to interview her before completing this stage of my field work.

At the beginning of June, I returned to Stockholm and resumed field work in the
headquarter office. Although it felt that the month abroad went by quickly, I had learned
an incredible amount of information about Kvinna till Kvinna and their partners in the
Balkans. I was able to then return to reports partners whom I met had filed with Kvinna
till Kvinna about their various activities and read them with a new interest. Also, I began
interviewing the home coordinators in Stockholm and had much more insight into the
work of the field teams.

In July, I took a three week break from field work during the time that Kvinna till
Kvinna closed its offices for summer holiday. This allowed me time for some much-
needed reflection and to take stock of what insights I had gained so far and consider what
else I needed to do in my time with the organization. I spent time reading field notes and
making notes about “initial strands of thought,” and also talked with my advisor about
what I was finding so far. All of this allowed re-entering the field refreshed and with a
narrower focusing on topics to bring up in interviews and conversations. I resumed field
work in the Stockholm office through the end of August, continuing with interviews and
observing in meetings. By that time, I felt that I had become a member of the
organization and was beginning to feel anxious about leaving (some relationships had
developed into genuine friendships, and I truly enjoyed being there). I met with Lovisa
before departing in late August and we agreed to keep in touch via email and that I would let her know how things progressed.

Phase 3: Analyzing discourses and writing

I returned to the U.S. at the end of August with a suitcase full of “discourse” I had collected (including books, pamphlets, etc. I had picked up in my travels). The exit from the field was jarring for a few days as I came to terms with the fact that I couldn’t “be there.” But, as I began to read and re-read interview transcripts and fieldnotes, I felt near to Kvinna till Kvinna again as I reminisced about my time at their organization. Since that time, I have communicated with Lovisa and Lena via email and with a few others who responded when I emailed them their interview transcripts. I spent the fall of 2007 mostly reading discourse and organizing preliminary themes. This was helped in part by also presenting two conference papers on my work with Kvinna till Kvinna. The first focused on dialogue and organizing and the second focused specifically on gendered organizing in post-conflict contexts. In the winter of 2008, I began to outline and write the results chapter and have been engaged in a constant process of writing and reflecting.

Summary

This chapter has provided the methodological basis for this dissertation, which was driven by interpretive and feminist sensibilities. Specifically, I have explained why reflexive interpretation was an appropriate choice for this study and elaborated upon the strategies I used for discourse collection and analysis. I also provided a detailed description of Kvinna till Kvinna and an account of how the research process unfolded.
This was done with an eye toward providing a rich contextual background for the results and discussion which are presented in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, I work to unpack how Kvinna till Kvinna accomplishes its goals of creating the conditions for women’s empowerment initiatives to thrive and to contribute to a sustainable peaceful society wherein women fully participate. My analysis focuses on key organizing strategies Kvinna till Kvinna has adopted as well as discourses surrounding their feminist values and ideology. Weaving between my own voice and the voices of Kvinna till Kvinna members and partners, I draw upon theoretical sensibilities discussed in chapter one to make sense of their organizing processes.

I have organized my analysis around seven key themes that can each be read as a core feminist value and practice that characterizes Kvinna till Kvinna’s work. In so doing, my goal is to show how their approaches to and the challenges they face in feminist organizing are both unique and, at the same time, a blend of commonly found feminist sensibilities and experiences. I believe that we have much to learn from Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing model by looking at the contexts in which they work, their partnerships, networking activities, creative approaches to development support, and organizational form and structures. Each of these areas is interconnected and there is significant overlap as to how core values (such as participation) hold influence across different areas. My hope is that through the themes developed in this analysis, those interconnections are highlighted.

I begin with the theme of Inclusiveness, Creativity, and Holistic Thinking: Imagining Possibilities for Peace to situate Kvinna till Kvinna in post-conflict contexts and to emphasize their peace building role. Then, I shift to specific dimensions of their
work by analyzing their partner relationships and networking activities in the themes

*Being There: The Importance of Presence in Partner Relationships* and *A Theme is Less Important Than the Opportunity to Meet: Networking a Community*, respectively. The next three themes, *Re-membering: Resisting Invisibility and Reconstructing Culture*,

*“The nicest container in the neighborhood:” Resiliency through Displaced Organizing,*

and *“We celebrated:” Acts of Appreciation, Celebration, and Care* explore different ideals that Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing activities engender. Finally, the theme *“One Can’t Do Without the Other: Reconstructing Feminist Bureaucracy,”* looks at how organizational structure is both enabling and constraining to a feminist agenda.

The results presented in this chapter are based on 375 hours of field work that included participant-observation and 31 in-depth interviews. I draw upon field notes and interview transcripts, as well as organizational documents in developing each theme. Further, I include photographs from the field where I feel they yield additional explanatory force to the text. The photographs also serve the purpose of humanizing the discourse and provide a way for me to share an even wider perspective on the field with the audience. To protect the identities of individuals, I use pseudonyms throughout the chapter. Participant roles are identified and Kvinna till Kvinna members are distinguished from partners. I have also incorporated “in vivo codes,” the language of the actual participants to the extent possible in elaborating themes.
Inclusiveness, Creativity, and Holistic Thinking: Imagining Possibilities for Peace

One question that surfaced in my consciousness throughout my time with Kvinna till Kvinna was: What does it mean to do peace work and peacebuilding? I knew before I entered the field that Kvinna till Kvinna believed in the interconnectedness of women’s empowerment and sustainable peace. In one of my initial meetings with the organization, Kerstin, the Secretary General at the time, explained:

Our work is “peace work” and we want to show the links between supporting women and peace and democracy. This is one of our major goals now, to make visible this connection between rebuilding the country and democracy. We know that this is true, but in practice it is a different matter. When it’s time to implement – the money is always for the men and for military build up.

What I did not know was how individuals made sense of that connection, or link, between supporting women and peace and how those links looked in practice. These ideas focused my attention both on the context of their work – post-conflict areas – and how doing peace work was articulated and enacted. In this analysis, I first explore different dimensions of context that influence Kvinna till Kvinna’s work and that their work, in turn, impacts. Then, I focus on what it means to do “peace work” by focusing on the organizational discourses and practices surrounding peace.

I came to understand that the contexts in which Kvinna till Kvinna is situated are more complex and multi-dimensional than simply the specific “post-conflict” area where they have field operations. First, peace movements have been instrumental in shaping the
founding and subsequent growth of the organization. Kerstin, one of the three founders, told her story of the organization’s beginning.

I was in the Women’s International Peace League. In the 80s, the peace movement was very popular in Sweden, and peace organizations were very common, I was also involved with “Psychologists for Peace.” Then, we went to Nairobi in 85 and were confronted by Third World women saying “that’s good that you have your ‘high’ feminist ideas, but look what’s happening to us in war times.” And we said, “ok, you’re right; we are not looking at war,” and we thought this was a Third World thing. But then, we had the war in the Balkans. And as usual, no one sees the women in the situation, and we said “look we have Yugoslavia in Europe – these are our sisters.” Everyone knew someone, or had relatives who were involved in the conflict. And we said, “what can we do?”

Boulding (2000) described peace movements as “popular groundswells of opposition to war and violence – accompanied by efforts to demonstrate alternative ways to deal with conflict and injustice” (p. 56). Sweden, in particular, has a vibrant legacy of active involvement in peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Andersson, 2003). For example, it was the Swedish section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom that initiated the Great Peace Journey, a public delegation that traveled across the world to meet and challenge state officials, which resulted in a United Nations summit in 1988. Further, there are historical connections between women’s movements and peace movements, as women’s organizations developed peace platforms in conjunction with platforms to increase the participation of women across all sectors of
society as early as pre-World War I (Boulding, 2000). Sweden, again, has historically been (and continues to be) one of the most gender progressive nations in the world in terms of national legislation and policies (e.g., corporate maternity and paternity leave policies are considered the most extensive internationally; see Seward, Yeatts, & Zotarelli, 2002). Out of this strong fabric of interwoven social movements, organizing for Kvinna till Kvinna continuously occurs. Elsa stated, “we are a development aid organization. We are a peace organization. And we are a women’s organization. That’s our threefold identity...”

Just as the shaping of Kvinna till Kvinna continues to be influenced by the heritage of Swedish culture and international peace and feminist movements, their organizing activities are also shaped by the post-conflict areas in which they work. Post-conflict indicates both specific places and times, but as I learned during my field work, the boundaries of those places and times fluctuate and are often blurred as international attention and funding is directed towards ever-present new conflicts and areas that are “post” could very well simultaneously be “pre” conflict. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the country is still rebuilding after the devastating effects of the war that ended in 1995. Much of the international development aid, though, is drying up, including funds from SIDA. As a result, Kvinna till Kvinna is phasing out their field office in Sarajevo, much to the disappointment of partners. The following conversation about a funding application took place at the Sarajevo field office between members of new partner organization Cure and Kvinna till Kvinna.
Taida: So, what do you think about it [Cure’s application]? What are your priorities?

(Lovisa and Natalie speak to each other in Swedish before answering).

Lovisa: We will probably have a lot of questions.

Daniella: (Laughs) Yes, we know, we remember.

Lovisa: And in September there will be new staff here. But, sometimes it happens we get the applications and we say that we cannot do this – that’s not necessarily the end.

Natalie: We’re starting our application process now, and applications for the next two years are due on the 27th.

Esther: Just to give you some encouragement, you have great ideas, but it has to fit with our strategy in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Lovisa: It’s important to elaborate as much as possible.

Natalie: The word from SIDA is that we will close here in four years.

Esther: And then they will want to channel funds through the gender agents.

Daniella: (shakes her head) No…this is the problem, they do nothing with this money.

(There is talk among the whole group about how the gender agencies could work better, how these things take time to build, etc.)

Lovisa: And in some ways, it is good – why should we be here forever? (Field Notes)
Even though Kvinna till Kvinna maintains a long-term perspective, their involvement in a post-conflict area, at least financially, is limited by the extent of their funding from the Swedish government (through SIDA). Moreover, as Lovisa’s final question illustrates, there are questions and tensions surrounding how long Kvinna till Kvinna’s role in peace building is necessary, when the time of post-conflict ends, and who should be responsible for civil society and women’s empowerment after that period. These questions have no clear answers, and as Galtung (2004) explained, embedded in conflict situations is a dialectic between past and future. The past involves the descriptive and seeking understanding of how the conflict came to be. The future involves the normative and what can be done about improving the situation. As a boundary spanning organization involved in post-conflict, Kvinna till Kvinna experiences this dialectic in relationship with partners in terms of working out the limits of “post-conflict.” For Daniella, there is still a need for Kvinna till Kvinna to be involved. For Lovisa, there is concern that prolonging Kvinna till Kvinna’s involvement past “post-conflict” entails infinite involvement, or staying forever, which brings into question who is (or should be) responsible for ongoing social change and societal reconstruction.

Another aspect of the post-conflict context that shapes Kvinna till Kvinna’s and partners’ work is a common understanding that conflict presents a unique opportunity for change. Ella from Kvinna till Kvinna expressed, “You have a momentum after the war to change – so why not do it equally? Money is put in anyway to reconstruction, but its very rarely put in equally; it’s ‘neutral’ – and so the aid is usually given to men.” Kvinna till Kvinna views their role in post-conflict regions as an organization that highlights the
need for the participation of women in reconstruction efforts if peace is to be sustainable and equitable. These are efforts that can gain traction and energy from the momentum and motivation to change and restructure institutions after conflict. Lena, also from Kvinna till Kvinna, explained:

I think that after a conflict - it’s partly about that everybody has a right to participate in how you want to reconstruct society after a conflict, how you want to make sure that the conflict doesn’t reappear but also how you want - in a way, time after conflict, this is time when things are open to negotiate about what you want society to look like. Then I think it’s a right for everybody in society to participate in that discussion. But then I also think that that in itself is a basic right which contributes to peace that also includes what – I don’t know how to put this. Closer peace like when everybody gets to participate and define what’s important and they want things to look like.

Conflict, which creates much chaos and devastation, also loosens the status quo for gender relations. While state and democratic structures are being developed and rebuilt, there is an opportunity to do so in a way that includes the active voices of those whose interests are often marginalized.

By transforming the disruptions present in post-conflict societies into opportunities to recreate and restructure gender relations, Kvinna till Kvinna enacts a unique process of peace-building. In analyzing what it means for Kvinna till Kvinna to be a peace-building organization, I came to understand their definition and practice of peace work hinges on three main characteristics: **inclusiveness, creativity, and holistic thinking.**
As evidenced in the quote from Lena earlier in this section, the notion that peace
work ought to include the participation of everyone in society is central to how Kvinna
till Kvinna carries out its work. The value placed on inclusiveness reflects a strong
democratic impulse that runs parallel to Kvinna till Kvinna’s understanding of peaceful
society. Karin explained,

There is a lot of things that need to be rebuilt or just built after one country or
region has been at war and that kind of transition period provides the space for to
help building up some kind of value system and democratic structure… and
democracy and the role of civil society – and the role of citizens in a society to
have it – yeah. A space for creating new use of perspectives and that I think after
the conflict and I think Kvinna till Kvinna is someone who is – I mean to support
the creation of or the strengthening of the women’s movement…

Strengthening democracy through supporting the women’s movement involves
advocating and supporting work that helps women gain a place at the “peace table” (see
Anderlini, 2007).

One of Kvinna till Kvinna’s early advocacy projects was to publish a thematic
report titled “Engendering the Peace Process: A Gender Approach to Dayton – and
Beyond.” In the foreword to this report, Kerstin Grebäck wrote:

One of the essential pre-conditions for achieving lasting peace is to involve civil
society in the peace process from the start….Civil society also have [sic] to be
acknowledged as an important agent in the forming of future societies.
But as long as half of the population are \textit{sic} denied access to this process, no sustainable results can be achieved. Women, who make up the majority of the targeted civil society during armed conflicts, are not mere victims of war. They are also important contributors to peace, and their commitment to peace needs to be acknowledged. Women’s special knowledge and experience from times of war should be used to create the foundations for reconciliation and co-existence before and during the negotiation of peace agreements, to ensure lasting relationships that can prevent an outburst of new conflicts. (p. 5)

The objective of this 56 page report is to analyze The Dayton Peace Accords, the first major peace agreement adopted after the approval of the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, by looking at the extent to which gender was taken into account. The report contains an analysis of the text of the Dayton Peace accords as well as its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the first part of the report, Kvinna till Kvinna found that

The gender dimension of the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the differential impact the conflict has on women and men was \textit{not a political priority and therefore not a part of the political analysis or of the final peace settlement}. \textit{These are serious missed opportunities to redress the gender inequalities and ensure sustainable human development. (p. 26, italics in original)}

The second part of the analysis regarding implementation actually puts into practice redressing some of these gender imbalances by drawing upon their partner organizations’ experiences in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The report concludes by highlighting the need
for international agencies to work more closely with local NGOs to increase gender awareness and increase their respect for local competence.

For Kvinna till Kvinna, practicing peace built on inclusiveness involves not only supporting those who are marginalized in the peace process (i.e., women), but making sure that a diversity of perspectives is supported. This is evidenced in the conscious choices made to support a diverse array of women’s groups. Lena expressed, “different parts of the population have different experiences and if you don’t draw on those experiences I think that the response will probably be worse than if you do.” For example, Kvinna till Kvinna attempts to support both urban and rural women’s groups and to link groups within and across country borders. Also, diversity can be found in the different types of women’s groups. For example, the Belgrade office, which works with ten partners in Serbia and four in Montenegro, supports partners who work with: violence against women, women’s centers, an organization that works with the women’s section of the largest trade union, women’s peace networks (i.e., Women in Black), a Women’s Studies program, a Roma Women’s network, a lesbian organization, an organization working to build archives and a library of the women’s movement, and one organization that is “hard to categorize” (Ella, interview, referring to partner Zena na Delu who work with women’s art and performance activities as well as women and technology issues). Although in Serbia there is a large concentration of partners in Belgrade (six), there are four organizations outside of the capital and in Montenegro the organizations are geographically dispersed. This diversity reflects the value that Kvinna till Kvinna places
on individual, unique experiences and the need for all perspectives to be included equally in the peace process.

Another characteristic that distinguishes Kvinna till Kvinna’s approach to peace work is creativity. Creativity is also fostered by the diversity of perspectives found among Kvinna till Kvinna’s partners. By linking together women’s groups with different objectives and experiences, they are able to provide resources and information to each other that they otherwise might not have accessed. The vital role of creativity and imagination in peace building has also been recognized by peace and conflict scholars. Galtung (2004) argued that the more alternatives there are available, the greater the potential for transcending and transforming conflict situations. In a similar vein, Boulding (2000) argued that at its foundation, peace work is about imagining a better future: “People cannot work for what they can’t imagine” (p. 29).

By fostering creativity and imagination through supporting and including diverse perspectives and approaching peace as an active process, Kvinna till Kvinna is also working to overcome dualisms that are taken for granted in conflict situations. For example, conflict is often reported in the media as involving only two-sides. Åsa, Press and Communication Officer with Kvinna till Kvinna explained,

The conventions of journalism say that you report in dualisms – on one hand, and on the other hand. This is not peace promoting. And when the only experts you have on the media are for example, U.S. war generals – these are people trained to see conflict, not peace. (Fieldnotes)
One of Åsa’s main projects has involved developing seminars and reports for journalists and media professionals that discuss alternative ways of reporting that include more than two opposing sides, and that specifically acknowledge the active roles of women in peace work and even in conflict. This work is built on the perspectives of women from partner organizations. For example,

In the Fall [2008], we’d like to have a larger seminar with women from the Balkans, and maybe a show a conflict – have one person from Serbia and one person from Kosovo and show a side that never gets reported. In the fall of 2006 we had study trips for women to come here to Stockholm. I talked to them, the women, and you see the same problems. They said “we’re being made fun of, not covered,” because of the functions, or malfunctions of the media. (Åsa, Interview)

Resisting and breaking down dualisms requires the capacity to imagine other possibilities than those that traditionally circulate conflict situations: win/lose, aggressor/victim, war/peace. Such either/or thinking typically serves the purpose of marginalizing one side of the binary (e.g., peace reporting is subjugated to war reporting) and can further entrench gendered hierarchies (e.g., men as aggressors, women as victims). Åsa’s project challenges such institutionalized ways of understanding conflict through the media by creating space for multiple voices to be heard and alternative knowledges to “rational” either/or thinking to emerge (Harter et al., 2008).

One of the persistent challenges that Kvinna till Kvinna faces in taking an inclusive and creative approach to peace work is to explain and to provide tangible,
measurable outcomes to outside stakeholders (i.e., SIDA) on how their work contributes to sustainable peace. Britt explained the difficulty in clarifying this connection for SIDA:

And we explain and we explain and our partner organizations and write and write and explain, and still somehow it doesn’t connect. And there are some of those issues that are difficult, and it becomes an obstacle. I mean we completely 100% believe and see that there is a connection but there is a problem in that.

During one of my first meetings with Kvinna till Kvinna, Kerstin also expressed this challenge. In her words,

We have been evaluated by SIDA and they have said, “look, in one way or another, what you are doing – it works. Women are empowered and groups who work with Kvinna till Kvinna are successful in their countries. But, you need to do a better job of saying in a structured way how you do what you do.” We don’t understand ourselves how we do it – but we do.

Although Kvinna till Kvinna has been and continues to be successful in the work that it does, articulating and accounting for concrete, specific contributions to sustainable peace remain a challenge. Throughout my time in the field, I became increasingly interested in how individuals understood the connections between women’s empowerment and the multiple different organizations Kvinna till Kvinna supports and creating sustainable peace. In discussing these issues with numerous organizational members, I came to understand that Kvinna till Kvinna fosters a holistic understanding of peace – a holism that is not easily quantified for the purposes of reporting specific outcomes.
For example, Lena talked about the concept of positive peace:

The way we and the way I look at peace is it’s more than just the absence of armed conflict. I believe that in order to have that kind of peace - we use often in our materials we use the concept of positive peace and I think that’s a good concept because it includes so much more than just absence of armed conflict. We really need to take into account the well being and the needs of the entire population and not only about some groups.

Positive peace engenders both inclusiveness and creativity as discussed previously, as well as a holistic understanding of what peace means. As Barash and Webel (2002) explained, positive peace goes beyond the prevention of war and is part of a “broader, deeper effort to rethink the relationship of human beings to each other and to their planet” (p. 427).

One way that Kvinna till Kvinna rethinks human relationships and expands the possibilities of peace work is by specifically supporting women’s health initiatives. At first glance, the connection between women’s health and wellbeing and peaceful society might not appear direct. But as Britt expressed,

But, no, with reproductive health and violence against women, it’s - but to me it’s really clear and I think it is so for most of us that work here, that if - and that experience I have mostly from the Caucasus, is that when women don’t have control over their own body and over their own health, they will not have the energy and strength and the wish to participate as active citizens in society. And then you cannot talk about gender equality and women’s participation in politics
or peace processes if women actually don’t have the strength and possibility to be there and participate. So, for me, it’s really clear that you cannot only talk about women’s political participation without making sure that there are conditions for that. And you cannot talk about women’s participations on peace processes on a political level if they’re not represented in the decision making structures, because that’s usually the argument that you get. But there are no women in the political symptoms, so they cannot participate. Yeah. And then that is a problem. So to me the connection is there and that’s the same for domestic violence or men’s violence against women and the same with all those issues. If women are not there, they cannot participate and there are a lot of reasons why they are not there and those are the sort of things that you need to work with. And health is one of the very crucial ones, I think - at least in my experience.

This view that access to healthcare is crucial in order to enable women to participate in democratic processes which, in turn, contributes to sustainable peace was also shared by Maia who is the leader of a partner organization in the Caucasus. When asked how she saw the connection between the work that her organization does with women’s health and education for women and young girls in the region and creating sustainable peace, she explained,

I see it very primal and directly because we do healthcare activities and educational work; but in my opinion, post-conflict areas, the health issues are the first which are neglected and nobody pays attention to health and special abilities connected to the women's health. But simply saying the health of women – on the
health of women depends the health of the whole nation how the people say. And if a woman is unhealthy and she has psychological disorders and problems, she can't participate in peace building. Yeah, you can start from organizing some seminars maybe about conflict resolution in Georgia…but if a woman is not feeling safe and secure and if she's not healthy, she can't be part of peace building and part of healthy society. So I see very primal connection to that and concern with educational work we do with young girls. If the girl is not prepared, if she has no possibility to study nine classes, not more, and she then she doesn't have access to extra education, to the world of computer, internet or English courses, and she's not self-developed, then how can you include that girl in the peace building?

Supporting and creating such initiatives is a fundamental step in creating peace and democracy that enables all members of society to participate more fully. This is important because, as Maia acknowledged, health services and women’s health are often set aside during conflict and post-conflict as priorities that be can be taken up again once things are “back to normal” or the more pressing needs of stopping conflict and preventing further conflict are lessened. The problem is that women then face further obstacles in creating change in their societies if their basic needs are not met. As Natalie put it, partners (and Kvinna till Kvinna through their support) play a vital role in post-conflict areas because “you see the work that most of these women’s organizations do that nobody else does.”
Another important part of peace work related to women’s health has involved psycho-social support in post-conflict areas. Kvinna till Kvinna directly supports several organizations that specifically provide psycho-social support services to women and families during post-conflict. Further, their work in bringing women together who are divided by conflict boundaries through networking activities can in itself be part of the peace process through offering space and opportunity for healing to occur. MaryAnn shared the following narrative of her experience at a network meeting in Jordan.

Then there was another example when we went on a personal meeting during this network meeting in Jordan which in itself was good but also sometimes I felt that, the big group discussions, they tend to become - they always become very politicized and people sort of repeat the same kind of arguments and you know where they’re coming from. It’s not that it isn’t important but sometimes it just becomes very much very sort of abstract or very political basically. Then there was one woman who works for an organization called Women Study Center and she works in Nablus which is also very isolated and affected by the occupation. She was telling over dinner - basically she was telling her personal story about how her husband was shot by Israeli military and her husband was a photographer for some international news agency or something. It was a very personal story and extremely horrible and it was just like - I was just completely shocked and I was completely shocked by the way she told it as well because it was very matter of fact and she was giving us all the details and talking about her five children and how they were affected by this and how she herself was sedated by medical staff.
because apparently this is what they do to many women whose family members get killed. They give them shots and basically she was in some kind of coma for a month or she wasn’t - she missed the funeral. She wasn’t around when her children saw her husband’s body. It was just so awful. I was trying to control myself but I just started crying. Then she was saying, “Thank you for sharing my feelings,” and I just felt really, really awful because I just felt pathetic crying in front of - but at the same time - then she was saying this was her experience after this she was a complete nervous wreck and this organization, Women’s Study Center, had somehow - I don’t know how they learned about her case but somehow they did and they offered her psycho-social support in a group and they also got very involved in her family and her children. It just felt so incredibly - because we’ve discussed the issue of psycho-social support. SIDA, among others haven’t quite seen the purpose or the need of psycho-social - we haven’t been very good at explaining it basically. I just felt that this case was - her story was just a very clear example of why it’s important or whatever the methods are why that kind of support is necessary. The way she was describing how her oldest son - her biggest fear is that her oldest son will want to take revenge or become a suicide bomber basically and that she’s put in so much work and this organization’s also put in so much work into trying to make him deal with his emotions in another way basically. So that made me feel that this is a very important part of our work.
Providing the space for such narratives to be shared and bearing witness to conflict stories is, as MaryAnn claimed, an important part of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work. From this example, it is clear that supporting such psycho-social support services contributes to the ongoing creation of a peace culture. However, this example is difficult to conform to the guidelines of standard reporting procedures to SIDA and other outside stakeholders who do not hold the same taken-for-granted assumption that there is an inherent connection between a women’s center and peace building.

“Being There:” The Importance of Presence in doing Partnerships

*I always say that this is the one organization who give you feeling of independence, of choice, and you can choose what you want to do and what you feel that is the needs of the women and local population to work on. When I first met the field coordinator, she told me that Kvinna till Kvinna's a Swedish organization who is working for women, and our priority is women, and from this you can do whatever you want for women. So and that was really nice because otherwise when some organizations come to Abkhazia and they have their own priorities like, they are only funding, for example, sport activities. It's not really the need in the area.*

(Maia, Interview)

This excerpt from an interview with a leader of one of Kvinna till Kvinna’s partner organizations conveys something I heard and witnessed time and again during my field work: Kvinna till Kvinna does things differently than other donors. Part of my goal was to explore how exactly Kvinna till Kvinna does development work differently and a
significant part of that was found in the communicative accomplishments of relating to and with its partners in the field. Ashcraft (2001) encouraged investigating the ideology-practice relationship in feminist organizing and to move beyond analysis that positions feminist organizing as a pure and ideal form and therefore privileges theory over practice. This approach allows for the focus to be instead on how members “‘do’ empowering relationships in the face of imposing inequalities” (p. 84). With their partners, Kvinna till Kvinna draws upon its feminist ideology to co-construct relationships that are dialogic, creating dialogic fields that thrive in spite of material and discursive power inequities.

My analysis of these relationships is anchored in the concept of presence as both a literal practice and a master trope that represents key features of these relationships. Hammond, Anderson and Cissna (2003) claimed that immediacy of presence is a key feature of dialogue and that presence translates to mutual access between partners. I use this and other key elements of dialogue theory combined with feminist literature to trace the contours of partner relationships and understand how they are accomplished in and through discourse.

Kvinna till Kvinna’s model for working in the field is based on having a local field office and on providing long-term support to its partners. Having these structures in place enables field coordinators to play a major role in developing and sustaining relationships with partners. Depending on the resources available, some field offices employ two field coordinators who work together in a field office, but many field coordinators work alone in the field office. Field coordinators are each part of a team that includes the home coordinator for that region as well (see Figure 1 for a depiction of the
team structure). Lea, the field coordinator in Kosovo, described one of the main responsibilities of her job as:

My main objective is to well, I guess one I don’t think you’re looking for one (laugh), but it’s one of the things of course, is to be the link between, you know Stockholm and here, meaning the representative of Kvinna till Kvinna here. Also meaning that I am the person, all the field coordinators are the persons that are doing our field work, which is what we are famous for doing. So, we are doing the core activity of our organization in my opinion….And that’s sort of in my hands. How I feel that is like, I am here so I know what’s going on, how the situation is looking on the ground which makes it possible for Kvinna till Kvinna to make decisions on different issues and make strategical plans let’s say, or plans for the future or how we would shape our support.

Providing a link between Kvinna till Kvinna in Sweden and the locations in which their partners are working is a crucial part of the field coordinator’s job. As Lea explained, “how the situation looks on the ground” is a perspective that can be only be gained from being there and it greatly influences the types of support they provide.

Regardless of the amount of detail that goes into applications and reports, there is knowledge to be gained from going into the field and understanding practices on the ground, from a local perspective. Camilla also emphasized this as she elaborated on Kvinna till Kvinna’s approach to the proposal process.

There are differences between proposals. You can look at something and say no way, that’s not us. But then you see it on the ground and it makes sense. For
example, I got a proposal once and it felt like a social worker should do it. It was a proposal to visit older women in their houses, talk to them, and cook for them. We don’t ask our partner orgs to say they are feminists, especially not then, not in Bosnia. Then we took a tour and we saw that there were elderly women who lived alone, refused to leave. But their families would leave because the area had become very politicized – Bosnian-Croats had been placed there. People were looting the Serbs, even the houses where these women lived. And fathers were taking their sons out to loot with them. So it was a matter of security – to show that women had a connection to a Serb. People would see the car parked out front – this was why it was so important to have a presence, and not just in the capital. This is just one example of how a proposal can be very different on the ground, in context.

Attention to local context has been lauded in development work as necessary to creating sustainable change (Marchand & Parpart, 1995). Kvinna till Kvinna not only recognizes the value of local context and knowledge, but also has built their field operations around the notion that their presence in the location is vital to making decisions. Their current structure places the field coordinator in the role of linking Kvinna till Kvinna to the local, situated knowledge and experiences of women. In this way Kvinna till Kvinna grants authority to partner voices and answers the “otherness” of the other by preserving their unique particularity (Bakhtin, 1993).

In addition to providing this crucial link to local contexts, the field coordinators also fulfill the role of representing Kvinna till Kvinna in relating to partners. By
participating in meetings with partners, attending their activities, and being available to answer questions via telephone and email, field coordinators are functioning to make Kvinna till Kvinna accessible to partners. As Lea explained,

And also I’m here to, of course, spend, not just spend time doing this organization, but to be there with them and we have dialogue with them all the time to see what is going on, what their needs are, how we can support them. And also be the one who tells them what we are demanding and then what we expect from them…

The second feature that stands out about Kvinna till Kvinna’s field model is its long-term perspective in supporting partners. This is not common in development work and often in post-conflict areas, there is an influx of aid immediately following the conflict, but long-term society building falls from international view as other conflicts arise (this is similar to ways in which certain parts of the homeless population in the U.S. are rendered “invisible” while in transition – see Harter et al., 2005). MaryAnn, a home coordinator, shared her thoughts on how Kvinna till Kvinna’s long-term approach is perceived by partners:

But I mean, the impression seems to be – most of our partners consider us a sort of – a reliable or sort of long-term donor. That's the approach we've had from the beginning. And that's also the way I feel that the partners perceive us. And in practice, we haven't – there has been – we've had partners, you know, where we've sort of terminated the support, but it's only like one or two cases, and I was – you know, it was before my time. And that was for various reasons, or – there
are occasions from the other fields as well where, you know – but in practice, organizations tend to sort of – they – or at least we tend to sort of, you know, keep our partners for a long – on a long-term basis.

Relationships built on a long-term perspective implicitly value reliability and also allow for time for organizations to grow and develop. This process is not always smooth, as MaryAnn noted relationships have been severed, but the majority of partners become more closely connected to Kvinna till Kvinna over time.

Because these close connections are built with the goal of long-term support that facilitates broader more sustainable social change than short-term funding of single projects, Kvinna till Kvinna is able to focus more on the partner organization as a whole. Milica, from partner Zena na Delu in Belgrade told the following story about their beginning cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna:

And at the time that was really important that Kvinna was really supporting the organization itself. They would always support projects but they are also -- a lot of the organizations are given money for offices…but I think at that time, they were supporting organizations as a whole. You know they were paying attention to -- yeah, it was a general support but it was also like -- it was really important for Kvinna to see the organization as a whole, not generally through a certain project that they would fundraise or something.

Over their years of partnership with Kvinna till Kvinna, members of Zena na Delu have struggled to find their purpose. Milica shared with me how they started during the 1996 student protests in Belgrade and their main concern was with the economic empowerment
of women. Since their inception, they’ve published a newsletter, trained women for nontraditional jobs, created peer education workshops for young women, and focused on cyber activities and technology issues for women. Throughout this time, they have remained partners with Kvinna till Kvinna and as Ella, a field coordinator in Belgrade explained:

There was a time when many donors would have left them [Zena na Delu], and they came over that. It’s been a five year process, and in the last year they have really pulled it together. They just didn’t have a focus and were trying to do too much. Other donors would leave, for good or bad, but for them they needed that time.

This type of long-term support allows for partnerships to be flexible enough that they allow for organizations to change and grow.

Kvinna till Kvinna’s commitment to maintaining a long-term perspective in its field work is borne out of concern for both the sustainability of their work and a sense of responsibility to their partners. Sustainability has become a development buzz word and is often used authoritatively in that organizations that depend on international aid must become sustainable, or independent. Kvinna till Kvinna also experiences this tension between independence and dependence in partner relationships. Camilla, one of the founders, explained to me that:

Our goal is to not be needed. And we’re finding new ways to work together when we’re not the donor. Because, it’s not that they all love us – sometimes they love our money. And this is easy to forget. When you do, you can be manipulated.
This speaks to the dynamic tensionality inherent in all dialogic relationships (Bakhtin, 1981) as well as the contradictory nature of concepts such as “sustainability.”

What is interesting about these particular partnerships is that Kvinna till Kvinna does not accept the viability of “sustainability” wholesale. As Elsa expressed, SIDA and the government, they always – they talk about this – you have to look upon the sustainability and the financial independency and so on. And I feel: get real. SIDA is not independent. SIDA is dependent on the government. But yet, we are not independent in that way. How can you demand the organizations that we support in the civil society to be independent? Everybody’s dependent on funding….So it’s a bit naïve, I think, that argumentation that all you have to talk to them about is that you will leave soon someday. You know? You won’t be here forever. Yes, of course. But there is a matter of timing as well. And this time, it’s not possible for them to get any money. If they don’t get money from any other donor, they can’t do their work.

Amid the tension between independence/dependence, Kvinna till Kvinna finds the space and resources to resist dominant definitions of sustainability (read: autonomy) and recognizes the interdependence of all institutions and organizations in the international community. Throughout this process, though, they recognize the necessity of contributing to partner organization development through capacity building initiatives that are not solely focused on fundraising efforts (i.e., the case of Zena na Delu mentioned previously).
Out of this questioning of sustainability emerges Kvinna till Kvinna’s unique long-term perspective that reconfigures sustainability as a mutual responsibility between themselves and their partners. This notion is illustrated in the following story told by Britt about her time as a field coordinator in the Caucasus.

An organization that’s called the Democratic Women of Samstkhe-Javakheti, which is the region down there [southern Georgia]. We started to support them in 2002, almost immediately when we started to work in Georgia. And to me its not one small thing with them that’s the success story, but to me they are such a good example on what happens when you actually give long term support and when you give an organization the possibility to make a strategic planning for a longer period then just half year or one year. They worked in the beginning only with reproductive health. They opened a gynecological clinic because its one of the regions where you have a lot of cancer diseases because of military leftovers or whatever you call them. So they opened a gynecological clinic and around that clinic it started to - women started to stay there and this story that has happened in all the places we worked, they become meeting places. So it continued when they started the Women’s Club and it grew and grew and it turned out for many women, this was the only place where you could actually go and talk to other women. And it turned out that there was a lot of issues that they actually needed, like assistance from professionals. So there was psychological counseling and juridical counseling and different things started in connection to the clinic and the clinic was still there and it is still there. And I think what happened like two and a
half years ago, because in that region you have a very large Armenian diaspora, and the women are very isolated and segregated from the Georgian society. But, they started coming to the gynecological clinic because it was free to go there. And because of the women that worked there in the organization, they started to understand that there are two completely segregated societies living in one region and that something needed to be done about that. So they started two years ago an integration project between Armenian and Georgian women where they organize a study between Georgia and Armenian villages for women that live like maybe 30 kilometers away from either other and never seen each other and its huge project now. In the first year, it was 50 villages, now it’s the whole region including like other cities and to me that’s a really good example of when you let things take its time, because someone could have written that project three years ago. But now it had the possibility to develop when there was the need for it and the organization was the one that developed it. No one was interfering. They knew that they had the support and I think that’s one of the most important things that Kvinna till Kvinna is sort of allowing women’s organizations to do - to have their processes that they own. And we are not saying that it has to be faster or different, but we are giving them the time to be strategic about their work.

For Kvinna till Kvinna, sustainability is inseparable from responsibility, and recognizing that entails respecting the need for organizations to build capacities and develop strategies so that they can grow in ways that are uniquely their own.
From a functional perspective, it can be seen how presence in the field translates to access in terms of having a field coordinator who represents and speaks on behalf of the broader Kvinna till Kvinna organization and by their long-term commitment to remaining in the field. Although these organizational structures support and enable dialogic relationships to emerge with partners, they do not automatically spring from such structures and role functions. Instead, they are an ongoing process carried out in the daily “doing” of partnerships. I now turn attention from how these partnerships are supported formally to how they are accomplished relationally between the field teams and partner organizations.

Partner relationships are marked by openness, respect, equality, and caring. In addition, there is strong sensitivity toward power relations and the consequences of such inequities on the ability of partners to participate fully in these relationships. Hammond, Anderson, and Cissna (2003) created the following metaphorical vehicles that capture the characteristics of dialogue: accessing, jamming, inviting, team learning, nondefensive changing, communing, flowing, and voicing. Useful in understanding Kvinna till Kvinna’s partnerships are the concepts of inviting, communing, flowing, and voicing. In addition, I draw upon feminist literature to discuss negotiating as a specific dimension of these dialogic relationships.

Inviting involves not just the recognition of otherness, but the welcoming of difference. One way to understand this in terms of Kvinna till Kvinna’s partnerships is to look at how they contemplate and make sense of the need for their support in different regions. For example, Kvinna till Kvinna was conducting research into the viability of
opening field offices in the African nations of Kenya and Liberia. Elsa, the Head of Field Operations, shared her experience of a recent fact-finding visit to the countries:

We were very well welcomed. And the people were interested, and on all levels said, “Yeah. Please come here.” Because of course we also asked, also: is there a need for us? Or is there already other donors focusing on women’s empowerment?

This attention to understanding not just what the needs are in a particular region, but if and how Kvinna till Kvinna can fulfill them was also expressed by Mari, who was preparing for a trip to Iraq, also a potential new field area for Kvinna till Kvinna.

And now naturally it is – now it is a possibility that to take the chances to go to Northern Iraq during this time and to meet with the women there. And my colleague was in contact with one of the leading women, Iraqi women, and they’re having a bit of gathering at the end of April, the beginning of March. Many women will be gathering there. They’re having some – a week of different performances, different activities. And one of the goals is to meet as many of the organizations as possible between themselves, between the women there. And then our colleagues with Kvinna till Kvinna will be going trying to meet as many as possible and to discuss those ways with the women. What do you think? What are the needs? How can we support you? And in what way?

By opening themselves up to possibilities of supporting different women in multiple ways and to the possibility that there is not a need for them, Kvinna till Kvinna recognizes the specificity of local needs. This approach signifies Kvinna till Kvinna’s
willingness to recognize and engage difference and openness to the ambiguity of outcomes. From a dialogic perspective, difference is a demand in order for connection to occur. Meanwhile, relationships are authored not from a single-perspective (i.e., the Kvinna till Kvinna way of doing things), but out of answerability to particular contexts, situations, and others (Bakhtin, 1981).

Kvinna till Kvinna’s approach to working with partners and their needs highlights the concept of inviting in another important way. As Lena, the home coordinator for Serbia and Montenegro, explained,

“It’s really important for us that they [the partners] are the ones to know what needs to be done. It’s important that they define the needs and they define the role and missions and whatever you call it and we support them to do that.

Rather than prescribing predetermined courses of action for these groups through conventional development methods such as requests for proposals, Kvinna till Kvinna invites partners to deliberate and decide their most pressing needs. This is manifest in the fact finding work done before entering a field (as mentioned previously in the examples involving the Congo and Iraq), and in the ways that partners, once partnerships are established, are asked to define their own needs, activities, projects, and strategies.

For example, while in Kosovo, I attended three different meetings involving Lea, the Kvinna till Kvinna field coordinator, representatives of the local UNIFEM office, and local women’s organizations. These were “listening” meetings for both UNIFEM and Kvinna till Kvinna, with the objective to listen to local women’s organizations and find out their needs and future plans. Lea and the two UNIFEM representatives, Flora and
Vlora, had decided to coordinate their efforts in seeking to work with new organizations. UNIFEM was preparing to put out a large call for proposals (CFP) to support several organizations while Lea was interested in developing one new partnership in the near future. Although both parties listened intently throughout these meetings, their approaches to offering support stood in stark contrast to each other and reflected vastly different philosophies of development.

We leave for the UNIFEM offices in the Kvinna till Kvinna car, an SUV almost identical to the one in Belgrade. Our first stop is the UNIFEM office where we meet Flora and Vlora. Flora is older than Vlora and appears to be the one in charge. We sit while they finish getting ready and then we all leave in Lea’s car. Mitrovica is about one hour away. I introduce myself to both women on the way and there is much talk about the situation in Mitrovica. Mitrovica is a city that has literally been divided since the war in 1999. There is a river that runs through the middle of the city and on one side is the Serbian city and on the other the Albanian (or Kosovar) city. There is a bridge with a military checkpoint that you must go through in order to cross sides. Flora grew up in Mitrovica and explains that, before the war, it was never like this. Anyone could cross the bridge at any time.

We arrive in Mitrovica and go directly to our first meeting at an organization called Community Building Mitrovica (CBM). Neither Lea nor Flora has met directly with this organization before, but they have heard about them and are both interested in their work. Their office is in the middle of Mitrovica, on the
“Albanian side.” We meet in a large conference room with two women, Valdete and Idrizi. Valdete is the spokeswoman. She appears to be in her thirties and is very enthusiastic. On the walls are many posters, some that are in English read “Fuck Terrorism” and “All the Arms We Need” with a picture of two stick people hugging each other. Flora begins by explaining that UNIFEM will soon be putting out a call for proposals and that they are interested in talking to local organizations before writing it, and Lea says that she is here to listen and learn about what CBM does. Valdete then explains more about CBM:

We are a mixed Serbian and Albanian NGO. We used to have two offices, one in the North of Mitrovica and one in the South of Mitrovica. Our main objective is to facilitate dialogue and we use media, mainly our magazine to communicate content in two different languages (we’re given copies of the latest issue, one in Albanian and one in Serbian). The problem is that people are constantly blaming each other – why don’t I have electricity or water? It’s because of them or them. There is a lack of information which gets translated into hate. There was real need for people to know what’s going on. We called the magazine M for Mirror – it’s linking two sides. We ran into the problem that we couldn’t distribute the magazine in the north once the negotiations in Vienna started [the most recent negotiations on the status of Kosovo], but here you have to find ways. CBM has decided to stay here in this location regardless of the status [of Kosovo]. In the north we are also supporting a center for women. They received many threats from men, but women guarded it. It’s a place for women to
sit and socialize and they also have a room for children. They hold workshops on psychological issues, gender issues, and gender problems. Also, we work with returnees, trying to create a dialogue with potential returnees. There have been many mistakes in the past of returning people with no preparation for them of how it will be. Lea and Flora are both very interested in what Valdete has discussed, but Valdete is a little pressed for time so Flora explains when the CFP will come out. Lea mentions that she would like to visit the women’s center in the near future and keep in contact with Valdete. (Fieldnotes)

Kvinna till Kvinna remains in the position of deciding which organizations to support, but by not imposing an agenda upon local organizations, they allow for multivocality and fuller participation to be part of the process. There is also an important connection to postcolonial feminism that can be seen in their field approach. By inviting such participation, Kvinna till Kvinna resists the notion of the other as merely an extension of self. This self articulation of needs rather than in terms of one’s own needs mitigates the tendency toward engaging difference for the purpose of seeing oneself better, a common enactment of a colonial stance (Narayan, 1997).

Communing and mutual implication was another important dimension of partner relationships. Hammond, Anderson, and Cisnna (2003) explained that communing involves communicative contextualizing of self and other as “the presence of one person serves to define the other’s role, and vice versa” (p. 134). The role of Kvinna till Kvinna as feminist donor is dependent upon local organization’s roles as partners. This sense of mutuality was captured by Karin, field coordinator in Belgrade, who stated:
I think it’s – it is I think quite – it’s a quite close relationship. Maybe not in all cases. That varies a little bit. I think because of the long-term commitment and because of our presence and because of our ambition or attempt to be with the organizations a lot in their faces and in their activities. I think that kind of provides the exposure that is how I think unusual if you would compared maybe with other donor organizations. And I think we are – we want to be a partner of other – I mean, yes, we do provide funds but it’s we’re also – I mean because of the way we work like with using a lot of the information and the examples from work and from the organizations in our own organizational development, in our development of methods, in our reports and in our democracy work. Somehow I think that in one sense also makes this partner relationship a bit more real. I think that it’s not that we – and I think we do sort of communicate that a lot that we need their expertise and their experience a lot in order to do our work and in order to get better and I think that’s something that they feel, that we do really think that they have a lot of things to contribute and I think that’s maybe important to balance them in our relationship.

Karin expressed the need for partner’s knowledge in order to do their own work, and how that knowledge and experience also is translated into their own organizational development. Communing in this case involves not only mutual implication, but a respect for local, situated knowledges. As Harding (1998) argued, “Knowledge systems, any knowledge systems, always are constituted initially through a set of local conditions” (p. 182). Some of those systems gain traction in other contexts and become cloaked in a
mantle of “universality” (i.e., Western science and technology which drives much development work). However, attending to marginal local knowledges that have not traditionally had this type of “movability,” does not position them as more correct, but instead seeks to understand the unique set of oppressive structures these women face and their resources for resisting them.

Communing in these dialogic partnerships extends beyond respect and attention to local knowledges for instrumental reasons. Rather, it’s part of the collaborative enactment of caring about local conditions and concern for the future. During my time in Sarajevo, I traveled with Esther, a field coordinator, and Lovisa, the home coordinator for Bosnia-Herzegovina from Sarajevo to Bratunac to visit the organization Forum Zena (Women’s Forum). On the way there, Esther explained that she had heard that there was concern with a local festival being planned by the municipality, which is run predominantly by Serbian officials.

Esther opens by asking Efiza to tell her more about the situation with the funeral. There is a Serbian cultural festival next week sponsored by the municipality and at the same time a Muslim funeral has been planned for 114 victims of war who were recently exhumed from a mass grave. The date of the funeral, May 12\textsuperscript{th}, is significant because it marks an anniversary of the war. Esther asks if the municipality can cancel that day’s festivities out of respect. Efiza says that the situation has turned ugly, “I feel sick.” She is worried there will be violence, the municipality has already started setting up for the festival. “These people [Internally Displaced Persons, in this case, Muslim families] couldn’t wait to
come back to their homes. And there is no way to be mixed by events sponsored by the municipality.” Esther also expresses concern for the situation and discusses different options with Efiza for how Forum Zena might intervene. Efiza explains that they have a woman from their organization who is working on this issue with a committee in the municipality and she is at a meeting right now, so hopefully they will hear from her before the day is over. Esther asks that they please keep her updated. (Field Notes)

Although the festival was not directly connected to Kvinna till Kvinna’s support of Forum Zena, it was an event that affected their partnership because of its strong impact on Efiza and the other women of the organization. This conversation represented a dialogic moment, a poignant flash of the ongoing process of dialogic relationships (Cissna & Anderson, 1998; see also Heath, 2007). Out of these dialogic moments, partnerships emerge as a form of associated living that is similar to Dewey’s (1916/1944) conception of a democratic community.

Partner relationships were also characterized by a great deal of openness and respect. These values were explicitly discussed as well as implicit in acts of listening and discussion. Milica from partner organization Zena na Delu in Belgrade explained,

…for example, when we talk with them [Kvinna till Kvinna], it’s like I like this conversation of what to do. They really have like maybe you’re thinking about this problem. I think this is really good when your donors can help you also to -- your project be better or thinking about -- I like this communication and projects with… I like completely. They really be open and give directions to help you, not
to leave you and then ask you like after like why you not put this or this. They’re really like willing to be open.

Openness involves listening to the other and allowing the space for each to voice genuinely their concerns and needs from their specific place of existence (Hammond, Anderson, & Cissna, 2003). For Buber, this was an important aspect of being rather than seeming. These partnerships open up the space for each party to be authentic with each other rather than to fall under the pressure to seem the perfect partner.

The dimension of voicing also foregrounds the process of doing empowering relationships rather than emphasizing the end goal of empowerment (Ashcraft, 2001). Karin provided the following example from her relationship with partner Bona Fide in Montenegro.

Like for example with the case of Bona Fide. We haven’t cooperated through that for many years but I think still in those cases I think that they maybe also see that someone that they – like somehow you support your friend or something like that. I mean someone that they can ask for advice from or that they can communicate quite open with. Because I think all we’re trying to stress is that it’s okay to make mistakes or its okay not knowing how to do things as long as there is some communication about it. Then I think that our partners feel that. That they can sort of always – that they can contact us or that they can talk to us when there are things that are not going the way they should be. Better then trying to cover it up and pretend that everything is okay. That’s something that I think is very important in that relationship.
Authentic empowering relationships are built upon the notion that the space and concern for voicing is vital to enacting collaboration.

Although I have highlighted the crucial role of the field coordinator in enacting presence, it is important to also recognize that dialogic relationships do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are situated in interconnected historical and social contexts and although Kvinna till Kvinna has a field model that supports the emergence of such relationships, each is unique and not entirely replicable by using the same model across different contexts. This idea represents the notion of flowing, that “persons in dialogue are connected not just with each other, but also with a history, a place, and a future” (Hammond et al., 2003, p. 134). Karin, a field coordinator, recognized this when she stated,

I can feel the history, or Kvinna till Kvinna and the history of the presence of Kvinna till Kvinna in my work. That others before me have established this kind of partnership. I mean it wasn’t something that I needed to build up but you somehow you just take over this tradition or you take over this kind of quite close and honest relationship.

Partnerships are built over time and their history will continue to influence their unfolding.

Each of the relational dimensions discussed thus far have emphasized the balanced nature of dialogic relationships. Several, though, have recognized the need for attention on tensionality inherent in dialogue as well as power relations. For example, Heath (2007) drew upon Habermas’ theory of communicative action to argue that
dialogue can function as critique of power. Hammond et al. (2003), on the other hand, argued that the relationship between dialogue and power needs further exploration but their treatment of dialogic tensions suggests that an analysis of how power surfaces is separate from an analysis of the distinguishing forms of dialogue (i.e. communing, voicing, flowing). My analysis of partnerships suggests that negotiating is a key component of dialogic relationships and overlaps with other relational dimensions. Kvinna till Kvinna was keenly aware of its role as a donor, even as they tried to equalize partnerships through presence. Britt, a home coordinator who had previously worked as a field coordinator, explained:

…it’s a difficult balance between being actually in charge of a lot of money and being the one that decides about money and also, at the same time, being a discussion partner and someone that can actually -- that women’s organizations can actually trust and have as a -- yeah, it becomes -- I mean if you stay for 3-4 years, you become a friend. But you have to be able to balance that somehow because you will always be the one who decides about the money, which is -- and if you don’t acknowledge that, you will get a problem. I think if you’re not aware that you actually have that power, then it can be personally difficult I think for those who work as field coordinators.

In development work, money translates into power. Within Kvinna till Kvinna partnerships, these imbalances are experienced in terms of decisions that get made about who and what to support. Ultimately, Kvinna till Kvinna bears the responsibility for making such decisions, even though they are borne out of open communication with
partners and their participation in the process. These decisions bring to bear the tension
between convergent and emergent outcomes.

Another aspect of negotiating is evident in exploring the control aspect of
presence. Presence is enacted upon principles of trust, accountability, and respect, yet
those principles also rest on the notion that presence enables Kvinna till Kvinna to
monitor partners more closely than in other relationship forms.

We have fewer partners, so there is a closeness which creates a very good
relationship. And it’s not only the closeness, we really know our organizations, if
there are problems, we would find out. That’s not the main reason to be close of
course, we trust the organizations a lot, but we are also so close – we notice
everything. (Interview, Ella)

As Ella expressed, closeness involves transparency that might not otherwise exist.

Although negotiating power is an ever-present feature of partnerships, to offer
only critique of power relations would not do justice to their dialogic character. Instead, I
use negotiating to capture how power is constantly being worked out in partnerships, but
the fact that power inequalities exist does not automatically negate other salient features
such as trust, nor do they ultimately disable feminist organizing (Ashcraft, 2001). Britt, a
field coordinator, shared:

And I think many of the organizations would say that they trust us very much.
Not only in that we keep on funding them, but they trust us that even if we cannot
fund them, we would discuss it with them and together with them decide how it
would be done when we cannot finance their projects anymore. And I think they trust our belief in them sort of and I think that’s really important.

In sum, the relational accomplishment of partnering with local organizations is usefully examined through the concept of presence. In dialogue theory, presence involves turning toward each other. Among Kvinna till Kvinna and its partners, presence is accomplished through both structuring the organization so that there is a physical proximity or field presence and by drawing upon dialogic and feminist sensitivities in relating.

“A Theme is Less Important than the Opportunity to Meet:” Networking a Community

“We don’t believe in creating a network, but we believe in networking.” (Camilla, Interview Transcript)

One of the major roles that Kvinna till Kvinna plays in post-conflict regions is networking by linking organizations to each other and providing the mobilizing resources that are needed for them to come together to share experience, exchange knowledge, offer support, and strategize about how to further the goals of women’s movements and peace initiatives. As Camilla explained above, Kvinna till Kvinna is not concerned as much with creating a formal network, but rather, they are more interested in networking, a dynamic interactive process. The focus of this section is on how that process is carried out and how it specifically relates to broader goals of feminist organizing. Networking by Kvinna till Kvinna and partners creates an open, collective space where empowerment, participation, movement, and the circulation of knowledges emerge as both products of networking and as significant parts of the process itself. This focus mirrors a similar
move by Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber (2006) who argued that collective action is primarily a communication phenomenon that attunes us to what people do and how they communicate rather than on the organizational structure (i.e. network).

During a visit I participated in with partner Bona Fide, Sabina, the leader, shared some of their experiences in working with Kvinna till Kvinna. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes.

Sabina went on to say that, “what is so important in our relationship with Kvinna till Kvinna is the environment they create, their concern with the women’s groups they support, and we’ve now grown into an information network. We can contact them at any time, for information, experience, if we need training. We are women who are poor (referring to women of Pljevlja), activists can provide support - it is very important - empowering women.” Karin interrupts to say that it is important to recognize that there is a history of activism here, it has not just sprung up in the past two years as a result of their cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna. My impression is that she is trying to deflect some of the gratitude and attention away from Kvinna till Kvinna and back on the women here who have been working as activists for many years, even before they formed the organization Bona Fide. (Fieldnotes)

Empowerment is a specific articulated value for Kvinna till Kvinna, as evidenced by their slogan “Women’s Empowerment Projects.” Their work does involve directly supporting such projects; however, as a set of communicative practices, empowerment is also accomplished through daily activities. Sabina speaks of how Kvinna till Kvinna’s
partners have grown into an information network and throughout my time there, I witnessed how the access to information and the ability to exchange ideas and news freely and openly was empowering. As Belgrade partner Zena na Delu defined it, “That moment when we admit to ourselves that we know what we want and that we can, is the moment hidden in the term empowerment. From that moment on, reality changes and becomes the field of wide possibilities and choices” (Zena na Delu).

Information becomes empowering for these women as it expands the choices they are able to make about control over their own bodies, political views, and the ability to change their lives. However, information exchange through networking in this case involves specific embodied acts of coming together physically in time and space – specific moments of empowerment. In particular, Kvinna till Kvinna helps coordinate network meetings that range from thematically-based seminars, to “open-space” meetings, to study-trips to Stockholm. This embodied dimension is important, especially in post-conflict areas when the opportunity to travel outside of a conflict zone is in itself emancipatory. MaryAnn, field coordinator for Israel and Palestine, explained,

…last year, we had a big – we were working very hard on strengthening our role as a networking – supporting networking things, and networking between the organizations. And I think that – the two major – or the two big meetings that we arranged showed – between our partners, showed that there's an incredible demand for this. And they – their – well, you know, because of all the restrictions on movement and the difficulties for partners to meet with each other, that's
something that we can actually work much more on. So that's, you know, I think what we will be focusing much more on from now on.

Although much important work in communication on the network as an organizational form has emphasized its capacity for handling emerging technologies (e.g., DeSanctis & Fulk, 1999; Hecksher & Applegate, 1994), Kvinna till Kvinna provides a counter-example as to why networking extends beyond impersonal and institutional modes of interaction and engagement (Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006; see also Dempsey, 2007).

I took part in one such network meeting in Sarajevo that was organized around the theme of Sexual and Reproductive Rights. The meeting was held over a course of three days and involved women partners from across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Keynote speakers included Nada Ler, “the most famous feminist in Bosnia” (Natalie, Interview), Maja Mumillo from Women’s Center in Zagreb, Croatia, and Mirsad Tokaca, from the Research Documentation Center in Sarajevo. In addition, partners held a roundtable discussion with Kvinna till Kvinna, Lovisa, the home coordinator, and Esther and Natalie, the two field coordinators in Sarajevo. Over this intense weekend, many ideas, experiences, and expertise were shared among the group. During a closing roundtable remark session, Nada Ler commented “The result of this seminar is that we are more equipped and more armed in understanding that we have control of our bodies. I would like to congratulate the organizations and participants.” Another participant remarked, “I constantly questioned my attitude with regard to sexuality. I really discussed many things with myself, so thank you.” In this way coming “together in one space” (MaryAnn,
Interview) enables personal empowerment as information gives way to learning about self and other.

Networking also allows for collective empowerment as participants recognize and understand that they are part of a larger feminist movement that extends beyond national boundaries. As Mjelina, a member of AWIN in Belgrade shared, “And its important for me to be part of a movement. It means that you’re not alone in what you see, you have support – it’s a generator of energy.” At times, this energy is much needed as women’s organizations become tired and burnout becomes a harsh reality. Milica, from partner Zena na Delu explained,

…the thing I like is every year there is a network meeting and the discussion over the agenda of the meeting is very alive and I guess it’s the end of the year and we’re very tired, that they do take care to raise up some important questions. Not innate things like, we have a nice agenda and just spending two or three days together. It’s just what are the needs of those organizations and needs of the women that they are working in those – I think this is good.

One empowering aspect of belonging to a movement is the ability of that collective identity to regenerate and strengthen organizations in ways that they could not have accomplished on their own. These networking activities track with an overall trend in global feminist organizations to seek network connections that supersede national identities. As Moghadem (2005) explained in her in-depth case study of transnational feminist networks, “The idea that the world’s women could contribute something different - a distinctive critique of states, policies, and international institutions and an
alternative vision for the home, the country, and the world – was the guiding light behind the formation of TFNs” (p. 89).

In addition to gaining a sense of being part of a movement larger than oneself, or one’s organization, networking also allows for opportunities for collective resistance to emerge. During the network meeting in Sarajevo, participants broke into small groups with women from organizations different than their own to strategize how they might develop and implement campaigns around sexual and reproductive rights and drawing upon each other’s shared resources and knowledge. Each group then presented their ideas to the whole group.

*Group 1:* Education aimed at men and women, campaign to change legislation, a media campaign, and research on the issue. (Maja Mumilla jokes that this is probably a little too ambitious.)

*Group 2:* Our working title for this project is “She-Woman”. We will use the research that others have done, because that is not their expertise to create TV shows and a series of Vagina workshops. Also, they will create peer education programs for schools and mobile teams to go to rural areas. They would also like to create a manual and curriculum in cooperation with all of you (other partners).

*Group 3:* Advocacy for international sexual education in primary schools – instead of religious studies (this gets much applause). Their main goal is to introduce sexual/reproductive education and make it part of the curriculum.

*Group 4:* We started with the assumption that only a healthy woman can enjoy sex, so we would like to conduct research into the health rights of women.
Group 5: Our focus will be on education and the problem of the lack of information about sexuality. So we created a detailed plan for workshops, and then getting feedback from participants and their evaluation.

These presentations seem to energize the audience; there is a lot of applause and laughter throughout. (Fieldnotes)

Cooperation in this way can lead to new strategies for resistance that extend beyond reactionary and potentially result in transformative strategies created from a grassroots perspective (Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005). These proposed projects are ambitious, but as Esther, the Kvinna till Kvinna field coordinator joked good heartedly during this session, “now we’re going to get 15 proposals on sexual and reproductive rights” (Field Notes). Proposals become projects that, with long-term support, have the potential to create change – change that is enabled, in part, through identification with a larger women’s movement.

Much has been written about network forms of organizing and their fit with practicing feminist values such as equality, democracy, inclusion, and egalitarian leadership rather than hierarchal structures (Moghadem, 2005). In the case of Kvinna till Kvinna, networking is conducive to practicing these values, but their networks differ from those most commonly featured in research on TFNs (Moghadem, 2005; Dempsey 2007), such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR), and Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI). First, Kvinna till Kvinna’s networking activities grew out of close, long-term relationships with specific organizations in post-conflict regions. Second, although
they do networking, and link organizations to each other that in turn form networks, they remain a formal organization. The function of networking is less about adaptability in this face of globalization and technological change than about further strengthening the access to resources and support available to women in post-conflict areas. However, networking remains a primary way to facilitate participation and voice among members, core feminist values and practices.

Participation is facilitated through networking by both formally adopting methods that privilege participation and by informally inviting multiple voices to be heard in everyday practices. Formally, Kvinna till Kvinna has utilized an “open space” method for some of its network meetings. MaryAnn shared,

..whereas in Jordan, we sort of – together with the groups, we had planned a program, and we had a very sort of – the method that we used was this open space forum. What is it called? Open space meeting? Open space? You know the methods, but it's basically – I mean, I've only done it this once. I've participated in a meeting once which had sort of open space. And basically, about the groups defining what the issues are. And it's a very sort of open – it's a way of sort of opening up the discussion to make it more like a coffee – the idea, the theory behind it is that too many conferences that are – have a set of agenda, and the interesting, the dynamic discussions take place during coffee breaks, when people can move around and speak freely and sort of – so it's built on that. And there's a whole sort of set of steps, how to do it, so it's actually quite sort of structured. But still, within that, there's a lot of space for people to set the agenda. And that was a
very successful method at that point. We were all extremely pleased with it. And the partners also really appreciated the way it was organized, because they felt they sort of – and the evaluations were overwhelmingly things like, you know, this – that this showed respect, and that this kind of was a sort of truly feministic way of doing this, and so on. So the method itself was very important.

This open space format was built around the idea that a theme was less important than allowing issues and topics to emerge from the group. Besides allowing for participants to own the process, this free exchange of ideas promotes equality among network members. As Boriana put it, “…networking is our ground basic method. Providing space for exchange of experiences…If you want to provide equal relationship between you and your partners you have to meet in a ideological forum.”

Even when a formal, “open space” method is not taken in network meetings, meetings are often built upon direct feedback from and discussion with partners. MaryAnn reflected upon how feedback garnered from a study visit to Stockholm in November led to a regional network meeting the following spring.

…after the week in Stockholm, everyone agreed that they wanted to meet more. They wanted to meet to actually get to know one another better…I think that's what sort of the conclusion was, that they needed more space. They needed time and space to meet one another.

Constant feedback from partners plays a vital role in Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing practices as they strive to enact the view “they [partners] are the ones who decide the needs” (Lena, interview).
Coming together in these times and spaces, though, is not an uncontested process. Milica, a partner member in Belgrade offered the following concern about network meetings:

But I think these network meetings that Kvinna till Kvinna is -- I just think Kvinna till Kvinna is missing one great opportunity that they’re the only ones that have the opportunity. Like yesterday’s agenda and we discuss it because sometimes they try for these network meetings also to do some training and stuff. Like sometimes it turns out to be really unnecessary and I think being the feminist donor and having the relationship they have with the organizations, they have possibility to organize the network meetings where we would actually discuss stuff. Like of course you do have moderated discussions but we don’t have to learn about the advocacy because we’re working in this field or whatever -- you know like strategic planning. I think they have a unique possibility that they as a donor organize the network meetings where we will discuss, you know like really feminist politics openly and stuff like that. That happened on the last network meeting. Like Kvinna till Kvinna organized this study visit for partners… the experiences of women, you know like coming back from Sweden were amazing. And it was really important to discuss different issues from political participation to culture to help. They were bringing a lot of impressions but the certain part was advocacy training. I was really frustrated. Because for me it was really important to hear how it was in Sweden, what where the impressions. Discussions had started around different issues was really great. I don’t think any donor could
organize stuff and get that sort of openness in discussions…we don’t need training. We need place for feminist discussions for discussing politics because organizations change. I mean we do cooperate with a lot of organizations but still we are always meeting some piece of information…still there is information that you’re missing or you don’t know or you just want to discuss what’s bothering you at the moment and what are the experiences we have around different issues. So I think network meetings of Kvinna till Kvinna could be a great opportunity for that. And the last meeting I was really happy and now advocacy and blah.

Milica expressed both optimism and frustration about the transformative potential of Kvinna till Kvinna’s networking activities. Having been a partner to Kvinna till Kvinna for eleven years, and an experienced organization, Milica felt that advocacy training was a misuse of valuable time.

The network meeting in Sarajevo, one that did have a predetermined theme (Sexual and Reproductive Rights) provided another poignant example of how feedback was used in planning. In this case, though, it was attention to the silence surrounding certain issues rather than their explicit articulation. The opening day of the meeting began with a presentation by Mirsad Tokac, Director of the Research and Documentation Center. He presented a victim’s of war database that would soon be available to the public. Natalie, field coordinator in Sarajevo discussed the motivation for including this presentation together with a weekend seminar on sexual and reproductive rights.

I’m very happy of the seminar for example now. Because we’ve discussed this for the past – almost since I started. How do we bring up the conflict again?
Because it’s like it’s sleeping under surface and getting difficult to speak with partners – it was a big step in terms of them sitting in the same room here and sharing information, which is supposedly quite neutral in terms of what happened. Because they are not – they don’t have the same ideas about this at all. And it was important, but also hopefully it will be able to generate more discussions about it. And the other part was to bring up the reproductive issues, to help start discussion, which we weren’t sure. We are quite convinced that it’s absolutely necessary that they start to address it again and the reason was that almost none of our partners do that anymore. They used to do a lot more of that, but it sort of disappeared from the agenda. At the same time that now things are moving backward in society in regards to that they – we were trying to encourage them to remember because it’s very basic in terms of women’s rights. It’s a very basic thing. If you don’t have access or information to that, where do you go?

In their boundary spanning role, Kvinna till Kvinna is able to spark conversations that might otherwise be controversial by “clearing the space” (Mari, Interview). As one participant claimed in the closing roundtable comments to this meeting,

“When I saw the agenda, it seemed odd, but now I understand. When the presentation yesterday [by Mirsad Tokac] was given in Bijelena, I didn’t go, because we want to avoid these issues. Now I’m sorry that I didn’t go, I think his attitude was misinterpreted in the local media. But hopefully I will have the chance to go again. (Field Notes)
Another way to understand networking is to examine how it fits with Kvinna till Kvinna’s strategy of maintaining a long-term perspective in its work. Networking cultivates knowledge and experience that remains after formal funding relationships have ended. For example, during my field work, Kvinna till Kvinna was facing the withdrawal of funding from SIDA in the Balkan region (with the exception of Kosovo). They were working on a four year phase out plan for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and one-year phase out plan for Montenegro. This was discussed openly in meetings with partners, and partners were asked to provide ideas for what might be most beneficial to them to make the withdrawal successful.

Karin opens by saying that “your report was very good, so I feel very well-informed, but it’s always nicer to hear from you. I’d like to hear more from you about a few things, but maybe it’s better if I talk first about the future support situation. There are still no 100% complete answers, but we have a preliminary answer – and that is that there will be funding for one more year, 2008. Unfortunately, we as Kvinna till Kvinna think it would be important to have a few more years – you also know unfortunately how dependent we are on SIDA. We are discussing with them that we think it is an unrealistic situation to exit in one year. We would like to get feedback from you about the next year of support. We will continue to work with the 4 orgs in MNE, but is there something bigger we can do? Like, for an example organize an international meeting, a networking meeting. Or, is it that we could help with fundraising for future support, maybe
that is the most important. Do you hear this news from others that donors are leaving?”

Ljupka: “No…some donors are coming, some are leaving, but the general impression is that NGOs are less strong than before. Some are using the municipality for support, if they are friendly toward the municipality – but we will not, because we collected signatures (for a petition to oust politician Beba Džakuvić) and the mayor of this town is from the same party as her.”

Karin says to me, “this is a general problem, that funds are only given to humanitarian organizations. And those that are critical in any way, such as this one, receive none. Ljupka goes on to talk about how they are good at educating, not organizing for funding. (Field Notes)

Ella, field coordinator in Belgrade, responded in a similar way when I asked her what she thought were the most important priorities for the withdrawal phase in Serbia and Montenegro.

In Serbia, we need to focus on holding a lot more network meetings. They are asking for the opportunity to get together and talk – an open space for them to talk also with other orgs who are not partners, because they could open up the discussion in a new way. We have invited other orgs before to talk about certain topics. This needs to be a space for strategizing and planning and to come up with joint actions.

These joint actions will hopefully lead to a strengthened women’s movement that can draw upon the network for information, energy, and support even after Kvinna till
Kvinna no longer formally operates in the country. This aspect of networking – that it can be a responsible approach to sustainable development and capacity building, has been overlooked in theorizing about the benefits of such an organizational structure. A commitment to sustainability, along with respect for local knowledges are at the core of why Kvinna till Kvinna links organizations to one another and provides the conditions and resources for their own strategies of resistance to emerge.

Kvinna till Kvinna has been successful in their networking strategies (for example, a strong network remains in Croatia even though Kvinna till Kvinna has withdrawn from the country) in part because of their willingness to de-center themselves in the process. Camilla touched on this when she talked about a recent network meeting for the Caucasus region:

In the Caucasus we recently held a meeting in Istanbul, where women could meet, you know “talking with the enemy.” Out of this came a network. There were coordinated actions out of one meeting. In the end, we can come up with topics, but a theme is less important than giving them the opportunity to meet.

We don’t believe in creating a network, but we believe in networking. Kvinna till Kvinna is a vital link, a boundary-spanner, for women’s organizations in the areas where they work. However, the way they enact networking embodies feminist ideals of both cooperative enactment and egalitarianism in that they recognize their role in relationship to their partners. This suggests that the process of networking is more important than the end product of creating a network and that leaving behind the
conditions for further networking is more important than creating a network “hole” that disables the process upon their withdrawal.

Re-membering: Resisting Invisibility and Reconstructing Culture

Another question from the audience, “What about suicides that have increased since the war?” The speaker responds that for now, the time frame is fixed, and again they are only dealing with direct losses. So, even people who have died from mine explosions after 1995 are not included in the database. He goes on to talk about the importance of creating a “culture of remembrance” and how this can be done in many different ways – science, culture, artists, performance, etc... A participant comments, “We are always going back, we are all victims of war. The neo-nationalistic statements are stopped now, because the figures are inflated – they don’t get to go into those figures anymore...so I’m glad for your information, it’s important.” (Fieldnotes – Network Meeting in Sarajevo)

As I took part in various meetings with partner organizations, learned about activities supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, and experienced the various ways networking occurs, I came to understand that a large part of Kvinna till Kvinna’s support contributes to reconstruction by re-membering public discourse with and about women and their unique experiences in conflict and post-conflict. The opening excerpt from my field notes took place at the Sarajevo network meeting during a presentation by Mirsad Tokač from the Research and Documentation Center Sarajevo (RDC). He presented his work with the RDC on creating a database of victims of war, the result of three years of intense research efforts. This example, which provides an anchor for this theme, illustrates how this is
done explicitly by supporting and promoting efforts to (re)create a culture of remembrance at the network meeting. There are also, though, many less explicit ways in which cultures of remembrance are being produced through purposive acts by partners. I have chosen the term re-membering in order to emphasize that it is an active and dynamic process that involves political choices to create space for marginalized and denied subjectivities to emerge (Myeroff, 1982; see also Adelman & Frey, 1997; Aden et al., in press). Moreover, re-membering can be understood as a specific feminist endeavor as it engenders feminist principles of voice, care and support, connectedness, and the value of alternative knowledge frameworks such as aesthetic and personal experiences. In this section, I explain how the process of re-membering unfolds through acts and discourses that facilitate healing, resists invisibility and erasure, and reclaims subjectivities otherwise denied in post-conflict.

Re-membering involves both collective and individual identities. From a collective perspective, re-membering is a symbolic and material process connected to public and collective memory, which during post-conflict is an especially contentious and sometimes volatile discursive terrain. Rhetorically oriented studies of collective and public memory have acknowledged that memory is fragmented, contested, and always unfinished. In post-conflict contexts, debating public memory of war and violence is often rife with rhetoric of blame and condemnation. Further, memory has significant consequences on the present moment, as individuals make sense of present lived circumstances by debating memory (Blair, 2006; Blair & Michel, 2007; Zelizer, 1995).
An example of this can be found in a conversation I had over dinner with Gordana and Mira, two of the network meeting participants and partners.

At dinner, I sit with Lena, Gordana, and Mira. Lena speaks in Bosnian with them and translates for me. We talk about the food, weather, etc…and then the conversation turns to Tito (I guess both women to be in their mid to late 50s). Today is the anniversary of Tito’s death, which was May 4, 1980. Gordana tells of how her workplace would send roses to Tito every year on his birthday. Mira points to a plant next to our table and says that this was Tito’s favorite plant, except with more white on it. They had to learn all of this in school. They then say that times were not bad, he watched over the country, and they could travel freely then. Later Lena and I talk about the nostalgia for Tito’s time and communism. She says that this is hard for her to understand, but at the same time, maybe things were more stable in a way.

Their present living circumstances in Bosnia-Herzegovina are held up for comparison and contrast against memories of life under the former communist era. This example also illustrates the ways in which memory, and by extension re-membering, are inherently narrative processes. Chronology and coherence play central roles in re-storying the past in order to make sense of the present.

Again, it is worth emphasizing that narrativizing experiences is particularly charged with political meaning during post-conflict and carries with it the risk of re-igniting hatreds and revealing vulnerabilities (e.g., rape victims who are cast out of families once they return home). However, such narrative acts also harbor the potential to
contribute to the peace process. As individuals re-member, they can contest master narratives of nationality and culture that are often used to justify conflict, and/or deny one’s own role in perpetuating the conflict. From the perspective of individual identity, narrative acts of re-membering are an integral part of the arduous healing process in the aftermath of personal devastation and trauma. These personal narratives function as a way to forge connections with others, thereby rebuilding the capacity to trust others and reweave the social fabric of torn and battered community life so that peace might be sustained (Miller, Geist Martin, & Beatty, 2005).

In the Balkans, Kvinna till Kvinna has a history of directly supporting work that facilitates the healing process. When they first entered the region in 1992, some of the first groups they supported were involved in providing psychosocial support. Their position is that health and wellbeing are essential in order for women to be able to participate in the rebuilding of society, so psychosocial support is necessary. Take for example, the story of partner organization Horizonti, located in Tuzla (BiH), and its founder, Mira. She explained to me, “I remember in very beginning I was also very, very cruel and I didn’t sit just close to enemy. You know, war is something that made me - psychologically, physically, emotionally - in every part of life.” In this honest reflection, Mira acknowledged that war affected her life and identity wholly and as a result relating to “the enemy” was impossible. Her organization, Horizonti, provides psychosocial support to women and families in Tuzla. It started out of efforts to use her (and others) training in psychology to offer help during the conflict. Mira expressed,
It was hard to be just psychotherapist in beginning of the war because people needed food, clothes, more than psychotherapy. Because they [aid agencies] couldn’t believe that psycho troubles are in front of food, clothes, a place for living, but we just decided to be professional in our job. That was hard in very beginning, but very soon realized that it’s good… So we started with refugees, women and children, but very soon realized that in war, all people also need psychological help. And we started to be psychological center and we worked on PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder, and we supported men when they came home after war.

With the support of Kvinna till Kvinna, Horizonti was able to continue and expand upon its support services. Tuzla was host to thousands of refugees during the war and several refugee camps were established near the city. The relationship between refugees and the natives of Tuzla was not an easy one. As Mira explained,

It was all hard times when people – refugees people and domiciled people [natives of Tuzla] had some kind of argue – some kind of bad relationship. Because refugees people had food, clothes, but domiciled nothing. And…food was just for refugees people. And refugees people, they’re jealous of us because we had flat, house. You know? So Kvinna started with gathering refugees and domiciled women naturally. It wasn’t that bad I think, but it was something became less and less bad and more and more good.

Bringing these two groups together allowed Horizonti to broaden their support services and facilitate the ongoing mending of broken society. Individual healing is also facilitated
through the services that Horizonti provides in individual and group counseling that attends to the personal experiences of conflict. Today, Horizonti operates as a psychological center that supports women and also works with youth in promoting nonviolence.

Another way in which Kvinna till Kvinna supports collective and individual healing is in its advocacy work. In 2002, Kvinna till Kvinna published the report *War Is Not Over With The Last Bullet: Overcoming Obstacles in the Healing Process for Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Cullberg Weston, 2002). This report is the result of a study sponsored by Kvinna till Kvinna wherein 89 women were interviewed at seven different women’s centers providing psychosocial support across Bosnia and Herzegovina and including one in Croatia. Through a combination of excerpts of women’s personal narratives and societal statistics on women (i.e. economic factors), this report argues for the importance of long-term psychosocial support initiatives in post-conflict society – a position that “has not yet been universally embraced as a legitimate part of humanitarian assistance” (p. 13). The report, which is targeted to the international community, provides evidence for the effectiveness of psychosocial support and women’s centers in healing after war. Healing is bound up with the rebuilding process and the way in which rebuilding is approached will have a profound effect on individual, and community healing, which in turn impacts future nonviolence. Specifically, the report found that “To heal, women need a community setting where they can share their traumatic experiences, where they can rebuild trust, and where they are met with a warm, understanding atmosphere” (p. 58). By engaging in this research and making it available to the public,
Kvinna till Kvinna is advocating that attention be paid to the healing process and that resources be allocated to creating the space and support necessary for stories to be shared. Kvinna till Kvinna’s support of the healing process involves honoring and respecting the significant place of recollecting in order to renew oneself and others while at the same time fostering the active re-membering of public discourse about conflict by privileging women’s stories and lived experiences in their work.

Kvinna till Kvinna also supports numerous activities that seek to build a culture of remembrance by celebrating and reclaiming women’s unique societal and cultural contributions. In this way, re-membering is a political act that commemorates women’s achievements and resists the tendency for women to be rendered invisible. One example of this is partner organization Anima, which conducts a women’s studies course in the seaside city of Kotor, Montenegro. In addition to these courses, Ljupka, a founder and activist, has also been involved in public debates about women’s rights and in protesting local government that does not support gender equality and women’s rights. Ljupka recounted some of these activities during a meeting with Karin in Kotor:

Ljupka: (Laughs)… you see Karin, you don’t even need to ask questions. Anima is trying to collect 6,000 signatures, so far we have about 4,000. There are 2 types of NGOs, some are close to the government and others are independent. Not all women’s organizations are on board with this campaign. For example, we went to …to collect signatures and the women’s organizations there did not even help us. We’ve sent our suggestions for the constitution to the president of parliament. (Karin asks for a copy of this). And he gave us flowers. I wouldn’t accept them. I
said that we will accept flowers when we are accepted in the parliament. One woman was in support of this; another, she thought it was rude. The gender equality committee in parliament has never had a meeting, not once since they were formed.

Karin then asks about the televised debate that Ljupka participated in about abortion and women’s rights. The debate was with two priests (one catholic, one orthodox). Ljupka says she is satisfied because she did not give up, but that maybe she should have been even more aggressive. She says that the women’s movement gained more with the debate than the church did. She tells a story of a young girl who asked her mother what it was the priests were talking about on television. So, it was a chance for her to talk to her mother about abortion.

(Fieldnotes)

The emphasis on women’s studies and gender education provides an opportunity for women to gain knowledge of women’s unique contributions and experiences throughout history and contribute to re-storying national identities (an especially salient endeavor in newly independent nations).

However, gathering the resources to re-story national identities, politics, and histories, is not without significant struggle. Karin talked to me about how her concern for the sustainability of Anima after Kvinna till Kvinna’s withdrawal from Montenegro over the coming year. At a meeting with Lila, a UNIFEM representative in Podgorica, Lila and Karin expressed their joint concern for the organization.
Over lunch Lila talks about how things are going in the country – the big story right now is that the woman who has been elected to the parliament and is working with gender equality, Beba Đžaković, is actually speaking out against women’s rights (in particular, abortion). Lila also talks about Anima, the Women’s Studies program in Kotor we will be visiting tomorrow. She is doing a research project with them – collecting data from and about women – but she feels they are very difficult to work with. They want to do the research their way, and Lila is sure the results will not be adequate. She also says that she doesn’t know what will happen to them, because the program is unsustainable. Kvinna till Kvinna is supporting them, but they are having trouble raising additional funds. Karin listens to this and agrees, saying that changes need to be made to their program if they want to continue. They’ve tried to be “adopted” by a university department, but so far this has not worked. Also, Karin says that their class format, ten weekends, is too much, if they would do 2 or 3 week sessions during the summer, they could maybe get more students. The problem is that students come for the first and maybe second weekend, and then have difficulties making it all the way to Kotor every weekend. (Field Notes)

During our meeting with Ljupka and Eniva at Anima, they further discussed their difficulties with raising additional funds. Being a politically outspoken organization has had negative consequences for finding ‘sustainable’ funding through partnerships with municipal institutions and in Montenegro, “this is a general problem, that funds are only
given to humanitarian organizations. And those that are critical in any way, such as this one, receive none” (Karin, Fieldnotes).
Cure, a partner organization in Sarajevo, provides another example of how the preservation of public memories and the ongoing construction of cultural identities require the active participation of women in order for them to be included in those processes. I took part in a meeting with Daniela, Taida, and Amira of Cure, and Esther, Natalie, and Lovisa at the Sarajevo Kvinna till Kvinna office to discuss their current application for support and future plans.

The meeting begins with Cure presenting a certificate to Kvinna till Kvinna thanking them for their support last year. Lovisa then says that they would like to mostly hear from them, what their plans are for the coming year. Taida explains that they have also applied for funds from the Global Fund for Women to help
support PitchWise, a festival they’ve started in September that will be held on the 6th – 12th this year. In addition to the festival, their ultimate goal is to establish a multimedia center for women that is built by women. This would be unique, because, although there are shelters, there is no resource library for the women’s movement. There is no place for education on Herstory, the women’s movement, sex and gender, and active citizenship. Taida jokes that obviously the center will take much longer, unless Susan Sarandon opens it, but I haven’t heard back from her yet. Taida and Daniella talk about reviving the women’s movement and giving it a voice. (Fieldnotes)

By creating a resource library for the women’s movement, Cure is striving to re-member the public’s knowledge of national histories and identities. Further, they are resisting the consistent process of being rendered invisible as cultural resources have been destroyed during conflict (e.g. the burning of the National Library in Sarajevo during the war). Again, this is not without significant struggle. Later in the meeting, Lovisa explained that Kvinna till Kvinna would be phasing out of Sarajevo in the near future. Daniella expressed her concern with the lack of resources for such a project, exclaiming, “But this is why we want to do something that will last. Women keep being erased.”

Kvinna till Kvinna has sponsored and supported PitchWise (which means “harmonious chaos”), a street festival put on to commemorate the lives and achievements of women and to focus attention on the ongoing political struggles that women face. The website description of the festival reads:
PitchWise is rooted in the idea that the transformative power of art can mobilize an individual to make the needed changes in one's life without expecting dramatic transformations, but rather to find inspiration and strength in the process which is in itself the carrier of change. The aims of PitchWise are twofold – primarily to create a platform for networking and artistic exchange between artists, activists, and students, youth and other publics; while to ensure that achievements of women are visible and acknowledged, celebrating and empowering women worldwide. The festival of women arts offers a broad range of artistic events including performing and visual arts. It is a place for an academic exchange and a series of workshops that address activism for human rights. In gathering diverse audiences with activities such as exhibitions/art installations, concerts, performances, poetry readings, art making sessions, film screenings, lectures/discussions and street activism, PitchWise Festival is a unique space for sharing, exploring, exchanging ideas and networking. PitchWise – the first festival of women arts demonstrates the energy and power of art-driven individuals from all walks of life who are combining various artistic expressions with their personal sense of social responsibility, embracing fresh, vibrant and alternative reality in culture of BiH and the region.

Through PitchWise, public space in Sarajevo is re-membered through the activities of women and new cultural artifacts are created.

Finally, Kvinna till Kvinna facilitates re-membering that strengthens the capacity to understand differences and trust others. One example of this is found in activities that
both support and challenge the identity of victim. The presentation by Mirsad Tokac mentioned in the beginning of this chapter provides a compelling example of how “victim” can work as a common identity moniker that allows individuals to transcend their differences. During his presentation, entitled “Truth Now – Peace Forever,” Mirsad began with the statement that “we have all been victims of war” (Fieldnotes). Variations of this statement were made numerous times throughout his presentation. Further, he explained that “The need for this type of database and information is manifold – to aid in prosecution of war criminals, to keep memories of the victims, and to give people access to information.” In this way, such re-membering through an electronic database both is a way to commemorate victims and to seek retribution.

However, there are limits to the utility of recollection and in performing the narrative identity of victim. As one woman participant argued, “Some women are exhausted by giving statements – especially those who survived concentration camps, and very often were raped, they don’t want to talk about this anymore.” Although sharing war experiences with others can be integral to the healing process, there comes a point where the victim narrative overwhelms and subsumes other, alternative identities. As mentioned previously, Kvinna till Kvinna does directly support several organizations and activities (such as scheduling Tokac’s presentation at the network meeting) that actively acknowledge the conflict and provide resources for victims. They also, though, recognize that women rarely have the opportunity to play any other role than “victim” in master narratives of war and reconstruction. The healing process is an important way to change this – by providing women with the resources they need to regain the health and
wellbeing necessary to participate in rebuilding society. Another important part of this is to provide space for women’s stories of activism and political involvement to gain traction. Åsa, a head communication officer, discussed in an interview her ongoing project to influence public media and reporting on women in conflict areas.

As in all political work, we’re dependent on media. We want them to report on what we think is important, on what we do, and on what our organizations do. Women are not just victims – they are actors. And both good and bad actors, we don’t want to shy away from the fact that women also participate in conflict. But, women are seldom put in the role to talk as an expert. It’s always more “how are you doing,” more personal, and it’s so much smaller than what they really are. And it’s not showing reality, because we know that women are involved….And there is such a reliance on “official sources” – they’re overused, and they’re considered neutral…when everyone knows that they’re not. It’s important to use other sources, otherwise you’re not giving the whole perspective. And also – criticizing the dualism…there is never just two sides, what about civil society?

And “War Reporting” has it’s own language. For example he showed this clip of an expert talking about “mopping up pockets of resistance.” Well, what does that really mean? That means killing people, doesn’t it? And those who are opposing war are always made smaller and less significant – because there’s always only two sides. And they’re seen as biased and as having small interests. This goes with women – they’re seen as victims, so they are smaller than the conflict. There are no other roles for women other than refugees and rape victims. And we know
that women are doing the majority of work as members in organizations and that there is a strong gender aspect to Civil Society.

Kvinna till Kvinna has actively sought to create alternative roles for women by educating and lobbying the Swedish media through seminars and by producing its own reports on women’s experiences. *Voices From the Field: About Prosecution of Sexualised Violence in an International Context* (Öhman, 2004) is a Kvinna till Kvinna report that complicates the role of victim by arguing that the ways in which victims are reported upon has serious consequences on their wellbeing.

By supporting psycho-social services that facilitate healing, women’s studies initiatives, cultural festivals, and actively protesting global reporting on victim, Kvinna till Kvinna contributes to both re-membering women’s identities and re-membering the public sphere with women. These are political acts that function to resist invisibility and to create space for women’s voices and experiences to be heard. In doing so, culture is (re)created and contested.

“The nicest container in the neighborhood:” Resiliency through Displaced Organizing

*Today I go with Lea [Kvinna till Kvinna] and Flora and Vlora [UNIFEM] to the same type of meeting, but with a different Kvinna till Kvinna partner organization. The organization is Ruka Ruci and they are located just outside of Pristina in an area called Kosovo Polje. Lea has talked about this area as being totally excluded from the rest of society. It is a Serb enclave where the UN brought in containers for temporary housing for people after the war. Since that time, people have remained living in the containers and become more and more*
secluded from society. Lea mentions that it is a very depressed and depressing place. However, Ruka Ruci, the organization that is hosting the meeting, has the largest and nicest container in the neighborhood (Lea says this with a smile). We park the car behind one of the containers, and there are a few older people along with chickens wondering around. I try to take in the surroundings without appearing as if I’m staring, but it is a very different way of living from what I have seen in Pristina. We walk to Ruka Ruci (Lea was right, it is a bright shiny blue container compared to the white rusted ones that surround it) and we are greeted by five women, two of whom are from Ruka Ruci. On the table is a large spread of snacks and drinks (chips, candy, soda, juice). The meeting proceeds similar to the one we participated in yesterday, we begin with brief introductions and the Flora explains the CFP from UNIFEM (Vlora translates for me again). One of the women from Ruka Ruci explains what they do, she is a psychologist who also works in schools with youth on drug use. In Ruka Ruci, they have had a strong focus on educating girls about sexual health….

The meeting draws to a close and as we are leaving, I ask the two women from Ruka Ruci if I might take a picture of them in front of their sign outside. I do this and I also discreetly take a picture of the community, as I think there is a lot that can be said about organizing and space in Kosovo Polje. On the short ride back to Pristina, Lea, Flora, and Vlora talk about how excluded people here are and the problem with misinformation and a lack of information. Lea tells a story about how she organized a workshop in Pristina for all of Kvinna till Kvinna’s
partner orgs on financial reporting and she was trying to get the Serbian organizations to join. She offered to the women in Bright Future, in northern Mitrovica to drive and pick them up, bring them to the workshop, and then drive them back herself. They were afraid to come because they had seen news reports that Albanian soldiers were on the streets in Pristina grabbing anyone who they thought was Serbian. She told them this wasn’t true and asked what news station they were watching – they replied vaguely that it was “cable,” but Lea says that it had to be Serbian TV. Flora agrees that the Serbian media plays a strong role in feeding people’s fears that they are not safe to leave their Serbian neighborhoods. Lea is disgusted and says that Serbian people here are being used for political gain, when in the end Serbia does not provide any real support to these people. She has read of cases where Serbian families have moved from Kosovo to Serbia, only to be discriminated against in the extremely difficult job market and elsewhere and called “Kosovars.” (Fieldnotes)

In post-conflict areas, the spatial politics of exclusion and inclusion often become intensified in efforts to “keep the peace” and regulate geographical boundaries and movement of people through military presence and the use of border controls. Further, people experience displacement on multiple levels as lives are uprooted, history is ruptured, and one is forced to physically relocate for safety and survival during conflict. After the violence has subsided, returning “home” can take years, and for many, displacement becomes a constant state rife with anxiety about the future. In the example above, Kosovo Polje, a Serbian minority enclave outside of predominantly Albanian
Kosovo is not officially marked off by military checkpoints (as are other minority areas of Kosovo, see the example of Mitrovica later in this section). However, the area, and the Serbian minority, are excluded from mainstream society by spatial practices that function discursively and physically to control the movement and freedom of people and information. In this section, I explore how Kvinna till Kvinna, through its partner relationships, supports organizing for social change despite the chaos of displacement – a phenomena I call displaced organizing. Displaced organizing involves calling into question the rules of inclusion/exclusion that govern discursive practices and remaining resilient and hopeful about change despite exceedingly oppressive circumstances.

The relationship between space and discourse has been an ongoing central concern for poststructural and feminist scholars. McKerrow (1999) argued that space and time have largely been treated as physical dimensions that exert external influence on discourse. A more complex approach to space and time (termed space-time by McKerrow) reveals that space-time is inextricably linked with power and works to manage discursive practices. This is important for feminists, and others, working to understand underlying forces of oppression so that they might be changed. As McKerrow aptly stated:

Space-time structures life, and through that influence, affects discourse in unseen, unfelt ways. Understanding those ways is critical if we are to explore the freedom to be what we are not, to become what we yet have not thought. To do otherwise is to remain ensconced forever in the space-time of our present lived experience, entrapped
within discursive contours that are shaped by forces beyond our knowledge or influence. (p. 272)

Drawing upon the work of Lefebvre (1976; 1991), Foucault (1980; 1986), and Soja (1989; 1996), McKerrow proposed a framework for deconstructing space-time from a rhetorical perspective. I draw upon that framework in analyzing displaced organizing.

Kvinna till Kvinna has (and is) keenly aware of the importance of space and place in supporting women’s empowerment. The preface to their report To Make Room for Changes: Peace Strategies for Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Thomasson, 2006), reads:

After ten years of cooperation with the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina we now wish to highlight the strategies they are using to win back a normal life and prevent a new war from breaking out. It is striking that the key element in their work is access to space. (p. 5)

As a result of this study, Kvinna till Kvinna has embraced the perspective that their role in empowering women to regain control of their lives in post-conflict situations is to make room for change. Camilla espoused the view when she explained,

Our last report, To Make Room for Changes, was based on our 10 years in the area. There are regional differences among the women. For example, women would rather die than say they were feminists. And there were women who were very outspokenly not political. But what they were doing was political. For them it was humanitarian. The spaces that were created for safety – out of that came a lot of politics. Today there are many women politicians on the municipal level. The one thing that women
said they wanted to do that they couldn’t do – they wanted to go to cafés. They couldn’t do that, women only met in their homes. They had no public space. I think that that is the core of Kvinna till Kvinna, though its [that report] about Bosnia, it’s really at the heart of what we do. Help provide space for women.

Carving out spaces for women takes many different forms. From the perspective of McKerrow’s (1999) spatial types and dimensions framework, “making room” involves the production of the three categories of space: (1) spatial practice, (2) representation of spaces, and (3) spaces of representation. Spatial practices involve material space and the infrastructure produced to manage the use of space (e.g. Kvinna till Kvinna supports overhead costs for many organizations so that they can have “office space”).

Representations of space involves formal and informal discourse about and management of spatial practices. Mappings, or the drawing of official and nonofficial boundaries through discourse, are examples of representations of space. In the case of Kvinna till Kvinna, they organize their field work by regions and support members to participate in regional network meetings. Finally, spaces of representation involve “the creation of imaginary spaces…wherein escape from domination is possible” (p. 281). The “room for change” that Kvinna till Kvinna has many real dimensions in terms of material resources, but it is also metaphorical, imagined space that embodies hope for a better future. These are not discrete categories, and systems of domination and control can reach across each dimension, shaping their use and function. As Shome (2003) argued, space is central to the enactment of cultural power and to the politics of identity. I return now to the opening
example from Ruka Ruci in Kosovo to examine how spatiality shapes organizing and how organizing resists dominant spatial ideologies.

The women of Ruka Ruci, and their neighbors in the area of Kosovo Polje, have been displaced from their homes and are living in large metal storage containers as a result of the 1999 conflict in Kosovo. Although the containers were set up as a form of aid and support, it is not hard to see the indignity and difficulty associated with such conditions. Although the space is not officially regulated by the military or the UN, clearly there are discursive practices at work that keep people from venturing out of this isolated area. These “geographies of exclusion” (Sibley, 1995) are bound up with notions of difference and identity as the national and ethnic identities of “Serbian,” and “Kosovar/Albanian” construct the discursive borders surrounding Kosovo Polje. Just as these borders gain significance in representations of space (e.g. leaving the area is dangerous if you are a Serb), the spatial practice of moving people into containers structures and reinforces their social isolation (akin to the ghetto-ization of poverty stricken neighborhoods in the U.S.). Foucault, though, usefully reminds us of our complicity in constructing and abiding such systems of control. In the opening example, Lea speaks of her frustration with women in another Serbian neighborhood of Mitrovica who refuse to leave even when Lea has offered to personally escort them to a meeting.

It is also important to note that at the time of my fieldwork, Kosovo, existed in limbo in terms of its status as a nation. Autonomous, but not independent, the war torn region of Kosovo has been under the administration of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) since 1999. While I was there, women talked about the anxiety they were
experiencing regarding the impending vote in the UN security council regarding the status of Kosovo. During the meeting at Ruka Ruci, women discussed this and other hardships facing them:

The woman from Ruka Ruci discusses the difficult situation for youth in this area. They are left by themselves, there is no transportation available to them so that they can meet with other youth, all of which is contributing to alcoholism. She explains that many youth sit and drink in the village all day, they have no hope in their lives. The problem of unemployed families is also brought up – this adds to the despair that people feel. And then there is the issue of the status of Kosovo – “we feel as if we are living here on one leg. We don’t know if there will be conflicts after the status is decided.” (Field Notes)

However, what is remarkable about Ruka Ruci is that despite the impermanence and instability of both place and time, they are working to change their circumstances. The goal of the meeting I participated in was to generate ideas about how they might work together collaboratively with other organizations to further women’s rights and access to healthcare. Their boundaries of their isolated “container” have been reconfigured to allow for alternative futures to be imagined through the exchange of ideas and experiences – they have transformed it (with support) into space that represents the “room for change” Kvinna till Kvinna has recognized as a vital resource.
Image 3 – The women of Ruka Ruci

Image 4 – The neighborhood of Kosovo Polje
Another example of how inclusion/exclusion is interpreted through spatial practices involves the inclusion of men in the women’s movement. Also while in Kosovo, I attended a “men’s meeting” hosted by partner organization Aureola.

Today I go with Lea to a workshop that one of the partner organizations, Aureola, is holding. This is a “meeting for men” and Lea has talked about how she is really interested to see how they do these. This is the first one she has attended. Lea has arranged for a translator to come with us, Yllka, who meets us at the office a few minutes before we leave. We are the first to arrive at Aureola, and we are greeted by three women from Aureola, Anita, Haxhere, and Fikrije. Anita is leading the workshop and she seems very pleased that Lea is here. Lea asks how the men know about this workshop and Anita explains that they have invited men from the surrounding villages who they feel could influence others in some way. Slowly, small groups of men begin to arrive (we are in a large open room with chairs around the perimeter). I am surprised by the diversity in ages of the men, they appear to range in age from early twenties to late sixties. The seminar begins with 11 men, although 5 more join a little while later.

The seminar begins with introductions, the participants give their names and their line of work. In the group there is a Human Rights Activist, three teachers, a student and leader of a youth organization, a youth forum director, a student and radio journalist, a coordinator from the office of “Handicore” (handicap). Anita introduces the workshop by explaining that “this is not a lecture, you are the ones who should tell us from your point of view what is gender equality.” There are three concepts that form
the foundation of the workshop: gender equality, stereotypes, and relationships. We will also discuss the differences between sex and gender, which varies between families and cultures. We will discuss why we think men are more powerful (this is met with mild smiles around the room) and why it is that women are the ones taking care of the household and children and why it is that they are not suited for certain jobs. Now I would like to ask you to give your views as family members and as citizens, in an ideal Kosovo, what would society expect of boys and girls?

By inviting men into the discursive and physical space of the women’s movement in Kosovo, Aureola is reconfiguring both the representation of their meeting space so that men are allowed access. They are also reconfiguring the space of representation of the broader women’s movement – which is traditionally imagined to only be inhabited by women. Reconfiguring space in this way can disrupt the binary thinking of male/female and masculine/feminine, but it also can make Aureola (and by extension the women’s movement) vulnerable to the structures of patriarchy out of which the need for feminism emerged. As Camilla in Stockholm explained,

> I mean for me, I can say, it is very important that we are a women’s organization. That doesn’t mean to exclude – I mean I think it’s important to have a lot of contacts. Our department, for sure, can have a lot of contacts – with very male. I mean we do things together with the military. And that’s sort of extremely male…For me, our partner organizations – for me, they are the ones sort of trying to change the politicians that will be – many of them – male. A lot of them have had youth workshops. Also with politicians – to both have for male and female
politicians. I would always be a bit cautious with the mixed ones. With the ones that I’ve seen, women do not speak. So then you just created one more forum for the men to speak…Because I do like it more when they are separate. I also think you can challenge them in another way if they are separate – the men as well…and just strengthen them separately. And I think that is important, usually. And for us, I think it’s important to have that focus. Because otherwise, we will take on so much. We, ourselves, want to change the whole world. I think it will be difficult. But if we can sort of have the focus on women, I think in itself, that will also change a lot of men.

By reconfiguring space, Kvinna till Kvinnan and partners allow for room for change to take hold and for women’s movements to strengthen and gain traction. These spaces, though are not fixed and are open to reinterpretation as partners decide to whom to allow access. Space is implicated in power as it functions as a resource for organizing and creating community in the face of displacement and allows for new spaces to be imagined that otherwise would not be within the dominant discourses of post-conflict and reconstruction.

“*We celebrated:*” Acts of Appreciation, Celebration, and Care

“You know that when we closed the office in Zagreb, we had a party with our partners – we *celebrated.*” (Camilla, Founder, Fieldnotes)

On my last day at Kvinna till Kvinna, everyone gathered in the lunchroom for a final “fika” – a Swedish word that in practice means sitting down together with others for coffee and usually a dessert of some type. On this day, as a nod toward my American-
ness (I think), the person in charge of the food had laid out a banana split buffet where everyone could make their own sundae. I was honored and a bit embarrassed by the attention. Lovisa spoke about how no one really knew in the beginning what it would be like to have me there doing research, but it had turned out to be very pleasant and they would miss having me around. I was given a book as a parting gift and I expressed my sincere appreciation for their openness and willingness to “let me in.” Since returning, I have often reflected upon that day as well as many other celebratory moments and the unique comradeship I experienced at Kvinna till Kvinna. As I’ve looked across these examples in my field notes, observations, and interviews, I’ve come to realize that there is a strong and unique sense of appreciation for self and other enacted at Kvinna till Kvinna through small acts of celebration and expressions of care for each other as women and as human beings.

One way to understand these communicative acts is to look at the emphasis placed on celebrating achievements at Kvinna till Kvinna. The opening quote comes from a meeting I participated in with Camilla, Boriann, and outside consultant Lennart Peck. The aim of the meeting was to assess the work and withdrawal of Kvinna till Kvinna in Croatia, its first official withdrawal from a country. The following exchange reflects Camilla’s enthusiasm about their achievements in the area:

Lennart: So, what has happened?
Camilla: (pumps fist in the air) Success! In 07, we’ve lobbied, we’ve recommended who should receive money, we’ve had big success. Only two organizations have closed, but that was for completely different reasons than our
withdrawal. The organizations have taken responsibility – they have to feel they can do it for themselves.

The withdrawal from Croatia, rather than a somber or negative affair, has become a marked moment of success for Kvinna till Kvinna. In a Kvinna till Kvinna newsletter article titled “Victories Celebrated when Closing Zagreb Office,” described the ceremonious occasion of closing: “At the closing ceremony in Zagreb, activists and government officials stood side by side and celebrated all the victories that the women’s movement had won since the Balkan war.” Success and victory in this context means that the partner organizations have remained open and fully functioning without Kvinna till Kvinna’s support (with the exception of two, as Camilla mentioned). In this way, Kvinna till Kvinna is celebrating collaborative success, recognizing the interdependent relationship between their organization and partners. The withdrawal from Croatia, a punctuated moment in the history of Kvinna till Kvinna, was celebrated to acknowledge the success of these interdependent relationships that were ending in terms of formal support. Celebration enacted in this way becomes empowering as the sustainability of partner’s work is a determining factor of success.

The example of celebrating the closing of the Zagreb office represents one way that Kvinna till Kvinna acknowledges achievement on a large scale. However, within the organization, they also celebrate individual achievements on an ongoing basis. One afternoon in June, just before the summer holiday when the office would be closed and while everyone was rather stressed with writing applications to SIDA, Ella told everyone that morning we would meet in the kitchen at 3:00 for an impromptu celebration. The
motivation for this was the grant received for the “teenage exhibition” (the largest grant, outside of SIDA, Kvinna till Kvinna had received to date), but also to thank several women for their work. The following scene describes this occasion:

In the afternoon, I join everyone in the kitchen for the champagne celebration. Ella has brought in 2 bottles of champagne and strawberries – everyone grabs a glass and sits or stands around the perimeter of the room. Liv, who has just had a baby, is also there with her newborn son – she worked on the teenage exhibition grant so I’m assuming she has been invited to join. I ask Ella if its ok if I take pictures, she jokes that it’s fine as long as I know that the champagne was purchased by her personally and not by Kvinna till Kvinna so that I don’t send incriminating photos to SIDA (we both laugh at this). Once everyone is in the room, Ella gives a toast, saying that there will be more celebrating next Monday at the “summer party” but they have several reasons to celebrate today. The first is the grant that Camilla and her team have received for the teenage exhibition. Camilla talks briefly about it and invites Linda and Natalie to also talk about the process of putting together the application. Lovisa asks if they can talk a little bit about what the actual exhibition will involve. They explain that now they have a lot more creative freedom in designing it and can outsource much of the actual printing, etc., and its more money than they ever imagined so now they’ll really start designing the exhibition, but one of the main goals is for it to be interactive. Ella goes on to congratulate several others. Mari, for her work over the past year in successfully closing the Croatia office, Monica and Elsa, on their return from
the Congo, Camilla, on her attendance at an international conference, Liv on her baby, and she thanks everyone at Kvinna till Kvinna for their ongoing dedication and hardwork. Given my observations of the high stress level over the past two weeks and the impending SIDA applications, my opinion is that this mini and spontaneous celebration could not have come at a better time. However, several people, including MaryAnn and Lena excuse themselves as soon as the toasting is finished in order to get back to work.

In this celebration, Kvinna till Kvinna members were performing a ritual that symbolized appreciation of others and self. As with the enactment of partnership through presence, a dialogic orientation can be found in such celebrations because they answer the achievements of others (Bakhtin, 1981; see also Madison, 2006).
Another way to understand how Kvinna till Kvinna enacts appreciation of self and other is through the value placed on care of the self. This value involves a specific embodied dimension and an acknowledgement that activist work is embodied work. As foreshadowed in previous themes in this chapter, for Kvinna till Kvinna, being a partner means being there and doing partnerships depends on presence – a social and physical accomplishment. To that end, there is an understanding that care is expressed not only in relationships, but in providing resources so that individuals can care for their physical and mental selves. In Stockholm, evidence of this abounds in the office space and services provided. There is a massage room and a massage therapist comes in once a week. All
employees are allowed to sign up for half hour slots via a sign up sheet in the kitchen. There is also a “vila” room. Vila, in Swedish, means light nap. The room is windowless and has a single bed. Any employee may go and lie down if she is not feeling well or just needs to clear her head. I should note here that during my time there, I did observe that many employees used the massage service, but I did not see anyone make use of the vila room. Offices are large and furnished with ergonomic office furniture so that employees can raise their desk to standing height to prevent too much stress on their backs from sitting. The common kitchen area is worthy of mention as I noticed that it facilitated not only camaraderie over meals, but also healthy eating habits. The kitchen, a large room with one large and two smaller dining tables, contained a full size refrigerator, stovetop oven, three microwaves, a dishwasher, and cabinets filled with dishes and cooking utensils. Each day at around 12:00, the space became alive with women fixing lunch – chopping vegetables for salad, boiling water for pasta, and microwaving leftovers from home. Basically, fixing food and eating nutritiously was easy, convenient, and encouraged implicitly through group practices. Finally, in my final weeks at Kvinna till Kvinna, a new practice was started. On Wednesdays, fifteen minutes before the weekly fika at 3:00 p.m., anyone who wanted would meet in the conference room for yoga. Both Lise and Mari, who were trained in yoga, had decided to initiate this and led the group through some of the simpler stretching exercises. I found myself comparing this work environment and the practices that not only acknowledged the body, but encouraged active care of individuals, to my various work experiences in the U.S. The body, and personal health as “obstacles to productivity” or the idea of “leaving your baggage at the
door” or “the policy exists but you can’t really use it” did not apply here. These small acts of care accumulate to show how Kvinna till Kvinna embraces a feminist orientation to valuing the female body and holistic thinking. However, it should also be noted that they are situated in a broader culture that engenders and supports these principles. For example, it is not uncommon for employers in Sweden to provide employees with massage services, either on-site or through the form of gift cards. Research on the health benefits of massage and its positive effects on overall employee wellbeing are widely accepted and organizations are subsidized for such services through the government.

Image 6 – Kvinna till Kvinna headquarter offices in Stockholm.
The field offices, and partner organizations, unfortunately do not share in these same resources that enable care of the self. However, evidence of the value placed on wellbeing, exists in discourse surrounding burnout, achievement, and celebrating. In a meeting with partner Bona Fide in Montenegro, Karin expressed her concern for the individual women.

Emira: We sometimes cannot sleep at night.
Karin: I’ve asked this before, but how do you take care of yourselves?
Sabina: We would like to have some small personal money that we could spend on ourselves.
Karin: What about you Jasminda, how do you take care of yourself?
Jasminda: In the beginning, I was very heartbroken, but now when we are together, I feel good when we do something.
Karin: In this group, do you feel that you are good at celebrating your successes?
Jasminda: …No
Karin: Especially in the phase that you are in now, that you are developing – it’s necessary to be careful not to use up everything you have inside of you in one year. There are some small tricks you can do all the time. When you are successful, stop and take a moment to say “we achieved a lot.” Also, what we’ve discussed many times – the division of labor.
Karin then brings up the retreat that Bona Fide has been planning since last fall, but has not yet taken place.
Sabina: The problem is that too many of our women have kids and cannot leave them.

Karin: Why not bring the kids and have someone babysit? (This gets laughs around the room…someone asks, “will you babysit for us Karin?” But it is clear Karin is serious about this suggestion).

Karin: It’s not important that everyone be an expert in making a strategic plan, it’s more important that you go through the process. So, how can we make this happen?

Sabina: Maybe in mid-June we could do this…

Karin: You don’t have to do this, but the money has been set aside and you’ve said that you need it (the retreat for strategic planning). (Fieldnotes)

Activist work, for Kvinna till Kvinna partners, is embodied work that is taxing both physically and emotionally. Unlike the position of field coordinator for Kvinna till Kvinna, the women of Bona Fide have no home office to retreat to, or one year contracts that can be used to limit or expand their time in the field. This reality does not devalue the work that field coordinators do in working with partners, but it does illustrate the stark, and sometimes harsh, inequalities of living circumstances facing women in different locations. One way that Kvinna till Kvinna tries to negotiate this, as illustrated by Karin, is to encourage – and provide resources for – taking time to reflect and celebrate individual and collective success.

Karin provided another example of concern for activist burnout when she participated in a weekend retreat with Women in Black in Belgrade and one of the days
was devoted to the “threats and the problems that human rights activists are facing in their daily life and in their work and what is needed to protect them and to support and how can they be better at providing each other with support.” This retreat was not organized by Kvinna till Kvinna, but Karin was invited to participate as a guest. She explained to me in an interview after the retreat that Kvinna till Kvinna has been involved in investigating activist burnout for a long-time and have planned to publish a report on the topic. Her following sentiments express her enthusiasm for the retreat and concern for the topic:

And I was thinking this weekend… that we are involved in the project out in the field and asks the questions. It might have something to do with the fact that they needed an organized retreat around it. I mean somehow – I mean at least it’s obvious it’s connected. I’m not saying that this is only us. We are not the only one who – I mean this is something that they have been working with all the years of course. But somehow maybe that [Kvinna till Kvinna’s report] contributed to them having the weekend which was so – it was also such a fantastic meeting and it was extremely important. I felt it was very emotional and many of the women who attended it said that they hadn’t been – that it was such a relief for them to talk about actually their own security and their own fears, or that they are sick and tired and because it’s not something that you – I mean you’re just working all the time and somehow you’re supposed to be brave and strong and so it was I think extremely important…and it felt important to be there also when they – especially what going on because both because I am so – I feel so
much richer in my understanding of their situation just by sitting there listening and I think it’s important that I know this and that we [Kvinna till Kvinna] now have a readiness – I mean I have to somehow, I have to report on this weekend and what was said here and to present it to the organization [Kvinna till Kvinna].

Through their concern for women partners not just as organizational members, but as human activists who suffer consequences from their actions, Kvinna till Kvinna demonstrates the value they, and partners, place on whole persons. This represents the feminist organizing values of integrative thinking and connectedness (Buzzanell, 1994) that integrates women’s experiences into work life and augments on how those experiences and emotions can inform organizing rather than inhibit it.

I conclude this section with a final example of celebration rituals that characterize Kvinna till Kvinna’s work. As I mentioned, resources vary greatly across geographic location. The field office in Sarajevo, for example, was not furnished with the ergonomically designed furniture I described previously in the Stockholm office and nor were partner offices. Rather than emphasizing these differences, though, I would like to highlight how celebration is valued across different contexts. On the closing night of the network meeting in Sarajevo, Kvinna till Kvinna sponsored a dinner and party at a fine restaurant at the top of one of the hills surrounding Sarajevo. I was fortunate enough to be invited to the event and recount my experience below.

The dinner is a very festive affair. It begins with a first course of chicken and vegetable soup, wine is flowing freely and everyone appears to be engaged in animated conversation. The band, 3 guys who play traditional Bosnian music
strike up after the first course and people start singing and clapping to the music. The second course – cold sausage, ham, cheese, and bread comes. Again, the band strikes up, this time people are out of their chairs and dancing. Esther has requested a song and everyone gets excited by this. Nuna and Maja [one of the keynote speakers] have joined our table and add to the liveliness. Many people are up in the middle of the room, and its time to present Esther with a present – she is leaving Kvinna till Kvinna and Sarajevo for another job in Behac and this is her last night “with the whole gang.” They give her a book about Bosnia Herzegovina and flowers. They tell her thank you for all she has done with Kvinna till Kvinna for Bosnia Herzegovina and that she will be missed. Esther says “there are no words…” the evening continues with more food, wine, dancing, music, and singing. Everyone appears to be having a truly great time – even the waiters join in the dancing. Lovisa, Lena, and I leave around midnight, and the party is still in full force (led by Esther).
Image 7 – Esther receives flowers from “the whole gang”
The closing party was also an embodied performance of celebration, mutually created by Kvinna till Kvinna and partners. As Madison (2006) argued, there is much more going on than “the meeting of bodies in their contexts” (p. 320), rather reciprocity is enacted and embodied in ways that open up the possibilities for experiencing difference on deeper and more full levels (Conquergood, 1985).
“One Can’t Do Without the Other:” Reconstructing Feminist Bureaucracy

...for me all through my experiences time after time I can see that however hard we are trying – I am not speaking about Kvinna till Kvinna only, but however [we] try as women to organize differently sooner or later we come back to the same discussion and models and structures and forms...

(Boriana, Interview)

In feminist and activist organizations, the struggle to sustain a political agenda while at the same time managing growth and the need for legitimacy in order to attain resources is ongoing. Women activists have long recognized and struggled with the need for increasing structure and administrative procedures as their organizations grow and hopefully become successful and fear that their politics will be diluted or co-opted (Moghadem, 2005; Reinelt, 1995; Riger, 1994; Yancey Martin, 1990;). Kvinna till Kvinna experiences this tension both internally within their headquarter operations and externally in their relationships with partner organizations. Throughout my fieldwork, discussion about the enabling and constraining features of bureaucratic form was a persistent topic and bureaucracy was a “master” term that attuned me to the rhetoric and discourses surrounding its use (Cheney et al., 2003). The discourse on this topic focused on deliberating the futility of the view that bureaucracy eventually subsumes activist impulses (as illustrated in the above quote from Mari), the commitment to accountability as a core value of the organization, the learning and dialogic potential of administrative procedures within partner relationships, and finally the need and value placed upon
actively engaging contradictions surrounding activism and bureaucracy. As my analysis demonstrates, such emphasis on reflexivity involves employing value-centered discourse (Harter, 2004) that allows Kvinna till Kvinna to continue to enact its empowerment agenda despite increased size, funding, and stakeholder demands for control.

One of the enduring and central narratives that was recounted numerous times during my time with Kvinna till Kvinna was that of its founding. Began by three women who were active in peace movements and working at the time for different peace organizations (Ella, Kerstin, and Camilla) the organization grew out of a desire to create change and meet the needs of women in conflict that were not being met by other aid organizations. Camilla, a founding member, and currently head of the Communication Department tells the story:

I’m one of the founders of the organization and I came from the Peace Movement. I was working for the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society (SPARS). Kvinna till Kvinna started out of a meeting held by Kristina – a speaker from the World Health Organization – who came home from the Balkans and talked about the rapes. This was the beginning of 93. Several people there knew each other from different organizations. The immediate response was that people asked ‘what can my organization do to help?’ Instead, some of us asked what can we do jointly? At first, we thought we’d just collect money – we knew there were peace organizations that existed. There were only women there, which was interesting because I didn’t come from a women’s org., in fact it was quite a male organization. But, we started with the idea to collect money (Camilla leaves the
room to get a binder of press clippings to show me)...you can see here that our first initiative was “5 kronor” – a campaign that stated if every Swedish woman was to give just 5 Kronor, they could raise 20 million kroner...Because of this outlook from the beginning, that we could collect money, I think that we have not initiated projects ourselves.

In the beginning each of us did this in our spare time. My peace organization would think it’s a good thing if I did this and Kerstin’s as well. In February of 93, we were just a loose network, and then I became the first salaried employee in September of 93. I came from the peace movement – I had worked with organizations and we were used to cooperation with other organizations. We were not good at development aid. We were also extremely enthusiastic...and we were stubborn, we did believe in what we were doing and in the end we did get money which everyone said we couldn’t do. We also got all of the women in Swedish politics to stand behind us, that was the first time that had ever happened. And Swedish Save the Children, we went to them and explained that it’s good for the children if women are safe. So we could use their number [telephone] for fundraising – this is the first and only time this has happened. We didn’t have our own infrastructure, and from the beginning we decided to take our time deciding what to fund. In August of 93 we made our first trip and in the end of 93 we made our first grant – this was without SIDA money. But then we did get SIDA funding quite early. We did a lot of things – you need to do that in the beginning.
We sent parcels (I interject that I’ve heard about the parcel project, Camilla laughs…). That is still the thing we are most known for in Sweden. In Tuzla, most of the aid was going to the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), and none to the local people. There were people who had decided to stay during the war who weren’t receiving anything. It was great, it was just a lot of things, and we had to check each one. In Sweden we are especially known for it. We will never do it again, but I think it was a good thing for the Swedish people. And some packages were nice, but not everyone sent new things. We almost died of it (laughter). Distribution was a nightmare, we almost didn’t get the packages there because of strict border controls. Condoms…I carried thousands of them in my suitcase and had to say they were for personal use….for a two week trip (laughter). You learn to lie. But it gave us an argument for why it’s better to buy there and support the local market – instead of doing like USAID does and buys everything from outside. It also gave us fame. We were more visible in Sweden and we needed it because we didn’t have a presence.

The story of the organization’s founding is a symbolic resource that helps organizational members make sense of the Kvinna till Kvinna’s purpose, individual roles within the organization, relationships to partners, and future directions for the organization (Burke, 1969; see also Harter et al., 2006; Mumby, 1987). Consequently, fragments of this story were woven into numerous conversations that focused on the evolution of Kvinna till Kvinna from a predominantly activist organization to a more bureaucratic one and in how
members made sense of, reified, and/or resisted the tensions surrounding bureaucracy and activism.

The story of Kvinna till Kvinna’s founding served as an important resource within the organization, but also as a source of identification with Kvinna till Kvinna for its partners. Take, for example, this quote from Lepa, the leader of AWC in Belgrade:

We are feminists organizing for social change. And our favorite person from Kvinna – she drove a city bus – we thought that was great, Kerstin. And she came here wanting to support women who were organizing for peace and freedom. We have good cooperation with Kvinna till Kvinna. Although when it comes to the funder’s politics – we never really saw anything in writing – is it on your website? (directed to Ella). But we know that they have feminist values, and there only a few truly feminist funders. I personally like the way that Kvinna was formed – the same way that we were, based on feelings of feminist responsibility and citizen responsibility.

Kerstin, who is no longer with Kvinna till Kvinna, and the other two founding members built partnerships with women’s organizations in the Balkans based on a sense of shared politics and a common worldview. Lepa expressed in her interview a sense how the stories of their two organizations are interconnected through a common past rooted in shared social goals – or as interwoven “narrative threads or fragments of broad discursive forms” (Harter, et al., 2006).

These feelings of nostalgia for an activist past, though, also served as the touchstone for negative feelings and frustration about Kvinna till Kvinna’s present
organizing. As Helena, a field coordinator explained, “Before it was some strong Swedish women who actually, by solidarity, went down to support other women in these countries; and now it's more like a business.” The issue of charismatic leadership – past and present – is common among activist and transnational feminist networks and “has its advantages and drawbacks” (Moghadem, 2005, p. 98). An advantage is that these women are often strong leaders and vital in generating the energy to organize, but a disadvantage can be, as hinted at above, that an organization can become overly identified with its leader(s).

This history, though, of unfettered activism, was also called into question. Elsa challenged this taken-for-granted history by challenging the definition of activism in the following: “And sometimes you can glorify, sort of, that – ‘Oh back in the good old days, we were all activists and never had to file a report.’ Is that what it means? And so I think it’s very necessary actually to pin down: what does that mean?” By questioning the meaning of activism, Elsa articulates one of the key concerns of contemporary literature on hybrid forms of organizing. What is the relationship between alternative logics (such as feminist and activist) of organizing and bureaucracy? (see Harter et. al., 2008).

Ashcraft (2006), has addressed this issue by arguing that hybrid and postbureacratic organizational forms are “often overlaid on bureaucratic skeletons” (p. 56). In part, that argument responds to the overwhelming abundance of organizational research on bureaucratic forms. The history of Kvinna till Kvinna, though, suggests that bureaucratic structures practices have been gradually overlaid and incorporated into their feminist form. This gives rise to a strong interdependence of bureaucracy and the activist impulses
that exist in feminist organizing. Bureaucracy enables their activist work (and that of partners) just as the success of their activist work gives to the need for more bureaucratic structures. Neither bureaucracy nor feminism is constituted in pure, ideal forms. Instead they are both re-constituted in relationship to each other.

The introduction of more and new bureaucratic practices, such as reporting and auditing, was also perceived by many to be an inevitable by-product of Kvinna till Kvinna’s continuous growth since its inception. Britt expressed this when she stated:

We have grown enormously in the last 4 or 5 years from 10-15 persons to 35, which is huge. Which means that even if we don’t want it always, we are some how becoming more structured and a little bit more bureaucratic organization, I mean we have to in order not to be completely -- in order to not have complete anarchy, we have to have some kind of systems for thing.

Du Gay (2000) proposed that this view of bureaucracy as unavoidable is typical of current anti-bureaucratic sentiment that permeates organizational discourses. Further, many popular anti-bureaucratic views position bureaucracy not just as something to preferably be avoided, but as an inherently morally bankrupt organizational form.

Within Kvinna till Kvinna, some of the frustration with processes that were perceived to be bureaucratic and restrictive arose from feelings that a) individual capacities could be better utilized and b) the overall workload was overwhelming. For the most part, it was home coordinators who felt that they were not able to contribute to the organization’s goals and mission to their fullest potential. For example, Lena expressed:
I think that our - when I say "our" I mean the home coordinators - I think that our capacities could be used in a much better way than it is now. I think we’re spending far too much time administration on reporting. I think if we could find a way to free some time or to be more efficient or to cut down on the administration …we’ve also discussed that each one of us could for example be responsible for a certain area of knowledge. If you want to do a conflict analysis you could talk to this person because she’s really good at that or if you need to know more about sexual and reproductive rights you could talk to this person because she knows a lot about this. I think that would be a big benefit for the organization and I think it would make the position more fun. People would want to stay longer and feel that they could develop within their current positions. It’s tough because everybody feels I think that there’s too much administration…

Britt, who had worked as a field coordinator in the Caucasus for three years before taking the position of home coordinator for Kosovo, articulated a similar sentiment when asked if there were anything she would change about Kvinna till Kvinna:

I would change the role and the functions maybe of the desk officers. Exactly how I’m not really sure but I don’t really think it’s an effective way of working, because it’s good to have like this link between the field offices and home. But, on the other hand, how it is today, it’s actually an extremely boring job and you’re not -- you don’t have the possibility to use your practical experience or your knowledge to that extent that I think that many of us would like -- that are working in those positions, because most of us that work as desk officers have
huge experiences from Kvinna till Kvinna and other things... And it takes very little in order for people to feel that they have the possibility to sort of use their energy...

Finally, MaryAnn echoed similar thoughts about the home coordinator position when she stated that:

I think we all feel that we are – our potential isn't really – we don't – well, I think we all feel that we could do more. We could sort of develop the role more, because I feel that some of it is just like rather kind of basic administrative, routine – I mean, I think we can become more efficient and, you know, reduce the papers, basically, and filing and paperwork, and discuss more sort of strategic issues or common – common development issues.

These frustrations with not being able to fully use one’s capacity reflect a fear of and desire to resist what Burke (1954/1984) termed “trained incapacities.” When orientations – or the “bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be” (p. 14) become fixed (i.e. home coordinator as administrator), they give rise to trained incapacities. These incapacities function as terministic screens that render us blind to seeing other ways of performing and other orientations.

Although member’s expressed their frustration with bureaucratic practices and cast the evolution of Kvinna till Kvinna from having a more feminist activist organizational form to a bureaucratic form as a negative one, they at the same time recognized the enabling features of routine and structure. As a feminist organization,
Kvinna till Kvinna members expressed the need for accountability as central to carrying out their goals and objectives. As Lena explained:

Now we’re building up structures which are necessary to have in this big organization that we’ve become and with this amount of money that we’re using each year. Again we need to since we’re working with tax payers’ money we need to make sure we use them in the responsible way.

Kvinna till Kvinna Members were keenly aware that their main source of funding (SIDA) came from the Swedish public in the form of taxes. Therefore, having the infrastructure in place to accurately report on the use of funds that they channeled to their partners was conceived as a social responsibility. Du Gay (2000) described these coexisting and complicated thoughts about bureaucracy as one way that we might “learn to see such frustration as a largely inevitable by-product of the achievement of other objectives that we also value very highly: such as the desire to ensure fairness, justice, and equality in the treatment of citizens” (p. 2). For Kvinna till Kvinna, this is an example of how instrumental rationalities – such as upholding the need for standardized reporting procedures – informs their social justice work.

Not only is Kvinna till Kvinna concerned with accountability to Swedish citizens, they are also concerned with modeling such democratic systems in the regions in which they work:

I don’t see any other way to do it. And then we work on the taxpayer’s money. So we have to be accountable. And we have to have the papers in order as much as possible. And if it is a post-conflict situation, I mean you strive to – we also
encourage that. For instance, we should support the bureaucracy within the country, in the way that if they start to take in taxes again, after a period of war – as the Balkans did – when that system starts, we encourage the partners. “You should be a part of it. You should pay taxes.” Because that’s the system. And they can include that in the budget, that they have to pay taxes also.

However, enacting these modeling behaviors in post-conflict areas in order to support democratic society is fraught with difficulties. Elsa went on to say that:

And there’s been a lot of different donors. They don’t care. And then they just get money for salaries. And there is no payment to the pensions or – of course, I don’t know if they will get – they don’t think they will get any pension from the government. Because they think it will be just corrupted somewhere. You know? But so what to do then? To support the system or not. And that creates also a lot of bureaucracy for us. Because we want to be legal…when we are in the country. And sometimes it’s very difficult to understand what that means, because you get different answers from different departments at the ministries. You just spend so much time trying to become legal as an international organization with presence in this country. It’s unbelievable. But still, we have to try to be that, because – yeah. We are legal here…And we want to be legal in that country as well, if it’s possible.

Ashcraft (2001) acknowledged that organizational form, such as feminist bureaucracy, is an ongoing process located “in the dynamic interaction between structure and practice” (p. 1303). The excerpt from Elsa above illustrates how structures for reporting on
spending funding influence how Kvinna till Kvinna carries out their work across different contexts, while at the same time practicing accountability gives rise to the need for particular infrastructure.

The interdependence of bureaucracy and activism could also be found within the relationships between Kvinna till Kvinna and its partners. Lea, the field coordinator in Kosovo, felt that there was tension surrounding this issue.

I’m just one person and there’s quite a lot of work around these things like reporting and application and whatever. And that feels a bit annoying…because they would rather me be more active…Do lobbying together with them….Even though it’s helping them, we’re not doing any activity work in the field and that’s a little bit sad. And that’s a consequence of all this [reporting]…and that’s very negative, very negative. Because we used to do all the time, we used to sit with them in meetings with politicians and participating in all these kinds of processes and it’s not happening any more. And that’s negative. I mean that’s more than negative. It’s tragic, because that’s what I would like to do most…But on the other hand, it’s for their good in the long run.

Tracy (2004) discussed possible ways to frame organizational tensions as either a) contradiction – cannot do two actions at once, but can alternate or choose one, b) dialectic – not viewing the tension as a tension through reframing, or c) paradox – to obey is to disobey and to disobey is to obey (adapted from Table 1, p. 135). Lea framed the tension as a contradiction in terms of her role as field coordinator. In order to do her job, she needs to spend much time on reporting rather than in the field actively
participating with the partners – and its impossible to accomplish both simultaneously. Lea, though, also points another aspect of this tension within the partner relationships when she notes that it in the long run it benefits them.

The idea that reporting is good for the partners reflects the ongoing process of professionalization many NGOs endure. As Camilla, the head of communication for Kvinna till Kvinna explained:

I think that for some of our partner organizations – they think that we have become more bureaucratic, and that they have to spend more time. And I actually think that’s okay. Because that will be the reality for them, as it is for us, that you need to write a lot of proposals. You don’t get everything – I mean not all proposals are successful ones. But you just have to keep going. This is the reality of being an NGO.

In this way, Kvinna till Kvinna performs the role of a boundary-spanner by providing partners with the resources they need to interact with a larger international community that is heavily entrenched in bureaucracy (Harter & Krone, 2001). However, several feminist scholars and practitioners have questioned the costs involved in becoming a professional organization.

For Kvinna till Kvinna and its partners, that tradeoff involves trust within their relationships. Take, for example, this scene from a roundtable discussion between Kvinna till Kvinna and partners at a network meeting in Sarajevo:

Lovisa, Natalie, Esther, and Lena sit at the front of the room. Nuna (from partner Zene Zenema) gives a debriefing on the partner meeting they held previously
today. The roundtable discussion begins and the second question has to do with reporting procedures and auditing. Kvinna till Kvinna has recently changed their system – they used to audit all of the financial reports for each partner organization themselves, but now all partners must use an outside auditor. Several partners talk about the stress of being audited, how they were treated with suspicion. One woman elaborates that the auditors were even looking in closets in their offices. Esther, Natalie, and Lovisa, take a few minutes to discuss this in Swedish before they respond. Lovisa explains, “Paying for local auditors to go through receipts is the only sustainable system. Instead of us going through receipts, when there are experts locally. In Stockholm we have an audit every second month – we have to meet certain International standards.” There is concern among the participants that “activism is lost” with the constant reporting and about their public image as an organization that is constantly audited. Esther then explains that last year there was a mistake, they weren’t happy – “no one was happy” - with the first audit. So with money they had left over for the year, they hired a different company to do a second audit – but this should not be the norm in the future. Nuna interrupts to say that “this is an issue of trust, and it makes us upset. You don’t trust – and that’s hard for us.” Esther replies that “From now on there will be audits only on the final reports. We need to get away from “we know each other well” – this process needs to be completely detached from personal relations – otherwise people are suspicious of what we do with Swedish taxpayer’s money. They think ‘you know them so well, you don’t control what
they do.’” Natalie adds, “We’re really sorry, it’s partly our fault, what happened last year. We’re also slightly inexperienced at finding good auditors.” Esther concludes the conversation with, “So this should be a help for both of us, going through this process together.” The session ends and it’s time for dinner in the adjoining room. I talk briefly to Esther before we leave the conference room and she is a little perturbed and flustered by the conversation that just took place and says again that “knowing each other well had nothing to do with it, we need to move beyond that.” (Field Notes) Feminists have long recognized the tension between impersonal bureaucratic structures that enact institutional rationality at the expense of other logics such as personal relationships and emotion (Buzzanell et al., 1997). By questioning Kvinna till Kvinna’s trust in them, Nuna illustrates how these tensions can become magnified in organizations with explicit feminist and social justice objectives (see Trethewey, 1997). For Esther, though, these are separate issues and should be treated as such.

Another way in which this tension is present in the partner relationships is in how it gets reframed so that seemingly inane and controlling administrative procedures become dialogic learning tools. I accompanied Karin, a field coordinator in Belgrade, to visit the partner organization Open Center Bona Fide in Pjelvlja, a remote city in northern Montenegro. Karin had scheduled the meeting to discuss their interim report to Kvinna till Kvinna.

Karin then steers the discussion toward Bona Fide’s interim report. She begins by asking the women to tell her how the process worked in compiling this report (she
mentioned earlier to me that one of the things she has been trying to work with them on is delegating and sharing the work so that Sabina is not the only one writing things such as reports). Sabina says that they all had different obligations in writing the report. If someone did not get it in on time, then they she had to put 1 Euro in a safe that would be used as community money. Sabina asks anxiously, “Is it ok?” Karin responds that “You have done a very very good job, I’m impressed and satisfied. There were some things that I thought were very good. For example, the section on the political context, it was very clear and you made good selections as to what to include. I like the way you have chosen things that are connected to your activities this period. I appreciate you are putting in the number of women who attended your activities, the dates of the workshops, and also the reactions and responses from participants. It was fun and interesting to read it, I found it honest and sincere.” Sabina then replies, “We are not experts, we make mistakes everyday, but because of that honesty we have survived.”

(Field Notes)

One way to read this scene would be to highlight the hierarchal relationship embedded in questions such as “Is it ok?” My reading and experience of the situation, though, suggests that the dominant function of the interim report in this relationship was to facilitate learning and dialogue. Certainly, power relations permeate this relationship (and all partner relationships) – as I will discuss later. Yet, Karin and the members of Bona Fide use reporting as a productive way to understand organizational processes and discuss organizational development goals. In this way, instrumental rationalities support other,
more dialogic ways of relating to each other than the traditional impersonal and distant characteristics of traditional hierarchical organizations.

Also, as evident in Sabina’s final statement, the relationship is one in which imperfection and mistakes are acceptable. As Elsa put it, “Hey if you [meaning a partner] have problems, don’t hesitate to talk to us, maybe we can help you, everybody has problems. It’s not just that they should give account for all the good things, the activities they carry out.” In this way, reporting, an act that could be a one-way process, is reconfigured through Kvinna till Kvinna’s and partners feminist organizing philosophies that values and welcomes mistakes, problems, and imperfections as well as ongoing dialogue.

Balancing the personal and professional within these relationships is a struggle that Kvinna till Kvinna strives to negotiate by fostering openness and reflection. Lena a home coordinator, reflected that:

I think there used to be some personal relationships which were not necessarily always positive. Positive in a way that people were close but maybe negative in a way that it was difficult question with the way the money was spent in the right way... but I think as a bigger organization we need to relate in a professional way and I think that’s possible to combine with being partners and working the way we want to work. But then I also think that those organizations that currently criticize us for being bureaucratic I think to some extent they may have a point and I think we need to have that discussion within our organization and with these
organizations, too to clarify what they actually - what is it that they perceive as negative? What is it that they think has changed?

Through this spirit of openness and willingness to listen to partner concerns, Kvinna till Kvinna is able to maintain its feminist orientation while integrating bureaucratic controls necessary for their – and their partners – survival and growth.

Members were also engaged in value-centered discourse about the way their work gets carried out. Lena reflected on their own aspirations have led to increasing and lengthier reporting procedures.

Sometimes I feel like we’re so eager to show to SIDA everything that we have achieved so we put everything in the reports….So I think it’s probably both us who needs to sometimes cut down on our ambitions to maybe finding ways that are more efficient. (Lena, interview)

During my time spent in staff meetings, I often heard the home coordinators, who were working on the most recent applications to SIDA, joke about being “overachievers.” Although this awareness indicates self-reflexivity, there is also an important gendered dimension to this aspect of organizational life. As Helena stated,

…and also we mostly have a tendency – the typical female tendency to say, ‘But next year will be better. When this happens, it will be better.’ But it will never be better. I mean, it's too much to do now. We are always a step ahead – behind. It will never get better.

As Kvinna till Kvinna and their partners continue to grow and change, they return to their organizational history and core values (e.g. reflexivity, closeness in relationships,
and accountability) to make sense of how to move forward. Across various conversations, I found that members were willing to challenge the meaning of master terms such as bureaucracy and activism. For example, Elsa challenged the notion that Kvinna till Kvinna had become more bureaucratic by arguing that the advocacy work they do is activism.

…this exhibition in Kungstragården [the teenage exhibition]…Is that activism? Because you’re out meeting people? You have an exhibition? Maybe that’s activism. Yeah, in a way. Young people come there and sit down. And they write their papers. You were there. You saw it….That’s activism, isn’t it? They can put a postcard to the minister of development aid. And also at the book fair in Gothenburg in September now. I’m sure that – we usually have something. You can send a postcard, or you can, you know, express yourself in some way. That’s activism.

Because Kvinna till Kvinna has gained legitimacy in Sweden as a respected women’s NGO and because of close ties with its partners, they are able to perform activism and carry out advocacy efforts in their home country on behalf of women in post-conflict areas. Through these actions and discourses, they constantly reproduce a feminist bureaucracy that is instrumental and moral, functional and normative (Ashcraft, 2006).

Finally, as evidenced throughout this analysis, Kvinna till Kvinna members are keenly aware of the ongoing struggles and ironies of doing feminist bureaucracy. As Camilla explained when asked about carrying out a feminist agenda within increasing bureaucratic structures, “I think it is a struggle.” Lena suggested that, “There is also some
kind of a paradox. What we’re good at doing or what I think we’re good at doing is working with the organizations and when we can end up spending all our time writing reports.” And Elsa offered, “That’s another dilemma that you have to deal with. And one can’t do without the other…You just have to realize that, I think.” Whether framed as struggle, paradox, or dilemma, these tensions are accepted as part of organizational life. Ashcraft (2001; 2006) used the term organized dissonance to describe hybrid organizational forms that are “Guided by the principles of sustained paradox and dialectical tension rather than a quest for harmony” (p. 58). Kvinna till Kvinna sustains tension through awareness, self-reflexivity, and dialogic partnerships and enacts alternatives to traditional organizational structure and practices. Although frustration with bureaucracy abides, Elsa articulated the potential downfall of dwelling too much on this single dimension when she stated, “So sometimes if we let…or think that, ‘Oh we’re just becoming a bureaucratic paperwork organization,’ and then you miss out on the things we actually do, which could be looked upon as activism.”
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

My dissertation journey emerged out of an enduring concern for how and why transnational organizing emerges as a response to humanitarian and social justice issues. This type of work is prevalent in post-conflict areas and there is much critique from feminist perspectives on how international communities intervene and either negligently mismanages such endeavors and/or exploits post-conflict situations to serve political and economic interests of powerful entities. At the outset, I mentioned that I was both hopeful and skeptical of transnational organizing and its relationship to global feminist movements. I believed in the potential of transnational organizing for impacting social change, but at the same time, in light of my feminist departure points, also remained cognizant of the power inequities that influence such relationships and the potential negative consequences of transnational endeavors. I can say today that my hope for the potential of transnational organizing has been reinforced by working with Kvinna till Kvinna and that I believe it is possible to create and maintain authentic relationships and alliances that do not exploit the “other.” However, this is not done without constant struggle and requires substantial energy and vigilance to consciously and consistently enact a feminist ideologies amid broader development and reconstruction culture that is decidedly more masculine (in a hegemonic sense) than feminine. Many of these struggles were found in the themes put forward in the previous chapter. In the following, I synthesize the findings from across the various themes to advance theoretical and practical implications of this work.
Theoretical Implications

In the following section, I outline the key theoretical implications of this study by returning to the research questions posed at the end of chapter one. In so doing, I synthesize the findings from across the seven themes presented in chapter three and tease out common threads across Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing practices that prompt further theorizing about feminist organizing. In doing so, I also draw connections between organizational communication, feminist theories, and broader social theories outlined in chapter one.

**Research Question One**

In the first research question, I asked: How does Kvinna till Kvinna enact feminist ideologies? This broad question interrogates the organization-ideology relationship at the level of everyday, micro-practices of organizing as well as meta-communication about those processes.

From the perspective of feminist organizational communication theory, an important way to address this question is by looking at what we learn about organizational form and the relationship between feminism and bureaucracy from this study. The case of Kvinna till Kvinna answers the recent call in feminist organizational literature to counter the tendency to privilege theory over practice “by rendering them accountable to situated member interaction” (Ashcraft, 2006, p. 60). The practices of Kvinna till Kvinna reveal some of the challenges and potentials associated with the survival and effectiveness of feminist organizing.
The ways in which Kvinna till Kvinna enacts feminist bureaucracy provides an example of how bureaucratic structures are both enabling and constraining. Modeling bureaucratic organizational forms has enabled them to establish legitimacy within the Swedish international development community as well as on the international stage. Also, the formalization of their organization has allowed for growth and expansion that furthers their empowerment agenda. The frustration experienced over increasing bureaucracy reflected a common concern for feminist organizations and activists – that formalization and institutionalization results in de-radicalization of feminist ideals. As an intermediary NGO, Kvinna till Kvinna has managed this tension by reflecting upon their role in relationship to their partners. Partners, in general, practice a more radical activist orientation, while Kvinna till Kvinna provides various forms of support to help them carry out their activist goals.

On the other hand, Kvinna till Kvinna’s feminist ideologies enable them to adapt bureaucratic features to fit their needs. For example, although there are rules and guidelines governing relationships with partners, these relationships exhibit dialogic qualities that demand openness to change and otherness. Further, they are able to practice alternatives to doing development work (i.e. practicing long-term commitment, challenging prevailing notions of sustainability) by drawing upon their feminist sensibilities such as connectivity and holistic thinking. Carrying out this work requires adhering to administrative processes, but they are able to do so without compromising their underlying orientation.
In these ways, Kvinna till Kvinna provides a thought-provoking example of how we might continue to theorize feminist-bureaucratic forms in such ways that feminist organizing is not lauded for its uniqueness, but for the viable alternatives it can provide to feminist, hybrid, alternative, and traditional organizations (Aschraft, 2006). The way in which Kvinna till Kvinna mixes hierarchal modes of power with egalitarianism both in relationship to its members and in the ongoing co-construction of partnerships can provides a valuable model for the civil society sector and development NGOs seeking to uphold social justice and change ideologies. However, as Ashcraft (2006) recently argued, the value of feminist-bureaucratic forms lies not only in their uniqueness – which could lead to the implication that feminist organizing is separate from more traditional, mainstream organizing – but also in the richness and complexity it brings to traditional organizational theory. I believe, for example, that Kvinna till Kvinna’s partnership approach can be instructive for both alternative and mainstream organizations that have vested interests in long-term relationships with other organizations.

When considering feminist ideologies and organizational form, another important feature of Kvinna till Kvinna’s work to consider is their networking practices. For Kvinna till Kvinna, linking organizations to each other is a means to building the sustainability of each organization, the women’s movement(s), community, and peaceful relationships. Nguyen-Gillham (1999) argued that social reconstruction has been under-theorized in sociology, and in particular women’s contributions rebuilding society have been overlooked. I argue that networking is a communication phenomenon that contributes to social reconstruction, and that not only has it been under-theorized in sociology, but that
a communication perspective is lacking and would be useful to understanding reconstruction processes in post-conflict areas.

Kvinna till Kvinna also provides an example of how feminist politics can be fostered through questioning long-standing definitions through both discourse and practice. *Sustainability* and *victim* are two terms that feature prominently across their talk and practices and are openly contested. By calling into question the limits of these definitions and challenging the institutionalized motives behind the proliferation of such discourses, Kvinna till Kvinna opens discursive space to reconstruct such terms. Kvinna till Kvinna resists the notion that sustainability is linked primarily to the financial health and independence of an organization after a donor exit, while at the same time recognizing the necessity of funding for their partners. Their approach to building organizational capacities in partner organizations reflects their commitment to holistic thinking by acknowledging the unique situations each organization faces and that innerconnectedness between sustainable organizations, communities, and peace.

As evidenced by their advocacy work that addresses the term victim and the work that they do to empower women to gain meaningful political voices, Kvinna till Kvinna also challenges the taken-for-granted assumption that women are only victims of war. The images and discourses surrounding women and war have become associated with the discursive formation of victim to the extent that their absence from peace negotiation processes is often unquestioned. Kvinna till Kvinna does call this seemingly fixed subject position, though, and in doing so contests the representations of women in war (as evidenced in the theme *Re-membering* and through their work in challenging war
Further, they seek to disrupt the marginalization that occurs when women are only framed as victims by empowering women – through supporting their initiatives that support women – to become active change agents. Both of these dimensions answer the call put forward by Wilkins and Mody (2001) to embrace the potential of development practices to question how and why social institutions continuously (re)produce certain knowledge formations while marginalizing others and to provide viable alternatives.

**Research Question Two**

The second research question considered: Why do participants create and maintain partnerships? Sub-questions to this were: How are these relationships (re)produced through discourse? and Whose interests are served and whose are marginalized through these partnerships? The theme *Being There: The Importance of Presence in Partner Relationships* speaks directly to the first question. I also draw upon that theme, as well as *One Can’t Do Without the Other: Reconstructing Feminist Bureacracy* and *Inclusiveness, Creativity, and Holistic Thinking: Imagining Possibilities for Peace* to discuss the two subsequent questions.

The aim of the first question was to explore the motivations for transnational organizing. In chapter one, I used global feminisms as well as pragmatist theory to frame the background for this question. As evidenced in the story of the organization’s founding, Kvinna till Kvinna was driven to start their organization out of recognition that their *sisters* in the former Yugoslavia were suffering. The proximity of the conflict made their needs more apparent, and Kvinna till Kvinna saw that women had needs that other organizations were not recognizing nor fulfilling. Since that time, the agenda of Kvinna
till Kvinna has expanded into locations further from Stockholm in the regions of the Middle East, the Caucasus, and soon in Africa. In my time with the organization, I came to understand that Kvinna till Kvinna believes in global sisterhood – that women across the globe are united by common forms of oppression. To that end, their practices do not negate the specific social and historical circumstances that women in such different geographic locations face. This is evidenced by their commitment to “being there” and establishing a field presence that is based on the perspective that local knowledges are invaluable, as well as their commitment to de-centering their organization in carrying out work in the region. However, this is not a smooth and unquestioned process and from a postcolonial perspective there are questions that arise. For example, I was surprised to learn that it was not a requirement for field coordinators to be fluent in the local language(s) in which they work. Many women, though, have background experience in the areas and do have some language skills. Several field coordinators, though, do not speak the partner’s home language. This is problematic from a postcolonial perspective in that partners are made to speak the language of Kvinna till Kvinna (see Mohanty, 2003).

In asking how these relationships are (re)produced in and through discourse, my goal was to examine both the nature of the partner relationships and the ways in which partners are represented through Kvinna till Kvinna’s work. As for the nature of the partner relationships, they were found to be dialogic in nature, built on openness and commitment to the relationship among people. These qualities are evident in the discourses that take place at network meetings, in meetings between Kvinna till Kvinna
and individual partners, and in the ways that both Kvinna till Kvinna and partners talk about the relationships.

The latter point concerning how partner relationships are represented – or reproduced – through Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizational discourses, is best answered by looking at their own body of research they produce through the form of thematic reports. These reports honor the voices and experiences of the women in the regions in which they work and they advocate specific political positions (such as the need for long-term psycho-social support services in post-conflict areas). In undertaking this advocacy work, Kvinna till Kvinna provides a space wherein women are asked to voice their experiences not only as a victim, but also as an active agent of change in building a peaceful, democratic society.

Research Question Three

The third research question explored tensionality inherent in organizing by asking: How do participants experience and make sense of tensions and contradictions that emerge in enacting a feminist ideology? This question was motivated by the recent spate in organizational communication literature that has contradictions, ironies, and paradox are inseparable from organizing processes (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Harter, et al., 2008; Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004;). Feminist theories have also recognized the tensions surrounding dualistic and binary thinking that can both reinforce and undermine power structures. In chapter one, I reviewed some of the dialectical tensions found across both bodies of literature: public and private, discourse and materiality, global and local, difference and solidarity, and power and resistance. This
was by no means an exhaustive list and I was not sure upon entering the field what tensions would be most salient nor where they would emerge (a case in point, originally my third research question asked, How do participants experience and make sense of tensions and contradictions that emerge in inter-organizational relationships?) After continuous analysis of the data and synthesizing findings across the seven themes outlined in the previous chapter, I feel that the experience and practices of Kvinna till Kvinna provide useful insight into understanding meta-dialectics that bind together overlapping, reciprocal tensions (see Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006). In the following, I discuss what we can learn about the meta-dialectics of public and private, discourse and materiality, and global and local.

First, tensions surrounding the dialectic of public and private are evident in the ways in which Kvinna till Kvinna continues to work out its feminist bureaucratic form. In many ways the organization has survived initial institutionalization and has adopted many bureaucratic conventions and adapted them to fit their feminist principles. One of the main feminist critiques against bureaucracy has been its complicity in reifying a strict divide between public and private life that serves to uphold patriarchal domination (Ferguson, 1984; see also Ashcraft, 2006 for an overview of this argument). As explained previously, Kvinna till Kvinna’s practices articulate a feminist bureaucracy that privileges its feminist ideology. In the process, the public/private binary isn’t transcended, but it is transformed into a dialectical tension that recognizes an ongoing both/and struggle. For example, in the theme “We celebrated,” there is ample evidence that Kvinna till Kvinna resists impersonal work relationships by acknowledging persons
as individuals and not just resources (Feree & Martin, 1995). As a public institution, though, they also recognize their accountability to outside stakeholders and uphold high standards of professionalism in their work, as shown in discourse surrounding notions of accountability in the theme “One can’t do without the other.”

Second, the dialectic of discourse and materiality is an underlying tension found across Kvinna’s till Kvinna’s work as they struggle to enact their feminist principles. For example, in partner relationships, presence is both a physical and relational accomplishment. Kvinna till Kvinna sets itself apart from other donors and aid organizations interested in women’s issues both in its discourses and embodied engagements with partners. The tension between discourse and materiality can be felt in the struggle to maintain open, dialogic partnerships in the face of shrinking and/or shifting resources. As field offices in the Balkan region downsize and prepare to close (and Kvinna till Kvinna prepares to expand into other regions), there was much anxiety over limitations on being there and doing things “the Kvinna till Kvinna way.”

Another way to think about how organizational members make sense of the dialectic of discourse and materiality is to trace the strong role that imagination plays across their work. This was specifically highlighted in the themes Inclusiveness, Creativity, and Holistic Thinking, Re-membering, and “The nicest container in the neighborhood.” Across these themes, I emphasize how Kvinna till Kvinna helps to provide space, both metaphorically and physically, for alternative futures to be imagined and communities to be created. However, these futures and communities are materially engaged and not abstracted from the circumstance of life in post-conflict society.
Recently, the concept of “bounded” has emerged in organizational literature as a way to understand how individuals make sense of organizational tensions such as rationality and emotionality (e.g., bounded emotionally, Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and accountability and empowerment (e.g., bounded voice, Dempsey, 2007). Both bounded emotionality and bounded voice describe the ways in which the expression of emotions and voice are strategically limited to certain forums and thus related (implicitly and explicitly) to control and resistance. From this, we might also be able to conceptualize the notion of bounded imagination, as related to the dialectic of discourse and materiality. Kvinna till Kvinna helps foster imagining alternative ways of doing things that are not unbound from present circumstances.

Finally, Kvinna till Kvinna provides insight into the dialectal tension of global and local organizing. Kvinna till Kvinna maintains a belief in global feminism and directly and indirectly expresses the view that women can identify with each other out of their shared experiences with patriarchal oppression. As an intermediary, boundary-spanning NGO, they often provide access to resources associated with global feminism for their partners in the form of information and organizational development. Their practices, though, also demonstrate careful attention to local knowledge. By allowing for needs to be generated from the local populations rather than from their own, or the international community’s perspective, they honor and acknowledge that local contingencies should determine which issues deserve attention (see Harding, 1998).
Research Question Four

The fourth research question asked: *What resources (symbolic and material) and/or obstacles for collective resistance does Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing practices provide?* To discuss this topic, I turn to the following themes: *Re-membering: Resisting Invisibility and Reconstructing Culture, We Celebrated: Acts of Appreciation, Celebration, and Care,* and *Inclusiveness, Creativity, and Holistic Thinking: Imagining Possibilities for Peace.*

In many ways, the women’s empowerment projects that Kvinna till Kvinna supports in relationship with partners are about mobilizing resources for collective resistance. By creating spaces for peace and feminist ideas to gain traction, they are inviting local women’s organizations to organize around strategies for resistance against dominant patriarchal ideologies that drive peace, reconstruction, and development agendas and marginalize the needs and voices of women. In particular, their networking activities are connected with building capacities for collective resistance among partners. By linking organizations to one another and facilitating the sharing of resources in terms of information and expertise, Kvinna till Kvinna fosters an environment of cooperation built around local political causes. For example, out of the networking meeting in Sarajevo emerged several potential projects advocating for women’s health and sexual and reproductive rights involving collaboration among partners.
Practical Implications

There are numerous practical implications that can be derived from the study of Kvinna till Kvinna’s organizing practices both at the level of international development and NGOs in general and the level of the organization specifically. First, the notion of sustainability is a buzzword in development work and underpins much of the discourse surrounding the negative consequences of resource dependency. The concern is that society’s, and an organization’s, motivation for becoming self-sufficient will be undermined by long-term support. From Kvinna till Kvinna, we learn that a long-term commitment to supporting organizations financially and in their own development does not equal dependency. On the contrary, their experience in the Balkans provides evidence that a long-term and holistic perspective can build capacities that foster independence and “ownership of the process” when they exit an area. Key to this is allowing for needs to be determined by the local organizations.

Second, the issues and concerns raised by partners in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro point to the need for greater focus by the international community on the complexities of the “post-conflict” period in general and more specifically, to the needs of marginalized communities during post-conflict. Twelve years after the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, women are still struggling to rebuild their lives and recreate infrastructures that support access to healthcare, education, and legal services. Many women expressed frustration at local government policies and agents that do not adhere to internationally codified standards of gender equality. This problem is exacerbated as more and more of the responsibility for supporting such infrastructures is shifted to local
offices as donors steadily leave the area. Further, ethnic tensions remain high in certain areas, particularly on the border of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although the threat of armed conflict on the scale of the 1992-1995 war is minimal, clearly the struggles of post-conflict are ongoing and vulnerabilities remain. Meeting post-conflict needs and reconstruction goals is often measured from a macro-perspective that foregrounds economic markers and other societal-level indicators (i.e. crime). As pointed out by Nguyen-Gillham (1999), this perspective obscures micro-level social factors of reconstruction where women are most likely to be involved. International responses and policies to post-conflict need to be directed toward both macro and micro level needs and priorities in order for women to become full participants in reconstruction.

At the level of Kvinna till Kvinna as an organization, I must say that I have learned much about the potential feminist organizing holds by studying them. Therefore, I humbly present these suggestions in the spirit of believing wholeheartedly in the work that they are doing. First, to a great extent, Kvinna till Kvinna is involved in trying to make the case for including women, and a more nuanced, micro-perspective, in post-conflict work to the international community through their advocacy work. Through such endeavors as creating thematic reports, organizing seminars to educate journalists, and crafting an exhibit to showcase young women in post-conflict areas, Kvinna till Kvinna is working to make gender equality and women’s needs and experiences non-negotiable aspects of peace negotiations, war reporting, and post-conflict reconstruction. The challenge lies in expanding the reach of such projects. Admittedly, this is limited by the
size and scope of the organization. Yet, there is room for more careful consideration of
the target audience of these advocacy efforts and their intended impact.

Second, in interviews with women who work for Kvinna till Kvinna, many
expressed the need for conversations about Kvinna till Kvinna’s feminist orientation and
the connection between sustainable peace and support for women’s empowerment to take
place at the organizational level. As mentioned throughout my findings, reflexivity is a
core practice and value for Kvinna till Kvinna and this was demonstrated clearly in
interactions with partners, conversations with individuals, and in celebratory rituals. I
think it would be useful, and perhaps even cathartic, to come together as an organization
to discuss the taken-for-granted feminist principles and peace connections in an open
forum. This should be done not necessarily to re-invent the wheel, but rather with the
goals of clarifying the mission of the organization and re-energizing individuals and the
group in their commitment to working for the organization. This could also provide
another venue in which to share in each other’s personal and collective successes across
the organization.

Limitations

No study is without limitations, and this dissertation is no exception. In reflecting
upon the overall project, there are three areas in which I think this project could be
enhanced. First, given my resources of time and finances, I chose to intensely immerse
myself in the field from April through August, 2007. I spent every hour possible during
that time in the midst of Kvinna till Kvinna, observing, interviewing, traveling to field
offices, and tagging along to any meetings, etc. to which I was allowed. A greater length
of time in the field would have allowed me to ease up on the intensity of the observations (although in the end, I found the intensity beneficial in terms of gaining acceptance within the organization). Also, a greater length of time, combined with greater financial resources, would have allowed me to spend more time in the field offices and with the partner organizations. In the course of my field work, I have come across numerous organizations to which I could have applied for additional funding for this project that I was not aware of beforehand.

Second, one group of voices that is absent from the discourse collection is the Board of Directors of Kvinna till Kvinna. Two factors, both related to timing, limited my ability to garner their perspectives. One was that the board only met once during the time I was in Stockholm and it was early in my field work. The other was that they were in the process of hiring a new Secretary General during which time several sensitive issues regarding the former Secretary General came into play. These issues were not the focus of my research and I sensed the reluctance to allow me to be part of conversations that involved these topics. Thus, I did not pursue the opportunity to take part in board meetings or interview board members. The voices of board members, though, could be insightful to understanding how Kvinna till Kvinna makes decisions to enter different post-conflict areas.

Finally, I would have liked to have been able study, at least at an elementary level, the common language of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. This would have at least allowed me to engage in small talk with partners in their native language. In many ways, my use of languages in my research mirrored that of Kvinna till Kvinna.
English is their working language with partners, Swedish is used in their home office and among organizational members, and translators are used whenever conversing in English is not possible. Although I felt I was able to gain a rich set of discourse through use of translators, and the English and Swedish languages, it would have been nice to express my respect through use of the local language. However, it should be noted that while most of the partners I spoke with had Serbian, Bosnian, or Montenegrin as their native language (which are variations of the same language), several partners did not. From a pragmatic perspective, it was not feasible to learn the native languages of all partners, or even know precisely which partners I would meet prior to entering the field.

Directions for Future Research

One of the criteria for qualitative research in chapter three was that it sparks conversation and generates new questions. I am glad to say that I close this dissertation with several new questions about feminist and peace organizing, some of which I will elaborate on in this section. First, I think that Kvinna till Kvinna and their many stakeholders could benefit from a more in-depth look at how their work does contribute to peaceful society. For example, in this study, I’ve highlighted their networking activities and argued that networking is an enactment of a feminist ideology. I think that more work could be done analyzing the networks they help cultivate to show how these strong social networks relate to a stronger civil society and peaceful relations. This could be done from a feminist perspective that captures the nuances of women’s networking, but could also be combined with more traditional network analysis to show for SIDA and others the breadth and depth of these social networks.
Second, I’ve only scratched the surface in this dissertation of articulating how care might be reclaimed as an ethical frame for organizing. I believe that the everyday practices of Kvinna till Kvinna, from their office furnishings to relationships with partners, are built on an ethic of care for the self and others. Care is often understood as an interpersonal accomplishment (Wood, 1994), or as part of the “emotionality” of the workplace. I argue that Kvinna till Kvinna provides an impetus for studying care as an ethical practice in organizing that is discursively constructed and physically enacted. As Mindry (2001) argued, questions surrounding motivations for “doing good” toward others are often the most difficult to really investigate. From an organizational communication perspective, though, starting from the departure point of ethical frames for organizing will most likely provide further insight into the dialectical texture of organizing and even core problematics such as organization-society and organization-member relationships.

Finally, I think that a productive way to continue this research with Kvinna till Kvinna would be to further the postcolonial orientation of the study and find out if, and how, they “inverse the narratives.” How are stories from the field internalized by individual members? How do members make sense of the women’s movement(s) in Sweden in light of their involvement with women’s movements in post-conflict areas? These are just two of many questions that could be posed in a future study seeking to take postcolonial theory seriously in organizational communication (Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007).
Personal Reflections

Although I have argued throughout for reflexivity in research, I have found it difficult to insert my personal self into this dissertation. The reasons for this, I believe, are twofold. The first issue I struggle with is reluctance to focus on me rather than the women and members of Kvinna till Kvinna. This is a common struggle in feminist research that strives to be self-reflexive and at the same time honor the voices and stories of others. The second issue of struggle that I have come to realize through writing this dissertation is the inherent vulnerability of inserting oneself into the narrative. I have become comfortable in my researcher voice that has allowed me to reflect upon and interpret the meanings of other’s stories. Even though I have strived to hold myself accountable to the stories so many have shared with me, I struggle to share my own trials in the field. Coming to terms with these struggles, though, has allowed me “reflect upon my reflecting” and ask myself how my personal experiences influenced my reflexive and interpretive processes.

First, through this field study, I reflected often upon what it means to be from the U.S. I knew from previous experiences that the reputation of my country was not held in high regard in most places across Europe. My personal response to this has been to downplay my nationality and try to fit in like a local. This journey revealed that there are different opinions depending on one’s location and gave me pause in thinking about my positionality and authority as a researcher. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, I was treated very well at times because of my nationality (this was unexpected and humbling on my part). In Serbia, I was identified by two different women whom I was interviewing as an
“aggressor” because of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the U.S.-led NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. These were both interesting learning moments for me as I pondered my relationship to U.S. foreign policies (and what it means to be identified based on these policies) and asked myself why I wasn’t doing more by way of peace activism in the U.S. Then, in Kosovo, I experienced the weird sensation of feeling like an “occupier” as I walked around exploring the city of Pristina. There are numerous streets named after Bill Clinton and there is a miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty on top of one of the main hotels. Being in Pristina and experiencing the odd array of incongruous U.S. cultural artifacts was the most uncomfortable I felt with my own nationality – in many ways, it felt like a prime example of imperialism. These experiences led me to reflect not only on my own identity, but also how I was writing about others in notes and throughout this dissertation.

Finally, this dissertation would not be complete without mentioning one life altering event that occurred. Soon after arriving in Stockholm and a few days before leaving for Sarajevo, I found out that I was pregnant with my first child. I was elated, surprised, and terrified. My husband had stayed in Athens and would join me in Stockholm later in the summer. When I shared the news with him, we decided that I would continue my field work as planned, but come home (or back to Sweden) immediately if need be. We also decided at that time not to tell anyone until we had the chance to absorb the news together in person. Although there are many interesting stories I could tell about being pregnant and doing field work, I think there is one overarching “theme” by which pregnancy weaves itself into this research. I became very conscious of
my own body which, in turn, led to me being interested in embodied dimensions of doing feminist work – whether it was research, activism, or working in an office. The dialectic of discourse and materiality took on new meaning for me as I experienced some physical discomforts of pregnancy while maintaining my role as “researcher.” I think that this experience gave me meaningful insights into interpretations of enacting care and feminist ethics that have found their way into the various themes I discussed.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KVINNA TILL KVINNA

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Time of interview:_______________ Date:_______________________
Place:_________________________ Pseudonym:___________________

Begin interview by explaining consent form, the purpose of the research, anonymity of interviewees.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me your story of working with Kvinna till Kvinna. How did you begin working with this organization and why?

2. What is your position and what responsibilities does it entail?

3. What do you like the best and least about your work?

4. In your own words, explain the mission and goals of Kvinna till Kvinna are.

5. What do you see as the biggest challenges to achieving these goals?

6. How does your position fit into this big picture of what Kvinna till Kvinna is trying to accomplish?

7. How would you describe the women in post-conflict areas that Kvinna till Kvinna works with?

8. How would you describe the organizations in post-conflict areas that Kvinna till Kvinna works with?

9. What do these partnerships/relationships look like? What makes them work well and not work well? What are the biggest challenges to these relationships?

10. How does Kvinna till Kvinna decide whether or not to work with an organization? Can you tell me about a time when Kvinna till Kvinna has made the decision not to work with an organization?

11. How would you describe Kvinna till Kvinna’s relationships with other international organizations – specifically the UN and state governments?
12. If you had to choose a “success story” to explain what Kvinna till Kvinna does – what would it be?

13. How do you think Kvinna till Kvinna’s work in post-conflict areas could best be improved?

14. What do you see are the biggest discrepancies between what international aid and development work, in general, provides for women in post-conflict areas and the real needs of these women?

15. If you could help me (and others) understand one or two key things about the realities of life for women in post-conflict societies, what would those be? What do you wish you could understand about their lives?

16. What keeps you motivated to continue doing the work that you do?
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR OTHER KTK STAKEHOLDERS

Time of interview:_________________  Date:______________________
Place:___________________________   Pseudonym:________________

Begin interview by explaining consent form, the purpose of the research, anonymity of interviewees.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me your story of your connection to Kvinna till Kvinna. How did you get involved with this organization and why?

2. Describe the relationship you have with Kvinna till Kvinna.

3. In your own words, explain the mission and goals of Kvinna till Kvinna are.

4. How do these goals fit with the goals and needs of your organization?

5. Tell me about a time when working with Kvinna till Kvinna was particularly challenging.

6. Tell me about a time when working with Kvinna till Kvinna was successful.

7. How do you think Kvinna till Kvinna views your organizations?

8. How do you think Kvinna till Kvinna’s work in post-conflict areas could best be improved?

9. What do you see are the biggest discrepancies between what international aid and development work, in general, provides for women in post-conflict areas and the real needs of these women?

10. If you could help me (and others) understand one or two key things about the realities of life for women in post-conflict societies, what would those be? What do you wish you could understand about their lives?

11. What keeps you motivated to continue doing the work that you do?
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